

Practical Wisdom



Taming Your Wild Mind for
Health, Wealth and Happiness

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Practical Reflection

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First Edition

Rural Ontario, Canada

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Introduction

Mindfulness and meditation are key aspects of resilience, but they can also be challenging practices. Before you abandon them, take a moment to look behind the curtain and understand how thoughts arise.

This guide is for those who believe there is always room for improvement. If you've ever felt regret, made mistakes, or struggled with self-doubt, this book is for you. It's a journey of self-discovery and personal growth designed to help you confront your past comfortably, directly and quickly to create a happier, healthier future.

If you are already a calm and steady soul, there's not much for you here - you've already achieved practical wisdom from mastering your mind. Perhaps you've had the best mentors and experiences to guide you. You've worked diligently to achieve this level of peace and security with professional and personal support. Congratulations! That effort is often vastly unappreciated by those who benefit from it, so three cheers to you for the time, effort, and resources you've dedicated. Now, go on and enjoy the life you've created.

All that remains for you here is the potential disappointment that the journey could have been shorter, more transparent, or more affordable. But, if you'd waited for this, you'd just be starting now instead of enjoying the bounty you already created.

You wouldn't need this information if you had loving and attentive nurturers who protected you from fears, pains, and doubts, resulting in stable esteem and a secure internal locus of control. You would have rebelled in your teenage years and found a distinct personality before rejoining your family of origin as an accepted and respected individual who is an integral part of the unit and whose needs are just as important as the other members. Does anyone?

I didn't make it through that journey unscathed. Mistakes were made; there were missteps and misadventures. If you are like me, you can assess your peers and realize there's a standard, and you are below it because of them. You have a choice: lump it or start working to fix the damage.

It's a skill, and learning it is up to you. Certain governments would have you hand your decisions over to them, but I am a conservative. I believe in empowerment and education, not dependence and docility, but above all fairness, when democracy isn't looking very fair.

Taylor Sheridan's John Dutton says, "Fair means one side got exactly what they wanted in a way that the other side can't complain about. There's no such thing as fair."

Everyone always thinks their end of the deal is the raw one. As a child, I protested, "That's not fair!" more than once, and when people replied, "Life isn't fair," I wondered if they were bragging, complaining, or excusing their behaviour. I didn't think it was acceptable and certainly not something to reinforce. I remember thinking, "How dare you!"

As an adult, I've realized that people dare. Unfairness can manifest in so many ways. With every fibre of my soul, I never want to be on the side of the heavy. While it was my intention never to do to others the

things that caused me pain, harm, or suffering, that doesn't mean there are no skeletons in the closet. I laid a path of learning and looked back and figured out, "Oh, that's how."

It's a world where we can do better, and it's not always as difficult, ambiguous, or distant as you might think. Whatever points you want to make with your life, the objective is to make them utterly clear, free of the need for spin or explanation, and with a clear head and a whole heart. You accomplish that by never accepting the unacceptable and never settling without exhausting yourself and all your options. As long as you are still breathing, you still have a chance.

Where Potential Awaits

Meditation helps you work through painful memories and ideas, while mindfulness helps prevent the creation of new ones. Dr. Joe Dispenza, author of **Becoming Supernatural**, says that when you can recall a memory without emotion, wisdom remains.

During my final Christmas shopping trip with my dad, he suggested I pick a pair of red shoes. This simple suggestion triggered a flood of memories from forty years earlier—the first time I picked out red shoes on a shopping trip with him.

Forty years earlier, I was about four or five. I remember the shoes from when I bought them to when I had to relinquish them to the garbage bin—a multi-year duration because we moved every two years, and they were purchased in one city and sent to the dump in another. They only fit because the salesperson showed me how to add padded inserts.

Directly returning home from the store, my mom went ballistic. I was frightened by my mom. Red, for shoes. I was wrong, wrong, wrong. I hated the throwing and the yelling; I felt horrible that it was my fault. While that day became indelibly impressive to me, my dad says he doesn't remember it. He likely laughed it off then, but it wasn't funny to my little self with its budding choice.

Not all "teaching experiences" are the ones you select. Four decades later, the shoe collector I became had no red shoes. Hundreds of footwear choices, not one of them red. An entire rainbow from violet to orange to coral, then to hot pink and magenta, but no red. Until that moment, I hadn't realized I'd been so avoidant. My office was painted red, and a swath of my wardrobe was red – coats, shirts, dresses - but I never wore the colour on my feet.

Fear crept into my little head, and I avoided red shoes forever. How ridiculous, right? What little girl didn't want red shoes capable of taking her home whenever she was lost, frightened, or threatened? As the Good Witch said to Dorothy, "You've always had the power, my dear. You just had to learn it for yourself."

The Coding of Personality

Avoiding future pain is one of the tasks your emotional unconscious takes care of on your behalf. Dr. Claparède discovered the power of a pin prick to create avoidant behaviour in the risk of pain a century ago. The prick of a pin is such minor pain, yet permanently undoing – until you consciously face it.

Practical Reflection

With new insight, I also realized that on that day, perhaps, I taught myself that my needs were not as crucial as maintaining peace in the house. It was a pattern of behaviour to mitigate my fear of my mom while needing her at the same time—a confusing way to interpret the world, both inner and outer. Making clear decisions on confusing information is next to impossible.

Worse, I needed protection where I was supposed to feel safe, so I helped myself to happiness, albeit the short-lived, hollow, dysfunctional kind—by pretending I could protect myself alone. When you can't trust, lean on yourself, but that's not what children are supposed to do or can do. At eight, when I threatened to run away from home, my mom offered to pack my bag, and I left. I sat alone in a cold, dark alley in a major Canadian city, lucky to have not been abducted, before I finally returned home, humiliated and broken.

Growing up, I was introduced as “the independent one.” What starts as pretend is enforced with experience before being finalized as a preference, if not something that is sustainable. Dysfunctional processing creates dysfunctional goals, and you realize it when you get close enough to watch the mirage disappear. It's not a waste of time chasing the wrong goals when you learn universal lessons along the way.

Perfect parents are unheard of, so don't judge yourself any more harshly than the ones you had. They are people too, imperfect as you or I, as imperfect as our judges and politicians, policemen and teachers, lawyers and doctors, scientists and engineers. Not everyone is a born parent, but society pressures everyone to become one.

It's no one's fault; it's just how the brain works in a society that unfairly pushes people down a path that isn't the best for everyone. It's not right for the planet, as it's overpopulated. It's not good for the child to be thrust unwanted into the world. It's not healthy for the parent who didn't want all that anxiety, expense, and devotion of the experience.

The push exists because it's right for the brain, which wants to ensure the transfer of genes to the next generation. It's right for politicians who want to grow their tax base, and it's good for capitalists who want to increase the economy by any means possible.

Just because you can doesn't mean you should. Question everything before doing anything you can't undo. Note the potential you can now realize for yourself and the world. It's a matter of understanding how “progress” is defined and measured by you and anyone else.

Realize everyone defines it and measures it in their own way, doing their best with the available resources and genuine constraints with a brain that is as human as everyone else. Intentions can be angelic and next to godliness, but actions are limited to the energy, money, or mood that rules the moment and the advice that rules the age.

One day, I shared a story with my stepmom to answer her question. She declared, “That's child abuse!” with stunned shock. My dad shook his head and said, “That's how it was done then.” When you seek justification through comparison, you are oriented by society instead of an inner compass.

Times change, and always will, hopefully toward whatever you define as progress. I define progress toward accountability and proper apology, not unfair excuses.

A little insight is a little humour and a lot of power—the power to change our minds. What made sense to a five-year-old doesn't always fly with an adult.

One little shopping trip went slightly awry. It was just a pair of shoes—nothing that should have mattered—yet there it is, seared into my mind and reflected in my wardrobe, behaviour, and personality. They call me an introvert, and I think, yep, a little girl aware that people can turn threatening instantly and turn to find solace in books instead.

Whose youth isn't littered with things gone slightly awry? Maybe you had helicopter parents and need to update your attitude toward risk. My friends tell me they are not helicopter parents, which I believe. In their assessment, they can think of those who are worse, and it's a well-stigmatized label anyone would want to avoid. They are comparing instead of hearing their moral compass.

Wishful thinking and glossy memories are fantastic for the baby books and the stories we tell our techno-friends, but they don't help correct the lessons we learned along the way in our present realities and the futures that await us.

The Power of Insight

Insight gives you awareness. Once you are aware, you can decide whether to continue or change your behaviour. The problem is that we often jump to the step of changing before we've nailed down what exactly needs to change.

Insight is as individual as the pain and the solution. But there's a process for that, and all it takes is reflection and consideration, and maybe even only seconds of it. It might take you longer to read this book, though I've attempted to keep it short and readable if I couldn't always keep it sweet. I use examples from my own life that were shocking and painful but today are merely facts. It's the result of draining out the emotion and finding the wisdom.

A long time ago, I was a new female engineer working in manufacturing, and I'd just been harassed again. It wasn't the first time. Finally, one day, I promised myself it would be the last time I suffered in silence and shame. Next time, I promised myself. When that time came, and it was more than I could laugh off, I went straight to the supervisor.

He said, "Well, I would have done something if you had told me sooner."

"Sooner? I came straight here," I clarified.

I'd already experienced the "too-late" defence and beat it this time. All those bitter regrets transformed into imaginary fantasy conversations paid off.

Today, I don't remember what the incident was about. I only remember this singular win: doing what I wish I'd done all those other times, with the right line at the right moment.

Finally, I removed myself from the environment where I knew there would be a "next time."

At first, I was afraid. Sadness replaced fear and then turned into anger. Finally, I realized I had another option and took it. Freeze, fight, flee.

What starts with awareness can linger for a long time before any action is ever taken and even longer before the right action is taken. It might take many times through the "if-then" iteration cycle before you accomplish "never again." Never stop trying new things until you win; sometimes, escaping is the win.

I was not the first one who was trained to protect herself, but I won't be the last. My employee handbook and management stood up against such behaviour, yet leaks happened, as they do. How many times does it take before change happens?

I'm asking this question beyond workplace culture or moral codes, but to the many things that don't match up in life, between what we are told and what we experience. Yes, life is unfair, so what are you going to do about it? If you know this as the question of a bully challenging you to back down, hear it as I heard it, from someone who genuinely wanted to understand and help.

It's unhelpful to dwell on the bad thing that happened. Transform helplessness into helpfulness by using your mental power and time to determine what you want to do, giving you back power and control. One day, your "bad thing" will also be some lost memory replaced by wisdom and the win of having done yourself proud.

When you find the answer to what you want to do about it, you hear the truth that will always persevere.

The Perseverance of Truth

A truth, said quietly and clearly, resounds and does not back down, apologize, request permission, fold under pressure, or disappear under scrutiny. Self-truth is the assuredness of knowing your mind and the peaceful feeling that comes with that, prepared to accept whatever consequences may be. It might result in less-than-peaceful circumstances, but you will be calm and confident, knowing that time will not change your feelings, nor who knows it. You cannot be intimidated or embarrassed. A truth is steadfast.

Your truth is your power to use how you'd like. You can know your truth and choose not to do anything about it. Secrets are the power we keep – and think we lose when they are released or taken from us, and sometimes that is a good thing. Negative power is a good thing to release and even better when completely controlling it. It might be a message we all need to hear, and it's all up to you.

The message I know you need to hear, and opposed it myself, is that we are operating under the consciousness illusion, with your mind playing the role of a dangerous master on the fastest network with a reliable doctrine in a global community.

By default, that is. The neuroscientists will tell you about the chemicals and biological processes. The evolutionary psychologists will tell you why it's doing what it's doing and what about that doesn't match modern times. Finally, the engineers redirect the energy in the name of progress.

The fun thing is that you get to define 'progress.'

Practical Reflection

Mind mastery isn't entirely about silencing the mind, as in meditation, nor about testing it, as with reflection, but getting to know it and its processes while they work. It is the necessary insight of a neuroscientist, an evolutionary psychologist, and a cognitive engineer.

Practically, being alone with your mind will get you far. You might find yourself looking forward to the moments when you can be silent to connect to that peace within. You might get that beast under your control and command and know you have an inner power. You could be present in every moment and seem like a genius to everyone around you.

Today's world presents a huge opportunity to benefit from intervention in your thinking, not only because it's entirely new, thanks to technology, but because of the individualization of power it provides. You can have a voice in an increasingly loud and boisterous world.

Technology might already be winning the game in your life. It seems we don't like being dominated by robots, yet our little phones seem to have all the power. We drop our agendas at the beep of anyone else's. While technology is a part of society's speed and modernization, it's not everything. You own the technology, even if we've let technology own us. It's time to take back technology and personal agency.

If you'd like to be empowered and educated to be released from dependence and docility, to rise above the status quo on your own accord and agency, to use your power for something other than compliance with the status quo, trust that you can and will with tools designed to help you manifest your idea of progress.

Part 1: The Evidence

It's by design that you trust in the rationality of your thinking. You think you are aware of your major decisions and why you make them. You have beliefs about who you are and what you want that you trust are genuine. You believe the voice in your head because it sounds like yours. You spent much money educating yourself, and you know you aren't dumb, ill, or impaired.

Of course, you are rational, and that's why you are reading up on how to become a better person. To get there, you must accept that you aren't as rational as you might want.

But you can change that, and that's what this is all about – a crash course in noticing your flawed thinking and the ways it hides from detection. When you meditate and become mindful, you notice these things, or you can learn about them first and then see if you notice them arise or play out in your life.

We all believe in the rationality of our thinking while watching other well-educated, well-informed, and otherwise intelligent people make incredibly questionable decisions. We are sure there is a simple explanation, and that surety draws a line in the sand between us and them.

That bias is just one of many that we all share.

The Consciousness Illusion

We live in an illusion of rationality because that is what we are aware of while we execute seamless and invisible pre-programmed circuitry. Contrary to your belief, 80 to 99 percent of decisions are unconscious and automatic. Up to ten seconds can pass before you know you've decided.

We all have a human brain, which is unique and fundamentally similar to everyone. Creating change, whether to become more productive or to improve your life, requires changing the circuitry. You can't do that when you don't even realize it's happening.

For most of us, a lot happens between setting an intention, deciding, and following through on the action. Curbing unconscious, automatic behaviour can achieve uncommon results, but first, you must spot the illusion.

The Bias to Confirm

Ten seconds is lengthy when you have a plan and know what to do with it. Your brain has more than a plan; it has a hard-wired bias.

In the decision-making consciousness lag, you are not looking for reasons why you might be wrong. You are not doing an analysis. You are looking for proof why that decision, which you aren't aware of, is the right decision.

Your brain is very good at giving you whatever proof you want. The name of this effect is called confirmation bias. We can find evidence for our beliefs, even when they are wrong, even when we don't know what they are, even when an overwhelming amount of evidence that we are wrong is available.

Practical Reflection

It's called confirmation bias because we have the hardwired ability to confirm, validate, and approve our irrationality.

The loop of unconscious automatic decisions starts with the chemical of an emotion. The emotion defaults to a particular perspective to filter incoming information. With it, we look for information to validate it. Verbally, we chose language descriptors that match the way we see it. Then, we find logical reasons for being correct, which strengthens the original emotion, closing the loop of how unconscious automatic decisions are made. When it comes to our irrationality, we are designed never to see it happening.

As the saying goes, knowing better means doing better. Emotions influence attention, decision-making, memory, physiological responses and social interactions. The ability to regulate emotion is directly related to your degree of success in any of those dimensions.

Invisible Strategies

Strategy is a general approach to figuring out how to get ahead. It involves forecasting and planning, analyzing and drawing scenarios, anticipating responses, and cataloguing resources and options. It's what you do when deciding what to eat this month and what Fortune 500 companies do when deciding who to merge with and whom to acquire.

Executives are responsible for strategy. They look at long-term trends and potential incoming threats and plot a course for where they want to go. While this sounds like they have everything figured out, in some organizations, the strategy is financial only, leaving other people to figure out how to make it happen.

In the corporate world, executives have a significant influence. People below them want their favour for raises, promotions, and easy projects with high profiles. People above them want to hear only good things and have plausible deniability.

An orientation to survive, knowing survival is a matter of social connection and status, crushed under the complications and pace of today, could turn even the most well-intended leader into the asshole executive. Robert Sutton thinks workplaces should consider adopting the no-asshole rule. Not all of them are executives.

Assholes do whatever it takes to get ahead, whether or not they think there is any problem with their tactics. Some are born, some are created by experience and culture, and some have it inflicted on them and decide to do the dolling rather than the taking. Everyone has a different moral compass, although most consider themselves good people who don't harm others. Instead, we can spin it into an identity of a reliable employee who gets the job done.

After a certain point, it's no longer about survival – it's about the beast of greed, otherwise known as the hedonic treadmill and bills to pay. What might be forgiven and understandable when it's the backstabbing colleague raising two kids alone is more difficult to rationalize when they drip with jewelry, drive a BMW, and vacation in France.

When we work for them, they propose insane schedules, never fess up to things they did wrong, and always leave the hard work to others while taking credit for things they had no hand in manifesting. If

that sounds like an asshole, it's also a result of typical cognitive biases, a lack of emotional intelligence, and expectations that are formed from experience instead of analysis – just like you and I.

Unfortunately, when we are personally in the crosshairs, we'd think we'd do one thing, only to find out that's not what we do. Given the situation, remember what you think you would do, and try to act on that principle when the time comes.

Business with a capitalist's playbook is straightforward—grow or get eaten by someone growing. In life, unchecked growth is called cancer. If everyone could rethink business as the hallmark of a well-managed day, it might result in a shared improvement in stress levels, attention spans, and mental anxiety.

Responding instead of reacting is a skill, and you can master a value-centered approach to leadership. You can also be the asshole out for the short-term material gain. It's up to you because if there's one thing executives don't get, it is confronted.

There are policies and rules, and then there is what people do. Those who have been around a while are in on the culture—what people do. Outsiders do what's written down until corrected by observation, experience, or intervention. It's being in the inner circle, one of the elites, or someone with keen attention skills.

“Hey, I'm not doing what anyone else wouldn't do,” they say. Using other people's behaviour to justify your own is a weak strategy. Weak because it's outside yourself, giving your inner direction to external standards. It is weak because it is full of flaws and errors.

Without a strategy to keep you honest, you will likely think everything will take half as long as it really will, even after you know that rule of planning. You can get easily overwhelmed by doing too many things because your mental executive planner doesn't realize how long all your activities take versus how much time is available.

If you are overwhelmed, your buddies are happy to offer their advice. They lean in and explain that you don't have to fill out all the fields in that form. Maybe they reveal they know someone in booking so you can get in now instead of the three-week stalemate facing your project today. You start to learn that for every system, there is a way to avoid it, ignore it, take advantage of it, and more; if you aren't doing it, you are in the minority.

It's secret, illicit, and stressful the first time, but then it becomes natural, second nature, normal. Exploitation is learned, and if it doesn't teach you how to get to the top, then you aren't morally cut out for the game. Decide what you want to copy and condone and what you would avoid and annihilate.

You can ask permission or beg for forgiveness; some start their planning by choosing the latter. A genuine apology matches the damage done. Words can make up for words, but only actions can undo previous consequences.

What are you going to do? “You can't fire everyone,” they say. One day, you'll also spot the all-or-nothing thinking inherent in that response.

Practical Reflection

Continual improvement is the alternative to firing the screw-ups and hiring the next hero. Perhaps, the economics of the churn aside, there isn't a perfect performer out there, and it's better to stick with someone you can work with than start over from scratch over and over again.

Executive function in your brain works essentially the same way. It gets the last word and rarely gets challenged if it also has a track record of imperfections, flaws and blind spots.

Continual improvement means accepting accountability, apologizing appropriately, and adjusting accordingly. Transparency means telling us what you think and plan, not informing us afterward.

How's that for a brave and bold new strategy?

Illogical Numeracy

If surgeons are epically good with a knife, they aren't so with statistics. Atul Gawande showed that checklists saved lives during surgeries, and "post-operative complication rates fell by 36%." Yet doctors fail to adopt such procedures. Pilots use them, and automotive relies on the APQP, but surgeons are immune to statistics.

Regardless of the lives that could be saved, the waste that could be avoided, and the damage that could be prevented, checklists and other process-enhancing devices are routinely ignored by those who think it's not them—it's everyone else.

Over time, it seems that no amount of data can undo our wishful assumption that we might have messed up in the past, but that was then. "Experience provides the same kind of 'mixed blessing' or self-knowledge: optimistically biased judgments persist even while calibration improves."¹ The researchers say you get better at measuring, but your rose-coloured glasses don't fade.

An average measurement usually follows an extreme one and vice versa, something mathematicians call regression to the mean. As Reid Dorsey-Palmateer and Gary Smith reported in 2006, flight instructors who failed to understand this pattern drew wrong conclusions about their teaching methods and what was working.

What works is making the other half of the equation invisible when distasteful. "Consumers evaluations were more favourable toward the beef labelled "75% lean" than labelled "25% fat". The labelling or framing effect was reduced when consumers sampled the product as compared to when they did not," write Irwin Levin and Gary Gaeth in 1988. Since they are the same thing, they should taste the same and be favoured the same, but perhaps we aren't entirely aware that there is only beef or fat and nothing else.

What works is changing the gauges. When you don't know your gauges are set up in Imperial and all the posted speed limits are in Metric, you don't know that you have been speeding since day one. Perhaps you were raised in the Imperial age and had to convert to Metric. Maybe you live in a world that sticks to only one, but my engineering degree required a whole course on converting numbers from one system into another.

What is the product of $8 \times 7 \times 6 \times 5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1$? Now guess the product of $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6 \times 7 \times 8$? People are way off both times, but the interesting part is that they guess differently. In grade school, we learned the

order of operations in mathematics. Yet, when asked to estimate the answers from two identical but reversed equations, people give two different answers.

These are the same equations; our estimates are off by an order of magnitude. If it's anything like humour and jokes, we are guessing the ending far before reading the first multiplication sign. We zone out at the first sign of a long sentence, put some math in there, and we're done. It's cognitive overload.

The answers are different because when we estimate, we start at the beginning of the equation and adjust from there. In the first, we start at 56 and adjust from there; in the second, we start at 2 or 6 and inflate a similar magnitude.

Regarding numbers, our final estimates are closer to an arbitrary starting point, an anchoring effect. Anchoring effects appear in legal judgments, forecasts, probability estimates, and answers to general knowledge questions. They work casually, subliminally, and even when we are told to ignore the anchor.

Anchors have strong cognitive effects, perhaps because we aren't meant to stray far from home. As a caveperson, even a few kilometres from home were enough to test your survivability. When it comes to numbers, you need a better basis than history and a more reliable tool than your brain.

Dan Ariely has performed numerous studies on this effect. When he asked students to write down the last two digits of their social code and bid on wine, those with higher digits were willing to pay three to four times as much.

Anchors work so well that when Starbucks wanted to blow the old price point for coffee away, they had to create a new anchor. They redefined the experience, language and options. In doing so, they made a blank slate of comparisons, setting the stage for a new anchor. Five bucks for a latte, sure.

Williams-Sonoma introduced the first bread maker. With no previous experience with bread makers, we compared them with alternatives at the same price. Introducing a second, cheaper version made sales take off. Which model was sold? The cheaper one. Introducing a luxury item suddenly makes the regular item look like a deal. Marketers refer to this tactic as the decoy effect.

Salespeople trick us into this effect when they mark things down. However, your anchor isn't the original price; it's what you'd pay right now. When something goes on sale once, we permanently revalue the item to that new price. After it goes back up, even if it's still cheaper than the original, we no longer see it as a deal. Once you get something on sale, you don't fall for the original again.

Everyone is born innumerate, but that's not an allowable excuse for not knowing your way around numbers in a world where quantifying and analyzing things is quick and easy, in fact, programmable. It's your job to know when not to trust your head and when to allow technology to do its thing.

Until then, don't let lies, darn lies, and statistics get you the way they can. Understand context and story; without that, it's all just numbers.

Illusive Control

For human beings, a fundamental orientation to control things might override everything else. It's all about control. We seek status because we think we'll have more power; we seek social connections to have people to control.

Practical Reflection

Control can be either internal or external. External control is power, and internal control is choice. However, as we seek control, we can interchange them.

“Control is a central animating force in human behaviour and operates like thirst. The need to drink emerges only when water levels are depleted; it can be satiated by taking in a variety of fluids, and once one has drunk enough, there is no further benefit from drinking it in greater quantities or from different sources. As the current studies demonstrate, power satisfies the thirst for choice, and choice quenches the desire for power because each replenishes a sense of control.”²

Maximize your ability to choose, and you won't need power over others. Ignore your internal preferences; you can achieve what you need through others.

If humans have much experience with power, experience with choice is a different story. Recognizing internal worlds, their uniqueness, and their shared humanity didn't start until more modern times.

Historically, you didn't marry because you were following your internal world and your heart; you married because of your external world, land, and finances. When it came to your profession, you did what the family did, learning from your parents, whether that was fathers to sons or mothers to daughters. Choice? For the most part, options were limited and predetermined.

It wasn't until more recently in human history that someone said no to power and yes to making individual choices. Humanity needs experience and familiarity with the latter to move forward.

Barry Schwartz popularized the idea of the paradox of choice. In theory, more choices should make us happier, but in practice, it doesn't. Proof has shown that we don't know how to decide but know how to ruminate.

Enlightenment is shining the light of consciousness onto the shadows of your dark side. It's not about knowing who to banish and why. Accepting and understanding your faults and weaknesses gives you more empathy and compassion for others. Maybe you can understand what it's like to be under someone's thumb when you have different ideas for yourself. Perhaps you start seeking less power and more choice.

Free the people in your relationships and organizations by mastering your preferences and ability to choose confidently and clearly. Organization Development, OD, is a field of practice that began with the intention “to see what can happen when people decide to live larger than themselves to pursue the collective gain of their team and their organization.”

W. Warner Burke says, “There is evidence that people in the helping professions, including OD practitioners, are likely to have higher needs for power than that of the general population.” People seeking power, instead of choice, know which professions will give them power, and there are many from which to choose, including the politicians and executives of today.

In 2011, science discovered that “people's desires to shape their identities can be harnessed to motivate behaviour.”³ They found that people were likelier to vote if you asked them who they were instead of what they supported. Voters vote, but asking about voting intentions is like the frog who decided to jump off the lily pad and then didn't. The difference is who you are or what you do, and the difference goes to the core of your identity.

Helplessness is a loss of control and predictability. Researchers found that “individuals must experience both lack of control over a traumatic event and lack of predictability concerning the event before they will sustain the losses associated with helplessness.”⁴ Lacking both control and predictability over traumatic events might lead to the feeling that there’s nothing you can do about it.

If you need to control yourself, start by getting control of your breathing. “By changing the pattern of our breathing, we change the pattern of the information being sent to the brain,” writes Dan Brulé in **Just Breathe**.

In Finland, school isn’t about the teacher’s opportunity to exert power. Students aren’t rewarded for providing the correct answer. Testing isn’t standardized, nor do they feel it should be. “We try to teach them everything that they need so that they can use their brain as well as they can. Including P.E., arts, and music. Anything that can make the brain work better.”⁵

If no one is to be left behind, school becomes a game of herding students through it efficiently—not effectively. It’s quick, but it’s also not working. Making a student’s brain work better might lead to more questions in the field, which leads to a more extended day and an inability to complete the mandated content. Engaged students get in the way with all their curious questions just as much as those who aren’t natural learners and need extra help, time and attention.

In Finland, the education system is working. Students are at or near the top of the best educated in the world. One teacher says, “School is about finding your happiness, finding a way to make you learn what makes you happy.”

“Tight control backfires and blows up,” says Nassim Nicholas Taleb in his book **Antifragile**. As James Clerk Maxwell mathematically described in his paper in 1868, steam engines needed a governor to prevent tight control and the instability produced by it.

What makes you happy—not what you need to do to make everyone else happy—is a different education than stuffing students with facts and skills. Still, it’s up to the parent to decide what is best for their child and the voter to choose which government to put in power and what strategy to support.

A Planet at Risk

The problem for developing countries is how to make renewables as cheap as coal. The problem for countries already developed is how to get released from the grip of tradition. It’s one thing to start and proceed forward, and it’s another thing to change horses in midrace.

“In order to build a new norm for housing including heating, air conditioning, and electricity, big suppliers and equipment companies come to an agreement with developers. Their real estate will be electrically equipped but they will require the buyer to be connected to their electrical networks. And that is how the moguls of electricity and construction put an end to solar energy,” says Jean-Robert Viallet.

Big money and old ways are difficult to overthrow. “To address the environmental crisis, we are gonna have to spend time fixing the democracy crisis because big money has so much influence now, our democracy has been hacked. Large contributors call the shots,” says Al Gore, and with his political history, he might know.

If democracy is at risk, what's the next experiment in equal and fair representation? We might need to answer that question for the planet's sake.

Pernicious Popularity

Everyday folk fall easily into the illusion of popularity as the potion of success. It's easy to believe that the more people you can count, the more books you can sell, the more opportunities will come your way, and the more doors will open for you.

If there's a reliable method that we use to give up responsibility, it's when we pick what's popular. We jump on the bandwagon and cave to social pressure. It's conformity at work, but to what will we conform? Albert Einstein said, "If A is a success in life, then $A = x + y + z$. Work is x, y is play, and z is keeping your mouth shut."

Common-minded people coming together will solidify and move toward a more extreme point. As the group's opinion becomes clear, group members become more reluctant to bring up contradictory information. Only additional supporting information comes to light by the spiral of silence theory.

Herding behaviour happens when we look to our peers to figure out what to do instead of independently seeking information and making an informed decision. We act like someone else did that analysis and can copy their answer.

When we unthinkingly follow, bubbles form and markets crash. The housing bubble happened because few decided for themselves, just as Madoff's victims wanted to believe the astounding results they were being fed.

When you are prosperous and happy, the world is with you, but they vanish immediately when the money is gone or the attitude fades. Popular people discover that popularity isn't friendship or loyalty. On the internet, popularity doesn't come without a lot of work, although there is a system waiting to be gamed and people who will sell you the keys to win it.

Too good to be true is difficult for anyone to resist. For things with intrinsic value, popularity is random. In 2008, researchers reported that "social influence contributes to inequality of outcomes in cultural markets, but that as individuals are subject to stronger forms of social influence, the collective outcomes will become increasingly unequal."⁶ More, they say that "social influence also generates increased unpredictability of outcomes."

In a study with over 14,000 participants, an artificial "music market" proved that early advantage snowballs into popular winners. Thanks to the herd mentality, we find it more agreeable when others like a song.

The researchers found that average-quality songs perform unpredictably. While the worst rarely did well, and the best seldom did poorly, the performance of anything in the middle was anyone's guess. Early random advantage greatly benefits song popularity and drives demand, but it could have been any song.

Studio executives, book publishers, and talent managers make their living attempting to back the best. When popularity is a matter of perception and not merit, it can be achieved with the proper marketing

Practical Reflection

and advertising budget, connections, and impression management. The most popular is not the same as the best.

The best will likely rise to the top, and the worst will likely sink to the bottom. For the majority, the idea of a meritocracy is false. In the middle mainstream, it's not what you know; it's who you know.

While ego gets a bad reputation, it's not about being full of yourself and thinking yourself better than others. Ego is identification with form. Our minds get wrapped up in ego when we confuse our worth with the worth of our things.

Children are outstanding examples of this. They have a toy and hold it so tightly it almost becomes part of them. If you take it away, you might think it was, as there will be an emotional onslaught against the loss. It's forgotten tomorrow, though, or earlier, and there's a new thing it's all about.

When we realize we are more than what we own, more than what's on our resumes, and more than our material possessions, we become free from the ego. Fears of being less than others, not worthy, or what it all might mean drop away and make space for appreciating what is true.

Ego may motivate you. If it does, it might have been those who went before you who reported that it's lonely at the top. If it's all about you, there might not be many people who want to be around you. Customers included.

Rich relationships, where people are smiling, are something you can't buy and are priceless to have. Insert credit card advertisement here. Popularity might feed your ego, but that ego can end up more significant than you, demanding more than you have to give, just like Seymore's Venus flytrap in **The Little Shop of Horrors**.

You can seek to meet the right people and craft an exemplary reputation to hide your true self behind, or you can be rare, remarkable and unmistakably the best.

Vanished Trade-offs

Every generation attempts to improve on the one before. We have ambitions for bigger houses, higher positions, and better kids. Of course, parents can take the best of what their parents knew and their personal experience and formulate a new manifesto incorporating a whole new generation of knowledge discovered.

So why is it going so wrong?

Kids always want to blame their parents, and the millennials would be human in doing so, but it doesn't solve any problems. The future relies on this damage getting undone.

Every time something new comes along, something old dies. Affordances is the term used to describe the swap. Tom Wujec describes how we once used astrolabes to tell time, whereas now it's on our phones. At the time, using astrolabes meant we understood the sky, directions, and mathematical concepts—these things we no longer need to know and no longer do.

As we innovate, we need to be conscious of the swaps, be good citizens with the risks, and start with wow, not marketing, for real success. Every time something new comes along, it creates an impact we

can't foresee. We try hard to improve, but the future is fundamentally unknown. Things heralded at the time for the advancement they allowed but became banned for the destruction they caused.

John MacKay of Whole Foods says, "When businesspeople operate with a low level of consciousness about the purpose and impact of business, they engage in trade-off thinking that creates many harmful, unintended consequences." He says, "It is the mark of emotional and spiritual maturity to say, 'I have enough.'" When it's not enough, you must specify what's missing.

People don't fear change—they fear loss. Innovation can have detrimental downsides when the affordances aren't crystal clear and acceptable, as with industrialized farming.

"The strategy of growing the same super-variety on millions of acres of land has caused the extinction of many varieties traditionally cultivated. It also drastically increases the water consumption. It requires the use of fertilizers and pesticides. It generally leads to reduced soil fertility and sometimes even total sterilization. Industrial agriculture also requires an incredible amount of fossil fuels. It takes oil, a lot of oil, to fuel the machinery and to produce the fertilizers and pesticides," says Jean-Robert Viallet. In short, it's good for the suppliers - but not the planet.

Worse, "the intensification of agriculture made it energetically deficient." Today, 100 calories spent produces only 70 food calories. That's a loss that doesn't make sense to continue.

If there are market and product mismatches taking place everywhere, the problem with innovation is the novelty and ego of it all. "The unfair ecological tradeoff: some countries exploit their land with low-cost work force. Other countries buy and consume," says Jean-Robert Viallet.

The quest for silver bullets betrays our unconscious love for avoiding work and owning shiny things. The mind is the brain in action, and your brain is wired to love the bright and shiny promise of future success that comes without work.

In Italy, they seem to agree that it's an intelligent use of power to think of others who don't have it instead of using your power to increase your interests or those of your friends and family. As Ducati Motorcycle Company Claudio Domenicali says, "There is no clash between the profit of the company and the wellbeing of the people." Clashes are trade-offs, and that internal conflict isn't doing anyone any good.

To use your power for the good of others is not the capitalist way. Nor is it the survivalist's way. It's the attitude of people who know that we are all in it together. Today, I will help you; maybe the tables will turn tomorrow. Life is unpredictable, especially as history shows, in Europe.

Steven Pinker explains two ways to view the nature of progress. First, problems result from people who must be defeated, shamed, punished, and corrected. The other way is to view issues as independent of people. There are problems; there always will be problems. There are many ways for things to go wrong.

To make people better, let's solve problems. Let us, as in there are some people in the way who could move. Allow us, as some systems need repair, and some people are blocking progress.

When we realize we have a problem, we immediately feel the urge to eliminate it – or whomever or whatever is pointing it out. This temptation of crisis drives people into action – the knee-jerk kind, like shooting messengers and throwing progressive thinkers in jail.

Practical Reflection

Doing that only trades the problem we had for a different one. How do we now also fix the 'justice' system or introduce one about justice and not merely punishment?

Problems aren't fun, and we want them gone as soon as possible, so we devise solutions and execute them. Our leaders prize action and efficiency, and whether or not those solutions were effective isn't really on anyone's radar. We are praised for our quick responses. Everyone loves a firefighter.

But firefighting gets old and tiring. Customers get fed up and leave, leaders start to see the cost, and you are drained and exhausted.

Daniel Levitin wrote in *The Guardian* in 2015, "Instead of reaping the big rewards that come from sustained, focused effort, we reap empty rewards from completing a thousand little sugar-coated tasks."

Firefighting is addictive. The thrill of stepping up to an immediate, critical, complex challenge and delivering on it is quite an ego boost. It also makes the day go by much faster, makes you feel like you earned your pay, and imparts a feeling of gratification, pride and worth. People love the firefighter who comes to save the day. What would we do without them?

We might protect the baseline needed to solve the already-established problem before destroying it with change. We might calculate the trade-offs we will make instead of throwing the dice, breaking things, and wasting more resources. We might make trade-offs consciously instead of using random experimentation.

Overlooked Information

If you wait too long to follow the path of progress or ignore the signs, you might miss the chance to experiment.

Detroit is famous for its belief in its immunity to change. In 2008, car manufacturers continued to produce vast parking lots full of cars no one wanted. Mitt Romney, a son of Detroit and chief executive of American Motors, took to the *New York Times* with his plea to let Detroit go bankrupt. In his view, this would force a massive restructuring.

Instead, General Motors and Chrysler received their bailout. Michael Capuano stated, "My fear is you're going to take this money and continue making the same stupid decisions you've made for 25 years." Detroit still carries the legacy of the most significant urban bankruptcy and the departure of half its peak population.

The Space Shuttle Challenger disaster stands as another example. Roger Boisjoly raised strenuous objections to the launch. The booster rocket engineer authored a memo to his managers predicting "a catastrophe of the highest order" based on disturbing data from the O-rings.

On the morning of the launch, 15 engineers agreed unanimously to postpone the launch. The O-rings' performance at that morning's low temperatures hadn't been tested. Footage shows the failure immediately, but despite the fears, no contingency plans were put in place, and the astronauts died, not in the explosion but more likely when they hit the water minutes later.

Practical Reflection

Ignoring piles of evidence calling for change or proceeding when you don't have the proof you need are both situations when someone needs to slow down the forward motion and have a fresh think about where things are headed.

When you think you know how to solve the problem and aren't in it, you don't know. All you can do is empower the people in it and stop telling, forcing, and pushing them to do what you want. However, for some people, the only point in achieving power is to find out what you can do with it, who you can control and what you can force people to do.

One of the Six Sigma toolkit tools is the Design of Experiments. Design of Experiments, or DOE, is a very intentional way of setting up trials to test different settings of different variables with the shortest amount of testing. This is the tool to help you test new ideas rapidly.

Designing any experiment requires planning and analysis. You likely will not have a eureka moment while running the trials because the best setting for each variable comes out in the analysis when it's all over. Once you calculate them, you validate the math and have your wow moment. If you trust the process, you will do what it says.

But trust is difficult, even when technology is programmed as best you can and it's running at the speed of your laptop. In one DOE competition, one of my group members thought he could do better than technology, with only half an hour left in a 24-hour challenge. I watched in shock as he grabbed the controls and started trying to guess randomly.

Just like that, his urge to control tanked our team, his impatience for the process, and his ego that wanted the win. When we get in crisis mode, we think we are the only ones who can do it. Move aside everyone and everything else; I have to be in control. Personally, I was happy I was never going to have to work with him again. People like that are exhausting to work with, and you rarely ever get the win.

Experimentation methods attempt to contain our control freaks, but they are not impervious. When it's your time to step to the plate because you are the one who knows more information, has more experience, or is in the right place, it's your job to speak up and take down the fearful control freak who wants command of the situation.

It happened to me once as a passenger in a car. In a hairy situation, the driver yelled, "Watch out!" and threw their right arm across my chest like a barrier. I was already wearing a seatbelt designed for that purpose, and I'd rather the driver keep both hands on the wheel in a crisis, not come flying off. Crisis reveals character, and like every team, we didn't recruit this brute and don't have the power to contain this brand of disaster. Know your lane and stay in it; we all might come alive.

In snowmobiling, they train you to tell oncoming riders how many people are behind you by taking your hand off your handlebars and using your fingers. An uncountable number of times, that person trying to tell me something has lost control and is now driving into me. Keep your hand on your handlebar, stay in your lane and drive like someone is always coming around the corner at you. Skidoo has innovated into a light on your sled telling the message, and I can't say again, do not let go of that handlebar. Ever.

When you catch yourself in a fearful urge to control, compelled to take action, stop, look around, and reassess the situation. Are you the right leader? If you need to clamp your lips, do whatever it takes. The

best action plan might need to come from the shyest person in the room, and if that's what you think, help them now. Ask them directly if you are able.

Daniel Kahneman called this trap of human nature the biggest one he'd eradicate if he could: the egoic illusion of control and smarts. Daniel Pink says the trait he admires most because he sees it so rarely is intellectual humility. Intellectual humility is the willingness to recognize what you think and believe might be wrong. Ray Dalio called it the most important lesson of his life.

When you lead your professional life with the knowledge that you might be wrong, you go on an adventure to tap into the fluidity of knowledge and have the opportunity to experiment. You appreciate the moments when you discover that you were wrong about something and get to replace it and update your worldview. When it's more important to understand than to be correct, you dare to explore, experiment and play with knowledge and all that you might think.

Usually, the go-to method of experimentation is trying one thing at a time and seeing what works. This can be exhausting and draining and often does not reveal the proper solution because things are usually related, and you need their interaction to know how they matter.

Still, it's far more advanced to approach a test by changing one factor at a time than by randomly changing many things at once.

The Dangerous Master

The mind is a dangerous master. Thoughts are outstanding servants, but when you let thoughts take the lead or use their products untested, things get dangerous, expensive, and depressing.

There's a line in the sand and prison bars between Bernie Madoff and the rest of us. But is he so different from you or me? Using our internal worlds and their external worlds, we judge. We have no idea, but we are sure we do.

The first time, it was concocting a tale of yesterday's trades to cover a significant loss. Investors weren't told about the loss but were fed a story. A fear of facing the truth, not an orientation to greed or maliciousness. A coward's act and a criminal act. But that's what he did instead of telling his clients that he lost their money when the market swung down.

Someone was on to him. They reported their suspicions—never losing in the stock market is unprecedented. However, the accusations were not investigated, and his clients came to assume they were immune to losses.

Madoff made off with other people's money for fifteen years. It's a tale about more than one person who couldn't face the truth and many influential people who ignored their gut instincts, indulged their greed, and justified status quo behaviour.

In Madoff's story, there's human behaviour on both sides of that line in the sand. It's slippery when we are too afraid to face the truth. No one is immune to ignoring red flags. Everyone has told people what they thought they wanted to hear instead of the truth as they knew it. People don't do their homework

and instead follow others. People trusted their rationality. People lost their life savings, and some took their own lives.

While natural and normal, drawing lines and creating division doesn't help society.

Insight can. Science can help create unification when we understand the difference between what anyone would do, given agency, and what an individual does. Better understanding leads to better detection, lower severities, and fewer occurrences for everyone when we work to prevent disasters proactively. It starts with seeing the dangerous master at work.

An Orientation to Survive

Your number one job is to survive. Brain scientist John Medina states, "The brain appears to be designed to solve problems related to surviving in an unstable outdoor environment and to do so in nearly constant motion."⁷

There's a joke about two people who encounter a bear. Perhaps, until this point, they would have characterized the relationship as friends or family, or maybe two lovers were camping instead of two unconnected people. It's worth wondering about the circumstances because of the joke's punchline.

One of them starts to lace up their running shoes. The second person says, "What are you doing? Get moving! Can't you see we have to outrun the bear?"

"No," the first person says, "I just have to outrun you."

Darwin's concept of survival of the fittest never meant to pit two people against each other. There's not a word about competition. Putting ourselves first is a survival orientation, if not always a kind one. It's not about *who* you should trust or not but *what* you should trust from everyone.

"The mind is a beautiful servant but a dangerous master," said Osho. The dangerous master puts themselves first. Science shows that we are inclined first toward generosity, but with a second thought, we withhold for ourselves.

Despite what our dangerous master would do, the correct lesson to the children comes out of our mouths: share. Sometimes, it is accompanied by that reinforcing slap.

It's worth considering the reinforced lessons since we continue to teach society these kindnesses accompanied by violence. Might is right, no one said, yet this is the orienting principle in society. Bigger is better; everything is power, dominating or being dominated.

Asinine Assumption

Jokes are funny and work because the punch line is truthful yet unspeakable. Humour gets us laughing because it's contrary to what we expect you to say, and we're shocked you spoke the truth.

Assuming that we are both in it together and that we'll do what's best for both of us, up to and including having bear steaks for dinner on our brand-new rug, is what we all do. Isn't it? Or is that an assumption limited to the hunters among us?

Unidentified assumptions lead us to catastrophic errors like confusing friends, hunters, and runners. As a child, you might discover that all your other friends have a parent's bedroom, not a mom's bedroom and

a dad's bedroom. The day may come when you go to work for a different company and find out that the rules for manners have all changed. Assumptions are dangerous when they are entirely invisible to the makers of them.

Invisible assumptions are the ones that have never been challenged, illuminated, or discovered. Eventually, a conflict arises to make an ass out of you or me, and invisible assumptions are finally revealed. It's our first opportunity to realize that you think, perceive, or feel a certain way, a different way.

In engineering school, I learned to make conscious assumptions to start solving a problem. Assumptions, dynamic reasoning behaviour, and functionality are necessary to characterize a problem-solving method. Conscious assumptions operate more as filters. They allow you to find a way forward through too much information or not enough of it.

If you have a problem and can't find a workable solution, an assumption is likely in your way. It could also be that no one wants to tell you. Robert Sutton says, "The assumptions and language we use – the lenses through which we see the world – can have big effects on how we treat others." This silence is called "polite" in some social circles.

Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann postulated the spiral of silence theory in 1974. "Our willingness to express our opinion openly depends on how we perceive that of the public. We hope others assume compliance if we don't express our opinions." You can assume silence means I agree or that I'm silent because I want you to think I agree when I do not, but it doesn't change the truth about what I believe or the danger of making the assumption.

Researchers have found that this assumption is a universal trait, and people of different competence tend to give each other's views equal weight.⁸ This assumption of equality undermines group decisions in teams.

Looking around the table, you see that everyone deserves to be there and have a voice, and you assume that a democratic process will be the best way forward. This is an unspoken reality of many project management processes.

However, opinions are not equal. There are experts and interested parties, and their input is treated equally, diluting the expert's weight. The outcome hinges entirely on the expert's ability to convince the rest of the members. Assigning complete accountability to this individual might be better for everyone's sake. In many cases, teams don't work.

When problems arise, I've never heard the assumption of equality or misplaced accountability to be called to attention. When things go wrong, fingers are pointed, and lessons are learned, but the decision-making process itself, the one that relied on consensus and voting, doesn't change. Teams are still assumed to be the solution, and their lack of functionality isn't brought to light.

Further, when the team approach is sanctioned by a governing body that hands out project management certifications, the assumption of authority and credibility is stacked against what you learned through first-hand experience.

Retrospection is the opportunity to discover an invisible assumption, but analyses into how things were done are saved for when they go wrong. People steam forward under the assumption that they didn't make any mistakes. No, they likely didn't, but there are always things that could have gone better.

While you explain your perfectly rational thinking to someone from a different walk of life, they will see the assumption blocking your way – hopefully, they will tell you about it. Ray Dalio would tell you about meritocracy, not democracy or dictatorships, at work in his organization, and the work he put into building that system, the academics who study it, and the billions invested through it.

Some assume there is no difference between what is in your head and what comes from your mouth. They think you don't know the answer if you are asking a question, even while they spent time in school with teachers as you did. Teachers always know the answer when they ask a question, but this isn't a classroom, and you are not a teacher, so you forget there are many reasons to ask a question when you already know the answer.

What people choose to share about their inner worlds depends on what they know and want you to know about it. What is disclosed depends on the sharer's assumption of what you'd like them to do, their assumption of how truthful you declare it, and their assumption of how it will go when they do share. Much effort – all of which disappears the moment they decide that there is no upside in starting a conflict. It is easier and more peaceful to stay silent and let them assume alignment.

On the other hand, someone you know could have all the bias in the world to tell you what they want you to hear. An excellent servant, we find the appropriate words and the relevant perspective when we need them. If communications and conversations are murky, it's the assumption that's clouding the message, and saying things louder with more words isn't the answer.

Humans might get nowhere without a way to proceed in the face of incomplete and overwhelming information. Assumptions come from somewhere, and having a rationale for something instead of a chasm of nothing is required for forward motion. It may not be perfect - a dangerous master and an excellent servant.

Making assumptions helps you survive, but remember that survival and assumption are starting points.

Ridiculous Rationalization

Despite outward appearances, everyone has a perfectly logical explanation for why they do what they do. Our reasons don't have to make sense to anyone else if they are always perfectly sensible to us. We are all the product of our lives and the people we've met, so our decision trees and how we navigate them are highly individual and personal.

As an engineer raised by an engineer who worked with engineers, I believe that engineers have assumptions about the world that prevent them from doing their best work. The ones at Red Bull seem to be no different, as they attempted to win points and prestige in 2010 with a new front-wing design on their Formula 1 race car.

During testing, the privileged favourite driver smashed the pair of wings they gave him. Did it matter? After all, they had only two pairs.

Practical Reflection

The Red Bull engineers calculated that their new design provided an edge. With that analysis, they uninstalled the wings from his teammate to replace the smashed pair. Red Bull might give you wings, but then they take them away.

It was an entirely rational decision to the engineers, backed by data. To anyone raised with siblings, it was utterly unfair. He broke his, and now you are taking mine? Anger and revenge provide focus and motivation, as anyone familiar with rivalry and the deep-set emotional drive for justice would know.

When Mark Webber, the guy who lost his wings, crossed the finish line first, he said, "How's that for number two?"

Taking emotion out of analysis will lead to the wrong conclusion every time, yet the engineers don't know what to do differently. As logical as it may seem, using data to make forecasts, predictions, and decisions isn't rational when thinking and feeling human beings are involved.

The data may be excellent, but the model doesn't include all the necessary factors. It completely ignores the most important one: emotion, the focused determination of "I'll show you." When we can't measure something, it's easier to convince ourselves that it doesn't matter, just as it's easy to look at the data when it's available.

Some people think engagement doesn't matter, so leave your heart and head at home; we only hire hands. I thought disengagement was a problem I was supposed to solve until the organizational coach told me, "Why don't you quit and stay?" I was startled to discover this was good advice.

Disengagement was the only way to get through the day when I was cognitively unnecessary; it was the only way to take my hands to work but leave my head and heart at home. Stop caring, stop volunteering, stop speaking up and out. Like a rape victim, disengage and pretend it doesn't hurt.

You may not know why you do anything; your motivations may be a complete mystery to your conscious self, even while you produce an answer. To have a logical reason is called rationalization. It makes sense to you; it doesn't make it valid or reasonable to anyone else. It's like a spoonful of sugar that makes certain things more manageable.

If you walked in on day one, and things didn't make sense, you'd likely keep your mouth shut to keep your job or assume you are too new to know better. When you think about saying something, it's become an acceptable way to do things, and there's nothing left to say. You've left it too long. You forgot why you cared. Culture becomes imprinted and ingrained in you as you adopt and conform to the norms and standards.

We can all rationalize things we cannot change until we realize we can change them. According to Kirstin Laurin, a researcher at the University of Waterloo, "People rationalize situations they're stuck with but rebel when they think there's an out." Win the lottery and be offered a better job, and you may remember what was so backward about that place and the culture.

In that moment, with a strategy for escape, rebellion takes hold. If serenity is the wisdom of knowing what you can and cannot change, rationalization is making peace too early. When it comes to change, you need a better toolkit, and you'll stop rationalizing all kinds of things. Increased creativity is part of that better toolkit for problem-solving, although the dangerous master uses it more destructively.

The dangerous master uses it to find more and better rationalizations. “The more creativity in a person’s job, the more moral flexibility the person reported,” says research scientist Dan Ariely. He said, “You cheat when the rules are flexible or unclear and when you have a conflict of interest or a reason to have a biased perception of reality.”

It’s a matter of survival. Your mind will put it out of your mind, change it, or make you not mind one bit. Life could be pretty uncomfortable and short without the ability to rationalize. With it, we can make a case for progress, navigate the arguments for it, and still be surprised when the votes come in.

Rationalization misses something vital in the calculations and analysis: choice.

Disjointed Judgment

You don’t need the ability to rationalize one outcome over another until you have decided that one will be better or potentially better. That foundation is judgment.

Madoff seems to think he had to do what he did because his clients wouldn’t have been able to handle the truth. “Fuck my victims. I carried them for 20 years, and now I’m doing 150 years,” he said.

Guilt and shame feel lousy because that’s how they function to get people to change. Pain is their mode of instruction. They wouldn’t have the civilizing power they do if they didn’t hurt. Dysfunctional perception is self-sacrifice under the assumption his clients can’t handle the truth.

In 2011, social psychologist Sara Konrath and her colleagues wrote, “Although people cannot seem to live without one another, they also sometimes cheat and manipulate each other, are physically aggressive and verbally offensive, lie, steal and exhibit several other socially deleterious tendencies.”

For some people, the point of having others around is to have people on hand that you can treat that way. With pathology, it’s always. It’s somewhere on the spectrum between always and sometimes for normal humans, but it’s not never.

Where you land on the spectrum matters because you look to the left and right and think, I’m okay where I am. No matter who you are, you know of someone who is better and, more importantly, worse.

Judgment is opinion in action. When you think emotions are useless and analysis is all you need, you judge the left brain as more valuable. You hold mathematicians and scientists in high esteem and don’t have much time for artists or philosophers. Your opinions are evident in what you allow into your life and keep out.

If everyone is entitled to their opinion, everyone is not entitled to their judgment—we have a system for that. We have an education system, a judicial system, and a parliamentary system, among others. Institutional systems rise above the individual to create a collective. Like all systems, they are there because they prevent the toppling of one individual.

We know that humans aren’t to be trusted, so we build systems and embed them in institutions. In this way, the collective, the long-term, and the unbiased have more of a say than any individual with power. Systems and institutions are imperfect, but they represent progress and our ideals.

One imperfection is our omission bias. Researchers have repeatedly proven that our judgments are harsher when we can observe something than when we could have acted and didn’t. When Bobby

throws the ball to Sally, she misses it, and the window gets broken. Bobby is punished. Yet, Sally could have tried harder, or what if she missed intentionally?

Intention makes all the difference. We always know our own, but we don't always know that of others. People explained their behaviour more favourably than the online behaviour of both friends and acquaintances. When it's yourself, it's called impression management and branding. When it's everyone else, it's called self-glorification and manipulation because you question their intentions while you know yours.

We judge others against consequences, not merely the actions but also the randomness involved. A drunk driver who hits a sign gets a different sentence from a drunk driver who hits a person. Yet what they hit was utterly random. The action of getting behind the wheel impaired is the lesson, but justice weighs consequences into decisions.

Nothing matters until that window breaks. But when it comes to our behaviour, we make concessions for all that can go wrong between intention and result. Hanlon's law says that people aren't mean; they are poor planners and terrible executors - always suspect stupidity before malice. We all are creative explainers, but we miss the opportunity to learn better for next time.

Perhaps, when you are on Facebook for too long, you forget that people are actively managing your judgment of them. Researchers found that those who have used Facebook longer agree that others are happier and agree less that life is fair. They found that those spending more time on Facebook each week decided that others had better lives⁹.

Doesn't everyone fake a better life with social media, or at least know that people are prone to do that? When you know them better, you judge them more harshly. Subjects judged acquaintances' inconsistencies as more intentionally misleading, hypocritical, and less trustworthy¹⁰. They know the truth versus what is being put out there, and they don't like you for it, while for them, it's okay.

Your reward center activates when you judge, provide an opinion, or become a thinking individual who can act. Dopamine is released, and your motivation comes alive. As Gregory Burns, author of **Satisfaction**, explains, dopamine "commits the train of action to a particular track by signalling the expectation of reward." The more unpredictable and the more novel, the better.

It feels good to judge because physiologically, in your body, it feels good because of the release of dopamine. It gets boring when you realize that it's just you and technology. It's fun when you think someone cares, you matter, and you have a chance to impact the future.

Social media thrives on judgment and your urge to share your opinion. Conversations rooted in judgment sound like, "That's bad." "How wonderful." "Now it's my turn."

When you begin to pay attention to how you narrate the world, the voice of judgment might be all you hear. It feels safe to hold on to what you know and to surround yourself with judgment like a security blanket. Take security to a conceptual maximum, and you will get a prison. You can't thrive if you're locked in a cage.

Releasing judgment means embracing what is, for what it is, and how it is, with the only objective of understanding it. Without judgment, conversations sound like interviews, with probing questions instead of flat comments.

Practical Reflection

With a mindset of learning instead of judging, you stop pretending to be the teacher in life with all the answers and instead become a student of the universe with only a hint of knowing.

A hint of learning can feel like awe when you realize there is so much more you don't know, and exploring it is the free, fun, and on-demand wonderland you were craving.

A Competitive Society

My brother got away with things in my house because "he's a boy." When it came to my older sister, it was "because she's the oldest." My younger sister said, "Well, she's the baby." I was sure that if I figured out who I was, then I would be able to get away with some things, too.

Before you start school and become a number in a formal ranking system, you already know things such as inequality. If school served me any purpose, it might have been to teach me that there will be people who make you do things you don't want to do and people who will tell you what's true despite what you know—the force of authority and insidious gaslighting.

Merit needs help to win because, as a society, we have other ideas in mind. A meritocracy means the best rises to the top. The best idea comes from the group meeting, and the best person gets the job. But it's a competitive world, and the best doesn't always win. It's a world of "who you know".

We don't vote for the best idea; we vote for whatever will improve our station. We don't promote the person best for the job; we encourage the most loyal, most straightforward to work with, least likely to make us look bad, and most able to pull the strings that need pulling. Another way to look at it is that we don't define 'best' based on the whole; we define it individually, comfortably, and personally.

The assumption of equality facilitates the agenda of anyone who has one. Instead of levelling the field democratically, it gives rise to competition and the survival of the most political. While everyone knows rank and privilege, every project manager is trained to wrangle people into line using consensus rules.

Rising Narcissism

Today, everyone wants everyone else to know how fabulous they are; social media has enabled us to quantify this.

As with most labels, narcissism exists on a spectrum. As a clinical label with criteria, it's at one end, yet if we're all shades of gray on it, it's helpful to realize the degree to which certain tendencies may apply to you and yours.

To be a narcissist is to be inauthentic in a specific way. In **Becoming the Narcissist's Nightmare**, Shahida Arabi writes, "Their false self is the self they present to everyone else: the narcissist often presents the image of being charming, well-loved, intelligent, successful, generous, and kind. However, in private, and often to the most intimate partner the narcissist has (whether it is a spouse or boyfriend or girlfriend), they are selfish, cruel, exploitative, rageful, abusive, demonstrate an irrational sense of entitlement, lacking in empathy and are prone to being unfaithful."

You may feel inauthentic as you attempt to better yourself, but hiding under a mask is another thing. Hiding is not the same as bettering. To better yourself comes from a position of acceptance and the work to change, to embrace your authenticity.

To be judged harshly is the moment you can tell the difference. The narcissist will rage against the unflattering assessment, the person working to better themselves will shrug, and the person with genuine authenticity who was a random target of some negative emotions might laugh at the absurdity of the harshness.

To lash back is to be in hiding. When confronted with evidence that doesn't make them look good, the narcissist deflects it back on the other person, calling them all kinds of names. At the core, it is an assumption, a rationalization, a judgment that they are superior to this person, and this treatment. Retaliation is the option they take. In the mind of a competitor, there can be only one.

Arabi writes, "They will invalidate your emotions and gaslight you to the point where you do feel like you're crazy. You will doubt yourself and apologize even when you have nothing to apologize for. You will find yourself trying to teach a grown man or woman the basic rules of respect." You won't succeed because of "their false belief that they have a right to treat people like objects, playing with them and putting them down whenever they please," she argues.

The core dysfunction might be the narcissist's unwillingness to change. Researcher Satoris Howes writes, "When most people find that their actions have resulted in an undesirable outcome, they tend to rethink their decisions and ask, "What should I have done differently to avoid this outcome?" When narcissists face the same situation, however, their refrain is, "No one could have seen this coming!"

Narcissistic abuse is what the narcissist creates instead of admitting things aren't working, that they screwed up, that they aren't all that. They do what it takes to win the public opinion contest. In a competitive society, it's all about whom everyone believes.

That speaker of facts, the victim, loses their grip on their truth, reality, and themselves. Arabi writes, "One day, narcissistic abuse will be a common terminology. It may not be in our time, but maybe our children will reap the benefits of a society able to recognize abuse that goes beyond the physical."

They possibly can't connect to the hurt they are inflicting; they enjoy it or think they have the right to harm others. "Regardless of their professional background, prestige or status, the majority of narcissists share a devastating lack of empathy, a grandiose sense of entitlement and an unwillingness to change their destructive behaviour regardless of their station in life," writes Arabi.

Narcissism is also on the rise. "Almost two-thirds of recent college students are above the mean 1979-1985 narcissism score, a 30% increase," said Jean Twenge in 2008. This reduction shows up in both reduced empathetic concern and reduced perspective-taking, which are the most central components of empathy.

As parents, they destroy the next generation. Arabi writes, "Children are not taught to pursue what makes them happy, but rather that they must pursue what makes their parents happy and if they don't, they will be put down, abused, and verbally, emotionally, and psychologically berated."

"Narcissistic parents put down your goals, downplay your achievements, remind you constantly of what you have yet to achieve, and put you down as much as possible so you never have a sense of worthiness and security that all children have a right to have as soon as they are born," Arabi writes. They hate to see you happy – unless it's due to an accomplishment they can show off to others.

In organizations, narcissists get the promotions. According to Satoris Howes in 2020, “Narcissists often rise in the ranks within organizations because they exude total confidence, take credit for the success of others and deflect blame from themselves when something goes wrong.”

For society’s sake, progress doesn’t happen when, collectively, no one can face the fact that they’ve made a mistake and that change is required. Progress doesn’t happen without change, and the narcissist can’t do it.

David Irvine writes in **Becoming Real** that we must “do the next right thing rather than take the path of least resistance.” Irvine says, “The call of authenticity goes beyond self-centeredness and narcissism to a commitment to the community. Citizens realize that an obligation accompanies every right and that every entitlement comes with responsibility.”

Maybe we can stop the abuse, especially since we can see it coming before it becomes commonplace. We can prepare and support parents, clarify and document rights, and improve and mitigate systems and institutions to bend the curve and crush the rising problem of individual superiority.

Threatening War

A competitive mindset leads to the threat of war. Wars can be physical, chemical, or reputational—you name something that anyone might want, and there’s a war waiting to be had.

With the pandemic, it’s the third world war, and it’s microbial. As we’ve seen the pandemic bring out both the best and the worst of people, we see how we are all in it together and yet how we are still worlds apart on the same planet.

Never before has the government had more competition for their support. A lack of social cohesion means you can’t find the one thing that the majority want – you have to find the many things that add up to enough support – and a minority can be enough to rule.

The tail can wag the dog when there is too much diversity in a society when the “majority” is less than half. To combat group competition, a change of language helps. “Subtle linguistic shifts from “a group of people” to “people in a group” – can affect mind perception” and can “change the amount of sympathy felt toward victimized groups,” argues Erin Cooley in 2017.

Professor Thomas Piketty says, “History shows us that if we want society to be cohesive, peaceful, and harmonious, we must prevent inequality from becoming too high.” According to the World Inequality Report, since 2015, the wealthiest 1% have owned more than the other 99%.

A group of people – the oligarchy – are the absolute few privileged on the planet. Traditionally, that is a precursor of war. Nationalism has been used to direct people’s attention from social problems to external countries. “Competition between countries, nationalism, is often used by elites to make people forget class conflict and instead focus on national identity,” Picketty says.

“What could go wrong? Beyond war, inflation, the end of the technology/productivity wave, and financial collapse, we think the most potent and short-term threat would be societies demanding a more equitable share of the wealth,” said three Citigroup consultants in a 2005 memo.

The demands of society get met. “What gets rid of the Depression is World War II,” says economic historian Suresh Naidu. “The governments of the societies involved just kind of take over production.”

As a result of the wars, capital is destroyed. “One-third is in the form of bombed cities, one-third is from inflation that destroys the public debt, which the citizens lent to finance the war, and a third is from new rules, like rent controls, nationalizations, and financial regulations.”¹¹ Jobs are created to replace all that was lost – and more.

After the creation of the atomic bomb, scientists realized that the only end to competition was mutual destruction. If the next world war is atomic, no one will survive. Yet, the lure of being the ultimate winner might be what prevents everyone from backing down, especially those without the means to seek it.

“The existence of a communist alternative scared the capitalist world into thinking that if it didn’t address some of the basic inequality issues, they would lose the battle for ideas,” says Professor Francis Fukuyama, a political economist at Stanford University. The world takes you seriously when you can annihilate it.

Today, we have drones armed with weapons of accurate destruction. We have the Panama papers that name specific people who’ve taken advantage of it for their purposes. The Occupy Movement is organized to rally for change. Typically, one charismatic leader can turn collective pain toward a shared, specific enemy, and then there’s a war.

Warren Evans, Sherriff Detroit, broke the law when he stopped all mortgage foreclosure sales in his county. He says that people don’t act “until things get so bad that they can do nothing but protest. And then these are called revolutions.”

Fragile self-esteem isn’t good for the ladder it inevitably creates. Under threat, our social comparison activity is about downward evaluation and upward contacts, “the former ameliorating self-esteem and the latter enabling a person to improve his or her situation and simultaneously increase motivation and hope.”¹²

In Canada, Justin Trudeau became the second Trudeau Prime Minister. “As long as people refuse to see my true strengths, I’ll be able to keep winning without much resistance,” he says after winning the boxing match against Senator Patrick Brazeau. Less than a year later, Brazeau was expelled from the Conservative caucus following his arrest for domestic assault and sexual assault.

After ten years of Trudeau, we have a Canada with record-breaking homelessness, crime, food shelter reliance, immigration, and a reputation on the world stage so tarnished that we now need visas where freedom to travel used to exist. Civil unrest will undoubtedly topple the government if it doesn’t spark a war.

If putting down those below you and kissing up to those above you doesn’t work, actively sabotaging the competition is always possible. In 2011, researchers found that in organizational groups, “introducing competition enhances within-group efficiency but also generates costly between-group conflict.”¹³

A performance appraisal system becomes detrimental when workers have access to a simple option to sabotage each other. With opportunities to comment on colleagues and evaluate employees and only so much money for raises, sabotage is survival to some. The more we work in teams, the more constant the options are to take someone else down, shift the blame and hide the evidence.

Practical Reflection

Maybe we can be more precise and targeted when we revolutionize society to rebalance equality. It's evolution when you lead change and direct how you plan to get there.

Equality is not merely something to long for but something that can end wars. "When the women were wounded, they were able to absorb their pain without passing it on. But when the men were wounded, they needed to make someone pay. That's what fed the cycle of war," writes Melinda Gates.

There comes a time when change is no longer possible. It's too little too late. Whether or not it begins with the current crumbling, the revolution is about everyone getting up and moving to something else.

Controlling Labor

After the war, the East and West took different journeys to rebuild. By 1981, as Ronald Reagan put it, "Japanese production of automobiles is almost twice as great per worker as it is in America. We were once the greatest producer of automobiles, producing more than the rest of the world combined. That is no longer true."

Behind the difference was how they treated labour. In the United States, automotive companies treated labour as a cost, not an asset. In contrast, Germany and Japan followed a different model in which workers sat on company boards and had more say.

Including labour – the people who do the work on the front lines - in decisions gave those companies a significant advantage. "They were able to use that expertise and increase their efficiency and eventually gain market share from US companies," says global economic analyst Rana Foroohar.

One such method was Toyota's Lean Manufacturing. Eventually, this methodology came to the States and was copied by others who aimed for the same results. They followed all the practices and produced all the appropriate artifacts, yet they failed to produce the same results. They could not realize the difference accounting makes, leaving labour as a cost and not recognizing the value of the smallest voice.

Consultants don't get ahead by pointing out leadership mistakes; they get ahead by praising them and introducing a new concept designed to correct the gaps of understanding and execution in the last idea. Re-engineering emerges, as does the need to provide the right amount of authority to the right people. The word "empowerment" is introduced, but no one gives up any power, and no new power is created, so no power ever changes hands. Finally, technology and automation aim to eliminate the need or ability for anyone to think, innovate, or be themselves.

In Lean Manufacturing, one practice is the power of employees to stop the line. In Japan, a worker pulls the cord, and the line stops when the defect is corrected. In America, that line is laden with dust. Parts are forced on when they aren't right, skipped when not there, and made due if they are beyond repair. The line must go on, they say in the West.

The worker's voice, which is supposed to matter, is useless when the worker is trained to show up and shut up. The ironic part is that America is assumed to be free, liberal, and full of ideas, whereas the East is supposed to be compliant, loyal, and happy, being nothing but a cog. What's wrong with this impression?

States-side, strikes result. Instead of freeing the worker and their ideas, voices, cognitive value and human worth, the government decides to increase the value of assets to increase investment and create jobs. “When they adopted these policies, it was very clear they would increase inequality,” says Columbia University economics professor Joseph Stiglitz. “But the magnitude of increase was much larger.”

Reagan responded by ordering the air traffic controllers back to work, and if they didn’t, he’d build the entire industry without them. In a **Tale of Two Cities**, Basil Rathbone says, “You are a humanitarian, aren’t you? You think that one person is as good as another. A naïve notion so contradicted by the facts.”

The West is coming to the light as individual CEOs consciously do things differently. “Everyone craves meaning and purpose in life, but few people find such fulfillment at work,” writes John MacKay of Whole Foods. MacKay is a Westerner, and Whole Foods is a grocery chain in North America.

In **The Moment of Lift**, Melinda Gates writes, “Any dominance is harmful: It means society is governed by a false hierarchy where power and opportunity are awarded according to gender, age, wealth, and privilege—not according to skill, effort, talent, or accomplishments.”

Ralf Heyen, Director of Human Resources at Faber-Castell in Germany, says, “We know that the more you give your people a say, the more they help the company to win.”

Lorena Lardini, a partner at a clothing company that manufactures clothing for high-end labels, says, “What’s the point of being richer? Really? What’s the point of being richer? Working next to smiling people is important, as it is where you have a human relationship. You have one life, and you have to enjoy it.”

It’s up to you to decide what to do about any oppression, domination, or silence you face. You can go along and risk one day forgetting that you were merely seeking the path of least resistance when you forget what you were resisting. You can also decide that when it’s your turn at the top, you’ll do it differently, only to discover that the constraints you couldn’t see from the outside are real and constraining.

Or you can decide, like Webber might have, that you aren’t going along with that game. You can go along and never forget that you once valued equality, respect, and fairness.

All babies do, so it’s likely that you once did if you now have a list of people entitled to those three things and those not. The ones who have done you wrong do not deserve it, and just like that, you’ve lost that value of equality, respect, and fairness in the name of growing up and learning lessons.

You can hold on to that horrible feeling of what it’s like to be dominated, oppressed and silenced and never wish it on anyone. Horror of all horrors, to be the one doing it.

Those who might have won a point have not won the contest because they are playing their game, and you are playing yours. You only lose when you join them in their competition. That’s what happens when you let them define success for you.

The choice is yours. You can hang on to your assumptions, rationalizations, and judgments or keep them from continually recruiting proof that you are right and everyone needs to know. Ask not what you know for sure but how you can know for sure.

The Fastest Network

Living too fast for today will keep you living in the past, unable to adapt to life's ever-changing demands. When you rely on the fastest network all the time, you might miss the beauty, joy, and fragrance of life.

The fastest network of all time is your automatic unconscious. The part of you that lives and breathes and makes up excuses for you so fast that you don't notice what they are created to avoid. If you'd choose distraction over processing your emotions, perhaps you'd phrase it as "I'm too busy." It sounds much better than being afraid of the pain, the ambiguity, and the truths that may emerge because then you'd have to do something about it, and it takes much less energy to keep on keeping on.

Alice Miller writes, "It is not our feelings that make us a danger to ourselves and our environment; it is the dissociation of those feelings caused by our fear of them."

Emotions are a rich source of personal information. Unlike any other information you'd read about in a book or get from someone else, this information coded in your reactions and responses is uniquely individual. You might think that the past is in the past, but you can't escape your mind, and that's where the past is written and waiting to be activated.

Pushing the information away will only allow it to fester and amplify. If it doesn't show up in out-of-proportion reactions to routine events, it might lead to cancer or other diseases related to your unprocessed emotions and stress. You will blow up with an outburst at the wrong time or cells that stop functioning normally.

An Accumulation of History

Human beings are not born finished, nor are they dictated products that will unfold according to plan. Instead, we are highly malleable.

You are a program that is being written and influenced. Like the programs you know, the one you have may be the best available, yet a better version awaits.

As a result of our experiences, perceptions, the people who explained them to us, and the resulting sense of it all, we carry the past into our futures. Our brains build networks of synapses, and what fires together wires together.

With any given decision, you have a map of well-travelled highways and terrain that has never been mapped before. When you think you've arrived at a decision, you are up to several seconds late to the game. Researchers report that "when the subject's decision reached awareness, it had been influenced by unconscious brain activity for up to 10 seconds."¹⁴

Now, more than ever, time is of the essence. That means we are increasingly on the highways built by experience regarding our decisions. Yesterday is leading today, even while today looks entirely different.

Practical Reflection

When we use the past to inform our futures, we can get a lot wrong – especially when the future looks less and less like the past, even if we are so short-sighted that we fail to see all the differences and the consequences of getting it wrong. It's simply that we are acting too quickly to notice that we are acting myopically stupid.

Fear and Pain

As babies, we come into this world with pure potential. The potential is easily damaged, limited, or impaired, even by those with the best intentions. According to physician and author Gabor Maté, “Get the first three years right, you can relax. You will practice remedial parenting for decades if you don't get the first three years right.”

Many people believe that we arrive with DNA that dictates everything that will happen. Still, the more science we learn, the more implausible the mechanistic theories we learn in biology classes. They admit that the life experiences of your grandparents are inherited, and of course, those of your immediate parents, and that your own life experiences from your first breath might matter to your life as an adult more than what's written in those genes.

Your brain comes as a self-coding device. Information about the environment is absorbed and travels up the spinal column to the brain. This sensory collected information is vast, as you might imagine. To deal with it quickly the first center to deal with that information is the reptilian brain, which drives our most basic instincts.

We run and react before thinking about whether we should because it helps us survive. However, we aren't at the top of the food chain because we are the fastest, most substantial, or most significant. We are at the top because we can stop and think.

The reptilian brain is the oldest and bottom part of the brain. Next, though, we have a second brain. The limbic system is the brain's center and the part where our deepest emotions are seated.

Third and finally, the neocortex is the brain's rational part and is also the newest. The prefrontal cortex, which houses the executive functioning of planning and forecasting, doesn't develop generally with attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder. Lacking impulse control and the ability to focus on demand, sufferers have difficulty maintaining employment, relationships, and finances.

Trauma gets encoded. It doesn't lead to conscious strategies but predetermined behaviour. Our responses to trauma and abuse are driven by the limbic and reptilian parts of our brains, not the neocortex.

In terms of parenting, getting it right has much to do with presence. You can feel if someone is present or not. Children can feel it, and it shifts their personalities.

Enforcing a time-out when the child has misbehaved is a common practice today. Yet, Gabor Maté says it teaches that the “relationship is conditional and unstable and unreliable and not available when they need you the most.” According to him, “Trauma is not pain and suffering. Trauma is being alone with your pain and suffering. It isn't what happens to you; it's what happens inside you.”

Whether you are a master of attention and focus or at the other end of the spectrum with a Ritalin prescription, it's worth tuning into where your energy may be depleted with unnecessary fears and

Practical Reflection

anticipated pains. R.D. Laing said, “There are three things human beings are afraid of: death, other people, and their minds.”

When we lived in caves, what was fearful and painful could kill us. If you think of the instinct to run or react like the warning light on your car’s dashboard, it is designed to go off and get you in life-protection mode very early. The brain is built the same by today's standards, but you know better.

It won’t kill you.

It might annoy you. It might upset, discomfort, anger, rash, or other things, but it likely won’t kill you. You have your consciousness to catch you in the act and question your behaviour.

It might be all you need. Marketing guru Seth Godin says, “Every successful person I know has a way to control their lizard brain.” Ritalin can get the organ functioning correctly if it isn’t doing it already, but it takes a human mind to pay attention to motivations and stay on course.

It was a prick with a tack that sparked such insight and made me aware of my problem with red shoes. In the 1900s, Dr. Edouard Claparède was treating a woman who had suffered a brain injury. The injury prevented her from processing new information, and she could not form new memories. For instance, he had to introduce himself at every appointment, as she had no memory of previous interactions with him.

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.

Claparède postulated her brain must have warned her. Her brain learned what might be coming and swerved to avoid it. Memory was not required. Learning happened without any conscious indication that it could or did.

Previous pain is encoded in your brain, and action is taken before you become aware of it. Like my aversion to red shoes, painful experiences create future avoidances that never enter your consciousness. When your brain makes your decisions for you, you don’t notice until it becomes unavoidable, like your body has to come out of autopilot mode.

“Gut feelings magnify perceptions that the brain's emotional centers find important and relay through the hypothalamus. Pain in the gut is one signal the body uses to send messages that are difficult for us to ignore. Thus, pain is also a mode of perception,” explains Gabor Maté.

Before reaching for that Tylenol, you might want to decode the message.

Social Rejection

How does a prick of the skin compare to the pain of rejection? Or of failure? For many human beings, it is about social roles. To them, relationships are everything. In 1992, Peggy Thoits found that “85% of respondents indicated one or more social roles as self-descriptors to a five-item “Who am I?” questionnaire. Today, that percentage might be much higher in a world with social media.

A pinprick causes minor lasting damage or pain, yet it's enough to stop the action. Today, researchers also know that social rejection is felt like physical pain. The experience of social exclusion in the brain recruits the same areas that code the somatosensory components of physical pain.

Worse, physical pain lessens over time, but when you associate the maliciousness of the action with its result, it's longer lasting than any physical pain. "Although people can become accustomed to the pain of an unintentional harm, the malice behind an intentional pain keeps it stinging," wrote Kurt Gray and Daniel Wegner in 2008.

As a test of self-control, small children are given one marshmallow now, and if they can wait two minutes, they can have a second. The children who waited were followed into their later years and were measured to be more successful, a trait attributed to their early self-control. On the other hand, the children who couldn't or didn't wait lagged their peers.

At least three researchers have postulated that it wasn't self-control that was the determining factor but environmental stability. "In addition to self-control, children's wait times are modulated by an implicit rational decision-making process that considers environmental reliability," report Celeste Kidd, Holly Palmeri, and Richard N. Aslin in 2013.

If you come from an environment where that second marshmallow is doubtful, you won't wait, nor would you find it rational to do so, even if you can. Like the children in my house, you take while the taking is good. Why would you wait if there isn't enough to go around, or the perception of such?

Those children expected the odds of the researcher returning, whether it was right or not. When we don't expect the odds, uncertainty about the probability itself is termed ambiguity. Researchers have discovered a fear of ambiguity, even if the preference is toward bad likelihoods.

In an attempt to get to the heart of this fear, they've discovered the fear of ambiguity might be a fear of negative evaluation by others. Researchers found that "only one of the explanations that have been proposed, the other-evaluation hypothesis, was supported."¹⁵ Apparently, "ambiguity aversion completely disappears is fear of negative evaluation by others disappears."¹⁶

When you know the odds, and so does everyone, you do what everyone would do. When you don't know the odds, you aren't scared of not knowing; you are afraid of doing what other people wouldn't do and casting yourself out alone, on your own. In an interview, the question about how you deal with ambiguity might be about what you do when you are the solitary voice around the table.

You had big dreams and ideas before you cared about what anyone thought. "Pursuing excellence can look like disowning your people," writes Melinda Gates. 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?

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 – and that includes with your social groups. Steve Flowers and Bob Stahl said, "Healthy shame signals that you've done something wrong. Toxic shame says you are something wrong."

People don't always know when they don't belong or when they make everyone else feel uncomfortable, but they know when they are targets – they may not know why. “People eliciting more negative emotions in their colleagues were more likely to be the targets of counterproductive workplace behaviour such as rudeness and teasing,” researchers argued in 2010¹⁷. Workplaces can be no different than the schoolyard; adults are no more insightful than children.

Gabor Maté writes, “somehow people are trained – some more than others – into unknowingly taking care of other people's emotional needs and minimizing their own. They hide their pain and sadness, even from themselves.” Adult women with undiagnosed autism have long learned to camouflage their differences in public.

No one wants to feel negative emotions, so we turn on the source of those negative emotions until their vacancy alleviates us. If that person makes you feel bad about yourself or envious, make it horrible for that person. That person will either change or leave. Quitting or staying is a process of rejection that becomes internalized or rejected.

The good news is that your brain can rewire its response. Or rather, a rat's brains can. They learned to fear it when treated to a shock and noise combination. Removing the shock, they initially feared the noise on its own. After repeated exposure, the nervous system suppresses the response to fear. Lessons about pain, unlearned.

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 could eventually overcome her fear of shaking his hand.

Preference Repeated

While conversion therapy for homosexuality finally moves towards becoming illegal, it's acceptable to teach and train people with autism to function in a neurotypical world instead of broadening what is considered normal. **Too Sane for this World** documents non-neurotypicals who have decided that fitting in and conforming to expectations wasn't working for them, and they didn't appreciate the implications that they are wrong and the world is right.

Psychosomatic illness is actual, and while it's all in their minds, it's not all in their heads. “Against all logic, people's subconscious selves choose to be crippled by convulsions or wheelchair dependence rather than experience the anguish that exists inside of them,” argues neurologist Suzanne O'Sullivan in 2017. Remember, it's not a conscious choice, as the choice happens long before the information enters the brain's rational part.

Maybe it depends on your core desires. Core desires manifest in what we all know of as your personality. As Robert Green writes, “The personality we project onto the world plays a substantial role in our success.”

According to Green, the false self is an “accumulation of all the voices you have internalized from other people of what you should be doing or have.” The Should Police. It begins externally and becomes internal before attempting to appear on the exterior.

Practical Reflection

In contrast, “your true self emanates from your uniqueness, and it communicates through sensations and powerful desires that seem to transcend you.” Green declares, “In following this voice, you realize your true potential.” David Posen argues that “stress comes from trying to be something you are not.”

You accumulated and internalized other people’s voices because there was a time when that was the preferable thing to do. Times have changed, and your personality can, too. It’s a matter of discarding those voices that are no longer preferable. According to David Irvine, you must “notice what depletes you and what nourishes you and act in accordance.”

With personality and temperament, people get trapped with labels and the illusion that these things are fixed. David Posen writes, “You can learn how to do it, whether it comes naturally to you or not.” Carl Jung says, “I am not what happened to me; I am what I choose to become.” If they’ve called you an introvert, and you wish you were laughing at the party's center, unleash your inner extrovert.

“When psychologists talk about personality, they’re referring to the patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving that make each of us unique.” When we come by that uniqueness, we tend to stick to it, even if it’s not ideal. As Dr. Joe Dispenza says, “How we think and how we feel become biologically stuck in the past.”

Emotions are chemical consequences of past experiences. An experience produces a chemical cocktail that creates a particular feeling; memorize the event, and you can experience the emotion on demand. Humans might be the only species to produce whatever chemical cocktail they desire simply by recalling the experience. In this way, our personalities become fixed because of the mental loop we are creating, experiencing and habituating.

It seems your preference is to share your preferences as much as you can since each time you do, you get a reward in the form of dopamine. In 2012, researchers found that “Self-disclosure was strongly associated with...dopamine. Moreover, individuals were willing to forgo money to disclose about the self.”¹⁸ Therapists have known this for decades and charge more than two pennies for your thoughts.

Patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving result from past experiences that you identify as preferences, even if they may not be the patterns you’d consciously choose for yourself or anyone else you love. Those preferences are hard-wired. It’s not a comfort zone because it’s comfortable – it’s a comfort zone because comfort isn’t always soft and luxurious but is always expected and familiar.

In the presence of other people, it seems we’d rather preserve our sense of individuality than order our favourite beer. In 2000, Dan Ariely wrote, “Individual choices in a group context are aimed at satisfying goals of information gathering and self-presentation in the form of uniqueness,” which “sometimes results in choices that undermine personal satisfaction and increase regret.”

While we seem to use preference to demonstrate individuality, we also choose those who are most like ourselves. Researchers provide the example that “people seem disproportionately likely to marry people whose names are similar to their own.”¹⁹

What you see in others says more about you than about them. “How individuals generally perceive others is a stable individual difference that reveals much about the perceiver's personality,” according to researchers in 2010.²⁰ As others put it, “People tailor their judgments of others to affirm their self-worth.”²¹

Practical Reflection

Maybe the preferences themselves don't matter all that much; it's only that you made it. In 2005, researchers stumbled upon choice blindness. "Participants made choices between presented face pairs based on attractiveness, while we covertly manipulated the relationship between choice and outcome they experienced. Participants failed to notice conspicuous mismatches between their intended choice and the outcome they were presented with. Still, they offered introspectively derived reasons for choosing the way they did."²²

Your history accumulates and turns into your personality, whether it's working for you as an adult or not. You can change it when you understand how it appeared so fixed in the first place.

An Automatic People

Insufficient attention, such as abuse, causes fear, pain, and loss to become deeply embedded in our psyche and manifest in our behaviour. You may have been lucky to escape such experiences. But what about no attention? Parents suddenly have to work, and no one is there to play with the baby. Will the baby grow up without any repercussions?

Orphanages in Romania and monkeys raised without a warm presence demonstrated that babies are not okay. Studies have shown that they need not just physical presence but attunement.

In 1988, Bowlby proved that "the craving for attachment or emotional connectedness is an innate drive, independent of the craving for physical nourishment."²³ He further demonstrated that caregivers' responses to the need for emotional bonding are essential to healing social and emotional development.

Neglect deprives a child of attunement. A defenceless child—and a developing brain—needs to know that it's safe and provided for while it does this job of growing. According to attachment theory, lacking a nurturer who provides this requirement of growth results in developmental problems.

When children don't feel this emotional connection, they become avoidant. They function under a false mask, pretending they can get along without it and don't need it. On the outside, appearances indicate one independent baby, but the mask doesn't fool biology.

The lack of attention and neglect causes damage in adolescence and adulthood if it misses the opportunity to be corrected in puberty. For children who experience early life stress such as abuse or violence, they are two and a half times more likely to experience massive depressive disorder before age 18. Poverty, illness or injury, and natural disasters are not the types of stress implicated, as you might imagine, but attention.

Remember it or not, your history isn't left in the past.

Self-Induced Sickness

You don't have to remember your childhood as abusive or neglectful to have endured dysfunctional development, either. "Many people are blocked from self-knowledge and personal growth by the myth they feel compelled to hold on to, of having had a "happy childhood," writes Gabor Maté in **When the Body Says No**. "It is a sensitive matter to raise the possibility that the way people have been conditioned to live their lives may contribute to their illness," he writes, yet "there is no true responsibility without awareness."

As a child, I was often told to “stand up taller” and “put your shoulders back.” I tried, but I kept failing. They attempted to correct my posture and presence with force and control. Force and control stem from stress, and stress is passed along to the subject in question.

“When we live by the stress hormones, we will always try to force the outcome. We’ll always try to push to make it happen,” says Dr. Joe Dispenza. “Stress is when your brain and body are knocked out of balance.”

Instead of projecting confidence and enthusiasm, I stared at the ground, depressed and not knowing what was supposed to be so great about life. In authenticity, my body betrayed my thoughts. When we need someone to ask us, “How are you feeling?” and no one does, we must ask ourselves.

If I’m feeling down, I look down to the ground, at my feet, and my spine curves appropriately while my shoulders round inward. If I’m feeling happy and hopeful, I look up, throw my shoulders back, straighten my spine and greet your gaze.

As do you. You can stand taller and make your outer world your inner world, but only if you intentionally take over your mind and its programming. Otherwise, you confuse inner awareness and outer expression, forcing yourself into stress.

You can consciously change the channels. “Each time you overcome those automatic habits, you will become greater than the program,” writes Dr. Joe Dispenza.

Denial is not an effective strategy. Ty Tashiro says that “attempting to remove emotion from daily interactions does not minimize its effects, but amplifies consequences because other people expect certain emotional responses.”

A tie between personality and cancer began with melanoma patients. In 1984, a study including melanoma patients “demonstrated that people can experience emotional stresses with measurable physical effects on their systems – while managing to sequester their feelings in a place completely beyond conscious awareness.”

The melanoma patients introduced what’s known as the Type C personality. These people are “extremely co-operative, patient, passive, lacking assertiveness and accepting...suppresses or represses ‘negative’ emotions, particularly anger, while struggling to maintain a strong and happy façade.”

More recently, Gabor Maté writes, “In many people with malignancy, there seemed to be an automatic denial of psychic or physical pain and uncomfortable emotions, like anger, sadness or rejection.”

Pancreatic cancer shows up in people who feel “responsibility to the extreme, either for everyone or for nothing,” says Caroline Myss.

With breast cancer, “research has suggested for decades that women are more prone to develop breast cancer if their childhoods were characterized by emotional disconnection from their parents or other disturbances in their upbringing; if they tend to repress emotions, particularly anger; if they lack nurturing social relationships in adulthood; and if they are altruistic compulsively caregiving types,” writes Maté.

Practical Reflection

“Cancer was most apt to occur in those women with a ‘helplessness-prone personality’ or some sense of frustration which could not be resolved in the preceding six months,” writes Maté. “Dependent men were more likely to develop a number of diseases, including prostate and other cancers.”

With lung cancer, “emotional repression works synergistically with smoking in the causation of lung cancer. The more severe the repression, the less the smoke damage required to result in cancer.”

Self-induced sickness doesn’t stop with cancer. With multiple sclerosis, an autoimmune disease, “A study in 1958 found that in nearly 90 percent of the cases, “before the onset of symptoms...patients experienced traumatic life events that had threatened their ‘security system.’”

Gabrielle, who has scleroderma, says, “I had read in different articles that people who come down with scleroderma are those who’ve always had to feel in control.”

“People with ALS seemed to have two lifelong patterns distinguishing them: rigidly competent behaviour – that is, the inability to ask for or receive help, and the chronic exclusion of so-called negative feelings,” writes Maté.

Betty Ford might have stumbled upon the recipe for alcoholism: “I was measuring myself against impossible ideals and coming up short.”

“The fundamental problem is not the external stress, such as the life events quoted in the studies, but an environmental conditioned helplessness that permits neither of the normal responses of fight or flight. The resulting internal stress becomes repressed and, therefore, invisible. Eventually, having unmet needs or having to meet the needs of others is no longer experienced as stressful. It feels normal. One is disarmed,” writes Maté.

“For those habituated to high levels of internal stress since early childhood, it is the absence of stress that creates unease, evoking boredom and a sense of meaninglessness.” He points out, “What defines stress for each of us is a matter of personal disposition and, even more, of personal history.”

If cancer is subconsciously induced or triggered, addiction is more of a conscious choice. When it comes to the reasons for addiction, Maté writes, “universally, the answers are: “It helped me escape emotional pain, helped me deal with stress, gave me peace of mind, a sense of connection with others, a sense of control.” Such answers reveal that addiction “originates in a human being’s desperate attempt to solve a problem.”

Your stress response protects you, but when ignored or broken, it leaves you with nothing. The stressed person puts up with it, ignores it, or thinks they are coping adequately until the connection between a lack of ease in reality and disease in the body is made or manifested.

Othering Violence

In **The Moment of Lift**, Melinda Gates writes, “Overcoming the need to create outsiders is our greatest challenge.” Neale Donald Walsch writes in **The Essential Path** that “the only difference between ourselves and the other is that our actions are forgivable.”

What’s counterintuitive is what privileged people think of their privilege. “Rationally speaking, it would make sense that the more of something you have, the more inclined you would be to share it with

others. But that's not what our research and a lot of other research seems to find," says psychologist Paul Piff.

In Piff's experiments, the coin flip determines which player would be rich or poor. Within a couple of minutes, dynamics start to crystalize. Rich players became more dominant and ate more pretzels. When moving their pieces around the board, they become louder. They started talking about how well they were doing and belittling their opponent.

After the game, when asked about why they won the game, "You can imagine the rich players would say, "Well, I won the game because of that flip of the coin, and I have two times the advantage." But none - not one - of the rich players attributed their inevitable success in this game to that force of luck that randomly got them that privileged position in the first place," says Piff. "When we watch patterns of human interactions, people who feel entitled and deserving of their success are more willing to privilege their interests above the interests of other people and often engage in ways that undermine other people's welfare so that they can get ahead."

The danger is that "the experience of being relatively better off than someone seems to affect everyone in the same way." As Piff puts it, "We translate perception and experiences of being better off than others materially to being better than others." This way of feeling justifies inequality; if you remember, it was not based on merit, talent, or hard work. It's just a lucky coin flip, and that's all the necessary incentive.

Personal decisions are not exempt from everything we can use to hurt people who aren't like us. "Shaming women for their sexuality is a standard tactic for drowning out the voices of women who want to decide whether and when to have children," writes Gates.

Sexual harassment is a term coined in 1975 by Lin Farley. She says, "It's about power in the workplace." Today, "it's an epidemic across all socioeconomic lines and every single profession, from waitresses to bankers, to teachers, to members of our military. It's everywhere," says Gretchen Carlson, herself a victim.²⁴

However, due to arbitration clauses in employment contracts, victims give up the right to sue and bring the crime to light. While the victim struggles with self-blame, her secrets hide the fact that it has little to do with her and that she's far from alone.

As Jackie Speier puts it, "This is a closed environment. Whenever you have a closed environment, whether it's in the military, on a college campus or here in the Congress of the United States, if you report, you become a pariah. Your career in this building is probably over."

Lin Farley talks about the damage the victims endure after the event, whether or not they report it. "What may seem minor has been in this woman's mind or psyche forever because even the minor stuff reminds the woman that she's just a sex object, and she's not going to be taken seriously."

Eliminating the violence that we inflict on the other is a matter of eliminating our biases. "Being a feminist means believing that every woman should be able to use her voice and pursue her potential and that women and men should all work together to take down the barriers and end the biases that still hold women back."

Practical Reflection

Parents unintentionally harm their children when they fix things for them too quickly, encourage them in one direction, discourage others, and value them for the bragging rights they generate.

In 2003, Michael Kernis argued, “Optimal self-esteem arises naturally from successfully dealing with life’s challenges, the operation of one’s core, true, authentic self as the source of input to behavioural choices, and relationships in which one is valued for whom one is, and not for what one achieves.”

It could be that your authentic self could not and did not survive your family of origin, no matter anyone’s best intentions. Being authentic comes with downsides, such as “promoting scorn or ridicule,” “encountering negative self-information,” and “exposing one’s vulnerabilities and sensitivities.”

Dispositional authenticity “can be defined as the unobstructed operation of one’s core or true self in one’s daily enterprise.” As Kernis and Brian Goldman wrote in 2006, “the higher the individual’s dispositional authenticity, the more they were able to deal with self-threatening information in an aware and non-distorting manner, which, as it turns out, related to better overall psychological functioning, secure forms of high self-esteem and greater subjective wellbeing.”

When our confidence in our beliefs is undermined, we don’t tend to respond in ways that build bridges of understanding but rather double down on our position. “People whose confidence in closely held beliefs was undermined engaged in more advocacy of their beliefs (as measured by both advocacy effort and the intention to advocate) than did people whose confidence was not undermined,” report David Gal and Derek Rucker in 2010.

The violence of exclusion ends up hurting everyone, most critically the one pointing the finger and blocking the entry.

Selling Insecurity

There was a time in my life when I would have told you everything was going perfectly, or so I thought.

I’d worked hard to go after and get a job that would challenge me mentally while allowing me to live like a remote, rustic cottager. It was April. The snow had just melted. Driving to work one morning, I realized I could no longer read the road signs.

My optometrist handed me a new prescription and new contact lenses. I’d gone from -3.5 to -4.5.

In May, I went to -5.5.

In June, I went to -6.5, courtesy of a different optometrist. This doctor said I’d be legally blind by Christmas.

Handily, he also told me that there was a psychological profile on the people who got this disease, and although I didn’t fit the gender, I might want to investigate my Type-A tendencies.

“Get rid of that stress,” he told me.

What stress? I genuinely wondered. It was not a rhetorical question, but one that my life – defined by its current address and activities – would depend on answering.

The revelation that it was a disease induced by stress necessitated finding out what was stressing me out. The fact that it was attacking my vision made me question what I could not stand to see. The stress

Practical Reflection

link told me that somehow, I was doing this, and I was the one who had to stop it. I also knew that merely commanding myself would get nowhere.

I wondered where on the scale that correction was no longer an option. That's when I stumbled on the pivotal question: "What can I not stand to see?"

It was an acceptance of the fact that my body was helping me, not hurting me and that there might be greater intelligence or a cause-and-effect situation happening.

I looked out the window and knew what I didn't want to see.

This house I'd centralized my life around was purchased in the winter under a blanket of snow. I need to go no farther for most Canadians who understand what perils snow can hide.

However, I'd seen photos. The relator had told me that although there had been a torrential downpour, the driveway had been repaired.

Indeed, the driveway had been repaired, but not the damage it created when it left. Instead of a backyard lawn and wildflowers, I had a gravel pit. That vista was not one I wanted to see, but deeper, I didn't want to realize I'd been duped, not smart enough to ask a specific question, but to take it for granted.

I could not stand to see that gravel pit, that eyesore, yet I didn't have much time or money to deal with it. "No problem," my body said, "I can take care of that, and I don't even require your permission."

Taking back control, I ordered topsoil, spread grass seed, and spared my body from having to do my dirty work. It's one thing to realize the problem and then another to take action. Accepting responsibility for the problem and not owning the solution is flawed thinking. Insight alone is not always enough.

In July, I went to -7.5, watched my grass grow in, and have maintained the same prescription since.

I allowed myself to be tricked by the woman I hired to help me buy a home; her language left an intentional, flawed impression. When someone says, "The driveway is fixed," I imagine a hauler scraping back the gravel to where it was. I do not imagine the far more economical 'solution' of ordering and spreading a new load.

It was my fault, as I realized and accepted. Buyer beware. Everyone knows you aren't supposed to buy a home in winter, and you're never supposed to trust a salesperson.

As Jean Kilbourne says in **The Illusionists**, "A person who feels happy and secure isn't going to be a perfect consumer because that person isn't going to be looking for products to shore up the self-image or to feel better about oneself."

Advertising will tell you that whiter is better, or the reverse, depending on what you have. The right skin colour is where power comes from if you don't have the right shade. They sell whitening creams to those who aren't ivory by birth. For those that are white, they shame you for your impoverished existence and sell you tanning creams to make it look like you can afford to play in the sun without a care in the world – with creams for those wrinkles and polishes for those teeth. Unilever purchased the ice cream brand Ben & Jerry's the same day it bought the weight-loss brand Slimfast.

Practical Reflection

“The real point is to turn these children into consumers at a very young age. If you can eroticize shopping in childhood, then you will get these people lined up at the malls for the rest of their lives,” says Jean Kilbourne. “What they’re doing is conditioning girls at incredibly young ages to feel that how they look is what’s most important about them, that their lovability depends on their sex appeal, and that they can buy this look and this sex appeal if they choose the right products and try hard enough.”

“If you take away that self-loathing that women have, then you will see industries all over the globe go bankrupt. So, what I think young women need to understand is that you are being exploited and you are being manipulated. You are being seduced into hating yourself to generate astronomical profits that keep a very few very wealthy,” says Gail Dines.

You’ve been under the impression of conversion therapy – if you were different, then people would like you. Will Rogers says, “Advertising is the art of convincing people to spend money they don’t have for something they don’t need.”

Self-induced sickness is a result of internalizing violence done to you because you are the other. You want to belong, and you don’t, but you try, and you buy, and it will be the end of you, your savings, and your wealth. It might even take your physical and mental health too.

The Reliable Doctrine

One day on the radio, I heard a transgender man talk about how he wanted to stay home and raise his kids without it being a big deal. The fact that it’s a deal is news to me, but that wasn’t the reporter’s point. “Dude,” I said to the radio, “if you’d kept your gender of origin, it would be such a nonissue; the feminists would be irate that you are on the air.”

I wonder why you are on the air. I believe it’s because the radio station set you up to make a listener question, if not consciously. Messages are sent between the lines as much as with air time. You got the words, but they sent the message—why did you change your body if your mentality stays the same?

You should do what you want; it’s your money, time, and body, and the surgeons must work. However, it looks painful on so many levels.

It might be easier to change the doctrine to fit the people than the people to fit the doctrine. We need fighters to do that, and it seems you can endure what it takes.

We all come into this world with a list of what we can do with some defaults already checked off. What boxes are already checked off depends much on the environment into which you are born; of course, it’s all about you.

The Domination of the Environment

On my first day at one professional office, I was shocked to hear my direct manager and my peer in a verbal fight and slightly horrified when it ended in my peer telling my supervisor to “Fuck off.”

If that wasn’t enough, the worst was that I was the only one expressing anything other than calm, if many were doing it out of sheer willpower. Always the misfit, I got involved.

Practical Reflection

Pulling my peer aside, I was not surprised to hear her say, "I'm not normally ever like this."

The work environment is called culture. Human Resources are usually assigned to "doing something about culture." If leaders understood how powerful this force is on human behaviour, they wouldn't be so quick to give it away.

"Culture can account for up to half of the difference in the operating profit between two organizations in the same business," says Harvard Business School James Heskett.

Based on his research, Dan Ariely says that he "used to think there were good people and bad people, and now there are just people."

Just people cued by environmental triggers. Marshall Goldsmith writes in **Triggers**, "Our environment is the most potent triggering mechanism in our lives – and not always for our benefit." As he describes, a trigger is any stimulus that reshapes our thoughts and actions.

Shaped Attitudes

In the Stanford Prison experiment, the inmates and the guards were typical run-of-the-mill keen university students, if also all white males with the privilege of an Ivy League university placement.

After the experiment, they'd never be the same. They changed so quickly and drastically during the experiment to fit their roles that the experiment was halted early.

The experiment was to try to understand how German guards could have oppressed Jewish prisoners. Today, Philip Zimbardo is known for exposing the "situational forces and group dynamics that can make monsters out of decent men and women."

Environment, not character.

First, save yourself when you learn and recognize these flags, like with the oxygen masks on the airplane. Robert Sutton says, "The more time that we spend knee-deep in nasty people, the more prone we are to become just like them."

One of the key findings was that it starts with taking away your name and giving you a number instead, as they do in Human Resources. It is also about telling you what to wear within a strict code, as they do in Human Resources. It's also about laying out the rules of privilege, rank, and order as they do in Human Resources.

It's not only about giving power and control of one human being to that of another, as they do in organizations with their hierarchies. It might be time to reimagine best practices in Human Resources, creating culture, and managing people.

The biggest problem with Human Resources is treating a human resource as they would a machine resource. A resource is something to be used as thoroughly and exhaustively as possible. However, humans don't want to be used, and certainly not to exhaustion.

Manufacturing is all about machines. When they wanted operators for those machines, they wanted human machines who don't complain, take breaks, or need benefits. When you start with an attitude of machines, you don't see all the potential you are leaving on the floor, of ideas, of talent, of motivation, of skills. You only see the extra costs and the comparative fragility.

Practical Reflection

Over time and geography, attitudes change. Some organizations are built on the hearts of humans, just as there are organizations built on their backs; some countries value collaboration, just as there are those who see only the costs.

Every culture is different, and everyone says they have a good one, but clarity would be more helpful than judgment. Some will help you thrive, and others will feel like it's killing you.

No matter where you are, the brain's number one goal is survival. Its job is to keep you alive, which means caring for things like breathing, keeping your heart beating, and ensuring that your opinion always conforms to those around you.

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. To ensure that you don't upset everyone and they toss you out to fend for yourself, you go along with those around you.

When children are adopted into families that have cancer, the adopted children will express that cancer with the same propensity as any natural child – despite having different genetics. Being introduced into the family unit, where you learn perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes, shapes the cancer, not the genetics.

Walter 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 which line was the longest. Going around the circle, the people before you are in on the experiment, and you don't know it. They give what you see as obviously the wrong answer. Do you change your answer or stick with your original?

The participants changed their answers to match. Five or ten other respondents would first give the same, but the wrong answer. Then, the participant was asked for their answer. The subject yielded to the group 37% of the time, giving the incorrect but common answer.

When asked afterward why they had given wrong answers, they couldn't say why or accurately come close to estimating how often they had changed answers.

Because that's survival is the answer. "The most significant danger our species brings to the world is our inability to think with those who would think differently," write the authors of **Collaborative Intelligence**.

Brain scans reveal that your brain is active in two areas associated with coding subjective value. You aren't just saying a different answer; you are changing your mind to a different answer. Conformity happened without you realizing you had left something behind.

"Genes do dictate the basic organization, developmental schedule and anatomical structure of the human central nervous system, but it's left to the environment to sculpt and fine-tune the chemistry, connections, circuits, networks, and systems that determine how well we function," writes Gabor Maté.

You can design or choose your environment to help your performance in every way, or you can be a pinball in your life without realizing it. Triggers can be invisibly holding you back. If meaningful behaviour change has been difficult for you, it's worth considering your environment's impact on your efforts and attitudes.

Visual Impressions

First impressions are quick and permanent. Luckily, sometimes, they are right. In 2012, researchers found that subjects “accurately judged the age, gender, income, and attachment anxiety of shoe owners based solely on the pictures.”²⁵

From first impressions, even names can be guessed. “Facial appearance represents social expectations of how a person with a specific name should look,” researchers found in 2017.²⁶ They found that “both a social perceiver and a computer were able to accurately match a person’s name to his or her face.”

But relying on impressions, or at least, not realizing when you are making them, can go spectacularly wrong.

When we form first impressions, we are determining what kind of trust we should ascribe to a person. It seems that we believe that people cannot be both kind and competent, so we are assessing which one of those two dimensions fit best on the person we are meeting. First impressions answer the question, “Are you mean and able, or kind and incompetent?”

First, notice that we don’t believe that someone can be competent and kind. That might be the first mistake of allowing impressions to lead. Individual to individual, malevolence can be just as harmful as incompetence, so it’s good to know which one you are dealing with, if there is this dichotomy.

If you want to be seen as competent, be mean. Regarding leaders, it seems we’d prefer them to be mean rather than soft. Larissa Tiedens found in 2001 that “decisions about who should be granted status went to targets expressing anger versus targets expressing sadness.”

Choosing the angry to lead might reveal a longstanding gender bias rather than actual competency. Being wronged is the appropriate time to be angry, but many people are taught to internalize anger and produce sadness instead. As Osho says, “Anger is active sadness; sadness is inactive anger. They are not two things.” Women are indoctrinated to go one way, men the other.

Ty Tashiro writes, “Others probably perceived my facial expression as more dumbfounded than upset.” It results from expecting the high road from people and getting confronted with the low road. It’s more sadness than anger. It’s looking incompetent and kind instead of mean and able. Upon inspection, it appears that linking leadership capability to someone’s emotional expression might be weak and problematic, especially as we progress toward throwing off the patriarchy.

Worse than using facial expressions to pick our leaders, we use their wardrobes, precisely the colours they choose. In 2012, researchers discovered that wearing red, relative to blue and green, conveys the “perception of less earning and leadership potential,” which makes job applicants less likely to get hired. Please do not wear red to that interview, which could be why even Liberals, whose party colour is red, rarely are seen sporting their party’s true colours.

Sometimes, people manage impressions by handicapping themselves before a performance, so when they mess up, they have something to blame. Thomas Kolditz and Robert Arkin presented subjects’ problems that could be solved along with ones with no solution. As they wrote in 1982, subjects “who had worked on unsolvable problems chose the debilitating drug, but only when the experimenter witnessed the choice.” It’s all about providing a plausible excuse when you perform poorly.

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Self-sabotage isn't conscious, and it isn't meant to be. If you were aware it was happening, you would stop it, and the self-protection nature of it would fail. You would get hurt. It might hurt your ego, your reputation, or your sense of values.

2015, the History Channel aired season one of the reality series **Alone**. Ten men are left alone to survive in the wilderness of Northern Vancouver Island as autumn ends. One contestant calls to tap out after losing his Ferro rod, which is required to start fires.

"How could you lose something upon which your survival depended?" the other contestants ask him. I wanted to know why he tapped out while his fire burned and abundant wood lay around. "I couldn't keep it going forever," he says. Sometimes, maybe your body wants to go home, no matter what your mind has resolved. He didn't have to keep it going longer than the other nine.

The first handful of contestants fear they were the first to tap out, while the winner is dumbfounded that it's over. "Already?" Alan Kay asks.

The contestants had been told to prepare for a year; it was only day 56. "I was planning my spring garden," he jokes, \$500,000 richer with the win. As he's whisked back to civilization, he cast one last glance back at his camp, and I would have declared that was a forlorn look on his face, but that might be only my impression of his emotional state.

Impressions of emotions are things we also get wrong. In 1974, when subjects were asked to cross rickety or stable bridges, Donald Dutton and Arthur Aron found "evidence for heightened sexual attraction under conditions of high anxiety."

In plain terms, we confuse fear and sexual attraction because the physiological responses they produce are eerily similar. Feel the feel, then look at your environment to see what to call it. Your sweaty palms and racing heart aren't because you are scared on the bridge but because there's a possible sexual partner in the vicinity, and she just gave you her phone number.

If you have butterflies in your stomach and a stage in sight, you can call it performance anxiety, which will hurt your performance. Or change your impression and performance. "By stating 'I am excited' out loud, individuals improved their subsequent singing performance."²⁷ Label a flip-flop stomach as excitement instead; you might nail that performance.

Impressions make you think you know some facts, and sometimes you do. The objective is to remember that they aren't always right. You might jump into bed with someone you should be running from, cry when you should scream, and feel sick with nerves when you are genuinely anticipating something incredible.

You can try to manage other people's impressions of you but suspect and investigate your impressions.

Sanctioned Goals

It's a problem when society is the one that checks the boxes. Your parents, you can confront. Your teachers, you can fail. Your society isn't a body and isn't explicit, rendering it rather challenging to take down.

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. What matters is that she's heard it. Gender discrimination is insidious, prevalent, and something that takes conscious and deliberate effort to root out, sort out, and dump out.

We get better lives for everyone when we stop seeing pegs, holes, constraints, and easy answers. "The intelligent person behaves according to the situation, and the stupid behaves according to the ready-made answers," Osho says.

If you are a girl, you are supposed to play with dolls, wear pink, be afraid of doing well in math, of the other girls not liking you and the boys not looking at you. You seek your power through social contacts, not physical form, and avoid adventure and anything that might be exhilarating. Like Mark Webber, you are second, and you are supposed to know it and accept it, not rally your emotional duress to prove the stupidity of it all.

Things have changed over the generations, and we celebrate progress. Roles have become less rigid, people's attitudes have become less righteous, and diversity has been more tolerated. For someone like me who believes in the potential of every human being, it's too much waste to witness, too many problems that need solving, and too much genius that remains untapped.

Men welcome change, too. While women are told that their ambitious, assertive nature is not welcome, men are trained that their emotions make them weak and useless. The pressure of a stoic, emotionless existence that exists solely to provide for dependents isn't healthy for them either.

"The greatest problem that modern man faces is that the mind is trained too much and the heart is completely neglected – not only neglected but condemned too. Feelings are not allowed; feelings are repressed. The man of feeling is thought to be weak; the man of feeling is thought to be childish, immature," says Osho.

How can a man marry for love and not for all historical reasons, like a consolidation of power, capital, and land, if he cannot feel? Perhaps he marries for children, servitude and duty, which only spreads the pain and harm to more people and the next generation.

How can a woman not be enslaved if she is not allowed her anger and hardness? I hope the days of gender expectations are over, but as long as people change their bodies to match what they feel inside, it's my feeling that we are farther, not closer, to a resolution.

Seeing a spectrum of gray where there is only a world of black and white is healthier for everyone and better for the whole. Diversity puts an expert at the front of the line for every problem and shortens lines for everyone.

Life is full of ready-made answers, but life has never met you. You might be differently abled. Your answers for life might be different from the norm. Your world might be all your own. You won't know until you peek inside, settle yourself down, and take a good, hard look at who you are and who you want to be. Maybe you are already well aware you've been putting on a mask for the benefit of others.

Take all the time you need – efficiency and wisdom never go together. You might need the same amount of time to undo the damage that was done. As Osho says, "Twenty-five years are wasted – one-third of your life – in making you a machine! And then it becomes difficult to unwind you again, to make

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you a human being again.” I write this at the age of fifty-one, twenty-five years past the moment the unwinding began, with a question from the CEO informing me of my difference and the value of it.

If there was ever a time to be a human and not a machine, that age is here; that time is now. If you do the work of unwinding yourself, imagine how heavenly those last twenty-five years will be.

In this swell of change, the new possibilities and freedoms pose new questions to people. Will you stick with the status quo or try something new? Never before has this question been so personal, empowered, and yet constrained by the basic education of choice.

To provide you with a checklist of when to do this or when to do that isn't practical. The world is changing so fast that the only way to manage the choices it throws at you is to go with the flow. More and more, this world is changing, and the least we need to do is keep pace. Survival is adaptation, not competition or obedience.

A checklist approach is too slow. If you need to trust your gut, you must do so immediately, not after checking the list twice, to ensure that the instant decision is preferable to the protracted analysis. Otherwise, it's too late.

The checklist approach is disabling because it makes you think the answers are outside you. Forever, you will be editing yourself, always pretending, slightly unsure, never authentic.

Instead, it's about always trusting yourself, whether you trust the gut or the long game. Learn the best practices from the relevant giants, and then leap from their shoulders as only you can. With confidence in yourself, instead of as a perfectionist student of some list, the world truly is your oyster.

Have you met the perfectionist student? They are so focused on repeating precise words that they miss the message. They highlight and underline, hand assignments in on time, fully complete, and never question a single lesson. While they regurgitate everything accurately and precisely, they learn nothing.

An empty vessel, an open book – no one is truly like this, and I've always wondered when the genuine learner will come out and play.

Working with information transforms it into knowledge, allowing it to integrate into what's already there, such that knowing better can lead to doing better. When your habits are by design, not something you don't understand how to break, your mind is under your command. Your goals are a matter of choosing them; they aren't dreams without plans. It's your life; you will find workable solutions.

Environmental factors play a massive role in whether you succeed or fail. “The adult with attention deficit disorder needs to know that the physical space she occupies can help to either harmonize or disorganize her mind,” writes Maté. Lean Manufacturing knows, and they called their approach to environmental organization 5S.

If you blame the environment when you fail, consider setting yourself up for success instead. Alloy and Abramson wrote in 1979, “Subjects in these experiments generally have attributed causality to themselves when they have succeeded and to factors in the environment or situation when they have failed.”

Just because the environment dominates doesn't mean it has to win every time. "Becoming addicted to our outer world is how we give our power away and mismanage our energy," writes Dr. Joe Dispenza in **Becoming Supernatural**.

According to Jimmy Chin, the filmmaker behind the documentary **Free Solo**, "Not letting your mind slip – that's the real superpower."

Whatever your goals, mind your environment to facilitate your success.

An Institutionalized Governance

Institutions are designed to rise above the individual, but over time, institutions fail.

Post-war, as historian Kate Williams describes, "The whole principle in which the rich do whatever they want with their capital and that's good for the nation is being challenged across the world." New taxes result. However, in response to the government's new need to tax the aristocracy, the aristocracy has options.

"Democracies, in general, are susceptible to this capture by elites, and unless the democracy is renewed by the non-elites every now and then rising up, the democracy will continue to move in this direction where power and wealth are more and more concentrated. All across the world, you now have this layer of oligarchs that use their money to buy political influence," says Francis Fukuyama.

Piketty says, "This logic of 'one dollar, one vote' is completely opposed to the democratic logic of 'one person, one vote.'"

People introduce bias. Where there is a person, there is an opinion, an agenda, or an interest, and the system's very design was to contain and manage it. Dr. Thomas Kerr says, "Canada does not have an evidence-based drug strategy. There's too much ideology and politics and not enough science and principles."

Bias and interest may not be limited to Canada's drug strategy. "Public servants know intuitively that their work is not as valued as it once was and that their focus is now less upon offering policy options and more on finding empirical evidence to justify what elected politicians have decided to do," writes Donald J. Savoie. It's not limited to public servants and politicians, as I can personally attest across many corporations and industries.

"Whenever science seems likely to generate knowledge that could create difficulties for their political agenda, they try to bury the knowledge and destroy the government's capacity to generate it," write three professors at the University of Waterloo.

In **Beyond Religion**, the Dalai Lama writes, "Any system can become a source of conflict and division." Some people know the game. They lead with lies and deception to keep well-trained citizens in a well-entrenched status quo.

Lies and Deception

Independent journalist John Carlos Frey would like mainstream media consumers to know that "We're being dumbed down, we're being watered down, we are being misinformed, we're being misled, and we're being told false information."

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In Canada, the CBC, Canada's Broadcasting Corporation, is funded by the federal government. A propaganda machine, if there ever was one, a personal outlet for the Prime Minister; even while they claim to be nonpartisan, coverage says otherwise.

Pivotal stories are missing from the CBC platform, but if you want to know what a news outlet supports, check out their chosen photos. Flattering images are selected when they support someone; when not, they can find an awkward pose. What's very telling is when they can find a photo of Mark Carney when he doesn't look like Mr. Burns from the Simpsons. How hard was that, I wonder, the card-carrying Conservative I am?

Amy Goodman, host and executive producer of **Democracy Now**, says, "The problem is the illusion of a free press. That's why we need a media that challenges the corporate power. When we cover war, we can't be brought to you by the weapons manufacturers. When we cover climate change, we can't be brought to you by the oil, gas, coal, and nuclear companies. When we cover healthcare, we can't be brought to you by the insurance and drug companies. We have to have a media counterbalance to those in power. It is the only equalizing force."

Ralph Nader explains, "The problem is that most of the big media are businesses. They respond to their investors, the stock market and their advertisers, and independent journalists bring their conscience to work. They call the situation as it is factual, so they are a rare breed. They're not indentured to commercial motivation."

"If something goes wrong with the government, a free press will ferret it and get it fixed. But if something goes wrong with the free press, the country will go straight to hell," says the son of the renowned independent journalist late IF Stone.

One version of going straight to hell is going straight to war. Collin Powell said, "To share with you what the United States knows about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, every statement I make today is backed up by sources, solid sources. These are not assertions. We give you facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence." And he had to read every word of it. Shakespeare might have said, "Thou doth protest too much."

Ralph Nader characterizes these actions harshly. "This is one of the greatest international crimes since World War II. And it was committed with the complete complicity of the mainstream media that kept critical voices, such as ours, off the air." It's impression management of the entire country.

Jeff Cohen of the Park Center for Independent Media says, "At MSNBC, I was on the air daily as a political and media analyst, but I lost my time because they had to make room as we got closer to the invasion of Iraq, for this endless parade of retired generals, majors, admirals, former CIA chiefs and we know how those people had no independence. The Pentagon was feeding them talking points, and most of what they said as our country was driven to war was false."

If Powell blatantly lied on air, Leslie Moonves, president of CBS, revealed much when he talked about the interests of CBS and the interests of America. "It may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS. That's all I have to say. The money's rolling in, and this is fun. I've never seen anything like this, and this will be an excellent year for us. It's terrible to say, but bring it on, Donald, go ahead, keep going."

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Cenk Uygur, ex-MSNBC host, says, “They don’t have to tell an anchor coming into the mainstream media, “Hey, be pro-government” although, with me, I was so thick-headed they had to, right? They don’t hire that guy; if they mistake hiring him, they demote or fire him, and the message is clear in the building. Shh, we don’t criticize the powers that be. We don’t take on the establishment; we are the establishment. And the guys who play ball get promotions, and everyone in the building sees them get promotions. So, it is an evolutionary process by which the mainstream media gets the product it wants.”

It’s a process Noam Chomsky calls manufacturing consent. “Manufacturing consent ensures that the ignorant and meddlesome majority keeps out of things.”

Professor William Black says, “This is not new to Washington. People who will give you the wrong answer but the answer you want are invaluable. And they often get promoted precisely because they’re willing to say and do absurd things.”

Chris Hedges says, “Those reporters who care more about truth will eventually become management problems, and the ones who can read power, in essence, function as courtiers, know how to play the game. The veneer of objectivity, neutrality, impartiality, truth, and yet assiduously serve, in essence, power, are the ones who rise with the institution, and that’s why if you look at the top management of even institutions like The New York Times, they’re filled with such incredible mediocrities.” A mediocrity is not excellence but what’s barely adequate.

“It makes you ask, seriously, whether those executives who run media conglomerates have any more ethics or morals than those who run the oil and gas, pharmaceutical, and tobacco industries. It’s an open question to me,” says Cohen.

It makes you ask where you get your news and how you question it. Michael Moore says, “You must start as a journalist assuming they are lying to you.” The media is not an information service for citizens. It is a business, and like all businesses, it’s designed to sell.

Make them prove it—don’t let fear, pain, and preference grease the message toward believability; embrace your inner skeptic and turn off the news.

Well-Trained Citizens

You know what you want to do, and you know what you are supposed to do. Like a well-trained citizen, you default to the latter without conscious interruption. Call it manners, class, or social skills; we know how to behave depending on where we are, not who we are.

“When you live every step of your life to please someone else, it’s scary,” says Samie Brosseau of her childhood in the cult The Twelve Tribes. “The foundation is based on obedience and submission,” says former member Roger Allen.

You don’t have to be born in a cult to be raised to be obedient or else. Or else it is often violent, and it is fear-based, including paddling, spanking, and beating. It wasn’t until I was an adult that I learned that it’s called corporal punishment.

Corporal punishment isn’t illegal in the United States but is prohibited by law in Germany. Violence and love should never intermingle. “Mixing up love and hate can be emotionally and psychologically very damaging to the kid,” says Stephen Kent, Ph.D., sociologist and cult expert.

Rolling Thunder said, “People have given their health to their doctor, their money to their banker, their soul to their preacher, their children to the school system, and in doing so, have lost the power to control their lives.”

And their careers in Human Resources. “There seems to be a disconnect between our professed love of democracy and how we’re so willing to accept a dictatorship every day we show up to work,” says Michael Moore in **Capitalism: A Love Story**.

You will keep getting sold out when you willingly give your power away. What’s more shocking than the American bailout of their banks is that they then paid bonuses to these executives and rejected any changes in oversight or operation. “Leave us alone,” the bankers said. “Why are you blaming us? Why do you think we have any culpability or responsibility?”

When you let someone do your thinking, you lose your sense of reality. It can happen when we trust parents, religion, or even someone we hire to be a coach, as Sarah Edmondson found when she joined the personal improvement group later outed as a sex cult, NXIVM. Cult expert Janja Lalich says, “It’s part of that indoctrination process that just shuts you down and moulds you, makes you conform and comply.”

Succeeding without your family of origin can be so tricky that the options are to fail and return. This is true of those escaping cults, domestic violence, or any situation in which you’ve been invested.

“The more time and effort that people put into anything – no matter how useless, dysfunctional, or downright stupid it might be – the harder it is for them to walk away, be it a bad investment, a destructive relationship, an exploitive job, or a workplace filled with brow beaters, bullies, and bastards,” says Robert Sutton. Forget thriving when you are preoccupied with simply surviving.

Nicole, an Occupy protestor, says, “So there are two million jobs in America that we can’t even fill because our education system is so broken.” Like many consumers, Nicole buys what they like, not necessarily what they need.

Post-graduation, Nicole is in over her head. “\$34,000 is all my loans. Which isn’t even that much in the scheme of how much debt people graduate from college with, but it is something and something that I am not at all able to pay off right now.” Like Nicole, following your heart without an employment plan might lead well-trained citizens into debt with no way to pay it off.

Implementing a system that would better align student’s interests with available job openings might be required. “Education is a system that has been growing without external stressors; eventually, things will collapse,” writes Nassim Nicholas Taleb in **Antifragile**.

What I call consumerism, Nicole sees as “monetary prohibition.” She says, “I don’t understand why we put a monetary prohibition on education. Education should be something we want for everyone. We want an educated society. We all benefit from an educated population.” So why, on an individual level, is Nicole’s education not benefitting her? Her situation contradicts her well-trained view on education, and it might be time for her to change her mind or her definition of education.

There are a lot of ways to get an education. In Slovenia, college is free, even for immigrants. As Michael Moore describes in **Where to Invade Next** when the government moves to change its policy, the students crumble the government.

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We want an educated population, but those with degrees and certifications may not be so-called educated. They are not the same thing. When students see “getting an education” as a box they need to check off to progress toward success in life, they check it. A well-trained consumer keeps the economy spinning.

Instead, if you begin with the end in mind and work backwards, you see that education is a solution to a problem—I need that degree to get in that door. As an engineer, that’s all my degree was. The most hands-on engineer I ever met estimated he used about five percent of his education. I never met anyone who claimed to use more.

With a firm end in mind, you accept a flawed system and a ridiculous bar because that’s the game, and you aren’t in charge of the rules. If you don’t want in that door, you don’t need the paper, and the education system collapses.

Education is supposed to teach you to think, empower your mind with new information, and discover what you want to do with your time and talents. However, school might serve more as a way to get citizens in line and make it easier for them to govern. Instead, an education should empower you.

“That is the secret of an empowering education: A girl learns she is not who she’s been told she is. She is the equal of anyone and has rights she needs to assert and defend. This is how the great social change movements get traction: when outsiders reject the low self-image society has imposed on them and begin to author a self-image of their own,” writes Melinda Gates in **The Moment of Lift**.

Who do you want to be? It’s a question for every citizen to answer for themselves, even while it may be the most difficult one to do on your own.

Well-Entrenched Status Quos

When companies do not take care of their workers, they are like a manufacturing plant that does not take care of its machines. Our ignorance is our undoing when we rely on something and ignore its health.

“For decades, individuals and companies have moved their legal selves to avoid paying tax that benefits those who work for them. So that when you come out of the HQ of one of these giant trendy IT companies, and you fall over, you hit your head, and you are lying on the pavement in a pool of blood, an ambulance arrives that has not been paid for, in any way shape or form by the taxes of that company. That’s a very new capitalist system,” says Paul Mason, journalist and author.

Today, workers are plentiful, and more are being born, raised, and trained daily. So why bother to worry about paying taxes to fund things like ambulances or the streets on which they drive? In a capitalist system, profits rule, not people.

A competitive society worries more about who’s paying even less tax or what country would woo them harder with better incentives and lower rates. Ultimately, the worker loses. Children are born merely to pay taxes and grow the economy.

Globalization has “meant that in the developed world, corporations were able to take jobs and move them and make a lot of money out of it,” says Ian Bremmer. When you are wealthy and connected,

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someone introduces you to the status quo. It's all about who you know; some know how to circumvent paying taxes.

For every class and caste, there is a way that things are done, even if it makes no sense to those who are on the outside. Even those who say that they will win the game to change it win, and then they forget what was so wrong about it.

Today, multinationals can manipulate the location of their profits, but they cannot manipulate the location of their customers. "You cannot send them to Bermuda," remarks economist Gabriel Zucman. In that fact, the legal loopholes could be closed. Theoretically, but even in theory, there's a sense that nothing will change.

The status quo is more resilient than most individuals. It's so rare to challenge it that we put images of those people on our currency. Instead, the objective is to make it look like things have changed.

Accountants and lawyers who help reduce costs and increase profits play with balance sheets and rules while not fundamentally changing processes or how work is done. The money they liberate was destined to go to the government in taxes. That's the quick way to win at the capitalism game—move things around.

Moving things around by buying and selling assets is how investors and bankers make money, even if they aren't making anything. Rich dads teach their children to save and invest, and poor dads teach that it's a feast or famine. To get more affluent, feast on investments, stocks and bonds. Think like a banker and realize everyone wants cash; some are willing to pay. Stocks are money you lend to a business; you make money if they use it well. If they don't, you lose. Choose based on their history, not their plans.

Truly making anything, taking out a loan and building a business are the small potatoes in the economy. "Statistics today show that only 15% of money from the largest financial institutions will be productive lending. The other 85% is just moving around this closed loop of the financial system – its assets being bought and sold by the same people; their value going up."

When the bubble bursts, the value disappears because the value is based on what people are willing to pay. When they need food more than they need to worry about their mortgage or their retirement, that value isn't there. "A bucket of cash could not buy a loaf of bread," says historian Kate Williams of the post-war poverty that gripped Europe.

Today, the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. "What we've seen over time – and this is fundamental to understanding why inequality has worsened – is that the share of all the money that's made in the economy is going less and less to the workers, so that is declining – the wage share – and the profit share, essentially what those that own the capital will get, is growing," says Faiza Shaheen.

Interest rates go up almost naturally, but wages do not. Raising salaries historically requires a revolution, often in the form of a strike. Striking turns the pressure of the consumer against the owners. When there is no consumer, there is power to manipulate, and no strike can do anything.

As **Rich Dad, Poor Dad** details, the rich start companies and build capital, whereas the poor become employed by those guys. While the poor route makes you very poor – with its post-secondary education requirement – the rich spend other people's money to create, innovate, and get ahead on nothing more than an idea, charisma and connections.

The only thing wrong with the economic model is those who still believe that the path of least resistance is the most appropriate for them. But if we are all investors, who will do the actual work?

James Baldwin said something that included a racial slur but was full of insight. "If I am not the [n-word] here, and if you invented him, you, the white people, invented him, then you have to find out why. And the future of the country depends on that." Decades have passed since these words were written, but they remain true today.

Everything rolls downhill. The CEO yells at his executives, who go home and yell at their wives, who in turn yell at their kids, who kick their dogs. The dogs bite the cat, who chases the mouse, who gets caught in the trap. When you can't face the source, you pass it to an easier target. That's a status quo that needs to go.

The Global Community

There's a reason I live in a small rural town. I've been to the library three times, and on the third time, the librarian called me by name and offered suggestions. In the city, I went to the library almost daily for nine years, and they never once knew my name, let alone my preferences.

Everyone has their preferences. In the city, you have anonymity. In a rural town, you have a community. In a city, you must create a community. In a globalized world, creating a community is more important than ever.

A community shares a truth. The Chinese have an expression: "Three men make a tiger." Elsewhere, you might hear, "Repeat a lie often enough, and it becomes the truth." These two belong to the same community, saying the same thing differently. Maybe if we stop saying this, people will stop thinking of it as advice because it's not how we want things to be.

Globalization creates a community where there wasn't before, bringing people together and exchanging information. I no longer take the reporter on the television for face value; I can look it up on the internet. In a global community, we don't always tune into what we share, but we jump on the differences, share the content without verifying its validity, and miss the message altogether.

Finding your community is critical. What an individual can tolerate and rationalize when it's just their burden becomes no longer necessary to carry. People no longer have to suffer alone; they can connect to create communities and, possibly, tsunamis of change. What one person can't do alone, a community can. You won't bump into them; you must find them.

If your histories and situations had not let your paths typically cross, you would have shared some excellent company. You share some stellar points of view with people who might be expressing them differently. In today's world, though, it can be hard to notice harmony when we are attuned in quite the opposite way, living in conditions far different from the ones for which we were designed.

What we're in together gets increasingly complex as you realize how diverse the people are and yet how shared the experience of being human is.

The Complication of Today

Diversity is to look around a table and see faces that do not think alike, just as it is to look around and see faces that are much the same but minds that are unique and individual. Both the visible and the invisible diversity present a challenge.

Historically, stereotypes served because diversity didn't. For all the pressures and reasons discussed, people within communities and groups looked and thought alike. There are still stereotypes today, but the evidence for them is dwindling, and the risk of relying on them is growing fast.

Appreciating and supporting citizens used to be straightforward when everyone was the same. Truthfully, they weren't the same, and it wasn't straightforward, but in comparison to today, and more so globally, the range of voices that need satisfying is wider. That range and its spread are called social cohesion.

Donald J. Savoie, author of **What is Government Good at?** writes, "Today, we talk about declining social cohesion; forty years ago, social cohesion was not even part of our vocabulary."

If diversity makes the job of government more complex, urbanization makes the job of social responsibility simple—worry only about yourself. As the demise of cities seems unlikely, the downsides of living in condensed spaces require universal understanding.

Skyrocketing Urbanization

My old hometown attempted to brand itself as the Creative Capital of Canada. When networking was a thing, I heard about it at an event to learn more about this project. I was curious because I thought it was about creative capital—the capital created with creativity, like they do in the arts. Instead, I discovered it had nothing to do with money and everything to do with geography.

I learned another story about attempts to attract more and better talent to this area and plans for economic development. I felt sympathy for anyone who would believe the branding and uproot their entire lives to transplant it here, only to find out that it was all marketing and the hopes of attracting creative people.

Hopeful, creative people trapped. Now that you've signed a rental contract and an employment contract, hook, line, and sinker. Fake it until you make it, marketers say. I was disruptive, asking questions about who was funding the project and making jokes about the creativity of Enron accountants. In the end, I was relieved that it failed. I've lived in many places in Canada, and it was the most oppressive city I'd encountered. Creative? That doesn't happen under a thumb.

The creation of cities happened as farmers moved in search of better-paying, less laborious work. What else is being produced as people come together in the name of production? Friedrich Nietzsche said, "Madness is rare in individuals—but in groups, parties, peoples and ages, it is the rule."

Anything that is automated creates more of everything it produces—not merely the good at the end of the line. More products result, but so do more byproducts, resource utilization, and jobs to take care of those things—if there's value. Value means someone will be willing to pay.

Urbanization leads to economists saying, "Yay, more jobs mean more money being spent and more jobs created!" The environmentalists want to cry as the planet is destroyed; the humanists tear their hearts

out as the difference between the richest and the poorest grows. Value is measured in only money. But what else does urbanization create?

Cities may be forged by opportunity but are ruled by competition and rivalry. In 1973, researchers studied dormitory density and helping behaviour with stamped letters strewn as if lost on the way to the mailbox. They wanted to see how many made it the final distance. "In the high-density building, 63.6% of the letters were returned compared to 77.4% of those in the medium-density dormitories and 90.6% of those in the low-density dormitories."²⁸ This is why it's rural for me, all the way.

In addition to the reduced helping behaviour seen in the high-density living areas, "the students in the higher-density dormitories reported less trust, cooperativeness, and responsibility in their residences."

The dilution of responsibility is seen with small groups as well. In a smoke-filling room, male subjects were less likely to report the smoke "when in the presence of passive others (10%) or in groups of 3 (38% of groups) than when alone (75%)," report Bibb Latané and John M. Darley in 1968.

Those other people don't even have to be able to help to dilute your feelings of responsibility. "Merely imagining the present of others or a crowded situation leads participants to respond more quickly to words related to the concept of unaccountability relative to matched neutral words," researchers found in 2002.²⁹

Further along the lines of making people less likely to help each other, bringing people together can also have the unintended consequence of driving them apart. In 1999, Cass R. Sunstein theorized the Law of Group Polarization. He says, "Deliberation tends to move groups and the individuals who compose them toward a more extreme point in the direction indicated by their pre-deliberation judgments."

In small groups, a diversity of opinion can't achieve enough weight to polarize groups, but bringing people together helps you find more people like you. Like that, you can stop pretending that you need to conform to the status quo. What used to be an ideal you thought you held all alone now has the protection of a group.

If people become hostile and extreme in cities, they also learn to see differently. In cities, there are angles, straight lines, and smooth, flat surfaces; in nature, none is true.

You might be familiar with an optical illusion that led women to believe they look taller with low-cut V-necklines and high-cut slits. The illusion consists of one line double-ended by outward-pointing arrowheads. A second line faces the arrowheads the other way. You are asked which line appears longer. You indicate the second, with its wide-open ends. A ruler must prove to you that they are indeed the same length.

This illusion is an urban creation. It results from judging depth surrounded by straight lines and far-away horizons. Artists use angles to create the illusion of depth on a two-dimensional surface. Once it's pointed out to you, you can't stop seeing it, but look back in history, and it's evident that using a vanishing viewpoint to nail perspective wasn't always known.

Indeed, some tribes aren't adapted to urban living and are stumped by the line question – what do you mean, point out the longer line? They are equal.

We could use less stress; nature is a great place to eliminate it. Studies have found that office workers who have a view of nature out their windows report higher levels of job satisfaction and lower stress levels.

Being outdoors is your natural habitat—surrounded by nature, not cement. Paying attention to your environment in the woods, beach, or backyard makes you happier and healthier. Taking that rural job that pays less than the one in Toronto might be your ticket to the good life and affordable housing.

Sprawling Digital Living

In 1997's **The Kid's Guide to the Internet**, Peter Jamison says, "Now that I've gotten on the Internet, I'd rather be on my computer than doing just about anything." If that was true, then what would a kid say today? Screens drown today's kids, and maybe soon, they may all start declaring, "I'm so over this."

In **Social Animals**, one teenager says, "Sometimes I think, maybe I should delete my Instagram, but then I think, what would I do with my life?" Yes, hit delete and answer that question.

This question speaks of a failed education system. Osho says, "A real education will help people find their life where they can be fully alive." A real education may have nothing to do with report cards and tests, recall and facts, repetition and obedience.

"The massive amount of content available on the internet, far from producing a smarter, more informed democratic citizenry, has made all of us dumber by shallowing out our thinking," says Robert McChesney in **Digital Disconnect**.

Today's problem isn't only shallower thinking; it's leaving kids to raise kids. "For the first time in history, young people are turning for instruction, modelling, and guidance, not to mothers, fathers, teachers, and other responsible adults but to people whom nature never intended to place in a parenting role – their peers," write Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Maté in **Hold on to Your Kids**. "When we compare peer relationships with parent relationships for what is missing, parents come out looking like saints," they write.

It's not just kids and teenagers who are swallowed in screen time. Before the coronavirus pandemic, working from home was a rare luxury. Workers at home tend to put in more hours at little extra pay. Mary Noonan, a University of Iowa researcher, says that people working at home may feel more pressure to demonstrate their productivity than those visible in the office.

Telecommuting improves task-based performance and organizational citizenship behaviour, meaning workers are more committed and engaged. They might be paying back what they see as an extra benefit, hoping it's not taken away.

What is gained in all things measured on the bottom line is short-term and beneficial for the organization—that seems clear. But when working from home is the standard for everyone, and it becomes the long-term expectation, do the benefits hold?

Loneliness and isolation drive employees to miss their commutes and cubicles. Stanford University researchers report that "49% of employees did not volunteer to work from home, despite the potentially considerable savings in commuting time and cost. The major reason for this in later interviews was the loneliness of WFH and the lack of opportunities to socialize in the office and after

work.”³⁰ In a world of who-you-know, socialization time is a necessary investment for future opportunities.

As Todd Hollingshead reports, “We learned that if you want to have a clear leader emerge, you are better off having them all located face to face or all working remotely.” If you want cohesive leadership, it’s an all-or-none affair. Either everyone is remote or physically together or give up the idea of inclusivity, cohesion, and leadership.

If they can’t fire you, they might be able to make you work from home instead. It’s better when they bait the trap, and you jump in with both feet. Then, they leave you out of the loop until a lack of connection shows up in unforgivable mistakes. This is why some people are bosses and others are leaders. It’s not the title; it’s the actions.

Your culture depends on whether you let the fearful bosses banish the threat to the virtual world or if your policy is all for one and one for all. No one goes virtual unless everyone goes together.

Management researchers say remote work opportunities are best suited for people with high emotional stability and a strong desire for autonomy. These people might be more immune to an organization’s social dynamics or have different plans than those on the corporate ladder.

To each their own, and the technological world seems to agree. As Steve Jobs put it, “the process of the technological revolution that we’re all in, it’s a process of taking very centralized things and making them very democratic, if you will, very individualized.” Jobs makes it sound like individualization and democracy are interchangeable.

What has become individual is not in alignment with the principles of democracy. When you Google something, Eli Pariser says, “You get what I call your filter bubble. And what’s in your filter bubble depends on who you are and what you do. But the thing is, you don’t decide what gets in. And more importantly, you don’t see what gets edited out.”

Pariser says information has gone “from human gatekeepers to algorithmic ones.” To see what gets edited out in your searches, try comparing the results from Google with those from DuckDuckGoGo or any other search engine. When I showed this test to one business, all their confidential documents came up in the latter, but Google let them believe there were no security issues. Expect massive differences—helpful ones, not merely extra noise.

In the words of Glenn Greenwald, “The United States and its partners, unbeknownst to the entire world, has converted the internet, once heralded as an unprecedented tool of liberation and democratization, into an unprecedented zone of mass, indiscriminate surveillance.”

“Using the same surveillance tactics that they use to target their users with personalized ads, sites like Facebook have developed algorithms that allow them to filter the kinds of news and information people see on their sites. This means that people on these sites only get information in their newsfeeds that agree with their viewpoints, effectively enclosing them in a kind of ideological filter bubble,” McChesney says.

Digital living is making privacy, democracy and agency a concept of the past, and all of it is designed to grow the economy. In short, it’s designed to make you a consumer as your highest purpose in life.

Exorbitant Consumerism

The internet is about taking and selling your data to better target you with advertisements. The goal might be your information, your vote, or your attitude. They are seeking more than your cash, and that's what makes them so insidious. Keep your cards in your wallet, but what about your mind?

After the wars, it is the beginning of indulgence to end a long period of sacrifice and suffering.

"Consumerism fuels growth, speeds up progress, and enhances the quality of life. It also increases CO₂ emissions exponentially," says Jean-Robert Viallet.

By 1979, Jimmy Carter said, "Too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns." Is he bragging or complaining?

In 1997, there was no social media or Google. When Marc Andersson was developing the Mosaic browser, "the biggest challenge he and his colleagues had to overcome was that the internet developed into an almost militantly egalitarian and cooperative community." For capitalism, for the economy, that would not do.

The biggest challenge in the early days of the internet was that no one was making money from it directly. A few monster technology companies now rule everyone's digital lives.

"Far from disrupting the anti-democratic tendencies of monopolies, the internet has turned out to be the greatest generator of monopoly in the history of capitalism," says Robert McChesney. "A small number of firms and websites get the vast majority of traffic, with absolutely no effective "middle class" of robust moderate-size websites or internet firms," McChesney says.

"Today we have this whole transformation of the economy happening both with trade and with technology that exactly has the sort of same property of creating lots of monopolies, and so it's generating again a small class of very, very wealthy people," says Suresh Naidu, Economic Historian at Columbia University.

Some explain all this control of the internet, the dodging of taxes, and other new capitalist practices by nothing more sophisticated than greed. According to Republican Keith Ellison, "They are doing this so that they can reap more monopoly profit, so they can buy more political influence, so they can give themselves more bonuses so that they can create more mergers so that they can get rid of more jobs. It is to screw the American people!"

Back to globalism: It might have nothing to do with Americans specifically. Success is the best revenge, and maybe someone hurt them deeply, but how much do you need before you call it greed?

Today, politics is branding and marketing like never before. "That the same communication practices plied by the world's largest corporations and the most celebrities are penetrating politics and government has implications for parliamentary democracy," according to author Alex Marland.

Branding and marketing intentionally confuse opportunity and our ability to pursue it. They hijack dopamine, the brain chemical responsible for spotting and seeking opportunity. When your phone beeps with notifications, dopamine makes you addicted to picking it up and checking. You should at least be aware of your addiction.

Says Zach Baron, “Anytime you are provided with a service, like Facebook, for free, you are in fact the product being sold. That social media companies are basically giant behaviour-modification systems that use algorithms to relentlessly increase engagement largely by evoking bad feelings in those who use them. These companies, in turn, sell the ability to modify your behaviour to advertisers who sometimes come in the old form of people who want to persuade you to buy soap but who now just as often come in the form of malevolent actors who want to use their influence over you to, say, depress voter turnout or radicalize white supremacists. In exchange for likes, retweets, and public photos of your kids, you are signing up to be a data serf for companies that can make money only by addicting and then manipulating you. That because of all this, and for the good of society, you should do everything in your power to quit.”

For the good of society, is it in your power to quit all your free services, or is your addiction going to get the best of you?

According to the 2018 Edelman Earned Brand study, about sixty-four percent of consumers worldwide will buy or boycott a brand solely because of its position on a social or political issue. They say once bitten, twice shy, and as adults, we have long histories of getting scammed, ripped off, or worse off for having purchased at some point in our lives. Those experiences colour all future ones, and there is often a choice in a globalized world.

Once you buy something, ownership of it changes your value perception of it. Endowment effects increase an owner’s valuation, and merely bidding triggers the effect “more pronounced than the levels of auction fever.”³¹ Selling things by convincing buyers that they already own them before they genuinely do is a tested way to increase sales. “Just take it home, see if you like it,” they push.

In 2010, researchers found that spending decisions related to experiences and not objects are “easier to make and more conducive to well-being.” Thomas Gilovich and Iñigo Gallo found that “participants were less satisfied with their material purchases because they were more likely to ruminate about unchosen options; that participants tended to maximize when selecting material goods and satisfice when selecting experiences; that participants examined unchosen material purchases more than unchosen experiential purchases; and that, relative to experiences, participants satisfaction with their material possessions was undermined more by comparisons to other available options, to the same option at a different price and purchases of other individuals.”

If you fall for consumerism, you might be on your way toward the unhealthiest resentment.

An Unhealthy Resentment

“Going into an investment with a predetermined exit strategy is rather noxious. We don’t have an exit strategy with our husband, wife, children, or close friends,” wrote John MacKay of Whole Foods.

We do and should have that exit strategy for both investments and relationships. Business is an exchange of value. Each side gets something out of the deal. You get cash, and your purchaser receives the product or service being sold. To have a successful business with clients galore, offer something everyone wants to buy. Not so easy, of course.

Practical Reflection

Relationships are a completely different exchange of value. If you aren't getting what you need from the other person, a similar unhealthy resentment will kick in. Relationship remorse? You bet everybody can name at least one when they realize they should have gotten out – much earlier than they did.

We should leave when we are abused or mistreated, taken advantage of, or aiding someone in their demise. We may not draw these lines or verbalize these strategies ahead of time, but we know when we are getting out. Some involve lawyers and document the rules in advance, but many do not and later wish they had drawn the paperwork, got out earlier, or recognized the flags.

The same must be said for investments, or you risk getting caught up in emotional attachment to damaging prospects, just as you might in a relationship.

Recognizing opportunity requires a particular perspective, starting with a basic understanding of what's going on in any exchange.

The Machine of Waste

When you pay the price of something, you expect something in return. There is an exchange of value. It might be as simple as a cup of coffee. Starbucks offers a specific environment to go along with that coffee, and if you've ever bought a Starbucks coffee, you know that extra value is reflected in a higher price. You go somewhere else if you don't want all that extra stuff.

People part with their cash for many reasons, some of the most common being for speed and convenience, getting something done for them, an experience, a status such as being on the leading edge, and access to people or information.

Or so we say when asked why we buy, but we can't be fully aware. Every decision is rooted in the emotional unconscious, and we may be unable to articulate or access the genuine reason we purchased.

When you think it's about features and benefits, it's about emotional needs. You might be selling project management services, but they might be getting relief from their fears about the future. You might be selling wellness workshops, but they might be getting increased confidence. The prospect of increased confidence may have them sold before you tell them what they must do to get it.

The desired value is why they buy. It appeals to their emotions, which hooks them into giving you their time or money. Perceived value is what they feel they get in return. You always want the perceived value to be higher.

Businesses reduce the barriers of desired value with sales and financing options and increase perceived value by offering customization and bonuses. Everyone loves to get a deal, and we all expect to get at least what was promised, as promised, and when it was promised. It doesn't always happen.

When the value equation goes the other way, they feel ripped off, called buyer's remorse. It is the unhealthy resentment we feel when we realize we've been duped of our hard-earned money. We will likely tell our friends to help them avoid the same disappointment, and we feel bad about ourselves for getting duped.

Some business models are built on only getting the first sale, only on making the promises, and only on getting your money. We have the Better Business Bureau to help inform us of these nefarious players ahead of time.

Practical Reflection

It's even worse when it's money we haven't earned because then we've sold out our futures. If we're worried about selling our souls to the devil, we must be more skeptical about advertising, marketing, and value.

The hedonic treadmill feeds the machine of waste. "Even as we contemplate our satisfaction with a given accomplishment, the satisfaction fades, to be replaced finally by a new indifference and a new level of striving," says social psychologist Phillip Brickman from his studies of lottery winners.

In 1979, Jimmy Carter said, "We've discovered that owning and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for meaning. We've learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives without confidence or purpose."

Those who hadn't achieved Carter's disposable income levels might have been thinking, "Speak for yourself." Researchers have found that it takes about \$70,000 per year of income before you realize you won't be able to consume your way to happiness.

The machine of waste prizes efficiency over effectiveness, getting it done fast, constantly in forward motion, without ever backtracking, pausing or correcting. Robert Green writes, "A natural response when people feel overwhelmed is to retreat into various forms of passivity." One of those forms might be to keep spending, consuming, and waiting to see what will change so you don't have to.

When efficiency is valued over effectiveness, bad things happen quickly. Colonial schooling is known to be "an unmitigated disaster for indigenous languages." As Nora Vasquez, Chemehuevi Indian, says, "I went to boarding school. If you were caught speaking your native language, you were punished." To her, language is "your breath that you take. Without your language, you might as well be dead."

Yet, it was undertaken in the name of efficiency and many countries. "It's an efficient way to give them a good education. However, bringing all of these children to a central location, educating them in English, and exposing them to the practice of the Hindu religion, does exert subtle or maybe not so subtle pressures on their identity as a tribal person," says linguists David Harrison and Gregory Anderson. As you've already read, you need to question what you think of as a "good education" as you become aware of judgment and indoctrination.

"Often people will deny knowledge of the language and later turn out to speak it," they say. "Languages get lower and lower status in the community. They are actively suppressed or at least actively discouraged. Oftentimes it is young children making this decision to stop using their ancestral language. And when those children grow up, the language is effectively gone."

When you feel oppressed, striking has historically restored a balance between workers and management. "In government the right to strike was introduced in a sector where by definition, there is no market to discipline either party's behaviour," writes Donald J. Savoie. "The absence of market pressure means that the self-interest of public officials does not include the efficient delivery of services. It also instills inertia in government operations."

Recently, the LCBO went on strike, where everyone buys their spirits in Ontario because the government says so. When I asked one employee how he felt, he said it had nothing to do with him because he was hired after the inclusion deadline. Yet, if you pay taxes, you are involved and old enough to vote, so it's your responsibility to get informed. How do you want your government to pay for things?

Practical Reflection

In Morocco, the government owns the hotel and casino, and that's how they pay for everything. In Ontario, sales from the LCBO go into the government coffers. Remove that, and you'll make up the difference in increased taxes. Which would you prefer? Every voter gets to decide, and you must choose. If you don't drink, like that guy who didn't, maybe you'd like all the drinkers to pay your bills. If you drink, you'd rather figure out how to lower your expenditures.

At the core, there might be confusion about the purpose of government. As a Conservative, I want as little government as possible and no more. A Liberal wants social safety nets and a redistribution of wealth, and the question that matters to me is from whom to who, and why doesn't philanthropy naturally cover the need? Should we fix that instead? What do we ultimately want from the machine called government?

Savoie writes, "Though Canadians may attach considerable importance to an efficient delivery of government programs and services and management of financial and human resources, what matters to ministers and senior public servants is if the prime minister and his most trusted advisors think that government is good at keeping things running on their tracks and out of political trouble." It's a conflict between the voters and the doers on the definition of performance.

The best way to get what you want is to squeeze people with a manufactured crisis. As Republican Baron Hill describes the financial crisis, "I got home on a Friday; everything was just fine in terms of the economy. I called back after my plane landed in Indiana to check in with my office, and all of a sudden, we've got this crisis on our hands and that I'm gonna have to vote when I come back Monday for a multi-billion-dollar bailout of the financial industry."

Some got bailed out, and some got sold out. Getting squeezed is the systematic elimination of options until there's nothing left to do but agree.

Professions at Cross Purposes

"Satisfaction is not the money. It's what you do to get it," writes Gregory Burns in his book **Satisfaction**. What satisfies you?

Parents want the best for their children, we assume. Alice Miller writes, "Luther told them it was their duty to release their children from the clutches of the devil...Because they believed him, they did not know that instead of exorcising the "devil" in their innocent children, their cruelty was planting the "seeds of evil" in them."

It's not only parents who begin with good intentions and end up paving the highway to hell.

Gabor Maté writes, "To be effective, a doctor had to listen to the patient, to develop a relationship with him, and he had also to trust his intuitions. Those are the qualities doctors seem to have lost as we have come to rely almost exclusively on "objective" measures, technology-based diagnostic methods and "scientific" cures."

If doctors enter the profession because they were sold on a career as healers, they are shattered when they realize their life's work is to prescribe pills. Forget that there's no time allotted for listening, no value attached to relationship building, and no credibility attributed to the patient's intuitions, at least not in Canada's system.

Doctors aren't the only ones who can be duped into a profession only to find that the system works differently than their initial intentions and original design. Being duped might be a universal experience for all professionals.

Academics thought they would pursue knowledge, not confirm what's already known or serve the agendas of corporations and governments while striving to publish or perish.

Unethical practices in the authorship of scientific papers have recently caught the world by storm, as long-held accepted findings failed to replicate. As Bennet and Taylor wrote in 2003, "Misuse occurs because of the academic system that measures the merit of research using the number of publications they have to their name. Therefore, it is the system needs modifying if unethical authorship is to be stemmed."

According to Professor William Black, referring to those in finance, "Every day they work, they make the world worse." If you asked people on Wall Street, in MBA programs, and the banking industry if they wake up with malicious intentions toward the rest of the world, the majority would deny it. Then, they would go to work and execute that very activity.

Some would say, "Hey, I'm just doing my job." What are your options once you've invested in the career and created a life with the bills that go with it?

Marina Walker, one of the 376 journalists who worked on the Panama Papers, says, "The banks, and the accounting firms, and the law firms, they are basically spending all of their resources in trying to damage national treasuries in creating an illusion of an economic system that works only for the one percent, and they are working to deepen that gap between the one percent and the rest of the world."

They create their own system. "There's another set of tax rules for the fortunate and well-connected. They can pretty much decide under the tax law what they're going to pay when they're going to pay it, and in some instances, almost nothing," says American Senator Ron Wyden.

Jack Blum says, "I spoke at a conference to the Inter-American Bar Association in Cochabamba, Bolivia. And I tried to say a lawyer's job is to keep people honest, and you shouldn't be helping them evade the law or break the law. My audience began to laugh at me. I blew up. "Why do you think you don't have clean water? Why do you think people are so poor? It's because you, as a group of professionals, are teaching people how not to be participants in your society."

Not participating in society comes with privilege, the privilege to get out of paying taxes, and taxes are income for a society. "There's a world that is only accessible for the powerful and the richest where they hide their money, where they enable money laundering, corruption, and actually, the plundering of whole continents," says Frederik Obermaier.

John Doe, the whistleblower behind the released data, writes, "Tax evasion cannot possibly be fixed while elected officials are pleading for money from the very elites who have the strongest incentives to avoid taxes relative to any other segment of the population." In the data, "We found payoffs to politicians. More than \$700 million in bribes had been paid. Two-thirds of the country's legislature had been tied to offshore companies," says Kevin Hall.

John Doe's manifesto describes the problem of too many professions at cross purposes. "Banks, financial regulators, and tax authorities have failed. Decisions have been made that have spared the

wealthy while focusing instead on reining in middle and low-income citizens. The collective impact of these failures has been a complete erosion of ethical standards, ultimately leading to a novel system we still call capitalism, which is tantamount to economic slavery. Hopelessly backward and inefficient courts have failed. Judges have too often acquiesced to the arguments of the rich, whose lawyers, and not just Mossack Fonseca, are well trained and honouring the letter of the law while simultaneously doing everything in their power to desecrate its spirit.”

The Panama Papers had worldwide ramifications. Governments fell, including Britain, Iceland, Brazil, and Argentina, yet significant reform hasn't happened.

From Doe's manifesto, the real problem was the need for his intervention. “The horrific magnitude of detriment to the world should shock us all awake. But when it takes a whistleblower to sound the alarm, it causes even greater concern. It signals that democracy's checks and balances have all failed, that the breakdown is systemic and that severe instability could be just around the corner.”

What you do when you go to work does matter, even if you started in that profession idealistically naïve or found yourself squeezed between a bill to pay and a job to do – that's how the consumerism world goes round and round.

You may choose the less travelled path when you find yourself at cross purposes, for it boasts a better commute. Do you have a whistle you should be blowing?

The Cost of Life

Robert Rafsky, while dying of AIDS, says, “The question is what does a decent society do with people who hurt themselves because they're human, who smoke too much, who overeat, who drive carelessly, who don't have safe sex? I think the answer is that a decent society does not put people out to pasture and let them die because they did a human thing.”

Rafsky didn't go quietly into that good night but protested and built new solutions every step of the way. “It was Iris who helped us see, we don't want a black market; we want to make the real market work,” says Jim Eigo. That they did; they got loud and inconvenient until they were included.

As a result of their protesting, requests, and commitment, they championed concepts like “humane trials” and persevered. Thanks to Rafsky, Eigo, and others left behind by the system, they took it upon themselves to find a way forward.

Such might be the task of every adult—finding a way forward when you are the one left holding the bag, dealt the raw deal, excluded from consideration.

“Emotions repressed in childhood remain stored away in our bodies, and in adulthood they can cause symptoms of varying severity,” writes Alice Miller. “What usually materializes is a pathological attachment, a mixture of fear of dutiful obedience that hardly deserves the name love in the genuine sense of the word.” She says, “Like depression, suicide is always the consequence of denied suffering in childhood.”

Always is a strong word. Suicide has also been the result of foreseen suffering, such as the kind that comes with the diagnosis of a terminal disease, a notice of foreclosure, or another terrible thing that would have to be so awful as to make suicide look like the better option.

Practical Reflection

For the children to whom Miller is referring, that denied suffering might as well have come in the form of authoritarianism, perfectionism, and violence.

The parent with all the answers holds the bar impossibly high and beats you when you don't meet it. The child feels unworthy and hopeless that time or effort will make a difference.

To reclaim the preciousness of life, work must be done. "The old wounds can heal over only when survivors of maltreatment have decided in favour of change, when they have decided to respect themselves and can liberate themselves from the expectations of the child within."

First, you notice that your parent continues to hold the bar too high or engage in other behaviours that you now see as damaging and hurtful. One day, you point it out and ask for change. Then you wait. The question is whether you become impervious to it or create a boundary that the behaviour cannot cross. What will not happen is behaviour change where you wish to see it. The only person you can change is yourself.

Revolution is part of life. Life might be precious, but it's not free or priceless. It has a price tag, and it cannot be avoided if there are many strategies to get by economically.

One day, we'd all like to retire. First, there's work and the price you must pay for the resources you will use, the structure that will shelter you, and the land you will occupy. There's no such thing as a free pass, as the price is paid in other ways when born into money. There is such a thing as child labour; though it might be illegal, it doesn't affect how you treat your children.

Though exploitation may be frowned upon, people are already shackled to a particular circumstance. "Sex workers couldn't address the long-term threat of dying from AIDS unless they could address the near-term threat of being beaten, robbed, and raped," writes Melinda Gates. For them, walking around with condoms might save them from AIDS, but having a condom on your person is an identifying characteristic of a sex worker, and that alone can be dangerous.

When you can't fill your time with education toward a career, with a job to pay the bills, with entertainment to give you a break, or with any of these things that cost money, you can do nothing but stand in the street, and that's illegal. Poor and homeless people are forced to break the law to live and be alive. This is the reality for those on Skid Row.

In Medicine Hat, as Jaime Rodgers says, "If you need a house, you get a house." Getting there was not easy, but they did it. Functional zero homelessness. Finally, their tunnels were being used for commuting, not for sheltering. Winter outdoors in Medicine Hat can be enough to kill a person – it's cold.

Many people are not lucky. Life hits them with a thud, and there is nowhere to turn. It can result from an illness, a layoff, or a bunch of other things that usually fall on a list like these, and you can easily classify them under "Things that would never happen to me."

Life can knock the hubris out of people, and you aren't usually around to see or hear about it. You have to trust in karma. The arc of justice may take a long time, but it does bend toward what's right. Today, you only have to see statues and monuments fall and convictions and sentences overturned to see that science exposes the truth, the facts, abused power and extreme authority.

Practical Reflection

It's the lies about paternity that are being discovered through DNA. When genetic testing came to the curious, I was intently interested to see what proportion of women had lied about who the father was over time, now that science can reveal the truth.

New truths are showing up in the misguided advice about how to nurture, being discovered through twin separation. When Bobby showed up for college, and everyone called him Eddie, it was the moment that would lay bare **Three Identical Strangers** and the impact of their adoptive parents.

These identical triplets separated at birth reveal the implications of parental harm and what society is capable of doing to other people without their knowledge or consent, or even sharing what was ultimately learned through the heavy price they paid. The study's conclusions are sealed until 2065 with the hope that by the time they are revealed, all the guilty parties will be dead.

Melinda Gates writes, "To me, no question is more important than this one: Does your primary relationship have love, respect, reciprocity, a sense of teamwork and belonging and mutual growth? I believe all of us ask ourselves this question in one way or another – because I think it is one of the greatest longings of life."

They say no man is an island; if you can't stand alone, it's incredible what you'll put up with to survive. "The happy ending lies not in Prince Charming but rather the awakening that he never existed at all," writes Arabi.

The problem is that you think you can't stand alone. Henry Ford said, "Whether you think you can or can't, you are right." The quality of your life may have everything to do with the quality of your relationships, what they taught you, and the quality of thinking you've applied to those relationships.

Part 2: Mastering Your Mind

As Dr. Joe Dispenza says, “If you are working on you, and I am working on me, sooner or later, we should see some change in the world.” Rumi wrote, “Yesterday I was clever and wanted to change the world. Today, I am wise, so I am changing myself.”

Mastering your mind is a skill. “Mindful awareness involves directing our attention not only to the mental content of our thoughts but also to the emotions and mind-states that inform those thoughts. It is being aware of the processes of our mind even as we work through its materials,” Maté says.

In part one, you learned about how your thoughts arise and where they originate – the emotions and mind-states, and that its materials show up in that voice in your head, the sentences in your journals, and the decisions you make all the time, large and small.

Someone asked me once, “In business?” The answer is yes, in business, for it is where the most damage is inflicted and where people still think it’s okay to treat people however you’d like - as long as you can get away with it. You will learn that what goes to work goes to the government, homes, schools, and everywhere. We must know our minds, if not for ourselves, then for our loved ones, the future of humanity and Earth.

Dr. Joe Dispenza says it’s not enough to know; you must understand how—possessing information about your mind's workings doesn’t do much. Information changes nothing – precisely when you don’t act on it. Mastering your mind happens when you decide it’s insufficient to understand how – you must do the work. Action changes everything.

Action includes conscious mental effort, whether tuning into yourself in silence, writing out your thoughts and feelings, or finding the time to get organized so you can pay attention in every moment without distraction. Dr. Jeffrey Schwartz states, “The mind activity that can physically rewire malfunctioning brain circuits and alter our dysfunctional emotional and cerebral responses is conscious mental effort.”

It takes conscious mental effort to do something different, and there’s no time like now. Alice Miller writes, “It is time to rouse ourselves from our inertia. As adults, we are no longer threatened by the same danger of destruction that many of us were exposed to in infancy, paralyzing us with fear and driving us to denial. Only in childhood is denial the sole means of survival. As adults, we can learn to stop ignoring the knowledge stored in our bodies because there is a real danger in being unable to understand the true motives behind our actions.”

Dangers of not understanding the true motives behind your actions include physical damage and disease, psychological unrest like regret and guilt, and weapons of distraction like addiction, and those are just some of the personal consequences.

Motives are as individual as your fingerprint, and the point may be much more profound than you know right now, but you will.

The Relentless Investigator

The solution to the consciousness illusion is to become a relentless investigator. Question everything, especially your emotions, thoughts, and deeds and those of the people around you.

Now you know to suspect what you do and say and get to know your emotional unconscious. The idea isn't to take emotion out of the picture, like a cold, calculating computer, but to embrace emotion and take the information that it's there to provide.

You might be the only one with access to that information. You might be uniquely positioned to bring something we all need to know to light. Maybe you shouldn't stop investigating until you find it. When you do, you will realize that new information always calls for change; sometimes, entire worlds shift and prepare for that.

No matter what you do or where you choose to go, you will eventually experience backlash. It will come from those who think you are wrong and those who know you are right. Either side may be equally fearful of the truth and the prospect of change. You scare them, and they fight you instead of their fear.

Your biggest problem will be identifying those who declare you evil when you are closer to the truth than they want you to know. Those who protest the loudest often have the most to lose. These are the bullies in life. They try to shut you down and hope you go away while confusing issues and creating smokescreens.

Listen for the sigh of relief from the one or few who think, "Phew, I wasn't the only one." You never are – you just haven't found them yet or found the right words.

But like a tourist in an unknown land, you aren't the first and won't be the last. However, you might be the first to get the message through, so plant that flag and celebrate when you do.

Unrooting Motivations

You can convince yourself you are on the high road, but knowing your true motivations will tell you where you are headed. Joan Erikson writes, "Layers of history and circumstance have made us one way, but it is important to peel off the layers and find all the buried parts of you."

While you are a child, what you do is survival-based. As a grown adult, what got you here won't get you there. Growth might entail unwinding some of what you've done to survive so that you can thrive.

"True motivation is knowing that I do what I do not because someone else wants me to do it, or because I believe someone will respect or like me for doing it, not because some inner voice tells me I "should" do it, and not because I am asserting my independence by defying someone who forbade me to do it," writes Maté.

Since our motivations are intermingled with the people around us, our need for belonging, and our orientation to survive, it's worth assessing who surrounds us and how that's working for everyone.

Wrangle Characters

Expect the best from people, but plan for what you know to be true – from you, too. “You must allow everyone the right to exist according to his character,” writes Robert Green in **Mastery**. “All you should do is strive to use this character.” For you, too.

While you know about things like first impressions, the propensity to judge, and the desire to control, others do not understand them and continue to think of themselves as intelligent, educated, and capable citizens.

Marilyn Monroe said, “Boys think girls are like books. If the cover doesn’t catch their eye, they won’t read what’s inside.” These days, I do not believe you can limit that sentiment to boys. Mark Zuckerberg discovered that people love to judge and rate the covers, and he built that desire into a global empire. Now that’s making use of character, if not in a socially constructive way.

Instead of subjugating herself to objectification, Rachel Maddow says, “If you can get over what I look like, it’s going to stay the same.” That’s a treat, as it’s possible to change your hair colour and style so many times I can’t recognize you. For women especially, the hazard of objectification is genuine, one that we can easily fall into without deciding consciously that is how we want to spend our time, money and energy.

Once, I spent an hour listening to another woman complain about her husband. Then, she asked me, “So, do you think you’ll ever get married?” Misery loves company. While many consider it an option to think, “I’ll show you how it’s done,” others entirely bow out of the competition. What’s for me is what’s for me, and you do you.

In business, there’s no shortage of characters to give you advice. Whole Foods co-founder John Mackey says, “It seems there is a new set of buzzwords to deal with every few years – from total quality management to reengineering business processes to Six Sigma and numerous others. But Conscious Capitalism is no flavor-of-the-month fad.”

They all say that, and they are all right. Total quality management wasn’t a fad; it introduced the idea that quality shouldn’t be limited to the production floor but comes as a result of how people are hired, trained, and deployed, how suppliers are selected and managed, and all the parts of the business that previously were thought of as interchangeable and fixed add-ons.

Suddenly, the practices of planning with intention and measuring accuracy and precision flowed beyond the plant floor. After this becomes accepted and normal, you no longer have to discuss it, and the term fades away. People who observe on the periphery and do not have their assumptions tested and updated see a fad, not a fading of old beliefs nor the adoption of new methods.

Reengineering business processes was about speeding everything up by eliminating the time it takes to seek and get approvals. As of this writing, this idea remains vastly unadopted in the Western world. We are supposed to be democratic at home but accept a dictatorship at work.

Reengineering recognized how power and control cost time and money and provided principles to eliminate it without pointing fingers or assigning blame. When all workers have the experience of being fulfilled at work, we can put the reengineering books aside. Calling it a fad was what the patriarchy did, so they didn’t have to respond to it.

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Six Sigma and its Green, Black, and Master Belts were supposed to remove bureaucracy and red tape similarly—hence the name. They were supposed to challenge old assumptions and long-held beliefs with the power of data. It's not me; it's the data; they were trained and empowered to say it. Those who wanted to stick to the status quo and their leadership agendas called it a fad and pointed to the expensive training, and there it went.

Conscious Capitalism, Mackey's idea that a business has to care about its responsibilities and impact beyond profits, is a flavour of the month if the idea is that current CEOs will stand up and say, "Oh yeah, you are right, and we were bad. We'll change now." Knowing that whenever you call someone a name, it bounces off them like rubber and sticks to you like glue.

It's not about who is winning and who is better. "A requirement of healing, becoming whole, is circuitry in the brain that can carry different messages and a different, non-helpless image of the self," writes Maté. "The parent remains firm but loving and resists becoming embroiled in emotional hostilities. It is not a war. He does not need to gain a victory over the child but only over his anxiety and lack of self-control."

It's about understanding. "If we can actively love, then there will be no attention deficit and no disorder." To actively love is to be interested in what they are interested in, in them and their thoughts and feelings. Not on their obedience, the way they seem to reflect you, and their flaws and shortcomings.

The relentless investigator seeks out judgment in all its forms to get to the core of motivation.

Uproot Causes

Blame, shame, and judgment don't take us as far as compassionate, empathetic, humanistic searches for truth, for everyone is logical if we don't always appreciate their programming. Nor do they. Most people believe they are doing the right thing but have different values, information, or ideas.

"The world needs a great revolution where each individual finds his religion within himself," Osho said. That starts with science explaining why things happen, leading to motivations that go beyond what people say are the reasons for doing what they do.

We need change for the better, change in the right direction. Since many problems become huge before a cross-functional team is pulled together to perform a root cause analysis, there are likely many root causes. Just like climbing Everest, melting an iceberg, or eating an elephant, one small change at a time in the right direction is the sustainable way to eliminate the root causes.

What are those right directions? Businesses are made of people; at the end of every root cause is a person. Even when the root cause seems to be a bolt fatigued before its lifecycle, it begins in someone's mind and ends in someone's hand. There was a person who designed it, tested it, made it, and installed it. It's not blame we are looking for, but lessons, knowledge and insight to be used for the future. We are looking for new and better ways to control the inputs to ensure the outputs.

NASA's Challenger disaster is one of the most popular investigations into what went wrong. The root cause expressed in the media talked of a ring failure. However, more accurate root causes point to the human nature to commit to a plan despite contrary evidence. Management had been informed of the likelihood of the launch decision's outcome, but it went ahead anyway. Other accounts tell of a lack of

clarity in the message, lost in engineering tables, graphs and diagrams. Still, others point to PowerPoint fatigue, the disengagement we have all experienced from slide after slide.

Lao Tzu, 25 centuries ago in China, demonstrated a deep understanding of the root cause as head of the court. The first case before him involved a thief who had taken half of a rich man's wealth. Lao was sentenced to six months in prison. The rich man protested, claiming he was the victim and should not be punished. Lao Tzu responded, "Your need to be in jail is greater. You have collected so much money for yourself, depriving so many people. Your greed is creating these thieves." Lao Tzu's first case became his last when the emperor realized the wise man's logic would also imprison him.

Whether it is communication challenges or greed and envy, looking to human nature as the root cause might seem daunting, given all the nuances and intricacies that make every one of us so interesting and unique. We are much more alike and share the common elements that make us human.

From what is known about human nature, the root causes of behaviour can be broken down into ten elements, which have been formed into the mnemonic "WEAKMAPPER" to help remember. "Mapper" because these elements map or guide behaviour, and "Weak" because they can be changed. These ten are Want, Encouragement, Acknowledgement, Knowledge, Measurement, Advice, Practice, Procedure, Environment, and Reward. They are the shortcuts to help answer the question, "Why would they do that?" because knowing better does not always mean doing better.

Want describes the inherent internal motivation that governs our gut reactions and instinctual decisions. When we want to do something, passion overcomes all else. What comes naturally also comes easiest. Significant hiring decisions and getting the right people in the right jobs are ways to assure quality.

On the flip side, when there is disinterest or dislike toward a required behaviour or task, there are many avenues to avoid it. Not enough time is a common and possibly valid excuse when we are all overutilized, but it might be the handiest, if not the most truthful one.

Encouragement is the cheerleader of behaviour management. We all fear rejection and disappointing others and hence seek to follow the encouragement we are given. It helps us find the extra bit of effort when we are drained, provides us with the faith that we might be able to accomplish something that might have seemed out of reach, and pushes us forward. Encouragement can take many forms, from verbal to nonverbal. However, the most potent form it can take is the opposite.

Studies have shown that as many as 20 encouragements are required to undo one discouragement. One interesting experiment involving Israeli soldiers in training. Before the training, the trainers were given the trainees list, each assigned a category of potential. At the close of the training, each soldier scored within their predetermined category. It is unsurprising, except that the categorizations were utterly random, rendering the results shocking.

Acknowledgement is the pat on the back for the job well done, the nod or cue to convey that an effort was noticed. It is the feedback that is received. After all, if the effort isn't seen or appreciated, it is likely to be dropped.

When an effort is not acknowledged, it sends the message that it doesn't matter. When a secretary, faithfully spending much time and energy on a report, misses an occurrence and no one says a word, she

waits before resuming it. When no word is heard, she receives the message that the report no longer matters. Perhaps at one time, it did, but now it is just a waste of time and effort. This test is frequently performed in large organizations where procedures and practices are outdated and outgrown. Sometimes, we know, it might be better to beg forgiveness than to ask permission.

Knowing that others will react is one of the biggest reasons anyone does anything.

Clarify Expectations

Knowledge is fluid. What we took for fact years ago—that the earth was flat and at the center of the universe—is mutable.

Like the citizens of that era, the journey to knowledge begins with not even knowing what we don't know. At this stage, we cannot even figure out what questions to ask or articulate.

In the next step, when we know what we don't know, we have figured out what questions to ask, even if we cannot evaluate the answers. In the third stage, we don't know what we know and, therefore, cannot question it.

The fourth and last stage involves knowing what we know, but even this last step can be mutable as our knowledge evolves. After all, we knew the earth was flat, and then we knew better. Knowledge is difficult to disregard; once we know something, we can't return to what it was like before we knew it. Once we learn to read, letters are no longer abstract squiggles.

The process is no different at work and in life, but it is faster and more personal. Knowledge is transmitted and shared through training, work instructions and prior education. If we don't know how to do something or that it even needs to get done, it won't likely happen. Sharing knowledge seeks to eliminate this barrier of not knowing what we don't know. It provides a language and a framework for the initiated to ask questions.

Where a procedure has been determined, documented, and available, it is likely to be followed. Business systems abound and are the basis of every quality program. They include templates, policies, work instructions, and rules. Where practices are likely undocumented, procedures constitute the thought-out and planned processes required to assure quality.

Of course, any procedure can be improved for clarity, completeness and effectiveness. Where any grayness exists in a procedure, variation will exist in a process, reflecting how it may be interpreted. Where gaps exist, variation can also exist. While we work to create more robust, effective, and efficient procedures, we must also ensure that procedures are a solid and tangible requirement.

While it may be tempting to create as black-and-white a procedure as possible, to facilitate as slight variation as possible, an overload of information and instruction can have the opposite effect. If you have ever leafed through multipage assembly instructions, you know the impulse to throw it aside altogether. To ensure procedures are followed, leave room for people to be human.

If we are verbally told that a certain way is right, with no concrete evidence to back it up, that might work, but not everyone would do what they're told. We all have somewhere to turn when we don't know what to do. A colleague, friend, or peer can constantly offer a suggestion, good or bad. While this

is obvious, it is also one of the underpinnings of corporate culture. Where rules are missing, procedures are not documented, or processes are ill-formed, deciding the proper course of action can be murky.

While attempting to provide clarity, measurements introduce murkiness. In one call center, performance was measured by Service Level, the percentage of total calls answered within 20 seconds and targeted at 80 percent. However, from a customer perspective, it was like having one foot in ice water and another in boiling water and calling your feet warm. Stellar service in the morning hours was no comfort for the customers experiencing inferior service at the peak times during the day and certainly wasn't the intention of the measure. With many examples of measures driving the wrong behaviour, on purpose or unwittingly, it is a good idea to look below the measurement surface for the actual story.

Measurements are variable because people have a chance and an investment in a different outcome. Most organizations call them targets. While measurements are integral to improvements, they are also a shortcut to understanding what is happening below the surface.

Uncaught, this behaviour becomes the culture, the rule of what to do in that situation. This can become the diverging point between what happens on the floor and what management thinks happens. Ferreting out these differences is why processes must be observed, cross-functional teams utilized, and subject matter experts involved, where the subject matter experts do it every day.

Habits, as they say, are hard to break but not impossible. Breaking habits takes time, intention, and effort, but we expect people to change on a dime when we pay them to change. When it works, it becomes the new way. In **The Moment of Lift**, Melinda Gates writes, "You don't get behaviour change unless a new practice is transparent, works well, and gets people talking."

From thoughts to actions, what you do daily matters and adds to a more concrete brain than plastic. Biologically, it's plastic waiting to respond to your deliberate attention. "Given that addiction is all about running from difficult emotions or hanging on to enticing ones, bare attention has the potential to dissolve the very motivations that drive the addicted mind," writes Maté. Reputationally, you are a personality with moods and habits that surprise no one.

You can change it if it's not straightforward, quick, or easy, but it's always clear. Ambiguity is not holding you back if anything is.

The Enlightened Opportunity

The solution to the dangerous master is to escape at the most enlightened opportunity. Masters are difficult to escape—that is what makes them masters. Escaping your emotional unconscious and the programming of your thoughts, words, and deeds by things you may not remember and didn't choose for yourself is spotting the chance.

Instead of what you used to avoid and classified as uncomfortable, you will rush in with glee in your heart and hope in your hands. Conflict will become not only your friend but also your saviour. Peace is not kept; it is made. Avoiding conflict is maintaining peace; making peace is raising the conflict and negotiating a solution.

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Miller says, “Today, we have a chance to look around, learn from experience, and devise new creative solutions for conflicts.”

New and creative solutions include accepting and facing conflicts instead of carefully managing around them. Maybe we can flip our perspective and appreciate conflict, not for its drama or egoic opportunities, but because of the inherent difference. Different ideas generate new and creative solutions. If all ideas were the same, there would be no conflict.

While trauma is often a door to personal growth, it’s not widely discussed. Instead, we hear a lot about post-traumatic stress. There is an alternative, and it might be more common.

As Jim Rendon writes in his book **Upside**, “Trauma survivors are often pushed to find more meaningful and fulfilling ways of understanding who they are and how they want to live.” He explains his research in post-traumatic growth and the “half or more who report positive changes as a result of their experience.”

This experience of living under one umbrella and then shucking it for a new one can happen by choice. Some realize they were born into a cult and seek escape, those who were born into religion and pursue science, and those who were born into communism and seek democracy.

Rendon writes that “growth is a rethinking, a reassessment of yourself and the world.” You may have perspectives you adopted as a child that no longer serve or match your reality. You might have functioned under a particular set of harsh or demeaning labels. It could be that your rules about how the world works don’t match your observations.

It’s time to be a skeptic and your own devil’s advocate.

Choosing to Thrive

While it’s often believed that humans' ultimate goal is survival, the ultimate goal is to become the best you can be. Survival is merely table stakes, the ability to remain in the game, but choosing to thrive is choosing the pursuit of mastery.

As Robert Green writes in **Mastery**, “The brain that we possess is the work of six million years of development, and more than anything else, this evolution of the brain was designed to lead us to mastery, the latent power within us all.” Green writes, “It is time that the word “genius” becomes demystified and de-rarefied. We are all closer than we think to such intelligence.”

Seek Challenge

A fulfilled life is bursting with challenges and a willingness to seek them. Your brain thrives on challenge, and your life deserves nothing less.

Cindy Paulson is a heroic survivor. At the age of 17, she was kidnapped by a serial killer. Escape was not easy, for her captor hunted and killed women for sport, and she was his next prey.

Miraculously, she did escape.

With Paulson’s testimony, the serial killer was put away for the murder of 17 women and the rape of another 30. He is serving a 46-year sentence and is never eligible for parole. When the movie of her

heroics came out in 2013, she was married with three children. After its release, she told the film's director that "she felt like a weight had been lifted."³²

Effort is what heals. If you've ever harvested a meal, built your shelter, or provided for your comfort, then you know nothing tastes better or is more satisfying than something you've worked to attain.

Contrarily, we consider challenges to be minimized and avoided and define progress as having more creature comforts and putting less effort into anything. Too often, managers and leaders think they protect people by keeping them in safe bubbles.

You must solve challenges, puzzles, and problems to become more capable. Robert Green writes that "limited actions and experiences create barren brains." A barren brain has no fodder for creativity, options, or solutions.

Facing a challenge shows you your capabilities. Joan Erikson writes, "The more you challenge yourself, the less fearful you will be of the regard and judgment of others." You might have doubted you could survive independently or been told you couldn't. And then you prove them wrong.

Only when challenged can you discover an ability you didn't know you had. Such is always the way with challenges—confidence, capability, and the ability to make new choices result. It's called growth, and not everyone who gets old grows old. Some merely age.

If you think of challenges as significant feats, you may not realize that the biggest challenge can be unseen. It can be a challenge to be with yourself without escape. To have the discipline to "Stay!" while your body is itching to get up and leave, to do something 'productive.' Sit still and meditate when it's challenging. You are producing peace of mind, freedom of spirit, and consciousness of will.

To surmount that challenge, you need positive thoughts. Lynne McTaggart says, "When we think positive thoughts, we release positive chemicals into our bodies. When we think negative thoughts, we release negative chemicals." A positive mindset leads to positive framing, and a negative mindset leads to a downward spiral.

As you've learned, how we assign labels to our emotions using our physiology and external environment isn't always accurate. Butterflies in your stomach might be considered anxiety when you're on a stage or excited at the podium. Sweaty palms and a hot face might be fear when you're on a rickety bridge or attraction when you're on a date. A positive mindset will have you leaning toward excitement and away from anxiety, toward attraction and away from fear, and toward success in the face of challenge.

Only the lazy say that time heals all wounds – and they are still waiting. "If hyperactivity expresses anxiety, lethargy and under arousal express shame," writes Gabor Maté. If you can't sit still, find out what you are anxious about; if you have no energy, what are you ashamed of? Fears may be unfounded when spotted, and shame may be misplaced when identified.

When you seek challenge, you don't always win. If you are never falling, then you aren't pushing yourself hard enough, you aren't growing, you are sustaining. There will be lessons to learn with any challenge, and the lessons you need make you seek the challenge.

Locked in the past, a question that gets asked far more often than answered is, "What were you thinking?" Answer that question profoundly and truthfully, and you will be on your way to progress. The

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more in touch you can get with your motivation, the more precise your decisions and the better the results, the closer you get to mastery.

Extract all the juice of knowledge from failure to take full advantage of it. You may find that you could have done better, even in overall success. Micro-failures aren't always tiny lessons but may hold the most significant insight for avoiding future catastrophes.

Ray Dalio knows about catastrophes. He declared that one would arrive and was wrong. After that destructive incident, he humbled his ego. According to him, "Pain + Reflection = Progress." He started asking, "Not how do I know that I am right, but how might I be wrong."

You don't want to be ninety percent down the road to stop and wonder why you started. Yet, that is the reality for many people. More get through their lives, and they never stop to ask once: Where do I want to go, why do I want to get there, and how do I want to experience the way?

Orient yourself to the future by deliberately choosing what you seek to master and finding the challenges that will enable you to do so.

Grow Empathy

As a philanthropist, Melinda Gates understands the lure of walking in, assuming you know better, and starting to throw your money around. She also understands the need to resist that seemingly efficient way of doing things because it's also completely ineffective. As she says, "Vishwajeet told me, "Their cup is not empty; you can't just pour your ideas into it. Their cup is full, so you must understand what is in it."

Robert Green's second law of human nature is to "transform self-love into empathy." Self-love is ego, the bold part of you that knows all the answers, the one barging in with orders and command. It sees only one side, which is a lopsided way to get by. It's not helpful or healthy.

Ego lets us believe that we are better than average. "The desire to feel good about ourselves is sufficient to explain the better-than-average effect," writes Jonathan D. Brown in 2011. It "is greater for important qualities than unimportant qualities," "increases in magnitude following a threat to self-worth," and "occurs when ... compared with a single peer and made directly."

People with depression exhibit a diminished better-than-average effect across the board. That is, with depression, you no longer see yourself as better-than-average but have a more accurate perception of where you stand in comparison to others.

"The research repeatedly demonstrates how important accurate empathy is for our sense of adequacy and how we need a safe parental relationship that provides an environment where we can express our despair, anguish, and rage. If you are in some way deprived of this, your sense of self can be injured, creating what's known as narcissistic injury," write Steve Flowers and Bob Stahl.

A lack of empathy leads to thinking that there are good and bad people; therefore, you are one or the other, as is everyone else. There are people to be banished and people to worship. The part of you that you deny gets shut down. The perspective that there are us and there are them becomes the default lens through which you see the world. Progress becomes the alternative of weeding out the people instead of investigating the circumstances that made such behaviour manifest.

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You need good to decode evil. A behaviour you identified as evil in a stranger was displayed by someone you love. How could they do such a thing, you ask, and you can find the answer with empathy. Everyone behaves under a certain logic; with empathy, it can be exposed. Without empathy, judgment reigns, and evil exists.

Decoding evil creates empathy, or maybe it is only possible with empathy. Either way, embracing and understanding behaviour as a cumulated reaction to life helps you navigate people, relationships, and possibilities.

Unilaterally, we see little attempt to learn from people committing malicious acts. One of these, the University of Texas tower shooting, stands out because the shooter, Charles Whitman, felt this end was coming and wanted help avoiding it.

Despite seeing at least five doctors, Whitman couldn't avoid the end he anticipated. Sixteen people died. In his will, he requested that whatever was left of his life insurance policy, if it was valid, be left to a mental health foundation. He also ordered an autopsy to determine if there were biological causes for his actions.

Today, names of perpetrators of mass violence are left out of media reports as if the non-naming of these individuals is enough to eliminate whatever caused their actions. With empathy, perhaps we can learn instead of scorn.

A better-than-thou mindset does not lead to an inclusive society but one that slowly eliminates everyone. Self-righteous people have their lack of empathy on full display, their propensity to judge out there in the open, and their egos up front and center. Jails get overstuffed, and people become more and more stressed that their bad side will leak out one day, and then it does.

A misfit myself, I needed some mind-reading skills, and apparently, that's what reading literary fiction improves. When we read, we are taking the role of the narrator. As close as we can, we see what they think, why they believe it, and what actions are justified to them in their mind. For everyone, they think they are sane, intelligent, and strategic. If it doesn't look that way on the outside, you are missing a theory of how their mind works.

Understanding someone else's world on the page may also help build empathy. Where theory of mind is the ability to know that what you are thinking is different from mine, empathy is the skill of feeling what someone else is feeling, which may differ from your emotional response. With a widening empathy gap, a better appreciation of the role of fiction might be what society needs.

Until you know how someone's mind works, you can't begin to change their thinking or what they do about it. When you do, you can ingrain that change and not rely on the highly unreliable cognitive knowing better to do better.

Empathy is not a judgment. I've had some people listen to my story, internalize how they would feel if it happened to them, and assume that's what I felt. They respond with judgments: "You are overreacting," "I know just how you feel," or "Oh my, how traumatic!" These responses tell me more about their world than how they understood mine.

Trauma is not what happens to us, but having no one to understand it. It's being and feeling alienated every time you tell the story. Anthony Storr writes, "When a person is encouraged to get in touch with

Practical Reflection

and express his deepest feeling in the secure knowledge that he will not be rejected, criticized, nor expected to be different, some kind of rearrangement or sorting process often occurs within the mind which brings with it a sense of peace, a sense that the depths of the well of truth have been reached.”

Empathy is asking questions, not judging, and not marking like a teacher if that other person got the emotion right because everyone’s world is theirs. Empathy is feeling what the other person feels and looking for the reasons that make sense.

That’s why we need stories—to help us realize that no matter what, someone has been there, done that, and lived to tell what went right and wrong. That’s learning from experience and the courage of expression. Instead, people will tell you what makes them look or feel good without the effort of unbiased evaluation. Hearing the truth might make people more empathic or act more humanely.

Empathy is sharing your stories, not because it’s all about you, but because there might be someone waiting to feel not so alone.

Build Compassion

Where empathy is the ability to step into an individual’s body and know what they feel, compassion is staying safely removed from the situation while leaning in that direction. Why would you want a certain level of coldness compared to empathy?

Empathy puts the individual above the collective; sometimes, you must sacrifice one to save the whole. When that is the situation, you want to be able to step out of what that experience might feel like and into your head without its nerve endings and with its cold analysis. Affective neuroscientist Jaak Pankseep says, “Free choice only comes from thinking; it doesn’t come from emotions. It emerges from the capacity to think about your emotions.”

Compassion creates room for kindness without getting overwhelmed by emotion. It allows the distance you need to think about your feelings. Writes Kelli Harding, “Being kind takes bravery. It requires standing fearless and doesn’t mean being positive or being a pushover.”

What if it took a hefty dose of anger to be kind? Rage is not the same as anger. Anger is internal; rage is its discharge. “Discharge defends against anger being experienced.”³³ Anger is knowing an injustice occurred, who did it, and what happened. Rage is attempting to correct the inequity without an organized response.

Anger gets stigmatized in society, but it’s rage and violence that should be contained, minimized, and trained away. Society needs anger for progress; you need compassion for rage. Compassion allows you to discover the wrong and correct it systematically, not incidentally.

Rage punishes, and anger motivates. Rage is the lower road of instant reaction. Anger is the higher road that answers the question, “What will you do about it?” The bully asks the question rhetorically, and anger says, “One day, I’ll be older, richer, smarter. One day is coming.”

Instead of releasing rage, let it gather and marinate, becoming pure anger. Rage lacks clarity and purpose. Transformed into anger, it becomes focus, clarity, and internal motivation.

When you experience anger, you realize it’s motivational power, as did Peter Stanley, Wall Street bond trader turned full-time AIDS activist. “I was going to work, and someone handed me a flyer. My mentor

says, “They all deserve to die because they took it up the butt.” I was deeply closeted, and I had to stew about it for the rest of the day. I got myself to the very next Act Up meeting. They could tap into that immediate anger and get stuff done,” said Stanley.³⁴

You cannot have compassion for the other until you have compassion for yourself. If you hold yourself to high ideals and horrific punishment, you inflict the same on those around you without realizing you’ve treated them with your high standard. You don’t see what you are missing because you don’t have it. Without compassion, you evaluate the world only as you experience it – closed and narrow.

Compassion allows you to find the sense in all of it. “Armed with compassion, we recognize that addiction was the answer – the best answer we could find at one time in our lives – to the problem of isolation from our true selves and from the rest of creation. It also keeps us gloomy, sad, and angry,” writes Gabor Maté.

The objective is to learn from negative emotions instead of ignoring them, coping with them, or pushing them away. The insight you gain when you sit with these feelings helps improve your world and increase your compassion for yourself and others.

What would you say to a friend? It’s often very different than what you’d say to yourself.

“Emotional competence is what we need to develop to protect ourselves from the hidden stresses that create a health risk, and it is what we need to regain if we are to heal,” writes Maté. “We do have to practice, pay constant attention to our internal states and learn to trust these internal perceptions more than what words – our own or anyone else’s – convey.”

Those inner states can be scary and detrimental when you don’t know how to visit them. As Ethan Kross and Ozlem Ayduk wrote in 2011, “It is helpful to understand and make meaning out of negative experiences. However, people’s attempts to do so often backfire, leading them to ruminate and feel worse.”

Sometimes, you are that person from whom you need distance. If you are introspective and attempt to recreate the feeling, you will be overcome and overwhelmed. You cannot do it with empathy. You must do it with compassion. Rumination is repeating the same incident as if it might change or spark insight. Insight requires a different perspective. Compassion allows you to reappraise a situation without experiencing it emotionally.

Looking back on our histories, we can ruminate or do two other things. We can suppress it by pushing it away. Or, we can re-appraise, which is to look at things from a different angle. Maybe you’ve learned something new, which should change how you interpret things. Returning to those histories with this new fact-based perspective is one way to re-appraise.

Researchers found that suppression effectively makes it look like it’s working. Emotions aren’t visually discernible. However, it increases sympathetic activation, the body’s fight-or-flight response. You can lie only on the surface; your body always knows.

According to researchers, if you can re-appraise situations, you will likely experience better relationships and well-being. You are more likely to be able to forgive wrongdoers and find empathy for offenders. Re-appraisers experience and express more significant positive and lesser negative emotions than suppressors.

Practical Reflection

Jim Rendon found that flourishing only takes three ingredients: warm, loving companionships, relationships without being controlled, and the space to grow. “Posed in a tone of compassionate curiosity, “Why?” is transformed from rigid accusation to an open-minded, even scientific question,” writes Gabor Maté.

You may want to call yourself by name while you try to learn what you did wrong. Some people even scold themselves by name. LeBron James tells interviewers about the mistakes LeBron James made. “Me, myself, and I,” they say, and when you see those three as valid and helpful options for learning, observing, and doing, you have the space in your psyche to get compassionate.

With challenge, empathy, and compassion, you choose to thrive, not merely survive. This makes you an enlightened ruler of your mind instead of a mindless servant of your thoughts and biology. You might find yourself heading into new territory, expanding your world, and finding more things to question.

Question everything, for you’ve been asleep and well-behaved for far too long.

The Immersive Experience

The solution to the fastest network is to slow down and pay closer attention at all times. If you are driving, you drive. If you are reading the news, you are doing that, not also eating and chatting and dividing up your attention and scattering it to the wind.

The ability to focus and tune into something is a skill on a spectrum of abilities. At one end is ADHD, clinically diagnosed with the inability to pay attention and stay on task. At the other end are people whose complete and sustained focus is what keeps them alive, like **Free Solo**’s Alex Honnold.

When you are actively attempting to stay alive, your attention widens. Time seems to stretch on forever. More, those moments are etched into your memory like a video you can return to at any time, to learn a new lesson each time you watch it. For myself, I have those moments that were indeed a matter of life and death.

After that, I learned I can focus and pay attention on purpose, without the threat, and time and memory do their things. When I want to remember something, I know how to do it. When I need more time, I know how to get it. It is by immersing yourself completely and ignoring everything else.

In your own world, it can be difficult to achieve this state of mind because everything in your visual field triggers a memory, or something urgent, or whatever it did before, in all the other times and days and years you’ve seen them. More, there are forces at work to keep things that way.

What you need is a new experience. Immerse yourself in a different world to dissolve your propensity to carve out and protect your current world.

Many people say they love to travel and take themselves everywhere—complete with all their perspectives, habits, and preferences. In doing so, they stay in a bubble no matter where they go. They miss the opportunity to get to know a different world, perspective, and worldview.

The more differences you can experience, the more food for thought. The more food for thought, the more insight you will have, the faster you will solve problems and the more confidently you can decide what works for you and what doesn't.

Diversifying Experience

Katie Couric says, "Media can be an instrument of change: it can maintain the status quo and reflect the views of society, or it can, hopefully, awaken people and change minds."

Sometimes, it's as simple as changing the channel to see how the competitor phrased the identical event and framed the same players. Business and politics are closely tied and never forget that the media is a business, not a public service.

While you seek to hear both sides of an argument and form your own opinion, know that the wider net you cast, the more likely it is to include the facts. Like the fisherman on the ocean with his net in a storm, pack your courage and anchor it in the confidence that you've done this before and will do it again.

Cast away the safe lines that bound you to doctrine and go forth with the power of knowledge. The more you know, the more you realize the endless possibilities.

Mitigate Risk

People go to great lengths to avoid uncomfortable truths. The trick is knowing whether you'd prefer alpha or beta risk. Alpha risk is thinking you are right when you could be wrong, and beta risk assumes you are mistaken when you could be right.

Atheists declare that God does not exist. If they are wrong, and somehow, in that vacuum that contains nothing and yet still contains mass, ends up containing God, then they are committing an alpha risk. There's the ego upside of being right for all eternity if they are wrong.

Agnostics hold onto the questions that remain in that unknown mass and state that the existence of God is unknowable. Different religions declare things that science knows to be false, yet there are many reasons for one thing to exist in your head and heart and another to come out your mouth and appear in your life. There's the ego downside of sitting on the fence and all of eternity if they are right.

Life, what you do with it, and what happens afterwards is one free land of opinion. Scientists have opinions, but science has no facts. Until then, the creative mind says, let me roam.

The Linguists attempt to convey the importance of understanding diversity. "Our favourite number in Sora is 93. It was four twenty-twelve one." It's a system that switches from a base-12 system to a base-20 system, whereas English uses a base-10. "We're scientists. We should know all these different ways of knowing math before they get flattened out and vanish."

For all the stories that could be told, why those stories? Why write them down? Why those?

The ability to introspect is relatively new. People didn't think about things and didn't question the status quo. The fact that the early pioneers did this is part of what makes them remarkable. They don't necessarily choose the risk of the bleeding edge, but they find themselves there.

Practical Reflection

The person who values peace may rush to shut down a conflict and settle for a false harmony, only to be full of rage when it boils up again later. Someone who values equality may not realize they are oppressing others with their passionate contributions to a conversation. Another can easily see that their desire to protect their child from the realities of life produced a teenager not fit to leave home.

No one is perfect, least of all the people we expect to be perfect: parents, teachers, and cops.

One person admitted to me that he'd lied on a personality test. I was incredulous, so he clarified. "I didn't like the results. I didn't think it was me. So, I went back and changed my answers." If the point of personality tests were to validate what you think of yourself or like the results instead of discovering new insights, don't bother with the test. Just take the answers in the back and wait until other people stop thinking you are cute, funny, or harmless.

More than ever, we have choices about who we want to be. We can craft and present a persona to the world, whether you think of it as a deliberate personal brand, professional influencer, or any social media profile.

Then there is the person reflected against the people with whom we spend most of our time. They may not be accurate, or even all agree, but they are another source of information about who you are.

As a process engineer, I learned there are always at least three truths: the one that gets documented on paper, the one that management thinks occurs, and the one that happens. If you are an employee, it's the role description, the things they tell you in the interview, and the school of hard knocks that your colleagues give you.

Finally, there is the side of everyone who doesn't come out and play with anyone else. Whether or not they ever actually come out and play at all is up to you. Many people don't know this side of themselves and may never. It's your choice when there is no one else to satisfy, impress, or care about.

For me, this is the working definition of an authentic self: the honest reality of you. Not the rose-coloured one that shows up on your best behaviour, not the version of you trained to turn ugly truths into pithy positivity, but the one who strives while knowing exactly where your feet are planted.

If getting to know yourself this well sounds indulgent, let me explain why it's not about you. It's all about us. Welcome to your intervention; we want you to get to know yourself.

When it comes to things to consciously aim for, you can aim for higher and better uses of your time and choose your battles wisely to win some wars instead of being distracted. You can aim to express them for the greater good instead of failing to notice the damage, consequences, and descriptors that you don't think apply but could be argued about.

Again, it's not about being right; it's about being principled. What's the principle you'd articulate and defend?

You can choose to get to know the self that is triggered by emotion, the self that longs to be heard and appreciated, and the self you'd be proud to call your friend.

Being "meh" with your opinions, goals, or values is like relying on a wet paper bag. When you need it to do its job, it fails you. Something will fall right through, and hopefully, it wasn't a jar of spaghetti sauce

or a glass vial of the last drop of medicine that could have saved you. I'd call that risky, no matter how you classify it.

Spark Ideas

You don't have to travel anywhere to expand your mind physically. Authors, artists, and meditators use their minds. Osho said, "Only a man who loves himself can meditate; otherwise, you are always escaping from yourself, avoiding yourself." He says, "In aloneness, you will disappear as an ego and personality and find yourself as life itself, deathless and eternal. Unless you can be alone, your search for truth will fail."

Do you get your most significant breakthroughs in the shower? When you are engaged in a mundane activity, you distract the conscious mind without taxing the brain, allowing you to get deep insight into a complex problem. Leisure pursuits can help you make progress with your non-leisure pursuits. If this is the case, you need more downtime.

There's a famous anecdote about such an experience. Archimedes faced solving the complex problem of determining if the king's crown contained solid gold or inferior metals. He couldn't damage the crown in the process. He toiled away and without luck. Then, one day, as he stepped into the bathtub and saw the water level rise, he realized he could use buoyancy to solve his problem. Comparing the displacement of the crown to that of a sample, he determined the goldsmith was indeed a fraud.

With the right kind of distraction, we may be able to integrate more information from a wide range of brain regions in more complex ways than when the brain is consciously working on a problem. Ap Dijksterhuis and his colleagues asked 80 students to pick the best car from a set of four to test the mind's ability to work on information while we consciously focus on something else. The researchers had previously ranked them based on size, mileage, maneuverability and other features. Half had four minutes to make their choices after reviewing all the information; the other half were distracted by anagrams. The ones who spent time focused on the information did worse than the ones who considered the information unconsciously.

Undemanding distraction similarly improves creative thought. Another study at the University of California showed that allowing the mind to wander could facilitate creative problem-solving. Compared to engaging in a demanding task, taking rest, or having no break, engaging in an undemanding task during an incubation period led to substantial improvements in performance on previously encountered problems.

Those problems might be in the rearview mirror, and you want to shut down the train of thought as irrelevant history. Yet, your attention is drawn to it because it is not over. Maybe the lesson applies to the future in ways you can't anticipate.

Making a mistake doesn't make you a mistake. Learning new things takes time, and there's always a period of discomfort as you go through a re-training period. "Owning your choices and beliefs, relinquishing the desire to convince anyone to join you, and knowing how to represent your needs as a calm, clear, self-possessed adult will begin to shift the energetics of your old family dynamics to make room for the new you," writes Kelly Brogan, M.D.

Practical Reflection

Just because you all share a last name doesn't mean you all have to share the same ideas. Merely because you grew up together, it doesn't mean you grew up in the same family. Ideas are diverse, wild, and free; the more you explore them, the more your world expands. You can always go home if you don't like what you find.

Things you don't like will keep happening until you learn the lesson to avoid, mitigate, transfer, or accept it. Know you know all kinds of ways to learn the lesson, integrate the changes and prevent the next disruption – or be the one crafting it your way and on your word.

The most interesting analyses and the best payoffs come from complex mistakes. If you drive to the mall and make a wrong turn, it's no big deal. If you drive cross country and turn sour, you could end up in Alaska instead of Arizona. Complex and involved mistakes define the roadmap of your life, whereas stupid and simple mistakes colour it.

Daydream, waste your time doing unproductive tasks, spend time off the clock, but make sure that your own company is what you call home, that your mind is your sanctuary, and you are the gardener of what is there.

The contents of your mind are yours to manage. If you don't like something, yank it out. If you realize someone put something there, and you don't want it, pull it by the roots. Be the gardener of your mind – in broad daylight and your peripheral vision. You are the only one who can find the correct answer. Even if everyone else says you are making a mistake, only you know.

As you spend your leisure time watching your thoughts or artistic pursuits, you might start to see things you never noticed elsewhere.

Remember that reading fiction has similar side benefits. You think you've indulged yourself in a riveting story and an empowering heroine, and you build your empathy and compassion and add to your theory of mind.

When you know how to thumb your nose at conformity, realize discomfort won't kill you, and start calling yourself a learner, your wild dreams get much closer. When people tell you you can't, you can respond with "Watch me."

Pursue Leisure

Taking time off gets a bad rap sometimes, but it can pay off in spades. It almost seems like there is a competition for who can work the most hours, sleep the least, and squeeze the most productivity out of every moment of the day.

Yet, when we get back to work, there is a limit, and when we observe it, we can be far more productive for having taken the time off. Arianna Huffington learned this message the painful way by overworking herself to the point of passing out and almost losing her eye as her face smashed into her desk on the way down.

Yes, working less can lead to more productivity, and Huffington wrote the book to encourage you not to have to learn the same lesson in your painful way.

For many of us, a little less self-sabotage can go a long way. The biggest question might be: What time do you need off?

Practical Reflection

When was the last time you did something for sheer enjoyment? We are living faster lives, becoming more work-focused and looking for ways to be more productive, but leisure is worth taking time out to pursue.

Taking time to focus on enjoyable activities gives you a break from the stressors in life and relieves boredom in a way that re-energizes you. Studies at the National Cancer Institute showed that leisure activity could increase life span by more than four years. If the time you spend your life on leisure activities could add up to four years, then that's practically free time.

Quality leisure time builds skills that help everywhere in your life. Your communication skills become enhanced as you find like-minded people and can connect with them. Your self-esteem increases because you see things you are good at and broaden your circle of support.

It is not multi-tasking; pairing tasks allows you to find the time to pursue more leisure. For instance, listening to audiobooks when scrubbing the bathrooms doesn't rob either experience. If you are always doing more than one thing, you may need this strategy of pursuing leisure more than any other.

Relaxing, engaging activities deserve some time on your agenda because they make the rest of your schedule more manageable. If you are always putting things into your brain, you must give them time to return. When your best ideas come to you in the shower, you need to create more of that kind of time. Couldn't you use more of your best ideas?

One woman mentioned how she loved colouring books when she was younger. When we become adults, we think we must graduate to canvases and be real artists. Instead, she reported that she went back to colouring books. Now, they make colouring books for adults and report on the calming effects they seem to have for many.

Many of us procrastinate on our leisure activities, thinking we'll take them up again when we retire. Many retired people are far busier in retirement than when they were working. If you procrastinate, you may find that you don't have the time to do them either.

No matter how busy you are or how important the things on your to-do list are, you will benefit from taking a break and doing relaxing, mundane activities. Take some time just for the fun of it.

The most flattering thing you can say about someone is, "They never make the same mistake twice." If you don't try new things, you won't make mistakes, which keeps the world stuck in the status quo, limits your worldview, and dulls your life. It's not repeating the mistake that matters.

Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new, and when you make a mistake, you get a new chance to try something new: learning from it.

When we learn, we first go through a period of not knowing what we don't know. When you don't know anything about a topic, you can't even begin to ask Google. You feel lost when you don't know what you don't know, but it doesn't have to last long.

Before long, you learn a little and suddenly feel like an expert. This happens so often that there is a name for it: The Dunning-Kruger effect.

Stupid mistakes happen when we jump right in without consulting at least one expert. When YouTube is full of videos showing you how to do anything, you can get enough knowledge to succeed as a novice

quickly. Consult three articles, blogs or videos, then give your newfound expertise a try. It might be good enough.

Next, we know what we don't know. We've put into practice the lessons we learned or the actions we were supposed to follow. Now, where we thought we understood is a chasm of execution. We immediately know what we don't remember and return for the tutorial.

When you know what you don't know, there is trial and error and quick learning. At this stage, you want to fail faster and try to create a quick feedback loop of deliberate practice. On your own, you can progress far through self-directed questions and answers.

The advice from rich dad to author Robert Kiyosaki was to fail faster. To learn rejection faster to improve his performance in his sales job, he took a side position dialling for donations for a non-profit charity. He increased his rejection rate, or failure rate, many folds and, in the process, accelerated his learning curve.

Third, we know what we know. A comfort level has been reached.

We know and can articulate tactics and skills and are pretty successful. There are mistakes, but they are systematic, where you connect knowledge and experience. We incurred them not because they were unavoidable but because your decisions made them inevitable.

These are when we run out of gas, stub our toes when getting ready at the last minute, or do not have the information we need for the meeting. We aren't perfect and don't need anyone to point it out. When we know what we know and are still learning, advice is not welcome. We don't need someone to tell us something; we need more practice and time.

Last, we don't know what we know. We've ingrained the skills and absorbed the knowledge so profoundly that we must search for an answer when someone asks us how to do something. At this stage, we know we make mistakes and don't know why. They are repeated and predictable, but we don't see the root. This is when we need an amateur to set us free.

The Nurturing Prerogative

The solution to the reliable doctrine is to replace it with a nurturing prerogative. Instead of continuing under the domination of what you've been led to believe, you can decide to live under different principles, and you don't need to rally against them or take up protest.

You pivot a little and start incorporating new things that help your brain and body relax. In that relaxation, you can see that two things can be true while knowing which path is for you.

One year, for vacation, we went holidaying on horseback for a week. We were each assigned a horse for a week while our stuff was carried, and we were guided from camp to camp to the next for a week. The camps were nestled in the mountains, and the days ranged from ice-covered water in the morning to hot, short-sleeved afternoons. I should remember the vistas and only good memories, but I primarily remember getting yelled at by the lead cowboy.

Practical Reflection

One morning, I'd heard him yell at someone, letting their horse lag instead of keeping up. Then, when we came to a creek, my horse stopped to take a long drink. Panicked, I would get yelled at for falling behind. I tried to urge the horse on, but I was losing. Then I heard the yelling voice of the lead cowboy, and it was directed at me.

But I was getting yelled at for not letting the horse drink. What was with the rule reversals? I was so embarrassed, and I hated the rest of the trip, wondering when I'd screw up next. I just wanted to go home. I think that day was my birthday, too. If you didn't put fear and rules into me, I would have continued to trust the horse and let it do its thing.

Loyalty may be the worst vice. Vices commonly pursue pleasure, so what's the pleasure here? Relationships, and the ability to forgo thinking because you've already sanctioned the source. Forget relationships and learn how to relate, or risk being sunk by that ship.

"The only solution is Love," said Dorothy Day. Many of us have no idea about love, only our experience that we've labelled as such, often tinged with judgment, violence, and desperation.

"The goal is for everyone to be connected. The goal is for everyone to belong. The goal is for everyone to be loved. Love is what lifts us," writes Melinda Gates.

Love may be poorly understood and a ridiculous word no one uses anymore. Nurturing may be rife with poor advice, and those who want to adopt kids are put through the gauntlet while anyone who can do it naturally is allowed to reproduce unchecked.

No license to parent is needed, although I think it would do society a lot of good. A parent can do much more damage than a driver, and we license those. A license doesn't lock people out; it lowers the risk to everyone, especially the innocent and the well-intended. Standardize training, get the best advice for everyone, and update as required. However, as a child-free nonparent, few would allow me to have an opinion.

When the government subsidizes childcare and provides mothers allowances while access to abortion and family planning ranges from difficult to functionally impossible, it becomes apparent that choice is not supported equally. What's not fair for women or children isn't fair for the majority of society – if only because of the proportion of women and children.

Robert Sutton says, "If we each took it upon ourselves to share as much warmth with others as possible without injuring them or ourselves, there would be more places infused with decency and good manners, and far fewer assholes, on this planet."

When you parent with warmth, it becomes clear what rules you are following that don't nurture, gestures, actions, and punishments that are not loving. "Only one whose need to be needed has disappeared can love," says Osho.

Warmth is not tough love, but it may undoubtedly be stern. Stern provides the instruction, preparation, and empowerment long before the punishment.

Tuning in and Disconnecting

When your head is full of anxiety, it's difficult to hear your voice of intuition.

Practical Reflection

You've learned how to ignore it long ago. You were built to run or fight when afraid, but those natural reactions have long since been drummed out. You've been trained to behave, and that training disconnected you from intelligence. You became more afraid of doing wrong than ignoring your inner voice of wisdom.

Intelligence is the source of intuition with which you were born, the voice you know to be true when you hear it, feel it, or however it communicates with you.

If you've disconnected from yourself, you've replaced that need for connection with technology. Technology has filled your hands with things to do, and it's taken up all of your attention.

What you do on vacation is up to you. You might have heard that you need to slow down to speed up. We usually refer to manufacturing when we say that, but it also applies to you. Make sure you take time off if you must take out health and travel insurance to go along with it.

Nature is the reliable solution to reconnecting with your inner nature. Disconnect from your device, and let the feeling of addiction fade into the sweet, ignorant bliss of not knowing what you don't need to know.

Absorb Nature

Osho says, "Joy arises only when you come home."

For human beings, the home might be nature, even if, at first, it feels completely foreign. The silence's absoluteness, the night's blackness, and the unfamiliarity of the surroundings. Outlast that discomfort of being outside your zone, and you will hear the sound of animals, appreciate the brightness of stars and embrace the resources around you.

Not enough people experience this vastness and abundance today, which is rapidly disappearing. If the world continues along its path, Joni Mitchell will warn you that they will rip it all down to put up a parking lot—you might want to know what you have before it's gone.

Researchers argued in 2015 that there is "evidence of lower frustration, engagement and arousal, and higher meditation when moving into the green space zone and higher engagement when moving out of it." The green space zone induces relaxation, while the urban environment encourages stress.

While it has been considered good advice for generations to get some fresh air when feeling under the weather, it wasn't until 1984 that environmental psychologist Roger Ulrich first used the standards of modern medical research to demonstrate that gazing at a garden can sometimes speed healing from surgery, infections, and other ailments.

What would you rather gaze at—a leafy vista or a brick wall? The answer is easy, but the impact is astounding—hospital patients who have a view of nature heal more quickly. One group of patients had an expansive, varied, natural, and anciently rooted view. The other was the opposite. The green exposed group healed on average 1 day faster, needed significantly less pain medication and suffered fewer postsurgical complications.

Throughout history, man has seen trees, water, and flowering plants as oasis. Flowering plants mean possible signs of food. Open spaces reduce the risk of surprise attacks by predators. Trees offer shelter

and protection. Our visual preferences and the emotional response associated with them come from efficient and long-passed wisdom.

More than one study linked more green space to less stress. Just three to five minutes of viewing views dominated by trees, flowers, or water can reduce anger, anxiety, and pain. Instead, feel relaxed. Studies have proven reductions in blood pressure, muscle tension, and heart and brain electrical activity after even such small exposures, which have proven effects on immune systems.

Being in nature also helps increase short-term memory. In a study by the University of Michigan, participants took equal-length walks through a paved city street or an arboretum. The ones who looked at trees instead of asphalt scored almost twenty percent better on a memory test after their walk than before. The asphalt group showed no change.

If you have three days to invest, your creative problem-solving ability might increase by half if you go backpacking. David Strayer, a cognitive psychologist at the University of Utah, demonstrated that a group of participants in the youth program Outward Bound performed fifty percent better on creative problem-solving tasks after a three-day wilderness backpacking trip.

Strayer describes the three-day effect of cleaning the mental windshield that occurs when we've been restored in nature long enough. "When we slow down, stop the busywork, and take in beautiful natural surroundings, not only do we feel restored, but our mental performance improves too." On the third day, our senses recalibrate – you can notice things you never did before, such as smells and sounds.

In some countries, public health policies are promoting nature experiences. In Finland, they struggle with high rates of depression, alcoholism, and suicide. Government-funded research asked thousands of participants to submit data on their moods and stress levels before and after visiting natural and urban areas. They found that a forty or fifty-minute walk in nature will improve mood. As a result, their government has invested in designing specific trails.

How often can you get out into nature? Is there somewhere near your work or home where you could stroll for your lunch break daily? In whatever ways you can increase your time in lush, green, wide spaces, it will improve your mood, health, and mind.

Follow Curiosity

Curiosity, not charisma, is the defining leadership trait. You must be aware of the problem, brave enough to ask the question, and courageous enough to seek the solution. To be charismatic, you ensure that no one feels bad about anything; in that way, progress is stalled. When you wonder why you feel bad, you follow curiosity to healing.

Judith Finlayson writes, "Childhood exposure to experiences such as abuse, neglect and domestic violence have major impacts on an adult's physical and mental health."

Nessa Carey writes, "All too often, the child grows into an adult with a high risk of depression, self-harm, drug abuse, and suicide. Once again, we have to ask ourselves why. Why is it so difficult to override the effects of early childhood exposure to neglect or abuse?"

Alice Miller writes, “As far as I know, what infants feel when they are physically attacked, and the effects that the suppression of these feelings have on the whole fabric of society are issues that have never been addressed by philosophers, sociologists, or theologians.”

“First, the fact that suppressed abuse is passed on to the next generation so that the progression of violence cannot be halted; and second, the fact that remembrance of the abuse we have been subjected to causes the symptoms of illness to disappear,” writes Miller.

Miller writes, “The first step must be to look closely at those wounds, take them seriously, and refrain from denying their existence.”

Get curious about those wounds if you have them. Start with if. Health is the result.

“Acknowledgement by parents of the injuries they have inflicted on their children dismantles many barriers, and the effect is similar to a spontaneous healing process. One normally expects this from therapists, but they cannot achieve this without the help of parents. When parents empathize with their children’s feelings and own up to their mistakes without saying, “Your behaviour drove us to do it,” a great deal will change.”

Maybe it’s time to try something new. In **How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci**, author Michael J. Gelb says that Leonardo knew the value of continuous learning. “Just as iron rusts from disuse and stagnant water putrefies, or when cold turns to ice, so our intellect wastes unless it is kept in use.”

Gelb states that he has heard many excuses for people not to begin their ideal hobby. So, maybe it isn’t so ideal? It should compel you, motivate you and amuse you. You should be so in love with the activity that you want to learn as much as possible, become as capable as you desire, and invest whatever you need.

When you think you should be interested in a hobby or pursue an interest in a certain way, it’s more like work than play. You might think it is a helpful skill to learn a new language, a projection of taste to learn a new instrument or a signal of bravado to undertake a new sport. Still, it’s more reputation crafting or career building if it’s not genuine interest. Winners quit when they realize their pursuit is no longer relevant or authentic.

Once-in-a-lifetime opportunities are something to seize. The trick is to recognize the proper opportunity and forget the imposters. For instance, there will always be more jobs, but there won’t always be that specific job offer. Unpack the opportunity into its components. From the components, you can assess if this opportunity won’t come around again and what kind of rare opportunity you would characterize as a dream.

Every opportunity costs time, money, and effort. Being willing to commit also means being aware of those demands. There might be some research, investigation, training, study or other preparation that goes with the expectation of success. Also, you must have extra room. For whatever requirements you know now, there will be that much more. You need to have what it takes, with a little room to spare.

Life is built the way our brains are built – on experiences. With age, we are less open to experience. It is the only personality trait of the Big Five to do so. Think of the glee of you at five jumping into the pool, and think of how you’d react today. The pools haven’t gotten colder. Our brains remember and respond

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to fearful memories more strongly than positive ones. We must consciously build positive experiences to combat this tendency and remember the fun of the splash, not the shock of the chill.

Each of us is born unique. We have preferences, talents, and values. When we follow these and other individual truths, we can start from a natural edge. You will learn and grow faster when you do what you want, how you want, toward the goal you set for yourself. You will accomplish more and set higher goals, easily living your brand, finding your blue ocean, and being completely authentic.

Until you have tried something, you have no idea. When you have no idea, you have no empathy. You don't have the experience to draw on, and when you have to make a lot of leaps of expertise, you will be pretty far off.

Trying something new will increase your creativity, empathy and intuitive ability. As a bonus, the experience will give you the confidence to tackle even more.

Surrender Attachment

Adlai Stevenson said, "Man is a strange animal; he doesn't like to read the handwriting on the wall until his back is up against it."

Surrender is not giving in, and it's not giving up either. Osho said, "The moment you feel you are no longer dependent on anyone, a deep coolness and a deep silence settles inside, a relaxed let-go."

I defined retirement as when you stop doing anything defined as work if you do not stop earning an income. What are you going to do with your time? You have your whole life to answer that question; hopefully, you will use it to find an answer.

If your heart, gut, and brain are aligned, go for it. You know what it feels like when your heart is into it. You are renewed and refreshed, filled with vim and vigour. On the contrary, you know what it feels like when your gut is going along for the ride. Excitement or anxiety, it's a step outside your comfort zone. Go through the appropriate level of analysis and make sure you aren't at risk of denial or other psychological incapacitation.

I have a rule that when you look around the table and everyone has had surgical intervention because of what you are doing, it's time for a new sport. For me, it's enough when you look forward and realize you are about to walk into a perfect hell and won't know it.

This is when you've achieved a certain level of mastery that gives you confidence, and you are hanging out with people who hang on the edge. When you hang on the edge and fall for the impression that you are a master of it, you will go over it, and the leading edge becomes the bleeding edge.

Know when to stay off thin ice when the cop pulls you and your snowmobiling gang over, and instead of giving anyone a ticket or anything, marches up to you and gives you a long training session that only ends when you can repeat two-two-two and know it means two seconds, two minutes, and two hours to save your life.

You are at the two-hour part when you've sweated through your clothes, your bag is lost, and the sun goes down. Know your limits and play within them.

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In two seconds, you gulp air. Instead of getting angry because the bag is gone, your guide is headed forward, and thinking it couldn't be that far back, you remember a rule about not going anywhere on your own.

In two minutes, you've approached an intersection you hadn't noticed on the way in. One way is more travelled; down the other loiters a pack of riders on a social break. Instead of being afraid to approach a pack of unknown others who may or may not know about a lost bag, old fears lead to taking the path more travelled.

In two hours, you're moving extra hard because it's the only way to stay warm in wet clothing and diminishing sunlight. Hypothermia, the cop told me, will make you think you are warm, and you will fall for it.

Over a week, you learn their names, families, and friends and highlight their backgrounds and daily lives. They also learn about me, my medication schedule and doctor, home address, and phone number, after which I have no choice but to give them my credit card number to pay the courier charge to return my bag.

I thought I was well-positioned to avoid this provision of vulnerable information. Although I had worked with the "solutions" team for over a year and was an employee on the national courier's quality team, there was "no way" the agent could allow me to provide the card number while the shipping party dropped it off. It's all about who you know, and I never seem to get that part right.

Instead, strangers always seemed to be the source of all good things, and the people you know are the ones of whom to be wary.

You have your things to process, rules that might apply to your world and no one else's. Call it meditation; think of it as thinking of nothing; think of it as feeling so intensely about one thing that no other thought may intrude. When you ask yourself questions such as "Why?" and "What?" I hope you listen to yourself intently and find your answers the most fascinating thing in the world.

Because if there is anyone who knows when you are spinning a web of a lie, it's you and your body. If you are trying to get away with something, you will want to get up and leave.

Who's the boss of you? "The adult with ADD is buried under a mound of yeses, many of which are not true yeses at all, only no's he's dared not say," writes Maté. If that's the adult with ADD, it's also too many employees, children, and students.

If you don't want the boss of you to be you, there are emotions, people, progress, and the environment already doing it for you. Is there a "You're Fired!" that you need to say to someone, something, sometime, or some feeling of which you'd had enough?

It could be that the finish line is in sight, and giving up now would look ludicrous. Yet, every day that is invested after the moment you realize it's not the right path is a day wasted. It might have been your dream all along, but as you get closer, you know it's not what you imagined.

"Sometimes it's not quite so obvious that the dream is the wrong size colour, and share for the dreamer," says author Augusten Burroughs. When the dreamer becomes the doer, the dream might require editing and shaping to fit or to know when to abandon it entirely.

Knowing when to surrender is understanding how to nurture the force that is you.

The Liberated Creation

The solution to the global community is to become a liberated creation. If you are isolated and lonely today, know you can find your community of like-minded people. Like an onion, finding your true, best self may take shedding a few layers and tears of goodbye. If you are going to cry, make it over something that matters, not because you can't undo what you've already done.

If you are going to wallow, then slow down now. If you can never undo it, really think it over. When the reasons are your own, in your head, heart and gut, it's the best analysis you can do. When in doubt, slow down, get alone, and liberate the creation that is you and only you.

Decisions are complex, and no one teaches you how to make them yourself. They'll tell you what to do, and that's not helpful. They'll take them away from you, too, and that's worse.

If you decide based on how you think it will work out, make sure you have your facts straight. How you want it to work out may not be how it does. If you would make the decision, for better or worse, as they used to say, then it's the right one. Divorce has taken the power out of those words today, so hear them again and know what they mean.

I am most proud of and hold in the most steadfast confidence the decision not to be a mother. It was a decision I had to make, was sorry to have to make, and was privileged to be able to make. There is no question in my mind that I am one of the lucky ones. I got to make that decision, not just in my head, but in my world. Many women do not.

Many women did not. As a woman, I feel it is a personal decision, yet not. You don't arrive at that decision alone—it either requires the deliberate use of science or the intervention of another human being. The very nature of it is that it is all about another human being – a third who cannot speak for themselves.

My mother told me the truth early—kids ruin your life. The truth behind that statement is that she had an idea for her life that didn't include kids. They were an expectation, a requirement, tacked on by someone or something else.

My dad was proud to tell me how he “negotiated” four of them when she'd only wanted two. As Melinda Gates says, “Sometimes the best thing a mother can do for her child is not to have another one.”

Before I recall anything my mother ever said to me, I played with dolls, and my favourite game was nap time so I could do something else. When my mother shared her truth, I already determined it wasn't the path I would take. For a loner like me, the idea of being attached to someone else, physically, and then for at least 18 years, was off-putting. I didn't like role-playing and kids' games when I was a kid; I didn't like being around figures of authority like teachers and nurses, and having kids meant dealing with all of that.

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No, thank you, I knew firmly, clearly, and early. As an adult, I have met many women who look at me with daggers in their eyes, envy and anger because there is no word for the depth and permanence of their regret.

I can't go back and liberate my mother with the same freedoms I had, nor have a challenging conversation with my dad about exploiting my mother. I can't help her decide and act on it before it is too late. I do wish I could have. I realize that would make me non-existent, and I'm apathetic. It's an unfortunate attitude that claims many mothers and children. Apathy isn't sufficient to sustain life.

This isn't a world that empowers, enables, and encourages human beings to reach their full potential. It's a waste of everyone's time, money, and energy. It's not what we can be, do, or have.

If the best time to plant an oak tree was 50 years ago, and the second-best time is now, this is for all the women who aren't sure what they want, all the men who are sure that they do know, and all the kids who deserve to be enjoyed, nurtured and given the best chance to flourish.

Or at least find the most flourishing path forward like I did, now that history is what history was. Headstrong women, doubtful men, and well-adjusted children will learn about the challenges they can help eliminate as they put their powers to good use and find their niche.

What's bittersweet is seeing how it could be a world of potential unleashed.

Separating from Thought

What kind of manager doesn't think employee engagement is critical? What kind of mother doesn't protect their children? What kind of chocolate isn't delicious?

I used to believe all these things were universal laws without exception. When I discovered that exceptions exist, I had two choices: accept the truth and change my assumptions, or what? 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."

It is frustrating when the world doesn't correspond to how you think it should look, feel, and act. You know the moments when things just should not be, yet there they are.

Your worldview is how you've made sense of the world. It's an accumulation of your experiences, knowledge and perspective. According to Wikipedia, it is "the fundamental cognitive orientation of an individual or society encompassing the entirety of an individual or society's knowledge and point of view."

When confronted with things that challenge our worldview, we have to change our worldview.

Design Quality

The history of quality is a story of continuous improvement. It's both the moral and the reason.

The premise is that poor quality is costly. If you don't have to pay for what you throw out, you don't have to charge for it either. Or, if you want to look at it the other way around, you don't throw your money straight into the wastebasket.

Poor quality is costly because the resources cost money and the cost of disposing of those materials. Not all businesses bear the costs of their impact. Some companies have low prices, and their products last

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for months, while others cost a little more but stay out of landfills longer. Better, when they break down, there are replacement parts, and you can do it yourself.

The realities of costs are not valid in a political economy. Governments negotiate, offsetting things like jobs. In that way, quality ceases to matter as a driving force for change, while landfill becomes a global problem.

Designing something on a small scale doesn't typically convert to design on a grand scale. If chemical engineering exists to automate and industrialize what chemists discover in the lab, an entire discipline wouldn't be needed if the scale was straightforward.

While products and services improve, so do approaches, strategies, and tools. Instead of describing each methodology created, let's look at the significant movements and their goals.

Continuous improvement started with quality control.

Products are inspected, measured, and tested at the end of the manufacturing line. Products that didn't cut the mustard were reworked if possible or tossed if not. Quality is achieved because harmful products aren't shipped.

Control is containment. Off the line, into the trash, while the customer unknowingly eats the costs.

Control of quality had the desired effect of improving customer perception of quality, but perception isn't reality. The added processes at the end of the manufacturing line and before the customer received the product were costly. They added resources from space to people, tools and equipment, and the most precious commodity, time.

Quality control leads to quality assurance.

Like how a winning recipe and fresh ingredients produce good results in the kitchen, the same idea prevailed on factory floors.

Before making the part, you know the machine is set up correctly, the material is within requirements, and all other factors are in place to produce a product that meets final specifications. That way, you don't have to measure the final product – you know it will conform to your standards.

While quality assurance requires much more knowledge, it is far less costly. You need to understand what key factors are required to produce a satisfactory result and how to ensure they exist before proceeding. Still, you minimize waste of time, materials, and space.

Toyota introduced Lean Manufacturing. Part of the methodology included allowing employees to shut down the line when they saw problems. Mechanics would make corrections immediately. Contrary to assumption, this saved money and drastically improved quality.

Designed quality came next. Quality moved from the manufacturing floor to the offices of the engineers and product designers. One such method was Design for Six Sigma.

Since the manufacturers had control over product design, they could create products that were easy to manufacture and cheap.

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Engineers and designers consider ideas such as reducing the number of parts, their complexity, and their uniqueness while products are in the concept phase.

The more integrated quality becomes into everything a business does, the more profitable the business.

Quality is not an addition. Instead, it results from design decisions, manufacturing actions, and marketing promises.

Quality control existed at the end, like icing on a cake. Quality assurance baked it in, and design quality started to look at the recipes themselves. It becomes cheapest to deliver, not by adding it in or checking that it's there but by removing anything that creates poor quality. Anything you must correct, catch, or make up for later adds cost and time.

It's time to inspect our thinking.

Quality has moved further and further up the stream and should continue to do so. Products and services are the results of actions, and actions are the results of decisions.

The thrust of improvement has been around the essentiality of data-based decisions, but now we know that's not practical. Technology has given us better tools to help us understand why we make logical errors. Quality has always taught us that if you can predict it, you can prevent it.

Quality of thought happens when we recognize our cognitive biases and emotional triggers instead of acting on them. The future of quality is improving our thinking. Improving our thinking is a matter of using science to tell us what to expect and putting our holier-than-that ego aside. Instead, we make plans, create designs, and arrive at an outcome that is better than expected. Because people will always compare your result against perfection, you will know the truth about what might have happened.

You cannot design with rose-coloured glasses, and you cannot learn with optimism. Hope for the best, but plan for twice as bad as you anticipate happening. Multiply by two because it's a whole new world every day.

Utilize Vocabulary

Quality design begins with monitoring language use. Vasya Gabov says, "My mother used to say, "The Russians speak Russian. Let the Chuylm speak Chuylm."

Watch what you say as you speak in your head or out loud. If our words manifest, it's no problem for you to lean toward what you want out of life and away from what you don't want. It's free, easy, and has no collateral damage. The best thing you can do is to stop talking and start observing.

As Nassim Nicholas Taleb writes, "Forget theory. Observe what works and replicate it. Stop narrating, starting tinkering." Try out some new words.

My love of Gaspé might have been inherited from my grandmother. She handed me the painting of the spot on its shores where she got engaged. Researchers have proven that part of who we become is passed on through three generations before us and their experiences. They call it epigenetics.

One of my grandmother's favourite experiences was getting proposed to on the shore in Gaspé. When she told me the story, it included the surprise delivery of the painting that the man down the beach was creating at the time of the proposal.

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When I met my love, I could have sworn he asked me if I'd ever been to Gas Bay. Since we were talking about snowmobiling, I assumed it was someplace around James Bay. Either way, my answer was correct when I said no. When he asked me if I wanted to go, I was beside myself with delight. I heard about the trails there in whispers, like Ontario should be embarrassed, and found a good reason.

Several years were spent on snowmobiles running infinity loops around Gaspé until my grandmother passed the painting to me, which now hangs in my office.

Running infinity loops around Gaspé is something of a gasp, eh? A snowmobile is a lot of fun and a chance to experience nature like never before. A jackrabbit with a fox on its heels jumps out before me. I've been an arm's reach away from a deer dozens of times, chewing away calmly despite the noise. The windmills were majestic and beautiful, with a clean design that proved clean power, if stunningly loud and dangerous.

As you begin your journey into the precision of language, you will note, as I did, that 'nice' and 'kind' seem interchangeable in conversation yet utterly different in manifestation. A dictionary and thesaurus can make you laugh at what you thought words meant and how you use them. 'Literally' might be one of the least helpful words as people use it to describe something as defined, while others use it to mean the opposite.

Recognize your limiting beliefs by their black-and-white language. If you say 'no one' or 'everyone,' it takes just one to render whatever you said false. The same goes for always and never. The most truthful, if annoying, answer I've ever heard is, "That's difficult to say." Please try.

You see black and white when life is only grey. White light is all the colours of the spectrum, and black is nothing. In art, black paint is not often seen on palettes because it doesn't exist in life. What looks like black is red and green, blue and orange, or yellow and violet, but the black straight out of the tube is the shortcut that looks flat and dull.

Catastrophizing is taking the odds and pushing them to the limit. People tell me that they "just died," but they are still talking to me. While I laugh when it's harmless, it rarely is. This tendency shows up when we are goal-setting, reflecting, and analyzing.

Voltaire once said, "Language was invented to hide feelings." What are you hiding? Is there something you're denying, and if so, what's the damage if it's true? Instead of speaking out, notice the propensity and desire and treat that as if it's not you but the lizard who doesn't have the consciousness to see. Take care of that pet because it's inseparable from your physical body, and where it goes, you go.

Notice the words you choose to say to yourself and the words that come out of your mouth. "Your narrative makes or breaks growth," Rendon says. Growth requires telling a new story instead of hanging on to what is old and gone.

Clarity of language forms the basis of communication. We know we cannot speak to someone else who is of another language, but when someone is of our native tongue, we forget the problem is still there.

We pick up the language, but it's in conversation that we find out if we share the meaning. Conflict happens when we react to a word based on our definition, not the speaker's intended message. We craft our messages without the benefit of a thesaurus and a dictionary.

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Andy Warhol said that everyone gets fifteen minutes of fame. If you've ever thought up phrases you wished you'd said at the time, don't lose them. Take the cue to start being proactive about finding your words. From experience, if you don't, you will blurt them out and not mean a word you say. You might want to have your words ready because the stairwell moment of genius that will strike you afterwards doesn't do you any good, and it means we've all lost out on your potential contribution as well.

Words clarify over lips and pencil tips. Writing and conversing with others is part of the work. Your conversations aren't for entertainment and enjoyment but for growth and development. Seeking to understand other people's perspectives, opinions, and information helps you define your own.

Keep writing until the trivialities of life disappear and that noise is gone. Write what you think as you think it, and you will become aware of the stuff in your head.

Now, more than ever, it's a time to have a voice and mind your words.

Choose Growth

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. The opposite is a fixed mindset, meaning 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.

What will you learn in the future? If you take the time to plan what you want to know, you will be happier. Planning for the future will increase life satisfaction. "Although self-reported future planning decreased with age, the positive effects of future-oriented planning strategies on life satisfaction were most pronounced for the older adults, and control beliefs also mediated this relationship," wrote Kimberly Prenda and Margie Lachman in 2001.

A growth mindset is the belief that effort makes all the difference. A fixed mindset attributes success to talent, something you are born with that never changes. Instead, those with growth mindsets believe in the development of intelligence.

Your mindset makes all the difference to your visual attention and, therefore, what your brain registers from the environment. As researchers found in 2014, "implemental mindset participants focused on foreground objects, whereas deliberative mindset participants attended more evenly to the entire scene."³⁵

When choosing my career, I remembered that my mother had always told me to marry a doctor, lawyer, or engineer. I decided that better advice was to be a doctor, lawyer, or engineer.

I looked up what that meant regarding years, costs and salary. Becoming an engineer was highly favoured in that analysis. The school choice was a no-brainer since we lived within walking distance of one of the best engineering schools.

I chose my discipline based on marks admitted the previous year. That analysis coughed up mechanical engineering as the highest discipline I could enter. However, I'd heard of a friend of a friend thinking

they were going to design cars and ended up designing cabinets. Thinking of the potential boredom of that career, I went to the next one down the list: chemical.

Having zero idea of what a chemical engineer does, I filled out my form and mailed it.

In a matter of hours, I chose my future. I've never once thought back and wish I'd done anything differently, even if I am nowhere near it now. It's just one way to decide using data, your heart, and your gut in perfect harmony and with minimal effort.

Trusting your intuition is trusting your gut instinct. It requires knowing what your body needs and how much of it. However, studies have shown that diets lead to a disconnection, a cutting off, of the voice of the body. Dieters learn to eat by rules, label things as good or bad and especially themselves as the latter. It sets them up for a lifetime of a negative spiral, constantly thinking about food. Repairing the mind-body connection and tuning back in is the way back to health, not more rules.

When you trust your gut instinct or know when to trust it, you can operate from a place of authenticity in the present moment. Authenticity is ingrained into your automatic behaviour. Others see that and interpret the automatic ease as authority. As people see consistency in your behaviour, they perceive your values.

Consistency of behaviour and transparency of values allow others to understand how you might behave in a different context. To others, you exude character and competence because you know what you are doing, why you are doing it, and where it will lead.

As adults, we get to be our parents. The high-five is a little silent when you give it to yourself, and the hug a little hollow, but it might be better than the memory that stood in its place.

The one about being wrong for being different, listening to people simply because they are older and in a particular position, and deciding between the two options: one day, I'll show you, and I'll go along for now. The latter is how we lose our authenticity.

In my research, age, and experience, I realized we all learn a bit of the first and a bit of the second. Do the first too often, and you might forget the truths you put on pause. Overuse of the second option, and not only do you never stand a chance to remember, but they also don't go away. Your self-doubt becomes a growing problem just as burnout becomes a problem with the first. If you are both burnt out and doubt your ability to bounce back, you have yourself a good mix.

Either way, the silver lining is that you have buried forgotten truths. At some point, it is helpful and even healthy to find them. We read books for their happy endings and lament that life isn't so straightforward, but what if it is because you aren't at the end yet? You celebrate the days you have left to fill and stop carving life into periods of working and not working. See years for filling and living. Do it with purpose.

All human beings are equal. I believe we are equal in our being. Our breathing and existence are without rank or status. We are, however, not equal in our doing, and indeed, that shows up as part of the inequality in our having.

There will be a day when psychological abuse is scorned with the same shame and guilt as physical and emotional abuse. To clarify, it's not about being angry with earlier generations – it's about seeing how

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we are all influenced, manipulated, and part of the problem. It's owning what we contribute to the world, the energy we bring and the consequences we create.

Inner work, just like inner damage, is invisible. You might be astonished by what you see when you know where to look. The effort to improve and change is invisible, but one day, people may appreciate inner work as much as blood, sweat and scars. Just because you can't see it doesn't mean it's not there; I know how much effort it takes to put a smile on your face like armour before you head out the door.

You don't keep your mind to yourself – it is readily apparent in your words, behaviour, and choices, and it is your gift to provide to the world, should you choose to do so.

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