

## **BOOK**

*A Beautiful Constraint: How to Transform Your Limitations into Advantages*

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## **SYNOPSIS [From the publisher]**

“A book about everyday, practical inventiveness, designed for the constrained times in which we live. It describes how to take the kinds of issues that all of us face today – lack of time, money, resources, attention, know-how – and see in them the opportunity for transformation of oneself and one's organization's fortunes.”

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“In Keith Richards' autobiography, *Life*, Jagger's fellow Stone explains how this distinctively flamboyant style came about. When the Stones started, he says, they played very, very small venues, and by the time the equipment was set up and the audience in place the singer often had a space no bigger than the size of a table to perform in. But as the front man of a band ambitious to break through, Jagger learned to work it, even in such a confined area, and it was from this combination of desire and restriction that his unique moves evolved.”

“At some point, consciously or unconsciously, the young singer made a decision about how to respond to the space constraint. It could have led him to be static, restricted, somehow less; instead he used it as stimulus to be more dramatic, engaging, distinctive, compelling. He used it to make him more.”

“Constraints have a bad rap. Constraint is, by definition, a negative thing. Its imposition prevents us from acting as we would like to, because it restricts us in some important way. Constraints hold us down, knock us back, make us fail.”

“This book's aim is to show how and why the opposite is true. How constraints can be fertile, enabling, desirable.”

“The beneficial power of constraint is all around us, whether we recognize it or not. In lifelong relationships, we commit to one partner to the exclusion of others; the constraint we put on ourselves allows us to focus our emotional energy on building a life with that person, and gives us a deeper level of intimacy and security in return.”

“In business, the forced but delicious fruits of constraint are all around us, their starting impetus now all but forgotten. Google's home page is as simple as it is because that was the limit of Larry Page's coding ability at the time.”

“Basketball owes much of its relentless energy to the introduction of the 24-second shot clock in 1954. And Twitter – well, we all know about Twitter. Which of us would be using Twitter at all today, if it had a limit of 14,000 characters rather than 140?”

“Any good business has always worked within clear parameters. The whole concept of a brand, for instance, is in effect a beautiful constraint. It is the clarity on what that brand is not, as much as what it is, that allows a team to focus on finding fresh, relevant, and inventive ways to be true to what it stands for.”

“One of the leadership challenges of today, like it or not, is the requirement to grow within constraints.”

“And as global citizens, we participate in a world of finite natural resources, with an increasing global population and increased demands from a new wave of ambitious economies.”

“So are things getting better, or are they getting worse? The answer, we have to believe, lies in our own hands. It hinges on how we choose to approach these new and emerging constraints, and whether we have the confidence to choose the path toward stimulating new possibilities.”

“There is a body of influential work on the modern relevance of lean,<sup>4</sup> frugal innovation,<sup>5</sup> Jugaad,<sup>6</sup> and even the value of dyslexia to entrepreneurs.<sup>7</sup> Each of these offers insights into a different part of what it means to thrive within a particular set of constraints.”

“TOC is a successful approach for some situations and businesses. Our interest, though, is not in eliminating constraints, but in positively leveraging them. We are proposing broader definitions of constraints and the situations in which we encounter them, and describing methods that can unlock a constraint's transformative benefits to make it a beautiful source of possibility and opportunity.”

“Constraints fall into four different groups: constraints of foundation (where we are limited in something that is usually seen as a foundational element for success); constraints of resource (where we are limited in an important resource, such as money or people); constraints of time (where we are limited in the amount of time we have to do something); and constraints of method (where we are limited by having to do something in a certain way).”

“By making a constraint beautiful, we mean seeing it as an opportunity, not a punitive restriction, and using it as a stimulus to see a new or better way of achieving our ambition.”

“Ten years from now, we would like to search Google for a definition of constraint and see it include this: a limitation or defining parameter, often the stimulus to find a better way of doing something.”

“When we met with him, the importance of the relationship between ambition and constraint had already become clear. Those who refused to scale back ambition in the face of constraint, like Netafim, seemed to be the ones most likely to find a way to make the constraint beautiful, whereas those who reduced their ambition were more likely to find the constraint constricting.”

“For the less ambitious, the opposite was the case; the constraint was the dominant dynamic. They looked to reduce the tension between the ambition and the constraint by trimming their ambition in line with the severity of the constraint. The constraint was allowed to limit them.’

“What's our purpose and how connected to it are we? How connected is this project to our purpose? Is our organization succeeding or in crisis, and does that lend extra motivation to this assignment? Am I excited about the opportunity we are going after?”

“A fundamental difference between these inventive people and teams and the rest of us is their core relationship with constraints. While we may see constraints as punitive, restrictive, and to be avoided, they see constraints as necessary, beneficial, and to be embraced.”

“To be very good at problem-solving, you need to be able to very clearly articulate the problem you are trying to solve, and constraints are key parameters of that definition.”

“Studies showed that giving people too much choice limits creativity, just as giving them no choice at all does.”

“Researchers found that when you put up a fence around a playground, children will use the entire space – they'll feel safe to play all the way to the edges. But if those walls are removed, creating a wide-open playground, the space the children choose to play in contracts: they stay toward the middle and they stick to each other, because that's what feels safe. This, Joyce suggests, is what happens in the creative process.”

“Part of what makes his comedy different, Seinfeld has observed, is that he deliberately denies himself sources of the easiest laughs, such as sex or swearing – or for that matter, any topic people are interested in talking about. Seinfeld's comedy is deliberately about the humdrum minutiae of life.”

“To unlock the potential of a constraint, we need first to increase our level of ambition with regard to the constraint, not decrease it. The tension this creates is invaluable.”

“And yet the young man who stood on a chair to talk to the dealers about working in that Four Seasons laundry radiated enthusiasm and commitment; for twenty minutes he made it sound like the most important and fulfilling job in the world.”

“In his business, the stars (or quarterbacks as he called them) were the salespeople on the showroom floor. They got the big bucks, wore the good suits, “because they are the people who make sure we hit our numbers with the quality of customer engagement that we have become famous for.” And yet he also had a group of people at the back end of the business servicing the cars, valeting, and washing them, who did not seem to be nearly as evangelical as that young man. How, the dealer asked, could he get his back end to be as motivated and engaged as that?”

“I'll tell you what a back end is,” said Bob, and he pointed to his own behind: “That's a back end. Here we call those people our Heart of House.”

“When the two solid fuel engines that power the Space Shuttle into space were designed, for example, they could not be much more than 4 feet 8.5 inches wide – the width of the rail line that was to transport them from Utah to Florida. This was the width of the line because the laborers who built it last century came from England, and their forefathers had built the tramlines in England along the paths made by the horses and carts that preceded them.’

“These paths were 4 feet 8.5 inches wide because that was the width of the roads, built by the Romans, on which they were based. Which is why a design feature of one of the most advanced pieces of technology ever produced was determined by a Roman road engineer over 2000 years ago.”

“We can see it in the QWERTY keyboard, the internal combustion engine, and even in formulations like the famous Moore's Law (see sidebar on page 41). And we can also see it in how organizations lock-in self-reinforcing processes and the cognitive rigidities that can come with them.”

“In other words, today's approaches are in effect yesterday's approaches, based on what was appropriate then, not necessarily now.”

“There is a great deal to be said for the consistency and clarity of purpose of habitual ways of doing things. But when confronted with a constraint that we are not used to dealing with, path dependence can limit us in several ways.”

“Path dependence can: Create lock-in to foundational assumptions that are no longer best for the future. Create lock-in to criteria for success that are no longer relevant or the most important. Create lock-in to organizational biases and priorities that are no longer appropriate. Make us closed to what might be possible, when we need to be open; we confuse what is possible with “what is possible within the way we do things at the moment.” Make us blind to new kinds of information that don't serve the efficiency of today's path. Lead us to follow approaches that are not going to be the best to solve this problem.”

“One of the reasons why people find themselves shrinking back to the victim mindset in the face of constraints is that their paths have become so well-grooved as to become ruts, and they can't answer the challenge of the constraints by staying within them.”

“All organizations, big and small, need to design repeatability into their methods, based on historic drivers of success: they achieve efficiencies to make them more competitive, provide confidence around a path to growth, set clear expectations of behavior, and create a sense of identity around shared practices.”

“But we need to be vigilant in assessing the degree to which these habitual ways become dogmas that blind us to opportunity, and create ruts that can be hard to escape.”

“If we want to make constraints beautiful, then it matters how we ask the questions that contain them.”

“Both sides of the propelling question are critical. The specificity and scale of the ambition needs to set a clear but high bar, a target we know represents our highest hope.”

“While challenging, the tension they capture can also be compelling. One of the top ten highlighted books of all time on Kindle, for instance, is essentially a propelling question. Tim Ferriss' *The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich* is in its very concept linking a bold ambition (joining the rich) paired with a specific and significant constraint (working four hours a week).”

“Some scientists have suggested that there's an evolutionary advantage to optimism. Optimism underpins progress by allowing us to believe in a better future, and so make it more likely that we will plan for and begin creating it. This optimism bias<sup>2</sup> exists across race, region, class, and caste and explains why so many cultures have a version of the “every cloud has a silver lining” aphorism.”

“Academics also show that positivity correlates strongly with both resilience and openness, two characteristics we are going to need to draw on as we commit to exploring and testing inventive new approaches from unusual sources.”

“Those who are genuinely resourceful see available resources in a very different way. They see resources as not simply what they control, but what they can access: what the rest of the company has, what those in their network have, what their neighborhood (literally or metaphorically) has, and indeed what the big resource owners they have yet to meet may have that they can use.”

“There are four different kinds of relationships we need to explore for additional resources. We know some of these already, but may not have considered them as sources of resources; we will need to see their potential through new eyes. Some we may never have considered as sources of value at all before. Invested Stakeholders These are the groups with which we have the strongest relationships today, because they have a stake in our fortunes and are the closest to us: our co-workers, members of the board,

non-executive directors and investors, along with our most fervent and committed loyalists and user groups.”

“External Partners This source is made up of partners with whom we already have a relationship, but lack the same level of emotional involvement and shared agenda as our invested stakeholders: strategic partners, the broader group of users and customers, even friends.”

“Resource Owners This is a group of people or companies with whom we currently have little, if any, relationship, but who have an abundance of a particular kind of resource that we need.”

“Our Competition This is a group with whom we do have a relationship, but typically see ourselves as precluded from considering as a source of potential value or trade.”

“Our habitual ways of thinking about resources blind us to opportunities within easy reach. If we can learn to look around us and see it that way, available abundance is everywhere. The key is to stop thinking of resources only as those we control, and start thinking of them as those we can access.”

“We need to define an agenda that we share with that abundance owner which makes it in our mutual interest to combine resources.”