



*“Following Through – A
Revolutionary New Model
for Finishing
Whatever You Start”*

Pete Greider, MEd and Steve Levinson, PhD
Published by Kensington Books

Summary by Bob Littell, Chief NetWeaver

Forward – Why I believe this work is so significant – **Bob Littell**

I met Pete Greider, one of the authors of this book, when we were both speakers on the same meeting program several years ago. After sitting in on his session, he sent me a copy of the book he co-authored with Steve Levinson and frankly I was amazed that this book is not one of the greatest business classics of all time having been first published in 1998.

Without a doubt, the **biggest single factor** that holds people back from **SUCCESS** in every:

- **business**. . .across every **field, industry, and profession**
- **weight loss and exercise program**
- **relationship-building endeavor** – both business and personal

. . .is a lack of ‘follow through’.

Now at this point, I need to momentarily digress because I believe it’s critical to add an important distinction between these two terms I stress in NetWeaving:

- **Follow Up**
- **Follow Through**

I should also point out that this is **my** distinction, not Greider’s and Levinson’s. I use **follow up** in a **time-related** context meaning that a person **takes action** within a fairly short period following the activity which should trigger the follow up.

For example, you meet someone at a networking event or reception who really impresses you. Then, either that same night, or the next day, you send a personal note or an email. It’s a fairly simple action which doesn’t take too much time or effort. So

in my vernacular, in this example, **following up** refers to the action of writing and sending a follow up email or personal note either that night or the next day.

But, I distinguish **follow through** as the **Quality** and the **Creativity** with which you follow up. In the former example, following your conversation, you would immediately sneak over to a corner and make some notes on the back of the person's business card noting what you talked about with special emphasis on important points the other person made. You would then include some or all of these points in the email or personal note you sent out. That adds quality and creativity to the follow up and is **above and beyond** what others do.

But let's say that in addition to sending a personal note with this higher degree of touch, here are some additional things you could do which would truly exemplify the distinction to which I'm referring:

- Along with the email you send, you followup by attaching an article with a note saying,
"Thought you might enjoy this article which pertains to our discussion."
- Even better, and much more powerful, you send an article with a cover note saying, *"Thought you might enjoy this article and in line with our discussion, the points in the article which were most helpful to me were: list three or four points"*. – this is what I mean by above and beyond.
- Better yet, in addition to **ALL** of the above, you follow up with a phone call within 24 or 48 hours, and you set up a breakfast or lunch meeting or maybe just a cup of coffee to get to know the person better.
- But, **best of all**, you follow up with **the note**; the '**personalized**' article; the **follow up phone call**, and you go that **one additional key extra step**, and on your phone call, you say,

"You know after we spoke last night, I thought of someone I whom I believe you would really benefit knowing (describing him or her briefly) and I'd like to 'host' a meeting to introduce you to him/her." **That's the power of NetWeaving.**

But now, returning to **why this book we're reviewing is to useful**, and perhaps more importantly, **WHY**, even if you **TOTALLY AGREE** with the effectiveness of every single one of these **EXTRA** steps I've mentioned and the difference they could make, **WHY** – according to my distinction – do so few **not even 'follow up'**? . . . And even more so, why do an even fewer number never think about going **above and beyond** and consider ways to creatively make people say, *"WOW, no one has ever done THAT for me before"*.

That's what this book does better than any other I've ever read – before or since. And not only do the authors uncover **WHY** so few of us even show a little initiative to **follow up**. . . as well as **WHY** even fewer go above and beyond to follow through, **they**

provide a series of very practical ways to overcome what they show to be a flaw in the way our brains are wired.

As we go through the review of Greider and Levinson's book, I hope you'll focus on your own situation, and keep thinking of ways which **YOU** could go *above and beyond*, and also how you can use some of the tools they suggest to actually take the action to. . .**JUST DO IT!**

Section I – “Following Through – A New Perspective”

Greider and Levinson spend almost the first half of the book describing example after example of human failures and failings and the cost we suffer in terms of **failed relationships with spouse and children; wasted time spent in mindless activities** when we know that same time could be spent so much more productively; **valued employees** who leave because no one took the time to acknowledge and thank them for their contributions; heart attacks, strokes, and other serious **medical problems** which could have been avoided with advance action.

“Poor follow through – failing to keep important promises to ourselves and others – does a lot more than just threaten our health. It takes a toll on virtually every aspect of our lives. It prevents us from achieving personal, financial, and career goals that should be well within our reach. It damages our relationships, produces stress, and creates regrets. It robs us of credibility, self-esteem, and peace of mind. Poor follow through deprives us, our families, our businesses, and our community of the full benefit of our intelligence, talent, imagination, and hard work.”

As the authors ask, if all of this is true, “WHY don't we take follow through more seriously?”

One of the causes they point out is that almost all of the positive follow through actions which we **COULD** take have ‘**wiggle room**’.

“Poor follow through would indeed get the attention it deserves if our follow through failures were more like car accidents. If follow through failures happened infrequently to stand out, and if the damage they did was immediate and definite, they'd get our attention. They'd engage our emotions. They'd urge us individually and collectively to take action.

But, unfortunately, that's not the way it is. And so we're oblivious when we really should be alarmed.”

Early in the book, in the form an example, the authors provide a **clue about the nature of the problem** - too much ‘**wiggle room**’. Later in the first half of the book, they describe the **architectural flaw** in the human design responsible for this, and finally in the second half of the book – **they offer solutions.**

Any of us, especially the Type A's amongst us, can identify with this set of circumstances the authors described and I've adjusted the facts for Atlanta. You're late for an appointment and you're driving from downtown and you need to get out to the perimeter. You find you're not only speeding, but you are doing some fairly aggressive lane-changing as you see openings because someone YOU consider to be 'less-thoughtful' is going the speed limit in the left lane. You have a little bit of a close call as someone has to brake suddenly in front of you, but you've been there before; nothing happened (i.e. *wiggle room*) and so you continue on in your harried way. Then up ahead, traffic slows to a crawl and as you finally get up to the cause, you arrive just as someone is being loaded into an ambulance with some very obvious serious injuries and by the car, or what's left of it, on the ground. . . is a sheet laid over a body of someone who was evidently killed.

Suddenly, you stop and ask yourself, "*What's so important about getting to that appointment on time that I would risk a serious injury, or even death, and how would that affect my family, our children, etc.?*" You slow down to the speed limit, you become a courteous driver again and wonder what made you drive so carelessly.

A person who has had two previous heart attacks still ignores taking his or her medications and following the recommended diet and exercise regimen recommended by the doctor. Nothing seems to be currently wrong and so there's still '**wiggle room**'.

But there's even a better analogy involving the car which explains the real underlying cause of our poor record of follow through. When there is a car accident, they don't just consider if the driver or drivers was/were at fault. They examine the **equipment** so see if there was in fact some **defect**. Greider and Levinson:

"Is there something about the design of the car itself that could have contributed to this accident? Perhaps, for example, there's a poorly placed rear-view mirror that obscured the driver's view, or a design flaw in the steering system that caused the driver to lose control.

*In contrast, when people try to figure out what causes follow through accidents, they never consider the possibility that the design of the equipment – in this case, **the human mind** – could be to blame.*

We were intrigued. Clearly, we humans have a blind spot. We completely overlook the possibility that our follow through accidents could be caused by the way the mind is designed."

Now wait a minute. **The mind with a flaw. . . a defect. . . how could that be?** Well why should that be surprising?

"Scientists certainly don't assume that the human body is perfectly designed. They have no problem, for example, criticizing the design of the human back – blaming it for making people so susceptible to injuries. And they have no problem regarding the appendix as an entirely unnecessary and potentially troublesome part of the digestive system.

The human mind is a product of the very same biological [and evolutionary] forces that shaped the body. The mind therefore, is just as likely as the body to have design problems.”

In the first half of the book, to me, the quote which Greider and Levinson provide that best describes the true nature of the problem is the following:

“We uncovered a fundamental truth about the human mind – a basic fact that’s ignored by the myriad of self-improvement experts and programs that invite us in, excite our hopes, and then leave us flat. We found out why we humans so often get nothing but disappointment in return for the sizable investment we make in self-improvement; why we so often allow our very best goals and plans to get lost in the shuffle and fade away; why we always seem to have more wisdom than we use.

We learned that, contrary to conventional wisdom, poor follow through is not caused primarily by a lack of willpower, insufficient motivation, low self-esteem, fear of success, or deep, dark character defects. We learned that poor follow through is not our fault! It’s caused, amazingly, by the paradoxical way the human mind is designed.”

In Chapter 5, “**We Have Met the Enemy and He is Us**”, we learn about the ultimate irony. Levinson, who lives in Minnesota, stumbled onto his big aha as he was preparing to stack some firewood in preparation for a big snowstorm on it’s way. As he sat on his couch, looking out the window, he watched a squirrel getting ready for the upcoming winter by instinctively gathering acorns. He doesn’t know why he does it. He just does. How lucky to be human:

“After all. . .I have intelligence and foresight. I can use my mind to figure out exactly what I should do. All that little squirrel can do is run on instinct.”

Then as he **planned** to only watch the pre-game show and a little of the game, he found himself ensconced on the couch. Soon it was halftime. . .no movement. . . then. . .the end of the game and the post-game show. By then it was getting dark and after all, it was already beginning to snow. “***Might as well watch the next game too.***” Sound familiar?

It was then that it really hit Levinson,

“The human mind is magnificently designed, but only to help us do half the job.

The whole job is doing whatever it takes to get what we need and want out of life. The first half of the job is figuring out what to do. The second half of the job is doing it.”

The squirrel has a ‘**hard-wired**’. . . ‘**instinct-based**’ guidance system which is simple and reliable.

“Being hardwired to act means that there’s no need for Mr. Squirrel to listen to a motivational speaker or a lecture from his mother-in-law about being a good provider. He doesn’t need inspiring. He’s always psyched up to do the right thing.”

But as you see every Fall, as the hard-wired guidance system squirrels automatically go looking for acorns – especially the ones that are easy to find out in the road - guess what happens to a number of them?

“Living things that are guided primarily by instinct pay a price for the convenience of always knowing what to do and always being motivated to do it. They follow through even when they shouldn’t”.

Our human “**intelligence and experience-based**” guidance system allows us the flexibility to adapt to the circumstances at hand. But, there’s only one problem, the design of the system is not logical:

“It draws on the most incredibly advanced capabilities to give us first-rate guidance in the of good intentions.”

If it was designed logically, “*We’d always automatically behave in accord with our intentions. If we decided we should do it, we would do it.”*

“If you decided you should exercise regularly, you’d just do it.” . . . “If you decided to spend three hours a day working on a book, playing with your kids, painting the den, or putting up firewood, you’d just do it. Nothing would stop you.”

Here is Greider and Levinson’s Theory on the **underlying cause** of our lack of follow through and the **nature of the flaw** in our brains:

“Evolution has obviously been experimenting with intelligent guidance as a means of making humans uniquely adaptable. Perhaps Mother Nature has hedged her bet. Rather than fully retiring the primitive survival-oriented guidance system that enabled our distant ancestors to detect and react decisively to danger and opportunity, could She have left the primitive system in place ‘just in case?’ . . . the closer we looked, the more evidence we found that not only is the primitive, survival-oriented guidance system still alive and well, it’s the source of our follow through problems.”

It is at this point that I want to leave the book for a moment and refer to some of what Pete Greider covered in his talk which I heard.

In his talk, Greider described two parts to our brain. He referred to this ‘primitive’ evolutionary remnant (i.e. the *instinctive-guidance system*) as “**Thor**” and as he said, “**It’s strong as an ox, but dumb as a board**”.

After giving several NetWeaving talks wherein I included a couple slides illustrating the two sides to the brain, I began to refer to our '**intelligent and experience-based**' side as "**Spock**" - the logical and emotion-free character in the StarTrek series whose decisions and advice were always completely logical.

If just that other side of brain worked that way. **Don't you wish Spock was as strong and powerful as Thor.** Unfortunately that's not the case.

So, first we must understand and realize that our lack of follow through does not represent some flaw in our 'character' but instead it's a flaw in the way we're wired – think of it like a bad back.

But secondly, and in my opinion, the most important piece of advice to come from this book (actually from Pete's talk since the book doesn't refer to Thor) is that because Thor is so much more powerful than Spock, we have to find ways to **FOOL THOR.**

Section II – “Follow Through Strategies

If the first part of this book was as much of a revelation to you as it was to me, maybe you also wonder why even though it IS a best-seller and Levinson one time was on ABC's TV Show 20/20, why has this great work not become the business classic which it should be?

Maybe it's a **PLOT** on the part of motivational speakers. . .weight loss and exercise guru's. . .and trainers of all kinds who want you to believe that THEIR system is actually going to work for you where others have failed. Just kidding.

And yet, as I think you will see, some of the **BEST** motivational and behavioral coaches and trainers have actually been providing good advice without realizing what they are really providing you with are. . .ways to fool Thor.

The two most important **STRATEGIES**. . ."*master strategies*" which Greider and Levinson feature in their book are "**Spotlighting**" and "**Willpower Leveraging**".

In simple terms, **SPOTLIGHTING** "*helps you follow through by stimulating your desire to do what you intend to do.*" "*Spotlighting keeps your good intentions from getting lost in the shuffle.*"

In almost the opposite way, **WILLPOWER LEVERAGING** "*makes it difficult, or even impossible for you to do the 'wrong' thing.*" "*Willpower Leveraging helps you get the biggest 'bang' out of each 'buck' of willpower you spend.*"

Without getting metaphysical on you, we all have **voices** within us. Those which say, "*You ought to do this, it's good for you and it's the intelligent thing to do.*" .or , the wrong ones - "*Go ahead and splurge. You know can always go exercise tomorrow and work those extra calories off.*"

Spotlighting allows you. . . “to turn a liability into an asset. It enables you to benefit from the mind’s often troublesome tendency to let the things around you – rather than your own intelligent guidance – determine which voices you’ll listen to and, there how you’ll behave.”

Spotlight is an ‘If you can’t beat em, join em’ way to solve the problem of having a mind that won’t automatically stay focused on good intentions.

In Spotlighting, instead of trying to make yourself less distractible – less susceptible to being influenced by what you see, hear, smell, taste, and feel at the moment – you celebrate how distractible you really are. You keep yourself on track by making sure that you’re exposed to the right distractions – that focus your attention on the right voices.

Spotlighting lets you take advantage of the enormous potential that ‘cues’ have to influence your behavior. Cues are the things ‘out there’ that cause you to pay attention to the particular voices – to particular needs, wants, fears, values, beliefs, and good intentions. A cue is a stimulus, a catalyst, a switch. Cues stimulate, activate, and energize voices. Cues make the voices speak up so that they have a greater say in how you behave.

A great example of this is to refer back to the example of the Type A person speeding to get his appointment. As the harried driver was speeding along at breakneck speed, the one voice was telling him, “Don’t worry about the consequences of speeding” – getting a ticket, getting in an accident, etc.- not likely – much ‘wobble room’. But, when presented with a **HUGE** ‘cue’ – a real live accident with someone seriously injured and one person dead, a **SWITCH** went off which triggers an immediate response to drive more carefully, conservatively, and courteously.

“Cues tune you in to particular voices that would otherwise be lost in the crowd.”. . . “Spotlighting is using cues on purpose to empower the right voices. Spotlighting is a way to keep yourself tuned in to the particular voices in the crowd that make you actually feel like doing what your intentions are telling you to do.”. . . “The more aware you are of how cues normally affect you, the better job you can do of using cues deliberately to help you follow through.”

According to Greider and Levinson, Spotlighting involves **three steps**:

First, you need to identify the right voices – the needs or wants or motives that urge you to do the same thing your intention is telling you to do. ***Use your imagination to conjure up a clear mental picture that makes you feel like doing what you intend to do – a picture that leaves you with no doubt that following through is worth the trouble.***

Secondly, you need to identify or create the right cues – the things out there that will stimulate those voices.

Make sure there are enough cues out there to keep reminding you to conjure up that motivating picture.

Thirdly, you need to find a way to make sure that you'll be exposed to enough of the right cues.

Creatively put them in places and in ways that they consistently will catch your attention and keep reminding you.

Here's one good example covered in the book which exemplify each of the 3 steps::

1. In spite of bragging to other people about what a great staff he has, David doesn't show that same appreciation directly to them and consequently he doesn't do a good job of motivating them. So to change his behavior he first needed to identify a voice or voices which would inspire him to do this and in his case, ***'he truly wanted to make a difference in people's lives'***.
2. When asked "*Are there times when you feel most like making people feel good about themselves?*", he immediately thought of his favorite past-time coaching Little League: "*I'm there to help build confidence and teamwork, not to win games.*"

"So, let's see if we can find a switch – a cue – to turn on this voice, to put it in the spotlight, to empower it. What would you do at the office to remind yourself of your Little League experience?"

3. How about putting a photo of his Little League Team on his desk – even better – in front of the phone so he would see it whenever he answer the phone. How about bringing a baseball cap to the office and hang it on the coat rack near the door? How about using the baseball memo pads his kids gave him. ***"The more you can surround yourself at the office with things that trigger the way you are when you're coaching [those kids], the more successful you'll be."***

And remember, just the opposite is true, "the more you're exposed to the wrong cues, the more tuned in you'll be to the wrong voice".

<p>These will be some of the exercises which we do within our smaller groups as exercises to demonstrate the power of "Spotlighting".</p>
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Cues are everywhere out there and as Greider/Levinson point out, "*The folks on Madison Avenue know all about cues. They bombard us with cues all the time to influence us to buy the products they market.*"

Have you ever thought that one of the most important roles of a business or personal coach is to act as a ‘cue’? **First**, they help you decide your ‘intentions’ - the right voices you want to hear – lose weight; expand your business, etc.? **Then** they help you determine what are the ‘cues’ which would keep the mental image of you, after those changes, in your mind? And **finally**, they help you creatively come with ways to **consistently expose you to those cues**.

Since you begin to identify the coach with these changes, the coach – him or her – becomes a ‘cue’ every time you think of or are around her/him.

In addition to ‘cues’, Greider and Levinson offer another Master Strategy for following through which they call, “**Willpower Leveraging**”:

Willpower leveraging increases what you can accomplish with the willpower you have. . .taking one easy action today that makes it much more likely that you’ll do the right thing tomorrow.

They give the example of a couple who was trying to develop the habit of exercising regularly. They did all the usual things – none which worked::

- joined health club
- set alarm clock early to get up and run
- purchased an expensive piece of exercise equipment and located it right in their bedroom

What finally worked? They bought a dog. “*Getting up and getting exercise feels like a necessity rather than just a good - but optional – idea.*”

The authors also point out that “**Willpower Leveraging**” is all about ‘**burning your bridges behind you**’. For the above couple to stop exercising would really mean having to get rid of their now beloved pet. But as Greider/Levinson also point out, “*You don’t have to make it impossible to go backwards . You just have to make it difficult enough. Instead of burning bridges, you have to pile large enough obstacles on them*” [which make it almost impossible for you to retreat].

Several other techniques are covered in the book here’s a quick overview but you should go back and review these in more detail:

- **Create Compelling Reasons** – why do you think it’s easiest for someone to follow an exercise and diet regimen immediately following a heart attack.
 1. **Make it Matter NOW** – whatever it is you’re trying to do, the more urgent you can make it, the better the chances for success.
 2. **Eliminate ‘wobble room’** – wouldn’t you drive better and safer if you knew that EVERY time you went more than 5 miles over the speed limit, you’d get a ticket? Remember you have to find ways to “fool Thor”.

3. **Make Sure It Fits YOU** – if it doesn't motivate you, it won't work.

- **You can lead the horse to water, you can't make him drink** – But don't forget, if you haven't led the horse to the WATER, there's no way it can drink. As Woody Allen was quoted as saying, "**80% of Success is showing up**".

I've thought about writing a book called, "**How to Write a Book**". Whether it's writing a book or just an article, I have found that if I sit down to start writing, it's difficult to get started. But if, instead of working on the article itself, I simply start by posing questions surrounding the topic AND resist the temptation to begin writing; but just keep asking questions, when I finally organize the questions into a logical sequence and then begin writing, the article almost writes itself.

- **Going too far** – this technique is a great example of the paradox of our minds. As Greider and Levinson point out, ". . .*while your mixed-up guidance system routinely lets your behavior stray from your intentions, it does have its limits.*" This technique is all about pushing beyond that limit to change your behavior.

Pretend that you were trying to quit smoking and you set it up so that every time you had ONE cigarette, you had to smoke three more. Sounds crazy but as you got ready to smoke that first cigarette, your guidance system actually helps you decide not to do it.

In another example cited in the book, a woman who consistently avoided unpleasant work tasks, made herself 'stand up' in her office. Each time she did this, it took a shorter period of time before she sat down and tackled the unpleasant work.

- **Strike While the Iron's Hot** – A great example was given of Katherine whose dog was lost and when another woman called saying she had found the dog, Katherine wanted to reward the woman but she declined. Over the next several days Katherine kept thinking of ways she could thank and/or reward the woman who found her dog and called. But, as the days went by, the motivation got weaker and weaker until the only thing left was a lingering *feeling of guilt* for NOT having done anything. What COULD Katherine have done? She could have at least taken a step in the right direction:

- - o Sent an email – sent a generic thank you card
 - o Posted a note reminder in a place she would have constantly seen as a reminder
 - o What else – you think of some

- **The MotivAider™** – Dr. Steve Levinson designed a device called the MotivAider to help people of all ages achieve their goals. The

MotivAider works by keeping your mind sharply focused on whatever change you want to make. The beauty of it is in its simplicity. By being able to ‘space’ the time lapse period over which you want to be reminded of the behavior you’re seeking to change, you can begin with very closely-spaced reminders (delivered via a small vibrating plastic instrument – about the size and dimensions of an over-sized matchbook), and as you get better and better, you begin to space the reminders (i.e. vibrations) farther apart.

And as evidence that Steve Levinson is first and foremost interested in changing behavior rather than just marketing and selling his instrument, he also provides alternatives which could be used in lieu of this. He just stresses that:

- 1) It must reliably get your attention; and
- 2) It must occur often enough to serve as a useful cue.

Examples would include: alarm watches, electronic organizers, computer programs that have reminder capabilities, oven timers, and alarm clocks.

The second source of signs can come from sights, sounds, and events that occur around you:

- the sound of a phone ringing in a neighboring office
- an airplane passing overhead
- your dog barking
- a chime of a grandfather clock
- a classroom bell
- think of some other ones which could serve as ‘cues’ for you.

The final note: The authors point out that even though you may have agreed with everything in this book and you decide to immediately launch your efforts to change a behavior or a series of behaviors, you must first understand and accept the magnitude of the undertaking you are about to tackle. *“We humans **break** too many promises because we **make** too many promises.” . . . “We grossly underestimate the cost of failing to follow through on any given intention”.*

“Never adopt an intention without realizing that you’re making a serious commitment.” – you’re making a promise; giving your word; putting your reputation and your credibility on the line.”

They recommend that you *“think about the intention as if it were a prospective mate.”* And so in line with this, they recommend you **‘date’** your intention for awhile to make sure that this is a commitment which you are truly willing to make.

Now that you understand **WHY** we have such a hard time, '**following up**' and '**following through**', what are YOU going to do about it?

As we say in preparation for each of the "**Don't Need to Read the Book - Book Club**" meetings, you don't need to read the book in order to come and to participate in our very inactive discussions, but **we DO want you to buy the book**; bring it with you to make notes in and to have for reference. Most persons who attend, tell us that this review actually made them want to read the entire book. You can get the first edition on Amazon for around \$2.00, or the updated and expanded version published in 2007.