

Excerpts from *The ONE Thing:*  
*The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results*  
By Gary Keller with Jay Papasan

## INTRODUCTION

### 1 – Going Small

“What’s the ONE Thing you can do such that by doing it everything else would be easier or unnecessary?”

- When you want the absolute best chance to succeed at anything you want, your approach should always be the same. Go small.
- “Going small” is ignoring all the things you could do and doing what you should do.
- It’s recognizing that not all things matter equally and finding the things that matter most.
- It’s realizing that extraordinary results are directly determined by how narrow you can make your focus.

### 2 – The Domino Effect

*“If you chase two rabbits you will not catch either one.”* Russian Proverb

- Highly successful people know they must line up their priorities. They find the lead domino and whack away at it until it falls.
- Extraordinary success is sequential, not simultaneous. Success builds on success.
- The key to success is built over time. It is built sequentially. It’s one thing at a time.

## PART 1 – THE LIES – They Mislead and Derail Us

### 3 – The Trouble with “Truthiness”

*“It ain’t what you don’t know that gets you into trouble. It’s what you know for sure that just ain’t so.”* Mark Twain

- Buying into The One Thing sometimes becomes difficult because we’ve unfortunately bought into too many other – and more often than not those “other things” muddle our thinking, misguide our actions, and sidetrack our success. Life is too short to chase unicorns.
- The Six Lies Between You and Success
  1. Everything Matters Equally
  2. Multitasking
  3. A Disciplined Life

4. Willpower is Always on Will-Call
5. A Balanced Life
6. Big is Bad

#### 4 – Myth: Everything Matters Equally

*"The things which are most important don't always scream the loudest."* Bob Hawke

- To-do lists tyrannize us with trivial, unimportant stuff that we feel obligated to get done – because it's on our list.
- Achievers do it differently. They pause long enough to decide what matters and then allow what matters to drive their day.
- Pareto's Principle –
  - Not everything matters equally.
  - The 80/20 Principle asserts that a minority of causes, inputs, or effort usually lead to a majority of the results, outputs or rewards.
  - Selected effort creates almost all of the rewards.
  - The majority of what you want will come from the minority of what you do.
  - Extraordinary results are disproportionately created by fewer actions than most realize.
- Extreme Pareto
  - Don't stop at the 80/20 Principle. Take 20% of the 20% of the 20% and continue until you get to the single most important thing.
  - No matter the mission or goal, start with as large a list as you want but develop a mindset that you whittle it down to a critical few.
  - Once you've figured out what actually matters, keep asking what matters most until there is only one thing left. The ONE Thing.

#### 5 – Myth: Multitasking

*"To do two things at once is to do neither."* Publius Syrus

*"Multitasking is merely the opportunity to screw up more than one thing at a time."*  
Steve Uzzell

- The truth is multitasking is neither efficient nor effective. In the world of results, it will fail you every time.
- Multitasking takes a toll. Distractions lead to poor choices, painful mistakes, and unnecessary stress.
- In order to be able to put the principle of The ONE Thing to work, you can't buy into the lie that trying to do two things at once is a good idea.

#### 6 – Myth: A Disciplined Life

- Success is not a marathon of disciplined action.

- Success is actually a short race – a sprint fueled by discipline just long enough for habit to kick in and take over.
- You can become successful with less discipline than you think because success is about focusing on the right thing, not about doing everything right.
- Another payoff from developing the right habit: it also simplifies your life. Your life gets clearer and less complicated because you know what you have to do well and you know what you don't.
- It takes an average of 66 days to acquire a new habit so don't give up too soon. Give yourself all the time you need and apply all the discipline you can summon to develop it.
- Super successful people aren't superhuman at all; they've just used selected discipline to develop a few significant habits. One at a time. Over time.

### **7 – Myth: Willpower is Always on Will-Call**

- Willpower isn't on will-call. Let's face it we don't always have willpower. It comes and goes.
- However, willpower or the ability to delay gratification is a huge indicator of future success.
- Renewable Energy
  - Willpower has a limited battery life but can be recharged with some downtime. It's a limited but renewable resource.
  - Because you have a limited supply, each act of will creates a win-lose scenario where winning in an immediate situation through willpower makes you more likely to lose later because you have less of it.
  - Everyone accepts that limited resources must be managed, yet we fail to recognize that willpower is one of them. We act as if our supply of willpower were endless.
  - Studies indicate that willpower is a mental muscle that doesn't bounce back quickly. When our willpower runs out, we all revert to our default settings.
- Give Willpower the Time of Day
  - Without intentionally protecting our willpower every day, we allow ourselves to go from a will and a way, to no will and no way. If success is what we're after, this won't work.
  - So how do you put willpower to work for you? When your willpower is at its highest, you do what matters most. Do your most important work – your ONE Thing – early, before your willpower is drawn down.
- Willpower may not be on will-call, but when you use it first on what matters most, you can always count on it.

## 8 – Myth: A Balanced Life

- A balanced life is a lie. Balance doesn't exist.
- Purpose, meaning, significance – these are what make a successful life. Seek them and you will most certainly live your life out of balance.
- Extraordinary results require focused attention and time. Time on one thing means time away from another. This makes balance impossible.
- Counterbalancing – The Long and the Short of It
  - So if achieving balance is a lie, then what do you do? Counterbalance.
  - The idea of counterbalancing is that you never go so far that you can't find your way back.
  - In your personal world, awareness of your spirit and body, awareness of your family and friends, awareness of your personal needs, none of these can be sacrificed if you intend to "have a life." Your personal life requires tight counterbalancing.
  - Separate your work life and personal life into two distinct buckets for counterbalancing purposes. An extraordinary life is a counterbalancing act.

## 9 – Myth: Big is Bad

*"We are kept from our goal, not by obstacles but by a clear path to a lesser goal."*

Robert Brault

- Big is bad is a lie.
  - It's quite possibly the worst lie of all, for if you fear big success, you'll either avoid it or sabotage your efforts to achieve it.
  - When we connect big with bad, we trigger shrinking thinking. Lowering our trajectory feels safe and big never sees the light of day.
- No one knows their ultimate ceiling for achievement.
- Going Big
  - Believing in big frees you to ask different questions, follow different paths, and try new things. This opens the doors to possibilities that until now only lived inside you.
  - Avoid incremental thinking that simply asks, "What do I do next?" Ask bigger questions.
  - A good rule of thumb is to double down everywhere in your life. Set a goal so far above what you want that you'll be building a plan that guarantees your original goal.
  - Act boldly. Big thoughts go nowhere without bold action.
  - Don't be afraid to fail. See it as a part of your learning process and keep striving for your true potential.
- Don't let small thinking cut your life down to size. Think big, aim high, act bold. And see just how big you can blow up your life.

## **PART 2 – THE TRUTH – The Simple Path to Productivity**

### **10 – The Focusing Question**

- To get answers we seek, we have to invent the right questions.
- So how do you do this? You ask one question: the Focusing Question.
- What's the ONE Thing I can do such that by doing it everything else will be easier or unnecessary?
  - Big Picture – What's my ONE Thing? Or what is my right direction in life?
  - Small Focus – What's my ONE Thing right now? Or what is the right action to take now?
- The Focusing Question asks you to find the first domino and focus on it exclusively until you knock it over.

### **11 – The Success Habit**

- The Focusing Question is the foundational habit to achieve extraordinary results and to lead a big life. Apply it to the important areas of your life:
  - Spiritual life
  - Physical health
  - Personal life
  - Key relationships
  - Professional life
  - Financial life
- Here are some focusing questions for setting annual goals:
  - What's the ONE Thing I can do this year to achieve my diet goals such that by doing it everything else will be easier or unnecessary?
  - What's the ONE Thing I can do this year to improve my relationship with my spouse such that by doing it everything else will be easier or unnecessary?
  - What's the ONE Thing I can do this year at work such that by doing it everything else will be easier or unnecessary?
- Start each day by asking, "What's the ONE Thing I can do today for [whatever you want] such that by doing it everything else will be easier or unnecessary?"
- Put up a sign at work that says, "Until my ONE Thing is done – everything else is a distraction."

### **12 – The Path to Great Answers**

*"People do not decide their futures, they decide their habits and their habits decide their futures." F.M. Alexander*

- The challenge of asking a Great Question is that, once you've asked it, you're now faced with finding a Great Answer.
- If you want the most from your answer, you must realize it lives outside your comfort zone.
- When setting goals, think both big and specific:
  - Big, because you're after extraordinary results
  - Specific, to give you something to aim at and to leave no wiggle room about whether you hit the mark.
- Think possibilities. The best goal explores what's possible. This is where high achievers that have undergone transformation, this is where they live.

### **PART 3 – EXTRAORDINARY RESULTS – Unlocking the Possibilities Within You**

#### **13 – Live With Purpose**

*"Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself." George Bernard Shaw*

- Our purpose sets our priority and our priority determines the productivity our actions produce.
- The prescription for extraordinary results is knowing what matters to you and taking daily doses of actions in alignment with it.
- Knowing why you're doing something provides the inspiration and motivation to give the extra perspiration needed to persevere when things go south.
- The surest path to achieving lasting happiness happens when you make your life about something bigger, when you bring meaning and purpose to your everyday actions.
- Discover your Big Why? What's the thing that gets you up in the morning and keeps you going when you're tired and worn down?

#### **14 – Live By Priority**

- Live with purpose and you know where you want to go. Live by priority and you'll know what to do to get there.
- Purpose without priority is powerless.
- Your most important priority is the ONE Thing you can do right now that will help you achieve what matters most to you.
- We have goals and plans for only one reason – to be appropriate in the moments of our lives that matter.
- "Goal setting to the Now" means knowing your future goal and then identifying the steps you need to accomplish along the way. This keeps your thinking clear while you uncover what you need to accomplish right now.
- Put pen to paper. Write down your goals. Much has been written about writing down goals and for a very good reason – it works.

## 15 – Live for Productivity

*“Productivity isn’t about being a workhorse, keeping busy or burning the midnight oil... It’s more about priorities, planning, and fiercely protecting your time.”*

*Margarita Tartakovsky*

- Productive action transforms lives.
- Putting together a life of extraordinary results simply comes down to getting the most out of what you do. Living for productivity produces extraordinary results.
- Time Blocking
  - Time blocking is a very results-oriented way of viewing and using time. It’s a way of making sure that what has to be done gets done.
  - Go to your calendar and block off all the time you need to accomplish your ONE Thing.
  - Everything else – other projects, e-mails, calls, meetings, etc – must wait.
  - If disproportionate results come from one activity, then you must give that one activity disproportionate time.
  - Each and every day, ask this Focusing Question for your blocked time: *“Today what’s the ONE Thing I can do for my ONE Thing such that by doing it everything else will be easier or unnecessary?”*
  - Once you’ve done your ONE Thing for the day, use the Focusing Question to identify your next priority and give that task the time it deserves.
- Time Block These Three Things in the Following Order:
  - Time block your time off
    - By planning your time off in advance, you are managing your work time around your downtime instead of the other way around.
    - Resting is as important as working
  - Time block your ONE Thing
    - The most productive people work on event time, i.e., they don’t quit until their ONE Thing is done.
    - To make this work, block time as early in the day as possible.
  - Time block your planning time
    - Planning time is when you reflect on where you are and where you want to go.
    - Take a look at your someday and five year goals and assess the progress you must make in the next year to be on track.
    - Also add new goals, envision old ones, or eliminate any that no longer reflect your purpose or priorities.

- Block an hour each week to review your annual and monthly goals.
- Four proven ways to battle distractions
  - Build a bunker – a place that takes you out of the path of interruption
  - Store provisions – have all necessary supplies, snacks, etc. on hand to avoid leaving the bunker
  - Sweep for mines – turn off your phone, shut down your e-mail, exit your internet browser
  - Enlist support – tell those mostly likely to seek you what you are doing and when you'll be available

## 16 – The Three Commitments

- Achieving extraordinary results through time blocking requires three commitments:
  - You must adopt the mindset of someone seeking mastery.
  - You must continually seek the very best ways of doing things.
  - You must be willing to be held accountable to doing everything you can to achieve your ONE Thing.
- #1 – Follow the Path of Mastery
  - The 10,000 Hour Rule – elite performers that separated themselves from others did so by accumulating more than 10,000 hours of practice
  - More than anything else, expertise tracks with hours invested
- #2 – Move from “E” to “P”
  - Continually improving how you do something is critical to getting the most from time blocking.
  - We tackle tasks two ways: Entrepreneurial (“E”) or Purposeful (“P”)
    - Entrepreneurial is our natural approach but we eventually hit a ceiling on our improvement
    - Purposeful people look for new models and systems, better ways to do things. They don't accept the limitations of their natural approach. They do whatever it takes to push through to mastery.
- #3 – Live the Accountability Cycle
  - Accountable people achieve results others only dream of.
  - One of the fastest ways to bring accountability to your life is to find an accountability partner.
    - Individuals with written goals were 39.5% more likely to succeed than those who don't.

- But individuals who shared their goals with a friend and provided progress reports were 76.7% more likely to achieve them.

## 17 – The Four Thieves

“Focus is a matter of deciding what things you’re not going to do.” John Carmack

- The Four Thieves of Productivity
  - Inability to Say “No”
  - Fear of Chaos
  - Poor Health Habits
  - Environment Doesn’t Support Your Goals
- #1 – Inability to Say “NO”
  - The way to protect what you’ve said yes to and stay productive is to say no to anyone or anything that could derail you.
  - Remember, saying yes to your ONE Thing is your top priority. Saying no to anything that keeps you from keeping your time block should become something you can accept.
- #2 – Fear of Chaos
  - Focusing on ONE Thing has a guaranteed consequence: other things don’t get done.
  - When you strive for greatness, chaos is guaranteed to show up.
  - It’s important for you to accept this instead of fighting it.
- #3 – Poor Health Habits
  - Personal mismanagement is a silent thief of productivity. Don’t sacrifice your health by trying to take on too much.
  - High achievement and extraordinary results require big energy.
  - Person’s Daily Energy Plan
    - Spiritual Energy – meditate and pray
    - Physical Energy – eat right, exercise and sleep sufficiently
    - Emotional Energy – hug, kiss, and laugh with loved ones
    - Mental Energy – set goals, plan and calendar
    - Business Energy – time block for your ONE Thing
- #4 – Environment Doesn’t Support Your Goals
  - Seek out those who will support your goals and show the door to anyone who won’t.
  - Make sure your physical surroundings support your goals.

## 18 – The Journey

“To get through the hardest journey we need take only one step at a time, but we must keep on stepping.” Chinese proverb

- A life worth living is a life of no regrets.

- *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying* by Bronnie Ware
  - I wish I had let myself be happier (they realized happiness is a choice)
  - I wish I'd stayed in touch with my friends
  - I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings
  - I wish I hadn't worked so hard
  - I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself not the life others expected of me.
- When people look back on their lives, it is the things they have not done that generate the greatest regret.
- All success starts within you. You know what to do. You know how to do it. Your next step is simple: You are the first domino.