

## THE BIG IDEAS

**How Are You Intelligent?**  
NOT “How intelligent are you?”

### **Creativity**

= Applied imagination.

### **Loving What We Do**

Is a key element to *The Element*.

### **Getting Filled w/Energy**

And flow.

### **What Draws You In?**

Check in on that!

### **Pushing Back**

Against stiff opposition.

### **Our Attitude**

Is crucial.

### **Dreams**

And next steps.

### **Quit Rotting**

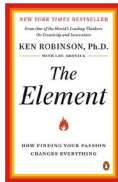
And start rockin’ it.

### **Conformity**

There’s a strong pull.

*“My goal with this book is to illuminate for you concepts that you might have sensed intuitively and to inspire you to find the Element for yourself and to help others to find it as well. What I hope you will find here is a new way of looking at your own potential and that of those around you.”*

~ Sir Ken Robinson



# The Element

How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything

BY SIR KEN ROBINSON W/LOU ARONICA · VIKING ADULT © 2009 · 288 PAGES

“My aim in writing [this book] is to offer a richer version of human ability and creativity and of the benefits to us all of connecting properly with our individual talents and passions. This book is about issues that are of fundamental importance in our lives and in the lives of our children, our students, and the people we work with. I use the term *the Element* to describe the place where the things we love to do and the things we are good at come together. I believe it is essential that each of us find his or her Element, not simply because it will make us more fulfilled but because, as the world evolves, the very future of our communities and institutions will depend on it.”

~ Sir Ken Robinson from *The Element*

Sir [Ken Robinson](#).

You might have caught Sir Ken’s genius energy in his brilliant TED talk.

Not only is he one of the world’s leading experts on creativity, he’s an all-around cool guy and... he’s a KNIGHT!

How cool is *that*?! That’s pretty saucy I say. :)

This book goes into depth on how you can tap into “The Element”—that “*place where the things we love to do and the things we are good at come together*” and our lives take on a magical awesomeness.

The book’s packed with goodness and I’m excited to share some of my favorite Big Ideas so let’s jump in!

## HOW ARE YOU INTELLIGENT?

“We think we know the answer to the question, “How intelligent are you?” The real answer, though, is that the question itself is the wrong one to ask.

### *How are you intelligent?*

The right question to ask is the one above. The difference in these questions is profound. The first suggests that there’s a finite way of gauging intelligence and that one can reduce the value of each individual’s intelligence to a figure or quotient of some sort. The latter suggests a truth that we somehow don’t acknowledge as much as we should—that there are a variety of ways to express intelligence, and that no one scale could ever measure this.”

Sir Ken goes off on IQ tests, Myers-Briggs tests and the idea that “intelligence” can be measured by any one scale. Fact is, it can’t be.

So, let’s stop asking ourselves \*whether\* or not we’re smart and start asking ourselves HOW we are smart!!

On that note: HOW are *you* intelligent?!? :)

## CREATIVITY AS APPLIED IMAGINATION

*"To make the Element available to everyone, we need to acknowledge that each person's intelligence is distinct from the intelligence of every other person on the planet, that everyone has a unique way of getting in the zone, and a unique way of finding the Element."*

~ Sir Ken Robinson

"Imagination is not the same as creativity. Creativity takes the process of imagination to another level. My definition of creativity is "the process of having original ideas that have value." Imagination can be entirely internal. You could be imaginative all day long without anyone noticing. But you would never say that someone was creative if that person never did anything. To be creative you actually have to do something. It involves putting your imagination to work to make something new, to come up with new solutions to problems, even to think of new problems or questions.

You can think of creativity as applied imagination."

Robinson tells us we can be creative in any range of activities—anything that involves our intelligence. From music and art to business and raising a family.

The key is to embrace the great range of ways in which we can demonstrate our creativity and to go from \*idea\* to implementation.

[Mary Elaine Jacobsen](#) puts it brilliantly in her great book *The Gifted Adult* (see Notes) where she tells us: "The difference between a creative person and a creative producer is hard work."

You got a good idea?

Whether it's big or small, here's to moving from our imagination to creation! :)

## LOVING WHAT WE DO

*"We need to create environments—in our school, in our workplaces, and in our public offices—where every person is inspired to grow creatively. We need to make sure that all people have the chance to do what they should be doing, to discover the Element in themselves and in their own way."*

~ Sir Ken Robinson

"People who work creatively usually have something in common: they love the media they work with.

Musicians love the sounds they make, natural writers love words, dancers love movement, mathematicians love numbers, entrepreneurs love making deals, great teachers love teaching. This is why people who fundamentally love what they do don't think of it as work in the ordinary sense of the word. They do it because they want to and because when they do, they are in their Element."

Loving what you do is a key element to rockin' the Element.

So... What do YOU love to do?!

Personally, I love to read, discover Big Ideas on Optimal Living and share them in cool ways as I create awesome businesses that help me get paid to do it!

... You?

## FLOW & GETTING FILLED WITH ENERGY

*"Being in the zone is about using your particular kind of intelligence in an optimal way."*

~ Sir Ken Robinson

"Activities we love fill us with energy even when we are physically exhausted. Activities we don't like drain us in minutes, even if we approach them at our physical peak of fitness. This is one of the keys to the Element, and one of the primary reasons why finding the Element is vital for every person. When people place themselves in situations that lead to their being in the zone, they tap into a primal source of energy. They are literally more alive because of it."

Robinson dedicates a chapter to "In the Zone" where he talks about [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's](#) research on *Flow*.

Check out our Note on that great book and remember that the flow state "happens when psychic energy—or attention—is invested in realistic goals, and when skills match the opportunities

*"Mental energy is not a fixed substance. It rises and falls with our passion and commitment to what we are doing at the time."*

~ Sir Ken Robinson

*for action. The pursuit of a goal brings order in awareness because a person must concentrate attention on the task at hand and momentarily forget everything else."*

Have you noticed that some activities you do fill you with energy? While others drain you?

Pay attention!

And see how you might be able to shift some more energy into those soul-enriching activities!!

This reminds me of some wisdom from [The Man Who Tapped the Secrets of the Universe](#) (see Notes): *"With an overwhelming desire for intensive expression, a love of all tasks of every nature, and a deep love of life and of all people and things in life, he believes that every person can remain vital and effervescent throughout one's entire life."*

It also reminds me of another gem from that book: *"There should be no distasteful tasks in one's life. If you just hate to do a thing, that hatred for it develops body-destructive toxins, and you become fatigued very soon. You must love anything you must do. Do it not only cheerfully, but also lovingly and the very best way you know how. That love of the work which you must do anyhow will vitalize your body and keep you from fatigue."*

Fact is, sometimes we're going to need to/choose to do things that don't necessarily fire us up. But, if we can shift our attitude towards it, we can still be energized!

So, let's find more ways to do the things that really fire us up and more ways to get fired up about the things that tend to drain us, eh?! :)

## WHAT ARE YOU MOST DRAWN TO DOING?

*"They show all of us the value of asking a vitally important question: If left to my own devices—if I didn't have to worry about making a living or what others thought of me—what am I most drawn to doing?"*

I love these types of questions!

Reminds me of [Jon Kabat-Zinn's](#) great one from [Wherever You Go, There You Are](#) (see Notes): *"Rarely do we question and then contemplate with determination what our hearts are calling us to do and to be. I like to frame such efforts in question form: "What is my job on the planet with a capital J?" or, "What do I care about so much that I would pay to do it?" If I ask such a question and I don't come up with an answer other than, "I don't know," then I just keep on asking the question."*

What do you love to do SO much that you'd actually \*pay\* to do it!?

(I'd read books. And share what I learn with cool people like you! :)

## PUSHING BACK AGAINST STIFF OPPOSITION

*"The message here isn't as simplistic as "Don't let anything get in your way." Our families, friends, culture, and place in the human community are all important to our sense of fulfillment, and we have certain responsibilities to all of them. The real message here is that, in seeking your Element, you're likely to face one or more of the three levels of constraint—personal, social, and cultural..."*

*Ultimately, the question is always going to be, "What price are you willing to pay?" The rewards of the Element are considerable, but reaping these rewards may mean pushing back against some stiff opposition."*

Two things here.

First, Robinson points out the importance of our relationships. In the pursuit of our dreams, it's

*"The only way to prepare for the future is to make the most out of ourselves on the assumption that doing so will make us as flexible and productive as possible."*

~ Sir Ken Robinson

*" Finding your Element  
sometimes requires breaking  
away from your native  
culture in order to achieve  
your goals."*

~ Sir Ken Robinson

really important that we honor our friends and family and communities.

[Jonathan Haidt](#) captures this point really well in his brilliant book, [The Happiness Hypothesis](#) (see Notes) where he tells us: "If you want to predict how happy someone is, or how long she will live (and if you are not allowed to ask about her genes or personality), you should find out about her social relationships. Having strong social relationships strengthens the immune system, extends life (more than does quitting smoking), speeds recovery from surgery, and reduces the risks of depression and anxiety disorders. It's not just that extroverts are naturally happier and healthier; when introverts are forced to be more outgoing, they usually enjoy it and find that it boosts their mood. Even people who think they don't want a lot of social contact still benefit from it. And it's not just that "We all need somebody to lean on"; recent work on giving support shows that caring for others is often more beneficial than is receiving help. We need to interact and intertwine with others; we need the give and the take; we need to belong. An ideology of extreme personal freedom can be dangerous because it encourages people to leave homes, jobs, cities, and marriages in search of personal and professional fulfillment, thereby breaking the relationships that were probably their best hope for such fulfillment."

AND...

As we honor that wisdom, we also need to realize that, often times, we will face strong opposition to many of our ideas. It takes a \*lot\* of courage to really trust ourselves and go for it.

As [Emerson](#) says (see Notes): "And truly it demands something godlike in him who cast off the common motives of humanity and ventured to trust himself for a taskmaster."

And, in his uber-inspiring book, [Overachievement](#) (see Notes), [John Eliot](#) tells us: "as soon as anyone starts telling you to be 'realistic,' cross that person off your invitation list."

He also reminds us: "History, though, shows us that the people who end up changing the world—the great political, social, scientific, technological, artistic, even sports revolutionaries—are always nuts, until they're right, and then they're geniuses."

So, there ya go.

Be cool. And be courageous! :)

## OUR ATTITUDE IS CRUCIAL

*" Perhaps the most important  
attitude for cultivating good  
fortune is a strong sense of  
perseverance. Many of the  
people in this book faced  
considerable constraints  
in finding the Element and  
managed to do it through  
sheer, dogged determination."*

~ Sir Ken Robinson

"We all shape the circumstances and realities of our own lives, and we can also transform them. People who find their Element are more likely to evolve a clearer sense of their life's ambitions and set a course for achieving them. They know that passion and aptitude are essential. They know too that our attitudes to events and to ourselves are crucial in determining whether or not we find and live our lives in the Element."

Ah. The power of shaping the contents of our consciousness!

I absolutely \*love\* the way [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi](#) captures the importance of this attribute in [Flow](#) (see Notes) where he tells us: "A person can make himself happy, or miserable, regardless of what is actually happening 'outside,' just by changing the contents of consciousness. We all know individuals who can transform hopeless situations into challenges to be overcome, just through the force of their personalities. This ability to persevere despite obstacles and setbacks is the quality people most admire in others, and justly so; it is probably the most important trait not only for succeeding in life, but for enjoying it as well. To develop this trait, one must find ways to order consciousness so as to be in control of feelings and thoughts. It is best not to expect shortcuts will do the trick."

Here's to rockin' that and knowing that shortcuts aren't gonna do the trick! :)

*"In my experience, most people have to face internal obstacles of self-doubt and fear as much as any external obstacles of circumstance and opportunity."*

~ Sir Ken Robinson

## DREAMS & NEXT STEPS

"I don't mean to say, of course, that we all can do anything at any time of our lives. If you're about to turn one hundred, it's unlikely that you're going to nail the leading role in *Swan Lake*, especially if you have no previous dance background. At fifty-eight, with a wobbly sense of balance, I'm getting used to the idea that I'll probably never take the speed-skating gold at the Winter Olympics (particularly since I've never actually seen a pair of ice skates in real life). Some dreams truly are "impossible dreams." However, many aren't. Knowing the difference is often one of the first steps to finding your Element, because if you can see the chances of making a dream come true, you can also likely see the necessary next steps you need to take toward achieving it."

I love this.

[John Wooden](#) comes to mind here (see Notes on [Wooden](#)). He tells us: "Youngsters are told, "Think big. Anything is possible." I would never go that strong. I want them to think positively, but when you think big you often start thinking too big, and I believe that can be very dangerous. Wanting an unattainable goal will eventually produce a feeling of "What's the use?" That feeling can carry over into other areas. That is bad... We should keep our dreams within the realm of possibility— difficult but possible—and make every effort to achieve them."

And how about a little more Wooden mojo? He continues: "I believe one of my strengths is my ability to keep negative thoughts out. I am an optimist. I believe this results from the fact that I set realistic goals—ones that are difficult to achieve, but within reach. You might say I'm a realistic optimist.

*Goals should be difficult to achieve because those achieved with little effort are seldom appreciated, give little personal satisfaction, and are often not very worthwhile.*

*However, if you set goals that are so idealistic there's no possibility of reaching them, you will eventually become discouraged and quit. They become counter-productive. Be a realistic optimist."*

As Robinson and Wooden remind us, it's super important that we \*believe\* we can achieve our dreams so we're inspired to create a plan and take the next steps in making it a reality!!

## QUIT ROTTING & START ROCKIN' IT

*"As the actor Sophia Lauren once said, "There \*is\* a fountain of youth: it is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of the people you love. When you learn to tap this source, you will truly have defeated age."*

~ Sir Ken Robinson

"Dr. Henry Lodge, coauthor of *Younger Next Year*, makes the point sharply. "It turns out," he says, "that 70% of American aging is not real aging. It's just decay. It's rot from the stuff that we do. All the lifestyle diseases ... the diabetes, the obesity, the heart disease, much of the Alzheimer's, lots of the cancers, and almost all of the osteoporosis, those are all decay. Nature doesn't have that in store for any of us. We go out and buy it off the rack."

This is genius.

We go into some really cool Big Ideas in our Notes on [John Robbins' Healthy at 100](#) and [Walter Bortz' Dare to Be 100](#).

Bortz puts it this way: "Until recently, fate had decreed that you would die around age 70. Now, with the identity of elements that contribute and shape your whole life, you can track and control your biomarkers. Matters of fate have become matters of choice... Dare to be 100."

Check out the Notes for more goodness. And let's quit eating the crap that's killing us!

Ahem. :)

*"The Element is about discovering yourself, and you can't do this if you're trapped in a compulsion to conform. You can't be yourself in a swarm."*

~ Sir Ken Robinson

## THE TENDENCY TO CONFORMITY

"When interviewed later, most of the subjects said they knew they were giving the wrong answers but did so because they didn't want to be singled out. "The tendency to conformity in our society is so strong," Asch wrote, "that reasonably intelligent and well-meaning people are willing to call white black. This is a matter of concern. It raises questions about our ways of education and about the values that guide our conduct."

Quick context: Robinson describes an experiment where 10 peeps are brought into a room. 9 out of the 10 are "plants," or part of the experiment. The other individual is the one being tested. The experimenter asks a simple question about which lines on a slide match. The answer is TOTALLY (!!!) obvious. The "plants" give the wrong answer and, lo and behold, the majority of the subjects will go along with the rest of the group and also give the wrong answer.

This phenomena is called "groupthink." It's literally insane.

The point is really simple: It's \*really\* easy to slip into conforming behaviors. It takes a LOT of courage to not do so.

Any time we talk about self-reliance, we've gotta bring up Emerson who, literally wrote the book (well, the essay, anyway) on developing self-reliance. He tells us: "*For non-conformity the world whips you with its displeasure.*" And: "*A man must consider what a rich realm he abdicates when he becomes a conformist.*" Plus: "*Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.*"

In sum: If we want to rock The Element, we've gotta have the courage to trust ourselves as we discover both what we love to do and what we're good at!

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Chief Philosopher*

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

[The Selected Writings of  
Ralph Waldo Emerson](#)

[The Gifted Adult](#)

[Overachievement](#)

[Dare To Be 100!](#)

[The Art of Possibility](#)

## About the Author of "The Element"

SIR KEN ROBINSON



Ken Robinson, PHD, is an internationally recognized leader in the development of creativity, innovation, and human resources. He has worked with national governments in Europe and Asia, international agencies, Fortune 500 companies, national and state education systems, nonprofit organizations, and some of the world's leading cultural organizations. Learn more at [www.SirKenRobinson.com](http://www.SirKenRobinson.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](http://brianjohnson.me).