

SHORTCUT 1: Power Up!

In 1977 Shannon Patrick Joseph Deegan was a gangly, tough, and athletically talented ten-year-old from Verdun, a working-class borough of Montreal. He played baseball and basketball well, but, as with most Canadian boys, his true passion was hockey. Even by Canadian standards he stood out as a talented center, having already traveled widely in Canada and even to the United States—which explains why he skipped school one winter’s day and snuck into the Montreal Canadiens practice at the storied Montreal Forum ice rink.

Ken Dryden was in the prime of his career in 1977, already a hockey legend and playing for a Canadiens team that would win the Stanley Cup four years in a row (1976 through 1979). To this day, the 1977 team is widely considered to be the best hockey team in the history of the game.

So you can imagine the thrill that went through Shannon when Ken Dryden, about to take to the ice for practice, paused to talk to him. The world’s best goalie took a long look at this tough

young kid and asked him why he wasn't in school. While Shannon stumbled through an answer that he hoped had the best chance of keeping him out of trouble, Ken followed up with another question. He asked if Shannon was a good student, and Shannon told him, honestly, that he was. Naturally, the conversation then turned to hockey. Canada has a highly regimented youth hockey program that limits who plays where. In less than a minute it was clear to Ken that the kid was playing with the best teams that a ten-year-old could be invited to join.

Their two-minute conversation ended with an insight that set Shannon on a path that would change his life. Ken, who had played collegiate hockey at Cornell, told Shannon that, if he was a good hockey player and did well in school, he should pursue a scholarship in the United States. Now, Shannon came from a large Irish family, and neither his parents nor any of his seventeen aunts and uncles had gone to college. So, at the time, Shannon had no idea what a scholarship was. But that didn't change the impact of the moment.

Shannon's parents were in total agreement with Ken's advice and encouraged Shannon to focus on his academics along with his hockey. In 1983, after a lot of work on the ice and in the classroom, he was offered a scholarship to the University of Vermont. After turning eighteen his freshman year, Shannon entered the NHL draft and was selected by the LA Kings. Heeding the advice of Dryden and others who advised him to complete his degree, Shannon stayed in school, earning a bachelor of arts in psychology and political science while playing hockey. His last year in collegiate hockey was by far his best. His physical play, along with nineteen goals and twenty-one assists in twenty-nine games, earned him a two-year contract with the Kings—in fact, it was one of the most lucrative contracts offered to a collegiate player in 1987.

But then things started to get tough. His aggressive playing style and the resulting nagging injuries limited Shannon's play in his first year with the Kings organization. During training in his second year—the first year that Wayne Gretzky joined the club—he sustained another back injury that sent him to Finland to play in the less physical European league.

The injury didn't heal. A specialist eventually told Shannon that he needed surgery and that his hockey career was over, almost before it began.

For a lot of people, a hit like that would be the end of the story. They would give up on their dreams, believing that their one shot at fulfillment, excitement, and happiness was over, wasted. But not Shannon. Through his dogged pursuit of his hockey career, Shannon had developed an intuitive understanding of what it takes to realize prosperity in any endeavor: a self-sustaining cycle of motivation, effort, and achievement that fuels your internal fire, a fire that has to be grown from an initial spark. He didn't see his injury as the end, just the end of one iteration of that cycle. The next iteration was yet to come.

The toughest part of Shannon's journey was deciding early on that the status quo wasn't going to be good enough—and deciding to *do something* about it.

And that's what the first part of this book, and this chapter in particular, is about—making a start and then sustaining your energy. It is the hardest part of pursuing a personal vision of prosperity. For me, and for most people I know, taking the initiative to embark on any new path is tough. It may be hard, it may be risky, and where we are right now isn't so bad, really. Right? Maybe. But that first step may be the key to an amazing career and a fulfilling life. Most of us are prewired to further the status quo, but how often is the status quo exactly what we want? Rarely, would be my

guess. But we cannot see the flaws with the status quo unless we are comparing it to a vision of something different, which requires us to think deeply about what it is that we desire.

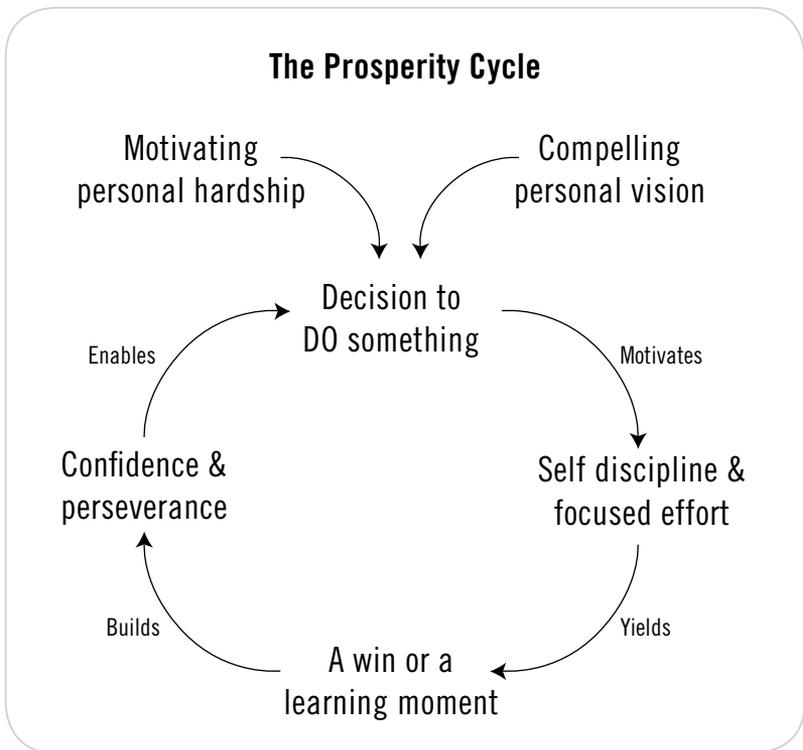
Any project or opportunity or goal that you consider tackling is most intimidating the moment before you decide to make a start. The opportunity that you perceive, but have yet to pursue, can make you miserable. It hangs over your head, taunting you. Will you pursue it or won't you? What will happen if you do? What will happen if you don't? This uncertainty increases your stress level. The only way to feel relief is to give up on the opportunity entirely or to do something about it. The amazing thing is that any opportunity you actively decide to pursue, regardless of how big it seems, will become less intimidating the moment that you start to work on it. The whole point of this first shortcut is to convince you to find the inspiration for the first step and just get started. I'll show you how your initiative can become self-sustaining, even effortless, but only you can decide to make a start.

The Prosperity Cycle

Motivation equals success. Guaranteed. It might not mean immediate success. It might not mean success in everything you try. But strong motivation breeds inspired effort, and that will always lead to triumph eventually, even if it wasn't the triumph you were expecting. Most entrepreneurs I know can tell the story of how motivation to add value in a unique way led to a cool opportunity, even if it wasn't the opportunity they were initially hoping for.

Without a steadily burning fire that drives us to do the hard work and make the tough decisions to create the life we want, we won't be inspired to change. Passion, that internal fire, is the

source of motivation. Without passion, you don't have much of a shot at prosperity, and this book won't do you any good. When you are living a life of prosperity, that passion is a roaring bonfire. When you aren't, it's smoldering ashes. Right now, you may not feel very passionate about any one thing in your life. Or you may have been persuaded that the thing you feel most passionate about isn't worth your energy, dampening the flames. You may not think of yourself as somebody who is inherently motivated. Many of us aren't. The Prosperity Cycle can help.



The Prosperity Cycle offers a structured process for achieving prosperity. It creates a perpetual feedback loop between your passions and your actions, propelling you forward down the path of your choice. Passion helps you get the cycle started, but the cycle itself reinforces your passion—powering your imagination and inspiring you to dream bigger and do bigger—“do” being the operative word. The Prosperity Cycle is a self-reinforcing cycle that will set you on your chosen path, keep you moving forward, and provide you with the vast amount of energy that you’ll need to get where you want to go.

The most successful people, particularly entrepreneurs, use this cycle to their advantage every day, even if only intuitively. They are inspired by a hardship or a vision to step off the beaten track, where others are consistently telling them what is and is not possible. That first step, though, is prompted by a decision to do something, to embark on a new path toward a different goal. Whether your initial spark comes from being mad as hell or incredibly inspired, it’s your ticket to ride. That energy and passion power the self-discipline required to get started and fuel the focused effort required to move forward. Effort always yields progress, even if it doesn’t quite turn out the way you had envisioned. A win is fantastic, but a learning moment can sometimes be even more rewarding. Either can lead to increased confidence and self-esteem, which, in turn, motivate you to make the decision to do it again, only bigger.

Each success you rack up builds your capability and gives you the confidence to keep going bigger. More important, it fuels the perseverance referred to in Biz Stone’s tongue-in-cheek comment about being an overnight success. There is no more satisfying human experience than applying yourself to a problem,

working hard to solve it, and finally knowing that you kicked its ass. Personal achievement is the human equivalent of nuclear fusion, releasing vast amounts of energy to tackle the next challenge in your path.

While this cycle is personal, let me be very clear that there is no way to sustain it without the help of others. Prosperity is not a solitary endeavor. We're talking about success, fulfillment, and happiness, and it's impossible to experience those things when you are alone.

The cycle of deciding to make a positive change followed by actually doing it, and doing it successfully, is habit forming—a healthy form of addiction. It's the addiction of the executive who grows a company at 70 percent a year. It's the addiction of the marathon runner or any high-performance athlete. You probably know someone like this, someone who always seems to be moving forward, who always has a goal in her sights and the plan and enthusiasm for getting there. You wonder where she gets the energy to do it.

It comes from the Prosperity Cycle. The cycle never ends for those who continue to fuel their internal fire, because even if they achieve their goals, life is full of new challenges and opportunities that renew the cycle.

Do Something!

The only prerequisite to experiencing the power generated by the Prosperity Cycle is the decision on your part to actually *do something*—to decide to invest the effort to take the first step toward what you want. I know you already have a complicated life, with more on your plate than you have time to accomplish, but so does

everyone else. This is where you have the opportunity to separate yourself from the crowd and start to look different—like one of those people who are making things happen and making it look easy. But it's not easy, especially the first step, and most of us need a push. That push typically comes from one of two places: a personal hardship that has made you mad as hell and ready to fight, or a personal vision of the future so exciting that you would do anything to make progress toward it.

In the rest of this chapter, I'll look closely at what motivates us to start the Prosperity Cycle, while the rest of the book explores how to keep it going.

The Motivating Power of Hardship

Even at five feet two, Amber Freed is easy to spot in a crowd—she practically bounces down the street (always in a hurry), blonde hair flying and a full-face smile. You see, she has a great life. She's thirty years old and happily married, has a wonderful group of friends, and avidly volunteers her time and money for several charitable organizations. She is also no stranger to hard work, underwriting her lifestyle and philanthropy with a six-figure income earned as an analyst for an investment adviser in Denver. When we met, I couldn't help but be impressed. Amber is the real deal, a model of achievement. I was sure that she must have had a leg up in life and been taught how to be prosperous at an early age. I couldn't have been more wrong.

Born in Wyoming to a mom and dad who both have substance abuse issues, Amber had a life that was anything but easy. As a preschooler she lost everything but the clothes on her back when her dad burned down their trailer for the insurance money. They moved to a poor neighborhood in Montana. The house next door

turned out to be inhabited by meth-cooking parents and their kids, who became Amber's playmates. The police shot the father during a raid, and the injured man took shelter on Amber's front porch. The image of the blood-stained concrete that they couldn't wash clean is etched in her mind to this day.

You would think it couldn't get worse than that, but you would be wrong. Her mom and dad's arguments over custody of Amber and her younger twin sisters led to moves from Wyoming to Montana to Texas to Colorado, back to Montana, and finally to Pueblo, Colorado. Along the way, Amber, not yet a teenager, got good at knowing when to hide the kitchen knives and how to make a 911 call that could end an out-of-control, drug-fueled episode without getting her parents sent to jail.

Sadly, the holidays were the worst. Extra time off from work just meant more time for multi-day binges that usually ended in her mom or dad's confinement to a treatment center at best or a suicide attempt at worst. One Thanksgiving, her dad got so angry that he grabbed the turkey from the oven and tossed it out the front door and onto the front yard. That set a precedent. In one-upmanship style, the turkey-in-the-front-yard gambit would be repeated at four more Thanksgiving celebrations.

I've never said, "I'm so sorry" so many times in an interview. But Amber was fine talking about it, wanting to share her story to help other young people, and wanting to explain to me how hardship powered her journey to prosperity.

And here's how it worked. Her family hardship was the source of motivation to begin a journey to a more prosperous life. During her gut-wrenching family experiences, Amber discovered that she had a choice—to be a passive accomplice to the caustic family environment surrounding her or to strike out in pursuit of a better life

for herself and her sisters. She knew that breaking the cycle meant going to college but also knew that there would be no family money available to make it happen. No, the only way she would go to college was on a scholarship. “My only way to get out of Pueblo was to be the absolute best,” she told me. “No room for failure, because I needed a full ride or I wasn’t going anywhere.”

Statistically, Amber was likely to follow her parents down the path of least resistance to a similarly self-destructive existence. But she didn’t. Instead she focused her energies on being the best student she could be and experienced a reinforcing succession of academic successes that allowed her to build a reputation as an academic force in her small public high school. By her senior year, Amber had received a full scholarship offer to the University of Denver, where she would later earn a bachelor’s degree in accounting and an MBA in five years.

Today, Amber looks back on her upbringing as a gift. How else could she have learned to be so resilient and open to change? She looks at the worst downside of challenges she has in her life today and they pale in comparison to what she’s already overcome: “What’s the worst that can happen to me? Lose my job? If everybody survived and nobody lost a limb, well, let’s just laugh about it!” And when she recalls Thanksgiving turkeys on the lawn? “It’s kind of hilarious. It’s sort of awesome to have the turkey on the front lawn. Who does that?”

Hardship in life is a given. It’s unfortunate, but we all face it. We lose jobs, we lose houses, we lose loved ones. We have tough childhoods. We have diseases. We can try to bury our struggles or let them defeat us, or we can use them to motivate us to a more prosperous life.

Daniel Coyle, in his book *The Talent Code*, calls motivating

experiences, some harder than others, *primal cues*. It's a great descriptor. According to Coyle's research, no one is born with innate talent. Talent is developed through thousands of hours of "deep practice" powered by extreme motivation. But where does this motivation come from?

For our purposes, we can define a primal cue as a hardship that intrudes on a person's life. That hardship can provide a highly motivated response. Coyle's most fundamental—and tragic—example is the number of highly accomplished people who lost a parent at an early age. Members of this unfortunate club include Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Gandhi, Newton, Darwin, Michelangelo, Bach, Dostoyevsky, Keats, Twain, and dozens of others. The primal message that all of these high achievers received as a young person was, "You are not safe," translated as, "Holy crap. I'm on my own and I'd better make something happen here or I'm in trouble." Scary, but also highly motivating—a motivation that breeds paragons of personal entrepreneurship.

Since this is the last way any of us wants to be motivated, let's move on to a less traumatic example. Coyle noticed that his youngest daughter was a considerably faster runner than her older three siblings. He theorized that this might be the result of a primal cue: "You're behind—keep up!" When he researched his idea to see if he could find evidence to support it, he was amazed. In looking at the past ten world record holders in the 100-meter dash, he found that their average birth order was fourth in families of 4.6 children. Next he looked at the top ten all-time NFL running backs in yards per carry and found that their average birth order was 3.2 out of 4.4 kids. The message that these youngest siblings received—"Run faster!"—caused them to transform their average speed genetics into a world-class level of performance.

I considered the power of hardship to motivate as I thought about what makes some entrepreneurs so successful. Sometimes, when you're an entrepreneur, all you have is hardship: long hours, low income, an uncertain future, every day a roller coaster of triumphs and failures. Everybody knows the classic example of James Dyson's more than 5,000 failed vacuum cleaner prototypes. But the entrepreneurs who make it power through the down times and use them to learn, to inspire their next big move. More stories are out there than I can count of an entrepreneur who was almost down for the count, decided to give it one last push because of an idea that came out of the latest failure, and went on to become hugely successful. Rather than being deterred, these entrepreneurs have figured out how to use challenge as a foundation for the next right decision, to jumpstart the Prosperity Cycle.

Say you set a path toward a goal and partway down the road something happens that makes that goal nearly impossible. When that happens, you have to be resilient. You have to decide that the status quo isn't going to be good enough. You have to stay focused on how you will move forward.

If I put my own life under the microscope, I look back to age five to eight. During that period I attended four schools in three states. I developed few friendships and became horribly behind in school. If I had been in a different family I could easily have continued down that path, continued to do poorly in school, become isolated, and ended up leading a life very different from the one I was fortunate enough to lead. But I was part of an amazingly supportive family who helped me turn things around. We eventually settled down and I was enrolled in a good public school, was exposed to a healthy peer group, and was able to build on small

successes and build momentum toward a happier life. You see, the Prosperity Cycle can begin at a very early age.

Is there or has there ever been a hardship in your life that could be a source of motivation to pursue a path to prosperity? I'm sure the answer is yes. While you may not have faced some serious motivating trauma early in life, like losing your parents, your hardships are your hardships and they are just as potentially motivating as anyone else's. Show me a person who doesn't perceive hardship in her life and I'll show you someone with a healthy supply of painkillers. Unless you are in denial, your life likely has some real aggravating stuff happening in it. Perhaps you have a boss who makes your life miserable and the situation irritates you to the point of making a job change or motivates you to the point of writing a business plan so you can become your own boss. Or maybe you are a middle child who never got the attention paid to the eldest or the baby of the family, and you use that to build a career as a performer. It doesn't matter what it is; if you perceive it as a hardship, you can use it to motivate yourself to start the change process.

Personal Vision—The Positive Motivator

Yes, hardship is motivating. There is no stronger innate force than our instinct for survival or self-preservation. But it isn't the only way we can be motivated to do something, to take action.

Many people develop a personal vision that is so exciting to them, so intensely motivating, that it sets them on a new path and gets the spark within them burning brighter. It leaves them no choice but to set a goal and adopt the discipline to make it a reality. I'm

talking about a personal vision for what your life could be. Perhaps you get goose bumps from the thought of taking an idea for a new product and making it a gleaming reality. Or maybe you see yourself as a revered leader at your company. Or maybe you want desperately to travel the world or to have the resources to send your kids to great schools. For Shannon Deegan, the hockey player from the beginning of the chapter, it was to play in the NHL.

The amazing thing about personal vision is that it's a power we can *choose* to harness. While hardship and challenge are often acts of fate, the seeds of a personal vision already exist within each of us. The beginning of a personal vision is the personal compass that we can choose to pay attention to or not. So in shortcuts 2, 3, and 4, I'm going to walk you through the process of indulging your curiosity, diving deep to know yourself better, and using that information to develop a personal vision that gets your heart racing and your imagination soaring. Regardless of the source of your current motivators, if they are going to set you on a new path, they have to be strong enough to encourage change.

Choosing Prosperity

In a white paper on rethinking education, Seth Godin wrote, “The universal truth is beyond question—the only people who excel are those who have decided to do so. Great doctors or speakers or skiers or writers or musicians are great because somewhere along the way, they made the choice. Why have we completely denied the importance of this choice? Who will teach bravery?”¹ When I first envisioned the Prosperity Cycle, I entirely overlooked this crucial

1. Seth Godin, *Stop Stealing Dreams (What Is School For?)* (2012), available as a free e-book or audiobook at www.squidoo.com/seth.

fact. Prosperity requires a decision to be prosperous, and even when we have the motivators in place—positive or negative—some of us avoid making the decision. Geo Concepcion, whom you'll read about in shortcut 10, helped me realize it was missing.

The problem is that the decision typically requires choosing change. Change is hard, and most of us humans are prewired to hate it. But think about it in scientific terms. Change is the conversion of a source of energy—in this discussion, a motivator—into a new form of energy—the determination to make something new happen. That conversion is critically important in life; it is the act of fulfilling our passion. It's the act of actually living.

That point of decision, of choosing change, is the point that separates people who are prosperous from those who aren't. Most of us face it almost every day. Change requires getting off your butt and making a plan. It requires stepping off the path that you're on, because the path is miserable or because you can see another path that is more exciting. Either way, something brought the fire within you to life. It's now your responsibility to do something with it, but you'll accept the responsibility only if the motivation is strong enough.

Entrepreneurs understand this more than most because being an entrepreneur means being a change agent. It means doing something that hasn't been done before. Success and prosperity seek out people who are thinking out of the box and developing new capabilities in themselves as well as in the world around them. If you can train yourself to embrace change, you will differentiate yourself from the vast majority of people and dramatically increase the odds of achieving your vision of prosperity. As you become more comfortable with change, taking even just small

steps to incorporate it into your life, each decision will become easier. And that is how the cycle self-perpetuates.

Once Powered Up, the Prosperity Cycle Never Stops

Shannon Deegan's personal vision was destroyed when he was told his professional hockey career was over. Was he disappointed to have lost his dream? Of course, he was absolutely crushed. But ten years of making his hockey dream come true had taught him that if he could come up with a new dream, he probably could figure out a way to make that happen, too. He understood the connection between effort and results. Instead of letting his feeling of loss paralyze him, Shannon used it to motivate the effort that he knew it would take to duplicate the success off the ice that he had achieved on it. A man who had become accustomed to taking big hits shook off the biggest hit of his life and was off in a new direction.

While Shannon was still with the Kings, a prominent Canadian politician had offered him a job after his hockey career was over, a time that they both thought was a decade or so in the future. Nine-and-a-half years ahead of schedule, Shannon made a decision, picked up the phone, and started his life after hockey. Shannon used the skills honed by hockey (hard work, preparation, street smarts, and communication) to excel in each of his career stops while learning successively more about what he liked doing.

Today, Shannon has his dream job: director of people operations with Google, a company people would almost kill to work for. It took many iterations of the Prosperity Cycle to get here, just as it did to get him to the Kings. Shannon can point to each of his previous jobs and explain how they prepared him for success at Google, but with a chuckle he'll admit that he didn't know where they were leading him at the time. He just kept making decisions

that seemed right at that time, investing time and energy in the activities that he enjoyed and excelled at, and moving forward—working for more and more interesting companies in more and more demanding positions, going back to school to earn an MBA at Yale University, and eventually making his way to Google.

This is what a perpetual Prosperity Cycle looks like in real life. You get it started, hopefully when you're young, and then you keep it going, shaking off the disappointments while feeding off the succession of wins that continue to fuel your energy and efforts. Your path may be cut off at times and you'll have to find a new one, cutting through a lot of rough country to discover where you are supposed to be. This is when the Prosperity Cycle can be most helpful.

A lifetime of prosperity is going to take a lot of iterations of the Prosperity Cycle. You can't just jump into the middle of the cycle and hope for the best. Like achieving any really big objective, you start small, gaining the experience and confidence required to take the next step . . . and the next, and the next. Prosperity is a process with a beginning, a middle, and an end, which becomes the next beginning. All you have to do is choose to turn it into one.

Every time you decide to make a change and achieve a new goal, and then follow through with it, you are leveraging the Prosperity Cycle: to map a little more of your world, understand the power of self-discipline and effort a little better, use the returns on each personal investment, build your confidence, and trust yourself more. And then you're that much more prepared for the next iteration, however it begins and wherever it ends.

You can float aimlessly through life and have a small chance of stumbling on something that meets your definition of prosperity,

or you can pursue it with energy and purpose. It's clear which one is the shortcut.

I thought of some of the best ideas for this book while riding on the cycling-friendly roads of Boulder, Colorado. That's what a lot of us do in Colorado—hit the road when the confines of the office constrict the flow of ideas and the only cure is a piercing blue sky and a bloodstream full of endorphins. After twenty or thirty minutes on my bike, whatever mental block I was struggling with is inevitably replaced by a new, exciting concept. That moment always ushers in a surge of energy that pushes me out of the saddle and makes me reach for a bigger gear.

I can't think of a better metaphor for what it takes to achieve prosperity—find something exciting enough to get you out of the saddle and reaching for a bigger gear. Figure out the first step in your own Prosperity Cycle and get going. Once you start, you'll never want to stop.

Finding the Shortcut

- You may not use it often, but you have already experienced the Prosperity Cycle in your own life. Think about an achievement that you had to work hard for and that you are proud of. Did it just happen? Of course not. You decided to do something, applied some self-discipline, and eventually made it happen. And it felt great. Go back to the Prosperity Cycle chart and trace through it with your achievement in mind. Use this example to internalize how the cycle works for you. Your path to prosperity is directed by how often you traverse this cycle. Prosperous people complete the cycle more often than less prosperous people. It's that simple.

- What is your motivation to enter the Prosperity Cycle? Are you currently mad as hell about something (hardship) and eager to overcome it? Or do you have a dream so compelling that you can't wait to begin to achieve it, cycle by cycle? If you know what it is, go to the shortcutoffprosperity.com website, print a copy of the cycle, and write it down at the top left (hardship) or right (compelling vision).

Do Something

- The very first step that you can take to launching your Prosperity Cycle is to decide to do the “Do Something” exercises here and at the end of every other chapter. Start now.
- The next three chapters will lead you through developing a personal vision, but it's never too early to start using the Prosperity Cycle. Identify something that you would like to make happen at work or at home. Make it something fairly simple. What is the very first step you need to make to achieve the goal? Make it granular, such as setting up a meeting or asking a colleague for help. Don't worry about the next steps for now, just take the very first step. Decide to make it happen and then just do it!
- One of the best ways to internalize the ideas in each of the shortcuts is to teach them to someone else. If you are serious about doing this, identify a confidant to discuss the concepts with as you learn them. Write that person's name down and make time to tell him or her about what you are doing to get the Prosperity Cycle started in your life.