D✔NE

How to finish your projects when traditional ways don't work

GEOFF McDONALD

DONE

The Book

Geoff McDonald - *Done: Why You Fail to Finish Your Projects and What to Do About It*
(Yep, I'm rapping my own book - All authors should!)

The Big Idea

Most projects fail due to a lack of motivation. And, that's hardly a surprise when you realize that most project plans only focus on **what** needs to be done. That's important and it's not enough. Instead of mere project planning, we need Project Design to embed our passion, inspiration and motivation into what we need to do.

Speed Rap

To overcome your most important business challenge or create your next big thing you need to concentrate your focus through creating a new project. Then you need to do the obvious thing - finish it! To help you finish adopt the seven rules of DONE: ❶ Stop planning ❷ Stop trying to fix things ❸ Include inner goals ❹ Use simple rules of thumb ❺ Structure your success ❻ Ship smaller sooner and ❼ Change you. Separately they're useful, together they are a powerful strategy for success.

Your Challenge

Tackle your most important business challenge or your next big thing with a project. Use the Seven Rules of DONE to finish it with aplomb. Picture the celebration right now!

**BOOK
RAPPER**

Contents

Book Rapper issues are not direct summaries of the books we review. We take what we consider to be the most important ideas from the book. We then re-package these key ideas so you can easily digest them in about 30 minutes. We also make it clear how you can take decisive action to benefit from these insights. In some parts we follow the book closely and in others we add our own models and interpretations. Given the *Book Rapper* issue is much smaller than the book we may not cover each chapter. If you want more details than what's in this issue... Buy the book!

BOOK RAPPER

The Cost of Not Finishing

Can you name five ways to improve your business? I bet you can. And, I bet you double you're not doing all of them. The big question is... Why not? There are two simple reasons: You're either not starting or not finishing. This RAP is all about tackling the things you want and completing the ones you start.

Money

Not finishing costs you money. Most people finish their client projects. But, what's the cost of not finishing your own projects?

Start

Finish

Reputation

Not finishing costs you leads, referrals and more money. If you're not getting things done, potential clients are going elsewhere.

Not finishing has an emotional cost. It's baggage you carry with you and it become the doubts that stop you from taking on your next big thing.

BOOK RAPPER

How to Create Your Next Big Thing

To overcome your most important business challenge or to create your next big thing you need to create a project. Here we look at the two types of work and the power of projects to get more done.

Continuous

Continuous work is when we do the same tasks over and over again - and we never stop having to do them.

For instance, email. Have you ever had no emails to deal with? Not likely. Or at least not for long.

Other examples... taking care of our bills, making sales, doing admin, finding and serving customers, updating your website, sharing on social media, building your network...

Continuous Work

Project Work

Projects

Continuous work is steady over time. And, our motivation dips slightly the longer we do it. In contrast, projects are a short focused sprint - we can get more done in short bursts. In *The Design of Business*, Roger Martin talks about the design of projects:

- Clear start and end date
- Specific outcome or objective
- Focus your attention due to the precise deadline and the specific objective
- Often require a new workflow and therefore make it easier to innovate and explore new things
- Your next big thing won't happen out of continuous work. You need to deliberately set time aside to focus on it, ie create a project.

The Seven Rules of DONE

To grow your business setting out on ambitious adventure is a great first step. And to complete our voyage we need bold, decisive and committed action. To help, here are The Seven Rules of DONE... Separately they are useful, together they can turn you into a make-it-happen machine.

STOP PLANNING!

Planning is not enough – particularly when it only describes what are we are going to do. We need to design our projects to include our motivations, inspirations & passion into our projects.

DON'T FIX YOUR PROBLEMS

Mostly, when we plan our projects we try to fix something that is broken. This is limiting and not satisfying. Instead, we need to transform the situation by creating a new context.

INNER OVER OUTER

Our default goal setting strategy works for some goals and fails miserably for others. Only focusing on the things we want in the physical world is limiting. We can stick at tasks longer if we create Inner Goals as well as Outer Goals.

RULES RULE

Creating complex plans to tackle complex problems is a recipe for confusion, chaos and disaster. Instead, we need to develop simple rules of thumb to make it easier to innovate and allow us to be flexible. Think traffic lights!

SHIP SMALLER SOONER

Traditionally we aim to deliver one big thing at the end of our projects. The problem here is the lack of feedback we get along the way. This leaves us wide open to creating something that nobody wants. Instead, we need to find out what will ultimately work by creating smaller versions of our final big thing.

STRUCTURE SHAPES SUCCESS

We think we fail because of a lack of willpower, discipline or focus. This is only part of the story. There are bigger forces at work impacting us in invisible ways. We need to design our environments to promote the behaviours we want and to stifle those we don't.

YOU HAVE TO CHANGE!

When we create our projects our focus is naturally on the end result. However, if that's all we do we miss a big opportunity. The real purpose of our project is to create a change in our situation and to make that change stick. To do that we need to change!

BOOK RAPPER

Stop Planning!

The common advice and usual practice when we start a new project is to start planning. Unfortunately, for many people, a good plan won't be enough. Here we share why you need to design your projects instead.

In their brilliant book *Switch*, Chip and Dan Heath refer to the work of Jonathan Haidt who talks about the Rider and the Elephant. Haidt suggests the Rational Rider is great for planning and lousy at taking action. And, the Emotional Elephant who is great at action and lousy at planning. Together they make a great team. And, when we imagine the tiny rider on top of the large elephant we realize that planning is not enough. Unless we can engage the elephant to move, the best plan in the world is useless.

Instead of simply planning we need to expand our scope, our focus and our attention to engage our full self. We need to be energised, inspired and motivated to take the right action at the right time. And this needs to be included in our Project Design.

Bernice McCarthy created *The 4-Mat Model* to ensure presenters address the four different motivation styles likely in any audience. To miss one style is to miss one segment of your audience.

Traditional planning only adopts one of these four styles: the What. For a person motivated by this preference it's a big win. And for everyone else it could mean you fail to take action, finish your projects and achieve the results you want.

Project Planning

WHAT ELSE	WHY
HOW	WHAT

Project Design
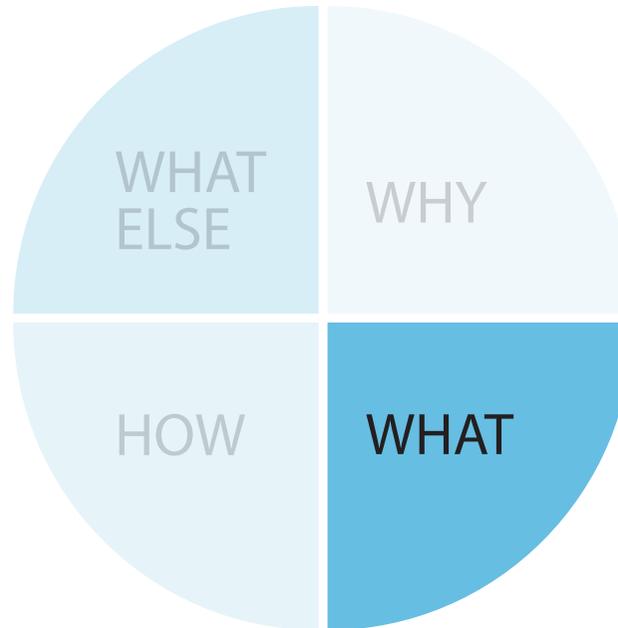
WHAT ELSE	WHY
HOW	WHAT
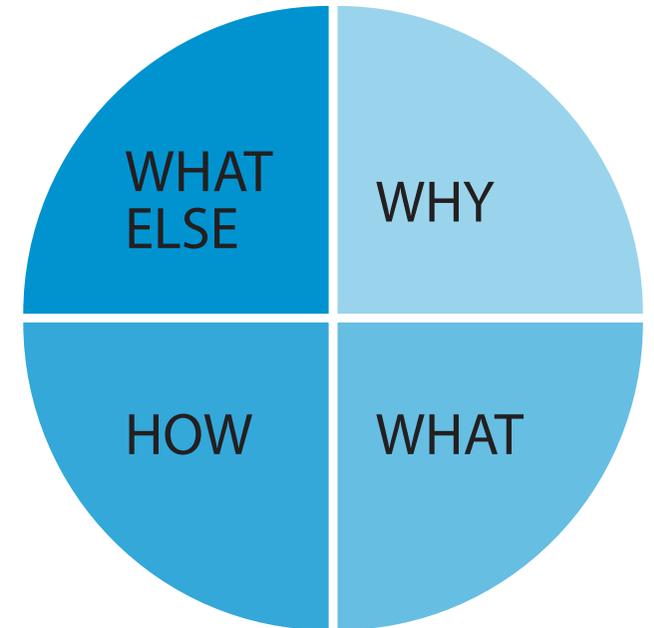
WHY: Why should I care? What's the big problem?

WHAT: What's the general solution to this problem?

HOW: What are the specific steps for solving this problem?

WHAT ELSE: What other problems is this connected to?

Don't Fix Your Problems

When a problem occurs our natural reaction is to fix it. That's fine for physical things that have a clear solution. And, it's not so easy for many business challenges that don't have a neat fix. Here we consider what to do instead of fixing things.

As Zaffron and Logan suggest in their book *The Three Laws of Performance*; when we try to fix complex things - like our most important business challenge - we tend to only achieve a short-term result. Then, the problem usually repeats itself over and over again. Think the booms and bust of cash flow.

The reason this happens is because we tend to tackle the problem from the same context as before. And, all we end up doing is shuffling our deck chairs when our ship is sinking.

We can achieve much better results if we transform our situation. To do this we need to shift the way we are looking at the problem. We want to shift the context so the problem effectively disappears.

For instance, instead of constantly chasing new customers with discounts and special offers, consider serving your current customers in better ways. Over time this is likely to produce better relationships, lead to new work through referrals and ultimately more consistent sales results.

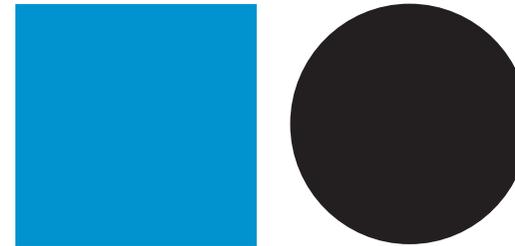## TWO WAYS TO OVERCOME YOUR MOST IMPORTANT BUSINESS CHALLENGE

Fix
CHANGE CONTENT
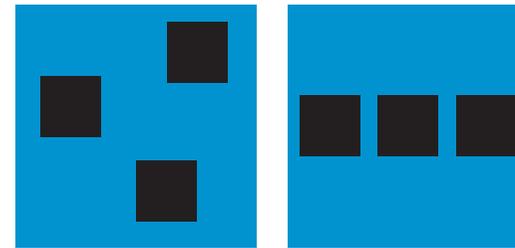
Transform
CHANGE CONTEXT

To transform your most important business challenge...

❶ **Identify the current context, assumptions and attitudes.**

❷ **Then look for what is missing that would transform your situation?**

BOOK
RAPPER

Inner Over Outer

Have you ever stopped to consider that you're working on the wrong goal? And, I don't mean writing a book instead of getting fit. If we pursue the wrong type of goal then our chances of success can be strangled before we begin. Here we look at Inner and Outer goals.

Heidi Grant Halvorson in her book *Succeed* suggests we all have a default goal achievement strategy. And this will work for us in some situations and not others. It follows that sometimes we fail to achieve our goal simply because we've tackled it the wrong way.

Typically we pursue Outer Goals - that's a result outside of us, such as: make more sales; update your website or launch a new product. This is crucial to overcome our most important business challenge. And, from a motivation point of view it's limiting.

In contrast, when we pursue an Inner Goal - something that we pursue because it satisfies us inside - we are more likely to stick at our tasks for longer and therefore more likely to reach our target.

This is not an either/or choice. It's both. For instance, you can achieve the Outer Goal of generating more sales through the inner goal of: building better relationships with your existing customers (relatedness); building systems to reach more people (autonomy); learning to sell more effectively (competence); or connecting your sales goal to the purpose of your organisation.

Four Inner Goals

The pursuit of a higher objective than the immediate task in front of you

PURPOSE

COMPETENCE (MASTERY)

The ability to learn and get things done with less effort or at a higher level

**The pursuit of freedom and choice in where you spend your time and attention**

AUTONOMY

RELATEDNESS

The pursuit of belonging, connection and better relationships with others

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Rules Rule

We often try to tackle planning in our complex world by creating complex plans. This might be logical and it's not useful. We don't need more complexity, we need simple. Here's how to plan just enough for your project.

HOW MUCH DO YOU LIKE TO PLAN?
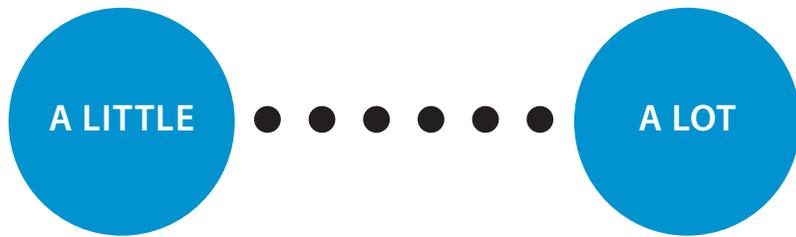
A LITTLE • • • • • • **A LOT**

How much do you like to plan? A lot, a little or just the right amount?

Under-planning can be bad because it makes it too easy to work on the wrong things - wasted effort. And, over-planning can be worse - planning a lot promotes the idea that we have it all handled when we don't. It also turns the action phase into blind following.

Naturally, we all think we plan just right. Unfortunately, this is almost impossible because our plans are presumptions about what we think will work. And we have no way of knowing what actually works until we've done it.

Also, in our increasingly complex world we try to plan in all the factors and simply finish up with more complexity than we started with.

SIMPLE RULES

The solution to planning just a little for a lot of impact is to use simple rules of thumb.

One of the best everyday examples of this are traffic lights. Red means stop. Go means start. And, Amber means prepare to stop. Easy! Three rules that help manage millions of cars everyday.

In their book *Simple Rules*, Sull and Eisenhardt show how a handful of rules can also form a powerful strategy. For years, Apple produced four computers - two laptops and two desktops; one of each for the professional market and one of each for the home user. Done.

The good news is that you already have a host of simple rules in your life and in your business. For instance...
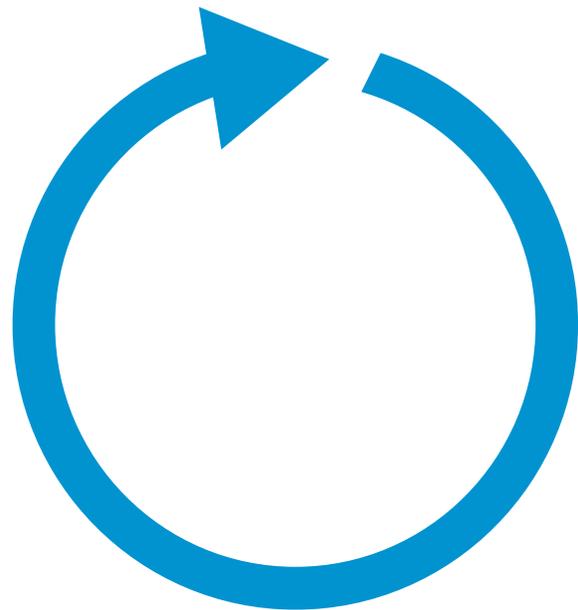
- **What time do you start/finish work each day?**
- **How much do you aim to earn each year?**
- **How often do you check your email each day?**
- **When do you return missed phone calls?**
- **When do you not work?**

BOOK RAPPER

Ship Smaller Sooner

The classic fantasy for budding authors is to be able to hibernate like Ernest Hemingway in a cabin in the woods to write your book in solitude and then release it to a flood of adoring fans. It's also a classic recipe for failure. Here we share why you need to ship smaller sooner...

Traditional marketing approaches suggest that you start by identifying your target audience, find out what is needed and solve that problem. This approach will usually result in steady sales and a boring same-old same-old product.
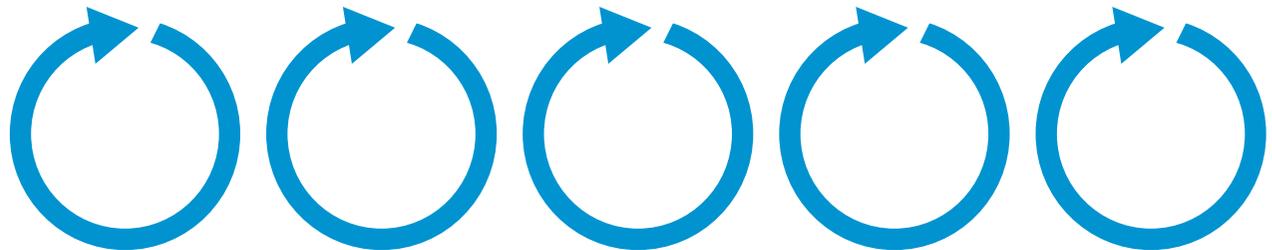
In contrast, the innovators and artists of the world prefer to create their ideal thing and launch this to the market. Whilst this often leads to an exciting and novel product the big risk is that nobody will want to buy it.

There is a third way. Start with your ideal product in it's smallest form. In *The Lean Startup* book by Eric Ries they call this your Minimum Viable Product (MVP). For instance, instead of writing your complete book, simply publish the outline and see if people are interested. Then, based on feedback you adjust your approach to satisfy both your desire for innovation and what people want. Next, you can repeat the feedback loop by adding a chapter, then another chapter and so on.

The other big benefit of this approach is that you can build an audience as you develop your product or service. So, when it is time to launch your next big thing you have a warm audience ready and waiting. This contrasts with the old way of launching a fully-formed something to a cold-audience and trying to razz them up with a lot of marketing hype. Skip that!

The key to the Ship Smaller Sooner approach is to complete a lot of smaller iterations and feedback loops - rather than one big one that is advised in the traditional waterfall method of project planning.

Traditional Waterfall Method

Innovative Lean Startup Method

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Structure Shapes Success

Whilst our internal drive for success is a major factor in finishing our projects, there is a bigger invisible force at work - our environment. Here we look at how structure shapes success.

Usually when we think of not finishing our projects we immediately focus on our own weaknesses. For instance, I lack discipline, focus, drive and willpower. That might be right. And, even if this is exactly what we need in the short-term, it will never be enough in the long-term.

Willpower is the ability to keep going. It's a powerful emotional response to the challenges of life. The good news is that it's like a muscle and we can build more of it as we practice. The bad news is that like all of our muscles they get tired and eventually fail. Often we reach for that chocolate bar not because we are weak, simply because we're exhausted and have run out of willpower.

There is one defining thing that marks the progress of human civilisation and that is that we shape our environment to our own ends. This means we pave roads, build cities, dam rivers and ultimately change the climate.

Our environment or the situations we find ourselves in shape our actions everyday too. This can be as simple as wanting to exercise simply because the sun is shining and it's a beautiful day. It also means designing our environment so that it favour us doing work. This could be as simple as removing clutter, playing the right music or putting up inspiring posters on your wall.

Structure drives out no structure. Create the structure that helps you get more done.

Willpower

Environment

Six ways to structure your success from the book *Influencer* by Grenny, Patterson, Maxfield, McMillan and Switzler:

❶ **Notice**: Start to observe what helps you get more done and what doesn't.

❷ **Visible**: Plot your progress on a graph or scoreboard.

❸ **Datapoints**: Make change and progress easy to see by measuring it.

❹ **Distance**: Bring the things you want to do more of closer and put the things you want less of further away, eg put fruit on your desk and chocolate in the high cupboard out of reach

❺ **Easy**: Clear the way so it's easier to do what's right

❻ **Structure**: Create a checklist or calendar reminder so you're more likely to follow best practice

BOOK RAPPER

You Have to Change

All projects are created from the view that we want to change something. And, whilst we usually focus on the things in our world, the real change happens within you. Here we explore the idea that you have to change.

The obvious first purpose of your project is to complete it so you can cherish the result that it produces. And, there is a deeper more powerful opportunity here.

The real purpose of all projects is to create change and to make that change stick. And, if we pursue our project strategy from this perspective we can take a more powerful path to success.

For example, rather than write a single book with an all-out un-repeatable candle-burning slog, it might be just as easy to write several books with less angst and effort through building a regular writing habit.
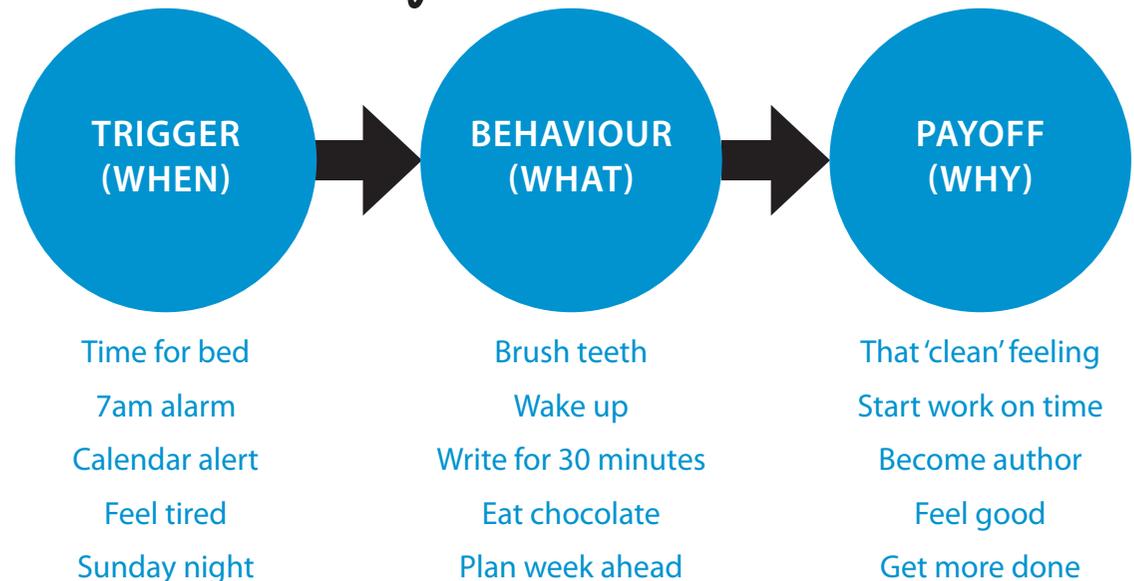
As Charles Duhigg suggests in *The Power of Habits*, our brains are energy intensive organs. And, as a result they take shortcuts to save precious fuel. Thus we build habits so we don't have to think about things from scratch all of the time.

Our habits are made up of a repeatable loop - something happens and we are triggered into action. And by performing this behaviour we gain a benefit or payoff (often a feeling).

By designing and building habits around the key tasks in our projects we are more likely to take that action consistently and with less effort. The key is simply to identify the three components: When, What and Why.

In the end, to fulfil our projects we need to change. And, the most effective way to achieve both outcomes is through building habits.

The Habit Loop

TRIGGER (WHEN)	BEHAVIOUR (WHAT)	PAYOFF (WHY)
Time for bed	Brush teeth	That 'clean' feeling
7am alarm	Wake up	Start work on time
Calendar alert	Write for 30 minutes	Become author
Feel tired	Eat chocolate	Feel good
Sunday night	Plan week ahead	Get more done

BOOK RAPPER

The Access Point

In his classic best seller *Becoming a Leader*, Warren Bennis suggests the starting point for being a leader is to stand up and say 'I want to make this happen'. And, this is also the starting point for any project.

Yes, it's as simple as that. You need the courage, strength and ambition to stand up and declare what you intend to pursue.

Normally, we start with the view of getting from A to B. This practical level of getting things done is useful. However, it's low quality motivational fuel and we can do much better if we want a compelling future to call us forward.

The next level up is to be inspired in life. This takes the step from focussing on 'doing' to 'being'. However, the limit here is that it is about being in the present moment. Whilst helpful, it's still not enough.

We also want to add a bigger frame or context: Who do you want to become? This keeps our attention on being in the moment right now plus it also gives us an aspiration for our future.

These three levels of 'better than we currently have' pull us forward and into action.
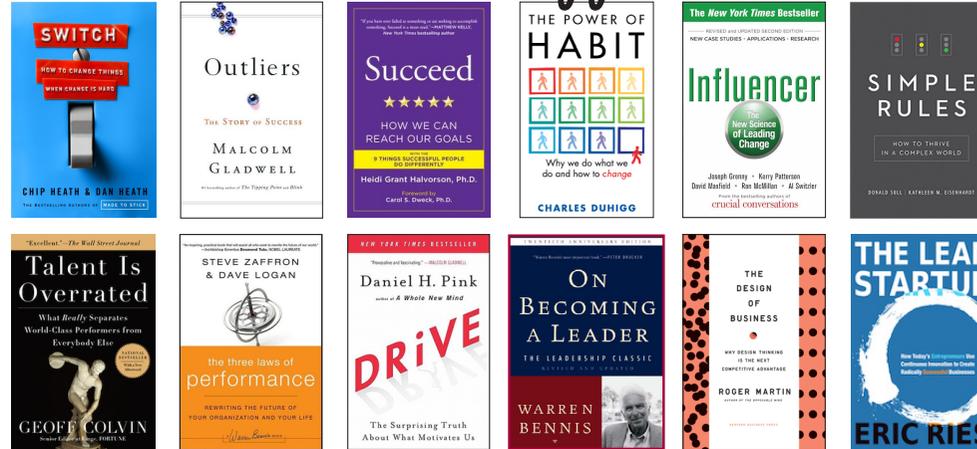
Three Levels of Better

BECOME THE PERSON YOU WANT TO BE

Who do I want to become AND who do I need to be right now?

BE INSPIRED IN LIFE

Who do I want to be right now?

GET THINGS DONE

What do I need to do?

BOOK RAPPER

More...

Three ways to overcome your most important business challenge and create your next big thing...

Buy the Book

More details here

Read these Book Rapper issues...

More details here

Do the Course.

Project Done was designed to help you overcome your most important business challenge and create your next big thing. It's a 10 week online group coaching program run over 12 weeks. We provide the strategic pathway, keep you accountable and provide the support you need to overcome the obstacles you will face along the way.

More details here
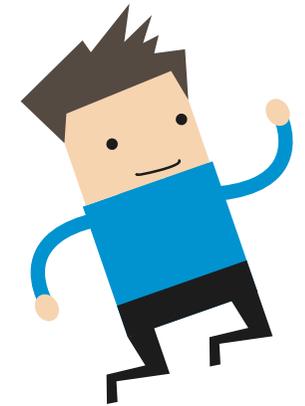
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BOOK RAPPER

CREATE *Your* NEXT BIG THING

Geoff McDonald

Author of Book Rapper, eight books and international presenter. Geoff is a former architect who helps business experts and organisations create their next big thing.

Three ways we can help you create your next big thing...

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