



Strategies for Acceleration and Reinvention

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Key Points

- **You should 'Red Team' everything**
- **If the world's best striker is constantly reinventing himself, why aren't you?**
- ***Is it an itch or a burn?* How this Thinking Tool can help you**
- **Read Happiness by Design and watch *Senna***
- **A Navy SEAL mantra that will help you re-frame your approach to life**

Acceleration

Does your organization have a 'Red Team'? It should. The concept comes from the military, where war games are waged between blue (home forces) and red (the enemy) teams. Of course, the US Army doesn't actually fight the enemy; it has its own people play the role of opponent. More generally, the term refers to **the practice of viewing a problem from an adversary or competitor's perspective**, as well as playing the devil's advocate when considering a major initiative or decision.

This practice started in the military but has caught in the intelligence community, business circles and even journalism. I used this tool extensively in my last management role, game-planning what could go wrong at our big public events. I found that it gave the whole team confidence that we were well prepared for almost every eventuality.

Thinking through worst case scenarios is a great thought exercise to anticipate potential weaknesses in a plan and develop contingencies for when they arise. While one can't expect to think of every possible outcome this way (after all, [Black Swan events](#) happen with more regularity than we like), don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. Any "predictive planning" is better than none.

For more information on this idea, click [here](#)

Reinvention

If the world's best striker is constantly reinventing himself... why aren't you? At 32, Cristiano Ronaldo is quietly staking a claim as one of the best football (soccer) players of all time. This month, his Real Madrid made history as the first side to repeat as Champions League winners (that makes it 3 times in the past 4 years) behind his 2 goals in the final. Later in June, he's expected to take him home his fifth Ballon d'Or, given to best footballer each year. With this kind of glittering resume, you'd think that he'd be resting on his laurels. Instead, he has re-fashioned his game and re-shaped his body - so regularly that one soccer writer writes: **“Ronaldo has reinvented himself more frequently than Madonna ...”** Read [more](#) (3 minute read)

Thinking Tool

Is it an itch or a burn? Sometimes we face situations that are described as “good problems to have”, such as when an unexpected opportunity arises. Our first instincts are often to say “yes” - to joining that non-profit board, agreeing to run that obstacle course race, or even to leave your job and start your own company. **Before plunging down those paths, it's useful to frame the offer through the following lens: is this an itch or a burn?** In other words, is this something that you're interested in (an itch), or are you chomping at the bit to get involved (the burn)? Looking at opportunities this way allow you to filter and ultimately prioritize them. Remember - **itches fade, but burning desires persist** - hopefully through the adversity you will inevitably encounter. Moreover, saying “no” to itches also preserves your energy and bandwidth for those rare offers that are simply too good to pass up.

Pop Philosophy

What Frank Underwood and George Costanza Can Teach Us

The Underwood are back (Season 5 of House of Cards just dropped on Netflix May 30), and while it is a bit chilling to see life imitating art in the Oval Office (rather than the other way around), Frank and Claire still offer up entertainment even if it's not escapism anymore. My friends know that I like to look for lessons in my TV fare, so it should come as no surprise that I extracted some useful advice from President Underwood's Machiavellian moves (and even George Costanza's moronic ones):

In an episode of last season's *House of Cards* (don't worry, no spoilers follow), Frank Underwood has an epiphany. Faced with a series of obstacles even his devious mind cannot defeat, he suddenly realizes that if he can't get the Congressional leadership "to do what they're dead-set against doing ... we have to reverse our thinking."

Somewhere in my head, a little bell went off. I had heard that strategic advice before, but from another TV character. People who spend any time with me know that I frequently quote from *Seinfeld* as an unexpected source of pop philosophy. Conventional wisdom says that it was a show about nothing; actually, it was a show about everything. There are few quandaries in modern life that can't be better understood with a little insight from Jerry, Elaine or Kramer.

I actually take many of my cues from [George Costanza](#) ... [Read *more* \(4 Minute Read\)](#)

Binge-Worthy

[Happiness by Design](#) | **Paul Dolan (released 2016)**: The Founding Fathers changed the game when they oh-so-casually wrote in the US Declaration of Independence that human beings had three inalienable rights: [life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness](#). We've been chasing that elusive state ever since - though with mixed success. This book will make the task a touch easier. Unlike a lot of texts on the subject, this one is focused on providing practical, actionable tips that result in more happiness. In his view, your sense of wellbeing is determined by how you allocate your attention. He suggests that we **spend time *deciding what makes us happy, designing our lifestyle to make those activities more frequent, and then avoiding distractions*** that sidetrack us from that path.

The top take-away: **Happiness = Pursuit of PURPOSE + PLEASURE over TIME.** Some activities, like watching TV, give our pleasure. Others - like meaningful work or philanthropic activities - fill us with a sense of purpose. Dolan's great insight is that we need *both* to be truly happy.

Binge Follow-Up: [Stumbling on Happiness](#) | **Daniel Gilbert (released 2006)**: This is a classic that you should definitely read if you're at all interested in the mechanics of happiness. Gilbert introduced me to the revolutionary notion of the [hedonic treadmill](#) and to the insight that humans are actually terrible at predicting what will make them happy.

Must-see Doc: [Senna \(2010\)](#) Montreal is hosting the Canadian Grand Prix this month, and hundreds of thousands of Formula One racing fans are descending on our fair city. Even if you aren't a F1 aficionado though, you will be mesmerized by this documentary about legendary racing car driver [Ayrton Senna](#). Crowned as the best documentary in winning the 2012 BAFTA Award, the movie is a **riveting exploration of an extraordinary athlete who ascended to racing immortality** and - if it's possible - to even more exalted status in his native Brazil. Like JFK and James Dean, **Ayrton Senna is frozen in time, an impossibly glamorous and talented young man taken in his prime**. The haunting score - as well as the almost incredible plot twists - will leave you feeling about the movie like most F1 fans felt about the man: we wish we had more.

Binge Follow-Up: [Meru \(2015\)](#)

If you're an armchair alpinist like me, you've no doubt devoured adventure stories like Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*. Most of the time, the books are so much better than any cinematic adaptation that I don't often recommend mountain movies. I'm making an exception this time. *Meru* tells the tale of the almost Quixotic quest by 3 world-famous mountaineers to **scale one of the last great unconquered peaks in the Himalaya**. What makes this doc a perfect pairing with *Senna* is that, while stylistically different, both films take us on tours of triumph amid tragedy (and vice versa) centering on people born to be on the big screen. *Fair warning*: if you have a fear of heights, this film might trigger it - the cinematography is *that* wild.

Philosophical Espresso Shots

Discipline equals freedom

“If you want freedom in life - be that financial freedom, more free time, or even freedom from sickness and poor health - you can only achieve these things through discipline.”
(*Jocko Willink, Navy SEAL*)

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Cheers,

Ion