

# DO MORE GREAT WORK

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Stop the Busywork.  
Start the Work  
That Matters.

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BY MICHAEL BUNGAY STANIER

“A coaching genius . . .” Tim Hurson, author of *Think Better*

“This  
little book  
is a  
dynamo.”

—MARSHALL  
GOLDSMITH,  
author of  
*What Got You Here  
Won't Get You There*

# **Do More Great Work.**

Stop the busywork, and start the work that matters.

MICHAEL BUNGAY STANIER

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*To my outstanding nieces and nephews—Mathilde, Harper, George, Seamus,  
and Hendrix—and to my godson, Finlay, and goddaughter, Stella.*

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## FOREWORD

### Here's the Challenge

**You spend more than half your life at work. And you want your work to make an impact and have a purpose, to be more than just a salary. You want to make it count.**

But that keeps getting lost. You know you could be doing more work that's meaningful for you and useful for your organization—yet somehow all the other stuff keeps getting in the way.

So how do you do more of the work that engages and stretches you—so you continue to grow and don't get stuck in a rut? How do you increase your personal contribution—so your work actually has an impact? How do you play to your strengths—so you're doing what you're best at? In short, how do you do more of the work that makes a difference and makes you happy, and less of all that other stuff that somehow fills your working day?

Right now it's not that easy to do Great Work. We're stretched to capacity, and we spend our time rushing from meeting to meeting, just trying to process the tasks coming our way. Technology keeps us overconnected and ever busy, as if *busy* were somehow a measure of success. The ebb and flow of the economy makes us feel less certain about the future, so we cling to what we know, as if that were all it takes to be secure.

This book is the sum of my work with thousands of people around the world as a coach and a facilitator. It uses just fifteen key tools—conceptual maps to help you identify what really matters to you, what drives the choices and the actions you take, and how you can get onto a path to more creative, motivated, and inspired work that's good for you and good for those you work for. The exercises are simple, quick to do, and deeply practical, and they help you focus on a Great Work Project so you can do more Great Work. Throughout the book you'll also find Great Work thoughts from smart people. And not just any smart people. Leo Babauta writes the world's most popular productivity blog, Dave Ulrich is a leading HR guru, Chris Guillebeau is a champion for the art of nonconformity, Tim Hurson is an innovation whiz, Michael Port's a business marketing guru, Penelope Trunk leads a tribe for Gen Y at work, and Seth Godin writes quite possibly the best business books in the world. These contributions are like Pop Rocks candy for your brain—each one fizzes and stimulates and delights.

You don't need a coach or a shrink or a consultant or a weekend retreat to figure out how to do more Great Work. You just need a pen, some paper, and a little bit of time to get clear on what matters and to build your own plan to do it. You also need to say, "It's time"—and get going.

Have more impact. Make more of a difference. Be happier. Do more Great

Work.

Warm wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Michael Bungay Stanier

## **PART 1**

# **Laying the Foundation**

Introduction: Before You Get Going . . .

Coaching Insight: Six Great Work Paradoxes

**MAP 1** Where Are You Now?

Toward Abundance *by Dave and Wendy Ulrich*

## INTRODUCTION

### Before You Get Going . . .

**If you don't know where you're starting from, it can be tough to get to where you want to go.**

Most of this book is dedicated to getting you on a path to doing more Great Work. But before that happens, let's spend just a moment or two figuring out where you are now.

We're going to start by having a close look at exactly what Great Work is. I don't want you feeling that Great Work is beyond your reach, that it's only for people who already have a deep sense of mission, who have reached enlightenment, or who are somehow extraordinary. Everyone can do more Great Work.

In this section, I'm going to explain why I call the exercises "maps" and share four tips that will help you use them to their full effect. Then I'm going to suggest three things you can do before you embark on the process that will make it easier to succeed. And finally I'll share the first of the fifteen maps. This initial map sets the scene by helping you figure out how much Great Work you're doing now—something that's useful to know before you set out on a journey to do more of it.

### JUST WHAT IS (AND ISN'T) GREAT WORK?

Graphic designer Milton Glaser started this ball rolling for me. Even if you've never heard of him, you probably know his most famous creation: I LOVE NEW YORK.

His book *Art is Work* is mainly a collection of his design work, but he opens it with a curious and powerful insight. He says everything we do falls into three basic categories:



**Bad Work • Good Work • Great Work.**

### YOU ALREADY KNOW WHAT THESE CATEGORIES MEAN

Over the years, I've asked thousands of people at hundreds of different organizations what these categories mean to them. Intuitively, they know—and their answers can be summed up like this:

**Bad Work**

Bad Work is a waste of time, energy, and life. Doing it once is one time too many. This is not something to be polite about. It's not something to be resigned to. This is work that is pointless.

Sadly, organizations have a gift for generating Bad Work. It shows up as bureaucracy, interminable meetings, outdated processes that waste everyone's time, and other ways of doing things that squelch you rather than help you grow.

### **Good Work**

Good Work is the familiar, useful, productive work you do—and you likely do it well. You probably spend most of your time on Good Work, and there's nothing wrong with that. Good Work blossoms from your training, your education, and the path you've traveled so far. All in all, it's a source of comfort, nourishment, and success.

There's a range of Good Work: At one end it's engaging and interesting work; at the other, it is more mundane but you recognize its necessity and are happy enough to spend some time doing it.

You always need Good Work in your life. At an organizational level, Good Work is vital. It is a company's bread and butter—the efficient, focused, profitable work that delivers next quarter's returns.

### **Great Work**

Great Work is what we all want more of. This is the work that is meaningful to you, that has an impact and makes a difference. It inspires, stretches, and provokes. Great Work is the work that matters.

It is a source of both deep comfort and engagement—often you feel as if you're in the “flow zone,” where time stands still and you're working at your best, effortlessly. The comfort comes from its connection, its “sight line,” to what is most meaningful to you—not only your core values, and beliefs, but also your aspirations and hopes for the impact you want to have on the world.

But Great Work is also a place of uncertainty and discomfort. The discomfort arises because the work is often new and challenging, and so there's an element of risk and possible failure. Because this is work that matters, work that you care about, you don't want it to fail. But because it's new and challenging, there's a chance that it might.

For organizations, Great Work drives strategic difference, innovation, and longevity. Often it's the kind of inventive work that pushes business forward, that leads to new products, more efficient systems, and increased profits.

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All great deeds and all great thoughts  
have a ridiculous beginning. Great works  
are often born on a street corner or in a  
restaurant's revolving door.

## SO FAR, SO GOOD

Those are three fairly straightforward definitions. You're probably nodding your head and thinking, "Yep, I get that." But how do you get the balance right? What's your perfect mix?

The truth is there is no perfect mix. Finding the right mix between your Good Work and Great Work (with no Bad Work) is the practice of a lifetime. And even if you do find a harmonious balance now, it will change. The best mix for this year won't be right twelve months later.

A number of factors account for this:

1. **Great Work decays.** Over time, Great Work decays into Good Work. As Great Work becomes comfortable and familiar as you master it, it no longer provides the challenge, stretch, or rewards it once did. Your Great Work of today won't be your Great Work five years from now.

The iPod syndrome kicks in. Remember how special iPods were when they first arrived on the scene? Now everyone has one, and they're taken for granted.

2. **Good Work has its attractions.** Even as we hunger for more Great Work, we're always drawn back to the comfort of Good Work. It's a perpetual tension—the challenge, risk, and reward of the Great against the familiarity, efficiency, and safety of the Good.

3. **Different years demand different responses.** Some years are "stretch" years when you go for it; others are years to conserve your strength, gathering ideas and laying the groundwork for your next initiative. This ebb and flow reminds me of an anniversary card I once saw that read, "Thanks for 20 great years . . . 7 average years . . . and 2 absolute stinkers."

But here's one thing I bet you've never said: "I have too much Great Work." Because no one says, "My life's just too interesting, too stimulating, too engaging, too fulfilling, too provocative. . . ." No one says, "I don't want to do more Great Work."

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I have an existential map. It has "You are here" written all over it.

STEVEN WRIGHT

In fact whatever your mix might currently be, almost inevitably you're hungry for more Great Work. And that's how these fifteen maps can help.

## THE POWER OF MAPS

In this book, there are fifteen tools that will help you find and do more Great Work. They're designed to reveal how you're working now, help you decide what you'd like to do differently, and instill the energy, drive, and confidence you need to do something about it. I call them maps for two reasons:

**Maps help you ask and answer questions.** We live in a culture that makes us do, do, do, with an emphasis on moving forward without really considering our path. Maps encourage us to stop and ask deep, powerful questions, like:

- ▶ Where am I?
- ▶ How did I get here?
- ▶ Where am I going?
- ▶ Is there a better route?
- ▶ Could there be a different destination?

Maps don't just provide a new view of the landscape. They can also be a pause button in disguise. And sometimes taking some time to size things up is the most important thing you can do.

**Maps help you take action.** They provoke you to make some fundamental choices that become the basis for action.

- ▶ Do I keep going?
- ▶ Do I stop?
- ▶ Do I take a new direction?

With the new perspective that a map brings, it's impossible not to make choices and do something—even if you choose to “keep on keepin' on” or even to do nothing for now.

## FOUR TIPS TO HELP YOU MAKE THE MOST OF THE MAPS

**1. Make the maps yours.** Another reason maps are powerful is because they demand interaction from the person using them. The maps in this book are useless without your input. It is the information you bring to each that will make it relevant and timely for you.

The maps aren't static. You can (and should) revisit each one. You'll likely discover that it will have changed. The map you create in August will be different from the one you do in January. In fact, revisiting the maps is in

itself a useful exercise, as it can offer new perspectives as well as help you track your progress in doing Great Work.

- 2. Find five minutes in your day.** The good news is that you don't need to go on a three-day retreat to find the time to do these exercises. While there's deep thinking and theory behind the maps, they're also designed so you can work with each of them in five minutes or less. After all, most maps are designed to impart practical information in a quick, accessible way.

All you need is a pen, a sheet of paper, and the willingness to take a few minutes to think about what matters to you. If you do, then this book will give you structures and insights with which to do more Great Work. So while you're eating lunch, waiting for a teleconference to start, or riding the train back home, pick up the book and play with a map. (You can of course spend as long as you'd like working on the maps. There's certainly a benefit to giving yourself some real time to reflect on Great Work.)

- 3. Use the maps in the order that makes sense to you.** There's a method to how the maps are arranged.

The first map helps establish where you are now and how much Great Work you're doing. Maps 2, 3, and 4 help you figure out what might be Great Work for you. Maps 5, 6, and 7 shift the focus from you to where the opportunities lie to do more Great Work. Map 8 guides you in choosing a Great Work project and 9, 10, and 11 help you expand the possibilities you have before you and then evaluate them in anticipation of taking action. Maps 12, 13, and 14 launch you into your Great Work and help you to determine the next steps necessary for moving forward. The very last map keeps you on track when the going gets rough.

The maps are designed to build on each other so you can work through them systematically and end up with a specific plan to do more Great Work. But really, how you use them is entirely up to you. Feel free to pick and choose. Find a map that seems to answer your immediate need, fill it out, and see where it leads you. No matter what order you do them in, I'd encourage you to work through them all at some point.

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Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it.

*STEVE JOBS*

**4. Don't worry about getting it perfect.** You may have heard that when ancient mapmakers ran up to the very edge of the known world, they would write *Hic sunt dracones*, or “Here there be dragons.” While that occurs far more in fantasy novels than it does in actual cartography, what is true is that in filling out the maps, you *will* run up against the edges of what you know and what you can anticipate. You won't always (or ever) have all the information and be able to map out everything fully.

Or you might find yourself thinking that your map is wrong. Of course it is. In fact, there's no such thing as a correct map. “The map,” philosopher Alfred Korzybski once said, “is not the territory.” Your map isn't reality; it's only your best guess at describing it.

That's OK. In fact, one of the reasons why you create a map in the first place is to discover what you don't know, as well as what you do. In short, an incomplete map is useful because often it is the gaps that spark questions and spur you to action.

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The thing that is really hard, and really amazing, is giving up on being perfect and beginning the work of becoming yourself.

ANNA QUINDLEN

The real test? Ask yourself if this map is useful for you now. Does it give you a new insight on how to do more Great Work? Does it help you to do anything differently? If so, then it's serving its purpose. If not, then make a change—add some new data to the map, come back to it later, or even just move on to another map.

## COACHING INSIGHTS

### Six Great Work Paradoxes

Or you could call this section “Six reasons why you might already be giving up on the idea of Great Work—and why you shouldn't.”

#### 1. YOU DON'T NEED TO SAVE THE WORLD. YOU DO NEED TO

## **MAKE A DIFFERENCE.**

The desire to do more Great Work is not a call to abandon your everyday life and become a martyr to a cause. You don't need to quit your job, stop earning money, give up your friends, or cease wearing regular clothes. Nor do you need to start a global movement, overthrow governments, or spark a revolution.

But it *is* a call to do more meaningful work. What can you do more of that makes a difference, shifts the balance, has an impact, adds beauty, changes the status quo, creates something worth being created, improves life, moves things forward, reduces waste, engages people, or allows love? (You don't have to do all of those. Just one will be fine.) There are opportunities to do any of these things all around you right now. Maps 5 and 6 will help you find them.

## **2. GREAT WORK IS PRIVATE. GREAT WORK CAN BE PUBLIC.**

It can be nice to get the applause, win the medal, or receive the pat on the back that says, *Well done!* And sometimes Great Work generates just that sort of recognition.

But not always. Because it is a subjective matter—Great Work is what is meaningful for *you*—often its reward is a moment of private triumph. Maps 2, 3, and 4 will help you define exactly what it is that matters to you. You know you've done something that matters, something that raised the bar a little, something that stretched you in certain ways—but not everyone else will know it. In fact, if you're just after public acclaim, then doing Great Work might not even be the best route.

## **3. GREAT WORK IS NEEDED. GREAT WORK ISN'T WANTED.**

What calls you to do Great Work is often a feeling of *I can't take it anymore. I've got to do something different.* It's a personal sense that something needs to be done, that the status quo can't be tolerated any longer, and that you need to be the one to adjust it. Great Work shows up at the intersection where what needs to change in your world meets what's important to you.

But Great Work is often not wanted. Oh, sure, it might well be *talked about* as wanted. Corporate leaders, in particular, are experts at proclaiming some sort of Great Work as the next quest for their organizations. But most organizations are deeply rooted in delivering Good Work and sustaining the way things are, so that there's minimal interruption to that Good Work. Taking a stand for Great Work means in some small (or significant) way swimming against the tide. Maps 7 and 11 will help you step up to this challenge.

## **4. GREAT WORK IS EASY. GREAT WORK IS DIFFICULT.**

Sometimes when you're doing Great Work, it's a glorious thing. You're in

that flow zone where things come easily and time seems suspended.

---

Everything that is contradictory creates  
life.

*SALVADOR DALÍ*

But not always. In fact, not even necessarily most of the time.

Great Work can be a time of grinding through it, of showing up when your muse isn't whispering to you. It can be a time of uncertainty, groping forward when you're not sure of where you're heading. It can mean picking yourself up off the floor and carrying on after the unexpected has just slapped you around a bit.

There are times when doing Great Work will test you. It will call on not just your skills and talents, but your resilience and your ability to manage yourself through the dip. Maps 14 and 15 may be able to help you with that.

**5. GREAT WORK IS ABOUT DOING WHAT'S MEANINGFUL.  
GREAT WORK ISN'T ABOUT DOING IT WELL.**

Here's the irony: It's often easy to deliver Bad Work and Good Work at an excellent level. (Just how many times have you revised that worthless Power Point presentation?)

And Great Work? It's often new work at the edge of your competence, work that tangles you up because it's different and you haven't done it a thousand times before. You're unlikely to be able to do it perfectly. When I say "Great Work," I'm not talking about a standard of delivery. I'm talking about a standard of impact and meaning.

**6. GREAT WORK CAN TAKE A MOMENT. GREAT WORK CAN  
TAKE A LIFETIME.**

Great Work can happen in a single moment. It's a time when you feel at your best, achieving a personal triumph, the culmination of days or weeks or years of practice.

Great Work can also be a project that develops over time, something that you've started and seen through. Not every minute of the journey is Great Work, but what it adds up to is.

Great Work can also take a lifetime. It can be a commitment to making changes in yourself and your world by means of the work that you do, or it can be a connection to a cause that pulls you forward and helps you be who you want to be. Somehow, time can both shrink and stretch to accommodate a Great Work moment.

These definitions are all true. They're all equally important.

## ARE YOU UP FOR THE CHALLENGE?

You're getting ready to go on a journey of sorts, a journey to find and do more Great Work.

All books like this are an invitation to start something new, try a different approach, and step into a new way of working and living. I don't know about you, but here's how I typically respond to that call to action. I pick up the book in question, flip through it, think, *Ah, that's a cool insight*, or *Hmm . . . , interesting*, or maybe *I should try that sometime*.

Maybe I get to the end of the book, maybe I don't. But eventually I put the book back on the shelf—and very little has changed.

I'd love this book to be different, to actually help you make a change in what you're doing now so you can do more Great Work.

Here are three things you might like to consider so as to be best prepared for what's ahead.

- 1. Get committed.** Answer this question right now: Just how committed are you to doing Great Work? What's your score on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being totally committed? Are you at 7? 4? 9? Something else?

Think about that score. What's the implication for how you're about to read and use this book? Are you going to flip through the pages, and then put it aside? Do you think you might try out one or two of the exercises just to see what comes up? Will you try all the exercises and hope for positive change but not count on it?

Where do you stand right now?

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The reinvention of daily life means  
marching off the edge of our maps.

*BOB BLACK*

And finally, if you were fully committed, scoring a big 10 out of 10 on the commitment meter, what would be different? How would you use this book and this opportunity if that were the case?

- 2. Get a notebook.** You'll find this isn't a typical book in that I won't be going on and on for pages at a time, sharing my views of the world and telling you what to do. It's much more like a workbook. I provide you with some useful structures, frameworks, and questions, and you get to work with them to help make sense of your life and start to do more Great Work.

You can make notes directly in this book, if you like. But you might want to consider getting yourself a notebook devoted to jotting down insights, thoughts, and ideas, practicing the exercises, and planning how to do more