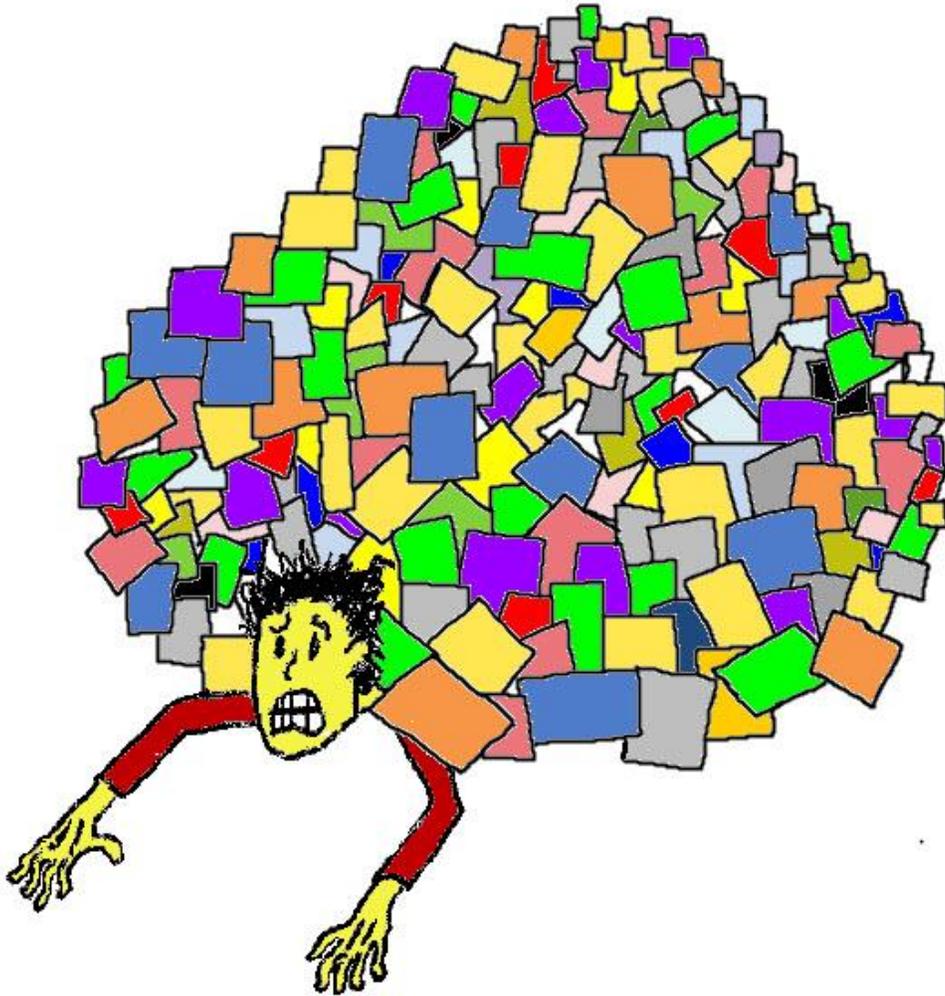


Ending the Silver Bullet Cycle



Breaking the Habit of Following
Snake Oil Trends

Dan Grubb

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

ACTIVITY 1

PENDULUMS: A history of silver bullet trends

ACTIVITY 2

SILVER BULLETS: How we aim them at problems but end up shooting ourselves

ACTIVITY 3

OWN YOUR LIFE: One crazy trick that can change your entire perspective

NEXT STEPS: Keeping Silver Bullets Out of Your Head

INTRODUCTION

I began writing this as a silent plea to my coworkers. We're an agile office using the Scrum method. This means that whenever we have a planning session for the next two weeks or the next quarter, we have to talk about how agile or not agile we are, write up stories and tasks for our work, assign points to our stories, enter them into the officially-designated software, and engage in some team-building activities to demonstrate how agile working is better and more efficient than non-agile work. This is in addition to our daily 15-minute meetings about what we're working on and our daily hour-long meetings whose goal is to have everyone in the same room to talk about whatever subject we have planned. Many people in my department are on two or three teams, so they have twice or thrice as many of these daily meetings.

This is what we call working efficiently.

If you ask our managers, scrum masters, and executives how this is working out, they will say it's fantastic and improves efficiency and makes everyone feel like a part of the team. If you ask the rank and file employees how this is working out, they will halfheartedly say it's innovative and terrific. If there are no managers, scrum masters, or executives in the room, they will say they are constantly in meetings and don't have enough time to actually do their work.

This is not a dig at agile work or Scrum specifically; that's just the world I was in when I started having these thoughts. I began to look into other methods of managing office work and realized they're all more concerned with creating an artificial utopian system than solving the actual problems in day-to-day life. I then came to an irritating conclusion: these work management methods are just an extension of self-help books. It then occurred to me that work management methods and self-help books are just two manifestations of a larger phenomenon: the silver bullet industry.

The silver bullet industry (trademark Dan Grubb please buy a copy on your way out of my

illuminating seminar) consists of self-help books, work management methods, motivational speakers, life hacks, and infomercial gadgets. They're sold as miraculous cure-alls whose seven easy steps promise to fix whatever's broken in your life. They cater to those of us who are vaguely unhappy with how things turned out and wish there were a simple, elegant solution. In other words, all of us. However well-intentioned these books and programs and devices are at the outset, by the time they get to us they've become just another pile of marketing promising a silver bullet cure to a different problem than the one we're trying to solve.

VOICEOVER: Tired of the Venn diagram of your career and personality not being one circle?

HELPLESS PERSON IN A MESSY KITCHEN THAT'S ON FIRE: There's got to be a better way!

VOICEOVER: Try the new Diamond Prism Advance method! It can cut your development time in half while doubling the calories you burn, depending on your results from our exclusive personality-signifying determinant!

NEWLY CONFIDENT AND FULFILLED PERSON IN A MESSY KITCHEN THAT'S ON FIRE: Thanks, Diamond Prism Advance!

Silver bullet solutions are ultra-modern forms of cults. That's a hell of a claim for me to make, but if you look at the overall patterns and methods involved, it's true. A charismatic leader brings you an amazing and simplistic new framework that he or she claims will solve your life's problems if you just follow these steps (after forking over your money, of course).

These modern-day snake oil salesmen prey upon unhappy people who are looking for a new direction in life. They use jargon and echo chambers to achieve the goal of selling a million units and making a pile of money before people get wise to the fact that snake oil doesn't cure anything. Then the genius goes away for a year or two, and when their checks start bouncing they unveil a new system built on the lessons learned from the previous failed system. Lather, rinse, repeat.

Now, who am I, the Martin Luther nailing his *95 Theses on the Bullshit Self-Help Miracle Product Industry* to the Wittenberg Church of Overextended Metaphors? I'm just some guy. I'm a low-level contractor at a big company who goes to lots of meetings that have little to nothing to do with me. I'm trying to get a job as a Scrum Master here in order to improve how we work from within, but I'm not optimistic.

I have three degrees, which is great, but they're in Communications and English Lit, which is not so great. My education did teach me some vital skills, though. Besides eroding my snobbish attitude and providing case studies in *Why You Shouldn't Drink That Much*, my liberal arts education strengthened my abilities to detect patterns and poke fun at them. This has informed my primary interests of statistics, politics, and humor. All three are about patterns. One proves them, one exploits them, and one pulls their pants down. I'm also in Mensa, which is weird. I have serious doubts about IQs as a measurement of intelligence. It's more like a talent for pattern recognition. So there's that. (I'd tell you what people in Mensa are like, but I'm too shy to attend any meetings, so I have no idea. They seem really nice, though.)

This is all to say that noticing patterns is kind of my thing. And when it comes to products sold by the silver bullet industry, the patterns shine distinctly, like a subway map written in highlighter under a black light. Patterns are my thing, not similes.

In this very short book, we're going to explore the history of silver bullet solutions, how they infiltrate our daily lives, and what we can do to minimize their impact on us. But first, an activity.

[back to top](#)

ACTIVITY 1

Take a look at your bookshelf. Count how many self-help books and books about improving how you work you have and write the number here. _____

Now count how many years you've been reading these kinds of books and attending these types of seminars. Write it here. _____

Now think back on how many programs, mindsets, and lifestyles you've tried because of these books and seminars. Write the number here. _____

Multiply the first number by 5, the second number by 10, and the third number by 100. Add them up and write the answer here. _____ This is how many points you have.

Okay, so those points? They're meaningless. You didn't actually achieve anything by doing a dumb 3-minute activity in a book. Sorry.

Whatever it is you want to work on, the important thing is not how you structure or schedule or track your work. The important thing is that you keep working on the thing and get better at it. Read on for more disappointment! I mean, uh, tough love? No, I sincerely want you to stop falling for silver bullet solutions, so let's learn about their origins.

[back to top](#)

PENDULUMS: A history of silver bullet trends

The silver bullet industry has its roots in ancient Roman collections of social norms such as Cicero's *On Friendship* and Ovid's *The Art of Love*. These works and others like them were basically collections of general knowledge about what sort of behavior was good and what you should avoid. Think of it as the Roman equivalent of *Goofus and Gallant*.

The genre stuck to simple taxonomies of manners and good habits through the Middle Ages and Renaissance and into the Enlightenment. Then, in 1732, Ben Franklin published his famous book, *Poor Richard's Almanack*. Franklin's wit and character made his book more fun to read than his forerunners. Sure, the older writers had their styles, but Franklin was catchy, which made him exciting. Which sounds better, "It's easy to wear out one's welcome" or "Fish and visitors stink in three days"? He would have made a killing in the bumper sticker business.

Franklin's catchiness would become a staple of future silver bullet opportunists. Like they say, you're not selling the steak; you're selling the sizzle.

The next major figure in the genre is Samuel Smiles. His 1859 book, *Self-Help*, encouraged dogged conviction and argued that just about anyone could raise himself up through hard work. While this sounds like the American fable of someone picking themselves up by their bootstraps, Smiles focused on fattening one's inner self rather than one's bank account. In fact, Smiles was not a fan of those born into money and considered their self-improvement almost impossible because they didn't know how to labor at something.

What Smiles brought to the silver bullet industry is the goal of not just following rules, but improving yourself as a person. All you need is this book and the life-changing tips found inside!

This brings us to the modern era and the man who, more than anyone, kicked off the silver bullet industry. The man is Dale Carnegie and the book is *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

No relation to the steel tycoon (he changed the spelling of his last name to match that of the celebrity gazillionaire), Carnegie was trained as a lecturer and actor and started his career as a public speaking teacher. When you think of someone presenting their \$400-a-person seminar on how to fix some aspect of your life, Dale Carnegie is the prototype that everyone has been copying for a century.

After giving lectures and selling pamphlets on public speaking for 20 years, Carnegie published his landmark book in 1936 and it's still taught in business schools today. It straddles the line between personal and professional improvement, offering advice for one's private life as well as how to succeed in business, especially sales and office work, the kind of jobs that involve a lot of meetings and handshaking.

Besides countless business leaders, *How to Make Friends and Influence People* was reportedly read by Charles Manson and helped him learn how to convince women to do his bidding. Remember what I said earlier about silver bullet techniques being like cults? Mm-hmm. You remember now, don't you? Yikes.

We'll come back to self-help books, but let's shift our attention from what businessmen were reading to how they did their work.

While Carnegie's book was churning out printing after printing, the office landscape was feeling more stifled. Most office work was done by people sitting in rows of long desks in open-plan spaces. The open-plan system was popular because it encouraged collaboration and efficiency, which meant results. Just kidding. It was cheaper! Throw some tables and benches in an empty warehouse and now that warehouse is a functioning place of business.

However, in the 1950s enough white collar workers complained of the raised blood pressure and increased distraction due to open-plan environments so companies began to change their layouts. After some experimentation with barriers and plants acting as dividers to break the giant rooms into sections, Herman Miller (the company, not the guy) invented the Action Office!

(Ahem.) The Action Office!!!

No? Nothing? "Action Office" doesn't ring a bell? How about if we use the more colloquial name: the cubicle!

I'll wait while you throw confetti and have a parade celebrating cubicles.

What, no parade? Oh. Uh, I guess we'll continue, then.

So the cubicle came out in 1964 and it was an instant hit. People loved not sitting elbow-to-elbow with their six million coworkers and the barest sense of privacy the cubicle provided. However, after a couple of decades, the cubes got old. People saw them as drab, isolating, and artificial. Employers saw them as an expensive waste of precious floorspace. What to do? (Maybe you see where this is going. Hint: the chapter is called Pendulums.)

So along comes the internet and the darling of the post-post-post-modern world, the internet startup. These energetic idealists were fueled by energy drinks and junk food and loved nothing more than to code for 96 hours straight. Their intensely casual work methods coincided with the proliferation of the notion that work comes first, and we saw people working longer hours without overtime, answering email on the weekend, and even working while away on vacation. The joy the startups found in grinding out work inspired the grandchildren of *How to Make Friends and Influence People*, which were books pushing efficiency, making more money, and cramming work into every corner of your life, whether you love grinding out work or not.

Since everyone was working and communicating all day anyway, companies started designing offices where people could collaborate and increase efficiency, which meant results! (I've heard that before somewhere.) Also, it was cheaper! Perfect for a startup waiting to make its first quadrillion or the established corporate behemoth making its hundredth.

Soon offices everywhere were knocking down walls and building rows upon rows of connected desks with people working elbow-to-elbow. Whether this was driven by budgets or ideologies,

the result is the same: in 50 years we went from the radical design innovation based on Henry Ford-style efficiency to the radical design innovation based on improving the work environment to the radical design innovation based on collaboration. It's simply a coincidence that today's ultra-modern offices look exactly like they did a century ago, just with more snack machines. It IS a coincidence, right? Right?

So what were the hot tips coming out of the silver bullet industry during this time? Like office layouts, the messages from the American Guru Association were swinging back and forth. Drill down and focus on all the tiniest minutiae and before you know it, you'll be done! No, wait, look at the bigger picture and track your metrics from a 30,000-foot perspective! Did I say 30,000 feet? I mean 3 inches. You should definitely micromanage yourself and track every action through our patent-pending Workographical Display! Forget tracking, focus on your life. Not your whole life, just the personal stuff. No, the whole you. No, no, wait, integrate your work life and personal life. Yes! Your worksonal life is the key. Final answer. No, wait! Lather, rinse, repeat.

This is just the glaring example in my life. If you look through your library of silver bullets, you'll spot these pendulum patterns again and again. Focus on yourself. No, focus on how you fit in your world. Wait, no, focus on your growth. Shoot, no, let's focus on what your growth means to those around you. You know what? You can't focus until you take this 600-part test and get a \$200 consultation from an expert. Then you can focus on you. Them. You.

The pendulum swings in how we interact with the world, what music is popular, fashion, movies, politics, everything. If you want to figure out how to look innovative and forward thinking next year, read some magazines from 20 years ago.

In all of the companies I've worked at, one pendulum swings reliably every 18 months or so. First they hire too many people to catch up on work that's been piling up. After several months, they find that they have people sitting around with no work to do, so they lay them off. However, the same people who estimated how many to hire are estimating how many to fire, so they get rid of too many. After several months, they find that the work is piling up and start hiring again.

Lather, rinse, repeat.

Sometimes the pendulum swings because of the economy. Sometimes it's due to culture-wide shifts in values. Often, though, it's because an executive read a trendy book and decided to implement all its recommendations to make everything work more smoothly. What that executive doesn't know, though, is that those changes were made five years ago because of a trendy book's claims and then unmade two years ago because another trendy book disproved those claims.

Remember how I said I've been trained to spot patterns? These are the patterns that we all fall for.

That was a lengthy history lesson. Let's take a break with an activity.

[back to top](#)

ACTIVITY 2

Imagine your ideal way of working. Don't worry about budget or reality. You can be with a group, by yourself, inside or outside. You can have a band playing nearby or you can be in a sensory deprivation chamber. For profit or not. With a goal in mind or not. You can work at night, during the day, or on and off in three-hour cycles. Whatever you want. Think about it and draw it. Pencil, pen, an app, a collage made of garbage, whatever you want.

When you're done, look at it and admire it. Damn, wouldn't that be great? Don't forget to sigh!

[back to top](#)

SILVER BULLETS: How we aim them at problems but end up shooting ourselves

Self-help trends play to our desire for simplistic silver bullet solutions where one change solves all of your problems.

Filling in blanks, taking multiple choice personality tests, and learning new vocabulary feel very productive. It's like those game apps where the button lights up so you press the button so it can light up again. It's a steady dopamine release system. You're reading, thinking, and writing about the problem you want to solve, which makes your brain release happy little doses of "hooray, I did it". But after a week of reading, thinking, and writing, you find yourself with a marked-up book, lots of notes, and none of your work done. It's reframed how you see your work...in more or less the same way it was framed before, but with more exciting, positive concepts attached to them. That feels terrific, but you still have to get those invoices out and get your steps in.

By the time people realize that the miraculous life-changing system doesn't actually fix anything, there's a new trendy life-changing system out saying, "They thought THAT was the solution, but they were dumb and outdated! THIS is the solution!"

"But Dan," you say. "Surely, these silver bullets aren't that big of a deal." In the grand scheme of things, you're right. No one's getting cancer because they were exposed to self-help books. But these silver bullets do cause actual harm to the people who invest in them.

The first loss is money. A book doesn't cost terribly much, but dozens of books do. And for a lot of people, so does a seminar. Not everyone has hundreds of dollars to go to a seminar, but they scrimp and save in order to spend an afternoon in a ballroom watching someone pace back and forth and lead the crowd in chants. But maybe you can afford it, so this isn't a big deal to you.

The second loss is time. Whether you're a student, a CEO, unemployed, or the President, you only have 24 hours in a day. If you spend it reading yet another book about yet another trendy

way or organizing your problems, that's time gone that you can't use fixing your problems. You can't get it back, so don't waste it.

Think about how much time and money you or your employer have spent doing meta-work analysis and chasing these silver bullet solutions. Imagine if that time and money were spent on finishing up those projects or giving everyone a small raise. Or instead of entering your calories and charting your steps, what if you spent that time doing more exercise? After a year, which use of time would have better results?

The third loss is the hardest one. It's hope. At its core, the silver bullet industry is selling hope. If you follow these steps and fill in this chart and organize your schedule in this color scheme, your life will improve. And maybe sometimes it works for some people. Great! I'm happy for them. But they're probably not reading this.

If you're reading this, I bet you've been burned. Someone told you that their method would improve your life, and it didn't. That doesn't just bring your hope level back to where it was before. It drops it lower. It's a net loss. It injects despair. When optimism is snatched away, it leaves a painful void that makes people look for something to fill it. Maybe it's alcohol or drugs. Maybe it's religion. Maybe it's a rigid lifestyle where the person at the top tells you what to do all day like the military or a micromanaged job or a cult. Or a shiny new perspective that promises fulfillment if you just follow these six easy steps.

At best, the silver bullet industry can give you a shot in the arm and help you get back on track. In general, though, they take your money, time, and hope and leave you wandering the metaphorical barren landscape, searching for the guidance that another life guru is more than happy to provide. This is due to a basic flaw in our brain's programming.

At the brain's core is the primordial stuff that the dinosaurs had, the reptile brain. Fight or flight? Threat or lunch? This is the part that tells us to fear new things and to react to challenges with violence. The heart of these instincts is the amygdala. This says, "Augh! What is that? It's different! Kill it!" If you're a bigot, blame your amygdala (and your upbringing).

The middle section, between the core and the frontal lobe, is the mammal brain. This is where you get nice things like working in groups and not eating your children. (Well, unless you're a hamster.) The mammal brain gives us an idea of how others are feeling so we can help them or seek help from them. It's how herd animals warn each other of danger and how your dog genuinely loves you. Does that mean snakes and fish are incapable of love? Yes. My sincere apologies to any fish reading this.

The furthest out and most recent addition to the brain is the frontal lobe. Humans have the biggest one, proportionally, but apes, dolphins, and elephants have a decent-sized one. This is where we get logic and abstract thought. You know how you're reading these arbitrary visual symbols and instantly converting them into arbitrary aural symbols and then instantly converting those into concepts? Thank your frontal lobe.

The brain evolved from the inside out, and the inner, reptile brain is the strongest part. So while we can do calculus and interpret Shakespeare, we're also wary of strangers and scared of thunder. This is generally good, because fear keeps us alive. But it can override our higher functions and make us act like crazy people.

Think about the last time you got in an argument about something trivial. It doesn't matter whether you agree on a movie's quality or which team is better, but when someone disagrees with you, your dumb reptile brain sees it as a threat and hits Red Alert. Now your adrenaline is flowing and your muscles are tensing and your heart is sending more oxygen through your system, which makes you feel aggressive and ready to hit someone. If you're a caveman fighting for your life, this is very useful. If you're in a bar arguing about a referee's call, it might lead to arrest.

What does our brain structure have to do with silver bullets? Everything. Think about how silver bullets are presented. Let's go with a simple TV commercial for some dumb product you don't need. First we see the stupidest person imaginable trying to flip a pancake in a pan. They get it on the floor, on the counter, even on the ceiling! You never noticed it, but yeah, that really is

tricky!

Stop. No, it's not. It's a pancake. It's easy. Also, do you even make pancakes? If you've done it more than once, this is not a problem for you anymore. Okay, time in.

The confident announcer with the deep voice tells us not to worry: there's a solution! Look at this amazing device that flips the pancake for you! Take the stress out of breakfast with the FlipMaster!

Stop. Why do they use deep-voiced announcers and why do they speak in that ridiculous tone? Because of how our brain works. Our smart frontal lobe sees that made-up problem for what it is: just some phony melodrama that doesn't apply to you, designed to sell a product. But at the same time, our reptile brain starts worrying. "Oh man, I hope that never happens to me!"

Now that the reptile brain is primed and worried, they send in someone smooth and confident to make us feel secure. Our mammal brains react to deep voices because if you're a pack animal, chances are you're being led by the biggest and strongest, and bigger people have lower voices. They also talk like a corny DJ because we're also suckers for confidence, and that tone and inflection sounds like confidence.

Let's imagine a scenario to look at confidence. Albert Einstein is giving a lecture on physics. If he can't go four words without throwing in "um"s and "er"s, we're going to lose interest. If he's followed by a confident dope who struts across the stage and declares the universe can be broken down into five simple categories, we perk up. "Oooh, he knows what he's talking about!" (He doesn't.)

In the eons-long history of evolution, confidence was almost always earned. Alpha animals are confident because they threaten the lives of the betas and are willing and able to back that threat up with claws and teeth. But for us, confidence has become disconnected from strength. Any weak idiot can be confident. All it takes is the willingness to pretend to know what you're talking about or the lack of awareness that you don't actually know what you're talking about.

Let's return to our commercial. We've been told there's a problem that could affect us and then given an impressive display of confidence about the solution. Our frontal lobe started out skeptical, but the reptile brain got worried and then the mammal brain got reassuring signals from a strong alpha male that everything will be okay. After seeing the commercial a few times, we start thinking maybe a pancake flipping device isn't such a bad idea, after all. And once again, we've fallen for a sales pitch because of confidence. Ever wonder why con man is short for confidence man?

Now, if you like watching some overly confident dope talk about the four steps to a new you, then have fun reading this book and thanks for your purchase. Love, Dan the Overly Confident Dope. Just be aware that what you're buying is a pattern of impulses that leads to a release of dopamine and not necessarily a solution.

And that's not completely dismissive. There's nothing wrong with changing how you think about a problem or how you approach it. Reflection is an important, healthy part of personal and professional maintenance, and it's good to check in with yourself to make sure you're not doing something you hate or that goes against your principles. Just be aware that thinking about things doesn't change them.

If you want personal fulfillment or a better career, it's not coming from a book. To paraphrase one of my favorite sayings, "Talk about improvement into one hand and crap in the other and see which gets full first." Whether you're dealing with a business in freefall, an abusive past, an addiction, or a vague but terrifying existential crisis, checking boxes and chanting with a crowd at a seminar will not solve your problem. If you can't do it alone and want help, you should talk to a therapist or attend an AA meeting or talk to someone in your area who runs a successful business to get advice and strategies. But if you're on your sixth method of reimagining how you approach your problem, then you can add silver bullet solutions to your list of problems.

If you feel like putting this book down and getting to work on fixing a problem in real life rather than theoretically, then by all means follow that impulse. If thinking about how to solve a

problem is still more attractive than doing to work to solve it, read on.

[back to top](#)

ACTIVITY 3

We need to dig a hole.

Draw a backyard. It can be your backyard, your parents' backyard, an imaginary one, whatever. It can have grass or gravel or trees or a swing set, anything you like.

Now, figure out where this hole should go and how big it should be. What's the hole for? Are you adding a pool? Planting a tree? Digging post holes for a fence? Decide what kind of hole you want and add it to your picture.

Think about how digging this hole makes you feel. Are you the type who enjoys working outdoors or are you more indoorsy? On a scale from 1 to 10, 1 being a bookworm and 10 being a farmer, rate how much you like working outdoors.

How does digging this hole fit into the grander scheme of your life? If you're digging it because it will make you money, mark it with an M. If you're digging it because it will bring you happiness, mark it with an H. If you're digging it because it will simply give you some exercise, mark it with an E.

Now, how deep is your hole? Not the one in the drawing, the actual hole.

Oh, you haven't started digging it? Maybe all that analysis and naval-gazing was a waste of time.

[back to top](#)

OWN YOUR LIFE: One crazy trick that can change your entire perspective

Sometimes I think about my job and my dad's. I check websites for accuracy. He's a foreman at a big DC-area electrical contractor. If I screw up, a few hundred people get a product that's slightly different than advertised. It sucks, but no one gets hurt. If he screws up, thousands can lose power. If he screws up badly, people can die. I don't want to know what could happen if he screwed up on a job at a military base or government office.

Most people don't have these stakes in their life. A relatively small number of us are doctors or firefighters or military personnel or police officers or construction workers or demolition experts. The rest of us are in sales or food service or administration or web development or something else that keeps the world going but feels like it doesn't matter. At the end of our day, we can't look at a thing that wasn't there before and say, "I did that! I made a thing today." If we're lucky, we clear out our inboxes or finish cleaning our stations before the shift is over.

Because our work lacks high stakes or concrete results, our work causes feelings of meaninglessness. When this occupational despair is combined with the cultural pressure to base your identity in your work, you get a lot of unhappy people who feel aimless. These people then go out and seek silver bullet solutions through self-help books, motivational speakers, and seminars about feeling empowered to take ownership of those reports you have to file every Thursday.

I must be absolutely clear on this point: Those silver bullet solutions are horseshit. You will not find happiness in a book. You will not find meaning in a seminar. You will not fix your life with a miracle time-saving product. Snake oil does not cure anything.

What a book or a seminar or a simple eight-step solution will do is make you feel good for a little while. It's like a faith healer. It will touch your face and push you to the ground and give you a temporary placebo effect, a fuzzy halo of wellness. Then it will wear off and you'll still have

diabetes. Your problems won't be solved.

So stop paying for placebos. Stop buying the books. Stop paying people to pace back and forth across a stage and yell shallow affirmations at you. Stop inviting speakers to your office to preach the good word of how their process disruption will undo the damage caused by last year's process disruption. Stop paying them and they'll go away.

Once you stop wasting your precious money and even more precious time on charlatans and grifters, you can work on whatever's not working in life. Will it be easy? Nope. Will it be fast? Nope. Is there another way to fix your problems besides fixing your problems? Nope.

I'm not going to guess what your problems are. I've never met you. Maybe you have a medical condition. Maybe you had a terrible childhood. Maybe you have an addiction. Maybe you're one of the countless people drifting passively through life. Whatever your problem is, you're going to have to identify it and address it. Whether that means therapy or a second job or a career change or leaving an abusive spouse or whatever, that's up to you and whoever's advice you value. The point is, I have no idea what the solution is and neither does that silver bullet merchant who's telling you how to take charge.

I wish I could help. I really do. I wish any of the silver bullet merchants could help. Unfortunately, unless you're just looking for a quick shot of dopamine, exciting catchphrases aren't good for very much.

So that's it. That's how to break the silver bullet cycle. You just stop chasing after mythical one size fits all solutions. Stop reading the books. Stop going to the seminars. Stop reimagining your framework. None of it's real. The only way to get the work done is to stop reading about it and start doing it.

[back to top](#)

NEXT STEPS: Keeping silver bullets out of your head

If you're the kind of person who frequents these seminars and read these books, you might be feeling really energized right now. You might be ready to clean out your bookshelf and remove yourself from "I'm interested in more information" mailing lists. That's great! Go for it.

But!

For whatever reason, you love this kind of thinking. You like imagining how your life or work or whatever could be improved. That's also great! But from now on, you need to keep your guard up against future snake oil salesmen.

There is no silver bullet. There is no easy answer. Whether it's getting healthier, solving interpersonal issues, strengthening your business, or finding your ideal life path, it takes a long time and requires work every single day. No one can fix your problems but you. Reading the book and attending the seminar doesn't improve your life any more than buying a treadmill makes you lose weight. You have to put in the time and effort every day forever.

So keep your eyes open and resist the urge to ditch your plans when a trendy new silver bullet comes out.

Now get to work. Good luck. I'm rooting for you.

[back to top](#)

About the Author

Dan Grubb is a fourth-generation smartass from Richmond, Va. When he's not improving life at his day job, he writes, performs, and produces the comedy podcast "Bunkum". *Ending the Silver Bullet Cycle* is his fifth book, not including the two that spontaneously deleted themselves for fear that they were too radically groundbreaking for this world. *Pity the Slug!* is the best of his humor collections, but *Senator Bigfoot 'n Pals* is okay, too.

Follow Dan on Twitter [here](#).