

WALL STREET JOURNAL BESTSELLER



NON OBVIOUS

**HOW TO SEE WHAT OTHERS MISS
AND PREDICT THE FUTURE**

MEGA TRENDS

ROHIT BHARGAVA

**FOUNDER + CHIEF TREND CURATOR,
NON-OBVIOUS COMPANY**

NON
OBVIOUS



Non-Obvious is a sharp, articulate, and immediately useful book about one of my favorite topics: the future. With actionable advice and entertaining stories, Rohit offers an essential guidebook to using the power of curation to understand and prepare for the future of business.

—**DANIEL H. PINK**, best-selling author of *To Sell Is Human* and *When*

Shatter your magic crystal ball and toss out the tea leaves. In this book, Rohit shows us how and where to find the future trends that will shape your business, your brand, and even your own decision-making.

—**SALLY HOGSHEAD**, best-selling author of *How the World Sees You*

There are very few books I read hoping that no one else around me will. They're the books that are so insightful, so thought provoking, and so illuminating that they provide a powerful competitive advantage. *Non-Obvious* is one of those. Pass on it at your own peril.

—**SHIV SINGH**, former senior vice president/global brand, VISA; digital head PepsiCo; co-author of *Savvy: Navigating Fake Companies, Fake Leaders, and Fake News*

This is one of those rare books that deliver insights that are useful and help illuminate where business is going. It's a great read.

—**CHARLES DUHIGG**, best-selling author of *The Power of Habit*

The best books approach their topic with a spirit of generosity. Rohit's new book offers insight into the business and cultural trends that matter, why they do, and what actions they might inspire. But more than that, it generously teaches how to develop your own process for evaluating the trends that matter and those that don't. Also, it's well-written, which makes it a joy and not a chore to read!

—**ANN HANDLEY**, chief content officer, Marketing Profs

PRAISE FOR *NON-OBVIOUS*

It doesn't take a crystal ball to predict that digital is the future. Rather than telling you what you already know, Rohit sets his sights on something much more important: helping you adopt a more curious and observant mindset to understand the world around you. If you believe in a lifetime of learning, read this book!

— JONATHAN BECHER, president, San Jose Sharks; former chief marketing officer, SAP

A lot of books promise to help you see things differently, but Rohit's book actually delivers. His insightful blend of visual thinking and business strategy shows you how to find meaningful patterns that others miss. A real mind-opener.

— SUNNI BROWN, author of *Gamestorming*

Non-Obvious is simple, elegant, and powerful: one of those intensely engaging books that I couldn't put down. Every year, I use the ideas in this book to help my team see new opportunities and out-think our competition.

— HOPE FRANK, chief marketing and digital officer + futurist

Rohit provides a gold mine of ideas and trends that will shape the future of marketing and product development. Read this book to get in front of the herd.

— GUY KAWASAKI, chief evangelist, Canva; author of *The Art of the Start, 2.0*

Lots of books tell you to "think different," but *Non-Obvious* is one of the few books that actually teaches you how to do it. Whether you are trying to persuade clients, motivate a team, or just impress a demanding boss, *Non-Obvious* can help you succeed. I've already purchased copies for my entire team.

— JOHN GERZEMA, best-selling author of *The Athena Doctrine*

Our industry is all about the future: the future of kids, the future of schools, the future of education. In the admissions office, the ability to recognize and leverage that future is an indispensable skill. In *Non-Obvious*, Rohit provides the tools we require to perform those functions with precision and get better at predicting what will be important tomorrow, based on improving our observations of today.

—**HEATHER HOERLE**, executive director, Enrollment Management Association

The insights in Rohit's *Non-Obvious* are an invaluable guide to understanding our customer's customer. His predictions are useful and highly anticipated within our group across the globe every year. As a B2B marketer and leader, this is one of my rare must-read recommendations for my entire team.

—**NAVEEN RAJDEV**, former chief marketing officer, Wipro

Non-Obvious is a powerhouse “must read” for corporate executives, marketers, and product and service developers. Rohit Bhargava provides valuable, entertaining, and easily understood sideways insights into critical trends shaping the near future. He lifts the lid on the myths surrounding the dark arts of trend prediction and offers practical guidance on how to spot, curate, and capitalize on Non-Obvious trends.

—**ROHIT TALWAR**, global futurist and CEO, Fast Future Research

Seeing things that others don't is perhaps the highest form of creativity that exists. Unlock the *Non-Obvious* approach, and you can write your ticket to success in any field.

—**JOHN JANTSCH**, author of *Duct Tape Marketing* and *Duct Tape Selling*

Very few people understand the world of digital business better than Rohit, and I have introduced my clients to his ideas for years. His new book is a must-read resource for learning to see patterns, anticipate global trends, and think like a futurist every day!

— GERD LEONHARD, author and keynote speaker

I actually wish some of Rohit's predictions wouldn't come true ("Selfie Confidence"? Nooo!) . . . but usually they do. He's the best at this, and this book shows you why.

— SCOTT STRATTEN, four-time best-selling author,
including the 2014 Sales Book of the Year, *UnSelling*

Artfully lacing stories together to pull out simple yet powerful trends, Rohit offers a blueprint for making trend identification a key component of your business strategy. The format of his book makes it easy for the novice to adopt these principles and for the expert to glean pearls of wisdom. While the title is *Non-Obvious*, your next step should be obvious: Read this book today!

— JOEY COLEMAN, chief experience composer,
Design Symphony; author of *Never Lose a Customer Again*



ALSO BY THE AUTHOR

*Personality Not Included: Why Companies Lose Their
Authenticity and How Great Brands Get It Back*

*Likeonomics: The Unexpected Truth Behind Earning Trust,
Influencing Behavior, and Inspiring Action*

*ePatient: 15 Surprising Trends Changing Health Care
(with co-author Fard Johnmar)*

*Always Eat Left-Handed: 15 Surprising Secrets for Killing
It at Work and in Real Life*

*The Non-Obvious Guide to Marketing & Branding
(Without a Big Budget)*

*The Non-Obvious Guide to Working Remotely
(Without Getting Distracted, Lonely or Bored)*

*Beyond Diversity: 12 Non-Obvious Ways To Build a More
Inclusive World (with co-author Jennifer Brown)*



ABOUT THE NON-OBVIOUS TREND SERIES

For the past 10 years, the Non-Obvious Trend Report has been one of the most widely read collections of future insights in the world, reaching well over 1 million readers. It's used annually by hundreds of global brand leaders.

This 10th Anniversary Edition features 10 new megatrends curated from thousands of stories, dozens of interviews and over 100 past trend predictions.

WINNER OF 20 INTERNATIONAL BOOK AWARDS, INCLUDING:

WINNER: Eric Hoffer Book Award (Business Book of the Year)

FINALIST: AMA-Leonard Berry Prize (American Marketing Association)

WINNER: Axiom Award (Gold Medal, Business Theory)

WINNER: Gold Stevie® – Book of the Year Award

FINALIST: The Montaigne Medal (Most Thought-Provoking Book)

WINNER: Soundview Best Business Book Award

WINNER: National Indie Excellence Award – Best Business Book

FINALIST: The Marshall McLuhan Award (Media Ecology Association)

OFFICIAL SELECTION: Gary's Book Club
(at the Consumer Electronics Show)

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*To my parents— for always giving me
a chance to see the world in my own way . . .
even if it wasn't always non-obvious.*

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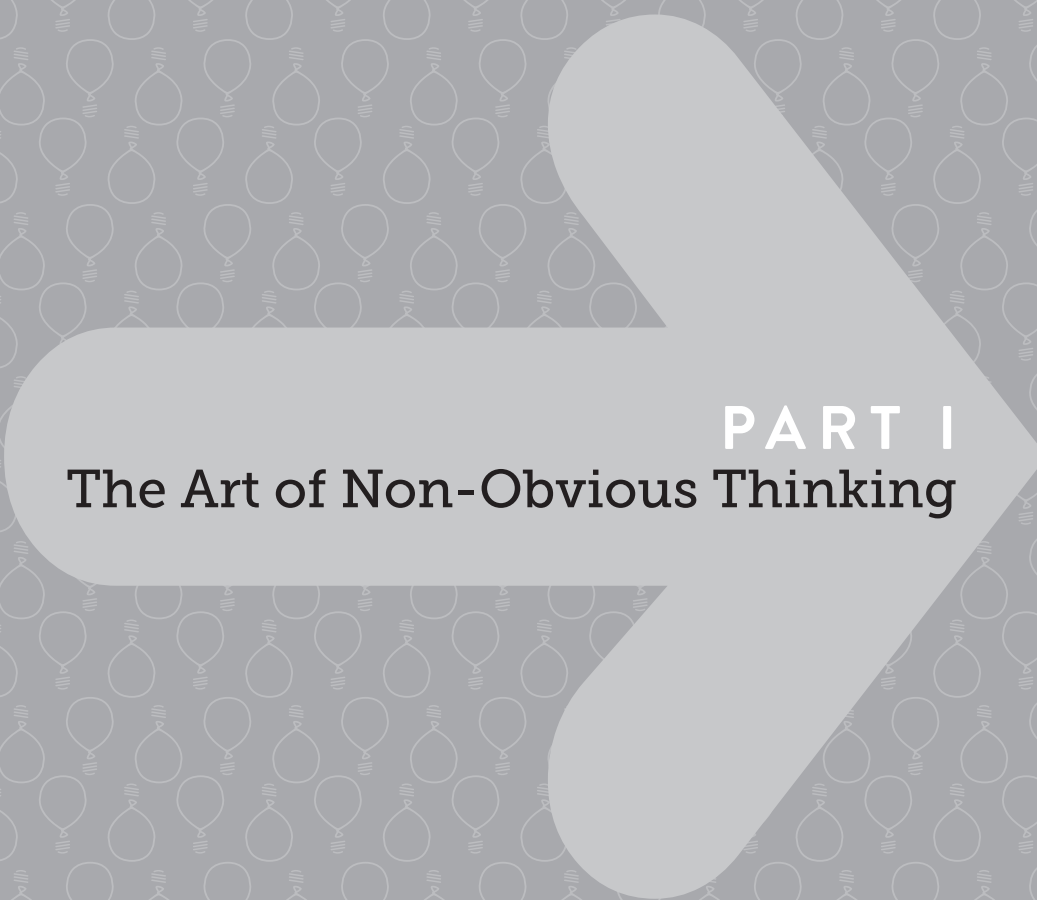
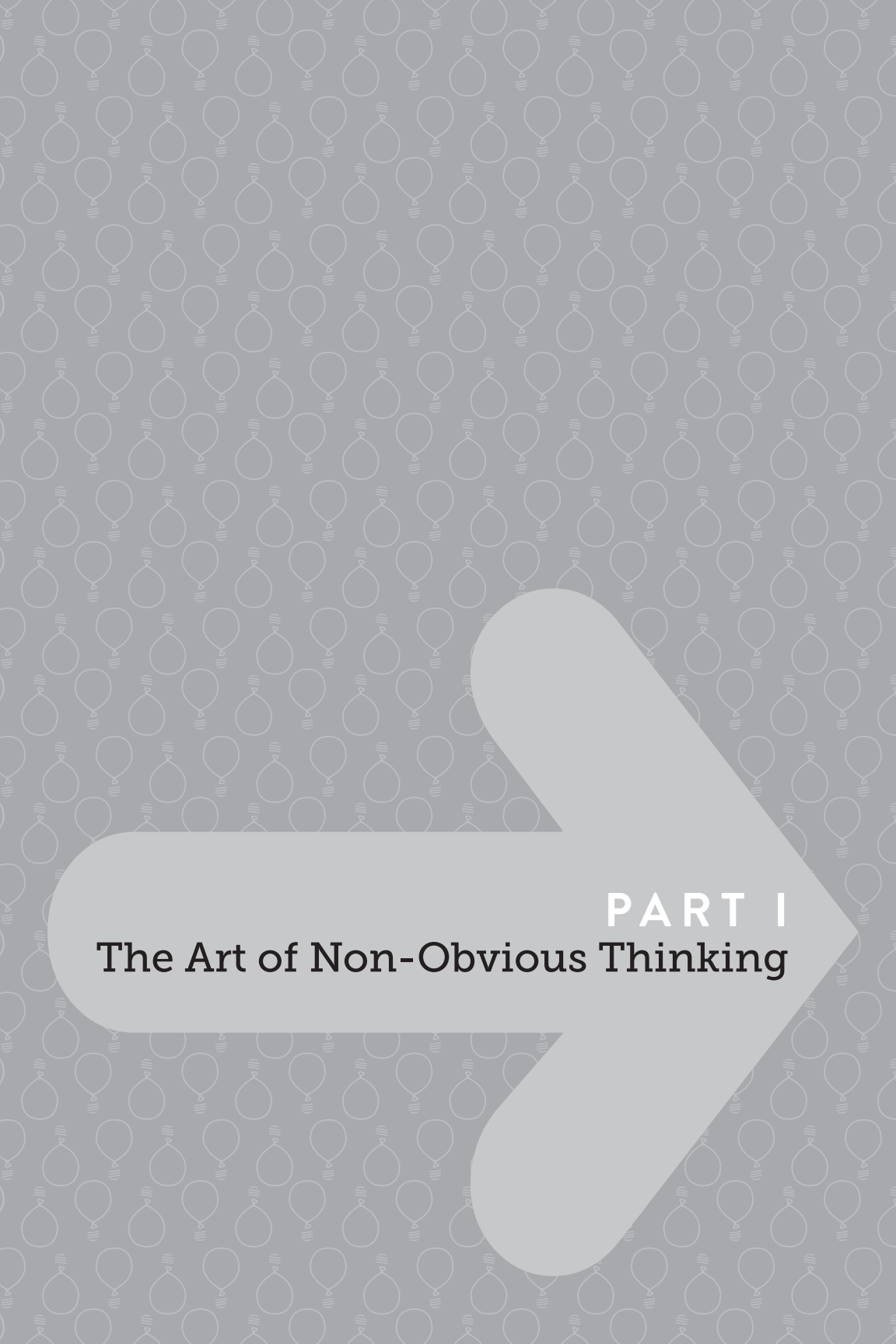
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PART I

The Art of Non-Obvious Thinking

INTRODUCTION

“I am not a speed reader. I am a speed understander.”

— ISAAC ASIMOV, author, historian, and biochemist

THE YEAR IS 1962, and a man named Robert Townsend has just fired his entire advertising department.

The company he recently took over hasn't been profitable in more than a decade and if he expects to reverse its fortune, he needs a big idea — but he doesn't have a big budget. In desperation, he sends a short brief to a handful of creative directors from the hottest ad agencies in New York, asking a single impossible question: “How do we get five million dollars of advertising for one million dollars?”

One agency responds with an unusual proposition. Bill Bernbach, founder of renowned ad giant Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB), asks for ninety days to study the business and agrees to take the job on one condition: Townsend must promise to run any advertising idea proposed by DDB exactly as written without question.

He agrees.

DDB starts by commissioning a series of focus groups, but the results are disheartening. The brand is a distant second place behind the dominant industry leader and there isn't much hope of closing the gap. Tasked with finding some insight they might use to build a campaign, an unknown copywriter named Paula Green has an unusual idea.

As a rare female copywriter during the notoriously male-dominated golden era of advertising, Green is already accustomed to bringing a different perspective to her work. Inspired by something she hears employees say during the focus groups, she writes a brutally honest new campaign tagline: *"Avis — We're only No. 2. We try harder."*

Townsend is skeptical at first.

Why would any brand spend money to advertise being second best — especially one struggling as badly as his? But true to his word, he reluctantly approves the campaign as written.

The ads are an instant hit. Less than 12 months after the campaign starts, Avis goes from losing \$3.2 million annually to earning \$1.2 million. Within a matter of years, some predict the campaign will soon need an update because Avis will no longer be number two. The tagline becomes a rallying cry for employees as well, serving as a manifesto they would use continually for the next fifty years. Today it is widely regarded as one of the best advertising campaigns ever.

Why did it become so iconic?

The question has inspired decades of debate. Some suggest it was the result of a unique trusted relationship between the brand and its agency. Others believe it was the humility in the tagline that helped humanize Avis and inspired their employees to indeed try harder in every customer interaction. Leadership experts instead credit Townsend's renowned people-first management style.

Green herself suggested the campaign worked because it "went against the notion that you had to brag." She also noted, with some irony, that as a woman in advertising, having to try harder was "somewhat the story of [her] life."

Her comment suggests there may be an overlooked detail in this story. Of the dozens of people involved in focus groups, everyone failed to appreciate the significance of that one employee's comment about trying harder.

Everyone but Paula Green, the one person who saw what everyone else missed.

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

This is a book about what it takes to see what no one else sees.

This skill is often described as creativity, and we live in a world that celebrates it. But finding the solution to a particularly tricky problem or discovering a world changing idea takes more than creativity — a fact I discovered one fateful day nearly two decades ago while sitting across the table from a man waiting to be inspired by anyone but me.

It is 2001 and I have been working in advertising for less than a year. It's long enough to understand the hierarchy. There are the *creatives* — who have cool titles like “Wizard of Lightbulb Moments” — and there are the rest of us.

I am not a creative.

We're sitting in a conference room on the top floor of an office building overlooking Darling Harbor in Sydney, outfitted with an enormous table made of Tasmanian oak (as our clients make a point of telling us). It is an intentionally intimidating setup.

As we present our epic game changing campaign idea, I can't help feeling quietly relieved that no one expects me to say anything. At first the presentation seems to go well. Unfortunately, as our pitch wraps up our client asks the one question we were not expecting: “What else you got?”

This is not good.

We had spent two months preparing for this meeting and our creative team was so convinced it was a winner, that they hadn't even brought a backup idea.

Our response to his question was truly terrible. Silence.

I slowly realized that the only person who could remember those abandoned ideas was the junior member of the team who had taken notes in all the meetings: me. Summoning my courage, I broke the silence and spoke up. It was a moment that would change my career . . . though not perhaps in the way you might imagine.

I did not pull a million-dollar idea out of my head. In fact, the truth is I don't remember what I said. But I do remember how I *felt*.

It was my first taste of what it meant to be on the other side, and I was hooked. I wanted to have that feeling again.

Unfortunately, creativity still wasn't my job. And judging from our failed client encounter, maybe creativity wasn't even the right word to describe what our clients actually wanted anyway.

Around that time I found inspiration in the words of an author who was once asked by novelist Kurt Vonnegut what it felt like to be "the man who knows everything."

WHY SPEED READING DOESN'T MATTER

Isaac Asimov has earned that reputation by writing nearly 500 books in his prolific lifetime. He is most widely known for his groundbreaking work in science fiction, but he also wrote everything from an illustrated children's guide to dinosaurs to a comprehensive two-volume guide to The Bible.

How could one man have interests and skills so varied that he could write and publish an average of more than ten books every year? Asimov credited his creative thinking to his legendary appetite for reading and learning about everything he could from a young age.

"I am not a speed reader," he once said. "I am a speed understander." *What if you could be a speed understander too?*

It's hard to imagine following Asimov's recipe for understanding in today's world. We are inundated by content, and most of it is not good. It has become nearly impossible to separate the bullshit from the believable. Digital tools have made it easy for everyone to share ideas, even if they are one-dimensional or idiotic. Yet bullshit, no matter how well packaged and easily distributed, remains bullshit.

To face this landslide of bad content, we are increasingly relying on a combination of algorithms and one-dimensional opinions shared on social media to help us filter the noise. And we've pioneered new methods of skimming out of sheer desperation. We watch television at accelerated speed, use speed-reading apps that flash a single word at a time, and turn to productivity gurus specializing in "time hacking."

None of these solutions work for long.

The problem is that expecting to get smarter from processing content faster is a bit like entering a speed-eating contest to enjoy a good meal. Eating 26 hot dogs in 60 seconds might satisfy your hunger, but you're likely to feel sick afterwards.

You can't understand the world better simply by reading about it as much as possible. You do so by being intentional about what you pay attention to in the first place. What if you could become a life-long learner, curious about the world and able to see, understand, and expect things others miss? What if you could use that skill to understand patterns, spot intersections and see around the corner to develop an observation of what the future might hold? And what if, once you put all the pieces together, you could actually learn to predict the future?

You can, and the ambitious aim of this book is to teach you how to do it. I call my approach *Non-Obvious Thinking*, and it can change your life. It changed mine, as I realized years ago after spending a memorable afternoon in Norway surrounded by 50,000 bottles of alcohol that I couldn't drink.

WHAT I LEARNED FROM A NORWEGIAN BILLIONAIRE

Christian Ringnes is one of the richest men in Scandinavia. A flamboyant businessman and art collector, he made his fortune in real estate and was the driving force and financier behind the critically acclaimed Ekeberg Sculpture Park in Oslo, Norway. Yet his legacy may come from a far quirkier accomplishment: amassing one of the largest independent collections of miniature liquor bottles in the world.

His decades-long obsession eventually ran into an insurmountable opponent: his wife, Denise. Tired of the clutter, she offered him an ultimatum: Find something to do with the more than 52,000 bottles he had amassed or start selling them. Like any other avid collector, Ringnes couldn't bear the thought of parting with his beloved bottles, so he did exactly what you might expect a

Norwegian real estate tycoon to do: he commissioned a museum for his bottles.

Today his Mini Bottle Gallery is one of the world's top weird museum destinations, routinely featured in offbeat travel guides. When I took a tour of the gallery, I was fascinated by how it was organized. Every room featured bottles grouped into quirky themes ranging from a "Room of Sin" inspired by a brothel to a "Horror Room" featuring liquor bottles with trapped objects such as mice or worms floating inside.

More important, like other well-crafted museum experiences, the Mini Bottle Gallery is carefully curated. Only about 20 percent of Ringnes' collection is on display at any one time. This thoughtful selection creates meaning for the entire gallery because each room tells a story, and those stories bring the experience to life.

As I walked out of the museum that evening, I realized just how important this idea of curation might be to my own work. What if the secret to having better ideas that clients loved was to get better at *curating* them before I needed them?

HOW I BECAME AN IDEA CURATOR

Back in the middle of 2005, I was part of a team tasked with starting what would become one of the largest and most successful social media teams in the world. At that time, social media basically meant blogging, so our services involved helping large brands find ways to engage bloggers directly.

Writing a blog seemed easy, so I decided to start one myself. My first few posts came easily, but then I ran out of ideas.

How was I going to keep my hastily created blog constantly updated with new stories when I already had a full-time day job? I needed a better method for collecting ideas.

I started seeking ideas everywhere. At first, I gathered them by emailing links of stories to myself. I scribbled possible blog topics on scraps of paper. I saved quotes from books and ripped pages out of magazines. As my collection of potential topics grew, I started saving them in a simple yellow folder with *Ideas* scrawled on the tab.

Soon worn from use, it was held together at its badly ripped seam by a tired piece of duct tape.

It worked, and I now had plenty of inspiration for what to write about. I did that religiously for four years, at times posting a new article every day.

During that time, I wrote more than a thousand articles and built a readership of hundreds of thousands of people. The blog won several awards, helped grow my network, and eventually helped me land a deal with McGraw-Hill to publish my first book, *Personality Not Included*, in 2008.

Two years later, I did something that would shape the next decade of my life.

THE BIRTH OF THE *NON-OBVIOUS TREND REPORT*

Near the end of 2010, I was reading article after article about trends for the coming year. Almost all of them were lazy, uninformed, or self-serving declarations of the obvious. According to one, the hottest trend of the year would be the iPhone 4. Another article suggested that “more people would express themselves on social media.” Yet another predicted that 2011 would be the Year of Drones. Not surprisingly, that one was written by the CEO of a company that made drones.

These weren’t trends — they were profoundly obvious observations of the world.

At best they were wishful thinking, and at worst they were veiled pitches for products or services hoping to profit from being considered trendy. In a frustrated bid to do better, I published my own list of 15 trends and called it the *Non-Obvious Trend Report*, named as a not-so-subtle criticism of all the blatantly obvious trend predictions I had read.

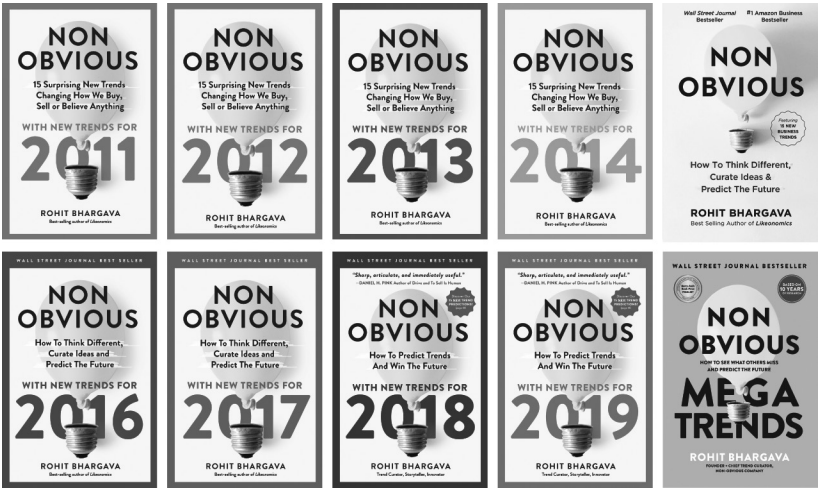
The report went viral as hundreds of thousands of people read and shared it.

Over the next five years, what started as a 20 page PowerPoint presentation shared online evolved into a robust annual trend report with hundreds of pages of research, interviews, panels and

eventually, in 2015, a bestselling print edition of the book you now hold in your hands.

Along the way, I left my job at Ogilvy, became an entrepreneur, spoke on some of the biggest stages in the world and published a new annual edition of the book with updated trends every January.

Now, ten years and nine editions later, my library of non-obvious trends has grown to more than a hundred predictions. The books have been translated into eight languages, earned nine prestigious international book awards, and reached well over a million readers. They also have led people to label me with a title I always struggled to embrace: a futurist.



WHY I AM A RELUCTANT FUTURIST

I am inspired by futurists who look at the world today and anticipate what will come. Reading *The Next 100 Years* by leading futurist George Friedman, for example, is like being engrossed in both a wonderful work of science fiction and a prescient description of potential reality. The year 2060 indeed might begin the “Golden Decade,” as he predicts. *That* is how futurists think.

In comparison, my team and I research trends to help brands and leaders understand the accelerating present and act on that

knowledge today. That's why "futurist" always felt like an overstatement to me.

In past interviews, I have described myself instead as a "near futurist." My lens typically focuses on trends that are affecting our behavior or beliefs right now. However, that doesn't mean my annual trend predictions expire; instead, if well predicted, they become more obvious over time.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

After a decade of making predictions, my team and I have seen some trends evolve into broader cultural or behavioral shifts while others have faded in significance.

In this tenth anniversary edition of *Non-Obvious*, we will take a look at the past decade of research and incorporate the most significant trends and stories while offering a broader context around the urgent need for more non-obvious thinkers in the world.

In Part 1, you will discover the five key mindsets required for being a non-obvious thinker, followed by a detailed look at my signature Haystack Method for curating trends and techniques for putting insights into action.

Part 2 of the book features predictions of ten powerful megatrends that will shape the coming decade, along with implications for culture, business, careers, and humanity. Each chapter also explores the potential implications each of the megatrends are likely to have in our world.

Finally, Part 3 includes a candid review of every previously predicted trend from the past nine years, along with a curated rating of how each one fared over time and the fascinating backstory of how the report itself evolved from year to year.

As you'll learn throughout this book, the benefits of learning to be a *non-obvious thinker* go far beyond just being able to identify trends. Seeing the non-obvious makes you more open minded to change and can help you disrupt instead of getting disrupted.

Non-obvious thinking can make you the most creative person in any room, no matter what your business card says and help solve

your biggest problems. Most importantly, non-obvious thinking can help you anticipate, predict and win the future.

Ultimately the biggest lesson may be that you don't need to be a speed reader to win the future. Being a speed understander is a far worthier aspiration. It's my hope that this book will help you get there.