

## GENIUS IS IN THE DETAILS

Life often hinges on the little things.

A one-hundred-mile hike begins with one step.

Friendships are developed one small interaction at a time.

Books are written word by word, sentence by sentence, page by page.

A mansion is built board by board, brick by brick, and a massive garden begins with a single flower.

Corporate dynasties are built on one decision and one action at a time. Managing even the largest enterprise involves attending to the smallest details with consummate care.

### **Moment-to-moment choices create our lives**

Maybe one shortcoming of many self-improvement schemes is that they concentrate on huge goals—such as happiness, health, love, or wealth—while forgetting how we do the little things: the way we sweep the floor, the way we shut the door when leaving the house, the way we set down a bag of groceries on the kitchen counter, the way we hold our face muscles when listening to another person.

The smallest choices can be as powerful and far-reaching as the largest choices. For example, the way we breathe when feeling distressed, the words we choose to describe a problem, the gestures we make when speaking to a lover—all of these are small choices that we may not even realize we're making in the moment. Yet when added together, all those micro-choices gain the force of a tidal wave that affects everything we have, do, and become.

Major choices in our lives, like who we marry (if we marry) or what career we pursue, can make a huge difference in the quality of our lives. But such big choices are made rarely, while every few minutes we make many small choices.

We can make such choices thoughtfully, in ways that are consistent with what we want in life. The way we choose to live the next moment is the way we live the rest of our lives.

### **Start small and reap big rewards**

Valuable lessons can be learned when we closely examine our moment-to-moment choices. Each day we can take some time to step back and watch ourselves as an outside observer would. We can see our lives played back as films projected on a screen and place ourselves in the audience. From that vantage point, we can take a microscope to everything we say and do.

To use any idea in this book, start with the smallest choices you make every day. If you want to gain better health, for example, then start by changing one small habit such as flossing your teeth daily. If you want to become a better listener, then just listen with full attention to the next person you meet. If you want to practice eating all your food more slowly (so that you eat less at each meal and enjoy it more), then start by eating one bite of food slowly with focused awareness.

If you apply this suggestion, you might notice that small changes start to echo throughout your whole life. If you start by noticing the color of your spouse's shoes, then you might also get better at noticing typos in memos. If you choose to show up at your next meeting a few minutes early, then you might start showing up at all your appointments with time to spare.

When we pay exquisite attention to the small choices as well as the larger ones, our lives can be more in tune with our values. By handling the details with care, we increase our experience of happiness, health, love, financial security, or whatever else we want in life. By taking baby steps, we can make transformational leaps.



## *Small change, big difference*

*In the space below, describe a routine activity you perform and what it might reveal about how you approach other activities in your life. For example, if you balance your checkbook regularly, you might notice that you faithfully complete other maintenance tasks (such as changing the oil in your car) on a regular schedule.*

*Complete the following sentences:*

*The routine activity I perform is ...*

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*When comparing this activity to other activities in my life, I discovered that I ...*

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*Now describe a small behavior you will change immediately—one that might pave the way for larger changes in your life.*

*I intend to ...*

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