

Rare and Remarkable Authenticity



Becoming Your Truest Self

Rayne Wordsmith

Rare and Remarkable Authenticity

Becoming Your Truest Self

© 2025 Resilience Imagined. All Rights Reserved.

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

The cover art is courtesy of Image by [桂生 蔡](#) from Pixabay.

First Edition

Rural Ontario, Canada

Table of Contents

Rare and Remarkable Authenticity	2
Introduction	4
From Decision Paralysis to Confident Choices	4
1: The Nature of Uniqueness	5
2: The Power of Doubt	12
3: The Fuel of Passion	21
4: The Choice to Thrive	29
5: The Biology of Change	37

Introduction

Decisions are arguably the most challenging and essential things in life, as they pave the path to the lives we lead, from what we do to who we do it with to where we do it. They can be loaded with regret, guessing, second-guessing, defending, justifying, chewing up the energy of attention and occupying vast mental real estate.

Barry Schwartz popularized the paradox of choice, and is it any wonder? Studies show it reduces happiness instead of increasing choices and creating more happiness. In an experiment with doctors who were given the choice of one drug to prescribe, they did. However, when two drugs were available, they chose the third option—do nothing.

Some people might have been lucky enough to be born close to their bliss and don't need to venture too far from their starting points. They find perfect happiness in carrying on with the family business, remaining in the same town where they were born, and creating lifelong marriages with their high school sweethearts. They are lucky indeed.

Others must find a place where we can thrive, which can be a daunting challenge that too few are accepting of. You need clarity on how to proceed and confidence that you are making the right choices.

From Decision Paralysis to Confident Choices

Life has an embarrassment of choices in that while the world of possibilities is open to us, we rarely venture too far from our starting points. Unlike previous generations, there is a new freedom to do whatever we want, not limited by gender, birth or orientation. Women have moved from the kitchen to the boardroom, African Americans have moved from the cotton fields to the white house, and queer folk have moved from the closet to the altar.

Marcus Buckingham, the author of **NOW, DISCOVER YOUR STRENGTHS**, describes how failing to use strengths leads to boredom, frustration, exhaustion, and a lack of fulfillment and that only two out of ten people have the opportunity to play to their natural strengths. Mathematically, that means eighty percent of us are suffering.

Thriving becomes even rarer in a team. Buckingham reports that 91 percent of team members believe in the myth that a great team member put aside their strengths and do whatever it takes to help the team. While this makes sense occasionally, prolonged sacrifice eventually leads to burnout and the result that was attempting to be avoided—letting the team down. It's worse for the team's results if its members are underperforming.

Buckingham says that the truth is that a great team member volunteers his strengths to the team most of the time, helping where their shoulders are broadest and strongest to support the team.

When there are more options than ever, a perfect set of choices should deliver everyone happiness, fulfillment, and purpose. Yet, it only creates misery.

Perhaps the paradox of choice is simply that we must improve at making them. In business, that's the counterintuitive way to succeed, with productivity, influence, and a host of tools to continue pursuing efficiency and effectiveness long after there's nothing left to cut. (Check the Downloads page at resilienceimagined.com/downloads.)

In life, the ability to make better decisions for yourself is called authenticity.

1: The Nature of Uniqueness

Picasso was expected to paint pictures that would sell well, obeying his father and the art community. He rebelled; if he hadn't, maybe few would know his name. Instead, we all do, and his work is next to priceless.

We can be obedient, or we can be the Picasso we were born to be. If that is your goal, these chapters provide clarity to move away from merely satisfying and toward leaving a legacy only you can.

You are unique, and it's your uniqueness that makes you authentic.

Defining Unique

First, let me define uniqueness. Unique doesn't mean special. You are not special; everyone is unique, which does not make you superior or inferior to anyone.

Special is better, unique is different and does not introduce comparison. It eliminates competition because you can't compare apples and oranges meaningfully. Which one is better? It depends.

Just like you. Situations, callings, and experiences await you because you are the best option available when we all look around. Don't let the team down now.

Being unique means being different, but it does not imply any ranking system or order. It simply means that you are not interchangeable with anyone else.

Your uniqueness is how you are different, singular, a sum of all your being. Being exceptional implies that the difference makes you better or worse than anyone else. As human beings, I believe that we are all equal, and I know that we are all different.

Different, By Design and Action

Unique means that how you approach a situation, think about an issue, or solve a problem is distinct from you. One person said that a lawyer is a lawyer is a lawyer, but if that were a true belief, we wouldn't care which one we hired.

Instead, we care about their personalities and how they treat us. We might even care about who they know and what those people say about them. We might even investigate their track record and experience. On the consumer side, when making selections, we know such things as uniqueness. We may not always care; it might not always matter to the situation, but we know they are there.

An Inherited Foundation

Life is made up of DNA. Your DNA gives you the advantages of evolution, the benefits of your inheritance, and the foundation of your nature. While questions remain and debates range about the exact way DNA works, you should know that the code you have is yours alone.

As you know, even identical twins are different and distinct from one another while sharing the same DNA. This is one window into how science knows DNA isn't like a program but more like a menu. You are built to be unique, from the second your DNA was formed to the individuality of perception and the continual wiring of your brain.

Being unique starts with your design and how you are built, which are products of evolution, inheritance, and nature. Double down on, defy, or ignore all valid options.

People who double down on it know what they are born to do. They have the body type, the gift, or an immediately emerging talent. When we are children, we all stand out in some way. Parents agree that their children don't come into this world as blank slates but with some inherent difference from all other people. This is evolution, inheritance and nature in action. Science can't explain it entirely, but science can explain that, yes, you are always unique. You and everyone else may ignore it until now.

Defy your inner authenticity by living according to someone else's expectations or rules, and you may survive, but you will not thrive. Thriving means living according to the way your physiology naturally functions.

The physiology of your brain is responsible for why some people are big thinkers, and some are more detail-oriented, and they also know the brain is highly adaptable. You have a natural inclination, and you can improve, grow, and change it.

A Filtered Reality

While it feels like you see like a camera, you only have a high-resolution vision in the very center of your eye, which is about 0.1 percent of your visual field. You think otherwise because your brain fills it all in for you.

Your physiological state affects your perception of reality. Psychologist Dennis R. Proffitt proved a connection between our experience of the world and how we see it.

They asked volunteers to kick a football through the field goal from the ten-yard line. Before doing so, they provided estimations of the goal's dimensions using a model. The initial estimates were all wrong, but after the kicks, the successful kickers saw the goal as 10 percent wider, while those who failed saw it narrower by the same difference.

It's your eyes that deliver this trick. Dr. Proffitt determined this by separating visual estimates and estimates by hand. The hand estimates were unaffected. The body and the brain have two different stories.

We run before we understand the danger or have enough visual information to identify it. The action comes from your unconscious visual system. It's responsible for your experience of a double-take as

well. A double take is the product of a mismatch between your expectations and reality. The two systems want you to know something is amiss, like a red flag.

How you perceive the world is more a product of your brain than your eyes. Your brain actively filters and rejects information, bringing only what matters to you to your conscious awareness. The reticular activating system, or RAS, is the system that does this. What matters to you? The things you've focused on in the past. If you can see the repetitive nature of this reinforcement loop, you are starting to appreciate the program at work.

Your name matters to you so that you can hear it from across the room at a party. When shopping for a specific car, don't you start seeing it everywhere? Your ability to tune out everything you are interested in is so powerful that you can miss entire people.

When your attention is focused on one thing, everything else is eliminated. When people were asked to watch students throw a ball back and forth and count tosses based on the colour of their shirts, many people didn't see another student walk into the center of the tossing game and then leave again.

You'd think a whole person would show up in your visual field, and he didn't. It was even more shocking that the student wore a gorilla suit. A gorilla suit! That's the power of your attention and the size of reality you might have missed.

The Value of Specialization

Like the organisms we are, specialization is the gift of differentiation. Our organisms, our bodies, all start as a single cell. That cell multiplies and divides, and at some point, those cells begin to take on specific functions.

They specialize. They become a cell of your heart wall, a cell in your blood or your brain. These cells are all different, as anyone with a microscope can confirm. It's the differentiation that creates the complex beings that we are.

Your uniqueness matters to us as a society. When you are differentiated, we all benefit. The more specialized something is, the better it can focus and become better at it. Differentiation creates unity because we need different things and, therefore, have to get along with each other to exchange, trade and support each other. With differentiation, you have more abilities, skills, and knowledge available to society.

As a society, we may not have an excellent track record of embracing diversity, specialization and differentiation, but history's long, slow arc is trending in the right direction.

What science can prove is that you are unique by design and in action in your life. Your world is all your own, as is everyone else's all their own. We see and notice different things, react to others, and feel different things, which might be on purpose for the betterment and design of a better human race.

If you don't see and notice how you are different, you might miss the opportunity to contribute to that design in your own life and possibly impact far more than you can imagine.

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

You wouldn't want Einstein on your basketball team, and you don't want to live your life as a fish out of water. You are here to find the value in your specialization, and it starts with the full realization that there is one.

The Same, by Design and Action

The way you and I arrive at decisions isn't unique. We make them the same way. Technology has allowed scientists to answer burning questions about how our brains work. The answers weren't what was expected. What appears as abundant control is startlingly a biologically driven need to survive.

If you think your life is a product of logical deliberations, you'd be shocked to find out how much of your behaviour is automatic action without your conscious intervention.

The Bias to Confirm

It happens because we are emotional decision-makers, not because we are flakey, but because of biology. It's all about the chemicals.

Emotions are designed to capture our immediate attention so that we can take notice of something around us. They are chemical reactions and sensations. Some of these chemical reactions and sensations translate immediately into action. We don't stop and consider how we feel and what we want to do; we act. For instance, we are all born to fear sudden loud noises and falling. When we hear a bang out of nowhere, we move and then ask questions.

Scientists can prove that there are up to seven seconds between making a choice and being aware of it.

Seven seconds. That's a long time. How far did you get before you realized you were running?

Your decision is made from your emotions, and in those seven seconds, your brain is finding ways to make that emotional decision make sense. Psychologists call this confirmation bias, and marketers call it providing the features and benefits.

Confirmation bias is the tendency to find information to validate what you believe. They can also prove that it happens when we don't know what we think, even when our beliefs are wrong.

The Reality of Beliefs

In 1947, Readers Digest published Henry Ford's quote: "Whether you believe you can do a thing or not, you are right."

More than fifty years later, Dr. Lipton published **THE BIOLOGY OF BELIEF**, offering scientific proof that Ford was right.

You've heard about the placebo effect, the power of a sugar pill to accomplish whatever you think it will. The power of belief is so mighty that one-third of all healings are attributed to this mechanism.

The nocebo effect is accurate as well. The nocebo effect is the opposite of the placebo effect and just as powerful. If you believe in the negative power, you will create a negative outcome you don't want, but it will happen. Your beliefs have so much more power than you think.

If your doctor tells you that you only have six months to live, you will drop dead on day 183. Be careful what you believe, especially if it's your worldview that doctors are always right.

Your beliefs inform your filters on the world, how you feel about it, react to it, and behave. People respond to your personality, and everything from your eyes to your thoughts is your reality.

Typically, our realities are based on emotional reactions to historical events.

When we don't know how to control our emotional reactions to events, we hold on to the emotion, drag it out, and bring it up on demand even years later. We focus our attention on the memory, and we continue to experience the emotion. When we do that, the emotion becomes a mood.

Even better, humans are blessed with the ability to create emotion on demand. We do that by imagining things; our bodies don't know the difference. When we think of sad things, we feel sadness. We can be in moods for days, weeks, and even lifetimes.

Why not choose happy?

The Program of Behavior

When we let our moods continue longer, they become a personality trait.

Our unconscious and automatic programs are based on our emotional reactions to historical experiences. We call them personalities.

For many of us, our emotions and what we are supposed to do when we feel them are so ingrained that people can predict our behaviour. We can even try hard to change our behaviour, and despite our best efforts, things remain the same or go back there quickly.

To hone in on the value of your specialization, there will be some things you stop doing and some you start. But, if you are a fish born in a forest and know nothing besides climbing trees, you must be introduced to water. You have to say goodbye to the woods. Those decisions are difficult for everyone.

Like any personal change, becoming more authentic requires hijacking your automatic behaviour and training yourself into a new way of being. It will be worth it; the journey is predictable, and part of its predictability is that things will feel different. Behaving differently is a skill that, like all others, can be learned and is a matter of practice.

It's taking advantage of the window of opportunity and redirecting your response in seven seconds. To break the cycle, pick a link and hack it by letting in the possibility of a different reality.

The Call of Always Becoming

These days, the experience of identity re-creation isn't restricted to adolescence as it was for earlier generations.

Achieving a voice of your own is a result of social interaction. Family and parents have strong influences, but so do friends, societal trends, and even popular culture, which play a role in identity formation. You know much about who you are through the mirror of these external influences as they model options and choices within your awareness.

According to psychologist Erik Erikson, we explore independence and develop a sense of self during adolescence. As children, we get to blame our parents, shame our siblings and look to our peers for the truths of reality, but the journey to adulthood means leaving those luxuries behind.

Between 16 and 21, the Amish can choose to stay or go. They don't decide in fantasy, but after time spent on the other side, a period called Rumspringa. The majority select baptism and remain in the church.

If you felt confused and insecure in high school, it's just part of forming a strong identity and direction. If you experimented and tried new things, ditto, it's just part of the process.

The Call for Identity Re-Creation

Identity and behaviour are so intertwined that when we lose an identity, we ask, "What do I do now?" not "Who am I now?"

In psychology, the sense of self is defined as how we think about and view our traits, beliefs, and purpose in the world. It is made up of how we see ourselves, how we value ourselves, and who we wish we were.

We should continually change how we see ourselves, appraise our value, and take action toward our wishes, not merely daydreaming and getting lost in wishful thinking.

As an adult, it's your job to decide what to do. You gain the ability to define relationships how you see fit, not because you were responding to your inner programming for sibling rivalry. You gain the ability to immerse yourself in other people's ideas of reality without losing your own to the right to belong. The decision to be an adult means taking responsibility for your beliefs, identity and relationships.

Or not. You could continue to live as though everything is your parent's fault and that all your relationships are about you.

According to researchers, about 6 percent of the adult population is in the "The Imperial Mind" category in Dr. Kegan's Stages of Adult Development. While Stage one is purely egocentric, stage two is when you are oriented to everyone else.

Becoming an Adult

In stage two, relationships are transactional. People are a means to an end. These adults care about behaving responsibly, not because it's the right thing to do but because it will have undesired consequences if they don't. They act morally because moral behaviour has been pre-determined for them by society, and they follow along with the rules.

The next stage is The Socialized Mind. Fifty-eight percent of the adult population is in this category. Here, you define yourself by your relationships with other people. You are concerned with what they think, feel and believe.

You can place too much emphasis on what they believe. External validation, or doing things for other people's praise, is a dead-end road. Eventually, the praise doesn't suffice, and you will rally against the people you hoped to impress. Instead of getting what you wanted, it's backfired on you.

On the upside, in stage three, you no longer view people for the limited role they can play in your life but start to appreciate that you affect others and their lives. When you do things that hurt your relationships, you want to repair the relationship for the sake of the relationship, not for what you could get out of that person in the future.

Putting other people before ourselves is an act of adulthood. Stepping back, letting others go first, and making self-sacrifice is good for society, and a good society is good for you.

However, it's unsuitable for the individual who gets lost, trampled on, and forgotten. When you believe that every individual can make a difference, adults at this stage start making differences. In stage four, individuals realize they have the choice to belong instead of trying to fit in. They know their ability to make choices and have an identity. They are the ones who move themselves or the boundaries.

Stage four individuals have The Self-Authoring Mind. About thirty-five percent of adults live at this stage. They decide who they are and are not limited by their relationships, society, or the environment. At this stage, you develop an internal sense of direction and the capacity to create your course.

Having adequate finances and a stable financial picture always helps your ability to question expectations and values.

Developing your sense of authority or voice, as we do in stage four, can be free for anyone. You can blog and get into a writing, reflection, and commenting rhythm until it breaks through. You authentically express your ideas as you feel, experience, and believe them.

In stage four, you recognize that you are always in flux and that who you are is something you can always negotiate.

Flexible Behaviors

Stage five individuals are rare, with only one percent living in this stage, but your sense of self is always mutable. Even at sixty, people have shown the ability to transform successfully, according to the Mills Longitudinal Study at the University of California Berkeley.

In stage five, your sense of self is not tied to a role or identity but is in constant flux with undefined boundaries. You are focused on the flow of your life and not tied to any particular aspect of it.

Stage five individuals find contradictions or a lack of internal coherence in anything acceptable, enjoyable, and funny. It's less about judging structures, theories, and methodologies as right or wrong than whether and when they are helpful.

In stage five, people create their value systems, accepting and rejecting at will from those available and quickly adding and subtracting. These systems come and go quickly, at will, and as the situations demand.

Your decision is about where you want to live your life. According to Kegan, Stage five individuals find many things hilarious in life, while the rest don't notice or find it frustrating.

For Michelle Obama, the objective is to embrace the reality that you are always **BECOMING**. You are always a work in progress, changing, adapting, and re-describing yourself.

Feeling Completely

Now that you've learned the power of your emotions as pre-cursors to all your behaviour, it's time to tune into that information channel. You need to be able to feel completely.

Sir Ken Robinson laments how the education system has produced people who live out of the top left side of their brains, the side where math and science reside. From the time you graduate, you are an emotional work in progress, trying to get back in touch with your entire body and emotional experience.

You can't discover your strengths when you don't know how things feel. Your strengths come quickly to you, and you enjoy learning. When you forget the feeling of learning and concentrate only on the marks you get, you don't have the emotional capability to discover your strengths.

It's true for your passions as well. Too many women get good at the lessons to not get angry about anything. You need the anger—how we choose to use it and express it matters.

Not knowing when and how we feel isn't doing us any good. When we overlook this information, we are in habitual reaction mode. Our bodies are doing the things they know how to do because we've always done them, and we are planning, scheming, venting, whatever, but we are not there in the present moment where life is going down.

Not being in our bodies is a big problem that shows up in repeated problems, self-induced sabotage, and a constant feeling of being overwhelmed.

Avoiding situations that create frustration isn't helping either. So-called negative emotions are there to point out what you value, and if you don't encounter situations that go against your grain, you will not find the source of pain that drives people to phenomenal success.

The design of emotion is merely a source of information about your world. When you don't have that stream of information, you are missing out on some essential wisdom about your nature. Paying attention to your feelings isn't letting emotions rule you; it is letting emotions inform you.

2: The Power of Doubt

These days, parents are taught to withhold love when it is needed—when the child is upset. At the critical moment, when the child needs you the most, you are supposed to call time out and put them in a corner.

Gabor Mate says 95 percent of the prison population is in trauma. While that seems shocking, it's obvious when he clarifies the nature of trauma. Trauma is not what happened to you; it's not having someone to help you process what happened to you.

You can derail your personality's program by pointing at confirmation bias. Like a software program that goes through a debugging process, you can do the same with the power of your ability to consider.

Editing Thoughts

Have you ever seen a massive, full-grown elephant restrained by a mere rope? When elephants are small, trainers use heavy chains. The elephant tries to escape and learns that he is not strong enough. Once the belief takes hold, the elephant stops trying to escape. By then, the chain is no longer needed.

Like elephants, it's our outdated beliefs that hold us back. We start learning lessons before we know how to reject the bad ones. Sometimes, those lessons are in textbooks, others in the media, and some from the wisdom of our personal experiences.

Learned Helplessness

Children are trained to look externally for love and attention. They look to their peer group, the media, and the internet. You have parents ranting that their kids won't listen and kids who have no one to help them realize that their emotions are valid, reliable, and something to be tamed.

Before you had a sound mind to question the values of lessons, your brain was learning them anyway. Now, as an adult, you continue to confirm beliefs that may not serve you. Consciousness is the gift to humans to allow us to question what we think to update, suspend or add new beliefs.

Your brain is hardwired to keep you alive. Today, you get to thrive, but you are still executing your personality program, which is oriented toward survival. Your personality program is your habitual way of seeing reality and reacting like always. It's in permanent reaction mode.

No parent is perfect, and when we are adults, we all get to parent ourselves.

Permanent Reaction Mode

In reaction mode, you trigger hormones associated with a fight-or-flight response. When an animal is threatened by something in its external environment, the organism's job is survival and taking care of the physical self.

To do that, we have to answer three questions without thinking: where am I going to go, how am I going to get there, and how much time to get there? It's what happens when the deer sees the wolf. Unfortunately, it is a permanent obsession or an ongoing daily demand for too many humans. Monitoring your surroundings continually is stressful; organisms are designed to be in fight-or-flight only for a short time. It's not intended to be long-term.

When we first meditate and take control of our bodies, we feel this fight-or-flight reaction. It's tough to sit there. If you don't have enough other ways to spend your time, the first few moments you try to do

nothing will remind you of the list of things you should be doing instead. You are rewarded for being productive, and you are doing nothing. It feels wrong precisely when you realize it is work.

A Distraction with Stuff

This focus leads to materialism. Maybe you've heard of the hedonic treadmill. This is the experience where you are always short of money no matter how much you make. You have nicer things. We keep thinking we will be okay, happy, safe, whatever, when we get enough stuff.

The hole you have when you aren't authentic can't be filled with stuff. Pleasure levels off and plateaus quickly, and pleasure isn't joy.

Have you noticed that the more stuff you have, the more you worry about it and the more you spend on it? It's not just the kayak but the cottage to go with it. Not just the new kitchen, but now I need a new wardrobe too. We are caught in a cycle of spending and upgrading because if we do our duty as consumers, do we go to consumer heaven?

Stuff turns into waste, and we have overflowing landfills, plastic oceans, and litter everywhere. When is enough?

The Trap of Technology

Technology is responsible for progress. Poverty, human rights, and other significant progress markers are up, not because of protests and politics but because of technology. Some examples are crop resistance, clean water, and renewable energy.

Technology has created a world where ignorance is a choice. Some people choose ignorance. They might do it accidentally by allowing default notifications, filtering, and other ways we let it rule our behaviour.

If you are someone who will hand over their choices to technology, many people are willing to pay to be the one who gets to do it. Technology is used by those seeking power, and they are more insidious than you may imagine. Technology has trapped and captured the attention of the entire human race.

Humans don't know about the power of their attention to create, heal, or do things you would call a miracle, but science can explain.

When the message upsets the establishment, technology squashes it and keeps them occupied with trivialities.

The Role of Media

News is a business of advertising. What they tell you about during the program is secondary to what they tell you about in between the segments. The point of the program is to keep you watching.

It's all about your inability to look away from gore. You get trapped by opinions, especially polarizing ones with potentially disastrous implications. The opportunity to judge others who fail contributes to your feeling of success. You watch the morning news eager to experience certain predictable emotions.

The morning news triggers your fear response, and you haven't even left home yet. They've convinced you that when you do, you do so with the expectation of seeing all kinds of rare things, like gunmen and mass shootings. They convinced you that air travel is fraught with risk. They've taught you that there are many reasons to be fearful.

Like you needed more to add to your list.

Social media has you in survival mode as well. You are worried about getting tossed out of the clan, and you don't even know them, need them or want them around. If you're going to get control of your emotions and make them do what you want them to, you have to protect them from other people.

Don't let other people dictate how you feel. Watch out for the red flag of, "Look what you made me do."

The Mindset of Growth

As humans, we are all like those elephants, too. There were times when we weren't tall enough, didn't know how to express ourselves, or how to do any number of things. Over time, we grew, built our vocabularies, and took courses from experts.

All personal change is about rewiring brain pathways. You've been built to survive, and now you must renovate some brain pathways to thrive. It requires shaking off a fixed mindset, which implies we cannot do much about ourselves, and adopting a growth mindset. It's possible because we know the brain can change itself.

If your brain can adapt, imagine what you can do.

The Ability to Conform

Society exerts pressure on you from birth to be one way or another, at more decision points in life than you might imagine.

Our ability to conform is hardwired. Conformity is the automatic skill of getting along with others in a community. In caveman days, that community was small and rarely interacted with any other community.

Back then, getting tossed out of the group meant sure death. You couldn't survive on your own. Survival in those days required the whole village. You needed people to take on different roles and care for other things because there was so much to do that one person couldn't do it alone.

Since the brain's number one job is to keep you alive, it does some automatic work, helping you conform to the group. We know to tell the story the audience wants to hear, but we keep the raw, unwelcome truth to ourselves. As Asch's experiments demonstrate, our relationships stay protected, no matter the uncertain but inevitable price.

The Asch Experiments

In the Asch experiments, subjects were asked to answer simple questions with obvious answers. They did so in the presence of others and after others had responded to them.

When asked which is the longest line, do you go along with the group or give the correct answer? The subject gave the wrong answer 38 percent of the time. Over 12 trials, 3 out of 4 participants yielded to the majority at least once.

After, subjects estimated they had changed their answers to only a tiny fraction of the amount they had. This means that they didn't always realize they were changing their answers. Brain scans now reveal that when people conform to group expectations, they change their minds, not just go along for the show. That's why we don't realize it—it happens automatically.

The farther in the future the decision at hand, the more likely we are to go along with the group¹. In the face of ambiguity, we look to others for guidance before acting. We even lie to protect the feelings of a laptop, as Clifford Nass and his team discovered.

We have swallowed our own good opinions and ideas, minimized our strengths, and learned to look to someone else for answers, approval, and guidance.

Cultivating Rebels

Progress happens when one person defies the status quo and brings everyone along, so how does that happen? To break through, the presence of two other people who also disagree with the group is all you need.

Regarding equality, one is a loner, two is an anomaly, and three starts a movement. Sometimes, everyone is just waiting for someone else to go first.

Some prefer the periphery. Asch found that 25 percent consistently defied the majority, and 95 percent stuck to their answers at least once.

Innovators tend to be risk takers, motivated by independence, money and intellectual challenge, but not by job security or responsibility, as researchers found.

You'd call it chaos if there were too many rebels and innovators. How do you know when you are fighting for a cause or simply causing chaos?

Picking your Battles

Some people know from a young age what they want to change about the world. I did not. I knew only that we were unique for a reason, and those reasons were unique. I believe that life is wasted only in the shadow of someone else. It's a failure if you don't leave that mark you could create, saying, "I was here." If we leave a flag of our nation when we conquer new territory, where are you putting down flagpoles with your life? Every conquest deserves recognition and respect, but it doesn't demand new territory, not just new to you.

The need to matter, the need for significance, is a basic human need we all have. Some people fulfil this need in dysfunctional, hollow ways. They find things to complain about but don't want to be improved or solved. If they were, they'd no longer have anything to complain about, and they'd no longer be satisfying their needs. Even the work of finding something new or different to complain about can be too much.

You may have nothing against anything you've learned, seen, or experienced. That's okay, enjoy this time, because it ends. In every life, bad things happen. They will be unfair, hurtful, discriminatory, or whatever, and they will happen to you or someone you love. Suddenly, you are no longer anxious about not having a purpose or feeling like a passive lemming; you have an inner fire that lights your ambitions, motivations and courage and becomes a force of change.

The Nature of Purpose

Having a sense of purpose helps us operate like tectonic plates instead of like a plastic bag on the open seas. On the waters, you are subject to the currents, tides, and wakes of passing boats that know where they are going. With more proactivity, you can operate under the surface, with more control and less subject to outer influences. Operating at the tectonic plate level, you make the currents and the waves.

The purpose isn't something you can sit down and decide. Being unable to articulate oneself should also not hold you back because the only way you can answer the purpose of a question is through experience. The purpose is something you recognize.

The purpose is something that motivates you passionately. It's something you feel, and you realize you are following your passion because you can't not follow it. There's simply no other choice. It compels you, and like a fly in a spider's web, the more you get involved, the harder it is to get out. Purposes catch you, and it may not hold you.

The purpose is not forever, and nor is it only one thing. A north star gives you the clarity to make the right decisions and see the distractions for what they are. In a world of roses, purpose gives you the inspiration, boldness and courage to be a daisy.

Cultivate Your Inner Rebel

Conformity is no longer required to survive. Thinking differently is necessary for progress. They are the successful entrepreneurs, the interesting artists and the life-changing teammates. They say you will fall for everything if you have nothing to stand for.

Do you know what you stood for or wanted to stand for before someone told you no? When we face intellectual challenges connected to our inner need for success, nothing stops our progress.

To rebel is to go against the grain in a way that doesn't hurt anyone yet, which is shockingly different from the norm. A little rebel fights for the right to make the right choice for you if no one else has ever done it before.

The Misperceptions We Manage

By the time we are adults, we know when we are supposed to lie, what we are supposed to say, and how to stay in good social graces.

Between ages three and four, we develop the cognitive capacity to realize that other people might not think, believe or know something we do.

That's when we develop the realization that lying is a thing. You can keep the truth to yourself. As long as you don't verbalize your thoughts, no one will know what you think—pretty heady stuff for a kid faced with temptation and nothing but an order to follow.

In National Geographic's show **BRAIN GAMES**, children are put in front of a chocolate cake and told not to touch it. Then, they are left alone to see what they will do and, secondly, if they will lie about it.

We are also much more practiced at this seemingly necessary life skill than you may believe. It depends on your belief system.

As Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson explain in **MISTAKES WERE MADE (BUT NOT BY ME)**, we have the unconscious ability to spin-doctor facts to enforce what we already believe, even if our beliefs are self-destructive or downright erroneous.

This creative brain trick is called cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance ensures that our identities are kept intact, at least to ourselves.

They may be invented and inaccurate, but we can find creative ways to explain information so they remain the same. Since much of our identity is based on these debatable descriptors, we are talented debaters who win every time, if only with ourselves and those who are too polite to disagree.

That's why we need trusted naysayers to tell us when our crazy is showing on the outside. Avoiding the truth will only undermine your productivity, contributions, and success in life. Be open to honesty, feedback, and the opinions of others. You don't have to accept them. You can reject them. First, you have to hear and understand them. Then, decide if they are helpful or not.

The Better-than-Average Effect

For most of us, our self-assessments are that we are better than average. Maybe we've learned entitlement by having parents who loved us with too much generosity. Maybe social media tricked us into thinking it's all about us.

Studies show that the only people who don't believe that they are better than average are those suffering from clinical depression.

The problem is that the math doesn't hold out. With an average, about half of the population should realize they are below it. They say we have an epidemic of depression and mental health, but we have far more people who are mistakenly rosy about themselves.

When your expectations don't turn out as you thought, it's not likely that you will logically reconsider and adjust your expectations. Instead, it's more likely you will double down on what you did believe, standing up stronger, louder or prouder than you were previously. Your glowing opinion of yourself might be exactly what is holding you back from finding the true you that can shine with authenticity.

The Root of Conflict

Perception is individual, and when we forget that we create and live in our worlds, we get caught up arguing about which version of reality is the correct one instead of leveraging our differences.

Perception is individual. When we don't know this, we get into conflicts about which version of reality is correct. The argument could go on forever with so many different versions of reality.

Instead, you can recognize that there are three versions of reality: one is the Truth—truth with a capital T—which is the facts and evidence that can be proved, validated, and replicated. Facts exist where there is no room for argument. When you understand the scientific process and the reality of what is required to become solid facts, you realize there is so little of it that the other two parts matter far more.

The other two parts are your truth and my truth. We have beliefs. There is concrete proof for things, and then there are things we believe are true because they have happened to us so many times; there is little room to believe in anything else.

To see a new reality, remember it's your brain painting the image with the brush of your attention and personality. Dr. Wayne Dyer says, "When you change how you see things, the things you see change." Ask the other side to explain how they see it their way, and try to expand your version of reality with the insight they provide.

The Protection of Opinion

Everyone is a very poor self-appraiser. If you want to know the truth about yourself, the best way is to observe yourself as if you were an actor in your own life. Like an actor who can play a role in a movie, then go back to their real life, your personality might be a script you don't realize you've memorized and doesn't reflect your true nature. If that were the case, that would only make you human.

We love our own opinions. When we talk about them, the reward center in the brain activates. Being rewarded makes us feel good, so we keep doing it.

We do it even when we should be listening instead. When our opinions are irrelevant and getting in the way, we spew them anyway. There are times when we take on the role of teacher when the role of student would serve our higher purposes.

Even more so when they've been shaken; if you've ever tried to play reverse psychology on someone, you know that there are times when heavy pressure can lead us to take the opposite stance. Researchers show that after we've been rattled, we go on longer about our point of viewⁱⁱ. What would your reaction be if you've ever conversed with someone who reveals a contrary stance?

Do you provide more and more evidence why your point of view is rational? Or do you stop talking and start listening? If you do the latter, you are the kind of rare, curious person who creates peace, builds bridges and finds unity. Next time, catch yourself in your defence and ask to hear the other side. "Tell me more" and "Why do you say that?" are handy phrases for such crucial conversations.

They say we have two ears and one mouth because we should listen twice as much as we talk. At the least, listening for real might be the best use of your attention instead of preparing your next story.

The truth is always going to be your best friend. When we can't handle the truth, we avoid helpful feedback and hold dearly onto wrong opinions. When we accept the truth for what it is—useful information—we can befriend it and get comfortable, even welcoming, of the emotions that can come with it.

Noticing What Bothers Us

If you want to know what someone doesn't like about themselves, listen to what they complain about in others. "The people who annoy you hold up a harsh but helpful mirror," says Kaja Perina, editor-in-chief of Psychology Today.

Researchers have shown that what you say about others says much more about you than they do. From how much we think others are liked by their peers to dispositional characteristics, how we describe others has a consistent relationship with our characteristics.

Psychological projection is the unconscious tendency to ascribe the things that make us uncomfortable about ourselves to others. We tend to extrapolate ourselves onto others because if there are 360 degrees, we only know one—our own.

Do It Your Way

More than ever, you can decide how you want to contribute to this world. Your mission, should you accept it, is to discover what makes you authentic and live life your way. Frank Sinatra said, "At least I did it my way."

Living life your way isn't the least thing you can do; it's the most you can do. Go ahead and live out loud.

Taking Radical Accountability

To regain that wisdom, you must be radically accountable. Radical accountability means accepting your life and your world as your own. Accepting that you have made the decisions that got you to where you are today is radical—radical, as in way out there. Many people would listen if you wanted to blame your parents, society, and others for your life's circumstances today. There are even very good reasons that make 100 percent sense.

As Dr. Phil would ask, how's that working for you? You've heard Einstein's definition of insanity: doing the same things and expecting different results. If you want different results, you have to do other things. You must alter your behaviour.

In psychology, people who believe they are responsible for their success have an internal locus of control. Those who think that luck or circumstances beyond their control determine their lives have an external locus of control.

Radical accountability puts the locus of control where power is in your hands. You will get further if you take action regarding anything yourself. In the case of your authenticity and discovering the life in which you thrive, no one will do it for you. It starts with taking accountability to find the truth or sorting facts according to how close they come and how relevant they are to the truth you need.

3: The Fuel of Passion

On your journey to authenticity, it's all about knowing what makes you feel good without regret. I remember my mother asking me if I was hungry as a child. I responded, "What's hungry?" When you associate eating with the clock and having to clean your plate, no matter what's on it, you have no idea that a feeling is supposed to precipitate an action.

You learn obedience, not bodily intelligence. When you realize that the sense of hunger isn't going to kill you, you take it as an indication that it's time to start to prepare a meal. Who needs a clock for aligning an agenda with another person? Alone, it never matters what time it is. The body has many things it would like to tell you, but only if you would listen more attentively.

Personal authenticity is about acting on the outside like you are on the inside. It's aligning with your body – heart, gut, and head – at all times, not just when they make themselves impossible to ignore.

Welcoming Information

Emotions are categorized as so-called good and evil, but they are simply information, and information is always helpful. It may not be how you wanted facts to fall, and the truth is sometimes painful to hear, but it's always better than being left out, passed over, or misinformed. Information is power, for with it, you can do something about it; without it, things can conspire against you unchallenged.

What happens when you welcome all your emotions, take the information they aim to provide and leave the judgment on the table? What if attaining authenticity is as easy as that?

A Constant Negotiation with Yourself

Being authentic is a 24/7 calling. How do you act when you have internal arguments about what you want? The core of authenticity isn't only about resisting outside pressures; it's about understanding your heart, head and gut because when they disagree, you are living your life like you have one foot on the brake and the other on the gas. What's detrimental for a car is not suitable for you.

Authenticity is being able to say no when we mean no. However, many want to be authentically good people, so there is an inner negotiation or an outer establishment of boundaries. We know one answer in our head, heart, and gut, and another that tends to come out of our mouths. The dieter does it when refusing dessert, winning the inner argument with the head. We all do it; the point is when, why, and how often we do it.

The objective is to shed light on these negotiations and exchanges. Sometimes, we sacrifice when that's not what the other person would want of us. We answer what the other person wants to hear when they want truthful answers. Or we bring the skills we think the team needs instead of the skills where we shine with excellence.

Whole lives can be lost, satisfying external expectations that never truly existed and internal expectations that are never identified, let alone chosen.

When you don't realize there is a tug of war with options, picking the ones right for you is even more challenging. It is a tug of war, and you are the only one who can cover your end. You are the only one who knows your head, heart and gut. No one is inside you, knowing what you think, perceive and feel. That's up to you to learn and figure out; the point is that it is yours and no one else.

Your Passions and Values

You do not decide values in a conference room or your journal. You can determine what values appeal to you, but the ones you own are the ones that leak out in your emotions and in what you get passionate about. They might incite you to anger, enthusiasm or joy. If you don't value something, you can't get fired up or fake it long enough to make it. You will fail to act in the crucial moment, outing you as someone lacking integrity. Picking values instead of identifying values is a sure path to burnout.

Your passions are the things you care about. Not all people care about the same things you do, and it might shock you to realize other people might be completely apathetic about things that fire you up. You might think they are dumb, lazy, or mean, but they have different passions, perspectives and experiences. You must build a bridge to win them over, not get louder, more precise, or cuter. Meet them where they are, and take them over to your way of seeing things.

Without passion, life is too hard to take. Apathy, constantly drained of energy, means you aren't connected with your passions or don't have a way to channel them into your work. Passion is motivation, the kind you can't ignore or pretend to have. You may be out of touch with your passions if you drag yourself and feel ragged. It might be as simple as admitting what part of the week you look forward to and what part of life you live it for.

Some people will tell you to follow your passion. I am saying that it should be one piece of the overall pie. If passion is the only piece, you may end up broke and alone and reconsidering what you think is essential.

There is an opposite for almost anything you value and your passion: someone with a personal reality, logic, and justification for the other side. That's okay; it's helpful for progress because different sides are needed on various things at different times. The point is to know your own and not try to change those of others.

To identify your values, you must reflect on your anger, frustrations and the fights you have had, wanted to have or been able to avoid. Values are yours to discover and follow by pursuing why you are passionate about the things that fire you up.

When you know your values, you aren't wasting your time with conflicts that will not be resolved, work that doesn't fill you up, or contribute to something that isn't worth your time and talent.

Your Worth and Demand

What people are willing to pay you to do is another one of the ways you are unique. There are things you are passionate about, and then there are things people would pay you to do. These two things can be very far apart.

You might hate the work, although it pays well, comes with status, and is in high demand. You will burn out over the long term. In many ways, you will drown your frustrations and lack of fulfillment in the short term. You might be the only one who knows how you release the pressure, and it's likely unhealthy. Don't dismiss this cost from the entire analysis of your situation.

Flow is the optimal human experience. You need to be at an appropriate level of challenge to get into flow. If you shy away from work that challenges you appropriately, you will not experience the incredible feeling of flow. Once you do, there's no going back. When you are in flow, your ability to learn is unmatched.

With pay transparency coming, your worth is no longer based on what you've made in the past. It's based on how you fit with the market. When you know what you are uniquely good at that matches your values and passions, you will discover that your worth might be much higher than previously thought. It's up to you what to charge, but you should know your worth and where it's in demand.

Your Strengths and Talents

Your set of strengths is one of the ways you are unique. For instance, some people get their energy from ideas, while others get it from people. The former is introversion, and the latter is extroversion, while everyone lands somewhere in between. Some people see the big picture, while others are oriented to details. Some people prize facts, while others prefer harmony between people.

There are many ways to be different, and what matters is knowing that your unique wiring makes some things very easy for you and very hard for other people. Strengths are the things you do with ease that you enjoy doing. You don't know these things because they come naturally and easily to you.

You assume that what comes naturally to you is universal. That is, everyone else can do it, too. I listened to David Chilton chide his peers for their inability to do math in their heads and realized he didn't appreciate his gift enough.

The problem is that you get upset when reality doesn't deliver the expected result. The frustration of genius is when you think that something that comes easily to you comes easily to everyone. Other people fail to provide what you know you can do easily. You can't fathom why.

Flip your perspective around and appreciate your genius. These experiences will valuably show you where you are different. When have you been so frustrated at other apparent ineptness? Perhaps they aren't so inept but average. Appreciating your strengths flips the switch on your relationships, including the one with yourself.

Your Community

Choosing your community is choosing to belong over fit. Fit is following rules, culture, and expectations that don't feel like they are serving you but rather suffocating you. Belonging is where you can grow, develop, and become more authentic daily.

Your orientation is to pick people who mimic you, replicate your strengths and share your views. You want to do the opposite deliberately. You want people who help you by identifying flaws in your

reasoning early, who help fill in your blind spots and point out when your ego is getting in the way. You want radical transparency, radical truth, and believable people.

Believable people are those who have done it at least three times. More, they can tell you how they did it. People who've succeeded because of luck, privilege, or other means don't know how to replicate their journey.

When people can tell you what to do and what you should avoid while doing that, you have a believable person to consider deeply. Becoming more authentic might require new relationships, boundaries, or conversations. A supportive community makes all the difference in your success, and you can learn to find, create, and develop the one you need.

The Myth of Well-Roundedness

Being in tune with your inner desires doesn't come naturally and easily. It requires balancing a long-term priority over short-term opportunities. You have to know which desires are fleeting. After all, the desire attained is no longer desire, and you are left feeling empty, like the sugar rush that leads to the afternoon crash. Instead of developing your authenticity, you might have fallen into the trap of trying to become well-rounded.

If you try to be everyone to everyone and do everything, you will invest much fruitless time trying to satisfy the wrong people, doing work you don't like, and failing to get promoted because you worked as hard as you could to do a job that made them go "meh."

Schools get you to focus on your weaknesses. They give you a report card, and you take that report home. Your parents automatically focus on the lowest mark and start planning ways to improve that grade. You learned that you needed to be good at everything. Most organizations also believe that each person must be competent in almost everything. In **NOW, DISCOVER YOUR STRENGTHS**, Marcus Buckingham writes that working on weaknesses "isn't developing, it's damage control."

Well-rounded is for ball bearings, not people. Buckingham argues, "The great organization must not only accommodate the fact that each employee is different but also capitalize on these differences."

Ray Dalio agrees. He was worried he'd be stuck in an echo chamber of yes-men or with people who were too scared or anxious to speak up.

People are born to be different and to capitalize on those differences. As a society, the trend has been toward greater acceptance of differences, and that wave will make its way into the remaining organizations. Until then, please don't believe this propaganda that we all need to have the same competencies at the level of capability dictated by our status in the organization.

Discover what serves your soul, and your success will skyrocket, whether you make a living or are done with that phase. Knowing what makes you unique gives you a clear compass for decision-making.

Diminishing Our Strengths

Tipping the teeter-totter like this might take another push if you are still diminishing the importance and value of your strength.

The problem is that you are suffering from the curse of knowledge. The Heath brothers, Chip and Dan, brought this to light in their book, **MADE TO STICK**. They capitalized the phrase to reflect the drama they felt it deserved, and there's no minimization of that drama here. It's a worthwhile deal.

The curse of knowledge refers to the psychological tendency that once you know something, you cannot understand what it is like not to know it. Then Imposter Syndrome sets in because you forget how naïve you once were and how far you've come on your journey to expertise.

Here's an experiment you can try for yourself. Think of a song both you and your friend know. Have your friend guess the tune while you tap out the beats. Elizabeth Newton did this experiment in 1990.

Tappers thought the listeners would guess correctly half the time, but after 120 tries, only 3 were correct guesses. Talk about frustration!

Psychologists can also tell you that when asked to agree with something, you search your mind for ways to agree. They call it the positive test bias. It works in reverse as well.

This means that when asked if you are better than average, you aren't evaluating your entire self against whatever average means; you are searching your mind for one way you are better than average. And, as long as you aren't depressed, you can find at least one.

A Result of Hard Work

Given their wickedly high IQ scores, you might think geniuses know who they are. Well, that is only one aspect of intelligence, and it's a pretty big bucket incorporating many different dimensions. There are also social, emotional, and musical intelligence, just three more. Again, these are broad buckets.

Intelligence itself is a moving and changing field of research. What if we got rid of these broad buckets? What if every person, thanks to their unique DNA, experiences and perspectives, was or is a genius?

When you think of things where you are better than average, I will bet you thought of things you worked hard at becoming very good. You put a lot of time and effort into it, and hard work pays off.

For me, it was math. I can't do math in my head; I don't even try anymore. But I became an expert in statistics, which was the core of my career. I have my engineering degree and knew the answers to my third-year calculus exam on sight. I got way better than average. It took a lot of hard, long, dedicated work, and that's exactly what that career was – work. I've since learned that it doesn't have to be that way.

The question that will help you discover your genius is this one. "When were you so intensely frustrated while those around you seemed shocked or annoyed by your reaction?" Whatever your insight was at that moment is your genius. Because it comes naturally to you, you think everyone else is being ridiculously dumb or slow.

Instead of making it all about them, make it all about you.

I first shared this question in a comment on a blog. Then, it became an article in Harvard Business Review. It's on page 13 of a required textbook at a Texas university. That's all to say that this question has value and merit.

In math, I went from a weakness to better than average. However, I'm still hard-pressed to do math in my head. I might be better than average with math, but it's not one of my strengths.

Discover Your Genius

When you appreciate your strengths, you become humble and compassionate at the same time. You are a person people want to be around, someone they want to hire and do business with, not only because they know they are getting the best but because the emotional experience of dealing with you is better.

No one wants to do business with someone third-rate or worse at something. Even if you are great at something but don't appreciate your strengths, you risk talking down to prospects, negative selling, or undermining relationships and success.

When you appreciate your strengths, you can approach people you can help with the mindset of assistance and service, not contempt and frustration.

When frustration hits, take a deep breath and a step back to choose how to address this opportunity to discover your strength. Every moment, there is the opportunity to teach, learn, speak, or listen.

It may be an opportunity to learn, so listen up. They may know something you aren't unaware of that renders your knowledge moot. Is there a worldview in which their choices or actions make sense? Higher levels usually mean access to more information. Adopt an attitude of curiosity and investigate. You may end up strengthening your strength.

Alternatively, it is an opportunity to teach, so speak up. What exactly do you know they seem to lack? How can you integrate that knowledge into the fabric of their wisdom so that it sticks? Teachers don't just dump knowledge but ensure the learner picks it up. Hone your communication skills, develop negotiation skills, or create another strength that gets your point across.

Try flipping your reaction around the next time you are frustrated or irritated with other people. What if they are normal, even above average? Imagine the energy change when you stop blaming them and start appreciating yourself. I ask you to stop taking your natural gifts for granted. I want you to stop and ask yourself, what does that make me?

The Way of Mastery

End frustration by embracing the diversity of strengths to appreciate your own.

When things aren't working, admit it. If you are overwhelmed, stressed, drained, or exhausted, at least one thing is not working. You know it in your gut and heart, if not your head.

Can you start building on what is working and tweaking the rest? More clients and more sales aren't going to save you. The silver bullet is a mindset of continuous improvement. Seth Godin says "excellent" is the death trap of businesses. You want to be remarkable.

The way to be remarkable is to eliminate all else.

Delegate what you don't like to do because someone else's passion can take it to the next level. Outsource tasks you find boring or repetitive. Take the things you are terrific at and find someone who is

even better. They might be more skilled, have more time to invest in it, or be hungrier than you are. Find and hire the subject matter experts, whether you give them the work, ask them to coach you, or take one of their courses.

Specialization, not generalization, is the way of mastery.

The Insidious Control Freak

Many leaders find delegation scary. We don't just think no one can do it as well as we did; we also worry that they might do it better than we did. It's not the outcomes that cause the fear but the loss of control.

Control is the perceived ability to alter events significantly. In one study, participants had the option of one machine-delivered shock or two self-administered shocks. Shockingly, 35 percent chose the double dose as long as they could do it themselves.

In post-evaluations, we are predictably wrong when we assess just how much control we have over a situation. We underestimate our power when things don't work out and overestimate when they do.

People have individual baselines for the level of control they desire. To some extent, we are all control freaks. Little kids look happiest when they experience the shock and awe of what they can accomplish by spitting peas across the room.

Once we get old enough to realize that tomorrow is coming, we seek to control outcomes to improve the future. There's a certain satisfaction in knowing that the world is different because we are in it, doing things.

A Failure to Shift Gears

We can make 12-month plans to keep everyone organized. We start six months ahead of time. By the time we are halfway through the year, we're pursuing solutions to issues that were a problem a year ago, but now something else is on fire.

As Levin says, "We always overlook variables we didn't consider in initial planning. Or, circumstances and events beyond our control that we couldn't anticipate may require us to shift gears." Large organizations with long-term plans lack agility but don't gain the alignment that long-term plans seek to provide in the sacrifice.

Control charts pepper our conference rooms. Their main objective is to remind leaders that what looks like a drop or an increase might not require action. They aim to quash the desire to take action.

The most significant learning from my first Six Sigma Black Belt training was to lock the knobs down. I was shocked by how difficult it was, with even executives who signed up for the process calling me and asking what knob I was about to turn. Reminding them of their commitment to do nothing was not something I enjoyed doing. I stopped answering my phone.

People love to make adjustments, but they have ripple effects that require stability to understand, and they aren't left alone long enough to learn. When left alone, things quiet down and get predictable and easy to steer.

Our desire to understand and control our worlds leads us to rely on data. Relying on past data for future decisions is becoming less reliable. Change is getting more complicated, and the future is becoming less and less reflective of the past.

Understanding the sources of randomness is the key to the control you crave. When you know the extent of randomness, you treat your successes with gratitude and your failures with compassion.

The Capacity for Self-Denial

Whether we fail to see, willfully resist seeing or creatively invent ways to rationalize away what we do see, our capacity for self-deception is impressively scary. Mark Twain said, “It ain’t what you don’t know that gets you into trouble. It’s what you know for sure that ain’t so.”

We have worked hard to build a reputation, not just for our career path and recognized accomplishments but also for the stories we tell ourselves and the descriptors we attribute to ourselves.

Some of these stories are so old and so well buried that we don’t even know we have them. They are feeding our decisions without our awareness. Confirmation bias describes finding information to prove our beliefs, even when equal information is available.

When you realize you have an opinion, label, or belief that isn’t your own, it’s up to you whether or not you want to change it. As an adult in a world of independence and choice, you must find, create and decide who you are.

Gloria Steinem sums it up with “The truth will set you free, but first, it will piss you off.” Be ruthless about what you are not the best. Then, find someone better at that specific thing than you are. Hire them, follow them, copy them, and learn from them. Researchers have proven that taking advantage of individual differences can lead to happiness, wealth, and health.

If society makes everyone’s mission to benefit from their unique diversity, we can swap chaos and conflict for collective progress.

Embracing Powerful Emotions

Don’t let them should all over you. Nancy Colier writes, “The ‘should’ police are here to tell you that, as you are, you are not good enough.” That simple belief is what is preventing you from being awesome. Bullies, shamers, and shoulders are all trying to change you to make their lives more comfortable. Don’t let them, don’t join them.

Are you letting it rule your life? Take back your power of authenticity, and you will be amazed to discover that the person who thought they weren’t good enough is pretty darn impressive.

The question you want to answer is: What makes you angry, and what brings you joy?

Anger will show you the root of an injustice you have witnessed. When that injustice isn’t personal, you have your answer to the problem you want to pick on. When that joy isn’t rooted in ego, control, or status, you have the enthusiasm the universe seeks to serve.

4: The Choice to Thrive

Stress comes from trying to be something you are not. Attempting to emulate values you don't hold dear, cashing on strengths you had to work hard to develop, and suppressing emotions you wish you didn't feel is a sure trip to burnout.

The body feels stress and, in doing so, shuts down non-essential functions, like cellular repair. Spend all day under stress, and you didn't repair any cells that day. Survival mode is not a way to live, at least not a long or healthy one.

Choosing to thrive is making entirely new choices away from stress. Don't de-stress; get rid of it entirely.

Identifying Sabotage

We surround ourselves with stress without realizing it. At one home, in the entryway, a new client told me about her many problems, and she could point to each one while we stood there.

Physical reminders of sources of stress in her visual field from which she could not escape. Indeed, she was overwhelmed from every direction – and her house was as neat as a pin. The reminders were embedded in the décor and every item in her space.

While we think of stress as coming from others and their expectations, your environment may contribute to your stress level.

Crushed by Conditions

As Marshall Goldsmith says, "Our environment is the most potent triggering mechanism in our lives – and not always for our benefit."

Environmental conditions can induce you to act in ways you may not recognize as yourself. In 1971, Stanford psychologist Phillip Zimbardo undertook a prison experiment. His objective was to investigate the psychological effects of perceived power. Volunteers, all young male students at the university, were assigned to be correctional officers or prisoners by random selection.

The experiment was abandoned after only six days because of the shocking degree to which the volunteers fell into their roles. Some guards enforced authoritarian measures. Some even subjected prisoners to psychological torture.

While the prisoners fell into the abuse, others even harassed prisoners who tried to stop it. The name of Zimbardo's book, **THE LUCIFER EFFECT**, describes that it's not a character that determines your behaviour; it's conditioning.

The Contagion of Emotion

Emotions are contagious, something you can catch from others, like a cold. Discouragement, frustration and stress are influenced as much by the people around you as by your baseline.

It's not just your empathy that leaves you feeling bad. You are built to mirror others. Aptly named mirror neurons work to synchronize the expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements of others. When you mirror others' behaviour, you trigger similar emotions.

Seeing someone smile at you will likely cause you to smile back. Social rules of responding in kind to someone work to change our emotions just as well as the mirror neurons themselves.

Emotional states can even be transferred to others without any direct interaction between people. A massive Facebook study revealed that exposure to a friend expressing an emotion is sufficient for you to pick it up.

Inflected with Negativity

Negative emotions have a more significant influence over us than positive ones. We remember them more frequently, dwell on them, and think they matter disproportionately to how they did.

We are more likely to pay greed forward than generosity. Fairness begets fairness, but when we feel poorly treated, we pay that forward to deal with the negative emotion.

We can undoubtedly pass stress around. One study revealed that rudeness in one employee's workplace creates stress at home for fellow employees. Further, they take it wherever they go, like to their partner's workplace.

Anger as Assistive

Researchers are generating more evidence that "anger is a potent form of social communication. It's a logical part of people's emotional tool kit. It's an appetitive force that moves us toward what we want and fuels optimism, creative brainstorming, and problem-solving by focusing mind and mood in highly refined ways."

Anger is a powerful emotion, but also stigmatized because of the reactionary way it is usually expressed. However, in the emotionality of decisions, you can embrace your anger and use it for good. You can feel, understand and use emotions for the powerful tools they are instead of letting the feelings use, mislead and even infect you.

Remember, it's just a form of information brought to you by the chemicals of your brain.

Mind What You Spread

You would mind your germs if you were contagious, but do you mind what you do with your energy when you are in a negative mood? It is within your power to stop the spread.

Now that you know how easy it can be to infect others with stress, negativity, and greed, you can consciously choose to own the energy you bring into a room or a post on Facebook.

You can bring positivity, joy, and light and pass them on. Be generous with good feelings. Can you think of a time when you felt joyous? Remember that and hold on to it when you need it.

Manage Your Environment

Some places and people charge you up or bring you down. Start to connect where you feel good and where you feel otherwise. Use that information to manage how you feel better by controlling what you allow into your proximity.

In your place of residence, look around and identify potential triggers. If the trigger is negative, toward the past or something you'd instead process later, box it up and store it out of sight until the time is right. Visual clutter is mental clutter; even if you know where everything is, real estate in your attention span and cognitive processing doesn't need to be there.

A clean and clear space helps create a clean and clear mind.

Being the Boss of You

Hillary Clinton wonders how the next generation will solve problems when they have an average attention span of 7 seconds.

If you think that's crazy talk and doesn't apply to you, let me ask you how long you can hold your attention on a white screen, in a white room, with no sounds, smells or anything else to narrate?

Try. Your number one job is to be your boss and not get up until you've lost track of time.

Your memories will attack you into getting up and doing something else. Your fear of missing out on something or a fire somewhere will get you up.

The most important work you can do is make this time longer and longer until you are fully back in your body and your irrationality will be gone. When you are in it, you know what makes you enthusiastic and what is automatic in no way. Decisions are evident because you know how they feel, and feelings are polar. There's no trepidation, mixed signals or confusion.

Doing this might be the most challenging work you can do as a human because everyone is trying to recruit you toward their agenda, and they had a massive head start. No matter how old you are, society is way older, bigger, and stronger...and you will learn the easy way to navigate that.

The Fluidity of Preferences

Our actions start to create preferences, which lead to behaviour habits that are hard to change.

When called to decide, we look to what we did in earlier situations, creating a preference. Actions create, not just reveal preferences. Decisions are susceptible to situational factors, even when they are unrelated.

We also overestimate the stability of our preferences. Ask people how much they'd pay to see their favourite band ten years from now; the average answer is \$129. Change that question to seeing their favourite band from ten years ago today, and the answer drops to \$80. Essentially, it's the same situation, but we pay more for our current preferences and think they will endure longer than they do.

If your favourite band today is the same as ten years ago, consider your preferences' fluidity. Do they reflect who you are today or who you used to be? How about the person you want to become? We can resist letting things go and updating our preferences as we age, but maintaining this flexibility keeps us authentic and our tastes timeless.

The Transition of Labels

It's those powerful beliefs that limit our contributions in life. We all have a specific identity or way of describing ourselves. We have descriptors regarding our relationships with other people, such as mother, daughter, sister, and friend. There's another set regarding how we spend our time earning an income before that gets replaced with the label "retired."

These labels are often clear-cut and not up for debate. You know how much they matter when they no longer apply. It can be a very disorienting experience to lose a label and wonder, "Who am I now?" When this happens, you get thrown for a loop until you find a new label that fits.

There's a whole other stock of labels that aren't clear-cut. Personality and behaviour descriptors are up for debate and usually exist on a scale. Our ingrained desire to protect these relative descriptors can chronically bog down our productivity.

Being open-minded and helping others find ways to accept new ideas is the path to authenticity. It opens up new possibilities and potentials, and that's the path to new, liberated futures.

The Age of Epigenetics

Now scientists know that DNA isn't a done deal. It's not a blueprint but a set of potentials. Your environment does the work of deciding what to turn on and off. Or rather, since it is you in your environment, deciding what to look at, what to absorb, and what to believe about that stuff, it is you.

You have your blueprint in your hands. You can change your body with your attention, focus, and thoughts.

Studies have been done to compare the effects of visualization with actually doing it, and your body reacts the same. Visualize fear and disaster scenarios, and your heart races and your palms sweat. Hold a pencil in your teeth, and how it forces your lips into a smile starts to incite the chemicals of happiness. We also know that standing like Superman creates the testosterone that goes with that assertive stance.

You are looking for causes and thinking of emotions as effects. However, your own experience tells you that the thought can come first. When the thought can come first, all else can follow from there.

Abraham Maslow says we get a thrill from the God-like possibilities that we see in ourselves during our most perfect moments. Yet, we simultaneously shiver at those very same possibilities. There is a kind of terror of being fully alive.

You felt long before you had language; you might get the label wrong without realizing it. Science knows we do this with attraction, fear, excitement, and nerves, which applies here, too. It's the excitement you were feeling when you shivered, not terror.

Express It To Create It

Just as your emotions can create your decisions, you can make the emotions. The researchers found that intentionally focusing on something positive can stop the perpetual spread of greed and eliminate that bad feeling.

Choosing what to focus on was used by the preschoolers, avoiding the marshmallow in favour of the larger and longer-term reward in Walter Mischel's experiments. No matter how old we are or what we want to feel, we can focus on the things that go with it, and we will create the corresponding emotion.

You've already learned that smiling back at people makes you happier, and you don't need them to start the cycle. You can hold a pencil in your teeth. You might laugh at how silly it feels as you are forced to smile.

Choosing your focus, owning your stance and naming your feelings in an assistive way creates a positive spiral instead of a negative one. When you think about being nervous, you start thinking of why that's the right feeling for the situation.

If you want confidence, stand like Superman, owning your space with open, broad postures. Your body will generate the testosterone that produces the feeling of confidence to match that Superman posture.

You Can Do Anything

Your success depends on your determination and ability to overcome your conditioning and environment. It takes conscious effort, but it can be done. While you usually feel and then express emotion physically, it's possible to do the opposite. By describing it physically, you can create the feeling that goes with your body.

Remember confirmation bias? It will undermine your confidence and ensure that your nerves get the better of you. Instead, use confirmation bias to create a positive spiral.

This is why a positive mindset makes such a difference. When you get the translations from emotion to label wrong, why not err on the beneficial side?

The Mindset of a Scientist

While every parent, generation, and culture is different, every child learns to obey an external voice telling them what to do, what is right from wrong, and all kinds of lessons.

These lessons include discrimination. Babies learn how to react to different skin colours by watching older humans. As babies, they don't respond any differently until they see adults behave differently. Babies also inherently know morality, instinctively wanting to punish stuffed animals that do mean things.

As you start to see, learned lessons get layered on top of instinctual ones. For example, they used to make children who preferred the left hand use their right hand in school.

While the line between the diversity we should embrace and the need to get along and share will always be complex and delicate, you must realize it is there. Authenticity requires you to think independently about what you know for sure.

That can be very difficult when we are good citizens of society with its complex rules and expectations. It's also a challenge when we are good children of well-meaning and caring parents. Another is when we are efficient students who know how to make the grade.

Thinking independently might not be high enough on your list of things to value. You've been trained to look for external validation, rules, and signs for what you should be, do, or have.

You will learn how to use this as a source of information, not a prescription. Instead of going along with it as we've been trained to do, you will learn how to take what you need and let the rest go.

If there is one thing that is for sure, no one can see what you think. You can keep it to yourself as long as you want if that's your thing. Or you can stay mum and work out a strategy and a plan. It's totally up to you. Just like your life is totally up to you. Every thought that crosses your mind should be inspected to make sure it's one of your own. Dumping the ones that aren't is the road to authenticity.

When you start accepting personal accountability for the things that happen in your life that you don't want, whether you created the situation or not, you have to learn how to start acting on them.

Find the Root

You must ensure you are working on the root cause to take proper action. If you have ever made a blundering mistake, you have probably uttered, "Well, I'll never do that again," but what exactly will you not do again that will guarantee that mistake will not be repeated?

Where I live, dandelions are common invaders of residential lawns. In 2008, the province banned hundreds of pesticides for treating these and other weeds. Since then, homeowners have had to find alternate solutions to control the problem. Mowing alleviates the sea of yellow, but only for so long. The best solution? Pulling the trespasser out by the root.

When you want to eliminate a mistake, you must treat it like a homeowner treats a dandelion—pull it out by the root. If you are a genius, you eat that dandelion for lunch and roast its root for a coffee substitute.

The objective of root cause analysis is straightforward: eliminate the thing that caused the mistake, and it's gone for good. Instead of wasting time tackling symptoms and spin-offs, you get to the heart of the matter and act with precision, accuracy and efficiency.

It's a great time saver when you get it right. It's productivity on rails when time is spent on investigation instead of immediate action. It's genius in the making because it requires and enables understanding of the factors and variables that matter. You can't undertake this exercise without learning something new about how it all went down (which makes it all the easier to solve next time!).

Finding the root requires reverse engineering the entire cause-and-effect chain until you reach the starting point, which we call the root.

One root cause analysis method involves asking why at least five times. Start with when, where and how you noticed the mistake. Step backward through time, each time turning the answer into the next question. Yes, but why did that happen? On and on.

Until you get there.

How do you know you've found the root? Whether it is commonplace and expected or something no one could have guessed, the root renders everything that happened before that event irrelevant. It often carries the Homer Simpson "D'oh!" or the V8 whack on the head. They say hindsight is twenty-twenty, so don't be so hard on yourself. You may not have known then, but you know now.

Consider New Possibilities

Like a good human, you've created a personality to survive this harsh world. What if the world wasn't so harsh, survival was almost guaranteed, and abundance was a thing?

The hardwiring in your brain protects you from being kicked out of the clan, wild animals that will eat you, and dangers and injuries.

Today, you don't have to worry about being kicked out of the clan. You've got a massive population from which to pick your inner circle who will love, support and help you grow.

Technology has given us new perspectives like never before, a better idea of what is possible, what can be done, and who can help us do it. When you are authentic, you use your strengths, follow your passions, and create worth in alignment with your values in the community where you belong.

You want to start considering this magical future. What do you want more of, and what do you want less of in your life, business, and relationships?

Start by imagining a new future. Think about how you spend your time and who you spend it with. You might have a clear goal or a list of bullet points. Knowing what you want is the first step.

Paralyzed by Choice

We know we don't fully appreciate these luxuries because we don't choose. When faced with too many options, we are paralyzed by indecision and the pain of potential regret. Things get complicated because we invest in relationships, careers, and communities.

We don't want to lose investments, while the upside could be huge. The pain we are scared of that might turn out to be joy and bliss. Fear of the unknown, of what might happen, we stay with the devils we know. The people that hurt, the habits that don't help, and the same perspective that maintains the status quo.

As you can imagine, seeing how these changes happen gives you the power to make those decisions with your self-interest in mind. Stop disowning your gifts or looking for them in other people by learning the specifics of where and how conformity can and will rob you of authenticity.

Finding Courage and Confidence

While this journey is one life-changing thrill ride of an adventure ending in personal nirvana, it is not without its challenges. The biggest challenge you will face is the courage to face the truth. It's a journey toward being more and more open-minded, and your brain doesn't want you to go there.

The most important question is how you want to spend your time. Things become our strengths because they start as advantages; when we do them, it feels good, and it is easy to get better. However, we lose sight of what they are. Answering this question with your voice of wisdom will point you toward your strengths and set your days for smooth success.

If you could pick your ideal community, what kind of people would you want to hang out with? You can and you should. First, you have to imagine who they might be so you can see them when they show up.

Your community wants you to thrive and own your true nature. They don't want you to fit in; they want you to be your best self.

Listen to Your Voice of Wisdom

To become more authentic, this lesson asks you to consider your perceptions and beliefs and the possibility that your reality is one of many other possible explanations, conclusions, and assumptions.

Especially for the ones you've walked away with that you don't like. Some conclusions are harsh truths we must accept to change and grow. For others, they are illusions keeping us trapped. Whenever you are stuck, choose change and growth.

Love, support and help are three words we experience before we understand what they are supposed to mean. We are told that mothers love us, so how they treat us must be what love looks like. Our limiting beliefs come from trying to shoehorn our experiences into what we are told.

What matters is how it feels on the inside, not what it is supposed to be on the outside. What do you know, despite what everyone else has to say on the subject? Consider your voice of wisdom and turn up the volume.

Thinking Independently

Rupert Sheldrake talks of his entry into bioscience. "Biology is based on the mechanistic theory of life, the idea that living organisms are machines, inanimate mechanisms, that they don't have feelings, they don't have intelligence, they don't have consciousness. All of this seemed to me to be completely implausible."

Like Sheldrake, you also have feelings, thoughts and awareness.

Thinking independently is the ability to test what you are being told to be accurate based on your experience. Your experiences will always be skewed. However, when they tell you something is impossible, and you've seen just one occurrence, your experience is all it takes. When they tell you that this is the way and you can find just one improvement, your perception matters.

Accepting that there will be a debate, and should always be a debate, will help you think independently and find the uniqueness only you can define.

5: The Biology of Change

When you are facing change, get ready. Expect discomfort, but know you can push through it and thrive on the other side.

Successful people have the mindset to improve continuously with perseverance. For all your best intentions to keep getting better, human nature will attempt to thwart your efforts. Knowing those tendencies will help you quickly grow, innovate, and amplify your impact. Let's clear your mindset about these tendencies.

Making Improvements

Not everyone makes improvements. We've been through change for the sake of change, which is a lot of effort, only to find that what improved and what got worse seems to balance out. So, was it worth it? We've endured loss, that kind of change that was not worth it or welcomed.

What about change when everything is better? Well, lottery winners prove that it's not all for the better, and some end up bankrupt.

Change for the better happens only deliberately and with much effort, and most of that effort is doing nothing while you learn what forces are holding the current state so firmly. Why is it the way it is? It's not a question of history; it is a question of stability.

Perseverance means trying again, not randomly but with a deliberate process, so you know what to change next, what will work, and when to throw the towel. Helpfully, there are only four steps in this reliable process of making improvements that genuinely are worth the effort.

The Rational Cycle of Change

You may have heard of the PDCA cycle. It's the process of setting a goal, checking progress, and learning how to improve through Planning, Doing, Checking, and Acting.

With our big, hairy goals, this cycle might take a year. For productivity goals, it might pan out over a day. Your change effort is going from one status quo to the implementation and new steady state of the next.

The best use of your time when you've made a mistake is to analyze the factors, events and actions that led up to it. Finding the root and taking precise action is the way to end mistakes once and for all. What mistake would you like to get to the root of and eliminate for good today?

According to Marissa Levin, founder and CEO of Successful Culture, ideas rarely go as planned. She and her partner have just launched the Women's CEO Roundtable. In the first four months, they tweaked the program five times. A failure? Hardly. It's excellence in the making.

Planning

Planning means knowing where you want to go and how you will get there. Projects have tasks, milestones, and dates. Action plans translate those tasks into who will do what and by when. Teams hold each other accountable for the quality and timeliness of those actions.

Plans vary greatly in their rigidity. They can range from a general pro-direction to micro-detailed and tightly controlled minutia.

Plans should reflect the level of detail required to mitigate the risk that planning is attempting to mitigate. Where deviation is possible and dangerous, plans are tight. Where creativity, flexibility, and adaptation matter, plans are loose.

Having no plan is not an option. Having a plan that doesn't provide confidence and clarity is one that isn't yet complete.

Know that when you plan, you will be wrong about the timing unless you have a store of data on which to rely. Otherwise, it will take far longer, cost much more, and involve more risk than expected.

Doing

Work the plan.

Masters of change are doers. The more changes you can tackle, learn from and start again, the better you get at it. I've moved 28 times. Each time, I've lost something precious, broken something irreplaceable, and left at least one loose end untied. That said, I have gotten better at it and know I will be doing it again sometime in the future – I haven't been scared away from it.

There is no replacement for the act of doing something. You can learn about it as much as you want and ask for as much advice as possible, but until you jump in and try, you will discover that you didn't even know to ask the questions that mattered.

It might take you 10 years; it might take you 10,000 hours. Proficiency isn't guaranteed with time, but it doesn't happen without it. The time will pass anyway, so you might make it count.

Checking

There's a difference between one year repeated for 10 years and 10 years' worth of experience. In the former, no learning, growth, or development occurs. To make your 10 years count towards proficiency, you need to be checking in with your results.

Whatever your change goal, there is a measure that matters. You don't necessarily have to assign numbers to it or rigorously track it. For example, when you lose weight, you don't need a scale to track it; you can see it in the mirror and how your clothes fit.

Make it a hands-on system if you decide to measure it with numbers. Please resist the urge to use technology to do it for you. In **SMARTER BETTER FASTER**, Charles Duhigg tells of the teachers who swapped the technology for paper-based systems to find step-change improvements in their results. What they didn't see with the technology became apparent when they had to use their hands to figure it out.

At the very least, check the plan. Track the time you thought things would take and get more realistic with your planning. Regarding the final analysis of your project's success, you might want to know how long this took and how much all this work cost.

Acting

The action step is about incorporating what you learn from doing and checking. Implementing an update, tweaking a plan, and having a crucial conversation take time, but doing them will keep you on track and up to date, creating as many improved outcomes as possible. It's about taking deliberate action when you realize you must do that.

It's not always easy, but it is usually apparent. Leadership is taking action when action is needed. Your investment in yourself is a significant indicator of your leadership.

Work the Process

When you understand the simple progression of these steps, change becomes something you can master. Work the plan, plan the work, and know when you are doing one or the other. Take notes, record data, and document goals.

Treat the cycle as you would any other cycle in life—as a natural one that happens to everyone and isn't worth getting emotional about.

The Science of Your Memories

Your memories may not work the way you expect.

Identities cause us to act or not act. They serve as decision-making shortcuts. When scientists asked, "How important is it to you to be a voter?" they got far more excellent turnout than when they asked, "How important is it to you to vote?"ⁱⁱⁱ The second question brings your values, and the first brings your identity to mind. You can't be something without doing the corresponding action, but you can value things without doing anything about them. Valuing something isn't as motivating as being something.

If you've tried to accomplish a new goal or change a habit and found yourself failing, your identity might be holding you back.

Brian Tracy, a sales guru, finds that if salespeople think about selling at a certain level, they will meet that level and then become blocked from achieving any more. They might accomplish a yearly goal in October, and although they spend November and December doing the same things they did all year, they will not lose any more sales in those last two months.

To take advantage of the opportunity to become authentic, you can take control of your identity.

As you've learned, your identity is the labels you ascribe to yourself. It might be what makes us unique, what sets us apart, and what you call yourself.

If there are seven billion people on this planet, and science tells us that they are all one of a kind, then we know there are far more than a handful of adjectives that describe you and no one else. We make transitions far more complex than needed when we fixate on the one adjective that is changing.

You get to choose who you want to be in real life. You get to decide how you live every day, what you want to be known for and how you want to be remembered. If you get to control anything that matters, your identity has the most promise and power.

Being in Transition

Being in transition isn't a comfortable place to be, yet it is an increasingly unavoidable state in this day of constant change. The rate of change has been increasing. This degree of flux and ambiguity is something new to humankind. Just a generation ago, it was expected that you'd go to work for one company through your entire career, retire, and take in a good pension for the rest of your life.

As you've noticed, it's not like that anymore. The so-called 'rest of your life' is about decades longer. For stable pensions, this longevity represents a challenge for those corporations. Earlier generations didn't have to worry or deal with layoffs, bankrupt pension funds or early retirement. Or even a long retirement.

Wondering how to spend your golden years wasn't as much of a concern when only a handful existed. Now, you might have thirty years in retirement, and that's much time without any demands or structure.

When you are in transition, you can feel lost, and that feeling can be very uncomfortable. Some things have ended, or you know you want to end them, and nothing new has begun yet to take its place, or you don't know how to fill that time.

It happens when you graduate from a program and don't yet have a job. You aren't a student anymore, yet you aren't an employee. How are you supposed to be spending your time? How long is it going to last? When this time is over, what regrets will you have? You won't have this freedom again.

It's human nature to want to grasp the first opportunity to escape this transitional state. We can take the package or the alternative position when we are told our job has ended. We are more likely to choose the alternative position, even when we know it's wrong for us when it's for lower pay and higher demands. We choose the devil we know instead of the one we don't. In this case, a lousy job will cause stress, exhaustion, and financial strain on the job market, which might hold the next golden gem.

A transition is an opportunity to craft your way from ambiguity to a better place. It's a chance to redefine who you are, rediscover what matters to you, and recreate how you live your life.

Oscar Wilde said, "My greatest mistake, the fault for which I can't forgive myself, is that one day I ceased my obstinate pursuit of my individuality." Every day, you get to take up this pursuit of yourself and change it as much or as little as you see fit. You only know how strong you are until being strong is your only choice.

Change Your Memories

Like a computer, you might think your memory is stable and reliable.

Of all the cases overturned through DNA testing, it might shock you that 73 percent were convicted initially with eyewitness testimony. Jurors treat these reports with great weight as accurate, but many factors can sway what we think we saw.

Recall changes the facts, too. “Emotion engraves the brain with vivid recollections but cleverly distorts your brain’s record of what took place.”

Each time we retrieve a memory, it changes a bit, allowing it to be added to, modified or even erased. “Memory is more dynamic, more fluid and more malleable than we thought,” says neuroscientist Daniela Schiller of Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

Chose Empowerment over Journalism

Fifty percent of your memories are lies you tell to yourself. Stop studying them. When studying them, you are not watching what you are doing. You are not hearing what you are saying. You are not in the present.

Forgetting is just as important to memory as committing it there in the first place. Without this ability, the weight of all your memories creates crippling confusion. While forgetting seems to happen only when it’s inconvenient, you are supporting a sound state of mind, a shaper intellect, and even a superior memory when you choose to forget.

You choose to forget when you cease recalling it. You eliminate the triggers and shut down recall when you notice it forming.

If only 50 percent of your memories are accurate, start telling stories that feel good and let go of the ones that don’t. If you can’t let go of them, find a way to say to it that is at least funny.

Alter Egos as Gateways to Personal Change

Lady Gaga, Marilyn Monroe, and Beyoncé all understand the power of an alter ego. More than just changing a name, an alter ego facilitates a desired shift in perspective that translates into a change in results.

Perhaps you have heard of Beyoncé’s Sasha Fierce. She described needing to embody a presence foreign to her everyday life on stage. Sasha Fierce was the solution. She was an alter ego Beyoncé could use safely and publicly to do things that Beyoncé wouldn’t do. Beyoncé says she killed her off in 2010, but by then, it was clear she didn’t need her anymore.

Today, it seems to be the artist's way to select a name reflective of the brand. Some singers, actors, and performers go by one name only to be called out by their birth name. Why not for you too?

If you can create this persona and step into it when you need to stretch into your future self, you are on your way to personal transformation.

Alter egos help bridge that gap between your current identity and your ideal self. Who is this alter ego you need? Name her specific abilities. Please give her a name reflective of her power.

Go ahead, split your personality on purpose, for a specific purpose, until you realize it was you all along, and a name is just a label.

Monitor Your Labels

When you say, “I am,” is what follows serving or hurting you? I am a conservative Canadian, a woman, and an engineer. While I am many other things, such as a blogger, a brunette, and a baker, I never think of those labels as applying to me; they aren’t identities so much as true things about me. Labels are identities with weight and implications.

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

Is it envy that you want? Or the rush of a good deal? Is it the ticket to enter the clique? Whatever your aspirations, the way is the result, and the result is the way. They are inseparable because you can’t fool yourself. To know one thing and act another way is an act, and all acts come to an end. Genuine authenticity endures.

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

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

The Way of Self-Authorship

Jacob Bernstein produced the documentary **EVERYTHING IS COPY** about his mom, Nora Ephron. The title comes from something Ephron’s mom said all the time. Ephron says, “I now believe that what my mother meant was this: When you slip on a banana peel, people laugh at you. But when you tell people you slipped on a banana peel, it’s your laugh, so you become a hero rather than the victim of the joke.”

Tell the story your way. When you tell your story, you get the laugh, and that’s never a failure. Unleash your creative genius by writing your story and what you want to say to it. Be your author; remember, you are still far from knowing how it will end, and those pages are up to you to fill.

What are you going to author today? In writing your story, you decide how you are cast and how it ends. Your identity is up to you to craft, re-create, and challenge, and ensure it never limits you with false beliefs of what you are and are not.

Your outlook colours your outcomes. While people get hired for competence, they get fired for attitude. A can-do attitude will help you power through learning curves, potential push-back, and hiccups. Believe in yourself first, and everyone else will follow.

A positive attitude will lead to a change in circumstances. Mislabeling of emotion will skew toward a more positive direction, leading to better actions and beneficial outcomes. Focusing on gratitude changes your attitude. You will find more of your experiences, talents, and opportunities when thankful for them. You see what you are looking for, so keep looking bright.

Scientists also know that some cancers are attributable to incorrect processing of emotions. We have a sick, hurt, scared society.

Scientists also know you can't think out when that's the case. Instead, you have people who don't know what to do with their emotions. Some learn they are something to judge. Some learn to box them, squash them, and ignore them.

Your emotions show up in your attitude, and you may have to process some emotional baggage to change your attitude.

Know Yourself

When it comes to self-awareness, we can all use some help. Like the patient who received the pinprick and refused any following attempt at shaking hands with a myriad of explanations, we don't know why we do things, and we are gifted storytellers.

Other people can see with transparency the truths we think we are doing a great job of masking and denying. Quentin Crisp has said, "The very purpose of existence is to reconcile the glowing opinion we have of ourselves with the appalling things that other people think about us."

Most of us will never learn those appalling things because we do an excellent job of avoiding that information, discrediting it when we hear it, and denying any truth to the rumours. It's just so much more energy-efficient than actually dealing with it.

Often, you can only avoid it for so long before it manifests in your life or health in unavoidable ways.

For Arielle Essex, she thought she wanted children with every cell in her body. However, she was having a difficult time getting pregnant. Doctors discovered a tumour in her brain, one of the effects of which was an inability to get pregnant. Essex chose to use the experience to get to know herself better. When she did that, she realized that, indeed, she did not want children, and after she made that realization, the tumour disappeared.

Phew, it can be difficult for a message from the body to achieve the level of consciousness.

Dissolve the Ego

When you finally realize that life is not all about you, and when you are gone, it will continue to function with merely a blip, you have stared down your ego and won.

Knowing your purpose and following that super-consciousness obediently is your highest social virtue. It requires taking your attention off others and even yourself regarding your ego. Purpose and super-consciousness come from service to society. When you serve, the ego must dissolve.

We serve our children by helping them learn to make decisions, find their purpose, and have somewhere safe to turn when life reveals its colourful unpredictability. We don't serve them by protecting them, giving them the answers, and pointing them in directions with our best intentions. Gabor Mate says parenting after age three is remedial, and you will have decades to keep practicing.

What children need from us is our ego-less presence.

Choose Pro-Direction

To work deeply, you have to plan deeply. This isn't an activity where you step back and fill your agenda with when you work on what task; it's time spent on the grander scheme.

It's not about knowing the details but understanding the direction. What are you heading towards? Many people only know what they are heading away from, leaving 359 degrees of opportunity. Clear heads, full hearts, can't lose.

You might want to narrow that down to get somewhere, but time spent planning, reflecting and dreaming about our lofty goals isn't valued. You are supposed to get moving. We prize action over inaction, but inaction is required so that the action isn't counter-productive.

The Willingness to Try

Experiencing a failure does not make you a failure. Attaching too much weight to a label you don't want will only hold you back.

The technology company Hewlett Packard reported that men apply for jobs when they meet only 60 percent of the qualifications, but women apply only if they meet 100 percent.

You can interpret those data as indicative of male confidence, cavalier approach and sense of swagger, but the conclusions don't end there.

Survey results indicate that not wanting to face failure was the big reason holding women back. They didn't want to put themselves out there if they were likely to fail. Only 13 percent of the men feared failure. If we think we will fail, we view the effort to apply as a waste of time.

Expecting failure and not even trying is another energy conservation technique that will undermine your ability to achieve your potential. It's not productive for anyone to set their sights lower than their highest potential. Believing you will fail and then not trying is a recipe for failure.

Influence Your Story

The male population viewed the list of qualifications not as a checklist but as a guideline. They looked at the larger picture, not a box-checking exercise. They applied if they thought they could do the job and wanted it, and they didn't "quibble over semantics," as one male respondent said.

As a job hopper, I can tell you that the job description or requirements never matched the actual role, but it was a cobbled-together document that served only as a marketing tool. Like all marketing tools, it's not a science or a contract.

Another gender difference surfaced in how they viewed the process. Men focused on the next step of getting the interview, while women focused on the outcome of the hiring decision without consideration for their ability to sway a decision.

Sometimes, we must focus on the next step and believe in ourselves. If you can do the job, believe in your ability to come out on top and revel in the experience. Knowledge work isn't as clearly or crisply defined as you may imagine.

It's worth remembering that it's not a meritocracy out there. The best doesn't rise to the top, so if you don't get the job, it doesn't mean you aren't the best candidate.

What's the worst thing that could happen? Answer that question logically to get fear out of the driver's seat. With those answers in mind, you can do many things to minimize, deflect, and avoid them.

Tweaking Deliberately

Failure isn't such a scary thing that we need to avoid. When learning to walk, we fell constantly; sometimes, we even laughed about it. Failure is stigmatized but essential for progress – personal and otherwise.

What problem do you want to forward? When we apply our strengths in service to something bigger and more significant than ourselves, we become geniuses whom no one can hold back. Even as a service provider, there is a grander problem you can pick on.

The only way to avoid mistakes is to avoid trying anything new. You will try new things when the status quo has got to go. Put experience first as your measure of success. Value the courage to try and the adventure, lessons, and stories earned through first-hand experience.

They say that luck is when preparation meets opportunity. You are now prepared for the luck that awaits you as you move toward your authentic future. Go forward with the confidence and courage that comes with inner knowledge. The world awaits the rare and remarkable you that comes with becoming your most authentic self.

ⁱ (Ledgerwood & Callahan, 2012)

ⁱⁱ (David Gal, 2010)

ⁱⁱⁱ (Christopher J. Bryan, 2011)