

# THE ONE THING

THE SURPRISINGLY  
SIMPLE TRUTH BEHIND

EXTRAORDINARY  
RESULTS

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IF YOU CHASE TWO RABBITS...



... YOU WILL NOT CATCH EITHER **ONE**.

RUSSIAN PROVERB

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# 1 THE ONE THING

“Be like a postage stamp—  
stick to one thing until you get  
there.”

—Josh Billings

On June 7, 1991, the earth moved for 112 minutes. Not really, but it felt that way.

I was watching the hit comedy *City Slickers*, and the audience’s laughter rattled and rocked the

theater. Considered one of the funniest movies of all time, it also sprinkled in unexpected doses of wisdom and insight. In one memorable scene, Curly, the gritty cowboy played by the late Jack Palance, and city slicker Mitch, played by Billy Crystal, leave the group to search for stray cattle. Although they had clashed for most of the movie, riding along together they finally connect over a conversation about life. Suddenly Curly reins his horse to a stop and turns in the saddle to face Mitch.

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

Mitch: No. What?

Curly: This. [He holds up one finger.]

Mitch: Your finger?

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

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

Curly: That's what you've got to figure out.

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

I didn't really get this until much later. I'd experienced success in the past, but it wasn't until I hit a wall that I began to connect my results with my approach. In less than a decade we'd built a successful company with national and international ambitions, but all of a sudden things weren't working out. For all the dedication and hard work, my life was in turmoil and it felt as if everything was crumbling around me.

I was failing.

## SOMETHING HAD TO GIVE

At the end of a short rope that looked eerily like a noose, I sought help and found it in the form of a coach. I walked him through my situation and talked through the challenges I faced, both personal and professional. We revisited my goals and the trajectory I wanted for my life, and with a full grasp of the issues, he set out in search of answers. His research was thorough. When we got back together, he had my organizational chart—essentially a bird's-eye view of the entire company—up on the wall.

Our discussion started with a simple question: "Do you know what you need to do to turn things around?" I hadn't a clue.

He said there was only one thing I needed to do. He had identified 14 positions that needed new faces, and he believed that with the right

individuals in those key spots, the company, my job, and my life would see a radical change for the better. I was shocked and let him know I thought it would take a lot more than that.

He said, “No. Jesus needed 12, but you’ll need 14.”

It was a transformational moment. I had never considered how so few could change so much. What became obvious is that, as focused as I thought I was, I wasn’t focused enough. Finding 14 people was clearly the most important thing I could do. So, based on this meeting, I made a huge decision. I fired myself.

I stepped down as CEO and made finding those 14 people my singular focus.

This time the earth really did move. Within three years, we began a period of sustained growth that averaged 40 percent year-over-year for almost a decade. We grew from a regional player to an international contender. Extraordinary success showed up, and we never looked back.

As success beget success, something else happened along the way. The language of the ONE Thing emerged.

Having found the 14, I began working with our top people individually to build their careers and businesses. Out of habit, I would end our coaching calls with a recap of the handful of things they were agreeing to accomplish before our next session. Unfortunately, many would get most of them done, but not necessarily what mattered most. Results suffered. Frustration followed. So, in an effort to help them succeed, I started shortening my list: If you can do just three things this week. ... If you can do just two things this week. ... Finally, out of desperation, I went as small as I could possibly go and asked: “*What’s the ONE Thing you can do this week such that by doing it everything else would be easier or unnecessary?*” And the most awesome thing happened.



Results went through the roof.

After these experiences, I looked back at my successes and failures and discovered an interesting pattern. Where I'd had huge success, I had narrowed my concentration to one thing, and where my success varied, my focus had too.

And the light came on.

## GOING SMALL

If everyone has the same number of hours in a day, why do some people seem to get so much more done than others? How do they do more, achieve more, earn more, have more? If time is the currency of achievement, then why are some able to cash in their allotment for more chips than others? The answer is they make getting to the heart of things the heart of their approach. They go small.

When you want the absolute best chance to succeed at anything you want, your approach should always be the same. Go small.

“Going small” is ignoring all the things you could do and doing what you should do. It's recognizing that not all things matter equally and finding the things that matter most. It's a tighter way to connect what you do with what you want. It's realizing that extraordinary results are directly determined by how narrow you can make your focus.

The way to get the most out of your work and your life is to go as small as possible. Most people think just the opposite. They think big success is time consuming and complicated. As a result, their calendars and to-do lists become overloaded and overwhelming. Success starts to feel out of reach, so they settle for less. Unaware that big success comes when we do a few things well, they get lost trying to do too much and in the end accomplish too little. Over time they lower their expectations, abandon their

dreams, and allow their life to get small. This is the wrong thing to make small.

You have only so much time and energy, so when you spread yourself out, you end up spread thin. You want your achievements to add up, but that actually takes subtraction, not addition. You need to be doing fewer things for more effect instead of doing more things with side effects. The problem with trying to do too much is that even if it works, adding more to your work and your life without cutting anything brings a lot of bad with it: missed deadlines, disappointing results, high stress, long hours, lost sleep, poor diet, no exercise, and missed moments with family and friends— all in the name of going after something that is easier to get than you might imagine.

Going small is a simple approach to extraordinary results, and it works. It works all the time, anywhere and on anything. Why? Because it has only one purpose—to ultimately get you to the point.

When you go as small as possible, you'll be staring at one thing. And that's the point.

## 2 THE DOMINO EFFECT

**“Every great change starts  
like falling dominoes.”**

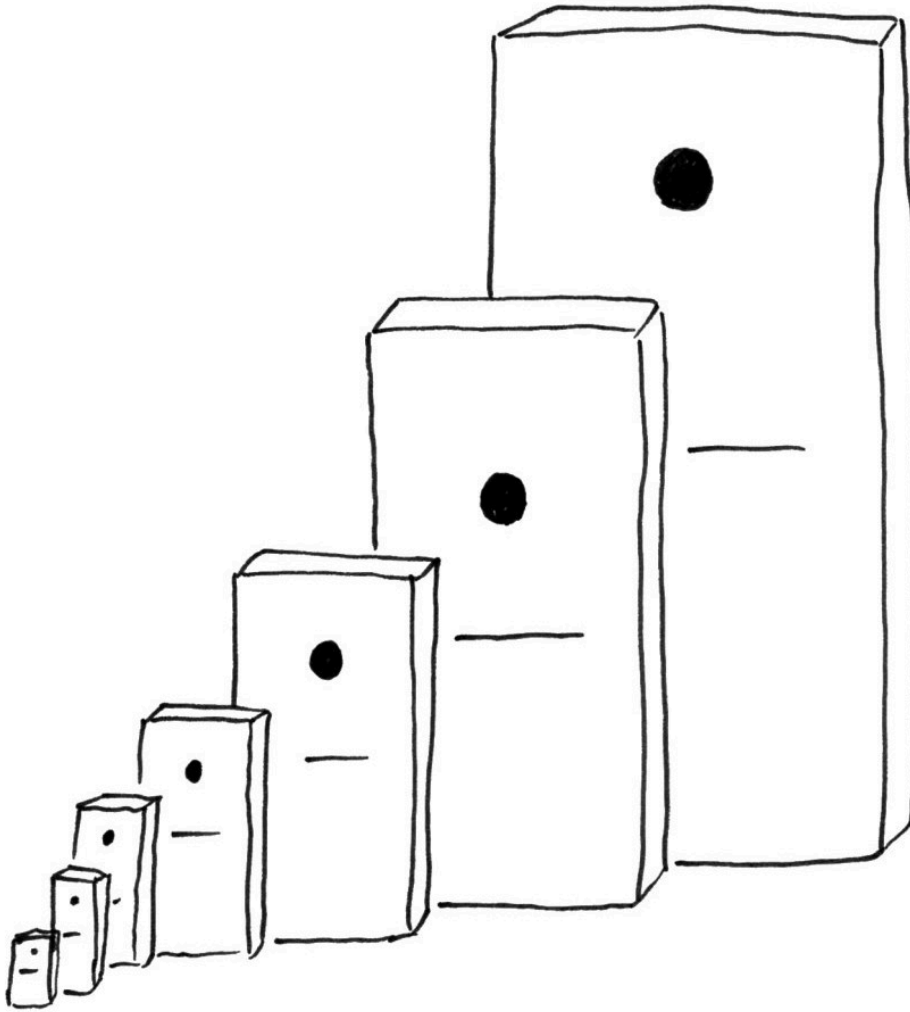
— BJ Thornton

In Leeuwarden, The Netherlands, on Domino Day, November 13, 2009, Weijers Domino Productions coordinated the world record domino fall by lining up more than 4,491,863

dominoes in a dazzling display. In this instance, a single domino set in motion a domino fall that cumulatively unleashed more than 94,000 joules of energy, which is as much energy as it takes for an average-sized male to do 545 pushups.

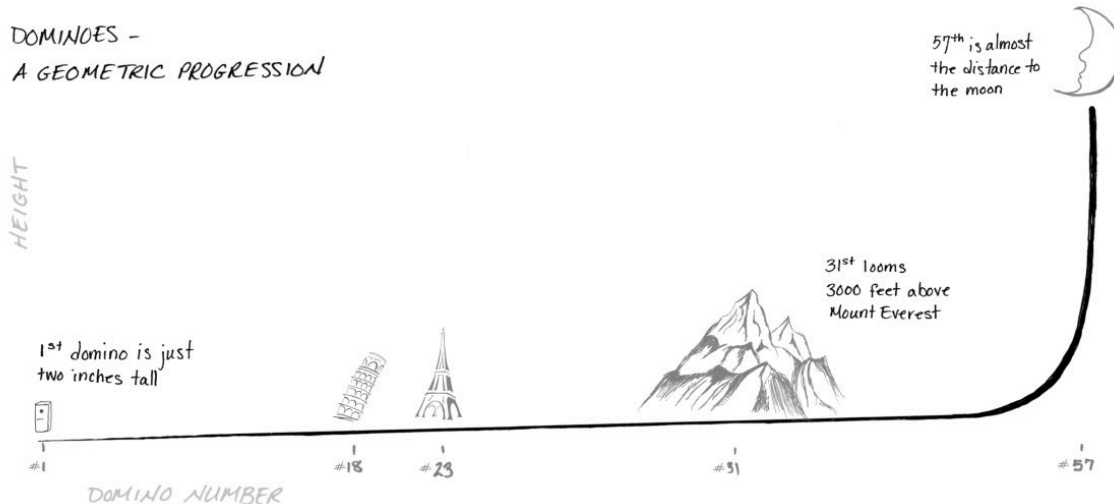
Each standing domino represents a small amount of potential energy; the more you line up, the more potential energy you’ve accumulated. Line up enough and, with a simple flick, you can start a chain reaction of surprising power. And Weijers Domino Productions proved it. When one thing, the right thing, is set in motion, it can topple many things. And that’s not all.

In 1983, Lorne Whitehead wrote in the *American Journal of Physics* that he’d discovered that domino falls could not only topple many things, they could also topple bigger things. He described how a single domino is capable of bringing down another domino that is actually 50 percent larger.



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FIG. 1 A geometric domino progression.



**FIG. 2** A geometric progression is like a long, long train — it starts out too slow to notice until it's moving too fast to stop.

Do you see the implication? Not only can one knock over others but also others that are successively larger. In 2001 a physicist from San Francisco's Exploratorium reproduced Whitehead's experiment by creating eight dominoes out of plywood, each of which was 50 percent larger than the one before. The first was a mere two inches, the last almost three feet tall. The resulting domino fall began with a gentle tick and quickly ended "with a loud SLAM."

Imagine what would happen if this kept going. If a regular domino fall is a *linear* progression, Whitehead's would be described as a *geometric* progression. The result could defy the imagination. The 10th domino would be almost as tall as NFL quarterback Peyton Manning. By the 18th, you're looking at a domino that would rival the Leaning Tower of Pisa. The 23rd domino would tower over the Eiffel Tower and the 31st domino would loom over Mount Everest by almost 3,000 feet. Number 57 would practically bridge the distance between the earth and the moon!

## GETTING EXTRAORDINARY RESULTS

So when you think about success, shoot for the moon. The moon is reachable if you prioritize everything and put all of your energy into accomplishing the most important thing. Getting extraordinary results is all about creating a domino effect in your life.

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

Why does this approach work? Because extraordinary success is sequential, not simultaneous. What starts out linear becomes geometric. You do the right thing and then you do the next right thing. Over time it adds up, and the geometric potential of success is unleashed. The domino effect applies to the big picture, like your work or your business, and it applies to the smallest moment in each day when you're trying to decide what to do next. Success builds on success, and as this happens, over and over, you move toward the highest success possible.

When you see someone who has a lot of knowledge, they learned it over time. When you see someone who has a lot of skills, they developed them over time. When you see someone who has done a lot, they accomplished it over time. When you see someone who has a lot of money, they earned it over time.

The key is over time. Success is built sequentially. It's one thing at a time.