



swart & associates®
HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

How Dr. Seuss Used the Power of Constraints to Create His Greatest Work

In 1960, two men made a bet.

The first man, Bennet Cerf, was the founder of the publishing firm Random House. The second man, Theo Geisel – better known as Dr. Seuss, was a well-known author. Cerf proposed the bet and challenged Dr. Seuss that he would not be able to write an entertaining children's book using only 50 different words.

While there was only \$50 on the line, millions of people would be impacted by this little bet in the years to come.

Dr. Seuss took the bet and won. The result was a little book called Green Eggs and Ham. Since its first publication, more than 200 million copies of Green Eggs and Ham had been sold worldwide, making it the most popular of Seuss's works. More importantly, the book was rated the fourth best-selling English-language children's book of all time.

On the surface, this might seem like a fluke. A talented author plays a fun game with 50 words and end up producing a hit. But as we look carefully, we see there is more to this story and the lessons to learn from it will not only help us become more creative, but also teach us how to stick with better habits in the long term.

Here's what we can learn from Dr. Seuss...

The Power of Constraints

Setting limits for yourself – whether it is time you have to workout, money you have available to start a business, or ingredients you are allowed to eat on your diet – often delivers better results than “keeping your options open.”

In fact, this strategy worked so well for Dr. Seuss that he used it for his other books as well. For instance, *The Cat in the Hat* was written by only using a first-grade vocabulary.

There are two main reasons why constraints provide benefits in health, business and life in general.

(1) Constraints Inspire Your Creativity

If you have a one-year-old who takes up almost every minute of your day, you figure out more creative ways to get some exercise. If you work on a project with little to no budget, you make innovative plans to cut costs in order to get what you need. If you only have an hour or two after work to

spend with family and loved ones, you figure out creative activities to make the most of this valuable time spent together.

In short, limitations drive you to figure out solutions. More importantly, constraints can help inspire your creativity.

(2) Constraints Force You to Get Something Done

It is easy to overlook the fact that schedules and deadlines are ultimately constraints we impose on ourselves to be more productive. In simple terms, a schedule (the constraint) forces us to get something done and don't allow us to procrastinate.

That is why professionals set a schedule to create work while amateurs create work when they feel motivated.

What constraints are you setting for yourself? What type of schedule do you have in place to achieve your goals?

Constraints Are Not the Enemy

More often than not we complain about things that we believe are withheld from us.

- “I don't have enough time after work to workout”
- “I don't have enough money to purchase healthy food”
- “I don't have a yoga or meditation class nearby that I can attend”

But you see this is the thing...constraints are not the enemy. Every artist has a limited set of tools to work with. Every athlete has a limited set of skills to train with. Every entrepreneur has a limited amount of resources to create something of value with.

Once you take the time to figure out what your constraints are, you can start making plans how to work with them.

The Size of Your Canvass

Dr. Seuss was given 50 words. That was the size of his canvas. His job was to see what kind of masterpiece he could create with those words.

You and I are given similar constraints in our daily lives.

Do you only have 30 minutes to fit in a workout into your day? So be it. That's the size of your canvas. Your job is to see if you can make those 30 minutes a work of art.

Can you only eat certain foods on your diet? That's the size of your canvas. Your job is to take those ingredients and make each meal a work of art.

You don't have a yoga or meditation class in your area? That's the size of your canvas. Download some yoga ([APP HERE](#)) or meditation ([APP HERE](#)) apps on your smartphone and make these sessions, on your own, a work of art.

Most authors would complain about writing a book with only 50 words. But there was one author who decided to take the tools he had available and create a work of art instead.

We all have constraints in our lives. These limitations should be viewed as opportunities and simply determine the size of the canvas you have to work with. What you will paint on this canvas is ultimately up to you.