

[brief]

make a bigger impact
by saying less ◀

Joseph
McCormack

WILEY

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*This is dedicated to Julie, my beloved wife.
Thank you for loving me and inspiring me every day.
Your presence in my life is a great gift.*

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FOREWORD

When Joe asked me to write the foreword, I was literally in the middle of wrapping up my own book (*Scaling Up*) and I thought I couldn't do it.

I wanted to do something special (and brief!) and you know how hard it is to say something brief. Then, I changed my mind.

Read the book.

You're busy; we all are.

Be a master of brevity. Now get started.

—Verne Harnish, Founder and CEO of Gazelles

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I first told my kids that I was writing a book called *BRIEF*, the jokes started flying. You could only imagine their comments. My friends and extended family followed suit saying the book should be only 10 pages long.

Funny ... I'm still laughing.

All kidding aside, I want to thank all of them for their constant love and support. It has been wonderful to see their nonstop encouragement.

As for my coworkers, clients, and close collaborators, this book has given me a unique opportunity to have deeper conversations and start to dream with them about the possibilities of a “less is more” world. On many occasions, they have taken time from their day job to lend me a hand. In particular, Johnny, Angelo, Angela, and Megan have been invaluable to get *BRIEF* airborne.

There are a few people, Meghan and Joyce at Sheffield and Christine Moore at John Wiley & Sons, whom I have depended on throughout with an honest editorial push to omit needless words and make this a better book.

Regarding my current and former clients, I have shared their insights, commentary, successes, and failures all while respecting their confidentiality and excluding any sensitive information they have shared with me. In particular, I have changed some first names and omitted surnames of those serving in our country's Special Operations community.

Finally, for all of those that I have interviewed for this book—a heartfelt thank you. Truly, this is a topic that affects us all.

PREFACE

Why BRIEF?

In our attention-deficit economy, being brief is what's desperately needed and rarely delivered.

When we fail to be clear and concise, the consequences can be brutal: wasted time, money, and resources; decisions made in confusion; worthy ideas rejected; people sent off in wrong directions; done deals that always seem to stall.

As the founder of a boutique marketing agency that helps clients such as Harley-Davidson, BMO Harris Bank, MasterCard, and W. W. Grainger get their stories straight, I know this is a rare skill.

For years, business and military leaders have complained to me about the same things. Mixed messages keep missing the mark. People are not on the same page. Long-winded presentations go nowhere.

For businesses to succeed in an information-laden and hyper-busy economy, the rambling has to stop. So I decided to write BRIEF, a step-by-step approach to get to the point quickly.

Anyone can learn how to make what's complex clear. After my firm was in business for just a few years, I was invited to develop an original curriculum for U.S. Special Operations Command in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. It turned out that some of the most elite members of our military were weak communicators. They

admitted their mission-critical briefs were painfully long, buried in details, and impossible to decipher.

The transformative work with Special Operations was—and still is—incredibly rewarding. That’s how BRIEF was born. It’s about lean communication. It’s like Six Sigma for your mouth.

After a few days in our Narrative Mapping courses, I saw an immediate shift. They were able to leverage storytelling skills and BRIEF techniques to be clear and compelling when explaining complex missions. They delivered complicated information efficiently and effectively, with clearer context and more compelling explanations. They used fewer PowerPoint presentations. As a result, the leaders fostered better and more engaging conversations.

One of the participants commented, “The difference is dramatic. Our briefs can prove that less is more.”

I believe the lessons learned with U.S. Special Operations can be used in the corporate world by those who want to be concise and clear when sharing their story.

You’re busy, so I’ve designed the book to be immediately useful. If you read and follow along actively, you will learn to create clarity and meaning and drive out waste and confusion.

The book is organized around a new form of ADD: awareness, discipline, and decisiveness.

Part One: Awareness—the conviction to hold yourself and others to a higher standard of succinctness

Part Two: Discipline—the BRIEF approach to producing the mental muscle memory necessary to make you a lean communicator every time

Part Three: Decisiveness—the ability to recognize key moments when you need to convey what really matters effectively and efficiently

Brevity is a choice.

When you want to get more, decide to say less. Those who want to succeed—even thrive—in an attention-deficit economy are masters of lean communication. They stand out, their ideas are seen and heard, and their companies succeed. Decide that being brief is your non-negotiable standard.






As I have seen firsthand, BRIEF tackles an issue that won't go away unless we become lean communicators and let our ideas stand out.

Are you ready?

This won't take long.

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HOW THE BOOK IS ORGANIZED

PART	INTRO	I	II	III	IV
QUESTION	WHY?	WHY NOW?	HOW?	WHEN/ WHERE?	WHAT'S NEXT?
TITLE	Why BRIEF and the New ADD	Heightened Awareness in a World Begging for BRIEF	How to Gain Discipline to be Clear and Concise	Gaining the Decisiveness to Know When and Where to be BRIEF	Being BRIEF: Summary and Action Plan
IN SIX WORDS	Discover BRIEF's main premise and promise	Feed world hunger for the point	Techniques to be clear and concise	Times to deliver "less is more"	Live it daily or lose it
THE GIST	Author's short story behind the birth of BRIEF and what every reader should expect	Flooded with information, interruptions, and inattentiveness, people are begging for less	Handful of practical approaches to develop the muscle to manage people's attention and stand out	Knowing and navigating the key moments when and where to use lean communication to make an impact	Series of practical insights and challenges to ensure you sustain the skill over time
YOUR FEELING	 Curious		 Captivated		 Committed
BOTTOM LINE	The new, non-negotiable standard in business	A brutal concern and a prerequisite for success today	There's hope for all types of people to tighten up their game	There's a time and place for the "less is more" mandate	Tips to ensure your BRIEF muscle gets in shape and stays that way

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

BRIEF was deliberately designed to be easy to read and immediately useful. To this end, we've added multiple recurring features and visual elements that quickly grasp the book's benefits.



- **BRIEF BITS**—These short sections offer memorable insights on how to be BRIEF. The military figure accompanying each of them is a reminder that we have to take a more disciplined, mindful approach to be sure we're always clear and concise.



- **BRIEF BASICS**—This handful of critical techniques are essential to being BRIEF. A solid understanding of these BRIEF BASICS is key to being a lean communicator.



- **EXECUTIVE ATTENTION**—Meet two modern executives whose lives are impacted by other people's inability to be BRIEF. Each scene depicts the problems they face and how brevity can turn things around.

Part One

Awareness

**Heightened Awareness in a
World Begging for BRIEF**