

# The ONE Thing Summary

By Gary Keller

What's the *one* thing we can do that would make everything else seem so much easier or even unnecessary?

*The ONE Thing* helps us to discover our most important goal, and gives us tools to ensure we use our time productively to get there. This central question allows us to set a path to success where we "do the right thing, not do everything right."

Keller is a bestselling author, business coach, co-founder, and chairman of the largest real estate company in the US. Jay Papasan is an executive editor and publisher who has co-authored bestselling books.

This book offers a simple and powerful framework to help us achieve extraordinary results in our personal and professional lives. Keller and Papasan believe that 'It is not that we have too little time to do all the things we need to do, it is that we feel the need to do too many things in the time we have.' Putting less on our plate, and sorting out priorities can help us lead fulfilling personal and professional lives.

Furthermore, many of the maxims we accept as good practice are actually myths that hinder our progress. We'll also look at priority, purpose, and productivity, and see why focused work leads to success. So if you want to learn how to sharpen your focus, cut through the clutter, and achieve better results in less time, then this book might be just the thing you need.

This Briefer summary examines why focusing on our individual one thing can lead to extraordinary success. We'll delve into what is meant by the "one thing" and why it's important to "go small in order to achieve big." We'll also see how the one thing creates a domino effect, and how there are six myths that prevent us from achieving our goals. Finally, we'll learn how to leverage the laws of purpose, priority, and productivity to achieve the extraordinary.

## Success Leaves Clues

*'It is those who concentrate on but one thing at a time who advance in this world.'* Og Mandino.

If we analyze any story of extraordinary success, the "one thing" is the common denominator.

If you think about your favorite brand, what do you think their one thing is? Successful companies and businesses have a particular product or service that is at the heart of the brand. If you think of KFC, it's the secret herbs and spices.

However, sometimes the one thing isn't as clear-cut as we may think. What is the one thing about *Star Wars*? Is it the movies or merchandise? Revenue from toys recently totaled over \$10 billion. On the other hand, the combined worldwide box office revenue for the six films totaled less than half that, \$4.3 billion. However, despite the revenue element, the films are the one thing because they make the toys and products possible.

If we look at Bill and Melinda Gates, they decided to put their wealth

towards making a difference in the world. They formed a foundation to do one thing – to tackle "really tough problems" such as health and education. Since its inception, the majority of the foundation's grants have gone to one area, Bill and Melinda's Global Health Program. However, they realized that they needed to settle on one thing – to eradicate infectious disease as a significant cause of death in their lifetime. Hence, they decided to focus on vaccines. Bill Gates explained, 'We had to choose what the most impactful thing to give would be. The magic tool of health intervention is vaccines because they can be made inexpensively.'

Technological innovations, cultural shifts, and competitive forces will often dictate that a business's one thing needs to evolve or transform. The most successful companies know this and are always asking what their thing is. And, when you get the one thing, you begin to see the business world differently.

So make it a thing to decide your one thing.

## **The One Thing**

*'Be like a postage stamp – stick to one thing until you get there.'* Josh Billings.

Our authors believe that people achieve success in spite of doing many things, not because they do so many things. So focusing on less, is how we achieve more.

Keller tells a story of how his business coaching calls would go. Every session would end the same way; the people he was coaching would agree to complete a list of tasks before the next session. Often most

tasks would get done, but more often than not, these weren't the things that mattered most. Keller started shortening the lists to just three things, then two things. Finally, he scaled it right down to just one thing. The results were instantaneous and staggering. The realization was we need to go smaller.

We all have the same number of hours in a day, so why are some people so much more productive? How do these people do more, achieve more, earn more, have more? Time is the currency of achievement, and people who use it wisely get to the heart of whatever problem they're solving. In short, they go small. If we want the best chance of success, we should endeavor to find the one thing.

But what does "going small" mean? Going small means ignoring all the things that you could do and doing what you should do. It's the ability to recognize that things aren't equal, and we need to find a better way to determine what matters most. So it's about connecting what you do with what you want, and realizing that results are determined by how narrow you can make your focus. And, when you go as small as possible, you'll be staring at one thing. And that's the point.

The fact is that when we prioritize and put all of our energy into accomplishing our most important one thing, the extraordinary happens, and this creates a domino effect.

## **The Domino Effect**

*'Every great change starts like falling dominoes.'* BJ Thornton.

Focusing on the right thing means that everything thereafter quickly falls

into place, as with a progression of dominoes.

Here's a question, can a 2-inch domino knock down the moon? The answer, believe it or not, is yes.

A single domino may seem insignificant but has the capability of knocking down another one that is double its size. This seemingly tiny ability compounds to produce incredible outcomes. The same logic applies to goals. When we start with just one goal in mind, the right one, we can achieve extraordinary things.

In 1983, physicist Lorne Whitehead determined that a single domino can bring down another domino that is 50% bigger than itself. In 2001 this was tested and confirmed by another physicist. They used dominoes of plywood, each 50% larger than the one before. If we had to line up a bunch of dominoes, we don't just have linear growth; we would have something called geometric growth. And geometric growth snowballs.

The geometric progression of dominoes is why we should aim for the moon when it comes to our goals. This is because all great things have small beginnings. Every masterpiece has its first brushstroke. The same rule is valid for nearly every aspect of our world, and our personal success is no exception. No matter how small the first step is, it will generate enormous power because the first activity compounds into something much more significant. There's no limit to the potential we can achieve when we align priorities, goals, and daily actions, because they generate a knock-on effect.

Success doesn't have to be the complicated, time-consuming process that it has been made out to be. Instead of getting lost in trivial tasks and trying to accomplish too much, all we need to do is simply narrow down

our focus to the single most important thing we want to accomplish, and from there, the domino effect will follow.

But before we set the domino effect in motion, it's crucial to identify and avoid the myths about success that block success.

## **Myth 1: Everything Is Equally Important**

Not all tasks are created equal, and our to-dos are not equally important.

Research shows that 20% of our effort produces the majority, 80% of our results. Focusing on a few high-impact things is key to creating extraordinary results.

The 19th Century Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto discovered that 20% of the Italian population owned 80% of the land, and so came the 80/20 Pareto principle. Since then, we've found that it's not just land ownership that seems to obey the Pareto principle. For example, Joseph M. Juran was in charge of quality control while working for General Motors. He discovered that most of the defects in their cars came from only a handful of production flaws. Following the 80/20 principle, it was clear that fixing these flaws should be the highest priority.

Keller takes this one step further. He says we need to go extreme on the 80/20 principle. We want to take the 20% of priority tasks we identified and apply the 80/20 principle to that. Then we want to take that 20% and use the 80/20 principle, and keep going until we arrive at our one thing.

## **Myth 2: Multitasking Gets More Done**

Multitasking is nonsense, and the bottom line is we won't succeed unless we focus on what matters most, and give that undivided attention.

Multitasking is one of the biggest time-wasters, and the fact is, our brains cannot focus on more than one thing at a time. Research shows that every 11 minutes an employee is interrupted, they spend a third of their day recovering. And, depending on the complexity, multitasking can add 25% to 100% more time to completing just one task.

## **Myth 3: Only People With Superhuman Discipline Succeed**

The key message here is that leading a disciplined life is about forming sequential habits.

Success isn't about blood, sweat, and tears. Success comes from positive habit formation. If we can apply discipline long enough to form a new constructive habit, it becomes automatic, and success ensues. Research tells us that it takes 66 days to establish a new habit-forming behavior, so if we get strategic and apply discipline to the right thing, we form a powerful new habit, turning it into a routine.

## **Myth 4: Willpower Is Unlimited**

Willpower is like a battery. So what saps our willpower? We lose drive

when we try to resist temptation, do things we dislike, or suppress emotions.

We need to build willpower by planning our days where we do our most important tasks when we have the most willpower (which is usually in the morning), conserve willpower for when we need it, and recharge through rest, diet and exercise.

## **Myth 5: We Must Live a Balanced Life**

Rather than seek out balance, we need to focus on the right things – after that, we can tackle the rest. No area of life should be neglected, but the idea that work, health, and relationships should all be in balance is a myth. Trying to maintain balance is what keeps us from achieving extraordinary success. Sometimes we have to allow things to remain unattended, at least in the short term, so we can focus on what's most important.

When it comes to work, we need to accept that by focusing on one thing, there will be other things that fall by the wayside.

## **Myth 6: Don't Ever Reach By Thinking Big**

The idea here is that even if we're concentrating on honing our focus and finding our one thing, we must still think in big and brave ways. Going small doesn't mean that we shouldn't think big.

## **Implementing Our One Thing**



We implement our one thing by discovering our purpose, priorities, and then working productively towards our goal.

To work this effectively, we need to focus on big picture and small picture thinking. We need to find our one thing, then ask what our one thing is right at this moment. Our big one thing is our purpose, and our small one thing means it's a priority. So first we need to determine our purpose, and then we should choose the most important immediate action we can take to attain it.

These three components to success can be seen using the analogy of an iceberg. Productivity is at the tip, priority is directly under the surface, and purpose is the deepest part. Our purpose determines our priorities, and our purpose and priorities drive our productivity. Keller suggests that to find our purpose, we should write a handful of activities we're passionate about, and then pick one activity and one outcome that most matters to us. It's suggested that we ask ourselves, 'What's the one thing I can do that would mean the most to me, such that by doing it, everything else will be easier and necessary?'

## **Prioritize and Set Goals to Now**

There are two strategies here: set goals to now and say no to unimportant tasks.

The basic premise here is to make our someday goals more achievable. Do this by looking at how your long-term goals support your someday goal. The idea is to form links between the years, months, weeks, and days so that you can set your someday goal to right now. Goal-setting to now helps boil down the one thing we can do right now in order to create

that magic domino effect.

Another way to prioritize is to learn the power of a positive no. This is where we say no to unimportant tasks. We learned about this in James Altucher's insightful book, *The Power of No*.

## **In Conclusion**

Unexpected things will happen in our lives, and the message is that we need to accept the chaos and not be distracted by it. We can't press pause on life, and there will always be something or someone that demands our attention.

To be effective, we have to make sacrifices and make our priorities the center of our focus. To do this, we should time block, where we timetable our one thing into our day so that it gets done. And remember, personal life should never be compromised. Work needs to be prioritized during working hours. Success stems from focusing on one thing, and not many things. When we discover that one thing, we need to work towards it and avoid the pitfalls that prevent us from achieving our goals.

This holistic guide teaches us to cut through the clutter, find our one thing, and do our best work, where it really counts. It really is about doing one thing each and every day.