

Conclusions

Onwards, Upwards and Over to You

**It takes as much energy to wish as
it does to plan.**

Eleanor Roosevelt

This book is titled *How To Win*. It's about developing a winning outlook. It's about winning arguments by influencing and persuading people. It's about delivering winning pitches that engross and convince people. It's about winning the job by reaching out to people and delivering an outstanding interview performance. And it's about winning the career race by developing your organizational savvy and applying your strengths.

Those are all the ways in which we can win. But allow me for a few moments to tell you about two guaranteed ways to *lose*.

Lose by doing nothing

Of course, one sure-fire way to lose in your career is to do nothing. Simply finish reading the book, put it aside and get on with your day-to-day job. Because some people may finish this book and think that they now *understand* what it takes to succeed. But understanding is not the same as *doing*.

A couple of years ago an acquaintance I'll call Sheena told me that she was miserable in her work as an executive at a publishing company. A somewhat flighty individual with an up-and-down temperament, she wanted to enhance her career prospects and asked me to recommend a book I'd written that could help her out.

She ended up reading *E is for Exceptional: The New Science of Success* (Pan Books), which I wrote a few years ago. She told me that she sped through it and loved it. She said that it gave her a lot to think about and that she would try to apply some of the lessons when she was less busy at work. Maybe she would have time in a few weeks after a particularly busy period.

But the weeks turned into months and the months stretched on and on. She never did get the chance to do anything about what she had learnt from the book – or, more correctly, she never made it a priority. She never blocked out the time to devise a plan of action for how she would escape her unhappy situation.

Fast forward nearly three years to the present and she's still stuck in the same job. She has seen a couple of teammates overtake her; she has talked in envy about her colleagues who left the company to go on to bigger and better things. But she still grumbles about how no one takes her seriously enough and how much she wants to get out. A colleague said that she is one of those weird people who almost seem to prefer moaning about their lot in life rather than doing something to improve it.

The point? Reading this book and understanding the principles is not enough. It's application – doing and action – that gets results.

It's the people who complete the written exercises, refer back to the chapters of this book and make a plan that get the benefits. It's the individuals who apply the skills, maybe make a few missteps, but learn, improve and grow in both skill and confidence that get the uptick in their performance. It's those who talk to friends and confidants about how they can tweak their jobs that get the recognition and rewards.

Reading this book and understanding the principles is not enough. It's application – doing and action – that gets results.

Do and you win. Put this book aside and you lose.

Lose by doing too much

With so much content in this book, you'd be forgiven for wanting to tackle everything at once. But there's another way to lose. And that's by doing *too much*.

In this book we have covered many concepts. We began with the growth versus gifts mind-sets. In terms of winning arguments, we discussed more than a half-dozen tips and techniques for improving our abilities to pre-empt quarrels and coax people to see things our way.

When it comes to delivering winning pitches, I suggested the “SOAR vividly” method for telling effective, engaging stories. But there were other principles too: turning molehills back into mountains and checking that our stories transport people away, to name just two.

Jumping ahead to the chapter on winning the race, we encountered the concept of organizational savvy and its four distinct sub-skills. Plus we discussed the importance of identifying and applying our four types of strengths and weaknesses.

The point is that this book is stuffed to bursting with content. There are nearly two dozen diverse concepts and techniques for revamping your life. And anyone who tries to tackle everything – or even half of what's in this book – at once is almost certainly doomed to failure.

When I work with clients, we typically work on no more than a handful of issues at once. One current client is working on her networking and relationship-building skills. Another client I'm working with at the moment is singly focused on improving his presentation skills by telling better stories and doing so more charismatically. A third client is looking for a job in IT sales so we're working on his interview patter. What they all have in common is that each of them is working on just a couple of things at once.

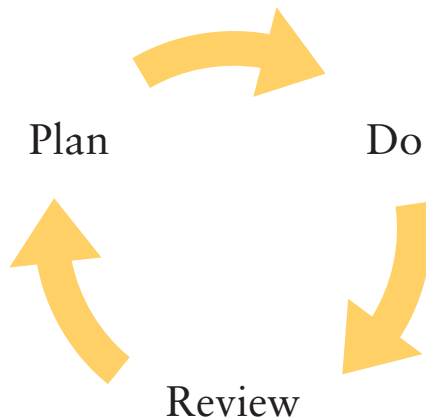
While it's, of course, admirable to want to improve yourself, be careful not to attempt too much at once. Better to focus on a handful of tasks or actions and get to do them well before you move on to a new bunch of activities. Otherwise, it would be like trying to learn Italian, take tennis lessons, write a novel, lose weight and take up kung fu *all at the same time*.

Be careful not to attempt too much at once.

Plan, Do, Review

When I work with clients, I encourage them to work through what I call the “Plan, Do, Review loop”. I suggest to clients that they:

- Plan what they intend to do by writing out a plan of action.
- Do what they committed to do in their plan.
- Afterwards, review what they did, how it went and how they can do better on the next cycle. Then it's back to writing out a new plan.



The Plan, Do, Review loop is based on decades of research telling us that people who *write down* plans about what they intend to

do are significantly more likely to follow through and actually overhaul their lives than people who simply have good intentions and think about what they want to do *in their heads*.

In study after study, researchers have found that people all over the world who *write down* their plans are more successful at changing their lives in all manner of ways. Fact: people are more likely to eat healthily and lose weight when they *write down* their plans. Fact: individuals wanting to quit smoking or excessive drinking are more successful when they *write down* what they will do and when.

Even students are more likely to complete their assignments when they *write down* their commitments. And managers are more successful at picking up new skills in the workplace when they – you guessed it – *write down* their plans.¹

Taking the time to write down (or type up) plans is not optional. If you only take one thing away from this entire book, I would argue that it would be this.

Plan, Do, Review: Step 1 – Plan

Begin by figuring out what would make the biggest difference to your career. Flicking back through the chapters of this book, what activities or changes do you feel would give you the biggest boost at work?

There may be quite a few things you'd *like* to work on. But what are the most critical handful, the ones that would contribute most significantly to your career satisfaction and success?

Next, think about how you will actually carry each of them out. Think about *what* you will do, *how* exactly you will do it, *who* you could involve and *when* you will do it.

I've found the following table useful in my work with clients. There are four columns for the actions an individual can take. And then

there's a final space at the bottom for a client to fill out the thing they'll do first. Here's what a blank table looks like:

What will I do?	How exactly will I do it?	Who could be involved?	When will I do it?
And what I will do <i>first</i> is to. . .			

Clients usually find it useful to fill out a separate table for *each* different skill area that they want to work on. For example, suppose that a taciturn woman called Mei Li decides that she wants to work on her organizational savvy and assertiveness skills. That's two distinct skills, requiring two action plans.

Let's look at one of these plans, the one she puts together for tackling her assertiveness. Having worked through the questionnaire in Chapter 2: Winning the Argument, she writes out her plan as follows:

What will I do?	How exactly will I do it?	Who could be involved?	When will I do it?
Remind myself of the need to be assertive	Re-read Chapter 2 on arguments	—	Next month on 31st July
Prepare for meetings	Before big, diarized meetings, spend 10 minutes writing bullet points about what I want to say	Talk to Padmal before weekly team meetings for input. Email Joanna for updates before departmental meetings	Before weekly team meetings, quarterly finance meetings and departmental committee meetings

(Continued)

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What will I do?	How exactly will I do it?	Who could be involved?	When will I do it?
Listen and empathize with Norman	Rather than beginning our conversations with what I want, begin by asking him how he feels about the issue and then let him rant	—	When I have my monthly telephone call with him
Use the DEAR method	Re-read the section on the DEAR method and write notes on what I want to say	Ask Alice for help – maybe to role play with me so I can practise first?	When making requests to Peter or Evelina, e.g. asking Peter for more budget next Wednesday
Prepare rigorously for my performance appraisal	Prepare arguments (using DEAR method)	—	Start working on this 1st October so I'm ready for November
And what I will do first is to . . . Email Alice today offering to buy her lunch to show her this action plan and get her advice on how to make all of this come off successfully			

The idea of having a separate section at the bottom of the table for “And what I will do *first* is to . . .” is to get started. Some people put things off because they’re lacking in confidence or feeling tired or lazy. But your life won’t get better – you won’t get the recognition, the promotion, the career contentment and rewards – from

waiting. So this space is designed for something that you can do quickly today.

Some people reading this may think, “I’ll do this later”. But the readers who actually *write down* their plans are the ones who are most likely to succeed.

Writing out your own action plan

Having good intentions is not enough. Psychological research tells us very clearly that people who turn their intentions into action plans (or to use the psychological jargon “implementation intention plans”) are significantly more likely to achieve their goals.

When I coach clients in a typical 90-minute session, we always spend the last 10 to 15 minutes working out what they are promising to do, who they could involve and when they will do it. Will you do the same?

Plan, Do, Review: Step 2 – Do

The next step in the Plan, Do, Review loop is to actually *do* what you set out in your plan.

There’s a famous quote from Benjamin Franklin that I like: “You may delay, but time will not.” For me it’s a great reminder that time ticks by. Put off what we know we could be doing and the weeks could so easily turn into months and the months into years.

If you want more help in not only putting together your action plan but also acting upon it, you could pick up one of my other books.

You Can Change Your Life: Easy Steps to Getting What You Want (Macmillan) contains advice on boosting your willpower, deploying visualization techniques to strengthen your resolve and enlisting the support of friends and colleagues to give you the best shot at improving yourself and, ultimately, changing your life.

Plan, Do, Review: Step 3 – Review

The final step in the Plan, Do, Review loop is to review what you did and how it went. So set aside a little time to think about your progress. In my experience, this consists of asking yourself three main questions:

- **“What worked well?”** Looking back at what you did and the results you got, what were you pleased with? What should you continue to do?
- **“What could I do better or differently next time?”** What could have worked better?
- **“How appropriate are my remaining plans?”** Looking forward to what you have yet to do in your action plan, is there anything that you may need to alter?

Just as crucial as the questions you ask yourself is the way you frame your own responses. You’ll remember in Chapter 1: Developing a Winning Outlook, we discussed the difference between the growth versus gifts mind-sets. People with the gifts mind-set look at missteps and failures as signs to give up because they’re not talented or gifted enough. But people with the growth outlook see even catastrophes and disasters as mere opportunities to continue learning. For a handy summary of the differences between the two attitudes on life, you could flick back to the section “Growing your confidence and capabilities” in Chapter 1 and in particular the table on page 29.

Understanding how best to review and plan your progress

Are you more of an introvert or an extravert?

When it comes to reviewing your progress and re-planning your next steps, are you the kind of person who likes to reflect quietly and work on your own? Or do you prefer to talk things through with other people?

Or maybe you like a combination of the two. Perhaps you like to work on some issues by yourself but would value the advice of trusted friends or colleagues to discuss weightier problems or larger opportunities.

Plan, Do, Review isn't something that you have to do alone. By all means make plans and review them privately if that's your style. Or talk about your plans with a confidant or a loved one. Do whatever works for you.

Oh, and if you'd like to delve further into your level of introversion/extraversion (as well as several other dimensions of personality), you could take a look at my book *Personality: How to Unleash Your Hidden Strengths* (Prentice Hall Life).

The science of effective reviews

When it comes to developing your skills – anything from improving your culinary prowess to getting better at a sport – how do you keep track of your progress? Are you someone who celebrates your successes, the milestones you've passed along the way? Or do you keep your eyes firmly on your goals and what you have yet to achieve?

You may be wondering why it matters. But to explain, I'll share one final research study which will allow you to make faster progress towards your goals.

A team of scientists led by Florida State University psychologist Kyle Conlon advertised online to recruit men and women who wanted to lose weight. Over a hundred participants attended an initial meeting in which they were given advice on how to lose weight; they also set goals as to how much weight they would ideally but safely be able to lose. Over the course of 12 weeks, the scientists monitored how much weight each individual actually lost.

Without their knowledge, the participants were randomly split into two groups. During weekly review meetings, the first group were told to focus on how much progress they had made (i.e. how much weight they shed each week). The second group were told to focus on their goals (i.e. how much weight they *still* needed to lose in order to hit their targets).

One group lost more than twice as much body fat as the other group.² But which would *you* guess would be more motivating? To focus on what you have accomplished or to focus on your goals?

Some commentators argue that it's a good idea to celebrate your achievements and congratulate yourself every time you make progress. However, the results of the study tell us that it was the participants who focused on what they had *yet* to achieve who lost the most weight. Remember that they lost *more than twice* as much body fat as those who focused on what they had already achieved.

In other words, focusing on our past accomplishments – on how far we've come – may end up reducing our enthusiasm. Perhaps looking back gives us a false sense of security. We risk resting on our laurels and coasting.

In contrast, focusing on our goals – on how far we still have to go – may help us to feel more inspired and motivated. Ultimately, *looking forward helps us to achieve better results*. Rather than allowing ourselves to be satisfied with the steps we've taken, we set our jaws and resolve to push on even further.

Focusing on our goals – on how far we still have to go – may help us to feel more inspired and motivated.

Reviewing your progress

University researcher Kyle Conlon and his colleagues suggest that we can keep our motivation high by keeping our “eyes on the prize”. One way of doing this is to compare ourselves to the role models we aspire to be like rather than the people we've overtaken.

For example, say you get a promotion. Rather than thinking how much better off you are than the colleagues languishing on the rungs below you, you could focus on what you need to do to reach the next step.

Or imagine you're a charity worker on a mission to feed starving people in a developing country. You could sit back by thinking, “I've helped thousands of people to have disease-free, healthy lives.” Or you could spur yourself on by reminding yourself that “I've still got tens of thousands of people to help.”

Then glance at your action plan to see what else you have yet to achieve. Which of your existing actions may need course-correcting? Or what entirely new actions may you need to add into your action plan? That way, you keep the momentum going rather than risk resting on your laurels.

Plan, Do, Review – and do it all over again

I know of a particularly highflying executive called Vaughn who uses the Plan, Do, Review method daily. The chief operating officer at a burgeoning Internet business, he begins each week on a Sunday evening at home by taking a few minutes to plan the major tasks he wishes to work on the next day. Most of those are to do with his work, but some aren't – he plays in a five-a-side football league and strives to get home early enough to have dinner with his wife and young children on certain nights of the week too.

When he arrives at work on Monday, he fights diligently to complete his priorities. One example: he schedules regular one-to-one meetings with each member of his team aimed at building their confidence and capability so that they too can manage their own teams as the business continues to grow.

Some days Vaughn gets nearly everything on his plan done. Other days he has to be flexible when issues spring up, such as system crashes, investor requests or unexpected client opportunities. But by having a plan, he can make better trade-offs in his decision-making about how to spend his time rather than constantly reacting to what everyone else wants of him.

At the end of each day, he reviews how things went. Should the systems problem that cropped up really have warranted his attention – or should he have left it to one of his team, for example? How could he pre-empt that client complaint next time? Did he spend too much time – or not enough – on internal meetings? And then he plans the next day.

But Vaughn's planning cycle doesn't just encompass what happened over the last day. Every year in August when his work is quietest,

he takes an afternoon to review his progress over the past year before planning for the next. Is his work still fulfilling? But, at the same time, is he making the most of his life outside of work?

Looking forward, can he see himself in the same business in 12 months' time? What skills does he need to pick up to stay at the forefront of his field? What adventures or activities would he like to experience for the hell of it? Which relationships does he want to invest in further – and how?

Looking further ahead

What are your medium- to long-term goals? Where would you like to be in, say, 6 to 12 months' time?

Plans don't have to be followed slavishly. The point of a plan – whether a quick daily Plan, Do, Review plan or a more in-depth annual one – isn't to do everything on it irrespective of what else may be happening in your life. But it gives you a focus. It helps you to identify what's important rather than allowing yourself to be buffeted by everything else going on around you.

Of course, you're welcome to review and plan using whatever questions you like. But here are some prompts:

- Looking back on the last year, what have you learnt?
- What would you like to be different in the future?
- What steps will you take to achieve the changes you desire?

Putting it all into practice

Planning what you would like to do, doing it and reviewing how you got on isn't rocket science. In fact, I often say to clients that change needn't be hard. The theory is simple. It just takes diligent practice and persistent application to get the results.

Think about it this way: consider the theory versus practice of running a marathon. We all understand the theory behind running a marathon. You put your running shoes on and run 26 miles. Easy.

But, of course, you actually need to train. You need to run and run and run. For day after day, week after week and month after month. At first you may only be able to run a mile or so. Your muscles may cramp up and your feet may get sore.

But after a few weeks, you may be able to run several miles. And you continue to run, run, run.

And then one momentous day you realize that you ran 10 miles. Wow. And then you run 12 and maybe 16 or 18 miles. Then 26 miles doesn't seem such a big deal.

The point I'm trying to make is that understanding the theory is very different from putting it into practice. Just like running a marathon, the theory behind success at work often isn't that difficult. The principles we covered in the chapters of this book may not have been all that surprising. But it's the people who put those rules and ideas into practice that win.

A final thought

To finish, I would like to share with you one of my all-time favourite quotes. The author Mark Twain once said: "Don't go around saying

the world owes you a living; the world owes you nothing; it was here first.”

I think the same can be said in so many areas of our lives. We could think about our careers and say: “Don’t go around saying your organization owes you a living; the organization owes you nothing; it was here first.” The same goes for your boss. Your boss owes you nothing.

The same may be true in our personal lives too. Expecting that our parents, husbands, wives or loved ones owe us something – that they *should* be the way we want them to be – is likewise an easy route to heartache.

It’s a useful lesson in life to accept that *we* – and *not* our organizations, bosses or loved ones – have the responsibility for our careers, livelihoods and happiness. If we want that assignment, funding, pay rise, promotion or corner office, we have to take the steps to get it. If we want to feel fulfilled, happy or loved, we can do something about it. Simply waiting and hoping isn’t a strategy.

We – and not our organizations, bosses or loved ones – have the responsibility for our careers, livelihoods and happiness.

If you want to be a winner, you can. Choose to *do*, to take action, to work towards what you want. Go on. Do it. And you may just achieve it.

Onwards and upwards

- If you want to hone your skills, improve your performance at work and your satisfaction with life, *you can*. Make the effort to apply the ideas and techniques within this book and you will get the results. Think that you *understand* the concepts and techniques but do nothing and you will stay the same.

- Also bear in mind that taking on *too much* can be as bad as doing nothing. Successful individuals plan and prioritize what they want to do. We all only have 24 hours in the day. So begin with the handful of things that will make the biggest difference to your life and career. You can work on the rest later.
- Use the Plan, Do, Review method to work out how *exactly* you will achieve your goals. You may be able to complete some of your actions in days or weeks. Others may take months. But by continually reviewing what worked or didn't and re-planning, you can make sure that you make progress.
- Keep this book with you over the months and years. I hope that you will refer to it time and again in your quest to win the argument, the pitch, the job and the race.
- Let me know what you thought about this book. And tell me how you get on. You can message me on Twitter – I'm @robyeung – feel free to say hello!