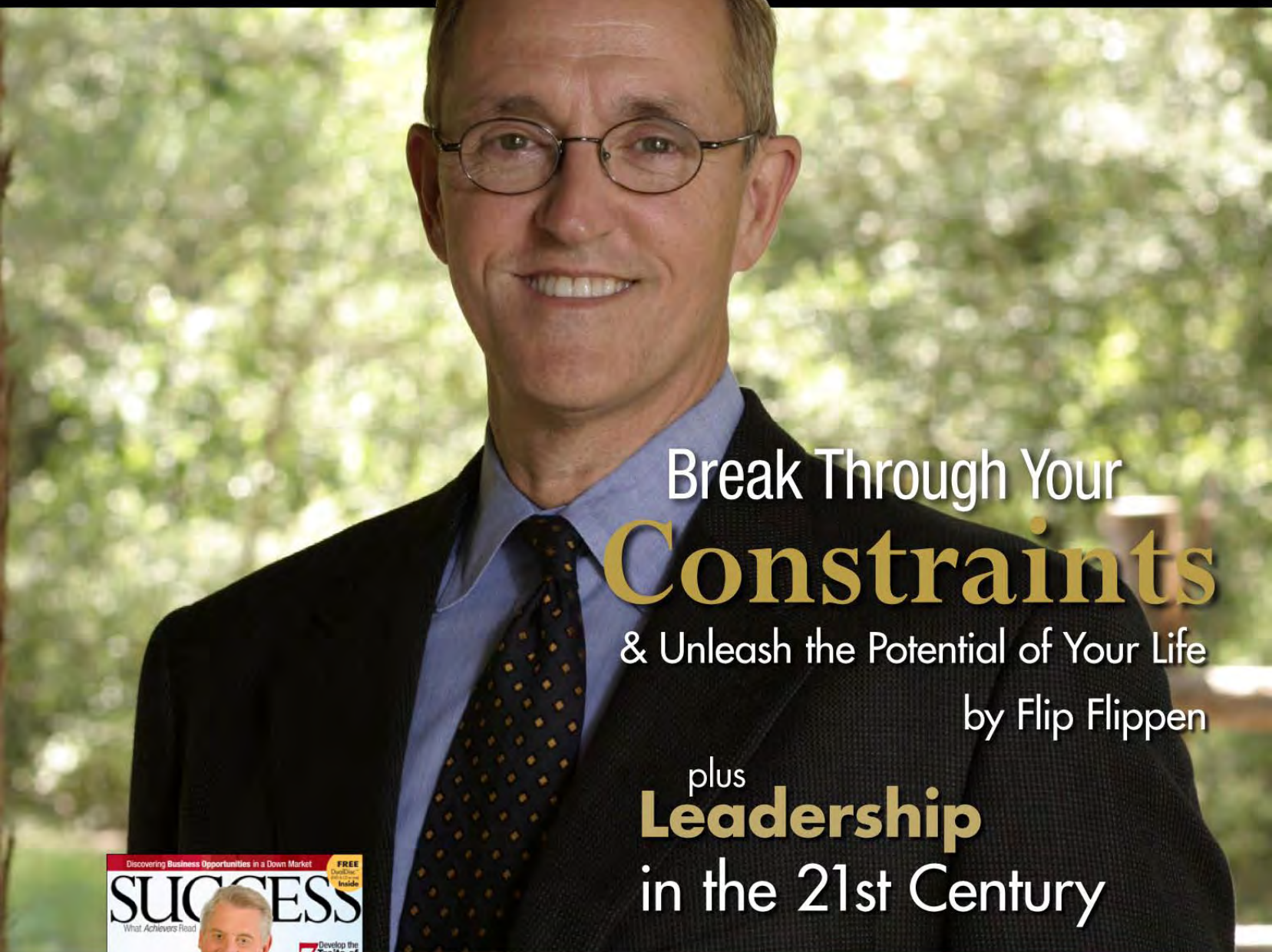


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## Break Through Your **Constraints**

& Unleash the Potential of Your Life

by Flip Flippen

plus  
**Leadership**

in the 21st Century



Reprint from

# SUCCESS Magazine



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## Break Through Your Constraints & Unleash the Potential of Your Life



**Have you ever seen a bungee run? No, there's no punch line. That's a real question.**

A bungee run is one of those huge inflatable games you see at carnivals or kids' birthday parties. It's a game where two players run as fast and as far as they can with bungee cords strapped to their backs. The object is to get as close to the end of the inflatable track as possible before the bungee cord snaps you back to the starting point.

It occurred to me recently that when we talk about success in life—about achieving the goals we set for ourselves—that the road to success is sometimes like a bungee run. When we enter the race, we muster all our strength to get us to the goal, but, inevitably, something snaps us back before we get there. And the snap isn't always pretty.

The bungee cords—or the things that snap us back from success—are what I refer to as *personal constraints*. These are behaviors that hold you back and keep you from achieving greater success, performance and fulfillment.

Here's a little quiz for you. See if you can answer this question in 10 seconds or less:

*What is the No. 1 personal constraint that keeps you from being more successful?*

If you're drawing a blank, you're not alone. I've asked this question to audiences all around the world, and I almost always get the same response—silent mind

searching. Unfortunately, you can't get rid of a constraint if you don't know what it is!

And if you are one of those rare individuals who can answer the question, keep in mind this is not the end of the exercise. You've just got a diagnosis. Now you need a prescription.

Maybe you've never thought about your constraints because you think that maximizing potential is all about what you've got—your talents, strengths and skills. And that's true to a certain extent. I highly recommend that you identify your strengths and find ways to utilize them.

But what if you're already playing to your strengths and still missing the mark? Or, what if you're playing to your strengths and hitting the mark, but believe you are capable of much more?

Then it's time to take a look at what's holding you back—to identify and address your personal constraints.

In my book *The Flip Side*, I identify some of the most common personal constraints and associate them with "characters" to help describe these behaviors. The following are just a few of the 10 characters:

**Icebergs**—Constrained by too little nurturing, empathy and emotion

**Bulldozers**—Constrained by an off-the-charts need for control

- Volcanoes**—Constrained by volatility
- Turtles**—Constrained by an inability to handle change
- Critics**—Constrained by excessive negativity

Do you see yourself in any of these characters? I sure did! In fact, I should have finished writing *The Flip Side* years ago. Ironically, my book about personal constraints was held back by my own personal constraints. Bummer!

We all have things that hold us back and keep us from realizing our full potential. If you think you don't, then right off the bat I'd say one of your personal constraints might be denial.

The real question is not *if* you have personal constraints, but rather what are those constraints and how do they affect you. Once you answer those questions, then you can focus on confronting your constraints head-on and getting them out of your life.

### The Constraint-Breaking Process

First, you must identify your constraint. If you think you might be a "bulldozer"—someone who is overly dominant and always has to be in control, take the bulldozer constraint quiz. Check any of the following "symptoms" that occur:

- I often finish other people's sentences.
- When I disagree with others, it's OK to interrupt and correct them.
- Being strong-willed allows me to accomplish more than others.
- 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 hard-headed, but I'm usually right.
- If I'm in charge, I don't like people stepping on my toes—people should stick to their own roles.
- People have said I'm stubborn, but I just have strong opinions.
- Weaker people shouldn't be in charge of things.

If you checked several of the symptoms, then you clearly show some bulldozer tendencies. So, what do you do with that information?

Well, you develop your own personalized TrAction Plan™ (TrAction is pronounced the usual way, but we capitalize the A to emphasize the need for action)—a customized plan to help you break your personal constraint.

If you're a bulldozer, here are some things we recommend you include in your TrAction Plan:

- Periodically start taking a step back during group interactions and let others speak. Watch the group dynamic closely and work on getting others more involved.
- "Check in" more during conversations by asking things like,

"Am I answering your question?" and "Is this helpful information?"

- Get some brutally honest feedback about how you are perceived by others. For example, ask someone to rate you on a scale of 1 to 10 on your stubbornness or your listening skills.

It's amazing to see what happens when someone breaks a constraint. I've spent years researching characteristics of successful people and helping high performers maximize their potential. What I've learned is that when you break a constraint, you don't see a *gradual* increase in performance. You literally see a *leap* in performance—as if immediately propelled to the next level.

### Personally Constrained Leaders

So far, I've focused solely on how personal constraints limit your own success. But we don't live in a vacuum. Personal constraints can also kill the success of people around you, especially if you are in a leadership position. I summarize this concept in one of my Laws of Personal Constraint for leaders:

*No organization can rise above the constraints of its leadership.*

Whether you're the leader of a family, a business, a classroom, an athletic team or even a country, your constraints impact those you lead.

Since I teach this concept, I would love to tell you that I have always dealt with my own constraints. But I haven't.

I didn't really get serious about dealing with my own constraints until I had children. I remember one time getting really frustrated with my oldest son about an incident in which he got angry. In the midst of that frustration, I realized that I was getting angry about his anger! I was literally passing on my constraint to my son. I realized, then, how my personal constraints were impacting my family. That was the day I decided to make some changes.

You see, your personal constraints really aren't *personal*. They aren't just about you. They are also about the people you care about.

So I want to challenge you over the next few days to put some serious thought into the things that limit or constrain you. If you need some help, consider asking your spouse or someone who's close to you—someone who cares about your best interest, who can be both honest

and sensitive.

Or, you can pick up a copy of *The Flip Side*, which offers strategies for identifying personal constraints *and* for breaking those constraints.

Because those with the least constraints... win! **S**



*Flip Flippen, author of The Flip Side, is the head of The Flippen Group, a corporate and educator-training company.*