The Charge
Activating the 10 Human Drives That Make You Feel Alive
by Brendon Burchard

Driving Forward
Get the most out of your life.

QUICK OVERVIEW
The Charge, best-selling author Brendon Burchard’s third book, explores the 10 factors, or drivers, that can help you live life more fully.

With a splash of neuroscience (carefully couched in layman’s terms) and a dash of psychology, Burchard reveals how to avoid living a life of quiet desperation. By “charged,” Burchard means a life filled with enthusiasm, excitement and meaning. Using anecdotes from his life, as well as from the lives of people he has coached, he helps you identify where you are, then familiarizes you with the route to a more meaningful life. While there’s no “formula”—since, after all, what’s meaningful to someone else isn’t necessarily meaningful to you—he outlines practices that will equip you for your journey.

APPLY AND ACHIEVE
Burchard points out in the chapter on contribution that although not everyone will feed children in Third World countries or gain ground in the battle against terminal illness, each of us can make a difference in the world we live in. Bringing your very best to the table in the activity you find yourself doing most often not only empowers you to live a charged life, but also make a real and lasting contribution. To begin to more fully and actively contribute and live “charged,” ask yourself these questions, and implement the answers.

- Am I engaging in the activity with my full mental capacity?
- What can I do this week that will improve my contribution?
- Am I looking for opportunities to share what I know with those who are less experienced?
- Who can I mentor so they can benefit from what I’ve learned?
Over the past fifteen years as a high-performance student and coach, I’ve been blessed to see the dramatic transformations people can make in their day-to-day lives when they simply choose to climb out of the half-lit mediocrity of an unengaged and unfulfilling existence. I’ve also seen people with already happy lives amplify their joy and satisfaction to levels they had yet to imagine. Regardless of where you are in that spectrum, it helps to know just what kind of life you’re in, and the type of person you are that led you to that life, sooner rather than later. With that in mind, we begin an exploration of three very different kinds of lives.

THE CAGED LIFE

Many people live their lives caged either in the past or in the expectations of others. They have never really ventured into the unknown or sought to break the boundaries that they or others have set for them. Because they have let other people or the past dictate who they are, their identities are trapped in a tight box of beliefs about what is possible for them.

Thus, their experience in life and their everyday thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are restricted. They generally feel tethered to where they are, bound by experiences they never got over, ruled by the results of yesterday, feared to disappoint their masters—masters that may well exist only in their minds. They often feel that the world has cornered them into a certain way of being and won’t let them escape, lashing them to false or unfair labels, expectations, and assumptions.

Moriah, a one-time client of mine, felt that way—trapped by a desire to gain the approval and love of others. When I started coaching her, she was always complaining, “No one understands me or gives me a chance—I’m just a prisoner of what everyone else wants and thinks of me.”

Despite this complaint, she never stuck her neck out and expressed who she was or what she herself wanted in life. She had gone to a school her parents wanted her to attend, she took a job her friends thought would be good for her, and she moved to a city her boyfriend always wanted to live in (which she secretly hated).

She moved, spoke, and acted like she thought others wanted her to, and she never ventured far from her routines because she feared failing and being judged by others. Her entire existence was a projection of others’ wishes, and she was never strong enough to look in the mirror and ask what she really wanted.

This is the imprisoned, obedient life. At some point, we all have felt its stultifying repression. We felt locked in, controlled, restless to get out. Not all of us have broken free, and here’s the really sobering part: some never will.

You cannot control everything in life. But you can control you.

There are only two ways out of the cage. The first happens when, by chance or fate, life flips it upside down, smashing our cozy reality and breaking open the cage for good. The second way out happens when we do the one thing that has ever helped anyone design a different destiny: consciously choose a new self-image and life, and fight to forge it into existence by consistently aligning our thoughts and behaviors to make it so.

THE COMFORTABLE LIFE

For many of us, life is not as dire as the caged life. Through work, dedication, and fortunate circumstances, many of us live what I think of as the comfortable life. We’ve followed similar paths to independence, opportunity, and freedom.

We have houses, spouses, cars, and kids. We feel engaged and thankful for our lives. We know we’ve made some trade-offs—a little less adventure here, a few more hours at the office there—but we knew what we were getting ourselves into. We saw our friends and peers take a similar journey, and they seemed happy.

And then one day, someone asks about your life, and you’re surprised to hear yourself reply, “Oh, things are… you know… fine.”

Trouble begins to brew in the back of your mind: Is this what I really wanted? Is this all there is? Have I made too many trade-offs? Am I living my life or someone else’s? Aren’t I more creative and sexy and spontaneous and ambitious and fun than this?

Often, your brain responds to this kind of thinking with the sharp tool of guilt: You don’t know how good you’ve got it. You should feel so much more grateful. Can’t you just be satisfied with what you have?
Though more of a rut than a cage, we start to feel trapped. Make no mistake: the trappings are much, much more comfortable, and the door to possibility is much bigger and more accessible—a free-swinging gateway to more, more, more. But even in the comfort comes a restless stirring.

THE CHARGED LIFE

The one living a caged life asks, Will I survive? So the focus is always on whether the person will be safe or be hurt. The one living a comfortable life asks, Will I be accepted and succeed? So he or she focuses on belonging and satiation.

The person living a Charged Life wonders, Am I living my truth and actualizing my potential? Am I living an inspired life and inspiring others?

The boredom, or aimlessness, that the comfortable self feels isn’t in the emotional repertoire of someone with a Charged Life, because of the joy and purpose the charged self feels in engaging in new and challenging activities. While the comfortable self feels that life is mysterious, the charged self finds life magical and meaningful. The comfortable self sees the world as familiar and therefore stale; the charged self sees the same world filled with exciting and unlimited possibilities for growth and progress.

We who live fully charged don’t feel disengaged or restless because of the trappings of our lives. We are not passengers on the collective march of progress—we’re creating our own world and our own definitions of what it means to live and progress. We are fully living and experiencing the lives we want, not coveting or chasing others’ lives.

To live a Charged Life, you’ll consistently strive toward ten different drives. Sometimes you’ll focus on one, other times, another. In this summary, you’ll read about activating two of these drives.

THE BASELINE DRIVE OF CONTROL

It turns out that the grandest needle mover in your depth of control over your life is your outlook, the quality of the meaning you attach to the events in your life and your future.

If this is true, it places you in a critical role in life—to serve as guardian to and director of your outlook toward yourself, others, and the world. This is a tougher task than you might imagine, as what you see in the world on a regular basis is what you tend to expect, and what most people are seeing isn’t all that positive.

If you’re going to maintain a sane and positive perspective about the world, it’s important to better guard the information you consume. In all cases, it wouldn’t hurt you to dramatically decrease your time spent watching television, listening to trash talk radio, surfing the net, or reading celebrity gossip magazines.

All that information you are consuming consciously and unconsciously is creating undue stress and unease in your life, and to a degree you probably don’t understand. Despite the popular metaphor, your brain is not a computer. Computers don’t have emotions; you do.

The same applies to the energy and esteem vampires in your life. You know—those who are constantly berating you with judgment and criticism, making you feel terrible about yourself. Decreasing your...
exposure to toxic people is just as important as decreasing your exposure to negative media.

Instead, perhaps it’s time to focus on consuming purposefully chosen educational and empowering books and programs, or meeting up with friends who also boost your view of life, or working through and tackling new challenges that remind you how strong and in charge you really are.

One of the most defining choices you can make in your entire life is deciding to control the quality of person you will be on an everyday basis. What will you stand for? What kind of positive values, standards, and beliefs will you demonstrate each day? How much honesty, integrity, fairness, and kindness will you insist upon when meeting the world? This is the stuff of character.

Beginning today, set an intention and a relentless focus on living your life as the greatest person you can be, in all situations. Demand that you demonstrate a strength of character in such a way that you find pride in who you are, and that others see you as a role model.

You cannot control everything in life. But you—who you are being, how you are treating others, what purpose is driving you.

THE FORWARD DRIVE OF CONTRIBUTION

When we feel as though we’re contributing to the world, we gain a profound sense of meaning and purpose. In fact, contribution itself is the source of meaning and purpose in our lives. If we’ve contributed something significant to the world, we feel that our time here was meaningful, that it mattered.

And if we know what we are contributing now and planning to contribute in the future, then we feel we are living a life of purpose. Sadly, many people are truly unaware of how much they contribute.

Strip away our sense of contribution from us, though, and you strip away our meaning and purpose. That’s why, when we don’t feel that we’re contributing, we feel so lost and unfulfilled. We sense that nothing really matters or, worse, that we don’t matter. This is what happens when we don’t feel that we’re contributing. When that feeling is a reality and we really aren’t contributing, then we lose an important sense of pride that comes with knowing we’ve given something significant. We also lose our connection with others, because they don’t feel we’re playing our part, adding value, or being helpful. So give of yourself with full expression and effort in your everyday life, though that giving is not necessarily tied to giving to any cause, group, or individual at all.

Giving Of

By giving the best of ourselves to everything we do, we exert our highest and strongest selves, and doing that alone can make us feel that we are contributing. Here’s what I mean. If I’m a tennis player and exert my full effort in a match, enlisting all my strengths, talents, and abilities, I will likely feel I am giving of myself. Thus, I feel that I am activating my drive for contribution.

It doesn’t even require that I feel I am contributing to the game of tennis, to the fans, or even to the moment. Just giving of myself can activate my sense of personal contribution.

This sounds a little odd—almost as if I’m taking a selfish perspective on contribution. But after coaching and training and getting the live feedback of tens of thousands of people, I’ve come to realize that contributing to the world doesn’t always have to be a social affair.

I bring this to light because too many people think of contributing as simply giving to something specific, so they never feel that they contribute to the world except when a Girl Scout shows up at the door hawking cookies. Ours is a society that has falsely assumed that contribution must mean giving to some specific cause rather than simply giving of our best selves. Thus, too many people don’t recognize the fact that simply being who they are is contributing significantly to the world.

Steve Jobs didn’t need to give to anything in particular to contribute immensely to the world. Jobs reportedly didn’t do things with an eye toward giving to the tech industry, the computer market, or perhaps even to consumers (though a relentless focus on the customer experience made him famous).
Unlike many billionaires, he didn’t form a public nonprofit (though his wife did and does) or have an interest in publicly showing off what he gave to. You don’t know Steve Jobs for what he gave to charities or certain causes or audiences. 
You know him for having been who he was fully: a creative guy who wanted to design and build better software, computers, stores, and mobile devices. He affected the world by doing what he did with excellence. For that, he contributed, he mattered, and he will be missed.
You have an extraordinary ability to contribute to the world by bringing the best in you to bear in any endeavor. Give of yourself fully to your creative endeavors. Recognize that as a contribution, and you just might find yourself feeling that you are living a more meaningful and purposeful life.

### Giving To

Another kind of giving is the variety of giving to others and broader causes outside ourselves with the direct intention of making an impact. You can give your time, energy, effort, resources, skills, connections, attention, and love to your team, your company, your family, your favorite nonprofit.
While giving of is really about mobilizing our internal resources for our own sakes, which often ultimately leads to an impact in the world, giving to is all about mobilizing our resources with the specific intent to contribute to something directly and specifically. This is the type of giving that most of the world recognizes and rewards, and for good reason. Giving to endeavors that you find deeply meaningful, with an intent to make an impact, is a direct path to meaning and happiness. But note the operative phrase: endeavors that you find deeply meaningful.
Here is where this type of giving often goes awry. People find themselves volunteering for projects or causes at random without the criterion of “deeply meaningful,” and they end up deeply disappointed in the experience.
Choosing the right giving activity matters just as much as choosing the right cause. Never forget that.
The question must be this: Where can we make our unique contribution to serve, and where can we do it in a way that keeps us engaged, fulfilled, and most likely to continue serving and making an impact?

### Having Incredible Influence

I remember meeting a very happy ninety-year-old volunteer at a nonprofit event for youth. After seeing this woman work joyously for nearly two hours with a group of elementary-school kids, I approached her and struck up a conversation about life. Something about her exuded a level of character that was palpable. At one point I said, “How do you have so much energy, and how do you have such incredible influence with those kids?” Her reply, which I quickly scribbled on a napkin afterward, changed me forever.

“Brendon,” she said, “all the energy and influence we ever want in life is controlled by one thing: whether or not we are purposefully acting as our highest selves. From that place of character flows grace and love, and in that place we find happiness and meaning.”
About the Author

Brendon Burchard has authored two best-selling books. He regularly appears in media outlets such as Anderson Cooper, ABC World News, NPR stations, Oprah and Friends, and has shared the stage with notables such as the Dalai Lama, Stephen Covey, Deepak Chopra, David Bach, Tony Robbins, Wayne Dyer, John Gray, Brian Tracy, Jack Canfield and more.

Brendon is living a charged life, as evidenced through his books, videos, newsletters, products and appearances, which now inspire nearly 2 million people a month worldwide.

Action Steps

Get more out of this SUCCESS Book Summary by applying what you’ve learned. Here are a few questions and thoughts to get you started.

1. Do you feel caged? What can you do to change that feeling?
2. Do you feel too comfortable or complacent? What can you do to live a more charged life?
3. What external information sources do you need to reduce or eliminate from your life?
4. Are there any toxic people in your life? If so, what can you do to minimize your exposure to them?
5. Are there any circumstances that you are allowing to control you? What can you do to gain control of that circumstance or your response to it?
6. List a few ways you contribute to the world around you.
7. In what ways are you giving of yourself by being fully you?

Recommended Reading

If you enjoyed the summary of The Charge, you may also want to read:

Your Best Life Now by Joel Osteen
The Truth About You by Marcus Buckingham
The Richest Man in Babylon by George S. Clason