

The Four Agreements Summary – Don Miguel Ruiz

7 MINUTE READ

[The Four Agreements](#) (1997)

by [Miguel Ruiz](#)

The Four Agreements is a provocative and mind-altering Toltec guide to waking up and finding peace in our illusory world – by retired surgeon, author and Eagle-Knight shaman Don Miguel Ruiz. ([168 pages](#))

[Paperback](#) | [Ebook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

Note: This **The Four Agreements summary** is part of an ongoing project to summarise the [Best Mindset Books](#) and [Best Self Help Books](#) of all time.

Note: This **The Four Agreements summary** is a stub. I'll write a full summary later. For now, you'll find enough meta-data here to help you decide if it's worth reading the book.

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The Four Agreements Review

[The Four Agreements](#) is a book that lays out an alternative, indigenous Mexican take on the nature of reality and existence. And though the author, [Don Miguel Ruiz](#), identifies as "[Toltec](#)", a broader label of [neoshamanistic](#) is probably more realistic.

In any case, the mythology he introduces is page-turning, his writing is powerful and his treatment of the illusory nature of reality is lucid and compelling.

If you're already steeped in Western or Eastern philosophy [The Four Agreements](#) is a good (short) read that casts familiar truths in new and enjoyable forms.

If you're new to philosophy of any kind, exploring [neoshamanism](#) or just looking for a good spirit-lifting read, [The Four Agreements](#) is as good a place as any to begin.

The Four Agreements Summary

You Are Living in a Dream.

Your world is made up of labels, concepts and beliefs. But these labels, concepts and beliefs are illusions. You are living in a dream.

This dream has been programmed into you using words; through a training process that began the day you were born. Words that came from your parents, your teachers, your communities and your peers. Words that grew into the labels, concepts and beliefs that define the rules and the

boundaries of your reality.

But this dream isn't soft or harmless – to you, its illusions are as real and as tangible as the laws of physics. They are the rules that tell you about yourself and the people around you. They are the rules that tell you how things "are", should or must be. They help you find order in chaos.

You agreed to most of these rules, even though you aren't responsible for them and even though you didn't really check them. And some of them are useful. But many of them are also inaccurate, unrealistic or unattainable. They trap you like a fly behind glass – unable to see past the fabric of the dream that constrains you.

The most harmful of these agreements reinforce that [you are never enough](#); that you are constantly falling short of some whimsical ideal. The result? The agreements you have made, knowingly and unknowingly, are the fundamental source of suffering and striving in your life. Worse, they make you a vector of suffering in the world around you.

And yet you hold on to them. Partly because you aren't aware of how arbitrary they are. Partly because you don't have any alternatives. Mostly because they make you feel safe. And safety, even if it brings suffering, feels better than throwing your world into chaos.

It *is* Possible to Wake Up.

But it *is* possible to wake up from this dream. It *is* possible to re-engineer your reality without the endless striving, without the suffering.

To do so, you must master three skills:

1. **Awareness** – Seeing the dream and its illusions for what they are;
2. **Forgiveness** – Accepting the consequences of the dream, in you and in others; and

3. **Action** – Dissolving and shaping your dream, and the dreams of others, into forms of your choosing.

This “second awakening”, this end of suffering, is a state oft described as “enlightenment”.

The Journey Starts With Awareness.

Simply reading and understanding the truths above is a first step to freedom. But any awareness you now feel will fade, fast. Instead of rising above the dream and working *on* it, you will soon sink back and be sucked *into* it. Perhaps as soon as you stop reading this article.

Improving your ability to maintain a heightened state of awareness is the only true gateway to enlightenment.

Many paths lead to such states of elevated consciousness. [Prayer](#) and [fasting](#) are common paths in most religions. The Buddha laid a clear path of [meditation](#) and [mindfulness](#). Indigenous American shamans ([among others](#)) perfected their own path with a plant-based tradition that “accelerates” the journey through [altered states of consciousness](#).

Though he alludes to it in his final ‘Toltec Pathway to Freedom’ (The Initiation of The Dead), [The Four Agreements](#) greatest weakness is that Ruiz didn’t (or couldn’t) plainly state the crucial importance of this plant-based tradition in neoshamanism. The result is a good description of “What” awakening looks like, but little real guidance on “How” to get there.

Whatever path *you* choose, the importance of training consciousness in “awakening” cannot be overstated. It is a fundamental prerequisite to all that follows.

Awareness Leads to Forgiveness.

With awareness and understanding comes forgiveness. Forgiveness for our past and ongoing 'failures' against agreements we still hold. Forgiveness for causing ourselves and those around us to suffer based on those illusions. Forgiveness for the suffering others cause as a result of their illusions.

This forgiveness, this unconditional acceptance, is at the heart of true, universal love. The delivery of this one idea alone, through a carefully kindled window of awareness, is perhaps the greatest triumph of [The Four Agreements](#). Grasping it, even for a moment, will lift a crushing weight from your shoulders. A weight you may have long since forgotten you carry.

You *will* fail to live up to your expectations; and so will others. You *will* make mistakes; as others will too. But *being human is complicated*. We are all the products of the illusions that make up our realities. Acknowledge *that* reality, accept *yours* and forgive yourself, and others – “for they know not what they do”.

From Forgiveness Comes the Strength for Action.

Forgiveness unlocks the space, energy and strength needed to reshape your reality by:

1. Preventing new, unwanted agreements from taking root;
2. Eliminating old, damaging agreements already in place; and
3. Programming new agreements that slowly eliminate suffering.

To this end, Ruiz proposes four new agreements to make with yourself today:

1. Be impeccable with your word;
2. Don't take anything personally;
3. Don't make assumptions; and

4. Always do your best.

The Four Agreements

1 – Be impeccable with your word.

Words are more powerful than we realise, they are the building blocks of labels, concepts and beliefs.

To avoid creating new, harmful illusions, be extremely conservative when using them on yourself or on others.

Get in the habit of saying only what you mean and meaning only what you say. When in doubt, say nothing at all.

2 – Don't take anything personally

Remember that the words and actions of others are the products of their own illusory realities.

Acknowledge that if you shared the same reality you would know no better than to act and speak in exactly the same way.

Armed with this knowledge: take nothing personally. It will defuse the power of the words and actions of others to impact you.

3 – Don't make assumptions

Though we know most assumptions are baseless, we often still give them the weight of full agreements.

The result? The violation of one-sided expectations is a major source of misunderstanding and suffering at all levels of life.

Be aware and wary of your natural tendency to assume things about yourself, others and the world around you.

Instead, look and listen without labels or judgement. Have the courage to ask questions and clarify.

And remember, when someone or something surprises you – [the failing isn't theirs, it is yours](#).

4 – Always do your best

Always do the very best you can. [Live with maximum possible areté](#) in each moment.

But don't worry about whether your best now is the same or better than your best yesterday, or even five minutes ago.

Instead, accept that your best will change from moment to moment – depending on the conditions within and around you.

Now, do what you can, with what you have, from where you are – you can ask nothing more of yourself.

The Path to Freedom

Though [The Four Agreements](#) is strong on "Why" and "What", it is sadly anaemic on "How".

Ruiz lays out three pathways to freedom:

1. **Awareness;**
2. **Discipline;** and
3. **Death.**

His contributions under the first two can be loosely summed up as: "**Become aware** of the agreements that dictate your reality and **have the discipline** to change them." You might squeeze a little more out of his writing, but not much. Unfortunately, his pointers on getting there don't

extend far beyond a well crafted "**Just do it**".

Though it should form the crux of his contribution – *Ruiz* is equally weak on point three, death. It would have been exciting to find here a carefully crafted discourse (both risks and rewards) on the rich tradition of shamanistic ceremony and plant use to reach the [altered states of consciousness](#) said to accelerate enlightenment. Instead, we are treated to a half-hearted exhortation to: "Wake up each day as if death were just around the corner."

Why Ruiz came so far only to abandon us at the most vital part of his teaching I don't know. But in all three cases, those looking for more would probably do best to find a good teacher of indigenous American spirituality or explore other paths (like [meditation](#)) with large and easily accessible bodies of practical literature.

The Four Agreements Summary: Conclusion

As with similar books, [The Four Agreements](#) is better enjoyed first-hand than summarised. This is especially true for crunches (like this one) that are more synthesis than summary.

Why? Because so much of their power lies in the author's own voice, in Ruiz's skilful ability to lift us, if only for a moment, above the thick smog of life to glimpse the blue sky above it.

If what you read here today struck a chord, I'd strongly recommend [picking up the original book](#). At only 153 sides, it packs plenty of impact per page.

Best The Four Agreements Quotes

These The Four Agreements quotes come from [TANQ](#) - **The Art of Living**'s growing central library of thoughts, anecdotes, notes, and

[inspirational quotes.](#)

["The Four Agreements are... 1. Be impeccable with your word. 2. Don't take anything personally. 3. Don't make assumptions. 4. Always do your best."](#)

- [Miguel Ruiz](#), The Four Agreements

["If someone is not treating you with love and respect, it is a gift if they walk away from you. If that person doesn't walk away, you will surely endure many years of suffering with him or her. Walking away may hurt for a while, but your heart will eventually heal. Then you can choose what you really want. You will find that you don't need to trust others as much as you need to trust yourself to make the right choices."](#)

- [Miguel Ruiz](#), The Four Agreements

["Whatever happens around you, don't take it personally... Nothing other people do is because of you. It is because of themselves"](#)

- [Miguel Ruiz](#), The Four Agreements

["If others tell us something we make assumptions, and if they don't tell us something we make assumptions to fulfill our need to know and to replace the need to communicate. Even if we hear something and we don't understand we make assumptions about what it means and then believe the assumptions. We make all sorts of assumptions because we don't have the courage to ask questions."](#)

- [Miguel Ruiz](#), The Four Agreements

["I will no longer allow anyone to manipulate my mind and control my life in the name of love."](#)

- [Miguel Ruiz](#), The Four Agreements

"God is life. God is life in action. The best way to say, "I love you, God," is to live your life doing your best. The best way to say, "Thank you, God," is by letting go of the past and living in the present moment, right here and now. Whatever life takes away from you, let it go. When you surrender and let go of the past, you allow yourself to be fully alive in the moment. Letting go of the past means you can enjoy the dream that is happening right now."

- [Miguel Ruiz](#), The Four Agreements

"Every human is an artist. The dream of your life is to make beautiful art."

- [Miguel Ruiz](#), The Four Agreements

"If you live in a past dream, you don't enjoy what is happening right now because you will always wish it to be different than it is. There is no time to miss anyone or anything because you are alive. Not enjoying what is happening right now is living in the past and being only half alive. This leads to self pity, suffering and tears."

- [Miguel Ruiz](#), The Four Agreements

"Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and drama."

- [Miguel Ruiz](#), The Four Agreements

"There is a huge amount of freedom that comes to you when you take nothing personally."

- [Miguel Ruiz](#), The Four Agreements

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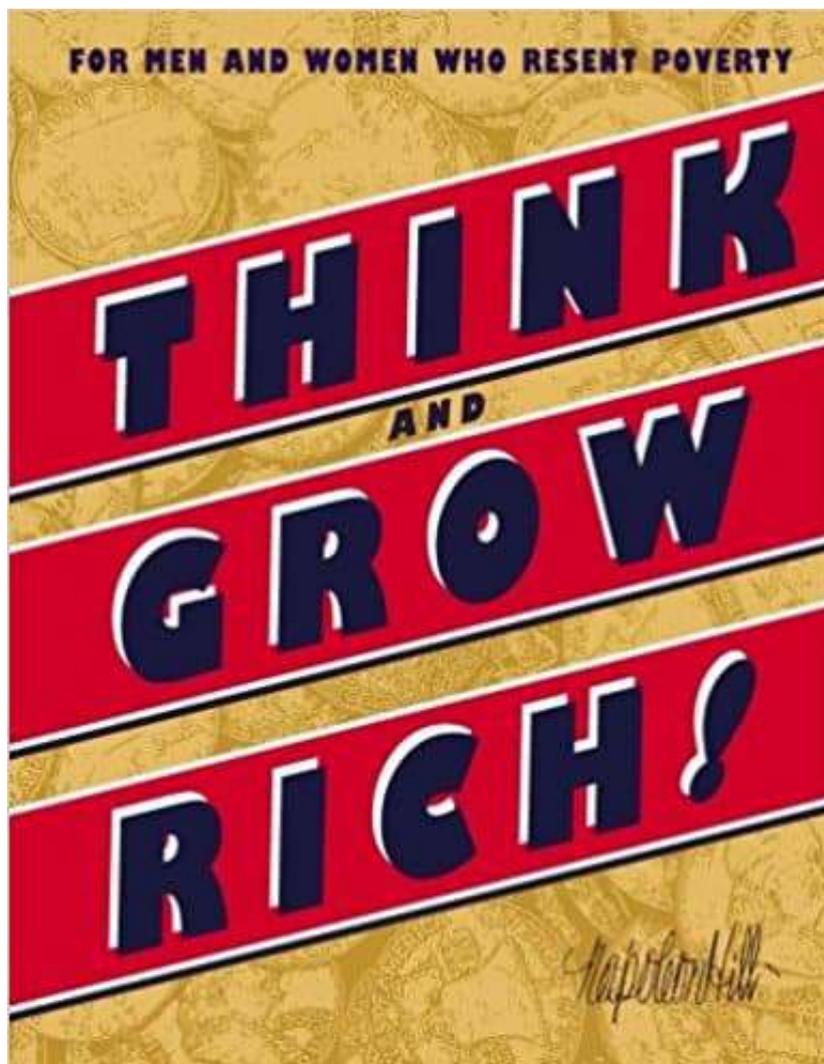
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And in the meantime...

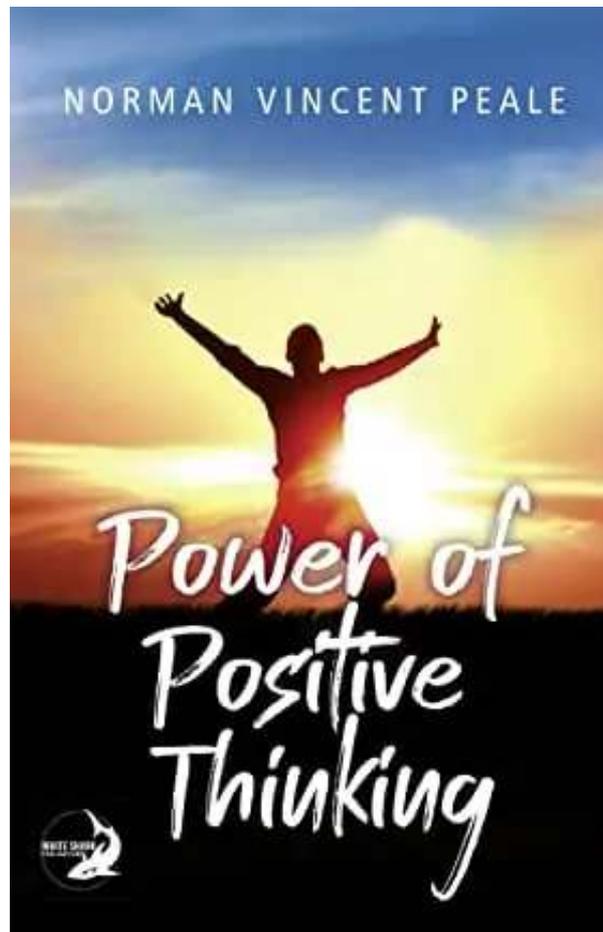
Here are 5 top books like The Four Agreements...



1. [Think and Grow Rich](#) - [Napoleon Hill](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

Think and Grow Rich is a best-selling book of all time and a cornerstone guide to the Law of Attraction and the role of the subconscious in transforming your life - by a titan of the self-help genre, Napoleon Hill.

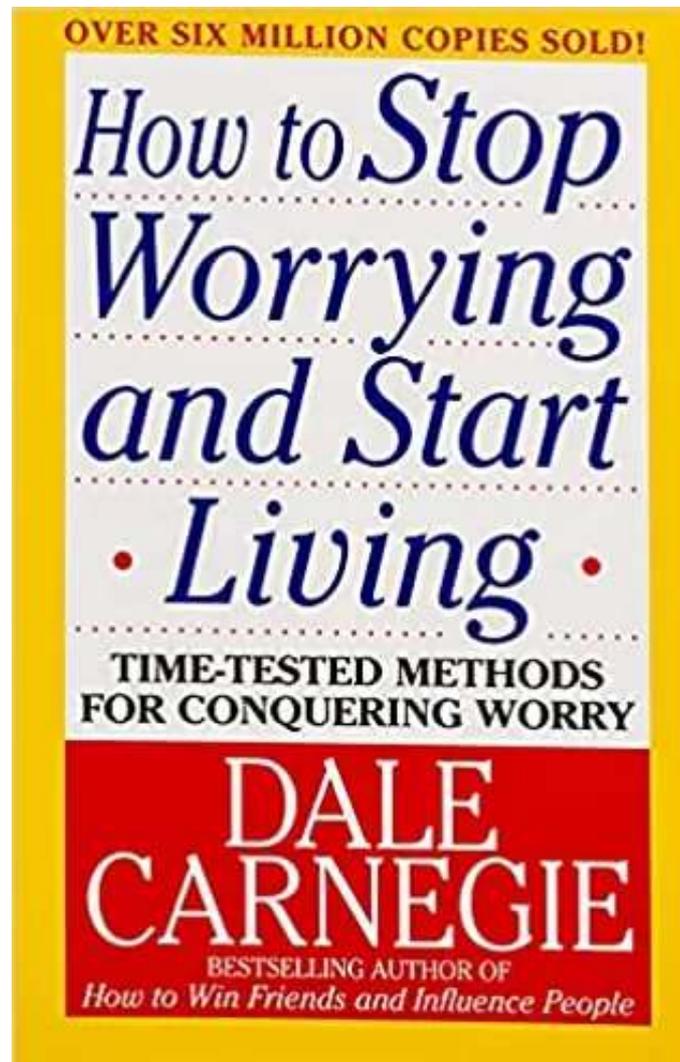
Published 1937 // 233 pages // Rated 4.2 over 254,900 reviews [on Goodreads](#)



2. [The Power of Positive Thinking](#) - [Norman Vincent Peale](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

The Power of Positive Thinking reminds us that we don't need a PhD in Human Relations to live our best lives if we can learn a few tricks to change how we think - by minister and best-selling author Norman Vincent Peale.

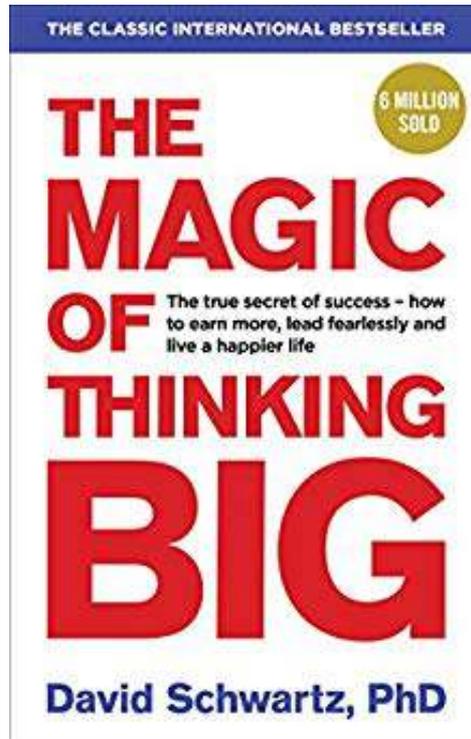
Published 1952 // 128 pages // Rated 4.1 over 96,300 reviews [on Goodreads](#)



3. [How to Stop Worrying and Start Living](#) - [Dale Carnegie](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

How to Stop Worrying and Start Living is a practical, common-sense bible filled with stories, case studies and simple step-by-step guides to conquering worry, anxiety and depression - by self development guru, Dale Carnegie.

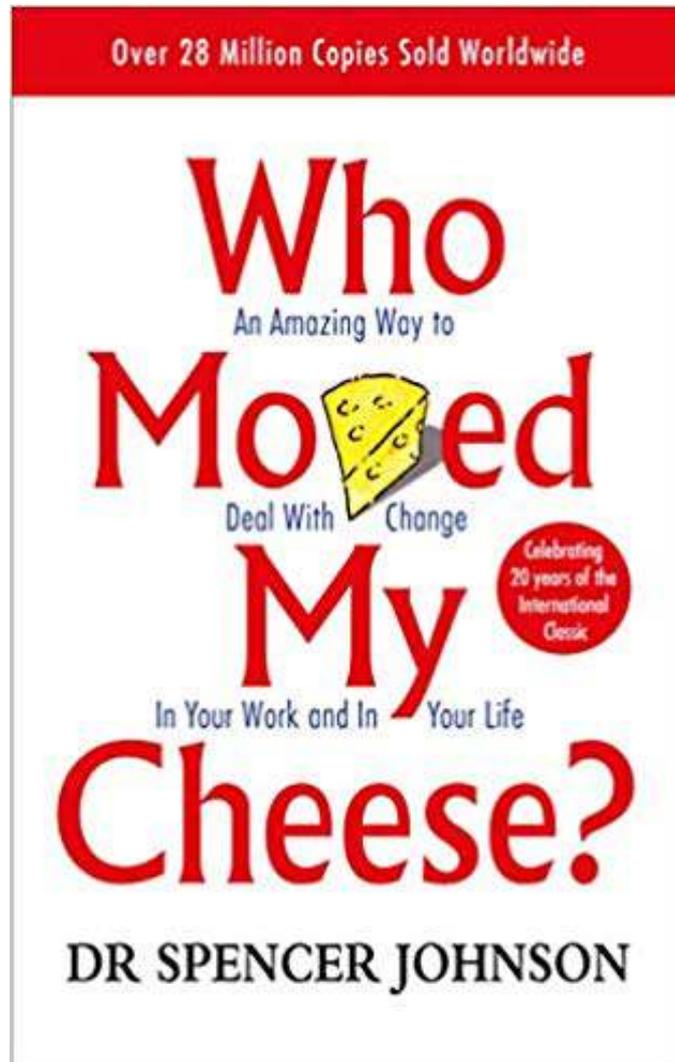
Published 1944 // 358 pages // Rated 4.1 over 87,800 reviews [on Goodreads](#)



4. [The Magic of Thinking Big](#) - [David J. Schwartz](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

The Magic of Thinking Big is a powerful, practical and uplifting book to help get you out of a rut, invigorate your goals and empower you towards success - by life-long motivational writer and coach, David J. Schwartz.

Published 1959 // 320 pages // Rated 4.2 over 77,300 reviews [on Goodreads](#)



5. [Who Moved My Cheese?](#) - [Spencer Johnson](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

Who Moved My Cheese is a short, light-hearted parable about the different ways we respond to life's changes and how doing so skillfully can help us find more success and happiness in our lives - by best-selling author, Dr. Spencer Johnson.

Published 1998 // 96 pages // Rated 3.8 over 405,300 reviews [on Goodreads](#)

Wish There Was a Faster/Easier Way?

Whenever you're ready, here are four ways I can help you be more productive, find more balance and live life more on purpose...

1. **Curious? Discover how productive you really are...** Take this free, 2-minute assessment to unlock your PQ and discover the top 25 habits you need to get big things done. [Take the 2-minute quiz →](#)
2. **Overwhelmed? Get a free chapter of my book...** Let me show you how to beat procrastination, permanently, with this free sneak peek inside **TAoL**'s ultimate productivity primer. [Download your free chapter →](#)
3. **Stuck? Grab a 90-Day TRACKTION Planner...** Get the tool thousands trust to help them take control of their time, master their habits and hit goals in every part of their lives. [Order your 90-day planner →](#)
4. **Burned out? Join the TRACKTION Community...** Take the 6-week masterclass, get weekly group coaching, find accountability partners and connect with like-minded self-starters. [Get started FREE →](#)

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The Four Agreements is a provocative and mind-altering Toltec guide to waking up and finding peace in our illusory world – by retired surgeon, author and Eagle-Knight shaman Don Miguel Ruiz.

URL: <https://amzn.to/3zaOND8>

Author: Don Miguel Ruiz

[Arthur Worsley](#)

I founded **TAoL** to discover and share the best wisdom on how to live long and prosper. Before that I studied Psychology, Philosophy & Physiology at Oxford and consulted at McKinsey. **Still curious?**

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