

THE BIG IDEAS

Why We Need Tools

Changing attitude isn't enough.

The Tools

Five of them. In a nutshell.

Willpower

The most important tool.

Consumer vs. Creator

Take your pick.

Being a Work in Progress

We all are.

Refusing a Limited Life

Is a good idea.

Staying Plugged In

Is the challenge.

Leading the Way

And changing the world.



The Tools

Transform Your Problems into Courage, Confidence, and Creativity

BY PHIL STUTZ & BARRY MICHELS · SPIEGEL & GRAU © 2012 · 288 PAGES

“Between the two of us, Phil and I have sixty years of psychotherapy experience. Based on this experience, we’ve identified four fundamental problems that keep people from living the lives they want to live. How much happiness and satisfaction you get out of life will depend on how well you can free yourself from those problems. Each of the next four chapters addresses one of these. Each chapter also provides you with the tool that works most effectively on that problem. We’ll explain how the tool connects you to a higher force—and we’ll explain how that force solves your problem. ...

The health of our society depends on the efforts of each individual. Every time one of us gains access to higher forces, all of us benefit. That places a special responsibility on those who know how to use the tools. They become the first to bring higher forces to the rest of the society. They are pioneers, building a new, reinvigorated community. I wake up every morning grateful that higher forces are there. They never stop revealing themselves in new ways. Through this book we share their magic with you. We’re excited about the journey you’re about to undertake.”

~ Phil Stutz & Barry Michels from *The Tools*

The Tools was the best book I read in 2012. Easily.

I immediately bought copies for everyone on our team, paid them to take the time to read it and even set up a book discussion group to walk through the goodness. I just love it and think you will as well.

You can get the book [here](#). Follow them on Twitter [here](#). And explore more on the site [here](#).

This is a tough book to distill into a Note. Most of the book is Kindle-highlighted and so is the hardcover copy I bought for a couple re-reads. (I never do that. This book is that good.)

We’ll take a quick look at some high level ideas and a super quick look at each tool.

I hope that’ll get you fired up to go learn more and make these Tools a part of your life.

Let’s jump in!

WHY WE NEED TOOLS

“A change in attitude won’t stop you from screaming because attitudes can’t control behavior; they’re not strong enough. To control behavior you need a specific procedure to use at a specific time to combat a specific problem. That’s what a tool is. ...

The point is that a tool—unlike an attitude adjustment—requires you to do something. Not only does it take work, it’s work you have to do over and over again—every time you get frustrated. A new attitude means nothing unless followed by a change in behavior. The surest way to change

“If changing your life were only a matter of attitude, you wouldn’t need this book. Real change requires you to change your behavior—not just your attitude.”

~ Phil Stutz & Barry Michels

behavior is with a tool.”

Attitude is important. (Of course.)

But it’s not enough.

We need to consistently take ACTION if we want to see change in our lives.

That’s what the Tools help us do—giving us practical tools to powerfully face the common challenges of life as we consistently connect to something bigger than ourselves that’ll help us rock it.

THE TOOLS

There are five tools. Each solves a different type of challenge and is associated with a different “Higher Force.” Here they are in a nutshell:

Tool #1: The Reversal of Desire

The Higher Force: Forward Motion

“If there is a key to influencing the future, it’s through bold action.”

~ Phil Stutz & Barry Michels

We all tend to avoid emotional pain. This is not good. It *dramatically* limits our potential. If we want to have a shot at actualizing our potential, we need to “reverse our desire” and, rather than crawl up in a little ball and try to avoid pain, we want to discipline ourselves to GET EXCITED about the challenges in our lives.

We need to know (!) that our *infinite potential* exists on *the other side* of our comfort zones and that the only way to break through to that infinite potential is to BRING ON!! the pain, learn to love it, and use it to catalyze our growth. Easier said than done but wow. This Tool rocks.

Tool #2: Active Love

The Higher Force: Outflow

You ever get stuck in a mental loop—where you’re looping around in your head again and again and again about all the things someone has done that annoy you? Stutz and Michels call that “The Maze.”

We want to notice when we’re stuck in the maze and get out. How? Use the Active Love tool. Focus on your heart and, rather than mentally beat the person up who annoyed you, beam them love. Sounds a little weird but it’s a lot awesome.

Tool #3: Inner Authority

The Higher Force: Self-Expression

How’s your shadow doing these days? You know, that part of you that you most despise and prefer to hide from the world? Well, we need to bring that darkness to light. Without integrating those aspects of ourselves we’re ashamed of, we can’t fully trust ourselves and express ourselves with authority.

“Until you can control your mind, you’re spiritually immature.”

~ Phil Stutz & Barry Michels

Stutz and Michels help us create a living embodiment of that shadow self and call it up when we feel fear in front of people. My version? The 4 foot 11 inch, 88 pound, anxiously shy little 14-year-old version of me who was the smallest kid in high school and terrified of most things. When I can team up with *that* version of me rather than wish he didn’t exist, my power explodes. (I get tears in my eyes just typing that.)

Tool #4: The Grateful Flow

The Higher Force: The Source

Feeling depressed, overwhelmed or otherwise drinking from the ick fountain? It’s time to connect to Source by getting your grateful flow on.

At this stage, we all know that gratitude is scientifically proven to boost our mood but Stutz and

Michels take it to the next level and make conjuring gratitude a fine art. Discipline your mind to *always* see the amazing things in your life. Get your grateful flow flowing. There's no (!) better way to connect to the Source of all higher forces/joy/love/all-things-good than gratitude.

Tool #5: Jeopardy

The Higher Force: Willpower

"But you're not really free until all hope for magic is crushed."

~ Phil Stutz & Barry Michels

All those Tools are nice but guess what? They're a pain in the *ahem* to implement. Stutz and Michels make the genius point that we all want to be "exonerated" from future work. We want to tap into the magic Secret that allows us to be done with this whole "hard work" thing once and for all.

Well, hah. That's not how it works. We need willpower if we want to actualize. This Tool leans into the "Jeopardy" gameshow soundtrack to remind us that time is ticking and you need to respond to life. NOW. Imagine yourself on your deathbed. You have NO MORE MOMENTS to live. Guess what? That version of you wishes you'd finally (!!!) do the things you know are best for you. Use the Jeopardy Tool to tap into your ultimate power: Willpower.

... That's a *super* quick look at the five Tools.

My primary intention is to fire you up to want to learn more. Yes, I know I'm selling the bliss out of this book. It's that good. (Get it here. Site here.)

Moving on... :)

WILLPOWER: THE MOST IMPORTANT TOOL

"Very few models of human growth accept this, let alone give you a way to build your willpower. Instead, they pretend it's easy to change your life. It isn't. Our approach is the opposite: we're telling you the truth about how difficult it's going to be—and we're going to make you strong enough to face the challenge. Doing that means increasing your willpower—which is what the fifth tool does. In a sense it's the most important one—the tool that makes sure you keep using the other tools. It won't matter how effective the other four are if you don't use them."

Willpower.

It's the heart of optimal living.

We need to translate Big Ideas into consistent, powerful action.

We've covered a number of awesome books focused on the science of willpower. Check out the Notes on [Baumeister's Willpower](#), [McGonigal's The Willpower Instinct](#) and [Duhigg's The Power of Habit](#) for a quick intro to the field.

Here are some gems to drive the wisdom home.

"Lasting peace of mind can only come from a connection to the Source."

~ Phil Stutz & Barry Michels

[Baumeister](#) tells us: *"Improving willpower is the surest way to a better life."*

[McGonigal](#) tells us: *"We may all have been born with the capacity for willpower, but some of us use it more than others. People who have better control of their attention, emotions, and actions are better off almost any way you look at it. They are happier and healthier. Their relationships are more satisfying and last longer. They make more money and go further in their careers. They are better able to manage stress, deal with conflict, and overcome adversity. They even live longer. When pit against other virtues, willpower comes out on top. Self-control is a better predictor of academic success than intelligence (take that, SATs), a stronger determinant of effective leadership than charisma (sorry, Tony Robbins), and more important for marital bliss than empathy (yes, the secret to lasting marriage may be learning how to keep your mouth shut). If we want to improve our lives, willpower is not a bad place to start."*

"To reiterate: as human beings we are given access to the infinite, but we have to work for it; it doesn't come for free."

~ Phil Stutz & Barry Michels

[Duhigg](#) puts it this way: "Dozens of studies show that willpower is the single most important keystone habit for individual success. In a 2005 study, for instance, researchers from the University of Pennsylvania analyzed 164 eighth-grade students, measuring their IQs and other factors, including how much willpower the students demonstrated, as measured by tests of their self-discipline. Students who exerted high levels of willpower were more likely to earn higher grades in their classes and gain admission into more selective schools. They had fewer absences and spent less time watching television and more hours on homework. "Highly self-disciplined adolescents outperformed their more impulsive peers on every academic-performance variable," the researchers wrote. "Self-discipline predicted academic performance more robustly than did IQ. Self-discipline also predicted which students would improve their grades over the course of the school year, whereas IQ did not.... Self-discipline has a bigger effect on academic performance than does intellectual talent." And the best way to strengthen willpower and give students a leg up, studies indicate, is to make it into a habit."

Cue the Jeopardy music.

Let's make cultivating our willpower a top priority!

CONSUMER VS. CREATOR

"The consumer expects a reward for the slightest effort—or better, for no effort at all. He cares only about what he gets from the world, not about what he might add to it. Living on the surface, jumping from thing to thing, his energy is diffused, like milk spreading across a tabletop. He makes no impact on the world; when his time on earth is over, it's as if he never lived. The creator won't accept that fate. Everything he does is with the intention of making an impact on the world. His code ensures this: He doesn't accept the world as he finds it; he brings things into the world that aren't already there. He doesn't follow the herd; he sets his own course. He ignores the reactions of others. He resists superficial distractions. He remains focused on his goals even if he has to sacrifice his immediate gratification. Anyone can live by this code, but very few of us do. It means putting your life in the service of higher forces. These forces can't be found on the surface of life; they're found in its depths. The creator's energy must have the singular focus of a drill boring through stone. As difficult as that is, a creator is rewarded many times over for his efforts."

The Consumer vs. The Creator.

Reminds me of Walter Russell and Nietzsche.

Russell (see Notes on [The Man Who Tapped the Secrets of the Universe](#)) tells us: "The Life Triumphant is that which places what a man gives to the world in creative expression far ahead of that which he takes from it of the creation of others. And it should be every man's greatest ambition to be that kind of man. With that desire in the heart of every man there could be no greed or selfish unbalance, nor could there be exploitation of other men, or hatred, or wars, or fear of wars."

"I began to understand what faith really meant: faith is the confidence that higher forces are always there to help when you need them."

~ Phil Stutz & Barry Michels

While [Nietzsche](#) (see Notes on [Thus Spoke Zarathustra](#)) reminds us: "This is the manner of noble souls: they do not want to have anything for nothing; least of all, life. Whoever is of the mob wants to live for nothing; we others, however, to whom life gave itself, we always think about what we might best give in return... One should not wish to enjoy where one does not give joy."

How about you?

Where are you on the Consumer to Creator continuum?

How can you move (even) more toward Creator?

JOYFULLY BEING A WORK IN PROGRESS

"Instead of seeing problems as an expression of a "condition" whose cause was in the past, we needed to see them as catalysts for developing forces that were already present, lying dormant inside us."

~ Phil Stutz & Barry Michels

"I can confidently predict that you're going to find yourself in the exact same boat. You'll try the tools, love what they do for you, and yet you'll stop using them. How can this be so widespread? The answer is that our entire culture has an unreal view of what it means to be human. We like to think of ourselves as finished products—complete on our own. We're not. To be whole, we need to stay connected to something beyond ourselves. The constant effort that requires means that a human being can never be more than a work in progress."

I love that.

Newsflash: We are not finished products.

[Osho](#) tells us that our being is in our becoming. That: *"Man is not born perfect. He is born incomplete, he is born as a process. He is born on the way, as a pilgrim. That is his agony and his ecstasy, too; agony because he cannot rest, he has to go ahead, he has always to go ahead. He has to seek and search and explore. He has to become, because his being arises only through becoming. Becoming is his being. He can only be if he is on the move."*

While [Satchidananda](#) tells us: *"The world is full of ups and downs, positive and negative. It's like a big factory. Human beings come in as raw material, and they are in the process of becoming perfect. Look at a Detroit car factory. At one end you see the beautiful finished cars, ready to be shipped out, but what do you see at the other end? All crude raw materials. Metal sheets, nuts and bolts, that go through processing. A lot of cutting, chipping, rubbing, scrubbing, chiseling, filing, grinding, welding, pressing. Slowly, it takes shape. People are like that also. That's what you call evolution or growth. Through that we gain experience, we learn."*

Each moment gives us an opportunity to more deeply connect to something bigger than ourselves. May we seize more and more of those opportunities!

REFUSE TO HAVE A LIMITED LIFE

"Human beings are only happy when they are reaching toward their highest potential. Paracelsus, a Renaissance physician and mystic, put it this way: "Happiness does not consist in laziness... In labour and in sweat must each man use the gifts that God conferred upon him on earth.""

~ Phil Stutz & Barry Michels

"A few rare individuals refuse to have limited lives. They drive through tremendous amounts of pain—from rejections and failures to shorter moments of embarrassment and anxiety. They also handle the small, tedious pain required for personal discipline, forcing themselves to do things we all know we should do but don't—like exercising, eating right, and staying organized. Because they avoid nothing, they can pursue their highest aspirations. They seem more alive than the rest of us."

Want to be more alive than your former (or current) self?

From the big stuff to the little moment-to-moment decisions, let's do the right thing.

Learn to drive through pain. (See Tool #1. :)

STAYING PLUGGED IN

"Think of your mind as a newly bought, state-of-the-art, flat-screen TV. You eagerly take it out of the box, but it won't play. An electrical connection has come loose; there's no buying a new connection, you have to fix it with your own effort. Worse, the connection will keep coming loose—you'll have to fix it every day. But the broken connection in your mind isn't to electrical power, it's to higher forces. And every time the connection breaks, one of your personal problems appears. The tools repair the connection—that's why they work. But the connection never lasts; it will break again. That makes using tools a task without end."

I love that vision.

"Real happiness is the constant presence of higher forces in our lives."

~ Phil Stutz & Barry Michels

Got a personal problem?

That simply means you've lost your connection to a higher force.

Solution? Plug back in.

LEADING THE WAY

"Let's imagine what this might look like: Close your eyes and use the Reversal of Desire on something you normally avoid. Feel yourself starting to move forward. Now see those around you, inspired by your forward motion, using the tool on whatever they're avoiding. See millions of people embracing pain and as a result, moving forward in their lives. How does the society you're imagining look different from the one we have now? When millions of individuals stop avoiding and start moving forward, there are no social problems they cannot solve. It's only a society that embraces pain that will lead the way for the rest of the world. ...

To help you become a creator, the book has to do more than convey ideas; it has to awaken higher forces inside you. To keep those forces vital, you will have to use the tools long after you finish reading it—in fact, for the rest of your life. That's our ultimate goal: for you to maintain an unending relationship with higher forces. Call us crazy, but nothing less will satisfy us. And if you aspire to be a creator, nothing less will satisfy you."

Inspiring.

Here's to becoming a creator, moving through our fears, inspiring those around us and changing the world in the process.

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

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you'll probably like...

[Willpower](#)

[The Willpower Instinct](#)

[The Power of Habit](#)

About the Authors of "The Tools"

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Phil Stutz graduated from City College in New York and received his MD from New York University. He worked as a prison psychiatrist on Rikers Island and then in private practice in New York before moving his practice to Los Angeles in 1982.



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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at brianjohnson.me.