



The Mind Mastery Manifesto

Rayne Wordsmith

Quality of Thought

The Mind Mastery Manifesto

© 2025 Resilience Imagined. All Rights Reserved.

This work may not be reproduced in any form, in whole or in part, without written permission from the author. Contact support@resilienceimagined.com for assistance.

First Edition

Rural Ontario, Canada

Table of Contents

Introduction 4

My Story 8

Principle #1: Question Everything..... 12

 The Skill to Solve Problems 18

Principle #2: Contribute Uniquely..... 19

 The Call of Genius 25

Principle #3: Reconnect Intelligence..... 26

 The Work of Superheroes 31

Principle #4: Analyze Truthfully 33

 The Identification of Alternative Explanations 38

Principle #5: Create Progress 39

 The Five Steps to Control Change 45

Onward from Here 46

Notes 47

Introduction

Clear thinking doesn't come naturally; it takes effort. Today, this effort is supported by science, necessitated by the complex and crowded world in which we live, and liberates every man, woman, and child within it. It is the ability to think independently and prioritize what is best for everyone, thereby reducing competition and creating peace – individually and collectively.

This is the central argument of this manifesto. We need an evolution of thought to solve the world's problems today. Like Einstein said, “We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.”

According to *The Art of Manliness*, “A manifesto functions as both a statement of principles and a bold, sometimes rebellious, call to action. By causing people to evaluate the gap between those principles and their current reality, the manifesto challenges assumptions, fosters commitment, and provokes change.”

You have assumptions about how your thought process works or how you believe you arrive at decisions. It takes commitment to learn the truth and effort to change it -all effort demands commitment to succeed. The change resulting from learning a new way of thinking is a smoother and more successful life. When your life is smooth and successful, everyone benefits. Word spreads, more people get on board, and a better life is a matter of choice for everyone.

Not everyone chooses information, not everyone chooses effort, and not everyone chooses anything, as you will learn if you keep reading. To some, smooth sounds boring, and effort sounds like work; even reading is too much. But you aren't scared – you've studied for tests and passed them before, and this is no different if the payoff is so much greater. Power. Control. An indomitable mind.

The Truth of Observation

When I was a kid, I realized that people do strange things. Seeking answers, I heard many “People do strange things” by explanation.

I also heard, “If you ask why again, you will be begging for a bruising.” These days, you aren't supposed to say or do that anymore, but many parents have told me of their tricks.

I wonder if every parent has a trick to create confusion between intimacy and violence. A healthy relationship should have all of one and none of the other.

We use the word “should” when we know one thing and then do another. “Do as I say, not as I do,” they say. We coin phrases like “tough love” to make everyone feel better about reality.

My family was all at the dinner table finishing up when my dad asked my mom what was for dessert. My mom said, “Oranges.” Then, she took one from the bowl in the center of the table. My dad said something that escaped my memory but not what happened next. He dodged an incoming orange, which splatted against the wall before sliding down in a pulpy, juicy mess.

We all laughed.

The Butt of the Joke

We laugh when we see it in movies. It stops being funny when you aren't fast, strong, or smart enough. Or old enough. They have a word for it in German. We don't speak English, so to talk about it, we use theirs: schadenfreude.

Parents have a trick for when enough is enough: when the day is too long and the paycheck too short, or it's the wrong time and place for curious questions, including the ability to explain time and place.

Counterintuitively enough, they wouldn't be good parents if they didn't have a trick. Instead, they'd have to face their shortcoming. Bad parents don't trick; they realize they fell short. You can only improve when you know you aren't great. Good parents never improve; they create more tricks.

Growing up, I realized there are two types of people: those who are happy to take the answer as good enough and move along with life and those like me who aren't satisfied when people shrug me off or attempt to silence or intimidate me.

If Stanley Milgram was on to something with his shocking shock experiments, about two-thirds of them do the former, that is, do what they are expected to do, as personally uncomfortable as it may be. They deliver a deadly level of electricity to punish a learner who isn't performing well at a teacher's instruction in a white coat. They might complain, but they do it.

"I was only doing what I was told," they say.

The Genesis of Solutions

Solving new problems requires not being satisfied with the old answers. But knowing better isn't enough to start to turn the flywheel of progress.

Neither is it enough to see the disharmony in your behaviour. We are too adept at selecting memories, creatively explaining, and incompletely analyzing. We are also gifted at failing to see our issues while dependably navigating around those of our loved ones.

You need an army to get the flywheel of progress to start spinning. Sometimes, someone finds the right words to put on paper at the right time, and they get read by the right people who know the right people. They know people and the truth sets everyone free.

Gloria Steinem warned that first, it will piss you off. Then, you will bargain with it before you are depressed and find a new way to look at it all. Finally, you will see the truth, and that's how it sets you free.

I was angry for perhaps decades before I started with terms and conditions. After that, I was treated for depression several times before finally beginning an argument with my doctors that ended my last 5150 hold early. "A metamorphosis," one doctor declared to the other with wide-eyed wonder.

The dark horse wins when you can explain a different perspective, offer new facts, and know the science better than the other side.

The Chronic Source of All Disease

You can never be set free if you have no room for anger. Unfortunately, some people were taught bad lessons about anger and how to handle it.

Some readers get too annoyed to get this far, others drop out when things get uncomfortable, and few will bear the pain of looking in the mirror. I am utterly grateful to the few in the past who made my life possible – the precious few women who got us the vote, the credit card, and the control over our bodies, to name the three that matter to me.

A few angels start the process, and eventually, the flywheel spins hard and fast enough to take everyone with it. Everyone is instrumental in the progress that contributes to the flywheel spinning, even if history has a dim memory of who did what and how it all happened.

While you may think you know who to thank and blame in your life, you might have a pretty mothy memory of how it all happened. When that's the case, your behaviour looks pretty strange. Sometimes, even to you.

People aren't strange. They think weird things. Sometimes, they don't even realize they believe them. They take the thought as good enough and move right along with life.

It's all fine and dandy until it's not good enough anymore. Health crises demand a rethink. Career shocks and relationship dead-ends qualify as wake-up calls. If you can't sit still, there may be something your body is trying to raise your awareness.

Thinking strange things does you no good, and the truth eventually becomes apparent. It's time to start questioning what you feel when that time comes. Or earlier if you are the proactive type.

The Gift of Being Human

How far you go from questioning your thoughts to ruling your mind is up to you. Consciousness is the gift to humanity to be different from the rest of the animals, but the choice is one you have to decide to take.

Default mind mastery is what was gifted to you by birth. It comes with confirmation bias, the ability to ratify whatever you think before you even realize you believe it. Up to seven seconds before. Even you would be on the protest line if your federal government functioned like that. I would lend you a sign that says, "Advocate for the Devil!" but too many people might get the wrong impression.

Try counting out seven seconds. Think about how much scheming an idea could do in that time.

Your mind might be the last frontier for the hide-and-seek game. We know more about the universe than we do about the brain and consciousness. However, there are many territories between the predictable irrationality you are born with and where people like cognitive engineers and behaviour economists are exploring and cutting new trails.

The Work of Mind Mastery

Practical mind mastery is the nature of your thinking as it matters in business.

Go mess it up however you'd like, to the line drawn by society. This is freedom within the bounds of liberty.

But in business, your actions have far-reaching consequences that affect everyone; some have their livelihoods attached. Most businesses fail because of management incompetence, often at considerable cost to the owners, customers, and suppliers¹. Society must draw a line in the name of liberty.

You could quickly lose the job of someone who could have told you it was a stupid decision. So, why are they the ones holding the pink slip? It's clear why – it's your company, and the jobs were a gift from you in the first place. And telling you it was stupid? Far from easy or acceptable.

However, when the resources you consume, the waste you contribute, or the consequence you didn't anticipate ruin the rest of us, how you decide does matter to the rest of us. Innovation affordances, such as Coke's move to ditch glass and move to plastic, are paid for by everyone, whether you waste your money on soft drinks or not.

When there is a flaw in the system, do you fix it or exploit it? You can't do both, and such is the nature of good or evil. In this grey area of ambiguity, there is no halfway.

The Pursuit of What's Possible

Potential mind mastery is everything beyond business, where money stops mattering, and excellence never stops mattering.

When does money not matter and good enough not good enough? When it's your health and your happiness. Sure, you thought money would buy it for you. At some point, you realize, hey....

You accumulate possessions, but an emptiness isn't going away. You realize, if it weren't for everyone constantly around, you would swear that relationships took a nose dive, too.

Someone said, "If money isn't buying you happiness, then you don't know how to spend it."

They might be right. When you can spend it on things that aren't for you or give it away, and it gives you sheer joy, you know you've spent it well. Not the ego way. It makes you feel like a reasonable person in a way that has nothing to do with you.

Some people choose a small number and invest everything in them. Others are at the other end, selecting billions who may never feel the impact or know they existed. Everyone should know where their position on this spectrum of joy is located.

Sheer joy. Not the fake, plastic, material kind. Not the shallow, praise-singing, social kind. Not the hollow, processed, chemical kind.

Have you felt it lately?

I think we could all feel healthier, happier and wealthier. It's simplistic to say it's all in your mind, but it might be the most straightforward path to getting there.

Where? That's for you to decide. I hope it involves less disharmony than the world we know now.

My Story

My wake-up call was a literal one when I was in my twenties.

Three years prior, I graduated as a chemical engineer. Before graduation, I knew I was headed to work on an airbag manufacturing line at a site that had been making nylon for so long that they had produced the parachutes for the First World War.

What we were making was like massive rolls of dental floss. Dental floss was one of the alternative sales avenues when things didn't go well. The entire spool had to run to the moon and back without a problem for an airbag.

The customer defined problems. The following customer had to weave it, so things that slowed his machinery were not good. However, the customers who mattered the most, including us, had never made a buying decision.

They bought a car.

One day, the airbag goes off.

The customer gets a lawyer.

As far as the chain of customers is concerned, it's the lawyer that matters. The lawyer can make anything look like a reason for failure that requires me to create an entire warehouse to supply a lifetime's worth of dental floss. Certain realities come to light if you look at the price of anything and wonder why it's so expensive.

Money comes from customers, investors, and employees. You can raise prices, get more customers, or get it from your employees when squeezing. Regarding the latter, you can find better ways of working or pay them less or less of them.

Better decisions always create more profitable outcomes. Still, the effort is often granular, and I'm watching the lowest-paid workers with a stopwatch instead of the boorish executive with a personal agenda.

If I'm generalizing unfairly, it's the product of standing around all kinds of organizations and watching people do all sorts of jobs at all levels. The decisions at the highest level are the ones going wrong, but that door is never open.

One time, while I was getting data to replace some guy's job with a piece of machinery, I spent too much time ducking the food flying off the conveyor. I started counting that data, too. With some figuring, I realized I could fix the conveyor and keep the guy's job without buying anything. My proposal was met

with the corporate version of “Get back on task,” which I took from someone with zero authority over me.

It was one of the days I missed the good old days at the beginning of my career when I was allowed to have an idea as long as I had the data. Back then, I was searching for a utopia where I could think, innovate, and be myself before I realized such things did not exist in the world of employment.

Data-based decisions, though, were a significant step in the right direction.

The Opportunity of a Lifetime

I noticed the company making wise hiring moves, including hiring chemical engineers to work in the mechanical areas and mechanical engineers in the chemical regions because synergy is required for both to work. Forcing them to rely on each other is brilliant design.

After two years on the airbag line, people started talking about Six Sigma. The only thing I knew about it was that Jack Welch was implementing it at General Electric.

I quickly found out more. The recruitment rules for Black Belts required managers to send their best senior engineers. On my team, that would mean the star performer would have to go. As I knew it, he'd become the star performer for his contributions on the global stage, which included engineering a new machine and doing much of the machining in his garage as required.

One day, he asked me how much of my engineering degree I thought I would use. I knew it was a trick question—they all were. He estimated he used 10 percent and admitted he used way more than most graduates.

My boss said, “I’m not giving him up.” Who would?

No one was interested in giving up his pursuits, especially for another fad. QualPro introduced statistical techniques into process management. Design of Experiments, or DOE, was a routine event that was the most efficient and effective way to learn and test new ideas. Now, it was Six Sigma’s turn.

When I was asked, “Would you like to go in his place?” It was the opportunity of a lifetime.

The New Way of Decisions

I went to Houston, like the sacrificial Ensign, happily doing my job. I spent a solid week in the conference room of a hotel just off the airport, followed by three weeks back in Kingston to apply the lessons. Such would be the routine for four months. After that, two years would ensue, requiring four to six projects to be completed yearly, saving at least a million a year.

That’s what Jack Welch told everyone. Get a Black Belt on your payroll for a million dollars of yearly savings. It’s a pretty good investment, and one any brilliant CEO would make. It’s even smarter when you send your lowest-paid engineer.

My first project was to increase the performance of the star performer's new machine. Everyone agreed it would be an excellent test of the program.

As I thought I had learned, Six Sigma's essence was to make a decision informed by data instead of how you usually would—ask the expert, the guy who built it. Instead of the old playbook, check the data first and then decide.

It might not have been the takeaway for everyone.

The Power of Data

Using everything I'd been taught, I postulated a theory that required speeding up the machine—not slightly, but twice as much.

Dave said it was never going to work. He'd attempted a test himself and crossed the theory off the list.

My defence was, "Not enough."

My proposal was a tough sell, to say the least. I was asking for permission and quickly learned that anyone can say no. Denial is easy. Saying yes takes risk, power, and authority.

Just asking is risky enough, and I was sent to do the chore myself. As such, I found myself in front of the right people, asking for permission. Permission to blow a few million dollars. When you run an experiment, you usually can't sell much of the product you produce while running it. If any.

I believe the Rosetta stone to permission reminded them that they were supposed to be doing this program because they wanted to make data-based decisions, not the way they always did.

Here's the data. Make a decision. I hope I said it nicer than that. I certainly took longer.

The potential upside was massive. If it worked, not only would they be able to get a higher price than they were currently getting, but they'd also have so much more of it that any supply issues would be moot.

Therein lies the reason for the CEO's phone call. As he explained, he'd get a graph of savings every month and have to remove my name from the chart for the other names to show up.

In spreadsheet terms, that meant I was saving quantum leaps more money. That's the nature of the upside.

The Challenge of Answers

"What are you doing differently?" he asked me. My wake-up call.

This was a perplexing question for several reasons. One, I'd just gone through the meeting grinder, explaining my theories, reasons, and how I came up with them. All my work was transparent and scrutinized.

Two, we were all subject to monthly audits by experts. Some wanted to ensure the program was delivering on expectations, and others had agendas that did not always alternate. Everyone had questions.

Third, I wasn't paying enough attention to anyone else to notice any sources of variation between them and myself.

But I sure would start. The secret to success with Six Sigma is noticing the variation. Please get rid of it where you can, especially where it matters, control it when you can, and avoid it when you can't—simple theory.

There was the obvious explanation that I was the only one allowed in the program who wasn't supposed to be allowed in. I figured the esteemed CEO knew that background.

Instead, I mentioned continuing to work in the same environment I had previously. I knew people and the process, and I had connections. That's my answer: the social game is helping me win if that's not how I summarized it.

There was an answer I worried might get me fired because it was how I was playing the social game, so I kept that one to myself.

There is no need for such secrets anymore.

The Way of the Status Quo

When asked why you are an outlier, everyone else's way is the status quo.

The status quo was visible in that conference room in Houston. For one, I might have been the only female in the room. I don't know because it was so common that I'd accepted it as the status quo by that point in my life.

They were all ten years older, accomplished, loyal, well-ranked managers. As much as I knew of the selection criteria, that seemed to be it.

The second thing I noticed was that they all had teams. I didn't learn about milestones, scopes, budgets, and other stuff until I worked in IT as a project manager and completed my Project Management Professional certification.

After some years in a company, you learn about things like Gantt charts. There are things called projects.

I'd been able to avoid the project world. Two different worlds, as far as I knew them.

To me, problems are not projects. Problems are ambiguous. Projects are clear. They are entirely different. Forcing a problem-solving framework into a project? The very idea confused and confounded me. How when you don't know where you are going or how long it will take to get there?

I found out later that you negotiate with leaders who allot you permission and time, and you do your best. You can't solve a problem with good intentions and congenial negotiations; you need good questions, which are sometimes unpleasant.

The Breadcrumbs of Questions

I had no idea how everyone else was scoping their problems. To me, I was pulling a thread. I didn't know if I would go up three flights of stairs and into that department. Maybe it would go lateral, and I'd ask questions two departments down the hall.

With that perspective, I had no idea how they recruited their teams.

I'd determine the next question I needed to answer, then find whoever was best to answer that question. I'd use my new tools to make sure they told me the truth and all of it, delete the lies, wishful thinking, and deluded dreaming, and keep the facts.

When given budgets to reward our teams, I bought gift certificates and handed them to my angel answer providers. "If anyone asks, you were on my team," I told them. After that, I found people willing to answer my sometimes-prying and always-probing questions.

I'd never leave a question behind, whatever it took, or whomever I was forced to meet. My CEO told me we had the same training about asking the source and resisting playing the telephone game.

Yes, it was a phone call. However, the telephone game I learned in primary school involved everyone sitting in a circle. A whisper is passed around, but it's nothing like the original.

The CEO could have and usually does, ask the most senior representative of that silo, who asks the next one down until finally, I get the question, in my lowly, barely manager level. I say some words; those words are summarized and passed along until, finally, what the CEO gets is nowhere near anything I said. I don't get worried about those questions and answers. I hardly matter in the whole chain.

This CEO knows how to make ***Everyone a Leader*** and wrote the guide—***A Guide to Leading High-Performance Organizations for Engineers and Scientists***.

Principle #1: Question Everything

Since there is a 'we' and a 'me' negotiation, compromises or a balancing act must be made. This is the nature of relationships, organized organizations, and the institutions of society.

Porcupines understand the difference between sharing warmth for survival and causing each other pain, or so the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer would argue.

There is no debate that we face harsh conditions requiring resource sharing, including limited space. However, people are not equipped with external devices such as quills to make esoteric concepts concrete.

Instead, collectively, we were equipped with decisions made by earlier generations. Earlier generations wrote laws, created systems, and taught us to respect institutions—a good way to protect the status quo.

Stanley Milgram found that certain conditions liberated people who would break from authority and do what's right instead of what they were told. One condition was witnessing a breakdown in authority. A second method was to put the word "choice" in front of you to remind you that you always have one.

Two people in white coats arguing with each other about the person you were just assigned to kill? It reminds you that you have the choice not to kill anyone. No one. At all. Not even harm them; it's not a luxury limited to doctors. Teachers, too, could take an oath on behalf of students and parents for their children. At least clarity of intention would be a step in the right direction.

Parents didn't use to argue. It was socially unacceptable. Then, it became something people did around their kids, in public, and now on the internet. People aren't always aware they have choices until someone points it out.

Regrettably, I expressed it in long blog posts, heated phone calls, and succinct comments. Powerful things, like words and ideas, require practice before control is mastered. Anger is powerful, but we might not use it for all its good.

Like raising little rebels.

With all powers, first, you learn first that you have them, then you learn to control them, and finally, how to use them on demand and with intention.

The Trap of Dogma

It used to be that the way one generation lived was good enough for the next. Better yet, it served as a solid foundation on which to improve. Over generations, we have built houses, communities, factories, and, lately, technology.

Technology changed the whole deal. What about the ways of our parents? The last decade isn't always relevant; sometimes, yesterday is ancient news.

I've found that dogma is a willing recipient of my anger and handiness, which is also likely the root cause. Not some person, action, or result. Some words, paper, perspective that my existence, preferences haven't yet widened, and right to not harm.

Like me, you might have a belief that doesn't serve you, never did, and yet the right people haven't argued in front of you. It's just an old idea rendered stupid by the time that hasn't met its match. Or it's alternative to gasoline.

Maybe some oranges must fly, and you must laugh about it all. It's called getting just desserts, but oranges can be dangerous, nutritious and sweet. On behalf of my dad, who ended up with Type 2 diabetes, perhaps give nature's sugar a try instead of that pie.

In Steve Jobs's 2010 commencement speech at Stanford, he implored the graduates to live their lives. "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma – which is living with the results of other people's thinking."

It's a decade later, and it's more important now than ever to ensure new liberties are created in the wake of the fall of dogma.

The Creation of Judgement

Every generation stands on the shoulders of the preceding ones.

Man writes laws, and kids are raised with good intentions, but justice is served by humanity and always wins in the end. If justice hasn't won, you aren't yet at the end.

In our justice system, we punish people for the dance of randomness. Sentences reflect the consequences, not just the action, but the consequences are random.

The results of other people's thinking are reflected in many ways in many systems. The long list of things you've been told you should be, do or have resulted from prior generations and ages.

What does dogma sound like? It's the should police. It's when people tell you what you should be doing, thinking or being. Society as a whole has a set of "shoulds." You should not kill people; you should pay your taxes, and you should mind the dandelions on your lawn to prevent their spread to the neighbours.

Did you know that dandelions are handy? You can eat them, and the roasted root is an excellent alternative to coffee. Instead, we poison them, rip them out, and import coffee from across the world. Mother Nature shakes her head at our miscomprehension.

From prominent moral doctrine to small ways of being in the world, standards are adopted that become voices in our heads, documents in our government libraries, and textbooks in schools. Do not confuse dogma for truth.

There is no time like now to question and decide for yourself. Times have changed. Definitions, like "people," seem to change with time, so maybe more than just the language no longer applies. It seems to me women are being erased as we read about "people who get pregnant" and put tampon dispensers in men's washrooms.

You may have been taught to respect your elders. Questioning does not require disrespect. Curiosity, the precursor to questioning, is an act of respect. It's the respect to understand more deeply, thoroughly, and ultimately.

And then decide for yourself.

The Responsibility of Freedom

I am selfish, shallow, and self-absorbed. Although I know only a tiny fraction of the world's people, I know this like other facts: I read it in [a book](#).

I don't have children. I must have been too selfish. Too worried about my agenda, my own body, my own needs to be able to sublimate them for someone else. Society only knows those selfish women.

Shirking their duty to the survival of the human race, it would seem. A movement of women is holding their eggs for ransom. They refuse to have children until something is done about the planet.

When it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and waddles like a duck, you are supposed to call it a duck, not a swan. No matter who raised it or what it looked like before it got pregnant.

There was a day when women fought for the right to decide. First, birth control freed women to enjoy sex as a gamble of adult fun. Later, abortions become an option instead of carrying a lifetime sentence. Third, divorce freed women from a social pact that was for life and made for one that was not worth the whole deal.

Three significant advances in the story of women's ability to be selfish. Or the opportunity to demonstrate that they are swans, not ducks.

We should be approaching a time when women aren't going to pull me aside to tell me how envious they are of my motherhood situation. Or rather, lack thereof. Not all mothers love their children immediately; not all children love their mothers ever.

When too many husbands complain about their wives, tell me about their exit plans, or tell me where they draw the line, I am proud to be solo.

When someone says, "Everyone's divorced these days," I get to raise my hand and say, "Not me."

The Shift of Logic

I'm not the one who is going to tell you that I have relationships and marriage figured out because I found a great partner, and we've figured out how to make communication, compromise, and conjoined assets work.

Far from it. I'm the one who's in the [happiest subgroup](#) of the population: single, childless women. Solo women.

I will tell you that divorce is a maladaptive solution. A maladaptive solution was created to solve a problem and, in doing so, created new problems.

One of these new problems is the collective attention span of this generation's children. People want to blame technology. I was taught tools like root cause analysis; technology is a mere contributing factor. After all, technology wasn't yet around when it happened in my family.

At one point in time, the point of a marriage was a union, a partnership of logic. It took two to get everything done, so the objective was to pick someone who could carry the other half of the load.

The institution was pretty ironclad when things became illogical, like having to take abuse and punishment. Getting out was death, which was stipulated in the marriage contract, or possibly running away, which was not.

Laws intervened. Sometimes, it is because logic wins; sometimes, someone's daughter is suddenly in the crosshairs. Laws are created to make the invisible social pact fair and transparent. A partnership is was, so a partnership went on paper as fifty/fifty.

Freedom ensued. Liberty is what protects everyone from the abuse of freedom.

Something different happens when that escape hatch is on paper, and people go in with eyes wide open to a distinct possibility. A new generation gets married with a different perspective, a temporary one.

What was once an institution that used to lock people up is now a game. Like all games, the most innovative, most prosperous, charmed-at-birth contest is the one that wins. We knew it wasn't fair, but now we see the game.

It's a game that gets you coming and going. You pay to get in. There are dates, weddings, and homes. You pay to get out after two to seven and less than 10 years. There are divorce lawyers, therapists for the kids, and assets to sell at a loss.

Or, you can stay solo. Watch your financial and legal back without a standard contract, and realize that you don't have relationships figured out. Not how to spot them, not how to sort their opportunities, and not how to manage them.

For myself, it's early days on the project plan to lock anything down, despite any timelines dictated by society, biology, or logic. I've hardly managed a proof of concept.

The Lessons of Childhood

Once, I heard that women marry the father for their kids and then the husband of their dreams.

Rarely have I met men who are both husbands and fathers. The women who did meet them met them young and knew it. They all married their high school sweethearts; they are still sweet to each other today. Their kids bring out both their fierce side and their soft pink side. Rainbow unicorns, they are. Ideal and excellent, I hope it's as fabulous on the inside as on the outside because there is no way to tell.

If all the parents who stayed married for the kids' sake are on their second time around now, looking for a life-mate instead of a set of DNA, how are those kids doing?

I was one of the first in my school. There are positive points like resilience. As someone who grew that resilience, I can verify that you only discover you can bounce when you've been dropped. You develop resilience and inner strength because what is the other option?

The options are endless. You hear kids say "despite," not "because of." Parents get to declare they can no longer live with each other but still love each other. When does the kid get to decide they should have the same rights? What happens to your DNA when the two strands cannot get along?

For me, how I developed resilience was easy. After my dad moved out, the musical bedrooms game was played. I lost. My older sister moved into the room that was my dad's, and I was introduced to the basement. That night, I prayed to God for the first time I remember and asked if I could please know what it is like to be loved before I die. Thanks, God, for answering.

I recently helped a friend move her daughter and two children back into her house. Decisions were made in weeks; a basement was finished, and a room was added to make the transition easier. It's a

gamble about who is facing the most challenging transition of the five, but the love going around is easy to see.

To make my views more perplexing to the casual reader, I think the transition is all on the upside. Leonard Cohen taught me that sometimes cracks are how the light gets in.

I've heard that children need a community to raise them, and I agree. A community exposes children to many kinds of people and thinking instead of allowing them to build a narrow worldview. Having parents and grandparents play off each other might make for a child who's a handful, to say the least, but so much savvier when it comes to meeting the world head-on and spotting dogma for what it is.

Raising kids wasn't supposed to be cheap, fast, or easy. You just wanted it that way—as did I. I have no patience for babble, no budget for toys, no social network to help, and no willingness to do something that will be less than excellent.

Farmers had many kids because the more hands, the lighter the work. When workers left the fields for the factories, the industry had to be introduced to the term “child labour.”

Not all people are parents. When mistakes are made, a parent invests the time and money to do it again, if necessary, from scratch. In contrast, when a kid fails, a person takes over the task and complains about it while berating the kid for being lazy, mean or stupid.

It's helpful to know if you are a parent or a person before you hold what is supposed to be a bundle of joy—not a bundle of things to complain about. Because if your spectrum of joy is helping the masses and assisting humanity, you won't have the time, energy, or money.

Parents and people see things differently. Some people prefer to express the notion that "not everyone should be a parent." That's a good thing because it's getting pretty crowded here.

The Homework of Adulthood

My views on parenting are my own. I am also not a parent because I wouldn't have hired myself to do it if such a thing were a standard in society, especially when there are many jobs. With many other skills, talents, and interests, I decided not to apply for the parent job.

I believe any child of mine deserves a parent from the A bus—not the short bus. Plus, there's my life, which wasn't created to waste away with mediocrity.

I believe parents must prioritize raising their children above all else. Your actions brought that child into the world; therefore, you are entirely responsible.

Imparting lessons you mean to impart is difficult. Parents can tell their kids, but is telling effective?

Before I introduce the nuance of tone and volume, you already know it's not about telling. Telling alone works so rarely that it's more likely that when it does, it is because the person already learned the lesson; they just needed to hear the words.

The words are no substitute for the action.

I try to keep the part of me that is bitchy and hurtful to myself, not because I deserve it, although at one time that was a false limiting belief, but because no one does. There was also a time when I would have loved to direct it to the people I felt deserved it. While there are always good reasons to be bitchy and hurtful, the higher road always has the better commute. It's so much easier to say than to do.

If I'd had a lovely existence, I might have spent my years with the social trivialities the calendar offers, only to look back with regret. I might have fallen for society's story about motherhood, but my mom told me the truth. "Kids ruin your life!" With the divorce, the truth about marriage was unavoidable.

Kids might define a significant part of your life; if that looks ruinous, maybe don't do it. Being a parent is a tall order, even without the extra help of sibling rivalry.

The beliefs a parent instills are designed to last a lifetime and define a life. And society worries about drivers when a car can do much less damage than a person. Who is the most likely to hurt, rob, or threaten you? Family. What's true on television is for once true in real life: detective work begins at home.

Motivation comes from a desire to move away from something about twice as much as a desire to move toward something else. Life gave me adequate fuel for both ends of the spectrum and enough time to progress.

Dogma doesn't have to last your lifetime or limit your life. I am also weirdly thankful for a childhood of scars, pain, and violated expectations. When I split my hand open, I realized I knew how to help myself. If my family's house hadn't burnt down, I might have held onto that security blanket much longer. Life will violate your expectations, so I'm happy I learned that truth at a time when learning was easy, instead of wasting time on a second language, musical instrument or athletic pursuit.

You can also think of becoming weirdly thankful as having grieved the life I didn't have. I went through denial, anger, bargaining, and depression, and I've finally arrived at acceptance and the door to a joyful life—the one I do have. We all want to be accepted. We all cry when we realize we aren't. Then we go forth and wow the world as ourselves.

I've accepted that I bottled all this up and used it to fuel the passion of my success and stumble into the happiness that is childless singlehood. Determination, endurance, and drive were all words assigned to me that were likely rooted in childhood experiences if they also leaked out in stubbornness, rigidity, and manipulation.

Shrug off the labels and embrace true power.

THE SKILL TO SOLVE PROBLEMS

As a change agent, the people whom I can't seem to be able to inspire into action had lovely lives. Their houses never burnt down. They never opened their hands and had to decide which direction to run to save their lives. There were no family members to be afraid of. They made it to age four without stories to tell. They say they want to change, and that's as far as I can get.

For now, I say, because time's not up.

Motivating people to achieve their goals is hard when nothing terrible has happened to them. Yet.

No matter how blue in the face I can get trying to tell them what's coming and possible now but won't be later, nothing I say will matter. They do not have the experience to draw from when they imagine the future.

They will listen to me with all the likelihood I would have listened to myself, including the years I poured all my heart, soul, and willpower into trying to listen to myself, writing commands in journals, tasks in calendars, and goals on whiteboards.

My nephew was diagnosed as autistic when he was a baby. My dad said, "There's nothing wrong with him. He's just like you when you were that age." Years later, I heard the nephew lose his temper and found some words. "Stop telling me what to do," he'd yelled at parents, grandparents, and everyone, thinking they had a piece of advice for him. I'd cheered for the apparent payback of early investment, thirty years ahead of me in saying that sentence.

My cat tells me what to do. She has figured out how to get me out of my seat when I am mid-sentence with an inspired thought. That's something no one else has figured out how to accomplish. She can tell me it's time to feed her, let her outside, brush her, or mind a household problem. Once, rags in a sink were about to cause a flood, and she thought to alert me to the situation in time. People don't find their words, nor does my cat, but she still achieves her goals. I'm thankful she doesn't like wet paws.

Figuring things out for yourself should not be a luxury, and it's never too late. It is the point of youth and the foundation of problem-solving. Make mistakes - do it while they don't matter; do them where they can't hurt. Or learn to contain risk and do it as soon as possible.

Yes, it's difficult to watch, so parents, if you can't look away, set up many play dates. Encourage them to move away—at least during their late teens and early twenties, when their brains go through the final stages of growth. Let them test their limits and make mistakes from your field of view.

If it's doing good that you are trying to do, maybe the first step is simply keeping our good intentions for ourselves. Not to ourselves, as in not saying anything and then patting yourself on the back for staying silent.

For ourselves, this means taking our advice first. This includes worrying about your actions and their consequences before telling anyone else what to do or how to do it. Do share with me any tips you may discover toward that end.

I do what I do and wait to be asked, "How did you do that?" It's limited but risk-free and led to many fun projects.

Principle #2: Contribute Uniquely

When you are an outlier, find the accuracy and precision in what, when, where, why, how, and to who. Then, work at becoming the best you can be at it.

When you are a part of a status quo, connect and spread yourselves thinly. Try not to end up in the same organization, on the same teams, studying the same subjects, and shopping at the same stores.

Keeping that connection to each other helps keep us grounded and protected while we explore the territory of diversity. You may need a team to help you decode and translate some answers. I know I did because I also know that everyone is at least somewhat both an outlier and a member of a status quo.

From an early age, we ask children, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Like their answers matter. No matter what they say, it’s a good laugh. The first joke is that their answers are delightfully ridiculous. The joke doesn’t end there, though. It’s like they will be so lucky as to have only one answer.

The joke is that they can’t begin to imagine the answer because those jobs don’t exist today. The disciplines don’t even exist, let alone the branches of institutions that can claim to house the best researchers exploring the leading edge who are willing to impart their knowledge.

At my alma mater, new disciplines existed, such as parking lots, farmer’s fields, and abandoned developments.

I hope those kids say they will be thinkers, innovators, and rebellion creators. That might be what we should all be when we grow up, no matter our physical age.

Since we, as a society, have roles for adults, we can help people into these roles, prepared adults who are poised to contribute to society. In some societies, birth determines what you will be when you grow up, no questions asked. In others, it is less clear, yet decisions must be made. You are on a path to prepare you for a future role.

Remember, when society aims to do anything, it’s like a committee doing anything. It is worse than any individual would do if given full authority, but it is next to impossible for anyone to tank. The most reliable way to establish the lowest bar is to give it to a team, committee, or other nebulous multi-party arrangement. Before recruiting anyone, let’s discuss your role and the domain where you have complete authority.

I knew I was off society’s track early. It seemed there was an issue with how long it took me to talk. Then, I learned my first word. It was “No.” Things did not look good for me since this was not an improvement.

I also learned that when you are going to start with no, put your running shoes on first. People are sharp, or at least fingernails are sharp. When you tell a little girl no, they might react by trying to claw your eye out. If you want to tell your teacher no, you should be prepared to get expelled. Refusing your parents might land you without television privileges.

When you are asked what you want, be prepared to hear no. Your bedroom walls cannot be painted black when the house is reconstructed. Don’t even think about asking why one more time. No, you cannot leave that food on your plate.

You will discover you can be different within reason, broken with specifics. Says who, I said. Aren’t you glad I found kinder and more effective ways to rebel? Well-behaved citizens rarely make history; obedience is for dogs.

People are different. On this point, we seem to agree. Different means we are distinct, various, and not alike. Once, I went so far as to say we are unique. However, some smiles turned upside down. I had to explain that through DNA, experience, and consciousness, I concluded that we are all irreplaceable.

I went on to say that one person could not be interchanged with another without material changes resulting. Such was my evidence for uniqueness. Smiles turned back around when I explained that no one is special, and unique does not mean special.

Different people doing dissimilar things make for unique contributions. All are required and connected; each has costs, rewards, and sacrifices. If I'm working on myself and you are working on yourself, eventually, the world will become a better place.

The Excellence of Excelling

The problem is you forget what job you are best suited to do, the larger context and bigger picture for your actions, and what it feels like to be genuinely hungry.

There are lots of jobs I'm sure you are very able to do. You don't have to prove it by doing them all. I can tell that you can do all sorts of things highly competently by the way you excel at excelling.

The way you do one thing is the way you do anything. Cutting corners, taking advantage, and not prioritizing your needs is a short-cut to a dead end.

As someone who wants to do everything, I can also tell you that prioritizing the critical things dictates that I never get around to the mundane things. The things we have to drag ourselves to do are often the very things we should be delegating.

The way is the result, so don't waste your time producing anything that's a meagre representation of your greatness. Excellence isn't frosting; you can't add it afterward to cover up shortcuts, mistakes, and rushed craftsmanship. Despite what editing, filters, and makeup would have you think.

If your potential is still inside you, it might be time to stop dragging yourself and allow yourself the time to find delight.

For myself, it was not lost on me that an earlier generation wouldn't have been considering engineering as a profession, owning their own home, or getting to write about solo-hood as a real option.

Securing the right to vote for women, birth control, the right to homeownership, and the right to credit, which usually takes the mother-and-wife route, were new accomplishments. I might not have realized they were worth celebrating had I gone the mother-and-wife route.

When you allow yourself to find delight, everyone wins. You find power instead of force, love instead of fear, and joy instead of drudgery.

The Fixation on Weaknesses

People are not porcupines, but we do have sharp edges. Some buffing is required. The problem is that we forget the point of the buffing and make a career out of it.

For me, it was math. I was desperate to prove I could do math, which was an apparent weakness. Report cards pointed it out. I spent time with my dad learning flash cards. Daily drills set facts in place. Yet, was memory going to be good enough?

I was so desperate that I became entrenched in a career in calculus, statistics, and probability.

I've met many other women who did similar things and still felt that initial motivation. Some said they had imposter syndrome, and others were happy to offer different reasons for choosing to master something they were least suited to.

When I was on the swim team, I lost before we started. Shorter than everyone, I was at a clear disadvantage. I didn't win; this wasn't about winning. It was about determination and my ability to imagine Jaws at my heels. Also, they let anyone join, and I needed something for my resume.

If you choose to fixate on weaknesses, fixate you will. You will always look for what you did wrong and where you could have done better and ignore the exhaustion of such work. You might not even know it is exhaustion until you feel what it's like to be energized. Or when you become an entrepreneur and stop caring about resumes.

Following your strengths is when you lose track of time. Your focus and attention are fully absorbed in the moment, so much so that you might forget where your body ends and blend into whatever you are doing.

Unfortunately, it feels like play, so we don't appreciate its value. It feels effortless, so we take it for granted. We spend our vacations doing it and our money pursuing it. Besides, you've been raised to believe you have to work to address your weaknesses.

No one knows what it feels like on the inside, so who can point out the best role for us? Maybe it's more a matter of when to switch our focus away from weakness correction and toward building strengths or how to choose our areas of self-development when we have the opportunity to be self-directed.

To be able to switch.

Before we get the opportunity to choose, our differences may be too inconvenient to handle.

The Inconvenience of Difference

When people are different, finding a place in our hearts for them can be challenging. We find them exhausting because we like one thing, and they want to do another.

If a kid needs a community to help raise them, it might take 100 people before there's another who is also into the same things. It might take a million people. Thanks to the internet, you can find them.

When we find that person excited by the same things and seem on the same wavelength, energy feeds off each other. Seeing them in action, you might call them extroverts. When we find that person, but only in author format, we could call them introverts.

Experience would make it seem that I might be a closet extrovert. As an introvert who can't sit still for a week after giving a twenty-minute presentation, I think it all depends on what kind of people you've met and conversations you've had. Or the early experiences that predisposed you, the conclusions you drew, and the experiences you repeated through the lens of your history. I remember going to hide in the closet for safety's sake.

School systems talk about children-to-teacher ratios, but what about the ones that happened before that? When a parent lacks time for everything, attention becomes a punishment, not a reward.

Misbehaving somehow ingrains itself as a way to get attention long after it's a functional way to get the amount you need. But now there are pills for that, and parents who can't put their phones down long enough in the doctor's office to consider their fifty percent of the problem.

One parent pointed out how much longer it takes to teach children to think for themselves than to do as you say. It's not just longer; it's capable of leading them into decisions you wouldn't have supported, and you can't argue with them. Is that what you wanted?

The Failure of Success

As a parent, that's a bittersweet moment of success, so I'm told. They've flown the nest and demonstrated that they don't need you to navigate the way. You did your job, and so you lost it.

A liberal wants you to be dependent on the government. These politicians believe in big government and that they are better positioned to make decisions and rules for you, and all you have to do is pay your taxes. A conservative believes in the competency of every citizen to be adults who want to make their own decisions in life and will spend their money accordingly.

I was raised a liberal, but one day, someone said to me, "Oh, you hunt? Live in a rural town? Oh, you're a conservative." Until then, I hadn't realized it was easy to cleave the world into two and know what side you would find like-minded people with decisions, large and small. Perhaps dividing the country shouldn't be so simple.

As an employee, it was my objective to work myself out of a job to get to the next more significant, challenging, complex problem. Finally, I realized there usually wasn't one, and everyone else was trying to make the current one last longer.

A friend told me about her excellent therapist. She was so wonderful that she could explain a mystery about how her mother would act. The answer eased her tormented frustration. I asked if they talked about what to do next time.

Therapists aren't excellent when they don't tell you what to do next time, but they are human. If you got up and left, they'd have to sell to fill your spot, and selling isn't a therapist's idea of fun.

Society has an embarrassing history of thinking it knows better, punishing the individual, containing the community, and wiping out the population. The propensity to act in such a reactive and then reparative way is named after Ignaz Semmelweis. He dared name doctors as deadly agents when he postulated the existence of bacteria and the lack of a handwashing practice. He ended up dying of infection in an insane asylum.

The norm is to teach the individual tools to make a bitter pill easier to swallow instead of teaching them how to build an army and fight the addictive power of sugar. "Orange, you good!" Unfortunately, the flora and fauna were not as resilient and did not have Internet access.

If some people are tone-deaf, I think it's also possible that some people are behavior-blind.

The Role of the Game-Changer

The Semmelweis effect doesn't just remind us not to point fingers without copious amounts of facts, friends, and finances. It reminds us that rejection is always the first response, and anything better is enlightened. Expect the default version.

If they will shoot the messenger, hire a professional with experience in message delivery and a wardrobe of bulletproof vests. This job doesn't allow room for weakness; it naturally eliminates the weak.

For any job, there is a list of requirements. In school, we all get report cards. It's clear the message: Higher is better, and lower than a certain number is a problem.

When there isn't enough attention to go around in a family, a school, or a society, attention is distributed based on need. Who needs it? The people who need it are the ones who are in trouble of being left behind.

If you are Semmelweis or any game-changer, leader, innovator, or visionary thinker, and you want everyone to look forward, not behind, first realize that what has captured your entire focus is entirely uninteresting and irrelevant to them.

First, let's not point fingers, shoot anyone, or do anything we must apologize for later. Then, let's all try to figure out how to communicate to everyone else what we seem uniquely interested in understanding, knowing, or doing.

One person can change the world. The job requires the courage and perseverance to stick it out until you reach the tipping point when you get to do you. Unfortunately, no one is born that way. You must fight for the right to be you; no one else will do it.

The Joy of Constraints

To pull off that job, you need to muster the energy and endurance that comes with strengths and being in flow.

To be able to explain it and teach it, you need to know it so well that you can communicate the complex with simplicity. Communication is everything, and words aren't the only way. You might have to pound some pavement, gather data, and present proposals as Jim Allison, the Nobel Laureate known as the Rebel Scientist.

Do you know your strengths? When was the last time you were in flow? Or what would be so energizing as to be worth it? Energizing, not exhausting, makes all the difference.

Differences are inconvenient whether you are a parent, a school, or an organization. We deal with them by finding a faster, cheaper, and more accurate way to sort them, but sorting is the problem. First, your parents teach you how to behave. Your immediate community then tells you about your personality, maybe your zodiac sign, and your birth order. Then comes the school with report cards and grades. After school, there's a new checklist of what you are supposed to master and how well you did. When you graduate, you join an organization, and a new checklist ensues.

What if differences weren't meant to be buffed away but the key to the new thinking, new perspectives, and new insights we need for the future? What if they were meant to be discovered and built up instead?

The assumption is that it would cost too much, be rife with defects, or take forever to achieve. At least, that's what they teach project managers: cost, quality or time. You can only have two. That's just the project view of the world. Whether written down or not, corporate or academic, parental or scientific, it is not accurate or precise, so don't fall for the black-and-white, the paperwork, and the tiny little boxes.

Problems and projects are not the same thing. While the project-lens world of unique contributions is laughable, it's the fast, easy, and cheap way in the problem-lens world. Problem-solvers say, "Constrain me more, please," because the more focused the problem, the easier it is to see the solution waiting on the flip side.

THE CALL OF GENIUS

Some weaknesses are irreparable and best managed with avoidance. Finding delight is an adventure, not a planned trip. Instead of improving your weaknesses, look for ways to delegate, deflect, and diminish their exposure.

Don't check off boxes and nestle into a predetermined box that describes who you are and how you behave. Look for ones that give you wings to fly and places to go. Find them by following your frustrations.

When something frustrates you, the question you must answer after venting is, "What are you going to do about it next time?"

The experience and question might be your unique call to the opportunity of a lifetime. When you are the only one frustrated, your genius might reveal itself.

If you have one, maybe everyone does. The problem of sorting disappears, and instead, the call to action is to find and develop our valuable differences, perhaps even our unique ability to contribute to this collective solution we call society.

We all have individual perspectives. Maybe the way to maximize the whole is to maximize the individual. Not compromise one or the other. There might be room for everyone.

No two organizations are alike, despite them declaring all to have “a great culture.” The research and development department at one organization was a hush-hush library of a deep thinker’s party, but the department with the same name at a different one was an air-gun blast like two-for-one shots at happy hour. Both were great; neither was for everyone. Culture is to business what personality is to people, so find the one that fits.

Cities, communities, and organizations can all be personified as living, breathing humans with one thing they say they are and one thing they are that you only know after you are on the inside. You see the marketing materials; you sign up for the dream. One day, you are being recruited; the next, you are an employee who can’t be enticed to buy, no matter the discounts.

There might be opportunities to maximize or room for improvement in our cities, communities, and organizations—just as there will always be when we look in the mirror.

The choice is often twofold. Focus on something that will exhaust you, and even when you are a master, you will feel not good enough. Or focus on something that makes time irrelevant, criticism painless, and innovation assured.

As long as there is time left, there is time to pivot. There are critics, lost opportunities, and failure, no matter your choice. You might want to pick the path with the better high points.

Orienting toward what feels energizing might be less about managing your agenda or choosing your activities and more about reconnecting your intelligence.

Principle #3: Reconnect Intelligence

If there’s one thing you can’t undo, it’s the past, but neither does that mean you have to accept the consequence that it delivered.

Change is always an option. You can change the parts you find disagreeable, keep the parts you like, and use your unconscious and subconscious to know the difference.

The problem is that we all use our conscience to make such important decisions, and in doing so, we tend to ignore the unconscious and subconscious.

It does suck being left out of a decision that affects you. It sucks even worse when you are nowhere on board with the decision.

Usually, I've found, that's when you get left out. They knew that you might cause problems, so you were not consulted. It's easier for them and often also practical because it creates the illusion that you are powerless.

No one is ever powerless; many are far more powerful than they believe.

I like to use all three sources of intelligence. That way, there is never a tie; one cannot take down the whole fort. It also makes me catch up in my own selective decisions less often. The minimum viable committee is me, myself and I. The collective who sees through illusions spots the lies and knows the truth.

Consciousness is what you think, like with that voice narrating life or reading this passage.

Subconsciousness is clearly below that. It's in your gut. If you've lost your mind-gut connection, so have many other innovative and successful people.

You lose your mind-gut connection when your parents tell you that you are not hungry, or rather, eat now, and eat this because it's what we made for the meal, and it's mealtime, according to the clock. Your gut or conscience wins and tells you to be obedient because the street is no place for little kids. I know – my mom helped me pack a bag, and I sat in the ally while I thought about it.

Later, diets are introduced, and charts are followed, but the real problem is that you don't know how to listen to your feelings of hunger and trust that your body knows what it's doing—maybe more than the government, which publishes the food pyramid. Hunger is the feeling of fat leaving the body, not a sign of doom.

I was the kid who asked my mom, "What's hungry?" and chose to make a bed out of the dining chairs because the rule was that I couldn't leave the table until I'd finished my plate. I figured that would be sometime the next day. Three days later, I was allowed to skip all future spaghetti meals.

That was then, progress says. Now, parents deal differently with the challenges of feeding children.

The Loss of Cohesion

If you may have lost your mind-gut connection, it's also possible that you've lost your mind-body connection. A quick test is to tell yourself to sit still and stare at a white wall for a while. See how long you can do it until your body wins. Your body wins when you fidget, and your mind loses when you get up and leave.

Sir Ken Robinson warns of the dangers of the educational system's focus on analytical left-brain skills, which produces people who have lost their feelings, creativity, and other right-brain skills. When all decisions start with an emotion, what use are your analytical skills? This is a wake-up call for the status quo.

Education is mandatory for a good reason: to prepare its citizens for things like getting a job. Historically, this meant a long career in or related to manufacturing.

Machines are good analogies for everything from the body to the mind to the universe, so it made logical sense to heavily emphasize left-brain skills in an educational institution designed to prepare for careers.

Lean towards math, logic, and science. Spend less time on things like arts, humanities, and physical education. After all, muscles are no longer required. Didn't you hear? Machines.

When it becomes clear that this is not the world today, that there are multiple forms of intelligence, and that most students will need creativity, intuition, and emotional intelligence, is it too late to lament that we might have educated-out problem-solving skills?

Go ahead and get angry.

Now, what are we going to do about it? Lamenting isn't going to cut it.

The Fragmentation of Mind

Buddhist scholar B. Alan Wallace observes, "We're living in a world that contributes in a major way to mental fragmentation."ⁱⁱ

That may be the way we like it. We don't fight technology as it propels us down this road. Nor do we switch off the news programs and advertisements or stop clicking on the headlines. No, we jump on social media, with its many channels, and tell our friends, watch how they react, and spy on everyone else.

When I say "wall," people imagine Facebook, not gypsum. When I say "friend," you imagine delightful distractions, not dependable people. The word "like" made me imagine people did, and then someone showed me how quickly he could create impressions of support.

There is so much to see, so little time. There are so many to meet in so little time. There are so many offers, so little to do.

When researchers asked study participants to spend 6 to 15 minutes entertaining themselves with nothing but their thoughts, their rating of this experience was overwhelmingly negative. But how bad is it to sit alone with nothing but your head?

For some, it is terrible enough to choose an electrical shock instead. Sixty-seven percent of the men and 25 percent of the women pressed the button to administer a shock that they had said they would pay to avoid.ⁱⁱⁱ

Shocking.

Terry Waite, who spent five years hostage, mostly in solitary confinement, remarked that the main thing he learned from his ordeal was that "Contemporary humanity has lost the ability to engage in productive solitude."^{iv}

Meditation seems to be something to brag about, not something to spend time doing, like reading, listening, and learning.

The Skill of Metacognition

Who has time to feel and reflect?

It's in solitude that your haunting thoughts come out, and there's nowhere left to hide. Unprocessed events come back to memory. The old storyline starts and reminds you of the hurt, agony, or whatever emotion you re-experience on demand this way.

Thinking about thinking is an essential skill for learning. It kicks in when you assess your progress and decide to remove the training wheels. It's what you use to determine if a memory might be inaccurate or a decision inappropriate. It's what keeps misplaced confidence in check.

Author Tim Ferriss has said, "A person's success in life can usually be measured by the number of uncomfortable conversations he or she is willing to have."

Many of those conversations will be with you. You need to know why you think that, what you missed about the whole situation, what you can learn going forward, and what lessons you got wrong last time.

You need to stop acting like there is such a question that does not require an answer and start working on answering it as the first principle asks. This one asks you to stop taking less than a good answer as an answer. You know, even if you don't know, you know.

Introspection, meditation, mindfulness—pick your language. Metacognition needs a solid place in society's mainstream, a skill everyone should learn.

At the very least, we need to recognize a lack of attention, a preference for distraction, and the inability to sit still as a lack of a skill and treat it as such.

Acceptance might involve grieving ideals and beliefs that no longer empower progress, giving up goals when you realize you've placed your ladder against the wrong wall, or deciding that enough is enough.

The Stigma of Emotions

As Harvey Spectre from the television show *Suits* said, "I'm against having emotions, not against using them." It also seemed that he was against using them when they were being used against him.

Your emotions are a source of intelligence—information only. We mislabel and misjudge them all the time, completely missing the information.

We create a vice instead and use that vice to distract from the information. If you have a vice, you want to disappear, stop, look and listen to what you've been attempting to avoid.

Sometimes, I can dive right in and shiver without losing a stroke. Other times, I dip a toe, suffer a foot, and go as fast as I can while looking like a turtle on the outside. What's valid with cold water is our behaviour with all new things. This metaphor may apply to you as well.

At first, it always feels weird, sometimes uncomfortable.

I'd rather feel than be numb, even if it's not always what I've labelled as fun. I've learned I can re-label and that being informed is always better than being blindsided. Fear becomes love, nerves become excitement, and anxiety gets an invitation to the backseat.

It is time to bring back feelings as something worthwhile, worth understanding, and worth not forgetting. You are not like Spock, whether you try to contain and quell them like Harvey or use them against other people like he does. Spock from Star Trek isn't human, so it's plausible when they say he doesn't have them.

Harvey is human (as a character goes), and season after season, we watch his failure to master his emotions take him on wild financial, relationship, and legal adventures. Despite what he might be against, nature laughs and continues doing its thing.

Nature doesn't care about your opinion. If you want science to care, you must invest much time and effort to argue your point and change hearts and minds.

The Destruction of Bullshit

What would life be without emotion, and yet, where did you learn how to deal with them? Childhood, in some way or form, with perhaps improvements made along the way.

When you read the title of some books, you feel like you just learned everything in the book, and there's no point reading it because you are convinced. The books I love are the ones that I follow right to the last word.

For the first time, I was struck by a dedication in *Braving the Wilderness*: "To my father: Thank you for insisting that I always speak up and take a stand—even when you passionately disagree."

Perhaps you heard the opposite: "If you don't have something nice to say, don't say anything." That advice can be a killer. Suppressing anger has been linked to cancers of the internal organs. When you bottle it up and shove it down, it doesn't disappear. It festers. As a problem-solver, I can't do anything with silence.

For me, when I had something to say and knew it wasn't nice, I'd shove those words down and run. If I couldn't run, I'd put food on them. Running would ensure I was isolated enough that I'd have no one to say them to. No matter how I tried, something would leak out of me at inappropriate times and in not lovely ways. It was a horrible existence, not knowing when I'd blow my top and mouth off to the wrong person. Yet, I did, time and again.

Brené Brown advises speaking truth to bullshit. This is life-changing advice; the problem is that far too many people are way out of practice. I know I was, and I can tell you how long it took me to reconnect with my intelligence, figure out what I wanted to say, and craft the message so it might be heard.

Passionate disagreement isn't venting or spraying your negative emotions where they don't belong. Emotions, especially negative ones, are contagious, so don't spread them to the innocent. Hone your argument and craft your message while turning emotions into wisdom.

The Achievement of Significance

Everyone craves significance to some extent, and some people find it through the attack or the easy moral high ground. “Virtue signalling” is a new phrase that indicates this same behaviour.

Attacking is an early-stage behaviour in the achievement of significance. It’s the moment the potential hero realizes the raw power within because something is out of control. It occurs somewhere after staying silent for the benefit of everyone else while you are dying inside and somewhere before passionate disagreement. At one end is a martyr; at the other, a saviour. Know your place and try to move further toward the more heroic end. Congratulations on finding your door to opportunity.

Society fears that kind of power, and rightly so. They want you to grow out of it, civilize it away, and cut that nonsense out. Society is the status quo, and all else must go. Will you open that door to your opportunity to find genuine significance?

Sometimes, it is all you can do to save yourself. Do, save yourself. If you have time and means for other options, consider them.

In movies, when the hero learns they have an incredible superpower, they also quickly realize they must know how to control it. They go somewhere safe, cause a lot of destruction, and then return with a new level of confidence and the mission to use it.

They meet people who are willing and able to help. They learn new skills, like how to listen. They also know that they don’t have all the answers, see all the sides, or understand all the factors, but they are safe now, and that’s what matters.

Passionate disagreement is a superpower. First, you recognize that, no, this is not ok. That alone is a step worth celebrating.

Step two: work to do. Two parts are always required: damage control and getting control. Repair and apologize as needed, and then hone that power.

People know their words have immense power in passionate disagreement, but where do they go to tame and hone it? If you’ve noticed, you can’t just hit a dislike button; you must craft your argument.

Expressive writing and other creative hands-on techniques help bridge the gap and bring the unconscious into consciousness.

THE WORK OF SUPERHEROES

As a woman, I’ve endured treatment, conditions, and people because I was taught it’s more important to fit in, to get along and to keep the peace. To be a nice girl.

I had to hear [Tony Robbins](#) say, “Fuck peace.” Thank you, Tony. Well-behaved women rarely made history. Liberating advice all of this was to me.

Tony made me realize that peace is not something you keep; it's something you create. It's what happens when you take your negative emotions and confront people with the results of their actions and a proposal for the work left to be done.

Sometimes, they take accountability and make it up or make it right. But it also happens when you give people a chance to do that, and they decide to shirk and run. It also occurs when you realize that reasoning with unreasonable people is not a possibility.

Growth is excellent, and it doesn't happen when we all pretend everything is okay and avoid negative emotions. Some people are feeling them, and people are feeding them.

Take a stand, especially when you passionately disagree. Give a listen, especially when you want to throw up a hand. Spend a second, especially when you want to click away.

I've noticed the times I was the first person to stand up and declare passionate disagreement with the status quo. Life's short options are endless, and waiting is a waste.

But when I'm done talking, I always discover there are people with me that I would never have expected. It stuns me how often doing the right thing means not going along with the status quo and how many others suffer from their passionate disagreements. That's not patience.

For all the times I remember standing up, there were countless times I followed others who were way ahead of me. I remember standing up disproportionately because of the spotlight.

As an instructor, I always tell my students that if they have a question, they should ask it because someone else likely has the same question. Your question might be valid and rational when it is valid or makes logical sense. I declare I can be wrong; it has happened more than once.

Feedback is gold. No one can do anything with silence but feedback; okay, now we have a place to start.

When I passionately disagree with something, my body knows it. It's pure, raw energy. If I try to write in this state, my handwriting is unrecognizable. Typing in this state produces a staccato that scares my cat, and my words per minute go through the roof. Rule number one: do it in a document, not an email. The whole idea is that you have a plan for when it happens.

Maybe you were like me, trying to lose weight but getting nowhere. I said no, and 15 pounds fell off without much else changing. Frankly, the relief made me so happy I couldn't stop dancing and forgot to eat.

Maybe you are distracting yourself from the truth you know or trying to ignore it. It won't work. Shoving food down instead of letting the words come out only adds to your problems, whether you overeat or not. Pick your vice. Find out if yours works the same.

You can't go from being all merry sunshine to leading a revolution overnight, so how do you start to reconnect your intelligence? Remember that emotions are designed to be feedback, pure and simple. Feedback is gold. Now, you have a place to start.

Principle #4: Analyze Truthfully

Improvement starts with truth—primarily the ability to confront that things aren't working. Worry hijacks our focus and biases our analysis.

Truth can be brutal, but the brutality of things imagined is not nearly as bad as the experience. Like Mark Twain said, "I've had a lot of worries in my life, most of which never happened."

It would seem that unless you are clinically depressed, you are going to be biased in your analysis. If you ask people if they are better than average, everyone says yes—except for depressed people. Maybe depressed people understand the nature of averages and that half would be below it, like heads or tails.

Maybe depression is the nature of thinking you are below average. I know I did. I also realized some truths that weren't clear to me until then. Mistaken ways of seeing things, yes, but also disproven science that I didn't know was disproven.

Data also shows that when it comes to planning, depressed people seem better at timelines as well. Things always take longer, much longer than you want, longer than you need, and longer than you can afford.

If anything, it might seem like depression puts people in a better position to solve problems. They can see the truth and have the ability to sit and dwell deeply on an issue.

Depression might be an evolutionary response to solve major and actual problems. Depressives think intensely about their problems in a systematic way that is often highly analytical. Numerous studies have shown that they break it down into smaller chunks and consider each at a time. Some studies have shown a link between feeling depressed and scores on complex intelligence test problems.

As dysfunctional as it may seem or as inconvenient as it may be, the symptoms of depression create the kind of environment perfect for complex problem-solving. Yet, society gives you a pill and sends you back to work.

If you want to ignore a problem, depression might be the healthy version of the end of the line. But it will help you too. Knowing this deliberate functioning of a healthy brain, resolving depression is about supporting a problem solver at work and not medicating them and telling them to get back to work.

But it might have been the nature of my problem that set the truth free.

The Magnetism of Opinion

Trying to answer that CEO's question about what I did differently, I knew a significant difference lay in the weight given to opinions. Everyone else was working on the status quo machines and grinding through views that had never before been tested.

In my situation, it was a one-of-a-kind newly invented machine. If I asked for opinions, there were none. Opinions were long used up. When people are at a loss, they grudgingly yield to the data. Or the girl? Without the data, there's no way to tell.

On those other project teams, opinions were rife. Where I would go from data to opinion about the data, they would go the other way around. We think it's this. Following that theory, they'd get the data.

The problem with that approach wasn't how Six Sigma asks you to do it. But it isn't very easy. It takes intention. Training. Maybe habit-breaking.

Science does it that way: theory, data, proof, law. Then, observations don't do what is expected. Laws are broken. Broken law, new data, new evidence, and this is how the knowledge kaleidoscope turns.

With ten years in a science-based company, the culture can rub off on your thinking and behaviour if you weren't already hired for how you fit the truth-seeking culture.

Trying to do things a new way when you already have a way will require deliberate and intense habit-breaking work, the kind that is prone to mistakes and tempts you to give up.

Part of the facts always includes what you want, know and trust, along with what all your stakeholders wish to know and trust.

The Way of Solutions

Six Sigma asks you to figure out the problem, get the data, and then ask for the data to determine the source of the problem.

It's human nature instead to see a crisis, jump into action, do a slap-up job, and end up with as many new problems as solutions to the old ones. You don't call your job 'slap-up'; you call it the best you could do at the time.

If it depresses you to think that part of the problem is on your shoulders or that you might have done something wrong, I hope it depresses you to the point where you stop doing anything and take a long, deep look at what you think you know and how you can be so sure.

Just for long enough to see the eureka moment of seeing a better way because it wasn't a fact; it was an assumption, rule of thumb, outdated operating window, or other such imposter of the truth.

We fail to recognize problems until we can see a better way. Simply put, we see solutions first, not problems. Six Sigma says, "Okay, whoa, Nelly. Let's pause and see if what you want to do is genuinely a solution."

My students have to do that. It's the only way I've found to make them pay attention to the four weeks of training when they are just waiting for you to stop talking so they can do what they imagine instead of listening to new ideas.

The Exhaustion of Old Ideas

To learn new ways when you haven't exhausted your supply of solutions, write down all the potential solutions you think you have.

At the end of the training, I give them back their action plans from the first day. They are always shocked they ever thought such a thing and called it a solution. Embarrassment all around. Mistakes are avoided, and temptations to give up are ducked and evaded.

For example, the experiment about being alone with your thoughts, choosing the electric shock, pressing pause, and reflecting before acting seems painful.

These successful students tell their direct reports to get into the next class. Despite the forewarning, everyone must learn that they don't have the answers.

The envelope is worth thousands and thousands of dollars, but charging for things avoided remains a bit of a trick.

Even as a Black Belt, the hilarious secret was that there was never enough work. When you walk by, people who shut the conference room door say, "I'll let you know when I need your help." We were getting paid anyway, and some had cottages to paint, others had kids to raise, and one, I heard, spent every day snowboarding.

When your only job is being on the payroll, working from home is a fantastic option. Some people took Jack Welch a little too seriously, but he wasn't making promises; he was doing marketing.

The difference becomes apparent when you look for the refund policy.

The Sway of Statistics

When you don't have the answers, and no one is giving them, you must scrutinize the data and make it speak.

Then, you use all sorts of tricks to make a little indication look like a concrete inevitability. You change the axes, adjust the scale, add suggestive titles, and away you go off to meet your decision makers who don't know statistics, haven't made graphs in years, and don't know that words and stories are more convincing than p-values.

None of them would be so brave as to admit that they don't know what a p-value is or its relevance.

When asked how long you will run the experiment, you don't use any formula you were taught. You lean on what you know about the culture and go for the most significant number that won't turn your newfound yes into a second-thought denial.

What's right in business and what's right in statistics often diverge, but there's no consistency in which principle your Six Sigma course will teach. With five under my belt, the rate is 2/5, meaning three of those programs would have resulted in a much larger number than the one that came out of my mouth. A couple of digits larger.

Statistical answers would have turned an expensive experiment into a nonstarter. Then what would I have done? It was the only solution I had.

Since projects were nonstarters, I had an open schedule—relatively speaking, no meetings. If an issue arose with my problem, I was available immediately to see it. The principle of 'see' is taught under many

guises. However, you don't have time to see if you are in meetings or running projects. Instead, you decide to know when you have the time. But by then, it's irrelevant.

Recently, I learned that most people panic when seeing white space in their calendars. I knew they brag about too many overlapping meetings and how wasteful they think meetings are, yet they don't know what to do without them.

Problems are not projects because you must respond to their demands, not wrestle them to comply with your wants and needs.

The fact that it isn't complying makes it a problem. So, expect it to behave like a problem—unpredictable, inconvenient, and attention-demanding—like a baby. Leave white space in your calendar appropriately. Book meetings for when you know you will need them. Don't forget to sleep.

The Champions of Evidence

The fifth and final thing I was doing differently was, again, because I was solving a problem and not running a project. I was not seeking consensus.

Project managers are taught several techniques to gain alignment, or at least agreement, when alignment isn't possible. If there is one way that teams can go from a higher potential to something worse than any individual would do alone, it's the approach to conflict resolution.

It's usually premature and biased.

Instead, without a team, I didn't have to worry about what to sacrifice to keep everyone happy.

After all, the star performer wasn't happy, and I was plowing ahead anyway. One person I liked, respected, and wanted to be satisfied with was him, next to godliness. Plus, there was Captain, my Captain. However, parents might be able to tell you that tough love is when you have to do what hurts because it will be worth it in the end.

I know he knows all about it. Under pressure to deliver a plan of action without any idea what to do, he asked the question while I sat in his office. I promptly burst into tears.

He responded like a parent. "I have daughters, and I know that tears are anger and frustration, so go ahead," he said as he looked around for a tissue to hand me. Of course, he found a mechanic's rag, which is pretty tough love for a face.

Tough love requires an intense focus on why you are doing it. Ensuring it's worth it in the end requires having an endgame. Especially if you are going to make it through any improvement, things always get worse before they get better, and things get worse. It went back to that first step in Six Sigma: know what problem you are solving.

According to standard timelines, I initially had three weeks for this task. When I was saying farewell to Six Sigma, they told me they didn't need the step because everyone knew the problem they were supposed to solve. What a waste of time, they said.

Just like that, the entire first step to pause for the cause is gone. Three months later, teams would argue over this or that solution, only to discover they were solving two different problems. That's a lack of alignment, no matter how you vote on which alternative you think is best.

When I first learned it, Six Sigma was introduced to solve the problem of flattening yield improvements. As I learned, there is a curve that represents the growth rate of anything that matures. It starts slowly, and little happens until a tipping point is reached. Suddenly, growth is steady and sure. However, that growth begins to ebb, and a plateau sets in—like a stretched-out “S.”

Knowing where you are on the curve is always wise because change is always coming. You must decide whether to brace for it or prepare to leave.

With plateaus, you should be getting ready to leave. Exit the business. To me and any listening employee, that should sound like impending layoffs. The writing is on the wall when the focus changes from customer service to business development.

The Six Sigma program would push out specific timelines. If we could all find a way to get numbers climbing again, we'd save our futures. We might even earn a nice jacket. It's too bad about the chronic Men's size; it's a small problem, but such is the way of the Ensign.

What's the truth about what problem you are solving and what problem you are facing? Do you know all of the issues involved?

The Durability of Old Ways

To the manager who's been around the block, the game of Six Sigma must have sounded different. They had their ways. They had agendas, experiments, and long lists of things they would do if they had the budget or the time, and they were blessed with both. Like everyone else with whom I've ever worked on every Six Sigma project and otherwise, in every training class and every organization. We all have our own ideas. Those ideas matter first. Before yours, before the experts, before the data.

People trained in Six Sigma develop newfound skills to baffle anyone with data.

The ability to baffle with data came with an added advantage: a new application that only the Black Belts would get. Since we'd only get it, we'd only know how to use it or open a file. If you wanted to see my work, I could send you a photo, but everything behind the number in the cell or the graphic in the image would be my secret to keep.

Secrets were easy to spot when you knew where to look. I was thankful for my phone call, which gave me a heads-up to start looking.

One problem with the application was that you could drag data points on the graph. In any graph, a data point represents a number, and any reader can determine what it means.

With this bug, you could imply anything you wanted. Didn't like that data point to reveal to the reader that your machine went bonkers that day? Just drag the dot to where it would be if it had behaved.

The only tell-tale marker would be a tiny white dot if it fell unluckily on an axis or gridline. With skill, any user could control where the axes and dots would be drawn, controlling the entire graph message.

Thankfully, this bug disappeared in later versions. Still, lies, darn lies, and statistics remained.

While solving my problems, I realized everyone else might have been solving their problems unique to their situation. Maybe others were solving the problem facing my manager. How do we get our control back? How do we get rid of this flavour of the month?

Like we got rid of every other one? Keep calm and continue doing it the way we've always done it. Write up the old ways using the new tools and templates, and we'll be all good. They may have never noticed that there was any difference.

According to that graph, the CEO was looking at the results, and they didn't lie.

THE IDENTIFICATION OF ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

Of course, none of this thinking is conscious, premeditated, or devious. These were some of the best, brightest and most moral people I've ever met.

It was useless and, in fact, laughable to think that it was about me. Sacrificial Ensigns do not make history, just interesting plot developments.

Finding an explanation that covered all the evidence took years of research. Great people were doing excellent things, yet they could not create a quantum leap of a result.

The only answer that mattered was the explanation that had practical use. It's not helpful or accurate to pump up an ego and move on as if I am God's gift to consulting. I've met them. I'm not them. They usually have British or South African accents. They are also much taller and enjoy residing in the city.

Falling for easy answers might be a long way down, but it's down nonetheless. Easy answers include hiring someone because they have the paper and trusting that the paper validates what you need. A Black Belt certification means you hired million-dollar savings to your bottom line, and now you are done. Go to work, little Black Belt.

I saw the same thing happen to Project Managers when certifications were introduced. Suddenly, what was once a craft became a commodity, and the difference was useless to explain.

One of my friends earned her entire Black Belt certification this new-fashioned way: She studied statistics, wrote the exam, and packaged two historical projects appropriately. Forget two years; you can get the paperwork in only hours.

Now that you are certified, you can return to doing it as you always did.

Every situation, every lesson, has more than one way to look at it—one way to see failure, another to see success. It's the same story, with the facts in different contexts and the beginning and ending in other places.

There might be limitless possible alternative explanations for anything that happened and why it did—not just yours or the other side. Negotiation, surprise twists, and innovations rely on finding the next one—not the right one.

To get my paperwork for my first Black Belt certification, I headed to the poshest room I'd ever experienced. The bathroom was about the size of an apartment. There was also a fireplace. I wanted to skip the ceremony and stay in my suite. However, I didn't want to miss the moment.

I was sure that the moment was coming when I would be accepted. Finally, there would be a meeting that didn't take place in the men's locker room because they would want to include me. Instead of using my bag of tricks to be heard, my opinion would be enough. The day would come when I'd be picked for a team, not because they wanted to lean on someone.

In a matter of hours, all my hopes were dashed. Not only would I not be accepted, but I was told I wouldn't ever achieve much more because I didn't wear a size 42 tall. All the CEOs did. Didn't you notice?

That status quo you thought you papered over is still there.

Unless you analyze the situation without ego and determine the relevant opinions while free of opinion. Like a particular CEO who knew how to make a phone call, whereas none of the others ever knew my name or allowed me a reason to give them one.

We are all waiting to see what you notice because it will show us where it's safe to hide our secrets.

Principle #5: Create Progress

I did notice, and maybe *The Wealthy Barber* did it.

On my 21st birthday, I was gifted the book and a cheque for \$1000. I intended to invest it and did as I told David Chilton over breakfast when I met him.

David Chilton is tall. Maybe he wears a 42. I didn't ask, although I was full of questions for the poor guy. I discovered he can do math in his head, but he doesn't realize it's a gift. He still thinks that people who can't do it are lacking something. He doesn't know they are the normal ones. Also, I did not spend my precious time discussing this with him.

In any given conversation, you can learn, or you can teach. When David Chilton is your audience, it's a learning moment. Always. For me, anyway.

When people buy stocks, they do so with emotion, not logic. The financial advisor tries to intervene with logic but can only influence so much. We buy stocks we know and can pronounce. We make the confusing mistake of shopping at and owning stocks of the same company. There's a circular investment plan. You also put all your eggs in one basket when you work there.

When it comes to progress, it's the same as stocks. We hope for the best and check the facts to quell our fears; sometimes, we win and sometimes lose. Oh well, it's a crap shot, we tell ourselves.

It isn't a crap shot. It's a game, and Ray Dalio at Bridgewater is super-crunching it to super-crush the results everyone else is getting. By using data along with people. Not data alone. Not people alone. It is a unique and profitable dance of art and science.

It is human nature to want to improve our odds with progress. One philosophy is that it is a crap shot because people are to blame.

You lose like I did because you got the game wrong. It wasn't to show that Six Sigma would help; it was to show that we are far more potent than a simple methodology.

One view of progress is that it is messy because people are sloppy, hard to control, and disobedient. They are disloyal, stupid, mean, incapable of change, and impossible to contain. Success relies on getting the right people and avoiding or dumping the bad ones.

No one ever called me loyal.

A second view of progress is that people are messy and way harder to fix, contain, or categorize than anyone can imagine. Since we are lazy, let's find a more straightforward, efficient, and effective solution.

Let's solve some problems instead of fixing some people.

The Predictability of Stupidity

Yep, people are broken. When they are panicked, they run. They don't think. Biology confirms this short-circuitry, which saves your life. Thank you when it's a cougar, but it causes you to forget to stop and open the door first.

Should we berate you for your stupidity or impatience or make the doors open the other way around? Solving problems instead of fixing people means we create a rule for architects that all doors will open. More, we invent panic bars. We stop yelling and start predicting and preventing.

It means knowing you should hire the introvert who will go around one-on-one and talk to everyone and not the extrovert who will close the area to pull everyone into a meeting.

Let's start by assuming people are perfect in their fascinating imperfections. Leverage that; don't polish it away.

Put them where their natural behaviour is precisely what you'd want. As I learned snowmobiling, I told them the bare minimum and then saw what else they needed to know.

Safety always comes first. Of course, someone said that a fool is born every minute and that there is no such thing as foolproof.

People aren't broken. They are misappropriated when we shove them into roles that don't fit. They are misappreciated when we tell them how to grow.

They are not broken but mis-trained when we teach them out of their bodies and into their left brains. They are mis-networked when it's all about who you know, and we stick with who we do. They are misdirected when exploitation is rife, and the criminals are always ahead of the cops.

And if they are still acting like children, they might also misbehave and misinterpret their reactions.

Evaluate the risks and mitigate them. Then, have fun. Here's some room to do what you do.

The Entertainment of Responsibility

If people were perfect, how would we spend our time? There would be no stories. An ideal golf game would be one in which there is nothing to tell. A perfect operation would mean we never need to meet about it, and ideal weather would give us nothing to complain about.

If you were perfect, there'd be nothing interesting about you.

If you are going to head down a road, you should know what the future will look like if you get where you are headed. Will it be problem-free or identical people?

It's pretty apparent which future the engineers have chosen. I'm an engineer who ended up studying everything I could about people only because it was required to find a solution to the problem facing society that occupied me.

Whatever it takes, I say.

The way to progress is knowing the problem you are uniquely gifted, positioned, or self-appointed to solve. Find, see, or pick it; there are enough to go around. Stop waiting for a leader to step in and tell everyone what to do. I've learned from you that you don't need to be told anything and that speaking is ineffective anyway.

Since the invention of the call display, who answers their phone? Certainly not when you don't recognize the number and it's a long-distance call. In this age of technology, we might need a new mechanism to reach everyone.

Or, leave it up to everyone. I say the more hands, the lighter the load.

The Assignment for the World

When it came to driving, my dad required me to pass his test along with the government. My dad thought we should know at least the basics of operations to understand that when the oil light came on, it wasn't a light that needed putting out; it was metal parts that needed lubrication.

However, sharing a vehicle with my older sister was a new lesson in fairness. Everything was a constant battle, including oil changes. I'd categorize them as necessary, but she considered them a frivolous expense.

My younger brother thumbed his nose at my dad's test even better. While my sister took the car out West and killed it on the way, my brother bought a dead VW van, parked it in my dad's driveway, and claimed to be restoring it. Instead, people came from far and wide to smoke and raid the cupboards.

As the person whose job was to fill the cupboards, I wasn't making anyone happy, least of all me. My dad's work involved almost constant travelling for weeks at a time. I was given the money for food and the responsibility of managing it, and it was running out quickly.

Maybe because I was the only kid with a savings account instead of a credit balance. Perhaps because I'd already cheated once, been caught, and learned my lesson. It was a bag of potatoes I was sent to get and a candy bar I knew I had enough money to include. I said nothing about the candy. However, the receipt gave me away, and a scolding ensued. Supposed to ask, not take. That's a good lesson to learn.

In one culture, the directive was the other way around: "Better to beg forgiveness than to ask permission."

Around the time I was tasked with the grocery budget, everyone had a lock on their door inside the house. Thieving was rampant. If you left your conditioner in the bathroom, it was gone before you remembered. When I was a member of the Movati gym, I forgot a couple of things and got them back.

Once, though, I was there with my sister, and she saw a perfect opportunity to upgrade her health and beauty provisions instead of a chance to be a perfect stranger and turn something into the lost and found.

If progress is messy, you are going to encounter a broken system. Are you going to exploit it or correct it? If you remember, this is the work of mind mastery. Taking the high road when no one will know.

The Addiction of Autonomy

If the world could sing in perfect harmony, I'd be asked to remain silent for the greater good. I did for a long time. Singing may not be my thing, or music entirely, but someone taught me how to tell a story, and someone else taught me I have a story to tell.

If we are going to choose progress, I might be one of the ones who can shed some light on how to solve problems. For the pile of things that I cannot do, solving problems seems to be something I can do.

One day, I overheard them say, "If we want to know if a problem is solvable, we just assign it to her." I would never hold anyone accountable for that, but rather, I suspect it's one of those things they'd know to say because it would keep me from giving up. You can't let them call you a girl. Goodness me, you aren't even supposed to let them see you sweat. Let alone cry.

Maybe that's all that I was doing differently. I am willing to do just a little bit more, fixate on what I can't figure out, invest a little deeper, tie my identity to it more tightly, and fear failure more fiercely.

When they told me I'd have to wait for data, I realized I had time to learn the program. The guys with tenure had old jobs calling their attention.

When they told me I'd have at most five days, I was there to sweat along them. If the guys with tenure did show up, it might cause a production disturbance as everyone stopped to look.

When they told me to hike so the rest of my team could have time to think about the problem, I walked around the airport for a few hours. Just tell me what you need; no problem.

Maybe it was about going solo and protecting the data from irrelevant opinions while following a proven process.

Maybe I was still used to sitting in boring lectures all day, listening to theory and imagining the practical need to know it. Perhaps I hadn't been around long enough to absorb the culture.

As unique as we are, we are no different. We have pain, fear and loss. We want to be heard and appreciated and see our contributions manifest. We want to be accepted, part of something bigger and not get lost.

We just all do it our way. And that's what saves us.

The Challenge of Physics

When is it true that the more things change, the more they stay the same, and when is it true that the only thing constant is change?

It's not so much that we don't like change; we don't like nasty surprises, loss, or losing control.

Continuous improvement is simply changing anything for the better, yet not so simplistic. In the temptation of crisis, you are facing the urge to rush into action, and if you fall for it, instead of one problem, you will have three.

Changes aren't always for the better, in some parts anyway. Even changes we pursue with great passion and commitment can bring negative downsides. Physics tells you to expect them.

The second law of motion states that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Imagine that if you set out to create change for the better, you also break, damage, or destroy something else.

In a world where gravity is a powerful force and a law, it is wise to respect it if you want your results to last. As the Wright brothers could tell you, you can't just run off a cliff and expect to soar.

However, it worsens because most of our actions to improve something aren't inappropriate. They morph the original, fix some of it but not all, or delay (and usually amplify) the original. It's unavoidable because foresight isn't perfect.

Now, you have the original problem, the changed situation, and the new issue. That makes three where there used to be one.

Poorly thought-out change results in being overwhelmed quickly.

The only way to get farther ahead is to plan the change, expect new problems, re-plan the changes before executing, and pay attention as you implement.

You will need profound mind mastery to defy physics and get away with it.

The Quality of Thought

Follow the data and resist the temptation to embellish the story.

When all these biases and traps intertwine and mingle, human nature's momentum leans toward chaos. It's merely the law of entropy. The difference between being busy and making progress lies in the quality of thought. We must change our minds to change our health, relationships, and success.

Not everyone gets so lucky. When we have to accept our lot in life, the brain tolerates otherwise intolerable conditions.

Frustrated frustration turns into logical acceptance, the voice of objection silenced under layers of rationalization. The funny thing is, it is still there, grumbling away, unheard and untamed, leaking out all over the place in self-inflicted pain and suffering. When false acceptance is no longer necessary and the clouds part to let the sun shine through, everything changes.

To work as an artist is to do the work you'd do before someone told you that you must make a living. Now, you can pick yourself, live authentically, and say you did it your way.

It's not selfish. It's demonstrating concern for the greater good to put yourself first. To resist empathy.

Empathy is remarkable when confused with compassion, concern, kindness, and morality. One data point, one story, may not represent the entire picture, but when you hear that one story, you will be swayed. Empathy as a route to logical behaviour is a flawed one.

Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes. This skill attracts specific behaviours, which doctors have to inoculate themselves against to function and thrive in their profession. If they attempted empathy for every patient, they would have difficulty getting through the day.

Patients need professionalism. We don't want to see a mirror of our anxiety, pain, and suffering. A calm demeanour makes us feel secure. We were raised to trust in cold logic, even if it's compassion that we need and want.

Empathy results in concern for an individual, which is terrific, but it's at the expense of the masses. On reflection, the automatic decisions we make out of empathy are regrettable. We want the fairness of lists, not the intervention for the individual.

When the lists aren't fair and equitable, we want someone to improve the system, not exploit it. To work like an artist and care like a doctor is about effective altruism and rational compassion for others. From that perspective, your thoughts are assured to be of higher quality, and your paycheck to be higher than the one earned by your servitude as a minion.

You are an organism that has the unique ability to be better than your default design and craft a better tomorrow than the one momentum dictates. That's an incredible power to learn and master.

THE FIVE STEPS TO CONTROL CHANGE

When it was my turn to be the instructor, I realized it was far more about telling people what to stop doing than teaching them anything new.

Stop rushing forward with your first idea.

Stop asking people for advice if you know, like, and trust them. Instead, ask for information from uninvested people on how things play out.

Stop doing anything without a theory for what will happen and an ability to see if that's what happens – or not, including what will not happen.

Stop doing anything faster without a plan for everything it speeds up – including the waste, frustration, and waiting.

Stop relying on people to be robots. Use records, templates, and processes to simplify everything—and remember that they are all fallible.

With those five steps alone, you can solve many problems once you learn you don't know how.

Like everything, you don't replace what you have until you realize it is broken or lacking. This goes for your coffee maker, dreams of marriage, and problem-solving toolkit.

When you don't rush forward with your first idea, you have a second. Now, you compare the two, and you realize, darn it, they aren't both apples, so you may not have the problem precisely and accurately identified. Ambiguity might be hiding.

You hear new and contrary ideas when you don't surround yourself with people who tell you the same things. Now, you compare what you thought you knew and maybe didn't, so perhaps you don't have all the answers. Assumptions might be hiding.

When you don't do things to see what happens or on a wish and prayer, you learn about the overall system; nothing is isolated, so you start to see connections and relations between things that are there and stop seeing the lore, mystery and misperceptions. Algorithms might be hiding.

When you don't scale prematurely, you create a plan to sustain that new level of performance, output, or business. Now, you don't fear success for the overwhelm and stress it creates or see size as risk, but know what to expect and do when it happens. Ambition might be hiding.

People become integral to the plan when you don't treat people like robots. Now, it's all about who you put where, and it's a game of talents, interests, and skills, not geography, relationships, or category. The agency might be hiding.

With those five new ways of thinking alone, you can find quick wins, easy opportunities, and profitable innovations.

Unfortunately, most people think it's more complicated than it looks, takes longer than it does, and see today's prices, not tomorrow's payoffs.

They have to learn that all new things look that way, along with more efficient and effective leadership tools to resolve conflict and manage change—no statistics are required to get better, faster, and wiser with everything.

Onward from Here

The work of mind mastery is sometimes tricky, lonely, and painful. You can live without doing the job, but it doesn't make life less complicated, lonely, or uncomfortable.

When you are better aware of what you think and why you might think it, the world becomes a less confusing, conflicting, and draining place.

My desire to move toward what it felt like to be loved and away from the people who made me want to kill myself led me into a world in which I discovered that the feeling of being loved might only come from God himself.

When people try, many things can go wrong between action and intention. It sounds like the word but feels like pain and looks wrong. My phone rings at eight on a Sunday evening, and I know it's my dad because he's on time. It's thinking, "Thank goodness he has an alarm clock to remind him of me." Of course, it's not what he does, and controlling what we think can only happen when we decode our thoughts about what does happen.

What's left to do with my motivation to feel love fulfilled and my desire to succeed on my terms?

New chapters are written, new bucket lists are drawn up, and the forward motion never stops. That's progress, the way of someone who knows that their mind would rather loll about in the status quo while complaining of boredom. It's attempting to be satisfied with completing a thousand sugar-coated tasks instead of the ambitious heavy lifting of a life's purpose.

What comes after feeling loved by God? Being heard and appreciated by human beings. God knows that's hard to do. Every one of them is so different, so figuring out what's in it for them could take, well, the possibilities are endless.

I'd instead let everyone figure it out for themselves. That way, when you go ahead and shoot the messenger, it's dogma that will take the bullet. Pull the trigger on some old thinking that's had its day.

With all your consciousness, master your mind. With all your power, be rare and remarkable with your unique contributions, reconnected intelligence, truthful analysis and unquestionable progress.

Notes

ⁱ De Meza

ⁱⁱ (Dixit, 2008)

ⁱⁱⁱ (Timothy D. Wilson, 2014)

^{iv} (Perina, Who Cares About Character?, 2015)