



# **Resilience Now**

54 Secrets for Bouncing Forward  
in Every Phase of Your Journey

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## Introduction

As you're about to discover, resilience is not just about enduring. It's about leveraging your challenges to bounce forward, not just back to where you were but to a new and improved version of yourself. This book offers you this unique perspective on resilience.

You will make new decisions, and while this prospect may be daunting, this book will equip you with the clarity and confidence to do so. The most important thing you will learn is that you have the power to make these decisions yourself and must do so. This independence is essential for mastering resilience.

You can consult anyone, seek advice, gather input, and choose to follow or ignore any idea you wish. However, you cannot reserve the right to blame someone else if it doesn't work out. You cannot say, "But I was just doing what I was told!"

This isn't just a disclaimer; I will clarify that I am not a doctor. I am sharing my personal experience and related science, that's all. Please talk to your doctor, call helplines, and seek immediate assistance when necessary.

Reserving the right to blame others diminishes your intelligence and reduces you to a mere robot. You are not a robot but a human being possessing unique intelligence. Unique does not mean special; it simply indicates that a comparison can be made. This uniqueness, akin to your fingerprint, DNA, and personal stories, is not just a characteristic but a value that should be appreciated and respected.

Worse than the lack of appreciation for your intelligence is the misconception that one should never question the teacher. You might think that the hallmark of a perfect student is simply following instructions. In that case, blaming the lesson when things go wrong makes sense.

However, the ideal student isn't merely a mimic; they are the ones who challenge assumptions and push the subject into new territory. Your intelligence elevates instruction. By challenging assumptions, you elevate your understanding and contribute to the growth of knowledge and experience in your field, which is intellectually stimulating and engaging.

The dutiful student can never rise above the instructor, creating a limited societal existence. However, we've gradually expanded our knowledge as a species and must keep doing so. It's the fundamental truth of growing up – you gain a bit of wisdom each day, as we all do, generation by generation.

We use this wisdom to help children catch up to society. We aren't born ready for the world; we're given eighteen years of training before we are expected to fully accept all the consequences of our actions. In many ways, all children are formed, whether with personality,

religion, or some other ideology, under the collective banner of education. All with good intentions, but good intentions pave the road to hell, so they say. A seed is already planted before children can think about and reject ideas.

Childhood perceptions and experiences define our personalities and personal realities into adulthood and beyond. Old and outdated lessons govern our lives, from our daily habits to long-term goals. Growing up, some of what we've learned keeps us stuck with old patterns and elusive solutions.

You might be trapped by what you were taught to believe. Unquestionable truths by people doing their best, but now you get to decide for yourself.

### The Secret to Bouncing Forward

With gratitude, and only after much reflection, I can now look back on every challenging person I've encountered with appreciation. I can connect those difficult experiences to the joy and freedom I possess today, even if I didn't fully recognize it at the time, to put it mildly. Without those lessons, insights, and the people who brought them out, I wouldn't have navigated to the life I live now. I would have remained trapped in old patterns and elusive solutions.

I wouldn't wish resilience on anyone because it necessitates a problematic experience. Yet, it isn't until you've had a challenging experience that you get the opportunity to do things differently. Realize that you are not cursed but blessed if you seek resilience. Embracing resilience can be inspiring and motivating, leading to personal growth and a new perspective on life.

Bouncing forward requires a change in approach. In this context, consider doing things differently—not randomly, but in a way that amplifies your unique intelligence. Not everyone takes advantage of this opportunity; some remain stuck until the end. If you were raised to believe in yourself as well-behaved, holding on to this belief might be your dead-end.

We were good little boys and girls; at some point, being good requires rebellion. One day, young adults move out and forge their own experiences. Slowly, as you become more and more of an adult, you rewind more and more of what your parents told you. With reflection, you realize some was spot-on wisdom, but some was sheer nonsense.

Knowledge is fluid. It gets updated and corrected. Some of that nonsense your parents believed was sensible then, but times change, and common knowledge adapts. Through science and experience, we learn more and try to do better. As a product of expertise yourself, you need updating and correcting. You need fluidity. Resilience is this fluidity.

When life forces you to look and reprioritize, to reflect and perhaps change your mind, and then act on those updates and corrections, it can be a challenging experience. It can be inconvenient, painful, costly, and miserable. Also, it is entirely worthwhile when you fully accept the challenge.

It's where you are now. It's a health, wealth, and happiness crisis that can no longer be denied or ignored. As Bessel van der Kolk, MD, writes, [The Body Keeps the Score](#). If you were too young to have had the opportunity to process it properly, trauma has impacted your body and mind.

Depression physically compels you to lie in bed and ponder your situation. This is especially true if you insist there's nothing wrong with your life. Your body questions, really? Really? It's unyielding until you thoroughly explore every aspect of your life to uncover what's causing sadness, anger, pain, regret, or grief that was overlooked when it occurred.

Before we hit rock bottom or something major disrupts our lives and forces us into adequate reflection, there are many opportunities to notice things aren't quite going right. These bumps along the way can help us make course corrections to avoid bad outcomes. If you are paying attention, there are warning signals and red flags.

If you realize you've overlooked them, don't waste your energy on regret—there's no time like the present to connect the dots and make one significant change that could be easier than many incremental ones.

### You Being You

Identifying what holds you back is crucial for overcoming it. Like the fish that asked, "How's the water?" and replied, "What water?", we have long stopped noticing or questioning the foundational aspects of our lives. Remember when you used to ask, "Why?" all the time? Where has that curious soul gone?

At times, simply recognizing old beliefs can cause them to dissolve. Other times, they resemble quicksand; it's often easier to navigate around them or construct a bridge over them than to explore the depths.

To bounce forward from setbacks despite invisible and difficult-to-detect limitations, I found that it takes having a purpose, setting yourself up for success, knowing what matters and what doesn't, feeling like I am getting somewhere, and having a tried-and-true formula on which I can one hundred percent rely for the complicated stuff.

When it comes to tried-and-true, science is the guide. Every practice, from neuroscience to marketing, is rooted in peer-reviewed published studies from reputable institutions and professionals. Sometimes, science doesn't present anything new but confirms wisdom passed through generations.

All the practices to become more resilient add up to you being you. You are you; using your unique intelligence is the art of bouncing forward. As I had to, you must find your path and do things your way.

You have a purpose, and you are entitled to it. In conscious servitude, you may live it entirely for someone else. It's up to you. Make the choice, and make it your own. Your purpose can change,

develop, and morph, but as long as you are alive, it's up to you to decide what to do with your unique intelligence.

When you know what you want, need, and possess with your unique intelligence to see, feel, and perceive, you gain insights that no one else can hope to grasp. You'll find motivation that no one else can provide. You'll discover courage you've never known. You possess the best answers, and your emotions may be the key to uncovering them.

## The Seeds of Purpose

My career began as a chemical engineer. An engineer engages in three essential activities: analyzing, synthesizing, and designing. Engineers cannot simply live and let live; they must tinker, tweak, and recreate with a purpose in mind.

In the realm of chemicals, from oil and gas to food production, my engineering experience revolved around large-scale industries that originated in a chemistry lab. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to explore mechanical engineering within chemical processes.

Each day, I found joy in discovering ways to improve machinery performance. I was designated a process engineer and became an expert in methods, with machines central to my work.

After a decade, I transitioned into the service industry, still working to enhance efficiencies. This time, however, my focus was on people rather than machines.

One day at a conference focused on quality, continuous improvement, and the art of optimization, I lost my composure and went on a tirade.

I criticized the lunch buffet arrangement as inefficient—look at the line! I pointed out the decision to place the table against the wall rather than in the centre of the room and questioned why there was only one set of serving utensils per dish.

After I finished my critique of the lunch, I continued to dissect the conference, evaluating every presentation that had occurred that morning. Unfortunately, I continued because my lunch companion said, “Tell me more.” And I did—loudly. I pulled no punches.

Eventually, I fell silent and realized that every table listened attentively to me. People began to move the tables, more utensils appeared, and the line diminished rapidly—a sense of relief washed over me.

Someone from the nearby table approached me with a business card. He handed it to me and said, “If you write that down, I will publish it.”

I tossed the card out at the airport on my way home while clearing out my pockets.

At home, I recounted the story and my embarrassment to a friend, who asked, “Why don’t you write it down?”

I laughed. “Because it’s so obvious.”

My friend stared at me and said, “Maybe you should write it down.”

A few weeks later, I reconsidered just how obvious it might be. I began to write it down, and my anger and frustration transformed into curiosity and insight. The transformation that occurs



when you convert feelings into words, intuition into understanding, and discomfort into freedom is genuinely remarkable.

## Welcome Discomfort

Essentially, continuous improvement involving people rather than machines means precisely identifying the nature of a conflict, quantifying the variables, and then using mathematics, graphs, and tables to determine who was right and regarding what, or who was wrong and about what. The outcome was always the same: both and neither.

Listening to the argument, picking out and measuring the things they were talking about, and then watching them over time was far superior to social games or even democracy to sort out the best direction when things mattered—for that matter, even defining what “best” means. It was the secret to better results every time, proven repeatedly.

Yet, as perplexing as it was, a welcome invitation never happened in my work. Only when people are forced into this framework do they proceed in this manner? Forced, like when doing it this way, is a condition of their continued employment, as demanded by a superior. Some companies I worked for went bankrupt instead of surrendering to data. That’s how rare it is to take the route of calculations instead of personal opinion and charismatic leadership.

What happens is that smart people make bad decisions and then say strange things afterward, which everyone pretends are acceptable explanations. I was often utterly dumbfounded by what I heard, witnessed, and experienced. If I thought that truth was stranger than fiction, I checked with the social and economic scientists who confirmed the universality of that behaviour and explained why.

My purpose became applying my skills to this universal and undeniable problem. Engineers are human, too, if a specific type of one. As a collective profession, engineers work to solve problems to move society forward as a whole. I took the knowledge of those scientists and added it to what I knew—what you can predict, you can prevent, and there are tools to do so.

I started writing it down when I realized I might have a solution no one else could provide. Like back at school, when the teacher asked a question, I looked around, waited, and looked around again before offering my hand to the air.

The way of data may sound cold, but it was rife with emotion. There were loud arguments, heated discussions, and even tears at times. Stories and opinions were drawn out as analysis brought them to light. It became not only compelling to share but safe to do so. Facts came out. The way of opinion and charm was smooth and easy, but it left a lot of relevant information unspoken, voices silenced, and opinions withheld.

To find your well of resiliency, you need all the relevant information, not just the agreeable facts. You need to let those emotions out, even if you don’t have someone in your world who will keep saying, “Tell me more.”

### 1. Know Your Truth

Looking back on my career forces the best creativity out of the most experienced recruiters. Try as they may, they cannot see the string connecting the dots—the career among the jobs, industries, and strange titles.

If you have unique ambitions as I did, there is no immediate or obvious path for anyone to take. As it always does, it means having to sort advice from what is applicable and relevant and what isn't, ultimately accountable only to yourself. Following your heart, making a life that matters to you, if not to anyone else, requires you to know what's true for you.

Truth produces feeling. Whether it's a clenched throat for fear of words coming out or a twisted gut when you hear a lie, your body knows the truth. I believe in science as a path to truth and suspect all scientists. I've learned that trusting experts is a matter of when. It's more than theory – it's accepting the science of what's life, which requires making room for emotions.

I've learned that you can't use facts, data, and approaches devoid of emotion and expect everything to work out swimmingly. After learning about calculated decisions and watching the cold, calculating engineers get passionate in a boardroom; such is the enlightenment. They yell. They pound fists. They have an opinion, and the data and analysis allow them to serve it as fact.

Charisma works just as well as data, if not better, to position opinion as a foregone conclusion. Maybe all consumers have been duped by a salesman at some point in their purchasing lives. Marketers, app designers, and politicians work hard to win you over and rarely use data.

Life isn't devoid of emotion, so all those statistical theories fall apart in one curse word, one threatening voice, and one ego that wants to dominate, especially when those humans are trained to use such powerful tools as statistics and graphs, even when they try desperately to put their feelings aside.

Change always makes room for mistakes. When mistakes are made, we observe three things in someone else: they didn't try hard enough, didn't think it through, or had bad intentions. They are lazy, dumb, or mean.

Notice if you are harsher on yourself than on your loved ones when you criticize yourself for making a mistake. If you are the type who doesn't make mistakes, then you are more forgiving with yourself than you are with strangers, and that assessment isn't helping you.

Begin to be kinder, supportive, and accepting. Here you are, taking the initiative to improve your life. You are conscientious, proactive, and self-sufficient. Most people buy books and never read them. Yet you are pages deep already, committed to doing things differently. If you label yourself as mean, lazy, or stupid, that's not what these facts indicate.

Interviewers like to believe that past behaviour predicts future actions for everyone. However, some people are fixed, and others are always becoming. Your new day may arrive for you as it did for me, the day you realize no hero is coming to save the day. If it's to be, it's up to me.

One day, someone asked me, "Why should you be the one?"

If I hadn't asked myself that question hundreds of times, I might have been stumped into silence and shocked into submission by this confrontation.

Instead, I said, "I'm not The One," and laughed like there was such a thing.

Often, there is far more space for others than we perceive. Success for one person doesn't dictate failure for another—not in this age of abundance. We have so much abundance that we have significant issues with trash.

When you know something must be done, you start discussing what "they" should be doing. Perhaps you are going along with something because you think it's above you to correct. It's someone else's responsibility. When that's the case, you must create accountability, check for alliance, and clarify alternatives.

One day, you finally accept that you can take action. Can? Must. The best student becomes the next teacher; a follower becomes a leader; a loyalist becomes a rebel; and a child becomes an adult. Maybe not in one day, but one day, it's undeniable.

Change happens. No one goes to bed young and wakes up old, but we all age, and one day, there's a hair, a wrinkle, an ache. The trick is to grow old and not merely to lose the years. Live a little, learn a little, and shift a little. Like that, you keep yourself headed down that highway of life, always becoming, always on purpose, fluid and adaptable, strong and resilient.

We all know better than we act about many things. We have unserious intentions to improve our eating habits and exercise programs, and it's not a lack of information that stops us from implementing what we know.

While you may act as if the present is unfolding according to your plan, you may know better. You may say one thing and believe another. You may be in the closet about numerous facts of your life, but the truth is out there, and you already know it.

Optimism is unhealthy when it's there as a denial of the truth. A positive mental attitude will help you find opportunities in the face of struggle, but thinking only positively can prevent you from seeing reality.

Do you have a suspicion or two you must embrace and investigate within the confines and privacy of your mind? At least when you introspect, do it without the rose-coloured glasses.

What's the truth you are uncomfortable admitting?

## 2. Clarify Happiness

Dan Ariely, behavioural economist and author of Predictably Irrational, can explain many ways we are fundamentally irrational.

Ariely will tell you that we have the same brain we had when we were living in caves. Back then, running from the snarling, scary thing with big teeth was more important than stopping and identifying what it was. It's instinct to react, to move away from the threat as fast as possible.

The gift of consciousness lets us notice the motion, stop running, and question the nature of the threat. Why are you running, and from what?

Defining the problem is the first step in solving it. Einstein said that if he had one hour to solve a problem, he'd spend 59 minutes explaining it. Most managers want action now. This bias for action creates waste every single time because you can't fix something if you are unaware.

Defining the problem is as simple as agreeing to the question, "So if I can get rid of this, no matter how I do it, you will be happy?" Of course, they'd say, "Yes, if..." We'd keep going until all the "ifs" disappeared. Then I'd have my marching orders.

Abject project failures were always preceded by a list of "ifs" still tabled while the project proceeded full steam ahead. Four, six, twelve, twenty-four months later, and there'd still be no tangible results for all the computing, all the papers produced, all the nodded heads. Instead, we'd be engaged in another game of whack-a-mole as we fleshed out another executive's pet idea.

Always, "Oh wait, let's try this now." Never relinquishing control to a problem statement, never willing to put a specific finger on what is broken, never asking, but telling. Retaining control and positioning themselves as the leader because they have all the answers, not the leader because they know how to use their resources best.

Entire careers are spent waiting for their turn to take the lead, and when they finally get it, they aren't going to relinquish it for any reason. Human beings become invested. They crave stories and explanations; they create gods when they can't find them. They can't help but form hypotheses. In a crisis, something is better than nothing; any story is better than a pile of graphs, data, and computations.

Science proves that with a hypothesis, confirmation bias kicks in. Science proves that despite your best intentions, you will find information to prove your hypothesis correct. Without a way to manage instinctual, flawed thinking, human beings are not in the best position to improve anything.

Throughout my career, the more I got paid, the less I was asked to think. Instead, I'd be told what to do, like I was an extra pair of hands for the one above me, with skills they didn't have in

things like Excel and PowerPoint. I knew how to create spin with data for a generation that didn't grow up with computers.

You don't have to think. For some people, this idea is heaven. My job required only my hands, and my head and heart could stay at home—more than once, I was invited to leave them there.

My opinions and feedback were not welcome. As an employee, one-third of my potential was utilized, while two-thirds atrophied. It wasn't a relief; it was a rejection. It was as dull as it was draining and stressful.

I was bored because I never knew enough to know why we were doing what we were doing, so my mind had no food for thought. It was draining because even short hours drag forever when you aren't connected to what you are doing.

It was stressful because I worried about what it would lead to: would I have to endure this until I retired? In future interviews, how will I explain what I did here in a way that would be honest, impressive, and indicative of a great employee?

Finding the best outcome with a limited pool of resources might be a continual challenge against a ticking clock. You may be like I was when I was selecting my next gig, seeing only one way or another while hearing the ticking clock. Ignoring the pressure is the key, either way.

Don't jump from the fire into the frying pan. Patience is a virtue, they say, and here it is because you aren't wasting time; you are mentally working out the right destination.

Default motivation will have you moving away from pain for your whole life if you let it and never toward pleasure. Knowing what you don't want is half of the battle. What you do want isn't always on the other side of that, but it can be found when you seek to see it—all those "ifs" that qualify success.

Eliminating pain is not pleasure, as you may know if you've ever taken your boots off after a long hike. The long road to finding your bliss might begin when you start itemizing everything you would include in that vision for your future.

What do you want? Your vision may be filled with material acquisitions. When you achieve that, you will be back here looking for emotional fulfillment, self-actualization, the possibility of a legacy, retirement, and escape. Still, a life doesn't have to be carved out in old-fashioned phases. Having a future destination in mind helps us get out of bed and remember why we endure, strive, and dream. Let the details get richer and the vision more specific.

Decades ago, I bought a unique journal. I listed everything I wanted: material, emotional, reputational, physical, and everything I thought mattered. When that stream of inspiration dried up, I realized it was likely a big puddle of everything I thought I might want, by marketing, by illusion, by the faintest of experience—the tip of the iceberg of my desires and motivations.

The following pages list the things I was fearful of wanting, what it might take to get them, and what it would be like to have them—the stuff with the “ifs” still attached. Can you be an author without fame? Is achieving something possible while leaving inevitable consequences or requirements on the table? These destinations are yet to be clarified.

After fear had its chance to voice an opinion, I picked another barrier or limit and kept going. As I said, I bought the journal years ago, and listing is not a one-time event. I’ve checked it more than twice per year since I’ve had it. Some things were crossed off as I changed my mind, some were added, and many more were attained. It’s a periodic auditing process to see if I am going where I thought I wanted and if I ever knew what I wanted.

It’s not a bucket list or a to-do list. It’s an awareness of visions and dreams, an inventory of destinations I can pick. There is no pressure to complete any of the items. It’s the record of a conversation with an invisible life coach that costs nothing and has handwriting that is highly similar to your own.

Have you made an exhaustive list of what you want from life and checked it lately?

### 3. Embrace Your Eccentricity

Growing up, defining myself was a constant struggle.

We moved every two years, leading to rootlessness and confusion when people asked me where I got my accent. It’s lonely when you realize you might be the only one with your singular combination of influences.

As not the only middle child, there was the oldest, the youngest, the boy, and me—the label-lacking person last in the list of introductions, even though I was the second oldest.

My wardrobe was comprised of hand-me-downs, not clothing of my choosing. When I rebelled, I was told I could sew my own if I wanted something different. I sewed my own long after I had no choice until I realized it always felt like a chore with a drizzle of freedom.

I was slow to choose a favourite from all the beautiful colours. I was told that yellow could be my favourite colour because it was the one left over after everyone else picked, as if no one could share a favourite colour or that every shade of the rainbow needed to be claimed.

From an early age, I believed we are all unique for a reason and that the purpose of life is to learn our differences and how to share them. My faith is one of interconnected individuality, which is the natural flow of nature—everything is in the balance of a system. I thought of the world as a puzzle, and if I could figure out who I was and where I belonged, everything would fall into place.

As a child, I thought gymnasts my age could naturally throw themselves around gracefully and effortlessly. With awe, I might have verbalized something to the effect, only to be put in place by an adult. “That’s not talent, that’s hard work.”

True, they did work hard for more years than I did, but I also learned that before any such studies had started, they'd either watch TV in the comfort of the splits or upside down on a handstand. Did I say 'in the comfort of'? Yes, I did. That's when I knew my time was better spent on something else.

My first word was "No." We only need this word when we'd like things to go differently. I learned to use it as little as possible, for the ramifications are usually nasty. Otherwise, I would have used it more freely, honestly, and openly.

You may not remember your first word or why you spoke it, but you will be able to recognize early incidents where your character was loud and proud and not appreciated.

After many moves, I met many families. I learned that what is inconvenient stubbornness to one is praiseworthy confidence to another. Avoid labelling anything unconstructively, especially yourself, and hiding the best parts of you under a veil of shame.

You are a genius. Einstein said, "Everybody is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it is stupid."

It might be a sign that you are doing the right thing if it feels good. If it feels chronically and consistently bad, consider stopping. Use emotions, not labels, as your guide. Look internally, not externally.

As an adult, you may discover that you are judging genius by a far too narrow definition. The narrowness may also serve to exclude yourself and reduce the pressure to perform. You might be the fish trying to climb the tree if you perceive genius as a performance.

As a fish climbing a tree, I turned math difficulty into the core of my career, and it never got much more manageable; it was never intuitive. I worked hard, and it was always hard work. If you take a girl who learned to define work by its degree of difficulty, she might spend her whole life focused on retirement, exhausted, drained and stressed.

If you take anyone with natural strengths and train them to focus on fixing weaknesses, you doom them. You might end up with well-rounded people who spend their whole lives believing they are mediocre, meaningless, and interchangeable while looking forward to the end of it.

There are many reasons why fish who know they are fish can still be found climbing trees when it's far from logical. Mine was the desire to earn respect from my father, which was a painful lesson. If you choose the pain, be clear on the point.

When you listen to people who are held up as successful in life, they usually say, "I couldn't not." They were compelled to write, or the voices in their heads would drive them insane.

Your highest purpose doesn't lie under a list of reasons why you should do something but why you couldn't not. Saying no is easy for everything that doesn't matter, and saying yes is easy for

everything that does. Your highest purpose might be saying yes to something that doesn't matter to anyone but you.

Geniuses do not set out to be that way. They get drawn into something, and what they have to offer is what is required. When you define genius as making a unique contribution to a specific problem, you start seeing it in others and, finally, in yourself. It isn't in the reception but in the contribution. You can't control how people take it, even if they do. You can only do your best.

When we find out where others perform easily better than us, it's not our job to try to catch up and stay up. Instead, it's our opportunity to quit that specific race by delegating to them, collaborating with them, or hiring them. Start matching opportunity to personality.

If you settle for trees, you'll never discover your ocean or find your oyster. The more races you quit, the better you become at the rest. You become more of a specialist and less of a generalist. If you genuinely stick with your natural abilities, it is easier to be even better.

Embrace your eccentricity as you invest in the hard work it takes to improve, which requires desire, investment, compulsion, and contribution. You may discover that you are hard-working, talented, and intelligent.

There is a list a mile long of things you are uniquely suited to do and a few things that make you rare and remarkable that you may have been taking for granted or, worse, thinking of them as weaknesses. Embrace your differences, which might be uncomfortable to do so, but can't be denied.

What changes if you drop shameful labels and follow your feelings instead?

### Mind Your Thoughts

Meditation is intentionally quieting down to hear the smallest voices inside your head—a snap of insight out of the blue, an internal voice of reason. When you start to think about your thinking, you spy thought in all its forms—but first, the loud ones.

When we start meditating, we glimpse the power of the dominator. We sit still, and before you know it, there it is! It's telling you that you better get up and do something else as if you hadn't decided that meditation is how you will spend this time. Exactly who is in charge? The mind? The body? The schedule?

You use willpower when you decide that one of them must lose. You need willpower when you are not united in your desires and intentions, like when you say you want something while secretly thinking of the drawbacks.

If you can delay gratification, success will be yours. In Walter Mischel's marshmallow experiment, children were given a marshmallow and told they could get a second one if they did not eat it until the researcher returned. Throughout their lives, these children showed that those who could earn two marshmallows went on to earn higher marks and better lives.



These marshmallow kids proved there are many tactics to strengthen willpower. One kid licked it, but that was by the rules. Another kid made sure she couldn't see it. The more ways you have, the longer your willpower will last.

Focusing on your breath is one tactic that is always available to you. Immediately, you notice the narration. You might last only moments in meditation, but now you know something profound about the war that is constantly being waged over the control of you and your actions.

Willpower works until it doesn't. When it doesn't, it typically snaps. The loss of willpower creates a big mistake, not a small error. Use it when you need it, and don't rely on it. Instead, aim for internal alignment.

Debating with that voice is one way we question ourselves and arrive at better decisions. Imagine peace when you are unanimous, and all of you agree.

#### 4. Extract Your Dreams

The edge that leads to success isn't power over will but awareness of it. The marshmallow kids knew they would be tempted, so they avoided, contained, or surmounted their internal drives with strategies. Maybe their parents taught them these tools.

What begins as an advantageous start in life continues, and not everyone has a stable, secure home or the benefit of nurturing instructors. Those who failed might have lacked strategies, learned that people aren't trustworthy, or knew that a sugar high is a headache. They didn't necessarily lack willpower but the desire to play the game.

Everyone can learn mental games at any point in their lives. When you think about your thinking, you want to identify the games you play, your assumed rules, and the objectives you may not fully realize you've set out to accomplish.

One of my managers was plagued by wishful thinking when she informed the HR team that I wasn't going anywhere. She told them that I had been a job hopper in the past, but I had reached an age where I was settling down. I was already applying elsewhere.

For her, it was the path of least resistance. Accepting the truth would have required more effort, including the work to get it. When she told me what she'd reported, her intention might have been to intimidate me into complying with her wishes. I will tell you that my manager and I did not discuss my future.

True to form, I hopped to my next job. With no room for the truth, it blindsided her. Don't let desire confuse your reality, or you might become blindsided.

That manager may have genuinely believed what she said, but then she met me. Maybe she couldn't imagine someone continuing to behave that way at my age. Your imagination muscle might need stretching to prevent wishful thinking from blindsiding you.

Wishful thinking is not all bad. It's there for a reason – to reveal to you your dreams. You may be shutting down your dreams if you shut down wishful thinking. The objective is to catch the thinking before it leads to talking before it leads to action.

Slow down and learn to look, perhaps by learning to draw.

When you learn to draw, you don't know how to make a pencil and do tricks. Instead, it is about learning to see what is correct before you and unlearning how you've represented things in the past. In 2015, Klugman and Beckmann-Mendez said, "Observation is key to diagnosis, and art can teach students to slow down and look."

While we start drawing pictures of our families as stick men and houses as boxes, we mature as artists when we move past the representational and into the realistic, and then finally, like dreams and wishes, new depictions of what cannot be photographed.

Someone said, "Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did. So, throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."

Whoever said it, it's advice from the school of hard knocks called living. For people on their deathbeds, Bronnie Ware reported in 2009 that the most common is regret for the actions they didn't take because, instead, they took the path of least resistance.

The path of least resistance is ignoring our dreams; it's succumbing to the manager who bullies you into staying in the same position for the rest of your career. It's going into engineering because I had the marks, the role model, and the hometown. It's doing what's next because you don't have enough time to question where it's headed.

If you might be disappointed by the things you didn't do, it might not be the success that matters, but experience. Oprah ran the marathon, and crossing the finish line was a success. You don't always have to be first for it to matter. Some finish lines only you will know you crossed them. Only you will know the ones you ignored and dismissed and the little adventures you never let live.

Limits are found when we explore and take the opportunity to push them out a bit farther. Whenever you connect with a new person, you expand your theory of mind.

Theory of mind is the term psychologists use to describe how an individual can appreciate and understand that what's in their head is in only their head and no one else's. It's a skill affected by desire and experience. You must want to understand what's in someone else's head and have met enough people to know just how diverse humanity can be.

When you get to know someone from a different walk of life, it stretches your mind. At some point, they say they believe or have experienced something entirely new for you. You are

surprised and stretched because you'll have heard it next time. After repetition, it becomes built into your theory of mind.

Life often shows us diversity, but we reject it. "No, that can't be that way," we say. We don't even begin to ponder our denialism. When you fail to connect with others, you fail to expand your theory of mind.

When you slow down and look, you realize how different reality might be from what you perceive. Tune in. Take notes of what people do and what people say. They will show you who they are, and patterns will emerge. Expect all patterns to continue carrying on.

A plan based on reality is a winner. Wishful thinking that is not identified as such will always lead to failure. Over time, you will figure things out. Ambiguity will clarify. Just because you don't know how you will do something now doesn't mean you won't be able to when you get to it. A positive mental attitude is nothing compared to a plan based on reality.

Leaving hopes for the future locked in your head as an amorphous wish ensures it goes nowhere. Complex things must come out of there and onto paper before you can begin to make sense of them and make them make sense.

Only with a solid foundation can you throw off those bowlines. It's a lot easier when you have a cargo hold of food, crates of riches, and crews of able staff to help support your journey. You don't know what you'll need to take with you until you take that dream out of wishful thinking and put it on paper.

When plans are on paper, you realize things don't add up. There's not just ambiguity in your plan, but things that will never make sense. People who don't act that way. Physics that requires violation? If caught early, you can do something about it.

Can you extract your dreams and wring the wishes out of them?

### 5. Write to Explore

When people reflect on the past and have a record of what they were feeling, thinking, and doing, they are in a much better position to identify and tackle deep-seated beliefs, limited thinking, and subtle patterns.

In the movie [Pretty Woman](#), Richard Gere's character says, "It cost me ten thousand dollars in therapy to say that sentence: "I was very *angry* with him." I do it very well, don't I? I'll repeat it: I was very *angry* with him."

If you want to get the most use from the money you spend on therapy, you need to journal. With pen and paper, you can learn how to make better choices and what is throwing you off when you don't.

Journaling is documenting your train of thought. Julia Cameron, author of The Artist's Way, advocates writing three pages by long hand first thing in the morning. She advocates this practice for opening your creativity and becoming aware of your heart's desires.

What you write may surprise or startle you.

Writing about your life experiences can also raise your immune function and help you heal. James Pennebaker, a psychologist, and his team of researchers asked 37 immune-compromised patients to write about their negative life experiences or daily schedules in four 30-minute sessions. Afterwards, those who wrote about life experiences had higher immune counts.

Pennebaker suggests that writing forces you to structure and organize the bad feelings; you can better get past them by doing so. As he writes in Writing to Heal, "When we translate an experience into language, we essentially make the experience graspable."

Processing one's feelings involves identifying them, finding relationships and connections, and extracting meaning from the experience.

Feel the feeling, then start using words such as "realize," "understand," and "because" to gain the most benefit. As you begin to see causes and effects, relationships and patterns emerge. Details come back, and motivations resurface, allowing you to question and learn.

Thoughts clarify as you search for the words, and your vocabulary increases as you find the right one, using dictionaries and a thesaurus. As you reach for the word, you will find new ones.

Studies show that vocabulary usage is one of the best measures of intelligence. A better command of language doesn't just make you sound smart; it also reduces the risk of miscommunication.

The very act of writing is one of expression. We were supposed to work on a paper in one high school English class. If we were not writing, the teacher would single you out and scold you by name. To avoid the scolding, I spent the entire class not on my paper but on my autograph. Just as your autograph is singular to you, there are the words, but then there is how it is visually displayed.

Pen and paper produce both the content and the visual display simultaneously – your handwriting, which is your own. While children can learn quickly to type, it takes years to master writing. Writing is an act of the mind and body in the moment. Typing is clicking buttons for bold, italic or underline.

When connecting with your inner thoughts, pen and paper are far more effective than word processing. Writing by hand, you are free to think, feel and create, to express more, with colour, weight and line than typing can, and to illustrate faster than formatting. Consider that, as you live in a world where curriculums and workplaces have long dropped cursive writing in favour of keyboarding.

Pen and paper slow you down. While business hates that, it is a good thing for this process. It's precisely what you need to hear: the quiet, tiny voice that may have been silenced long ago. Many people can type faster than they can write, and printing is more precise and straightforward for most people to read. However, it's that act of slowing down that is beneficial.

Students who take their notes with pen and paper outperform those who take them with a laptop. Because the paper note-takers have to choose what's most important, they listen more carefully and process the information in real-time. The keyboardists don't have to interact much or work with the information as hard. After the class, they walked away with very different absorption rates from the lesson.

Identifying and accurately naming emotions is part of your emotional intelligence. As you process your feelings, you will become more self-aware as you connect past choices to present realities. Behaviours that didn't work last time become habits you are breaking this time.

You will become more aware of your feelings in the present instead of storing them for later processing. With more experience, you can manage these feelings and gain the distance necessary to make a different choice than you did last time.

Through your inner work, you build empathy for others. Now you've seen a different angle or have more information or other priorities. You identify and question your assumptions and start to notice other people making them, too. You realize you weren't the only one duped. Minds can be set, and minds can be changed, and it's an owner's prerogative.

Memories are fallible, but when we look back and read our handwritten words, we can at least believe they were our own. At the time, at least, if we find it hard to believe we ever wrote them. That's when you realize how far you've come.

Get a notebook – one that feels good to you. Not one that feels like you shouldn't "ruin it" by writing in it. Not one that feels like you're back in school and hating it. Find your notebook and a great pen and record your thoughts and feelings, especially when you can't ignore them.

If you are wondering what to write about, start writing about what crosses your mind. Use it as an outlet for your unwanted thoughts, feelings and experiences. Build your trust with the paper, who will tell no one. Talk to the blankness, who never interrupts but patiently listens. As you do, you find yourself going deeper and deeper and getting to know yourself better and better.

Do you have a practice of draining your thoughts onto paper?

## 6. Start with the End

In Walter Mischel's marshmallow experiments, where you could earn a second marshmallow if you resisted eating the first one for some time, one of the funniest strategies was the kid who licked the marshmallow. No, he did not eat it. He followed the rules. He claimed it as his. He gave in to a little gastronomic pleasure without letting it overtake him. Maybe he became a

politician or took his talents to the courtroom; it was brilliant and innovative in testing the definitions and boundaries provided.

When you start with the end in mind, as is one of Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, you uncover rules you were following that don't exist or climb a ladder leaning on the wrong wall. You have definitions more rigid than required, just like when you look back on your own life and observe, "I didn't know we were allowed to do that."

Keeping the end in mind means knowing where you want to end up before you get there. I often used this habit to design data collection systems. With the end in mind, I thought about the data required to manage and improve the process while it was still in the design phase. It added new requirements, as always, but we had far fewer gaps that required the dreaded manual tracking.

Growing up with money was always an issue; when I started earning it, I wanted to ensure I was clever, beginning my financial quest with wealth and stability in mind. I attended a weekend event for women to learn the financial information they'd need through life. I heard horror stories about losing inheritances in divorces, getting laid off and having no emergency funds, and then Betty Jane Wiley's story of deliberately giving it all away—almost all, anyway—not the silk underwear.

For Wiley, enough was Enough. She wrote the book and told the story of selling things necessary for her life as a writer in Toronto but completely ridiculous for her dream address: a secret cabin in the woods. You don't need the crystal stemware, but silk long johns are the best for chilly winters.

Wiley helped me recognize that life offered more choice and freedom than first appeared, and she was willing to call out the illusions as she saw fit. She knew her truth, picked her destination, and embraced her eccentricity to transform her writing career according to her dreams and purpose.

An exit strategy protects you from bad organizations, poor investments, and dysfunctional relationships. When we fail to identify our exit strategy, we may settle in and stay, forgetting that it was supposed to be a temporary solution. Comfort can grab ahold of you. It can make you lose your dreams. Or you can do what you must, knowing this situation is temporary.

We get caught on the treadmill of more stuff, better vacations, impressive promotions, titles, and credentials. For many, work becomes a source of stress, frustration, and overwhelm. When those sources are chronic, they impact our health and wellness.

The sources of those damaging emotions are the decisions we and others make. We might be wrestling with an impending decision, coping with someone else's decision, or navigating the barrage of day-to-day decisions.

Our decisions affect other people, and at work, the more so, the higher you get. In our own lives, we might be able to live and let live, but at work, the decision of a CEO, colleague or manager can cost someone else their raise, promotion or even their job.

Within that competitive and dangerous reality, we learn to play games. At its worst, it's infighting. Every organization has an unspoken understanding of what's expected, what's tolerated, and what we don't talk about. The longer we stay in a team, company, or group, the more games we play, the more strategies we learn, and the more secrets we keep.

The problem is that it's real life and death, not a game. When we do these things, we hurt people we can't see or know. It's not just the insurance claim that is met with a policy of denial. It's not just the recalls of food, toys, and cars. It's not just the oil spills, the plastic ocean, and the ravaged earth.

We can all arrive at better decisions and act on them. Such is the nature of good choices—knowing what's best for you and doing it without looking back and calling it selfish, short-term, or the path we wished we'd taken.

Seth Godin, marketing thought leader, says that every successful person he knows has a way to conquer their lizard brain. The lizard brain, the oldest and smallest part of the brain, calls the shots long before your consciousness knows there is a shot to call.

Conquering the lizard brain requires the ability to delay gratification. Knowing that voice that says, "I need it now!" is full of hyperbole, desperation, and agenda, just as the one that backs away from a challenge is full of fear, and the one that spins everything into a success is full of ego.

Most organizations have management operating systems. These systems could teach people how to understand the consequences of their actions within their roles, the organization and beyond, but instead, they usually instruct people with narrow and specific directives. They expect obedience, and employees cannot think better than what they are told.

Whatever you want to call it, you need a system to know that you, your team, and your employees are equipped to conquer decisions. This doesn't mean recoiling from conflict with fake alignment; it means leveraging diverse perspectives and requiring leadership from all. It means everyone is engaged and using their unique position, perspective, and power to make the best decision. Peace is made, not kept.

Every position comes with a specific power. When it's your power, use it intentionally. When you begin with the end in mind, you understand the interconnectedness of everyone's power and how they are expected to use it in every anticipated situation. You know how the power you have connects to the result you need.

Without understanding this web of information, your lizard brain takes over, and you do whatever is easiest, fastest, and most immediate. At worst, you do what you are told.

When you think about your thinking and start with the end in mind, you will prevent wishful thinking, ruminative sabotage, and regretting dreams you didn't realize you had until it's too late to do anything about them.

Do you know where you want to end up, and is it where you are headed?

## Liberate Your Wild Dreams

If your wild dreams were anything like mine, they were trashed by the people you thought mattered. Sometimes, your critics don't know what they are saying or thinking. Instead of listening to them, you should laugh, thank them for their concern, input, and opinion, and carry on.

When I was seven, I wanted to write a recipe book. I was laughed at and told, "You can't even cook!" In response, I moved on to other dreams. In retrospect, I think I had ample time to learn and maybe even do it with innovative excellence. Not only was it a tame dream, but it could have had a long runway.

There are tame dreams and wild ones. The tame dreams are the ones sanctioned by society. Wild dreams are those you think you are not allowed to have, which peak from the edges of your consciousness. They live in the dark, vast wilderness of no idea because you have never ventured there and can't rely on anyone else to do it for you.

You dream, whether you remember them or not. When you liberate your wild dreams, you realize the people you thought mattered are human—not mean, lazy, or stupid, just human. Like humans, they sometimes pass their pain on to the next person.

One day, you might decide to keep your wild dreams secret.

Today, just as then, there is no realistic barrier to becoming a cookbook author, if that's what I meant. I know I could do it, but today, I know myself well enough to know that I'd become fixated on food, and fixated on food, I'd end up overweight and unhealthy.

As an adult, I know that some dreams are dumped in the past and can remain without shame, sadness, or remorse. But some of them cannot.

Realistically, what dream can't be updated, modernized or pursued today? It might be difficult and take longer than you can calculate, but rarely is it too late. Every barrier, roadblock, or constraint can be met with problem-solving skills and become a matter of time and effort.

You have to spend your life doing something. Time will pass anyway. Maybe it's time to coax those wild dreams out of hiding.



## 7. Eschew Obedience

The brain's number one goal is survival. Its job is to keep you alive, which means managing things like breathing, keeping your heart beating, and ensuring that your opinion always conforms to those around you.

What's with that last one?

In the days of the caveman, survival required conformity. You couldn't live without your community of other people, literally. You depended on everyone to survive for food, protection, and comfort. You go along with those around you to ensure they don't toss you out to fend for yourself.

Solomon Asch and his researchers designed an experiment to test what our brains do in the presence of other people. Participants were presented with three lines and asked to choose the longest line.

This is how it goes. You realize that the third one is longer. Yet, the people reporting their answers ahead of you all say they think the first one is the longest. When it's your turn, what do you say?

Going around the circle, the people before you are in on the experiment, and you don't know it. They give a wrong answer, but all choose the same incorrect answer. Do you change your answer or stick with your original?

The participants changed their answers to match. Thirty-seven percent of the time, the subject yielded to the group.

When asked afterward why they had given wrong answers, they couldn't say. Furthermore, their estimates of how often they changed their answers didn't come close to the truth.

The answer is that we change our answers because we are programmed to survive. Brain scans reveal that you aren't just saying a different answer but changing your mind to a different answer. Conformity happened without you realizing you had left something behind.

If you want to lower the grades of all the females in the math class, ask everyone to merely indicate the appropriate box of their gender on the cover sheet. It doesn't matter if the girl knows that the message from society that math is for boys is bogus. Studies prove that what matters is that she's heard it.

You've met people who actively manage other people's opinions. They speak first in meetings and use visual and physical intimidation to keep you quiet. Like the teacher looking out at the classroom over her spectacles, different people have different ways and reasons, and you know who is open-minded and who isn't.

Discrimination is insidious and prevalent, and it takes conscious and deliberate effort to root out, sort out, and dump out. More people are standing out and standing up for themselves. Groups of like-minded people are connecting, sharing, and supporting each other. People are advocating for laws to be revised. Citizens are calling for fairness, freedom, and the right to choose.

As a baby, you go along for the sake of your survival. As an adult, you have choices. Getting tossed out of the group today isn't a death sentence, but our brains don't know it. You no longer need to conform to stay alive. You can move. You've got 7 billion to select the 30 people around you to feed, clothe, protect, and help you. Choose to thrive instead of merely to survive.

Shonda Rhimes is a thriving force in entertainment. Creator of shows including Grey's Anatomy, she talks of "badassery" and the need to embrace her accomplishments. She reveals that she used to downplay them; she suspected it was expected. Her epiphany was her realization that no one wanted her to do that.

No one wants you to oversell your skills or overstate your success, but everyone wants you to own your accomplishments authentically. The path to living with resilience is paved by acting with humble pride, not humility.

Rhimes says she could only feel authentic when she stood in her place, owned her successes and the hard work it took to achieve them, and did not hide behind her shadow. When she wore her accomplishments as they fit, she says the people around her felt more comfortable, too—like they fit, not too big or small.

If Rhimes isn't successful, what does that make me? We all worry about how you will measure me if you measure yourself like that. Downplaying is acting like you didn't have natural talents, didn't sweat the time and hard work, and didn't impact or influence anything. Downplaying undermines everyone's effort and dedication.

The good news is that you've survived false competition, gender stereotypes, and systematic bias. Way to go! Now is the time to swap surviving for thriving. Revive your bright, shiny, happy self that knew no judgement, who only knew fun, ease, and playfulness.

Sometimes, progress is a simple matter of knowing when to move on. You have to hear your inner voice and tackle it for truth. Then you have to dare to let some people down. It's amazingly as simple as saying, "I'm not so sure." Then, they don't call you again. Gone without a problematic confrontation or an uncomfortable conversation. Sometimes, leaving behind those who do not support, nurture, or tolerate you is straightforward.

Pay attention to how you feel before and after an interaction with someone. When it's consistently a negative consequence, consider moving on for your mental health. It's a skill of self-protection before you get too deeply embedded.

It is people who change our opinions, open our communities and connect our philosophies. Conformity might be ingrained, but you should eschew obedience when it requires sacrifice. You should, and you can. Your people are out there.

You will get farther in life as yourself than trying to be anyone else. People who score high on authenticity tend to have better resources for dealing with setbacks, feel more secure in their ability to meet life's challenges, form deeper relationships and develop a stronger sense of self-worth. They also make more money. People in jobs that match their personalities make one month's wages more in their salaries than those trying to fit in.

According to Abraham Maslow, self-actualization is realizing your potential and the highest form of motivation. He says, "I think of the self-actualizing man not as an ordinary man with something added, but rather as the ordinary man with nothing taken away." Nothing conformed to fit in, nothing was downplayed away, and nothing was systematically ignored.

Are you a little too well-behaved?

#### 8. Meet Your Shoemaker

A friend recently confessed that she doesn't save the good stuff for the company. I congratulated her on her progress toward standing up for her values and not caving to tradition, while my own set of gold-rimmed chinaware is stuffed in the back of my cupboards, used once in twelve years.

Being welcomed with abundance into other people's homes makes us feel great. Why don't we use the good stuff for everyday celebrations, even if it's just dinner for one? We all have things we don't do for ourselves but happily do for others.

Many of us were raised in homes where the good stuff only comes out for guests. The houses even have dedicated bedrooms, bathrooms, and reserved linens. We were raised to scrimp when they can't see and spend when they can. Forget the Golden Rule; we learn to treat other people like they deserve better than we deserve, not merely as we wish to be treated, but better.

While generosity is a virtue, self-sacrifice is not.

They say the shoemaker's kids have no shoes; a plumber's house always has dripping taps, and a blacksmith's home has only wooden spoons. These days, you can see web designers with outdated or ugly sites, personal organizers whose homes are a disaster, and PR firms who are well-kept secrets. Once, I borrowed a car from a mechanic. It required some preamble about ignoring the lights on the dashboard and the lowdown on other idiosyncrasies.

Psychologists call this disconnect vocational irony. To those affected by the disconnect, it's not at all funny.

When it's apparent that they need to hire themselves, they scoff and say, "I get paid to do that," so if no one is paying us for it, we aren't going to do it. We all have a divide between what we

do for money and what we do for fun. We categorize time into buckets for work and play, allowing leakage to go only one way. When time and money are involved, whatever we do all day long, we tend not to do for ourselves.

One day, what you think others can't see will come out in its glory. Before then, the things you feel are your dirty secrets may well be known by many people who are too polite to let on that they are fully aware.

If you are like a doctor, lawyer or therapist, emotional attachment prevents you from serving yourself as well as you would serve a client. For the home organizer, it's much easier to tell someone to throw something out than to throw your own thing out.

Your professional personal cheating may not be blatant. You may be a project manager and manage your home projects just as you would at work. However, we all bring some professionalism to work that we shed when we kick off those high heels or unknot that tie.

Recently, my vet told me I needed to cut down on the portion I feed my cat because she was a little over her ideal weight. Me too, I must say, and from my visual assessment, the vet also. I wondered how she'd like it if I put a lock on her fridge; I could anticipate how my cat would react when her bowl was empty and she wanted to eat. Are you giving advice that doesn't genuinely fit the problem but is based on force and control?

We might give advice professionally that we don't personally follow. Every industry has a standard approach and experts who wouldn't take the advice they are paid to provide. What behaviour or belief do you leave at work? Or is it more a matter of picking one up when you get there? If it's the latter, is that evidence of some obedience that needs eschewing? Living under this mental divide drains your energy and becomes a slippery slope.

Your vocational irony could be a fear of showcasing your skills. The web developer would prefer clients to believe in the possibility rather than do their best and remove all illusions of skill. Sometimes, you must recognize skill gaps and how you will fill them.

When we come home after doing something all day, it can be the last thing we want to do. We've given our best all day and are worn out. Like the mechanic, it means moving on to something else when the day ends. Are you just too super-saturated with that activity? Maybe it's a sign that you are overworked and heading towards burnout.

Can you delegate, deflect, or decline some work to free up space during your workday to work on the job only you can do? If you answer no, then it's not just worth your attention; it demands it.

Maybe you don't define a problem in the same way as others. The mechanic doesn't need to fix anything. His vehicles serve him fine. If this is the case, you may be ignoring risks. You might get

caught one day needing a part with all the skill and time in the world because you aren't going anywhere. Don't lower your standards to the point where you might trip over them.

Are you devaluing yourself and your skills? If you don't think you are worth it, you may not be charging enough, settling for less than you deserve, or being taken advantage of by people daring enough to try. You are aware of this incongruence at some level, which is a source of your displeasure.

If you are in this situation, tally up the costs and benefits. That plumber's leaky faucet is costing him real money in water bills, let alone the environmental impact. If you won't do it for free, is it something you like doing, or is that the whole point of work?

Treat yourself as you would a guest. When you meet your shoemaker, you begin to accept what you think you deserve, who you think you are, and what you should do with your time.

What advice do you give but don't take?

### 9. Illuminate Fear

Edouard Claparède pulled a bit of a mean trick. He achieved a startling insight into the brain's learning process by doing so.

In the early 1900s, he was treating a woman who had suffered a brain injury. The injury prevented her from processing new information, as it prevented her from forming new memories. Every day, he had to introduce himself anew.

On this fateful day, he placed a thumbtack in the palm of his hand. For the first time, when she shook hands with him, she suffered a painful prick. After that, she refused to shake hands with him for every subsequent appointment but couldn't articulate why.

Learning happened completely unconsciously without any indication that it could or did, but obviously, her body knew, as demonstrated by her newly avoidant behaviours. Claparède postulated that her brain must have warned her. It knew what might be coming and swerved to avoid it. Memory was not required to learn to avoid pain.

With the help of today's technology, scientists know that all decisions start in the emotional unconscious. Information is gathered from your environment through your senses and travels up your spinal cord to your brain.

Information about your environment first enters the lizard part of your brain that makes survival-oriented decisions, like fighting or fleeing. From there, the information travels through to the emotional part of your brain before finally making it to your consciousness. As Claparède demonstrates, not all of it does.

Experiences of pain embed reactions without your awareness. Never again, your brain says and doesn't give your mind a chance to weigh in on the decision. A pinprick is hardly lasting damage or pain, yet it's enough to stop action.

Scientists know that psychological pain registers similar to bodily pain. How does a prick of the hand compare, then, to the pain of rejection? Or of failure?

We've all survived the grade school playground, the high school gymnasium, and the performance review. If fleeting physical pain can cause such reverberations in our future actions, what doors of opportunity slammed shut when we were picked on, unfairly evaluated, or didn't measure up?

You had big dreams and ideas before you cared about what anyone thought. If you didn't have helicopter parents, you might have even had a chance to try some of them out. And what happened? Pain. You skinned your knee, you lost your marbles, or you bruised your ego. You start to learn what not to do by your brain remembering the pain and going a different way.

The good news is that your brain can rewire its response—or rather, a rat's brain can. When rats were treated to a shock/noise combination, they learned to fear it. When the shock was removed, they initially feared the noise. After repeated exposure, the nervous system suppresses the response to fear. Lessons about pain are unlearned with the repetition of unmet expectations.

Just because it caused pain the first time doesn't mean it will the second time, but our brains don't take the risk. Unbeknownst to us, automatic behaviours arise to circumnavigate the situation.

Think back to the poor woman with the pin prick. If she found the courage to shake hands again, and if Claparède was so kind as not to prick her again, she would eventually overcome her fear of shaking his hand. Conscious effort can undo unconscious programming. Inspecting pain reduces it to a size that is more proportional to reality.

This is courage – the conscious intervention to do something you know will hurt. Instead of reacting like it will end you, you know it's only temporary discomfort.

Fear keeps you rooted in reaction and works so smoothly that you will not notice what you actively avoid. One day, avoidance becomes apparent, and it's up to you to recognize the fear underlying the poor choice.

If you avoided certain things because you thought they'd be too much pain, why not try them again? Ditto for the things you tried and didn't go well the first time. Perhaps they were dreams you can still achieve with flexibility and creativity, as Randy Pausch shares in his last lecture.

There are many ways to flip your fears back on themselves. What if you feared wasting your life and potential more than being broke and unemployed? What if you feared never knowing yourself more than you feared having no one at your funeral?

Fear has a hierarchy; some are nonsense, mingling with the real ones. Fear can make the ridiculous seem normal, like worrying about your funeral – you are the only one who won't be there.

It can be discomfoting to realize you have fears that aren't realistic in a world of grown-ups, science, and concrete reality. You have to be the one with the flashlight to shine the light and prove that there is nothing under the bed, and that bed might be a figurative one in your head. Sometimes, the light alone is enough to make fears dissipate.

What if you feared living a life that fulfilled someone else's dream or that your best songs remained unsung? What if you labelled that flip-flop of butterflies in your stomach as "excitement" instead of "nervous jitters"?

Leading experts believe all fear is learned. Shed light on your fear. Jack Canfield states, "Most fears cannot withstand the test of scrutiny and analysis. When we expose our fears to thoughtful examination, they usually evaporate." Bring up those memories of tacks, torment, and teenagers, and see how much you've grown.

What if it won't hurt as much as you fear?

## Fostering Success

There are two ways to get anything done: a project and a process.

Projects have the luxury of knowing precisely where they are headed and when they will finish. There is a deadline and a time when things will be called "done." Processes are never done. They have no end date, no finish line.

There is a time and a place for each. You use processes when there needs to be a flow to things. In projects, managers are there to create the flow of things. You need to tap someone and say, "Okay, what you need is ready now; you may begin." In a process, there is a natural connection between beginnings and endings; there is no need for someone to direct the flow.

If you've ever been on any project teams, you know that they all sound the same in status reports, but some are a hot, sweaty mess, and others are easy, breezy, beautiful collaborations. Some have done the same project so often that it might as well be a process, and the project manager is there simply for status reports. Some are genuine projects and seek to follow a method proven to have worked on other genuine projects.

Resilience is not a milestone you set out to accomplish but rather a way to live with short-term discomfort and even pain against a deep commitment to a different future. This shall not last. This will pass, even if I have to do something to make it happen. It's a process, not a project. You will try, and try again, and again.

A process evolves. Sometimes, it's immediate and quick, and other times, it's so slow as to be called drift. This happens because metals wear, valves leak, and filters plug. In life, the process is about your pace, your identity, and your reality.

You already know everything about picking your pace and those who try to speed you up or slow you down. You know your pace by knowing when you keep looking at the clock, willing for time to pass, and when you look and wonder where all the time went.

You may not know that you have changed and will change, along with your reality and your story.

### Batten the Hatches

Your past isn't fixed but a result of the last time you thought about it. Each time you recall a memory, it comes into the consciousness of the person recalling it, not the one who recorded it. Things seem funny, a little off because a more intelligent, wiser person knows how things turned out. Flags that exist in your memories weren't red the first time around.



With each realization, you change a little. Over time, you aren't the person you were but a new one. Fool me once; shame on me. But fool me twice? No way. Once bitten, twice shy is all about avoiding pain, if you recall.

To foster success, you must know how to keep up with yourself as you change, learn, and grow. If you are a process, not a project, you must be able to manage a process.

If you lose your keys periodically, you may come home loaded with stuff and have no consistent place to unload everything daily. When you leave, your mind is occupied with the morning's tasks and strangely empty of information when you ask, "What did I do when I came home last night?"

The best use of your time is to work on the root, not the symptom of the problem. Working on the symptom is buying several extra sets and running into the problem less often. It's helpful but not complete. Working on the root is as permanent as installing a hook beside the door, dedicating a pocket in the purse, or a bowl on the table.

When you work on the root, you work on the event that led to the symptom that captured your attention. Simply asking why many times and finding the first thing that precipitated the undesired result might be the best use of your time and energy instead of each of the symptoms and continued, if reduced, risk.

In business, I hear, "We found the root, and it's in the other department," or in upper management, or Mother Nature. As they say this, they shrug as if they are justified in giving up.

If you are experiencing the fallout, the problem is yours, and there is a solution you can and should implement, even if you have to satisfy yourself with indestructible walls against recurring symptoms. Do the best you can, as imperfect as it may be. Protection, prediction, and isolation work wonders against roots you cannot control.

You might have to clear some symptoms before you can see the source of the best use of your time, money, and energy. Take progress, and not just change, for the sake of change.

### 10. Spy Reality

Spying reality is accepting what is there instead of what you wish was there, what you are told is there, or what you think is there. Only then can you see where your time and resources are best spent and prioritize them consciously and purposefully because there is always more to do than time and resources.

Picture a circle into which you can place everything in your direct control. In Stephen Covey's [7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#), he describes this as your circle of control. You control when you get out of bed, where you work, and who you marry, among other key decisions.

The circle of influence is outside and surrounding the circle of control, like a target. It includes things you can try to get someone else to do but can't do directly.

The outermost circle is the circle of concern. Concerns are the things that worry you, but you can't control or influence.

Covey uses these concentric circles to explain that the closer to the center that you work, the more you can expect for your time and energy. When you need the fastest resolution and easiest payback, the answer is to work in your circle of control. No one can get in your way; you don't need anyone's help, permission, or input, and you only have yourself about whom to worry.

Instead, we spend most of our time on things that concern us, going nowhere. It's the time we spend watching the morning news, checking in on social media and keeping up to date with what's in fashion. We aren't in an immediate position to do anything about these things, but they occupy our energy and attention.

The circle of concern is where big fears grab our attention, sometimes because we are powerless. A feeling of desperation takes hold, and an inevitable unwanted future seems unchangeable. After all, by definition of the circle, you can't. All you can do is talk – complain, muse or wish.

Talking feels like you are doing something, even if you are not. It satisfies your brain that you took action, even while nothing changes, and your logical mind knows to continue worrying. It's the path of least effort, but it's biological to be drawn in. The marketers who steal and hold your attention are using science to trap you.

Attention to the circle of concern is a waste of time and energy. Progress will be easier and faster when you work within your circle of control, then on your circle of influence, and lastly, on your concerns. First, go fast, and then go far. Do what you can alone, then recruit and join other people.

If you notice you are getting sucked into concerns, decide what action you want to take about it. In reality, something can always be done. When you think of what you can do, move the item from something of concern to something you can influence. When you take action by strategizing the best way to do that, you are working in your circle of control on something in your circle of concern.

Organizing a rally, writing a letter, or building social awareness all require action by working within your circle of control. Changing hearts and minds involves influencing and impacting something in your circle of concern. The lack of action is a waste of worry. Use your worry productively and decide what you can do about it.

Be wary of the tendency to give up because you don't have the network yet. You can meet anyone, ask anyone anything, and get answers to all your questions. This is using social media productively.

Covey recommends that you work on increasing your circle of influence over time. Growing your network and making relationships stronger will do that. Improving your communication, negotiation, and influence skills will help. Relationship building is a long-term commitment, an investment of time and persistence that should never be done with the idea of an eventual payoff.

We must remember that other people are never under our control, even if they may be employees, children, or otherwise dependent. Assume you are dealing with a brain and body under its control, even if they do what's expected 99.9 percent of the time. Good or bad, there are always surprises.

All we can do with other people is influence them. While we may have every concern and attempt to influence with loving intentions, too often, we try to solve our problems by getting other people to change their ways.

Changing your spouse's behaviour to make you happier takes more work than changing your attitude, perspective, or whatever else you can do. We spend our time educating, coaxing, reminding, and nagging, directed at the spouse and not ourselves. Then, we waste time and money on a divorce and go through the same experience, not learning much better about the whole process of choosing, courting, and compromising.

When you direct it at yourself, you realize there are some things they'd change about you, too, and you start working on that. Better relationships begin by thinking about yourself first, if perhaps not in the ways you have in the past.

Control what you can and influence as needed. If you have strong and mutually supportive relationships with shared concerns, move on to changing the world. Rumi wrote, "Yesterday I was clever and wanted to change the world. Today, I am wise, so I am changing myself." Changing ourselves is where we have the most control, the most insight, and the most time.

Many things will concern you; most will appear as if you have to accept them, but the world changers were unwilling to settle and found some way to influence someone so they could impact everyone.

In everything that concerns you, there is someone you can influence, and doing so is in your control. That way, you can exert control over everything that concerns you, which is why you must prioritize.

Where can you swap concern for influence and influence for control?

### 11. Finish Business

Many people say that they are too busy all the time. For some, that's true. Others are bragging rather than complaining.

People will stay too busy if the actual function of being overscheduled ensures you never get to pause. It's simply a tool of procrastination to avoid silence and reflection, the real work of getting to know yourself.

Where does all your time go? You might be surprised at the difference between where you think it goes and where you spend it. May the clarity set you free to do something about it.

The quest takes time and energy. Many face overwhelming workloads, a rich social life, and insufficient sleep. There's no shortage of things vying for your finite resources of time and energy.

But overwhelm can be minimized, time can be found, and the work isn't as difficult or painful as you may anticipate.

Daily chores seem to overwhelm and multiply. That life-changing business idea is inside you, but first, the laundry. You have the next Harry Potter in your head, but today, there are mouths to feed.

It may not always be that way. One day, the business of nurturing is over, the home improvement projects are complete, and there's nothing left to do but clear the remaining clutter. A distracting physical environment is a distracting mental environment.

The objects in our surroundings create thoughts about the history behind them or the future they represent. A pile of bills reminds us of the need to pay them or the things we purchased and no longer want, obligations that came with fiscal impacts. Shame, guilt, and regret. These thoughts weigh us down and drain our energy unnecessarily.

With visual reminders of all you have to do everywhere you have to look, is it any wonder you only have the energy to sit down? To move forward into a new future, you should clear out the baggage of the past.

There's freedom in removing things and making space in your environment. You might think you've put it out of your mind, but when you've finally dealt with it, you feel so relieved that you realize how much mental and emotional tax you pay daily for unfinished business in your environment.

We think we own our things, but it's the reverse. All stuff takes maintenance and care, not just the big things like boats, houses, and cars. Clothing, tools, books, and tech must be stored and cleaned occasionally. Imagine the time on your hands when you own nothing; if you have no time, you may own too many things.

The more you have, the more you have to do. You could keep yourself busy and unfulfilled by caring for the things around you. You must start over again as soon as you think you've finished. It's a never-ending spiral of no time, freedom, or space for anything different, better, or new.

It's time to stop paying those emotional taxes. A purge makes space for a new future. When you deal with the things you have been ignoring or putting off, you might find they didn't take as much time as you thought.

Tasks you've been putting off may be easier than you anticipated. You almost always find that it wasn't worth all the mental anguish you spent thinking about the duty you had waiting for you. It was easier done than worried about.

Make a list of all the things you know you have to do. You might need a whole journal, and that's fine. Once it's out of your head, it is out of your mind and in a safe place. Now that you know you've recorded it, your mind will know it can stop mentally triggering a reminder every time you see it. And now, you can move it out of sight until you are ready to deal with it.

What if you could spend one hour daily tackling something on this list? Designate the hour of the day when you have the most energy. That could be first thing in the morning or when you get home. Whatever it is, schedule it, and protect that hour until these things are complete. It will happen.

When you have unexpected time, you can look at the list and pick something that matches the energy and available window. Without a record, you'll waste time remembering what you would do.

Pay attention to how important or urgent something is. If it's not necessary and not urgent, pack it away. If its status of urgency might change as time passes, note that deadline and put a reminder on your calendar at a point early enough to deal with it. If it takes two minutes or less to deal with it, do it now.

You don't even have to do everything on the list. Authenticity means knowing what is yours to do and what isn't. By sticking to your lane in life, you can build toward self-actualization and allow others to work toward theirs. You can deflect, delegate, destroy, or diminish the work as appropriate.

Deflecting the work means directing it to someone else. You can reduce your inbox by introducing the requestor to someone else who can help, thereby taking you out of the loop.

Delegating the work means getting someone else to do it for you. You'd be amazed at what people will do for only five dollars; check out [fiverr.com](https://www.fiverr.com).

Destroying the work means getting rid of the whole problem. If you have a pile of clothing to alter, sell or donate the entire pile, and voila, no more work. Since this measure is the most extreme, ensure you aren't making future troubles bigger, like having to purchase replacements when you are already struggling financially.

Diminishing the work means doing enough to make the rest easier later. If you have been postponing your taxes, gather and organize all the receipts and paperwork. You are most of the way there and can delegate to an expert to cross the finish line.

There's much power in getting this list smaller. You may feel stressed about its size and diversity, but once you pick something and do it, even if it's the easiest thing on the list, you will feel relieved and more competent.

Starting small creates momentum to tackle the next thing, and soon, you will be resolving things exactly when they present themselves instead of putting them off.

How does your environment trap you in the past?

### 12. Set Boundaries

They say fences make great neighbours, and they make great relationships, too. Boundaries are like fences for your relationships. Setting a boundary means being aware of how far you will go to meet the expectations of others and when you must draw a line.

Just because you've allowed something hundreds of times in the past, you can hold your boundary the very next time. Say no. It's a perfect little word and a complete sentence.

When they say, "That's not like her," you might want to resist the urge to say, "It is now."

Shonda Rhimes, creator of such hits as Grey's Anatomy and Scandal, tells of a story when someone crossed her boundary in My Year of Yes. At a PTA meeting, there was a demand that bake-sale goods be homemade. She writes that her response was automatic and not very contained. In a booming voice, she said, "Are you [expletive] kidding me?" causing heads to whip around in her direction.

Some parents work and don't have time or the inclination to bake. It's all about choices and boundaries between what you have time for and what you don't. Boundaries ensure we don't make personal sacrifices to accommodate other people's choices.

Proper and adequate boundaries enable personal freedom to flourish. It is inappropriate for a PTA to prohibit store-bought goods, as that imposes a standard on others. How would you categorize the contributions of a mother who owns a baking company? A boundary reflects what we will or won't do according to our principles. To each their sandbox in life.

Boundaries let you do some serious juggling with people, priorities, and the pace with which you choose to satisfy them. You can't do it all; you must choose, and that's true no matter who you are or your parenting ambitions.

Rhimes explains that she misses story time with her kids if she kills it on a script. If she reads books with her kids, she ignores her work. She declares she doesn't do it all. When one thing

gets her focus, another suffers. And there's nothing on her list worth crossing off to do home baking.

You could say the same for the pursuit of any goal. When you are moving forward with one thing, everything else on your list of priorities is not getting your attention or making progress. That's fine, as long as you are making these choices for yourself, and that is precisely what setting boundaries is all about – saying no to other things.

Anything you spend your time on should be worth your time, and you make the call. If someone wants you to do home baking and that requires you to sacrifice something important to you, the answer you are looking for is "No."

Your time is precious and limited; you only have so much of it and can't get it back once it's gone. Knowing this, you might lose your cool when stuck in traffic or forced to wait unexpectedly and be tempted to multitask.

Multitasking is not a good strategy for stretching your time and energy further. In your brain, there is no such thing. The brain can only do one thing at a time, and you lose momentum when you switch tasks.

When we get interrupted, we lose concentration, and it takes an average of 23 minutes to get back to the level of focus you had before the interruption. Getting interrupted increases stress, frustration, mental effort and time pressure. Put your phone on silent to get things done.

Stuck in traffic is not a good time to catch up on your emails or phone your friends. Even hands-free technology distracts you from potentially dangerous situations. Instead, you can focus on the road, other drivers, and your mindfulness practice.

Some things are done better together than alone, without the cost of multitasking. Sure, you have to eat and network, so Never Eat Alone, as Keith Ferrazzi suggests.

Watch that your boundaries deliver as you intend. When one of my friends swapped our intimate coffee chats for a workout connection, it ended the intimacy. You can't say the same things when they are going to be overheard, so a certain quality of the relationship was lost. Redefining the relationship in such a way could have been anything from intentional to the best available option, but the mere question is too intimate to ask.

How do you want your relationships? Once you've decided on it, there's more than one way to set a boundary and more than one downside to doing too many things simultaneously. Set your boundaries and let other people choose how they would like to respond. It's all you can do since you can only control yourself.

In your relationships, you should set and enforce some boundaries. Friends that suck your energy aren't friends. Tune into your feelings in your relationships to better inform yourself about the boundaries you should be setting.

You don't have to cut friends out, but you can define time limits, schedules, and your responses. Pick and choose based on your priorities and feelings, not a sense of obligation. Your primary responsibility is to you. Your obligation to everyone else is to be able to show up with your best energy.

Your feelings matter, your goals and desires matter, and your opinion matters. Make sure they are heard. Although not everyone will listen or care, you deserve to express them, and their responses tell you everything you need to know. When you demonstrate self-respect, you will notice that respect from others also ratchets up a notch or two.

Most of us are doing too much and are frazzled. Setting some boundaries might be challenging and involve some tough conversations. To build your motivation, think of the relief you will feel after you've had them.

What lines do you need to draw to set yourself free?

### Craft a New You

If your world needs changing, and you know it, crafting a new you about becoming is about the person capable of getting it done. Whomever you need to be to do it – do not deny it, ignore it, or sweep it away, but lean into your full potential.

Whatever you do, the only option not available to you is acceptance. No, there are things you don't accept and can't take. There are many ways to make bitter pills easier to swallow, but one day, you can't swallow them anymore. Something needs to be done, and you are the one to do it.

Look in the mirror and see your hero. Every hero goes on a journey, never without an unwanted call to action and many trials and tribulations. The trials and tribulations prepare the hero, who knows he's there not because he's superior but because he is the best choice for the undeniable need.

When our emperors aren't wearing clothes, someone must notice and let us all know. You can't rely on traditional media, which are paid to take a particular political perspective, or social media, which is standard-less yet controlled and designed to be an echo chamber.

Your most important part of you, your most vital contribution to the world, might be something only you can do, even if you aren't the best in any singular category. It's the combination that matters and is unique to you. The rest is communication, influence, and other things you can learn.

Crafting something means taking the time to work with what nature presents and is already there instead of bulldozing the trees to put up a subdivision and build a parking lot. This unique direction and patience of pursuit separates a craft from a hobby or a profession.



Everyone has personal goals and a pace of progress that suits them, as you do yours. Take your time, and do it deliberately. Our efforts to change can take a long time to materialize externally, yet you know there is progress. It's a craft.

You can be whomever you'd like to be and leave behind whatever traits, habits, and behaviours that don't serve you. However, don't go bulldozing down the good stuff. You might want to appreciate who you are and who you might be before firing up the power tools of personal change.

### 13. Build Your Wellness

In business, it's supposed to be all about what the customer is willing to pay for. According to management consultants, that's about five percent of total expenses for every business. The singer P!nk laughs about how she thought being a singer would be about singing, but she says it's "about five and a half percent of it."

The amusing thing about P!nk's five-and-a-half quantification is that it seems true for most professions – what you think you do full-time is what you do about five percent of the time. The rest of the time, you are doing the collateral work, making that way possible, or continuing along the path and managing, leading, and sustaining.

Stereotypes help inform our expectations. They are created when a general rule of thumb describes the population well enough. Profession is one such shortcut. Stereotypes stop working when we forget that they were shortcuts for some and start thinking of them as forgone conclusions for all of them. The depth of uniqueness within a collective population is often underappreciated.

The ninety-five percent that looks like the collateral is the part that makes all the difference, while we all focus on the 5 percent that's visible. The rest is there, like scaffolding for success. You can't get there without it, and it will define the height you achieve.

The ninety-five is the way of doing what you do. It's the accountant at Enron, the one at the collection agency, or the sole proprietor who volunteers for the non-profit on the weekends. No two accountants are created the same.

How, where, and why you use your skills will determine if you find joy in your work or sheer drudgery – while you do the same activities, even while an outsider cannot observe the difference. Your orientation makes all the difference to your wellness.

I've heard every HR manager say they have a "great" culture in business. Yet, what is excellent to you may be horrible to me. Get it wrong, and things that they think are rewards feel like punishment to the receiver, like the time the boss was taking us all on her boat for the weekend. I was horrified at the prospect while everyone else cheered.

Workplace cultures are as different as people, yet they can be described as such. There are extroverted and introverted ones, ones open to new ideas and those who stick to tradition, micromanaged and risk-tolerant, empathetic, and extreme capitalist ones. If you know yourself and do your research, you can find where you fit, and where you fit is where your wellness will soar.

These eight dimensions of wellness are physical, intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual, environmental, occupational, and financial.

Physical wellness is the ability to maintain a healthy quality of life. This ability is the product of eating right, moving regularly with periods of intensity, taking routine check-ups, and avoiding detrimental behaviours. Feeling and being healthy gives you energy, stamina, and resilience that will serve you through stressful and frustrating periods. If you think you are getting away with poor physical health, don't get to the point where you aren't healthy enough to make the changes required.

Intellectual wellness is the ability to open our minds to new ideas and experiences that could enhance our lives. Openness is one of the five personality traits; we all have a level with which we are comfortable, but it's essential to fill that level and not stay stagnant and bored. Learning is a lifelong pursuit that doesn't have to take place formally. Expanding your horizons and using your creativity will develop your intellectual wellness.

Social wellness is the ability to relate to and connect with other people. We become like the five closest people around us, so it's essential to choose wisely. Remember, relationships are about quality, not quantity. Opportunities to connect exist within any of these other dimensions. Think about it in person and not just online.

Emotional wellness is about understanding ourselves and our feelings. Being able to observe them and let them go instead of reacting to them and letting them dictate our actions is the product of inner work like you are doing here and now.

Spiritual wellness is the ability to establish peace and harmony in your life. Peace and harmony result from matching what you value with what you do and the search for meaning and purpose. Taking time out for relaxation and meditation will give you time and space to ponder more significant questions. Accepting the views of others without needing to agree with them will also improve your spiritual wellness.

Environmental wellness is the ability to impact the world around us positively, be it your office, home, neighbourhood, or planet. The scope can include everything from the design and décor of space to its physical location and the people that populate it. They say people are a product of their environments, so root yourself somewhere to grow. Ensure you get fresh air and natural light every day. You may decide to become an advocate for the planet; you may choose to redecorate.

Occupational wellness is the ability to get personal fulfillment from our jobs while having time for other pursuits. You need to use your strengths to get accurate fulfillment in your work. Here, your wellness is determined by the demands on your time and the degree of support. If one is out of whack, you could feel less than well. Your career path is something that is up to you to manage. It's also only up to you to evaluate. Misery to one can be bliss to another. If a new role, career or organization promise a better use of your strengths, go for it.

Financial wellness is being fully aware of your financial state. You create and manage budgets. You have a saving plan for the short and long term. You have identified your financial goals and might be working with a financial planner to realize them. Achieving financial wellness might mean cutting back in other areas. It might mean adding to your skill set and finding higher-paying work with better benefits. You may be in a position where the best financial picture means striking out alone.

To live a top-quality life, you need good health in all eight dimensions of wellness.

Is your wellness balanced and complete?

#### 14. Alter Your Ego

If you have ever been in a new situation, imagined someone else, and asked yourself, "What would they do?" you already understand the power of an alter ego. Projecting that person's perspective provides a brand new window. Even if you are asking what Jesus would do, he offered much instruction that might help point to answers, but the instructions told as stories were designed so you get to know the person, not a dogged checklist of do's and don't's.

Know the person, and you can have a good guess what to do. Armed with lists, there might be too many holes and contradictions, but the latter better describes our justice system than the former.

Norma Jean understood brand power, especially the label you give it. You know her as Marilyn Monroe. Beyoncé understood the power of an alter ego and told us all about her on her third album, Sasha Fierce.

It's common practice for women to change their last name upon marriage to match their spouse. They are no longer singletons; they are now wives, and their name change might help them transition into a new way of being in the world. Whether or not this tradition is fair and equal is up to you to decide, or if anyone changes in the act of marriage.

What's in a name? It can mean a lot. Nominative determinism is the theory that people gravitate toward careers that fit their names. It came about in 1994 with humour when a researcher stumbled upon a paper on urology by Splatt and Weedon and a book on polar explorations by Daniel Snowman. We notice things that seem to have patterns and meanings, whether or not they do.

Labels can define who we are as we conform to the power of expectation, even when it's random. One study classified soldiers by their performance levels before training. Teachers knew how each soldier was classified, but the soldiers did not. Final performance results correlated closely with the original classification. The twist is that the pre-classifications were completely random. This and similar evidence show that we fulfill our expectations consciously and unconsciously.

People whose names are at the beginning of the alphabet have that experience of being called on first imprinted on their behaviour. They don't jump at an opportunity because they've always been at the front line. Teasing them with scarcity doesn't get them to buy. It works better with people toward the end of the alphabet who have heard, "Sorry, we already ran out," a few too many times.

Names are labels that describe the person we are and whether or not they match. If you want to change the person you are, it isn't as simple as changing a name, but it might be the easiest way to start. When that new name corresponds to a new behaviour or way of being, you have created an alter ego. The correct name helps other people's expectations align with the message you want to send.

A name can mean everything, or it can mean nothing. Ultimately, the person bearing the name makes conscious decisions and employs free will. An alter ego isn't just a different name; it's a distinct personality – one that is crafted, designed and provides the ability to adapt to something more manageable and faster than usual. Alter your ego until it becomes a part of your personality.

Having an alter ego to help you into a new way of being, thinking and believing is nothing new. An alter ego can help you immediately step into a new personality. Actors do it from role to role. In character, they try to stay that way, for even the most minor step out can mean over or under-reacting on camera, says Jason Alexander, although you may think of him as George Costanza from Seinfeld.

For Monroe, she felt unwanted. Everyone else was in an orphanage because they didn't have parents. Her mother was still alive, so she believed she was there because hers didn't want her. Today, she is remembered as a sex symbol, a wife to notable men and a mistress of the President. Wanted, indeed.

In an interview with ITN Music, Beyoncé explains that she is naturally introspective and serious, while Sasha Fierce is who she is on stage when performing. With a litany of awards and accolades, something must be working.

It worked so well; she reported: "I don't need Sasha Fierce anymore because I've grown, and now, I'm able to merge the two." Today, known as Queen B, there's no need for anything more

than a letter and a crown. If you never thought you could be a singer because of stage fright, maybe an alter ego is all you need.

When you embrace change, you become a different person. It happens gradually; sometimes, we don't realize we've changed until someone points it out. An alter ego can make it happen deliberately and quickly, a crafted effort instead of an organic one, a revolution of personality instead of an evolution of one. An alter ego helps leave the past in the past. It helps to create the space that time will eventually provide: a new name, a new role, a new behaviour, a new story.

Alter egos assist you on the path to freedom, to help you bounce forward into a completely new way of being. As a facilitator of change, an alter ego paints a clear picture of the person you aim to become. Since pictures are required to get the right brain involved in the change effort, the more visual, the better.

Creating your alter ego can be the easiest step to take when facing change and may be the most fun. You get to decide who you are and want to be. Choosing your name and way of being might be the most self-empowering thing you can do. Even if only you know.

Turn your checklists and rules into a personality. How does someone who embodies the intent behave? Everyone makes different choices about presenting themselves, creating a personality that does certain things. If you want to do other things, you need a distinct personality, if just for a little while.

Choose the name with deliberate intention. Cheryl Strayed chose her last name after she did such a thing. She strayed and wrote the Wild book about it. Richard Prince said, "I never had a penny in my name, so I changed it."

For me, Rayne Wordsmith is the part of me who never lived through any of this but lived to write about it, to protect the beautiful people who smacked me along from the one-sided perspective I've offered. Become born into a new self with no baggage and all the skills and courage you need to succeed.

Who is your ideal self?

### 15. Discover Your Genius

Conversations around weaknesses start early. What got your attention when you brought your report card home as a child? The courses you excelled at or the ones bringing the average down? When you discover your strengths, you thrive, but it's weaknesses where we tend to focus.

Solving weaknesses commands attention, but building strengths offers the most significant payback. When we talk about strengths, we have enthusiasm and energy. When we talk about

weaknesses, we have shame and embarrassment. You will always get farther on positive energy than you will on the negative.

For children and report cards, there are practical reasons why focusing on weaknesses might be right. Weaknesses command your attention when it's a one-personality-fits-all society.

Suppose you learned only about IQ, your intelligence quotient. In that case, you might think that there are smart people and not smart people, and everyone falls somewhere on the spectrum between the two, quantified for easier comparison.

Today, we know that this is as flawed as looking at society as a black-and-white one and giving everyone a number – and value – based on the whiteness of their skin. The very idea is shocking but doesn't stray too far from history.

What we've learned with skin, we need to know with brains. Eliminating biased ideas from all the corners of the psyche where they may lurk takes a long time. Bias is insidious, and the call to identify it is universal.

There are so many different ways to be intelligent that everyone may be in their singular intelligence category. This appreciation for diversity means it's less important to fix your weaknesses and more essential to find and build your strengths. Well-rounded is for ball bearings, not people.

School could be an opportunity to learn precisely how you are different in a good way instead of how you are different and must change. Build, not tear down. Support and assist students in finding these differences, as teachers may be best positioned to do so.

You may have found ease in school with only the things that seem to disappear year after year: art, music, writing, reading. With that sense of immersion, you could graduate without appreciating or knowing your strengths.

Everyone knows people in the arts – they command everyone's attention, prioritizing filling their dreams over anything else. Yet, they seem to end up with material abundance as collateral. They are entrepreneurs who bet on themselves.

Entrepreneurship is highly valuable, but you won't learn much about that in school, either. Real life is an entirely different game of earning a living. You have to find out what people will buy from you, which takes emptying their wallet and choosing you as the recipient. And people are picky. They all want it fast, free, and perfect from the one who is the best.

You can satisfy that market finickiness with ease. All it takes is discovering your strengths. As an adult, it matters how you are better than average. After you matriculate to society, it's up to you. You've made it through the system; now, you can carve out your standards and play to your strengths.

Weaknesses and strengths might be two sides of the same coin. Strength in one situation may be labelled a weakness in another. You might not have to work as hard to improve as you think. It might be more of flipping your perspective and identifying the context.

One reliable way to identify our strengths is through our frustration with others. We take our strengths for granted and assume everyone else finds them as easy. But they will disappoint you, and you will get upset. I call it the frustration of genius, having been through that situation myself when I had my lunchtime rant at the conference and someone showed me the mirror.

When you say, "I can't believe they are so stupid," it could be that they are doing their best. They could be completely unaware of whatever is on your mind. You might be uniquely suited to see the solution to a problem that perhaps only you can see.

Unrecognized, your source of genius will cause you immense frustration as you expect the same performance or ability from other people. When you are in that situation, try increasing your capacity for self-appreciation. When you flip the mirror around, you might realize that you are far better than average and that most people aren't dumb, lazy or mean.

How can you help other people navigate through what you've gone through to have learned what you know and be able to go through life as you do, better for it? You are equipped to connect and assist when you've been there and felt that. When you haven't been there and never thought it, you risk sounding condescending and inflicting more harm than good, as you may already know from experience.

If building strengths is the key to discovering your genius, and everyone has one, why aren't you doing it already? Three myths might be holding you back.

The first myth is that we change as we age, but the reality is that we learn to conform and become farther from our true selves. Your dreams, skills, and values will change, but your personality will remain the same as long as your beliefs and perceptions remain.

The second myth is that you can't rely on your strengths but must determine how to improve your weaknesses. The reality is that you can evolve your role toward what energizes you and away from your weaknesses, transition to new jobs, and find purposeful work outside the confines of a traditional career. You have transferable skills and experience and can leverage or pivot into many possibilities.

The third myth is that strength is something where you exhibit high performance. If you are good at it but don't enjoy it, it's not a strength. If you are relieved when it's over, it's not a strength. It's about how you feel while doing it. If you like doing it, you will have some capability, and doing the work to get better at it doesn't feel like a chore. If you enjoy it, you will naturally gravitate toward excellence.

Having a strength doesn't mean you are naturally excellent. It means you have an accelerated ability to achieve it. You must still put in the teaching and training time, but you won't need as much.

I didn't like math, especially statistics, and I became embroiled in statistics, even to the point of teaching it to others. I spent eighty percent of my time doing things I didn't like, which required all my focus and concentration to function at an acceptable level. Is it any wonder I raced toward retirement as fast as possible and struggled to find energy at the end of the day?

It takes integrity to admit your weaknesses, but your feelings are undeniable if the message isn't always straightforward. If you don't feel good, you aren't using your strengths; knowing them is half the battle. It takes work to articulate and identify them, but Marcus Buckingham has developed a test to help make this job more manageable.

Buckingham's test told me my five strengths were Strategic, Focus, Achiever, Learner, and Ideation. That's precisely what I do now, and I leave the statistics, socializing, and stressing to others.

What is the nature of your unique capabilities?

### Make Some Momentum

Three frogs hang out on a lily pad, enjoying the afternoon sun. One of them decides to head back to work. How many are left? If you said two, you forget that choosing to do something and doing it are two different things.

As a youngster, I spent some time portaging. This is the quintessential Canadian activity of paddling a canoe, carrying it and all your stuff across sketchy terrain, and sleeping in a tent for days. Rain or shine, because sites are reserved and paid for in advance. If you don't get a move on, someone will come along and boot you out of their place.

What seems superb on a warm sunny day is character-building on a windy day in wet clothing. Those summers made me thankful for pine needles because what is pointed and hurtful on one end is soft cushioning when they give up their ghost and fall to the ground. Sometimes, gratitude is a matter of time and perspective and the need to see what was always there and what will be gone tomorrow.

Some say this too shall pass, and there will be no moment like this. Forward motion is a matter of moments and noticing the ones that matter. If you leave it to intuition to tell you which ones to appreciate and which to call challenging, you might get it all wrong. Instead of leaping, you might be hanging out, basking in the sun, and socializing in the mainstream.

We all crave change but are stuck with the devil we know over the devil we don't. The problem is that the devil we don't know may be an angel. We need a method to make new decisions so



that we minimize risk. We need the confidence that change will not come with unforeseen drawbacks or worse problems.

Leaving comfort and security for ambiguous futures and uncertain journeys requires a reason to go and a better reason to keep going when the going gets difficult. Make tiny little changes to find your reasons.

Strengthen the magnet's power that pulls you from where you are today. Then, you will be free to make your own choices about tomorrow.

### 16. Baby Your Attitude

Remember when you were a toddler, just learning to walk? Of course, you don't; I don't, so let's review.

You decided to give it a go and put one foot in front of the other. Your attention was on a goal in the distance. You stayed present with no expectations and no disappointments. You didn't aim for a perfect stride.

When you fell, you got back up. The failure didn't overwhelm you. The possibility of doing it again didn't paralyze you. Memories and fears didn't stop you. No, you saw a gap between where you were and what you wanted to be, and that's all you needed. A baby has a "wow" brain working as you learn through experience.

As an adult, learning has become a chore, adventure a threat. You don't have a clean slate of a baby anymore. You've forgotten that experiments don't always succeed but are necessary for progress. Mistakes come with stigmas, and trying new things becomes uncomfortable.

Adulthood has made us fixed, harsh, and jaded. You've heard and said things like, "This doesn't do it for me," or "This doesn't feel right." We might look stupid, feel awkward, or get laughed at. We want to quit as the discomfort mounts to frustration.

Intuitively, we read these biological signals as time to quit, when contrarily, these are the signs that we are just about to break through. When we've almost made it, we think it's time to stop. They say it's darkest just before the dawn.

When discomfort becomes apparent and progress becomes measured in baby steps, instead of reading it as a signal to stop, it's counterintuitively a signal to push a little more. When it's the hardest, it's when you are about to break through. When you think you can't sit for a moment longer in meditation and are itching to leave, but you stay, it is the moment you train your body who's the boss.

When things get tough, a chemical response kicks in. Your body realizes that change is happening. Your cells receive cortisol, the chemical of stress. Your brain wants to use that signal to shut down and go back to the status quo. Your consciousness is in the driver's seat. Are you going to press on or listen to that backseat driver?

You can do so much more than your brain wants you to know. It's very protective of you, but you can take charge.

Experience is capable of changing the structure of the brain. We are not born with a set number of neurons that are fixed in function. The brain can grow and change, and the feedback is most intense before it yields to change.

The right attitude isn't about ignoring real pain but the early indicators that get confused for impending doom. For instance, your body can go three days without food without an issue, but when is it that you think you are dying of hunger? For some people, it's a matter of mere hours. If you can ignore it, it disappears, and you don't die.

If you push through this change notification, your body changes its response. Now, those cells are getting serotonin, and they vibrate differently. When you feel this vibration, it's like pins and needles. Some part of you was asleep, and it's waking up. Push through the discomfort and feel relief as a new way of thinking, living, or being becomes the new normal.

No, it's not supposed to feel right; it's supposed to feel new and different. You've labelled the feeling of new and other as evil. You have learned to retreat when you've almost made it. You've become stuck, bored, and safe.

Cameron Diaz of Charlie's Angels said she was taught to love the pain from adequately stressed muscles. When that happens, tiny tears form, and from the tears comes new growth. You get stronger because you teach your body that the status quo isn't good enough.

When you have a baby's attitude, you respond to information differently. You can absorb, consider, and reject it if it doesn't move you forward. You begin with humour and joy instead of expecting it as a product of your environment. Instead of reacting, you respond. You are looking past the inevitable discomfort to the moment when it passes.

You need to start remembering the relief and awesomeness of accomplishment. Label that feeling as growth, confidence, and adventure. Think, "Wow, I can't wait to see what's next. "I wonder what other opportunities will unfold." and "This is feeling good."

Returning your baby attitude means attacking some of the attitudes you've created. Attitudes about looking like a fool, making mistakes, fearing failure. Here's the word scientists use, and you can too: experiment.

An experiment is a test, an experience, and a lesson. The only failures are those of bad design, and design is something anyone can learn. Shall we try this? The most challenging part can be determining what to measure.

We do things we must do, so make it a requirement: no arguments with yourself, no deadline extensions, and no rationalizing away hitting the snooze button again. Tell yourself, "I will not

give up,” and then don’t. You will persevere. You are filling your life with excitement, momentum, and transformation. You will trust yourself.

If you’ve come this far but thought it should be easier, it’s no problem to dig a little deeper. If others are criticizing you, get new people.

If you lack motivation, inspiration or enthusiasm, review your why and renew your answers. Dream a new dream if the old one wore out.

If you thought you’d see results sooner, find a different indicator, as you may be missing an earlier one.

Consult an expert to improve your process. Ask other people who’ve been where you are what worked for them. Babies can’t pick their families or training, but you can choose your community, perspective, and mindset.

You can do it; it is in you, and your life could be so much better for it, better than you imagine. Attitude makes all the difference. When you think you can, you will find a way. It may not be immediate, but doors will open, and ideas will emerge.

We all have the determination to pursue our goals. Determination makes everything possible, including having fun and finding humour.

What experiment would liberate you from fears of failure?

### 17. Tap Curiosity

Have you ever had the experience of doing something even though you knew better? I know I have, and often. In the novel Sweet Thursday, John Steinbeck wrote, “Man is the only kind of varmint sets his trap, baits it, and then steps in it.” Just like excellent authors do, he captured an accurate – if not flattering - observation of human nature.

Why are we our worst enemies, and is there anything we can do to outsmart human nature? This question has captured my fascination and attention for the past ten years, and I argue that we can—and have to—evolve our decisions beyond human nature.

Sometimes, doing things when we know we shouldn’t it’s a good definition of “fun.” However, most mistaken decisions are not so obvious.

Decisions fly right under our radar. We often don’t even recognize that we have even made a decision. According to world-renowned brain scientist Eric Kandel, eighty to ninety percent of what we do is unconscious. Brain scientists can prove that decisions are made up to seven seconds before we know we’ve made a decision.

Psychologists can show that when equally representative information is available, we ignore the pieces that disprove what we have already decided and hone in on the pieces that prove our stance. This error in selecting information with a skewed perspective is called confirmation bias.

When that decision doesn't work out as planned, we follow it. We don't tend to look back and realize or admit we made a mistake, but we keep moving forward.

If mistakes were made, they were made by someone else. Cognitive dissonance kicks in to explain away our foibles and failings. We continue to follow the path that we are already on, with minor corrections when required.

We spend good money after bad, good energy on trying to solve the wrong problems, and sound resources filling holes in solutions that don't work—individually, organizationally, and globally.

That is until we reach the end of that path and find a wall. They say that people with an addiction don't act until they reach rock bottom. The good news is that you can define rock bottom as when you decide to take a different action and later can look back and realize that was the lowest point—everything got better after that point.

Mindfulness, becoming aware of all the invisible thoughts, decisions and actions you make, helps drop the veil on the automatic programming that might be derailing you. Try swapping willpower for curiosity.

Picture the face of a curious baby. Now, picture the face of a determined two-year-old. The first is open, willing, and primed for learning. The second is rigid, forced and set. The difference is a future that is broad and flexible versus one that is narrow and fixed. Contrary to what you may think, being determined to accomplish something doesn't brace you for hard work as well as curiosity can.

Psychologist Ibrahim Senay devised a way to test the difference between thinking, "Will I?" and "I will." The former is a curious mindset, while the latter is determination.

The results are surprising. In several different test designs, the participants primed with "Will I" stuck with complex tasks significantly longer.

Further analysis revealed that internal rewards drove those primed with a questioning mindset more compared to trying to achieve an arbitrary external standard.

Saying "I will" also sets you up for a lack of resilience. We all stumble when trying new things. When you fall once, you will feel like a failure, possibly guilty and deflated. Being determined requires willpower. Willpower is a limited resource, whereas curiosity can be endless.

When you are curious about yourself, you may respond with creativity and find new ways to achieve the goal. The goal becomes a journey of discovery instead of a pre-determined fixed path with only a black-and-white, yes-or-no, two-option result.

Curiosity is something that you can develop. It's just about noticing things we find interesting. The power of observation leads us to recognize more questions to pursue. We are engaged and

focused, shutting out the distractions that seem to come from everywhere and diluting our productivity. We feel vigour and energy as we spot opportunities we might have missed.

Being curious about others builds relationships. Asking other people about themselves and listening to the answers so that you can ask further questions shows people that you are genuinely listening. That is a rare and remarkable experience.

When doctors do it, they are far less likely to be sued in case of a mistake. Doing it in an interview shows you are passionately interested in the company and helps you stand out. Do it when you are dating; you are much more likely to get a second date.

Curiosity may even help you live longer. One study observed 1,000 older adults over five years. In conclusion, the adults rated as more curious were likelier to be alive, even after considering other factors.

In other studies, those who regularly and deliberately engage in experiences that take them out of their regular routines demonstrated healthier brains later in life.

As you move into the new world your dreams and efforts create, take time for curiosity. You can build your curiosity by learning new things. There may be skills to develop, knowledge to absorb, or training to take. Any of these will create opportunities to become more curious and revel in new experiences.

Allow your fascination and engagement to be your guide. Allow yourself to engage in these new things, even if it takes time away from the forward march. Not only will this help your willpower and ability to stick to it, but it may also just take you to a new destination even better than the one you were plotting toward. It might just pay for itself with a longer life.

Be open, live in the mystery, and forget that black-and-white thinking of determination and judgment.

Where can you swap willpower for curiosity?

### 18. Find Your Goldilocks

Just like Goldilocks and her struggles, some goals will feel too small, and others too big.

The correct size of a goal is personal, but universally, a goal too small will not feel worthwhile, and a goal too big will feel insurmountable. Do you know the size that works for you?

Tricks might work for you. One fitness guru suggests setting a goal of just one push-up, with the notion that when you do one, you will do more because you are already there, and what's one more?

Or, you might think, why bother with just one? It's much preparation for a little effort, and no one has transformed their body with just one push-up. We think it's not worth it, so we don't do it. You might be able to trick yourself or see right through your games.

Another fitness guru suggested that you go to the gym, with the notion that we will work out because we are there. However, when I used the time instead to lounge in the hot tub, steam room and sauna, I started thinking of the gym as a place to relax instead of to work out.

Making goals smaller to make them more achievable didn't work for me. Worse, I feared that if I moved forward while looking down at my feet, I would lose track of where I was headed. Accomplishing many tasks that don't add to significant change can be exhausting and unrewarding in the long term.

Significant goals are motivating but can be daunting. Enthusiasm is required to launch a long project. According to Todd Beeler's [The 7 Hidden Secrets of Motivation](#), facts give us reasons to justify our motives but aren't the root of motivation. The heart leads, and the head follows. Any aspiration from a "should" or "could" is weaker than one rooted in the heart's desire.

Once you've started, you are suckered in and keep pushing out the end date. I have many projects I may not have started if I'd known they would have taken so long, yet we all have lives, careers and ourselves to fill.

To break big, hairy goals into SMART goals that aren't too small or insignificant, think about worthwhile milestones. What's the minimum reward to make it worthwhile, and how long will it take?

What's true for you may not be accurate for your employees, so engage them instead of deciding for them. This may require going outside your comfort zone as you include people in decisions you previously might have made alone. Cheers to you for progressing outside of your comfort zone.

Going out of your comfort zone requires more time and energy, but maybe only the first time. Do you remember when you were learning to drive? It might have been a palm-sweaty, nerve-wracking experience, but now you can get somewhere and not even remember the drive. When it's a first, realize that it will take more time and energy than it will when you have mastered it, and remember, you will master it.

Sometimes, enthusiasm must be dampened. When the finish line is near, overexcitement can make a shortcut tempting, but it will undermine success.

The secret to accomplishing daunting and motivating aspirations is to break them down. According to Charles Duhigg, in *Smarter Faster Better*, you should have stretch and SMART goals to get there. Stretch goals are big and hairy, and SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound.

Your aspiration to quit your job may mean breaking it down into smaller steps, like updating your LinkedIn profile, starting a side hustle and understanding your financial picture. You don't

need to know all the steps; you need to know how to get started. Then, make that first step a SMART goal.

SMART goals ensure you never feel lost and know what to do next while knowing that what you do is worthwhile. A SMART goal without a stretch goal is merely crossing things off your to-do list; a stretch goal without a SMART goal is a dream.

It can be troublesome to be realistic with timelines. Parkinson's Law states that work expands to fill the time allowed. Hofstadter's Law states that work takes twice as long as we think it will, even when we know this law. Our estimates and experiences often widely differ.

When you can't measure the quality of the work, you use time spent as a proxy, and quantity and quality don't often go together.

At work, I found that people would make work last as long as possible if they weren't sure what was coming next and would rush if they thought the next project would be more enjoyable.

Small things were either left until the end or rushed because they didn't hold the promise of a worthy enough accomplishment. Either way, they expanded or contracted the work to match their level of interest in it.

No one wants to start a long, complex project or waste time on meaningless tasks. We are biological beings who understand that time is a moment and our impact is bordering on insignificant. As such, action hinges on now. Tomorrow may never come.

You know yourself. Big enough to be motivating and challenging, small enough that you can do it, purposeful sufficient to inspire, and frivolous enough to be fun. Stack your goals and make them custom fit for you.

Pay attention to the actions that follow your decision—or the ones that should follow it. Attention may be free to pay, and the rewards might be priceless.

Is your goal tailored to fit your motivations?

## Values and Their Value

Identifying your values is one thing; discovering what you already embody through your actions is another.

Values aren't about logically believing something. Values are to be identified, not chosen. They are already ingrained and inform your actions. Then, if you aren't satisfied with them, you can change them, but attempting to approach values with logic and selection will confuse everyone and erode trust.

At one organization, posters celebrated a culture of "managerial courage," while anyone who spoke against the status quo was shut down in meetings, alienated from project teams, and summarily dismissed. Culture confuses when you say one thing and do another.

Disharmony creates distrust. Are they aspirational, as we're aiming to move there? Or are they outright lies, as we have no plans to make that progress? It's difficult to tell when you are new and navigating your role.

Values have a value attached to them. We perceive an order or rank for them. It's terrible to value possessions; it's good to value diversity. If that's the case, you should immediately identify what you represent if you might be embarrassed by them or disagree with their importance.

When we agree on our values, we affirm that we've found the right clique. Name and claim the values that you already have, as there may be enough to go around and no genuine rank that needs to apply.

When you get emotional, or try not to, it's your values knocking on the door of your consciousness. If you can identify what gets you riled up, that kind of energy on demand is robust.

So, find solitude, feel the anger, and reveal the truth. Then, please do something about it. That's how we will create peace by doing something about the things that anger us with their undeniable truths.

If we all pick one, can you imagine how much more peaceful this world will be? Because it's not just you who has anger that can be turned into positive power. With your rage transformed into compassionate action, you can help others do the same.

### Achieve Strength

Potentially traumatic events before the age of eighteen are called Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACEs. Across the United States, 61.5% report having an ACE of 1 or more, and 24.6% report three or more.



At that magical age of eighteen, my ACE went from 8 to 9 when I checked the box for having a close family member in jail. That member was my younger sister, and she was there because I'd charged her with physical abuse.

Since we both couldn't continue living at home after I'd charged her, I was shipped off to my grandparents. There, I woke up one morning to my grandfather sexually molesting me, but I already had that experience on the list ticked.

As a child, I responded by hiding in the closet and only coming out after he'd left. When I told my father about it, he said he would have done something if I'd told him sooner, like before the scary man left the house.

Only that scary man was the host's brother, who became my stepmother. Therefore, he became my uncle, not some random stranger lost through time. As an adult, I learned that it's never too late, but sometimes, the point is no longer there.

Going through all these events, I had no one to turn to, no friend that would begin to understand, and they all were going through the same other problems I was: the first year of engineering university, where the sheer workload is designed to occupy all your time.

By the time I graduated, my yearbook quote was, "Life is one damn thing after another."

It continued for a long time until I became an observer of my thoughts.

Why be my own worst enemy? My thoughts and words leak into my actions and destiny. As they say in some circles, the energy you put into the universe returns to you. Maybe God hears your commands and says, "Make it so."

Today, I say, "The universe always has my back." Since then, we've shared many jokes, and life's been highly entertaining.

### 19. Brace Your Backbone

Vertebrae are to backbones what values are to confidence. Values show up in behaviour, not in words. They exist in your ability to find your inner strength to expand your comfort zone.

With values at work, you find yourself doing things you might have otherwise classified as complex or not like you. You might fear public speaking, yet you are on your feet, and the words are already out before you realize you are speaking in public. Values unleash your passion, and passion creates action.

Your values are demonstrated in your behaviour and not articulated in your vocabulary because of how the lizard brain controls your body. Values motivate, and understanding these subconscious sources of motivation can power you through difficult times.

I value taking risks in life because you only get one. Insurance, by its very nature, is risk-averse. Imagine the potential conflicts I experienced while working for an insurance organization.

A difference in values creates conflict between two people. Your values push your buttons. When you examine why you are having difficulty with someone, look for the difference in values. Conflicts with others can be an excellent way to identify your values.

What we think we value may not be what we truly value. Take inventory of how you spend your time to reveal your genuine values. Notice what gets cancelled and what never does. The executive who says he values his family but doesn't spend time with them hasn't nailed it. It may be that he values providing for his family.

Your ultimate value may show up in unhelpful ways until you've nailed it. The ultimate value of independence might be self-reliance, but it might also mean you are slow to ask for help when needed.

Your value of independence judges the request for help as a weakness, but a self-reliant person asks for help when needed without judgment because asking for help is part of the ability to rely on yourself. Rely on yourself to save yourself, get help when it would be helpful, and save the judgment for the independent who doesn't exist in this society. We all depend on the sun, the air, the water and the soil.

A backbone built around integrity will ensure you always tell the truth, but it might mean you've burned some bridges with words that could have been left unsaid. Just like any quality, there are times when our values serve us well and times when they hinder our success.

Just like strengths and weaknesses, context and perspective shape the utility of our values. Again, alignment is your friend. Identify your values, learn where and when they are best suited, and get yourself there.

When you clarify the foundation of your values, you can see when they serve you, when they hinder you, and how they affect your relationships with other people. This will reveal the environments that support you and help you succeed and where you might have your ladder against the wrong wall or invest in people who don't have your back.

It's human nature to surround ourselves with people who reflect our opinions and move away from those who don't. We cancel appointments with people who push us to think uncomfortable thoughts. We have an ingrained ability to discern immediately if we will like someone and avoid meeting all kinds of people who can break open our world with insights, contacts, and opinions.

While this creates a world of us versus them, consciousness is the power to act differently and decide that one value is not better than another. We do not have to share them. We have to live and let live.

We are all a product of our experiences, framed by our perspectives at birth and the people who raised us. On the inside, everyone is rational. You can start building bridges between backbones when you see the shared logic of both sides.

Building bridges might be more of a necessity than a luxury if you have a family. For all the things they do have to share, families do not necessarily share values. If you have siblings, you could have values different from theirs. Generational differences can easily exist as well. With family, you may have enough shared interest to find that common ground between two values.

When you find the truth of your values, you can also see how you can strengthen them. Are you consistent? When you are not, is it because you value something else or have a blind spot? As you reinforce your values, you build your backbone.

We can use our backbone to change the world for everyone or to change our world. We want to move toward times when it can help us and limit when and where it would hinder us. The world changes because someone can't stand by the status quo. People who instigate change do so because they stand up and create it.

Steve Jobs changed how we interact with music, Emily Davison stood up for the right of women to vote, and Nelson Mandela fought against apartheid. Maybe you are so weary of accepting the unacceptable that, like Rosa Parks, you must take a seat to change the rules.

Issues can get your blood boiling, and anger can be a helpful emotion to change anything. Anger doesn't let you step back, sit down and remain passive. It spurs you to action. How do you feel when you feel angry? Energetic, powerful, determined, and committed.

Don't swallow your anger or release it prematurely as rage. Identify it, contain it, and use it. Conflict is necessary for progress—it shows where it is needed. What are you angry about? Why are you angry? What can you do to take control?

There is an ultimate value in your life, the one thing you wouldn't compromise under any condition. Extreme tests in life and how we respond to them help us find our ultimate values. Knowing how you'd want to answer will help you find your values even if you have not faced a life-changing challenge.

For what would you take a stand?

### 20. Mind Your Aspirations

Many people buy knockoffs to look and feel good. Many people can't distinguish between the real thing and an inexpensive imitation. Why waste the cash if you can purchase the envy you want for less money?

Is it envy that you want? Or the rush of a good deal? Is it the ticket to enter the clique?

Whatever your aspirations, the way is the result, and the result is the way. They are inseparable

because you can't fool yourself. To know one thing and act another way is an act, and all acts come to an end. Genuine authenticity endures.

New research shows that wearing knockoffs may backfire. In one study, young women were asked to wear pricy Chloe sunglasses. They were honest, but half the girls thought they were knockoffs. The researchers found that the group with the fakes would later cheat the honour system far more frequently than the wearers of the authentic label.

Not only did knockoff sunglasses make them behave dishonestly, but it also made them more cynical of other people. They thought other people were more dishonest and likelier to act unethically than the group wearing the originals.

We are not only what we eat but also what we wear. In the luxury of the first world, we have complete choice over both. Your brands craft your sense of self, and that sense of self crafts your behaviour, including your posture and confidence.

Ironically, knockoffs not only fail to bolster our ego and self-image, but they also undermine our internal sense of authenticity. They say fake it until you make it, but surrounding yourself with counterfeit makes you feel like a phony on the inside, and that inner dishonesty leads to lying and cheating in the real world. In an increasingly transparent world, you'll never make it like that.

Researchers showed that standing like Wonder Woman increases your testosterone and decreases your cortisol, making you less stressed and more confident and dominant.

Similarly, force yourself to smile, and you will feel happier. You may think you are masking what's going on inside with that false grin, and what you are doing is changing your feelings. The body sends the signal back that changes your mood to produce the chemicals of happier emotions.

In other experiments, researchers proved that the symbolic meaning of clothes can affect performance. They had two groups wear lab coats. The second group was introduced to them not as 'lab coats' but as 'Artistic Painters Coats.' On tests for detail and accuracy, the participants wearing lab coats did better than the artist coats.

It's not just what you wear – how you think about what you wear or what labels you use as you narrate your life and present yourself to the world.

They say to dress for a phone interview the same way you would a face-to-face interview. When you do, you get mentally prepared and physically adjusted to present a polished professional interview. Getting dressed is a process in which our physical appearance changes, and so does our mind. When you throw on a jacket and plop in front of Zoom, you sit down as your unpolished self instead of the professional version.

When you project an image, it always reflects your behaviour. The body and the mind do not like to be in disharmony. Whether that's your brands, your posture, or your words. Change

either, but do change one to change both of them. What's out for people who say yes while shaking their heads back and forth because one of them said yes and one of them said no?

Even if you are not in business, you have a brand. A brand is how people think of you based on how you express yourself, how you hold yourself, and what you do. It's your physical presentation and character that goes by the label of your name.

How can you bolster your image, ego, and self-respect authentically and honestly or ensure it's telling the right story in those precious few seconds of a first impression? You get but one, and it is in your complete control. When my motto was that life was one damn thing after another, it was. Unintentionally, I created a brand for myself that was hurtful and undermining, and when I changed my motto intentionally, so did my world.

People may not remember what you say or what you do, but they will remember how you made them feel. You can craft your elevator pitch all you want – those words matter. At the same time, you should think about how you want to make them feel with your tone, pitch, and presence.

We like to feel good and stick with people who make us feel good. On the other hand, some people use negative sales techniques and claim success. Negative sales techniques find and amplify pain to facilitate a purchase. They make you fear that you are missing out, and if you don't act now, you will forever be lost. Other people say you can catch more bees with honey than vinegar.

Your brand is what you project, define and embody. It should match the feeling you'd like to impart to people—your vibe. Asking people for feedback on your first impression might shed helpful insights into how you come across. First impressions are hard to shake, so we want to make sure they are on target or find out what needs to change if they aren't. When there is consistency, you are more believable and trustworthy.

Set yourself up for success by surrounding yourself with authentic, genuine artifacts of who you want to be and are working towards becoming.

What is your brand?

### 21. Reveal Your Drive

Historical reactions define our expectations, steer our attention, and create our reactions.

What happened to us in the past and what we did back then become responsible for our sense of valuation, self-worth, and the outer world. Earlier experiences construct and repeat our defence mechanisms, safety precautions, and coping strategies. They get reinforced with use and become significant highways in the brain, becoming increasingly efficient and successful until circumstances change.

When you are fed, safe and loved, your inherent motivations turn to the bigger things in life. According to Daniel Pink in [Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us](#), your

concerns now are gaining purpose, autonomy, and mastery. If one of these three is broken, it may be the next source of your burgeoning resilience.

The purpose is to find meaning. Does your life give you a reason to get out of bed in the morning and keep on?

You may find purpose in your work, at home with your family, church with your congregation, or volunteering with your favourite non-profit organizations. With every hat you wear, you may have more than one and have it everywhere you go. Maybe you are seeking it while you read these pages.

Making a contribution, doing something that matters, and changing something you care about move us more than fearing punishment or the anticipation of payday.

When you wake up most mornings with excitement, energy, and passion, you have found a purpose. The vision that inspires you might come from looking forward to your evening or imagining your legacy.

Autonomy means doing things your way; many consider it a luxury they'll never experience.

Too many people are raised to give their heads to their parents, their hearts to their religion, their anatomy to their doctor, their future to their government, and all responsibility to everyone else. They are never to blame, nor ever wrong. That's their way, and they're sticking to it. While it doesn't seem to work to accomplish anything productive, being absolved of responsibility helps some people sleep at night. For everyone, it is a matter of nature and nurture.

Mastery is what you choose when good enough is not.

You decide to put work, sweat, and effort into things, not as a cog in the machine but as the maker of the machine itself. Respect the elders for the foundation they've provided us; we will not rest on our laurels. Democracy is too fragile an experiment, and the universe too harsh on life for that.

Mastery is creativity, married with skill. Absolute mastery begins when you create something unique and extraordinary. It's about being in a state of flow that comes from exercising your ability and just enough challenge.

The joy is in getting better, not in getting there. It's about progress and process. Mastery is hands-on learning that commands our focus, takes total attention, and gives back a feeling of confidence and success.

While you imagine the relevant details of your future, consider that other people's definitions or measures of success may not be yours. It may not be your purpose to make as much money as possible. It's not your purpose to fulfill an extension of your parent's ideas of their purposes. It's yours and yours alone.

Imagine someone giving your epitaph. What does it say about who you are and what you did that makes you proud of yourself? It's a blank page; you may fill it in any way you wish.

Liberating purposes are created consciously by you. They aren't found through investigation and seeking. They are clarified that way, but they are found by following the decisions only you can make for yourself. If you don't like the world you created and don't like the results you are getting, the good news is that you can change it.

Autonomy means having self-direction and control over what you do, how you do it when you do it, and so on. What quantity of your day do you spend according to your wishes rather than serving or satisfying someone else?

You may already be self-employed without a boss but feel pulled by customers, suppliers, and employees. Becoming more resilient might mean hiring more staff, including a staff manager.

The pursuit of mastery is also fulfilling. What do you find deeply interesting? Mastery takes time, and we do not develop it in subjects that cannot hold our attention long enough. It's up to you to find it, not your instructor or manager to provide it.

Once you find something that captures your attention, the next step is to find mentors. Mentors will help you figure out what skills you need to acquire. They will also help you avoid making the mistakes they made along the journey. The right mentors are invested in you and want to see you succeed.

Mentors introduce you to helpful people and connect you to resources to help you travel a path they've already travelled. Mentoring is not about providing a privileged advantage to a select few but guiding those who want to do the extra work. The additional work creates the advantage, sometimes looking only like knowing the right people.

Putting in extra work without knowing how to use that time productively can be wasted. Doing the wrong things or learning bad habits can take years to repair. Every master can name at least one mentor, and it's a privilege to be one. As long as there is someone who looks up to your skill level, you can serve as a mentor to a keen apprentice. Learn, teach, learn again because the apprentice will teach you, too.

What would you work to master?

## Find Focus

It's incredibly easy to focus on the wrong things, even when you know exactly where you want to go.

At one point in my career, I explained my grand dream of teaching and helping employees make better business decisions to a career counsellor. She told me I'd have to get my Six Sigma Master Black Belt. I asked her if she knew what it meant. She did not.

Every hiring manager I encountered asked for the certificate, yet they were unfamiliar with what it certified. They also didn't realize that there was no standard behind it, no governing body, and nothing to prevent anyone from claiming to have it or selling the appropriate paperwork.

Credentials are often used by hiring managers to filter their talent pool. Just like I got my engineering degree, you need a piece of paper to get in the door, even if that's the only use for it. Filters exist to help us find focus, and you have to ensure that you aren't filtering out the good stuff.

Instead of getting another piece of paper that meant nothing, I decided to find another way. I communicated my approach differently instead of staying within the tried and true Six Sigma boundaries and language.

I talked about working with human nature to create change, and people in human resources spied on me with evil eyes. I pivoted to strategic process innovation, and people asked me to confirm their cost and benefit analyses designed to justify buying the latest technology. Finally, I tried talking about managing cognitive biases, and it was enough for people to stop and ask, "What's that?"

When presenting new information, getting past someone's filter so they can focus on what is in front of them is sometimes a matter of creativity and seeing options instead of defeat.

Stay focused on your definition and experience of progress instead of external expectations; when you look up, it will be incredible how far you have come. Progress is always a matter of focus and returning it to commitments, plans, and goals when it's usually lost to novelty, excess, and boredom.

## 22. Specify the Plan

In business, planning is an accepted practice, if not an embraced one. Business plans are a necessary evil of entrepreneurial financing and, some say, of success.

When Japan was taking automobile production away from America, it was found that it spent twenty percent of its time planning. In America, it was just five percent. That would mean the difference between a day spent planning and just a few hours in your week.

In your daily life, imagine the difference a plan might make and the fact that not all plans are created equal. A plan in your head might not be much of a plan. A plan that's all strategy and no tactics is a one-sided failure.

A plan is a document of your future analysis, so have you looked at all angles? Making specific, documented plans leads to significantly higher self-reported progress toward goals than a general commitment. Writing down your plan substantially affects whether you will do it.

In studies of patients undergoing hip surgery, those who recorded what, when and where they would do their rehabilitation started walking almost twice as fast as those who had not.



These patients must move when they wake from surgery or risk scar tissue forming and destroying the joint's flexibility. As you can imagine, the agony is extreme, and it's not unusual for patients to skip out on sessions. If you can predict that you will want to avoid it, you can prevent it from happening.

Patients are asked to plan to avoid skipping out. Ahead of time, these patients chose an immediate reward for their efforts. One placed a bowl of M&Ms in the bathroom and would take one on the way in and one on the way out. When you need to, why not use temptation and necessity to overcome avoidance?

If plans work wonders, planning the reward works miracles. When we don't plan a reward but take one, that reward often undoes the very thing we are celebrating, it's the partying to make up for the crappy job. Still, you create a vicious cycle: spending money you didn't have and underperforming at work.

Dan Ariely, the author of Predictably Irrational, used the promise of reward to get through the severe unpleasantness required to achieve a long-term goal. He had to self-administer a drug to cure the Hepatitis C he contracted from a blood transfusion or risk liver cirrhosis in thirty years. He used his love of movies to get through the ordeal. If you know you are going to be down for the count, plan for as much pleasure as possible.

As Charles Duhigg reports in The Power of Habit, rewards are essential in creating habits. Our brains are wired to notice patterns with clear rewards, making them into automatic loops of behaviour. It's the small steps that matter—they are the ones that build a habit.

A carrot only works for so long. If the distance appears never to get smaller, it becomes ineffective as you stop believing you will ever get there.

Celebrating milestones is as vital as commemorating accomplishing goals, and ensure you separate the two. A goal is finally losing a set amount of weight and turning in your gym membership. When it's a milestone, instead, you stop focusing on the scale and turn to other markers of physical health, like flexibility or strength.

It's the variable reward that is the most effective. B.F. Skinner determined that mice would respond the best to random rewards. They would press a lever and get a reward. They pressed the lever compulsively when that reward was sometimes small, big, or nothing.

As Nir Eyal, the author of Hooked, explains, social media, video games and even email providers employ variable rewards to keep you hooked. According to Eyal, three types of reward can be varied. They are the rewards of the tribe, the hunt, and the self.

The rewards of the tribe are those that make us feel accepted, important, attractive and included. You get a hit of happiness when someone likes your Facebook post or retweets you.

While you can't control those things, perhaps an evening cuddling with your sweetie after a challenging workout is the reward that would get you moving.

The hunt rewards include finding deals, information, and unique finds. You know how exciting it is to score a win at an auction. After your jog, you will indulge on Pinterest or Instagram for half an hour with your favourite library paperback.

The rewards of the Self include sensory stimulation and our need to control, dominate and complete challenges. Possibly, you are spurred into action by the prospect of playing Jane McGonigal's Superbetter or Candy Crush Saga for 30 minutes.

Any of these types of rewards offer the possibility of randomness, which can genuinely delight you and kick your motivation into high gear.

Your plan for success includes where and when you will take action and incorporates an immediate short-term reward to get you moving and accomplish the tough stuff along the way.

You have your stretch and visionary goals, and now you should think about how to layer in the promise of reward for your accomplishments. What makes it worth it that doesn't undo all the hard work or create new damage?

Everyone knows how to plan by breaking down the steps that would be required. However, we don't always begin with the end in mind and plan what will make it worthwhile and what will make it feel good when we get there.

If life is always about the next time, the next carrot, then you might find that one day you burn out, and you never get to that last one. Reward yourself at intervals, and make the reward part of the plan.

What rewards would work for you?

### 23. Simplify Actions

For simple success, it's the granularity of the plan that matters. Does it adequately simplify actions or leave you guessing about the correct actions, when you will know you are done and how well you did it?

When actions are simple and easy, we can find ourselves in execution mode while others wonder how to get started. A decision already made carries the least risk and the maximum momentum.

A pattern emerged in a study of parole board decisions. It was all about the timing. Prisoners who appeared early in the morning would get parole about 70 percent of the time, while those late in the day only stood a 10 percent chance. If you are ever a prisoner facing a parole board, do what you can to get in the front of the line, whether first thing in the morning, after break, or after lunch.

The default answer from any parole board is no. As a prisoner, you want them to overcome the default, to do what they don't normally do. In physics, the required extra energy is called the activation energy. Extra additive energy is needed to get the momentum going. Never forget that changing your mind from its default requires extra, additive energy. Breaking out of a pre-ordained track takes effort, and you can use that to your advantage by setting out the guardrails in advance.

Making decisions takes a toll on the mind. You may not be physically tired, but the brain is worn out. The more choices you make throughout the day, the harder each one gets. It drains away your willpower without your awareness.

Like your muscles, willpower is a finite resource with limits. Experiments have shown that making decisions erodes willpower. The decisions aren't hard, but numerous. The more numerous choices you need to make, the lower the remaining willpower you will have at your disposal.

Eventually, when willpower is gone, you take shortcuts. It's like when you are doing push-ups and start to lose the correct form after a few. For the judges, the first shortcut was the option to deny the parole. Ducking decisions might worsen things in the long run but are less harmful than the second option.

Acting on impulse is the second shortcut in the face of decision fatigue. Cue the drive-through on the way home from work, the inappropriate Facebook comment, and the rant at your spouse. The energy it takes to take the high road is gone.

Since willpower is a finite resource, you don't want to waste it on making decisions that don't matter. Steve Jobs was well known for wearing the same thing every day – at least one less decision daily. Tim Ferriss, the four-hour guru, automates minutiae, adopts rituals, and applies creativity only where it's most valuable to minimize his decision fatigue.

Eating a snack will increase your willpower on demand. Research has shown that glucose restores willpower, but if you are a dieter, that might put you in a catch-22 or on a slippery slope.

When tackling something difficult, offset it by simplifying the rest of your life. Use your willpower wisely, and don't waste it on the challenges you can predict coming.

Like a muscle, strengthen your willpower, but don't rely on it to work when you've just maxed out its potential. You can feel your rubbery legs after a hard workout, but you can't feel your rubbery willpower. Let it recover when needed, or give it that glucose boost.

To maximize your willpower, focus on what's at hand and put everything else on automatically. Decide everything on a Sunday when relaxed and rested by the weekend. Set out your outfits for the week. Plan your meals and buy the groceries. Write down your schedule. Do the tough

stuff when you have the most energy. Now, all you have to do is take simple actions. Choose your rewards randomly and build them in, too.

Even better is not having to make these decisions because there is no choice. Meals can be delivered automatically and show up. Uniforms make getting dressed easy if you believe those who have followed in the footsteps of Steve Jobs and his monotonous wardrobe. Many varieties of businesses offer routine maintenance and refill services. Some of them know when you will run out before you do, and consumers seemed to have stopped thinking of this as creepy.

Follow your plan using checklists, templates, and other tools to stay on track and execute with pre-orchestrated ease. Simple actions are easy to evaluate regarding quality and degree of completion, so you can monitor when willpower is causing problems or when anything else is getting in the way.

Having a document on which to rely requires making fewer decisions. As Atul Gawande says in [The Checklist Manifesto](#), checklists have helped doctors, pilots, and engineers get things right. Templates provide structure and focus, whereas blank pages can be paralyzing. Going to the gym to work out can present too many decisions, but taking a group class or hiring a trainer requires only following along.

Whatever your aspiration, take the complexity out of it. Stay aware of your available willpower supply. Minimize the decisions required to apply the saved willpower to your new goals for the rest of your life. With that knowledge, make the conscious choice to plan and make actions as simple as possible.

What can you do to reduce your need for willpower?

#### 24. Prepare your Space

The space around you matters so much that it might be worth your weekend to consider a painting project, a downsizing garage sale, or a trip to the donation center.

Or, you might decide it's time for that trip to India, where the celebrities say they find a connection like no other place in the world. Place matters, and we often forget about its impact, large and small, and our ability to do something about it, large and small.

You can change things when you stop and realize they aren't that way on purpose. In 1984, Ester Sternberg, a physician and neuro-immunologist at the National Institute of Mental Health, participated in a groundbreaking study.

Sternberg remarks, "We took it for granted that hospitals were noisy, smelly, disorienting mazes, but it hadn't occurred to us that stress could affect a patient's healing – or that we could do anything about that." Acting on this ground-breaking insight, they took action to test environmental conditions on health and healing.

What some call ground-breaking, some might call obvious. The test compared the healing rates of patients who looked at a brick wall and those who could see trees. Some might say that the tree-viewers got lucky when they got their room. Quantifying the link between mental stress and bodily health might have been ground-breaking, at least for Western medicine.

At one company, there is a gym on the premises; however, there is a waiting list for getting a locker. When one of the trainers asked a new member why she didn't show up very often, she said it was because she didn't have a locker and because of that, she didn't have the supplies she needed when a window of opportunity unexpectedly opened up. Hearing that, the trainer marched her off to a secret area with reserve lockers. "Here, now you don't have an excuse," she said.

While this preferential solution is unfair to those on the waiting list, they've always said it's who you know, and people love exploiting systems. You need to be prepared when you don't have enough space to go around.

Progress toward our goals is directly affected by how prepared we are for change when the need arises or the opportunity to make a different choice presents itself. If you need three gym bags ready to hit the gym when the window opens, buy three sets of workout supplies and store them at home, at the office, and in the car.

Whatever it takes so you don't have an excuse when you look for one.

Designing your environment to support your success is a critical step we often overlook. Changing your eating habits with a change in the environment might mean sitting at a different place or eating at the table. Consider purging your cupboards of all food that is no longer on your plan, and even consider taking a different route to work to avoid the usual donut and calorie-laden coffee routine.

In a shoddy environment, you will find it hard to accomplish anything of excellence. Poor lighting, stuffy and cramped furniture or a cold and clammy environment can erode your motivation. If you can't fix it, change it. Find somewhere else to carry out the work.

The Lean Production System uses a model for creating environments to flourish productivity. If you've ever seen the show Clean Sweep, you've seen it in action. The point is to have what you need, where and when you need it, in good working order with nothing you don't need.

The first step is to sort. Go through everything and make piles of what needs to stay, go, or get repaired. Next, focus on the stuff that is waiting. Depending on the frequency you need it, find a place for everything. Then, put everything in its place—finally, elbow grease. Everything should be clean and ready to be used. After that, build the habit of putting things back in the same place after you've used them.

Do you keep forgetting to put your keys on the hook? Put the hook where you usually find your keys. Standardize the behaviour; don't change the behaviour to make the standard. Now, keep it up, and it should be simple to do so. If not, you might need to go through the steps again and relocate permanent homes for things or other tweaks to your system.

You may not be aware of the triggers of the behaviour you want to stop, but as they present themselves, take note and then make a change. If you can't eliminate the trigger, change your response to it. As soon as you know you've followed a trigger into the behaviour you want to avoid, snap yourself out. You may want to wear elastic around your wrist; you may have a different tactic to jump your mental needle when the record sticks.

When you want to start a new behaviour, design triggers and make them prominent. For example, leave your vegetable steamer on the counter, put your fruit in a bowl on the table, and ditch the fryer if you are changing your eating habits. With clutter, you won't notice these triggers. Clearing the clutter makes way for new habits. Use physical reality to change mental reality.

With creativity and planning, you can use the environment to shake up the routine and change the triggers that sparked the old behaviour so that the new ones can take hold. When your eyes absorb your environment, they should be able to understand your goals and intentions and rise to meet them. Let your environment support you, and may you change what you can and make a plan when you can't.

What can you change to make your environment more supportive of your goals?

### Prime Advantage

Once, I was assigned to a call center. This business unit was missing its targets, budget, quality, and other metrics, so I was asked what I thought. I booked my travel so I could leave Toronto for Montreal, where I'd spend a couple of days, and then on to Moncton for the rest of the week before coming home to Toronto.

On the first leg of the first trip, I met a senior manager who was verbally supportive and polite. With dismay, I heard that the direct manager was off sick. On the second leg, I met a few senior managers; unfortunately, their direct manager was ill.

In the second week, the same two managers were again sick. However, they were well and reported to work when I was absent. This looked like avoidance, and it needed to be resolved.

In my investigation, I found out that there had been previous attempts to solve the call center's problems, earlier versions of "me" that were assigned to go forth and conquer. Someone told me that my team had even produced a proposal of changes, although nothing changed.

It might have been helpful if they hadn't been so secretive about the history of affairs. I discovered a pattern to these other attempts that I recognized from the past. Get someone more competent, ask them what they would do, and then tell everyone to do it that way.

Jokes were made about consultants asking the most competent employees how they would do it if they could and then dressing up the messages with charts, role models, and many references.

I couldn't comprehend the audacity of someone who walks in and thinks they've nailed it in a week as if they have all the knowledge and experience gained from years on the job.

The smarter-than-thou routine fails with an amateur at the front of the line. Jokes aren't far from the truth, and no one was laughing when they asked me, "How are you going to tell us how to do it better if you've never worked in a call center before?"

It was my turn to laugh. "My job isn't to do your job. My job differs from yours, and if you know your job and I do mine, we can figure out how it gets better together."

Overpopulation comes from a world where every woman is a mother, and overcontrol comes from a world where every manager has all the answers.

I had no answers, but I knew how to find them.

### 25. Balance Your Energy

It's time to balance your energy once you've used all your time.

You can manage time but not create it. Energy is a different story. Energy comes in four wellsprings in human beings: the body, mind, emotions, and spirit. In each, you can systematically expand your energy and renew it.

When you balance your energy, you will be far more productive. You match the time and energy available to the appropriate task on your to-do list, and everything gets done. You find that thing that eludes you now – spare time.

Proper nutrition, sleep, exercise, and rest are essential for the body's physical energy. However, when pressed to find more capacity, these are some of the first things we give up. The result is less energy to deal with everything on our plates, which adds to our stress and leads us back to energy-depleting behaviours.

Grabbing a chocolate bar to get through the afternoon is a downward spiral. The sugar crash is coming to get you, just as having a nightcap to get to sleep will rob the quality of that sleep. Studies have shown that alcohol before sleep will lead to a disturbed and unrestful night.

Some people need more sleep than others, but trying to get by on less sleep is not wise. Operating on sleep deprivation has been proven to show up in lower IQ points.

If the body and physical energy are about keeping the machine running correctly, your mind's energy shows up as emotions. Emotions control the quality of your energy. Think of when you feel upbeat and optimistic compared to when you just got a teardown. What was the effect on your energy? Likely, you were far less productive.

Emotions are chemicals that dissipate quickly, in minutes, but when we hold on to them by thinking about them, they create a kind of emotional hangover that can last much longer. You've heard about people in moods and others who are still in a mood about something that happened decades ago.

Don't pressure yourself to be upbeat all the time. You need to own the energy you bring into a room, but you can't appreciate light without dark. Appreciate the dark emotions. The point is to use them for good. It's natural to get anxious, insecure or impatient when confronted with unreasonable demands. Feel the feel, then take the wheel. Respond instead of react.

Anger is a highly motivating emotion; you want to make sure it doesn't lead you into knee-jerk reactions. Slowly exhaling for five or six seconds induces relaxation and recovery. Anger is unprocessed sadness, so ask yourself what is disappointing, depressing, or distancing you. Please don't attempt to control anger; attempt to process it.

Similarly, sadness is unprocessed anger, so is it the other side where the truth exists? What are you hurt about when you should be angry or feeling inferior when you are furious? Are you ashamed when it's the other party who was in the wrong? As the rape victim Gisèle Pelicot said, it's time to stop shaming the victim and stop putting destructive emotions on people innocent of bad choices.

Intermittent breaks help gain perspective and allow the emotions to dissipate. Take the emotion, make some space, and use it constructively. Life demands reactions or responses. Balancing your energy is about turning reactions into responses with distanced reflection.

To perform at its best, our brains need intermittent breaks. Our bodies slowly move from a high-energy state into a low one in 90 to 120-minute cycles. At these intervals, you might yawn, get restless or be tempted by distraction, but you power through and keep working. Instead, get up for a quick walk to the water fountain and back. Breaks will restore your energy, whereas ignoring the drain will make the work more difficult and take longer.

Everyone's energy varies throughout the day. Some people are Larks and jump out of bed, ready to go. Others are Owls who do their best work after the sun goes down. In the window of the day when you know you have the most energy available, use it to tackle your most challenging work.

Introverts get energy from ideas, and extroverts get theirs from interacting with others. The difference is that some people get energy at networking events while others are drained. To an introvert, an extrovert is an energy vampire – a life-changing awareness when you learn how the



other half lives. Knowing which one you are can help you realize where your energy goes and how to build it when you need more.

Radical acceptance is the notion of accepting everything as it is without judgment or reaction. It allows one to resist getting pulled into drama, working on other people's problems because they seem more straightforward than one's own, or creating worse situations by reacting the wrong way.

You can find radical acceptance by reflecting on disappointing experiences. Call yourself by your name, and ask what happened, why it happened, and what you can learn from it. The lesson is not what you should have done or could have done – it's what did happen and what that moment taught you. From there, you decide what to do next time.

For instance, if you forget to pack long pants at the all-inclusive resort and have an embarrassing wardrobe moment, the lesson isn't about how to ensure you pack better. It's about the reality that you made it through it, and it wasn't as bad as you might have anticipated. The embarrassment didn't kill you. With that in mind, you may wear a kilt with pride and adventure next time.

Your spirit's energy is the underlying focus of all this work – to find meaning and purpose for you and your life. Take care of your body, mind, and spirit; they will take care of you.

Do you know how to build your energy when you need it?

### 26. Run Toward

In horror movies, when the protagonist is running from the villain, they turn back to look. When they turn back, they invariably trip, lose momentum and get caught. Yet, it's true that we have brains designed to run from pain rather than toward pleasure and to take off running before we know what scared us.

Chasing a dream is more energizing than escaping a nightmare, but nightmares snatch us first. Running from something is based on fear. From the frying pan into the fire is what happens when you forget to run toward a goal and think only about the escape.

Running towards something is based on desire. Feel the fear, flip it into desire, and you are motivated from both directions. You will run forward and keep your eyes fixated in front of you.

To run, you have to know why you are running and where you are headed. With your consciousness in the driver's seat, you can find new motivation that is far more compelling and magnetic. First, choose where you want to go. Then, never doubt your ability to figure it out and eventually get there.

History is there to learn from, and there's a time and place to visit it, take the lessons, and get back to living in the moment—or, better, running toward manifesting a dream. Think of this as a replacement that has to be big enough to offset the fear.

If your vision of your destination doesn't resonate to your core, it may not be powerful enough to pull you through the weak moments on the tough days. The most potent idea may be the only one that works for you.

Cora's Restaurants, a success story from Canada's east, started and stays oriented toward women who want employment while staying home when their kids get home from school. Cora's is a breakfast and lunch restaurant but is closed for dinner.

Tell people that your business plan is to only be open for two out of three meals, and they'll think you are crazy. It's so wild that it works. These are the types of powerful ideas that resonate with your core and with the people you want to come along with you. If it's the only thing that would work for you, you might find that you are far from alone.

If your role doesn't fit you, or the culture torments you, you could meet with a career coach to find out what you want to do, align your resume to that new position, and reflect on star contributions for the interview. Most libraries offer this as a free service; if not, they can direct you to the nearest resource.

A library card in hand will get you running toward all kinds of goals with all types of help at your fingertips. Marathoners pick a point on the horizon and never look back. Sprinters spy the ribbon and never take their gaze off of it. Winners, that is.

John Landy let the competition beat him. You may have heard of Roger Bannister, the first to break the 4-minute mile barrier. You may not have heard of John Landy. While Landy looked over his shoulder to see where Bannister was, he passed him on the other side. When you compete only with yourself, you never succumb to competition.

Keeping your eyes forward means having a meaningful and specific destination in mind, like a red ribbon, which magnetically ensures you maintain attention and focus. Running from something without knowing where you want to end up could land you in a similar situation.

Pick a future, and don't look back. When you look back, you fall into the old habit. Simply stopping something creates a void that must be filled by something else, and a failure to fill it leaves you twitching to return to the habit. If you want to stop doing something, you must start doing something different.

To change a habit, you must replace it first. You may want to escape certain things, and that's fine, but the next step is to consider how the replacement should look and feel. What do you want?

Let's say you have realized that your time watching television is spent watching other people living their dreams. You decide you want to do that, too. Instead of observing life, you could participate; however, you don't have the energy yet to do much else.

Instead of watching mindless entertainment, watch documentaries, watch instructors, and watch experts becoming experts. Keep watching until you can envision the same for yourself and are on your way.

Like driving cross-country, it may take you a while to get there, but there are milestones along the way. When you are running toward something, you can see the milestones, craft the journey, and accomplish the miraculous.

Necessity is the mother of invention; some have said it is curiosity. Have you ever seen a curious kid? They get so antsy that they can't sit still. Have you ever seen someone so frustrated that they couldn't put up with something anymore? Anger, purposefulness, and openness to creative solutions can be enough to propel a vision.

If you want something done right, you'd better do it yourself, or at least for yourself. Every long journey starts with a tiny step and a direction. Time passes anyway. One small step every day adds to an entirely different place at the end of a year. Progress is simply destination plus pace. Then, keep taking the steps.

What pleasure awaits you in the future?

### 27. Align Agendas

The best advice I'd ever received might have been that the operators would make or break anyone's success. If you see yourself as their resource, you have the right idea. You are doomed to be corrected if you see yourself as their authority. I learned that my job was not a higher rank than an operator, even if it was, but an interconnected role.

No matter your life goals, success is interconnected with other people. As a change practitioner, I always try to figure out what's in it for them. What makes them tick, what ticks them off, what boxes do they tick in their role? My job is done if an organization's transformational goal can be connected to everyone's internal motivations.

Connection creates alignment, and we are all on the same team, headed into the future together. What initially can look like agendas in conflict share common ground when inspected more closely. As a change agent, conflict is often presented between managers and those they manage.

Loyal career managers get stuck when I teach the principle of what's in it for them. When asked what's in it for the employees, the answers say what's in it for the company. The managers explain that the employees should care about the company's best interest or vision. They often expect them to do as they are asked and trained to do, and I've been assigned to provide the training because that expectation is not working.

Employees should care about what's best for the company. Often, they do, but more often, it's not enough. On the surface, the employees will care. They will care because it's their job, and the

job is required to pay the bills. They will care because you will fire them if they don't, yet they know you can't fire everyone, and every herd animal knows that the safest place is the middle of the pack.

Collectively, they don't care. At best, you will get general good-enough compliance; at worst, they will strike back in ways known to them to be invisible to you. If you've never lived in their world, you have no idea what they know about how to take you down with a death of a thousand paper cuts.

You can try to shut down every possible way, but they are always ahead of you. When you start down that road, the mere presentation of a new situation in which you haven't told them what to do, they will do nothing, which might be worse than hiring someone smart and letting them do their thing within a pre-determined boundary, with all interconnected boundaries to be negotiated.

I push them to think not of titles and roles but of people's names and faces to get more personal. If this person is a learner, like I am, I emphasize the learning opportunities and safe zones to do so. If they are a routine person, and life exists on a specific schedule, I talk about managing that. Often, some fears need to be addressed, and with those set aside, progress can begin.

I have had one boss throughout my career—me. Later, VPs told me of the number of people who "worked for them," I immediately understood the nature of the gap I was being asked to solve. No one works for someone else, so for that VP, no one was working, but everyone was showing up for work. As I dug in, I found a dictatorship where everyone did what they were told, to the letter, and no more: no risk-taking, no offering of suggestions, and complete disengagement. There was infighting and internal conflict, resources deliberately withheld, and many ways in which the internally broken operations hurt the company and its customers.

I've worked on teams with other people, reported to people, and been an employee. I've always worked for myself. I believe that everyone I've met works for themselves, too. They report to someone, and they may hold a job for another. They might be supporting generations of dependents. Everyone decides how to manage expectations, including their own, but everyone makes their own decisions.

I've met mothers who work for their children, fathers who work for their families, and students who work for their education. Some immigrants work for their permanent residency, academics for their tenure, and entrepreneurs for their egos. There seem to be millions of reasons to work, but they all seem personal.

Intelligent people do bright things when you give them the tools and resources. When you hide information, force authority, and undermine agendas, smart people do dumb things. They all do their best, no matter how well they are supported.

To win everyone over, align agendas by connecting their passions and purposes to your own. Together, we go farther than any individual can alone.

It's easier than you think because you aren't asking anyone to do anything different. You are finding a way to intermesh and mingle different agendas into one by getting your agenda out of the way. Take the time to do it right, and you'll find this means coming to terms with needing or wanting power. Empowering others is a gift of power, and when you give it, it means you are giving up power that wasn't right for you to have in the first place.

It takes this agenda-aligning work to organize an organization, although a dictatorship is faster and easier, if never sustainable. When you send people to war who didn't sign up, their hearts aren't in the fight, and you will lose. Get their hearts in the fight—passion scares off doves.

Use whatever power you have to expect people to do precisely as they do, and then put them exactly where you want them to do that. Put the skeptical, critical people in the quality department. Put positive, enthusiastic people in research and development. Put the charismatic in marketing and the scientific in leadership. At the same time, this stereotypical simplification is almost enough to be a joke; when personality and role match, people thrive.

We all hope and do our best, but rose-coloured optimism should be avoided in HR and placement decisions. There is no such thing as being well-rounded when it comes to people.

To take permission with purpose, you have to get to know what people value, and you can't ask directly – they tell you what you want to hear. Look for instances of conflict, and be wary if you cannot find any – for anyone who gives away their permission so freely is a human being you cannot trust to identify injustice when it's seen.

You've outgrown the comfort of denial. Knowing your values and valuing differences in yourself and others, you are ready to meet your future's new and helpful people. Say no to the devil you know and get permission from those ready, able, and willing to help you be your most resilient.

Are you letting everyone around you operate at their full capacity?

## Quick Wins and Short-Term Goals

At university, I barely made it through the first year of calculus. In the second year, I improved by doing every homework question in the textbook, not just the assigned few. By the third year, I knew the answers to the exam on sight. Luckily, they came straight from the textbook, and I remembered the solutions.

I showed my work for twenty-three minutes, taking three or four pages per question. Then, one question didn't work out correctly. A little reverse engineering on my incorrect answer revealed that I'd thought one plus one was three. Instead of looking for that instance, I marked my answer wrong and wrote the correct one beside it.

Then I waited for the next seven minutes to pass so I could leave. I doodled on the back of my exam to pass the seven minutes to avoid the temptation of perfection. Haven't you ever made things worse when your intentions were otherwise? Finally, the doors opened, and I went to the gym, where the idea of perfection would always be laughable.

In the context of life, we all need to know when it's "Good enough." Any time the finish line is one that we've defined for ourselves on our terms, it's a win. Don't waste your time polishing pearls (particularly if it will worsen) when you've got a diamond that still looks like another rock.

When you pander to the status quo to prove you are above it, you aren't anymore. When you define yourself by external measures or let them dictate how you feel, you need to regain control.

You have clear priorities; let them show. When you have a reason why that is further and farther than your immediate goal, you are far likelier to attain it. Shoot for the moon; at least you will land among the stars.

### Seek Revenge

I learned a lot in the school of hard knocks, and I don't let it define me. My experiences aren't exceptional; they don't make me distinct and may never have had anything to do with me.

People who hurt you intentionally do so out of their pain and are passing it on to you. They crave significance and aim to take yours. They know they had a massive effect on you, and the longer it lasts and the deeper it goes, the more significant they feel.

Don't let them have it. Success is the best revenge.

Take the success for yourself as you heal, repair and recover. With these practices, you will reach a place where the memory, so painful now, no longer arrives with any emotion. It's just a fact of your past, and that's it. That is the successful revenge. When you have the memory without the emotion, the wisdom without the pain, you move on.

Moving on happens when a different memory surfaces, bringing uncomfortable emotions, realizations, and necessary changes until, finally, one day, there seem to be no longer any old memories lurking to derail your days.

They say self-improvement is like peeling an onion, one layer at a time, sometimes involving tears. But, like chilling an onion first, there are ways people have learned over time to make the experience better, faster, and more manageable.

Successful revenge involves getting unattached to the pain, fear, sadness, or anger so you can feel joy, happiness, and satisfaction again, no matter how you've been robbed of it or how unfair or wrong it was.

It was terrible, but it doesn't define you. You are much too rare and remarkable for that. The world loses too much without your contribution. Like a phoenix, you will rise from the ashes and be reborn anew as a person to whom that happened and nothing more while being everything more, the stunning and magical creation that you are.

Get revenge by letting it roll off of you. While it's no easy feat, remember that you can and will.

### 28. Forget Commitment

If every journey of a thousand miles begins with one step, you only have to take the next one. Then you have to take the next one and the next one. One at a time is nothing; a few can be a quick win, and when you line them up, you have accomplished a short-term goal. Try it briefly before committing to the whopping, overwhelming, complete idea.

Forget New Year's Resolutions – they don't come around often enough. They only last for a little while, anyway. Why not try it again on the first of every month? Imagine what you can accomplish in a month.

Matt Cutts, an engineer at Google, gave a TED talk on how he could also introduce himself as an author. Not a great author, but one who has completed a novel. He participated in an event every November where tens of thousands write a 50,000-word novel in 30 days. Breaking it down, you must write 1,667 words daily (and not delete the previous day's work when you don't like it in the morning). Keep moving forward.

Cutts declares that thirty days is the right amount of time to add or subtract something to your life. Morgan Spurlock has made a TV series out of the idea, where ordinary people are inserted into a different lifestyle from their own for 30 days. However, when Cutts tells you about the time he cut out sugar, he admits that day 31 was a binge day. Maybe it was October, which is the month for sugar.

Recent research suggests that it takes 66 days to form a new habit, but the time varies greatly depending on the person, the behaviour, and the circumstances. The range is from 18 to 254 days. Thirty days and 21 days are popular targets.

The 21-day period comes from the observations of Maxwell Maltz, the author of Psycho-Cybernetics and a plastic surgeon. He noted that it took about 21 days for amputees to stop sensing a phantom limb, nose job recipients to get used to seeing a new face, or for a mental image to dissolve and a new one to gel.

How long it takes isn't the core issue; it's developing your commitment muscle, building your tolerance for failure, and trying again. It's growing your baby attitude and finding your goldilocks goals. It's seeing if it's as easy as you think it is while you learn that you have what it takes and so much more.

When it becomes automatic to trust your intentions, you stop watching the calendar and cease counting the days. Self-trust is a thing of beauty. The person who doesn't have a snooze button, who is never late, and never has to apologize – or at least it's something to aim for and see if you can stick for 30 days to such an ideal.

You can test the strength of your commitment muscle by observing your inner reaction when you say you will do something. If you say you will get up at 6:00 am, yet in saying so, you already know you will hit the snooze button, your commitment muscle needs strengthening. Thirty days will help you build your self-trust.

Like the Amish, you might use your 30 days as a trial period. Amish adolescents get Rumspringa, a chance to try the outside world, after which almost ninety percent return to their origins.

Your Day 31 might remind you why you chose the goal, invest, and toughen your resolve, or you might decide that the goal isn't for you. Trying new things expands your theory of mind and your horizons.

Habits can take a long time to form, but it also doesn't matter if you mess up now and again. Every moment is a chance to start again. The behaviour that you want to change forms over a long period, and it might take that amount of time to undo, maybe longer. Be patient with yourself. Benefits await, ones you can't imagine.

One of those benefits is remembering how your life was spent. Cutts remarks that he won't look back on his life and wonder where the time went. Ask him what he was doing in May, and he'll have a different answer than if you asked about June. For most of us, there's no appreciable difference. The time blurs, and we wonder where it all went.

Cutts is also building self-confidence. Every challenge was more complex than the last. The more he accomplishes, the more he knows he can. He's learned that small, sustainable changes add to things that stick and that big, crazy challenges could be much fun. He's become more adventurous, climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro, a feat he wouldn't have attempted before. He says he went from "a desk-dwelling computer nerd to the kind of guy who bikes to work. For fun!"



Thirty days will pass anyway so that you can use them to your advantage. The trick is to decide what, when, and where you will do something without negotiating with yourself. Forget commitment; remember you can always go back, and maybe you won't.

Sometimes, we need a little tough love with ourselves. What would happen if you were the perfect parent to your inner child? You'd eat your broccoli, do your homework and get to bed on time. Maybe it's worth 30 days of parenting yourself toward a new behaviour. Especially if you want to raise children one day, parenting yourself might be the best way to train for it.

My mother had always shared her truth that having children had ruined her life. There are other women I know for whom it destroyed their bodies, and still others who died in the process. I wholeheartedly resisted the pressure to become a mother, and I know I'll never regret it.

Life contains many goals you can't resign or turn back. Periodic goals like these may help you appreciate what you want out of life, the choice that would make you want to risk it all before you do and regret it.

Test your goals, try on dreams, and break yourself out of a rut by starting with something small. Ultimately, your commitment muscle will help you tackle your goal. And then the next and the next.

Cutts's question is, "What are you waiting for?"

### 29. Outsmart Temptation

You know the future is coming, but do you know what you will do when it arrives? The secret of goal accomplishment is self-awareness coupled with tactical planning. When you know that something will happen, you plan for what you'll do when it does.

In pursuing any goal, there will be critical times when your desire to change is tested. These times could be when you are on a weight loss plan and are out to dinner when the waiter comes with the dessert cart, tempting your well-known sweet tooth. It could occur when you want to complete your first novel, but when the writing-time alarm goes off, you are tempted to hit the snooze button. Our temptations and when they hit are as individual as our goals.

Getting ahead of temptation is knowing what, when, and where it will hit and what you will do about it when it does. The second part is the critical part. Instead, we assume we will have enough willpower to carry through with our intentions or be astute enough to avoid the challenge. Or, we are like the kid who resorted to licking the marshmallow. We get caught doing unsavoury things, but what else did we have planned?

You want to avoid getting squeezed into action. The first step is knowing these temptations or challenging situations. Next, decide ahead of time what you will do instead. When you plan how to deal with potential critical situations, you are far more likely to follow through with your intentions.

If-then plans are called implementation intentions. They take the form of if something happens, then I will do this. If I am going out to dinner, I will tell the waiter in advance that we will not be having dessert. If I am tempted to ignore my writing time, I will head to the coffee shop with my laptop. You know yourself, so think about what triggers and traps might await to undermine your success and how to trick yourself through them.

Implementation intentions help you achieve your goals by leveraging your psychology. When you form these statements, you are forging a mental link between the if-part and the then-part of the plan, says Peter Gollwitzer, Ph.D. of New York University. When people create these if-then intentions, analyses of close to a hundred studies show a medium to significant effect on the increased goal attainment rate.

This is not a time when copying someone else's homework will do you any good. You must recruit your brain and emotional state by thinking about what might happen and then visualizing yourself as the hero in this new ending. It's all about you and up to you.

These plans are compelling because of the heightened emotional state and activation that thinking about these situations creates. These are not merely execution plans but plans for avoiding crises. Identifying the new action and marinating your senses to expect this response will help you act when the time comes.

Thinking in advance of what might derail you recruits the emotional part of your brain. You get nervous, afraid, or whatever you would feel if it was going to happen, if on a smaller scale. The more you can amplify your emotional response to the proposed action you will take, the better your chances of automatic success. This heightened activation helps automate your chosen response when the cue presents itself. Instead of reacting, you are coding responses.

The "then" part is the action plan you will implement. Imagine yourself doing an alternate action and how good it feels. Feel the success and triumph of executing control over the situation and coming out on top. It's your world, and you are going to master it!

If you want to cheat and see what someone with a similar goal anticipates and what they will do about it, there are many articles on the internet. Compare notes, but your triggers may not be on anyone else's list. However, people are creative and full of ideas about doing things differently.

Implementation intentions are not about the result of having the list finished. Moments of temptation can come at you from left field when you aren't very prepared. The trick is to prepare now. Don't just focus on the mundane, expected challenges, but mine your past and your vision for the future to devise those few derailing situations that will matter.

If-then planners act more quickly and deal more effectively with mental demands. They do not need to think through what to do; they do it. What was not part of their nature before looks automatically ingrained and becomes a new part of their personality.

Prevent a bad outcome when you can anticipate it. Change the future if the situation could challenge you or has in the past. You can predict it, so take steps to prevent it. If it's a situation you don't want to find yourself in, you can protect yourself in advance.

These times do come. Life can throw us off course, but you can have a lifejacket ready to grab—better when wearing it. Be prepared for the test of your willpower. When it happens, you will know what to do and, even better, have pre-trained your brain to act differently.

Have you studied for your next test?

### 30. Build Perseverance

Forming new habits and achieving goals takes perseverance, not persistence. It's the difference between succeeding and knowing when to surrender and give up.

Giving up implies that one more step could have been taken and wasn't. Giving up is rife with abandonment, unfinished business, and a degree of incompleteness.

Surrender is peace in knowing there was nothing left to give or try; it is grace in letting go; it is serenity in the effort and completion of the battle, if not the completion of the goal. It is understanding the game and the rules and deciding it's not worth competing.

It's acceptable to surrender; don't waste more time with your ladder against the wrong wall. It's not adequate to give up if all you needed was a break, a new tactic, or a helping hand.

Knowing when to persevere can make all the difference. Like the fears of the gold prospector, some heartbreaking failures come from giving up too soon. Like the chronic gambler, some of the most enduring regrets come from calling too late. Getting perseverance right doesn't appear that straightforward.

Sometimes you should push, but when? After all, when you are going through a brick wall, it doesn't matter how persistent you are; you should give up. Maybe pick up a shovel instead, perhaps a rope.

Everyone does not quickly develop the determination to continue despite setbacks, and it is not always the correct answer. When should you give up?

Doing things out of obligation or duty becomes draining. It's using consciousness and willpower instead of the depths of the subconscious. If you use your weaknesses instead of your strengths, if values you don't have are steering progress, and if you are surrounded by people deep in their pain, you might struggle in quicksand.

Everyone complains about pushy people, control freaks, and aggressive sales agents. Going after short-term advantages often destroys the long game. A good rule of thumb might be to give up when someone ignores you or says no once. No means no in every situation.

However, there's a wide range of responses between yes and no. If it's in the grey zone, keep trying politely and respectfully, listen harder for where the doors may be cracked open farther, and try them next. It took Oprah twenty meetings to become the first African-American on the cover of Vogue.

Give up your high standards when your measure of achievement is perfection. Henry Ford once said he was lucky his customers would buy imperfect products. It's commonplace. We buy software knowing there will be patches and version upgrades.

Today's stuff is almost built to be disposable, and it's a trash-filled world before any of it ever makes it to the dump. Don't produce rubbish, but don't get caught up polishing pearls. Accept good enough when it is, and move on to the next challenge.

Women often wait until they are ninety to ninety-nine percent perfect before doing something. They read job descriptions and don't apply because they aren't an ideal match. Men go for it when they are at sixty percent. Passing used to be fifty percent, and most businesses have a total performance rating of under forty percent. Lower that bar and take the chance.

Going for it when you are not quite as ready as you want to be will help you build perseverance and, simultaneously, show you where you don't need as much as you expect. Some do say yes. Some hire someone they like who is good enough over the person who has all the requirements, but they wouldn't want to sit beside on a long plane ride. Be yourself and use your personality.

When an expert says, you can't ignore them. Clarke's First Law says, "When a distinguished but elderly scientist states something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong."

Experts can offer insight to help you push past obstacles, tools to make challenges easier and feedback to catch you on your assumptions, but if they tell you that it's impossible, you are on to something big. Double down and keep going when all the experts agree.

When someone says you can't, and they don't know you that well, resolve to prove them wrong. Their comment says more about themselves than it does about you.

When you are trying to change someone else, give up. You can only control yourself. When you let people go, do not think about it with finality. That attitude will only amplify your paralysis and grief. Instead, think of it as creating space and time to learn and grow, and that paths might cross again.

When there is no sign of progress, give up. At the wall, try going around it, over it, under it, through it, but if it's not moving, whatever you try, accept that reality as a constraint and form a new plan. If you think stopping and the idea feels good, knowing you will never achieve that long-term goal, there's your answer. It's time for a different, more authentic goal.

When everything else is falling apart, give up. If you've lost your friends, family, finances, and health, yes, you can still break through and make it, but would it be worth it if you have no one with whom to celebrate?

If it's going to be lonely at the top, and you are a people person, rethink it. If you wind up surrounded by people who like you only for your success, you probably won't enjoy it as much as you expect.

If it's your body screaming for relief, go ahead and be a skeptic. You can take far more pain than what your body tells your mind. If you think you can't get that last rep, take that last lap or hold that pose for a moment longer. Breathe. Transfer your awareness of the pain onto something else. Your brain is bringing out the protectionism, but it's much more premature than it needs to be. Remember, it was built for when we lived in caves, and now we have band-aids. You will heal and be stronger for it.

Give up if it's no longer serving you or going to serve you or if you hope things will change that you cannot control. Keep going if it's a matter of pain, fear, or rejection. Those things are false and only exist to separate those who don't want it from those willing to earn it.

While there is a stigma against failure, sometimes it is success to give up. Build perseverance by knowing when it's worth it. Pour in all your energy when you believe in yourself, your analysis, and your vision for the future. Know when to quit, and never look back.

Where are you pouring in your energy that never returns to you?

## Go Farther

There's a saying that if you'd like to go fast, go alone, but if you'd like to go farther, go with people. Not just any people. The right people can take you further and farther the fastest.

According to Oprah, who might have had a front-row seat to a few transformations, relationships hold most people back.

Relationships can help us grow to new levels of potential, and they can also be the most challenging thing on your path to becoming resilient and living your best life. People are complex, especially if you don't know yourself.

Our identities and behaviours are often a result of other people, and as we start to understand the depth and tangle, it becomes difficult to know how to proceed.

We invest in people and relationships, or at least some of us do, while others only take from others. Some are takers because they think they have no choice, and some genuinely don't. It's difficult to tell until you get invested.

Alone, you don't get those moments of insight; however, you don't get many other things alone. You may not need relationships, but you can benefit from them, as others could benefit from

knowing you and your truths, experiences, and insights. Other people say the strangest things sometimes, and it's in those moments where you realize that your world is different.

No man is an island, and humans are social beings. However, there are givers and takers, fighters and peacemakers, and it's unlikely your experiences were consistently isolated to the positive side of humanity. Likely, you have wonderfully flawed people you call friends and family because they think you are wonderfully flawed.

Everyone is wonderfully flawed. Choose your people from far beyond their first impressions, Facebook profiles, or toys. Choose them for their courage to speak up, their perceptive difference from your own, and their sense of humour, spirit, or soul.

### 31. Recruit a Truth Team

Once, I was at a conference surrounded by quality professionals who agreed on the importance of feedback and data. They lived and breathed the art and science of getting feedback, soliciting opinions, and assembling focus groups.

At lunch, two speakers mentioned that they had no prior information about their audience and would have liked to know who had signed up for their talks so they could better understand their audience's needs. Two attendees said they wished specific talks hadn't conflicted because it forced them to make a difficult choice.

So, how did they answer the feedback survey? Of these four, half filled out the feedback form. No one mentioned their pain points or even hinted at the room for improvement. Everything was great! Great, great, great! Even quality professionals say one thing and do another.

As Clifford Nass writes in [The Man Who Lied to His Laptop](#), we don't mean to lie, but we do it. We want to avoid hurting the other person's feelings, to protect the relationship, and sometimes because we aren't aware of our truths.

When we answer surveys, we protect the relationship, no matter what reputation we might be undermining. When we share information, we do so because we agree with it while serving up opinion as fact.

Confirmation bias is the tendency to seek information that confirms our ideas, even when there is more information that we are wrong. We prefer the status quo, even while professing the desire to change. We hear about the way the world is and the findings of science, and we still believe, "Not me."

Quentin Crisp has said, "The very purpose of existence is to reconcile the glowing opinion we have of ourselves with the appalling things that other people think about us." Think, but don't always verbalize. Most of us will never learn what appalling things other people think about us because we do an excellent job of avoiding that information, discrediting it when we hear it, and denying the truth.

We all think we are wise and moral while continuing with limited perspectives because there is a limit to having one perspective, the one that is yours and all around you. We create echo chambers, choosing others who agree with us and confirm what we already believe. We pick people who share similar backgrounds and perspectives. Sometimes, they are the people available in our circles and families. Nowadays, if there is anything your relationships are capable of being, it's convenient. You can block anyone and find like-minded groups easily.

Sometimes, we need trusted naysayers to yank us back to reality when we get lost in our bubbles. We need others to point out the truths that we can't see. We don't always need or want them to give us their take on the situation. Their questions alone can be enough. We need them to help steer us along and say the things not everyone will be brave enough to voice.

It is human nature to see conflict as destructive instead of productive. To disagree with the boss is risky; it takes a specific skillset called 'managing upwards.' If you're a boss thinking your mandate isn't my way or the highway, your employees may have assumed it on your behalf. Or, they may have deducted it from your actions instead of listening to your policy. Whatever it takes to avoid conflict when you see it as destructive or threatening.

We are accustomed to seeing political leaders berating each other instead of seeing them come up with a better policy that serves more people than what either one individually can think of. Abraham Lincoln was among the few presidents who intentionally surrounded himself with people willing to disagree with him.

Naysayers are just as easy to find, so go looking. To shake up your perspective and become more open to new ideas, you must consciously seek out specific people willing to disagree. Even in science, there is room for opinion. For every opinion, there is someone with an alternative; for every expert, you can find the opposite.

Embracing naysayers means promoting a culture that isn't about hierarchy but about contrasting opinions—backed with data if need be. The best leaders know this and have deliberately done this.

Kim Scott, an advisor to Dropbox and Twitter, believes the most potent tool for a team is "radical candour"—the practice of caring personally and challenging directly. It is not lashing out with negativity. It is not an opportunity to tear someone down or point out many imperfections.

Radical candour points out blind spots, misinformation, lack of information, or an alternative way to view the facts. It is not debate; it is not conflict. It is done with kindness, care, and compassion. It is joining someone where they are on their journey and pointing out what they appear to be missing.

Knowing what they might be missing takes time and observation. Jumping in and diagnosing what you think is obvious will be wrong and offensive. People contain multitudes, and you likely don't appreciate the issue's complexity.

When you tell the people who care about you that you are interested in honest, direct feedback, you open the door to radical candour. Some will take you up on your offer; some will not. The people who do will become your truth team and help you identify your assumptions, discover your values, and change your beliefs.

Are your people radically candid with you?

### 32. Conscript Giants

When you are a child trying to see the parade, you might be lucky to see it from someone's shoulders. Why grow out of that notion?

Whatever your aspiration, someone has preceded you in some way. Someone wise said, "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." Some say Isaac Newton said it; some attribute the quote to Einstein.

Either way, the notion is to build on preexisting knowledge rather than "re-inventing the wheel," as they say. When you conscript giants, you embed gratitude for the work done before you, upon which you can build your platform.

The internet has allowed us to find out who they are and maybe even access to the route they took and the lessons they've learned. Whatever you want to do, there is a course you can take, a blog you can read, a podcast you can tune into, or a video you can play.

The idea in this age is to ask the right questions and make new mistakes.

Then tell everyone about your new mistake so we may all learn from it too. This part doesn't happen nearly as often as it needs to be happening. Too many researchers mistake hypothesis failure for experimental failure; however, proving that something doesn't work or can't happen can be equally valuable as validating hypotheses.

If you don't believe there is anyone from whom you can learn, that may be. However, there are likely parts of it that you can adopt from others.

If you adopt one giant, you will forever remain in that giant's shadow. To be utterly unique, you need a team of giants. Your motivation won't come until you believe it's possible. Giants help you see far and think about what might be possible for you.

For years, experts said the human body was incapable of a four-minute mile—it was impossible. In the 1940s, the record was improved to 4:01 and stood there for nine years. But then, in 1954, Roger Bannister broke the barrier. (As mentioned earlier, look forward.)

These days, a four-minute mile is almost routine. Was technology to thank for the new baseline? Shoes have improved, but not that much. Was it training theory? Roger didn't have any unique technique to share. What you can attribute the change to is the sheer knowledge of possibility.



When we believe that something is possible, it is. "Whether you think you can or can't, you're right," said Henry Ford. When someone else has done it, we know it's humanly possible. We know it's personally possible when we can identify with that person. When we can learn the way from those people, it's just a matter of time and effort.

The first step then is to identify what kind of giants you need. These people have faced similar challenges, been in similar situations and risen to greatness in the ways you hope to accomplish. There are three right there, as no one giant may encompass all that for you.

Find giants by asking people in that industry, checking the most popular blogs in that field or using the resources journalists use when they need someone to interview on a given topic.

Whatever you need to learn, you can find the resources for free. Massive online open courses, or MOOCs, take prestige and price out of the education equation. It's the paper on the wall you have to pay for, and the paper doesn't always matter.

Certification and competency aren't always the same thing. Sometimes, you need to know; sometimes, you need the paper to enter the door. An education looks like a fast answer to both, but not always. There's often a dilution of competency when there is a certification at the end.

In Canada, processes cannot be patented. When the process leads to results that get attention, that attention creates a demand. The demand creates a market, and the right entrepreneur steps in to cash in on the opportunity. You've seen it happen in fashion, and it happens in other fields as well. Where demand exists, create a supply that looks like the real thing.

The project management world created a certification process and business, and now expert project managers are competing with newbies perceived to be on the same level. The newbies are cheaper, and the hiring manager has a budget. The certification leads the manager to believe they are interchangeable when that is far from the case.

Certifications offer a baseline, and once competence is commoditized, it gets lower over time, but so does the money you can make doing it.

The problem with certification happens the other way around as well. Doctors who immigrated to Canada are driving taxis because their certifications aren't applicable here. Yet, we don't have nearly enough doctors, and the healthcare system is crumbling.

And there is no better place for foreign-educated healthcare workers than driving taxis? I have a few ideas, and I'm sure I am not alone. Don't worry about certification; go for competency. When you are the one hiring, get referrals and ask for recommendations.

After you understand how the giants do it, question the conventional wisdom. Pay attention to what niggles at your unconscious, what you feel in your heart and know in your gut.

Listen to the giants, sort out the nonsense from the senses, and thank them for all the wisdom they've generated and passed along. Without that foundation, where would we be? With your contribution, where will we go?

What new mistakes can you make?

### 33. Consult Experts

Experts are helpful people, whether we are planning, evaluating, persisting, or prospecting.

In Think and Grow Rich, Napoleon Hill shares the story of R.U. Darby, the gold prospector who tried and tried and gave up only three feet from gold. Instead of persevering, he sold all his tools for a few hundred dollars. The prospector who bought them made millions with just three more feet. The point is not to "never give up." The moral is to consult experts first.

Your head might not be the best suited for the job. But there is an expert for that, and it's your job to know that you aren't it and to ask the one who is.

The second prospector was successful because he'd hired the right experts to tell him what he needed to know. R.U. Darby did not consult an engineer. The second miner used his head before his tools and realized what he did not know and where he was out of his league. The engineer predicted gold would lie three feet from where Darby quit. He was right. Some experts know their stuff, just like some people know they are not.

To leap, experts help you find the wrong assumption holding you back. If you remember Clarke's Law, experts become experts by making assumptions, and at least one is faulty. That's why they are wrong when they declare, "Impossible!" It's your advantage when they spot it, and don't confuse complex with impossible.

You've made some assumptions about what's impossible with your life or background. What if those assumptions were wrong? What if you weren't ever aware of your assumptions?

Whether we fail to see, willfully resist seeing, or creatively invent ways to rationalize away what we do see, our capacity for self-deception is impressively scary. While confirmation bias is the tendency to seek and find information to prove what we think is true, this tendency is so powerful that we can do it even when there is an overwhelming amount of contradictory information.

In 2017, a 61-year-old limo driver, Mike Hughes, built a rocket to prove the Earth is flat. Hughes was not the only one who could deny the truth; an entire cruise of passengers also went in search.

It took science 104 years to accept the existence of bacteria in the stomach. Doctors were taught that bacteria can't exist in the stomach, so when they saw H. Pyroli in the slides of patients with stomach ulcers, they saw but didn't see the bacteria. Mark Twain said, "It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that ain't so."

Thousands of witnesses and two years were required to shake the bedrock belief of medicine into accepting what they saw. Barry Marshall and Robin Warren won the Nobel Prize for pointing out that the bacteria *H. Pylori* causes stomach ulcers.

Asking for help is difficult because people often fear rejection, look stupid, or show need or weakness. If you don't have any expert help, you need it. As you go through this journey, the obstacles you face relate to relationships, psychology, and the environment; consider experts in those fields for personal lessons.

Consulting experts doesn't always mean hiring someone. Many experts write books. Some have YouTube channels. A lot give TED talks. Find the expert on your preferred platform who addresses what you need to know and immerse yourself in their content. You can ask for help anonymously, and no one has to know that you don't know everything.

If you don't have a library card right now, get one. Libraries give you access to all of these things plus more for free. You can download audiobooks for home, take courses at your own pace, and easily access eBooks. Knowledge is within your reach; it's waiting for your questions.

Are teachers the only ones who can ask questions while knowing the answer? Of course, they always know the answer to the questions they pose, but that's not the way questions are supposed to work.

Everyone else worries that asking a question will make them look stupid, and our first responses sometimes are, "What, are you stupid?" We learned the wrong things about how questions work.

What's fun and eye-opening is asking a question and getting an answer that is even better than the one you were waiting for.

Asking is difficult because you may have to approach someone you don't know. Your target may react in unexpected ways. In [Rejection Proof](#), Jia Jiang tells of his intentional journey to beat the fear of rejection over 100 days. The surprise is that while he asked for things he was sure would elicit a negative response; sometimes people said yes.

Jia Jiang says he learned three things about rejection: First, you will become weak and timid if you don't practice outside your comfort zone. Second, it's a numbers game. Third, avoiding it is worse than receiving it.

You may lack confidence and experience in asking questions. Maybe you were told that asking is rude and that you shouldn't do it. In [The Art of Asking](#), Amanda Palmer talks about how she stopped worrying and let people help.

Palmer was the Eight-Foot Bride who would put on a mini-mime and give people a flower for their donation. She then learned the power of asking her Twitter fans when she or someone needed something, always grateful and amazed at the solutions that would arrive.

No one gets through life without help. No one can be an expert at everything, but everyone can be at their own thing while knowing what that is, how to describe it, and how to find those who need it. We need help, and we have the power to give it.

Give more than you receive, and do not ignore your own needs. Do not fear to ask for whatever would help. After all, when someone asks you for help, when are you happy to give it? Ask like that, and you'll get all the help you need.

What help could you use right now?

### Interrupt Interference

Since I'd never worked in call centers before, someone higher heard of my work and concluded that they needed to validate what I was doing. I was told the conversation went something like, "Whoa, Nelly, that cowboy of yours might need reigning in, if not corralled altogether."

A group of external consultants were hired to check my work. You would recognize the name if you followed Canadian federal politics. A place to which I'd applied but did not get an interview.

I gave them everything I had collected, analyzed and concluded. "If they have this, why do they need us?" one asked me. I could do nothing but shrug.

I helped them in every way I could without volunteering or leading anything. That is, I answered questions but didn't offer my insights. I would have if asked, but I was surprised, but not surprised, that they didn't. After all, they were there because I was questionable, like stinky cheese.

It was time for them to present their findings a few weeks later. One problem was that the schedule was always off. We all agreed on that.

"Ta-da," they said, revealing a graph with the daily intervals and the number of staff required for each interval. It was a brand-new schedule.

The director invited the consultant to leave and turned to me. "Will it work?" she asked. I surmised she already knew the answer.

The team knew that call volume varied from Monday to Friday, January to June. They also knew a schedule that worked for these scenarios would be expensive and violate their budgets. When the consultant arrived, such was about where we were on the curve of continuous improvement.

I confirmed what she already knew, "No."

The consultant presented a fixed schedule, and we'd already determined that a variable schedule was needed. We needed a formula, not an answer.

After that meeting, the consultant was terminated, and we got back to work figuring out their variables, the setting that made things click, and the external factors that were always waiting to derail our careful planning.

Cowboys might be what you need to herd well-intended managers who play tug-of-war with corporate strategy. You plan; nature laughs. If the road to hell is paved with good intentions, let's aim for fewer interventions and more focus on ourselves.

### 34. Choose Control

With the call center managers, the transformation from a fixed set of protocols to a variable set became a process of loving change more and more.

I would analyze, show them the data, and ask how my analysis matched real life. Over time, they learned to read charts, and I knew what happens daily. It's a mutual learning I call collaboration, and it's what I meant when I said, "I do my job, and you do yours."

I can teach you how to manage data, what you have to manage, and what resources you have at your disposal. I can teach you what data I wish I had. We do our best to use what is available, what we need to collect, and what collateral we can leverage. When projects introducing new technology show up, we pull out our wish lists of data and insights.

This is how I lead continuous improvement and what it means: I teach them how to do it, then back away slowly until they are on their own. It's my version of nurturing, although once a boss said I was the least nurturing person there. Sometimes, you must shake your head at what people can't see.

When my bosses showed up to find out what I was doing differently, they realized something big was different when I took the seat at the back of the room. It's not my show; it never was. I deliberately work myself out of a job.

I nurtured it; I didn't control it, dominate it, or demand it. I got dinged in performance reviews for not being aggressive. How's that working for you? Dr. Phil might ask, but I didn't point out that the things they reward and recruit aren't the things that work.

I love change, and I'm already looking forward to the next gig. Mentally, I love the complexity of the problems. Socially, I know I'll find a new and fascinating insight into human nature. With repetition, though, I know it starts with everyone spying on me with evil eyes and ends up with everyone relieved, but the joy of the journey stops offsetting the initial painful welcome.

My bosses told me that no one likes change, but if that were true, we wouldn't look forward to vacations, different seasons, new restaurants—or retirement, for that matter.

What is true is that no one likes loss or a lack of control. Change can bring loss, and change isn't always of your choosing. In that culture, though, I knew not to argue. When you quash the truth

of those around you, problems remain elusive. When you reward aggression and dominance, you get a tug-of-war culture, and I craved peace.

In addition to genuine curiosity and listening, my way was different because I gave them the control they wanted. Each had a different theory, and when evaluated with data, the team could collaborate effectively instead of arguing over who should get the lead. It produced such a different result that they were better able to react and adapt quickly.

In short, they loved change when they were in control of it.

When change looks murky, we avoid it. Maybe we want to get rid of that lousy job, but then we also stand to lose some close friendships, access to the company gym, and the subsidized cafeteria. We start with ambitions and then quickly catch ourselves. We think the devil we know is better than the one we don't.

However, you can easily maintain friendships, find a new gym, and bring your lunch, which might even be healthier.

When facing change, we must identify all the costs and consequences and look at the whole picture. Some consequences can be mitigated, and others are benefits that would motivate us to act if we knew about them.

Some negative consequences might appear big at first but shrink on closer inspection. By evaluating the effects of change, we can control our interpretation of it and find even more reasons to pursue it.

When it comes to fate and control, people either have an internal locus of control or an external one. People with an internal locus of control believe that they control the rewards they receive in life. Having an external locus of control means you think their fate is in the hands of factors outside their control. Success comes to those who believe they are in control.

Sometimes, our fates are handed to us. It might be a pink slip or a call from the doctor. Facing those changes, it is hard to love change. However, the next job might be better, even your dream job. From the doctor, you might be grateful you didn't delay the appointment.

What you can't control are other people; even while we try, we all learn it as babies. To get something, you cry, and someone will bring it for you. Later, we learn to use our words, but fewer still learn about the efficiency and effectiveness of working within your circle of control instead of your circle of influence.

We attempt to influence other people in many ways, some perfectly normal and some neurotic. We try to control other people to make our lives easier. You can influence them, but they are free to choose their response, which may not be what you expected.

When we manipulate or intimidate others, our attempt to control them is apparent. We force them to do all communication work when we withdraw and withhold. We might intentionally push them away to give us time to process.

We whine and complain, expecting others to intervene and help. When we criticize and confront, we manipulate their emotions to change our own.

When we judge and label people, we attempt to push them in a specific direction. This is one way society governs itself, using shame and blame to keep behaviour within an acceptable limit.

You are making changes you want and know the required effort. Getting someone else to change who doesn't have the level of commitment that you do is almost impossible. They may even want to, but they change according to their priorities, needs, and capabilities.

You, too, are on your journey of determining what matters most to you, your responsibilities, and doing the best you can. Instead of changing others, we can change our perceptions and feelings about their behaviour.

People may try to recruit you to their agendas, particularly as you change. As they start to see changes in your life, it may threaten them, expose them or otherwise strike a chord of fear. They may respond with efforts to make you stop changing or to go back to the way you were before.

You have chosen control of yourself and your destiny, so you are immune to these efforts. You refuse threats, criticism, evasion, complaints, or disapproval. You also refuse praise. Good or bad, when you respond to others, you give up your internal locus of control.

Know you are in control of yourself and only you. If one approach doesn't work, try another. And another, and another. When you love change, life is an adventure.

What kind of change could you love?

### 35. Disregard Orders

Once, I had a colleague who believed entirely different things from me. Perhaps more than once, but the conflict was front and center this time.

One day, I received an order to combine his technology with my methodology. I couldn't understand how to do that, as the core foundations were diametric. This wasn't peanut butter and chocolate but black-and-white paint. Mine relied on teaching people to think, and his relied on telling people what to do. One is empowerment, and the other is control.

Giving someone wings and then putting them in a cage made no sense. It made no sense to tell someone to do what they think is best and then prepare to mark them against a set of orders.

At its best, the result would be counterproductive and confusing. Disharmony is rife, and for me, it frustrates the world. I refused to contribute to mass confusion, pre-determined blame, and someone's personal need for control.

Unfortunately, the day came when the powers that be decided the best solution was to lock the two of us in a conference room and see what came out. Or maybe who, I wondered when he started screaming at me, "I used to be an assassin, you know!"

Please don't waste your energy, time, or reputation playing games that aren't fun, fighting battles you aren't sure what they are about, and tied up in competitions that come without any rewards. If you win, you might find it not what you expected, and the crown is one of thorns.

You have but one choice: survive and prepare to have more options in the matter.

My mother told me she brought me into this world and could take me out of it. I can't remember how old I was when I learned, no, mothers are not allowed to get away with murdering their children. I survived with her for almost 16 years; in the meantime, I learned what I could survive. When survival is all you can do, plan and prepare for when that day changes.

When someone tells you what they would do if they were you, they give you advice. The problem with advice is that what is true or correct for them may not be accurate or proper for you. If you take the advice, it may quickly take you toward new and more significant problems.

Henri Nouwen has said, "When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand." If advice isn't the most significant thing to give someone, it may not be the best thing to take from someone.

People with your best interests at heart may offer unsolicited advice. When we offer advice, we feel we have helped someone or done a good deed and start worrying about why we aren't taking it. It's not advice; it's an order.

Your problems seem easier to solve than theirs, but they don't understand the situation, only what they see. Like an iceberg, what's on the surface is nothing compared to what's underneath. You contain multitudes that only you have access to.

Free advice is often worth the price, but even so, there can be something to it. It's not unbiased; it is loaded with the other person's bias. Their advice teaches you what you need to know about that person, not what you should do with your life. File it under "Good to Know," but do not follow that advice.

When it is good to know and follow, you start hearing the same comment repeatedly. This is a sign, not a foregone conclusion, that there might be a helpful truth you are denying or ignoring which is holding you back, and this is your opportunity to notice.

Following other people's advice tends to take you off your path. In contrast to advice, counsel is more like a warm presence that says nothing. A good counsellor will seek to understand your



goals, needs, and situation. They will ask a ton of questions before offering any insight. They are attempting to keep you on your path and help you through whatever trouble you face.

Regarding your aspirations, it's possible someone gave you advice that soured something for you. I used to love getting lost in fiction until my dad called it "mind candy," it took me reading about the benefits of reading fiction to bring me back to it.

Teachers may have squashed your artistic endeavours by pointing out a lack of drawing ability. Adults may have quieted your singing voice simply because they needed silence after a stressful day. If your childhood no-bars dreamer announced a goal, how was it treated? Was it 'you go, girl' or was it, 'are you kidding, you're a girl'?

Whatever the reaction to your dreams as a child, forget about them. When people hear ideas, their responses are enthusiastic and supportive at one end or mocking and antagonistic at the other. They picture themselves doing it, and what they observe for themselves is not you in your world.

No matter how people responded, it created an impact. We might modify our dreams to accommodate random advice. We might have changed the vision. A new component that should never have been there may have been added because of someone's random comment. Maybe we erased a vital ambition by mistake.

Some of your aspirations you may have edited on your own. We all have an identity and know when something matches that identity and when it doesn't. You are practical, so THAT frivolous thing shouldn't be there. You are a great mom, so ALL THESE THINGS should be there. You are a valued employee, so THIS CHUNK doesn't happen.

Dreams and ambitions are allowed to be irrational, unsuitable, and conflicting. There's no judgment here.

What if you were the kid watching the emperor parade his new clothes? Like the fresh eyes of a child, most breakthrough inventions and ideas came from novices and outsiders. They aren't limited by what's been tried before, what's assumed to be too difficult or expensive.

If there's another person who's always wrong, it's the layperson who declares something impossible. Is anyone right when they say something is impossible? Proving something impossible is such a feat that they keep making movies called Mission: Impossible, and we all know they succeed.

We live in a time when things are changing much more rapidly than ever before. Whatever was impossible when you were just a child might be commonplace today.

Technology has broken many barriers, but so have attitudes. Responsibility for bad grades has shifted from the student to the system, news reports have moved from the professional to the population, and drinking water has shifted from the tap to the bottle. Knowledge has shifted

from knowing the answer to that of asking the question. Maybe it's no longer about whom you know but about who you want to meet.

Judgment is a destructible force. When things change constantly, an opinion that was accurate at one point may become inaccurate or obsolete. Forget all judgment of yourself and everyone else and recover your aspirations. Laugh when they say impossible—you earned it.

What advice should you stop giving or taking?

### 36. Leverage Details

Subconsciously supporting your goals can launch your ability to achieve them into the stratosphere, just as a bit of undermining can sabotage you without conscious effort.

One of the basic human needs is the need for significance. That is, to stand out in some way that is better and different from everyone else. Some people answer this need by having a problem that makes them special and unique. If they got rid of the problem, they'd no longer be able to satisfy their need for significance.

You may not have been aware you had this need nor were in pursuit of one. You know only a tiny fraction of what is happening around you. Although your brain is processing and absorbing tons of information, it's also filtering it.

Filtering is how you can tune out background noise at a party. Your reticular activating system (RAS) makes these choices about what to bring to your attention and what to ignore. These choices are based on your values and threats, defined by your experiences and history.

What you've paid attention to in the past, you will notice in the present. Your name is something you value – you've written it out, spoken it and seen it millions of times in your life. You can suddenly tune in when you hear your name across that crowded party.

When your RAS is picking up cues of what you want to focus on by the words you say, the thoughts you think, and the images you look at, you need to ensure that there is harmony and alignment in everything you do, what you pay attention to, and what you want. What you say should reflect what's possible in your life. If you say I can't, you won't.

I had a friend who constantly complained about something I thought was relatively easy to fix. Trying to understand what was going on, I was talking to another friend. "She's not complaining; she's bragging," that second friend said. Such insight out of the perspectives of others!

Bragging and complaining sound remarkably similar but differ when you pay attention beyond the words. Considering that person's choices and behaviour, it's easy to see the difference. However, you may have no idea without a team of truth-tellers around you.

Some people may sound like they are complaining, and you may even sound that way to yourself, but unless you want to accept help, do the work and be open to feedback, you are

bragging. The difference between bragging and complaining is between a problem you think you want to solve and one you genuinely are working to resolve.

Affirmations are popular as a powerful way to change your beliefs about yourself. If you talk to yourself in language that reflects what you want to be accurate, you are on your way there. If you say something, wanting it to be correct but believing otherwise, your mind calls you on it and labels you a liar.

If there is a chasm between where you are and where you want to be, you can start with statements that reflect progress, such as "I am becoming..." or pay attention to the sources of the lie of which your mind is well aware.

How do your clothes fit? Do they pinch and make the thought "I am fat" circulate in your brain? Are they cheap and worn out, making the thought "I'm not worth it" crop up in your consciousness? Or are they in good condition and comfortable while presenting the image you want to contribute to the world? You are in control of what you wear, and you are in control of what you think about what you wear.

How many times do you type in your password every day? Is it irrelevant or reinforcing? Is it something pointless, like "All Mice Eat Cheese 3x/Day!" Phrases that use the capital letters of first words with numbers and special characters are the strongest, but why not "I am happy and healthy earning \$5k/w?" Use your passwords to cement your goals.

Not all unconscious influences on our actions are unnoticeable. Subliminal stimuli are below the threshold of conscious perception, but you can become more aware of them. When you pay attention to the messages on every level, you can see where you can make small changes that provide massive support with minimal effort.

How often have you found yourself singing along with a song? Have you listened to what you are saying to yourself? Whatever you listen to should be a conscious, empowering choice. It might be specific and raise your self-esteem, confidence, and positivity. The lyrics should reflect what you want to achieve, how you want to feel, and what you want to have happen. Write your own if you need to.

What is valid for music also applies to movies. Be careful of what you intentionally absorb with your eyes. When you choose movies, decide if you want to be exposed to almost two hours of violence, drama, and strife or if you want to build a good feeling with more uplifting choices.

What pictures are on your desk, screen saver, or background? Since there will be something there anyway, why not use the opportunity to strengthen your goal, increase your well-being, or reinforce your new choices?

Your RAS is your executive assistant. How you train this executive assistant is up to you. The words you use, the things you look at, and how you feel all send training messages. Choose these training messages carefully. If you don't like what you are getting, change the training.

Are you living in perfect harmony?

## Befriending Change

Not everything goes according to plan; sometimes, even when it does, it doesn't turn out like you planned. I remember when I had the opportunity to train a classroom of managers on new tools and ways of working. It went according to plan, but I decided, "I'm never doing that again."

With the required permission and careful preparation, I ended up with a room of managers who were told they needed to learn from me for a week. While I prepared to deal with people who thought they were there as punishment, I realized I had more significant problems.

Unfortunately, they were not alone with me at the conference center. Next door, all their colleagues were deciding the company's future goals and promotions—which they would miss out on.

I taught the selected managers while their buddies played hockey—literally on a frozen pond when our ballroom lacked a window.

They evened the score the night I arranged s'mores for them, complete with an outdoor bonfire. Limbs from manicured trees on the landscaping were ripped off and tossed into the fire. Fireworks were set off. But they weren't the only ones who weren't having fun and needing release.

For me, the week of training was a social activity from breakfast until dusk, and I was drained like never before. I gave all my energy to motivate and inspire a class who were ruminating over where they went wrong to have ended up there, and I was exhausted. I was so happy it was an experiment and not my contracted future.

Friday morning, I found out everyone else was already headed home, so I excused my class, relieved it was over. I drove home, knowing I did not want to go through with the business model of a consulting practice I had in mind. Thank goodness I piloted the idea before I invested everything. Thank goodness? Thank planning.

You already know why you are the first person who needs to do the heavy lifting to put yourself first. It's an investment in yourself that requires befriending change.

Befriending change means knowing the following best action, and sometimes, that means doing nothing. You know how hard that is.

The best action might be observing, getting quiet, and doing nothing—if you can manage it.

### Ace the Test

More than twenty years ago, my CEO wanted to know, "What are you doing differently?"

He went on to explain that he gets a monthly graph showing the amount of savings each of his Black Belts has racked up and every month, he has to take my name off the chart to see anyone else. By differently, he means resulting in so much more savings than everyone else.

Thanks to the careful tracking of individual contributions, this CEO could quantify the difference, follow the analysis, and ask the question to one of his junior engineers.

There were a couple of obvious ways to answer the question: I'm one of the few females; I was the only one who didn't meet the selection criteria for age or service; I'm the only one working in the same environment as before the promotion. But you don't tell a CEO what is obvious. So, what do you say to a CEO?

I spent twenty years answering this question and was always on that purpose. Meanwhile, some HR directors thought they needed to guide my career. There was constant external pressure attempting to send me off in other directions, promotions that sounded to me like punishments. All this pressure created a job-hopper who ran from one impending undesired future to another. Sometimes, the trick is to stay ahead of the game, even if their intentions are good.

Twenty years later, I have an abundance of answers. One of them, maybe the biggest one, is why I couldn't answer the question – I wasn't paying attention to anyone else; I was focused on my test, eyes on my paper.

### 37. Picture Your Success

Visualization is one of the most potent mental exercises if you have the ability, but not everyone can do it.

Pictures are worth a thousand words; you are not alone if you don't have one in mind. The ability to visualize runs on a spectrum from those with aphantasia to those who can paint or draw from memory alone – and get it accurate.

Many people's attempts to draw a bicycle betray their confidence that they know what one looks like. Maybe you have solid lines, vivid colours, fuzzy memories, and shades of gray.

Law of Attraction proponents ask you to visualize having things already. They believe that putting focused, positive energy into the universe will bring it to you. If you focus your mental energy on positivity and abundance, it's that easy. Don't you want into their universe?

You do not want in on The Secret because when it does not work, the answer is that you are not trying hard enough. After all, the corollary is that if you don't have it yet, it's because you've let negative thoughts creep in, and in short, you are the one to blame. Give in too long, and you'll undermine your sense of competence. Do not let them blame you; it's the technique.

Picturing what you want to have without picturing how you will get it will make you feel good in the short term but backfires in the long term. When you visualize the fruits of your success

without the work it took to get them, you produce the feelings of having it already, undermining your motivation to make it come true.

It's helpful to think you can just put it out there, and the universe will bring it to you. Maybe that's even the case. Patience is a virtue, but God helps those who help themselves, and if there isn't one, you might waste all your opportunities waiting for divine intervention.

Have you heard the joke of the man on the roof in the flood? Waiting for God to help him, he turned away three ways to get saved. In heaven, he asked God why he didn't help. God says, "What do you mean? I sent you a canoe, a raft, and a helicopter!"

In one study, three groups of students were about to face their mid-term exam. Group 1 was asked to visualize doing well, Group 2 was asked to visualize studying, and Group 3 was a control group. After the exam, Group 1 felt better about themselves, but Group 2 scored higher grades and was less stressed. Visualizing doing the work is what paid off.

Success is a result of action, not dreaming. Everyone defines success for themselves, but when you visualize success, you are better off visualizing the performance, the work, and the lead-up to that evaluation you envision going favourably.

The real power of visualization is picturing the process of getting there, not the outcome. What do you do the next day if things end happily ever after? Take help where you get it, and you might want to visualize all the help you could use divinely arriving in your inbox, at your door, and in your life. Then, send the email, invite the people, and make the call.

Send out the energy as gratitude for what hasn't happened yet but what you hope will. Since you trust in the universe or put your faith in God, you know that it will happen and be the right door to open, or it won't happen. If it doesn't, thankfully, you've avoided a disaster you didn't see coming.

We've all worked hard to get something we regret, and we learned that what we set out to achieve may not be the best idea. After that lesson, you start reacting differently when things don't go your way.

Research has revealed that, in some cases, mental practices are almost as effective as physical practice and that doing both is more effective than either alone. Guang Yue, an exercise psychologist from the Cleveland Clinic Foundation in Ohio, compared people who went to the gym with people who carried out virtual workouts in their heads.

Yue found a 30 percent muscle increase in the gym goers, but the people who never touched iron gained an impressive 13.5 percent, almost half as much. Not too shabby for all the convenience, affordability, and relative ease of mental practice.

The Soviets popularized mental rehearsal back in the 1970s to compete in sports. Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus, and Muhammad Ali all used this technique. They used vivid, detailed mental

images and ran through their entire performance before swinging a club or stepping into the ring.

Brain studies now tell us why mental rehearsal works. The brain doesn't differentiate between thought and action. Both produce the same patterns in the brain; the more substantial the brain's circuitry, the more automatic the behaviour.

You can imagine yourself as a new you. Dr. Joe Dispenza wrote the book Becoming Supernatural and runs retreats to help people do exactly that. His list of lottery winners, spontaneous healings, and more is so long that he says he's almost bored of it if you could get bored of miracles.

Create a vision board or a mind movie if you are inclined toward video. Focus on actions, results, feelings and emotions, and not so much on the products of that success.

Forget about the dream house, car or trinkets you will buy; focus on the steps to get there and enjoy the journey as the point of the process. If you do it merely for the result, what will you do after it? Time doesn't fill itself; budgets don't balance themselves, and dreams don't manifest alone.

Can you visualize your future unfolding as you wish?

### 38. Get a Reminder

I have a pet rock. Engraved into it is the word "Celebrate."

When I was burnt out from pushing myself, my therapist gave me this physical reminder to help prompt me to take joy in my accomplishments. Historically, I tend to move on to the next one before the proverbial paint is dry on the last one. Time to celebrate was wasted if you asked me, yet my life was far from a stoic hinterland.

It was time to celebrate instead of only thinking about where I could have done better. It was time to relish the victory instead of only moving on and trying to improve next time. That engraved stone helped me break through those nasty tendencies and remember to appreciate the effort, not just the result. It was time to take joy in accomplishment.

When I made accomplishments to make other people happy, I didn't take the joy because it never was about that. It was only about relief that it was over. I failed to realize that I should choose goals that have personal meaning. At the same time, those whom I was trying to make happy seemed only momentarily changed before returning to their earlier dispositions. Today, I realize any attempt to make anyone else anything is an attempt to control them.

I realized the things I wanted to celebrate had no traction in my life, but they remained lofty dreams and castles in the sky. You can't pursue your goals when consumed by satisfying someone else, which isn't always worthwhile. Pivoting to a life built on my foundation was an accomplishment worth celebrating, and I had the rock to prove it.



Engraved stones are popular. Carrying one in your pocket that matches your goal can help you remember to make different choices. Its weight will bring your attention to something you want to focus on differently, and it might make you more grounded.

Patti Digh, the author of Life is a Verb, says we all need something to ground us, something meaningful that reminds us of a promise we've made, a feeling we want to have again, or someone we love. For her, it's orange and teal Buddhist mala beads.

Married people get a ring to remind them of their vows, engineers get a ring to remind them of theirs, and Super Bowl winners get a ring to remind them of their accomplishments. People worried they might forget their anniversary can buy a ring that heats 24 hours before the day. Try ignoring a band of 120 degrees on your finger!

Objects can remind us of the past and influence our futures. When people think that luck blesses them, they perform better. Researchers at the University of Cologne studied participants who were given a golf ball and asked to sink a putt. Players improved their performance by 35% when informed that the ball was lucky.

Believing in your good fortune when you control the outcome can make a difference, so you might as well think yourself lucky. They say that luck is when preparation meets opportunity. You are doing the work of getting prepared so that when the opportunity presents itself, you will see it and be able to seize the moment. A physical reminder of your preparation might help you appreciate how far you've come and where you are going.

Athletes are well known for their superstitions. While practice makes the difference, superstition gives them a feeling of control when it's certainly not the case. What you see them doing may not do with the actual ritual. You can see them adjusting their hat a certain way, but it's a trigger to remind them to focus. Maybe they are physically shaking off an unhelpful thought. Whatever works, they say.

The feeling of control may give them psychological advantages that give them an edge—until they lose and change their superstition. Phiten, a company that sells titanium-infused necklaces, found a market with baseball players. Although they cannot produce any studies to prove their work, they sell anyway. Belief is all that matters, and having a reminder of a ritual may be spurring all their sales.

Happier, a gratitude app company, gives away bracelets to users. Every time you notice the bracelet, it reminds you to be grateful. Will Bowen provides bright purple bracelets to remind people of their goal to live in a complaint-free world. Live Strong uses yellow bracelets to remind people to live healthy lives while generating donations for cancer research.

Lucky charms, talismans, and amulets are all physical forms that remind us of our goals and the ability to get there. They keep our change goal in mind – which is very important when breaking and forming new habits. We must bust out of unconscious patterns, consciously choose

different behaviours, and do that often enough to make the new behaviour unconscious. Not only is there a reminder that is usually in your field of vision no matter where you go, but it might also be a conversation starter that will get you to share your big why with others.

Believe, have faith, and get the results you need. The power of a placebo is proven. If you think it works, it will work, but if you think it won't, it won't. The placebo effect occurs with everything from pills to operations, but so does the nocebo. It's the opposite of a placebo. Negative expectations come true just as reliably, so choose wisely.

Whether it's a ring, bracelet, engraved rock or lucky totem, a physical reminder can help jar your consciousness and help you ease into a new way of behaving while giving you a psychological edge. Let them think you are a flake while you laugh through impossible things. Take it from me – it's a moment worth celebrating.

Do you have a physical reminder of what you are trying to accomplish?

### 39. Track Progress

Tracking progress is critical. You need feedback to adjust, celebrate, and learn what's working and what isn't.

At first, your progress may be easily reflected by a feeling of success, which is all you need to keep going. Farther into your journey, you may want or need more tangible, specific, and detailed feedback. According to research published by Benjamin Harkin, Ph.D., of the University of Sheffield, the more frequently you measure, the more successful you will be.

Harkin conducted a meta-analysis of 138 studies comprising 19,951 participants; they found that prompting participants to monitor progress increased the likelihood of their success. The more frequent the monitoring, the greater the chance of success. Furthermore, if the information was physically recorded or publicly reported, there was an even greater chance of success.

The key decision is whether you should track how far you've come or how far you've yet to go. To maximize your motivation, you want to track the smallest area. In the beginning, this will be progress, an increase from zero. Toward the end, it will be how far you have left to achieve your goal, a decrease toward zero.

Flip at midway to optimize tracking. When you are halfway there, celebrate, then switch your measurement system to focus on what remains. Tracking the small part is a psychological trick that works because it magnifies the perceived impact of the following action.

Success becomes systematic when you manage the inputs and monitor the outputs. Every system creates a transformation. It takes inputs and produces outputs. Managing means having detailed insight into the workings of transformation. When you see you are getting an output you don't want, it means knowing what inputs you need to change and how.

When output measures don't reflect the level of success you expected or wanted, you need to get some insight into what might be happening. You need to understand the factors involved and expose the misalignment.

You are a system which is made of systems like the musculoskeletal system. When you get sick, you think back to the possible inputs. Did you eat something funny, forget to drink enough water, or fail to get enough sleep? Those three checks are inputs to your system, while how you feel is the output you'd like to change. Your doctor sometimes is no better authority than you.

To build new habits, think back to the framework developed by Nir Eyal. Developed to clarify how technology becomes addictive and used to construct assistive habit-forming technologies, it can be used to build your goal-achievement system. According to his model, it all starts with an internal trigger. What do you want?

Following the internal trigger is the external one. With technology, this is the beep of a text message arriving. Something interrupts your attention and redirects your focus. Maybe it's that bright bracelet you are wearing. With that decision, think about how you will interrupt yourself and take the new path. Perhaps there's an implementation intention for that.

Next in Eyal's model are the steps of action and reward. By this stage, you may have them intimately combined in large and small scales. You may want to refine them now in the context of directly following the trigger you've determined.

The final phase is getting invested and seeing where you've been throwing suitable investments after bad. The more time and effort we spend doing something, the more likely we are to engage in other actions consistent with that behaviour. Step back and check how you've spent your time against your stated priorities. Do they still match?

Optimization means tracking and assessing the performance of each input relative to its different aspects. It looks like perfecting your habit loop until you completely comply with taking action when and where you intended.

With rewards, you will want to test what you've devised. If they make you feel like there is something to look forward to, that is worth the effort. And, of course, you will want to continue tracking your success.

As you work with the data you generate, you may stumble across other variables to monitor and measure. Your overall stress level may have an impact. The amount you slept? The quantified-self movement knows no bounds of what you can measure about yourself and your experiment of one.

Using your data is to move beyond symptoms and into causes when insight hits. For example, a problem with weight is not a problem with the scale. When you realize that weight is a symptom of something else, track the improvement on that something else – a sense of control, a feeling

of security, the time you can spend pursuing your passion – the list is long. If you have a journal, you can connect the dots.

What you don't want to do on your weight loss journey is to become obsessed with food. If you suddenly spend all your time looking at recipes, shopping for ingredients, and counting calories, you will be more consumed by food than before. Pick a new hobby that requires two clean hands and has nothing to do with food.

Without data, insights can be meaningless. Ensure you track your progress and know what measures to take. Use the data, learn what doesn't work and change it.

Can you track success in real time?

### Prepare for Failure

Hoping for the best may not be your best strategy. Just in case anything goes wrong, know that it usually does. It's called life. No matter how good your plans, how brilliant your ideas, how sterling your merit, sometimes Mother Nature has her ideas and doesn't stop considering everyone in the grand planning of the universe.

One day, a global insurance company came knocking, or their recruiter did. They were looking for people with my expertise because they would be starting their internal program and wanted it to be unique to them, so she said. I translated that as an opportunity to give my research a whirl.

My stepmother had worked there. Upon hearing the news, she intervened with a message. "It's going to kill you. They are going to want to tell you exactly what to do." I heard her message and prepared for failure accordingly.

A couple of things might be facts. One, they'd learned the Steve Jobs rule about not telling people what to do when you've hired them to tell you what to do, which qualified as that. Two, I'd be part of the team telling people what to do so that I could influence them at will. Three, well, everyone dies somehow, and if I do it while leaving something worthwhile behind, then it wasn't a waste.

Managing change is complex, but it doesn't have to be difficult, as you might be learning. Once in a while, you might miss something in your planning, and sometimes, it's Mother Nature laughing. Either time, it's an opportunity to update or correct your model and learn what factors you forgot.

Since these failures will happen, the best thing to do is prepare for them. Preparing your attitude and psyche for a potential backfire is another material thing to do.

If there's one thing an engineer knows, it's a failure, and there are only three things you can do about them: reduce how much damage they cause, reduce how often it happens, and reduce the number of times it catches you blindsided.

Preparing for failure means assessing your risk and trying to control as much of it as possible and eliminate even more—even Mother Nature. There are ways to work with the force of nature and even use it to your advantage.

Don't fight against anyone or anything, but listen, assess, and mitigate as required. When you aren't in charge of the pace of those changes and failure comes knocking, you can treat it like the guest that it is until it moves on. You've done it before, and you'll do it again.

Every failure is an invitation to get closer to seeing the humour, finding the inspiration, and amplifying the hope.

#### 40. Cope Proactively

According to Robert L. Leahy, "You are afraid of your feelings because you think you should be rational, in control, never upset, always clear in how you feel, and on top of things." Even though you recognize that you're a nervous wreck, your fear of your feelings drives you into a much worse shape as they are something that you absolutely cannot escape.

Whatever coping skills you developed, there was a good reason why you did it once and another reason why you persisted. Now that you are almost to your goal, these deep-rooted coping strategies can be swapped out for a new way to analyze, take action, and gather feedback.

To cope proactively is to grow old, not just get old. The tools of mental performance offer a problem-focused strategy for coping. Without that power to reflect and grow, life's challenges and complicated emotions can be overwhelming. Overwhelmed, we use common coping mechanisms that don't change much, even as we age.

In Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me), authors Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson describe how it makes you perfectly human not to see your role in an outcome you didn't like.

Avoiding or denying happens when we create situations so we don't have to face others. Doing everything you can to escape a problem will only inflate it and bring it down on your head at the worst possible time.

Social support feels like it's helping, but be careful. Venting doesn't help—you, them, or anyone. Talking to friends about concerns isn't taking action either. Loquacious procrastination is what I've heard it called. It's socializing instead of doing the work you know needs doing. It's one thing to ask for input and feedback and use it; it's another to ignore what is said or use a social connection to avoid doing the work you know you need to do.

Denial is the refusal to acknowledge a stressful problem or situation, avoiding the facts or minimizing the consequences. Take time to figure out how to deal with a distressing situation, and don't get stuck there.

Blaming is a simple assignment of accountability. It feels better and is easier when we can point to someone else, but that also gives away our power.

All these strategies could be called cowardly, but they're a waste of time because only one question matters: "What can I do to ensure it doesn't happen again?"

Even when it's someone else's doing and not our own, if you are the one in pain, you are the one who needs to change it; we are all accountable for our own lives and actions. As much as there is a justice system, it's up to you to use it—and improve it, if that's the case, because I fail to see how taking time away from someone else does anything for me.

There is something you can do when you take accountability and take action. It is the human condition to realize we are imperfect and insignificant, yet we can strive for better and have a more significant impact and reach than we could imagine.

As the dominating gymnast Simone Biles says, "We tried peaceful protesting. Then Colin Kaepernick – he lost his job. He lost his career. They took his whole career away from that poor man. And look at us now," she said on the morning of what would have been Breonna Taylor's 27<sup>th</sup> birthday. "It's working. You have to be the first, and people will follow."

Frame your life, and put the story in your hands so you can take action. You must be first in your own life, and people will follow.

When you finally see an uncomfortable truth about yourself you do not like, do not get lost. If you can't remember your commute to work, you were thinking about other things along the way. You might be ruminating over issues or planning the future. This is multitasking. Instead, practice observation, and you might stumble across a new insight to help you solve your current problem or move you closer to your goal.

Rumination is compulsively focusing on the symptoms of distress, the causes, and the consequences. It's repeating the experience like reliving it. There's no distance between now and the first time. The story in your head is from the same perspective (your own), with the same information and funny how it is, the same outcome. You don't like these feelings, and it feels like wallowing; still, there you are, up to your neck in old emotions.

Brooding might be what you do when eating that bag of chips. You are thinking about other people and wishing you had strings on their limbs and scripts for their mouths. You got sucked into the emotional experience as much as you desired to change it. Going over and over something in your head cements it; it doesn't solve it.

When we fear the words that will come out, one strategy is to put food on top of it. If you don't want to face what awaits at home, you may agree to pile even more work on a full agenda. Distraction, avoidance, and giving up your power push problems into the future and make them

more prominent. Saying you are too busy to think is a sure signal to stop and question your motives and actions.

Worrying is merely a waste of time if rumination and brooding are counterproductive. Worrying is a down payment on a problem you may never have. If there are potential adverse outcomes, look for them intentionally and plan to avoid them.

Wishful thinking is spending time imagining the past didn't happen or a magic future in which crazy, highly irregular, and spectacularly improbable things have happened. Dreaming about things you can't do anything about wastes your mental resources that could be spent on visualization, planning, or deliberate reflection instead.

Lottery tickets might be a tax on wishful thinkers or a legitimate purchase of hope. Economists would call them the former, while I think it's fair to see the commerce in the latter. Forming beliefs and making decisions according to what might be pleasing is handy. Still, when you focus on facts, evidence, rationality, and reality, you realize no one ever wins the lottery.

Even those players whose numbers are pulled will end up bankrupt, deprived of true friendship, or obsessed with taxes. Build sand castles in the sky, but then come back down and figure out how to get foundations under them, like sweat equity and compound interest.

Gratitude helps you see your situation as manageable. People who practice gratitude experience more positive emotions, sleep better, make new friends, and even have more muscular immune systems.

Practicing gratitude changes how we perceive our situations because there is always something for which to be grateful. Being grateful to the people around us may lead to new opportunities, which is what you need to cope more proactively.

What attitude are you projecting?

#### 41. Verify Knowledge

Ask a fish, "How is the water?" and you may never get an answer, for it begs another question: "How would I know?" Like a fish, I lacked comparison to tell what I was doing differently, but I also lacked a belief in rhetorical questions.

Every question deserves to be treated with curiosity and not dismissive disdain. Every question sparks an adventure, a challenge to discover – my version of fun.

I discovered that getting answers to questions is indeed a tricky thing to do. If it's the word salad of the politician, it's the same thing when you ask someone to whom it comes naturally or someone who's done it so long they forget. People don't know, but who's going to say that?

People will say anything to avoid admitting they don't know.

When it happened to me, I had forewarning; I wrote it on my hand, and it still took willpower to force it out. The first time is difficult. After that, you realize the power of that sweet truth, and all the stigma disappears.

It was during one of my training sessions. We were each told to prepare a talk on a specific aspect of the subject we were learning and give it to the class. Each person would talk for no more than five minutes and then be asked questions about it. This was the kicker: You would be allowed to sit down and take your seat as soon as you said, "I don't know."

It shouldn't be difficult, right? After all, we were students ourselves, new to these subjects.

The day started badly. By three people into the day, we were almost an hour behind. By eleven that evening, we were willing the student on stage to say it! Why was embracing uncertainty so tricky? One reason is that what would other people think?

Students offered opinions, guesses, theories, and sometimes correct answers if they were somewhat butchered and incomplete instead of "I don't know."

Now that you know how hard it is to say it, listen for it. Listen for when people should be saying it but are filling the air and offering up potential traps should you confuse their answer for knowledge.

Try it yourself. You will find what I did – that when you embrace what little you know, the world of infinite possibility is one of limitless potential. The only thing holding you back from the wondrous amazement of your desire to hold on to something, anything.

When you embrace the silence that starts by saying, "I don't know," you can begin to listen for the truth. Ray Dalio credits most of his success to the hard way he learned that he didn't know as much as he thinks he did. His lesson was a shift in mindset from "I know I am right" to "How do I know I am right?" One of his principles is to watch out for people who think it's uncomfortable not to know everything.

Still, you ask questions people cannot answer because you think the answer should be obvious. Not only that, but it would also be beneficial. Why can't the fish tell you in the seconds before you test it yourself? Take my word for it – the fish is not trying to be aloof and antisocial. The fish may be shocked at the spotlight, stunned at the opportunity to be heard, and searching for the right words.

One day, you stop asking people questions that they cannot answer. You don't let go of the question, but you let go of the method you used to answer it.

Instead of surveys, science, assumptions, measurements, optimistic analyses, mathematics, wishful forecasting, and piloting—there's a whole host of methods, modes, and answers waiting. Indeed, many of these tools were part of my intense training, in my simplification of it.



In business, I found helpful answers about how the brain naturally produces behaviour when seeking to contribute, organize, and collaborate. I used my skills and experience to find ways of taking deliberate action to rise above it. Those actions necessitate employee wellness, environmental responsibility, and global diversity for profits. In the end, business isn't everything.

We must make decisions in our careers, at home, or daily. We all consult others for information and advice but are ultimately personally accountable for the consequences.

Moreover, we all have to judge for ourselves how well we are doing it, while everyone else will also be scoring us. You do it to others, as you decide what you want and don't want in life, and they do it to you, too. Monitoring your progress accurately is necessary to learn and correct where required, and it's a tricky sport, especially if you are going to ask others how you are doing.

The second mindset, "How do I know I am right?" allows room for the reality that you can't know everything. While his forecasted depression in the early eighties didn't happen, he saw the crash in 2008 while other institutions were still declaring strong buy positions on banks about to go bankrupt.

You can find out as much about the truth as you can or need to as is relevant to the decision at hand. It starts when you can say, "I don't know." Those four words, and believe me when I tell you it is a superpower. It requires separating knowledge from noise and the courage to face the illusion of pain in saying it. I'm not saying it is the source of pain.

How do you know you are right?

#### 42. Forgive Errors

Do you forgive your errors or use them for permission to make more? Just because you blew your diet by eating some of the boss's birthday cake doesn't mean you might as well order the double bacon cheeseburger on your way home.

If you are like most people, you throw in the towel on yourself but wouldn't let a friend. Perhaps for you, it's an excuse to indulge. Possibly, we do them the favour of lowering the bar on performance.

We are often better able to forgive others for their slip-ups than our own. We see only the outside of their world, the result of their action, but we see our whole world. We forgive them for running out of gas, but in our worlds, we have our secret reasons why it happened and why no one else would have done it.

With ourselves, we know where we've cut corners or didn't bring our best selves to the task, but when it comes to others, we remember that no one is perfect, everyone has weaknesses, and the human body is not a machine.

Nor are you. You make mistakes; we all do. You don't have to flaunt or tell people about them in a book. You can keep them secret while you forgive, decode, and eliminate. The forgiveness you apply to others eventually comes home as you learn to be more forgiving of yourself.

If you cannot internalize your accomplishments and are abundantly aware of all your mistakes, you may have Imposter Syndrome. This term, coined in 1978, refers to this feeling where high-achieving individuals live in fear of being exposed as a fraud. They think their success is due to luck, timing or the actions of others. Mistakes don't expose you as an imposter; they happen to everyone.

The thing that you may not know is that mistakes love company. The more you admit to your imperfections, the more someone else says, "Me too!" When you aren't alone with the problem, you aren't alone in facing the need to do something about it. Maybe they have ideas you can borrow.

Forgiving errors isn't about expecting less; it's about learning from them to eliminate them. Forgive, but do not forget. Instead, use them for insight.

When you've made a mistake, the first thing you need to do is accept it. If you've hurt someone, apologize. Please make sure the affected party understands that you didn't mean it. Express your desire for that person's forgiveness. Communicate your remorse and take responsibility for your actions. Explain why you did what you did. Give a genuine and heartfelt apology and ask how to make it up to them. You might be surprised that it meant much more to you than it did to them.

You aren't responsible for other people's reactions but only for your actions. Make amends, and then make sure it doesn't happen again, especially if you suspect they triggered your behaviour for which you apologize. Yeah, it might be their fault, your reaction, but it's your peace of mind, your need for a boundary.

We need to stop beating ourselves up and indulging our inner critic. This unneeded voice magnifies small things, dredges up stuff from the past, ignores the larger context, and doesn't credit effort.

Start by picking something manageable. First, prime yourself to change your perspective by imagining yourself in the care of a loving individual. The exercise will allow you to see it from the outside and put you in a position to act like you would if a good friend came to you admonishing themselves for their mistake. A good friend says, "Don't you talk to the person I love like that."

Acknowledge the facts. What happened? What were you focused on at the time? How were you feeling? How does this situation compare to similar ones in your history? What else was going on? What were the results you and everyone else experienced? If a fact is hard to face, that's when to take a hard look. It's these truths that set you free.

Sort what happened into three piles: mortal faults, unskilled-ness and everything else. Skills you can learn and develop are worth some time and attention. Mortal faults deserve noticing but will want more attention than they are worth, as we call them weaknesses and aim to become well-rounded. It may not be something you need to master – gain enough strength to ensure no one gets hurt, not even you.

What things have you tried in the past to change? Is there improvement here worth crediting yourself? Is there evidence of insanity in trying the same thing repeatedly without any appreciable difference in the ending?

Be still with your reflection and be patient with the feeling of forgiveness to allow it to sink in. If the person you wronged won't grant you the words you long to hear, you can still give it to yourself by earning it through this post-processing activity.

Carrying anger and resentment toward someone else only hurts you. They don't know you are sending them daggers, but your emotions take their toll. You see the benefit of forgiving others, so do the same for yourself. Take the lesson and move forward. It's all about progress, not perfection.

By forgiving errors, you accept that you made a mistake. Then, you can be in a reasonable frame to learn the lesson and move on.

Where should you be gentler with yourself?

### Secure Support in New Places

After purchasing my second home was finalized, I knew my grandmother would be over the moon for me. I wondered what it was like for her to realize it was mere blocks away and that she would never physically see it. The realization of that thought broke my heart to pieces and delayed my visit for days. Finally, I felt terrible for staying away.

It was the third house I'd bid on, and they say the third time is the charm. I saw it on Friday the 13th and bought it on the same day. It was scheduled to close on Friday the 13th, but the sellers moved it to Thursday the 12th to avoid bad luck. I always thought of 13 as a baker's dozen—one more for good luck.

I printed out colour photos of each room of what would be my home and took them to my grandmother. I'd forgotten about her dinner hour and, of course, stormed mealtime. She ushered me over anyway, and I pulled up a seat on the spare side of the table.

"Perfect!" she said. Then she laid down her fork. I was pleased with her assessment when I wished I'd been curious. "Tell me more," I could have said.

I thought nothing too much of it then, but I wish I had, instead of thinking I'd better get going.

When I moved in, I realized just how right she was. The strange green colour painted throughout the main floor matched the matting of my Group of Seven paintings I would be hanging where there were already nails.

My duvet was the odd shade of lavender grey as the walls of the main bedroom. I knew the back room would be my office, and sitting in my chair, just above my monitor, is my backyard neighbour, the church. God and religion are two different things, and I typed away right under His nose. If she didn't know what my stuff was like, how did she know it was so perfect?

I wished I could have asked her, but after I witnessed her put down her fork, she never picked it up again. She was gone three days later.

Personal growth usually means outgrowing the support structures that got you there. When Forrest Gump started to run, his braces fell away from his legs as he built speed and got stronger. What's true in Hollywood fiction is played out by kids who leave behind their training wheels, floaties, and primary pencils daily. We outlive those who raised and loved us, and those sources of support need replacing.

When settling is not an option, you'll find that these kids become adults working hard at finding better materials, improved designs, and more exacting tools.

#### 43. Detect Resistance

Minor setbacks and repeated starts are normal when anyone learns new things, changes habits, and redefines their reputation and identity. Resistance is when the setback becomes the status quo.

Sometimes, it is because we have no idea what to do next. Ambiguity is a prevalent source of resistance. It's the fear of "What will I find?" When we aren't sure what path to take or what we will find when we get there, we languish in indecision.

Comfort with ambiguity is a skill that helps you turn fear into anticipation of adventure. It's human to feel fear of an uncertain future, for you are oriented to survival, and if you don't know the where and how of that, your brain might get a little nervous.

When you are suffering from indecision, you need to clarify what matters. The trick to making a decision is to identify the relevant criteria.

Analysis paralysis is the label we assign to the lack of progress resulting from too many options. Comparing them in your head in any sane way that looks at all sides entirely and robustly should be paralyzing. You'd need all your resources for that kind of mental computation.

Here's the way out of paralysis and ambiguity.

List the options in a column. As you are comparing why A is better than B, there is a reason for that. Name the reason. Start making a list down the page. You will end up with a list of criteria

that runs down your page. To compute the decision, complete the grid with a relative score for each option against each criterion.

When you are done, there will be a score per option. A mathematical winner; if not, you must be more precise in your scoring and more extreme in your rankings.

The real power is not what the numbers tell you but what your gut and heart tell you when you see the final computations. Are you disappointed, sad, or confused? Maybe you missed something, and it's this continued pursuit toward clarity that costs you nothing and risks nothing that enables you to identify the invisible, to name the mutable, and to test the unknowable.

How did you react to the winner? It may tell you that your criteria are relative and require a weighting factor or that some are more important than others. Go ahead, add that level of complexity, and do the math again.

The problem is that you are missing options. When you look at the criteria you've identified, does something new come to mind? If not, give your criteria to someone else and get a fresh perspective on what might satisfy all of them.

Perhaps you have faced some decisions that looked binary, like an agonizing black-or-white choice. Do you eat well, or do you save money? The answer is both. Either/or decisions fade away when you don't accept them and start looking for new alternatives.

It's good to know when options and criteria will never come together. For Simone Biles, the two things that don't match are the media's criticism of the size of her legs and their praise of her ability to perform like gravity doesn't affect her. You may not understand how everything is related, but once you connect the dots, you are accountable to act no matter how uncomfortable the realization is.

When the option is correct, we know it immediately and can move on. It may not be easy, but it will be forward motion, and if there's no pain like where you are now, then every step forward will never be as bad as the last. Instead of trying to decide, go back to create more options and clarify your criteria.

Sooner or later, you know your answer and are merely gaming the process to get the one you want or know is right. Progress is having a way to sort out your motivations and detect your resistance. Feelings matter; they are information that needs to be acknowledged. Sometimes, the productive way through resistance is to feel unpleasant or painful emotions.

Not having a plan to work through ambiguity and emotions can lead to anxiety and worry. Anxiety can chew up your time and mental energy, diverting you with "what if" thoughts that never come to pass. Worrying has you invested in an imaginary future that isn't real.

Realize you have a choice. Planning puts worry in its place. Put fear to work by listing everything about which you are ruminating. Once it's on paper, your brain won't try to keep reminding you of the same thing over and over. You can then identify the more significant or profound issues on paper. You can then come up with strategies to deal with them productively.

Physical activity can help to alleviate worry. If you need one more reason to get your sweat on, studies have shown that working out helps with all kinds of emotional issues, including anxiety and depression.

You may be incredibly hiding your fears, anxieties, or resistance, but the symptoms are more challenging. Investigate the symptoms and expect to find your resistance. There is a very good reason for it. Learn that reason, incorporate the knowledge, and bounce forward.

You want to know yourself better than other people know you. The proof is when you do what you say and act with integrity, without resistance.

What is holding you back from your greatness?

#### 44. Ring the Bell

In school, you might have surfed the bell curve without knowing it.

When marks are collectively too low, the whole class fails the exam, and the teacher applies a statistical formula to the marks to bring everyone up. This statistical formula is the standard curve of probability, otherwise known as the bell curve.

The bell curve describes the expected results of repeated trials over time. Picture a peg board with a funnel at the top. Place a ball bearing in the funnel, hitting various pegs down the board until it lands in a slot at the bottom.

These slots at the bottom are called standard deviations. A ball bearing would land directly under the funnel without pegs on the board. We call that zero, with everything on one side positive and the other side negative.

Over many trials, the little ball bearings lined up in the slots, looking like a bell. Very few are out at each end; many are in the center and not far from it, and there is a graceful curve between them, mirrored on both sides exactly.

This bell curve, the standard probability curve, describes what is expected in many things in life. You can surf it and affect the entire population of results, like with the test scores.

You want to be in the middle to get the most benefit with tests. If you stick with the majority, you'll get a passing grade. Put much more work in, and the bell doesn't push you up the curve as much.

Ringling the bell is heading toward the poles. In real life, that's precisely what you want to do. You want to stand out, not blend in with the crowd. Polarization is finding that long tail of your community and continuing to refine and hone your niche.

The more choice we have, the more likely we are to be paralyzed by the options. Being paralyzed by choices means we don't make any. In an experiment with doctors provided with the selection of one drug to prescribe, they did. However, when two drugs were available, they chose the third option – do nothing.

Potential clients who know they need someone from your industry may see a long list of possible providers and have no idea where to start. Being the ideal fit is prominent and easy to sell. Being everything to everyone ends up being nothing to anyone, if only because the choice is paralyzing.

To be polarizing means to be one hundred percent committed to one thing. If you are water, you are either hot or cold, but you are by no means diluted by the other. And you stick to it. Katy Perry is annoyed by people who are up and down, in and then out, wrong when it's right, as she sings in her hit song Hot 'n' Cold. I feel her pain.

When you are polarizing, it will save you time. You can't make everyone happy; authentic transparency creates a polarizing presence. Immediately, you are a magnet to your people and, equally, drive away the people you don't want: your niche or long-tail results from this continual precision of transparent authenticity. You become increasingly you just as you find more and more of your community. Welcome home.

Go for polarization to immediately draw the right people into your world and ensure you never even meet those who would waste your time. Being polarizing means that the people you don't want turn away so quickly that you don't even notice they were ever around.

In real life, we want the best. We aren't interchangeable people. We know that individually, if not collectively, and are always looking to climb that ladder if we all have different ideas about how to get ahead. Polarization, as the method to get ahead, assumes that marketing takes care of itself when you are the best. People want to invite you, hire you, and be around you.

Being polarizing doesn't mean you have to go out and start a fight, champion a fringe cause or get involved in politics. It means being as crystal clear and upfront as possible.

On the contrary, when it's not right for someone, you want to know the right way so that you don't waste your time or try to convince them of something they will end up saying no to anyway. You want that no if it's coming, quickly and easily.

Before you react to that prospect's potential scariness, let me unpack why it will ultimately create more business for you and better relationships than trying to be everything to everyone.

If you are worried about driving potential clients away, think of that instead as a good thing. We've all worked with people who have made us cringe when we see their number on our call display. There are clients we are better off not having because of the emotional energy, the financial costs or the reputational impact. When we speak of being polarizing, we want to think about pulling the right clients towards us as much as we like to think about driving the wrong clients away.

There are many advantages to being committed without waffling, diluting or hesitating. When you are not the best, you are wasting time investing in becoming your best. People who work through college understand this intimately, as their homework isn't a result of what they could have delivered but what they could do in the time they had.

Those without time demands might be able to hand in work that reflects their actual ability, not just what's needed to get the mark, finish the paper, land a better job, score a better life, or get the opportunity to make longer-term investments.

You don't need lukewarm time-wasters or spending all your time hustling. People respond to that level of commitment with the same degree. They either know immediately that you are a match or you are not. Getting to the yes or no fast is a time-saver for everyone.

People buy when they realize that what you are selling will get them to where they want to go faster, easier or cheaper. You can only define and communicate this effectively when you know what they want, why they want it and where they are now. "They" becomes something exact.

"Extremism in the pursuit of remarkability is no sin. It's practically a requirement," says Seth Godin. Polarizing your prospects will lead to an efficient and effective marketing and sales funnel.

If they say 'yes, please' and then don't sign, you can work on what you did that made them change their minds. Buyers are fickle folk, but if you start with the yes-pleasers, you will be better able to learn how to convert them to a sale every time.

Ring that bell for stronger communities, loyal customers, and stable support. Get polarized by getting out of the middle and claiming the specificity of who you are and what you do.

Where do you need to be more specific?

#### 45. Nurture your Mind

There's an old story about a grandfather telling his grandson about the two wolves. There is a dire wolf, full of anger, hatred, pity, and doubt, and a good wolf, full of empathy, compassion, joy, and love. They circle in your head.

"Which one survives?" the boy asks.

"The one you feed" is the wise answer.



When you nurture your mind, you are feeding the good wolf. The bad wolf doesn't wait for feeding time; it grabs a bite whenever possible. Meditation helps you observe who wins and provide proper care and feeding as required.

Mediation is turning control over to your mind, observing with nonjudgment where it goes. You can watch and learn, or you can command and control. Both practices will enable you to master your mind and your resilience. Meditation for silence and mindfulness for observation are two parts of getting to know yourself. As a pair, I call it incubating your mind.

Nurturing your mind is to stop and see what it has to say and where it wants to go. You watch your thoughts like they are clouds in the sky. Some will be laughable, and they will dissipate. Some will be thunderclouds. All of it will be informative and worth it. Keep at it; one day, you will find your blue-sky mind.

If you spend all your time in command and control of what you are doing, where you are going, and who you are seeing, it's worth stepping out of the driver's seat, turning around, and hearing what the backseat might have to say about where the bus is headed, in a safe and controlled manner.

Giving your mind some well-deserved time in the driver's seat has powerful effects on the brain. It has been shown to reduce ruminative thinking and dysfunctional beliefs. It also directly reduces depression, anxiety, and mood disorders.

Researchers can see reduced grey matter density in brain areas related to anxiety and stress in regular practitioners and an increase in grey matter concentration in areas related to learning and memory, regulating emotions, sense of self, and perspective. Long-term meditators show larger hippocampal and frontal volumes of grey matter.

Buddhists who spend lifetimes becoming experts can lower or raise their heart rates and body temperatures through thought alone. There's even evidence of one monk putting his hand through a rock. There's practical, then there's what's possible, and what the mind can accomplish is truly amazing. Don't let them tell you what's not possible.

Meditators show enhanced performance in many ways. They demonstrate better focus and attention and the ability to work under stress. They can process information better and make better decisions. They can also have greater mental strength, resilience, and emotional intelligence.

Mindfulness is the act of focusing on the present with all senses engaged. It is a form of meditation. Either technique you choose, the deliberate practice of calming one's mind, has been shown to refresh our ability to concentrate and focus more efficiently and strengthen connections in the default mode network in the brain.

Mindfulness helps you stay in the moment and pay attention to what is happening around you without the constant chatter of narration. Mindfulness is merely paying attention without judgment, being aware of what is going on around you without the tendency to narrate it. Feel your world instead of thinking about it.

Mindfulness and meditation are powerful tools for mastering your mind. They are so easy, yet why don't we do them? The next time you go to do anything, pay attention to what you are doing. If you are drinking a cup of tea, notice the smell. Feel the cup in your hands. Direct all your attention to exactly what you are doing.

Attend to various stimuli with consistent and positive attention. If you are narrating, use non-judgmental language and facts, not reactions or opinions of those facts. There's quite a lot of power in focusing your mind and noticing your language use.

You will eventually be able to stop the constant narration. The voice in your head, your voice, will quiet down and settle. When it does speak up, it will be full of insight and wisdom instead of criticism and negativity.

When you've mastered paying attention to an object and an experience, you can work to master your breath. Sit comfortably, close your eyes and monitor your breath. Think consciously about something you do entirely automatically, and watch for your mind to say, "Yeah, go on without me; I'll be over here." Where does it go, and how can you bring it back?

Focusing on your breathing and barring everything else out can quiet you quickly. Whenever you feel like holding your breath, start deep breathing. Take a deep breath when you need instant relief from your thoughts or feelings. Your breath is your way back to your authentic self when things get out of hand.

Mantras are statements that you repeat. If you think of all the times that you've learned the rules you are in the process of breaking, then think how many times you have to repeat the new lesson. Mindfulness and meditation can tame the wild mind, find your soul, and connect to your spirit.

All it takes is nurturing your mind and feeding that good wolf gratitude, truth, and harmony. It takes noticing it when it manifests, deliberately adopting a positive attitude, and watching your words flow honestly.

Are you tending to your good wolf?

## Attaining Instant Inner Harmony

As any curly-haired girl will tell you, I am the girl with the curl. They might all get told the poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "Once there was a girl with a curl," usually while twirling one together. "When she was good, she was very good, but when she was bad, she was horrid."

One day, my grandmother said, "I wish I could have that curl."

I scampered off, found a pair of scissors and gave it to her. The girl with the curl is selflessly generous when she is very good, although the horrified reaction I got wasn't what I'd expected.

My grandmother felt awful but preserved the story so I could learn from it one day. My curl is framed with a ribbon and the school picture, which tries to hide the damage.

Another lesson she preserved for me was from June 7<sup>th</sup>, before my second birthday. There is a photo of me asleep in my grandmother's arms, like a perfect cherub. She's dated and captioned the photo like she knew there would be a long day when she'd have to tell me about it.

That day, she said, "Your mother was on the phone and had many things going on. I told her to bring you over to me, and I wrote this here because she was calling you everything but."

Indeed. My mother would have had three kids under four and was completely overwhelmed. Why I was the one constantly kicked out was my source of torment, and here, my grandmother had all the answers for me.

She tells me it says "Little Angel," but the way it's written, I could be convinced that it says "Lucifer Angel."

Significant life events that shaped you might be long lost to Father Time. Perhaps there is no one to tell you about what happened to you and how that might have indelibly affected your personality. Knowing the correct answers and choices for you is finding your inner harmony – the one that resonates with your head, heart and gut, because they don't always agree.

Your head wants what is logical, your heart wants love and joy, and your gut wants to be safe. It's rare to find all three, and the point is to keep looking until you do because your point of origin might have been very far from where you ever felt a sense of belonging, love, or hope.

### Go to the Source

In doing those projects for that CEO who called me, it was never my purpose to run projects and share the workload because I was an independent introvert. It was my purpose never to let them call me a girl, for womankind's sake. It was naively my purpose to listen to instructions and do my best while pulling my weight and never asking for help. On purpose. Directed. With a long-term goal and an immediate plan. Sometimes, those plans worked.

When you don't have a plan, you have no idea why what worked or how it did. You chase your tail and make answers after the fact.

Perhaps you have already spotted the flaws in my strategy, plan and actions.

Later, I realized that some people were protecting their reputations while I was creating one. Others wanted to be the top dog with a big pack to lead, and I had never been interested in that social game. Everyone else was worried about everyone else, and I was the only one not checking in, comparing, and collaborating. I was results-centered, but everyone else was relationship-centred.

Twenty years later, I know there are many games—the trick is to know which one you are playing and which one you have a fighting chance at winning.

From my CEO, I learned that you go to the source instead of playing the telephone game. Usually, a CEO asks a Chief Operating Officer, who has a VP to ask, who asks an AVP, who asks a director, who asks a manager, who asks the junior engineer. Then the answer goes back up the chain, yet it twists and morphs as it gets there.

When they use the actual phone, it's intimidation. Nothing puts someone on the spot and forces a response out of them like a phone call. As I provided to the CEO, you get a spontaneous, not thoughtful, momentary, and incomplete answer.

Go to the source. When the question is worth asking, it's worth being patient.

#### 46. Remember Why

Sometimes, our short-term goals overtake our long-term goals. We forget our plans and fall for indulgence.

If you've ever woken up with a hangover and swore off alcohol, only to engage the next weekend again, you've probably experienced this pendulum of motivation. Your memory of the pain diminishes, your belief in your ability to moderate your consumption grows, your desire to fit in with the crowd increases, and your memory of the fun times you had drinking amplifies. Pow, you are back nursing another lousy morning.

Memory is notoriously fallible. That is a human memory. Unlike your computer, we don't write something to the brain. Remembering something isn't like going and getting a file out of storage. Instead, every time you recall something, it is affected by the recall.

According to Wikipedia's list of memory biases, there are over fifty ways in which memories are unreliable. Since motivation is either about moving toward pleasure or away from pain, and we put in twice the effort on the latter, let's first look at how we forget about our pain and lose our motivation.

You may have heard that pain is the currency of transformation, but we forget this pain quickly. Psychologists postulate that this occurs to satisfy the need for healthy self-awareness and positive self-esteem—in other words, to feel better about oneself. But that doesn't work well if you want to change yourself. Strong starts for change dissipate when we forget the intensity of the pain that catalyzed the desire to change.

The Fading Effect of Bias undermines our motivation for change. The emotional intensity of adverse events dissipates at a faster rate than positively perceived events. We also forget the feeling of payoff from hard work but remember how hard it was.

Have you tried to change before and remember it as being particularly hard? Change bias is the tendency to place one's past performance as more complicated than it was after investing effort in producing change. Tell yourself it's easier than you remember, and you are probably right. Tell yourself that this will inflate the value of the result and make success that much sweeter, and you are also correct.

Mothers forget the pain and discomfort of childbirth enough to get pregnant again. If memory hadn't served so kindly, the population would have had more difficulty getting this out of control. What is functional when we're few becomes dysfunctional when we are many, but that's what consciousness is for: remembering why.

The more pain you can remember and hold, paired with remembering your profound truths, the more motivation you will unleash. The longer you can make that hangover last and the more detailed you can remember about how it was an experience you don't want to repeat, the more you'll be able to face the next time stone cold sober.

The more you realize that you can't trust your memory, perspective, or thinking, the more you will extend this realization to other things and people. The easier your life gets because everyone is on a path to find their way. While their world may seem strange, everyone is a logical, kind, wonderful person. It may take much curiosity and creativity to see it when it's your nemesis, but it's there, and you will.

If you want to eat better, you have to remind yourself that although the pizza looks rewarding, a more rewarding feeling comes from the energy of fueling your body with vegetables and lean protein. These profound truths are what you already know, but you must work to find what drives you to take the path you choose when you wish you were on a different path. When you understand why you make the choices you want to change, you must also keep these accessible so you don't lapse into past faulty expectations.

While you are running toward a new aspiration, remember the problems that aspiration will solve and how bad they feel. Record them before you forget. There's a scientific reason why people like Oprah, who keep and review journals regularly, are more successful than people who don't document their goals and experiences.

We have to plan ways to remember the pain we are moving away from, but we also have to remember the fallacies in our thinking. There were reasons why we chose our current behaviours.

When you experience moments of inertia, you need to be able to remind yourself of the intensity of the pain because you won't remember it as bad as it was. If you can read your words and trust what you wrote, you can tap into the original motivation when it fades. Maybe you are a visual person who can conjure images of the darkest moments that will face you toward the light on the horizon.

Your memories won't stay as reliable, vivid or fresh as you think. Nor do anyone's memories, so arguing about the past suddenly seems ridiculous. There is room enough for many perceptions. They will change and fade, and in those weaker moments when you are looking at the easy way out, your past self can remind your current self and get back on track.

Bolster your ability to recall the truths by documenting your reasons and having them accessible when you need them. Remember and tune into your intentions; never rely on your memories when they matter.

Have you documented why your old ways don't work anymore?

#### 47. Sneak Up

If you've ever attempted to climb a mountain, you know the way to the peak isn't always a straight line. Sometimes, the best way to climb it is to circle it repeatedly, always creeping a little higher as you go.

Sometimes, the best way to tackle your goal is to take the scenic route. There's always more than one way to get there. Think about a goal to lose weight by increasing your physical activity. Which physical activity you choose will directly impact your future physique. Marathon runners look very different from sprinters. Sneaking up on your goal requires you to be very specific about what result you want to achieve.

Look around at people who already have what you want to achieve. What universal truth applies to them and no other group? Runners run. Bikers ride. Writers write. What does your group do? When you do that thing, too, your success is a matter of investment. You focus on what you are building toward rather than on the label you call yourself. Quality is not a title; it is a habit.

If you've ever tried to lose weight by dieting, you've experienced the backfiring phenomenon that all you can think about is food. Whether educating yourself about nutrition or trying new recipes and eating methods, your brain, conversation, and activity revolve around food. And what does that make you? Hungry or obsessed about what you can't eat.

Sneaking up on weight loss means finding something that absorbs your attention more than food, exercise and how your clothes fit. When you take your mind and attention off the problem

and get immersed in things you like to do, you even forget to eat. You sneak up on your weight loss goal without looking at it. When your stomach rumbles, it's an annoying interruption that receives nothing more than a dismissive "Later."

Want to be fit and thin? When you drop a size, drop the wardrobe related to that size. Burn your ships and believe you aren't going back. It's forward only. When you hold on to the clothes, you tell yourself that you expect to revert to that size. It undermines your success because it demonstrates self-doubt.

Act as if your goal is going to happen. Small commitments toward the inevitability will help motivate you to keep going and the need to accomplish it—acting as if you already have it will also shift your mental focus into the future. You start to spend more time imagining what it will be like to be wearing different clothes. You can imagine what it will be like to introduce yourself as a thin person. You imagine a future self while you are consciously creating this new you.

It will also help you realize what you are sneaking around. That's ok; sometimes, there is a rabid dog on a chain that doesn't need to be disturbed. Sometimes, there is a memory with which you are not ready to deal or a person you are not prepared to confront. There is no sense in letting it stop you and letting it take over your agenda. It's your agenda, and you will deal with it when you are good and ready; it doesn't stop you.

You do not need to deal with every painful memory, annoying person or upsetting situation all at once, or even ever. There's a reason hunters wear camouflage: cats creep, and ninjas blend into the night. Sneakiness works when tackling life's more significant problems and attempting to pull off some amazing feats of progress.

You don't need permission, feedback, or support. While it's great to have them, you can succeed without them, vitally when you recognize when you need to sneak around.

If you don't get it where you think you need it, it's time to find a way to sneak up on it.

Whatever situation you feel is impossible, some jailbreakers use a spoon, mothers escape with only their clothes and children, and savers put aside only a small amount and build a nest egg.

What if people who loved you needed to know how to do it? I'm sure more than one mother could have used a code book, an ample community, and a sturdy family tree. You should love yourself so fiercely that they can follow your example by observing your behaviour. Fiercely loving yourself suddenly means taking your advice. It means helping yourself as you would your best friend or a perfect stranger.

Once we embrace radical acceptance or are on the way to it, we start realizing that we did things that we wished we hadn't or wanted to but didn't. There comes a point when we recognize a disconnection between our actions and our intentions.

Previous ability to deny our role in the whole thing or shed blame on someone else has worn thin. That disconnect shows up in mere minutes as losing our tempers, focus, or interest. As soon as you realize you are and have to be responsible, you can't resist the urge to do something about it.

Suppose you need to be sneaky, sneak. Redefining your goal can make it easier to accomplish. Take permission from the fact that you are an adult to find a way to sneak out or sneak in, whichever way you go.

What covert action helps everyone involved move forward?

#### 48. Deflate Ego

No one sets out to be egotistical, but the ego is more insidious than you may realize. Egos are the names we call ourselves, the things we have, the accomplishments we list. The ego is very invested in these things.

The ego likes to lead. To be authentic, you must listen to your inner voice, follow your guidance system, and do you when everyone else wants you to be a certain different way to make their lives easier or when your ego wants you to go a sure way to be more impressive, to gain more things, to have more influence.

You see past the ego and into spirituality when you realize you can take all those things away and still live, breathe, and even thrive.

Spiritual authenticity is about connecting to something beyond yourself. Instead of putting ego first, we are silent sponges, willing to listen, learn, and serve the universe, God, higher wisdom, whatever you want to call it—something bigger than ourselves.

To be clear, being spiritual is not about being religious. Religion complicates things by dictating beliefs and following doctrine.

Spirituality is the feeling of connection to the world's peace and wisdom, that everything is unfolding as it should and that all the pieces are where they should be doing what they should be doing. With ego deflated, you surrender to the acceptance that you are not in charge, and neither are you nothing, but you have an interconnected role to play in how this all unfolds.

It requires you to do it yourself and stop letting your ego cheat you of that role by satisfying external expectations and demands.

Is it selfish to do so when others impose different demands and expectations? Forget religious beliefs; some of us were raised always to put others first and think of selfishness as horribly bad.

Dictionary.com defines selfishness as "devoted to or caring only for oneself; concerned primarily with one's interests," regardless of others, and "characterized by or manifesting concern or care only for oneself."



Ouch.

The last three words of the definition come to bear here: “regardless of others.”

I don’t need people more concerned with my interests than their own. When people are more interested in what I’m doing than what they should be doing, their noses are jammed into my business in a pretty unwelcome fashion. They show up in my life expecting me to entertain them with “what I’ve been doing.” They tell me stories about what other people are doing, and it’s easy to know that my stories will also be turned into fodder for gossip.

You can call them all selfish, from nosy busybodies to self-involved people in their self-pursuits. Some salespeople don’t care about my needs; they want to make the sale. That’s all about them and nothing about me. It reeks of desperation and makes it dead easy to say no quickly, firmly and efficiently and to spread the word to their prospects.

Maybe we need another word because concerning yourself primarily with one’s interests does not have to be “regardless of others.” It might even put regard for others at par with respect for the self.

During wartime, when food was far scarcer than it is today, mothers would pride themselves on their ability to make a small chicken feed their whole family. How did they do it? By serving themselves the parts no one else wanted—the wings.

Fast-forward a few years, and air stewardesses told passengers to put their masks on before helping other people. Like the lessons of the poor dad, the ones about putting yourself last will also not serve you well.

There are underlying reasons why social favour changes from one extreme to another.

One reason might be that there’s no longer a scarcity mentality or reality, and that’s not just because we aren’t at war anymore or because we’ve been adding growth hormones to chickens. A rapidly changing world brings opportunity, equality, and abundance.

Putting your mask on first doesn’t mean stomping on other people to do it. It means taking care of yourself so that you may be of more help to others. The same goes for your authenticity.

When you prioritize authenticity, you can better serve the whole. As Bob Rosen says, “When you take care of yourself first, you show up as a healthy, grounded person in life.”

Restlessness, boredom, and depression are signs of living a life that’s more of a lie than an expression of your inner truths. For me, that was working in the insurance industry. I wanted to go fast when they tried to slow, and vice versa. Questioning myself and checking with everyone else on everything made me a lacklustre performer and a hassle to be around. Being authentic is not a result but a continuous journey as you evolve with life, learn about yourself, and become true to yourself.

It doesn't only affect your mental health. Excessive shopping or spending that feels out of control can indicate an inauthentic life. As Dr. Susan Biali, M.D., author of *Live a Life You Love*, wrote, you might buy expensive treats and classify them as necessities because they make life livable. They call it retail therapy, but it's not therapeutic until you understand why you are doing it and can make choices with a clear head, whole heart, and free hands.

Some people are locked into so-called golden handcuffs, thinking they've put in so much time, why leave now? Or the contract is so good that they can't possibly say no. The only way time pays off in a job you hate is when you view it as a jail, hoping to be laid off with severance.

People who are in jobs where there's a fit between their personality and the role earn one month of pay more per year. So, you can gamble on the severance package and hope the multitudes of alternative futures don't play out, or you can get that extra month's pay now by finding a more authentic way to earn a living. Here's to those future fatter cheques!

Shopping to fulfil boredom, escape stress, and find release and distraction has long been an unhealthy habit. It can also be a reward to ourselves for getting out of bed and dragging ourselves to a job we can't stand. Good job, you earned your mocha latte today! An authentic life is livable without any extra props or support. An ego-driven life may look successful to others, but only you can be the judge.

What is your ego making you do?

## Spread the Word

When I started to put together boxes of notes, binders of research, and hundreds of books, I read a blog post published by MIT Sloan about making data-based decisions.

Being the first to comment, I agreed with the approach. It would work; however, it doesn't happen thanks to cognitive biases, automatic thinking, and cognitive dissonance. Leaders find data to prove what they want and how they want to do it, and when things don't work out as expected, they are creative explainers and don't learn the truth about what went wrong. With data, we fail to recognize that we've made things worse and do it all over again. In fact, in my years as a Black Belt, I'd only seen one decision made based on data.

A second comment followed mine. I recognized the name and pondered the world's smallness that we'd be meeting again across the vast expanse of the internet. Such is the nature of the long tail, I suppose, when you find yourself in it. It becomes a tiny world where everyone knows each other, and your reputation precedes you. Her comment agreed with mine; I knew her experience was no different.

My phone rang, and it was the author of the article. He asked me for the citations, references, and sources behind my blunt and direct words. Along with that information, I shared the afterword from Atul Gawande's book, [The Checklist Manifesto](#).

Gawande shared his experience that despite the lives saved with his approach, he starts from scratch everywhere he goes. The data doesn't open doors or convert opinions, and the needle barely ticked when discussing saving lives and the brilliant surgeons who do it.

I told the MIT Sloan author that if you think data is going to work anywhere less critical, with people less committed to selfless work and the pursuit of excellence, then there is still a piece missing about how to do that.

"What would you do differently?" he asked. I laughed and told him that's exactly what I was working toward solving. Recognizing that problem started my research journey, which I was swimming in.

And just like that, the article was gone, and the ability to shed light on the truth was taken with it. This potentially illuminating article (and its comments) became a thing of the past. Such is called the publishing bias, where researchers only write about what worked according to their intentions and hide all else. It's shocking, but actual knowledge is hidden from the plain view.

Gone, just like all the good jobs, you get to think, innovate, and be yourself. Instead, like Bill Steiner's cartoon in *The New Yorker* in 1990, it's always 'sit,' 'stay,' 'heel.' Always? Hopefully not.

#### 49. Share Success

Should you share your personal improvement journey or keep your targets and goals to yourself?

In today's oversharing world, it's worth understanding the opposite inclination. A school of thought says sharing goals is a good idea, but before you do, it's worth hearing why you might prefer to stay mum.

The idea behind sharing is that we will ensure that we keep our intentions. We don't want to let down the people we've told, and we certainly don't want to gain the reputation of someone who doesn't do what they say. They will hold us accountable, we think. Despite this rationale, there are good reasons to keep it all to yourself.

The first and most obvious reason is to avoid disheartening feedback. They may express doubt or be less than impressed or remind you of your previous failed attempts. They will share that discouraging tale if they know others who've tried it and were unsuccessful.

If they have tried it unsuccessfully, they will share their challenges and likely won't want to see you outdo them. Before you've done anything, you must face all these emotional hurdles. Your motivation can get destroyed before you even get started.

The second reason is scientifically backed. Studies have shown that people discussing their intentions are less likely to accomplish them. When you say the words out loud, your self-identity is satisfied just enough that you are less motivated to do the work. It gives you a

premature sense of completeness. Four studies found that people were likelier to accomplish intentions when intentions were kept private.

Keep your intentions secret. Knowing this, you have to overcome the urge for connection by sharing. You have not to tell people to whom you mean everything. What you can do is make some progress and share that. Don't tell them where you are heading, but you can let them know where you were and where you are now.

While this may sound like bragging to you, isn't that the point of social media? Kidding aside, in a weight loss research study by Ray Wu, people who posted progress photos lost 1.2 lbs per week, while the group who didn't share lost only 0.27 kg. Of course, this could be a chicken and egg thing. If you aren't losing weight, you'd probably want to keep that to yourself while your success is rewarding to share.

In Charles Duhigg's book Smarter Faster Better, he shares the story of the difference between teachers having data and teachers using data. Teachers always had electronic dashboards reporting many statistics on their students. Still, when they instead used manual recording and transforming of the data, the teachers started making changes to their methods and tracking the results. In less than a year, the state's worst school had more than doubled the school's overall scores on standardized tests.

With the availability of technology, you may be tempted to use Excel or an app to track and interpret data, but as Duhigg shows, you will be more successful if you bust out your index cards, chart paper, and coloured pens.

Aside from social media, there are many ways to share your progress, including privately. You can meet with a trusted advisor or mentor to review and get feedback while you do.

Since you've recorded your progress, you can see if the dips or plateaus correlated to anything internally or externally. Once you've identified those things, you can plan what to do the next time they come up.

Analyzing your progress is much easier when you log these events and the measurable results. As we've discussed before, memory isn't so reliable, so when learning from trends, it's much more helpful to have notes.

Don't tell them what you will do, but start making progress quickly and share that. If you are trying to lose weight, you don't need to tie your progress to the scale; you can start by not eating sugar for one day. Then, share that baby step.

Baby steps build into significant results, one step at a time. Maybe you're solving your weight problem by taking up a new hobby to take your mind off food and your body out of the kitchen. Share that journey with laughter and your baby's attitude.

You can get anything done with enough passion, intention, and commitment, but you already know that. Given enough oppression, frustration, and resolve, you can find the answer to any question, solve any problem, and bridge any gap, but we don't appreciate adversity the same as positivity.

It's the oppression that helps you find your natural voice. The frustration points toward your natural talents, and the resolve ensures that you keep solving and solving until you are done. One day, you accomplish the goal or ingrain the habit. Imagine when you get to share that!

When you have something to share and see movement in the right direction, go ahead and wait for them to ask you how you did it, monitor, document, and share those steps. As I did with this book, I kept track of what I was trying, what was working, and why, and I waited until someone observed my success and wanted to know how I had done it. The same will be valid for you.

When they ask you how you did it, are you ready with your answer?

#### 50. Maintain Momentum

Objects that are in motion stay in motion; the only thing you have to manage is directing where they go.

Keep the momentum because it's easier than getting going again. However, we all get drained and want to take a break occasionally. The trick is not to lose the momentum.

Now that you are beyond survival and aiming toward self-actualization, you need momentum for that last push. Momentum comes from competency and resiliency, built by consciously noting and recalling good experiences.

These good experiences are all the wins you've had along the way. You may take where you are now for granted, but you've been through some challenging work to get here.

We always want confidence in our ability to pursue our goals, but confidence comes after we do it, not before. The easiest way to gain confidence when needed is by recalling similar situations.

You've done it before, and you can do it again. Recall those earlier successes as you felt them, not as you are now, accustomed to them as the new normal.

Having a store of these moments at hand is something you can use to remind yourself of positivity when things are looking weary. Keep letters of kudos. Collect inspirational quotes. List the things for which you are grateful. When you pull out this shoebox, folder, or chest, you will find yourself becoming more muscular, adding to it, and getting back with refreshed energy.

Look back and see how far you've come. Now, when you look forward, doesn't the rest seem insignificant? When you take pride in how far you've come, the things you've learned, the work you did, and the sacrifices you've made, doesn't the remaining journey seem much more manageable?

Rick Hanson, Ph. D., argues that our brains are like Velcro for bad experiences and Teflon for positive ones. Social researchers' negativity bias can prove that negative things significantly influence one's psychological state and processes more than neutral or positive things when presenting information of equal intensity.

You need to remind yourself and note positive life experiences consciously. While they might happen in roughly equal doses, our minds are wired to pay attention to and store the negative stuff because that's what you need to know for survival.

We remember insults more than praise, even when they are equally presented. If something good happens to you on the same day as something terrible, you will remember the bad. When your brain wanders, it is more likely to go to something that made you angry or hurt rather than one that made you happy and proud.

Without intervention, your perception is out of whack. What you think you know about the world, the past, or the possible is a teeter-totter in your mind and one big bad bear. If you want to level the teeter-totter to be more positive, you must recruit memories, feelings, and accomplishments to come and sit with you.

Positive emotions broaden our scope of attention, cognition, and action, helping us solve problems, innovate, and create strategies. They help us build physical, intellectual, and social resources, allowing us to better deal with what life throws at us. They help us take in more information, hold more ideas in mind at once, and play with those ideas to see how they relate to each other, which helps us learn and perform better.

What are these positive emotions? Joy, interest, contentment, and love are the four basic positive emotions under which all others fall. Joy includes emotions like amusement, elation, and gladness. Interest includes curiosity, intrigue, excitement, or wonder. Contentment is tranquillity, serenity, and doing nothing. Love is in the moment, exploring, savouring, and being playful with loved ones.

When you have one of these experiences, stay with it longer. Let it marinate. Absorb with each sense how it feels, where it feels, the posture it commands, and the motivation it creates. Then, enrich it. Dwell on it; memorize it.

Find something fresh and novel about the experience you didn't notice last time. Let that sink in. Now, imagine the hostile experience at the back of your brain. Let the positive merge into the damaging water, washing away the dirt. This process will instill a happy experience in your brain.

When you need it again, you can tap into it on demand. It's a memory with vivid detail because you created it that way. It's linked to many triggers in your memory because you built it that way.

Suddenly, everything you've been doing is hanging together and giving you the grit you need to cross the finish line. Your journals can be your most loyal cheerleader when you fill them with the conscious intention for when you'll need them. I have many journals on the go anytime because they each serve their purpose, pace, and system.

If you catch yourself on a negative path, refer to your cache of positive reminders to change your thoughts and consciously work on ingraining happy ideas and memories.

Take time to list and remember your accomplishments. They don't all have to be successes in everyone else's book. You know where you worked hard, regardless of the result.

When you take time to relish in your achievements, you build up banks of memories that help you gain competence and resilience. Unless you bask in your achievements, you miss out on the kind of experience needed for the extra push. Maintain momentum with a positive mental attitude and the memory of confidence.

Do you have a ready list of confidence builders for when you need it?

### 51. Spiral Upwards

One day, someone finally solved the riddle of my employment frustration. I wasn't brought on board to help provide answers; I was brought on board so that someone would think I was providing answers. I was there to create an illusion, not a contribution. Relieved, I could surrender the effort instead of continuing to try to persevere.

Whether or not that was my actual role was a matter of perception, inclusion, and participation. My manager's manager took me out for lunch and explained it to me. "It's all smoke and mirrors," he said.

I thought I understood. That is no problem. I can sort it into black-and-white facts.

I understood better after a town hall. Someone asked the VP if he could explain the savings created from the last project, in which most of us participated for months. We were expecting to hear how you sell nothing as a viable answer.

We'd done genuinely nothing. We'd produced graphs and PowerPoint decks but didn't change anything. If you don't change anything, you can't claim savings. Savings happen due to one way and then another, and the difference between them. With no change, there is no difference. So, how do you sell nothing as a viable answer?

The VP laughed. "Oh, you'll love this," he started.

The winning line turned out: "Are you going to tell your boss that you spent three million dollars and have nothing to show? Or are you going to say that you broke even?"

I can only imagine the feeling of blowing three million and having nothing to show for it. I can only imagine what I might agree to protect my ego and reputation. Hopefully, you don't let things get so far out of control.

Some people loved that answer, and some didn't. I didn't love it at all.

I signed up to do the work, find the savings, improve things for customers, clients, and investors, and not create jobs for his consulting buddies. At that moment, that's all we were doing—employing ourselves. Further, I do not condone bullying, which was precisely what that was.

For that, someone said we saved three million dollars moving numbers around in Excel and creating slides in PowerPoint. To some, that's a pretty good gig if you can get it. The trick is keeping it. It's not you who will get laid off—the entire department.

While everyone becomes aware of that fact, they also become confident that they will be one of the ones that survive. Lying and bullying executives create toxic, dysfunctional work environments that hurt everyone.

Everyone thinks, boy, that team is dumb. Or, that person sure is lazy. Or, wow, is that manager ever mean? Not me, however. Not me. I'm better than they are, everyone says. No matter who "they" are. It's called the free-from-bias effect.

If you hang with turkeys, you might also be a turkey or on your way to becoming one.

The energy you bring into a room is yours to control. Your energy affects people, so you can affect others by being aware of and managing your energy. When you can hold on to new behaviour despite the challenge of group dynamics, you can ripple that energy into the group, and the whole group does better.

What if you could walk in that door with Wonder Woman-like powers? A study led by Sigal G. Barsade at Yale University proved that when you bring good energy into a group situation, the group's performance improves. In a comparative study, the positive emotional contagion group experienced improved cooperation, decreased conflict and increased perceived task performance. A little Wonder Woman can spread around a room.

You know you do better when you bring positive energy to a task. But when you take your better self into a group situation, it's easy to fall back into old habits. Groups are a test of progress, but what is it about groups that challenge us differently?

For one, emotions are contagious. From infancy, we begin to imitate facial expressions. Studies have proven that pulling the face pulls in the emotion. Smile because you have the policy to return smiles, and you will feel happier. See someone frown, and they will bring you down. The latter happens more frequently.



Like viruses, negative emotions transfer more easily than positive ones. We generally react more strongly to fear, pain, or sadness. The whole point of these emotions is to trigger help from someone. When you are outnumbered, your energy can't overcome their energy, which is why sometimes the outnumbered win.

How do the outnumbered win? By using tactics proven to accelerate the transfer. To spread your positive energy faster than the pack of negative people in the room, you can say no and do a few things.

Eye contact is powerful. When speakers make it, we feel like they are talking directly to us, even when the room is full of other people. Psychologists know that staring directly into someone's eyes causes an arousal reaction. The type of arousal changes depending on the people involved. A large or ominous stranger who stares into our eyes will elicit a fear response, but when accompanied by a genuine smile, it causes a positive arousal.

The eyes will also tell you if a smile is genuine or not. Fake smiles don't cause crinkling in the corners of your eyes, so make sure it's a genuine smile because they might be checking your eyes for the tell-tale wrinkles. Smile often, and make sure the smile is genuine. Smiling increases your likeability factor. Returning a smile is almost impossible to resist.

To spread positive energy, make eye contact with everyone faster and hold the gaze longer than comfortable. In the study, the positive infiltrator would look intently into people's eyes. See if you can identify and make a point of noticing their eye colour. Having a purpose will remind you to do it.

Immediately adopt a positive posture, and don't change it. You will feel uncomfortable because you will want to mirror the posture of the person you are talking to, adopting their energy. We do Mirroring subconsciously; following the other person's cues and changing synchrony is hard-wired, so you must fight the urge for a moment longer than the other person.

You want them to succumb to the power of mirroring first. You know you are successful when people relax and open up their postures. They will lean toward you and turn their bodies toward yours when engaged. Take charge of the energy you bring into the room and be the emotion that ripples.

Can you be the alpha in the room with the best contagious energy?

## Always Improve

I was often asked in high school, "What happened to the last one percent?"

Finally, I discovered that there is no room on the report card for the three digits and that the best anyone can get is ninety-nine percent.

In high school art class, I finally found out that there was no room on the report card for it. Further, a “00” messes up the calculation of the entire overall average. The best you will ever get is 99 percent. Since settling for that when I’d earned more, I settled for all kinds of things.

That last one percent is lost in constraint. Any certified Project Management Professional has to learn that you have to manage three constraints: cost, quality, and time, and forget about having all three.

As the world discovered in 1999, going from ninety-nine percent to one hundred percent is a whole additional digit. What is just one more for you and me, and all things quantified, is a massive technological leap.

In 1999, mild panic took hold as people wondered if the clocks would stop working, the water would stop flowing, and the hydro would stop running. To you, it came and went without significant event. I didn’t party like it was 1999 because I was on call, just in case.

Coming up the engineering ranks requires learning a thing or two about programming. I knew how to do an end-to-end analysis of the costs and benefits of using a two-digit year instead of a four-digit one. I wasn’t an MBA or a consultant but a junior process engineer.

In programming, whenever you specify a variable, you assign it a length. The length determines how much storage it will require, the programming speed, and other variables that create a user experience of time and money—speed and price. One, we can quantify easily, and the other, making decisions with the customer in mind, is not something the business has always done.

Henry Ford said you could have any colour you wanted, as long as it was black. User experience is a modern notion tied to technology, automation, and interfaces. It is based on making things intuitively obvious, but what is evident to one person is a complete mystery to another.

Continuous improvement is merely a journey from the mysterious to the obvious, and it always begins with a good question. “For what would I settle?” Maybe you can’t get what you want, but don’t settle for less than satisfaction.

## 52. Adjust Your Baseline

People do strange things when it’s their job and don’t want to disappoint people they hold in high esteem. Wanting to measure up, we discover a muscle we’ve not yet used. What is willpower on the inside is the responsibility and adult behaviour on the outside.

Once, I transcribed a process map and provided it in a left-to-right flow, like a title across a page. The recipient said, “It’s all wrong,” and shook her head. I could have argued, defended, or justified my work, but I invited her to show me herself instead.

Over the day, she worked through it, arriving at the same flow but from the top to the bottom. Looking back and forth from mine to hers, she finally laughed, realizing they were similar.

In content, anyway. However, she and I had different perceptions, like how other cultures perceive time differently. A geographical representation of 'tomorrow' and 'yesterday' will result in various directions.

Fundamentally, her map and my map were different. Mine was as "all wrong" as she'd first observed. I implied equality; she implied a hierarchy. I implied a timeline; she implied a permission-based checkpoint system.

Implied information is essential but easy to miss. It is rarely documented yet critical to the performance of the overall whole, the system, the organization, or whatever larger gear is driving the machine. It wasn't noted on my map or hers, but we might not have rooted it out otherwise.

Sometimes, even when it's labelled a failure, there's a reward to be relished, something that worked out so well even if you had no idea it was coming, like finding alignment and new insight in the face of conflict. A new baseline is revealed.

Some believe the accomplishment of the task itself should be the reward, that you should be humble and diminish your success, or that failures are a better use of your attention. Celebrate successes along the way; it is proven to increase your positive emotions.

Resetting your baseline when you've achieved success resets your bar of possibilities and expectations, helping you build a success mindset. It notes that you were able to learn and change. People who exhibit this behaviour have what's known as a growth mindset.

In Mindset: The New Psychology of Success, Carol Dweck wrote about her theory. A growth mindset means you believe that hard work is the key to getting ahead. It's never time to sit back and coast.

The other side, the fixed mindset, believes there's not much you can change about yourself. You might as well coast because you can't do anything about anything, and hard work doesn't pay off. When you think you are born able to do some things and not others, you don't work to learn. Of course, you are better off learning when there's a foundation of ability than when there's none, but a growth mindset means that you trust in your ability to learn.

When you mark experiences proving the former to be accurate, you reinforce your growth mindset. To do this, remember the work. Luck had nothing to do with it. Circumstances had nothing to do with it – you saw the opportunity and grabbed it. It was all you – well, your part anyway. Identify what part had everything to do with you and grow your growth mindset.

The pursuit of mastery is a growth mindset. Knowing that practice pays off, you can learn, grow, and change daily. You aren't stuck with what you were born with and aren't ever too old to learn new tricks.

A growth mindset means that you know you can learn and improve. You can remember – it's all you've ever done. Whether you've learned that you must be the one to do it, redo it, or keep doing it, nothing happens without you doing something to make it happen.

Celebrating successes will keep you motivated. For a new behaviour to become a habit, it's helpful to reinforce it with a reward. You put rewards into your plan on purpose to keep you motivated. If you cheat yourself now by taking the motivation and skipping the reward, it may not work next time. You may have undermined your self-trust. Relish the reward because you've earned it, but don't let it become part of the new normal.

We need to be cheerleaders when we push through a little more complicated situations, especially when it might be something that only you know how hard it was. Recognize the moment with some positive self-talk and bask in the accomplishment. The reward for enjoying that feeling of accomplishment is one we forget to take.

Whether you are the type for big parties or private indulgences, it is essential to absorb the joy of accomplishment, acknowledge the hard work, and congratulate the determination. Moving on to the next step often consumes us; we forget to recognize that we've achieved something.

And then we don't need rewards to motivate us anymore. Remember the patient who used M&M's to make himself move despite the pain? The bowl of M&M's doesn't have to be there anymore, and now he moves without needing it. Sometimes, we forget to re-evaluate the reward and what is considered routine, whether it's become a natural expectation for now.

It's essential to drop away from the rewards you've used to achieve the new level of success, or you risk never being happy. When you get used to that level, it will take bigger and bigger rewards to entice you to take on the risk, and eventually, what you won't be enough, or you have too much to stand to lose, and you won't move on.

When you fall into a pattern of saying "I deserve it" too often, you respond to some stimuli you acknowledge and have an argument ready for when it rears its head. There's a point when what was functional is no longer working. Recognize when you get to the hump of the hill, and don't slide down the slippery slope into dysfunction.

Relishing rewards gives us a chance to recharge. Everyone stops and catches their breath at the vistas and the top. Once in a while, you must stop and catch your breath, so you might as well do it when the view is worth taking in, not when you are crushed by exhaustion and staring at your toes.

At the top, redefine normal to where you are right now. Get used to the feeling of being there. Accept the new baseline and the new story you will be telling yourself. Save the experience as the new baseline.

If a reward got you here, how can you use that reward to accomplish something even more incredible? Remind yourself of the competence you exhibited, the skills you honed, and the easier the next step is than when you considered it earlier. The new you can do this.

Does your reward feel as good as you anticipated? If not, why not? There might be a lesson right in that mismatch that you don't want to miss.

Have you stopped to redefine normal?

### 53. Press Pause

We all need to take a break once in a while. Yes, you do.

Vacation, and not doing work while on it, is an outdated idea. It's not only a fear of missing out while away that keeps people seemingly chained to their desks.

In America, Canada, Japan and the Netherlands, we average a vacation entitlement of 10 days off per year. Yet, a survey by Harris Interactive found that at the end of 2012, Americans had an average of nine unused vacation days. In several surveys, Americans admitted that they obsessively check and respond to emails or feel obliged to get some work done on vacation. How relaxing is that?

Take a cue from your leader. Do they take vacations, and if they don't, is that someone you want to follow? For how long? In competitive cultures, to get ahead, being out of the loop can mean missed opportunities. We also fear things spiralling into a massive problem when we miss the chance to nip it in the bud. We seem to think staying in the game is more relaxing, or we will lose our place if we leave.

We could all do more of it if we understood that downtime has massive value. Marcus Rauschle of Washington University in Saint Louis and this colleague demonstrated that a particular set of scattered brain regions consistently became less active when someone concentrated on a mental challenge but began to fire synchronously when someone was lying in an fMRI machine.

After many confirming studies by other researchers, this circuit was named the default mode network, or DMN. It's not the only network that activates when resting—at least four others.

If you can't take a vacation, maybe you can try to get more sleep. Some people say that they fall asleep when meditating, and if that's the case, you may be sleep-deprived.

Sleep is the most fundamental form of downtime, yet many executives report only sleeping 5-6 hours. Do they think they are bragging? Their brains would likely complain if given the chance. Their bodies do – you can see poor health from overwork on people's faces.

New parents are chronically exhausted; you don't have to see it on their faces to believe it. Students, too, aren't sleeping enough. As many as 30 percent of students from kindergarten to grade twelve don't get enough sleep at night.

A failure to get a solid night's sleep undermines the ability to form and consolidate memories, which is part of your ability to learn. Without adequate sleep, your ability to learn could drop off as much as 40 percent. Everyone needs differing amounts, but your body determines how much you need, not your frontal lobe, the executive part of you that sets the alarm.

While you sleep, memories stabilize and link. Dreaming occurs during REM sleep, while non-REM stages prime the brain for learning the next day. When sleeping, your brain cycles through different phases of sleep, including light sleep, deep sleep, and rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. These cycles repeat every 90 minutes or so.

Interrupting sleep cycles leaves you groggy and can often leave you feeling more tired than before. Waking up naturally may be the thing to do if you can manage it. Getting to bed on a routine is part of a good sleeping habit because you wake up naturally, on time, without that disturbing, jarring alarm.

Sleeping and vacations aren't the only beneficial forms of downtime. Daydreaming helps us affirm our identities.

Daydreaming is when we replay earlier conversations and imagine how we'd rewrite them as a way to learn for the future. If wishful thinking is what we do when we imagine other people doing things differently, daydreaming focuses on what we can change – ourselves. One day, you wish you said something at the moment. Another day, those words are coming out of your mouth, a daydreaming return on investment.

While dreaming during the day in the safety of our minds, we practice how we might approach difficult situations differently or even for the first time. We leaf through our mental to-do lists and half-finished projects and reflect on our priorities. We recall childhood memories and imagine alternative futures. It's our opportunity to determine who we are, who we want to be and how we might get there.

During downtime, we develop our understanding of human behaviour and instill an inner code of ethics. We reflect on why someone behaved as they did and try to connect with empathy and compassion. We can search for logic and understanding of what motivated that behaviour. Or, with pain and judgement, we can decide that's not how we want to treat others and examine if we have wronged anyone and how we will not be like that person.

Pressing pause effectively requires planning and preparation. You can't suddenly decide to go to bed early if you still have chores and aren't yet tired.

The best vacation time is when the boss is doing it, too. When the cat is away, the mice play! Setting up your autoresponder with the right interim contacts might help you step away with more confidence. Before committing, talk to your major stakeholders and see if anything is on their radar. Do the work before stepping away; stepping back can be much easier.

Whether it's a better night's sleep, a vacation, or some time spent daydreaming, take some time to press pause and allow yourself to recharge.

Do you need to schedule some downtime for yourself?

#### 54. Start Again

Frank Sinatra said, "At least I did it my way." It's not the least you can do; it's the most.

It's the pinnacle of your life's purpose to put your unique fingerprint on your choices and actions. These pages and information were primarily intended to explain the forces and challenges that make picking yourself tricky.

One thing I learned about English class is that Coles Notes was invaluable. I read the assigned story but didn't have the correct answers when called upon in class. Knowing the expected answers was helpful because seeing things differently and going about a mission your way isn't something people allow in their company, especially in classes like English, where the answers are not black and white.

Maybe you've heard someone say, "Put on a sweater; you are making me cold." When you act contrary to expectations, your risk tolerance freaks them out. It doesn't matter how comfortable you are – they are uncomfortable watching, like a movie.

Look around next time you are there – nothing is happening in the real world to them, but they are acting like they could be collateral damage. In their seats, they dodge the fists on the screen and react like they are feeling the blow. Maybe they are – their mirror neurons working overtime.

What if you looked at your life as if you were the main character in a story, and we all discussed it in English class? You have loose ends to tie up. You have flaws that make you both likable and irritating as a character. In a way, they define how you will make decisions. We say things are out of character for someone when they act in a way that violates the boundaries created by our histories. You are a character and have a story.

Moreover, you have a purpose or a mission that summarizes these things. You may not know it, but pretend someone did author the story. You are the main character, and we discuss it in English class. When that storyline comes to light, trivialities disappear, chasms of connection open, and you know what matters and what doesn't.

One of my clients told me that his family is the most important thing to him. He was a little incorrect after checking where his time was going and the things he cancelled first. The fact was that providing for his family was the most important thing. Providing for them was the precision that made all the difference. From that reality, we can talk about needs; they might need more than money.

Find your happy ending when you get clear about why you are doing what you are doing with truth and honesty, and then see where the story goes. Try not to lie to yourself.

For me, it was four-leaf clovers. I found my first on my way to the apartment I didn't want to have to move to and was balling all the way. Through my tears, beside the sidewalk, I saw it. Blinking them back, I thought of all the time I'd spent searching for them on my lawn, my stepmother's natural ease at finding them, and the irony of seeing one now. Broken out of my self-pitying mental loop, I picked it and still have it today. Take the pot of gold; remember, no rainbows are without the storms.

There might be something about this journey you want to focus on and become more precise and focused on by letting other things drop away. Maybe your goal was to become a writer, and you've discovered that historical non-fiction draws you in, so you start saying no to projects that call you away and yes to ones closer to that genre. You take your current goal, and you pivot a little.

Maybe your goal ended with a legitimate dead end. It happens. You cannot resolve it no matter how hard you try or want it. Maybe your finances forced you back to the land of cubicles. It's an opportunity to marinate and learn from it. It doesn't mean your dream of a happy career is over; there's just a flaw in the plan, a bug in the program, a needle in the ointment. Take the time to reflect on your actual goal and old strategy.

It's cocoon time, whether that is a couple of hours or a couple of years. Just don't make it a lifetime.

One way to get out of this world safely is never to put yourself out there, never try anything new, and always pander to others. By now, you have stopped choosing what is safe and started choosing to thrive. You've learned how strong, challenging, and clever you are – no matter the press.

The best time to try something difficult is after you've succeeded at a challenge. There will be a next time, a time when you pick off where you left off and get ready to make it to the next level. But for now, something else has become more critical. Take your reward for finishing; it's time to move on.

There is always a point when enough progress has been made, and something else is now more critical. With life, there's never a point of completion, never a finish line, at least not while you are still breathing. You can achieve all your goals when you know where you are headed, how to take the next step forward, and always do a little better the next time.

For maximum resilience, do it your way.

Are you doing you the best you can?

It's all you ever can do.