



The ONE Thing

The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

You want less. You want fewer distractions and less on your plate. The daily barrage of emails, texts, tweets, messages and meetings distract you and stress you out. The simultaneous demands of work and family are taking a toll. And what's the cost? Second-rate work, missed deadlines, smaller paychecks, fewer promotions — and lots of stress.

And you want more. You want more productivity from your work. More income for a better lifestyle. You want more satisfaction from life and more time for yourself, your family and your friends.

With *The ONE Thing* by Gary Keller and Jay Papasan, now you can have both — less and more. *The ONE Thing* delivers extraordinary results in every area of your life — work, personal, family and spiritual.

The ONE Thing shows up time and again in the lives of the successful because it's a fundamental truth. Applying the ONE Thing to your work — and in life — is the simplest and smartest thing you can do to propel yourself toward the success you want.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- About the six lies standing between you and success and how to beat them.
- That willpower is not always on will-call and how to use it as effectively as possible.
- How to construct a Focusing Question.
- How to navigate the path to great answers by using the Great Question matrix.
- How to time block.



by Gary Keller
with Jay Papasan

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE ONE THING

by Gary Keller with Jay Papasan

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Introduction

Considered one of the funniest movies of all time, *City Slickers* sprinkles in unexpected doses of wisdom and insight. In one memorable scene, Curly, the gritty cowboy, and city slicker Mitch leave the group to search for stray cattle. Curly reins his horse to a stop and turns to face Mitch.

Curly: Do you know what the secret to life is?

Mitch: No. What?

Curly: This. [Holds up one finger.]

Mitch: Your finger?

Curly: One thing. Just one thing. You stick to that and everything else don't mean sh*t.

Mitch: That's great, but what's the "one thing"?

Curly: That's what you have to figure out.

Out of the mouth of a fictional character comes the secret of success. Whether the writers knew it or unwittingly stumbled on it, what they wrote was the absolute truth. The ONE Thing is the best approach to getting what you want.

Going Small

If everyone has the same number of hours in a day, why do some people seem to get so much more done than others? The answer is they make getting to the heart of things the heart of their approach. They 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 the focus. When you go as small as possible, you'll be staring at ONE Thing.

Getting Extraordinary Results

Toppling dominoes is pretty straightforward. You line them up and tip over the first one. In the real world, though, it's more complicated. The challenge is that life doesn't line everything up for us and say, "Here's where you should start." So instead, every day you should line up your priorities anew, find the lead domino and whack away at it until it falls.

This approach works because extraordinary success is sequential, not simultaneous. The domino effect applies to the big picture, like your work or business, and it applies to the smallest moment in each day when you're deciding what to do next. Success builds on success. The key is over time. Success is built sequentially. It's one thing at a time. ●

PART I: THE LIES: THEY MISLEAD AND DERAILED US

Over time, myths and mistruths get thrown around so often that they eventually feel familiar and start to sound like the truth. Then we start basing important decisions on them.

The challenge we all face when forming our success strategies is that success has its own lies, too. If we're going to maximize our potential, we're going to have to make sure we put these lies to bed.



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Lie No. 1: Everything Matters Equally

Equality is a worthy ideal pursued in the name of justice and rights. In the real world of results, however, things are never equal. No matter how talented people are — no two are ever equal. Equality is a lie.

Not everything matters equally, and success isn't a game won by whoever does the most. Yet that is exactly how most play it on a daily basis.

Although to-do lists serve as a useful collection of our best intentions, they also tyrannize us with trivial, unimportant stuff that we feel obligated to get done — because it's on our list. Achievers operate differently. Achievers always work from a clear sense of priority. Instead of a to-do list, you need a success list — a list that is purposefully created around extraordinary results. If your to-do list contains everything, then it's probably taking you everywhere except where you want to go.

Applying Pareto's Principle

Pareto's Principle, also known as the 80/20 Principle, states that the minority of your effort (20 percent) leads to the majority of your results (80 percent). It points us in a clear direction: 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 people realize.

Depending on the circumstances, it can play out as 90/20, where 90 percent of your success comes from 20 percent of your effort. Or 70/10 or 65/5. Just understand these are all working off the same principle. The insight is that not everything matters equally; some things matter more than others — a lot more. A to-do list becomes a success list when you apply Pareto's Principle.

To go further to an extreme, start with as large a list as you want, but develop the mindset that you will whittle your way from there to the critical few and not stop until you end with the essential ONE Thing. ●

Lie No. 2: Multitasking

Multitasking is a lie because nearly everyone accepts it as an effective thing to do, but when you try to do two things at once, you either can't or won't do either well. Multitasking is an effective way to get less done.

The term "multitasking" emerged in the 1960s to describe a computer's ability to quickly perform many tasks. However, the term is inherently deceptive. Multitasking is about multiple tasks alternately sharing

one resource (the CPU), but over time, the context was flipped, and it became interpreted to mean multiple tasks being done simultaneously by one resource (a person).

People can do two or more things at once, such as walk and talk, but we can't focus on two things at once. Our attention bounces back and forth. This is fine for computers, but it has serious repercussions in humans.

When you switch from one task to another, two things happen. The first is nearly instantaneous: you decide to switch. The second is less predictable: you have to activate the "rules" for whatever you're about to do. It always takes some time to start a new task and restart the one you quit, and there's no guarantee you'll pick up where you left off.

So why would we ever tolerate multitasking when we're doing our most important work? Just because our day job doesn't involve bypass surgery doesn't make focus any less critical to our success. Your work deserves no less respect. ●

Lie No. 3: A Disciplined Life

Contrary to what most people believe, success is not a marathon of disciplined action. Achievement doesn't require you to be a full-time disciplined person where your every action is trained and where control is the solution to every situation. 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, for one simple reason: success is about doing the right thing, not about doing everything right.

The trick to success is to choose the right habit and bring just enough discipline to establish it. That's it. As this habit becomes part of your life, you'll start looking like a disciplined person, but you won't be one. You'll be a person who used selective discipline to build a powerful habit.

Sixty-Six Days to the Sweet Spot

The right discipline goes a long way, and habits are hard only in the beginning. Over time, the habit you're after becomes easier to sustain. Habits require much less energy and effort to maintain than to begin.

In 2009, researchers at the University College of London asked the question, "How long does it take to establish a new habit?" The results suggest that it takes an average of 66 days; the full range was 18 to 254 days, but 66 represented a sweet spot — with easier behaviors taking fewer days and tough ones taking longer.

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Super-successful people aren't superhuman; they've just used selective discipline to develop a few significant habits — one at a time, over time. ●

Lie No. 4: Willpower Is Always on Will-Call

Most people assume willpower matters, but many might not fully appreciate how critical it is to success. Willpower is so important that using it effectively should be a high priority. Unfortunately, because it's not always on will-call, putting it to its best use requires you to manage it. Willpower is a timing issue; when you have your will, you get your way.

Willpower has a limited battery life but can be recharged with some downtime. You must monitor your willpower fuel gauge. Full-strength willpower requires a full tank. Never let what matters most be compromised due to underfueling. Eat right and regularly and get plenty of rest.

How do you put your willpower to work? You think about it. Pay attention to it. Respect it. You do what matters most first each day when your willpower is strongest. Maximum strength means maximum success. ●

Lie No. 5: A Balanced Life

The idea of balance is exactly that — a grand yet not very practical idea. In your effort to attend to all things, everything gets shortchanged, and nothing gets its due.

When we say we're out of balance, we're usually referring to a sense that some priorities — things that matter to us — are being underserved or unmet. The problem is that when you focus on what is truly important, something will always be underserved. There will always be things left undone. Leaving some things undone is a necessary tradeoff for results. But you can't leave everything undone, and that's where counterbalancing comes in. You must counterbalance your work and personal life buckets.

1. Counterbalance your work bucket. View work as involving a skill or knowledge that must be mastered. This will cause you to give disproportionate time to your ONE Thing and will throw the rest of your work-day, week, month and year out of balance. Your work life is divided into two areas: what matters most and everything else. You will have to take what matters to the extremes and be OK with what happens to the rest. Professional success requires it.

2. Counterbalance your personal life bucket. Acknowledge that your life has multiple areas and that

each requires a minimum of attention for you to feel that you “have a life.” Drop any one, and you'll feel the effects. This requires constant awareness. You must never go too long or too far without counterbalancing them so that they are all active areas of your life. Your personal life requires it.

The question of balance is really a question of priority. When you change your language from balancing to prioritizing, you see your choices more clearly.

When you're supposed to be working, work, and when you're supposed to be playing, play. It's a weird tightrope you're walking, but it's only when you get your priorities mixed up that things fall apart. ●

Lie No. 6: Big Is Bad

This is possibly the worst lie of all, for if you fear big success, you'll either avoid it or sabotage your efforts to achieve it. No one knows their ultimate ceiling for achievement, so worrying about it is a waste of time. When you allow yourself to accept that big is about who you can become, you look at it differently.

Thinking big is essential to extraordinary results. Success requires action, and action requires thought. But here's the catch — the only actions that become springboards to succeeding big are those informed by big thinking to begin with. Make this connection, and the importance of how big you think begins to sink in.

Everyone has the same amount of time, and hard work is simply hard work. As a result, what you do in the time you work determines what you achieve. And because what you do is determined by what you think, how big you think becomes the launching pad for how high you achieve.

Don't fear big. Fear mediocrity. Only living big will let you experience your true life and work potential. ●

PART 2: THE TRUTH: THE SIMPLE PATH TO PRODUCTIVITY

Success comes down to this: being appropriate in each moment of your life. If you can honestly say, “This is where I'm meant to be right now, doing exactly what I'm doing,” then all the amazing possibilities for your life become possible.

The Focusing Question

How we phrase the questions we ask ourselves determines the answers that eventually become our life. The

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challenge is that the right question isn't always so obvious. Most things we want don't come with a road map or a set of instructions, so it can be difficult to frame the right question. Clarity must come from us.

To get the answers we seek, we have to invent the right questions — and we're left to devise our own. So how do you come up with uncommon questions that take you to uncommon answers?

You ask one question: the Focusing Question. Anyone who dreams of an uncommon life must find an uncommon approach to live it. The Focusing Question is that uncommon approach.

Anatomy of the Question

The Focusing Question collapses all possible questions into one: “What’s the ONE Thing I can do / such that by doing it / everything else will be easier or unnecessary?”

• **Part 1: “What’s the ONE Thing I can do ...”:** This sparks focused action. It forces you towards something specific. The last phrase, “can do,” is an embedded command directing you to take action that is possible. Not should do, could do or would do. Action you “can do” beats intention every time.

• **Part 2: “... such that by doing it ...”:** This tells you there’s a criterion your answer must meet. It’s the bridge between just doing something and doing something for a specific purpose.

• **Part 3: “... everything else will be easier or unnecessary?”:** This is the ultimate leverage test. It says that when you do this ONE Thing, everything else you could do to accomplish your goal will either be doable with less effort or no longer even necessary. This elevates the answer’s potential to change your life by doing the leveraged thing and avoiding distractions.

The Focusing Question asks you to find the first domino and focus on it until you knock it over. Once you’ve done that, you’ll discover a line of dominoes behind it either ready to fall or already down. ●

The Success Habit

Habits can be hard to break and hard to create. But we are unknowingly acquiring new ones all the time. When we start and continue a way of thinking or a way of acting over a long enough period, we’ve created a new habit. The choice we face is whether or not we want to form habits that get us what we want from life. If we do, then the Focusing Question is the most powerful success habit we can have.

Obviously, you can drive yourself nuts analyzing every little aspect of everything you might do. Instead, start with the big stuff and see where it takes you. The Focusing Question can direct you to your ONE Thing in different areas of your life. Simply reframe the Focusing Question by inserting your area of focus. You can also include a time frame — such as “right now” or “this year” — to give your answer the appropriate level of immediacy, or “in five years” or “someday” to find a big-picture answer that points you toward outcomes to aim for.

Here are some Focusing Questions to ask yourself:

- For My Spiritual Life: “What’s the ONE Thing I can do to help others?”
- For My Physical Health: “What’s the ONE Thing I can do to achieve my diet goals?”
- For My Personal Life: “What’s the ONE Thing I can do to improve my skill at _____?”
- For My Key Relationships: “What’s the ONE Thing I can do to improve my relationship with my spouse/partner?”
- For My Job: “What’s the ONE Thing I can do to ensure that I hit my goals?”
- For My Business: “What’s the ONE Thing I can do to make us more competitive?”
- For My Finances: “What’s the ONE Thing I can do to increase my net worth?”

To make your ONE Thing part of your daily routine, you must first understand and believe it. If you don’t, you won’t take action. Then you need to ask yourself the Focusing Question each day. When you do this, your direction will become clear. Once you make the Focusing Question a habit, you fully engage the power to get the results you want. To help yourself out, leverage reminders, such as putting up a sign that says, “Until my ONE Thing is done — everything else is a distraction.” And be sure to recruit support — research shows that those around you can influence you tremendously.

This one habit can become the foundation for many more, so keep your success habit of using the Focusing Question working as powerfully as possible. ●

The Path to Great Answers

The Focusing Question helps you identify your ONE Thing in any situation. It clarifies what you want in big areas of your life and then drills down to what you must do to get it. It’s a simple process: Ask a great question, then seek out a great answer.

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Ask a Great Question

Great questions, like great goals, are big and specific. Consider the Great Question matrix:

Quadrant 1: Big and Specific

Quadrant 2: Big and Broad

Quadrant 3: Small and Broad

Quadrant 4: Small and Specific

When applying the Great Question matrix to an issue such as increasing sales, you get the following breakdown:

Quadrant 4 (Small and Specific): What can I do to increase sales by 5 percent this year? This aims you in a specific direction, but there's nothing truly challenging about this question. For most salespeople, a 5 percent bump in sales could just as easily happen because the market shifted in your favor. Low goals don't require extraordinary actions, so they rarely lead to extraordinary results.

Quadrant 3 (Small and Broad): What can I do to increase sales? This is not really an achievement question at all. It's more of a brainstorming question. It's great for listing your options but requires more to narrow your options and go small. Unfortunately, this is the kind of average question most people ask and then wonder why their answers don't deliver extraordinary results.

Quadrant 2 (Big and Broad): What can I do to double sales? Here you have a big question, but nothing specific. It's a good start, but the lack of specifics leaves more questions than answers. There are still too many options, and without specifics, you won't know where to start.

Quadrant 1 (Big and Specific): What can I do to double sales in six months? Now you have all the elements of a great question. It's a big goal, and it's specific. You're doubling sales, which isn't easy, and you have a timeframe of six months, which is a challenge. You'll need a big answer. You'll have to stretch what you believe is possible and look outside the standard toolbox of solutions.

So if "What can I do to double sales in six months?" is a Great Question, how do you make it more powerful? Convert it to the Focusing Question: "What's the ONE Thing I can do to double sales in six months such that by doing it, everything else will be easier or unnecessary?"

Find a Great Answer

Answers come in three categories: double, stretch and possibility. High achievers understand these first two routes but reject them. Unwilling to settle for ordinary

when extraordinary is possible, they've asked a Great Question and want the very best answer.

The research and experience of others is the best place to start when looking for your answer. Armed with this knowledge, you can establish a benchmark. With a stretch approach, this was your maximum, but now it's your minimum. It's not all you'll do, but it becomes the hilltop where you'll stand to see if you can spot what might come next. This is called *trending*, and it's the second step. You're looking for the next thing you can do to head in the same direction as the best performers, or, if necessary, an entirely new direction.

Because your answer will be original, you'll probably have to reinvent yourself in some way to implement it. A new answer usually requires a new behavior; so don't be surprised if along the way to a sizable success you change in the process. ●

PART 3: EXTRAORDINARY RESULTS: UNLOCKING THE POSSIBILITIES WITHIN YOU

There is a natural rhythm to our lives that becomes a simple formula for implementing the ONE Thing and achieving extraordinary results: purpose, priority and productivity. The most productive people start with purpose and use it like a compass.

Live With Purpose and by Priority

Who we are and where we want to go determine what we do and what we accomplish. A life lived on purpose is the most powerful of all — and the happiest.

Happiness happens on the way to fulfillment. We all want to be happy, but seeking it isn't the best way to find it. The surest path to achieving lasting happiness appears when you make your life about something bigger, when you bring meaning and purpose to your everyday actions.

The Power of Purpose

Purpose is the straightest path to power and the ultimate source of personal strength — strength of conviction and strength to persevere. 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.

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Discover your purpose by asking what drives you. Purpose is why you're excited about your life. Pick a direction, start down that path, and see how you like it. Time brings clarity, and if you find you don't like it, you can always change your mind.

Goal Setting to the Now

We need a simple way of thinking to save us from ourselves, set the right priority and move closer toward accomplishing our purpose. Goal Setting to the Now will get you there. By thinking through the filter of Goal Setting to the Now, you set a future goal and then methodically drill down to what you should be doing right now. It can be a little like a Russian matryoshka doll in that your ONE Thing "right now" is nested inside your ONE Thing today, which is nested inside your ONE Thing this week, etc. Essentially, you're lining up your dominoes.

Understanding and completing Goal Setting to the Now trains your mind how to think, how to connect one goal with the next over time until you know the most important thing you must do right now. You're learning how to think big — but go small. ●

Live for Productivity

The most successful people are the most productive people. Productive people get things done, achieve better results and do so because they devote maximum time to being productive on their top priority, their ONE Thing. They time block their ONE Thing and then protect the time blocks with a vengeance.

Time Blocking

Most people think there's never enough time to be successful, but there is if you block it. Time blocking is a very results-oriented way of viewing and using time. It's a way to make sure what has to be done *gets* done.

So go to your calendar and block off all the time you need to accomplish your ONE Thing. If it's a one-time ONE Thing, block off the appropriate hours and days. If it's a regular thing, block off the appropriate time every day so that it becomes a habit. Everything else — papers, email, calls, — must wait. When you time block, you're creating the most productive day possible in a way that's repeatable every day for the rest of your life.

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?" When you find the answer, you'll be doing the most leveraged activity for your most leveraged work. This is how results become extraordinary.

Once you've done your ONE Thing for the day, you can devote the rest of it to everything else. Just use the Focusing Question to identify your next priority, and give that task the time it deserves. Repeat this approach until your workday is done. Getting "everything else" done may help you sleep better at night, but it's unlikely to earn you a promotion.

To achieve results, time block these three things in the following order:

1. Time block your time off. Successful people launch their year by taking time out to plan their time off because they know they'll need it and that they'll be able to afford it. By planning your time off in advance, you're managing your work time around your down-time instead of the other way around. Resting is as important as working.

2. Time block your ONE Thing. Yes, your ONE Thing comes second. Why? Because you can't happily sustain success in your professional life if you neglect your personal "re-creation" time. The key to making this work is to block time as early as possible in your day. Aim to block four hours a day, minimum. If you can do more, then do it.

3. Time block your planning time. This is when you reflect on where you are and where you want to be. Block an hour each week to review your annual and monthly goals. Ask, "Based on where I am right now, what's the ONE Thing I need to do this week to stay on track for my monthly goal and for my monthly goal to be on track for my annual goal?" You're lining up the dominoes. There is magic in knocking down your most important domino day after day.

Protect Your Time Block

For time blocks to actually block time, they must be protected. The best way to do this is to adopt the mindset that time blocks can't be moved. So when someone tries to double-book you, just say, "I'm sorry, I already have an appointment at that time," and offer options. ●

The Three Commitments

Achieving extraordinary results through time blocking requires three commitments. First, you must adopt the mindset of someone seeking mastery. Mastery is a commitment to becoming your best. Second, you must continually seek the very best ways of doing things. And

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last, you must be willing to be held accountable to doing everything you can to achieve your ONE Thing.

1. Follow the Path of Mastery

When you see mastery as a path you take rather than a destination, it starts to feel accessible and attainable. A healthy view of mastery means giving the best you have to become the best you can be at your most important work. The path is one of an apprentice learning and relearning the basics on a never-ending journey of greater experience and expertise.

2. Move from “E” to “P”

The path of mastering something is a combination of not only doing the best you can, but also doing the best that can be done. It's called moving from “E”— the Entrepreneurial Approach — to “P” — the Purposeful Approach. Our natural approach is entrepreneurial; it's seeing something we want to do or that needs to be done and racing off to do it with enthusiasm, energy and our natural abilities. However, our natural abilities have a ceiling of achievement, a level of productivity and success that eventually tops out.

Highly productive people don't accept the limitations of their natural approach as the final word on their success. When you bring the “P” to the same ceiling of limitation, things look different. The Purposeful Approach says, “I'm still committed to growing, so what are my options?” You then use the Focusing Question to narrow those choices down to the next thing you should do. It could be to follow a new model, get a new system or both.

3. Live the Accountability Cycle

Taking complete ownership of your outcomes by holding no one but yourself responsible for them is the most powerful thing you can do to drive your success. Therefore, accountability is most likely the most important of the three commitments. Without it, your journey down the path to mastery will be cut short as soon as you encounter a challenge, and you won't figure out how to break through the ceilings of achievement you'll hit along the way. Accountable people absorb setbacks and keep going; they're results oriented and never defend actions, skill levels, models, systems or relationships that aren't getting the job done.

When life happens, you can either be accountable or unaccountable. When life happens, the accountable person seeks and acknowledges reality, owns it, finds a solution and gets on with it. The unaccountable person avoids and fights reality, blames, makes personal excuses, and waits and hopes. ●

The Four Thieves

Our best intentions can be undone. Just as there are Six Lies that will deceive and mislead you, there are Four Thieves that can hold you up and rob you of your productivity.

1. Inability to say “No”: It's one thing to be distracted when you're trying to focus; it's another to be hijacked before you can even get to. The way to protect what you've said yes to and stay productive is to say no to anyone that could derail you. So here's a simple rule: A request must be connected to your ONE Thing for you to consider it.

2. Fear of chaos: Messes are inevitable when you focus on just one thing. While you whittle away on your most important work, the world doesn't sit and wait. It's important for you to accept this instead of fighting it.

3. Poor health habits: Personal energy mismanagement is a silent thief of productivity. It's key to exercise, make some time for meditation, and be sure to get eight hours of sleep. Don't sacrifice your health by trying to take on too much.

4. Environment doesn't support your goals: Your environment is simply who you see and what you experience every day. The right people in your life and the right physical environment on your daily path will support your efforts to get to your ONE Thing. ●

The Journey

As satisfying as succeeding is, as fulfilling as journeying feels, there is actually an even better reason to get up every day and take action on your ONE Thing: No regrets. Life is too short to pile up woulda, coulda, shouldas.

Success is an inside job. When you put yourself together, the world falls into place. You know what to do. You know how to do it. Your next step is simple. You are the first domino. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The One Thing* you'll also like:

- 1. *The Power of Habit* by Charles Duhigg.** Duhigg shares the scientific discoveries that explain why habits exist and how they can be changed.
- 2. *Extreme Productivity* by Robert C. Pozen.** Pozen explains how to determine your highest priorities and match them with how you actually spend your time.
- 3. *One Piece of Paper* by Mike Figliuolo.** Through a series of simple questions, readers will create a living document that communicates their values, passions, goals and standards to others, maximizing their leadership potential.