

# The Three Laws of Performance

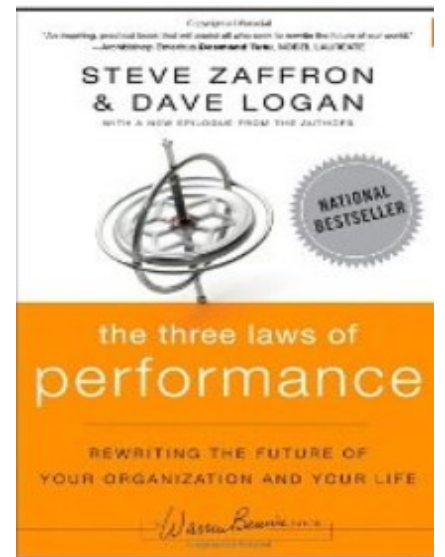
*“The three laws provide concise, elegant access to elevating performance far above what most of us think is possible”*  
—Warren Bennis

Joann Simon for JSGS 808 Dr. Keith Walker

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## The Three Laws— Summary

How did corporations manage to turn their situations from that of struggle to breakthrough performance, even when all odds were stacked against them? People within the organizations applied the Three Laws of Performance to re-write their own future, and that of their organizations. By understanding that our *way of being* creates the context for our past challenges and threatens to project forward to our future, Zaffron and Logan introduce three laws and three leadership corollaries to unlock previously-hidden potential. Through the understanding that our actions are correlate to how things *occur* to us, the authors provide the steps to change how our world occurs, and through language, create our *invented* future. Individuals transforming their *way of being*, discover the ability to re-write their future and that of their organizations. Leaving the past in the past, becoming complete, and living our authentic life is the invitation that is set out with all the tools to guide the reader to new possibilities and breakthrough performance.



Steve Zaffron and Dave Logan. **The Three Laws of Performance.** (2009). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers

## About the Authors

“Steve Zaffron is the CEO of the Vanto Group, a consulting firm that designs and implements large –scale initiatives to elevate organizational performance. Zaffron has directed major corporate initiatives with more than three hundred organizations in twenty countries.”

“Dave Logan is on the faculty at the Marshall School of Business at the University of Southern California and is a former associate dean. He is also senior partner of CultureSync, a management consulting firm. Logan has written three books, including *Tribal Leadership*.”

p. 221



Steve Zaffron



Dave Logan

## The Power of Rewriting the Future



We have already defined for ourselves a default future whether we can picture it or not. We live our way into this default future as though it were pre-ordained. No matter how hard we try, our persistent problems continue to reappear, and this pattern continues through our lives and permeates organizations. It's the reason that interventions, motivation, change theories don't work. Most change efforts fail because the more things change, the more they stay the same at a personal level, and within our organizations.

What is required for people, and organizations is rewriting what we know will happen. We begin to create our invented future after we create an open space of nothing. Only then, are we truly free to declare our invented future. Once we re-write our future, our actions naturally shift to align. Rewrite the future, and old problems disappear. Apply the laws and you will have the power to re-write your future.

From



To



## Part I : The Three Laws in Action

### First Law of Performance

*How people perform correlates to how situations occur to them*

**“A law isn’t a rule, tip, or step; it distinguishes the moving parts at play behind an observable phenomenon. A law is invariable. Whether you believe in gravity or not doesn’t lessen its effect on you”**

*p. xxxiii*



### Chapter One: Transforming an Impossible Situation

The turnaround stories of three companies illustrate the power of The Three Laws when applied to individuals, who, through their individual transformation, collectively define a new future for their organizations.

The first law answers the question, “Why do people do what they do?” When we do something, we assume that our perception of the situation is the same for others. But, this first law distinguishes between what happens, and the story we tell about what happened. How a situation occurs for us is more than our perception or experience. It is the culmination of our views of the past, which explains for us why things are the way they are, as well as the future. Our actions are based on how the world occurs to us, and not the way it actually is.

Unless we can alter how situations occur for us, we can never break out of our default future. Until the occurring shifts, our actions align with this default future. The first law says there are two elements: how a situation occurs, and performance. These two are **always** aligned.

## Second Law of Performance

*How a situation occurs arises in language*



If we can shift how situations occur, new actions will follow. The key is to shift your actions, and allow others to shift theirs to take performance to a new level. The story of the Polus Group, is about a company that faced a performance challenge and how it was turned around. When the founder suffered an incapacitating stroke, the void of leadership left the leaders convinced they had lost their future.

Discovering the power of language begins with recognizing that whenever we say something, other communication is carried along. This is the unsaid but communicated. At Polus, the language, and unsaid messages were holding people back. Bound to their past and their perceived lost future, they had no space or the freedom to create anything new. What happened can be compared to the language equivalent of clearing clutter out of a closet.

Exploring the unspoken, we discover our rackets. A racket has four elements:

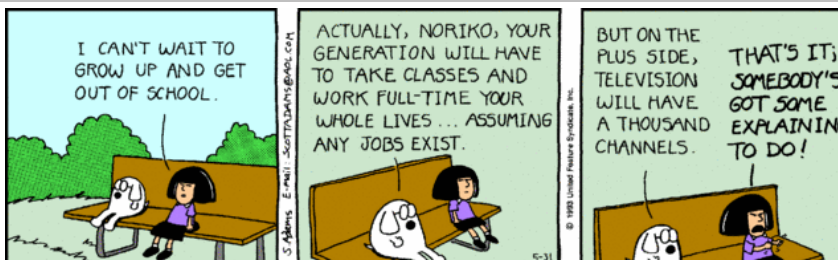
1. A persistent complaint
2. A pattern of behaviour that aligns with the complaint
3. The payoff for continuing the complaint
4. The cost of the behaviour

Once we identify our rackets, we gain power as we discover that how situations occur for us hold us back. Language defines how situations occur for us. Consider that our persistent complaints don't reside in reality but in the unsaid. This is the *reality illusion*. Once we see these situations as a result of language, they become something we can impact.

### Chapter 3: Rewriting a Future That's Already Written

## Third Law of Performance

*Future-based language transforms how situations occur to people*





Future-based language transforms how situations occur to people by rewriting the future. Future-based language replaces the default future to declare our invented future.

The conditions required for future-based language:

A future cannot be created on top of one that is already coming toward you. Before anything can be created, there must be a space of nothingness. To “empty this canvas”, we move through three dimensions

- Seeing that what binds us isn't the facts, it's the descriptive language of a story
- Articulating the default future and asking if it is what we really want
- Completing issues from the past

### **Completion; Generative Language That Creates Space**

This process goes beyond healing or getting closure. If we truly complete an incident, it no longer resides in our future. It no longer drives our actions and we are free of it forever.

#### **The conversation of completion:**

- Start a conversation that identifies a benefit for the relationship
- Address what happened, how you acted, and take responsibility
- Take the necessary action such as an apology, or relinquishing the racket

*“A leader is most effective when people barely know he exists.*

*When his work is done, his aim fulfilled, his troops will feel they did it themselves.”*

*—Lao Tzu p. 93*

Leadership that rises out of the three laws has the power to rewrite the future of a group or organization. Each of the three laws has a message for leaders, corollaries that guide what leaders do, and shapes who they are

### **Leadership Corollary 1**

*Leaders have a say, and give others a say, in how situations occur*



While leaders can't control how situations occur for others, they do have a say. Leaders can interact with others so that situations occur more empowering to them. Leaders create the space for dialogue, and processes that empower people to feel that they are co-authors of the future, and not just recipients of a future created by others.

## Part II

### Rewriting the Future of Leadership

#### Leadership Corollary 2

*Leaders master the conversational environment*

To achieve breakthrough performance, there are two elements that need to exist.

- Ongoing and organization-wide commitment to resolving all incompletions to move past issues from the future to create the blank space for the new future
- Foster integrity by expecting people to be truthful, do their work very well, and as others expect them to do their work

*Integrity is not a moral or ethical issue, it's about workability. Integrity is about being whole and complete, and honoring one's word.*



#### Leadership Corollary 3

*Leaders listen for the future of their organization*

Leaders don't write the future by themselves. They create space and provide listening for the future. Rewriting the future is achieved by empowering people as co-authors.



### Chapter 5: The Self-Led Organization

There is a looming crisis in organizations stemming from many external pressures. Current questions that face us are:

1. What would an evolution of organizations look like?
2. What could organizations look like in the late 21st century?
3. How can we build them to release us from the crisis we are facing?

From the perspective of the Three Laws, the entire human experience arises in language. We use language in a way that results in a lack of integrity and a loss of power. We don't say what we think, and we don't do what we say. However, honoring our word is the route to creating wholeness and path to earn the trust of others. This allows us to step forward and become a person who is self-led. The self-led organization arises from self-led people who participate in networking conversations.

*“Everyone  
thinks of  
changing the  
world, but no  
one thinks of  
changing  
himself.  
— Leo Tolstoy  
p. 143*

The future of the organization can be re-written by altering the network of conversations within. This flow can be accomplished by implementing the following:

**Leaders Step forward;** individuals stand up for the possibilities they see for the organization

**Manage the Environment of the Network of Conversations;** conversations include integrity and dialogue about future possibilities

**Create Ongoing Conversations with Stakeholders;** dialogue that includes individuals outside of, and around the organization

**Listen for a Future That Encompasses the Self;** people let go of the default future and shift from struggle to creativity

**Don't Lose Your Self;** the Self of the organization can withstand a change in leadership

**Self-Led Management;** leaders adopt a Hippocratic oath commitment to the health and vitality of the organization

## Part III Mastering the Game of Performance

### Chapter 6: Who or What is Leading Your Life?

Now we move to the deep work to understand what it takes to be leaders in our lives, in our relationships, our work, and our community.

When we take on the challenge of self-invention, we become what we are committed to, what we stand for, and what our vision is.

Who are You, Really? Critical moments in our lives can have the power to define who we are, in that moment, and for the rest of our lives. Those pivotal moments create in us a sense that **something is wrong with me**, and this decision we make about ourselves forms our persona. The impact of these decisions can create for us a life sentence of being bound by that critical moment to a life of limits and inauthenticity.

We possess the power to transform this personal by confronting this life sentence and through future-based move away from being a victim to being the author of our future.

We access this future by intentionally creating a crisis in which we confront we focus on areas where we have resigned ourselves to a lack of joy and freedom. The crisis is fully created when we give up the resignation for fulfillment and power. Resolving the crisis comes when we are willing to give up some of the things that kept us trapped like risk-avoidance and safety.

*“When we alter how we occur to ourselves, everything around us shifts. Our business associates, our families, even life, shows up in a new way. With that new foundation, anything is possible — even a new future.”  
p. 168*

## Chapter 7: The Path to Mastery

Grand masters exude power, freedom, and knowledge in their field, and while we sometimes think that masters possess some innate gifts. However, masters think *from* the principles of their field, rather than *about* the principles of their field.

There is a path to mastery, but no steps:

### Milestone 1: Seeing Your “Terministic Screen” in Action

Instead of using our current understandings to see and understand something new, we reject the need to make new things fit into our current lens and we see the situation only on its own terms

### Milestone 2: Building a New Terministic Screen

This “*aha*” moment happens when we see something world new through the lens of a new idea

### Milestone 3: You’ll See New Opportunities for Elevated Performance Everywhere

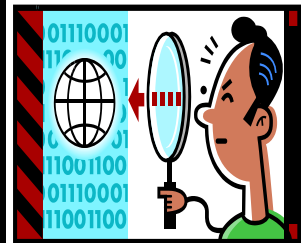
As though we are looking through new contact lenses, from the first law, we begin to see how situations occur to people, and in doing so, we understand why they act the way they act

Where we were trapped by confusion, we find ourselves standing for the future we want.

The Three Laws now become a part of our terministic screen.

### Milestone 4: Teaching Others

Our performance is elevated when we move from our own personal interest to the interests of others and our organization



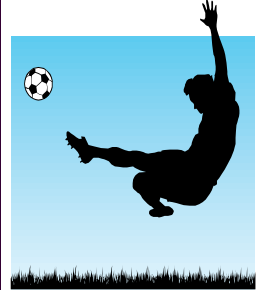
### Moving From Within the Three Laws

- When how a situation occurs and performance are correlated, we are inside the First Law
- When we can see language at work and how situations occur in language, we are inside the Second Law
- When we give up our rackets, get complete, and our way of being transforms, we are inside the Third Law

*“If things were simple, word would have gotten around.”*

*Jacques Derrida p. 169*

## Chapter 8: Breaking the Performance Barrier



### Commitment 1: Get Out of the Stands

Move from judgment on the sidelines to accountability by being in the game

### Commitment 2: Create a New Game

We use future-based language to declare what is important

### Commitment 3: Share Your Insights

Sharing invites others to take on performance challenges with you

### Commitment 5: Find the Right Coaching

Seek our opportunities for networking with others who are playing the performance game

### Commitment 6: Start Filing Your Past in Your Past

Futures are designed, not figured out

To distinguish past from future, look ahead to nothingness and declare what you wish to be and what you are committed to

### Commitment 7: Play the Game as If Your Life Depended on It

Turn away for your life sentence and create your powerful future

Remove judgments and resistance

There are no obstacles, just conditions of the game

### A few words of review

I have read many books on leadership through the lens of improvement, and change theory. However, this book does away with those ideas and replaces them by challenging the very core of who we *think* we are, and how that identity impacts our relationship with our self and others. The potential power of this book is only possible if you are up to the game of asking those deeply-rooted questions and issues. The authors present the possibility of creating a new way of being, one that is aligned with our greatest possible potential, not the potential we always thought we had.

I have experienced the power of the Three Laws of Performance. While I have not reached the level of mastery, having a glimpse of what is possible is incredibly inspiring, and hope-filling. The Three Laws offer no judgment of failure for those of us who continue to work our way through the laws, but instead, the certain knowledge that an *invented* future can be ours.

This book is not an academic study, although the authors draw on research. The authors present the laws with a certainty that is hard to deny when you read example after example of individuals and organizations who have accessed the power of the Three Laws. The Three Laws has the capacity to take you from wherever you are, and elevate you to a performance level never-before imagined.

### Some Questions to Consider

1. Become aware of how your own performance correlates to how situations occur to you. What if you could do something about how situations occur, to you, and others around you? What impact could this have on performance?
2. Think about your rackets. Do your rackets hold you in place? Or doing the same thing over and over again holding you in place?
3. As you think about your performance challenges, look to see what incompletions you have. How do your incompletions hinder you from creating new possibilities?