EXCLUSIVE EXCERPT

# Always Eat Left Handed

## 15 SURPRISING SECRETS FOR KILLING IT AT WORK AND IN REAL LIFE

**ROHIT BHARGAVA**
Best Selling Author of Non-Obvious

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*No animals were harmed in the writing, printing or distribution of this book. The trees, unfortunately, were not so lucky.*

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HANDed

# Also by Rohit Bhargava

Personality Not Included:
*Why Companies Lose Their Authenticity And*
*How Great Brands Get it Back*

Likeonomics:
*The Unexpected Truth Behind Earning Trust,*
*Influencing Behavior, and Inspiring Action*

Non-Obvious:
*How To Think Different,*
*Curate Ideas and Predict The Future*

## EARLY PRAISE FOR *ALWAYS EAT LEFT HANDED*

"If humor is contagious, Rohit's new book is positively addictive. Funny, insightful, and perfectly unexpected, *Always Eat Left Handed* is the most entertaining 'business book' I've read this year. Read this and learn why doing things wrong might be the best way to be right."

—Dan Roam, author of *Draw To Win*

"Filled with compelling stories and unexpected insights, this book exposes how most self-books that share career advice are cliché. Bhargava's book is a rare treat with an illuminating point of view you probably haven't heard before. I adored this book."

—Nancy Duarte, CEO of Duarte, Inc. and best-selling author

"The opposite of just about any career advice book I've ever read. Make people cry. Ignore your job. Start smoking. Each suggestion felt unbelievable … until I read it. Now I recommend this book to all my employees, interns, suppliers and anyone else I know who can use a jolt of brutal honesty on their path to being more successful."

—Ben Tubuo, VP of Supplier Diversity – Walt Disney Company

"Most career advice books are boring, useless, or still stuck in the 1990s. Not this one. Rohit Bhargava has written a counterintuitive, smart, and entertaining career guide that's relevant and necessary—for today."

—Dorie Clark, author of *Reinventing You* and *Stand Out*, and adjunct professor at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business

"After years of studying people and the decisions they make, I treat any self-help advice with a healthy skepticism. This book was different. The stories had me hooked from the start. What surprised me even more was the fact that despite the non-scientific tone of the book, every secret was firmly rooted in the principles of behavioral science. In other words … they work. Buy this book for anyone in your life who you would like to see make better decisions."

—Francesca Gino, Author of *Sidetracked* and Tandon Family Professor of Business Administration, Harvard Business School

"Ever wonder what it actually takes to build an amazing network? This book goes beyond the hype and provides a unique and actionable guide on how to surround yourself with amazing people, connect authentically with them, and build the network you've always dreamed of."

—Clara Shih, Founder and CEO of Hearsay Systems and Member, Starbucks Board Of Directors

*"Always Eat Left Handed* is a wonderfully accessible book of small non-obvious things that anyone can put into practice. Although it is applicable to any field and age, Rohit's advice is especially good for the world-weary young millennial, who has had it up to their eyeballs with well-meaning advice. It's a rich collection of entirely snackable content that showcases how small changes can lead to big shifts in how one experiences life and work."

—Gabriella Mirabelli, CEO Anatomy &
Host Up Next Podcast

"Whether you are just getting started or changing careers, the beautiful lesson of this compelling book is the tiny intentional choices you make every day matter more than you think. This powerful little book will help you break down barriers, stand out and get the success you deserve every single day."

—Gloria Bell, Co-Founder, Women in Tech

"Where was this book when I was starting out my career? This would have reduced my learning curve by a decade. A concise, refreshing read that should be mandatory for those entering the 'real-world' that could use a hand, maybe even a left one."

—Scott Stratten, President, UnMarketing Inc,
Best Selling Author of 4 books, Left-Handed at Golf,
Baseball, Hockey

"In this engaging and easy-to-read book, Rohit lays out the secrets anyone can use to get ahead and make a big difference in their life and work - simply by being a little different from the rest!"

—Melanie Notkin, founder and bestselling author of *Savvy Auntie* and *Otherhood: Modern Women Finding a New Kind of Happiness*

"If you are tired of reading self-help books that try to teach you how to succeed by playing the same game as everyone else, this book offers a different approach. Like my in-person conversations over coffee with Rohit, this book will entertain and inspire you to be more intentional about how you find joy and success in every part of your life – and fulfillment through the journey you take to get there as well."

—Mallika Chopra, Author of *Living With Intent*

"If you are trying to build a compelling personal brand for yourself, this book will help you along that journey. Surprising, quirky and occasionally outrageous ... this is the most fun collection of career advice I have ever read."

—Porter Gale, Author of *Your Network Is Your Net Worth*

"Careers of the 21st century will require speed, multitasking and creativity. If I were 20 again, I would bet my success on advice from someone who has spent his life looking at future trends and non-obvious insights. That person is Rohit and that book is *Always Eat Left Handed*."

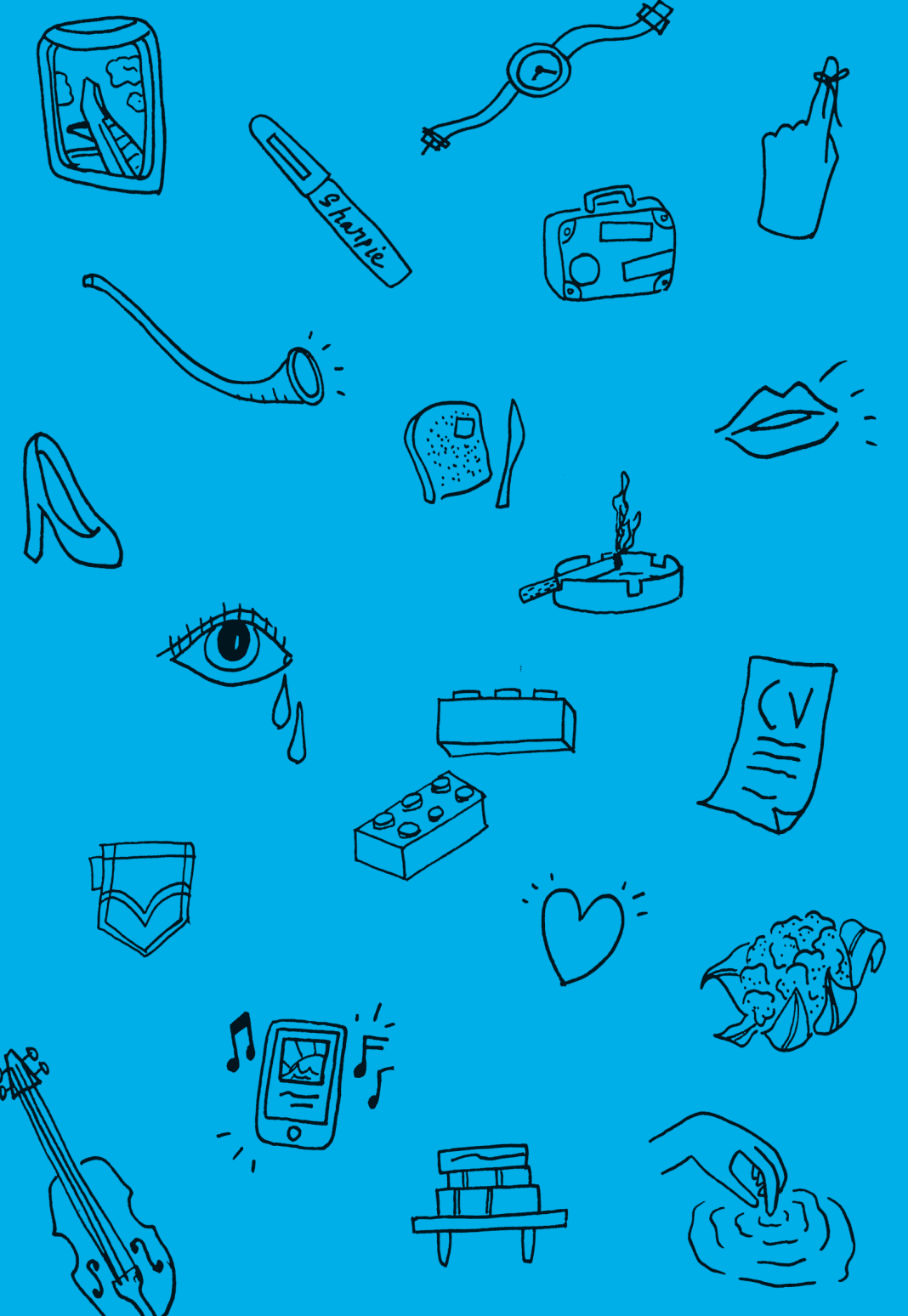
—Pamela Slim, author of *Body of Work* and *Escape from Cubicle Nation*

"Want to know the 5 simple steps that can change your life? Actually, they don't exist. Success isn't as easy as clickbait articles make it out to be. *Always Eat Left Handed* offers much more than that. When it comes to sharing the honest truth behind what it really takes to do great stuff at work, Rohit nails it. Are you tired of overpromising miracle cures and overhyped advice? This book is for you."

Mitch Joel, President of Mirum,
author of *Six Pixels of Separation* and *CTRL ALT Delete*

"This no-nonsense guide will help you make better decisions about your future and avoid the most common mistakes people have when they are first starting out in their careers."

—Dan Schawbel, New York Times bestselling author of *Promote Yourself* and *Me 2.0*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READ THIS FIRST

# Is This Book for You?

Let's talk about you. Right now you are building your career, or maybe you are still finishing school … and you're surrounded by people giving you well-intentioned advice. Parents, professors, teachers, mentors and even random connections on social media all have an idea of how to help you get what you want, do what you love or supercharge your career.

You are already a master of figuring stuff out and you know that watching a YouTube video is a lot faster than reading a book. You don't describe yourself with words that fit in a neat little drop down box or any box at all. And you are highly skeptical of any book (or anyone) who offers "secrets" for being successful.

So, what can a book tell you that you can't already get from a video or buried in some of the unsolicited advice flying your way? Why should you read *this* book and how do you know it won't be a waste of your time?

The answer is one word: *non-obviousness*.

This book is written to share the opposite of what your parents, teachers and professors and bosses have been probably been telling you for years.

In the pages that follow you'll learn why it's good to interrupt often, the upside of making people cry, why it pays to be a crossdresser, how procrastinating more is the key to success, why you should start smoking and more unexpected advice like that.

My guess is that the ideas in this book (much like the word I use to describe them), will confuse some people and make many others angry. I am betting that you will not be among them.

In fact, if you've made it this far—you're probably exactly who this book is written for. Or maybe you're still curious about why to eat left handed.

Either way, keep reading to find out …

INTRODUCTION

# Why Eat Left Handed?

This is not a book about being left handed.

It is curious, though, just how many successful people happen to share this one trait. Left-handedness may offer a distinct advantage in everything from creative thinking to a variety of sports from boxing to bowling.

More than 25% of professional baseball players either bat or pitch left handed. Three of the last five U.S. Presidents (including George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama) were all left handed. Lady Gaga, Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Oprah Winfrey and Jennifer Lawrence are all lefties too.

Despite only making up about 10% of the world's population, experts suggest that left-handers benefit from their uniqueness both in terms of being forced to stand out at an early age, as well as thinking differently.

In sports, the advantage is so well known that when dominant tennis legend Rafael Nadal (who is right handed) was younger, his father trained him to play left handed to get an advantage on other players.

If you happen to be left-handed, by now you're probably feeling pretty good about yourself. If you're not, don't worry … the truth is, I'm not either.

Wait a minute, what kind of author writes a book like this and starts it with all the reasons why being left handed is great when he is not even left-handed himself?

Though I am not left handed, I do actually *eat* left handed … and the story of why I do that will probably explain a lot.

## HOW I DISCOVERED THE MAGIC OF EATING LEFT HANDED

It all started several years ago as I was rushing to a networking event. In my busy haste that day, I realized I had skipped lunch. As I was walking to the event, I had already created a mental plan. I would head straight to the food table, load up a plate with finger foods and find a quiet spot to eat before starting to network.

Unfortunately, my plan immediately hit a wrinkle because there weren't really any quiet spots—so I joined what appeared to be a not-so-crowded standing table. I quickly realized that shaking hands to greet anyone would be a messy affair while eating so I switched to eat with my left hand.

That simple shift made shaking hands and meeting people much easier at that table, and for the rest of the evening as well. Heading home that night, I realized the conversations from that event had somehow been better than any other event I had been to in the past several months—but I wasn't sure why. It couldn't have been the fact that I was eating left handed, could it?

Unsure but curious, I decided to try eating left handed again the following week.

When you go to a lot of networking events (as I was doing those days as part of my job), or even a lot of parties at bars or clubs to meet new people, it can be intimidating to start a conversation. Though I would describe myself as an extrovert, I was never one of those people comfortable walking up to total strangers and randomly starting a conversation. Most people aren't—even if they pretend they are.

It was at that second networking event that I realized why my connections with people had been so much better.

Eating left handed helped me change my mindset. Instead of forcing myself to start conversations with a goal of collecting as many business cards as I could, I was able to step back and just be easier to talk to. I asked more questions and listened more intently. I was in less of an impatient rush. I invited new people into conversations and focused on others instead of myself.

In a room filled with people thinking about their agendas or selling their products or finding their next employer—I accidentally became the most approachable person in the room by focusing on others instead of myself.

Since that moment, always eating left handed has become my reminder to always be generous with my time and to focus on other people. It has helped me stand out for kindness and opened up more opportunities than I could have ever imagined. And it led me to write this book.

## HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

In the short chapters to come, you will read about fifteen more "secrets" like this one. Each of them is something you can do right now. You don't need special abilities to eat left handed. You don't even need *to be* left handed.

The aim of this book is to offer you a collection of approachable ideas you can use right away. It is a compilation of some of the hidden, counterintuitive, and sometimes baffling lessons that I have uncovered often by accident through a career that has included fifteen years working with some of the biggest companies in the world on branding and marketing, then walking away to start three successful businesses, write four best-selling books, travel to over thirty countries as a professional speaker, and work with some of the most inspiring and successful people in the world.

All the secrets are organized into four goals—to help you think, work, communicate and connect better—and they are shared here as a collection of stories.

If there is one theme that links them, it is that there is power in the tiny intentional choices you make every day—from what you wear to which hand you choose to eat with.

I believe making those choices deliberately can indeed help you kill it both at work (and even more importantly) in real life too.

CHAPTER 1

# The Pomegranate Principle

*"Whatever happens, I can't let them see the inside of my book."*

This wasn't what I expected to be thinking as I was getting ready for my first interview to launch my new book.

It was just weeks before *Personality Not Included* would go on bookstore shelves and already my months of planning were being pushed off track.

The day before, my publisher McGraw-Hill had sent me a sample of the dust jacket in advance of my planned book tour with a short apology that the *actual* book wasn't quite ready yet. I had a cover, no book, and my first big interview was in less than twelve hours.

I was starting to panic. Should I cancel? Try to reschedule? Do the interview without the book?

Finally, I had an idea. I started combing through my bookshelf to see if I had another book that was about the same thickness and dimensions as my soon-to-be-completed book. I found one and wrapped the jacket over top to see how it would look.

It was a perfect fit.

Almost immediately, my mind filled with all the worst-case scenarios. *What if I had to open the book during the interview? What if I had to read something from it?* I was already imagining a moment when my entire charade would be embarrassingly exposed for the online world to see.

Still, I decided to do the interview anyway.

The next day I showed up to the interview and proudly held up my book cover, fitted carefully on top of a worn copy of *Made to Stick*. I made it through the interview without my secret being exposed.

Many years (and interviews) later, I realized just how silly my concern had been. No one ever asks you to read from a business book during an interview. And no one, from a brief look, can tell that the interior of a book doesn't match the dust jacket anyway.

Of course, at the time I didn't know any of that and my problem felt monumental. Looking back, the "secret" to surviving that situation was self-confidence. The kind of self-confidence I had been sorely lacking nearly a decade earlier when I had what I not-so-fondly remember as the worst meeting of my life.

## HOW TO FAIL MISERABLY AT SELLING YOUR IDEA

The year was 1998 and I had an idea that I thought was going to change the fine dining industry. At the time, very few restaurants had a website and so I had come up with an idea to use the Internet to bring these restaurants into the 21st century (literally, since it was still two years until the year 2000!).[1]

My business model consisted of services (getting restaurants to pay me to build their websites) and media (creating an online directory of websites that would become the place for anyone to find a restaurant).

To start, I registered the domain name *www.dc-restaurants.com* for my directory and then started my efforts by going door to door in a part of Washington, D.C. called Georgetown to try and convince restaurant owners to pay me $200 to build their website. Everyone asked me the same question: "Why would any restaurant need a website?" It was, after all, still 1998.

After more than a dozen rejections, I decided to go to one restaurant and offer to build their website for free just so I could pretend I had a paying client and entice other restaurant owners to give me a chance. After I built that site, I listed it on my directory along with the handful of DC area restaurants who already had websites that I had found online. Then I visited a few more restaurants. Even *that* didn't work.

As a last-ditch effort before giving up, I had an idea.

What if I could convince the dominant Internet provider at the time to list my directory and drive traffic to it? Then I could show the restaurant owners how many people were visiting my site and all the potential customers they were missing. It seemed like the perfect plan to convert those skeptical restauranteurs.

Part of what inspired that plan was the convenient fact that the headquarters of America's biggest Internet provider at the time happened to be right down the road from where I lived. After several calls, I managed to get a meeting with one of their regional directors.

A few weeks later, I walked into the lobby of the provider, which was already better known by its acronym: AOL. My big meeting started with some quick small talk, after which the director listened to my description of *www.dc-restaurants.com* patiently. I talked about the vision for the site. I talked about what I wanted to do for restaurant owners. I talked about how *sure* I was that AOL users would be very interested in finding restaurants online.

After quietly listening to me ramble on for about ten minutes, he said politely, "I understand what we can do for you. What can *you* do for us?"

*Silence.*

I didn't say anything. I didn't invent anything. I didn't even move. I just sat there. I didn't have an answer because I didn't have enough confidence to recall all the work I had

done before.

Looking back, I realize there were plenty of things I *could* have said.

I could have mentioned the research I had seen about how more and more consumers were looking online for restaurants but that there was no directory of restaurants in our area yet. I could have told him about the few successful directories like mine that I had found in other cities which seemed to be thriving. I could have even told him about how I had researched AOL and knew they didn't have a directory like this one already.

Unfortunately, none of those facts came to mind, because I was too nervous. I failed because I didn't have the confidence or knowledge to be able to come up with a good answer to his reasonable question in the moment when I needed it.

After what seemed like an eternity, I finally said I would think about it and get back to him. I quietly thanked him for his time and escaped the room as quickly as I could. That was officially the worst business meeting of my life.

It would be easy for me to excuse my lack of confidence as a natural result of my age and inexperience. I used to think that if I had just been older and more experienced, perhaps I could have succeeded in that meeting.

Yet it seems like everywhere we look today, there are entrepreneurs who start billion-dollar overvalued "unicorn" companies and make the rest of us feel like underachievers,

no matter how old we are.

Is it possible that some people just seem to earn their self-confidence faster than others? And if so, what do they know that everyone else doesn't?

## THE POMEGRANATE PRINCIPLE

The answer comes from a fact you will quickly discover if you ever happen to search the Internet for advice on how to deseed a pomegranate. On the Internet, everyone seems to have a theory for the correct way to do this frustrating task.

The only thing all these self-declared experts agree on is the *wrong* way: slicing it in half and picking out the seeds individually. Instead, one popular video suggests cutting it in half and whacking the back of each half with a wooden spoon (highly entertaining but messy). Another illustrates how you could cut it into sixths and slowly peel it apart (precise but hard to do exactly right).

Finding divergent advice like this online is something we encounter often. The challenge is knowing which advice to follow.

> **The Pomegranate Principle:** In a world filled with conflicting advice, the ultimate skill is building and learning to trust your own intuition.

Intuition can seem like an example of a big complex thing that is hard to intentionally improve. It isn't.

The truth is, intuition is built from the tiny observations that we all make every day. When you get a "gut feeling," it is an example of your brain using a memory from your past to help explain the present. Scientists call this *pattern matching* and human brains are great at it.

That's why it pays to focus on the details—no matter how small or insignificant. What if tiny little "life hacks," like learning how to deseed a pomegranate, were the real secret to improving your intuition?

Life hacks like using club soda to soak up a red wine stain. Or turning on a seat heater to keep takeout food warm in your car. Or rubbing a walnut on damaged wood furniture.

In *Always Eat Left Handed*, you will read about fifteen simple but useful ideas like these. To organize them, the book is divided into four parts.

The first part is called **Think Better**. It is all about encouraging you to be more observant, invest in yourself and how to be resilient after failure. The second part is **Work Better** and focuses on how to succeed in the professional workplace. You will learn about why it matters to have professional empathy and integrity, and why job descriptions and being on time are both overrated.

After that, the third part of the book is all about how to **Communicate Better** and offers a deeper look at the

backstory behind my illogical disgust for cauliflower, why you should interrupt often and the power of simplifying and telling better stories. Finally, the fourth part includes ideas for how to **Connect Better**, including the unexpected benefits of cross-dressing and why you might *want* people to steal your ideas.

Each of the secrets is shared through the lens of a personal story, with minimal buzzwords and told as briefly as I could make it. For each, you will also get real actionable advice for how to put that idea to work in your personal or professional life, and why it matters.

When you are left handed, you are forced to see the world just a bit differently than other people. Regular everyday items like scissors or can openers just don't work for you.

Being left handed means you have to get better at finding your own solutions to life's tiny problems. That is a mentality we can all embrace, no matter which hand we happen to prefer.

So let's get started learning how to do it.

CHAPTER 2

# Be Forgetful

## THE SECRET: FIND YOUR RESILIENCE

The first time I had breakfast with Tim Ferriss, he was a guy about to launch a book that had been rejected by 26 publishers.

We first connected through an email he sent saying he was a reader of my blog and asking to have breakfast together at the SXSW Festival in Austin, Texas (which he knew I was speaking at). Amidst the chaos of that event, we found a window to have breakfast at the Hilton hotel across the street from the madhouse of the Convention Center.

That morning he was peppering me with questions about marketing and blogging and sharing his ideas for promoting his soon-to-be-released book.

A few months later, his book called *The 4-Hour Workweek* came out and performed better than anyone predicted. It catapulted to become a #1 bestseller and in the years since has sold more than 1 million copies.

The second time we had breakfast together, he had stayed the night at our house and we were talking about his unlikely rise to fame and what he was going to do next. That day, I remember admiring how he was able to see past his continual failures and achieve something great.

We love to hear stories like this: people fighting past their early failures to achieve big success.

British inventor James Dyson, the creator of the best-selling line of premium vacuum cleaners, famously failed in designing the proper level of suction for his cyclone-powered vacuum more than *five thousand* times before finally getting it right.[2]

When Harry Potter series creator J.K. Rowling was writing the first Harry Potter book, she was a single mother on welfare writing her book from cafes in Edinburgh, Scotland. Her manuscript was also rejected by multiple publishers before one finally took a chance on her.

The stories of successful people seem filled with plenty of failures and rejections like these along the way … but there is another side of these stories that you rarely hear about.

## WHAT THEY DON'T TELL YOU ABOUT FAILING

These big celebrated failures unfold over months and sometimes even years. They are memorable because of their duration and severity.

> In real life, most of the failures you will have are not the sort of thing you will want to celebrate ... or even admit.

What about the small *daily* failures that we have far more often? Failures like inadvertently posting that photo to Instagram without making sure there wasn't something embarrassing in the background. Or accidentally missing a deadline for work. Or not having the answer to a question you should have known.

These are the tiny embarrassing failures that weigh on our minds in the short term. When it comes to building your resilience overall, the real question is how can you train yourself to consistently overcome these types of setbacks, forget about them and move forward?

To answer that question, consider the extreme example of people who manage to survive in disastrous situations.

## HOW TO SURVIVE DISASTER

When faced with a life-threatening moment, adventure writer Laurence Gonzales estimates that about 90% of people freeze or panic. What makes the other 10% maintain their calm and ultimately survive?

Gonzales explores this fascinating question in his book *Deep Survival: Who Lives, Who Dies, And Why*. The thing that sets survivors apart, according to Gonzales, is that "they immediately begin to recognize, acknowledge, and even accept the reality of their situation. They move through denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance very rapidly."

There is plenty of science to support this idea that the ability to be resilient and overcome adversity has a lot to do with how quickly you can accept the reality of a situation instead of dwelling on what could or should have happened instead.

## THE ART OF CALM

Beyond acceptance, the next step toward real resilience is finding a way to remain calm. Gonzales also tells the story of interviewing former NASA psychologist Ephimia Morphew-Lu about the curious case of several scuba divers who had drowned despite having air in their tanks and working regulators.

Morphew, the founder of the *Journal of Human*

*Performance in Extreme Environments*, shared that after extensive study, researchers had finally concluded that the deaths were a result of an uncontrollable feeling of suffocation that some people feel when their mouths are covered.

This led victims to make the unintentionally suicidal choice to uncover their mouth and nose far under water and drown.

Panic literally killed the scuba divers.[3]

Being calmer in the face of adversity may not have such life and death implications—but when you add this skill to the ability to accept a situation and move on, you can become more resilient yourself in the face of almost any failure … no matter how extreme.

## HOW TO BE MORE RESILIENT

### TIP #1 - Shift Your Explanatory Style

Martin Seligman is a psychologist who is sometimes described as the "father of positive thinking" thanks to his lifelong mission to study, teach, and write about the relationship between optimism and pessimism and why people choose one or the other.

In his national bestseller *Learned Optimism*, he describes

one of the key differences between people who bounce back from adversity and those who don't in terms of their "explanatory style"—a term he uses to describe the way in which a person tends to explain situations in their mind.

If you challenged a group of people to draw a cat, for example, a person with a negative, pessimistic explanatory style might say or think "I can't draw anything," while a positive, resilient person might say "I'm not great at drawing a cat, but I *can* draw an amazing house."

Shifting your explanatory style to be positive and optimistic is within your control to do—and can have a big impact on your future success.

## Tip #2 - Be Low Maintenance

When someone has a lot of unreasonable demands or requires constant attention, they are labeled as "high maintenance." In the real world, unless you happen to be a highly-paid pop music star, it usually pays to be the opposite. Sometimes when someone treats you dismissively or without the respect you think you deserve, it is not about you.

Feeling overwhelmed can make us all behave badly or slight someone without intending to. If someone doesn't return your message, choose to follow up with kindness instead of accusations. Most of us are just doing the best we

can and many times the thing *you* need just won't be at the top of someone else's to do list. Get over it and try instead to have more empathy for someone else's situation.

## Tip #3 - Don't Mention It (for Real)

When you hold a grudge or dwell on a string of failures, the usual way that it comes up over time is through minor comments or remarks mentioning it in passing that demonstrate how much you have *not* forgotten about it and have not moved on. To fight against that, make a mental commitment that once you have publicly shared that you are "over it"—you will not mention "it" anymore—even in small side comments.

This commitment is the ultimate self-fulfilling prophecy. In other words, once you make the mental commitment to not mention it, you will end up really getting over it much more quickly. Of course, this doesn't mean avoiding a problem—so if something is unresolved, you need to face it head on first … *then* you can actually move on and not mention it.

CHAPTER 6

# Ignore Your Job

## THE SECRET: DELIVER WHAT THEY DON'T ASK FOR

Most people writing a job description start with the same sad first steps: a Google search followed by lots of cutting and pasting. The reason is simple: writing a job description is hard. Even people who spend all day recruiting and interviewing job candidates generally hate writing job descriptions. It's hard to fit everything in. Yet no matter how long or detailed a job listing seems, one thing has always been true … no one ever hired anyone hoping they would ONLY do what was listed in their job description.

Your job description is not a finish line, it is a starting line.

Yes, you do need to do your job. And whether that "job" involves working for someone else, or even launching your own startup, there are bound to be some things you don't enjoy doing or think you are overqualified for.

The biggest chances you will have to prove yourself hardly ever fit into the thin confines of your job description. Instead, they will challenge you to do something you never imagined you would need to do. Something like standing very, very still for an extended period.

## THE TIME I (SORT OF) MET AL GORE

Several years ago I had the chance to attend the first edition of a now annual event called the Future of Storytelling. It was an elite audience and I was there with the CEO of the company I was working for at the time to help him present on the art of storytelling. I had worked for weeks on learning his presentation and he had promised to give me the chance to present a few slides alongside him for the first time.

Our session was hosted in a small room with an A-list participant list of only about twenty-five people, including former U.S. Vice President Al Gore. Unfortunately, the projector available in the room was not working and my CEO had a highly visual presentation with lots of slides.

The only improvised solution we had was for him to present directly from his laptop. That could work because of the small size of the room … but there was another problem.

We were minutes away from our scheduled start time and there was no chair or table high enough to place the laptop on so most people could see it.

In an instant, my "job" was clear. I would have to hold his laptop up for forty-five minutes so he could present. Unfortunately, that would make co-presenting awkward and probably impossible … and so my big chance to present had vanished.

Rather than focusing on myself, though, I did what I had to do to make that presentation work. At the time, I was disappointed. Looking back, I realized the lesson in humility that I also learned that day. You're never too important to do what it takes to get the job done … even if it means posing as a human table for forty-five minutes.

## BRINGING LATTES TO AMERICA

One of the best examples of ignoring a job description comes from the founding story of a brand many of us interact with daily. In the 1970s, a salesman named Howard Schultz was leading a team at a Swedish company selling housewares when he got an unusually large order for drip coffeemakers. The order piqued his curiosity and he decided to travel to Seattle to meet with the tiny coffee shop owners who had placed the order—Gerald Baldwin and Gordon Bowker.

Over the course of the next year, Schultz steadily worked to convince them both to hire him as the director of marketing,

and finally in 1982 he moved to Seattle and joined the team at the small coffee shop known as Starbucks. Only a year after starting, Schultz visited Italy on what has now become part of the legend of the founding of Starbucks. It was there he realized that coffee shops could be meeting points for a community and that the idea of Italian-style coffee drinks like the latte and espresso might be popular in the U.S. as well.

Inspired, he came back to Seattle and convinced the founders to start selling those drinks. He felt the future of the brand could be huge, but the owners worried that expanding would mean losing the individuality of Starbucks, so Schultz left in 1986 to start his own coffee chain called Il Giornale. A year later Baldwin and Bowker put the Starbucks brand up for sale and Schultz immediately got a loan to buy it.[5]

The story of Schultz and his outsized vision for that tiny chain of coffee shops in Seattle is one that some of you might have heard before. Starbucks is clearly a huge success story, with more than 21,000 stores in 65 countries and a current market value of more than $70 billion. Yet if you look at Schultz's unlikely path toward CEO of one of the world's most valuable brands, there is a clear pattern of never being constrained by his job title.

When he was leading a sales team, he took a pay cut for half his salary at the time to join Starbucks. When he was leading marketing for Starbucks, he wanted to expand rapidly

and ended up leaving to become an entrepreneur and start his own coffee shop. And when he came back to buy the brand, he promised his investors he would open at least 100 new stores in his first five years of business (which he did easily).

You might look at a successful entrepreneur like Schultz and think that his story is unique, but the lessons behind it are ones you can use to propel your own career and life forward too. He refused to be defined by his job title at any point in his career, no matter how good the job might have been. You don't have to start a multibillion-dollar company to have that same mindset. It all starts with choosing to be more than the title on your business card and thinking beyond your role.

## HOW TO DELIVER WHAT THEY DIDN'T ASK

### Tip #1 - Understand the Real Need

There are usually two sides to a task that someone asks you to do: the task itself and the underlying need behind it. Professional organizational consultants, for example, understand that often they will be called by someone who is suffering from feeling overloaded by the things that they own. The solution, in that person's mind, is to get a better organizational system to store their stuff.

What great organizers understand, though, is that usually the problem is only *partially* based on a lack of organization. Instead, what people really need is to form new *habits* along with a new organizational system. The key to getting organized is training yourself to stick to a system that you develop—otherwise, that overwhelming feeling will just come back when the disarray inevitably builds up again.

## Tip #2 - Make It Better

Improving on something before delivering it is a key element of going above and beyond what is asked. There will be plenty of times in your career when you are asked to just "get it done." I remember one such time when I was living in Australia and had been asked last minute to assist a visiting American colleague to organize her presentation to our Sydney office.

As part of helping review her slides, I changed the spelling of various words such as *color* into *colour* because the Aussies use British spelling conventions. She hadn't asked me to do it, but she noticed. Can you get in trouble for doing more than you're asked? Of course. Is it worth it? In my case, it was.

The next time an opportunity came along to collaborate with the U.S. office, she specifically offered me the first chance to work on it because I had demonstrated to her in that small moment that I would always be thinking about making something better instead of just doing what I was told to do.

## Tip #3 - Rewrite Your Job Description

People are hired based on job descriptions all the time out of necessity, but that doesn't mean a weak or incomplete description of your job should hold you back from doing your best work. Rather than wait for your performance review or some other scheduled moment for evaluating your performance, take some time and rewrite your job description *on purpose*.

Consider what you're doing that you shouldn't be, and what you would like to be doing *more* of in an ideal world. Then write it down on paper. The next time you do have a meeting to discuss your role, doing this will give you a clearer picture of how to direct the conversation. After all, the most qualified person to write your job description is you … *after* you've already been doing the job.

CHAPTER 7

# Never Serve Burnt Toast

## THE SECRET: HAVE INTEGRITY WHEN NO ONE IS LOOKING

There was a time when I thought my job was to deliver toast as quickly as possible.

I had just graduated from college and was working as a waiter in a popular downtown café in Washington, D.C. At the time I was holding down two jobs while I studied for my master's degree. Waiting tables was the one I loved. It involved more personal interaction with new people every day and was way more exciting than my other desk-bound job. I was also better at it.

At the time, I didn't realize just how much working in a restaurant would teach me about relating to people … particularly angry ones. Specifically, I remember this one irate customer who taught me a lifelong lesson after I made a big mistake with her order.

## MY TOUGHEST CUSTOMER

I never asked her name, but I can still picture her face. That morning she was clearly not having a good day. She was alone, on her phone talking about something that was clearly only important in Washington, D.C.—like an upcoming vote on some obscure bill that hardly anyone had ever heard of.

I guessed that she was a lobbyist. Not wanting to interrupt, I was watching her out of the corner of my eye while taking care of my other tables but had not gone up to take her order yet. That was my first mistake.

When she was finally off her call, she was already annoyed. "I've been sitting here for like half an hour!" she said. "Are you my waiter?"

I nodded and tried to be friendly. She seemed to warm up a bit and ordered an omelet with toast. Then she pulled some papers out of her bag and started to look over them.

I placed her order in the system. If I had the breakfast shift, many of the meals I served included toast. Every once in a while that toast would come out a little "extra crispy" on one side.

A common trick my fellow waiters and I used was to flip the toast over so the better-looking side was presented face-up. We assumed most people would never know the difference.

My annoyed lobbyist customer that day was not one of those people. I knew I had made my second and much bigger mistake the moment I put that toast down. She picked it up, turned it over and then she looked at me.

Not wanting to get yelled at, I quickly offered to get her a new plate of toast … anticipating what she was about to say. Realizing that yelling at me probably wasn't a good use of her time, she instead asked me a question I will never forget: "If you knew it was burnt, why did you give it to me?"

It would have taken me an extra minute to wait for a different plate of toast and serve her non-burnt toast instead of just flipping one slice over. But I didn't.

As you can probably guess, I didn't get much of a tip on that meal.

What I remember more than that is the fact that I missed the chance to do what I knew was right instead of what I knew was easy. I missed a chance to have integrity when no one was looking over my shoulder and demanding it.

## WHAT IF NO ONE IS LOOKING?

How many times in our lives do we get the chance to take the easy way out? More than we probably realize. Most of us don't go through life with security cameras watching our every move. And even if we did, choosing *not* to be lazy or selfish isn't always an easy thing to do.

Several months ago, I contracted with a small company and handyman to do some construction work. I asked him to start and paid my deposit. Just a day later, I was doing some research online and discovered that there was a special

rebate offer on one of the materials that the contractor had recommended and we had already approved. I assumed he knew about it and planned to keep the rebate for himself.

Before I could ask about it, I got an unsolicited email about it from the contractor. The email shared a link to the rebate and promised that after he purchased the materials and received it, he planned to give me a credit for half of it. I wasn't expecting him to share any of it, much less tell me about it. Most contractors wouldn't.

His short-term choice to do business with integrity cost him half of the rebate—about $200. Yet I was so impressed with the experience, that I have told more than a dozen people about it and already helped him get at least two more large projects.

His choice to do business with integrity brought more referrals and trust.

## HOW TO HAVE MORE INTEGRITY

### Tip #1 - Share the Unexpected Truth

There are some truths we expect. You can't lie about the degree you earned in school or about where a product you are selling was made. But we don't often expect to hear someone *proactively* tell the truth—especially in a sales situation.

For example, we don't expect the mechanic to tell us how much he *actually* makes after he charges us for a job. What if he did? That kind of honesty would stand out—and it is the perfect example of the power of sharing the truth before anyone forces you to. When you can find the courage to share things that your competitors or other colleagues don't, then you can stand apart based on your unprompted honesty.

## Tip #2 - Do What You Say You Will Do

During conversation, most of us tend to make lots of promises. We promise we will introduce one person to another. We promise we will get back to someone on a request they shared. We set professional deadlines for ourselves. Integrity is doing what you say you will do—and this applies to even the most basic of promises.

When I suggest that I can make a connection for someone, I always do it. If I promise to share the name of a great book with someone after mentioning it, I make a point of sending a follow-up note with the name and a link to buy it. The point is, being "world class" at following up is one way to do what you say, and something any of us can get better at doing more routinely.

## Tip #3 - Put Your Name on It

Unlike many other professors, when I give my students a writing assignment, I never give them a minimum required length. Instead, I ask them to give me a well-thought-out and well-written piece on the assigned topic—as long as they need for it to be. If they can address the topic of the week in a powerful and compelling way with one sentence, I invite them to do it.

The one thing I do insist upon, though, is that they put their name on it and publish their assignment publicly on our class blog. This transparency means every other student in the class can read it too—and I grade them publicly on a 1 to 5 scale through a comment on their post.

My reason for this is to underscore one of the most basic truths about the Internet: that everything you share online reflects your reputation. By putting their name on it, my students are making a promise that they stand behind their work, and that usually means they try harder to deliver great writing and thinking.

I'm still hoping one of them delivers that perfectly crafted one sentence response. So far, no one has.

CHAPTER 17

# Why Most Good Advice Is Useless

If there were a step-by-step guide on how to write a book about being successful, one of the requirements would probably be to have at least one chapter on the power of making mistakes. Successful people love to romanticize mistakes and the lessons they offer about life in and out of the office.

This is not a book about failing more often or even making more mistakes to fuel your learning. If anything, you could describe it as a book about *avoiding* mistakes.

## WHY MISTAKES ARE OVERRATED

But wait a minute—aren't making mistakes an important part of becoming successful? Most people will tell you so. In fact, one of the places where you hear this shared most is during commencement speeches.

If you watch YouTube videos of popular commencement speeches delivered to graduating high school or college seniors every year, you'll quickly encounter four generic pieces of advice which are shared over and over again:

1. Take risks.
2. Never give up.
3. Do what you love.
4. Make mistakes.

What if there were times when each of these turned out to be extraordinarily *bad* advice?

Take risks, for example. Risks can be necessary and powerful unless they are predictably dumb wastes of money or time.

Giving up, though often underappreciated, is one of the great skills of life when you learn how to do it strategically.

> Doing what you love sounds nice, but one of the best ways to kill your passion for something is to force yourself to pay your rent immediately by doing it.

And then we come to the advice about mistakes. At least the other three points are positive. They ask you to dream bigger.

Encouraging someone to make mistakes seems to go in the opposite direction. Why would anyone *want* to make more mistakes?

## ALL MISTAKES AREN'T CREATED EQUAL

Of course, the reason successful people tell you that making mistakes is important is because they tend to remember the big ones they have made and where they led to. Yet no one gives a speech or writes a book about the seemingly stupid, microscopic mistakes we make that ruin our day or our week. Those are the ones that cause us to scratch our heads afterward and wonder how we could have been so dumb.

For example, the first time I was invited to go to Brazil to deliver a talk, I was very excited. It was one of the countries I had longed to visit for years and finally, I had my chance. The day of my flight I showed up to the airport only to realize that I had neglected to get a travel visa or even check that I needed one. The airline did not let me board, I missed my event and I looked like an idiot. Even worse, I had to forfeit my speaking fee and had disappointed my clients. *That* was dumb.

As you might imagine, the experience trained me to check multiple times on visa requirements for any new city before I travel … but I wish I never had to learn the lesson that way. I would much rather have learned the way I did in my first real job managing web projects in Australia.

## WHAT PROJECT MANAGEMENT CAN TEACH YOU ABOUT LIFE ...

As a project manager leading a team of designers and programmers to build complicated websites, I quickly learned there are two words that matters more than any others: *deadlines* and *dependencies*.

Everyone tends to focus on deadlines, but dependencies are what really control your timeline. Every task on a project usually has other tasks that must be completed first. We couldn't build a homepage, for example, until the design was done and approved. If the design was delayed, the homepage would be delayed. That's a dependency.

Now imagine that you have a project with five hundred different tasks spread out across a team of a dozen people, each with dependencies to other tasks. It gets complicated quickly. Especially if you are managing multiple projects.

I quickly learned that none of the other project managers ever created an entirely new timeline for every project. Instead, they showed me how to start with a previous project timeline—and then add or subtract tasks to customize it for your latest project.

Real life is a bit like this. We are always working to build out our own knowledge much like these templates … with ideas and advice and life hacks. Which brings me back to the one problem left handers know well but most of the rest of us never think about.

## A FINAL LESSON FROM LEFT HANDERS

When you write in English, you are writing from left to right. The problem for a leftie is that you end up smudging your writing if you use certain types of ink on certain types of paper. It is exactly the kind of small problem that only left handers know or care about.

There are many solutions lefties have developed for this frustratingly common problem. Some train themselves to write letters at a different angle to change the position of their wrist. Others slant their paper the opposite direction. One enterprising entrepreneur even invented a wearable writing glove called the "SmudgeGuard."

And then there are the left handers who skip all the fuss and just use a pencil. More than anything, this is a book about thinking like them.

AFTERWORD

# Why This Book Took 4 Years to Write...

The first time I wrote this book, it took almost exactly three weeks. I put it online for free and over 20,000 people downloaded it.

Then I figured I should probably make *some* money on it, so I made the new price 99 cents for the ebook and another 5,000 people downloaded it. That was 2013.

Then I let it sit online for nearly four years.

When I came back to it, I realized just how much more I needed to do. The book felt unfinished. It bothered me that it wasn't as good as I knew it could be.

So I spent the past year revising, rewriting, expanding and editing. While stopping and starting, I wrote and published another book (my annual edition of *Non-Obvious*), but kept returning to this manuscript.

You hear a lot of things described as a "labor of love." Truthfully, the labor that went into rewriting this book was probably half love and half desperate necessity. It just really needed it.

The book you now hold in your hands is about 30% longer than the original with many entirely new sections. The secrets have been completely reorganized into four parts and the tips have been updated, rewritten and edited.

I share all this background to firstly explain why you might find multiple versions of this book online and also why the book says "New Updated Edition" on the cover.

It was a thrill to write this book and get it out four years ago.

It is an even bigger thrill to finally have the chance to rewrite it and say everything I wished I took the time to say the first time around.

Second chances can be a beautiful thing. I hope after reading the book, you will agree.

# 3 Reasons To Share This Book

Now that you've reached the official end of the book, I would like to offer a short pitch with three quick reasons why you should take these 15 secrets and bring them to your friends, family, workplace or school.

## Reason #1: You Can Be The Connector

Books can offer a powerful credibility boost. Dumb people skim headlines. Smart people read books. The smartest people are the ones who introduce others to books and make connections. You can build your reputation as a person like that, and sharing books like this one can help.

## Reason #2: You Can Elevate The Assholes

It is almost impossible to be happy in work or life if you are surrounded by assholes. Sometimes the ideas in a book can

make a point or connection that you cannot. And assholes, unlike idiots, may be just as likely as you to read a book. If you're lucky, this might be the book that inspires them to be kinder, which will make the time you're forced to spend with them more bearable too.

## Reason #3: You Can Help Me Make Money

Ok, I realize this is not particularly important to you, but my day job involves doing consulting and speaking … and I love to help people and get paid for it. If you enjoyed this book, I guarantee you would enjoy working with me too. If that sounds like it might have value at your workplace, please get in touch with me directly and we can talk about how to make it happen – and how to make you a rock star for suggesting it in the first place.

# How to Stay Curious

Now that you've read the book, I have a few suggestions for how you can keep up your sense of curiosity.

The first step is choosing to consume media and stories that are not served up by algorithms or shared by friends on social media. True curiosity involves digging past this and choosing to see more.

I spend about six hours every week reading stories and headlines from several hundred different international news sources. This ritual is part of my annual process to curate trends for my book *Non-Obvious* which is published every December … but it is also the way that I stay informed on all kinds of topics.

Of course, I realize that most of you probably don't have as much motivation as I do to build this much time for reading and research into your usual weekly schedule.

Beyond the book, every week I also share between five and seven interesting underappreciated business stories of the week along with a short note about the significance of each and a link to the full story.

I collect these "Non-Obvious Insights" into a weekly email that goes out every Thursday morning. If this seems interesting, I would welcome you to join my list of more than ten thousand curious readers.

**To sign up, just visit**
***www.rohitbhargava.com/subscribe***

A FINAL REALITY CHECK

# IS THIS BOOK SERIOUS?

YOU MIGHT BE THINKING AFTER READING THE TABLE OF CONTENTS or the cover description that some of the "secrets" shared in this book are being presented sarcastically.

When I advise you to start smoking or be a cross dresser or interrupt more often—I must be exaggerating, right?

I am not.

But if you are thinking that, I am guessing that you probably haven't read the book yet and just skipped directly to this section out of curiosity. That's ok—I would probably do the same thing.

So just to be clear: I am indeed serious about every single secret I share here and have specifically chosen the way they are presented because I want entice you to dig into the stories behind them.

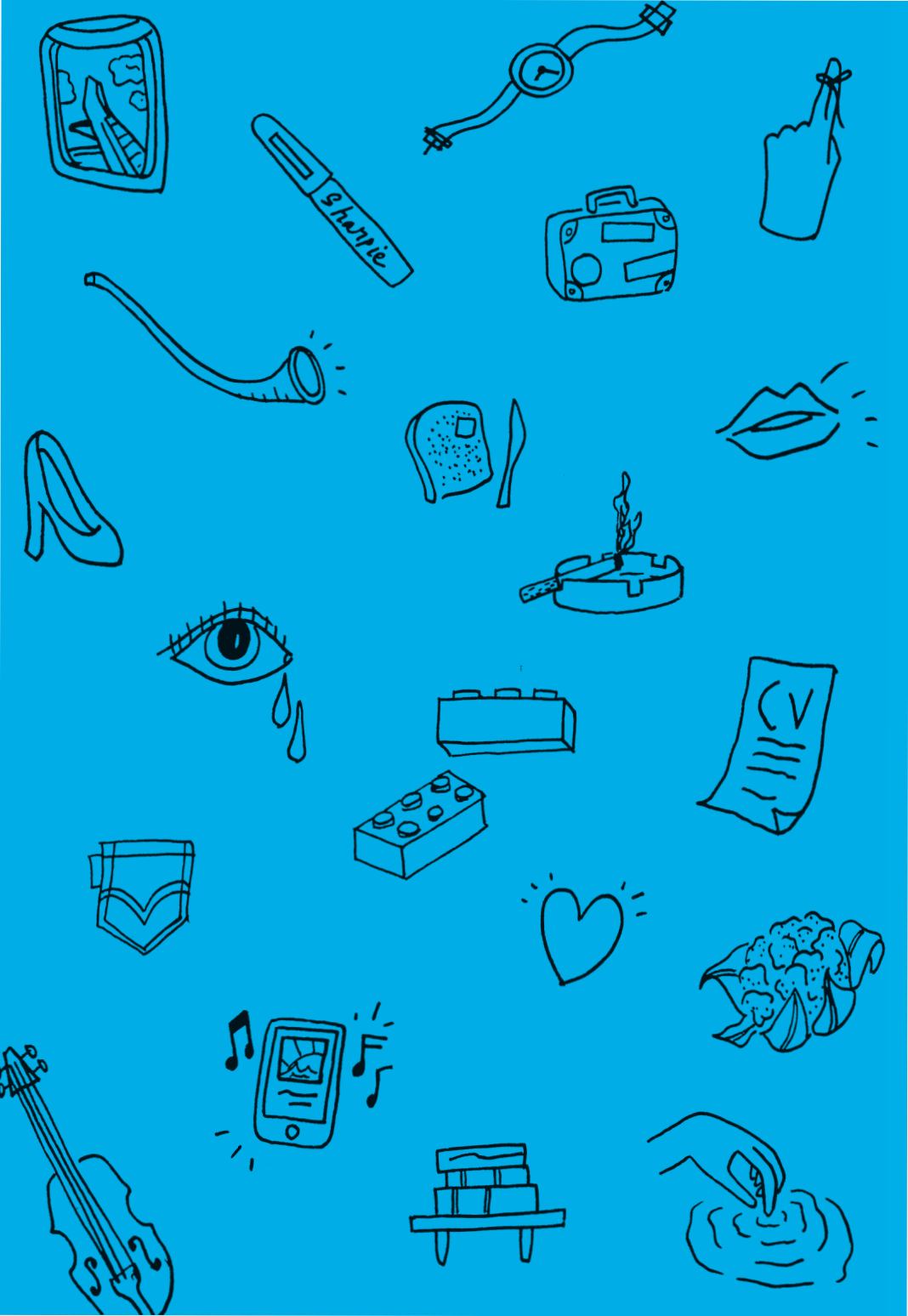
Any well-meaning advice book can tell you to do what you love or have more self-confidence. None will tell you about the upside of learning to interrupt more often. Or that cross-dressing *does* improve your empathy. Or that telling better stories *will* make more people cry.

These are all good things.

So now that you know the stories and secrets in this book are serious, I hope you will go back and read it. Consider this a sort of introduction to the book, put at the end for those impatient souls who will skip to the end of a book and read that first.

I know you jumped here because I'm just like you. And if we already have that in common, my guess is you'll find much more in the book that we share as well. There's only one way to find out.

Take some time and read it.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