



**THE 50 SECOND
Q&A**

**Pithy wisdom from
Thinkers50**

Featuring

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Julian Birkinshaw

Rachel Botsman

David Burkus

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Peter Fisk

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INTRODUCTION

Distillation lies at the heart of successfully communicating. The more complex the ideas, the more intricate the context, the greater the premium on distillation.

At the Thinkers50, as we travel the world and the internet, seeking out the best ideas in management, we look out for the thinkers who have a gift for distilling their research and concepts down into memorable phrases, tightly argued articles, clearly constructed diagrams, and examples which are as evocative as they are instructional.

To hone their distilling skills, we challenge thinkers to complete our Thinkers50 50-second Q&A. The result is a unique insight into what some of the world's leading business thinkers are thinking – and how they manage their lives.

We hope you enjoy this collection of our recent examples of distilled wisdom.

Stuart Crainer & Des Dearlove

Thinkers50 Founders

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CHRISTIE HUNTER ARSCOTT: THE QUEST

Christie Hunter Arscott is principal of Quest, a global leadership institute for early career women (www.herquest.org).

What book are you currently reading?

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success by Carol Dweck. Dweck's research fascinates me because I am interested in analyzing the impact of not only skill set development but also, mindset shifts on early career women (I believe a focus on skills must be coupled with with targeted efforts to address one's mindsets. Both are critical parts of the gender equation!).

How do you describe what you do?

I am a "Gender & Generations Strategist". As a strategic advisor and thought partner, I support organizational leaders in their quest to attract, retain and advance the next generation of women leaders.

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

I find the work, research, writings, career impact and service of so many individuals a source of constant inspiration. There are too many to count. Gloria Steinem and Michelle Obama are two individuals leading the list.

What does success look like?

I am a firm believer that each individual should craft their own definition of success and understand that this definition may evolve and change

over time.

For me right now, career success is the ability to function at the intersection of 3 areas: my passions and interests; my skillsets and expertise; the evolving needs of the market (in particular how these needs relate to women and millennials).

What is your competitive advantage?

The ability to combine research and advisory work as part of my practice.

My research continues to inform my work with organizations - ensuring my approach is experientially grounded and evidenced based, while focusing on bridging the gap between research and practice.

Our new venture QUEST - The Global Leadership Institute For Early Career Women - is differentiated by the research driven nature of the content and approach.

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

I approach life, including every day human interactions, with a spirit of inquiry.

I am constantly asking questions, absorbing knowledge, and refining my points of view based on new inputs.

I read. I have deep conversations. I observe. I research. I write. Fresh

thinking comes from innate curiosity and approaching life with this spirit of inquiry.

How much time do you spend travelling?

Too much :-)

What is the secret of a great presentation?

Believing in your message. Authenticity always wins.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

What people question may in fact end up being your greatest differentiator. When I was awarded a Rhodes scholarship I was featured in a newspaper article with an opening line that read, “While most Rhodes scholars go to Oxford to study medicine or law, Christie’s going to study women’s studies”. Even from the outset, I felt a kind of juxtaposition about what “conventional” Rhodes scholars do and what my plans were. People asked me monthly what I planned to do with my degree. In the end, what was questioned the most became my greatest differentiator.

What is your next goal?

Immediately, expanding the reach and impact of QUEST - The Global Leadership Institute for Early Career Women
Longer term, writing a book ... stay tuned!

JULIAN BIRKINSHAW: INNOVATING MANAGEMENT

Julian Birkinshaw of London Business School worked with Gary Hamel to launch the Management Innovation Lab, champions the importance of management innovation. He was included in the 2015 Thinkers50 ranking.



What is your competitive advantage?

I am good at bridging between the worlds of academia and practice. So I am much closer to the real business world than most research-focused academics, and I understand the world of theory better than any full-time businessperson.

How would you describe yourself in three words?

Creative and disciplined at the same time; very efficient at getting things

done

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

I read a lot, and deliberately quite a wide variety of topics, not just business books. I go to academic seminars, which are often very narrow but have some interesting concepts buried underneath all the literature and statistics. I also write my ideas down in short blogs – strangely, the habit of trying to construct an argument actually helps me to develop my ideas further.

How do you divide your time?

My time is split four ways – teaching at London Business School, consulting and speaking to external audiences, research and writing, and finally administrative responsibilities at LBS (department meetings, seminars, running the Deloitte Institute)

How much time do you spend travelling?

I travel once a week – a mix of long and short haul travel. And I never stay long enough to get jetlag – I am usually abroad for only a day or two.

What is the secret of a great presentation?

The quality of the speaker is obviously key here – I have seen brilliant speakers captivate their audiences talking about incredibly obvious and mundane things. But beyond the speaker's basic charisma, the secret of a great presentation is that takes the audience somewhere new and surprising. Remember, most of the audience for a business presentation

have seen a lot of these presentations before, so they don't want another story about Jack Welch or Steve Jobs. I believe they want something different, that forces them to think and reflect in ways they don't usually do. Of course, it also has to link that new thought back to the "real world" as well.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

To be a good management thinker, the first point is you need to actually know what you are talking about! This means starting from either a strong foundation in practice (running a business) or in theory (getting a PhD). There are really good management thinkers coming from both camps. But the people who jump into book-writing or conference-speaker without any sort of foundation are usually very superficial.

The second point is that the neat new ideas usually emerge at the intersection between theory and practice. So if you start out in academia, you should spend a lot of time working with executives to understand their world view, and if you start out as an executive, you need to read widely, to place your practical experience in the right context.

RACHEL BOTSMAN: THE SHARING AGENDA

Rachel Botsman (rachelbotsman.com), winner of the 2015 Thinkers50 Breakthrough Idea Award, is one of the foremost champions of the sharing economy.



What book are you currently reading?

H is for Hawk.

Do you describe yourself as a thinker?

It's funny, describing yourself as a 'thinker' or a 'thought leader' seems to make many people uncomfortable. They ask "what else do you do?" or "what organization do you belong to?". It's not a box that people seem to accept. And yet the world needs people who have the privilege of being given the time and space to think. So yes, I do use that term.

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

I'm inspired by people who make complex things simple.

What does success look like?

Creating thinking that has real impact in the world across countries, classes and fields.

When did you last say 'Eureka!'!?

I don't think I have ever said that word in my life! There are of course magic moments when many dots you have been trying to join together suddenly do so to form a 'simple' insight. They give me a Eureka feeling but I never vocalise it!

What is your competitive advantage?

I have no agenda. I am not trying to sell anything through my work. Most people you hear and read pitch in some shape or form or are simply trying to prove themselves.

How would you describe yourself in three words?

Authentic, curious, warm.

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

Its an alchemy of curiosity and discipline. Rachel Botsman

How do you divide your time?

It differs. I don't think of dividing my day (e.g. I'll spend 2 hours writing, 2 hours speaking etc). I have found it is better to do different types of

work in blocks. For example, teaching and research go well together so I do them over the same months. Speaking and writing do not marry well so if I have a big writing project, I have to clear the speaking calendar.

How much time do you spend travelling?

A fair bit! But I have got a lot more conscious about where I am going and the reason why. I have two young kids and I think best when I am still.

What is the secret of a great presentation?

Being totally present with the audience. Yes the stories, timing, delivery, visuals etc are all important but a presentation goes from good to great when all you are thinking about is that connection with your audience. You don't just know but can feel what you want them to walk away with.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

Find a lens on the world that is uniquely yours. Through that lens, join together different dots to create a fresh idea. Most importantly create a vehicle or artefact to carry the idea. It can be a tv show, a book, a business etc. One article is not enough. Then marry the idea. Love it, hate it but most importantly understand the idea better than anyone else in the world. Know when to push the idea harder, know when to let it go. Once you have the idea, figure out your business model that gives you the freedom to keep thinking versus locked into to have to sell services.

DAVID BURKUS: REINVENTING MANAGEMENT

David Burkus (davidburkus.com), shortlisted for the 2015 Thinkers50 Radar Award, is the author of *Under New Management*.

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What book are you currently reading?

Roger Martin and Sally Osberg's *Getting Beyond Better*, I find social entrepreneurship a fascinating new area of study that fulfills the promises Corporate Social Responsibility first made.

Do you describe yourself as a thinker?

I think the irony of the collection of thinkers in the Thinkers50 is that "questioner" might be the more appropriate moniker. Those assembled

aren't afraid to challenge the status quo, question current management norms, and offer new ideas for leadership.

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

A lot of my intellectual heroes are a part of this year's Thinkers50. Daniel Pink, Liz Wiseman, Roger Martin, and Nilofer Merchant are just a few of the folks whose work inspires me to make a contribution to management thought.

What is your next goal?

My new book, *Under New Management* was published in 2016 and I have big dreams for it. It re-examines a lot of management norms and profiles companies and research that offer a better, if counterintuitive, way forward.

What is the secret of a great presentation?

Give.

MICHAEL CHASKALSON: MINDFUL LEADERSHIP

Michael Chaskalson (openmindwork.co.uk) is one of the pioneers of the application of mindfulness in leadership and in the workplace. He is the author of the agenda-setting book *The Mindful Workplace* and the bestselling *Mindfulness in Eight Weeks*.

What book are you currently reading?

All the Light We Cannot See by Anthony Doerr: gripping, tragic, uplifting.

How do you describe what you do?

I try help people discover the rich mechanisms of their own minds; to see how these impact what they see, do, think and feel; and to get more choice around these.

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

A fairly unknown Tibetan lama - Dhardo Rimpoche. He just got on with helping people, wherever he found them. When you were with him, you were his sole focus.

What does success look like?

For me, it would mean the people I work with coming to see more clearly, experience more vividly, feel more in charge of their own lives and become kinder - to themselves and to others.

What is your competitive advantage?

I never intended for it to be like this, but I've been a monk; an

entrepreneur; a student and researcher of the psychology of mindfulness - and, strangely perhaps, I've worked with several top business leaders. There aren't many of us like that out there.

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

Teaching - really working to catch the lived moment of each student's issues.

Conversing - with colleagues, students, clients and friends.

Thinking - sitting at my desk, working it out.

Retreating - weeks of solitude each year, letting things unfold and emerge.

Realising that I've got so much more to learn.

How much time do you spend travelling?

Too much. But then again...

What is the secret of a great presentation?

Engage. What do the people in front of you most need to hear about at this moment? Be real. Care - about the people you're talking to, about your material.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

You've absolutely got to put in the hours of mindfulness practice. Then read widely, think, talk to others and make connections. Don't strive too hard...

What is your next goal?

Over the next five years I want to extend my reach - to impact society more deeply.

Describe yourself in three words.

I struggle to answer that, so I asked my wife.

She said at my best I'm:

Open, Energetic, Calm.

We left it there...

ENRIQUE DANS: TECH DIRECT

Enrique Dans (enriquedans.com), shortlisted for the 2015 Thinkers50 Digital Thinking Award, is Spain's leading commentator on technology trends.



What book are you currently reading?

Finishing *Little Rice: Smartphones, Xiaomi, and the Chinese Dream* by Clay Shirky

Do you describe yourself as a thinker?

I rather think of myself as someone that challenges others to think

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

My mentor, José Mario Álvarez de Novalés. Although he is no longer

with us, he keeps making me want to be better.

What does success look like?

I'm working hard to find out.

What is your next goal?

Understanding the full implications of machine learning and the huge societal change that will come associated with its adoption

When did you last say 'Eureka!'!?

When I figured out the amazing feedback loop between the use of the social web and a professor's workflow...

What is your competitive advantage?

Perseverance. I started blogging at least once a day in 2004, and I haven't stopped a single day ever since...

How would you describe yourself in three words?

Chaotic, provocateur, perseverant

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

Just keep thinking and let more inputs step in... one of my mottos is "you don't blog with your head, you blog with your feet (as you keep walking through more ideas)"

How do you divide your time?

I don't. I'm totally disorganized and chaotic. Everything just keeps

coming and even though it might feel unmanageable, things just seem to fall into place.

How much time do you spend traveling?

Not as much and not as far as I would like to.

What is the secret of a great presentation?

Connecting with the audience, challenging them, having them reach the ideas by themselves.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

Don't!

ERICA DHAWAN: CONNECTING

Erica Dhawan (ericadhawan.com), champion of collaboration and connectional intelligence, was included in the 2016 Thinkers50 Radar selection of upcoming management thinkers.



What book are you currently reading?

I'm re-reading Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half a Yellow Sun*.

Do you describe yourself as a thinker?

Actually, I usually describe myself as a thinker + movement builder. I believe that one part of my impact is to develop original concepts as a thinker based on connecting the dots of old and new ideas, trends and world changes. The other part is to make those ideas practical for people

and organizations so that they become actionable, scalable and sustainable.

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

My biggest inspiration is the musical performer Beyonce for her ability to take risks, work hard, use music to spread ideas, constantly reinvent and evolve herself.

What does success look like?

Success looks like having a laser focus on the things you care about most.

What is your next goal?

My vision is to make our Connectional Intelligence learning products become the "modern day Myers Briggs" reimagining how we assess personality styles and teams and our measurement tools become the "Net Promoter Score of Collaboration." I am also committed to growing my consulting firm Cotential, which helps executives improve and measure the business value out of collaboration through data analytics, training and consulting.

What is your competitive advantage?

The world is ever changing. I believe that being more human--breaking the silo of 'expert' to 'audience' and being constantly evolving is my greatest strength. I have spent my life focused not solely on generating and spreading ideas, but instead designing a community to enable many

others to achieve the shared purpose of spreading Connectional Intelligence across the world.

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

I spend 2 per cent of my time surrounding myself by new thinkers and doers to stay connected to the changes happening around the world.

How much time do you spend travelling?

About 2 cities a week - Delta or United are my second home :)

What is the secret of a great presentation?

Less of a presentation and more of a conversation.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

Be willing to put in the hard work and persistence, don't give up and publicly state your commitments and goals in the world.

ALESSANDRO DI FIORE: INNOVATION MEETS STRATEGY

Alessandro di Fiore is the founder of ECSI Consulting (www.ecsi-consulting.com) and one of Europe's leading thinkers at the awkward intersection between strategy and innovation.



What book are you currently reading?

Irrational Man by William Barrett

How do you describe what you do?

I help organizations to practice leading edge management ideas. I am a thinker, always looking for the business relevance of the ideas I develop. I work with other people for the benefit of other people.

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

The normal people I interact with daily whether they are sales agents, plumbers, accountants, or whatever. There are always small things, gestures, words, behaviors to learn from.

What does success look like?

Contributing to build something enduring which is better than yourself.
A new business, a family, a client's team.

What is your competitive advantage?

Ideas with relevance and the ability to work with people to put the ideas into practice in organizations.

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

I read a lot. I keep expanding my academic and media network of friends and professionals to always get fresh thinking and perspectives.

How much time do you spend travelling?

50 per cent of my time.

What is the secret of a great presentation?

Few messages, simple to understand with a solid back-up. I am always suspicious about the 50+ slides presentation. As in advertising, repeating the same messages multiple times will help to imprint them in the mind of the audience.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

Keep raising your personal bar of aspiration, even when you believe you have made it. Networking for ideas.

What is your next goal?

To transform ECSI Consulting from a European Strategy & Innovation consulting boutique to a global one. First step, opening our USA practice in Boston.

Be ranked among the top global thinkers in the innovation space.

Describe yourself in three words.

Resist the usual.

PETER FISK: GAMECHANGING GENIUS

Peter Fisk, author of *Gamechangers*, thrives where brands meet technology and where creativity meets change.



What book are you currently reading?

I'm reading *Neuroscience of Leadership* by Dr Tara Swart, which explains how your brain is more "plastic" (flexible) than you think, and how by some simple brain exercises you can adapt your thinking to different business situations, and also sustain your full capacity until at least your sixties ... Lots of water, exercise, and sex, are all parts of her prescription!

Do you describe yourself as a thinker?

“Thinking” and “doing” are the yin and yang of a successful business
Some people are thinkers and doers, whilst others who are thinkers or doers need to connect with each other.

The best way to develop new thinking is by doing, learning from the practical insights of making things happen in a practical way.

The best way to develop new doing is by thinking, standing back and looking for smarter, better ways to make things happen.

I try to be a thinker and doer.

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

Leonardo da Vinci - the sculptor who became an artist, and then scientist and engineer. The best ideas come by making new connections - business learning from nature or sport, one sector learning from another.

So who is the modern-day Leonardo da Vinci? Steve Jobs was, with the ability to combine design and technology, to imagine the uncreated and non essential.

In today’s world it could be Jack Ma, or Elon Musk, or Zaha Hadid. The inspiration comes from people who do amazing things, the thinking from making sense of what they do.

What does success look like?

Success look like a better world. Which means making real, practical differences to real people’s lives, in small and big ways.

Revenues, profits and shareholder value just show that you are doing this in a way that people want, are prepared to pay for, and creates the money to invest in a better future.

What is your next goal?

To build the world's community of "game changers" - people from every country and sector inspiring each other to be more disruptive, more innovative, and more audacious.

When did you last say 'Eureka'!?

Every time I get out of the bath!! Just like Archimedes, right? But seriously, it's about having time to think, having stimulus to stretch yourself, and having confidence to creatively define your best ideas in new and interesting ways.

What is your competitive advantage?

Advantage is not measured by how different you are from your competitor, but by how much more you can do for your customer - its about relevance and enablement.

I seek to help my customers to do amazing things - not just slightly better than others - but things they never thought possible, or were able to do.

How would you describe yourself in three words?

Passionate. Practical. Peter.

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

By staying real. By working with the world's most interesting companies, to help them solve real challenges. Every business person can read the new books - about millennial power, new business models, social media, being sustainable, and being a great leader - but it is about applying these concepts in real, connected and practical ways

How do you divide your time?

50 per cent business (thinking, writing, speaking, training, advising). 50 per cent personal (socialising, parenting, meeting, exercising, relaxing) ... so 8 hours of each, each day ... I think that's healthy!

How much time do you spend travelling?

I take around 120 flights per year (which is probably not healthy!) ... visit around 40 countries, work for 80 companies, and talk to around 2 million people (that's really exciting!)

What is the secret of a great presentation?

Leaving people thinking, inspired, and wanting to learn and do more!
It takes the right theme, practical content, lots of engagement, and fun.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

Find your own footsteps ... "Don't spend you time living somebody else's life"!

VLATKA HLUPIC: SHIFT HAPPENS

Vlatka Hlupic (vlatkahlupic.com) is author of *The Management Shift* and a professor at the University of Westminster.



What book are you currently reading?

I normally read several books at the same time. One of the books I am currently reading (again) is *The Hungry Spirit* by Charles Handy.

Do you describe yourself as a thinker?

People refer to me as a thought leader. I would describe myself as an applied thinker as I endeavour to apply my thinking into practice to make a difference for individuals and organisations.

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

Peter Drucker.

What does success look like?

Success is measured by the number of lives that one's ideas have touched and made a positive difference.

What is your next goal?

I have three immediate big goals: To continue spreading positive ripples with *The Management Shift* globally, to launch the new book by the end of 2016 and to launch a petition for humanising management with the Chartered Management Institute.

When did you last say 'Eureka!'?

When I got the idea for my forthcoming book.

What is your competitive advantage?

Ability to see the big holistic picture and connect the dots from different disciplines. That enabled me to figure out the HOW of implementing a new management paradigm as described in my book *The Management Shift*.

How would you describe yourself in three words?

People tend to describe me as a visionary, inspirational polymath. I see myself as passionate, purposeful humanist, working hard to make this world a better place.

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

By going through a continuous cycle of reading, reflecting and writing.

What is the secret of a great presentation?

Connecting emotionally with the audience.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

Find your purpose, pursue it passionately and persistently with dedication; always look at the big picture and do your best every day; be genuinely nice and compassionate to connect with your stakeholders and make a positive difference.

WHITNEY JOHNSON: DISRUPTIVE FORCE

Whitney Johnson (whitneyjohnson.com) is author of *Disrupt Yourself* and was included in the 2015 Thinkers50 ranking.

What book are you currently reading?

The Passion of Dolssa, a Young Adult novel, by Julie Berry

Do you describe yourself as a thinker?

Yes, but only in the last few years. I needed to have a track record as a do-er before I could be a credible think-er.

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

Professionally? Clayton Christensen, hands down. Brene Brown, a distance second.

What does success look like?

Paraphrasing Samuel Johnson, The ultimate result of all ambition is to be happy at home.

What is your next goal?

Yikes. I just published *Disrupt Yourself*, but ok, I'll go with it – launch a podcast. When a dream is said aloud, it comes alive.

When did you last say 'Eureka!'?

As I was prepping for a webinar on identifying your distinctive strengths in early September, I was feeling overwhelmed. *If I can just sit in my office*

and connect with a few people via e-mail, I will again feel in control. It then occurred to me that when I feel in control, I also feel strong. So, identify the go-to-when-you-are-under-stress activity (non-self-sabotaging), and you'll have also identified a strength.

What is your competitive advantage?

I think, write, speak and live personal disruption.

How would you describe yourself in three words?

Determined , introspective, kind

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

Whenever I write something, I ask therefore what? I want to get to the point in what I am saying or thinking that the person reading says, "huh, I hadn't thought of that."

How do you divide your time?

Hmm. Which answer shall I - the workaholic -- give you? If I'm being honest, which I am: Work- 70 per cent, Family 20 per cent, Church - 10 per cent.

How much time do you spend travelling?

50 per cent

What is the secret of a great presentation?

Connection not perfection.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

Write – and publish what you write.

Share what you publish on social media.

You are doing this because you want to find your voice, and have something to say.

When you write, you find your voice.

When you publish, you figure out if you have something people want to hear.

MARGARITA MAYO: REAL LEADERSHIP

Margarita Mayo (margaritamayo.com), a professor at Spain's IE Business School, offers a unique and authentic take on leadership. Her forthcoming book, *Renew: How authentic leaders reinvent themselves to change the world*, will bring her ideas to new audiences.



What book are you currently reading?

Re-reading a classic, *The Tipping Point*, by Malcom Gladwell, the magic of spreading ideas.

How do you describe what you do?

I'm a researcher, a writer and a speaker.

Envisioning a better place for people to work and live.

Writing and speaking to help develop leaders' authenticity.

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

I'm not inspired by 'super' heroes, but by 'unsung' heroes.

People who re-invent themselves to deal with every day life challenges.

What does success look like?

Creating happiness – close and far from me.

My happy and well-educated children.

Executives and students who become better world leaders.

A more just society with equal opportunities regardless of class.

What is your competitive advantage?

Discipline and persistence are the seeds of creativity.

Future focus and priorities give me a flexible mindset.

Then, add sense of humor and positive outlook.

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

Asking questions and listening to those who are rarely asked.

How much time do you spend travelling?

I had a life-changing journey from small town Segovia in Spain to Boston.

Now I take short trips, every month I go to Berlin or Paris.

What is the secret of a great presentation?

Not a secret format, but having something to say that you believe in.

Even better, a story that you *live* in.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

Be authentic – find your inner passion rooted in your life story.

Learn something new every day from someone.

Build a context for others to grow.

What is your next goal?

Reach out to more people, with new ideas and stories, to inspire them to renew themselves, and change the world.

That's what I aspire to with my upcoming book.

Describe yourself in three words.

If I may, three words with nuances:

Unstoppable thinker

Impulsive learner

Creative writer

ANTONIO NIETO RODRIGUEZ: PROJECTS INC.

Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez (antonionietorodriguez.com) is the world's leading champion of project management. He is Director of the Program Management Office at GlaxoSmithKline Vaccines and chair of the Project Management Institute. He is author of *The Focused Organization*.

What book are you currently reading?

Playing to Win – How Strategy Really Works; A.G. Lafley, Roger L. Martin
Agile Competitors and Virtual Organizations: Strategies for Enriching the Customer; Steven Goldman

Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win; Jocko Willink

How do you describe what you do?

Convincing the world: business leaders, business editors, business schools, governments, senior officers... that project management is pivotal for economic development, growth, value creation, personal improvements....

Despite having been ignored for more than a century by leaders, academia and the business press project management is the essential ingredient for successfully implementing any (long) term strategy.

In practice, I advise senior leaders on how to prioritize their numerous strategic initiatives, how to align their teams, how to deliver their

projects more successfully, how to create a culture that drives execution, and how to become more focused as an organization.

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

In my teens I was inspired by sports, especially football players.

In my twenties I was inspired by the MBA faculty at London Business School, especially Costas Markides.

In my thirties I was inspired by entrepreneurs, ready to put everything at stake to make it work, including the owner of the night shop close to my home.

In my forties I am inspired by

What does success look like?

United and caring family

Find and work on your passion

Achieve self-confidence

Constant personal development

Impact on peoples' lives

Help organizations to do better

Contribute to a better world

What is your competitive advantage?

My biggest competitive advantage is that I combine my "thinking" activities with a full time job as senior executive in one of the largest

pharmaceutical companies in the world, which allows me to see which of the ideas and concepts I develop work in reality.

No other “thinker” I know dares, or is able, to have this combination. They are academic, consultants or retired executives, whose concepts often are based on a new buzz, but which only scratch the surface and don’t bring any sustainable improvements to organizations.

Einstein used to say: “In theory, theory and practice are the same, in practice they are not”. This applies very well to management theories.

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

I look for unusual stories by listening to unusual people.

I read but not only books, also blogs, contributions (sometimes a single comment on a post has more insights than the entire article).

I ask my partner to challenge my views.

I write to force myself to structure and simplify my thoughts.

How much time do you spend travelling?

This year, due to my role as global Chairman of the Project Management Institute, I am travelling quite a lot, almost every week I am on a plane.

In a normal year I will have two to three trips per month.

What is the secret of a great presentation?

I derived my secret formula for great presentations after having delivered hundreds of keynotes, trying new things every time, and observing the reaction of the audience.

The challenge I set to myself when I deliver a presentation is to keep 100 per cent of the audience fully focused, without looking at their phones, for the entire session.

To do that, here are my secrets:

- a) Be authentic - share a personal story when you failed in your career
- b) Master the topic but talk in simple terms most of the time
- c) Use stories rather than frameworks or obvious examples
- d) Make sure there is a flow in your presentation with a strong conclusion.

The last recommendation is to start making impact, do something unusual, say something different -- you have 50 seconds to capture the audience, if you do it and your presentation has all of the above, you can keep them engaged for hours.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

Believe in your passion

Challenge common thinking

Keep learning

Understand what matters to your most important stakeholders (and learn their language).

What is your next goal?

Over recent years I have set myself a couple of BHA goals that I would like to achieve within 18/24 months.

My two last BHA goals were: a) to become Chairman of PMI and b) deliver my first TEDxTalk.

Currently I am working on:

a) Becoming part of the elite of world thinkers by being selected in the Thinkers50 in 2017

b) Publish my first blog or article with the *Harvard Business Review*.

Describe yourself in three words.

Authentic

Dreamer

Passionate

LAUREN NOEL: MAXIMIZING MILLENNIALS

Lauren Noel is one of the founders of Quest, a global leadership institute for early career women (www.herquest.org).

What book are you currently reading?

The Confidence Code, by Katty Kay and Claire Shipman

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Bill Martin, Jr. and Eric Carle (nightly, animal noises included)

How do you describe what you do?

Inspiring early career women to build meaningful careers and fulfilling personal lives through Quest, our new global leadership institute for women in the first decade of their careers.

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

My one-year old daughter, Camille.

What does success look like?

Meaningful relationships, good health, and making an impact.

What is your competitive advantage?

Optimism

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

Speaking with the 20-somethings at our events. They make me feel old but they bring such enthusiasm and great ideas.

Vacations at the beach.

A 30-minute run outside every day.

How much time do you spend travelling?

About once a quarter to Quest events, preferably with my husband, since travel is more fun if you have someone to share the experience with.

What is the secret of a great presentation?

Keep it short and then get the audience talking.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

Enjoy what you do for as many hours of the day as possible.

What is your next goal?

Putting together an exciting agenda of Quest events around the world. Contributing to changing companies' female talent pipelines for the better over the short and long run.

Describe yourself in three words.

Cheerful

Active

With integrity

GIANPIERO PETRIGLIERI: EXPLORING LEADERSHIP

Gianpiero Petriglieri is a professor at Insead, a prolific HBR blogger and was shortlisted for the Thinkers50 Leadership award.



What book are you currently reading?

Practical Wisdom by Barry Schwartz

Room on the Broom by Julia Donaldson, 2-3 times each evening, out loud.

Do you describe yourself as a thinker?

Not in isolation, no.

I'm a professor.

Thinking originally, writing, teaching are all part of what I aspire to do

well.

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

My wife and children.

Friends and students.

The open sea.

Wintery mountaintops, after it has snowed.

What does success look like?

Achieving your goals.

Living up to your values.

Loving, being loved, and knowing it.

Being able to experience freedom and intimacy at the same time, at least sometimes.

A few positive surprises along the way.

Dealing with the impossibility of having all of the above, all the time, with dignity and integrity.

What is your next goal?

Writing regularly, without rush.

What is your competitive advantage?

I am very mindful that I am not a company, an asset or a machine.

Therefore, I do not have a brand, a market, or a competitive advantage.

I have an identity, beliefs and skills that I work on every day.

And far most important, I have amazing friends and students.

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

I teach a lot. I work with managers almost every day.

They keep my thinking fresh.

How much time do you spend travelling?

About two months a year, geographically.

At least once a day, psychologically.

What is the secret of a great presentation?

Address a question that people care about as much as you do.

Speak to people about an issue. Not the other way around.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

Find your own path. Be prepared to be alone for stretches, if you must.

If you can, don't go it alone.

Remember and imagine in equal measure.

Your voice is a distant aim, not a means.

SHAMEEN PRASHANTHAM: DANCING WITH GORILLAS

Shameen Prashantham is an Associate Professor of International Business & Strategy at CEIBS. His research focuses on new venture internationalization, and on how internationalizing new ventures and large multinationals interface with each other, a phenomenon he refers to as “dancing with gorillas”.

What book are you currently reading?

China’s Next Strategic Advantage by George Yip and Bruce McKern

Rough Diamonds by Sam Park and colleagues.

How do you describe what you do?

I research, teach and write on “dancing with gorillas” – large corporations engaging with startups.

I try to connect scholars and practitioners interested in multinationals with those interested in startups.

More generally, I aim to bridge the worlds of research, teaching and practice.

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

CK Prahalad, who gave me the phrase “dancing with gorillas”;

Andy Murray, for his resilience and persistence;

My mother, who exemplified living with compassion.

What does success look like?

Aligning one's strengths with the ambitions one pursues to accomplish meaningful outcomes.

And doing so in a balanced way – balancing the professional and personal, the material and the spiritual.

What is your competitive advantage?

Having a network of incredible thinkers and writers who care both about scholarship and making an impact on practice.

My European training as an academic – which makes talking to real people in real organizations come naturally.

A first-hand experience of different parts of the world: I am an India-born, China-based British national who started life watching Sesame Street on the telly in the US.

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

Talking to entrepreneurs and managers in diverse locations;

Reading material and watching videos featuring leading thinkers (including on Thinkers50!);

Watching what my young children do on my iPad.

How much time do you spend travelling?

On average, a fortnight every quarter; too little and life can be stale, too much and the joy goes out of it.

What is the secret of a great presentation?

A logical train of thought with clear takeaways;
Well-crafted slides that convey enough without overwhelming;
Interacting, showing you care about the topic, and adding a touch of humour.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

Be true to who are. Step out of your comfort zone periodically. Don't lose sight of the big picture.

What is your next goal?

Writing a book called *Dancing with Gorillas* on winning strategies for engagement between corporations and startups.

Then, extending the ideas covered in the book to the pursuit of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 17 – strategic partnerships to achieve the preceding Goals 1 to 16.

Describe yourself in three words.

International. Reflective. Creative.

ALF REHN: REINVENTING INNOVATION

Alf Rehn (alfrehn.com), shortlisted for the 2015 Thinkers50 Innovation Award, is author of *Dangerous Ideas*.



What book are you currently reading?

Leadership BS: Fixing Workplaces and Careers One Truth at a Time by Jeffrey Pfeffer and *Superforecasting* by Philip Tetlock and Dan Gardner.

Do you describe yourself as a thinker?

At times, yes, because it's the one thing that ties together all that I do: being an academic, a strategic advisor, a writer, a speaker, a board professional and a (pop) culture vulture.

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

I try to seek inspiration in people outside of my own field, and primarily people who challenge the status quo. So I try to seek it in everything from original philosophers to upstart chefs. And gin, of course. Can't forget gin.

What does success look like?

Success is freedom, freedom is success. It doesn't matter how rich or famous you become, if that's just another thing keeping you tied down to things.

What is your next goal?

My next goal has for some time been to finish my book *Saving Innovation*, a book that has resisted my finishing it for some time now.

When did you last say 'Eureka!'?

When I finally figured out what the secret to a great creative culture is.

What is your competitive advantage?

I'm naturally suspicious of anything that is universally accepted or celebrated, and utterly comfortable with provocation and challenging the status quo.

How would you describe yourself in three words?

Creative, contrarian, caffeinated.

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

I ensure that I have a very high ISQ (Input Strangeness Quotient) at all times: I read strange things, meet curious people, make sure to travel to odd places and cultivate bizarre interests.

How do you divide your time?

I try to share my time evenly between academic work and engagements with business and industry. Balance, balance in all things.

How much time do you spend travelling?

As someone who lives in several countries I estimate that I'm travelling, in one way or another, at least 50 per cent of my time. At times far more.

What is the secret of a great presentation?

A true connection with the audience, a narrative arc, and an element of surprise.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

Only follow other people's footsteps as far as to the precipice, but not over it...

MEGAN REITZ: THE DIALOGUE CHALLENGE

Megan Reitz is author of *Dialogue in Organizations* and a professor at Ashridge Business School. Her new research (with Michael Chaskalson) explores the impact of mindfulness training on key leadership capacities.

What book are you currently reading?

First Person Action Research by Judi Marshall. Her approach to 'living life as an inquiry' speaks right to the heart of effective leadership - and to a more humane workplace.

Oh the places you'll go! by Dr Seuss – a favourite of both my daughters, one that I love reading out loud and also a book that contains some wonderfully wise messages for all of us.

How do you describe what you do?

At 'work' - Persistently seek to create more humane workplaces through inquiring, researching and advising about how we 'encounter' one another in our organisations. In particular how we are present (or not) with one another, how curious we are (or not) about one another, how we speak up (or not) to one another and how the organizational system we influence and that influences us creates 'rules of the game' which perpetuate or change these things.

At 'home' – Navigate attempts to be the best wife, mother, daughter and friend that I am able to be.

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

My children inspire me to be the best I can be for their sake.

Martin Buber's work on I-Thou dialogue inspires me to imagine and work towards more dialogic organisations whilst keeping me cognizant of the hurdles in the way.

What does success look like?

Living life in an inquiring, generous, compassionate, passionate and joyful manner and thus inspiring my daughters and others around me to do the same. Being curious and finding the funny side when I don't manage to do this whilst being more determined to experiment. Feeling that I have made some positive differences to some individuals who have then in turn made positive differences to those around them.

What is your competitive advantage?

This question I find tricky - I don't particularly feel the need to see myself as in competition with others. I am however extremely grateful for and aware of how privileged I am to be safe, loved and able to follow my passion.

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

Experience new things, sometimes on my own and sometimes with others – research, meet up, travel, talk, read, see – and inquire whilst I do so.

How much time do you spend travelling?

Enough but not too much. I spend a lot of my time in the beautiful environment of Ashridge which I am lucky to have 7 minutes away from where I live.

What is the secret of a great presentation?

Genuine connection with the audience and being utterly passionate and endlessly fascinated about your topic – these feelings tend to be contagious.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

Take time out to reflect regularly and learn to reflect while doing. Find out what you are passionately interested in and allow that to be a big part of your life. Keep things in perspective by knowing what is important to you and to those around you and why.

What is your next goal?

I have a few....Writing books on mindful leadership and also on speaking truth to power are high up on the priority list....I also want to continue to push the boundaries with my consulting and coaching practice, deepening my inquiry and my understanding about leading in the moment.

Describe yourself in three words.

Dedicated, curious, spirited.

DAVE ULRICH: LEADERSHIP CAPITAL

Dave Ulrich, shortlisted for the Thinkers50 Breakthrough Idea Award, is the creator of the Leadership Capital Index and one of the world's leading thinkers on HR and leadership.



What book are you currently reading?

I don't really read books, I read authors.

I often read fun authors for escape and for passing treadmill time (Lee Child, John Sanford, Jonathan Kellerman, John Grisham, Michael Connelly, Nelson DeMille, and so forth)

I read thought leaders for ideas ... Gary Hamel, Ed Lawler, Henry Mintzberg, Lynda Gratton, Roger Martin, Ram Charan, and so forth.

I read scripture for personal renewal.

Do you describe yourself as a thinker?

I probably would describe myself more as a learner than thinker. I like the tag line for our Organization Learning Capability book -- "Ideas with impact" -- which captures a passion for learning that delivers value.

Who or what is your biggest inspiration?

My dad taught me to be the best I can be. My mother taught me to serve others by her example. My wife teaches me to be aware of how my intent should match my behavior and to invest in relationships. Our kids and grandkids teach me to play more and obsess less.

What does success look like?

A lot of people judge success by creating value for themselves. I try to judge success by creating value for others. And also remembering to charge my cell phone at night, do my 10,000 steps a day, and remember what city I am in when I wake up in the morning.

What is your next goal?

To observe what others don't see.

To simplify complex problems.

To learn from mistakes.

To serve someone else each day

To renew myself through even with a bad diet and well intended exercise.

When did you last say 'Eureka!'!?

My word is “whowser” and I said it when I heard we had a new grandchild coming!

What is your competitive advantage?

When young, I read the Agony and the Ecstasy and realized that Michelangelo’s success was partly genius and insight and partly longevity. Now that I am older, I hope I have enough grit and passion for continued learning that gives me a little insight for what is next.

How would you describe yourself in three words?

Committed to learning, service, adding value, and trouble counting to three

How do you keep your thinking fresh?

I keep it in the refrigerator. Just kidding. I try to ...

- Think big by observing and asking unanswerable questions
- Test small by experimenting, never doing the same talk twice, and changing at least 25 per cent of my ideas every year
- Fail fast by being brutally honest about what works and what does not
- Learn always by pondering and improving

How do you divide your time?

Badly.

How much time do you spend travelling?

Too much.

What is the secret of a great presentation?

A great presentation solves problems of others more than telling them what I know.

A great presentation is one that someone remembers a week (or at least 24 hours) later.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

Don't go where you don't want to go.

Ponder and find your answer to the questions: What do I want? Whom do I serve? How do I build?