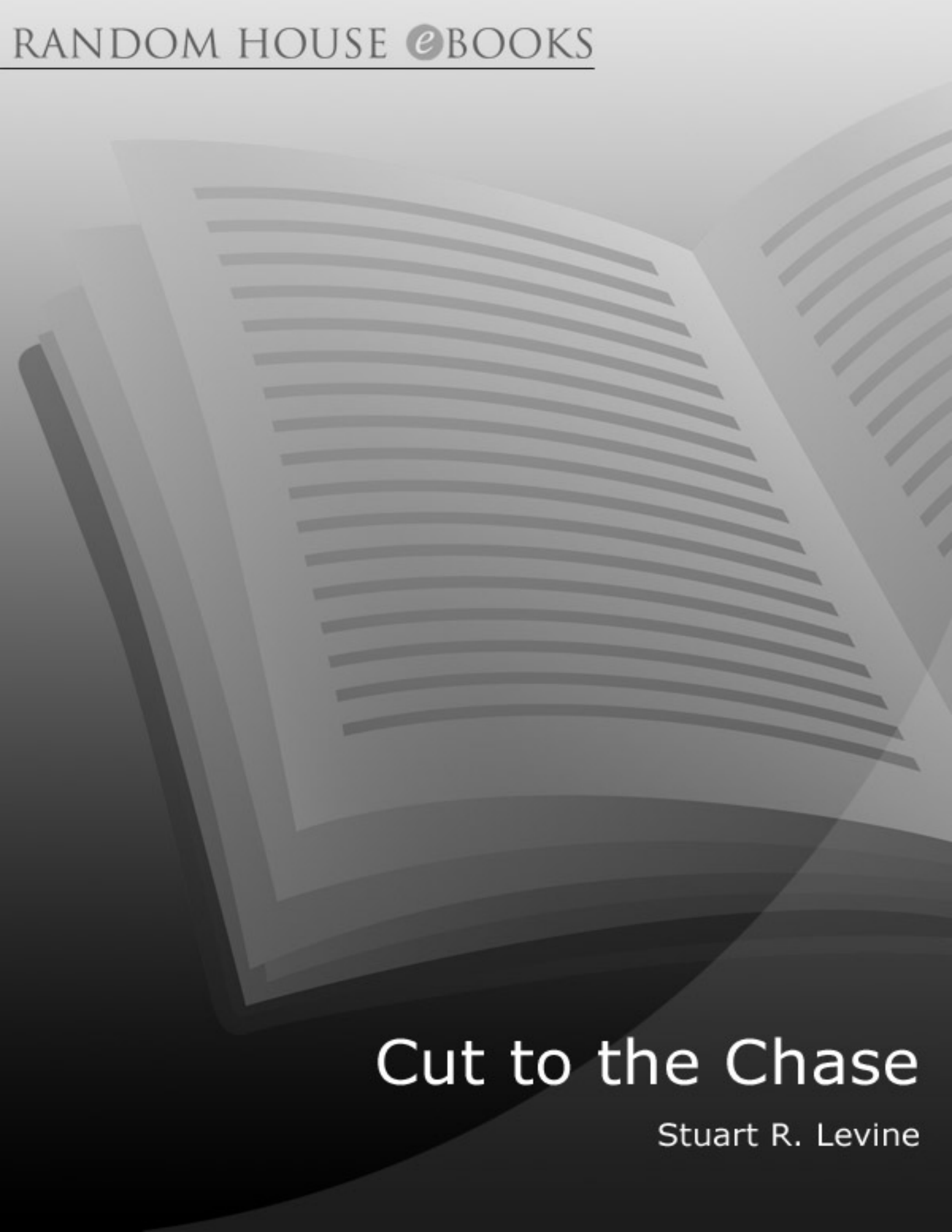


RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Cut to the Chase

Stuart R. Levine

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68. If you need a drummer, hire a drummer.
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74. A picture is worth a thousand words.
75. Tell a story.
76. On it. Pending. Done.
77. ... To get to the other side.
78. Weed out your reading pile.
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82. Don't let your BlackBerry become a CrackBerry.
83. Avoid toxic people.
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87. Know when you're stuck.
88. When you hear something once, pay attention. When you hear it twice, act.
89. If you sense trouble, do something.
90. Procrastination takes years off your life.
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92. Don't make the same mistake twice.
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97. Take back the weekend.
98. Turn the page.
99. Know when to put the book down.
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Move past the page and into action.

Calendar

Acknowledgments

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About the Book

How can I get more done?

How do I work out what really matters?

How can I improve my work/life balance?

The answer to all these questions, according to bestselling author and business guru Stuart Levine, is to **cut to the chase**, and in his new book he's gathered together 100 concise, invaluable lessons to help you do just that. Cutting to the chase is about more than getting to the point; it's about staying focused, getting to grips with the job in hand and concentrating on what's important. Ultimately, it's about making the best use of your time and energy.

Whether you want to know how to prioritise, how to deal with each task efficiently, or even how to make sure others don't waste your time, *Cut to the Chase* has a set of brilliant and simple rules you can follow. It is an indispensable guide to taking control of your time so that you can lead a happier, more balanced life.

About the Author

Stuart R. Levine, former CEO of Dale Carnegie & Associates, Inc., is Chairman and CEO of Stuart Levine & Associates LLC, a consulting and leadership development company. Author of the national bestseller *The Six Fundamentals of Success* and co-author of the international bestseller *The Leader in You*, he has spoken throughout Europe, the Pacific Rim, and South America. He has been profiled in leading publications and has made numerous television appearances to discuss leadership and personal growth. He serves as Lead Director for Gentiva Health Services, Inc. and J. D'Addario & Company, Inc. and has been frequently called on to discuss corporate governance issues.

Also by Stuart R. Levine

The Six Fundamentals of Success

CUT TO THE CHASE

AND 99 OTHER RULES
TO LIBERATE YOURSELF AND
GAIN BACK THE GIFT OF TIME

STUART R. LEVINE

rh
BUSINESS
BOOKS

To Harriet—energetic, passionate and loving
To Jesse—a living expression of strength, and values
To Elizabeth—clear, thoughtful, and purposeful

You each inspire me every day. Making more time to spend
with you is what cutting to the chase is all about.

PREFACE

Before appearing on the *Today* show to discuss my previous book, *The Six Fundamentals of Success*, I was talking to Matt Lauer about some of the ideas in the book. Right before we went on the air, he leaned over and said, “You know what really drives me nuts? When people come into my office for a five-minute conversation and, an hour later, *they’re still there!* Why can’t they *cut to the chase?*”

Matt was among the first to single out that rule, but he was not the last. In countless conversations with CEOs and managers, in my speaking engagements and in my consulting work with executives at some of the top companies in the country, I heard similar questions: How can I get people to stop wasting my time? How can I keep conversations on track? How can I get more done in less time? They all boiled down to the same answer: by cutting to the chase.

Cutting to the chase is about much more than getting to the point. It’s about *defining your purpose*—whether in accomplishing a specific task or in your career and life. It’s about *knowing your world*—your job, your organization, your industry—and your place in it. It’s about *concentrating*—shutting out distractions, setting personal boundaries, and focusing on your goals. Ultimately, it’s about understanding that your time is, quite literally, your life.

The rules that follow are lessons that I’ve learned from my decades of working with managers and executives. You can apply these lessons to your own life and career, no

matter what your job or how high up in your organization you are—or hope to be. This book will help you as individuals and leaders, as family members and community members, to continually reinforce the purposefulness of your actions. Nothing, I would argue, translates more directly into effective performance. But these rules aren't only for individuals; companies, too, benefit from cutting to the chase. In fact, I believe helping people cut to the chase is the critical leadership skill of the next decade.

I believe that each of the 100 rules in this book is essential and have avoided repetition whenever possible. However, you will find recurring themes—keeping meetings short, conversations focused, and communication clear. Ideas as important as these bear repeating in different contexts and applications.

Whether the waters ahead are calm or turbulent, people who cut to the chase are the ones who will thrive. Because cutting to the chase isn't just about doing your work faster—it's about putting your career on the fast track. It will lead to better business results—and liberate you to focus on everything you're working *for*: your community, hobbies and avocations, and, most important, the people you love.

While the payoff for cutting to the chase is more time, ironically, it often requires you to invest some time and energy up front. As with any type of personal training, it requires discipline, practice, and heart. I suggest tackling a few rules to start that speak best to your situation. Take note of how much time they help you to save—I promise that you'll be invigorated by the results.

Life is beautiful and fragile. The disasters that have rocked our world in the early twenty-first century have, I believe, led people to a greater awareness of that fact. We live in an age where our competitiveness is matched only by our desire for work/life balance. Of course, at the same time employees are striving for greater meaning in their lives, employers are struggling to create increased value

for customers and shareholders. How do you solve these seemingly conflicting problems? By defining your purpose, knowing your world, and concentrating. In other words, by cutting to the chase.

I'd enjoy hearing your experiences applying these rules. Please e-mail me at cuttothechase@stuartlevine.com. You can also visit our Web site at www.stuartlevine.com. Thank you.

—Stuart R. Levine

Start Now!

1. Cut to the Chase.

THE ONLY RULE I have repeated from my previous book, *The Six Fundamentals of Success*, is Cut to the Chase. Why the need to say more here? And why an entire book on the subject? Because I realized that my prior advice only scratched the surface of what cutting to the chase is all about.

We give our time away all day long, to emotions that gain us no advantages, to people who do not value our time, to inefficient habits. If you want to take back this time, you need to cut to the chase. The following are the underlying principles behind cutting to the chase, and, in fact, every one of the other ninety-nine rules in the book.

1) *Define your purpose.* Whether you're planning a major project at work or thinking about where you want to be in ten years, a clear purpose is your true north by which to navigate as conditions change.

2) *Know your world.* Continuously seek to understand what's happening in the world, the economy, your industry, and your organization. Recognize what motivates people. And most important, know yourself—and the world around you.

3) *Concentrate.* Shut out distractions. Set personal boundaries. Focus. Don't let people steal your time and don't give it away easily.

Cutting to the chase means approaching everything from your next phone call to the next five years of your career with clarity and focus. It's about knowing what's important and what's not. It's about spending time wisely—yours and others'. It's about getting more done with less effort. And, yes, it's also about work/life balance—about taking back the weekends and leaving work earlier so you can spend more time doing things you enjoy with the ones you love.

Cutting to the chase involves a commitment to thinking differently. It's easy to blame change, intrusive technologies, or increasing expectations at work for our own lack of discipline. But wasting time is a personal choice. You can continue complaining that you never have enough time. Or you can put down your BlackBerry, switch off your e-mail alarm, close your office door, take a deep breath, turn the page ... and just start.

2. Just start.

*Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it!*

—Goethe

THE LONGER YOU delay starting something, the more shadows you see. To paraphrase a famous Nike campaign, *just start*.

One CEO I know wanted to initiate a recognition program called “I Caught You Doing Something Good.” He created a committee to put the program together. But the people on it were busy with their regular jobs and had trouble finding the time to meet. The CEO was anxious to spend more time recognizing his people for their hard work. Realizing that the committee was too swamped to put the program together in a timely fashion, he just started. He sent an e-mail to the entire management team asking for nominations. When the results were in, he sent his high performers a personal thank-you note and a \$100 gift certificate. The program is working beautifully. The energy it created has added momentum to the company.

Wouldn’t it be nice if life took a cue from horse racing and a gun went off when it was time for us to get moving? Life rarely sends us a signal as clear as a starter’s pistol. It’s up to us to recognize when it’s time to just start.

3. Get in early and go home on time.

TOO MANY PEOPLE get to work fifteen minutes late, thinking they'll stay late to make up the lost time. They spend the first half hour getting coffee and catching up with colleagues on the hot new reality TV show. Once they sit down, they make a couple of personal phone calls, and if they're lucky, they'll get in an hour or so of "real work" before lunch. Of course, lunch itself is split between planning an upcoming meeting at their desks and catching up on office gossip. With the rest of the day spent returning e-mails, they might get in two or three hours of real work. So they stay late, inevitably chatting with the other night owls for another half an hour. But it's okay—after all, they're "off the clock."

These people leave the office hours later than they should. They feel burned out because they've been there for almost ten hours, crammed in lunch at their desks, and still have so much left to do. Such people often feel ill-used by the organization and see themselves as martyrs. But the truth is, they have wasted hours of valuable work time and have accomplished far less than they could have.

The most effective executives and aspiring executives and managers get in early and stay focused all day. To regain control of your day, first get to work on time. Or, better yet, early. Work smart and hard the entire time you're there. Visualize a stopwatch ticking away in your head, if necessary. At lunch, leave the office—if only for five or ten minutes—to clear your head so you can be

productive in the afternoon. If you want to catch up with friends at the office, schedule lunch with them. When colleagues drop by your office, tell them, “I’m working on something right now, but I’d love to catch up. Why don’t we schedule lunch?”

Don’t confuse time spent at the office with time spent working productively. Working hard and smart will liberate you to spend more time *outside* the office with the people you care about most.