

SUMMARY THE ONE THING

GARY KELLER, JAY PAPASAN



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Summary of “The ONE Thing” by Gary Keller and Jay Papa- san

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The one success secret you really need in your life.

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Introduction

“Dream BIG!”

“Shoot for the moon-- even if you fall, you’ll land among the stars.”

“If you can dream it, you can do it.”

“Work hard, dream big.”

How many times did you hear or read quotes like these as a kid? How many times were you led to believe that you could-- and should-- embrace big dreams? Pretty much everybody heard this at one time or another, so as kids, we were wide-eyed and hopeful, brimming with promise and fully believing that we could achieve anything. But over time, that optimism and self-confidence simply fades away. Over time, we become cynical. We succumb to negative self-talk and become our own worst enemies. We criticize ourselves relentlessly or box ourselves into dead-end jobs that we hate because we believe that’s as good as it’s ever going to get. And the authors believe that that attitude is exactly what holds us back.

Because we often adopt this attitude as a result of negative feedback, harsh criticism, or bullying, we sometimes fail to see that this mentality is a choice. Rather, we assume that it has been imposed upon us by others or that our perception is indicative of the real state of the world. But the authors believe that transcending a defeatist mentality is the key to accomplishing anything. If we want to succeed in life, if we hope to ever become our best selves, we must learn to re-train our brains and embrace the power of “thinking big.” So, over the course of this summary, we’re going to explore that power and learn how you can get in touch with your inner child again.



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Adjust Your Priorities

If you're like me, you probably have a to-do list a mile long. Also like me, you probably make that to-do list in a stream of consciousness fashion, scribbling down thoughts as they come to mind because you're afraid you'll forget them. By the time we've finished writing these lists, we may reflect on them with a sense of accomplishment; now, we have a nice, orderly list of everything we need to get done. But sometimes our list-making strategies can do more harm than good. Because if your to-do list is random, it's not an accurate reflection of your real priorities. Here's an example of how it works in practice and why it can be toxic.

Thanks to my busy schedule, I often struggle to reply to messages. It doesn't matter if they're important emails or texts from friends, all messages tend to pile up in my inbox and get ignored for days because I simply don't have the time to go through them during a typical day. But because I get anxious looking at my ever-growing list of notifications-- (there's something especially stressful about those little red pop-ups telling me I have 59 un-opened messages)-- I usually put, "Answer messages" at the top of my to-do list. This means that when I look back at my to-do list and prepare to start checking things off, "Answer messages" looks like it's the most important thing for me to do. But that might not necessarily be the case! Going through every single message and crafting a personal reply to each one can take me hours; I could easily waste a whole day just working through my inbox. But my messages might not be the most important or most time-sensitive thing I need to do. So, if my priorities are off kilter and I tackle messages first, I might fall behind on more important things. I might neglect the project that needs to be completed in 48 hours while I'm answering messages that aren't time-sensitive at all.

The author observes that this is a common struggle for a lot of people; our priorities are often out of alignment and we don't even realize it! So, that's why we need to learn that every item on our to-do list is not equally important and not equally urgent. In fact, only a few of our daily tasks will actual-

ly increase our success and get us closer to the futures we want. So, if we really want to live our best lives, we need to start by re-assessing our priorities and asking ourselves which tasks are really important. We'll always have to do some things like folding the laundry or preparing meals, but it's important that we keep these tasks in perspective. For example, maybe folding the laundry or cleaning the bathroom is a really big deal for you because you feel better about yourself when your house is clean. And if that's the case, that's awesome! You should definitely stay on top of those tasks.

But if you have the opportunity to pitch your product to a big investor or take a phone call with someone who could advance your career, don't ever let yourself think, "I can't, I don't have time for that, I have to clean the bathroom!" Sure, that might be a silly example, but you get the idea. Because if we let our priorities get out of hand, it's totally possible that we might neglect amazing opportunities in favor of something we could do any time. That's why the authors' first piece of advice is: don't let that happen to you! But how do you know when your priorities are in the right order? How do you know when your to-do list looks right? To help answer that question, the authors have constructed a formula. They call it the "80/20 principle." This simple principle means that 80% of the real results in your life are achieved by 20% of your work.

If you think about that in terms of your to-do list, you realize that 20% is actually a really small amount. So, that means that only a few of your daily tasks will really count for something. That means that your job is to re-assess your to-do list with that principle in mind. So, take a look at your list and ask yourself which activities will really contribute to your success. Success looks different for everyone, so make sure you have a clear vision of what you hope to accomplish and what will contribute to that vision. Then go attack the tasks that will make your dream come true! The rest of the items on your list can wait.



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What's Your ONE Thing?

In the previous chapter, we talked about narrowing down the items on your to-do list and finding the tasks that will contribute the most to your future success. But in this chapter, we're going to take an even closer look and ask you to get even more specific. And it all starts by figuring out your ONE thing. Your ONE thing can be surprisingly versatile because it functions as what the authors call "a focusing question." A focusing question is exactly what it sounds like; it's a question you can ask yourself to improve your focus on any given thing. It can help you with a simple task or your overarching life goals. Here's how it works: let's say you have a massive to-do list and you're getting a little overwhelmed. When you're staring down a mountain of tasks, it's easy to get stressed out, confused, and flustered. That's why it's important to break that mountain down into small, manageable chunks by asking focusing questions.

So, whether you're trying to organize your craft room or figure out the trajectory of your career, you can always ask yourself this question: "What's the ONE thing I can do right now that will make this situation better and simplify my to-do list?" If you're trying to look at the big picture and decide things like what college to attend, what major to pursue, or what job you should take, this question can help you. Because in this case, the answer would be dependent on the ONE thing you want to do with your life. And as you ask that question, you'll be able to feel your heart leaning toward that one thing. Similarly, on a more immediate level, this question can help you in the moment because it can guide you to the right decision for right now.

For example, maybe you're trying to start your own crafting business. But first, you need to organize your craft room. The trouble is, your craft room is so chaotic, you don't even know where to start. Should you start sorting everything out right now? Or should you go out and buy organizing supplies so that you can put things in their proper place as you go? When faced with choices like that, it's easy to get overwhelmed or to say that you shouldn't even bother starting your own business because you feel like you'll never

get this done! But asking focusing questions can help you to break those tasks down and take it one step at a time. It might be impossible to wave a magic wand and get your business up and running in a heartbeat, but right now, you can go buy those organizers, And then you can ask that focusing question again. Then you can take the next step and the next step until you've completed your goal.

The authors assert that focusing questions are what sets their work apart from other self-help books. Because focusing questions don't promise you something mystical or unrealistic and they don't claim to be able to do anything for you. Rather, it's about providing you with the tools that will help you to embrace the power of thinking big. This book can't do the work for you and it isn't a magic guarantee. But it is an opportunity to find direction and to enjoy the big picture without getting overwhelmed by it.



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Build Positive Habits

If you've ever read any self-help book or success story, you know that discipline and motivation are the two key things that everybody talks about. If you can just be disciplined, if you can just be motivated, it sounds like you can grab life by the horns! The trouble is that neither of those things come naturally to anyone. And for some people, those traits feel so out of reach that they might as well be reaching for the moon. So, what are you to do? How can you get your life on track if you can't manage to focus or stay motivated? The authors have discovered that the secret lies in building a sequence of positive habits. And the greatest part about forming habits is that it's so, so easy to do!

In fact, we form habits all the time without even realizing what we're doing. For example, if we drink our coffee from the same mug every morning or perform our morning routines in the same order, we're creating a habit. It only takes twenty-one days to form a habit, so if you can do anything consistently for just three weeks, you've already turned a pattern of behavior into an automatic reflex that you don't even have to think about! And that's exactly what the authors believe you should do when it comes to self-improvement. This revolutionary approach is awesome because it takes a lot of the stress and pressure out of making good decisions! You can say goodbye to the motivational posters that glamorize the struggle of improving your life; instead, concentrate on making good habits reflexive!

However, that's not to say that it won't be hard; there's no doubt about it--forming new habits is always tough at the beginning. But if you can just get yourself in the swing of making good decisions, it will become reflexive before you know it! So, how do you do that in the first place? The authors believe that you should simply take it one step at a time and keep following the practices we've discussed in the previous chapter! For example, let's say you're like me and you get really anxious about all those unanswered messages. Maybe you'd really like to make a habit of replying to all your messages every day and knowing you can breathe a sigh of relief. You'd like to

dedicate a solid hour of your day to going through your messages, but how do you find the time? How do you keep from getting distracted or interrupted? In this case, you would ask yourself focusing questions to help yourself cut through the distractions and find what you need. For example, maybe that means you need to get up an hour or two earlier than usual and take a walk to a quiet park where you can sip your coffee and answer your messages in peace. And once you've done that, do it the next day! And the next day after that. Just keep doing it until it's become a habit.

But after those habit-forming three weeks are up, the authors posit that you should take your self-improvement game to the next level. And if you want to do that, the key is to switch up your habits by forming new ones. For example, don't just spend the rest of your life focusing on answering your messages; you've already got that down! So, once that habit has become reflexive to you, pick something else you want to improve and work on that. And once you've got that one under your belt, pick something else. The authors have discovered that this is the world's most successful people stay at the top of their game. But the best part is that it isn't a secret limited to billionaires or movie stars; it's something anyone can do! So, don't stress yourself out and don't think of building good habits as an insurmountable, stressful thing that only superheroes can do. Because if you let your mind and body take over and allow your positive habits to become normal parts of your day, you won't have to work at it all the time. Just take it one step at a time and let your natural habit-forming tendencies do the rest!



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Final Summary

Everyone wants to know what it takes to be successful in life. But often, we feel as though the real secret eludes us, lost amidst the noise and chaos of all the people who insist that their way is the right way. The authors believe that you can cut through the noise and simplify your self-improvement practices by simply identifying your ONE thing. By embracing the power of “thinking big,” asking focusing questions, and developing positive habits, you can identify the ONE thing you need to do right now and the ONE thing you need to do with the rest of your life.



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