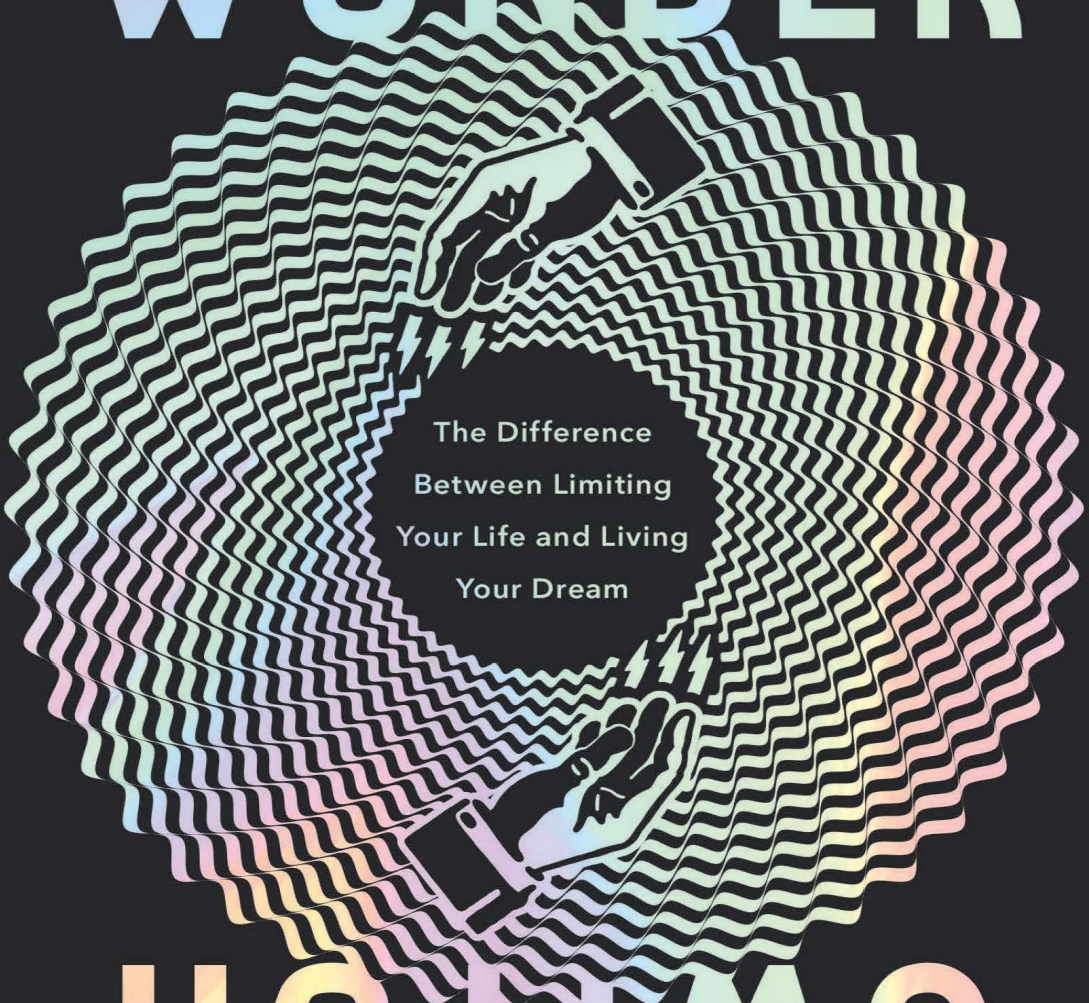


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THE WONDER



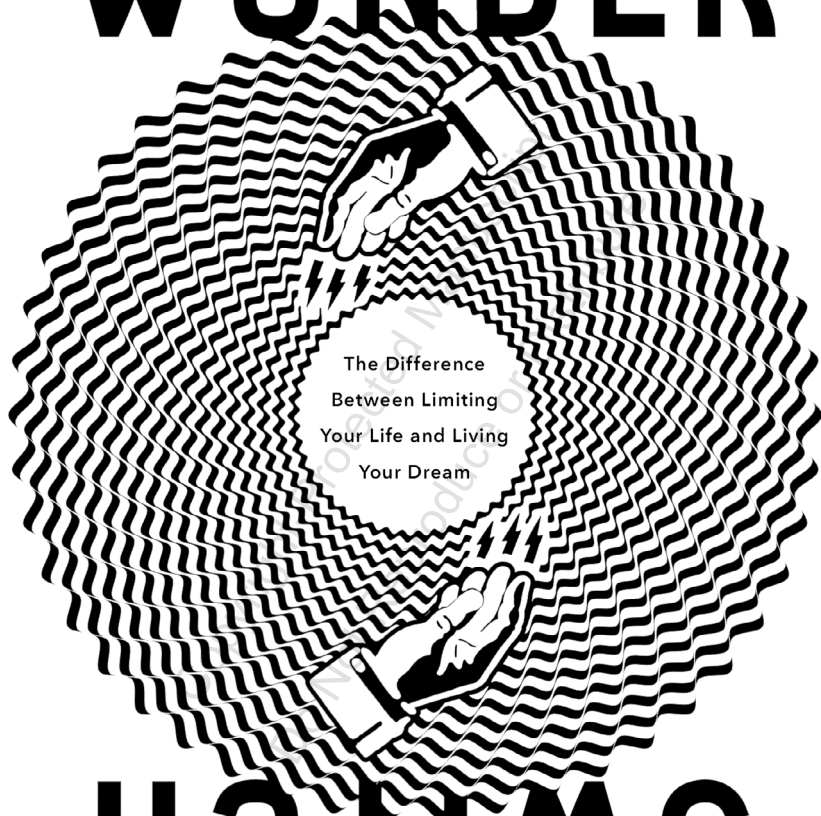
The Difference
Between Limiting
Your Life and Living
Your Dream

HOLLIS

HARRIS III

Foreword by creativity expert Kevin Carroll

THE WONDER



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The Wonder Switch

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CHAPTER 1

Wonder Switch On

The Beginning of Everything You Want

I started performing magic as a kid, back in the 1990s. Though the information age had already arrived, we didn't have that information readily available in our pockets quite yet. For the most part, people were still comfortable living in mystery because Siri and Google weren't around to instantaneously provide answers to all of life's questions. That made it highly enjoyable to create mysteries onstage. It was so much fun that I've spent most of my life traveling around the world performing magic shows in almost forty countries for over two million people, not including appearances on TV or YouTube.

Though my career over the last few years has evolved beyond being an illusionist, I'm still performing magic, but audiences are more averse to wonder in response to that magic than they used to be.

Night after night, before the house lights go down and the show

begins, audience members are relaxed. But the moment the emcee prepares the audience for what is to come, there's a shift in the room. People sit up, lean in, and often cross their arms—not just because the show is starting but as if they're preparing to intellectually defend themselves against any chance of being fooled, as if that's what watching a magic show is all about. As I walk onstage, people stare me down, thinking, "All right, Mr. Magic Guy, let's see if you can fool me." Instead of sitting back, relaxing, and enjoying the show—instead of realizing that wonder is one of life's most beautiful experiences—they become wonder-crushers.

We don't do this with any other art form. We don't stare at a painting and shrug off the painter's talent simply because we may "know how she did that." When you watch your favorite musical artist make magic on an instrument, if you're a musician, you never simply crush your awe and wonder by saying, "Even though I can't play guitar like that, I know how he did it. I know those chords."

Knowing how something was accomplished doesn't mean it isn't beautiful or enjoyable to experience. And beautiful things contain elements of mystery, since there is always more to discover. We may want to know all the secrets, and many magicians may even present their illusions as puzzles to be solved, as if they're taunting you with a challenge: "I bet you don't know how I did that." But mysteries are beautiful. Mystery can leave us in wonder. And wonder tells a different story.

The Wonder Switch

Imagine sitting in total darkness but having no idea where you are. You don't know what's around you. You don't know what's behind you. You don't even know what's right in front of your face.

Allow your imagination to explore the scenario. Sitting alone in the darkness may sound nice to you. Or you might wonder what's in the room with you. Is it your worst fear? Or maybe your worst fear is that there's absolutely nothing and no one at all. You are completely, utterly alone.

Now imagine a light switch on the wall.

Does the knowledge of that switch give you hope? The lights aren't on yet, which means the world around you has yet to be illuminated. But what if you could find that switch and turn on the lights? You no longer have to be in the dark, because turning on that switch gives you the ability to see.

Wonder is like that light switch. Having the wonder switch on leads to a healthy form of curiosity that is connected to dreaming, innovation, and creativity. The wonder switch also controls how you use your imagination. It doesn't affect whether you use it, because your imagination was at work while you sat in the dark. Wonder simply changes what you use your imagination for. Everything you want, and then some, is on the other side of turning the wonder switch back on.

But what if your wonder switch stays off? What's the cost?

The stakes are high; without wonder, your life is ruled by cynicism, stress, worry, and anxiety. Research shows that your life span will likely be shorter too.¹ Maybe you feel unmoved by this information because you feel apathetic or complacent. But I believe there is still hope, regardless of your current state. That you've cracked open this book and read this far means a voice inside you is saying, "There's more for you," even if that voice has become a faint whisper.

The reality for most of us is that life, and the art of living it, is an ongoing journey of the wonder switch being turned on and off.

We're born with it on. Then a bully on the playground or in your home turns it off. A teacher or coach who affirms the magic inside you turns it back on. Then someone whose own wonder has been crushed, crushes ours. Wonder switch off. On. Off. On. Off.

Years go by, and the gaps between the switch being on or off grow bigger. Then the gaps become like expansive canyons until the wonder of our youth feels like a distant, vague memory. Finally, the switch is worn and rusty, the way most things get when they haven't been used in years. And so we learn to live without it.

We settle. And we allow the wonder that was crushed in us to crush the wonder of those around us.

As you'll find out in the chapters ahead, wonder affects all areas of your life, just like there's no part of darkness that light doesn't illuminate.

If you're struggling at work, wonder can transform your leadership by changing the stories you tell yourself and the stories you lead others to internalize. Wonder permits you to believe in those you lead in new ways, helping you see the magic in others that they have yet to see in themselves.

If you're struggling as a parent, engaging wonder can transform your parenting. It permits you to see the world the way your kids do, gifting you with a healthy dose of empathy and understanding as you try to relate to the stories they're living and telling themselves. Great parents, like great leaders, are wide awake to the world of possibilities, with wonder increasing your ability to help your children step into their authentic selves and live their fullest lives. Without wonder, you run the risk of crushing your kids' wonder and crushing their hopes and dreams in the process.

It doesn't matter if you don't think you're a leader, or if you don't have children, or if you're not married. Everyone, deep down, has the desire to live what they consider to be their version of a creative life. As we'll soon discover, you are already creating, for better or for worse. But wonder can ignite or breathe new life into your creative process, regardless of your creative pursuits. Wonder gives birth to curious exploration that neuroscience connects to innovative thinking. It doesn't take much effort to see all the ways your creativity is connected to other areas of your life. Sure, you can creatively reimagine every facet of your life and work, but you don't have to in order for wonder to work its magic—it impacts even things as seemingly mundane as your personal or family's financial picture, including your ability to crush debt and increase your capacity to give generously to others.

If you're content with the level of success you're currently experiencing in your life and work, that's amazing. There is no single definition for "success"—it feels like a word that should always be in air quotes. To be clear, this isn't a self-help motivational book about becoming an entrepreneur, growing a business, or making more money, though wonder is an essential part of those processes. If growing your business is your dream, this book will serve you well. My hope is that this book, and the wonder it will guide you toward reawakening, will make you a healthier, happier, and better human being. In turn, you'll become a better partner, neighbor, and friend. It will enable you to be released from the nightmares that often haunt you, and permit you to receive love, give love, and be part of collectively changing the future of our world.

Maybe all that sounds a little grandiose. Maybe you're here, reading or listening to these words, because you're struggling to hold on to hope. If so, I have good news—wonder can keep your

hope alive. New studies in neurobiology connect wonder to your body's physiology and even your ability to emotionally connect with and empathize with other human beings.² Increasing your capacity to give and receive love isn't hyperbole.

Without wonder, our curiosity dies. Instead of adventurously exploring potential solutions to the problems we bump into throughout our lives, we succumb to the pressures that come from being a responsible adult, and we settle for a life filled with stress and anxiety. The feelings of failure produce shame, so we isolate ourselves. And the lack of connection leads to a lack of hope, which breeds complacency. We feel like we aren't enough. We feel like we don't fit in or belong. We feel like the things we desire are forever out of reach.

So many lies. But wonder can lead you to the truth. Wonder is a powerful catalyst for change. It surprises you and, as my friend Brad Montague says, "rescues you from the ordinary."³ Wonder is the moment when you witness something beautiful and bigger than yourself and know without a doubt that you were made for more. It whispers, "Isn't this extraordinary?" Wonder is more than just a feeling—it is a childlike state that gives you permission to believe in real magic.

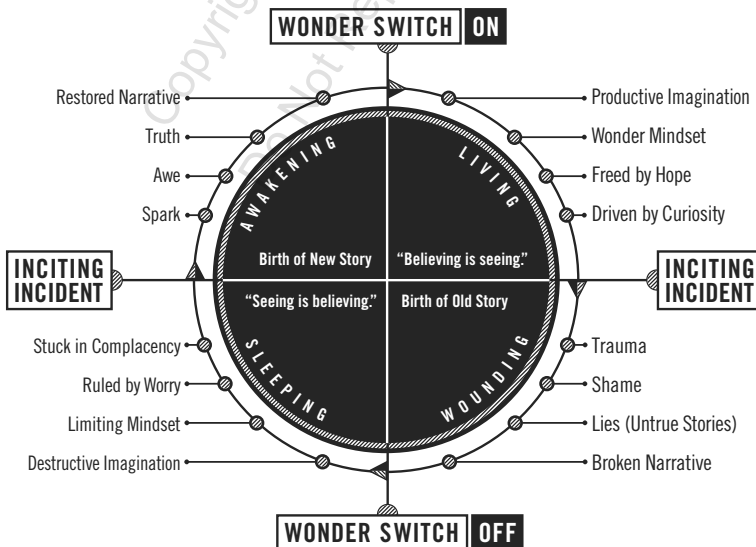
By the time you're done with this book, my hope is not only that your wonder will be awakened but that you also feel equipped to cultivate and sustain wonder in your life. There's more hope for that than you may realize, because wonder doesn't exist only on the mountaintops. It exists in the nooks and crannies, in both the joys and sorrows we experience in our journey along the way.

I understand that you may have picked up this book thinking that flipping the wonder switch back on could be done in three simple steps. Unfortunately, as we'll discover together, that isn't

how wonder works. But I will equip you with some steps you can take to find yourself in a state of wonder more often and teach you how to develop a Wonder Mindset.

Let's explore a simple framework I've used to help guide countless others through the process of changing the stories they're living, with wonder at the center. To change a story, transformation is required. Transformation happens when an individual or even a collective team at an organization moves from an old story to a new story. As we'll discuss later in this book, the narratives we have adopted as true, whether they're actually true or not, are what shape the stories we tell ourselves. Those stories drive all our thinking and behavior. I've worked with so many people who struggle to make the changes they want to make because they're stuck in an old story.

Here's what that process looks like, in the form of something I like to call the Transformation Map:



The Wonder Switch is at the center of this transformational storytelling process. And while this book clearly focuses on the role of wonder, we'll also explore the power of story. As the map shows, stories and wonder go hand in hand.

It's important to know that it's entirely possible to be at different places on the map in different parts of your life. I've coached many leaders who live wide awake to wonder at work but are highly cynical and stuck in complacency when it comes to their personal relationships, dating life, or marriage. Others may embrace possibility in their parenting, for example, but assume the worst when it comes to their current role at work.

We are complex storytelling creatures with multiple narratives. Many of us have developed religious narratives, political narratives, financial narratives, relational narratives, health narratives, and other narratives that guide our lives.

When we change the untrue stories we tell ourselves and embrace the radical self-inquiry required to make the leap to a new story, we'll find truth, hope, and live a more whole, authentic life, allowing us to experience the love and belonging we so strongly desire. We can't get there without wonder, because wonder is what gives us permission to believe—to imagine that a magical new story is possible—long before we're able to see that story come to life.

The fact that this map is laid out in a circle makes this process of change a never-ending cycle. Often just when things in our lives are going well and we like the story we find ourselves in, inciting incidents can blindside us against our will, causing trauma, wreaking havoc, and sucking us back down into the bottom of the circle. As we work toward healing and grow in wisdom, we can spend more and more of our lives in the top half of the circle and

become better equipped to respond to the incidents that so often become catalysts for negative change.

We'll come back to this map a few times throughout this book. For now, what's an old story you currently feel stuck in? Can you identify that story and where you are in this process of taking steps toward a story driven by wonder?

Maybe you feel shame from something in your past or still experience the lingering effects of unresolved trauma. Maybe the lies you've been tricked into believing led to a broken narrative, and the limiting beliefs, worry, and cynicism keep you from imagining anything remotely hopeful, so you've settled, grown comfortably numb, and are now stuck in complacency. If that's where you find yourself, get ready. Sometimes it takes only a spark to ignite your awe and lead you back to a place of wonder, where more is possible than you currently imagine.

The Beginning of Everything You Want

What story do you want to come to life that currently exists only in your imagination? Seriously, if you could wish for anything, what would you wish for?

Did you ever have that conversation as a kid? We used to ask each other about wishes all the time in school. Maybe it was being born in the eighties and the timing of the release of *Aladdin*. Or maybe all kids think about what they'd wish for and out of curiosity ask their friends, in case there's a better wish they haven't come up with yet. When you're seven, you never know when a genie's going to appear out of nowhere, so you've gotta be prepared, ya know?

Honestly, I can't even remember what my childhood wishes

were, other than the usual “more wishes,” which was obviously disallowed every time it came up. But if I ever received a wish now as an adult, I’d wish for wisdom. It’s what I’m consistently striving for, begging mentors for, praying for, and feel like I never have enough of. And if you think about it, wishing to gain wisdom is almost the real-world equivalent of wishing for more wishes.

Think about something you want. Anything. What is it? It may not be what immediately comes to mind.

For example, an easy answer to that question might be something like “more money.” But is it money you really want, or what you imagine that money will give you? Is it money, or is it financial freedom, or the resources to do more good in the world? Or is it that you’re under the impression that if you just had the money, you could live the kind of lifestyle that offers you more friends, solving any loneliness you’re currently feeling?

Wisdom peels back the layers and offers more depth, allowing you to sidestep the foolishness and guiding you to what can truly fulfill you. Wisdom helps us come to the realization that often what we think we want is not always what it seems. Wisdom helps us see that there’s almost always more to the story.

As wisdom peels back those layers, taking you to greater depths, what will you then find yourself wanting? Possibly closer relationships or a better marriage? A more meaningful company? More contentment? More joy and purpose in your life? If you had wisdom, couldn’t you have what you want by being able to identify what’s getting in the way and the steps required to attain it? I think so. What if all the magic you’re searching for (and you are indeed searching for it, whether you realize it or not) could be had if only you possessed the wisdom to know where to find it and how to grasp it?

So how do we find wisdom? How do we become wise?

Socrates said, “Wisdom begins in wonder.”

If he was right, then maybe becoming wise begins with the reawakening of wonder.

Is it possible that one of the reasons our world seems so lacking in wisdom is that we’ve lost our sense of wonder? I don’t think it would take much convincing for anyone to look around and come to the same conclusion. You can witness foolishness in a few quick clicks on YouTube or by watching just a few minutes of television. Flip through the channels—it’s everywhere. You could also read the comments sections or Twitter replies of just about any tweet or other social media thread. Especially threads about politics. Or if you’re like me, you can simply look in the mirror. I like to think I’m a smart guy, but the truth is, like a child who acts out because negative attention is better than no attention, I act foolish sometimes.

So much in the world around us conspires against our wonder in an attempt to crush it, replacing our curiosity with complacency. Those who fight to crush our wonder prefer we stay in line, not ask questions, and settle for the status quo. If they succeed at that goal, we won’t cause a ruckus or be part of the disruption that awakens others from their slumber. As we leave a state of wonder, we pivot to a place of worry.

If wisdom begins in wonder, then worry gives birth to foolishness. Some of the biggest regrets of my life arose from decisions I made when I was cynical or scared. And the older I get, the more I realize that cynicism is just my pretending I’m not afraid. If you spend your life gripped by fear and worry, complacency will only lead to another version of regret—getting to the end of your life with a long list of shattered dreams rooted in things you wish you *would* have done. Either way, this is not the way of the wise.

I used to think the big question was, Do we start out foolish

and work to become wise, or do we start out wise and grow up to become foolish? But maybe the truth is that we're born awake to wonder, and as our wonder is crushed, the hope of wisdom—and all that comes with it—slowly fades away.

You have to admit, our culture's growing in foolishness is somewhat ironic because we now know more than humanity has known at any other time in history. We've been in the information age for decades. We seemingly find the answer to any problem with a simple online search. If something is a mystery to us, a video explaining the mysterious is at our fingertips, all in a device that fits into our pocket. We've been psychologically conditioned to no longer value mystery, making wonder uncomfortable. After all, why be amazed by something when you can simply "understand" it? There wouldn't be reason to be amazed if understanding how something works meant losing our capacity to continue to marvel at the thing we now understand.

Clearly, information and wisdom are not equals. Information is finite. Wisdom is infinite. Access to information does not automatically lead to positive transformation. The age of information has led to living in an abundance of certainty. But that abundance of certainty has clouded our vision and permitted us to live under the illusion that we are wise. As a professional illusionist, I see this tension play out every night I'm onstage.

Not All Secrets Are Meant to Be Kept

When my wife turned thirty, a big group of friends got together and threw her a surprise party. We rented a cool, historic old building in downtown Nashville and had everyone dress up in twenties fashion, and I even hired a ragtime piano player and variety

performers to complete the part-vaudeville, part-speakeasy vibe we were going for. The moment she walked into the room and everyone yelled, “Surprise!” it was as if we were saying, “Hey, Kate! We love you!”

Can you imagine how hard it was to keep that whole thing a secret? Sometimes the not knowing is beautiful. Not knowing leaves room for surprises. A surprise party says, “Surprise! You are loved.” If there are no secrets or mysteries, there is no room for wonder. And if there is no wonder, we’re left without wisdom. Lacking wisdom, we never discover the magical life we’re each capable of living.

As we learn to embrace the mysteries of life and the world around us, we learn to wrestle with the tension—the tension found in the fact that some mysteries are meant to remain a mystery, and some are meant to be solved. After all, not all secrets should be kept.

Whenever you don’t know something or find yourself getting “tricked,” you may feel dumb or uncomfortable. But these experiences can also give birth to wonder, and wisdom begins in wonder. But I don’t want you merely to begin. I don’t want you to turn your wonder switch back on only for a while. My hope is for it to stay on so you can live a life beyond your wildest imagination. I also hope you lead others around you to do the same. But for wonder to stay alive, we must identify the narrative that threatens to crush it.

To grasp the power of the stories we tell ourselves, let’s venture back to the mysterious land of make-believe, to a world where the monsters who chased us didn’t get to win—where our swords slayed the dragons and our demons couldn’t come back to haunt us. How does that sound?

Impossible, you say? You might be right. That’s a world I *wish*

we could go back to regularly. Sure, we could imagine it. In the world of imagination, literally anything is possible. I don't know about you, but the world where the monsters who chased us didn't get to win—that world didn't survive my childhood. And demons came back regularly to haunt me, long before I became an adult.

In this book, you'll reawaken your wonder, that childlike wonder you often felt when you were a little kid, before this world robbed it and took it far away. But, of course, we can't blame it all on "the world." We are complicit in the untrue stories we tell ourselves. We need to take responsibility and spend less time pointing fingers. Yet even if you are responsible for telling yourself many stories filled with falsehoods, it does not change the fact that you've been robbed of wonder. My hope is that you gain back some of the wonder that was taken away a long time ago.

While there is no magic wand that can undo the past, you *can* repaint your future—a future that is brighter than you could ever imagine. To paint that bright future, you have to turn on the lights. But before you do that, you must sit in the darkness, where thieves and monsters lurk, waiting to crush your wonder to steal the magic away. The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek.⁴

Let's venture into the dark together.

Keep reading!

Don't stop here. Order your copy of **The Wonder Switch** to learn how to reawaken your wonder, redesign your future, and step into a powerful new story of meaning, purpose, and possibility.

<https://harrisiii.com/the-wonder-switch/>

What's the biggest lie holding you back?

Ready to flip your wonder switch back on, but not sure where to start? Reawakening your wonder is less about finding something you don't have, and more about getting rid of what's in the way and keeping the wonder switch turned off.

While you're waiting for your full copy of The Wonder Switch, **take our short, free assessment** to identify the #1 lie holding you back. In just a few questions, you'll discover what's behind the untrue stories you tell yourself, and gain practical advice on how to get back to the truth and ultimately, the life you're capable of living.

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