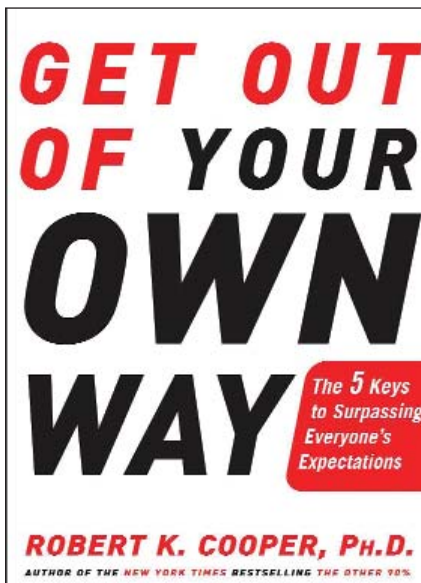


Change Your Brain



Get Out of Your Own Way: The 5 Keys to Surpassing Everyone's Expectations

By Robert K. Cooper
Reviewed by Laura M. Francis



I NEVER THOUGHT that a book about brain function and reaching one's potential could be a page turner. But, Robert K. Cooper's latest offering, *Get Out of Your Own Way*, is just that. The *New York Times* bestselling author knows how to captivate his readers. He takes the complex issues of brain functionality, supports them with scientific information, and shows readers why their brains are still like those of their caveman ancestors. Then, he tells them how to shut off those protective brain areas so that they can envision and surpass their goals.

Cooper does all of that in a witty, humorous, and approachable style, with

easy-to-read passages that are entertaining and bring the information to life. He describes intricate scientific theories and eloquently translates them into everyday examples and corresponding advice to which readers can relate.

The book has a two-fold purpose. First, readers must figure out their "open space goals." Cooper describes them as goals that get to the very core of who we are and how we want to live our lives. These goals tap into deep motivating powers—we do them because we want to and because they matter to us. Cooper points to two questions that we should ask ourselves regularly: What do I want above all? What am I doing right now to make that happen?

By identifying our open space goals, we are one step closer to achieving those things that will bring the most joy, fulfillment, and satisfaction to our lives.

The second purpose of the book is to realize our goals. To do that, we have to get out of our own way: Gain control over our brain's ancient faculties so that it works in tandem with our efforts.

While our ancestry has wired our brains to be cautious and negative, there are other areas that stimulate positive thought. Once people gain awareness of their automatic responses to various situations, they can learn how to turn off the ancient-brain reactions and plug into those positive areas. As Cooper states, "A little attention from you, at the right moments, can change a lot of (your brain's) unproductive habits into positive attributes that will move you forward toward what you want, beyond what anyone thought you could accomplish, in remarkable ways and with remarkable ease."

Cooper offers readers five "keys" to unlocking their fullest potential and achieving their grandest goals. Each key is a short phrase that is easy to remember, such as "Direction, not Motion," and is followed by a synopsis of its meaning. The related chapters delve into the essence of each key with more in-depth attention. Cooper uses real-life stories to

Going for Gold

T+D editors look at three more books to help readers achieve goals in different ways.

Change the Way You See Everything Through Asset-Based Thinking

By Kathryn D. Cramer and Hank Wasiak
(Free Press, April 2006, \$22.95)



It's perfectly natural for most people to focus on what is wrong, missing, or not working in their lives, say the authors. They describe that kind of thinking as deficit-based, and they say it can deprive us of the energy and conviction that we need to fully excel and exceed our goals.

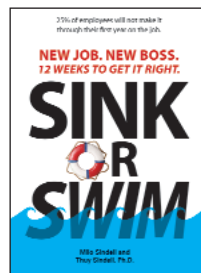
Instead, they advocate focusing on what is right, or asset-based thinking, to emphasize our strengths and the opportunities that life presents us. By changing our outlooks, we become open to successful thinking and behaviors that help us do things we can't even imagine.

Designed to be read quickly, *Change the Way You See Everything...* is concise and to the point. It's filled with real-life stories that encourage and inspire. The book pops from beginning to end with unique fonts and visually arresting photos—a delightful departure from the average self-help business book.

—Josephine Rossi

Sink or Swim

By Milo Sindell and Thuy Sindell
(Adams Media, April 2006, \$14.95)



The authors, described as 30-something thought leaders in the field of career development, bring an interesting approach to the topic of being a new employee. They point out the traps to avoid—and more important—

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illustrate how they have overcome their brains' automatic protective features (features that were what our ancestors needed to stay alive) and instead turned their brains into powerful allies. He provides specific ways for readers to identify their open space goals and how to pursue them.

Readers are also treated to easy-to-digest chunks of information related to topics that support the five keys. For example, the author discloses ways to overcome multi-tasking so that they can really focus on the pursuit of their goals. He also explores ways to deal with frustration and irritation without losing focus. Each of those information chunks provides a learning moment that can be applied to the reader's life. And Cooper's personal stories add a touch of humanity that will make readers feel connected with him.

Cooper also discusses the four human brains—yes, that's right, *four*—which are located in our heads, hearts, guts, and spines. He talks about the sensations we all get when something just doesn't feel right and those gut reactions that counter what our heads are telling us to do. Cooper claims that those are valid messages and that we should listen to what some would consider emotional areas. His stance on emotional intelligence is that we all need to trust our hearts, guts, or spines at times, turn off our brains, and stop overthinking and over-analyzing. Because I thought the book was going to be quite analytical and dry, I was pleased to read that he considers emotional intelligence to be skill.

Cooper also offers what I would consider to be fairly standard advice: Wait five seconds before answering a question or taking action. But he doesn't stop with a trite fortune cookie saying. He goes on to explain how this five-second pause is processed through the brain and why it's important to brain functions. Frankly, he kept me entertained and riveted

throughout the entire book. And he espouses ideas that counter what organizations deem to be productive for workers, such as the art of doing nothing. (He says it's an important element to reduce stress, calm down, and make the most of our energy, not effort.)

One item missing from the book is a diagram of the brain and all of the areas Cooper discusses. If readers were able to view the areas of the brain that he references, then it would round out the learning process. But even without the visual aid, *Get Out of Your Own Way* is a wonderful book that has many important lessons to teach. It accomplishes its goals in simple ways, with wisdom and recommendations intertwined with stories that bring the process of setting open space goals and surpassing expectations to life.

Cooper's book is an inspirational read that made this reviewer start to plan her own open space goals. I give it four full cups of coffee and strongly recommend it to readers who are looking for more joy and satisfaction in their lives.

Here is one parting thought from Cooper as you begin your journey: "No matter who you are, no matter how hard your life has been, no matter what challenges you are facing right now, one of the greatest powers you have—at every turn and in every moment of your life and work—is to shape what you become."

Get Out of Your Own Way: The 5 Keys to Surpassing Everyone's Expectations, by Robert K. Cooper. Crown Publishing Group: New York. 352 pp. \$25.

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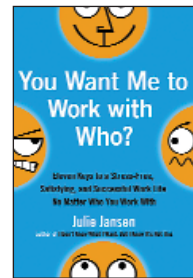
ly—the positive steps you can take to make sure that you are not part of the 25 percent of employees who don't last one year on a new job.

This is almost a workbook approach, with calendars, checklists, and icon-driven reminders of how to progress through those critical first weeks. I'm not sure that this book would be necessary for a mid-career professional with a job or two under her belt. But for a younger person on perhaps her second assignment, this book might be useful. I can envision a new hire propping open this book every week just to make sure she is taking every step the authors suggest. There is nothing too radical about what the Sindells suggest, but they present it in a practical, linear way.

—Rex Davenport

You Want Me to Work With Who?: Eleven Keys to a Stress-Free, Satisfying, and Successful Work Life ... No Matter Who You Work With

By Julie Jansen
(Penguin Group, March 2006, \$14)



We've all worked with difficult and unpleasant co-workers, but what can we do about it? In her new book *You Want Me to Work With Who?*, best-selling author Julie

Jansen offers real-life advice about how to work effectively with stubborn, incompetent, lazy, indecisive, irritating, lewd, and repugnant co-workers.

According to Jansen, there are 11 key character traits that shape our day-to-day workplace behavior. Often, the difficult people we work with can lack or have an overabundance of some of those traits. Using hands-on self-assessment exercises, this book helps us recognize the root causes of the problem behavior, effectively confront the problem co-workers, and find real solutions to deal with them in the future.

—Paula Ketter