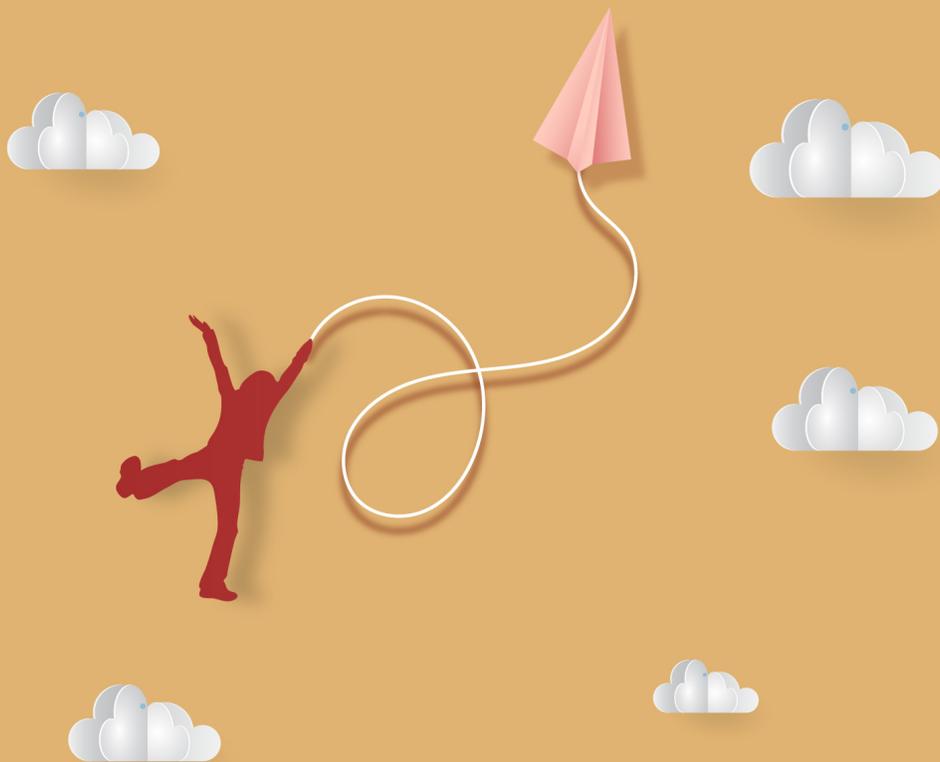


SUMMARY

MAXIMIZE YOUR POTENTIAL

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Summary of “Maximize Your Potential” by Jocelyn K. Gleib

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In *Maximize Your Potential* (2013), you’ll learn how to succeed by making the most of the talents and skills you already possess.

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Introduction

“Follow your passion.” At some point in your life, you’ve probably been told something along those lines. And although it sounds easy enough, those of us who are more realistic understand that it isn’t always that simple.

Because being a rock star might be your passion, but following that dream probably won’t be enough unless you have some serious musical talent to back it up. But on that note, you’ve probably also learned that possessing a natural talent for something makes it easier and more enjoyable. As such, you might often find yourself wishing that you could turn your talents or favorite hobbies into a career. And although you might not become the next Ozzy Osbourne, that might be easier than you think!

That’s because maximizing your potential is all about making the most of your natural talent and passions. So, whether your “thing” is math, baking, or art, in this summary, we’ll take a look at the easy steps anyone can take to maximize their potential. And by applying the insights of leading influencers like Cal Newport and Joshua Foer, you’ll learn:

- Why a job title isn’t the most important thing
- How you can become a luckier person, and
- Why asking for help makes you look good

How to Find Your Dream Job

We've all heard the phrase "Do what you love and you'll never work a day in your life." But why do some people seem to do that more easily than others? Is it because they simply stay true to their passion and wait for their bliss to follow naturally? That might sound nice, but it's definitely not realistic. In fact, finding job satisfaction has a lot more to do with the culture and lifestyle of their job than what their day-to-day job description actually entails. How?

For example, let's look at environmental journalist Bill McKibben. McKibben loves his job, but not necessarily because writing is his greatest passion in life or that environmental issues are the most important thing to him. Instead, Bill is happy because he has control over deciding when and where he works and because he knows his work is making a positive impact on the world. These two factors comprise the biggest elements of his job satisfaction and that means that journalism is only one of many careers which could bring him satisfaction. McKibben's story also goes to show how skill is more important than passion when it comes to meeting your career goals. After all, you can be deeply passionate about something you're terrible at!

But in McKibben's case, he didn't start out as a highly skilled journalist or even display a unique flair for writing. Instead, his time in undergrad led him to the simple discovery that he possessed an aptitude for writing which helped him to craft articles for his college newspaper, the Harvard Crimson. Years of practice (and over 400 articles!) helped him hone his craft until he possessed the skill to write for *The New Yorker*. And instead of stopping once he'd found a good job, McKibben kept working and honing his skills until he was good enough to be his own boss. Then and only then did he determine that he could quit his job and retire to a cabin in upstate New York, where he began working on his first book.

So, as you can see through McKibben's story, it's not always the person with the most talent who accomplishes their goals. Instead, it's the person who makes the most out of the skills they have.

Find Your Mission

The rapid rise of technology has everybody a little bit afraid that the robots are coming for our jobs. This is a very natural anxiety and there are two ways of handling it. One is to panic and worry that your job is becoming obsolete. The other is to focus on a mission rather than your job title. This can be really helpful if you consider that job titles come and go with the weather and, as such, are more irrelevant than we think. For example, just a few years ago, the term “app designer” didn’t mean anything! But now it’s one of the world’s most popular jobs! So, instead of putting your focus on a job title, identify a personal mission statement for your skills that covers what you’re good at and what you want to accomplish.

This will help you keep your sights on a clear, identifiable goal that will open up your career prospects. So, for example, instead of focusing on your role as an “online innovation director,” you could clarify for yourself that you’re passionate about developing new and innovative ways of making content accessible online. This can also help as you struggle with feeling uncertain about the future. Because we all feel this way from time to time, but sometimes we convince ourselves that “luck simply isn’t on our side.” But in fact, luck isn’t some mysterious force that favors some people over others. Instead, it’s something you can cultivate by remaining open to all of life’s possibilities.

For instance, let’s say a professional networking opportunity leads you to cross paths with someone who offers you a brilliant job opportunity. You could call that a lucky encounter or you could recognize that by putting yourself out there and meeting people, you’re literally making yourself open to promising new opportunities. So, if you just revamp your view of luck (and avoid staying inside, glued to the computer), you’ll find that you can literally make yourself a “luckier” person!

Change Your Attitude

How would you describe the attitude with which you start each day? Would you say you start by thinking, “I’m going to be good at my job” or “I’m going to get better at my job?” Both of these sound like positive things but they are actually very different. That’s because someone with a “be good” attitude just wants to show that he can perform the specifics of his job as required. He’s not really focused on improvement or growth; he just wants to be good-- or maybe even just okay-- at his current job. By contrast, someone with a “get better” attitude is always looking for new opportunities to succeed and excel. So far from being content with where he is in the moment, he’s constantly measuring his progress against what he accomplished yesterday and asking himself if he’s better today. And rather than comparing himself to others or feeling defeated by setbacks, the “get better” employee views challenges as another gateway to improvement.

If that sounds pretty good to you and you’d like to swap your “be good” attitude for “get better,” the good news is that the human brain is highly adaptable. In fact, it’s pretty easy to train yourself into developing better habits! Here’s how. Start by relinquishing your fear of mistakes. We’re all a little bit afraid of looking foolish or messing up, but studies show that the most successful people are those who freely and openly acknowledge their capacity for making mistakes. And in so doing, they actually make themselves less likely to mess up because they’ve removed the crippling fear factor that often causes people to make sloppy mistakes.

Another healthy habit is being willing to ask for help. Often, we want to look like we have it all together and we know what we’re doing on our own, so we’re afraid to be vulnerable enough to ask for help. In this case, the answer is as simple as, “Stop being afraid to look silly!” If your focus is on growing and improving in your personal and professional life alike, then you’ll realize that not knowing something is an opportunity to learn! So, don’t be afraid to ask someone else for advice; chances are, they’ll be happy to let you learn from them!

Let Your Creativity Flow

Do you keep a journal? Many adult professionals don't because they think it sounds like a silly or childish thing to do. But in fact, a number of highly successful and creative people-- Che Guevarra, Andy Warhol, and Virginia Woolf, to name a few-- have recognized the benefits of keeping a diary! Why? Because in addition to its creative benefits, a journal can be an excellent opportunity for you to serve as your own sounding board. A sounding board is a person or a group of people that will let you bounce your ideas off of them and provide you with honest feedback in return. Your sounding board can help you determine when your ideas need improvement or when you might be in the wrong and you can use their perspective to grow. So, if you don't have access to a group of people who can provide this for you or you'd simply like to improve your self-awareness, journaling can be a great way for you to become your own sounding board.

You can start by capturing all of your ideas-- or even your daily thoughts and reflections-- in the pages of a journal. If you have an idea that sounds promising or that you want to flesh out later, write it down! But in order for a journal to work like a sounding board, you can't just toss a thought on paper and never visit it again. If you want to properly develop your ideas in the future, you'll need to return to your journal on a regular basis. By revisiting your thoughts and mulling over them with new eyes, you'll find that what once seemed insignificant has a spark of brilliance. Likewise, that idea which seemed so perfect-- the one you were ready to sink your life savings into-- might seem impractical in the light of day.

You might find that consistency will help you reap more benefits of journaling; that's why the author recommends that you set a regular time to write and find a peaceful place to write in. By giving yourself a bit of structure-- along with a space which allows your ideas to flow-- you can help normalize the activity for yourself. And if you write even a little bit

every day for a week, you'll soon develop a habit that brings you a sense of structure and consistency!

Build Resilient Relationships

We all know that relationships can be complicated and that life is full of ups and downs. However, we're often more understanding of this in our personal relationships than we are with our professional partners. But because people are people, the truth is that everyone brings their own unique moods, backgrounds, and baggage to the table-- even when it affects their job performance. And no matter what line of work you're in, at one point or another, you're going to run into a difficult employee, a cranky client, or a troublesome supplier. When these cases arise, it's important to remember that-- as in personal relationships-- the key to any mutually beneficial relationship is establishing a strong collaboration which allows both parties to get what they want.

How can you do that? Well, the first step is to form a social contract that explicitly lays out the terms of what you're both expecting and how you will collaborate to meet your common goal. The concept of "social contracting" was first introduced by management expert Peter Block in his 1981 book *Flawless Consulting*, when he theorized that strong collaboration is inextricably linked to the formation of a social contract. He asserted that you learn how you'll collaborate by asking about-- and honestly articulating-- what each party wants. Even though we may sometimes find it difficult to be blunt or honest about what we want, Block affirms that it's always in our best interest to try. Because clearly defining what each person wants from the relationship means that it will always be a lot easier to manage.

So, start by simply being honest. Even if your goal isn't completely altruistic-- let's say you're only working on this project so you can get a promotion-- just be up front about it. Because in order for any collaboration to work, both partners must find a way to get on board and support each other's goal; your partner can't genuinely do that if they don't know your real goal. So, remember to be honest about your own motivations and also be on the lookout for opportunities to connect with your partner. When

they share their expectations with you, ask questions and learn more about what you can provide for them. And be ready to respond with openness when they ask how they can do the same for you.

As you're building your social contract, it may also help to draw on prior relationships and share with your partner what has and hasn't worked for you in the past. Talk about what you'd like to avoid or what successes you hope to achieve and then work together to find a vision that's mutually agreeable for you both. Don't think you have to limit your discussions to things you've done well, either; if you've learned valuable lessons from a mentor or previous partner, feel free to share those too! You might also find it helpful to ask your partner if they've previously collaborated with someone who taught them about what did and didn't work for them. You can even bounce business best practices off each other as well!

Don't Miss Out on Potential Opportunities

We all know about the instinctive human “fight or flight” response. It originated as an evolutionary advantage designed to prolong our life expectancy and help us evade predators by heightening our awareness of potential risks. And in an age when human life expectancy wasn't very high—due to the prevalence of predators, extreme weather conditions, and myriads of other dangers waiting to ensnare our ancestors—being on the cautious side wasn't such a bad thing. And because it's kept us safe for centuries, it's no surprise that today, we still have a tendency to cling to the safest or most secure options, even if that means missing out on potential opportunities. But it's time to shake up our worldview a little bit!

While it's true that we live in an unpredictable world with any number of dangers we can't anticipate, our tendency to avoid risks in the hope that nothing will happen to us means that... well, nothing will ever happen to us! Because although our instinct is to be afraid of the fact that we can't anticipate what's coming around the corner, we should tweak that thinking to allow room for the idea that what's around the corner might actually be good! And if we start trying to replace our fears with that thought, we can begin training our brains to focus on the opportunities that are present in every decision we make instead of the potential dangers. After all, think about how many times you've missed out on something exciting because it sounded a little too risky! When you made those decisions, did you first stop to think about the potential benefits... or just the things that scared you?

However, it's important to add that the author isn't suggesting that you should abandon your sense of self-preservation altogether; it's good to be aware of risks. But we should never fixate on them. To get a sense of the author's advice in practice, let's take a look at a sticky situation for the managers of The Coca-Cola Company in 1989. When the Berlin Wall came down, things got a little complicated because the German end of Coca-Cola's management team wanted to use this historic milestone as an

opportunity to expand the franchise into East Germany. But because it seemed overly complicated and a bit too risky, Don Keough, the current president, declined to pursue the opportunity. But the management team refused to accept that decision. In fact, they were so determined to pursue a bold new opportunity that they threatened to quit if Keough didn't seriously consider their request!

Their willingness to take a risk motivated Keough to reconsider and he finally traveled to East Germany, where he discovered the thriving potential market for his product and bought a couple of new factories. That's not to say that they never encountered any pitfalls or that any risk you take will be devoid of fears and setbacks. But this story does go to show that, just like the folks at Coca-Cola discovered, pursuing a risky opportunity doesn't always spell out certain doom. Instead, it can bring you greater success than you ever imagined! That's why the author advises that we should be aware of potential risks and avoid being foolhardy, but by the same token, we shouldn't be afraid to go out on a limb for something that could be profitable and exciting.

Final Summary

We all want to be successful, but people often make the mistake of assuming that success is arbitrary and only comes to those who have certain gifts and talents. But the truth is that maximizing your potential is simply a matter of making the most of the skills you have and learning to use them to your advantage. By being open to new opportunities, forming social contracts and cultivating communication which will enhance collaboration, and learning how to take new risks, anyone can maximize their potential.



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