

The Blind Squirrel Method

*A woodland fable about success
and the stories we sell*



James Burchill

The Blind Squirrel Method

*A woodland fable about success
and the stories we sell*

James Burchill

BlindSquirrelMethod.com

Copyright and sharing

The Blind Squirrel Method

A woodland fable about success and the stories we sell

Copyright © 2026 James Burchill. All rights reserved except for the sharing permission below.

Free PDF edition · October 2026

You are welcome to download, read and share this complete, unchanged PDF free of charge, including by email, social media or a website. Keep the author credit, website links and this notice intact. No registration or email subscription is required.

This permission does not authorize selling the book, distributing altered versions, or reusing its text or illustrations in other commercial products. For adaptations, translations, commercial reuse or other permissions, contact the author through jamesburchill.com. This notice does not limit uses permitted by applicable law.

This is a fictional fable for adult readers. Its questions and worksheet are aids to reflection, rather than a tested method that guarantees results.

Illustrations were created with AI assistance. Cover lettering and page layout were prepared for this edition.

Author photograph: the portrait published at jamesburchill.com.

Website and permissions: <https://jamesburchill.com>

Book website: BlindSquirrelMethod.com

Contents

<u>Bracken Wood</u>	3
<u>1 — The Acorn</u>	4
<u>2 — The Empty Baskets</u>	6
<u>3 — The Orchard Gate</u>	8
<u>4 — What Pip Knew</u>	10
<u>5 — The Price of an Acorn</u>	12
<u>6 — The Path in the Story</u>	14
<u>7 — The Winter Store</u>	16
<u>8 — The Lesson for Sale</u>	18
<u>9 — The Next Search</u>	20
<u>Before following the squirrel</u>	22
<u>A page for your next search</u>	23
<u>About the Author</u>	24
<u>Reading and manuscript notes</u>	25

Bracken Wood

In Bracken Wood, every autumn brought advice: Store early. Dig deeper. Follow the jays. Avoid the jays. Listen to the elders - unless they've had a disappointing year.

Most advice was offered freely over a fallen branch.

Some came wrapped in leaves and cost more than lunch.

This was the autumn Pip found an acorn, and Bracken Wood found an expert...

A fictional fable for adult readers

Free to read. Free to share.

If Pip gives you a useful question to ask, pass the book along. More writing and practical resources are available at jamesburchill.com.

The Acorn



Pip had been searching since breakfast. His basket contained a twig, two damp leaves and a stone he had briefly mistaken for something edible. Above him, the oaks stood thin and disappointing. It had been a poor autumn on the eastern side of Bracken Wood.

Pip had sharp eyes. Keeping his attention where he put it was another matter. He would begin inspecting the ground beneath an oak, notice something moving in the bracken and go to investigate. On the way back, he would remember another promising patch. By then, he was seldom quite sure which oak he had started with.

He covered a great deal of ground this way. He took some pride in that. He was considering whether the stone deserved another look when his foot caught a root. He fell forward, nose first, into the leaves.

Under his left paw lay an acorn. It was round, heavy and apparently untouched. Pip turned it over. No crack. No hole. He gave it an experimental bite and closed his eyes.

"Any good?" asked Hazel, arriving along the path with a basket.

"Quite possibly the finest acorn in the wood."

Hazel peered at the disturbed leaves. "Lucky landing."

Pip grinned. "Excellent technique."

They both laughed. Unfortunately, Mallow the magpie was sitting directly above them, and he heard only the last part.

By noon, Mallow had told six squirrels that Pip had developed a technique. By supper, the technique had become a system. The following morning, three strangers were waiting outside Pip's hollow.

Pip explained that he had got up early, washed in the cold stream and searched the eastern path. All of this was true. He did not mention the stone. It seemed irrelevant.

Nor did he mention how often he had changed direction. Written down, his morning would have looked rather unsettled. Described to three attentive strangers, it sounded purposeful.

One visitor asked whether washing before breakfast was essential. Pip had never considered the question. The visitors waited with such hopeful expressions that he found himself saying it probably helped.

Mallow arrived carrying a handsome piece of bark. Across it he had scratched THE ACORN METHOD.

"An evening talk," he suggested. "One acorn admission. Share what you've learned."

Pip looked at the empty space in his winter store. He also thought of the weeks he had spent searching, the miles he had covered and the things he genuinely knew about the wood. Perhaps Hazel's joke had been unfair. Perhaps he had earned this.

He knew the fall had been an accident. But he had been out searching when it happened. Surely that counted for something.

By the time he agreed to the talk, he felt he had been too modest about the whole affair.

Twenty-three squirrels attended. Pip stood on a stump and described his morning. The audience took notes when he mentioned the cold water.

At the back, Hazel put up a paw. "Which part helped you find the acorn?"

"All of it works together," Pip said.

It sounded convincing. He wished, suddenly, that he knew whether it was true.

The Empty Baskets



By the end of the week, Mallow had pinned three letters to the seminar tree. One squirrel had found two acorns after attending. Another said getting up early had changed her outlook. The third had not found anything but felt closer to a breakthrough.

Mallow placed that letter slightly lower down.

Pip was pleased. Here, at last, was evidence that he had helped. He began planning a second talk.

Hazel stopped beside the letters. "How did the other twenty do?"

"They haven't written."

"Perhaps we should ask."

Mallow fluffed his feathers. "You can't expect everyone to follow through."

Hazel looked at him. "We don't know whether they did."

Pip offered to come with her. He expected the visits to be encouraging.

They found Twig asleep beside his basket. He had risen before dawn for five mornings and searched until his paws hurt. He had found nothing. He had assumed the fault was his and had not wanted to trouble Pip.

Fern had found four acorns, though she had found about the same number the previous week. Moss had given up after the cold stream made him miserable. Two squirrels had never intended to search; they had come for the refreshments.

At each hollow, Hazel asked the same questions. What had they tried? Where had they searched? How long had they spent? What had happened? She also asked what they had done before hearing Pip's talk.

By dusk, Pip's pride had become a small, uncomfortable object behind his ribs.

"Three good letters," he said. "I thought that meant something."

"It does mean something. Those squirrels chose to write those things. We were asking the letters to tell us about everyone else."

Back at the seminar tree, Mallow suggested putting up only the strongest account. Fern's four acorns would look excellent beside Pip's portrait.

"Include what she found the week before," said Pip.

"That rather complicates it."

Pip took a fresh piece of bark. He wrote down what they knew about all twenty-three visitors, including the ones who had done nothing and the ones they had not yet found.

The new notice drew a smaller crowd. Twig stayed to read the whole thing.

"I thought I was the only one," he said.

The Orchard Gate



Pip decided that the next talk needed a demonstration. He would take a group along his route and show them exactly what he did. Mallow called it an exclusive expedition and suggested a larger admission fee.

They assembled before sunrise. Hazel arrived late, carrying a breakfast parcel for her younger brother. She had to leave it at his hollow before she could search.

"Early starts are a question of priorities," Mallow announced.

"He does consider eating a priority," Hazel said, and passed him.

At the eastern path, Pip lifted a low branch and slipped through a gap in a fence. The others followed until an elderly squirrel appeared on the other side.

"Morning, Pip. Just you today?"

Pip stopped. "I've brought a few friends, Uncle."

Beyond the fence lay an orchard of old oaks. A stone wall sheltered it from the wind. Pip's uncle kept the paths clear and knew which trees had produced well. He let Pip pass through whenever he liked.

Twig stared at the gate. "I've been walking round this place every morning."

The extra journey took nearly an hour. By the time Twig reached the eastern path, several other searchers had already passed through.

Pip explained that he had found his famous acorn outside the orchard. This was true, and he was relieved to say it.

"But you reached the path earlier," Hazel said. "And your uncle told you which end to try."

Pip looked through the gate. He had never thought of it as an advantage. It was simply the way he went to work.

His uncle agreed to let today's group cross. At the far side, they spread out beneath the trees. Hazel found a cracked shell; Twig found nothing. Pip found one sound acorn beside a fallen branch.

"There," Mallow said. "The method."

Pip looked back towards the sheltered orchard. "Some of the method, perhaps. We should write down the gate."

They also wrote down Hazel's later starting time, the length of Twig's journey and which trees each squirrel could reach. The list was less flattering than a speech about determination. It was more useful for planning tomorrow.

On the way home, Pip asked Hazel whether she thought he had done anything to deserve his success.

"You searched," she said. "You kept looking. You know things I don't. None of that closes the gate behind you."

What Pip Knew



The next morning, Pip nearly left the cold stream out of his routine. Then he climbed in anyway. He liked the feeling afterwards. That, he decided, was enough reason to keep doing it himself.

At Hazel's suggestion, they met beneath the same oak at the same hour. She had brought two identical baskets and a piece of charcoal.

"Teach me something you can actually show me," she said.

Pip picked up an acorn and turned it under her nose. A tiny hole marked one side.

"Leave that one."

He showed her a split in another shell, then the difference between a damp, soft acorn and a firm one. Hazel had been carrying several poor specimens home. Pip could spot them quickly, even under dirty leaves.

He also knew the difference between a promising place to search and a place that merely looked promising. Sometimes fallen branches caught acorns rolling down the slope. Sometimes a tidy patch had already been searched.

"Why wasn't this in the talk?" Hazel asked.

Pip considered the question. "I thought everyone knew it."

They spent several mornings recording what they found. Both searched before and after Hazel had practised Pip's checks. They changed sides of the path and made a note of rain, other searchers and the trees overhead.

The results wandered. Some mornings there was almost nothing to find. Pip's knowledge did not persuade a bare oak to produce. Hazel did, however, bring home fewer spoiled acorns after he had taught her what to inspect.

Mallow arrived while they were counting. "So the system is proven?"

"We've learned something about checking shells," Pip said. "We've barely started on where to search."

"That won't fit on the sign."

Hazel handed him a larger leaf.

Later, Pip found a fine acorn in a patch they had almost skipped. For a moment he felt the old certainty return. He could picture the headline.

Then he looked at the empty patch beside it and wrote both results down.

He still wanted to be good at this. He was beginning to see how that wish could get ahead of what he knew.

The Price of an Acorn



Bramble arrived at the seminar tree with a basket so full that Mallow nearly fell off his branch. Here was the sort of result he had been waiting for.

"Thirty-two," Bramble announced. "All gathered in three days."

Mallow fetched the charcoal. Pip fetched Hazel.

Bramble had searched beyond the northern stream. He had borrowed a cart, paid two cousins to help and bought passage across the beaver's bridge. The search had gone well. The portrait, Mallow said, would be magnificent.

Hazel asked what Bramble had paid his cousins. Then she asked about the cart and the crossing. Bramble tipped his head from side to side as he counted.

When they included everything he had paid, nine acorns remained for him. One was spoiled. He had also missed three days of work repairing winter stores, though he wasn't sure how to value that.

"Eight is still eight," Bramble said, rather defensively.

"It is," Pip agreed. "But thirty-two is what we're putting on the tree."

The owl who lived above the noticeboard opened one eye. She had been trying to sleep through their success stories for a fortnight.

"If you put up the basket," she said, "put up the bill."

They cleared a stump beneath her branch and began a ledger. They recorded sound acorns kept after expenses, hours spent and anything borrowed that still had to be returned. When they didn't know a figure, they left a space rather than making one up.

Pip opened his own winter store that afternoon. There were more acorns than he had ever gathered in a fortnight. Most had arrived as admission fees.

For several minutes he stood very still.

He had been pointing to the growing pile when anyone asked whether his method worked. His success at attracting an audience had become evidence for his success at searching.

Mallow said the distinction was unnecessarily technical.

Pip carried the ledger to the seminar tree. He made two entries: acorns found, and acorns received for talks. Then he added the costs of holding the talks.

The owl looked over his shoulder. "That should help."

"Will it stop me being wrong?"

"No," she said. "But you'll have somewhere to start looking."

The Path in the Story



Mallow had already commissioned an illustrated account of Pip's discovery. It showed Pip moving steadily through the forest, head high, eyes fixed on the distant oak. The acorn waited at the end of a dotted line.

Pip thought it was a good likeness. He had begun to remember the morning that way himself.

Hazel brought the picture to the place where they had met. She put it beside the root.

"You fell here," she said.

"I was changing direction."

Hazel waited.

"Rather abruptly," Pip added.

She laughed, and he found he could laugh too. Then they tried to reconstruct the morning without the dotted line.

Pip remembered a jay calling from the east, though he could no longer remember whether he had heard it before or after finding the acorn. He had told the audience that he followed birds. On some mornings he did. On that particular morning, he wasn't sure.

Hazel remembered the stone in his basket. Pip had left it out of the story so often that he had almost left it out of his memory.

They found an earlier note Pip had scratched on the wall of his hollow: TRY WEST IF EAST EMPTY. It did not sound much like the unwavering commitment described in the illustrated account.

"I wasn't trying to deceive anyone," he said.

"I know."

The original morning had been full of guesses. The story had acquired a plan with every telling. Pip could see why. It was difficult to hold an audience with a stone, an uncertain bird and a fall.

Mallow studied their corrections. "The dotted line gives it direction."

"Give it the direction I actually took."

"It loops back on itself."

"Twice, if I remember correctly."

They replaced the picture. The new version had several paths, a question mark beside the jay and a small stone in the basket. Mallow insisted on keeping Pip's heroic expression.

For future searches, Pip began writing down his route and reasons before leaving. When he changed his mind, he added another note. He wanted a record he could compare with the story he would tell afterwards.

That evening, Twig studied the new picture for a long time.

"Mine looks a bit like that," he said, pointing to the loops.

The Winter Store



The weather turned while they were discussing the next expedition. A wind from the north stripped the last leaves from the ridge. Beyond it lay a stand of old oaks where, according to Mallow, opportunity favoured the bold.

Twig proposed taking his entire winter store to pay for a cart and two helpers. If the ridge produced as much as he hoped, he could return with several times what he had spent.

"Commitment," Mallow said approvingly.

Pip almost agreed. He had once made a similarly expensive journey and returned with little. He liked to tell the story as an example of persistence.

Hazel asked what Twig would eat if the ridge was bare.

"I'll have to make it work."

The answer unsettled Pip. When his own expedition failed, he had stayed with his uncle and eaten from the orchard store until he recovered. In the version he told onstage, this part occupied half a sentence.

Twig had no orchard to return to. His sister and her two young ones shared his hollow.

Pip took him aside. He explained what had happened on his own trip, including the weeks afterwards. Twig listened without speaking.

"You said you risked everything."

"I said it. I hadn't counted what was there to catch me."

They changed the expedition. Twig kept his food reserve. Two squirrels would inspect the ridge on foot before anyone hired a cart. They agreed to turn back if the weather worsened or they failed to find enough promising ground by midday.

The first scout returned with news of a few productive trees. The second reported a damaged crossing and a long exposed path. They postponed the cart.

Overnight, a branch came down across the route. No one could say what the original expedition would have gathered, or whether anyone would have been hurt. They knew what they had avoided spending and what they still had available to try elsewhere.

Mallow called the outcome timid.

Twig closed the lid of his winter store. "I've still got next week."

Pip helped him move the cart money back into the hollow. They had made a smaller attempt than Twig wanted. It had given them enough information to change their plans.

For once, Pip felt no urge to turn the result into a lesson about courage.

The Lesson for Sale



Mallow arrived at Pip's hollow carrying a bright new sign. He had spent an entire afternoon on the lettering.

"The complete woodland wealth system," he read. "Learn the secrets of a successful squirrel. Limited places."

Pip looked past him at the new ledger. "We can't offer that."

"We've improved everything. More records. Better pictures. An owl."

"We can teach squirrels to check shells. We know something about choosing search patches. We don't know how to make them wealthy."

Mallow set the sign down carefully. For the first time, he looked tired rather than offended.

He had paid the illustrator, carried notices across the wood and spent his evenings arranging seats. He wanted the talks to succeed. Pip could understand that. He wanted paying work too.

They sat over the ledger and worked out what a useful lesson might cost. Then Hazel suggested watching Pip teach it before they advertised anything.

Three squirrels volunteered. Pip gave a splendid explanation of shell inspection. He demonstrated the checks quickly, with the easy movements of long practice.

When the volunteers tried, two missed the tiny holes. The third discarded a sound acorn because a mark on the shell looked suspicious. All three said they had enjoyed the lesson.

Pip looked at Hazel. She passed him another acorn.

He tried again, more slowly. He let the squirrels handle examples, asked them to explain what they were seeing and watched where they hesitated. By the end, he understood more about what they needed to practise. He also understood how little their polite smiles had told him.

The revised notice offered a small practical session on sorting gathered acorns. It described what participants would practise, what they should bring and what the lesson would not establish. Mallow added the price and the cancellation terms.

Bookings were slower. Those who came had questions Pip could usually answer. When he couldn't, they made a note and checked together.

Mallow kept the old sign for a while. Eventually he turned it over and used the back for the timetable.

"We could still make it sound a little more exciting," he said.

Pip considered this. "Draw a very small worm."

The Next Search



By late autumn, a rumour reached Bracken Wood that acorns gathered beneath moonlight kept twice as long. The squirrel bringing the news carried an impressive basket and a convincing expression.

Mallow glanced at Pip. Pip glanced at Hazel. Hazel fetched the notebook. They asked what twice as long meant, which trees the acorns came from and how they had been stored. The visitor knew some of the answers. Others, he said, had never seemed important.

Rather than move the winter harvest outdoors, they set aside a small batch they could afford to lose. They agreed what they would compare and when they would inspect it. As far as they could, they kept the trees, shell quality and storage conditions alike. They wrote down the differences they couldn't remove.

The owl read their plan. She pointed out that the night gatherers might simply be choosing different acorns. They changed the plan before beginning.

Pip found this irritating for about a minute. Then he crossed out a line.

On the morning they began, he and Hazel searched four marked patches beneath the eastern oaks. He still hoped his favourite patch would do best.

He still felt a private satisfaction when it did. This time, he noticed both feelings before reaching for a conclusion.

They recorded the empty patches too.

Later, Twig arrived with a modest basket and a question about one of the trees. Pip walked with him to look. He had no answer ready. The two of them stood beneath the branches, examining the ground.

At the seminar tree, Mallow had pinned a new notice. It described their next small trial and invited volunteers. Underneath, in smaller letters, he had written that the result might be disappointing.

Someone had added: THEN WHY BOTHER?

Hazel wrote back: SO WE CAN FIND OUT BEFORE WE BET THE WINTER STORE.

Pip read the exchange on his way home. His original acorn was long gone; he had eaten it before anyone suggested putting it under glass. The famous stone sat beside his notebook.

He picked it up and felt its reassuringly useless weight.

The following dawn, Pip rose early because he liked the quiet. Hazel joined him later, after taking breakfast to her brother. They carried the same sort of basket and took different paths to their meeting place.

At the root where Pip had fallen, he paused to inspect the leaves. Then he stepped carefully over it.

He had learned that much for certain.

~ The End ~

Before following the squirrel

The story is fictional. These questions are a practical aid for examining advice, rather than a score that certifies a person or a method.

- 1. State the claim precisely.** What result is being promised, for whom, over what period and at what cost?
- 2. Ask about the missing baskets.** How many tried the approach, what happened to them and which results have not been recorded?
- 3. Look for a comparison.** What happened before the change, or among reasonably comparable people who did something else?
- 4. Check the gate.** Which advantages, resources, obligations and market conditions differ from your own?
- 5. Examine the explanation.** How is the action supposed to produce the result? What evidence could challenge that explanation?
- 6. Count what remains.** Include time, expenses, losses, help received and obligations still outstanding. Keep different sources of income separate.
- 7. Protect the next attempt.** Decide what you can afford to lose, what reserve you need and when you would stop.
- 8. Examine the teaching and the sale.** Can the adviser explain the method, identify its limits and demonstrate useful learning beyond their own success? What do they earn if you believe them?
- 9. Design a small test.** Write down what you will try, what you will compare, when you will review it and what would change your mind.

A page for your next search

The advice or claim I am considering

The result I want and the time available

The strongest evidence for the claim and what is missing

The circumstances that differ from mine

The small test I can afford and the comparison I will use

The cost limit and reserve I will keep

The result that would support continuing

The result that would make me change or stop

My review date and what actually happened

About the Author



James Burchill is an author, systems architect and CTO whose work spans business, software and technology.

His career spans nearly four decades across software engineering, entrepreneurship, publishing and teaching. He is the founder of Driftinel and has taught at Sheridan College and McMaster University.

James enjoys understanding how things work, improving them, and sharing what he learns. His writing explores how businesses and their systems change over time, and how to keep them connected to what they were meant to achieve.

More writing and practical resources

jamesburchill.com
vault.jamesburchill.com

Enjoyed the book?

Share the complete PDF with someone who might find it useful.

The book and FREE PDF: BlindSquirrelMethod.com

Reading & manuscript notes

For readers who want to explore the ideas behind the fable, the following research provides useful starting points. It does not validate this fictional story or its worksheet as a tested decision method.

Jerker Denrell. Vicarious Learning, Undersampling of Failure, and the Myths of Management. *Organization Science*, 2003. Examines how missing failures can distort what observers learn from organizations. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.14.2.227.15164>

Paul Gompers, Anna Kovner, Josh Lerner and David Scharfstein. Skill vs Luck in Entrepreneurship and Venture Capital: Evidence from Serial Entrepreneurs. NBER Working Paper 12592, 2006. Presents evidence for a role for skill in venture-backed entrepreneurship. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w12592>

Francine Lafontaine and Kathryn Shaw. Serial Entrepreneurship: Learning by Doing. NBER Working Paper 20312, 2014. Examines business ownership experience and subsequent business longevity. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w20312>