

Constraint Free

What holds you down?



by Flip Flippen

THERE'S A REASON swimming with barbells isn't an Olympic event. Yet most of us attempt something just as illogical—we strive to “reach our potential” without first getting rid of the traits that weigh us down.

The greatest swimmer in the world couldn't do much more than tread water unless he or she let go of the barbells. It wouldn't be the swimmer's great abilities that determined his success but rather the weights that held him down. It's not just the ability—it's the weights. Similarly, things *other* than our talents, personality, or academic achievements play a greater role in determining how far we go in our careers and relationships.

I have had to face my own “personal constraints” before I could be the best husband, father, friend, boss and co-worker. You, too, can recognize and jettison your constraints. It isn't always an easy process. But it's a simple one. You can start setting yourself free the same day you identify your constraints and determine to get them off your road to success.

That is the basis of Overcoming Personal Constraints (OPC). Focused on the “Top 10 Killer Constraints,” PPC offers a step-by-step process to bust constraints. What keeps you from excelling at work? Are you too opinionated? Do you struggle with saying no? Are you skeptical of new ideas? Do you procrastinate? To experience success, you need to overcome your personal constraints—the attitudes and behaviors that hold you back from reaching your potential.

Learn Five Laws

Before you can overcome your constraints, you first need to understand five laws:

Law 1. We all have personal constraints. Some are inconsequential, and some are “hireable” (like employing a highly-efficient assistant to keep your disorganization from becoming fatal). But others are “owned constraints,” such as self-confidence, self-control, and maintaining effective relationships.

Law 2. You can't rise above con-

straints that you don't or won't address. We are blind to some of our biggest constraints. But we also tend to cling to some obvious constraints that stare back at us in the mirror—a common one being stubbornness.

Law 3. Our personal constraints play out in every area of our lives.

They are with us 24/7—at work, at home, and anywhere in between.

Law 4. Personal constraints are role-specific. Behaviors leak into every compartment of our lives but become constraints only when they get in the way of attaining specific goals. (High aggression can be beneficial in competitive sports but disastrous in social interaction.)

Law 5. Those with the least personal constraints win! It's not necessarily the most talented or the hardest working that win but rather those who remove their most impacting constraints.

Diagnose Your Constraints

The next step is to diagnose your constraints. Each of us can find several of the Top 10 Killer Constraints—those creatures inside our personalities: **Bulletproof** (overconfidence), **Ostrich** (low self-confidence), **Marshmallow** (overly nurturing), **Critic** (too demanding), **Turtle** (resistant to change). Five more Killer Constraints are presented in my book. Let's begin with a simplified diagnostic process:

- 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? You might be **Bulletproof**.
- Is it important what other people think about you? Do you have a hard time moving on from your mistakes? Is that an **Ostrich** in your mirror?
- Do you 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? Sounds like a **Marshmallow**.
- Do you have unrealistically high expectations of yourself and others? Are you typically skeptical of ideas and opinions? Do you point out (and usually remember!) the mistakes of others? **Critic**, heal yourself.
- Do change and uncertainty make you nervous? Is it hard for you to switch directions? Do you prefer tried and true approaches? **Turtles** may be your favorite animal.

A diagnosis isn't much help without

a prescription, though, so our work isn't finished. In fact, I rarely provide someone with a shocking, unprecedented diagnosis. Someone who isn't naturally adept at deepening relationships usually knows that already.

Three Actions Steps for Turtles

The next step is to design a plan to overcome your constraints by taking **TrAction Steps**. By taking a few simple, practical steps, you begin to make progress and to make a difference without compromising your core identity. For example, let's use the Killer Constraint we've labeled *Turtle* to illustrate the OPC process. Here are some sample TrAction Steps Turtles can do to start getting traction—today! Repeat after me:

1. I will start being even more open to new ideas. Even if I'm feeling some resistance, my first reaction will be positive and enthusiastic, such as, “Wow, what I really like about where you are headed is that. . . .” This will help demonstrate that I am really weighing the new direction.

2. I will make more statements such as, “I know I can be resistant to things at first, so I'm really not trying to do that in this case. My only real concern is that. . . .” If I am still feeling resistance to being pushed in a new direction, maybe a question such as this would help: “Do you want me to think about it

for a while, or should we make a decision now?”

3. I will start trying different things and say “let's try it” more often. I prefer more stable, tried-and-true choices, but there may be another option that I am missing out on. [State a specific habit or routine that you can focus on and then try something substantially different. Have someone who knows you well help come up with a fun idea of something new to try such as a new restaurant with a different food choice or a different route for a particular drive.]

You can identify the other Killer Constraints—and TrAction Steps for each of them—by reading my book, *The Flip Side*. Dropping the weights will make you a better swimmer. You'll quickly find that the air is easier to breathe when you're on top of the water. PE

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ACTION: Take these three action steps.

