



OVERCOMING PERSONAL CONSTRAINTS™

Those With the Fewest Constraints...WIN!

by Flip Flippen with Dr. Chris White

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FLIPPEN BUSINESS EBOOK //

OVERCOMING PERSONAL CONSTRAINTS

Those With the Fewest Constraints...WIN!

INTRODUCTION

OVERCOMING PERSONAL CONSTRAINTS

I have always been interested in what made some people successful while others just plugged along at lesser levels. In sports, multitudes of people are fast, strong, and coordinated, and yet only a few play at the highest levels. In politics, some elected officials continue to provide valuable public service year after year, while others end up compromising. In marriage or parenting, virtually everyone starts out with good intentions, but so many relationships end up strained. Why, why, why? I was full of questions, and it seemed the only way to get the answers was to study as many highly successful people as I could and find out what differences existed between them and their lower-performing peers. So I did.

We studied everyone we could access—and that was a pretty impressive group of people. We studied the top teachers, principals, and superintendents in education. We studied many of the top performers in nonprofits and corporations. We studied many of the world's top athletes from all kinds of sports, and we studied high schoolers who were exceptional in test scores and performance. We studied television personalities, and we studied moms and dads who were doing an outstanding job raising their kids. We studied top people in retailing, and we studied top people in the military. We are still studying people, because we want to continue to refine our understanding of the differences between those who perform at the top and those who don't.

THEORIES OF SUCCESS

At the heart of Overcoming Personal Constraints is the powerful notion that our strengths do not single-handedly define our success. No matter how formidable our talents, we are held back by behaviors

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that set the limits of our performance or often define the reasons for our failure. In other words, our Personal Constraints determine our ultimate level of success. If you can identify those constraints and make a plan to overcome them, then you'll see a dramatic surge in success, productivity, influence, and happiness in all aspects of your life. In short, you'll learn who you were born to be.

The Personal Constraint Theory™ of success challenges two prevailing approaches to self-improvement that frequently did not work for my clients in my 20 years as a psychotherapist: Personality Theory and Strength Theory. Personality Theory asserts that our personalities are essentially fixed in ways that define how we act. A broad field that encompasses several sometimes-conflicting views of "the self," Personality Theory offers little help identifying issues or strategies for improvement. I agree with the underlying idea that our innate characteristics or traits often define who we are, but Personality Theory fails to acknowledge our tremendous capacity for making positive change in our lives, and therefore offers limited use as a tool for growth. Dozens of profiles can describe your personality. Tests such as DiSC, Myers-Briggs, and Taylor-Johnson are interesting to take and helpful in describing your personality, but they are not particularly useful in bringing about behavioral change or directing personal growth.

Another popular school of thought, known as Strength Theory, suggests that if we pay attention to the directions in which we move naturally, this can reveal our strengths and show us where to focus our energies. Strength Theory goes something like this: our hardwired personalities resist change, so we should build on our natural abilities instead of concentrating on areas in which we underperform. In other words, to quote the phrase by which this theory has been popularized, we should "play to our strengths." I certainly agree with the basic concept of Strength Theory—why work in an office when you are a gifted musician or stay in a job you hate just because it pays a decent wage? Find your gifts, develop them, and use them for the highest and greatest good.

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Strength Theory contributes to success. But it's not enough. If you know your strengths but are trying to get to the next level, playing harder to those strengths won't necessarily cause a significant jump in performance. Most people I work with don't need pep talks about being better at what they're already great at or loving themselves as they are. Telling a highly creative person with no self-control to simply celebrate and expand his creativity, for example, would be counterproductive; his or her gifts can never be fully expressed without the focus and discipline that come with self-control.

Neither Personality Theory nor Strength Theory has been greatly useful to my work. The idea that my personality is impervious to change doesn't help me much when I am trying to make my life better. And being told to focus on my strengths doesn't address the behaviors I need to correct in order to fully leverage those very strengths and move my life forward.

In contrast, Personal Constraint Theory is built on the notion that change is more than possible; it is imperative. To live fully, we can and must learn how to minimize our behavioral constraints while we maximize our strengths. Granted, many obstacles are difficult to overcome, and a single-minded focus on our limitations could be frustrating and even depressing. But to ignore them is even worse.

OVERCOMING PERSONAL CONSTRAINTS

HOW DO PERSONAL CONSTRAINTS DETERMINE SUCCESS?

Simple. They set the limits for where you can ultimately go, no matter how gifted or talented you are. Your Personal Constraints—your conscious and unconscious limiting behaviors—hold you back and determine your ultimate level of success. Most of us know at least one person in life who possesses great talents, abilities, gifts, or opportunities yet seems to have done so little with it all. Perhaps you might be looking at your own life so far and wondering, *Have I really been living to the fullest of my abilities?* If you're like most people, the answer is: *Probably not.*

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FROM SKEPTIC TO BELIEVER

During our data-gathering process, I asked our staff, “Who was the number one influence in sports?” Immediately one of them said, “Mark McCormack.”

The late Mark McCormack was indeed one of the greatest influences in contemporary sports in the last century. He shook hands with Arnold Palmer in 1960 in a deal that changed the endorsement world forever. Prior to that, virtually no one had ever heard of endorsement deals. From that historic moment, Mark began building International Management Group (now known as IMG), a global company that has represented everyone from Tiger Woods to the pope to Nobel Prize winners.

I later found myself sitting in Mark McCormack’s study, talking to him about how to become better. I had to be either stupid...or onto something.

Mark thought I was stupid.

But his wife didn’t. She was a well-respected tennis great, having won numerous professional tennis titles in a twenty-three-year career, and she was sitting next to him on the couch. Thank goodness for wives. Betsy said, “If this works, if you can really help someone identify the things holding them back—and then do something about them—you can sign me up right here. How do we do it?”

Mark, on the other hand, looked at her enthusiasm with more than a little skepticism and went off to do some work in his office. He was going to be a tough case, and I knew it. An hour later he rejoined us. I asked him, “Mark, what would you say if I could show you the number one Personal Constraint that is holding you back from performing at a much higher level than you are at now?”

He didn’t hesitate. “I don’t believe you could.”

Finally, after some discussion, he decided that he wanted to go through the process himself to explore the concept of Personal

“...what would you say if I could show you the number one Personal Constraint that is holding you back from performing at a much higher level than you are at now?”

Constraints and how they could impact someone's performance. I joined Mark and Betsy in the den to begin a life-changing growth process.

As we sat discussing Betsy's career, she asked a great question. "If I couldn't get better by practicing more, then what should I have done?" That question brought us to the *Flippen Profile™*, the instrument I had developed and used successfully with so many people.

Betsy was a great tennis player. At seventeen, she had been ranked as the world's top junior player. She held five singles titles and twenty-five doubles titles in her amazing career.

When she asked what her Personal Constraints were, I was really put on the spot. I don't know anything about tennis, I didn't yet know she had played competitively, and I sure didn't know she had won as many tournaments as she had. Yet there was her question: "*What are the Personal Constraints that are holding me back?*"

I asked Betsy to fill out the *Flippen Profile* so we could go over the data and see what it identified as her most impacting Personal Constraints. As we looked over her scores, we turned to the coaching pages that isolated her top Personal Constraints. The most impacting Personal Constraints for Betsy were her high-nurturing scales and her low aggression. She did not have the killer instinct required to play and win competitively. In other words, her talent and skill had brought her this far, but her Personal Constraints would keep her out of the number-one spot. I was in awe of Betsy's talent and drive. But ironically, the same love and consideration for others that have made her a wonderful mother and friend turned out to be the constraint that kept her from going on the court and "destroying" the opponent.

When I showed her the data, she leaned back in her chair and sighed. Mark was sitting next to her. He laughed and said, "See? I have been telling you that for years! I was right, wasn't I?"

"In other words, her talent and skill had brought her this far, but her Personal Constraints would keep her out of the number-one spot."

That created a dilemma for Mark, as he was now seeing that this process was something he could really agree with. There was another question he had to answer as well—he had known her for years, and I had known her for less than an hour; how could I know what I knew so quickly? But the truth was the truth. Betsy was too nurturing and not aggressive enough to be able to win at her current level of competition. This was most apparent when she played against someone she really liked. Her pattern was invariably to lose the first set and then try to come back and win after she had placed herself behind. Creating a handicap is not a good way to play at the top.

“Betsy,” I said, “can you imagine what would happen if we could not only identify your top Personal Constraints but create a plan so you could start immediately to overcome them?”

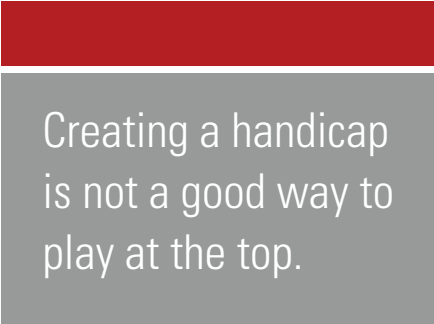
Well, she could, and she did—and so did Mark.

THROWING OUT THE WEIGHTS

A few years ago I took my boys on our annual guys’ outing: a grueling, six-day backpacking trip in the mountains of Colorado.

The morning after we arrived in Beaver Creek, we went to the ski area where we would begin our hike. We put on our packs and began to head toward the lift that would take us up to our starting point. As we rounded the corner of a large building at the base of the mountain, the entire plain ahead of us literally exploded with color. We could hardly believe our eyes!

We had no idea we had just walked into the biggest ballooning event in the country. Mesmerized by the scene of balloonists preparing for flight, we watched as hot-air balloons of every color in the rainbow swelled with air and began to fill the sky. Pilots and crews scurried about. Blasts from tiny furnaces punctuated the morning bustle, and inflated balloons strained to lift their passengers to the heavens, held fast as they waited for the ropes to be removed.



Creating a handicap
is not a good way to
play at the top.

One balloon caught my eye. Most people were running away from it because it had become dangerous—the furnace had stopped firing hot air into the balloon before it had fully inflated. Half filled and tethered by a long rope, it was slowly arcing its way in a circle, knocking over everything in its path like an enormous plush bowling ball. A crew member was frantically struggling to untie a rope that wouldn't budge while the balloon wreaked havoc in slow motion. As we watched from a distance, the balloon continued bumping along the field, as it pulled and lurched against the restraints. I looked at my sons and said, "Boys, I know just what that feels like."

They asked, "What do you mean, Dad?"

"I know what it's like—wanting to get off the ground, but tied to something, and trying desperately to break free." I went on to explain that I could remember various times that unseen "ropes" kept me tied down when I wanted to soar. Despite my mistakes and failures, I knew I was meant for more. Cut me loose and let me go—I WANT TO FLY!

Later, as we watched the balloons rise toward the heavens from a mountaintop where we were sitting, I reflected further on the striking similarities we share with them. I realized that we are all riding in a hot-air balloon. And whether we recognize it or not, we are all in a race. Some of us are still tied to the ground, looking for a way to get loose so we can take flight. Then there are those who are lifting off but not gaining any altitude because they are carrying too much weight. The ropes and weights hold them down as they try to move up and out.

As we begin our ascent, we notice that some balloons are immediately soaring upward, while others are hovering along the surface, barely clearing the ground. Then someone runs up and yells at one of those struggling to get off the ground, "It's the weights! Throw out the weights!"

"I know what it's like — wanting to get off the ground, but tied to something, and trying desperately to break free."

After a moment the person in the gondola gets it. *It's the weights that are holding me down!* They begin to throw the weights overboard, and sure enough, the balloon begins to rise.

The journey you are about to take is all about you: your balloon, your weights, your ropes, the things that hold you down. You can choose to live life as you always have, or you can choose to identify and overcome what has held you back. You can fly—and the air, the scenery, and life itself will be so much more exhilarating as you discover how to overcome the Personal Constraints that have been holding you down.

Let's find the weights in your life and throw them overboard.

THE 5 LAWS OF PERSONAL CONSTRAINTS

At the heart of Overcoming Personal Constraints is a set of simple principles that describe the impact of Personal Constraints in your life. I call them the 5 Laws of Personal Constraints. Used together, these laws provide a solid foundation for the personal-growth program presented in the chapters that follow.

...life itself will be so much more exhilarating as you discover how to overcome the Personal Constraints that have been holding you down.

LAW 1 //

WE ALL HAVE PERSONAL CONSTRAINTS

We all know of public figures who make the headlines daily as they fall prey to rage, greed, and moral failures. But we also know of constraints being played out on a smaller scale—parents who are too critical of their children, the boss who is too defensive to hear feedback. Having constraints is part of being human. I have them. Everybody I know has them. And you have them, too. As we've seen, some constraints are more damaging than others. There's no point focusing on minor inconveniences when a potential train wreck is waiting somewhere ahead.

As I was developing this process, I found that Personal Constraints fell into three basic groups:

- 1. INCONSEQUENTIAL CONSTRAINTS:** This group doesn't make a great difference on a daily basis unless they hinder a specific role or job. For example, a lack of fashion sense, being short or tall, or being left-handed generally have minimal impact on success.
- 2. HIREABLE CONSTRAINTS:** These are constraints that you can hire someone else to do for you. They could be critical but are not if the solutions are provided by others. Hireable constraints include things like messiness (hire a housekeeper), disorganization (hire a secretary or assistant), and poor grammar (use a spell-check program or hire an editor).
- 3. OWNED CONSTRAINTS:** This category will impact your personal and professional life most profoundly. One thing I keep trying to do is hire someone to do my gym workout for me—but it never seems to work! These constraints include behaviors such as low self-confidence and self-control and other character issues (for example, lack of trustworthiness) that you alone can change. Addressing this group will give you the greatest gains.

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The focus of all that we will be discussing in this book is on those behaviors in the third category. I have little interest in spending a lot of time working on constraints that are inconsequential or negligible. Those things that I can hire others to do certainly have importance, but they will always be secondary to those critical constraints that only I can address and correct.

After we have reviewed our goals, roles, and relationships, we are in a better position to see which constraints we can ignore, hire out, or own. Knowing the difference is key to identifying the constraints that are impacting our success the most. Only then can we expect to start getting the results we want.

LAW 2 //

YOU CAN'T RISE ABOVE CONSTRAINTS THAT YOU DON'T OR WON'T ADDRESS

There is an old story about how hunters catch monkeys in Africa. They hollow out a coconut, making sure the hole is just large enough for a monkey's hand, then place a small orange or banana inside and chain the coconut to a tree. The scent attracts the monkey, who sticks his hand into the coconut but soon discovers the hole is not big enough for him to remove both his hand and the prize. To get his hand out, he must drop what he's holding. But he won't. He is so intent on getting his treat that he will not even drop it to escape as the hunter easily captures him.

Do you see the picture?

Many of us are held captive by the constraints we continue to clutch tenaciously—including unresolved issues from our past—because we can't or won't address them. Like the monkey we are paralyzed and stuck between two worlds, not realizing we are choosing denial at the expense of freedom.

After we have reviewed our goals, roles, and relationships, we are in a better position to see which constraints we can ignore, hire out, or own.

Overcoming our constraints is both possible and necessary if we desire to live life to its fullest. Coming to terms with this simple fact will help us let go of the old to embrace the new.

LAW 3 //

OUR PERSONAL CONSTRAINTS PLAY THEMSELVES OUT IN EVERY AREA OF OUR LIVES

You may have heard the phrase, “Wherever you go, there you are.” This is true for our constraints, as well; they go wherever we go. The point of recognizing this is not to condemn ourselves and our limitations but to more fully understand their impact. If you are difficult at work, odds are good that you are just as difficult at home.

Just like trying to run from your shadow, you can’t run from your constraints. Realize the impact they make, be open to feedback, and be willing to address them.

LAW 4 //

PERSONAL CONSTRAINTS ARE ROLE SPECIFIC

This can sound like a contradiction to Law 3, but it isn’t. Law 3 states that our constraints play themselves out in every area of our lives, while Law 4 chimes in to clarify that our constraints might play themselves out more in one area than in another.

I was born with dyscalcula, a math learning disability. Can you imagine what would happen if I were an accountant? My struggle with numbers would not make me a good hire for that job. I’d probably plunge the company into bankruptcy and land the entire management team in prison. While behaviors tend to leak into every compartment of life, paradoxically, they become constraints only when they get in the way of attaining specific goals.

The point of recognizing this is not to condemn ourselves and our limitations but to more fully understand their impact.

The impact of our constraints can vary depending on what role or context we are in. Behavior that restricts us in one area might be more of an asset in another. A junior-high teacher, for example, will have a lot more trouble with a high level of aggression when he's teaching math class than when he's coaching football after school, although his aggression will still need to be managed in every area of life. Being methodically analytical probably helps a physician in private practice but can be a hindrance for someone in a fast-moving sales or marketing position and an irritation in relationships, where majoring in minor issues can wear thin pretty fast. Having low aggression doesn't work for a race car driver, and having low self-confidence doesn't work well for a salesperson. Our Personal Constraints are role specific—pure and simple.

To understand our constraints fully, we must consider them in terms of the various roles we play in life. We need to evaluate each constraint in context and determine whether it is keeping us from performing our best in a given position or situation.

LAW 5 //

THOSE WITH THE FEWEST CONSTRAINTS...WIN!

Here we get to the heart of Overcoming Personal Constraints: the reward for the removal of our constraints. Year after year and with thousands of success stories, we have been able to prove that people who actively choose to identify and remove their Personal Constraints will fare better than those who do not. It boils down to physics: the lighter the load you carry, the farther you can go. This final law provides hope. You can do something about your current situation that will also have an impact on your future.

But it gets slightly tricky here, so follow me. I am not saying that people *with the lowest number of constraints* win, but rather, those who *learn to minimize or eradicate significant constraints* win.

To understand our constraints fully, we must consider them in terms of the various roles we play in life.

A significant constraint is one that gets in the way on a regular basis and causes damage to relationships and your ability to produce great work. Those with the fewest significant constraints will outperform those with a greater number of significant constraints.

It is true that many people are simply born with fewer Personal Constraints than others. For example, Vern Hazard, one of my staff members, has been an international model and traveled all over the world. Vern is handsome, athletic, and an English scholar, as well. Most of us don't come with the gifts and talents that he naturally possesses. But being born with fewer personal limitations and constraints is not the same as personal growth. Personal growth refers to working on everything in your life that stops you from living to your full potential.

One of my good friends, Mark Stiles, uses a baseball analogy that I find most appropriate for this picture. He says, "There are guys who were born on third base but are convinced they hit a triple." Being born with advantage, family influence, talents, gifts, and abilities is not the same as personal growth, nor should we confuse someone who comes loaded with these attributes with someone who has learned how to use his gifts in valuable ways. Vern works hard to be the best at everything he does. Yes, he's gifted, but it's his passion and drive that set him apart.

Ultimately this book is about winning. By winning I don't mean that you compete in races or make the most money. I mean that you become your personal best. That you win at being you—the best you there is.

...being born with fewer personal limitations and constraints is not the same as personal growth.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



FLIP FLIPPEN

Flip Flippen is a man with an uncompromising mission: “To build relationships and processes that bring out the best in people.” Flip has helped thousands of corporate executives, professional athletes, and industry leaders achieve dramatic improvement in performance and productivity.

Flip is a renowned thought leader, orator, philanthropist, and psychotherapist. He is recognized as one of the top leadership gurus in America. His book, *The Flip Side*, is a *New York Times* and *USA Today* best-seller and is available in nine languages. Flip is chairman of the Flippen Group, a respected leadership development and talent assessment company and the largest educator training company in North America.



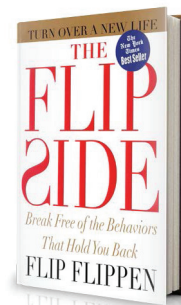
CHRIS WHITE

With the unique combination of a Ph.D. in statistics and a heavy dose of personality and humor, Dr. White has the uncanny ability to make the complex simple and to teach and explain with contagious enthusiasm. This ability helped propel *The Flip Side*, a book he co-authored, to the *New York Times* best-seller list.

In over a decade at the Flippen Group, Chris has worked with some of the most influential people and organizations across the globe, including professional and college teams and athletes in every major sport, Fortune 500 executives, and top educators. As director of coaching and development, Chris leads the company’s personal growth efforts worldwide and has taught and consulted on several continents.

The content in this eBook is from the book, ***The Flip Side – Break Free of the Behaviors That Hold You Back***, available at amazon.com and wherever books are sold.

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The Flippen Group was founded in 1990 by internationally known educator, *New York Times* best-selling author, psychotherapist, executive coach, and leadership expert, Flip Flippen. We are one of the largest educator training companies and fastest-growing leadership development organizations in North America, with offices throughout the United States and in India.

Each year, thousands of educators and business leaders attend Flippen Group “hands-on” trainings and hundreds of thousands of people are challenged and inspired by our keynote presentations. On any given school day, Flippen Group education curricula and processes touch the lives of more than one million students in districts nationwide.

Clients include Fortune 500 companies, small businesses, professional athletes, major sports franchises, government agencies, non-profit groups, colleges, and school districts of every size and description.

The Flippen Group employs professionals across the nation. All Flippen Group executive coaches and training personnel come from backgrounds that enhance the delivery and value of the training experience.

The education training staff are former educators, administrators, and teachers who implemented our processes firsthand in their own classroom or campus settings. The team understands the importance of a quality education, the value of a positive learning environment, and the significance of preparing the next generation for the world of work.

Our processes and trainings create a positive working environment and build cohesive team dynamics, resulting in increased productivity and retention.

Flippen Group has been highlighted on both local and national media outlets, including *The Today Show*, the *Super Bowl Pre-Game Show*, and Speed Channel’s *24/7*, among others.

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