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**The Surprising Science Behind
Why Everything You Know About
Success Is (Mostly) Wrong**

BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE



ERIC BARKER

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"In this compulsively readable work, Eric Barker is your rollicking guide on a journey through the science of success. You'll discover why some of us are orchids and others dandelions, what pirates and prison inmates can teach us about honesty and generosity, how to network like the world's greatest mathematician, and much, much more. *Barking Up the Wrong Tree* is a brilliant kaleidoscope of a book. It shines with so many insights you might need sunglasses to read it!"

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BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE

The Dog-Lying Science Behind
Why Everything You Know About
Dogs Is (Probably) Wrong

ERIC BARKER

For my parents,

who kindly put up with an orchid, hopeful monster,
unfiltered leader of a son.

What the heck does that mean, you ask?

Well, we better get started . . .

Nothing important comes with instructions.

—JAMES RICHARDSON

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Nothing important comes with instructions.

—JAMES RICHARDSON

imagine watching an event during which after the winner claims victory you need to wait half a day in order to see the runner-up finish?

It's only natural to wonder what made Robič so dominant and successful in such a grueling event. Was he genetically gifted? No. When tested, he seemed physically typical for a top ultra-endurance athlete.

Did he have the best trainer? Nope. His friend Uroč Velepec described Robič as "Completely uncoachable."

In a piece for the *New York Times*, Dan Coyle revealed the edge Robič had over his competition that rendered him the greatest rider ever in the Race Across America:

His insanity.

That's not an exaggerated way of saying he was extreme. It's a literal way of saying when Robič rode, *he utterly lost his mind*.

He became paranoid; had tearful, emotional breakdowns; and saw cryptic meaning in the cracks on the street beneath him. Robič would throw down his bike and walk toward the follow car of his team members, fists clenched and eyes ablaze. (Wisely, they locked the doors.) He leapt off his bike mid-race to engage in fistfights . . . with mailboxes. He hallucinated, one time seeing mujahedeen chasing him with guns. His then wife was so disturbed by Robič's behavior she locked herself in the team's trailer.

Coyle wrote that Robič saw his insanity as "awkward and embarrassing but impossible to live without." What's fascinating is that Robič's gift was not unknown as an advantage in athletics. As far back as the 1800s, scientists like Philippe Tissie and August Bier noted that an unsound mind can help an athlete ignore pain and push his or her body beyond its naturally conservative limits.

I don't know about you, but my high school guidance counselor never told me that hallucinations, mailbox assaults, and generalized insanity were vital to being a world-renowned success at *anything*. I was told to do my homework, play by the rules, and be nice.

All of which raises a serious question: What really produces success?

This book explores what brings success in the real world. And I

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much like a trial. Then we'll settle on the answer that gives the best upside with the least downside.

In chapter 1, we'll look at whether playing it safe and doing what we're told really produces success. We'll learn about what Harvard professor Gautam Mukunda calls "intensifiers." Like Jure Robič's insanity, intensifiers are qualities that, on average, are negative but in certain contexts produce sweeping benefits that devastate the competition. We'll learn why valedictorians rarely become millionaires, why the best (and worst) U.S. presidents are the ones who subvert the system, and how our biggest weaknesses might actually be our greatest strengths.

In chapter 2, we'll find out when nice guys finish first as well as when Machiavelli was right on the money. We'll talk to a Wharton School professor who believes in compassionate business and altruism, and a teacher at Stanford whose research shows hard work is overrated and kissing up is what gets promotions. We'll look at pirates and prison gangs to see which rules even rule breakers follow, and find out how to strike the right balance between ambitiously getting ahead and being able to sleep at night.

In chapter 3, we'll dive into Navy SEAL training and explore the emerging science of grit and resilience. We'll talk to economics Ph.D.s to calculate the best time to double our efforts and when to throw in the towel. Kung fu masters will teach us when being a flaky quitter is a great idea. And we'll learn the silly word that can help us decide when to stick with something and when giving up is the best move.

Chapter 4 looks at whether it really is "what you know" or "who you know." We'll see how the most networked employees are often the most productive but that the greatest experts almost invariably classify themselves as introverts (including an astounding 90 percent of top athletes). We'll get insights from the most connected guy in Silicon Valley and learn how to network without feeling sleazy.

In chapter 5, we'll look at attitude. We'll see how confidence can push us past what we think we're capable of but how that needs to be balanced with a grounded view of the challenges ahead. We'll learn