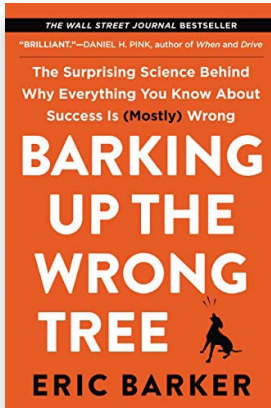


EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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Eric Barker is the creator of the blog Barking Up the Wrong Tree. He was also a former screenwriter.

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THE NUTSHELL

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Introduction

Success doesn't have to be something you see only on TV. It's less about being perfect than knowing what you're best at and being properly aligned with your context. The thing that sets you apart, the habits you may have tried to banish, even the things you were taunted for in school, may ultimately grant you an unbeatable advantage.

Should We Play it Safe and Do What We're Told If We Want To Succeed?

Too often we label things "good" or "bad" when the right designation might merely be "different." We spend too much time trying to be "good" when good is often merely average. To be great we must be different. That doesn't come from trying to follow society's vision of what is best, because society doesn't always know what it needs. Being the best often means just being the best version of you.

Once you know what type of person you are and your signature strengths, pick the right pond. It's way too easy to think, "I've always succeeded, I am a success, I am successful because I am a success, because it's about me, and therefore I will succeed in this new environment." Wrong. You were successful because you happened to be in an environment where your biases and predispositions and talents

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and abilities all happened to align neatly with those things that would produce success in that environment. Ask yourself, “Which companies, institutions, and situations value what I do?”

Do Nice Guys Finish Last?

In a lot of short-term scenarios, a little cheating and bullying can pay off. But over time it pollutes the social environment and soon everyone is second-guessing everybody, and no one wants to work toward the common good. Being a Taker (people who selfishly always try to get more and give less) has short-term benefits, but it's inherently limited. In the end, nobody wants to help you because they know what you're really like. Who are a Taker's worst enemies? Other Takers. While Givers (people who consistently look for ways to help others) get tons of help from other Givers and receive protection from Matchers (people who try to keep an even balance of give and take), they have only Takers to worry about. Meanwhile, Takers end up being disliked by everyone, including other Takers.

Unless Takers learn to trust and cooperate, they can never really scale their efforts the way a group of Givers can. Even Matchers, who do benefit from trust and reciprocity, are inherently limited because they often wait for someone else to initiate a good act, which prevents exchanges that could be beneficial for both parties.

Do Quitters Never Win and Winners Never Quit?

Grit is one of the key reasons why we see such differing levels of achievement between people of the same intelligence and talent levels. A Navy study revealed a number of things that people with grit do—often unknowingly—that keep them going when things get hard. “Positive self-talk” comes up in the psychological research again and again. In your head, you say between three hundred and a thousand words every minute to yourself. Those words can be positive (I can do it) or negative (Oh god, I can't take this anymore). It turns out that when these words are positive, they have a huge effect on your ability to keep going.

We don't like to think about limits, but we all have them. While grit is often about stories, quitting is often an issue of limits—pushing them, optimizing them, and most of all, knowing them. In Peter Drucker's book *The Effective Executive*, he explains: “The executive who wants to be effective and who wants his organization to be effective polices all programs, all activities, and all tasks. He always asks, ‘Is this still worth doing?’ And if it isn't, he gets rid of it so as to be able to concentrate on the few tasks that, if done with excellence, will really make a difference in the results of his own job and in the performance of his organization.”

It's Not What You Know, It's Who You Know (Unless It Really Is What You Know)

Since you need to have a network to be successful, can you build one and still feel good about yourself, even if you're an introvert? In 2011, Fortune magazine named Adam Rifkin, a shy introvert,

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the best networker in Silicon Valley. He's also the nicest guy you'll ever meet. In fact, he goes by the nickname "Panda." What's Panda's secret to networking? Be a friend. Networking isn't just a skill anybody can learn. It's a skill you already know.

Believe in Yourself...Sometimes

Plenty of research shows that looking through the lens of self-esteem might be the real reason the debate over confidence is so fraught with grief, but what's the alternative to self-confidence? University of Texas professor Kristin Neff says it's "self-compassion." Compassion for yourself when you fail means you don't need to be a delusional jerk to succeed and you don't have to feel incompetent to improve. You get off the yo-yo experience of absurd expectations and beating yourself up when you don't meet them. You stop lying to yourself that you're so awesome. Instead, you focus on forgiving yourself when you're not.

Work, Work, Work...or Work-Life Balance?

In *Just Enough* the authors refer to it as a "collapsing strategy"—collapsing everything into one barometer of whether or not our life is on track. Most of us find it easy to focus just on money and say, "Make the number go up." Convenient, simple...and dead wrong. The insanely successful people the authors spoke to often felt they were missing out in another area of life, like their relationships. When we try to collapse everything into one metric we inevitably get frustrated.

There are four metrics that matter most:

- **HAPPINESS:** having feelings of pleasure or contentment in and about your life.
- **ACHIEVEMENT:** achieving accomplishments that compare favorably against similar goals others have strived for.
- **SIGNIFICANCE:** having a positive impact on people you care about.
- **LEGACY:** establishing your values or accomplishments in ways that help others find future success.

You want to be contributing to the four needs on a regular basis. If you ignore any of them, you're headed for a collapsing strategy.

Conclusion: *What Makes a Successful Life?* If you align your knowledge of yourself with your career and the people around you, it can form an upward spiral that leads to not only career success but also happiness and fulfillment.