

THE ACHIEVEMENT HABIT:  
Stop Wishing, Start Doing, and Take Command of Your Life  
By Bernard Roth  
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Find Bernie's photos, reader success stories, and a list of his speaking events at  
[TheAchievementHabit.com](http://TheAchievementHabit.com)

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

### FOR BERNARD ROTH'S *THE ACHIEVEMENT HABIT* (HarperBusiness; July 7, 2015)

Back in the 1960s, mechanical engineer Bernard Roth met many engineers in the Silicon Valley, who worked for big companies such as Hewlett-Packard, and had dreams of starting their own companies. People just talked about it, and nothing happened. This observation inspired Roth to start teaching a class at Stanford in which each student had to choose a project having to do with their own life—writing a cookbook, building a robot, running a marathon—the only requirement was that the project was deeply personal. Now, for the first time, Roth brings his mantra of “Doing is Everything” to his inspirational and valuable new book, *THE ACHIEVEMENT HABIT: Stop Wishing, Start Doing, and Take Command of Your Life*

For more than 40 years, Roth has taught the class at Stanford University. He now teaches it at one of the world's leading centers for innovation, the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford (d.school), where he is the academic director and one of the founders. Addressing situations related to problem solving, personal growth, interpersonal relations and group relations, Roth draws upon design thinking—a set of general practices that are effective in solving design challenges—to help guide readers on the path to a more satisfying and productive life.

By sharing his own personal experiences and stories of his students, Roth hopes to motivate readers to see their life in an honest and open way. To facilitate making this change, this book provides many tools and concepts, including:

1. Why using reasons (excuses), even legitimate ones, to explain one's behavior is self-defeating
2. How to change your self-image into one of a doer and achiever

3. How subtle language changes can resolve existential dilemmas and barriers to action
4. How to build resiliency by reinforcing what you do rather than what you accomplish
5. How to be open to learning from your own experience and from those around you

Our behavior and relationships can be transformed, THE ACHIEVEMENT HABIT is a must read for anyone that wants to create habits that make their lives better.

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## TALKING POINTS

### **FOR BERNARD ROTH'S *THE ACHIEVEMENT HABIT***

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#### **What is design thinking?**

Design thinking is a set of general practices people like Bernie Roth have developed over the years that are effective in solving design challenges. These challenges could be things like: how to improve the wait time at an amusement park, how to clean up a highway, how to improve online dating, etc.

#### **Important Concepts from THE ACHIEVEMENT HABIT:**

- **The Power to Change** – It is possible to change your habits and develop new attitudes about things. Although it can be hard to overcome things like depression, if you start with the small stuff and changing the way you think about them, it will be easier to change the large stuff. A box of Cheerios can be broken down into cardboard and wax paper. It is a source of biomass or source of small chips and grains. It also can be made into a sludgy mixture. The same dynamic can be applied to ourselves. Behavior and relationships can be transformed into something different. Make the familiar into the unfamiliar.
- **Reasons Aren't Useful** – One of the biggest excuses for not getting things done is lack of time. The difference comes down to intention and attention. In order to make something a priority in your life, you have to be willing to walk away from the things standing in its way. Roth used to be late for a board meeting—he would arrive with an apology, explaining that the highway was unusually congested. He realized that his reason for being late had nothing to do with traffic—he did not see the meeting as a high priority in his life. Once he realized this, he gave it the attention it required. This insight led him to change his attitude to time overall. While our society loves reasons, reasons don't allow us to take full responsibility for our behavior.
- **How do you get around Obstacles?** – The answer lies in changing the way you think about the problem. In his book, Roth provides more than twenty methods to help readers work

through their problem-solving strategies. These include reframing, hard work, creating a supportive environment, relaxing, making lists, enlisting humor, mastering conversation, and brainstorming. Instead of jumping from method to method, Roth recommends finding the few problem-solving techniques that work best for you and sticking with those. “The more you practice your chosen techniques, the more easily you can unlock yourself at will,” writes Roth.

- **Finding Assistance** – We are all better off when we assist each other to figure things out. If you want people to assist you, you should ask them. And, do the same for others. But do not pretend to know more than you do. Roth warns that superficial networking for personal gain may not be beneficial in the long run. Instead, he suggests that readers, “Stay real, instead, and build friendships.” Arguing against the old adage that you should never mix business with pleasure, Roth points to those that have successfully built their business and lives by mixing the two.
- **Doing is everything** – There is a big difference between trying to do something and actually doing it. They are two totally different actions. Back in the 1960s, Roth had met many engineers in Silicon Valley, who worked for big companies such as Hewlett-Packard, and had dreams of starting their own companies. People just talked about it, and nothing happened. This inspired Roth to start teaching a class at Stanford in which each student had to choose a project having to do with their own life.
- **Self-Image** – What you can achieve in life has a lot to do with your self-image. If you see yourself as a risk taker and a doer, you’re more likely to take risks and do. The book has exercises to assist the reader to develop a new self-image. Roth encourages readers to conduct a series of exercises to flesh out a better self-image: Evaluate your family’s values, ask yourself questions about your intentions in life, write out descriptors of your family members, and list a series of attributes. By closely examining yourself, you can shape and redesign your self-image.

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## PRESS REVIEWS & ENDORSEMENTS

### FOR BERNARD ROTH’S *THE ACHIEVEMENT HABIT* (HarperBusiness; July 7, 2015)

“Roth’s avuncular tone, gentle persuasion and concrete advice will convince you that turning yourself into an achievement superstar is not only possible, it’s inevitable.”

—*Success Magazine*

“ . . .An inspirational and practical guide on how to fulfill goals despite obstacles and challenges.  
Excellent . . .”  
—***Library Journal***

“An accessible primer to the basic elements of design theory, based on the premise that  
“achievement can be learned.”  
—***Publishers Weekly***

“Academic director of the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design (the d.school) at Stanford University, Roth pulls together years of experience in teaching students and professionals how to accomplish more out of life and presents those findings in a clear narrative. He incorporates thought-provoking questions into his analysis that allow readers to discover for themselves the answers to such queries as, “Who am I? What do I want? What is my purpose?” He also encourages readers to think about their family backgrounds and how the dominant role models in the formative years have influenced and affected them in adulthood. . . . Effective methods to help in the process of making positive changes in one’s life.”

—***Kirkus Reviews***

“Bernie Roth is the central pillar and the conscience of the d.school at Stanford and one of its real gems. With his wisdom he has helped so many students over the years make positive personal transformations and have better lives. It’s exciting that he now puts his best ideas into this book for many more of us to benefit.”

— **David M. Kelley, Founder of the d.school at Stanford University, Founder and Chairman of IDEO**

”*The Achievement Habit* is a masterpiece in describing how to think creatively and fulfill your life’s ambitions. Everyone who reads this book will clearly see why Bernie is considered one of the most creative and liberated thinkers today.”

— **Paul Hait, Entrepreneur/Olympic Gold Medalist**

“Bernie Roth is a master teacher who unlocks his students’ minds and hearts allowing them to create the lives they dream to live. Finally, his wisdom is available to the entire world.”

— **Tina Seelig, Professor of the Practice, Stanford School of Engineering, Author, *Insight Out***

“Before unleashing design thinking on others, unleash it on yourself. You, and the world, will be far better for it. The Achievement Habit reveals a host of invaluable approaches to this most personal of design projects.”

— **Tim Brown, CEO of IDEO and author of *Change By Design***

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# FULL AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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Bernie Roth is the Rodney H. Adams Professor of Engineering. A longtime veteran of the Stanford design scene, he first came to the Stanford Design Division faculty in 1962. He arrived from New York City, his birthplace, with a wife, two children, a proper haircut, a sports jacket and a very traditional background in Mechanical Engineering and liberal New York politics. The experience of the Vietnam-War protest movement, the Human Potential Movement, and the other social upheavals centered in San Francisco Bay area, totally changed his life as an educator. It added a missing dimension, the explicit concern for his students' education and growth beyond simply developing their technical expertise. The only things that he seems to have lost in the transition are the clean haircut and sports jacket. His most recent activities have moved him more strongly into experiences that enhance peoples' creative potential through the educational process. His primary intention as an educator and person is to empower his students, colleagues and friends to have fulfilling lives.

In 2003 he joined a small group of colleagues to discuss bringing more cross disciplinary collaboration into education. These discussions led to the formation of Stanford institute nicknamed "the d.school." Bernie brought to the d.school a wealth of experience in teaching design, an intimate knowledge of the functioning of Stanford University, and a worldwide reputation as a researcher in kinematics and robotics. Since 2005, the d.school has been the primary focus of Bernie's professional activities.

In the 1980's, Bernie, (together with the late Rolf Faste and Doug Wilde) developed the concept of a Creativity Workshop. The Workshop was offered to students, faculty and professionals around the world. These same techniques have been made available to d.school students and are described in *The Achievement Habit*. He has found that these types of learning experiences enhance students' ability to make meaningful positive difference in their own lives. He is especially pleased that his activities at the d.school have contributed to creating an environment where students and coworkers get the tools and values for realizing the enduring satisfactions that come from assisting others in the human community.

Bernie and his wife Ruth live on the Stanford campus. He is fortunate to be able to bike to work and to many other daily activities. For over thirty years he has been part of a group that rides a twenty mile bike loop each Sunday morning. He has two grown sons, Elliot lives in San Francisco, CA and Steven lives in Novato, CA.