

How to Build Momentum for Your Ideas,
Business, and Life *Against All Odds*

CUMULATIVE ADVANTAGE



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INTRODUCTION

Tim Ferriss knows Oprah.

I do not.

The underlying purpose of this book is to figure out why.

Understanding how Tim launched his career into Oprah Orbit—and why I did not—has implications for the momentum of YOUR ideas, business, and career.

Significant implications, by the way.

If you don't recognize his name, Tim Ferriss is one of the most renowned authors and self-help gurus on the globe.

His first book, *The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere and Join the New Rich*, was a sensation that spent more than four years on the *New York Times* Best Seller List and has sold more than 2.1 million copies worldwide.

The success of the book propelled Tim into the glittery echelon of celebrity, and today, everything he touches turns to gold.

- His podcast has topped 500 million downloads with 9,000 five-star reviews.
- He's one of the highest-paid speakers in the world at \$75,000 per appearance.
- CNN named him "one of the planet's leading angel investors."
- He's written four more books, all instant best sellers.

Tim Ferriss is Mr. Success, a hero to a generation looking to hack a lifestyle that gets more life out of less work.

Yes ... it's good to be Tim Ferriss.

I was curious to learn how Tim generated the momentum to become the star he is today, so I snooped around. He's been quite open about his history—transparency is part of Tim's charm. Here are a few highlights from my investigation:

- Ferriss was born prematurely in Long Island, NY. He was small for his age and bullied as a child.
- In an interview, he said he grew up nerdy, hyperactive, and prone to serious health problems.¹
- He lived in a middle-class home, but his parents would buy him as many books as he wanted, nurturing a love of reading.
- He graduated from college with a degree in East Asian Studies after completing a senior thesis entitled

“Acquisition of Japanese Kanji: Conventional Practice and Mnemonic Supplementation.” (I have no idea what that means.)

- After graduation, Tim worked in sales at a data storage company.
- In a famous TED talk (with 8 million views), he openly discussed a suicide attempt during his college years, battles with bipolar depression, and self-paralysis that prevented him from following through on much of anything.
- He hit another low in 2004 after a friend died, a long-term relationship ended, and his business startup stalled despite the many hours he put into it. He took a year off, traveled Europe, and collected ideas for a book.
- His pitch for *The 4-Hour Workweek* (originally titled *Drug Dealing for Fun and Profit*) was rejected by 26 different publishers.

After learning all these facts, I was disappointed. There’s just not a lot here that would have foreshadowed his astronomical success.

Even after his book took off like a comet, many of the reviews were scathing. Some thought Ferriss was recycling old self-help techniques, exploiting technicalities in sometimes unethical and dishonorable ways (he admittedly likes to cheat), and that his success was due in large part to his considerable skills as a self-promoter.

The fact that Tim Ferriss is an A-list luminary is so improbable ... and that's exactly what makes him an irresistible case study. When you examine where he was in his life up until the age of 29 (when he wrote his book), predicting he would soon be hobnobbing with stars like Hugh Jackman and LeBron James would confound even the most aggressive Las Vegas oddsmakers.

Clearly *something crazy* happened.

“Nobody expected the book to be a success,” Tim said in an interview. “It had an initial print run of like 10,000 copies, which isn't even *partial* national distribution. But I think the timing was right, and to everybody's amazement, including my own, it became the number one *New York Times* best seller.”

Then, the Tim Ferriss Hit Machine really revved up.

- The book's success enabled new relationships with top venture capitalists who taught him the insider secrets of investing.
- Based on this advice, he built a multi-million-dollar investment portfolio that included more than 50 companies like Shopify, Evernote, and Uber.
- His new wealth and book-fame rocketed him into orbit with leaders in business, sports, and entertainment.
- He leveraged these dazzling new connections to create a star-filled podcast with eager sponsors.

- Tim then took these podcast interviews and pieced them together into another best-selling book called *Tribe of Mentors*, filled with stories from celebrities such as Arianna Huffington, Madeleine Albright, and Neil deGrasse Tyson.

I need to pause the Tim Ferriss Success Fest for a moment to compare and contrast his career trajectory with my own. It makes a point, I assure you. In fact, it makes THE point of this book.

Tim and I published our first books at roughly the same time. From this “starting line,” I had more than twice as much business experience than Tim, more education (including three years studying under the world-famous management consultant Peter Drucker), and I had a larger audience (500 percent more Twitter followers). I could never know for sure, but I probably had more money in the bank, too!

Yet, our careers had massively different momentum shifts in a short period of time.

Like Tim, my debut book introduced a big new idea. *Return On Influence* was the first book on influence marketing. My book was published and promoted by a huge New York City publisher, McGraw-Hill.

ROI didn't hit the *New York Times* Best Seller List, but it was very successful in the business book genre, hitting number one in several Amazon categories for a few weeks. The book earned me interviews and appearances on CBS News, Bloomberg, and *The Wall Street Journal*, to name a few.

Over the years, I've also had an amazing career as a keynote speaker and consultant, and I'm currently up there with Tim among the top 1 percent of all authors on Amazon.

But that's the end of the comparison.

I'm no Tim Ferriss.

I'm not getting calls from Oprah. I can't even get a return call from my plumber.

This book answers the question, "Why not?"

What made the difference? What greased Tim Ferriss' flywheel against all odds and built a global sensation? Was it pure luck, or is there some lesson about momentum we can learn and apply to our own ideas and businesses?

Spoiler alert: *Of course* there's a lesson here, and the answer lies in a somewhat obscure idea called *Cumulative Advantage*.

The Principle of Cumulative Advantage states that once a person gains a small advantage over others in their field, that advantage will compound over time into increasingly larger advantages.

But not always.

This book explores the fuel for that turbine of success. What is *that difference* that gives an idea, a person, or a business unstoppable momentum?

Even if you don't see any apparent initial advantage in your own life, I'm convinced you can build life-changing momentum by understanding how others turn small ideas into big successes.

I can't promise you superstardom—and you probably don't need superstardom—but I'll show you how to build relentless momentum for your idea, your business, and your career even if the odds are stacked against you.

To begin our journey, let's start digging into this rather obscure but fascinating idea of Cumulative Advantage ... and in some cases, Cumulative Disadvantage.