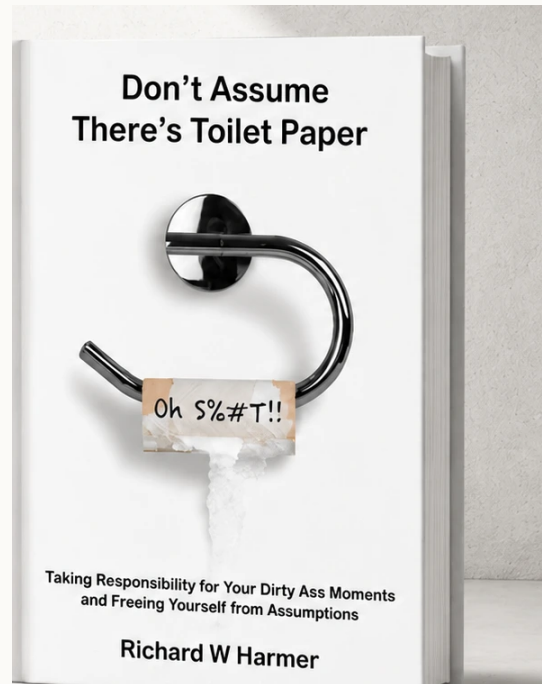


FREE EXCERPT · CHAPTER 7

Stop Missing What's Right in Front of You

A sneak peek inside the book about the assumptions that quietly shape our lives.



from **Don't Assume There's Toilet Paper**
by **Richard W. Harmer**

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Stop Missing What's Right in Front of You

Things don't usually explode all at once. They build. Quietly. Subtly. Right in front of you. Not all the time of course but... 80 percent of the time, it's a build-up. And most of the time, you saw it coming. You just didn't do anything about it.

That's what this chapter is about.

Not being smarter. Not being more talented. Not having some special edge.

Just paying attention to what's right in front of you.

Again, you walk into a bathroom. You sit down. You do your thing. You look over... and there's no toilet paper.

That's not bad luck. That's inattention. You didn't check. You assumed. You moved too fast. You weren't present.

Now you're dealing with something that could've been avoided with two seconds of awareness.

That's life. That's relationships. That's business. That's health.

Before I started writing this, I was like most people. Moving fast. Thinking ahead. Half listening. Half present. Always onto the next thing. And then life has a way of slowing you down. Not because you chose it. But because it forces you to.

I can point to a moment that shifted something in me. And to this day, I'm not sure why. I was driving to Houston from Dallas. It's four hours. Nothing special. Easy drive. No major life event. No wreck. Just driving. And I had this thought hit me. **I will never be in this exact moment again.**

Not this road. Not this version of me. Not this exact time. And it hit me harder than it probably should have. Because I realized how many moments I had already missed.

I missed not enjoying the ride. Even though it was for work, I could've at least enjoyed the drive from Dallas to Houston.

How many conversations was I a part of I wasn't fully in? How many times I was physically present, but mentally somewhere else?

That moment didn't fix everything overnight. But it started something. It made me more aware. And from there, it became a process. Not a flip of a switch. A process.

I had a friend ask me one time; how did you get better at being present? And I told him the truth. I didn't just wake up one day and figure it out.

It's been a step-by-step process. Learning. Failing. Catching myself. Drifting again. Coming back.

Writing this book actually helped me more than anything. This is why this book wasn't just written for you. It was written for me. I needed a check. A reminder. Daily.

I needed to slow down and actually look at my own life. Because I've had enough happen in my life to know that none of this is guaranteed.

I've lost 4 friends before they were 45. Cancer.

A few months before my friend Matt (different Matt you'll hear about later) passed, we sat down together. Just two guys having a meal. Lunch. But it wasn't normal. It couldn't be.

He had been diagnosed with colon cancer at 40. By the time I saw him, it was bad. His weight was half of what it was when he was healthy. Because Matt wasn't someone you'd expect this to happen to. He was lean. Healthy. Same age as me.

The kind of person you look at and assume... he's got time. We all assume that, until you're facing your own mortality.

We sat there for a while, just talking. And then he said something I won't forget. He looked around the restaurant for a second and said, "You know what, Richard? Most of these people... they don't understand. They don't get it. And they won't until it's too late."

No drama. No speech. Just truth.

I knew exactly what he meant. It wasn't just about him being sick.

It was about perspective. About how most people move through life like it's guaranteed. Like tomorrow is already scheduled. Like there's always more time.

And sitting there with him, I realized something. The way I've always thought about life... the awareness that this life ends.

The understanding that nothing is guaranteed. That wasn't something to fix. That was something to hold onto. Matt didn't say it to validate me. But that's what it did.

It confirmed something I already felt.

That most people don't wake up to that reality until life forces them to.

And sometimes... That moment comes too late.

Matt was 42 when he passed. And I still think about that conversation. Because it wasn't just a moment. It was a reminder. This is going to end.

For all of us.

We just don't know when. Or how. And the question isn't whether that's true. The question is what you do with it while you're here. I lost my brother. I lost my brother-in-law. I lost my Dad. I lost my grandmother. Another friend, Justin.

A host of other people. Just like you probably have.

And even as I'm writing this, I'm thinking about my Aunt Josie. She just passed away days ago. I had to add this in here.

She was one of those people who was just present. Always aware. Always paying attention.

She was the connector in our family. The one who kept people together. The one who always knew what was going on in everyone's life. The one who showed up. And when she passed, I was in the middle of editing this book.

She was in her mid 80s and lived every ounce of it. Really lived a life full. Aunt Josie was special.

It made me realize something I still need to be reminded of every day. To be present. Not just because she's gone. But because of what she represented. Connection. Awareness. Presence.

And it made me think. How many people are physically here... but not really here? That's what we're talking about.

Focalism

Psychologist Daniel Kahneman spent years studying how people think and make decisions. One of the concepts that emerged from that work is something called focalism.

Focalism is a fancy word for a pretty common human habit. We tend to focus on one thing and dramatically overestimate how much it will impact our lives while overlooking everything else surrounding it.

Think about buying a new car.

Most people don't spend much time thinking about the insurance payment, maintenance costs, registration fees, repairs, or the fact that in a few months the new smell will be gone and it'll just become another car sitting in the driveway. Not to mention the fact that the new car's value depreciates significantly the moment you drive it off the lot.

Instead, we imagine how it will feel to drive it. We picture ourselves behind the wheel. We imagine the compliments. We imagine pulling into the parking lot. We imagine the freedom, reliability, and excitement

that come with ownership.

We focus on the reward. We rarely focus on the responsibility.

The same thing happens with boats. Everybody loves the idea of owning a boat. They picture sunny weekends on the lake, family memories, fishing trips, and spending time with friends. What they often fail to picture is where they're going to store it, how much maintenance it requires, what fuel costs, what happens when something breaks, and how much time they may spend taking care of the boat instead of enjoying it.

There is an old saying that the two happiest days of a boat owner's life are the day they buy it and the day they sell it. While that's obviously an exaggeration, there is a reason people laugh when they hear it. Many discover that the reality of ownership looks very different from the version they imagined in their heads.

What's interesting is that this doesn't just happen with purchases. It happens with promotions, relationships, retirement, moving to a new city, starting a business, or achieving some big goal. We imagine how we'll feel when we get there. We mentally live in a future version of our lives. We focus on the outcome while neglecting everything that comes with it.

Now, I'm not suggesting that planning for the future is a bad thing. It isn't. Goals matter. Dreams matter. Ambition matters. The problem occurs when we become so focused on the future that we stop paying attention to reality in the present.

When we do that, we start making decisions based on an incomplete picture.

**We see the trophy but not the season.
We see the destination but not the road.**

CONTINUE READING...

If this chapter made you pause, the journey is only beginning.

Keep reading the story of the assumptions that quietly
shape our lives and how taking responsibility sets us free.

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