In his epic 707-page *Tools of Titans*, Tim Ferriss shares the habits and beliefs of 101 people at the top of their game, including tech investors like Chris Sacca and Peter Thiel, entrepreneurs like LinkedIn’s Reid Hoffman and Evernote’s Phil Libin, superhuman athletes like Amelia Boone and Wim Hof, media figures like Edward Norton and Whitney Cummings, and more.

These are the principles that successful people use to achieve audacious goals, improve themselves, and be happier. If you can apply the lessons from this book, you can be more effective.

The problem with *Tools of Titans* is its organization – every titan has a separate chapter, leading to over 140 short chapters over 707 pages. For Tim, this makes sense, as he wants to pay homage to the titans and make it easy to find personalities you care about. But when organized this way, it’s hard to see the bigger picture.

What I really wanted to know were *patterns of habits across the titans*. What do many successful people do that I don’t currently do? I wanted to see the beliefs of titans organized by theme, like how to define your life goals, how to think of good ideas, how to be happier everyday.

That’s what I’ve done in this *Tools of Titans* summary. I’ve extracted my favorite lessons from the book and reorganized them by theme. This way, you can see how 10 titans focus their lives to cut out the noise, and how 9 titans find time to be grateful every single day.
How to Use Tools of Titans

The book is very, very broad. There are a lot of ideas. Don’t get intimidated by all the practices you think you need to emulate – each person interviewed suggests just a handful of ideas. No one does them all.

One major theme in the book is an emphasis on action, not information. As Derek Sivers says, “If information was the answer, then we’d all be billionaires with perfect abs.” These principles will only improve your life if you regularly apply them.

I suggest you digest this Tools of Titans summary as follows:

- Identify 3 top ideas that resonate the most strongly to you. Plan daily actionables that will put these into practice. Actually do it.
- Queue up 5 more secondary ideas that you want to work on, after you’ve gotten the top 3 down.
- Read a summary of Tools of Titans periodically (once a quarter) to see what you can improve about your life. Rinse and repeat.

Don’t think that you have to reorganize your life entirely at once. Improving one thing is the best first step to improving your overall life.

Commentary on this Summary

Because success means something different to everyone, Tim purposely makes the book very broad, covering health, wealth, and happiness. When you read the book, what you find important may be very different from what I find important. Therefore I highly recommend reading Tools of Titans yourself and extracting your favorite points.

That said, for the major themes below, I do believe I’ve captured all the most common themes across titans. If you think I’m missing something, leave a comment or email me.

I’ve organized this summary with dominant concepts first, then interesting smaller ideas later. I’ve moved the “Part 1: Healthy” section to the end, as I didn’t find as much commonality between people as in the “Wealthy” and “Wise” sections.

For long quotes, I edit for clarity and conciseness, but always keep the intent of what is being said.

My personal notes are in brackets [ ] and don’t necessarily represent the views of Tim Ferriss or the titan.
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Introduction

- different readers highlight different points from Tools of Titans as the most important lessons.
- spend time engaging with provocative questions – the value is in the reflection and learning to think like the people in this book, not just absorbing trite lessons
- question why you skip sections or dismiss them as irrelevant – are they pointing out a deeper problem you don’t want to surface?
- someone has done your version of success before – emulate their beliefs and habits
- your idols have flaws just like you, but chose to maximize their 1 or 2 strengths
- Siddhartha’s story about what he has to offer: “I can think, I can wait, I can fast.”
  - “I can think” – good decision-making and asking good questions
  - “I can wait” – plan long-term, be patient
  - “I can fast” – be able to withstand pain and be resilient

Major Themes of Tools of Titans

You Need to Focus

Does life feel busy to you? It doesn’t have to be. These titans have hundreds-fold more opportunities than you or me, and they have to apply a laser focus to the opportunities that will fulfill their goals.

If you feel like you’re spinning your wheels and moving really fast, but not making any progress in life, you probably have to focus your goals. Here’s a Tools of Titans summary of the major quotes on focus.

- “Being busy is a form of laziness – lazy thinking and indiscriminate action. Being busy is most often used as a guise for avoiding the few critically important but uncomfortable actions.” – Tim Ferriss

- People are busy because they’re “addicted to busyness and dread what they might have to face in its absence.” Being busy is an “existential reassurance, a hedge against emptiness: Obviously your life cannot possibly be silly or trivial or meaningless if you are so busy, completely booked, in demand every hour of the day.” In reality, in the grandest of schemes [e.g. heat death of the universe], what we do doesn’t matter. From Tim Kreider

- It’s worth spending a lot of time defining these goals. You spend 5 minutes figuring out where you want to eat for dinner. If you spent that 5% of time on your career, this would be 2 full working years, just spent on figuring out how to live your life. From Will MacAskill
- Very useful visual metaphor: Imagine you have a glass jar, and next to it big rocks, pebbles, and sand. If you put the sand and pebbles in first, they take up the space, and you can’t fit the big rocks in. But if you add the big rocks, then the pebbles, then the sand, everything fits. From Kaskade

- Derek Sivers advises not to be a donkey, citing Buridan’s ass, a fable where a donkey that is both hungry and thirsty is placed midway between hay and water. Unable to make a choice, the donkey dies. Sivers advises being patient and methodical. Don’t pursue all the directions at once and making progress on none. Have patience – with focus, you’ll be able to do everything big you want in life.

- If it’s not a “hell, yes!” it’s a “no.” Derek Sivers uses this benchmark to assess his opportunities. Reid Hoffman has a similar idea – “there needs to be one decisive reason” for an expensive action like traveling to an industry conference. If it’s a blended reason full of multiple unsatisfying reasons, most likely it’ll be a waste of time.

- Chris Sacca moved near Tahoe instead of living in San Francisco to go back on offense. If you survey the things you have to do, “which of those did you assign yourself, and which of those are you doing to please someone else? Your inbox is a to-do list to which anyone in the world can add an action item.”

- Beware of moderation arguments. “I’ll just do a little startup investing” or “5 hours a week isn’t that bad.” If this is an area where you go all-or-nothing, then you need to cut it off completely.

- “Accepting the requests you receive is at the expense of the quality of the very work – the reason for those requests in the first place – and that’s what you always have to protect.” – Maria Popova

- “Desire is a contract you make with yourself to be unhappy until you get what you want.” Naval Ravikant is therefore careful to choose his desires carefully, to avoid having more than one big desire at any time. Focus helps you avoid anxiety and desire from dozens of unfulfilled wants.

### Visualize Your Goals

Why are you pedaling so hard if you don’t know where you’re going? Many titans visualize their long term goals, so it becomes easier to know what they’re fighting for and what to say no to.

- “I am a big believer that if you have a very clear vision of where you want to go, then the rest of it is much easier. Because you always know why you are training 5 hours a day, you always know why you are pushing and going through the pain barrier.” – Arnold Schwarzenegger

- Tony Robbins spends the last part of his morning meditation imagining the three things he’ll make happen. “See if as though it’s already been done, feel the emotions.”

- “Pick a goal and write it down 15 times a day, every day. It will seem as if the universe just starts spitting up opportunities.” Scott Adams believes this helps your brain filter in the opportunities that fit your goal, much like you can hear your name in a room full of noise.
Note that these concepts sound close to The Secret, a book I used to mock as crockery (“where are all the Secret billionaires?”), but am rethinking the underlying point of, now that I’ve seen pretty rational people support its concepts.

**Be Courageous. Be Brazen**

Do you have a big goal you would love to tackle, but you don’t feel ready? You likely have put artificial constraints on yourself.

Many titans spoke about pushing past artificial boundaries placed on us by society or by ourselves. Realize that every titan you admire started out where you are today. The difference is they had the courage to push past this obstacle. Here’s a Tools of Titans summary of the top courage quotes.

- “Everything around you that you call ‘life’ was made up by people that were no smarter than you. And you can change it, you can influence it, you can build your own things that other people can use.” – Steve Jobs
- “Don’t be afraid to do something you’re not qualified to do.” – Dan Carlin
- “If I had always done what I was ‘qualified’ to do, I’d be pushing a broom somewhere.” – Naval Ravikant
- A high-agency person: “when you’re told that something is impossible, is that the end of the conversation, or does that start a second dialogue in your mind, how to get around whoever it is that’s just told you that you can’t do something?” – Eric Weinstein
- Don’t be afraid to start because you feel you need the perfect starting kit of connections, funding, ideas. These are excuses, and you can likely make use of the assets you do have.
- To make a difference in your short life, “do the type of research that other people would think of as risky or even foolhardy.” “Have no fear. You’ve got one chance here to do amazing things, and being afraid of being wrong or making a mistake is just not how you do something of impact.” – Adam Gazzaley
- Tim Ferriss’s fear exercise
  - Write down the 20% of activities and people that are causing 80% of negative emotions. You need to escape this.
  - If left at the status quo, what does life look like in 6 months, 3 years?
  - What is the worst that could happen if you made the change you’re afraid of? How could you undo any damage from the worst case? What is the permanent damage?
    - You will likely find there is little permanent damage, and if you fail, you’ll be able to resume your old life just fine.
What is the best case scenario if I made the change? Have less intelligent people done this before and pulled it off?

After this exercise, you usually realize that the worst case in what could happen is nowhere near crippling, and you don’t have great reasons not to do it other than fear.

Don’t be afraid to punch above your weight class. “Go to all the meetings you can, even if you’re not invited to them, and figure out how to be helpful.” While at Google, Chris Sacca invited himself to meetings and offered to take notes.

Tim Ferriss did something similar when launching the 4-Hour Workweek by going to CES and parking himself at a blogger hangout lounge. He asked a lot of dumb questions and never pitched – he just put himself there to learn more.

Ryan Holiday suggests the “canvas strategy” – early on, your role is to pave the way for other people, to let them do their best work, to find canvases for them to paint on. Don’t worry about being taken advantage of. Find the grunt work nobody wants to do and constantly strive to be helpful to people. Give your ideas away.

The person who clears the path controls the direction.

If your ego gets in the way because you think you’re high and mighty, then realize that this lower position is simply a temporary situation and you should get the most out of it.

Bill Belichick mastered the art of analyzing film, a grunt job, and he started as a volunteer.

Adam Robinson suggests approaching each interaction as a challenge to delight the other person. Including investment meetings or job interviews. This puts the focus off of yourself.

10% challenge: Go to the counter and ask for 10% off your coffee. You have to learn to ask for things and put yourself out there. From Noah Kagan.

“When I had the opportunity, did I choose courage over comfort?” – Brené Brown

Jamie Foxx, born Eric Bishop, started his career at an improv venue. They’d have 100 guys and 5 girls in line to perform, and they’d always pick the girls to get variety. Jamie made a unisex name to get picked. [I love this story for its cleverness and chutzpah – Jamie knew what he wanted, and he made it happen.]

Action, Not Information
Are you obsessed with learning new tactics, but have a problem following through?

Realize that success doesn’t come from knowledge, it comes from action. Especially when reading nonfiction books like this Tools of Titans summary. Don’t just absorb the platitudes – think hard about what actionables you want to apply to your life.
“If information was the answer, then we’d all be billionaires with perfect abs.” – Derek Sivers

“Mastery doesn’t come from an infographic. What you know doesn’t mean shit. What do you do consistently?” – Tony Robbins

Don’t feel you need to have that perfect unicorn idea before you start acting. Most likely you’re holding yourself back. “Inspiration is for amateurs – the rest of us just show up and get to work. Things will grow out of the activity itself and that you will – through work – bump into other possibilities and kick open other doors that you would never have dreamt of if you were just sitting around looking for a great ‘art idea.’” – Chuck Close

“You’ll never be the best-looking, smartest, most educated person in the room. But what you can always compete on, the true egalitarian aspect to success, is hard work.” – Casey Neistat

“Free education is abundant, all over the Internet. It’s the desire to learn that’s scarce.” – Naval Ravikant

In college, Rob Rodriguez created a comic strip. He’d try to develop an idea fully-formed by staring at the ceiling before he started drawing. He realized that he was much better at simply drawing, finding something cool, then keep iterating to create something. “You have to act first before inspiration will hit. You don’t wait for inspiration and then act, because you’re never going to act.”

BJ Novak suggests first-time comics book their first week of shows in advance, so they can’t back out after a bad performance. Commit to future actions in a high energy state, so you don’t back out.

Everyone starts somewhere. If you need a dose of courage, look at the earliest blogs of Tim Ferriss or Ramit Sethi, watch the pilot of South Park. The big presences you see today started out no better than the rough drafts you see, and you don’t have to do any better.

Generate a Lot of Bad Ideas to Get Good Ideas

Do you feel held back because you struggle to find the perfect idea?

Your bar is set too high. Spend your energy coming up with LOTS of ideas, even if they’re silly. There are bound to be some good ideas in there.

“If you can’t come up with 10 ideas, come up with 20 ideas.” James Altucher suggests you might feel bottlenecked by the need to come up with good Instead, just come up with ideas, period. There are bound to be some good ideas in there. What matter isn’t your hit rate, but the quality of your best ideas.

Suggestions for idea brainstorming lists: “10 ways I can save time” “10 ridiculous things I would invent” “10 old ideas I can make new” Many more here.

Similar idea: IBM got better sales by setting sales quotas low, so that salespeople wouldn’t feel as timid in picking up the phone. After getting their first sales, they’d find momentum.
Malcolm Gladwell comes up with as many ideas as possible, scrutinizes them, and kills them off. The unkillable ideas are worth going forward with.

Many writers don’t believe that writer’s block exists. “If I don’t feel inspired, I need to move forward. I need to have discipline…I say “You, book, are fighting with me. Okay. I’m going to sit here, and I’m not going to leave you alone until I find my way out.” – Paulo Coelho

**Start a Habit with a Tiny Push**

Want to lose 50 pounds, or meditate for half an hour daily, or read a book a week? If you chew off too much at the start, you might falter and feel self-defeated.

Instead, try just one small action. No one ever has too little time or energy for one small action. This builds momentum to adopting your habit.

- To get in shape, Matt Mullenweg committed himself to one push-up before bed.
- Meng Tan suggests taking just one mindful breath a day.
- Rick Rubin suggests a struggling artist to just “write one word. Do you think that you could come up with one word?”
- [The point of this tactic is that if you visualize a giant goal, the barrier to action is very high. If you falter, you’ll be disappointed with yourself, setting off a vicious cycle. Instead, distill your behavior change into the tiniest possible unit. Commit to doing just that one little thing. You’ll find it’s not as bad as you thought.]

**Being Away from Hotspots**

Not in the hotspot for your career? Don’t worry – this can give you other advantages to compensate. [Useful concept if you’re not in the Bay Area and you’re building a startup.] This helps surmount the excuse of “I don’t have X or I’m not in location Y, so I can’t start.”

- Chris Sacca’s cabin in Truckee helped him get away from the Valley noise and focus his priorities, in addition to having a hangout spot people wanted to go to
- [Similarly, Richard Branson’s Necker Island is a beautiful vacation spot, letting him invite the likes of Barack Obama and Bill Gates and have an excuse to spend time with them. There is something to the idea of having a unique asset or skill that gives you a unique medium to hang out with people.]
- Shaun White found practicing in Southern California to be superior to the typical Vermont or Colorado, where the cold and hiking will crumble your spirit
- Richard Betts (master sommelier) found two well-regarded chefs in Tucson. Since no one wants to move to Tucson, he realized that moving there would supercharge his learning.
How to Imagine the Future

If you work in innovation of any kind, then you likely want to build for the future. How can you push the boundaries of your thinking to arrive at big ideas?

Titans who speak about imagining the future have a consistent theme of running against consensus. The biggest changes to the future may be things we don’t currently expect. Here are the best quotes on innovation and boundary pushing from Tools of Titans:

- “Any useful statement about the future should at first seem ridiculous” – Jim Dator
- “It’s far more important to be imaginative than to be right” – Alvin Toffler
- If what you’re working sounds reasonable to most people, you may not be thinking creatively or innovatively enough.
- “To do original work: It’s not necessary to know something nobody else knows. It is necessary to believe something few other people believe.” – Marc Andreessen
- “The difference between a billionaire and a non-billionaire...not accepting the norms of your time.” – Neil Strauss
- “When 99% of people doubt you, you’re either gravely wrong or about to make history.” – Scott Belsky
- “Five billion new consumers are coming online in the next 6 years. What do they need?” – Peter Diamandis
- “You get paid for being right first, and to be first, you can’t wait for consensus.” – Naval Ravikant
- “What can you do that will be remembered in 200 to 400 years?” Shackleton Sniff Test: “is this the most audacious endeavor I could possibly conceive of?” – Bryan Johnson
- “It’s good not to follow the herd. Go the other way. You’re gonna stumble, but at least it’s a new frontier.” – Rob Rodriguez

Stress-Testing Ideas

By yourself, you’re unlikely to find the very best solution or see the entire picture. You need other people to stress-test your ideas. If it survives the trial by fire, then it’s a good idea. If it doesn’t, you’ve just saved yourself a lot of time.

- “Whenever [Ben] brings in a deal, I just beat the shit out of it. I might think it’s the best idea I’ve ever heard of, but I’ll just trash the crap out of it and try to get everybody else to pile on. And then, at the end of it, if he’s still pounding the table saying, ‘No, no this is the thing...’ then we say we’re all in...it’s the torture test.” – Marc Andreessen
“How do you know if you have A-players on your project team? You know it if they don’t accept the strategy you hand them. They should suggest modifications to the plan based on their closeness to the details.” – Reid Hoffman

“I ran into Jeff Bezos a bit later and was saying I just got to talk with Elon, and I’m superexcited about Mars. I really hope that one day I can go. And Bezos looks at me and goes, ‘Mars is stupid. Once we get off of the planet, the last thing we want to do is go to another gravity. We should just live on space stations and mine asteroids and everything is much better than being on Mars.’” – Phil Libin. Question commonly held goals and beliefs.

The military uses red teams to challenge plans. “How would you disrupt this plan or how would you defeat this plan?” – Stanley McChrystal

Put away your moral compass when evaluating ideas. For example, the cause of air quality doesn’t automatically have to do with corporate greed. Jumping to conclusions will cause mistakes and avoid the best solutions. From Stephen Dubner

Meditation and Mindfulness

Tim Ferriss says most of his interviewees practice some sort of meditation or mindfulness practice. This reduces anxiety, increases happiness, and makes you more aware of your life.

You don’t have to do it everyday. In his early life, Arnold Schwarzenegger meditated for a year, and continues to see lifetime benefits even when he stopped. “I could really disconnect my mind...and learn how to focus more and to calm down.” “I don’t merge and bring things together and see everything as one big problem. I take them one challenge at a time.”

A similar concept is working while listening to a single track or album on repeat. This puts your mind into a trance-like state of focus and is similar to mindfulness practices. [I do this.]

Be Grateful for Things

One of the most surprising themes from titans was gratefulness for life and achievements so far. I would have imagined the most successful people to be take-no-prisoners, perpetually unsatisfied people, but many people cut the other way. I used to think that stress and anger were great motivators, but this might cause missing the forest for the trees. Here’s a Tools of Titans summary of gratitude:

Tony Robbins believes gratitude prevents you from feeling anger or fear. He starts off his morning with consideration of gratitude in his meditation.

In his 5 minute journal, Tim Ferriss recommends naming 3 things you’re grateful for at the end of every day. Instead of repeating the same things like your health, consider:

- An old relationship that really helped you
- An opportunity you have today
- Something great that happened yesterday that happened to you or that you saw
- Something simple near you or within sight

- Seth Godin asks: Why fixate on all the times someone betrayed or rejected you? It makes more sense to keep track of all the times it worked, all the times we took a risk and it worked out. The narrative is up to you.

- BJ Miller gets perspective by looking at the sky. “Realize that we’re all on the same planet at the same time. Realize that the light hitting your eye is ancient, stars that you’re seeing may no longer exist by the time the light gets to you. Just mulling the bare-naked facts of the cosmos is enough to put all my neurotic anxieties in their proper place.”

- Ed Cooke suggests something similar: “imagine the world from the stars. Then you zoom in and you’re like, “There’s this tiny little character there for a fragment of time worrying about X.”

- Jocko Willink reads about human suffering like the My Lai massacre to be grateful for what he has.

- Joe de Sena was inspired to start Death Race after getting fed up with Wall Street. He wanted to suffer in nature and return to a time when you just want water, food and shelter, which would make all other needs pale in comparison

- Tim Ferriss keeps a “Jar of Awesome.” He puts entries whenever something cool happens in a day. These are easy to forget, and they help you appreciate the small wins.

- Try a morning practice to express heartfelt gratitude to someone you are about or who’s helped you.

- Rob Rodriguez chronicles the memories of the day at midnight. He reflects on them years later and appreciates the importance of small events.

- Casey Neistat recommends Little Dieter Needs to Fly about a Vietnam prisoner of war, which will make you appreciate your cushy life

- “Happiness is a choice that you make and a skill that you develop. You choose to be happy, and then you work at it. It’s just like building muscles.” – Naval Ravikant

I’m not certain yet why being grateful helps you better accomplish your goals, but here are some suggestions.

- Being grateful for past successes helps you acknowledge that you are capable. This avoids the paralysis from feeling you’re not good at anything.

- If you’re afraid of taking a certain action, reflecting on similar past actions helps you realize the outcome will be good and it won’t be as painful as you think it is.

- Being grateful for other people inspires a cooperative spirit. You often need other people for success, and thanking past connections helps you seek more connection.
• Neurologically, feeling good about memories positively reinforces the behavioral circuits that produced those memories. E.g. you can be grateful for that one time you reached out to a long lost friend and had a great weekend together, which will weight that behavior more strongly in the future.

Design Your Work So You Learn From Failures
Set goals so that if you fail in achieving them, you still grow tremendously along the way.

• Scott Adams defines “systems” rather than “goals.” You should choose projects or options that let you build skills or assets that will still be useful if you fail. Example: “what persistent relationships can I develop?” vs “how do I network with 5 startup founders?”
  • For example, Tim Ferriss started podcasts on a whim, knowing that if he failed, he’d still learn the techniques of audio production and get to interview cool people.

• Failure isn’t durable. Rob Rodriguez failed in the movie Four Rooms, but the cast directly led him to envision Spy Kids, and he reproduced the three-story act structure in Sin City.

• “You never have to be upset about everything. Everything is for a purpose. You just failed your driver’s test...I couldn’t be happier. I’d rather you fail with a teacher and take it 100 more times than fail in front of a cop.” – Rob Rodriguez

• The principle of “Good,” from Jocko Willink. If you fail, say “Good,” and reflect on how you can grow from the experience.
  • Didn’t get promoted? Good. More time to get better and try again.
  • Didn’t get funded? Good. We keep more of the company.
  • Got beaten? Good. We learned.

Small Details Can Make a Big Difference
Small actions can have a large impact, especially if you’re building a product or providing a service. People notice the details.

• Chris Sacca wears cowboy shirts, leading to a clear self-branding, unending media mentions and a recognizable style no one will imitate

• Derek Sivers wrote a fun shipping email for CD Baby. Instead of simply giving a confirmation, it talks about how “Our world-renowned packing specialist lit a local artisan candle and a hush fell over the crowd as he put your CD into the finest gold-lined box that money can buy.” This little automated bit of joy could spread word of mouth.
Alexis Ohanian did the same for Hipmunk error messages. If you put in the same destination for From and To, it’ll say “That’s an awfully short trip.” Date errors lead to “We don’t support trips to the past yet.” Long trips mean “Why don’t you just move there? 30 days is the max.”

Josh Waitzkin thinks the little details add up to something big. If you’re not cultivating quality, you’re cultivating sloppiness. There are hundreds of times more little moments than big moments.

Morning Routines
Getting the start of your day right prepares you for success the rest of the day.

- Tony Robbins primes himself and induces a change in physiology to get in the right mental state. He starts with a cold-water plunge, then follows with rapid breathing exercises or a short walk, then ends with a meditation on what he’s grateful for, and what his goals are.

- Tim Ferriss’s 5 Morning Rituals
  - Make your bed
    - Getting the day ready with a small task encourages you to do another
    - No matter how bad your day goes, you can make your bed. This gives you some feeling of control
  - Meditate
  - Do 5 to 10 reps of something like pushups, squats
  - Titanium tea
    - Pu-erh aged black tea
    - Dragon well green tea
    - Turmeric and ginger shavings
    - 1-2 tablespoons coconut oil
  - 5-minute journal
    - Answer the below questions with 3 answers each
    - I am grateful for...
    - What would make today great?
    - Daily affirmations. I am...
  - Reid Hoffman spends 60 minutes working on the problem he set the day before, when his mind is the freshest.
End of Day Routines

- “Never go to sleep without a request to your subconscious” – Thomas Edison

- Reid Hoffman gives his mind an overnight task, like a product design, strategy, or a problem. He lets his subconscious mind get to work. “What are the kinds of key things that might be constraints on a solution, or might be the attributes of a solution, and what are tools or assets I might have?”

- End the work day with very high quality – don’t develop bad habits. Hemingway ended his writing sessions mid-flow and mid-sentence, so he could start with momentum the next day.

- Tim Ferriss has an end of day journal
  - 3 amazing things that happened today
  - How could I have made today better?

Solve the Easy Problem

Are you struggling day to day with your problem? Take some time to think about how you can simplify it, or do the same thing but get a 10x greater reward.

- Reid Hoffman suggests “part of business strategy is to solve the simplest, easiest, and most valuable problem.”

- Seth Godin tells a story of a designer Lynn Gordon who had trouble getting business for toy designs. When she switched to the book business, she got a hit with her 52 activity card deck series.

- “What would this look like if it were easy?” Justin Boreta asks this when he’s stuck.

- [I take this to mean to look for areas you can apply your skills that are much bigger. Or solve the easier problem that unlocks the bigger market. Or find a way to simplify your life to focus on the 80/20 rule.]

Be Your Unapologetically Weird Self

Many titans, especially those in entertainment, praised authenticity. People crave realness and connection, and being yourself will find the audience that likes you for you.

Don’t be afraid to differ from common sense or society’s expectations to be yourself.

- “Be your unapologetically weird self.” – Chris Sacca.

- Whitney Cummings found her greatest comedic success in telling her embarrassing moments and allowing a catharsis when her audience connected.
Seth Rogen started his standup as a teenager trying to imitate other comics, when another comic told him “Dude, you’re the only person here who could talk about trying to get a hand job for the first time. Talk about that!”

Cato purposely wore darker robes than was customary and by wearing no tunic. As expected, he was ridiculed, and he wanted to train himself to be ashamed only of things that are truly worth being ashamed of.

In the pilot of his TV show, Andrew Zimmern could have made fun of a Japanese restaurant’s name, translated to “morning erections.” But he stuck to his guns and stayed respectful, which set the tone for his entire show. “It is so much less work just to be yourself.”

Early in his radio show, Glenn Beck spent 15 minutes sharing his biggest mistakes and his past as an alcoholic, in response to a caller who said he was Mr. Perfect. Glenn thought his career was over, but realized people are starving for something authentic.

Josh Waitzkin says being world-class requires embracing your eccentricity and building on it.

Jon Favreau believes, “don’t go for funny. Go for the truth, and you’ll hit funny along the way.”

Bryan Johnson (Brantree founder) sold credit card processing door-to-door by walking them through his pitch book. “I am the same as everyone else, except with me, you get honesty and transparency and great customer support.” He won by offering honesty in a broken industry with shady practices.

Dan Carlin suggests “copyrighting your faults.” Radio producers complained about him going into the red in the recording meter, but he claimed that as his style.

1,000 True Fans
A true fan is defined as “a fan who will buy anything you produce.” True fans become your direct source of income AND the major marketing force for ordinary fans. If you can get true fans, then you’re sure that you’re solving problems for a real group of people.

- Similar in concept to “early adopter” and Paul Graham’s Do Things That Don’t Scale
- Kurt Vonnegut suggests “write to please just one person” – yourself.
- “The best art divides the audience.” – Rick Rubin. If half the people love it and half hate it, it’s pushing the boundary and not catering to the mainstream.
  - [This relates to the idea that Netflix can make such high-quality shows because they’re not bound to 24 hours of broadcasting, and they’re not beholden to advertisers, so they can make riskier shows.]
- “General fame is overrated. You want to be famous to 2,000-3,000 people you handpick.” – Eric Weinstein. Mainstream fame brings more liabilities than benefits.
Being Tough
Getting through rough patches requires grit and willpower. If you want to be tough, be tough. Make the tough call on your very next decision.

- “If you want to be tougher mentally, it is simple: Be tougher. Don’t meditate on it.” – Jocko Willink
- “Push yourself harder than you believe you’re capable of. You’ll find new depth inside yourself.” – Stanley McChrystal
- “Put yourself in groups who share difficulties, discomfort. You’ll find that when you have been through that difficult environment, you feel more strongly about that which you’re committed to.” – Stanley McChrystal
- “Create some fear and make individuals overcome it.” – Stanley McChrystal
- Seneca suggests enduring a period of simplicity and baseness for 3 days to reset your comfort setpoint – like sleeping in a sleeping bag or eating only oatmeal. After this, the smallest morsels of food will be delicious.

Investment Principles
Some investor titans share investment principles that guide their decisions.

- Tony Robbins’s hedge fund friends
  - Cap the downside. Be obsessed about not losing money and protecting against the downside.
  - Find asymmetrical risk and reward – how do you get huge rewards with little risk?
  - Asset allocation – diversify

- Tim Ferriss
  - Invests in companies that have technical founders; are in a space that he can impact through his network; have some traction so he doesn’t have to start the fire; show less entitled founders; aren’t a party round with no lead
  - Tim also tries to get more equity through his advising time without putting in more capital
  - Breaking your rules to co-invest is a bad idea, but following rules when others reject is can work out.
  - An approximation of a hedge in VC is big businesses like Uber, which have a lot of international exposure and could be considered counter-cyclical to the macro economy.
  - Tim’s portfolio makes him feel like there’s “no way I’ll lose money on this deal,” meaning they’re rarely moonshots
- Kevin Rose
  - Do you understand it?
  - Will it be dominant and growing 3 years from now?
  - Will this technology be more or less a part of our lives in 3 years?
  - He takes the features and play out how they impact the emotions of consumers who use them.
    - g. Twitter’s character length and texting medium lowers the friction for sharing. Following is a new activity that promotes competition and scoring.
- Scott Belsky
  - Learn from the past without being inspired by it or following patterns. What conventional wisdom was shunned?

### Empathy

- “How can you create something for someone else if you can’t imagine the world through their eyes?” – Chris Sacca
- When dealing with someone upset, ask yourself, “has this person slept? Has this person eaten? Is something else bugging them?” You don’t get handed a baby who’s crying and think, “that baby’s out to get me.”
- It’s silly to blame someone for not understanding you because most people don’t understand themselves and have a hard time communicating ourselves to other people.
- When delivering feedback, are you being unfair because you operate from a greater set of information, and you know something they don’t? Make sure you empathize with their context.
- “You can trust a lot of people. You don’t have to live in fear of strangers. Strangers are just people you haven’t flown yet.” “I assume the best in people. I assume that I can trust them until they prove me wrong.” – Jason Nemer, acroyoga founder.

### Telling Your Past Self to Relax

Tim Ferriss poses a question: “what would you tell your younger self?” The most common response was “relax, don’t get anxious – everything will work out.”

[Naturally this suffers from hindsight bias, since the anxiety possibly caused the motion and inspiration leading to today’s success. And now that they’ve achieved a level of fame and success, things come easier to them, so they have to work less hard. But if I were to take this productively, I’d connect this to the Focus theme – worry about the one or two big things you want to get right. The other details that stress you out don’t matter.]
How to Raise Your Kids

Titans mentioned various childhood influences that made them who they are today, or practices they employ with their kids. A Tools of Titans summary on child-rearing:

- Reid Hoffman played a lot of complex board games, which helped him grasp complexities in circumstances. Came into use in Paypal.

- Teach your kids how to lead and how to solve interesting problems, by giving them interesting problems. We cannot out-obedience the competition [e.g. in physical labor]. From Seth Godin.

- The job you’re going to do hasn’t been invented yet. The interesting jobs are the ones you make up. From Chris Young.

- Girls should be taught to confront their fear, and should be urged the same amount of caution and protection as with boys.

- Girls may find West with the Night a good book.

- Don’t typify weather as good or bad – this ties your mood to an external factor like weather. Better to say “it’s a beautiful rainy day” and go outside and play anyway. From Josh Waitzkin.

- Have kids introspect about what they’re doing without following them closely, like when teaching riding a bike. “What were your thought processes? What were the risks you took?” From Bryan Johnson.

Interesting Short Ideas

Here are a bunch of cool less commonly-repeated ideas from Tools of Titans, summarized and categorized by theme.

Business Tactics

- Raise Prices
  - The conventional wisdom in the Valley is to price your product low to get mass penetration and volume. This causes problems with being unable to fund sales and marketing to rev up the engine. People paying for your product is proof that it’s good. From Marc Andreessen.
  - Chase Jarvis, a photographer, charged a high professional rate of $2,500 a day for his first day-rate gig. He had to deliver equivalent value, but he had trained his craft.
  - Ramit Sethi gives away 98% of material for free, then charges very high prices for flagship courses, 10-100x what competitors charge.
  - Tim Ferriss charges didn’t take advertisers until he had 100k+ downloads per episode, avoiding the small fish. He also sometimes has high-priced events costing $10k per seat, with 200 seats.
  - Failure is not good.
Marc Andreessen feels pivoting is too easy of an option and overvalued. Put the time into figuring it out and getting it right.

Peter Thiel believes failure is overrated. “Most businesses fail for more than one reason. So when a business fails, you don’t learn anything at all because the failure was overdetermined.” Failure can be damaging and demoralizing, and the death of every business is a tragedy.

Jack Dorsey says the worst advice given in his trade is “fail fast!”

Psychological warfare

When competing in bodybuilding competitions, Arnold Schwarzenegger would tell competitors if they had a knee injury since they looked a bit slimmer – this would throw them off.

He who cares the last wins

In negotiation.

Even though he wanted to enter acting, Arnold Schwarzenegger avoided bit parts and became wealthy independently through real estate. This let him wait for the big film.

Taking the short-term loss for a long-term advantage

Arnold Schwarzenegger and the head development made Twins for zero salary and a percentage of profit. It turned out to be his most profitable film ever.

George Lucas negotiated for toy rights.

Are there any ways you can bet on yourself, lower short-term risk for the counterparty, but increase your long term potential? What about working at a company you really like for free? Converting your salary to more equity?

Speed in decision making for subordinates

Reid Hoffman empowered his reports to make judgment calls. “I’m okay with an error rate of 10 to 20% if it means you can move fast.”

Tim Ferriss gave his supplement fulfillment partners discretion for $100 calls. Nothing exploded. He reduced his customer support time from 40 to 2 hours per week. “People’s IQs seem to double as soon as you give them responsibility and indicate that you trust them.”

Speed in execution

“If you have a 10-year plan, why can’t you do this in 6 months?” – Peter Thiel

Not having to be hyper competitive

Peter Thiel has in the past been too focused on beating competitors, rather than on doing something that’s more important. He also believes competition is a terrible thing for company
health, preferring monopolies. “How do I become less competitive in order that I can become more successful?”

- Eric Weinstein switched to tech from academia because “it’s better to be in an expanding world and not quite in exactly the right field, than to be in a contracting world where peoples’ worst behavior comes out.” In a competitive space, your mind becomes defensive and rent-seeking.

- Rule of 3 and 10
  - Everything in the company breaks when you triple in size and when you reach a power of ten.
  - Big companies have the opposite problem of startups, in that they plan for tripling that may never happen and get bogged down.
  - Stanley McChrystal has a similar recommendation: at battalion level (600 people), you have to lead a different way, by developing people who are going to do the work.

- Marketing Tips
  - Effective email newsletters
    - Ramit Sethi generates 99% of revenue through email
    - They’re crafted to be simple 1-on-1 emails, even though behind the scenes there’s a lot of optimization
  - Add + to any bit.ly or kickstarter auto-generated URL, and you can see the stats
  - Use Google Image reverse search to find press that covered similar products to yours
  - Use Facebook/Linkedin to get warm intros to writers

- Going 10x bigger vs 10% bigger
  - When you go 10 times bigger, you have to start with a new approach. You’re by yourself in a new space, not competing with everyone else who’s also trying to get 10%

- Start with Why
  - Tell people what the purpose of what they’re doing is, before telling them what to do.
  - Rob Rodriguez recruits actors for his low-budget films by saying: “I’m a big fan. I have a part you would never get. I work independently. Ask any of your friends. They’ll say: go have that experience. You’re going to feel so invigorated. It’s going to be the most fun you’ve ever had, and you’ll probably get great reviews.”

- Connecting for new ideas
  - New ideas may come by connecting things that have never been connected before. Something that is a commonplace solution in one area connected to another.
- Robert Plath putting two wheels and a telescoping handle on luggage.
- Hiroji Satoh putting foam on a table tennis paddle.

- The Law of Category
  - With a new product, don’t ask yourself “How is this new product better than the competition?” but “What new category is this product the first in?”
  - People are defensive about brands, but open with new categories.
  - IBM was first in computer, DEC was first in minicomputers.

- Understand principles, not just tactics
  - Tactics become outdated. Learn the principles (like behavioral psychology) and you will create new tactics

- Make use of your assets – you don’t need as much as you think.
  - Director Rob Rodriguez makes a list of assets and builds a film around the list, to stay lean. His cousin has a ranch in Mexico, so that’s where we’ll shoot. His cousin has a turtle, so that’ll be in the movie. It also affected his style – because he didn’t have good audio, he cut rapidly when it got out of sync, which led to a trademark style.
  - Alibaba’s Jack Ma: “There were three reasons why we survived: We had no money, we had no technology, and we had no plan. Every dollar, we used very carefully.”

**Personal Growth**

- Overcoming procrastination
  - Tim Ferriss forces himself to write down 3-5 things that are making him the most anxious. Then he asks, “if this were the only thing I accomplished today, would I be satisfied with my day?” “Will moving this forward make all the other to-dos unimportant or easier to do later.” Then block out 2 to 3 hours to focus on one of them.

- Imagine you’re below average
  - Derek Sivers believes this to compensate for our tendency to think we’re above average.

- Skip the MBA, and learn with the $120k you would have spent
  - Tim Ferriss used it to invest in startups to learn about company building
  - Do this with any degree you’re thinking of getting. Convert the tuition to some change in your work or life, like working less or paying for advice

- Journal to get your ideas and problems down on paper
“Once we get those muddy, maddening, confusing thoughts on the page, we face our day with clearer eyes.”

Writing down your swirling thoughts can help you figure things out.

At the very least, it helps you get on with your day.

Using the body to gauge a good idea

Scott Adams and BJ Novak both use the bodily reaction – adrenaline, endorphins – as a way to detect good material.

Become a double/triple threat

Scott Adams advice: It’s very hard to be the best in the world at one specific thing, like the top NBA player. But you can easily become very good (top 25%) at two or more things, and combine them to great effect.

Marc Andreessen agrees, citing communication, management, sales, finance, and internationalization as 5 skills to augment any career.

Ask the dumb question

“Often, there’s a very basic, very dumb question at the center of a story that no one’s asking.” Like “Why are banks loaning money to people who can’t pay it back?” Alex Blumberg

Luis von Ahn had an adviser who constantly asked, “I don’t understand what you’re saying.” This forces deeper reflection to realize the concept isn’t clear in the speaker’s mind.

Malcolm Gladwell’s father had “zero intellectual insecurities. He will ask the most obvious question without any sort of concern about it.”

Be vulnerable to get vulnerability

Share some personal info about how you relate to a problem they have, or how you’re struggling with pressures

This will open up the conversation and help them reciprocate the pain

Usually people think you gain trust first, then become vulnerable, but you can’t earn trust without being vulnerable first. Brene Brown

Where can you put yourself into an environment that gives maximum exposure to new ideas, problems, and people?

Work in an area where you’re not fungible

Tim Ferriss decided not to be a full-time venture capitalist when Kamal Ravikant told him, “people have come up to you crying because they’ve lost 100-plus pounds. You will never have
that impact as a VC. If you don’t invest in a company, they’ll just find another VC. You’re totally replaceable.”

- Email bankruptcy
  - [Tim mentioned this as a bad consequence of his stress, but it’s an interesting concept. If your inbox is overwhelmed, you may just need to declare bankruptcy, where all previous emails will go unread. Make sure when you do this that you have good habits to reduce your email load in the future]

- Avoid a culture of cortisol
  - There’s so much emphasis on being busy and fear of missing out that you can go day to day perpetually anxious. There really shouldn’t be many emergencies in your life. Focus on your big goals, and cut out the 20% of things that cause 80% of your unhappiness.

- 3 people to keep watching
  - A senior you want to emulate
  - A peer who is better at the job than you
  - A subordinate who’s doing the job you did better than you did
  - “If you want to be successful, surround yourself with people who are more successful than you are. If you want to be happy, surround yourself with people who are less successful than you are.” – Naval Ravikant

- Learning from your future self
  - Think about a 10-year-older version of yourself. What would that person tell you?
  - (This might be a good way to visualize the best version of yourself, and to highlight the things you know are good for you but don’t currently do.”

- Give away ideas
  - People love great ideas. Give them ideas and encourage them to do it.
  - The ones that you can’t give away may be the one that you’re supposed to do (I suppose if you believe that the best ideas are ones that most people don’t find obviously good ideas).
  - MMA fighter Marcelo Gracia publicizes his sparring sessions, an unusual act since it could give away his strategies. “If you’re studying my game, you’re entering my game, and I’ll be better at it than you.”
  - Tim Ferriss documents his method because most people will be scared off by the detail; 40% will try it and be worse; 10% will try it and be better at it, but those will thank Tim for what they’ve learned and be grateful.
• Early rising
  • “I’m up and getting after it by 4:45. I like to have that psychological win over the enemy. When I wake up in the morning, I’m thinking about the enemy and what they’re doing. It’s still in my head: there’s a guy in a cave somewhere, he’s rocking back and forth. He’s waiting for me, and we’re going to meet. When I wake up in the morning, I’m thinking to myself: What can I do to be ready for that moment, which is coming?” – Jocko Willink

• Stepping outside yourself
  • “It’s very hard to follow the advice that you know is good. If someone came to me with my list of problems, I would be able to sort that person out very easily.” – Sam Harris

  • “Sometimes, I’m not a participant in my own life. I’m an observer of that guy who’s doing it...I’m not reading you correctly if I’m seeing you through my own emotion or ego.” – Jocko Willink

• Submerge yourself in the greatest works of all time
  • Rick Rubin suggests this for artists trying to find their voice today rather than competing with what’s on the radio now.

  • Relevant for studying businesses too

• Aspects of good writing
  • For novelists, “keep it simple. Trust your reader. He or she has a lot of imagination. Don’t try to describe things. Give a hint, and they will fulfill this hint with their own imagination.” – Paulo Coehlo

  • Naval Ravikant likes *The Day You Became a Better Writer*

• Daily writing prompts
  • Cheryl Strayed suggests spending 30 minutes writing to develop ideas and improve your thinking. Try writing 2 pages. Go for uninterrupted flow, and don’t stop to edit.

  • Sample topics:
    • Write about a time when you realized you were mistaken.
    • Write about a lesson you learned the hard way.
    • Write about something you lost that you’ll never get back.
    • Write about being loved.
    • Write about what you were really thinking.
    • Write about something you don’t remember.
- Write about why you could not do it.

- Imagining your mentors in your head
  - Goethe wrote a book by locking himself in a hotel room and imagining his 5 best friends on different chairs.
  - Ask yourself, “what would [X] do?” I think about my wife and co-founder this way often. Requires thorough understanding of their values and thought processes.

- Learning the macro from the micro
  - Josh Waitzkin learned chess not from the opening moves, but from the end game – two kings and a pawn. This taught macro principles like empty space and opposition.

- The Dickens Process
  - Examine your limiting beliefs that are handicapping you. Take 5-10 minutes to reflect on each of the below questions.
    - What has each belief cost you in the past, and what has it cost people you’ve lost in the past? See it, hear it, feel it.
    - What is each costing you and people you care about in the present? See it, hear it, feel it.
    - What will each cost you and people you care about 1, 3, 5, and 10 years from now? See it, hear it, feel it.

- Tell people what you want, not what you don’t want
  - Instead of “stop slouching” say “stand up straight”

- Practice going first
  - People are ready for interaction, but you have to initiate. Make eye contact first, say hello first, smile first. You’d be surprised by the response

- Dreams vs goals
  - A dream is something you fantasize about that will never happen. A goal is something you set a plan for, work toward, and achieve

- Improve or eliminate
  - Look at your weak points. Instead of continuing it mindlessly, improve it, eliminate it, or delegate it

- Frustration with not making progress

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By Allen Cheng | Visit [www.allencheng.com](http://www.allencheng.com) for more book summaries like this one
Most people fail to achieve their goals because they don’t put in the work and give up too easily when the progress isn’t obvious.

“Show up, do the work, and go home.”

If you commit to a long-term goal, then only one decision needs to be made and adhered to – put in the work. This is easier than having to make small decision after small decision, which can cause you to go astray. Make the single decision of your goal.

**Personal Happiness**

- **Calmness under fire**
  - “Calm is contagious.” Said to Navy SEALs. People mimic your behavior
  - Matt Mullenweg exemplifies “getting upset won’t help things.”
  - Reid Hoffman has responded to insults with “I’m perfectly willing to accept that.”
  - “The key in a restaurant, and in any high-pressure situation, is that 75% of success is staying calm and not losing your nerve. The rest you figure out, but once you lose your calm, everything else starts falling apart fast.” – Sam Kass
  - Evander Holyfield, while watching TV and relaxing before his big fight: “I’m either ready or I’m not. Worrying about it right now ain’t gonna change a damn thing. Whatever’s gonna happen is gonna happen. I’ve either done everything I can to be ready for this, or I haven’t.”
  - Shaun White had a similar idea with “What’s the big deal? I’m going to try my best, and I’m going to go home, and my family’s there.”

- **Ego invites suffering**
  - Tony Robbins suggests that the reason you suffer is you’re focused on yourself and your own feelings. If you’re worried about your kids, it’s because you feel you’ve failed your kids. “Suffering comes from three thought patterns: loss, less, never.”

- **Dealing with haters**
  - Address counterarguments in your work, or be self-deprecating to disarm your critics
  - Tim Ferriss calls himself a “professional dilettante” to pre-empt critics
  - 10% of people will take anything personally. Expect it and treat it as math.
  - For the thoughtful critics, take time to address them to show you don’t take yourself too seriously. This will decrease the number of real haters.
  - To deal with hecklers, Margaret Cho goes the empathy route, trying to understand why this person is disrupting a performance everyone has paid for and agreed to sit for. Give them a lot
of time. Ask the person she’s with “Is this person usually like this?” Ask the people around her “was she like this before the show?”[This probably gets the heckler to be pretty embarrassed with the attention.]

- Yell obscenities to get into aggressive work energy mode
  - Eric Weinstein has a powerful, aggressive energy to his creative mode. He has an incantation of curse words that takes 7 seconds to yell.
  - Make your own, and read it loudly like you’re casting a spell

- Help people by just bearing witness
  - Tim Ferriss sometimes fixes people’s problems by just listening to them. On the podcast, people merely knowing you’re listening is more important than responding to everyone.

- Choosing against conflict
  - “Don’t hang around people who are constantly engaging in conflict.” – Naval Ravikant. People who regularly fight with others will eventually fight with you.

- Three options
  - For anything in life, you have three options: change it, accept it, or leave it. It’s not good to want one but not do it – like wish you would change it but not changing it, or wish you would leave it but not leave it.

- Dealing with anger and other negative emotions
  - “Anger is a hot coal that you hold in your hand while waiting to throw it at someone else.” – Naval Ravikant
  - When feeling anger, don’t suppress it or swat it away. Acknowledge it explicitly. This helps to dissolve the issue. “Inviting Mara to Tea” by Tara Brach

- Equine therapy
  - Guide a horse across a field with no bridle, using body language.

- Memento Mori
  - Various people use a calendar to count down the number of days they have left to live. It’s frighteningly small (something like 20,000 days for me at age 30).
  - Wait but why raises the sobering fact that when you leave your parents’ house for college, you’ve already used up 93% of your in-person parent time.
  - [I currently use the Mortality chrome extension]
  - “You’re gonna look back and say, ‘Shit, I should have been laughing, and now I’m dead.’” – Jamie Foxx
• This Too Shall Pass
  • Some titans shared a phrase they used to keep pushing through the tough times.
  • “Tonight, I will be in my bed.” – Chris Sacca

• Avoiding suicide
  • Call the national prevention lifeline
  • Realize killing yourself will spiritually kill other people. Take your pain, multiply it by 10, and give it to the ones who love you.
  • There’s no guarantee that killing yourself improves things – you could be suffering eternally in hell’s punishment!
  • Make a non-harm pact with a friend. Make it about them as much as about you

• Physiology matches the body
  • Shay Carl finds vlogging is daily therapy, since he feels better by smiling and faking it til he makes it. Sometimes he just looks in the mirror and laughs at himself.

• Don’t be cynical
  • “Cynicism is a disease that robs people of the gift of life.” – Rainn Wilson
  • “Being jaded is almost like being dead. Nothing impresses you because you feel like you’ve seen it all before, and you go through life with dark lenses on.” – Jason Silva

• Just Note Gone
  • Notice something previously experienced that is no more, like a breath, or a thought, or an emotion
  • This trains you to realize each sensory insult passes

• Joy of loving-kindness
  • Identify two other people (could be strangers) and think, “I wish for this person to be happy”
  • This increases your own happiness and takes the focus off of your own ego
  • Whitney Cumming suggests that every time you meet someone, in your head say “I love you” before you have a conversation. Imagine doing this at Starbucks or the DMV.

Miscellaneous Interesting Ideas
• Not taking questions for what they literally are
• Try to rework a question to focus on what you believe is the right thing. Related to the PR technique, “answer the question you wanted to hear”

• In response to Tim’s question “who do you think of when you hear the word ‘successful?’”, Derek Sivers asks, “The first answer isn’t much fun because it’s automatic. When you think of the word ‘successful,’ who’s the third person that comes to mind?”

• In response to a question about favorite tech trends, Peter Thiel replies, “I don’t like talking in terms of trends” because that means people are doing it and there’s a lot of competition. “What I prefer over trends is a sense of mission.”

• Catching cheaters
  • Luis von Ahn made a puzzle and called it something fictional, like Giramacristo’s Puzzle, then put the solution on his own website where he could track IPs. After a few times, no one did this anymore.

• Use ‘TK’ as a placeholder for things you need to research later
  • Few or no words in the English language have these two letters together

• Dealing with journalists
  • Record on your side so you can use the tape for your own purposes. Check that they’re OK with repurposing the audio

• Feeling of belonging on mental health
  • Disasters like 9/11 decrease suicide, violent crime, mental illness symptoms. The reason could be that a feeling of collective belonging “buffers people from their psychological demons” – Sebastian Junger

• Personal security
  • Kidnappings are common when picking up at airports (they disguise and hold up your name). Use a made-up name for your car reservation or use Uber.
  • You’ll never take me alive! – tool that hibernates when disconnected from power, paired with disc encryption

• How to get strangers to invite you home to eat and sleep
  • In Europe, Cal Fussman asked, “How do you make the perfect goulash?” He’d ask a grandma, and translators would help translate, then each person would want to show him their local speciality.

• The good shit sticks
  • Harry Crews, an author, kept no diary. “The good shit sticks.”
• Don’t worry if you lose all your notes – you can start from scratch. Joshua Skenes started Saison this way when a flood destroyed his recipe books.

• Paulo Coelho says “Forget notebooks. Forget taking notes. Let what is important remain. What’s not important goes away.”

• (Helpful for me, given that I worry about forgetting things after reading and thus taking copious notes).

• Picking the best recipe online

• Andrew Zimmern suggests finding the recipe that is most specific. If someone is describing in a deep level of detail, the size of the pan to the quarter inch, you know they’ve gone through it. If they just say “grease the pan,” you know something is wrong.

• Getting feedback over the phone

• Mike Birbiglia likes getting feedback about bits and jokes over the phone. In person, the listener feels the pressure of laughing or responding. On the phone, you can hear in the silence what the reception is.

• Keep the house lights on when performing on stage

• House lights let you see people’s faces, so it’s a connection, not a performance. From Brene Brown

• Cooking as bonding

• You start with strangers, but when you’re cooking, everyone’s focused on the same goal of creating a project together and not losing their fingers. Everyone can contribute a different skill set.

• The uncaged tiger

• A tiger named Mohini was held in a 10-by-10-foot cage for 5 or 10 years. She was released into a big pasture, but then spent the rest of her life in a corner 10-by-10 foot area. Even when you have freedom, you might put artificial barriers for yourself.

Short Quotes
Here’s a summary of the best Tools of Titans short quotes.

• “Be so good they can’t ignore you” – Steve Martin

• “Everyone is interesting. If you’re ever bored in a conversation, the problem’s with you, not the other person.” – Matt Mullenweg

• “Life is always happening for us, not to us. It’s our job to find out where the benefit is.” – Tony Robbins
“Kanye, why do you have a giant picture of you on the wall?” “Well, I got to cheer for me before anyone else can cheer for me.” – Kanye West

“Trust and attention – these are the scarce items in a post-scarcity world.” – Seth Godin

“When you complain, nobody wants to help you. If you spend your time focusing on the things that are wrong, you become a source of destruction for people.” – Tracy DiNunzio

“Money is a great servant but a horrible master.” – Daymond John

“The faster you move, the slower time passes, the longer you live.” – Peter Diamandis

“Discipline equals freedom.” – Jocko Willink

“I am not against fear. I am pro-bravery.” – Caroline Paul

“A person’s success in life can be measured by the number of uncomfortable conversations had.” – Tim Ferriss

“I treated every single patron like a ten-second love affair.” – Amanda Palmer, on succeeding as a street performer

“We don’t talk about teaching disabilities, only about learning disabilities.” – Eric Weinstein

“I don’t know if I can stay up that late.” – Julian Schwinger, professor who was asked whether he could teach the 9AM course.

“There is no excuse for spending most of your life in misery. You’ve only got 70 years out of the 50 billion or however long the universe is going to be around.” – Naval Ravikant

“The notes are right underneath your fingers, baby. You just gotta take the time out to play the right notes. That’s life.” – Ray Charles

“If you say you’re not creative, look at how much you’re missing out on just because you’ve told yourself that.” – Rob Rodriguez

“Just fucking look in the mirror and check yourself out. My aspiration is to go underground and be a ghost.” Justin Mager, in response to where people can find him

“You have to have penis skin on your abs.” Charles Poliquin, describing what sub-10% body fat looks like and the point at which you can see all the abs
Sets of Tools
This is a Tools of Titans summary of tactical items for hiring, asking good questions, and solving your life problems.

Good Hiring Questions
- “What do you think about that really gets you excited?” – Adam Gazzaley
- “What are you doing that the world doesn’t realize is a really big fucking deal?” – Alexis Ohanian
- Matt Mullenweg auditions his employees instead of relying on interviews.
- “Tell me something that’s true that very few people agree with you on.” – Peter Thiel
- “What problem do you face every day that nobody has solved yet?” “What is a great company no one has started?” – Peter Thiel
- “What interesting thing are you working on? Why is that interesting to you? What’s surprising about that? Is anybody else thinking about this?” – Chris Young
- “If I gave you $100 million, what would you build? How is it defensible?”
- “What will people who don’t hold you in highest regard say about you?”

Questions to Elicit Stories
- Tell me about a time when...
- Tell me about the day or moment when...
- Tell me the story of...[how you met X, how you majored in Y]
- Tell me about the day you realized...
- What were the steps that got you to...
- Describe the conversation when...
- How did that make you feel?
- What do you make of that?
- What did you learn from that?
- Explain that a bit more.
- If the old you could see the new you, what would the old you say?
- You seem very confident now. Was that always the case?
- Describe the debate in your head about [X decision or event].
What did you want to do when you were a child, before anybody told you what you were supposed to do?

[Give vulnerability to get vulnerability]

**Interview Tips**

- When interviewing, tell them they can always control the final cut and cut stuff out later, but we can’t add interesting stuff in later.

- “Aim for the heart, not the head. Once you get the heart, you can go to the head.” – Cal Fussman

- Ask an unexpected question, make them think
  - Cal Fussman asked Gorbachev not about the Cold War but “what’s the best lesson your father ever taught you?”
  - Mike Birbiglia told Obama his wife was pregnant, and he was the first to know. They talked about child care and poo.

**Tim Ferriss’s 17 Questions**

Check out my [longer writeup on Tim Ferriss 17 questions here](#).

- What if I did the opposite for 48 hours?
  - As a salesman, Tim decided to call outside of 9 to 5 to get past the gatekeeper assistants.

- What do I spend a lot of money on? How might I scratch my own itch?
  - Tim Ferriss was spending $500/mo on supplements, so he created his own supplement that he couldn’t find at retail.

- What would I do if I had $10 million? What’s my real target monthly income?
  - Tim realized his fantasies were far more affordable than expected, and he could afford to be happy now.

- What are the worst things that could happen? Could I get back here?

- If I could only work 2 hours per week on my business, what would I do?
  - Use the 80/20 rule to find the best outputs of your time.

- What if I let them make decisions up to $100? $500? $1,000?
  - Tim gave his fulfillment centers more discretion so he could spend much less time on customer support.
• What’s the least crowded channel?
  • When launching his book, he heard about blogs as an undervalued way to build a following. He went to CES and worked his way into blogger group discussions.

• What if I couldn’t pitch my product directly?
  • People don’t like announcements or being sold products. They like stories. Tim Ferriss decided to build stories from subjects in his book, and make the launch itself a story by doing something unusual (like a video trailer or BitTorrent partnership).

• What if I created my own real-world MBA?

• Do I need to make it back the way I lose it?
  • If you lose $1,000 at the blackjack table, is this where you should try to recoup it?
  • Tim lost money on his San Jose house. Instead of anchoring and trying to rent it to get back some money, he cut his losses and focused on creating income elsewhere.

• What if I could only subtract to solve problems?
  • Removing things is easier than adding things. What can you simplify to achieve growth? Like your product design or website.

• What might I put in place to allow me to go off the grid for 4 to 8 weeks, with no phone or email?
  • This forces you to create systems that allow operation without you, empower other people with rules and tools.

• Am I hunting antelope or field mice?
  • Don’t chase all the small details. Which item, if done, would render all the rest easier or irrelevant?

• Could it be that everything is fine and complete as is?
  • Tactics like reflecting on daily wins and Jar of Awesome help you avoid anxiety.

• What would this look like if it were easy?
  • Don’t overcomplicate things or feel like you need to struggle. Like above, simplify for the greatest efficiency. Look for a way to roll a rock downhill.
  • If the answer isn’t simple, it’s probably not the right answer.

• How can I throw money at this problem? How can I waste money to improve the quality of my life?
  • “If you’ve got enough money to solve the problem, you don’t have the problem.”
  • Use money to earn time.
• No hurry, no pause.
  • You don’t need to go through life huffing and puffing. You’ll get nearly all the way there by putting one foot in front of the other.
  • Derek Sivers had a story of trying like hell to bike a route in 43 minutes. He then relaxed a bit and biked it in 45 minutes.
  • “Slow is smooth. Smooth is fast.”

Questions for Sports Coaches
• Who is good at [SPORT] who shouldn’t be?
• Who are the most controversial trainers in [SPORT]? Why? What do you think of them?
• Who are the most impressive lesser-known teachers?
• What makes you different? Who trained you or influenced you?
• Have you trained others to do this? Have they replicated your results?
• What are the biggest mistakes and myths you see in training? Among pros? What are the biggest wastes of time?
• What are your favorite instructional books or resources on learning this?
• If you were to train me for 12 weeks for a competition and had a million dollars on the line, what would the training look like? What about 8 weeks?

Healthy
Good General Health Principles
• Work on the deficiencies you’re most embarrassed by
  • True in athletics and beyond
    • Laird Hamilton: “All you flexible people should go bang some iron, and all you big weight lifters should go do some yoga.” Stop being complacent in your strengths
  • Flexibility is passive; mobility requires demonstrating strength through the entire range of motion
  • Consider changing “diet and exercise” to “eat and train”
    • The former is aesthetic and doesn’t have a clear goal; the other is functional and has a clear goal
- How to find a good doctor
  - Ask your doctor “what does cholesterol do?” Identifies doctors who simply follow heuristics vs those who truly understand something
  - The time they spend on your first visit
- Be around people who can push you
  - When heli boarding, 80-year-old Don Wildman surrounds himself with younger guys to raise the energy
- Don’t hold yourself back in embarrassment of your abilities
  - Gabby Reece’s story about how a volleyball coach singled out a player and said “I need you to put this ball away and for you to win this game.”

**Exercises recommended**
- QL walk
  - Warmup for quads and glutes
- Jefferson Curl
  - Do at beginning of workout for mobility
  - Start with 15 pounds
- Ag walks with rear support
  - Highlights problems with shoulder flexibility or strength
- Pike pulses
  - 15 to 20 pulses
- Cast wall walk
- Glute medius exercises
  - 10-15 reps for each, for all 7 exercises, for each leg, no rest in between
    - Remember to keep big toe below heel
    - Starting position is laying on side
  - Lift leg vertically up/down
  - Front kick forward to 45 degrees
  - Back swing as far back as possible without arching back
- Full front and back swing
- Clockwise circles – ankles should be 12 inches apart at least
- Counterclockwise circles
- Bicycle motion
- Cossack squat warmup for ankle mobility
- Deadlift for maximum strength gain
  - Deadlift to knees then drop the bar
  - 2 to 3 sets of 2 to 3 reps each
  - Follow each set with plyometrics (sprint 10-20 meters, 6 to 8 box jumps)
  - 5 minutes of rest
  - Twice weekly
- Grease the groove
  - For pull-ups, do half your max reps in sets throughout the day, with at least 15 minutes between sets
  - The rest allows for creating phosphate hypercompensaion

### Interesting Health Practices to Consider

- Stem-cell banking – save your extracted teeth, which contain mesenchymal stem cells and can regenerate tissue like bone, cartilage, motor neurons
- Hyperthermic conditioning – heat exposure (like from sauna) increases growth hormone levels and endurance
  - Two 15-minute dry-heat sessions at 100degC separated by 30 minute sof cooling increases GH 5-fold and lasts for a couple of hours
- Ketosis
  - Tim Ferriss feels mental clarity at 1 mmol beta-hydroxybutyrate
  - Ketones have anti-catabolic and anti-inflammatory effects
- Therapeutic fasts
  - Fasting 1 to 3 times per year can starve precancerous cells, slow rapidly dividing cells, and make cancer selectively vulnerable to chemo
• 5-day fasts 2 to 3 times a year can reboot immune system via stem cells
• Dominic D’Agostino goes as far as to suggest that in late-stage cancer, he would skip chemo and use ketogenic diet as the base therapy. [unclear how proven this is]

- Metformin
  - Disrupts liver’s ability to make glucose and downregulates signaling associated with cancer proliferation. May mimic calorie restriction and fasting
  - Rats with metastatic cancer show 40-50% higher survival rates when dosed with metformin

- Hyperventilation and strength
  - Do pushups a few reps short of failure. Record the number
  - Rest 30 minutes
  - Do 40 repetitions of max inhale, then max exhale. You should start tingling
  - On the last exhale, do another set up pushups while holding your breath. Your pushup count should increase dramatically

- Hugs
  - Wim Hof hugs with his left arm over the person’s shoulder, which is distinctive and meant to be a “heart to heart”

- Exercising in a more fun way
  - There are much more fun ways of moving your body than treadmills.

- Blood tests
  - Lp(a) particle is most atherogenic particle, and 10% of people inherit elevated levels. Most common risk for hereditary atherosclerosis
  - Oral glucose tolerance test – hyperinsulinemia predicts metabolic problems
  - HbA1c – measures your overall insulin production.
    - Magnesium can drop this value
  - Lithium
    - Small doses seem to decrease suicide rates and improve mood, brain health
  - Gotu kola cream
    - For loose skin or stretch marks
  - Stretching
- Finish static stretching with a voluntary contraction to lower injury

- Activate muscle tendons to increase strength
  - To activate hamstrings, rub back of leg right above knee and below butt for 8-10 seconds

- Improve endurance with breathing
  - Decide beforehand that you’re going to rest from one set to another for a certain number of breaths. This will slow breathing

- Psychedelics
  - Tim Ferriss says he removed decades-old anger and resentment after 48 hours of psychedelic experiences
  - Psychedelic experiences are thought to be authentic expressions of your psyche, not artificial products
  - In a trial at a large company, Jim Fadiman told people to come in with problems they’d been struggling with for months. After a few hours on psychedelics, they were told to work on the problems. 44 of 48 problems had some sort of solution
  - Microdoses of LSD or psilocybin may help people with depression feel better enough that they do something about what’s wrong
  - The most profound positive effects come from “transcendental experiences,” or the feeling that you are connected to other things and living systems. This causes a realization that your ego is not a big part of you
  - After an experience, the feeling is, “I was back in the prison of all the things that hold me back, but I could see the door was locked from the inside”
  - Great sitters don’t have an agenda and don’t want you to see a certain thing
  - If you try it and get the answer, you should hang up the phone. Do homework after the experience and make changes before relying on medicine again
  - Avoid destructive ideas during the experience – “if it’s true today, it’ll still be true tomorrow.”
  - After a psychedelic experience, you’re more suggestible, and you develop habits, bad or good. Useful to have a period of reflectoi and integration afterward. [Allen note: this may be because drugs open up new synaptic connections, and reflection cements them]
  - Ibogaine seems to affect almost every neurotransmitter class, including opioid, NMDA, serotonin, sigma, nicotinic receptors

- Flotation tanks
• Tim Ferriss reports that 2 weeks of twice a week floating feels like a month of daily meditating

• Mobility
  • Squat all the way to the ground with feet and knees together – proves full hip and ankle range of motion

• Wear zero drop shoes
  • Where toes and heel are equal distance from ground, like Vans. This avoids shortening Achilles tendon
  • Vans or Chuck Taylors are common

• Avoiding jet lag
  • Exercising for 5-10 minutes seems to reset your clock

• Tetris as emotional therapy
  • Games like Tetris or Bejeweled occupy visual center. This limits endless cycling over whatever you’re obsessing about.
  • Helps with PTSD, addiction, and insomnia

• Chilipad for sleeping
  • Circulates water underneath your normal sheets

• Beverages for falling asleep
  • Honey + apple cider vinegar
  • Yogi soothing caramel bedtime tea

• Mindfulness
  • Meditating won’t dull your edge – it helps you focus on the few things that matter, rather than every opportunity that pops up
  • It practices recovering from distraction. The reward for meditating is getting 30% to 50% more done in a day with 50% less stress
  • Practice getting just one mindful breath a day.

• Acarbose
  • Lowers blood glucose levels when taken with food. Also an anti-diabetic drug

• Cold exposure
  • Tony Robbins primes himself with a cold water plunge to prime himself for the day.
- Rick Rubin alternates between sauna and ice bath. “By the end of the fourth or fifth round of being in an ice tub, there is nothing in the world that bothers you.”

- Pros use acid in cooking
  - Acid makes everything taste better