

THE BIG IDEAS

The Developer

Mapping + Making + Meshing.

Mediocrity

And its slippery slope.

Today's the Day

To die empty.

Step + Sprint + Stretch

The three goals.

The Lag

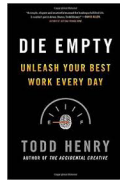
Between planting and harvest.

Optimism vs. Wishing

The difference is action.

Time to Summit

Give us what you got.



Die Empty

Unleash Your Best Work Every Day

BY TODD HENRY · PORTFOLIO © 2013 · 230 PAGES

“Your days are finite. One day, they will run out. As a friend of mine likes to say, ‘You know, the death rate is hovering right around one hundred percent.’ Many people I know spend their entire life trying to avoid this fact. They fill their lives with frantic activity, bouncing from task to task, and no matter how successful they perform in their work, as they close up shop for the day they are left with the question, ‘Did the work I did today really matter?’ Others I’ve met are incredibly successful at, vested in, and highly compensated for their work, but over time they’ve grown stagnant. They sense they have something more to give but they can’t quite put their finger on why they’re stuck in first gear. They have a nagging suspicion that they are capable of contributing more—maybe even being truly brilliant at *something*—but have no road map for unlocking what that contribution might be...

If there is one overriding goal of this book it is this: to bring newfound clarity and sense of urgency to how you approach your work on a daily basis, and over your lifetime. I hope to help you lock onto a focused understanding of what’s really important and help you make a commitment to chase after it with gusto rather than simply settling in for the ride.”

~ Todd Henry from *Die Empty*

How would you like to die?

With a calm serenity knowing you gave your best and used your greatest gifts in greatest service to the world as you created a body of work you are proud of?

Or, with deep regret that you never took the risks and cultivated the discipline to show up with urgency and diligence each day to create a life of deep meaning?

The answer is obvious.

The challenge, of course, is closing the gap between our aspirational ideal of giving our lives all we got and our current reality that may fall a little (or a lot) short of that.

Closing that gap and unleashing our best work every day so we can Die Empty is what this book is all about. It’s awesome. (Get a copy [here](#).)

[Todd Henry](#) is the founder and CEO of The Accidental Creative and author of a book by the same name. He helps organizations and individuals come up with and implement brilliant ideas and his book is packed with Big Ideas on how we can go about doing the work we’re here to do.

I’m excited to share some of my favorites so let’s jump straight in!

“This book is about cultivating the mind-set and the methods you need to unleash your best work each day, and to increase the odds that, at the end of your life, you will not regret how you spent your days.”

~ Todd Henry

"How much of your day do you spend doing work that you will be proud of later?"

~ Todd Henry

MAPPING + MAKING + MESHING = DEVELOPER

"The Developer is constantly weaving together available resources and opportunities to create value. He doesn't work frantically, but instead works with urgency and diligence, making plans and then executing them, learning from his actions, and then redirecting them as needed. He recognizes that uncertainty is not an enemy, but a natural part of engaging in important and valuable work. He also knows that opportunities are valuable only if he is prepared to take advantage of them, and as such he is constantly developing his skills that will be needed when he gets where he wants to go rather than where he is currently. If you want to die empty of regret, with a body of work you can be proud of, you must focus on becoming a Developer."

As Todd advises, if we want to die empty of regret with a body of work we can be proud of (<—love that concept!), we need to become a Developer.

A Developer? Yep.

A Developer integrates the three kinds of work Todd has identified: Mapping + Making + Meshing.

In short:

Mapping = Having a clear vision of what you're up to. Knowing your mission and choosing your battles wisely.

Making = Actually doing the work—with urgency and diligence. Every day.

Meshing = Developing your skills so you're always growing.

The Developer integrates all three of those.

Alternatively, "The Driver" gets the Mapping + Making but misses the Meshing. While "The Drifter" gets the Making + Meshing but misses the Mapping. And "The Dreamer" gets the Mapping + Meshing but misses the Making.

Of course, Todd goes into (brilliant) detail on each of those and the book is essentially all about mastering the process of becoming a Developer. Check it out for more.

For now, let's do a very quick inventory.

What's your mission? Where are you headed? How's your Map?

Are you showing up each day with Urgency + Diligence? (I didn't count the number of times Todd used the phrase "urgency + diligence" but it was a LOT.)

Are you taking the time to develop your skills and optimize your life so you're constantly growing and ready for more and more opportunities?

When you're not rockin' being a Developer, which do you tend to be: a Driver, a Drifter or a Dreamer? (I can see elements of each at different phases of my life!)

THE SLIPPERY SLOPE OF MEDIOCRITY

"Mediocrity doesn't always mean underperforming—it's a sliding scale and a state of mind. It means settling in and succumbing to stasis. Mediocrity comes from the Latin words *medius*, meaning middle, and *ocris*, meaning a rugged mountain. Literally it means to settle halfway to the summit of a difficult mountain. It's a compromise of abilities and potential; a negotiation between the drive to excel and the biological urge to settle for the most comfortable option."

Wow. That's awesome.

Mediocrity = *medius* (middle) + *ocris* (rugged mountain).

"You cannot chase safety and count on emptying yourself of your best work. You cannot pursue greatness and comfort at the same time. Commit today to stepping outside your comfort zone and set some goals to help you get there. In short, grow."

~ Todd Henry

Literally: To stop halfway to the summit of a rugged mountain.

The alternative? To continue forging ahead. To move through the inevitable (!) challenges of any climb and reach the summit.

According to my Apple dictionary, the word mediocre has many synonyms: ordinary, average, middling, middle-of-the-road, uninspired, undistinguished, indifferent, unexceptional, unexciting, unremarkable, run-of-the-mill, pedestrian, prosaic, lackluster, forgettable, amateur, amateurish; informal OK, so-so, 'comme ci, comme ça', plain-vanilla, fair-to-middling, no great shakes, not up to much, bush-league.

It has one antonym: excellent.

Todd has a chapter dedicated to confronting "The Siren Song of Mediocrity" where he presents what he calls the "Seven Deadly Sins of Mediocrity."

He named + organized them alphabetically, "A-B-C-D-E-F-G." Here they are: *Aimlessness + Boredom + Comfort + Delusion + Ego + Fear + Guardedness.*

The antidote to those deadly sins? *Define Your Battles + Be Fiercely Curious + Step Out of Your Comfort Zone + Know Yourself + Be Confidently Adaptable + Find Your Voice + Stay Connected.*

Those antidotes to mediocrity/guides to excellence are the chapters of the book—which, of course, are all about helping us reach the summit of our lives as we create GREAT work and die empty. Let's take a look at some of my favorite Ideas on how to summit our potential.

TODAY'S THE DAY

"Imagine for a moment that you will have a guest accompanying you throughout your day tomorrow. This person's task will be to follow you around from the moment you wake up until the moment you fall asleep. They will take copious notes about your schedule, how you interact with your family and friends, how you engage in your tasks and projects, and your mind-set through it all. Once the day is over, this person will spend the next few days processing their observations, draw conclusions about your motivations, and compile their notes into a book about you that will stand as the definitive record of your life and work.

How would you act differently tomorrow if you knew that your actions and attitude on that *one* day were going to be a permanent testament to your life? If you're like many people to whom I've posted this question, you would probably get up a little earlier, pay extra attention to your family and the barista at Starbucks, be fully vested in every meeting, be meticulous in every task, call up an old friend for lunch, reconcile with an alienated colleague, and generally wrap up loose ends.

Next I ask, 'How does your imagined behavior compare with how you are actually living your life today?'"

Wow.

That's one of the best exercises I've ever read.

What would YOUR life look like on a day in which someone tracks and reports your every action and publishes that as a testament to your entire life? What time would you get up, what would you do next? How would you interact with your family and friends and colleagues and random people you encounter?

What do you do now that would be part of such a day?

What would change?

Let's slow down and capture some highlights.

"Intention and theory don't change the world; decisive action does."

~ Todd Henry

Here's what my ideal day would look like: _____

Awesome.

Let's imagine that what we're about to do RIGHT now is being observed by someone who is writing the story of our lives.

And, let's remember that someone IS.

It's you. What you do moment to moment matters.

As [Abraham Maslow](#) said (see Notes on [Toward a Psychology of Being](#)): *"The serious thing for each person to recognize vividly and poignantly, each for himself, is that every falling away from species-virtue, every crime against one's own nature, every evil act, every one without exception records itself in our unconscious and makes us despise ourselves. Karen Horney had a good word to describe this unconscious perceiving and remembering; she said it "registers." If we do something we are ashamed of, it "registers" to our discredit, and if we do something honest or fine or good, it "registers" to our credit. The net results ultimately are either one or the other—either we respect and accept ourselves or we despise ourselves and feel contemptible, worthless, and unlovable."*

P.S. That exercise is a really cool way to gather some data to help you create a Masterpiece Day. Check out my video on that [here](#).

STEP, SPRINT, AND STRETCH

"Growth doesn't happen by accident. It's the result of intentional effort and consistent progress. You must define how you want to grow, then establish a plan to help you get there. There are three kinds of goals that help you grow: Step, Sprint, and Stretch. A step goal is a very short-arc goal (often daily) that helps you maintain forward progress, even if it's small progress. A sprint goal is a medium-arc goal (a week or two weeks) that causes you to go beyond yourself for a season in order to increase your capacity, and a stretch goal is a long-arc goal that forces you to go far beyond your comfort zone.

Each of these three types of goals nest within one another. Step goals help you accomplish your sprint goals, and sprint goals help you accomplish your stretch goals. They don't always have to co-exist, but it's unwise to set the long-arc goals without having accompanying short-arc goals to help you get there. For example, running a marathon is a great example of a stretch goal, but I would be foolish not to set corresponding sprint and step goals to help me work my way up to 26.2 miles. The stretch goal is the objective, but step and sprint goals are the building blocks. We usually reach our end goal, but fail to consider the mechanics, or the day-to-day logistics, of how we will actually get to where we want to be."

That's genius. (The book is PACKED with well thought out little models like this.)

Step + Sprint + Stretch goals.

Reminds me of [Gary Keller](#)'s dominoes/goal setting to now approach to goal setting in his great book [The ONE Thing](#) (see Notes) where he tells us: *"Goal Setting to the Now will get you there. By thinking through the filter of Goal Setting to the Now, you set a future goal and then methodically drill down to what you should be doing right now. It can be a little like a Russian*

"You should have a set of step goals you are accomplishing today, which should be helping you accomplish a set of sprint goals over the next few weeks, which should be leading you toward a set of long-term stretch goals."

~ Todd Henry

matryoshka doll in that your ONE Thing "right now" is nested inside your ONE Thing today, which is nested inside your ONE Thing this week, which is nested inside your ONE Thing this month. . . . It's how a small thing can actually build up to a big one. You're lining up your dominoes."

What's your big picture Stretch goal? What will you do over the next one to two weeks as a Sprint goal in that direction? And, most importantly, what's today's (and tomorrow's and...) gonna-get-it-done Step goal you can take with urgency and diligence? Seriously. What are they?

This is my Stretch goal: _____

This is my Sprint goal: _____

This is my Step goal: _____

THE LAG

"The lag is the gap between cause and effect. It's the season between planting a seed and reaping a harvest. It's the time when all the work you've done seems to have returned little to no visible reward, and there is little on the horizon to indicate that things are going to get better.

When you are in the lag, the only thing that keeps you moving forward are (a) confidence in your vision and ability to bring it to fruition, (b) a willingness to say no to other things that tempt you to divert from your course, and (c) daily, diligent, urgent progress."

The lag. That gap between a ton of effort and the hoped-for results.

The Developer knows this is part of the game and sticks with it—remaining confident in your vision and ability to bring it to life while saying no to things that'll take you off track and showing up day in and day out with your diligent, urgent awesomeness.

Let's remember that most of the things we want are measured in horticultural time, not clock time.

Plant. Tend. Give it time. Tend. More time. Harvest. Repeat.

Here's to embracing the lag and taking the next Step + Sprint toward our Stretch goals!

OPTIMISM VS WISHFUL THINKING

"There's a vast difference between optimism and wishful thinking. One is a mind-set that expects progress through effort, and the other is nothing but a bulwark against the fear of failure.

Someone who is optimistic expects the best while actively working to bring it about. Wishing externalizes responsibility and hopes that everything lines up according to plan, but doesn't do anything to actively bring about the desired change. Someone who operates from a place of wishful thinking is—in essence—a closet pessimist."

Love that.

Reminds me of [Tony Horton](#)'s great wisdom from [The Big Picture](#) (see Notes). He tells us we need FUNCTIONAL OPTIMISM and describes it like this: "So when obstacles show up, it's important to recognize the need to deal with them realistically, with a plan, but one that is born from a positive mind-set. I call this Functional Optimism and it's a key component of achieving your Big Picture goals. It's not about knowing everything can work out. It's about knowing that everything will work out because you're going to do whatever you need to do to make it happen."

"I know that my contribution is defined by how I choose to engage the battles I face every day, and that my legacy is nothing but a series of choices to engage in or abstain from action."

~ Todd Henry

Optimism needs some muscle to it or it's just wishful thinking. Here's to the ACTION that makes our optimism strong.

TIME TO SUMMIT

"I hope that this book has been helpful in some way in instilling a similar level of urgency in how you think about your life. You have a finite amount of focus, time, and energy to offer the world, and it can never be reclaimed once it's spent. There's no use in wasting your time lamenting the past, because you cannot change or control it. Rather, I urge you to focus on what's next.

Ultimately, your life will be measured by what you gave, not what you received. Don't hold out on the rest of us—we need you to contribute. Spend your life building a body of work you will be proud of. Engage today with urgency and diligence. Plant seeds every day that will yield a harvest later. Tomorrow is only an unfulfilled wish, so live and work as if today is all you have. If you do, you will be able to lay your head down each night satisfied with your work, and in the end, you will die empty of regret, but full of satisfaction for a life well lived."

Those are the final words of the book.

Reminds me of [Stephen Pressfield](#)'s conclusion to *The War of Art* (see Notes): "Creative work is not a selfish act or a bid for attention on the part of the actor. It's a gift to the world and every being in it. Don't cheat us of your contribution. Give us what you got."

Here's to living with a grounded, energized sense of urgency and diligence as we courageously leave the land of mediocrity and summit our highest potential, creating a body of work we're proud of as we die empty—knowing we did our best with the precious days of our lives!

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

If you liked this Note,
you'll probably like...

[The Happiness of Pursuit](#)

[Getting Things Done](#)

[The War of Art](#)

[Do the Work](#)

[Turning Pro](#)

About the Author of "Die Empty"

TODD HENRY



Todd Henry is the founder and CEO of Accidental Creative, a consultancy that helps organizations generate brilliant ideas. He is the author of *The Accidental Creative* and runs a top business podcast of the same name. He is a sought-after speaker, consultant, and coach. He lives in Cincinnati with his family.

Connect: www.toddhenny.com

About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at brianjohnson.me.