

A portrait of Jay Papasan, a middle-aged man with short grey hair and a friendly smile, wearing a dark suit jacket over a light blue checkered shirt. The background is a soft-focus green foliage.

The Story of 'The ONE Thing' with Jay Papasan



Getting one thing right can be key to your success in business and life. Jay Papasan, co-author of The ONE Thing, talks about the premise of the bestseller and how it came to be written.



Jay Papasan

James: James Schramko here. Welcome back to SuperFastBusiness.com. This is Episode 801, and to celebrate the number one on this episode number, I've got a themed episode today. I've brought along a special guest, Jay Papasan. Welcome to the call.

Jay: Hey, thanks for having me. Eight hundred and one. That's really impressive.

James: Thanks. Yeah, I'm surprised.

Jay: You know how to stick to things. You don't quit easily.

James: You know, there's a couple of themes over the last decade or so. And that is, I've been doing the podcast, I've been running a live event most years, and I've been looking after members of my SuperFastBusiness membership for that long, a little bit longer actually, I started in 2009.

So I found my one thing that works. And there's a lot of things I don't do in my business. It could really be characterized by the things that most entrepreneurs do. They're very, very busy and overworked, overwhelmed, you know?

Books that struck a chord

And I've got to say, when I read the book, [The ONE Thing](#), which you co-authored with Gary Keller, it really struck a chord. There were a couple of books that came out around a similar time. There was the Essentialism and The ONE Thing, and they're the few times I've actually read a book and thought, oh, wow. I mean, I almost don't want to write a book now because I feel like it's been done.

It was such a great collection of ideas. We'll touch on some of the topics that it covers, of course.

Jay: [Greg McKeown](#), he wrote Essentialism. He had me on his podcast recently, and I've had him on ours. That book is very complimentary. And you wrote a book, which is very complimentary. And so I do think that the world benefits when you give them a new perspective on something they may already know, and they can maybe take advantage of it. Because there's nothing in our book that I think was original. I just think we approached it from a new perspective that hopefully made it accessible.

James: Right. And, you know, when I was doing the [interview about Essentialism](#) on this particular podcast many, many years ago now, probably about half our episode catalogue ago, the thing I complimented him about was listing his resources. Because, you know, even with my book, and I go to great pains in my book to talk about the source of where I've collected ideas from, as you said, not a lot of new ideas.

But I will say that I think these days, there is starting to be a message now about [getting appropriate sleep](#), about that [more work doesn't necessarily mean you're going to go better](#), and if anything, in the year 2020, last year, it was the big wake-up call to traditional businesses and corporations that there's a whole other way of doing life.

And, you know, I talk about that a little bit in [my book](#). Of course, I've been in the online world for quite some time. You've, no doubt, coming from and still being operating in the property industry, would have seen a huge shift, even since you published The ONE thing.

And of all the books I've read - and I've read lots and lots of books, I'm not sure if it's 3000 or 4000 - but it really struck a chord. And there's absolutely no doubt that it informed some of the life choices that I was making in combination with books like The 4-Hour Workweek. It led me down the path of having virtual assistants and building my online business.

The journey behind The One Thing book

And then in the last five years or so, really just questioning everything and stepping back from the way everyone does things to get that leverage. I'd say my book is about leverage, but so is your book. I'd love it if you could talk about the process leading up to yours, because I know you started researching for your book probably well before it got published. And you went through reams and reams and reams of scientific papers and research. And you referenced a lot of things.

Now if someone's listening to this, it's probably the right time to mention your background and what the book is, and then we can launch into your answers. You got plenty of time to think about that. But the book is The ONE thing. Basically, you came to this book, you partnered with someone who's big in property.

Before that, though, you actually worked in the publishing industry. And that probably gave you fantastic insights into how to make a great book. You worked for HarperCollins Publishers, and you were an associate editor. You've also been a teaching assistant before that, and a translator in the language market. It's no surprise your book's been translated into 40 different versions.

But you've basically put together what at the time was a real breakthrough book, for a market that probably wasn't ready to hear the message yet. And the book goes into breaking down why being busy and overloaded happens, about multitasking and the myths around balance, and that bigger is better, and those sort of things.

You talk about really getting down into productivity, how you actually get results. Like, there's a lot of discussion about willpower and habits. And I'm sure that that will be something worth chatting about. But why don't you let me know, how did you go from the publishing industry to the property industry, and then think, oh, okay, we need to publish a book?

From publishing to real estate to putting out a book

Jay: So, I'll try to make this not like the super long story. I mean, when I met my wife in New York City, I was in publishing, and she was in PR. We got married up there. And I'm from the south, in the United States, and I loved the big city. I lived in Paris before New York, but I was kind of, I was going to start a family. I was kind of wanting to do it, not in the big urban environment.

And so Wendy, she's from Fargo, North Dakota. So if you've seen the movie, she likes to say she's been moving south her whole life, right? Because she started in the frigid cold. And she's like, Oh, you want to go south? I'm with you. So we actually came to Austin, Texas, for a weekend, just to check it out. She had been here in college. And we just fell in love with the town and moved here without jobs.

And after a summer of me being a moderately successful, but not financially successful freelance writer, I got placed in a couple of big magazines, but wasn't making much money, Wendy just said, "Get a job." And I was like, "You know what, you're right." And she goes, "You're not meeting anybody. I'm an introvert. So let's just go get a job."

And I ended up taking a job as a newsletter writer, at what at the time was a very small regional real estate franchise company called Keller Williams. And at that time, Keller Williams had 6700 agents in about 14 states and Canada. And they called themselves an international company, because they had, you know, a couple of hundred agents in Canada. But it was a small company, 27 employees, I remember it.

And I found out after a couple of years of working there, and learning about this new industry, it's a weird entrepreneurial industry, and I was fascinated by that. I love small business, I love entrepreneurship. And I was like, I had no idea that the property industry was that. And I found out that the founder, Gary Keller, wanted to write a book.

And so I literally bumped into him in the bathroom, James, and I just said, "Hey, do you remember that I used to work in publishing? I hear that you're writing a book." And he kind of looked at me cockeyed, and said, "No." And he called me into his office, and he laid out a vision for writing 13 books, he just dropped it. Like, here's my plan. And it was not one book, but 13 books.

And he pitched me on a book called The Millionaire Real Estate Agent. And I told him at the time that it would probably sell 50,000 copies if he really did it well. And I don't think he was happy with that answer, because that's a lot of copies of a book, but I think he was thinking bigger. And I can't remember what exactly happened in between. But he laid out five books that he was modeling, right?

Here were five books that he and our partner back then, Dave Jenks, were looking at to kind of take parts of them to use in the new book. And one of them was a weightlifting book called Body for Life by a guy named Bill Phillips, sold millions of copies. One of them was a soccer book by the US female soccer star, Mia Hamm, if you know who that is, called Go for the Goal. And then there was a book called The Millionaire Next Door. Do you know that one?

James: Yep.

Jay: That's a great book about investing. Good to Great. And one other book, which I can never remember, but there were elements of each of those that he really liked. Well, here's the thing, when I was at HarperCollins, I did the Bill Phillips book, and I did the Mia handbook. So I showed him my name, and then we were off to the races.

And we wrote our first book, The Millionaire Real Estate Agent, in about 90 days. And we self published it, sold 100,000 copies the first year, and it's sold well over a million copies today. So I completely botched the market for that one, way bigger than we ever anticipated. And we've written five books since.

But my background was on, not even how to write a book, it was how to publish a book. And Gary is an artist. He was a musician. He's very lyrical. He's very creative, as a lot of entrepreneurs are. And we just kind of partnered. I can bring structure. I've studied writing my whole life, I love words. We were great complimentary people. So we partnered together to write these books.

But that's kind of the origin story of how I went from New York to working for a real estate company, is now we kind of are running a publishing arm from within what's now the largest real estate firm in the world. We have 170,000 agents in 50 countries. So it's been a rocket ship. And our market is, a lot of times, these agents that work for this company are our first audience, and then the people they serve. So it's been a very good business model for us.

When a book makes a mark on an industry

James: I think there's worth touching on that. How much did the book contribute to the growth of the agency?

Jay: I think that the first book was very significant. And it still remains what I kind of think of, even though it hasn't sold, The ONE thing has lapped it now, it's sold more than twice as many copies in less time. It also has a much bigger market. But from the real estate business, and you know this, you've written a book, there is a reason that as a business founder or a leader that you might want to write a book, because it gives you legitimacy.

And Gary was very honest. When he was starting the company, Keller Williams was not seen as a legitimate choice for the top agents in the industry. And he was asking the question, how do we become relevant? And he's like, well, no one's really done the analysis. And that first book was really, what would someone do in order to net a million dollars from a real estate sales business? It was a big question.

And we interviewed a whole bunch of top performers and tried to come up with an answer that was less about Gary's ego and experience and a lot more about research. And we did that in a relatively short period of time. And no one had that knowledge. And so it really did work. We were able to say, if you want to build a business, instead of being a salesperson, well, we kind of wrote the book on that.

And people in the industry call it the red book. And that's the best branding, like they don't even say the title. Oh, have you read the red book? And I'm like, touchdown. That's like, the ultimate win as a business person, is that the model is associated with your business model. And your competitors are using your book to teach their agents.

And I don't even know why no one has jumped in and tried to own that space. And so we've been able to stay in charge of that space. So I think as a business owner, it's a big investment, you know this, to write a book. And it's a really big investment to then support that book in the world so it doesn't immediately go out of print.

But if you're willing to do those things, it's a sort of, you know, moonshot, right? A lot of people will do for research or technology. If you're willing to do an old-fashioned moonshot and invest a lot of energy in intellectual property, you can get an asset that's worth a lot more than just any royalties you get for selling it.

How does the book fit the business model?

James: Yeah, that's really what the question becomes, you know, how does the book fit into the business model? I think some people who don't have a book think, well, I'll just publish a book, and then I'll be rich, and I'll just live off royalties. That would probably be a mistake, right?

Jay: I'm sorry, I almost choked there. That's funny. No that doesn't happen.

James: You know, for me, I went broad first with [Work Less, Make More](#). And it was really the get-to-know-you book and to share some of the principles that I've assimilated, you know, through reading so many books and living and trying different business models to get my way of living. And I hope to share that with lots of people. And it's done well.

The next book that I'm doing is actually much tighter. It's more around that concept of a million dollar business, taking people from six figures to seven figures, because that's the market that I...

Jay: That's what you coach people to do. That's your program, right?

James: It's where I create a lot of value for people. Someone comes along making \$100,000, they could be making a million dollars. That's a really tangible result for them. And it's still quite broad. But it's definitely more specific than the first one. And then the third book is actually even more specific, and that's about creating a membership business, because that's my sweet spot.

Bayou, puddle, ocean or well?

Jay: So here's a model for you from the book publishing world.

James: Please. I'm all ears.

Jay: My publisher Ray Bard, he's a legend, right? Bard Press is who helped us with The ONE thing. He only does one book a year. He's now handed the reins - he's retired - to a guy named Todd Sattersten, who is also a legend in the business world. They're both brilliant.

But their model was always, they only published two kinds of books. And so, if you think about the classic matrix, right? The two axes, one is how big is the market, and the other one is how deep is the felt need? So it's depth of need, like how big is the pain you're solving, and how big is the market for it?

And in the broad, but shallow, you have kind of like a bayou, right? Like a swamp. It's not very deep, but it's very broad. In the lower left quadrant, you have a puddle, right? It's not very broad, or it's not very deep. But then you go to the other side, you have a well, and an ocean book.

And The Millionaire Real Estate Agent was in actually a well book. In the US, North America, there was at that time, only about 700 or 600,000 agents, when we published it. There's about 1.2 million. As a book market goes, that's not very big, because what percentage of people even read books this day? But we got lucky, right? We were on to something, timing found us.

There were a lot of people that didn't want to just be salespeople. So there was a strong felt need for a guide to going bigger. And I'm going to bet that your next book is a well book, because there's a lot of people that are making 100 grand. And essentially, they're self-employed.

They're making okay living, but the moment they stop working, the income is going to stop, and going through that next journey, right, where other people are creating the income, and they actually become a business owner, that's a different skill set than getting to 100,000.

And there's a lot of people that are weary. They're seen as successful, but they're worn out, and they're wanting someone to take them to that next step. And I think that well territory, one, you can target it. Just like any business, I want to know who my customer is, I can target it. And I'm solving a big problem for them.

Everybody aims at the ocean, and most of the time, they think they're in the ocean, and they're in the bayou. Right? It's really broad, they can't target it. And they're not really solving a big enough problem for me, or anyone else. So like, who's going to read 250 pages about a problem that's not really painful?

So anyway, that's my diatribe on, if you're going to write a book, make sure you're in the well or the ocean category before you do all the hard work of writing it, unless you just really want something to give your grandkids.

What publishing can do for a business

James: Yeah, I love that. And, you know, part of my journey has been listening to smarter people than I am, especially on topics that they have deep knowledge in. It's fascinating to me that a big part of the growth of a property business came from having a publishing unit in-house. And that's actually a description of how my business looks now.

I do the coaching and my team are pretty much a publishing team. We're a publishing business. We create the podcast, we pump out some [videos](#), we format our training content and put them into multimedia formats for our members. And we put it up on the website and across our social media.

Jay: Intellectual property matters, right? If you can create original intellectual property, that's a way to build trust. That's a way to build a conversation with you not in the room that can lead to, I believe, it's a conversion tool. Like, yes, we make money from selling books. Gary Keller, I don't own any of Keller Williams, but he makes a lot more money when agents choose to join this company because they read that book.

Or for you, they heard this podcast, or they read your blog. That investment, it's almost like marketing, right? Brand marketing or something, it feels kind of fuzzy, and you're not sure what the ROI is. But it actually is a great conversion tool. So that when you have a lead, they're warmer and they're more receptive because they've been experiencing this stuff. That's my philosophy around it, at least.

James: Well, you're not Robinson Crusoe on that. I think my friend [Dean Jackson](#) says the same thing. And I agree with you. Some people think, oh, I'm going to start a podcast because I want traffic. Or I'm going to write a book, you know, to get new prospects. Sure. But I think the real benefit is the conversion. It's a conversion device.

Jay: The average book sells about 150 copies.

James: Wow.

Jay: Not a year.

James: That's amazing.

Jay: Well, think about how many get published. Like this year alone, something like 350,000 business books will be published. To digest that, you could not read all of the business books published this year in your lifetime. So getting something to the market and building a market for that thing are very different.

And podcasts has an even lower threshold. You've got a \$100 microphone, and a camera on your laptop, boom, you're in business. There's no barrier to entry. But how do you stand out from the competition?

James: Yeah. I actually tell people, don't bother starting a podcast, initially. Do little videos on your socials or something to see if there's a nibble. It's true. I'm lucky I got into podcasting early, and I built an audience of people who will listen to every episode and give me fantastic support. At my stage in life and business, it's become something I just want to do.

And going back to the topic of the book, it's one of the few things that I've done consistently that has been a massive result. If I have a room of my own customers at an event that I run, and I ask them where they found out about me or what caused them to be in the room, they'll all say the podcast.

And in the last couple of years, the book has been a nice little conversion tool, too. People coming into my membership, they tell me they read my book, they liked what it was about, they hopped onto the podcasts, they get a feel for if I'm the right person to help them, and then they join SuperFastBusiness membership. It's a fantastic doorway.

Commitment and the snowball effect

Jay: There you go. You just said it, you've done 801 episodes. And I do think that if someone is going to choose to do something like a podcast, in our industry, we call it geographic farming. Like, if you were going to try to get property business by sending postcards and mail to a neighborhood or a zip code or whatever, you don't just do it one time. It could take 12 months to 18 before you get any idea of how successful you might be.

The reward is in the people who make the longer commitments, and the audience building, and the consistency and the trust building. I think a lot of people underestimate that. A lot of people start podcast, and they're immediately not being consistent. And then their audience loses trust, and they go to the next thing. Or they just stop, because they didn't get the results fast enough.

And we talk about that in the book. And I bet you talk about it, that a lot of times, that expediential results, those things come by continuing to do the right thing over a long period of time. And people will say, "Ah, that James was an overnight success." And you'd be like, "No, man, I've been doing this for 800 episodes, which is why I'm so successful."



And it doesn't mean it takes 800. But I think most people underestimate what it takes to actually get to that extraordinary success where the curve hits, and everything starts to gain momentum and snowball in your favor. But those are the sort of things that make for extraordinary businesses.

James: Yes, I saw that when I started doing little [social media videos](#) a couple of years back, it took about three months until they started to surface, because we tracked them as best as possible. These days, like every single month, we roll into \$20,000 or \$30,000, that can be attributed to that channel as the first attribution. So it is a snowball.

I love the idea of a snowball. I talk about the snowflake at the top of the mountain. By the time it hits the bottom of the mountain, it could take out a small village. And it's especially true of membership sites. And that's what I've helped a lot of my community do, is to build memberships.

They can be brutal in the beginning. It's like childbirth. There's no upside in the beginning, you got the whole pre-birth, you've got the birth, it's just dirty nappies and spoon feeding for a long time till they can even talk. But in time, kids can come good, and they can become a great addition to the family. It's like a membership site.

The business application of The ONE Thing

I want to ask you a couple of questions around, how do you take people who are reading the book, I know you've got a call to action there about putting The ONE Thing to work; would you like to just sort of talk about the mechanics of how that sort of interplays with the business model?

Jay: So we have a coaching company and a training company behind The ONE Thing, and what I've learned as being an author, as much as I love social media as a way to engage, like, those are really inexpensive ways to engage with a lot of people. As I studied the most successful people, the email list became the asset that was at the foundation of that business.

And I'll say that's kind of the hub from which many things go. Like, we teach people, your business is your database, right? If you have a database that you have a relationship with, right, you're not spamming people, they have opted in, they want to hear from you on some regular rhythm, and they're regularly opening and consuming, think about how much junk we get. If someone is actually signing up to get more, they want something and they think you have it.

Why a database is hugely important

So for us, our strategy, if we have a book, is we want to give them something of value. And they know exactly what's happening - give us your email, and we'll send this to you. And a lot of people will immediately unsubscribe, I get that. But we're trying to get people to opt in to our ecosystem, where then we can find out exactly what it is that they need that we offer, or not.

If someone doesn't open an email from us for three months, we send them a note saying, "Hey, you probably have forgotten about that you signed up for this, and we don't want to keep occupying, so we're going to unsubscribe. If that's a mistake, you can sign back up here." I don't want a brag list, I want people that actually open and engage.

So for us, it all starts with getting people into our database, whatever that means to you. But I want one that I can control. If my database is on Facebook, Facebook could change the rules tomorrow. And it's not my database, it's their database. So I'm very conscious of, my foundation is my database. And for me, that's an email list right now.

But I know that could morph. Maybe that becomes something else. I just want to own it and control it, so I can have a conversation with my potential clients and clients. And then we build from there. But that to me is, if there was like the 20 percent of the 20 percent, is how do I take them from an experience, a book or a podcast, and get them into my database? That now becomes something that I can predictably know kind of what my revenue will become. That's predictable income now.

James: So if we were to put that in a sentence...



Jay: Put it in a bumper sticker. Your business is your database. How do you get people to opt into it?

James: Exactly. When I was running Mercedes-Benz dealerships, they actually mandated that we print out a hard copy of the database of the dealership customers and keep a copy in the safe, a fireproof safe. We're speaking the exact same language here. We've had guest after guest after guest talking about, [email is still the thing](#).

It's still, you know, in 2021, email is still the thing. I'm huge on email, I've created courses around it, [Conversational Conversions](#). It still blows my mind. You know, in December 2020, I sent out three emails inviting my audience to attend a training. I had some people, friends of mine, clients actually, present some training that was very relevant for a good portion of my audience, and many of them made a purchase. And I had a massive month in December 2020.

In the year of the pandemic, and crazy year, probably finished the year on the best month I've had in a long time based on stacking things together, and the power of the email is what did that. It's just mind-blowing.

Jay: Think about how many businesses went into COVID, right? And they had customers that showed up every day. And they're pivoting, right? They're like, 'Oh my gosh, we have to deliver a virtual experience.' They had no way to tell those loyal customers that they had a service to offer. If you don't have a database, you're always at risk for that moment. So I love that you just highlighted that.

Those businesses that immediately were able to pivot were the ones that had a connection to their customer. Otherwise, like, they're worried about their income going away. They're going to spend all this marketing to tell people. I just want to hit a button and say, "Guess what, we can still serve you."

The perils of reliance on someone else's platform

James: Exactly. And you know, you're lighting the board up when you talk about the risks of Facebook. My most famous training ever is called [Own The Racecourse](#), and the entire concept could be summarized as control, being in control. It was drummed into me by my mentor. And having come from the automotive industry, I dare say there's a lot of parallels to the property industry in terms of the complexity and the mindset and the lessons learned.

But you know, I'm a huge fan of that idea of not building your entire business on someone else's beach, when they decide to make it private or whatever. There was a news article yesterday about a small business who only spent \$43 million on ads on Facebook, and Facebook just switched them off overnight. And they won't even get into a dialogue with this customer about why. No reason given, no recourse, you know, done.

Jay: Here's a truth that we're kind of touching on, and the way we've been talking about it. COVID accelerated a lot of trends. And if you don't have a digital first, physical enhanced business, you have to move there. Right? So you have to have that element that you can go to. And in your database, there's inherently going to be digital.

But you have to have some sort of digital foundation. You can enhance it with physical, and you need to own it. You can't rent it, because you could be evicted at any moment. And then you're lost. I was reading about the grocery stores. Do you all have Instacart where you are?

James: We don't have Instacart. But I'm sure there's probably something similar.

Jay: Well, it's basically was this emerging service where people would deliver groceries and stuff. And so COVID happens, everybody's in a pandemic, people want to have their groceries delivered, most grocery stores were not prepared for that. So they immediately entered into relationships with Instacart, who had the ability to have digital, like, relationships with their customers; they had a database, and they immediately started working together.

Well, guess what, guess who owns all the customers now? Instacart. And one executive said, you know, they've kept us afloat with revenue, but I'm not actually sure we have any margin left after we pay the fee to them. And they became completely reliant on a third party, right? Completely reliant on a third party for their business.

James: Apparently, like those food delivery services take about 40 percent of the bill, you know.

Jay: It was 20 percent for Instacart. So even 20 to 40 percent margin, my goodness, that's huge.

James: I think the important lesson there, and it's probably similar for Afterpay, is you want to be the one with the relationship with the user. And there's a lot of value in that, it makes your business valuable. So in summary, if you've got a business, you probably should have a book. And the book should be used as a device to get an email. And the book is a contributor to the conversion that happens with that person who got the email.

Now it would be a really good time for you to mention, where can our listener go to get on your email, or whatever it is that you're giving away, whether it's a newsletter or a training, I'm not sure what you give people, but it's a good time to mention it.

Jay: If they wanted to visit the1thing.com, we have all kinds of free training around living the book and kind of living a more focused, simple existence around your business or your personal life, that is what we do. And there's a lot of resources there that people can take advantage of.

And if they want to, they can sign up and just kind of model what we're doing. And we've been pretty successful. I think we have about a 35 to 40 percent open rate on our email list. And in five years, we've grown it to, I want to say 95,000 that open it every 90 days. And so that's been kind of our model. And we're just trying to grow that as an A asset in our business that supports everything else.

I will say this, not everybody should write a book. But you need to ask, do you have an asset that represents your knowledge, your unique value proposition? A book is a great version of that. It could be your podcast or your YouTube channel. But it needs to be something that demonstrates you have deep and unique knowledge. That is one of the ways that you can quickly earn a lot of trust.

How reading can boost your chances of success

I just love books because I'm a book nerd. It sounds like you are too.

James: If I could say something really important, you said it before, actually, that most people don't read books anymore, especially since the digital age. But that's absolutely, unequivocally, without doubt, the single smartest thing I ever did as a young business person, was to read business books. But it actually went back even before business. When I was 12 years old, I read Tom Hopkins's the Art of Selling.

Jay: Are you kidding me? Oh, my gosh! That's old school.

James: Like, I was at an airport in Perth having to fly back to Sydney, I was like a 12 year old, and there was really nothing there, and I grabbed this book off the bookshelf, and I read it on the flight home because it was a midnight flight. And I didn't even know what selling was. But I must have ingested a lot of the languaging and the themes and thoughts. And years later, when I started to get exposed to roles where selling was an advantage, I was actually naturally good at it. I was naturally infused at an early age.

And then when I got an actual sales job, I went and bought six or seven books from the Australian Institute of Management bookstore. And then when I became a sales manager, I went and bought six or seven books, I read them all on the weekend. And then from then, I just went into every direction possible, from personal development through to strategy, and then, you know, all the things around it.

You know, the best books I bought in 2020 were my cookbooks, because I did a lot of cooking last year. You know, maybe I'm not keeping Instacart afloat. But we did a lot of procuring of Good Foods and cooking.

Jay: That was one of the gifts of that strange time, is that a lot of people started preparing and eating food together again as families. And there was some strange gifts from last year, I don't want to call. But so many people who've lost loved ones; it's hard to talk about gifts coming from it. But that was one of the hopefully bright moments that showed up for some people during that time.

James: Well, like, you know, my grandmother used to teach me when she was educating me around painting, she would tell me that you can't have shade without light or light without shade. So she was classically describing Yin Yang. If you have dark things in one area, there has to be some light somewhere. I found a lot of light in 2020.

And, you know, as you said, we have to be empathetic to the people who didn't even make it through the year, and certainly, a lot of people were ruined. But I think the book is a great guide for people to find that pathway out. Like, if you're overloaded or overwhelmed or confused, or trying to do a lot of things at once, or you struggle with discipline and willpower, the book is the key to unlock that.

And just like a lot of the other books I read, it was part of the fabric that ended up regenerating in the things that I do now. I have to attribute it.

What weekly accountability can achieve

There was one thing in particular that I thought was curious, and that was since 2010, I started a mastermind group where each week, we get on a group call. This was a long time before virtual masterminds were popular, I think they became popular in about 2020.

Back then, I used to do this, and I still do it now. I've done it every week, I've done two or three calls every week since 2010 with a group. And on this call, we have a framework, and the framework is, share a win. And that's based on the idea of gratitude, like, what's the light in your week, like what was good? Because as entrepreneurs, we could just, you know, go into some desperate, unhappy moment, like we're always missing our target, or we haven't achieved this or that.

I think Dan Sullivan talks about the horizon effect. So we share our win, then we talk about the challenge. And that's a nice way of saying our problem. And you know, that's where I can add a lot of value fixing that. And then the third component, which we've been doing since before your book came out, is the one thing. And it's like, what is the one thing you would like to achieve between now and next week's call? And I always focus that entrepreneur.

Jay: That is the origin story of the book. Do you know that? We didn't write that in the book. That's how it showed up. Gary has been doing those calls for as long as I've known him, over 20 years, but he's been doing them for 30, weekly coaching calls for him. And at the end of the call, he would ask for commitments, and people would say the three or four things they were going to get done before the next call.

And guess what, they would always do some, but not the most important one. And it was really in frustration and anger almost, he was like, "James, if you're only going to get one thing done this week, what's it going to be to advance it?" And to his wonder and surprise, when there's only one thing on your list, people do it. There's no place to hide. So it's that instant accountability. And they did the other stuff, too.

And he's like, "Well, this is the secret. If I just focus on the main thing, this other stuff just naturally gets done."

James: I did not know that. And it wasn't in the book. So I definitely didn't read it.

Jay: We cut that chapter.

James: Right. And it's like, yeah, that's hard, isn't it? Always cutting stuff out.

Jay: The book was 440 pages. We cut it by almost 50 percent.

James: I just had a chat with [Perry Marshall](#), and his latest book is 36 pages. That's quite an achievement.

Jay: Wow! That's poetry.

James: Yeah, or maybe another P word. It's almost a pamphlet. Like, I literally emailed him and said, "Is this the book or is this a summary of the book?" He goes, "No, that is the book." Okay. And then [we chatted about it](#). But it's really taking the 80/20 of the 80/20 of the 80/20, and of course he's known for that.

But I did not know that. But what I've noticed is if I speak to an entrepreneur 50 times a year and they tell me the one thing they're doing the next week, they get stratospheric results. So I already instinctively knew. And it's why when I read that book, it's like, oh, my God, you know, of course.

And even as we're chatting, we have so many philosophies in common. It's rare that I would find someone with this much that I have in common, the way that we think, and I'm not good at writing the book, so I get help with that. You know, everyone needs a Jay Papasan in their life. They'd be lucky to have one.

What do you think, if you only could make the book 36 pages, what would have to stay in?

The 36-page version of The One Thing

Jay: There's a pyramid in there where we talk about, you know, the book is extensively about being productive. And we make a point that when you really look at the most productive people and businesses on Earth, kind of the iceberg, right? What's underneath everything else is a deep sense of purpose. They have a mission that they're on.

And that mission, you know, if you've read Angela Duckworth's Grit, the number one thing that leads to people having a lot of grit, persistence, they just don't quit, is a sense of purpose. If you're really clear what your mission is, your purpose is, that gives you a really clear sense of priority. And that's the middle of the pyramid, purpose and priority.



And if you're saying no to the stuff that doesn't matter, and yes to the few things that do, by default, you're going to be operating in your optimal productivity zone, because doing the most important thing is the definition of being productive. It's not about how much you do, it's about the importance and value of what you do is.

So to me, I love that, because I'm very purpose-driven. And I want to have an impact with what I do. If I'm going to spend this much time at work, I want to know that hopefully I have fun, and we make a really big difference for people. But I've seen that pattern. And people, they always want to go to success and then significance. If you make your success about significance, you're a lot more likely to be successful.

I want to have an impact. I'm going to drive with purpose. So that would have to stay. We would have to talk about the focusing question, what's the one thing I can do such that by doing it, everything else is easier or necessary? It's a mouthful, I get it. But it's really about asking, of all the things on my current to-do list, what's the one that would be most impactful today, or this week or this month? So getting real focused on the thing that matters.

And then the last piece would be on time-blocking. When you know what you have to do, you have to make a reservation on your calendar for you and yourself with that task to get it done. The most successful people on the planet, their calendars aren't just about meeting other people. They're really clear allocations of time to do the things that matter most.

So if you just had one appointment every day, to do the one thing that mattered most for your business, I guarantee you at the end of the year, you would have at least doubled it. That's what happens. You see people invest 30 minutes or an hour, like, 'Okay, I know I'm supposed to call clients, I'm just going to call one today.' Great.

Call one today, and then two tomorrow, and then two the next day, and then two the next day, then make it three, and then let it build naturally. But just show up every day and do it. And you will be so much more successful than everybody else out there. It's like the tortoise and the hare, right? Everybody wants to wait, and then sprint to the finish line. It's more fun and more exciting, but it's not sustainable.



That's not how you get to 801 episodes, James. You got to show up every day and do the little boring work that actually, success is so boring when you think about it. You're just kind of doing a handful of things again, and again. And then you don't even realize it, but you're getting really good at them.

So I want to talk about purpose and why that underscores priority, and your productivity. I want to know the question. How do I identify my one thing? And then I've got to make a time commitment to go get that done, or it's worthless. Clarity without execution does nothing.

James: Yeah, boom! Like, you could drop the mic if you're holding it. That was great. That's what I was looking for.

Jay: That's my 36-page version of *The ONE Thing*.

James: I couldn't speak to you for this long and not cover the topic of the book. But we definitely got in there. Of course, if you're listening to this podcast or watching it anywhere that we publish it, go and get [The ONE Thing](#). It's absolutely essential in your library. If you could only have a few books, this one has to be in there.

Jay: Thank you for that.

Wrapping up the episode

James: And just to illustrate what you're talking about, this podcast recording, this is what I do. I block it into my schedule. We scheduled this recording last year. It's in the scheduler. It gets done. It will be published and people will find out about Jay, you know, you'll get some new audience.

Some of my own audience will get some really useful tips, which is the point of this podcast. And some of those people will be ready for the next stage of coaching because, you know, even though we don't have ads on our podcasts, I do make money from the podcast from having [services and products](#), etc. over at SuperFastBusiness.com.

And after this podcast, that's the best part, it's Thursday morning here, I don't have any appointments until next Tuesday. I love that. I block three days a week where I do work activities. And I have four days a week with zero scheduled calls. And my life is absolutely transformed, from when I had a job back in 2008, working a lot of hours, under a lot of pressure, for an annual wage that was more or less close to a couple of months' worth of income these days.

It is confounding and counterintuitive that you can actually make a lot more money doing so many less things. I'm living proof. I'm sure you're doing fine. How many properties did your business sell in the last year? Your personal business?

Jay: The one my wife runs for us, our real estate sales team sold 260 properties last year.

James: Right. That's not bad going, I'm sure there was a quid in that. So well done.

Jay: Yeah. It's a good, little business.

James: You definitely don't look overworked and overstressed. So I like the authenticity.

Jay: I'll tell you this. What you just described, one, congratulations on getting there. That's really cool. I love hearing that because I am, I like work, I enjoy my work. Retirement seems weird to me, as long as I can show up and enjoy my work and know that it's fulfilling. But I also know that it's not about how many hours you put in. And the cult of hustle is highly overrated, that the most successful people understand what you just said. It's about the handful of things that you do really well. It's not about how long you do them, or how many days you work and toil.

And two people I can think of that have been our number one agent, of all the 170,000 in the last four or five years, both of them work just 100 days a year. They got it so clear. And they designed their world so that they could focus on the handful of things that mattered and everything else was somebody else's job. And they were incredibly successful, not in spite of it, but because of it.

James: Jay, that's awesome. Well, thank you for sharing this time. If this is work for me, I'm sure I can pump out a few more episodes here and there.

Jay: This has been fun. I love talking to like-minded people, James. I appreciate the invitation.

James: Of the 801 episodes, this one's going to my top few. I keep an inventory on fingers on one hand of the ones that I've had the most enjoyment from, and this one's right up there. So this has been a great experience for me. I know our listeners got tremendous value.

Your website, the1thing.com. Jay Papasan has been dropping fantastic hints for us. If we have a business, if we're thinking about a book, if we want to make a good income from the book, take that experience from a proper publisher who's come into an entrepreneurial business and just lit the thing up, millions of copies of this book have been sold in 40 different languages. It's amazing.

Congratulations, and I look forward to the updated next version. If there ever is one, I'll be the first in line to buy it.

Jay: Thanks so much for having me. Hopefully, someday, I'll be in your town or you'll be in Austin, Texas, and we can grab a cup of coffee.

James: It's definitely going to happen as soon as it's allowed for sure. Thanks, Jay.

Jay: Take care. Thank you so much.



Achieve more of your
business goals with help
from James

[CLICK HERE](#)