

# **An Accidental Academic: My Story and Lessons Learned**

**David Patterson, Google and UC Berkeley**

“2<sup>4</sup> Life Lessons From the First Half Century of My Career,”  
David Patterson, to appear, *Communications of the ACM*.

# **My Story: Accidental Academic**

- **Accidental CS student**
  - Wrestler, Math major in high school and college; 1<sup>st</sup> college grad
- **Accidental UCLA grad student**
  - New UCLA PhD (Jean-Loup Baer) took pity on undergrad
  - Injured knee in last minute of last match just before graduation
- **Wife & 2 sons in Married Students Housing as RA**
  - Lost RA-ship after ~4 years because grant ended
  - Part time at Hughes Aircraft Company ~3 more years
- **Accidental Berkeley Professor**
  - Berkeley tried to hire Doug Clark, but he turned down offer
  - Wife forced me to call Berkeley CS Chair to check on application
- **1<sup>st</sup> project led by Assoc. Prof too ambitious, no resources**
  - Took leave to DEC to rethink career in 3<sup>rd</sup> year

# **What Works for Me: People Lessons**

- 1. Family First!**
  - Don't sacrifice your family's happiness on the altar of success**
- 2. Choose Happiness**
  - Have good friends and a good family.**
  - Help others.**
  - Develop a spiritual side.**
  - Have a job you love.**
  - Take time to have fun.**
- 3. It's the people, not the projects, that you value in the long run**
- 4. The cost of praise is small. The value to others is inestimable**

# What Works for Me: People Lessons

5. **Seek out honest feedback; it might be right**
6. **Beware of those who believe that they are the smartest person in the room.**
7. **“For better or for worse, benchmarks shape a field.”**
8. **“I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it.”**
  - **“Friends come and go, but enemies accumulate.”**

# What Works for Me: Career Lessons

9. “Most of us spend too much time on what is urgent and not enough time on what is important.”

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	Necessity	Effectiveness
Not important	Distraction	Waste

10. “Nothing great in the world has ever been accomplished without passion.”

11. “There are no losers on a winning team, and no winners on a losing team.”

12. Lead by example.

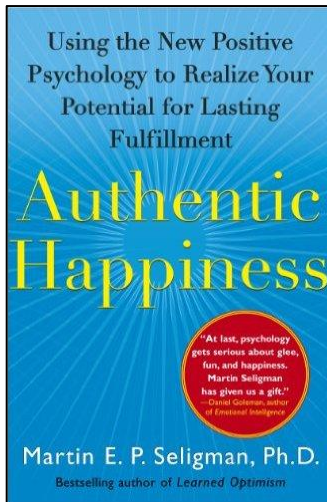
13. Fortune favors the bold.

14. Culture matters.

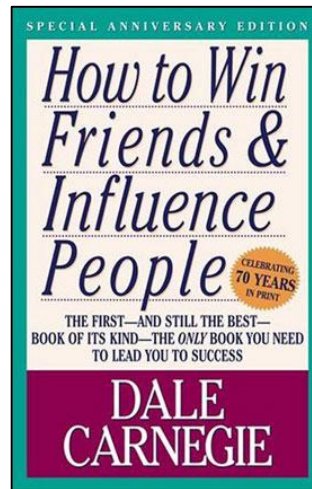
15. It’s not how many projects you start; it’s how many you finish.

16. Look for the positive opportunities.

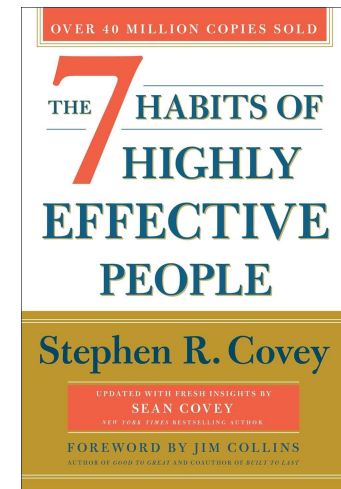
# 5 Slim Books to Jump-Start a New Career



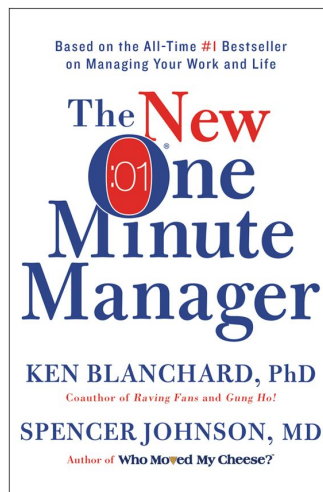
How to Be Happy  
(2004, 336 pages)



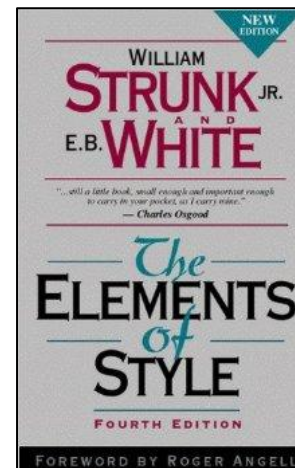
How to Lead and Persuade  
(1998, 288 pages)



How to Be Productive  
(2020, 464 pages)



How to Manage Up and Down  
(2015, 112 pages)



How to Write Well  
(1999, 105 pages)

# **My age at 13 Forks in the Road to Turing Award**

**16: Ask Linda to “go steady” (married at 19)**

**20: UCLA Math course cancelled  $\Rightarrow$  take CS courses**

**21: New PhD Instructor gets me undergrad researcher job**

**21: Wrestling knee injury prevents draft into Vietnam War**

**21: Linda OK with going for MS and then PhD**

**24: Lose RAship (wife+2 kids)  $\Rightarrow$  Hughes Aircraft & hardware**

**26: Get Fellowship from Hughes so can finish PhD**

**28: Doug Clark turns down UC Berkeley (and Stanford)**

**28: Linda forces me to call UC Berkeley CS Chair about job**

**28: Linda picks poor but proud (despite sisters' houses)**

**31: Sabbatical at DEC to see cost of complexity of VAX**

**32: Paper rejected on return to Berkeley  $\Rightarrow$  RISC project**

**33: Getting tenure with only 2 journal papers (10 conference)**

**... : ...**

**70: Share ACM A.M. Turing Award with John Hennessy**

# **9 Magic Words for a Long Relationship (for both partners)**

**“I Was Wrong.”**

**“You Were Right.”**

**“I Love You.”**