

Four seconds to change your world

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In Rihanna's recent song with Kanye West and Paul McCartney, the pop princess declares she is "four, five seconds from wildin'" (reliably translated by Urban Dictionary as "to go crazy").

One can only hope she solicits the advice of a certain **Peter Bregman**, who contends that four seconds is all you need to regain self-control, establish direction in your life and achieve your goals.

The New York-based motivational speaker has authored an optimistic new book entitled *4 Seconds: All the Time You Need to Stop Counter-Productive Habits and Get the Results You Want*.

Running to 272 pages, the book introduces a "Four Second Rule" (Bregman's capitalisation) which stipulates: "The secret to making good decisions that can simplify your life is always to take a single breath - lasting four life-s seconds - before acting."

About to hit send on an angry email to your boss? Take a four second breath and reconsider your options. Tempted to take a swing at a television producer because there's no steak at your hotel? That's right - four seconds of silence and you might avoid a fateful error.

In addition to the four-second rule - essentially a variation on the old adage of "think before you speak" - Bregman advocates a variety of zen techniques such as stopping thought, remaining silent and meditating. The aim is to reset your thought pattern and change your perspective on whatever situation or challenge is causing stress or concern.

The book also encourages readers to identify five priorities for the year, on which they should spend 95 per cent of their time. To-do lists should contain one box for each of the five areas, plus a sixth box - "like sugar" - for the other 5 per cent. It's a method readers might recognise from Bregman's previous book, *18 Minutes*, or his blog posts at the *Harvard Business Review*.

According to reviews by other motivational speakers, *4 Seconds* is no less than "priceless" and "life changing".

Organisational psychologist Connie Henson, who runs leadership development organisation Learning Quest, said the "four second rule" was broadly speaking a sound idea that could reset your thinking in moments of stress.

"There's that part of our brain that wants to quickly speak when in reality, we need...a few seconds to let our best thoughts come forward as opposed to our first thought," she said. "It's sometimes harder to do that than it sounds."

But Ms Henson warned the deep-breath strategy does not work for everyone.

"For many, many people it is helpful, but...there's a percentage that will actually increase their anxiety and it's actually not the most helpful thing for them to do," she said.

Stretching, standing up and going for a short walk could all help in times of confrontation and stress, Ms Henson suggested. "Labelling your feelings" - by talking to someone or simply writing them down (without sending them to your boss) - was also an effective tool, she said.

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life/four-seconds-to-change-your-world-20150324-1m6f34.html>