

## THE BIG IDEAS

### Excel

Don't compete.

### Syntropy

To perfection!

### God Is in the House

And he plays great music!

### Lighthouses

vs. Weathervanes.

### (Seemingly) Impossible

What will you do?

### A New Friend

Make adversity your ally.

### Gradualness Kills

What are you waiting for?

### Change

Becoming new.

### Soul Nourishment

Your soul's hungry. Feed it.

### 30 Minutes

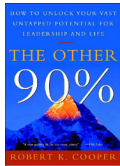
Are you closer now?

### Small Choices

... And destiny.

*"Every moment of our lives we are either growing or dying—and it's largely a choice, not fate."*

~ Robert K. Cooper



# The Other 90%

How to Unlock Your Vast Untapped Potential for Leadership and Life

BY ROBERT K. COOPER · THREE RIVERS PRESS © 2002 · 336 PAGES

**"Are you closer right now to where you want to be than you were a half-hour ago?"**

~ Robert K. Cooper from *The Other 90%*

[Robert Cooper](#) says you're only using about 10% of your potential. Eek!

The good news is that he's got some great ideas about how you can tap into [The Other 90%](#). (HIGHLY recommend the book.)

You might want start by asking yourself: **"What's the most exceptional thing I've done this week?!?"**

And follow that by asking: **"What's the most exceptional thing I will do next week?!?!"**

Seriously. Stop. Get out a pen and paper. Write. It might just change your life. :)

And when you're done with that, let's jump into some of his Big Ideas about how we can unlock our vast untapped potential for leadership and life!

## EXCEL

**"Yes, there are times when the gold medal only goes to the winner. But not in the race of life, where the winners are those who are superior not to others but to their former selves."**

Don't compete.

Excel.

From Cooper: **"To excel means to reach beyond the best you have ever given because doing so matters to you personally, for its own sake. It means to run your own race—as an individual, team, or organization. To excel is to know your greatest strengths and passions, and to emphasize them while honestly admitting and managing your weaknesses."**

Are you superior to yesterday's former version of yourself? Good.

Let's keep the momentum. :)

And how about some more love on excelling from William Faulkner: *"Don't bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself."*

And from [Erich Fromm](#): *"Independent of others and in concert with others, your main task in life is to do what you can best do and become what you can potentially be."*

## SYNTROPY

**"Every moment of our lives we are either growing or dying—and it's largely a choice, not fate. Throughout its life cycle, every one of the body's trillions of cells is driven to grow and improve its ability to use more of its innate yet untapped capacity. Research biologist Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, who was twice awarded the Nobel Prize, called this syntropy, which he defined as the**

*"Genius is childhood recaptured."*

~ Rene Dubos

'innate drive in living matter to perfect itself.' It turns conventional thinking upside down. As living cells—or as people—there is no staying the same. If we aim for some middle ground or status quo, it's an illusion—beneath the surface what's actually happening is we're dying, not growing. And the goal of a lifetime is continued growth, not adulthood."

*Syntropy.*

What a BRILLIANT concept.

Reminds me of [Abraham Maslow's](#) wisdom (see Notes on [Motivation and Personality](#)) that in any given moment we have two options: to step forward into growth or to step back into safety.

I love that.

I like to think of it this way:

We wake up in the morning. Is our first act a step forward (we get up immediately; we say the mantra we committed to; whatever) or do we step back into safety (stay in bed; hit snooze; etc.)?

+1 one if you stepped forward.

-1 one if you stepped backward.

<|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|>  
-100                                    -3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3                                    +100

So, after that first act/thought, you're either at +1 or -1. Yah?

(Notice that the difference between where you could be and where you actually are is actually TWO units apart, not one, btw.)

OK. How about the next moment? Forward or back?

And the next moment: Forward or back?

And the next: Forward or back?

Moment to moment to moment...

Fast forward to the end of the day.

Where are you? +25,000 or -25,000?

Pay attention because the weight of those negative numbers add up pretty quickly! Good news is that the positive numbers add up really quickly as well!

So, step forward.

Let's get in line with the natural force of syntropy, please.

## TONIGHT, GOD IS IN THE HOUSE

Have you heard the story of Art Tatum? It's pretty cool. Art was one of the world's greatest jazz pianists. Here's his story:

Art was born partially blind in Toledo, Ohio in 1909. He became completely blind after he was beaten as an adolescent.

Art absolutely loved music—especially the piano. His family couldn't afford a piano or lessons so when he wasn't at school or working, he'd have someone walk him over to the local saloon where he'd sit at the player piano and follow the keys for hours on end.

It was hard to keep up with the dizzying speed of the keys going up and down, but that's how he taught himself how to play.

*"As Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor, Nobel laureate, and supporter of the Tibetan people said, 'We must understand that there can be no life without risk-and when your spirit is strong, everything else is secondary, even the risks.'"*

~Robert K. Cooper

*" We may affirm that absolutely nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion."*

~ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

Here's the cool part: What Art didn't know (because he didn't have anyone telling him it was impossible) was the fact that the manufacturers of player pianos of the 1800's and early 1900's used two pianists, not one, to make the rolls of paper music.

Not knowing it was impossible, Art became the first pianist in history to play four hands of music with his two hands. Amazing.

Apparently, at one point Art Tatum played with Fats Waller, another jazz legend. Waller told the audience: *"I am just a piano player. But tonight, God is in the house."*

## LIGHTHOUSES

**"It's easy to act as if you are a weathervane, always changing your beliefs and words, trying to please everyone around you. But we were born to be lighthouses, not weathervanes. Imagine a vertical axis running through the center of your heart, from your deepest roots to your highest aspirations. That's your lighthouse. It anchors you in the world and frees you from having to change directions every time the weather shifts. Inside this lighthouse there is a lens and a light. The light represents who you are when nobody else is looking. That light was meant to keep shining, no matter how dark or stormy it gets outside... when you find that light inside you, you will know it. Don't let anyone else dim it... and one more thing: remember to look for the light inside others. If at first you can't see it, look deeper. It's there."**

You're a lighthouse.

How's your light?

Wanna turn up the voltage?!? Try this exercise to brighten it up:

Write down the five values that describe or define who you are and what you stand for:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

(Mine? Authenticity, Hope & Optimism, Energy & Enthusiasm, Wisdom, Kindness & Generosity.)

Please (please please!) take the time to do it right now!

(If not now, when, eh?!?)

## THE (SEEMINGLY) IMPOSSIBLE

**"It takes great goals to lead us out of our everyday limits into accomplishing more than we ever thought we could or would."**

What are *your* GREAT goals?

Give yourself the freedom to *really* dream!

—> *What would you do if you KNEW you could not fail?!?*

If I knew I could not fail, I'd: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*" A ship in port is safe, but that is not what ships are for."*

~ Grace Murray Hopper

*"There is not passion to be found playing small- in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living."*

~ Nelson Mandela

*"Great spirits meet calamity greatly."*

~ Aeschylus

*"Adversity calls forth the soul's courage to bear unflinchingly whatever Heaven sends."*

~ Euripides

*"Deep within humans dwell those slumbering powers; powers that would astonish them, that they never dreamed of possessing; forces that would revolutionize their lives if aroused and put into action."*

~ Orison Marden

Awesome.

Now, how can you align your life even more powerfully with that intention?!

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While we're on the subject, here's some more big goal love:

Per Tom Peters: *"I don't want an epitaph on my gravestone that says, 'He would have pursued some big dreams in his life, but other people wouldn't let him.'"*

Per Thoreau: *"If you have built your castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them."*

Per Vaclav Havel: *"We must not be afraid of dreaming the seemingly impossible if we want the seemingly impossible to become a reality."*

Per Eleanor Roosevelt: *"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."*

And, [James Allen](#) (see Notes on [As a Man Thinketh](#)): *"The greatest achievement was at first and for a time a dream. The oak sleeps in the acorn; the bird waits in the egg; and in the highest vision of the soul a waking angel stirs. Dreams are the seedlings of realities."*

## MAKE ADVERSITY YOUR ALLY

Cooper has an entire chapter on how to deal with adversity and offers an array of brilliant strategies to step up to the challenge and push through to the other side.

This is one of my favorite Big Ideas from that section: **"What can I do, however small, to gain some control over this situation?"**

Taking action in the face of fear is another one of the themes echoed throughout the literature.

Makes me think of Paul Bunyan's character, Christian, in his book *Pilgrim's Progress*. His hero has a shield that makes him invincible. AS LONG AS he heads STRAIGHT AT his problems. If he takes his challenges head on, nothing can harm him. If he turns his back and avoids his challenges he's vulnerable. Remarkable.

[David Schwartz](#) says it brilliantly in his classic [The Magic of Thinking Big](#) (see Notes): *"Action cures fear. Indecision, postponement, on the other hand, fertilize fear... Jot that down in your success rule book right now. Action cures fear."*

Susan Jeffers wrote an entire book (and a brilliant one at that!) called *Feel the Fear... and Do It Anyway*.

So, the next time you're feeling stressed or overwhelmed. Take a deep breath. (Make that three deep breaths. :) Smile to yourself and write down a few things you can do right now to gain some control over your situation.

And then, of course, start doing them!

## GRADUALNESS KILLS

**"Say no to the drug of gradualness. It was Martin Luther King, Jr., who spoke out strongly against making slow changes. Either we risk or we don't, he said. Either we change or we don't. There's no acceptable middle ground because it lulls us into complacency. Lasting changes rarely occur when we ease our way into the future. They come when we leap. The leap themselves can be small or large. Once we take action, we see things differently and for many of us there's no going back."**

*"As Darwin saw it, it's not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but those who are most responsive to change."*

~ Robert K. Cooper

*"With all your science can you tell me how it is, and when it is, that light comes into the soul?"*

~ Henry David Thoreau

*"Are you closer right now to where you want to be than you were a half-hour ago?"*

~ Robert K. Cooper

*"If not now, when?  
If not you, then who?"*

~ Hillel

Reminds me of William James' brilliant statement:

*"To change your life:*

- 1. Start immediately;*
- 2. Do it flamboyantly;*
- 3. No exceptions."*

How great is *that?!?! :)*

You want change?

Change.

## CHANGE

**"Aristotle said, 'Time does not exist except for change.' The origin of the word change is the Old English cambium, which means 'to become.' In other words, time does not exist except for becoming something new. What, exactly, are you choosing to become?"**

Amazing...

Are you changing?

... What, exactly, are you choosing to become?

## SOUL NOURISHMENT

**"It is heartening to realize that although we may crave comfort and routine, we nourish the soul's growth primarily through what is hard. As Darwin saw it, it's not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but those who are most responsive to change."**

Powerful.

You embracing change yet? :)

Cooper has some great ideas about how we can feed our soul by embracing change.

Do you take the same route to work everyday? Mix that up. Eat the same foods everyday? Always hang out with exactly the same people?

Mix that up!

Break out of your routines.

And nourish your soul!!

(Pretty, please. :)

## 30 MINUTES

**"Are you closer right now to where you want to be than you were a half-hour ago?"**

Wow. There's a gauge of how we're doing.

So... Are you closer right now to where you want to be than you were a half hour ago?!!?

Try asking yourself that question throughout the day today.

ESPECIALLY when you feel yourself slipping into time-wasting stuff. In those moments, pause. Step back. Check in with what you're committed to in your life. Ask yourself, *"Am I closer to where I want to be right now than I was a half-hour ago."*

Very powerful way to keep ourselves in integrity!

"We are each given the chance to leave a unique imprint on the world. What will be yours?"

~ Robert K. Cooper

## SMALL CHOICES & DESTINY

"William James, a pioneer in philosophy and psychology, said, 'All of life is but a mass of small choices—practical, emotional, and intellectual—systematically organized for our greatness or grief.' When asked if these choices could be altered, he replied, 'Yes, one at a time. But we must never forget that it's not only our big dreams that shape reality... The small choices bear us irresistibly toward our destiny.'"

We're shaping our destiny moment to moment to moment.

What habits do you have that don't serve you? What do you need to do less of? (Starting now?) Good. Work on that. The next time you find yourself drifting in the direction of these less than ideal behaviors, notice it. Make the small choice to bring yourself back.

What habits do you have that truly serve you—bringing out the best in you and pointing you in the direction of your greatest life? Good. Identify those and nurture them. Build your life around these habits. Never let a day go by when you aren't nurturing these.

And may we never forget William James' wisdom that: "*The small choices bear us irresistibly toward our destiny.*"

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Hope you enjoyed that whirlwind tour of some of the Big Ideas from one of my favorite books!

It's one of those books that you can read from page 1 on or pick up anywhere and get inspired. If you're resonating with Cooper's mojo, I hope you go out and pick it up.

For now, here's to rockin' your favorite Big Ideas and tapping into that Other 90%!!

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Chief Philosopher*

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

[Motivation and Personality](#)

[The Magic of Thinking Big](#)

[The Power of Full Engagement](#)

[The Pursuit of Perfect](#)

## About the Author of "The Other 90%%"

ROBERT K. COOPER



Robert K. Cooper, Ph.D., is a faculty member of the "Lessons in Leadership Distinguished Speaker Series." Called a "national treasure" by Professor Michael Ray of the Stanford Business School, Dr. Cooper is recognized for his pioneering work on excelling under pressure and the neuroscience of trust, initiative, and commitment. He has designed and presented leadership development programs for many organizations, including 3M, Ford, Sun Microsystems, Novartis, and Allstate. Learn more at [RobertCooper.com](http://RobertCooper.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).