

THE
FLIP
SIDE

*Break Free of the Behaviors
That Hold You Back*

FLIP FLIPPEN

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EXCERPT



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Introduction

If I asked you *what one thing* determines your level of ultimate success, what would your answer be? Your talent? Your skills? A college degree?

Is it possible that something *other* than your talents, abilities, personality, or academic achievements will define how far you go in life? Could it be that the things that hold you back—or constrain you—are a far more reliable indicator of your success than any skills or talent you may possess? And if it is possible to identify whatever those personal constraints are and break free of them, do you believe that you could soar to new heights in your life? Would you choose to break free of your personal constraints if I could show you what and where they are and how they are affecting you? If you answered yes to these questions, then read on.

Physician, Heal Thyself

This book should have been finished several years ago.

And I think you'll find it fascinating why it wasn't. The various reasons all boiled down to one single source (drumroll, please)...

My personal constraints.

How ironic that the completion of a book about *your* personal constraints was being held back by *mine!* You see, I thrive when things are

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changing. I crave the energy I feel when I talk about and act on new ideas. I get bored easily, and the status quo wears me down.

When I don't seem to be making obvious, measurable progress, I have difficulty resisting the urge to change things to get moving—even if this means moving in a wrong direction!

So the progress of this book has stalled several times. I've replaced various people involved in the project. And, of course, I'm always changing the manuscript. I suspect (or at least hope!) that most of these changes were beneficial. But I also know that some of them slowed down the project unnecessarily.

I am not a better writer today than when I started years ago, nor am I smarter. The difference is that I found out which personal constraints were affecting my performance, then took the steps required to break free of them once and for all. Does it really work? You tell me:

- My company, The Flippen Group, is the largest teacher-educator company in North America.
- We are among the best executive-development companies in the nation.
- Tens of thousands of educators have experienced our processes, and millions of young people are impacted each year.
- Our ideas have been featured on the *Today* show, during the Super Bowl, and in numerous articles, dissertations, papers, and radio and news shows.
- Our staff continues to expand, teaching others in conferences and seminars the same key principles that brought and continue to take them to new levels in their own lives.

To become the best I can be means that I have to identify the things that are holding me back and take the steps to remove them from my life. I call those things personal constraints, and I want to show you how to find and remove yours—before *they* find *you*.

What defines The Flippen Group's success as individuals, and as a company, is that we work hard to identify not only our strengths but

also those personal constraints that keep us from being what we can be, and then we do whatever it takes to break them. We have helped thousands of people Overcome Personal Constraints (OPC), and we have watched them win—in arenas from Wall Street to NASCAR to the Super Bowl to Best Superintendent to Greatest Mom.

Do you know your own most crippling personal constraints? Are you ready to deal with these obstacles to your success?

If so, join me and the thousands of others who have already gone before you to “the Flip side,” by identifying and removing whatever is holding you back from wherever it is you have always wanted to go.

3 The Five Laws of Personal Constraints

More than three decades separated the work I had done with Janice and Tony from the time I spent with Peter and Daniel.

During those years my company has had the privilege of working with some of the most outstanding leaders of business, sports, and education of our time. The information we gathered told the same story: in every field talented and capable people were short-circuiting their own success. But they were also finding that they could fulfill their potential once they could identify and overcome the constraints that were holding them back. Drawing on these experiences and insights, we created a complete system for identifying the specific factors that limit our performance. They could then develop a personalized plan for growing through them.

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

Law One: *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 the OPC 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. *“Hire-able” 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. “Hire-able” 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.

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 Two: 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.

Think of young Tony landing in prison or Daniel's unwillingness to examine himself. The problems that they didn't deal with kept them stuck and unable to grow in those areas. In Daniel's case suc-

cess in other parts of his life may have lulled him into thinking that he didn't need to work on his shortcomings; Tony, having gone to prison, on the other hand, probably never believed he could change in positive ways.

Both positions are sadly misleading: 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.

What's Your Personal Constraint?

In the chapters that follow, you'll learn about the Top 10 Killer Constraints that most of us are faced with (either in ourselves or in the people around us). But before we discuss each constraint in more detail, here's a quick assessment to help you start thinking about which constraints are holding you back . . . and what areas you might need to do the most work on.

- Is it hard for you to admit fault?
- Are you opinionated?
- Is your first reaction to feedback to think about why it isn't accurate?

If so, you might be *Bulletproof*.

- Do you wish you were more confident?
- Is it important what other people think of you?
- Do you have a hard time moving on from your mistakes?

If so, you might be an *Ostrich*.

- Do you ever struggle with saying no?
- Is it difficult for you to say what you really think?
- Do you frequently find yourself being overcommitted and worn out?

If so, you might be a *Marshmallow*.

- Do you have high expectations of yourself and others?
- Are you usually skeptical of ideas and opinions?
- Do you remember the mistakes other people make?

If so, you might be a *Critic*.

- Has anyone said you are hard to read?
- Do you ever wonder why other people have closer relationships than you do?
- Do you struggle expressing affection and emotion?

If so, you might be an *Iceberg*.

- Do you struggle to motivate yourself?
- Do you procrastinate frequently?
- Do people misinterpret your laid-back tendencies?

If so, you might be a **Flatliner**.

- Is being in control important to you?
- Do your strong opinions cause others to perceive you as not listening?
- Do you finish other people's sentences?

If so, you might be a **Bulldozer**.

- Do change and uncertainty make you nervous?
- Is it hard for you to switch directions easily?
- Do you prefer tried-and-true approaches?

If so, you might be a **Turtle**.

- In disagreements, do you tend to get the last word in?
- Do your emotions escalate when you feel challenged?
- Do you get frustrated with people frequently?

If so, you might be a **Volcano**.

- Do you thrive on spontaneity?
- Do you make quick decisions?
- Do you get bored easily?

If so, you might be a **Quick Draw**.

11 *Killer Constraint #7:* Bulldozers (Overly Dominant)

Dominant people tend to run things. That's not a problem unless they do so at the expense of the contributions of others.

I was working with a Texas school district on a process to help them raise their students' test scores (as well as the performance of their educators). That is how I met the superintendent, "Teresa."

The hills were turning to beautiful orange and soft browns as the sun set behind them. The golf course in front of us was perfectly cared for, and the creek that ran through the retreat setting was surprisingly cold for Texas. The whole atmosphere was perfect. As we were sitting down to start the discussion, Teresa blurted out, "I'm in a hurry and don't want to waste time with pleasantries, so who has the agenda?"

I sat quietly, watching with interest.

"I know what I want, and I know how it needs to be done. So let's skip the debate about how this program ought to move forward," she said next.

One of my team said, "We really need to go over the information together. I'd like to share with you what we have done in several hundred other districts to accomplish the goals you are after. We have a lot of experience in schools just like yours and can save you considerable money and heartache—with just a few simple changes."

“That is all well and good, but I still know what I want. So let’s dispense with that part of the discussion,” she responded.

The meeting took about twenty minutes, as Teresa ran through her agenda and asked several very pointed questions of her staff. They brought up some things that she needed to look at, which she quickly dismissed without further discussion. She was a bottom-line kind of lady, and her interest was in her agenda. As soon as she was finished with her business, she left.

We continued discussing some of the issues that had been raised, and it was clear that her staff members were uncomfortable. Finally one of them turned to me and said, “Flip, I apologize for how that came off. She is under a lot of pressure, and there is a lot riding on what your team is doing with us.” I nodded in understanding. My team is frequently brought into situations during times of transition and great pressure.

But pressure is no excuse for bad behavior.

We were the experts in implementing our processes and knew better than she how to help her achieve her goals. But she would never know that unless she took time to hear us.

I asked her staff a question: “Wouldn’t it make sense if you let us walk you through this process so that you aren’t wasting money and ending up with something that none of us are happy about?”

We were surprised when they agreed, and we continued the discussion in that vein. Time flew by, and we were all pleased with the savings they would make and, more important, with the outcomes, which would result in more students being successful.

A few days later Teresa called and informed us of her plans and how we were to move forward. I asked if she had reviewed the work her staff had done, and she responded, “No, I haven’t had time. I know how I want it done, so let’s agree that will be how we move forward.” I wasn’t surprised, but I was certainly disappointed.

Months later I called one of the senior people in her group and found out that he had taken some sick days. I called him at home to see if we could help in any way and to let him know we were thinking of him. “What’s the problem?” I politely asked, not wanting to

intrude too much. “I have bleeding ulcers and have developed irritable bowel syndrome. I’ve been ordered to stay home in bed for two weeks.” Again I wasn’t surprised. The source of much of the stress they were under was clear, and it wasn’t pretty.

A few months later I was back with Teresa and her team, going over the personal-growth data that we had gathered on each senior person. The goal was to help them accelerate their performance professionally as well as personally. Everyone was excited about getting his or her information, but as soon as it was passed out, Teresa stood up. She announced that she had a luncheon she didn’t want to miss and that she would be back in a couple of hours. Everyone else began going through the data and working enthusiastically in teams. Teresa never came back that day.

I called her a week later and offered to come to her office (three hours away) and meet with her personally to go over her data. It was then that she told me her agenda. “I intend them to go through this process, but I don’t have time for personal growth. I’m paying you to improve *them*, and that’s what I’m looking for.”

Remember what we discussed earlier about no team being able to rise above the constraints of its leader? Within the next few months, most of her team began aggressively pursuing other jobs.

And a year later?

Well, let’s say that Teresa “retired” from her position. She is now serving as a consultant for other districts. Sad, but true.

The Crush of the Bulldozer

Overly dominant people are tough. They are tough to be around, and they are tough to deal with. Sadly, they usually think they are the answer and final word regarding anything. They argue with people, and they run over people who don’t bend like they want. In marriages they are very difficult to deal with, and only the strong or the foolish survive those experiences.

They may be right about 90 percent of their points, but they are 100 percent *wrong* in the way they deal with people. And, to top it off, they are bullies. They lose relationships and employees easily because they don't care about what they do to them.

A balanced dominance is the mark of a good leader. You have to have people who will make things happen. I know because I am a take-charge type of person. I also know what happens when dominance gets too high. Thankfully I have several people who, over the years, have gotten in my face and told me when I was wrong—not necessarily wrong about a point, but certainly wrong about not listening and being so impatient to move forward. The people who live on the high side of dominance are the ones who bulldoze their way through life.

Bulldozers: Short on Humility and Perspective

One evening my wife and I were visiting with a small group of friends that included Mark and Betsy McCormack; newscaster Paula Zahn and her husband, Richard; Ray Cave (the former managing editor of *Time*); Howard and Janet Katz (Howard was past president of ABC Sports and is now head of NFL films); and Nando Parrado, whose harrowing story of survival in the snowbound Andes was told in the bestselling book *Alive!* Needless to say Susan and I were the least renowned of the group but probably the most pleased with the evening.

Nando, in his quiet and simple way, gave us his personal version of the famous 1972 plane crash in the Andes Mountains that killed his mother and sister, along with many members of his rugby team and their families. Initially unconscious for three days, Nando awoke to discover that only he and fifteen of his teammates had survived the tragedy and that the most horrific aspects of his experience were still ahead. After seventy-two days of battling subzero temperatures, starvation, and avalanches with no supplies or medical attention, the group finally realized they were waiting for a rescue that would

never come. Without a clue as to where they were, it was decided that twenty-three-year-old Nando would lead a three-man expedition over forty-five miles of frozen mountain wilderness to reach Chile and bring back help. His account of the obstacles and his determination to reach his grief-stricken father—or perish trying—ranks as one of the most dramatic survival stories of our time.

After Nando had finished sharing his amazing story, we sat down for dinner. I was reflecting on the day, struck by the clear contrast of his humble telling of a truly heroic event with an earlier meeting Betsy and I had with a businessman who had talked nonstop about himself the entire meeting. Regaling us with all the details of his accomplishments and his importance, the businessman monopolized our meeting with information regarding a business deal that he was currently putting together. Since he had not once taken the time to inquire about anyone else in the meeting, he never knew he was in the presence of several others whose accomplishments far exceeded his. Nonetheless, we sat quietly while he bragged of his feats without letting anyone else get a word in edgewise. Overall our meeting was a long and painful event.

I thought about the amazing contrasts in people. Nando's life was one of quiet excellence and commitment, while the other man's was one of arrogance and self-importance. Certainly there was no question as to which man understood what true leadership was.

Are You a Bulldozer?

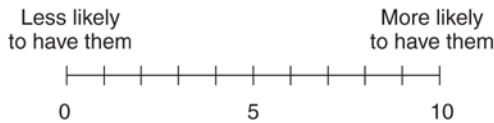
Check any of the following symptoms that occur and add up the total.

- I often finish other people's sentences.
- When I disagree with others, it's okay to interrupt to correct them.
- I am comfortable leading a large group of people by actively taking charge.

- Being strong willed enables me to accomplish more than others.
- I am comfortable with heated discussions.
- When others are talking, I am already thinking of what to say next and looking for an opportunity to win them to my way of thinking.
- I can be pushy and maybe even hardheaded, but I'm usually right.
- If I'm in charge I don't like people stepping on my toes—people should stick to their role.
- People have said I'm stubborn, but I just have strong opinions.
- Weaker people shouldn't be in charge of things.

Bulldozer Tendencies?

Mark your total below.



So I'm a Bulldozer—Help Me!

You might be thinking: Is this really that big of a constraint? What's wrong with me being in charge—doesn't someone have to be? What if people like who I am, including the fact that I'm more assertive? Could it be that I'm just a great leader? If I got input from everybody, wouldn't I waste a lot of time? Do I really need to get votes from everyone if I already know the best option?

Did you notice what all of the above questions have in common? They're all about you. And when it comes to this constraint, that may be the greatest lesson to take home: it's not about you.

The reality is that people usually don't write in big bold letters that we've been running over them. They may speak by moving on to

another opportunity, and there may be hurt that was never expressed. I would venture that most of the people whom you've had heated discussions with or whom you have perceived as pushy had this in common: being similar to you!

But let's remember that the goal isn't to become passive. The goal is to keep the strengths of being strong willed while also minimizing the damage. Instead of the leader that builds followers, be the leader that builds other leaders!

Specific TrAction Steps

Here are some sample action steps you can take to start getting traction—today! Once you read all of the constraint chapters, if this is determined to be one of your killer constraints, then steps like these will be part of your TrAction Plan (to be built in chapter 15).

- I will start taking a step back in group interactions at times. If I have an opinion, I will hold my thought and see if anyone else steps up to express a similar perspective. Instead of clarifying my position, I will focus on asking more reserved people what their thoughts are, being willing to say things such as “No, you go ahead, I insist.” I will avoid interrupting other people or finishing their sentences. [Designate a specific person to watch you and hold you accountable during a few interactions.]

- I will start checking in more during conversations by asking, “Am I answering your question?” or “Am I giving you the impression that I am really listening?” or “Do you feel strongly about this? Tell me more.” Communication is more than just tag-team talking, so I will better engage the people I have discussions with.

- I will start getting more agreement from those around me. To avoid being perceived as pushy, I will become further aware of my tendency to take charge and will intentionally step back and observe

more. I will avoid seeing a decision as black or white and will try to better understand how others are feeling about the decision, as opposed to just thinking about the facts.

- I will start getting more feedback on how I am perceived by others. For example, at the end of a meeting I could ask someone, “Did I listen well and participate proportionally?” Or I could ask someone whom I work closely with, “Do you feel like I’m overcontrolling at times? Do I ever micromanage you?” [Have someone give you feedback once a week on a specific question like one of these.]

How Can I Deal with a Bulldozer?

To effectively deal with someone like this, it is always important to make sure the person feels validated. Even the extreme of each constraint contains some positives, so make sure you communicate the positives also. Here are some potential strengths to validate: Decisive, Strong willed, Assertive, Leadership ability.

- Be sure to ask questions about what Bulldozers think and how they feel. Say things such as “Your opinion is really important to me—tell me more” to help reinforce that you value their perspective. If you are feeling pushed on or run over, it is appropriate to say that you aren’t feeling heard. Let them know that you want to hear them but that you want the same courtesy in return.

- Provide clear guidelines when appropriate for interactions with Bulldozers. For example, before a meeting you might clarify, “We have an hour together, and here are the topics we really need to cover...” This will make it clear who is running the meeting and help him or her understand if you need to take the reins.