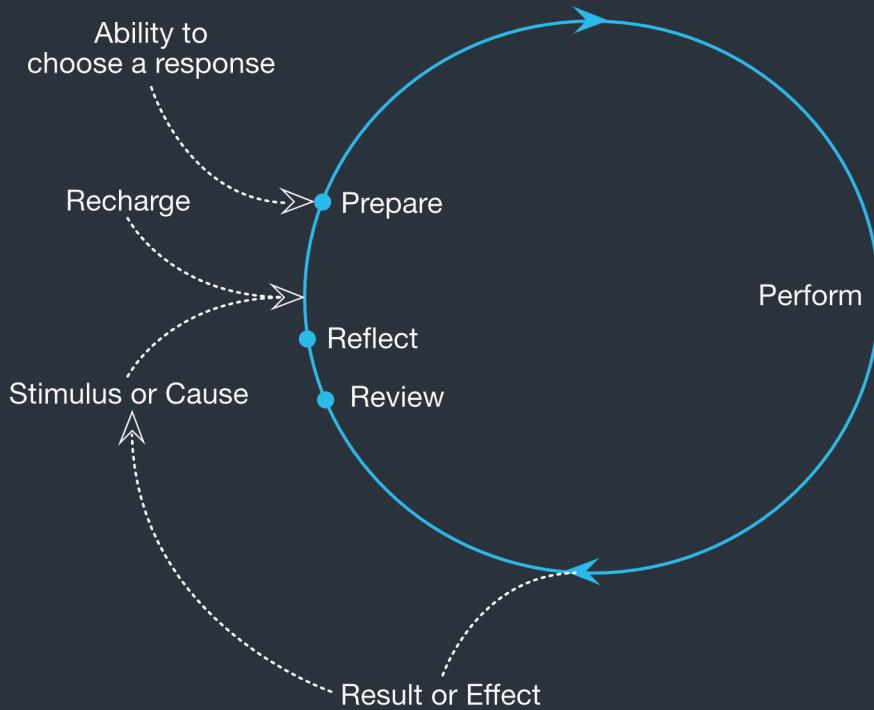


# Triumph over Time



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# Triumph over Time

## Principle-based Productivity

Joshua Bruce

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*Dedicated to Becca a wonderful coach, human, collaborator, editor, and partner. Thank you for the years so far and hopefully many more to come how ever we continue to evolve and grow that.*

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# Disclaimer

*Triumph over Time* is a work of nonfiction. Nonetheless, some names and personal characteristics of individuals or events have been changed in order to disguise identities. Any resulting resemblance to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

# Introduction

I'm not usually a fan of introductions to books. However, given this book tries to be high on utility and pragmatism, having a more philosophical and emotional introduction seems to make sense.

# My Confession

I'm the hardest working lazy person you'll ever meet.

I'm willing to work very hard so I don't have to.

*Josh Bruce, self-referential joke*

We're all sort of hardworking lazy people, mostly from our perception of work and literally how the human body functions. When I say "lazy," I don't mean I want to sit around and do nothing while zoning out on mindless television. Further, when I say "work," I typically mean something I didn't volunteer to do, aren't driven to do, and feel pressured to get done. I have to work to stay focused. I have to work to care emotionally. I have to work to take one more step.

Everything else in my life is play.

Some people operate well in environments where they're told to do work they don't care about while being pressured to turn it around in 24 hours or less when 48 is more appropriate. They enjoy the adrenaline rush. The feeling of being a superhero for a day or the underdog overcoming insurmountable odds.

That's not me.

That's my confession.

Now for my obsession.

The passage of time. More specifically, my emotional response to the passage of time. More generally, the emotional response of others to the passage of time.

Randy Pausch once said, “Time is the only commodity that matters” and I agree. With that said, I have no concept of time.

Just to make sure that landed, I have *no* concept of time.

When I told a friend this he laughed. It is admittedly odd that the time-obsessed, hard-working, “lazy” person, has no concept of time.

One hour is one hour. That doesn’t describe *time*, that describes a measurement system *for* time. If you spend one hour in a meeting and one hour playing a game you enjoy, the time has not changed, only the context. More specifically, your perception and response to the context.

The “container” (setup and surroundings) for the meeting you attended was probably CRAP, which contributed to people becoming DRAB.

CRAP is a mnemonic I use to remember things we want to avoid when setting and maintaining a container for an interaction:

1. Communication Barriers: static on phone lines, overuse of acronyms, interruptions, and so on.

2. Rushed: “Quick! We should have a meeting on solving world hunger with 100 of the greatest minds on the planet, and we’ll do it in 30 minutes or less.”
3. No Agenda: “Why are we here? What are we wanting to accomplish? *How* are we going to accomplish it? Who should be here and why?”
4. Pointless: “We totally could have done this via text or email.”

DRAB is another mnemonic I use for what typically happens to (or the types of) people within a container, CRAP or not:

1. Disengaged: “I would really rather be doing something else.”  
Note: They may also be *really* engaged in something else, just not the thing they’re in the room for.
2. Resentful: “Oh, great, I get to go to another one of *his* (or *her*) meetings. Really getting tired of them; they’re always CRAP.”
3. Annoyed, Angry, or Agitated: This could be tied to resentment if directed at the organizer but could also be between members of the group.
4. Bored: “So, let me get this straight, you want me to sit here and watch you enter things on your computer while I wait for the moment you may, or may not, ask my opinion on something you can’t answer yourself? Guess this is another meeting where I count the threads on my shoelaces.”

Meanwhile, your game playing experience was the opposite. Conversation was flowing, you didn’t care how much time passed, you

knew why you were there, and it had purpose. Not only that, but you were engaged in all that was going on around you, enjoying the company of others, and could not think of anything else you'd rather be doing.

The gameplay description is close to that of flow.

For me, I try to make every experience the gameplay experience and I work hard to keep it that way. If that sounds interesting and possibly appealing, then I hope to help shed some light on walking through life in a consistent, if not constant, state of meditation.

# Humans

On Earth, humans are at the top of the food chain. Any one of our nearest neighbors in that chain could whoop us in a fair fight, but there we are. We're not the biggest, strongest, fastest, or most adept at fighting. However, we're one of the *only* animals able to easily adapt to almost any environment (or to adapt the environment to us) within a single lifetime...in other words, we would probably be extinct if not for a couple of things pertinent to this book.

Our ability to:

- fashion and improve tools;
- pass knowledge to future generations;
- form coalitions (work together toward a common purpose);
- envision the future in ways other animals cannot; and
- run excessively long distances without keeling over from exhaustion, lack of oxygen, or heat.

For example, someone in a family creates a stone axe made of flint. This person teaches their children how to do the same. Their children improve it and teach their children the improved way. The third generation continues to improve the methods. The family (coalition) as a whole becomes better equipped to forage for food and protect themselves; thus survive.

# Language

Over my life, career, and researching this book I've noticed a common thread in what causes misunderstandings and suffering: Language.

High school is probably when I first really noticed. A friend once said, "He cheated on me."

"Did he know the rules?" I asked.

"He was my *boyfriend*," she replied, thinking that meant everything.

"Does he know what that means to you?" I asked.

"Why are you defending him?"

"I'm not. I'm pointing out that you can't cheat if you don't know the rules; it's one of the reasons we have the concept of first-time offender. And, if the rules hide inside the label you call someone, like 'boyfriend', you should make sure everyone knows what the rules are."

Over 20 years later I was speaking with a recruiter. She said, "They're looking for an IT Project Manager."

To which I replied, “I don’t do well with labels. What would they be expecting this person to *do*? A sort of day in the life of kinda thing.”

She replied, “Project Manager things.”

This is referred to as a circular definition, which means I need to know the definition first. In other words, it assumes I know what is meant by Project Manager and what one of those does on a universal level.

“Thanks,” I replied, “I understand, but for them specifically. I’ve seen roles for Scrum Masters that read more like Business Analysts and vice versa. For them, specifically, what does the Project Manager label *mean*? ”

When it comes to the contents of this book, I will do my best to use common language and common definitions, explain jargon when possible, and so on. Therefore, I don’t want to create “new” words and definitions while still respecting problems caused by our use of language. Further, I will avoid breaking out the thesaurus and using synonyms; therefore, “work” should always mean the same thing throughout *Triumph over Time* and a different word will be used only if describing a different concept.

For example, Risk Management as defined by the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK - pim-bock) is a practice of monitoring and tracking events with a potentially positive or negative impact on what you are planning to do or are already doing. The majority of common definitions, captured in dictionaries, for

“risk” don’t allow for the concept of a “positive” risk. The common definitions being:

1. a situation involving exposure to danger.
2. [in singular] the possibility that something unpleasant or unwelcome will happen.
3. [with modifier] a person or thing regarded as a threat or likely source of danger.
4. (usually risks) a possibility of harm or damage against which something is insured.
5. the possibility of financial loss.
6. [with adjective] a person or thing regarded as likely to turn out well or badly, as specified, in a particular context or respect.

The last common definition in the list above is the only one allowing for a positive risk, which is the next to last definition from the Oxford English Dictionary. Therefore, while the majority of common uses don’t allow for the concept of a positive risk, the PMBOK and commercial fields deviate from that majority, this happens often. The use of the term “positive risk” can cause confusion or seem like an oxymoron if not used in contrast to the term “negative risk,” which is just a “risk” in the minds of most people.

For our purposes, I have chosen to call it “Event Management,” which comes with its own downsides.

“Events” are things that impact you from the outside world. This simple change allows us to reduce confusion when we say “risk” (or “threat”) and “opportunity” to describe a future possibility with perceived negative or positive impact, respectively.

There’s also the tense problem.

- A risk or threat is a *future* event with a perceived negative impact.
- An opportunity is a *future* event with a perceived positive impact.
- An issue is a *present* event having a negative impact.
- A reward (or similar) is what I refer to as a *present* event having a positive impact. I say, “I refer” here because commercial sources don’t offer a present-positive word for the same.

If “event” is the outside world acting upon you, “actions” are things you do to impact the outside world.

- A goal is a *future* outcome you give yourself.
- A request is a *future* outcome someone has asked you to perform.
- A performance is an action you are already doing, regardless of whether it’s a goal or request. (For the sake of humor and completeness, “work” is an action you are performing that you don’t want to, didn’t choose to, and find little-to-no enjoyment in.)
- An achievement is a *past* action with a successful outcome.

- A failure is a *past* action with an unsuccessful outcome.

To sum up, when it comes to language, I will do my best to be internally consistent, leverage context, use plain language, prefer common over commercial definitions, and keep it simple.

## Tone

I'm kind of a chameleon. I grew up in a military family, moving to a new place every two or three years.

In adulthood, I continued the pattern of moving every couple of years. Sometimes, it's just down the street; other times, it's a few states away. Being dropped into a new place and culture gets me excited.

Basically, I get to ask myself, "How do I keep from getting beat up here?"

This shapeshifting is helpful with clients as well, be they corporate or non-corporate, individuals or groups, regardless of education or socioeconomic status.

Some want a harmony-loving monk most days. Some need a stern personal trainer on others. Others love a misanthropic curmudgeon professor. While others still appreciate a laidback spiritual guide with an unfailing love of humanity. I can be all of those while still being *me* because I'm more than one thing or type, and so

are you. Some receive cursing and swearing better than proper and “professional” language; I can do both while maintaining the integrity of the message.

It’s not to say I don’t know who I am. Or that I’m hiding behind masks. Rather, I’m willing to shape my presentation to something more easily absorbed by the client.

(Something said by every humanoid alien from science fiction—ever.)

Unfortunately, with a book, I won’t be able to verbally bend and dance with you the way I normally could. Therefore, each chapter is written with different clients, friends, and family members I love in mind instead of pretending I know you or assuming that you don’t know me at least a little. If I try to speak directly to you, based on what I know of you, this book would be a dry and neutral read.

So, *you* may sometimes feel like I’m talking directly to you, and other times it may feel like you’re watching me talk with someone else.

## Density

*Triumph over Time* is intentionally dense, which is to say we have done what we can to ensure each word, sentence, and figure is absolutely necessary to communicate understanding at a consistent

level across the entire book while consolidating as many, related fields of study as possible.

The primary goal, as it relates to density, is to ensure you don't become bored. This boredom is something I often noticed researching the book. Repetition of anecdotes and explanations, which lead me to often feel like saying, "I get it already, can we move on, please?"

I understand the various reasons for the repetition; however, I hope to walk a different path. Besides, if I did the same, even the audio version of the book would be multiple days long.

The metaphor I started using is that *Triumph over Time* is like a wine reduction. If the works of everyone referenced in the back of the book (and beyond) were analogous to grapes then, over the years, the ideas have had the chance to mature into multiple wines, each with a subtle nuance all their own.

I've taken them home. Tried them out individually, collectively at various ratios, and shared them with friends, family, and clients. Then, I poured what I hope is the perfect ratio into a pot, added subtle nuances of my own, and let it simmer, until all of it could fit into one bottle.

As such, you may find it beneficial to return on occasion to possibly pick up on something that was missed or misunderstood your first time through. (I already do this with many of the references in the back of the book.) Further, you may find yourself inspired to explore a topic in more depth. In other words, *Triumph over Time* is not

intended as a “one and done” read and believes you are intelligent, creative, and curious.

With that said, feedback and questions, as always, are welcome!

# Synergy

I don't like the word synergy, to be honest. The impact the word should have is inversely proportional to its level of use. Synergy was a term used by some '90's and early-aught CEOs to stand-in for "team player," which was a stand-in for "fast-paced environment," which was a stand-in for "What do you mean you're only putting in 40 hours a week, you're not gonna get a promotion that way?"

Having said that, synergy is the most appropriate word in the English language for what we're talking about in this book. Synergy is:

the interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, substances, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects

You have a goal or vision. Having a good set of tools helps achieve it. Having a good set of practices helps as well. Good principles multiplies that. Good values multiplies it even more.

Individually, values, principles, practices, and tools improve your chances of achieving your goals effectively. Having said that, you can find greater and more holistic success if the individual parts build and strengthen one another.

# **Fifth Generation Time Management**

There are many names we've tried to come up with for what's in this book and the field or industry we practice in the real world. Time Management, Self Management, Stress Management, Productivity, Life Management, Project Management, Risk Management, Communication Management, Agile Software Development, Change Management, and so on. Each one has its nuance, positive and negative connotations, and proposed boundaries set by those who practice them.

For example, some say Agile Software Development should only apply to software, while others say the opposite. Most fields and industries have jokes about themselves. Some jokes were written by those practicing in the field.

One of the more popular jokes from the self-improvement field comes from poking fun at Time Management. They all start something like this: "Calling it Time Management is ridiculous. You can't *manage* time, you can only manage..." actions, yourself, life, and so on. Calling the skill, practice, or profession "time management" is like saying you're going to learn how to manage the universe; entirely beyond your influence and too big for your (or my) brain.

All fields have their heroes and heroines. Their contributions are downplayed and overplayed depending on who you talk with. The same is true for Time-self-stress-life-whatever Management.

As we seek differentiation, we tend to rename things. Either to differentiate “our thing” from “their thing” or to get away from a label that has gone sour, “Oh, it’s not Project Management, it’s Agile Software Development” or vice versa.

Stephen Covey is one such “hero” and the author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. When people in the Time Management field reference Covey, the Time Management Matrix is often brought up as his seminal contribution to the field of self-management. I disagree. In fact, I barely recall or credit Covey with the Time Management Matrix at all, if for no other reason than it is one idea in one chapter of a much larger work and body of work. The Time Management Matrix is laid out when Covey describes the four generations of time management.

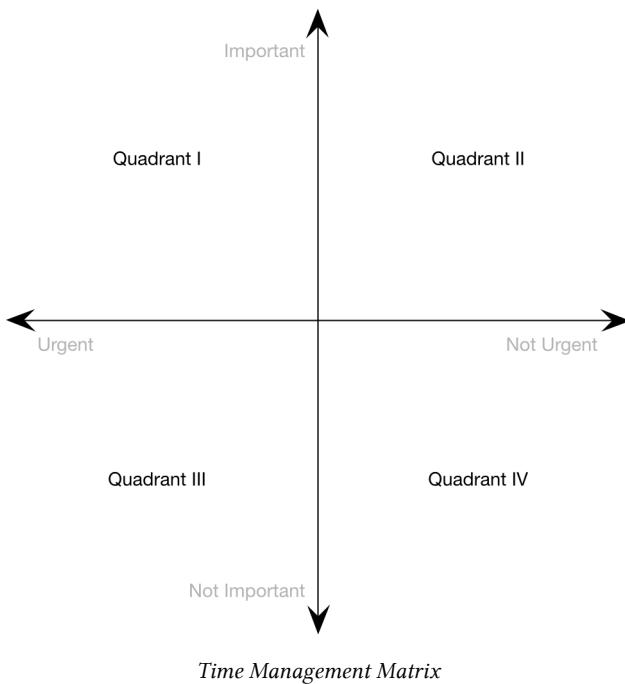
In short, the **first generation** is getting what’s in your head into the world in the form of notes and checklists (to-do lists). **Second generation** becomes future-oriented with calendars and appointment books. **Third generation** introduces the concept of values (personal or collective) and prioritizing based on those values along with short-, medium-, and long-term goals and daily planning to the achievement of those goals. **Fourth generation** focuses on maintaining production and production capability by way of interpersonal relationships and results-orientation with a further emphasis on being principle-based and character-centered.

Each generation adds to the previous more than it abandons or replaces things.

In the case of time management, Covey's work is focused on the fourth generation using what he called the Time Management Matrix to describe the point behind a planning method. You want to spend most of your time in Quadrant II in order to become what he called a Quadrant II Self-Manager.

What does that mean?

Imagine a chart where the X-axis represents urgency and the Y-axis represents importance. If divided in fourths you end up with four quadrants, important and urgent, important and not-urgent, not-important and urgent, and not-important and not-urgent. Quadrant II is the top right corner, and contains things that are important and will rarely, if ever, become urgent; namely reflecting on and building character does not help you while your house is on fire with you in it.



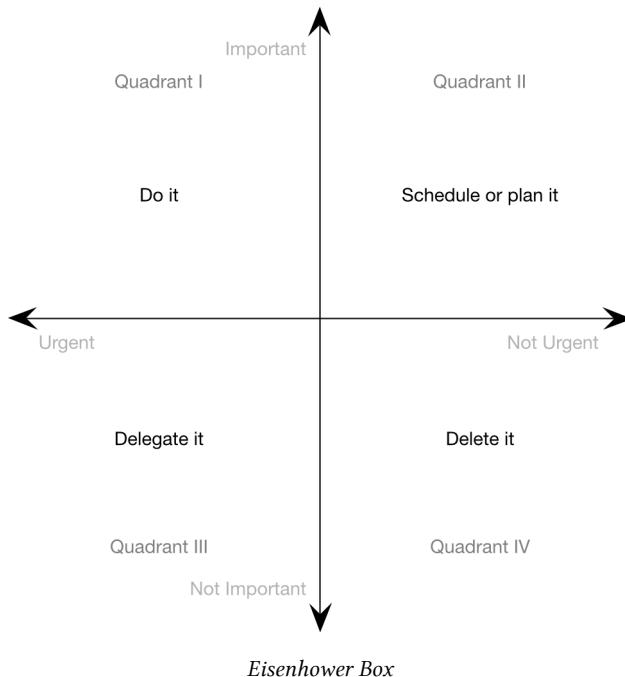
Spending most of your time in important and urgent or Quadrant I, can burn you out. Spending most of your time in not-important and urgent or not-important and not-urgent, Quadrants III and IV, may end up with you becoming irresponsible. Spending most of your time in important and not-urgent, Quadrant II, is where discipline and balance are achieved, according to Covey.

Some have interpreted this matrix as a way to manage your to-do list; if the item is important and due soon, put it in Quadrant I and do it. Once Quadrant I is clear, start working on Quadrant II things so they never become urgent. This is not a bad idea; however, it is not related to Covey's work directly, in my opinion.

When The Time Management Matrix is attributed to Covey, it is often related to this to-do list management method. However, Covey recommends leveraging calendars based on vision, roles, and goals to “put first things first” not the time management matrix.

Using the matrix as a to-do list management tool is more like what's been called the Eisenhower Box.

The Eisenhower Box was definitely named after President Eisenhower and *possibly* used by him to make some decisions, though the jury's still out. Quadrant I is fire fighting; do the thing. Quadrant II is for things like long-term strategic planning or getting down to the gym; schedule the thing, which does tie to Covey, indirectly. Quadrant III is mostly meetings; delegate the thing. Quadrant IV are time wasters and most leisure activities; delete the thing.



There's debate on the origins of the Eisenhower Box. Did Eisenhower invent it? Was it derived from a quote of his? Did he use it? That sort of thing.

Regardless, I don't see The Time Management Matrix and The Eisenhower Box described to the same purpose in the same sources. Further, given the prescriptive nature of The Eisenhower Box and Covey's own words, I see them as using the same model in two different ways.

If you've heard the allegory of the jar with the rocks, pebbles, and sand, fourth generation thinking is where that comes from. It's easy

to tell we're still coming to grips with the fourth generation, given the explanation I felt was necessary, which is fine.

I also think we're coming to recognize a **fifth generation**, which is focused on agility, flow, purpose, and, by extension, mindfulness.

*Triumph over Time* hopes to help usher in the fifth generation without emphasizing a specific approach or vantage, which is in keeping with the fifth generation itself. I will use comparison to describe what I mean by not emphasizing an approach or vantage.

In personal productivity, I have found three popular resources, relatively speaking, that can get you very close to a fifth generation system. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey, *Getting Things Done* by David Allen, and The Pomodoro Technique® by Francesco Cirillo. Each one takes a specific approach and vantage.

Imagine a mapping application. When zoomed out completely, you are at the highest level. You have a vantage with great breadth but little depth and detail. Now imagine looking at an image of the street view little breadth but great depth and detail. Transferring to the forest metaphor, the highest level is the territory or region, and the street view is the undergrowth on the forest floor.

*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* takes a region-first approach and can get you to the forest and some of the trees. *Getting Things Done* takes a trees-first approach and can get you to the undergrowth with little knowledge of the forest whatsoever. The

Pomodoro Technique® takes an undergrowth-first approach (or walking down a street by way of the street view images).

The first focuses on values, principles, and people. The second focuses on processes, tools, and “being like water” (agility and flow). The third focuses on becoming *focused* (flow and mindfulness).

They all have parts of the others. In some cases, it may only be one sentence. Further, each is geared toward, though not necessarily made specifically for, different types of thinkers. If you tend to be what we call a strategic thinker, the top-down approach of Covey might be your preference. If you’re what we call a tactical thinker, the bottom-up approach of Allen might be more your thing. If you’re extremely detail-oriented, find your focus failing, or have issues with interruptions or distractions, The Pomodoro Technique® might be the best place to start. If you are, or want to be, someone who can transfer up, down, and side-to-side with ease, at-will, and with purpose, you might prefer *Triumph over Time*’s similar depth across the entire breadth approach.

# Time, Change, & Possibilities

Time and Change are the Wonder Twins of existence. Change without time wouldn't exist, as change depends on transitioning from an initial state (past) to a new state (future) over time (present). Time without change couldn't be proven to exist at all.

Imagine looking at a picture representing all of existence. The contents of the picture do not change. Prove, without referencing your own ability to perceive beyond the picture, that time is passing.

There's an idiom that says, "The only constant is change." That's because time is constantly unfurling and everything is constantly changing, even only on a microscopic level.

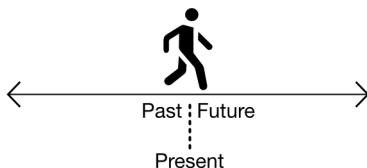
The pre-Socratic philosopher, Heraclitus, is credited with saying, "You cannot step in the same river twice." Another line is sometimes added, making the quote, "You cannot step in the same river twice for once you do, the river has changed and so have you."

Sensory deprivation rooms are designed to minimize how much change you are exposed to. No clocks. Same small room. No sunrise or sunset. And, if you spend enough time in one, you could go insane. Of course, without change, you could not go insane. Or, move. Or, breathe. And, same is true if there was no time. So, at least we have that going for us.

Simply put, you could not experience existence nor prove that existence exists without time and change.

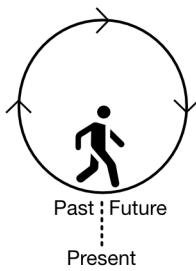
# Time

Time has been around since, well, the beginning of time. Whether you think the beginning was a deity snapping its fingers, the Big Bang, or something in-between, before the beginning of time there was nothing; or, at least nothing to experience and, arguably, no consciousness to experience it. This is typically referred to as a linear-view of time; there is a beginning, middle (execution), and end.



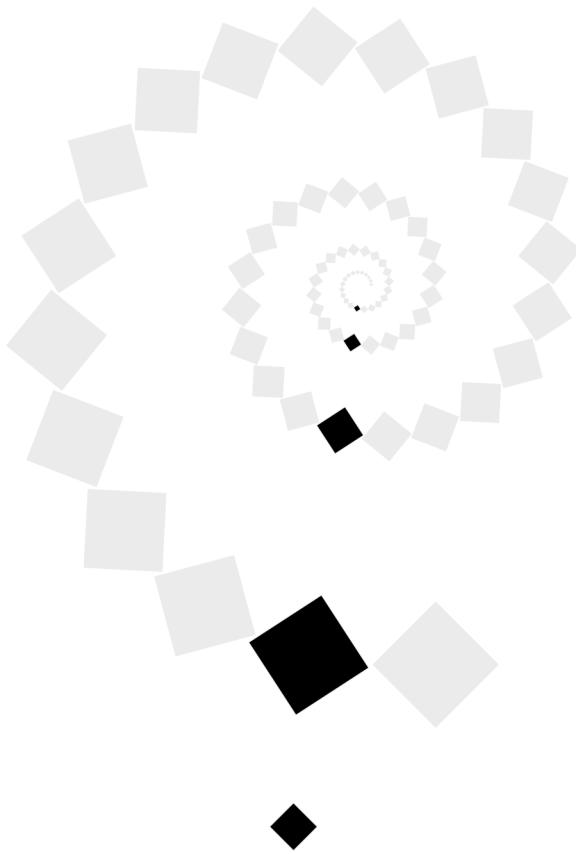
*Linear-view of Time*

A linear-view of time is often compared to a circular- or cyclical-view; there is a beginning, middle (execution), and new beginning.



*Cyclical-view of Time*

I've even heard of a spiral-view of time. A combination of linear and circular views. Imagine a spring standing upright. Time is the spring itself; however, if you take a vertical slice from the coil, events will not be much different within that slice, just the details.



Summer time, major battles, time of increased compassion

*Spiral-view of Time*

It's an attempt, if you will, to explain the concept of history repeating itself with a model of time that allows for repetition while simultaneously acknowledging that the War of 1812 was not the same as the Vietnam War.

Like all things, each view has its pleasures and pains.

A linear-view is helpful in capturing and reviewing history in discrete batches; however, viewing the past is often used as a way to try to control and predict the future, which is impossible. A circular view results in less emphasis on trying to control and predict the future and more emphasis on being in-sync with the cycles of time; however, you can become doomed to repeat the past. The spiral view is future-focused while viewing the past as unchangeable and the future as unknowable; however, this can lead to a fatalistic and hedonistic approach to life.

What view do you tend toward?

No matter which you lean toward, when it comes to your consciousness, to the best of our knowledge, there is a distinct beginning and end; a certain point before your birth and the moment of your death. This is your life time-box, otherwise known as lifetime, which is a limit, not a destination; meaning you could reach the end before your time has run out.

Whenever you give yourself an hour for a task, that's a time-box. Just because you gave yourself an hour doesn't mean you have to take an hour. The tension many feel with time is often grounded in pretty much the same fear. The fear of death or, more appropriately, a life not lived because none of us knows when our time-box will end.

Therefore, we spend time modifying diet, exercise, and sleep in the hope of getting more time compared to what we were given that we can spend later doing the things we want.

We want to spend time slower.

“Giving yourself an hour” is an interesting phrase because it takes time from a concept and tightly couples it to a method of measurement. One hour is one-twenty-fourth of a day. A day is one-seventh of a week. A week is roughly one-fourth of a month. A month is one-third of a season (or quarter). A season is one-fourth of a year. A year is one-nth of your lifetime.

Dividing things up this way makes time easier to grasp. (You might even divide lifetime by life-role; spouse, work, and so on.)

Time is neutral and democratic.

You can’t “buy more time.” You can’t “get time back” or “borrow time.” Your lifetime is an account. You have no idea what the balance is. You are constantly spending time, even while sleeping. And when the balance hits zero, that’s it. No overdraft protection. No loans to take out. No bailout of any kind (at least not yet).

The “good” and “bad” things you do may have little bearing on when you hit zero. People have lived to 100 years old while regularly smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol. Others have died around 50 while living a healthy lifestyle, *literally* while exercising. Others have died in their 30s after living a life of excess having just decided to live a healthier lifestyle.

Living life is a role playing game made of probabilities with few certainties.

I think writer and singer Henry Rollins said it best when he said, “No such thing as spare time, no such thing as free time, no such thing as down time. All you got is lifetime. Go.”

Time is not the enemy, stress is. Put another way, our *response* to the passage of time is what ultimately ages us.

How is it a 30 minute meeting can be exhausting, frustrating, and all you want to do is leave? However, you can go to a two-day retreat where you cried, felt emotionally raw, and all you wanted to do is stay?

We say things like, “This meeting is taking forever!” No it’s not. It just feels like it. Conversely, people say things like, “I lost track of time.” Of that there is no doubt.

The latter is what I mean when I tell people I have no concept of time. Even when I do make the time to check the time, I usually don’t freak out or become tense. Kind of an “Oh! Neat, that’s what time it is” feel.

Ultimately, time is:

- presumably infinite and personally finite,
- universally constant and personally unique,
- neutral and democratic.

Time doesn’t *want* you to lose. It’s just operating the way it knows how.

## Past

The past is a nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there.

*Josh Bruce, personal maxim*

Many of us look to what we consider were our peak years and stay there or spend our lives trying to recapture them.

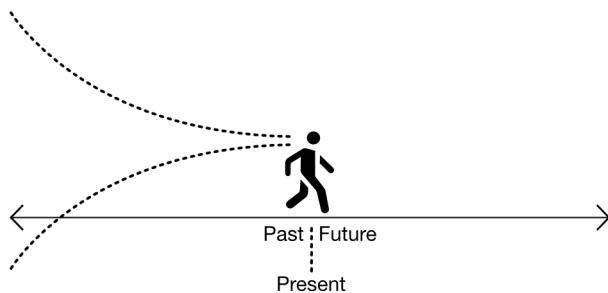
The high school football star who's constantly trying to replicate that feeling in the present and future. The person who can't bring themselves to form a new relationship because they're still hung up on their previous one.

Still others look to the past as a way of gaining moral high ground in feuds: "I didn't start it, you did." Others look to the past as a way to control and predict the future; the concept of astrology is based on this.

Changing the past is impossible; we can only determine how to progress into the future, which is happening whether we want it to or not. Further, viewing past patterns may raise expectations, but it may not alter the probability of outcomes, which is the premise behind every weather forecasting joke ever. Finally, the farther into the past we look, the higher our probability of being wrong about what happened.

Imagine a horizontal line representing time. You stand in the middle. Spreading out behind you are two lines starting roughly

from your head. They go from narrow to dramatically separated the farther away they go. The closer the lines, the more assured you can be your memory of a thing is correct. The farther apart the lines, the higher the probability your memory of the past will be incorrect.



Have you ever read something from someone, and it made you feel insulted or angry? Later you read it again or simply discover it was a misinterpretation of intent? Our brains are adept at molding our perception of the world and memory of it to match our expectations and emotions. No one has a monopoly on an objective view of history.

## Present

The present is a fickle thing. Everything you just read or heard is in the past. And again. You're in the present now. Nope, now.

You get the idea. The present is now. It is no longer than "that." Only an *experience* can be longer than now.

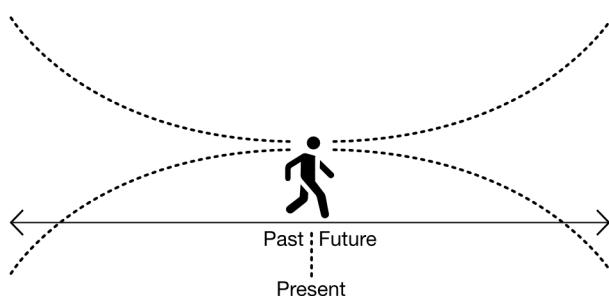
The present is where reality is. The past is a memory. The future is filled with possibilities. Reality is right here and right now.

It's not to say you shouldn't come up for a breath now and again to survey the regions of the past and future, only that being in the moment offers solitude in a world that can be crazy and loud.

## Future

The future is the past inverted and is based on speculation not memory.

Remember the horizontal line with the cone going from you to the beginning of your lifetime? This same cone, flipped horizontally, goes from you to the “end” of your lifetime. The closer the lines of the cone, the higher the probability you will be correct on what will happen. The farther apart the lines, the higher the probability you will be incorrect.



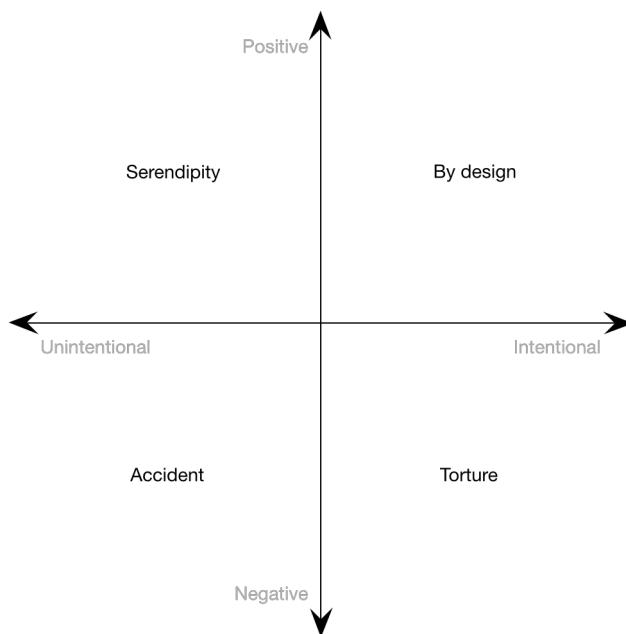
The uncertainty is what causes many of us to not appreciate change or deviation, which is seen as error. Our vision of the future must be the one that comes to fruition. Depending on the type of educational or household system you grew up in, your vision not coming to fruition could be seen as abject failure, which means *you* are also a failure. The fear of being wrong or failure has very strong emotions associated with it for many people.

# Change

Imagine a chart. The X-axis goes from unintentional to intentional. The Y-axis goes from positive to negative.

Whenever a change happens, you can place a dot on that chart. The dot answers the questions:

- How did this change make me feel?
- How intentional was the agent of that change?



We have names we tend to call things that fall into the four quadrants:

- Unintentionally-positive is serendipity.
- Unintentionally-negative is an accident.
- Intentionally-positive is “by design.”
- Intentionally-negative is torture.

The chart measures in scales, not just buckets. As such, there are degrees of intentionality and grades of emotions. Further, the chart is informational, not judgmental; therefore, there is no “good” or “bad” place for something to be. Having said that, humans tend to favor intentionally-positive over other quadrants, including serendipity. The size and shape of elements placed in the chart can be used to indicate other things as well.

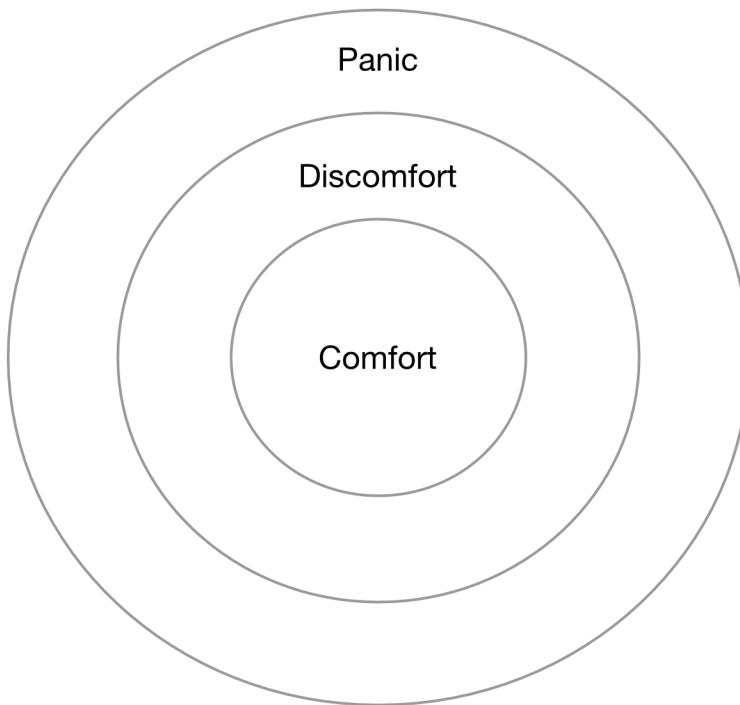
The size of a marker may indicate the forewarning given for a specific event like a hurricane or earthquake. The hurricane shape would most likely be larger than that of an earthquake. Hurricanes we usually see coming days, if not weeks, in advance. Earthquakes can happen in a matter of moments.

The shape placed on the chart may indicate the destructive or constructive nature of the event. A hurricane that never hits land might stay a triangle as it is not viewed as destructive to humans. A severe earthquake, on the other hand, might be an octagon, indicating its destructive force. A painter painting a portrait might be a circle illustrating a creative force.

## Zones of Change

for each desired change, make the change easy (warning: this may be hard), then make the easy change

*Kent Beck, Tweet from 2012*



*Zones of Change*

You're walking in a forest. You pick up a stick. You have changed the stick. You bend the stick a little, no noises are made. You continue

bending, it creaks and pops. You continue, suddenly it snaps in two.

You changed the stick, at least twice. Once when you picked it up. Twice when it stopped being a stick and became two sticks. And, really, every point you were interacting with the stick, but we'll focus on major changes.

In the beginning, the stick was in its comfort zone. The **comfort zone** has little to no stress and feels safe. When you started bending the stick, it remained in its comfort zone. When the stick started creaking and popping it passed into the **discomfort zone**; stressful yet still safe. Finally, the stick hit the **panic zone**, filled with stress and danger. Eventually, the stick hit the end of the panic zone and split in half (violently rebounding to the comfort zone but not the same).

When changing things, it's usually preferred that the panic zone be avoided. Forcing a rose open before it's ready usually doesn't end well for the rose or the one forcing it open. With exposure to different types of changes, the comfort zone tends to grow in size. Or, the object of change can be manipulated or prepared in some way (putting the stick in warm water would have softened it to bend farther before snapping).

## Final doesn't Exist

I had been working on a site with a client for about two years when he asked, "When's it gonna be done?"

To which I replied, “It’s software development; it’s never done.”

“What do you mean?”

“Let’s try this. *It’ll* be finished when users don’t report defects, users don’t ask for new features, or y’all decide to replace it with something else; otherwise, someone will always be doing something to it. Beyond that, *we* were finished with the base requirements and migration six months ago, and users aren’t reporting bugs. So, *I’ll* be finished when you stop asking for things or stop paying me, whichever comes first. *You’ll* be finished when you move on to another project.”

With a laugh, the client said, “Ah! Gotcha.”

“Yeah,” I continued. “Once you build it or acquire it, you’re maintaining or improving it. Otherwise we’d all be running the first version of our operating systems, living in houses with thatch roofs, or everything around us would just be slowly falling apart” I finished, knowing this would probably be our last conversation.

I honestly think they were still using that system a decade later. Still not final.

Humans attach permanence to things marked “final,” “finished,” or “done.” Even things not marked that way can become viewed as unchanging because it’s been so long since a noticeable change has occurred or the expectation that things don’t change (people surprised a definition for a word in the same dictionary is different from one year to the next). Of course, if nothing is ever “done,” we wouldn’t feel like we accomplished anything.

That's one reason endurance activities like marathons have some sort of milestone to gauge progress. Climbing a tall mountain might have basecamps every few miles. Without things like that we get lost in the monotony of putting one foot in front of the other. The monotony causes us to lose morale to continue. Or, you can flip it to be the thing driving you: "Yes! I'm one step closer."

You often see this in meetings. People glancing at their watches, the clock on their computer, their phones, anything to get a feel for just how much longer they have to endure the monotony of this meeting. ("Twenty more minutes; I can make it!") Many of us need those mile markers to drive us forward. To inspire us to press on. To give us even the slightest dopamine hit.

That's one of the reasons possibility lists are so effective. Each item you mark off gives you a little dose of happiness.

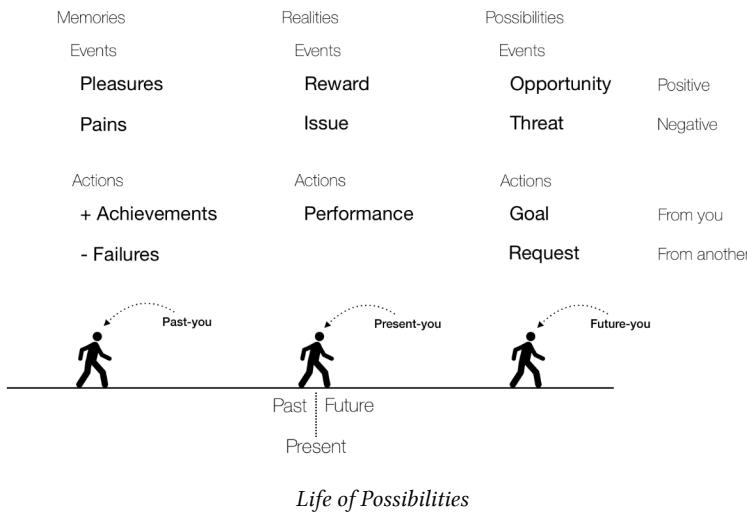
Most changes, positive or negative, do not wait for you to be "ready." When we see it as positive, we're okay not being completely ready. What wrecks people is something negative happening they never thought would or were oblivious to.

It's easier to prepare for the worst when the worst isn't happening.

# Possibilities

The combination of time and change is the opening to the realm of events and actions. Events and actions have future, present, and past types.

The definitions used here might be a bit different and are foundational to what we're talking about.



## Possibilities

are events or actions that *could* happen.

## Realities

are events or actions that *are* happening.

**Memories**

are events or actions that *have* happened.

**Events**

are things outside of yourself, and usually outside your control, that could impact, are impacting, or have impacted your life large and small.

**Actions**

are things you do that could impact, are impacting, or have impacted the outside world large and small.

The aforementioned sub-types have two sub-types based on perceived positive and negative impact. Further, there are three variants based on time.

**Opportunities**

are possible future events believed to have a positive impact should they become reality.

**Threats (or Risks)**

are possible future events believed to have a negative impact should they become reality.

**Goals**

are possible future actions originating from yourself.

**Requests**

are possible future actions asked of you by someone or something else.

**Rewards**

are present events having a positive impact on your life. Not necessarily in return for you doing anything.

**Issues**

are present events having a negative impact on your life.

**Performances**

are a goal or request currently being executed.

**Pleasures**

are past events with a positive impact on your life.

**Pains**

are past events with a negative impact on your life.

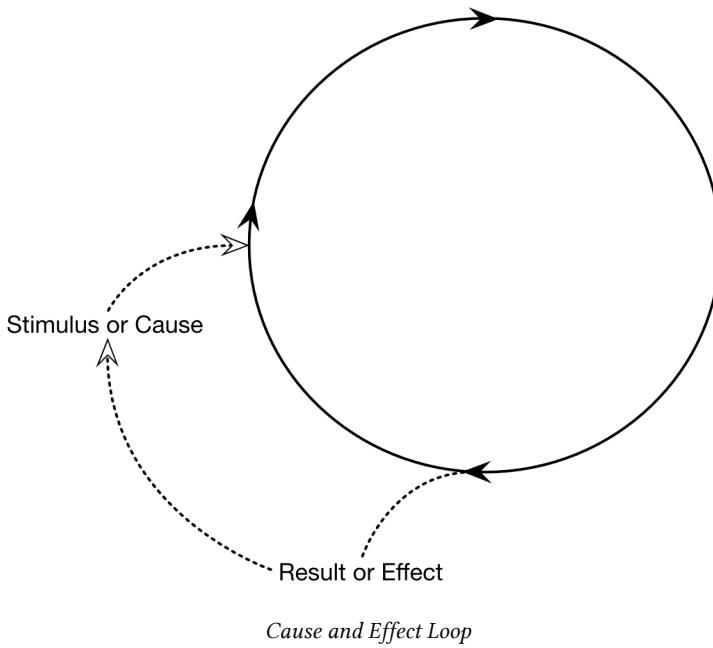
**Achievements**

are past performances successfully executed.

**Failures**

are past performances *not* successfully executed.

All possibilities have a probability of turning into a reality. All realities become memories. All three have a perceived or real impact on you. Each impact has a duration. How long will it affect you or the outside world. This is what we commonly refer to as cause and effect. A possibility becomes a reality (cause) that affects you and the outside world.



A cause sparks an event or action. The event or action has some type of result. That result may cause some other event or action to spark. This is a foundational model we'll see a lot with varying degrees of complexity.

It's important to note that these are not lifecycles. In other words, it is often perceived that threats can only become issues. While that is often the case, it is possible something perceived as having a future negative impact actually has a positive impact when it happens or over the long run.

You're asleep in bed. You hear the door open and think it's a burglar (threat). You head toward the door slowly, phone ready to call

emergency services. A voice calls out, “Don’t worry, it’s just me.”

The “me” in question being your significant other (reward). As you come rushing into the kitchen, you slip and fall, hurting your elbow and dropping your phone, cracking the screen (pain).

The question that gets raised is: Was the previous example one experience or event, many experiences or events, or both? This brings us to the notion of the Action Loop, which is fractal-like in nature and seen to varying degrees throughout productivity literature.