

The Effective Executive Summary – Peter F. Drucker

7 MINUTE READ

[The Effective Executive](#) (1966)

The Definitive Guide to Getting the Right Things Done

by [Peter Drucker](#)

The Effective Executive is THE timeless classic on leadership and management; on getting the right things done - by the dean of business and management philosophy, Peter F. Drucker. ([208 pages](#))

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

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

Contents

1. The Effective Executive Review
2. The Effective Executive Summary
3. 1. Why do we need effective executives?
4. 2. What makes an effective executive?
5. 3. How can executives become more effective?
6. The Effective Executive Contents
7. Best The Effective Executive Quotes
8. The Effective Executive PDF Summary
9. Read More: 5 Books Like The Effective Executive
10. Wish There Was a Faster/Easier Way?

The Effective Executive Review

[The Effective Executive](#) is a must-read for anyone making big decisions in their organisations. It's a wonderful, thought-provoking self-help book that's as relevant and insightful today as it was back in 1966.

Drucker's overall thesis is this:

1. Society has made (and is still making) a huge shift from manual to knowledge-based work since the mid 20th Century;
2. This shift involves a dramatic increase in the number of executives (decision-makers) in the workforce; and
3. Our success (as individuals, organisations and societies) depends on how well this increase is accomplished.

In short: We need far more executives.

But there's more to the problem than headcount.

The executive's job, Drucker argues, isn't just to turn up and get busy. The executive's job is to make decisions that significantly impact the entire organisation's performance. The executive's job is to deliver outstanding results.

To do this job well, executives need to upgrade their skills. Executives *can* and *must* learn to be more effective.

This is the problem [The Effective Executive](#) sets out to help each of us tackle.

It's a short, well-written book whose power comes as much from its parables and practical checklists as the questions it encourages us to ask.

If you've read it, you'll know what I'm talking about.

If you haven't read it yet, [go grab a copy](#).

And in either case, thank you for being here and I hope you enjoy this free

summary.

The Effective Executive Summary

I've structured this summary to answer three questions...

1. Why do we need effective executives?
2. What makes an effective executive? and
3. How can executives be more effective?

Read on, or click one of the links above to skip to a question below.

1. Why do we need effective executives?

Society's changing demands have driven the rise of large, complex organisations.

We depend on those organisations as...

- Actors (economic, government, healthcare, education); and
- Employers.

We need effective executives to build effective organisations; to integrate individual, organisational and societal goals.

But we also need effective organisations to train and fill the increasing demand for effective executives.

It's a chicken and egg problem.

But the only thing we can directly control is our own self-development.

Effectiveness *must* be learned.

And change starts with each of us doing what we can to become a more effective executive.

2. What makes an effective executive?

An ineffective executive:

- Focuses on problems;
- Lacks clear goals, directions or values; and
- Does a little bit of everything.

An effective executive:

1. **Knows where their time goes** – Brings what they can under control;
2. **Focusses on outward contribution** – Focus on outputs ("*What results are expected?*") instead of inputs ("*What work can be done?*");
3. **Build on strengths** (Own, superiors, colleagues, subordinates, situations); on what *can* be done;
4. **Concentrates efforts** – Decides and sticks to the ONE area where superior performance will produce outstanding results; and
5. **Makes effective decisions** – Focuses on a few, fundamental strategic questions and embraces dissenting opinions.

Effectiveness (👉) spans mechanics, attitudes, values and character; it spans procedure and commitment.

Each of those things can be developed. Each lies within our control.

Effectiveness *can* be learned.

3. How can executives become more effective?

3.1. HOW TO KNOW WHERE YOUR TIME GOES.

We are not naturally good at managing time.

And as executives get more senior they:

- Lose more and more direct control over their time; and
- Spend more time just keeping the organisation together.

The effective executive takes control of what discretionary time they have left.

To take control of *your* time, you must:

- Record time – keep a time log.
- Analyse and optimise the results:
 - - Eliminate low impact activities;
 - Eliminate activities others could do just as well, if not better;
 - Eliminate ways you waste other people's time (ask them);
- Solve common time-wasters:
 - - Eliminate recurring crises;
 - Eliminate overstaffing;
 - Eliminate meetings;
 - Improve information:
 - - - **Accuracy** – Is it right?
 - **Delivery** – Is it useable?
- Consolidate discretionary time into the largest time-units possible:
 - - Estimate available discretionary time;
 - Set it aside in a continuous amount by e.g.,

- - - Working at home one day per week;
 - Scheduling meetings for:
- - - - Specific days (e.g., Monday and Friday); and/or
 - Times (i.e., afternoons)

3.2. HOW TO FOCUS ON CONTRIBUTION.

The effective executive focuses on results rather than effort.

To get clear on what results matter:

- Ask yourself: *"What can I contribute that will significantly affect the performance and results of the institution I serve?"*
- Ask your colleagues: *"What contribution do you need from me to make your contribution to the organisation? When do you need this? How do you need it? And in what form?"*

To maximise contribution, work on:

- **Communication** – Instead of *telling* subordinates, ask them *"What are the contributions for which this organisation and I, your superior, should hold you accountable? What should we expect of you? What is the best utilisation of your knowledge and your ability?"*
- **Teamwork** – Think sideways; ask *"Who has to use my output for it to become effective?"*;
- **Self-development** – Ask *"What self-development do I need? What knowledge and skills do I have to acquire to make the contribution I should be making? What strength do I have to put to work? What*

standards do I have to set myself?"; and

- **Development of others** – Lead by example.

To keep meetings focussed on contribution:

- Insist that the purpose of a meeting is spelled out before it is called; ask "*Why are we having this meeting:*"
 - - *To brainstorm ideas?*
 - *To reach a decision?*
 - *To inform? or*
 - *To clarify next steps?"*
- Designate a facilitator to direct and listen but not to take part.
- Have the facilitator state the purpose at the outset and keep things on purpose.

3.3. HOW TO BUILD ON STRENGTHS.

Staff for strength:

1. **Look out for impossible jobs** – Break any job that defeats 2 competent people into more specialised roles.
2. **Make each job demanding** – Be sure it challenges the strength and abilities of the person who fills it.
3. **Appraise potential candidates on strengths** – Ask:
 1. "*What have they done well?"*
 2. "*What, therefore, are they likely to be able to do well?"*
 3. "*What do they have to learn of acquire to get the full benefit from his strength?"*
 4. "*If I had a son or daughter, would I be willing to have him or her work under this person? Why?"*

4. Manage weaknesses:

- - In individuals:
- - - Accept that where there are peaks, there are valleys;
 - Focus on strengths relevant to performance of the task;
 - Use the organisation to compensate individual weaknesses;
 - Overcome weaknesses that inhibit strengths through work and career opportunities.
- - In organisations:
- - - Appoint the best person for the role, even if “indispensable” elsewhere and
 - Remove anyone who does not perform with high distinction; but
 - Do not blame them – a bad appointment is the fault of the appointer, not the appointee.

Build on your boss's strengths – Ask:

- *“What can my boss do really well?”*
- *“What have they done really well?”*
- *“What do they need to know to use this strength?”*
- *“What do they need to get from me to perform?”*

Build on your own strengths.

- **Be yourself** – embrace your strengths and your weaknesses;

- **Ask** – *“What are the things I can do with relative ease?”* then...
- **Do more of that** – Feed the opportunities. Starve the problems.

3.4. HOW TO CONCENTRATE YOUR EFFORTS

The effective executive:

- Does first things first; and
- Does one thing at a time.

To do so, they:

1. **Let go of the past**; of activities that are no longer productive:
 - - They ask – *“If we did not already do this, would we go into it now?”*
 - If the answer isn't *“Hell yes!”*, they get out of (or curtail) it fast.
2. **Focus on opportunities** – treat other criteria as qualifiers rather than determinants;
3. **Focus on ONE task at a time** – then review the situation and pick the next ONE task that comes first;
4. **Choose their own direction** – rather than climb on the bandwagon;
5. **Aim high (for something that will make a difference)** – rather than do something 'safe' and easy.

3.5. HOW TO MAKE EFFECTIVE DECISIONS

The effective executive acts:

- **Quickly** – Within a few days, at most a few weeks; and
- **Decisively** – Without hedging or compromise.

But their success depends on making effective decisions. To do so, they ask:

1. *"Is this a generic situation or an exception? What is the underlying root cause?"* – The generic has to be answered by a rule or policy, the true exception (though rare) as it comes.
2. *"Is a decision really necessary?"*
 - - *"Will the situation degenerate if we do nothing?"* if not...
 - *"Do the benefits greatly outweigh the risks?"*
3. *"What are we measuring?"* – What (alternative) measurements are appropriate and relevant?
4. *"What goals (or boundary) conditions is the decision trying to accomplish?"* – The more clarity, the higher the chance of success.
5. *"What does everyone think?"* – Dialogue, dissension and disagreement lead to better decisions than consensus; they avoid pandering, generate alternatives and stimulate imagination;
6. *"What do we have to know to test the validity of each hypothesis?"* – What facts would make each opinion tenable?
7. *"What is right?"* – Rather than *"What is acceptable to others?"*
8. *"What are the next actions?"*
 - - *"Who has to know?"*
 - *"What action needs taking?"*
 - *"Who will take it?"*
 - *"What does the action have to be so that the people who have to do it can do it?"*
9. *"How will we know if the decision is being executed and working?"* – How can we build feedback into the decision (TIP: Go see for yourself).

The Effective Executive Contents

The Effective Executive has a preface, a conclusion and 7 main chapters...

Preface

1. Effectiveness Can Be Learned
2. Know Thy Time
3. What Can I Contribute?
4. Making Strength Productive
5. First Things First
6. The Elements of Decision-making
7. Effective Decisions

Conclusion: Effectiveness Must Be Learned

Best The Effective Executive Quotes

These The Effective Executive quotes come from **The Art of Living's** ever-growing central library of thoughts, anecdotes, notes, and [inspirational quotes](#).

"The knowledge worker cannot be supervised closely or in detail. He can only be helped. But he must direct himself, and he must direct himself towards performance and contribution, that is toward effectiveness."

- [Peter Drucker](#), The Effective Executive

"The truly important events on the outside are not the trends. They are changes in the trends."

- [Peter Drucker](#), The Effective Executive

"The man who focusses on efforts and who stresses his downward authority is a subordinate no matter how exalted his title and rank."

But the man who focusses on contribution and who takes responsibility for results no matter how junior, is, in the most literal sense of the phrase, 'top management. He holds himself accountable for the performance of the whole.'

- [Peter Drucker](#), The Effective Executive

"It is just as risky, just as arduous, and just as uncertain to do something small that is new, as it is to do something big that is new. It is more productive to convert an opportunity into results than to solve a problem – which only restores the equilibrium of yesterday."

- [Peter Drucker](#), The Effective Executive

"Meetings are by definition a concession to deficient organization For one either meets or one works. One cannot do both at the same time."

- [Peter Drucker](#), The Effective Executive

"All military services have long ago learned that the officer who has given an order goes out and sees for himself whether it has been carried out. At the least he sends one of his own aides—he never relies on what he is told by the subordinate to whom the order was given. Not that he distrusts the subordinate; he has learned from experience to distrust communications."

- [Peter Drucker](#), The Effective Executive

"People inevitably start out with an opinion; to ask them to search for the facts first is even undesirable. They will simply do what everyone is far too prone to do anyhow: look for the facts that fit the conclusion they have already reached."

- [Peter Drucker](#), The Effective Executive

"It is more productive to convert an opportunity into results than to solve a problem - which only restores the equilibrium of yesterday."

- [Peter Drucker](#), The Effective Executive

"Intelligence, imagination, and knowledge are essential resources, but only effectiveness converts them into results."

- [Peter Drucker](#), The Effective Executive

"If there is any one "secret" of effectiveness, it is concentration. Effective executives do first things first and they do one thing at a time."

- [Peter Drucker](#), The Effective Executive

The Effective Executive PDF Summary

Want to save this The Effective Executive summary for later?

Click the link below to get this whole summary as a handy FREE PDF...

[Get the latest FREE The Effective Executive PDF Summary →](#)

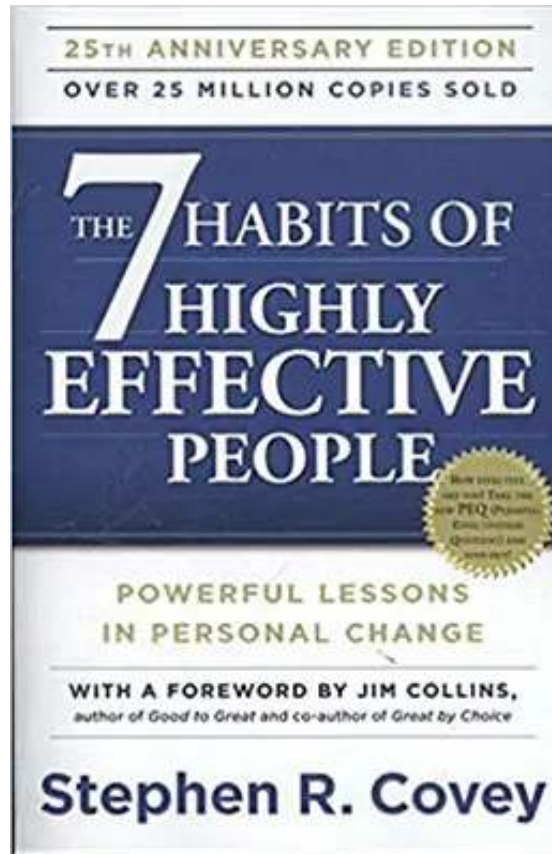
Note: Direct link to PDF. No email required.

Read More: 5 Books Like The Effective Executive

Enjoyed this The Effective Executive summary? You might enjoy the rest of the books on these lists of the [Best Productivity Books](#) and [Best Self Help Books](#) of all time.

And in the meantime...

Here are 5 top books like The Effective Executive...



1. [The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#) - [Stephen R. Covey](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

Powerful Lessons in Personal Change

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People is a perennial masterpiece on leading a happy, productive and purposeful existence and an unmissable stop for any pilgrim of personal improvement - by educator, author and speaker, Stephen Covey.

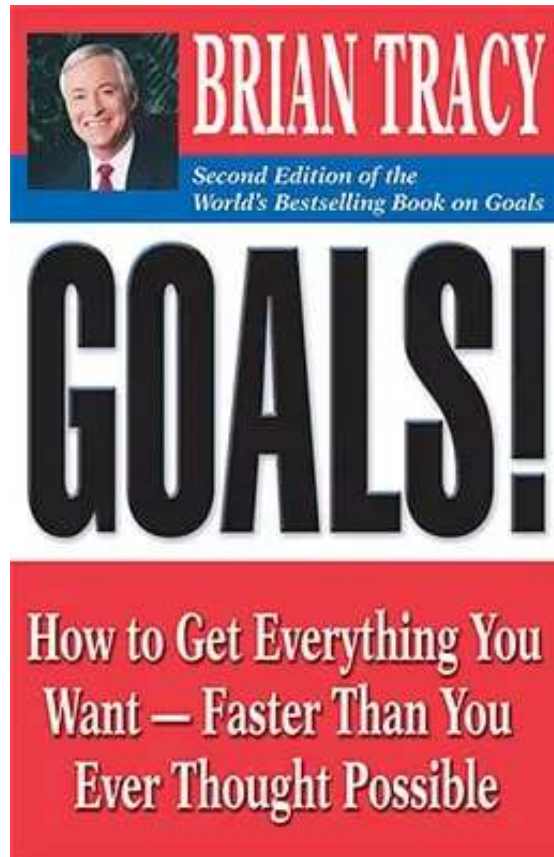
Published 1989 // 372 pages // Rated 4.1 over 623,800 reviews [on Goodreads](#)



2. [First Things First](#) – [Stephen R. Covey](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

First Things First is an action-oriented time-management manual, filled with frameworks and exercises to help you do more of what matters and less of what doesn't - by the author of the #1 book on this list, Stephen Covey.

Published 1993 // 384 pages // Rated 4.1 over 40,400 reviews [on Goodreads](#)

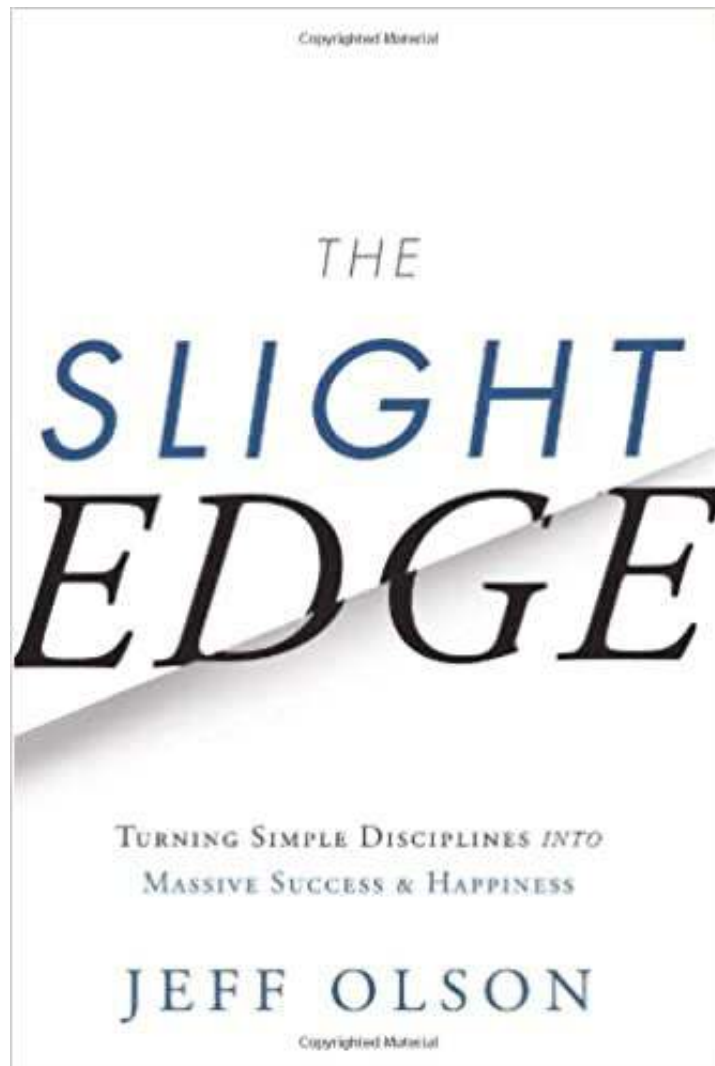


3. [Goals!](#) - [Brian Tracy](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

How to Get Everything You Want Faster Than You Ever Thought Possible

Goals! was the first book I ever read on productivity and probably the most readable and complete guide to goal-setting ever written - by sales legend and time-management master, Brian Tracy.

Published 1989 // 291 pages // Rated 4.2 over 14,200 reviews [on Goodreads](#)

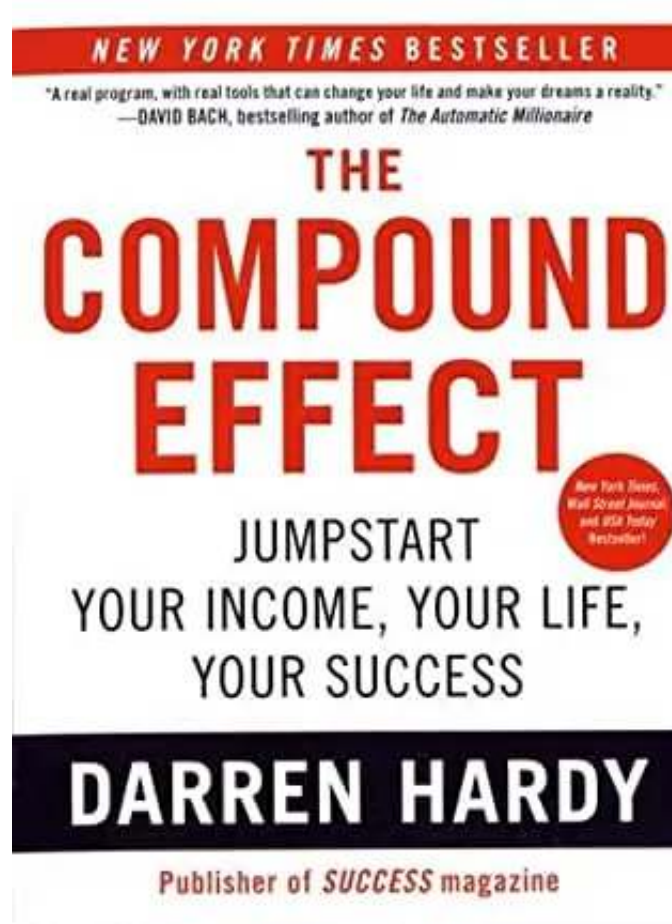


4. [The Slight Edge](#) - [Jeff Olson](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

Turning Simple Disciplines Into Massive Success & Happiness

The Slight Edge is a short, punchy, practical guide to the why, what and how of using simple daily disciplines to achieve breakthrough success - by serial entrepreneur, speaker and author, Jeff Olson.

Published 2005 // 168 pages // Rated 4.3 over 21,900 reviews [on Goodreads](#)



5. [The Compound Effect](#) - [Darren Hardy](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

Jumpstart Your Income, Your Life, Your Success

The Compound Effect offers a concise, practical guide to mastering small choices that determine big outcomes which dictate the course of your life - by best selling author, publisher and motivational speaker, Darren Hardy.

Published 2010 // 162 pages // Rated 4.2 over 39,400 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 →](#)

[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?** [Learn more](#) or [take my FREE productivity quiz](#).