

SUMMARY

THE SIMPLE MECHANICS  
OF MAKING MORE  
AND WORKING LESS

WORK  
THE  
SYSTEM

—FOURTH EDITION—

SAM CARPENTER

1/1/2022

“I say this without hyperbole: *Work the System* is one of the most useful business books you’ll ever read.”

—JOSH KAUFMAN, author, *The Personal MBA* and *The First 20 Hours*

“Mandatory reading. *Work the System* liberates . . .”

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“*Work the System* is one of the most useful business books I have read.”

—JOE VITALE, author, *Attract Money Now* and *Hypnotic Writing*, and star of *The Secret*

“*Work the System* has profoundly changed my life and business.”

—KEVIN WILKE, founder, NitroMarketing.com

“Quite simply the best management book I’ve read.”

—COLIN MILLS, CEO, The FD Centre

“One word: AWESOME!”

—RYAN LEE, author, *Passion to Profits*

THERE WILL BE A MECHANICAL ADJUSTMENT IN THE WAY YOU SEE YOUR WORLD. WHEN THIS PROFOUND SHIFT OCCURS, SYSTEMS METHODOLOGY WILL MAKE IRREFUTABLE SENSE, AND YOUR WORK AND LIFE WILL NEVER BE THE SAME.

[www.workthesystem.com](http://www.workthesystem.com)

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PHOTO BY SHELLEY HANLON

SAM FOUNDED CENTRATTEL IN BEND, OREGON, in 1984. With a background in engineering, construction management, publishing, and journalism, and residing in Bend and Stearns, Kentucky, his outside interests include mountaineering, hiking with his dogs, skiing, cycling, writing, reading, and traveling. *Work the System: The Simple Mechanics of Making More and Working Less* was first published in 2008. His second book, *The Systems Mindset: Managing the Machinery of Your Life* ([www.thesystemsmindset.com](http://www.thesystemsmindset.com)), was published in 2016. Sam is founder and director of the nonprofit, Kashmir Family Aid. He is married to Diana Bybee Carpenter.



**CENTRATTEL/WORK THE SYSTEM  
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

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Cover design by Greenleaf Book Group and Kim Lance  
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## A simple mindset tweak will change your life.

**I**T STARTED WITH A MIDNIGHT INSIGHT. After a fifteen-year nightmare of coping with his struggling business, Sam Carpenter discovered and then developed a simple methodology that knocked his routine 80-hour workweek down to zero, while multiplying his net income by a factor of 100. Now, in 2021, here's his best-selling business book, revised yet again, showing how you too can instantly break free to build the business and life of your dreams.

In this fourth edition of *Work the System*, Carpenter reveals the profound insight and exact uncomplicated, mechanical steps he took to turn his business—and his life—around. Once you “get” this new vision, success and serenity will come quickly. You will learn to:

- Make a simple perception adjustment that will change your life forever.
- See your world as a logical collection of linear systems that you can control.
- Manage the systems that produce results in your business and your life.
- Stop fire killing and become a fire-control specialist.
- Maximize profit, create client loyalty, and develop enthusiastic employees.
- Identify insidious “errors of omission.”
- Maximize your biological and mechanical “prime time” so that you are working at optimum efficiency.
- Design the life you want—and then, in the real world, create it!

You can keep doing what you've always done and continue getting unsatisfactory results. Or you can find the peace and freedom you've always wanted by transforming your businesses or corporate department into a finely tuned machine that runs smoothly and profitably on autopilot.

**Overview:**

Once one can see life as a collection of systems, then those that are within that person's control can be managed to create a life of freedom, wealth and contribution. Most people can't perceive the systems that compose their lives and so they end up with random results that are, shall we say, "not optimal." In Part One of *Work the System*, the reader is assisted in understanding and then attaining this systems mindset. Parts Two and Three provide the necessary fundamentals. This summary is comprised of direct quotes from the book, and contains approximately 15% the number of words.

**The book is divided into three parts:**

Part 1: The Mindset. "Getting it" – changing one's perception of how the material world works.

Part 2: Documentation: the boring-but-true protocol, vital to the creation of freedom and wealth.

Part 3: Additional contributing points/positioning.

**Epigraph:** "One should choose the simplest explanation, the one requiring the fewest assumptions and principles." —William of Ockham, 14<sup>th</sup> century English philosopher.

**The heart of the method is** a profound shift in perception that, for most, occurs spontaneously in an identifiable (and memorable) moment in time. The WTS method is believable and tangible, a pragmatic, mechanical tact that produces immediate, dramatic improvement in business and personal life.

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## Preface to the Fourth Edition

1. The purpose of the book: “The root purpose of *Work the System* is to guide you to a new way of perceiving your life so you can gain better command of it and therefore be better able to get what you want. I like to call this mini-awakening, ”getting it.”
2. Things can be fixed instantly and permanently: “I changed my life after a moment of insight, moving from a nightmarish, impoverished existence to a life of peace and prosperity. I now work less than one hour per month. Yes, we are financially secure now, with more than my wife, Diana, and I need, which enables us to invest and share.”
3. The simplicity of the solution: “There are no gimmicks or mysterious theories here. No Six Sigma-type complexities. No hype. No BS. What I discuss, including the getting-it insight you will experience, will make perfect sense.”
4. The bottom-line reality: “There are an infinite number of puzzle pieces out there, and for each of us to get what we want in our lives, it’s just a matter of seeing those pieces, making a proper selection, and then assembling them in a way that produces the results we desire.”
5. “Contrary to popular opinion, the workings of the world make perfect sense. There is an inherent order that is stunningly evident if one drops preconceived notions and quietly observes life as it is.”
6. “Must one turn life upside down in order to benefit from the book? No. Career-wise, you may have to do something different than what you do now in order to reach your goals of freedom and prosperity, but probably not. People who follow the WTS strategy become super-efficient, and most of them keep doing what they have been doing all along as they suddenly break the chains and leave their competition in the dust.”
7. “One by one you will take your systems apart, analyze the elements, and then make them better. Over time, complexity and confusion will decrease and will be replaced by order, calm, and rock-solid self-confidence. There will be little fire killing and no confusion, and as you peer down at your handiwork, you’ll feel self-respect and you will be proud of what you’ve accomplished. All by yourself, you will have created the life you’ve always wanted.”
8. “The most satisfying outcome is that life-theory and hard reality become congruent.”
9. “Each of us each of us has a mechanical aspect and an emotional aspect; and contrary to much pop-psychology theory. I say it’s a good thing to separate the two. It’s about fixing the mechanics of life first.”
10. “I take issue with the presumption that the road to freedom and prosperity begins with the elimination of personal emotional hang-ups. *Work the System* is about straightening out the mechanics of a life first: get the machine right, and emotional improvement will tag along naturally. Can one have emotional hang-ups together with wealth and freedom? Of course. We all know people like that. But hang-ups or not, obtaining wealth and freedom will go a long way toward improving the emotional end of things.”
11. “...you can flip a switch and your life can become what you want it to be. This is because the switch is located in your head and therefore is readily accessible.”
12. The struggle: “Ninety percent of people struggle. On the surface, it seems this is because they don’t set direction, they don’t get organized, and they spend too much time on fire killing and trivialities. That’s true enough. Yet when the mechanisms of life one layer deeper are seen, the causal reason for the struggle suddenly becomes obvious.”
13. “We shuffle bad results rather than tend to the mechanisms that will prevent the bad results from occurring in the first place. Because most of us use up our days coping with too much that doesn’t matter and in repairing bad results, we don’t think about delving downward to make adjustments where those time-wasters and bad results are propagated. We humans just have a penchant for thrashing around on the surface, not paying attention to the simple mechanics down below.”
14. The search for spiritual peace: “The key is to get your personal physical world—with all its boring and base considerations—straightened out first, so you’ll have the time and energy to focus on what is beyond it.”



15. "...this mechanical existence that we experience can be perceived as a beautifully orchestrated spiritual place if we can just, moment by moment, go deeper to see it for what it actually is."
16. Blow-by-blow, I describe the book's evolution. "The developmental history of Work the System is a perfect illustration of the system-improvement thread that is...the centerpiece of the book itself."
17. "...in a general system-improvement effort aimed at 'life simplification,' in 2018 I gave the consulting/coaching branch of the WTS business to my long-term employee, Josh Fonger. ([wtsenterprises.com](http://wtsenterprises.com)). Also in 2018, I gifted the Business Documentation Software branch of WTS to my associates Emanuel "Manu" Gug and Marcello Scacchetti. ([businessdocumentationsoftware.com](http://businessdocumentationsoftware.com))."
18. "In this Fourth edition, my long-term associate, Josh Fonger, has gathered sixteen real-life case studies from his consulting/coaching clients. Each vignette is presented in short-story format...you'll find these case studies in Appendix E. And in the last year, Josh has launched a 'Work the System Certification' training program for those who wish to operate their own (Work the System) consulting business or to just get a deeper understanding of the methodology." See [wtsenterprises.com](http://wtsenterprises.com).
19. "Business is art. The ability to patiently ascend the learning curve, to relentlessly plow through obstacles, to keep improving things no matter what, to ultimately create something of beauty out of the miscalculations of the past—to weather the storm—are beautiful things. A successful business is a self-sustaining entity of worth that creates value for all involved."
20. "The colossal human error is the assumption that there is a cosmic inclination to chaos. The mechanical truth? There is a default propensity toward order."
21. Here's a summary-within-the-summary: "To complete this Preface to the fourth edition, I'm thinking it would be good to explain the overall threads of the book, right here at the start. I'll keep it simple:"
  - "Reality is what IS, whether you like it or not.
  - "Drop the prescribed menu. Cut loose. Make up your own mind.
  - "Your life is a collection of linear 1-2-3-4 systems. The scary and wonderful thing about that? In this moment—don't argue with me—every condition of your life was preceded by an assemblage of step-by-step processes. And this means the processes that are executing right now—seen and unseen—are determining your future. To create the life you want, you must intensely manage your systems in the present moment. You must ceaselessly perform system improvement. Do this, and great future results will come along almost spontaneously.
  - "Spend the majority of your work time in preparation and building, not personally executing the work.
  - "What dysfunctional primary system is pervasive in business and personal life? It's one-on-one and group communication protocols including frequency, speed, encapsulation, direction, and tools. The stupendous news? Bad communication is quickly repaired, and the instant return on investment is astonishing.
  - "People say, 'Everything happens for a reason.' That's true enough, yet it's a sophomoric vision. Almost always, the individual who declares this is referring to a pre-stamped life, a template-existence in which someone upstairs is orchestrating every occurrence.
  - "...but being a puppet is not the divine endowment we've been given. Rather, our God-given gift is the freedom to choose."
  - "Point-of-sale. Get the wheels turning NOW! At first glance, this might seem platitudinous. It's not.
  - "Create value for others, all the time.
  - "Mind the gap." Silence breeds paranoia. Don't stop talking.
  - "In the walled kingdom that is your life, be very careful about who and what you let enter through your gates.
  - "The more control you have over your every-day life and your destiny, the more productive and happier you will be.
  - "The magic of life is right here, right now, in front of our noses. It's not 'out there' somewhere."

## Preface to the First Edition: It's Just Mechanics

1. “Be assured that you will find nothing deceitful or unsavory in these pages. Nor does the work-the-system methodology have anything to do with esoteric theory, politics, or religion.”
2. “It’s about common sense and simple mechanics...I call it a workingman’s philosophy.”
3. “What if you could reengineer your existence piece by piece to make it exactly what you want it to be without having to count on luck, Providence, blind faith, or someone else’s largesse?”
4. Don’t let the title of the book fool you: “...winning the life game means following the rules, for if we don’t, any win is a ruse.”
5. “...take the title of this book at literal face value, understanding you will be working YOUR systems. In these pages, I will challenge you to see, dissect, and then refine them one by one until each is flawless. I call this process ‘system-improvement.’”
6. “Life is serious business, and whether you know it or not—or whether you like it or not—your personal systems are the threads in the fabric of your existence. Together they add up to you.”
7. The book is intended to convince the reader to change his or her perception of the world: “The foundational thrust of Work the System is not to educate you in the ten steps to peace and prosperity or to warn you of the five most common mistakes in seeking happiness and material success. The Method digs deeper than that, causing a modification in how you see the elements of your world. And when this quiet yet profound mechanical shift in life-perception occurs—you will remember the exact moment you “get it”—the simple methodology will make irrefutable sense and you will never be the same.”
8. The book gives specific instruction on getting control of your life and your business, “...to get what you want.”
9. The two primary psychological approaches are discussed. “...the first holds that the events of the past and the mindset we formed as a result of those events determine today’s happiness. In this view we are victims of unpleasant circumstance and have a chance at peace only if we face and then disarm the psychic monsters planted in our minds long ago. That’s the Freudian stance. The second approach, the cognitive, maintains that the thoughts we feed ourselves today are what matter most, and the events of the past are just that—in the past—and gone forever unless we insist on swirling them back into the present moment.”
10. There is a criticism against traditional psychology, that these professionals won’t necessarily like what is said in the book: “Old-school psychologists who see endless dour complexity in the human condition will sniff at the simplicity of the Work the System message. Things are more complicated than that, they’ll say. I thank them in advance for the oblique compliment. This is an elementary, dispassionate, drop-the-load dispatch that describes lives as they really are: simple cause- and-effect mechanisms that can be logical, predictable, and satisfying.”
11. “In these pages, I will challenge you to see, dissect, and then refine them (your systems) one by one until each is flawless. I call this process system-improvement. You will create new systems, too, while discarding the ones holding you back, the ones that have been invisibly sabotaging your best efforts.”
12. In an anecdote, I define my view that freedom is not about being in the middle of things and working long hours, where all processes come to a halt when one is absent: “...in the bigger picture this leader was a slave to his job, and the people who depended on him were slaves to his presence. They waited for his response and could not move ahead until he provided input. In his absence, because he failed to set up business processes that kept producing while he was gone, things came to a standstill just the way water accumulates behind a dam.”
13. My personal regret about young peoples’ inability to focus: “In the past twenty years, the lure of instant gratification has seized a huge chunk of our population. For members of the hooked-up generation, too many with the attention span of a gnat—addicted to cellular phones, headset-music, and dumbed-down by the silliness of much of the media and entertainment industries—it’s a stretch to slow down to consider the root of things. The nervous gratification of the moment is a distraction from the quiet contemplation of the reasons why events unfold as they do.”



14. A summary point, especially related to the hooked-up generation narration above: “It’s mandatory that we take the time to understand the machinery of our lives if we are to modify that machinery to produce the life conditions we desire.”
15. It won’t take long to fix things: “Yes, the work-the-system methodology is a throwback of sorts, back to an age when it was universally accepted that the path to success required careful preparation with no expectation of immediate payback. But having said that, know that an investment in the strategy will show real benefits almost from day one.”
16. I describe how the thread of the book will follow my own experience with (my business) Centratel, and how Centratel is a “closed-system laboratory.”
17. “The strategies described in the book are not just for business owners. They’re for anyone. I point out that when I use the word ‘manager,’ that the word refers to anyone, in the sense that each of us manages our own lives.”
18. “I don’t adhere to the work-the-system principles and guidelines every minute. I fall down on the job now and then. Nonetheless, because I have structured my existence around the Method, the details of the day continue to take care of themselves despite any temporary distraction or physical/mental slump.”

## **Introduction: The Simplest Solution**

1. Always: “Keep it simple!”
2. I discuss my life’s transformation from chaos to harmony, peace and wealth: “Twenty-two years ago, at a time that I can pinpoint exactly, I experienced an unexpected shift in perception that began the transformation of my existence from chaos to calm—from a desperate financial condition to prosperity, and from endless toil to relaxed, occasional input.”
3. “...to tackle the more involved challenges of your world—the challenges that have stymied you because of their invisible complexities—we’re simply going to redirect the perceptive, investigative, and analytical skills you already possess.”
4. Standing outside of yourself. Getting It. “Here’s how it will be for you: instead of seeing yourself as an internal component of circumstance enmeshed within the day’s swirling events, your vantage point is going to be outside and slightly elevated from those events.”
5. “My overall life-role is as a project engineer. That is, I’m someone who accepts a problem, designs a mechanical solution, and either alone or in concert with others makes that solution work in the real world. I’m a project engineer in every aspect of my being, including my family-and-friend personal roles.”
6. It’s a non-holistic approach that produces a holistic result: “...it’s a very good thing to take your world apart, to study it, to get things straightened out piece by piece. You can view things as a whole later when you’re not working on the details. There will be plenty of time for that.”
7. Overview of changes that will occur:
  - a. “You will undergo an elementary yet fundamental shift in perspective.”
  - b. “There will be no turning back.”
  - c. “You will not be wallowing in unsupportable theories of reality.”
8. The Three Steps to the WTS Method:
  - a. “Separation, dissection and repair of systems.”
  - b. “Documentation: creating goals, principles and processes.”
  - c. “Ongoing maintenance of systems. Greasing the wheels.”

## Glossary of Terms

**99.9 percent of everything works fine:** It's the truth! There is a penchant for efficiency in the world; systems want to work perfectly, and most of them do.

**Business:** One does not have to show up in order to earn money.

**Error of omission:** A less-than-perfect situation that occurs because someone didn't do something. It is the cause of the majority of problems in the world and in personal lives.

**General operating principles:** The second of the three primary Work the System documents; a two- to four-page collection of "Guidelines for Decision Making" that is congruent with the strategic objective. Essential for the work environment and, in a simplified and shorter format, for one's personal life. (See chapter 10.)

**Job or profession:** One has to show up in order to earn money.

**Linear:** For our purposes, this is how most systems execute themselves, in a 1-2-3 stepped progression. Yes, there are always minor external and internal variables that prompt physicists to construe that systems are, strictly speaking, nonlinear. But here in the real world, we are streamlining things so events can be understood and manipulated. A linear system is not chaotic; within its context it is logical, reliable, simple to understand, and simple to improve.

**Off-the-street people:** These are the people who will "do the work" as viewed by business owners or managers. Depending on the situation, off-the-street workers can be novices or professionals. But because of your thorough documentation and systems strategies, they don't need to be mind readers or fortune-tellers, and they don't necessarily need specific experience in a given field in order to perform superbly.

**Outside and slightly elevated:** The essential perspective of the Work the System methodology is external and above. The view downward also encompasses the viewer. Objectively, we see ourselves below, as separate and distinct, which is the opposite of the common vantage point in which the viewer is integral to the workings of his or her day.

**Perfect:** In the Work the System world, 98 percent accuracy is "perfect" because trying to achieve that additional 2 percent demands too much additional energy. It's the law of diminishing returns in action, and it's a catch-22: The enormous energy required for this tiny increment of improvement is in itself imperfection because that energy could have been put to much better use elsewhere.

**Primary system, or system of systems:** Composed of subsystems; a whole, encapsulated entity with an ultimate purpose; an organism unto itself, such as a personal life, business, job, car, or relationship.

**Project engineer:** The role of a business owner or manager who adopts an outside, system-improvement/system-management posture rather than an inside, doing-the-work role. For a personal life, it's real-time positioning in which one's systems are contemplated, analyzed, and then controlled.

**Recurring:** A process that happens over and over again.

**Strategic objective:** The first of three primary Work the System documents. It's a single page that defines overall goals, describes methodology, and prescribes action; it will serve as an individual's thought-out and carefully constructed "guidebook" to give direction for making major and minor decisions. It is an essential instrument for a business and for a personal life. (See chapter 10.)

**System improvement:** The heart of the method. A search-and-repair process that involves tooling a system into perfection and then, in one's workplace, documenting that system so its perfect functioning will recur. It is the day-to-day mind-set of a manager, the prime responsibility of an organizational leader. In one's personal life, it's an embedded inclination to seek out and identify personal systems, then to hone each to perfection.

**System management:** A focus on maximizing the efficiencies of systems in order to prevent recurring problems, to increase production, and to garner more personal time. It tackles a problem by considering the root cause of it and therefore is the opposite of fire-killing.

**System, subsystem:** Traditionally defined as “a set of entities, real or abstract, where each entity interacts with, or is related to, at least one other entity.” This set of sequentially related and linear actions and/or events has a singular purpose. Within the Work the System context, we are interested in recurring systems. Note that the terms system and subsystem are interchangeable depending on context.

**Tweaking:** The opposite of neglect. The assertive, boots-on-the-ground mechanics of making incremental system improvements that ultimately produce hyper-efficient primary systems.

**Workingman’s (or workingwoman’s) philosophy:** A set of beliefs stemming from the hard, cold, sometimes dirty realities of the job site; the view that a carefully composed blueprint directs the assembly of individual pieces into a superb end product.

**Working procedures:** The third of the three primary Work the System controlling documents. These are instructions that describe how the individual systems of the company or the job are to operate. They are end products of the system-improvement process. Written working procedures are not necessary for personal life. (See chapter 11.)

**Work the System methodology:** The mechanical process of establishing goals and then perfecting the systems that will help attain those goals.

**Work the System mind-set:** The crystal-clear internal understanding of the mechanical way the things of this world operate. Typically arriving as an epiphany in a moment of time, this viewpoint makes it easy to isolate systems for examination and modification.



# PART ONE

## THE SYSTEMS MINDSET

### Chapter 1: Control is a Good Thing

1. “There is an almost cosmological sense—a carryover through the generations from the ’60s, no doubt—that ‘we’re all one,’ and the problems in our lives and the world around us are created by people who don’t share our brand of let-it-be spirituality. If my boss, my spouse, my parents, my children, my neighbor, and my government would just lighten up and be sensible—like me—then everyone would be happy!”
2. Control is, indeed, a very good thing (despite society’s 60’s-ish assumption otherwise): “It’s my contention that being in control of the details of our lives is mandatory if we are to find peace and success—if we are to find happiness. Conversely, while we’re focusing on those factors that are in our control, we must lighten up about those that are not. If we attempt to influence events that we cannot affect, we are in for discontent.”
3. I describe my chaotic youth. At age 23 it suddenly occurred to me that my focus should be on what I could control and let the rest go.
4. Woodstock: A delusion. The real world isn’t that way.
5. “Too many of us—old and young—finger-point and complain and wonder at our dissatisfaction. It’s too bad we do that because it’s not just depressing, it’s a distraction from what we actually need to do to find life satisfaction and to contribute.”
6. The solution lies in making an internal change in ourselves: “It dawned on me that happiness would not be found in control over others or in complaining about world conditions or in finding the perfect drug. It would be found by paying attention to the moment-to-moment details of my own existence.”
7. I discuss Stephen Covey’s Circle of Influence.
8. “Too many of us are paralyzed in the static snapshot of how we think our worlds should be instead of facing the truth of our own unpleasant flowing realities. Life is not a snapshot. It’s a real-time streaming video— and the video plays on, whether we affect it or not.”
9. “...an unfounded assumption smolders. It whispers there is chaos all around, that systems and organization are bad and that Big Brother is right there behind the curtain, always steering things in the wrong direction.”
10. “This thread of paranoia leaves too many of us obsessing about conditions that are not in our control, and that obsessing distracts us from taking the personal actions that would truly make us free! It’s not ‘the system’ that holds people back. It’s a flaw in individual perception.”
11. “It didn’t occur to me that by being blind to personal systems, the mistake of a lifetime could be waiting just around the corner, ready to flatten me when I least expected it. And less dramatic but more endemic, that small inefficiencies could quietly accumulate and take me to the same dark place. The logic that this churning flow of life would be at my command only by paying close attention to the nuts and bolts that composed it, was beyond me.”
12. I discuss the space shuttle, “...arguably the most complex machine ever built by man, and a launch was a magnificent display of human system control.”

### Chapter 2: Events Did Not Unfold as Anticipated

1. I discuss Centratel as a perfect laboratory for developing the WTS method, and for explaining it, that it is an “enclosed system of systems,” and “a primary system composed of subsystems.”
2. I briefly describe the key to turning the fortunes of Centratel around: “The root cause of the turnaround was the discovery and application of the principle that management must focus on improving systems, not in performing the work or in repeatedly snuffing out brushfires.”
3. Centratel processes phone calls for businesses and professions in various vertical markets. It’s essentially a private 9-1-1 call center.
4. I chose this business for three reasons:

- a. It was about people and communication.
  - b. Revenues would be passive (I would not have to be present to earn income).
  - c. Revenues would be recurring (clients would pay each month).
5. I described the first 15 years of operating the business as a nightmare. “Long hours, little money, no friends, bad health and single custodial parent of two.”

### **Chapter 3: The Attack of the Moles**

1. “As the years passed, I thoroughly learned the ropes of the business, priding myself on being expert in every facet. I was able to perform any function and address any challenge...What a feeling of power as I simultaneously solved multiple unrelated problems! I was a master of survival, a fire killer extraordinaire. How heroic! But in my blind arrogance, I was swept up in endless fire killing. I was headed for destruction, and I didn’t even know it.”
2. “Long-term planning didn’t happen and routine maintenance was a vague concept for the future.”
3. “Statistics show that of one hundred new business startups, only twenty will survive five years. Then, in the next five years, only four of those remaining twenty will still be functioning. In another five years, three of those four will disappear, leaving only one out of the original hundred. That’s a 99 percent small-business fatality rate over a fifteen-year period. This is in accordance with my admittedly anecdotal conclusion that the vast majority of small businesses are mismanaged.”
4. “Too often, what ends a business or a job, or what casts an onerous spell on a life, is death by a thousand cuts. This is relentless erosion caused by recurring inefficiencies and their toxic offspring: fire killing and distraction.”
5. “Through it all, I was the heroic save-the-day entrepreneur, the master fire killer who would work as long and as hard as necessary.”
6. “The Whac-A-mole game is the perfect analogy of how most people operate their lives.”
7. “The problem wasn’t how I was playing the game. The problem was the game I was playing.”
8. “I compare the lives and careers of Mick Jagger and Jim Morrison.”

### **Chapter 4: Gun-to-the head Enlightenment**

1. I describe hitting the wall: “Then I had the midnight epiphany; certainly a result of my physical and mental exhaustion combined with my realization that, this time, there was no way out of the immediate crisis.”
2. “For the first time, I saw Centratel as a closed package, a primary system—an independent, stand-alone mechanism, a machine—a separate entity, like a human body, an airplane, a tree, or a city. And I knew that the primary system I called Centratel shared a commonality with all other primary systems in that it was simply the sum of the numerous separate subsystems that composed it.”
3. “It sounds corny, but in my dream-state I rose up and out of the jumble that was my life. I was no longer an integral part of it. Floating upward, just above the chaos, I gazed down at the details of my business spread out neatly as individual physical components on display on a tabletop.”
4. “For the first time, I saw Centratel as a closed package, a primary system—an independent, stand-alone mechanism, a machine—a separate entity, like a human body, an airplane, a tree, or a city. And I knew that the primary system I called Centratel shared a commonality with all other primary systems in that it was simply the sum of the numerous separate subsystems that composed it.”
5. “The logic of it was crystal clear, exquisite. I felt a quiet joy. To this day I remember every wonderful nuance of that night’s vision. And from that night, I can remember that a line from an old rock song by The Fixx reverberated in my head as I lay there: “One thing leads to another . . . one thing leads to another . . .”
6. “I had taken the wrong stance—a backward stance—because the mechanics had been invisible to me! All I did was kill fires, unaware that those fires were the products of dysfunctional individual subsystems that were not being managed.”
7. “My world was chaos not because I was some kind of loser or unfortunate victim of circumstance, but because so many of my subsystems were not being managed.”

8. "I was startled to grasp that there is no human 'King of Everything' who directs the goings-on of the world. On its own, and no matter what, this earth keeps turning and life carries on in an overall structured and organized pattern."
9. The world is not a confused, chaotic mass of sights, sounds and happenings: "Everything works fine 99.9 percent of the time."
10. "Our minds and bodies are complex mechanisms. They are machines that perform—or don't perform. They are indescribably complex collections of subsystems, operating via countless sequential and cooperative protocols."
11. "I asked myself, could it be that the common presumption that says that the world is not functioning well—the world is a mess—is wrong? Yes, I realized, that presumption *is* wrong, because in any given life, on any given day, countless events and connections—systems—work perfectly."
12. "Get that your life is already a collection of systems. These life-systems have determined your life condition in this moment, whether your life is going well or not; whether you have managed those systems or not!"
13. "Overall, the systems of this world work absurdly well: 99.9 percent of everything works just fine, and even the parts we consider imperfect are that way only because we think those parts should be different."
14. "It struck me that if the universe has a predilection for order, it should be a simple thing to 'climb on board.'"
15. "...if we can proceed with the premise that there is a proclivity for powerful efficiency—rather than blindly buying into society's almost universal notion that all is chaos—we will stop fighting events. Instead, confident and deliberate, step by step we can descend one layer deeper to go to work to construct the exact lives we want."
16. Disclaimer: "Of course, it must be said that although there is a regulatory force disposed to keep systems flowing, human free will enables us to cause havoc on personal and global scales."
17. "It is telling that the annoyance of the politically correct is nowhere but in the West. This is a result of people trying too hard to regulate other people. It is systems-thought taken to the extreme by people whose basic needs are satisfied and who therefore have the time and energy—and proclivity—to attempt to channel the thoughts and actions of others. Busybodies."
18. We can trust and rely upon the rules of the universe. "For me, one plus one equals two. For you, one plus one also equals two. The natural mechanics of planet Earth are reliable and can be trusted. And human-devised systems will also operate reliably if they are properly put together and maintained. If they are not put together correctly and/or not regularly coddled, they will fail to produce the results we want."
19. "I now float through the day in fascination. Instead of being swallowed up in a hodgepodge of unpredictability and fire killing, I see events and objects as part of one structured system or another. This real-time, outside and slightly elevated perspective has channeled peace and prosperity into my life and into the lives of those who depend on me."
20. "This bears repeating: the colossal human error is the assumption that there is a cosmic inclination to chaos, when the mechanical truth is that there is a default predisposition toward order."
21. "By perfecting your life's individual systems—by identifying them and then rebuilding them one by one—order and peace will accumulate incrementally."
22. "Once systems are studied and flawed components are exposed and repaired, they will produce desired results. Creating necessary new systems and eliminating unnecessary ones will add to success. And since this is all mechanical, when the changes are made, improvements will be instant."
23. "Now we are at the heart of the Work the System Method. Whether an outcome is to your liking or not, the underlying process is performing exactly as constructed."
24. "Without prodding or willing it to happen, I stepped outside my life and rose above it. I looked down, never again to settle back into the morass that had been my previous existence."
25. "Late that night I understood way down deep inside that perfectly executing systems were at play everywhere and all the time, and that imperfection was the anomaly. And I realized that my business—and for that matter, my whole being—was the sum total of the results of the efficient and inefficient processes that composed it."
26. "The leader's role is to first see the wheels of the machine, and then figure out how to get those wheels turning fast and with maximum efficiency."
27. "It was simple logic. Creating efficient subsystems would of course cause the primary system—Centratel—



to be efficient too.”

28. It was simple logic. Creating efficient subsystems would of course cause the primary system—Centratel—to be efficient too. And to take this a step further, it seemed to me that if the individual subsystems could be made more than efficient, if each were to be made potent and powerful, then my primary systems—my business and my life—would become potent and powerful too.”
29. “Once I clearly defined an objective, I just needed optimize the individual components to meet that objective.”
30. “I would no longer manage the results of inefficient systems. Instead, I would expend my energies on perfecting those systems—and the results would take care of themselves.”
31. “A life’s condition is not the result of luck or of being good or bad. And it’s not about intelligence, karma, attractiveness, education, social class, political stance, or even about how hard one works. A life’s condition is determined by simple mechanics—the mechanics of the systems that compose it.”
32. “My new perspective was not just an interesting new concept. It was an electric, life-changing revelation. Late that night, the moment the switch flipped in my head, there was no going back. I was a changed man.”
33. “...the business mechanisms I would fix and/or create would function without direct moment-to-moment supervision by me...”
34. “Centratel would become a machine.”
35. “In the workplace, the challenge and the solution is to make...organic human processes as solid and reliable as the mechanical objects that surround us. On planet Earth, we accomplish this with documentation!”
36. “The base fact of life is this: every single life-result is preceded by a sequence of steps executing over time. Here’s the simple formula:  $1 \rightarrow 2 \rightarrow 3 \rightarrow 4 = \text{Result}$ . Therefore, the secret to ‘getting what one wants’ lies in spending the majority of one’s efforts in managing the left-hand side of the equation, the  $1 \rightarrow 2 \rightarrow 3 \rightarrow 4$  part.”
37. “In the process of rebuilding Centratel system by system, strength and resilience would evolve as by-products.”
38. “I immediately turned my attention to creating three sets of documents that would get Centratel on track. First, I would create the strategic objective, which would define us and set our direction. Second, I would put together the general operating principles document, which would serve as our “guideline for making decisions.” Third, we would begin to write out working procedures, which would exactly detail every recurring process of the business.”\*

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## Chapter 5: Building the Machine

1. “Until that night when I had my awakening, my vision of Centratel was of an amorphous mass of interrelated and confused sights, sounds, and events. Unraveling had been impossible because of my presumption of chaotic complexity.”
2. “On a subliminal level, the feel-good holistic precept that everything is related to everything else so we should consider each of our actions in a global way, encourages paralysis while it masks mechanical disarray.”
3. “Now I understand that the reason I had felt helpless to fix my business and my personal life was because I had seen them as impenetrable entities. I never contemplated the notion of a process that would dissect them into simple subsystems that I could optimize one at a time.”
4. “Instead of fixing the faulty mechanisms, I had been caught up in attending to the recurring problems those hidden faulty mechanisms had produced.”
5. “From the moment of my late-night epiphany we were on a new path— and there was no turning back. Marching ahead without pause, we quickly began to see actual results.”
6. “We made all critical human and mechanical systems redundant. The first year passed and we confidently hammered on. Customer and staff complaints declined dramatically, and chaos dissolved into serenity as we relentlessly improved our processes and mechanisms, one by one.”
7. “We tackled the most dysfunctional recurring systems first.”
8. We invested — and sometimes inadvertently wasted time and money — as we experimented with new

- concepts, tried to find the right management people, and stumbled with the documentation.”
9. I discuss “Stress-reducing action items.”

## Chapter 6: Systems Revealed, Systems Managed

1. “You wake, study, read, exercise, and eat. You breathe, walk, and digest your most recent meal. You go to work, talk to friends, drive to the store to pick up groceries for dinner. You put gas in the car. You earn money and put it in the bank. Later, you pay the bills. You’re always aware that every one of these accomplishments was preceded by a 1-2-3-4 process that executed over time.”
2. “Systems don’t operate randomly. Like computer code, they relentlessly execute in linear 1-2-3-4 sequence according to their construction. In your world, like everyone else’s world, they are embedded wall to wall. And now you know that for sure.”
3. “You see life more accurately. You’re one layer deeper than the people around you.”
4. “...the essence of your work, health, and relationships lies within systems, and although they are veiled behind the buzz of everyday consciousness, there is nothing complicated about them — or about their management.”
5. “By focusing on the systems that are within your circle of influence you’ll see that tweaking them to higher efficiency is almost always possible.”
6. “Yes, systems and subsystems intertwine and affect one another. Yet first they are separate entities”
7. “Each of your personal systems has direction and thrust. Each is headed somewhere, attempting to accomplish something, driven by an enigmatic power.”
8. “Most people are not in control of their existences, especially if the definition of control includes the qualifier ‘I am getting what I want in my life.’”
9. “So, drop the idea that life is convoluted and mysterious and get to work repairing the simple underlying inefficient mechanisms one by one.”
10. “In our culture it is common to call the simultaneous handling of the day’s umpteen events, multitasking. This is a flawed expression because it suggests that the conscious, hands-on command of multiple concurrent undertakings is some kind of laudable accomplishment... Instead, the term system management is what we’re after.”
11. “Living can seem complicated, but that complexity doesn’t leave you helpless to get a grip on circumstances, because one at a time you can take action on relatively simple subsystem components that you pluck out of the chaos.”
12. “From the start, the primary system is probably better than OK, working well in most situations. Rather than starting from scratch, which in itself introduces a whole host of challenges and unintended consequences, could we just make a simple internal adjustment?”
13. “At best, a system combines with other systems to help you reach desired objectives. At worst, an errant system invisibly creates problems that manifest themselves subversively, contributing to a gnawing anxiety that you are not in control of your life.”
14. “This is about making small, mechanical betterments in subsystems that over time will add up to a primary system made of steel. This is how you will get where you want to go.”
15. “One can compensate for the negative outcome of a recurring problem, but without repairing the errant process that caused it, the problem will undoubtedly occur again.”
16. “The improvement of a system is a system improvement, and the documentation of that system improvement is called a working procedure.”
17. “In the workplace, permanence happens first by creating written descriptions of how systems are to operate. And second, by getting responsible parties to willingly follow the steps described in the documentation. Third, involved parties must be encouraged/rewarded for constantly improving their systems.”
18. “The system enhancement and associated documentation will not only prevent the error from happening again, they will cause the primary system to be incrementally more robust and reliable than before the problem occurred.”
19. “Your job is not to be a fire-killer. Your job is to prevent fires”
20. “Business IS art. It’s a heroic undertaking, and within a successful business lies two wonderful by-products: real and useful value to others— employees and customers—and personal income for the creator.”

21. “In organizations and in individual lives, outright mistakes account for only a small percentage of total errors. Most problems stem from nonexistent process management and show themselves as ‘errors of omission.’”
22. “...as time passes, the mechanism gets better and better. Imagine a mechanical system that improves with time rather than wears out! Effective leaders understand this.”
23. “Most people don’t understand the system-improvement methodology or even that there is such a thing. With best intentions and working hard, they stumble along, batting off the fastballs as they come hurtling in from all directions. I was like that.”
24. “Despite the near perfection of our natural world, look around right now and notice that the human qualities of dependability and consistency are in short supply. And because they are in short supply, people accept that condition as normal. Actually, people should accept it as normal. It is normal! And happily for you, this means standing out from the crowd won’t take much effort.”
25. “So, how do you perceive your life? Do you see it as problematic—unfair, unpredictable, and inhospitable? Or do you view it as orderly and directed?”

## **Chapter 7: Getting It: A room Full of Boxes**

1. “First you work your systems. Then your systems do the work.”
2. This chapter is a metaphorical explanation of the WTS method. The protagonist walks into a room of boxes, which are scattered and chaotic. The mechanisms in the boxes have been neglected.
3. “You, the systems mindset technician arrives on the scene, well prepared with tools and instructions.”
4. “You straighten the boxes into an orderly pattern.”
5. “You, one-by-one, fix the boxes’ contents.”
6. “You document your work.”
7. “You finish and prepare to leave, looking back at the boxes, feeling very good about things: You feel intensely satisfied with your work and with yourself.”
8. “You know this by now. First, make the various systems consciously visible. Second, bring each to the foreground for examination and quick initial documentation. Third, examine. Fourth, adjust and document to final form. Fifth, maintain.”
9. “Each thing we do is a component of a system, a system that has a purpose, whether it is managed or not.”
10. “Reaching the point where you see the systems around you is the first and most significant step.”
11. “Moment by moment, in real time, you will proceed through your day seeing everything around you as part of a system. No more will you perceive your world as a random conglomeration of people, objects, and situations. You’ll see life as a logical collection of individual processes.”
12. “What seemed complex will suddenly appear elementary. With confidence in your new vision, you will change your strategy from fire-killing to system improvement because it is obvious this is the most sensible thing to do.”
13. “If you want to see where you fit within the machine that is your life, you must observe it from an external vantage point. You must stand outside of it if you are to see how you are a part of it.”
14. “There is no need for me to list a one-through-ten-step process for making the Work the System method produce results in your life: You must simply ‘get’ the new perspective of seeing the systems in your life with the same clarity with which you see the rest of the physical world around you. Once that happens, the rest will be fill-in-the-blanks sensibility.”
15. “...it’s what one does that counts. Good intentions, a positive attitude, and passionate enthusiasm are not nearly enough. What matters are the physical actions one takes.”
16. “Most people don’t fail by making overt mistakes. They fail because they don’t take action.”
17. I belabor this point because it is key: “...once the work-the-system methodology is internalized and applied, you will be a different person living a different life.”
18. “The systems mindset is logical, but it’s magical too, as the world you used to take for granted erupts into magnificence: simple and beautiful and predictable.”



## PART TWO

### MAKE IT SO

#### Chapter 8: Swallowing the Horse Pill

1. “With your documentation you will transform ephemeral, feather-in-the-wind organic processes into iron-clad machines that do your exact bidding every single time.”
2. Documentation is the core of the WTS Method: “In your business, having your protocols written down is as important as what you think or say.”
3. “The Strategic Objective is your Declaration of Independence, your mandate for a better future. The General Operating Principles document is your Constitution, a set of guidelines for future decision making. The Working Procedures are your laws, the rules of your game. Can you imagine our government not having its foundation recorded in written form? Why would it be any different for your business or your job?”
4. “...last-minute fire killing is not just dramatic, but it also satisfies a powerfully addictive craving, providing the business owner an instant ego boost fueled by adrenaline and/or cortisol. (Can one be addicted to cortisol? Yes.)”
5. “One day not long after the light bulb switched on in my head, I realized that creating the necessary documentation would not be flashy. The mission would sometimes be tedious as it was clear that cataloging all of our systems would take time.”
6. “I suddenly realized that, yes, the unassuming nature of creating documentation masks its viability!”
7. “Yes, the one-time heavy lifting necessary to create your documentation will be intensive at first, but once in place, your ongoing workload will dramatically and relentlessly decrease. In my case, I transformed one-hundred-hour workweeks into ten-minute workweeks.”
8. Objective: “The one-page strategic objective will provide overall direction.”
9. Principles: “Upon completion of the strategic objective, you will begin to put together a list of general operating principles.” These are “guidelines for decision-making.”
10. Working Procedures: “Instead of killing fires, you will spend your time creating a fireproof environment. Your working procedures will be the blue-collar centerpiece of this effort.”
11. “Responsive to your everyday business experience and adjusted with evolving circumstances, working procedures are fluid (see samples in Appendix C).”
12. “Every system process should have its own written working procedure.”
13. “The documents you will create are mechanical aids. However, there is something else that is important about them. They are on paper and therefore concrete. Their physicality makes what you are doing and where you are going REAL.”
14. “Like bedrock, your three master documents will stand against the storms that blow across your world. And what storms create the most havoc, reversing forward progress? Your own emotions.”
15. “There will be times when you think you are sinking, and when those times occur your documentation will reach down and yank you to the surface before you drown.”
16. “By dispassionately dealing with stone-cold reality, the odds of getting what you want are infinitely higher than waiting for a ghost to communicate good tidings, a horoscope or tarot card to predict a prosperous future, or a multimillion-dollar lottery winning to land in your lap.”
17. “This world operates at 99.99 percent efficiency because there are unalterable physical laws that are powered by an unfathomable strength—a strength that hungers for order and efficiency.”
18. “In the systems that make up our lives, results occur in a cold-blooded way, and that’s a good thing. Outcomes don’t mysteriously conform to our individual desires just because we want them to. And that’s OK because this mechanical reality is predictable.”
19. “When you understand the utter dependability of the world’s mechanics, and then carefully adjust those mechanics, you will get what you want in your life.”
20. “Working or relaxing, you don’t float or obsess anymore. You direct, build, watch, and enjoy. It flows.”

## Chapter 9: We Are Project Engineers

1. “By now you know how much I like to review things, to drill them home—the essence of the Work the System method is to:
  - a. “Acquire the mindset, deeply internalizing the fundamental perspective. *Get it.*”
  - b. “Pinpoint and describe goals for your business.
  - c. “Create a collection of general operating principles, your guide- lines to decision-making.
  - d. “Identify specific systems for improvement.
  - e. “Dissect each system into its most elemental components.
  - f. “One system at a time and leaning hard toward stark simplicity, change sequences and add or delete steps as necessary. Add new systems as needed. Discard the ones holding things back. Experiment. Make each of your systems perfect.
  - g. “Document each tweak you make into the working procedure for the particular system. Keep the updated working procedures in play and tend to them on a regular basis, inspecting and tweaking as necessary.”
2. “The strength to take a new direction comes more from a belief lodged in the belly rather than from something learned in the head.”
3. I discuss the importance of having a system analogy (and give an example): “Your analogy will illustrate systems methodology to you, a reminder of the characteristics that all systems share. In your day-to-day existence, you will keep this analogy in the back of your mind in order to keep your new perspective front and center.”
4. “Your analogy will keep your energies channeled toward system management as it reminds you that a jumble of fire killing will drag you down. It will be a steady reminder that you are a project engineer who calmly creates and maintains efficient systems, not a fire killer who responds like a puppet on a string to crisis after crisis.”
5. “If you are like most people, you already have an unconscious tendency to dissect complexities so exposed components can be dealt with one at a time. The Work the System Method will turn this soft ephemeral proclivity into an assertive, structured quest.”
6. “In any part of life, in order to avoid system failure and to ensure top efficiency, the performance of regular system maintenance is mandatory.”
7. “In considering your new analogy through your new posture as a project engineer, you will begin to watch your existence from a distance. The more time you spend seeing your life from this bird’s-eye view, the faster you will attain your goals—and the more time you will have to spend on this outside and slightly elevated perch.”
8. It’s a simple thing: “Avoid becoming caught up in the work. Instead, step outside, look down, and isolate individual systems. Then, deciding overall what you want them to accomplish, identify defects as well as outside changing situations. Then improve the systems while always documenting the revisions.”
9. “Now I don’t think about my analogy too often because the systems mindset is permanently hard-wired inside my skull.”
10. “All systems everywhere operate across time in exactly the same 1-2-3-4-step way. This is not theory. This is mechanical reality.”

## Chapter 10: Your Strategic Objecting and General Operating Principles\*

1. “Boring but true: to end workplace chaos, identify the separate systems, get the system elements of each down on paper, and then make adjustments in those systems. Work your systems one by one.”
2. “First, put together the strategic objective. It will require just a few hours to develop a workable draft and maybe another five hours total.”
3. “I dug in and laid out our direction, targets, and general strategy in the Strategic Objective, the first and most important of the three primary documents. It gives identity and direction. It prevents flailing away.”
4. “The strategic objective is not a nebulous, feel-good mission statement based on self-aggrandized hope.

It is not something designed to make the board of directors feel good about themselves or intended to impress stockholders and staff. Instead, it's a blueprint in which we acknowledge the day-to-day existence of the business in a mechanized, objective way."

5. "Most business owners have a cursory idea of what success would look like and an inkling of what they have to do to succeed, but because they're hamstrung with fire killing, they don't take time to sit down quietly and firmly establish objectives or to develop specific strategies. They don't even take the very first mechanical steps necessary to sort things out."
6. "Once you have (the strategic objective), a concise, tangible representation of who you are, what you believe, where you are going, and how you will get there, you'll find it uncanny how the physical world will align itself, how it will manifest what you've put down on paper."
7. "After I completed the first draft of the Strategic Objective, I began creating the second critical document, the General Operating Principles. Congruent with the spirit and the specifics of the Strategic Objective, this became a collection of foundational guidelines for making decisions."
8. "Operating principles are tried and true, sensible, and simple to understand and remember. They are not flashy, as they quietly lie beneath the events of the day. They change very little as circumstances evolve."
9. "The general operating principles, like the elements of the strategic objective, keep us steadily moving in a focused direction, whether there's a tendency toward non-action on the one hand or a momentary burst of impetuosity on the other."
10. "We are dogmatic about following our Principles."

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## **Chapter 11: Your Working Procedures\***

1. "Know that a this-will-happen-every-single-time protocol won't materialize via mind reading, a one-time conversation, or when discussed in a meeting. A system must be set in concrete if it is to be executed the same way every single time, and this means creating it in hard and/or soft copy and then ensuring it will be implemented."
2. "I said this earlier: The difference between a large successful business and a small struggling one? Documentation. The former has it. The latter doesn't."
3. "At Centratel, the same inefficiencies kept cropping up over and over, devouring any bottom-line profit and literally killing me physically. These recurring problems were the natural result of undocumented and therefore unmanaged organic work systems."
4. "Now, working procedures prevent serial headaches by converting uncontrolled feather-in-the-wind organic work processes into predictable mechanisms."
5. "Breaking down the overall operation, we isolate systems into enclosed system package units and then outline each on paper in simple linear, chronological format. (First, this happens; second, that happens; third, etc.)"
6. "At Centratel we analyze an individual system-process and document it as it is. Then we find the cause of any inefficiencies, devise fixes for those causes, and then create a prototype written working procedure that will include the necessary steps to eliminate those causes, thus preventing the inefficiencies from returning ever again."
7. "We don't just repair a less-than-ideal outcome. We also modify the causal system so the bad outcome doesn't repeat itself."
8. "...a working procedure makes a system touchable—something to be seen, grasped, understood, perfected, shared, and then executed exactly the same way every time."
9. "As a leader, it is your ethical responsibility—not just an efficient way to operate—to provide written direction for your staff. I occasionally remind my employees that it is management's moral obligation to provide them with the tools to do their jobs."
10. "At work, every recurring process requires a working procedure."
11. "We break things down into small system package units' by extracting systems from the daily operation and then outlining them on paper in a simple linear, chronological format. (First, this happens; second, that happens; third, etc.) We also have a number of nonlinear Working Procedures that are better

- explained in either a narrative or a bullet-point format.”
12. “Instructions that are not written down are feathers in the wind.”
  13. “**Key point number one:** “Create a formal ‘bottom-up’ corporate expectation whereby front-line staff is encouraged, and expected, to both poke holes in existing working procedures and draft preliminary new ones.”
  14. “**Key point number two:** For designing and producing working procedures, use the best solution every single time the process occurs.”
  15. “**Key point number three:** Procedure documentation is not limited to just the obvious problem systems. It applies to all internal systems, no matter their perceived efficiency.”
  16. “**Key point number four:** Create your working procedure documents for anyone ‘off the street.’ This means that someone who doesn’t even work for your organization could instantly perform the process.”
  17. “...be ruthless in insisting that your staff follow procedures exactly, but balance this strict rule with the understanding that if a procedure can be improved, it will be improved instantly.”
  18. “Unwieldy bureaucracy is the enemy, and like a super-virus, it infects most organizations.”
  19. “The idea is to give your business a large accumulation of these small, good things.”
  20. “In the quest, as we created working procedures for every process in the company, we always repaired the most dysfunctional process first.”
  21. “As we worked up the new procedures and released them as official, I delegated more and more tasks that had been my individual responsibility.”
  22. “We were no longer ‘at work.’ We were obsessively working our systems.”
  23. “We now spend the preponderance of our time coddling our machinery so it produces exactly the results we want. We spend very little time coping with bad results because we have so few.”
  24. “Procedure documentation must go to the top of your priority list or the effort will be derailed in a week or two.”
  25. I discuss the four reasons why staff *will* buy into the methodology.
  26. “Yes, be ruthless in insisting that your staff follow procedures exactly but balance this strict rule with the understanding that if a procedure can be improved, it will be improved instantly.”
  27. “If one of us (at Centratel) witnesses slow-moving decision-making in another business, we cringe.”
  28. “The classic example of bureaucratic paralysis is, of course, government, the ‘public sector’ nonprofit organization that is literally in business to spend other people’s money on other people. Bloated, incredibly inefficient government has given documentation a bad name. If there is a cultural generalization about the nightmare of paperwork and bureaucracy, one can point to the overabundance of governmental organizations that surround and engulf us. (But yes, I know you already know that.)”
  29. “Too many business owners are looking for answers to their chaos problems in the wrong places because they have not gone through the dissection process that thorough documentation demands. They don’t see the internal inefficiencies of their systems so they seek spur-of-the-moment global solutions: some quick fix—a magic pill—that in one fell swoop will make everything better.”
  30. “We relentlessly tweak internal mechanisms to perfection. It’s what we do with our time. We endlessly work our systems.”
  31. “A problem is a good thing—a “red flag for improvement”—when your staff takes it as a cue for the creation or enhancement of a working procedure.”
  32. I end the chapter with a quick summary of procedure documentation

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## PART THREE

### SO SAY WE ALL

#### Chapter 12: Good Enough

1. “Getting things too perfect is counterproductive and shortsighted.”
2. “Get in, do the work, and get out. If you’re a ‘smell the flowers’ person, sniff the flowers later when you can give them proper attention.”
3. “In the business world, 98 percent accuracy IS perfect because trying to achieve that additional 2 percent demands too much additional effort.”
4. “Time and money wasted is time and money gone forever. And a waste of time and money means some other positive things that could have happened, didn’t.”
5. “The Good Enough rule is especially applicable to working procedures. A 100 percent accurate document that took forever to create carries imperfection because the extra time spent creating the masterpiece is lost forever. The finished product has an embedded taint, and it can never be called ‘perfect.’”
6. “Throughout this book, I have asserted that you must tweak your procedures to perfection. Now you better understand why my definition of perfection is, figuratively speaking, 98 percent flawless, not 100 percent.”
7. “Guard your consciousness and your focus. Don’t waste time on useless information or complain about what you can’t influence. With the people and events around you, be militant about relegating unimportant media- and advertisement-driven trivia to the mental trash pile. Don’t let zero-relevance details poison what is important to your life, no matter how dogged the encroachment.”
8. Here is one of my favorite end-of-chapter vignettes: “This is not a (Expletive) Clock.”

#### Chapter 13: Errors of Omission

1. “...the largest errors were not the result of overt mistakes. They were the outcome of failing to take steps that should have been taken. These are errors of omission. The large errors of omission are bad enough, but numerous small ones will add up to an equally dire end.”
2. “One could say that not taking action is the physical manifestation of an error of omission.”
3. “The errors-of-omission principle works hand in hand with the axiom, ‘What you say or think is irrelevant. It’s what you do that counts.’ Nike’s simple ‘Just Do It’ credo, which is as metaphysical and profound as a dictum can be (and is perhaps the most recognizable three-word sequence in the English language), embodies Ockham’s admonition for “parsimony in scientific explanation.”
4. “In any context, an omission is something left out, something not done. Here’s the rub: it’s a choice not to do something that should be done. Laziness and procrastination are choices, therefore not taking action is a choice!”
5. “A problem assertively prompts us to create or improve a system or procedure. We don’t want setbacks or scary moments, but when they occasionally occur, we think, ‘thank you for this wake-up call,’ and take assertive system-improvement action to prevent the setback from happening again.”

#### Chapter 14: Quiet Courage

1. What is quiet courage? “Quiet courage is unadorned action and is the opposite of procrastination. A lack of quiet courage incites an error of omission. Quiet courage resides deep inside and causes one to buck up to do what needs to be done, whether one wants to or not. Founded on internal fortitude, it is made real by self-discipline.”
2. “Measurement and stark objectivity are important, but an inability to measure should not stymie efforts to invest resources.”
3. “Problems that will never happen can’t sap your time and energy. They can’t hold you back. Therefore, problems that will never occur have tangible value. But how can we measure these future problems that won’t happen—problems we prevent before they become reality? The answer is, we can’t.”

4. "...so we invest time and money to prevent unmeasurable negative events that won't happen and to foster equally unmeasurable positive events that will happen. This is quiet courage."
5. "At Centratel, maintaining the quiet courage posture is easy for us because it aligns with the rest of the work-the-system methodology. It's a learned habit, ingrained by simple Pavlovian positive reinforcement. It works, so we do it."
6. "Visualize laziness as an object, something physical that is outside of you and perched on your shoulder like a small rodent."
7. "Ask, 'Why am I being cowardly in this moment? Why am I being a *wimp*?' It's a bit of twisted psychology that rattles-the-cage and invokes passionate reaction. Of all human failures, cowardice is perhaps the most abhorred. Paraphrasing my WTS Consulting business associate, Josh Fonger: 'The mark of a successful CEO lies in the ability to take diverse and sparse empirical evidence and rapidly make cold, hard decisions.'" (Regarding Josh, see [wtsenterprises.com](http://wtsenterprises.com))

## Chapter 15: Point-of-Sale Thinking

1. "The (point of sale) concept is spelled out in our operating principles document, Principle #14: 'Do it NOW.'"
2. "All actions build on 'point-of-sale' theory. We don't delay an action if it can be executed immediately. Just like any major retail outlet, we 'update inventories and databases at the exact time the transaction takes place.'"
3. "We ask, 'How can we complete the task NOW so we don't have to deal with lingering details later?' Bam! We completely finish a task NOW, take care of the background adjustments NOW, and then get on with whatever is next . . . NOW!
4. "The aim of point-of-sale processing is to gobble up details as they arise. It's the antithesis of fire killing. Like quiet courage, point-of-sale positioning is the opposite of procrastination."
5. "Like quiet courage, point-of-sale positioning is the opposite of procrastination."
6. "For both your business and your personal life, the point-of-sale posture allows you to focus on the path ahead while your other systems strategies prevent problems from sneaking up from behind."
7. "Strategy #1: "...altogether reject procrastination and make it your moment-to-moment quest to knock off tasks as they appear."
8. "Strategy #2: "...automate a task and thus altogether eliminate the requirement for human action. By doing this, the do-it-now goal is achieved without any effort at all."
9. "The point-of-sale chant? AUTOMATE-DELEGATE-DISCARD."
10. "Point-of-sale means being on the offense, eyes open and ready to handle whatever comes up, instead of procrastinating and/or burning up precious time sorting through old details. You will be in an assertive posture, better prepared to handle the inevitable body slams that are part of living a life."
11. "Our veteran managers embrace the do-it-now tenet not just because it's our policy, but also because in their experience it has been so potently effective."
12. "It's important to remember that in a point- of-sale cash register, the all-at-the-same-time tasks are automated. Multitasking—many systems executing at the same time—is a perfect application for a computer, not for a human being. Let your systems do the multitasking."
13. "Communication with my management staff is rarely via a regular, real-time one-on-one conversation."
14. "If any information you receive is not used, or is of marginal use, categorize it for what it is—a waste of time and energy—and then, with a big grin, dismiss it from your life."
15. "Procrastination most often appears during the low times, the times when willpower is weak because of stress, fatigue, problems, distractions, and/ or inexplicable lack of motivation (for whatever reason). Failing to carry through with the point-of-sale mandate is often the first casualty."

16. “Too many people live in chaos because they fail to slow down enough to set goals and determine sensible strategies to reach those goals. Too often, mindless rushing prevails when one should instead be calmly making system adjustments.”

## Chapter 16: Extraordinary Systems Operated by Great People

1. “...an essential aspect of the business machine you will create: design it to be operated by regular people like you and me, people who don’t have superpowers.”
2. “We do have an extraordinary staff, but that is not because of my skill as a personnel recruiter, or just dumb luck. It’s because we attract and keep quality employees due to the great work situation we offer.”
3. “The great situation attracts the great employees. We just need to have enough sense to recognize them when they walk in the front door and then, once hired, treat them like the adults they are.”
4. “Seeking the consummate employee who will solve all problems — a from-the-top-down quick fix — is not systems thinking.”
5. “You want smart, honest, clean-living, and enthusiastic employees who will believe in what you have created—individuals who become intrigued with your vision and who will want to continue into the future with you, at least for a while. These good people are the bedrock of your future”
6. “It seems logical that the business leader should hyper-focus on producing the product or service and finding customers. But this is the problem! Exclusively concentrating on these vital missions without an overall strategy of system-improvement of the product or service—and the delivery—ultimately leads to dysfunction.”
7. “Failure to adopt an outside and slightly elevated perspective over the entire operation is a primary reason only one new business out of one hundred will survive fifteen years.”
8. “The (successful) leader’s largest time-expenditure is not in coordinating big deals. Instead, the leader is spending most of his or her time supervising adjustments of the system mechanisms that produce and sell the product or service.”
9. “The ultimate key to empowering your employees lies in your own internalizing of the systems mindset.”
10. I list the questions we ask in a job interview: Hoops that must be jumped through.
11. “Don’t confuse feelings with logic, the subjective with the objective. However compassionate, hiring someone because of a ‘this person needs a break’ gut feeling is usually a mistake. Use gut feelings to disqualify rather than to qualify people.”
12. “Hiring and then firing someone is not just a bad investment for the company, it’s an intense personal blow to the employee. For the job prospect, it’s infinitely less painful to not get the job in the first place. Be compassionate by creating a thoughtful (and of course, documented) hiring protocol.”
13. “And what about the attributes of the leader of a large, successful company? Most times, these people are not innately superstars. Beyond an adequate degree of intelligence and their willingness to work hard, their leg up is that they naturally operate from a systems perspective—while the huge majority of people do not. These leaders are heavyweights because they understand that moles must be eliminated, not repeatedly whacked.”
14. ”The role of the leader: “Via managers who understand the process, the large-business leader focuses on perfecting systems and keeping them that way, constantly making efficiency adjustments while simultaneously keeping up with trends and changes. It should be the same for you if you are to climb out of the morass within which 95 percent of the world struggles.”
15. “Via managers who understand the system-improvement process, the successful leader is focused on perfecting processes and then keeping them that way.”
16. “All the ships in your fleet must be traveling at full speed, so you will want to ensure that all your people are on board. One slow boat will hold back the entire flotilla”

17. “A by-product of the systems mindset is the ability to instantly distinguish the efficient from the inefficient.”
18. “It’s easy to find floundering businesses. You can’t help stumbling across them because they are everywhere. In visiting such businesses there is also much to absorb. Note the lack of pride, the fire-killing/in-the-nick of time comportment of the employees, the lack of detail oversight. Feel the chaos. This is the antithesis of what you want for your work and your life.”

## **Chapter 17: Consistency and Cold Coffee**

1. I discuss an unpleasant incident at a coffee kiosk many years ago. The outcome?: To this day, I don’t like to use Kiosks.”
2. “Here it is yet again: the creation, maintenance, and enhancement of internal systems must be the leader’s primary objective.”
3. “We try hard to avoid foul-ups, but when we do commit an error, we’re obsessive about fixing it. We bombard the unhappy customer with tender loving care to the point where he or she is happier after the error than before it.”
4. “Objectively observing my reaction to that single cup of cold coffee, I learned that the success of a business depends on consistent high quality.”
5. “It’s a powerful human idiosyncrasy, this willingness to make snap yet irreversible bad decisions based on a moment’s bad mood.”
6. “With clear-cut rules for your people, no gray areas exist to cause uncertainty and anxiety.”
7. “Employees want rules to be consistent and fair.”

## **Chapter 18: Hyper-Communications: Grease for the Wheels**

1. “It seems sensible that a discussion of communication would parallel other work-the-system protocols, protocols that dictate that quality supersedes quantity. However, in considering communications, I pointedly disagree. The sense I have developed over the years is that the quantity of communication is a direct determinant of the quality of communication.”
2. “More communication leads to better efficiency, stronger cooperation, and deeper trust. Between two nations—or between two people—if silence reigns, problems will arise in the relationship or there will be no relationship at all.”
3. “Do what you say you will do. Keeping promises is a system in itself, a habit that bolsters one’s personal self-respect as it propagates solid relationships.”
4. I give a number of suggestions to improve communication: “Discussing communication mechanics can be a monstrous proposition, so (in the unabridged book) I boil it down into separate pieces.”
5. “We don’t wing it with our communications. Intense management of communications systems delivers freedom.” (See Appendix G for Centratel’s Communication System.)

## **Chapter 19: Prime Time**

1. What is Prime Time? “The Prime Time approach is about executing the most potent actions when brainpower is at peak capacity. Here’s how to exert tight governance over the most powerful primary system at your disposal—yourself.”
2. “There are two components. The first has to do with your most effective time of day due to biological makeup. Let’s call it biological prime time, or BPT. The other component has to do with what you do with your time. This is mechanical prime time, or MPT.”
3. “First, let’s talk about biological prime time. I’m robust but an older guy, and I function at maximum effectiveness for just seven or eight hours within a twenty-four-hour day.”



4. “If anyone of us frivols away our daily allotment of BPT, that’s a full day’s peak creative allotment wasted.”
5. “Because my car is out of gas does not mean it needs repair.”
6. “Analyzing the why of BPT is not important because it just is what it is. What is vital to know is when it occurs.”
7. “During your BPT is when you should create your strategic objective, general operating principles, and working procedures. It’s also the best time to sit with your staff to explain your new strategy.”
8. “You will learn to cherish these golden hours as a commodity to be carefully parsed, never frivoled away.”
9. “The lo-fi non-prime-time hours are a reward for the prime-time hours that were well spent. Both periods are equally gratifying.”
10. “If you are going to break complexity into workable components, try consolidating time into one-day manageable chunks. It’s easier to master one day at a time.”
11. I talk about the alcohol/caffein/antidepressant cycles.
12. “Mechanical prime time (MPT) has to do with *what* you do with your time. It’s the time spent building primary systems such as a business or a career and, with some notable exceptions that I will discuss, it is not the time spent working at a job for money or mechanically producing the product or service.
13. “If your goal is freedom and prosperity, maximizing your MPT is critical. Create as much of it as you can.”
14. “Unlike BPT, which happens automatically whether we are ready to take advantage of it or not, MPT exists only if we generate it.”
15. “Your task is to identify exactly what MPT is for you, and then spend as much of your day there as possible.”
16. “The key indicator of a ‘job’ is that one has to show up. Not so with a true business.”
17. “MPT is...not the time spent working in the business producing the product or service, or dealing with everyday recurring business affairs.”
18. “The day you ‘get it’ and switch your focus to the blow-by-blow mechanics of building a business for yourself, while leaving aside theory and wishful thinking, freedom and wealth will begin to materialize. You’ve attained the systems mindset.”
19. I talk about the benefits of holding a traditional job. (Running a business is not for everyone.)
20. “In a real business, the owner is not the one physically generating the product or service. This can be a bitter pill, but it is difficult to dispute that if you are the one creating and/or delivering the actual product or service, you own a job more than you own a business.”
21. Reverse definition of a business: “The key indicator of a ‘job’ is that one has to show up. Not so with a true business. A real business operates with cursory supervision from the owner, churning out profits as its own primary money-making machine—its own organism, self-sufficient and independent. Think this pleasant thought: ‘Money keeps materializing in my bank account while I’m elsewhere.’”
22. “Here’s the great thing about owning a real business: someday it can be sold as a packaged entity, a self-contained primary system.”
23. “If other people are doing the sales and production work, and the organization cranks out solid profits without moment-to-moment input from you, your business will have tangible worth.”
24. “With good management of MPT, “the leader spends the majority of his or her time focused on driving the business to self-sufficiency, protecting it, and making it grow.”
25. “When you are not in BPT, it’s certainly OK to focus on MPT tasks — the tasks that have to do with improving and growing your business and your life. High energy or low energy, keep your work activities pointed toward primary business-building or career-advancing activities per your critical documents.”
26. “When you begin to see a reduction in time demands at work, you will be inspired to use BPT and MPT in your personal life.”

27. “No matter where you and I are, or what we’re doing, this instant in time—this right now—is IT! Any other time is not real, either memory or conjecture.”
28. “Try this: for brief moments in the middle of working your systems, withdraw a bit in order to look down and celebrate the only true reality there is—this right now—and be grateful.”

## **Chapter 20: The Traffic Circles of Pakistan**

1. I discuss the dramatic differences between Pakistani and U.S traffic circle “cooperative social agreements,” and metaphorically apply those rules to business.
2. “Here’s the question: to get what one wants — in this case, traveling from one place to another as unscathed and as rapidly as possible — shall it be Pakistani-style, via independent, single-minded challenges to one another (a rudimentary free-for-all system) or shall it be by group cooperation (an intricate and formal system)?”
3. “And away from the traffic circles, in societal processes, it is simply more productive for each participant to consider the welfare of other participants and to carefully follow simple rules that deal with common contingencies. For traffic and for the culture as a whole, it just works better. It’s a matter of mechanical efficiency.”
4. “But is there is more to this than efficiency? Ignoring the mechanical aspect, which traffic circle is the more creative and fun? The more innovative and free form? Clearly, it’s the Pakistani circle. The flair and competitiveness in Pakistani streets is a remarkable thing, with a colorful, good-natured jostling that is fascinating to watch.”
5. “In life beyond traffic circles, could it be that a staid, rules-based conservative foundation is the perfect launching pad for surges of wild-eyed innovation and leaps of faith?”
6. “Today, slow down and create order and structure. Later, from this framework, take your risks.”
7. In the end-of-chapter vignette I discuss how we applied the work the system method to survive the COVID-19 challenge.
8. “If I had to point to the most important work-the-system principles that saved us (from the COVID-19 onslaught), what would they be? I’d say it was in having the quiet courage, the innovative mindset, the resources, and an awesome staff that allowed us to meet and survive the unexpected earthquake.”

## **Chapter 21: System Improvement as a Way of Life**

1. “Gain a more accurate understanding of the mechanics of how this material world functions and then apply this understanding in every instance. ‘Get it,’ and the systems mindset will be so embedded that it will modify even the smallest decision of the day. It will be part of you.”
2. “For a given primary system, to ensure desired results occur over and over again, the task is to adjust its subsystems so the correct components are being used and they are sequenced properly.”
3. “It’s about preparation. If you pay close attention to the mechanical details of your world and make proper manipulations to the key systems that compose it, you will construct a life that is unencumbered with fire killing and seldom dictated by urgency.”
4. “No longer will the tail be wagging the dog.”
5. “...know that things can be fixed quickly if you really, truly see the deeper reality of how things work — that the world is a collection of systems — and then focus on step-by-step system-improvement.”
6. I review the work the system Method, step by step as well as give a detailed summary of “the rules of the game”
7. “Forget about making mighty homerun swings that will win the game. The numbers are more than a little against you and your too-powerful swings will be a distraction and a waste of energy. Instead, hunker down, enhance what you have, and go for the surefire incremental system-improvement advances: the

singles and doubles.”

8. “Focus on the mechanical systems that produce the results and never doubt that a superb collection of subsystems will produce a superb primary system.”
9. “...most people look for better results without considering the mechanisms that would produce those better results. They don’t know about the system-improvement concept.”
10. “You see the machinery. You work that machinery so it produces the exact results you desire. No longer will invisible systems produce random bad results. You never forget that systems are executing, real time, this minute, whether managed or not.”
11. “One last time I remind you that the mandatory adjustment is in your moment-to-moment perception of the world’s unfolding. All your actions stem from this new, outside, and slightly elevated vision. Your life is composed of separate systems that function flawlessly 99.99 percent of the time.”
12. “The Work the System mind-set is focused, deliberate, and organized. It’s about action, not reaction.”
13. “Few people understand the magnificence of the systems around them—but now you do. You reject escapism as you appreciate the here and now for the miracle it is—the miracle that was always right there in front of you.”
14. “Be outside the events of your day and treat those events as elements of your overall game, a game that you will make perfect with proper engineering. This game, of course, is your life.”