

# **What Could Be**

**The 7 Freedoms of Your Full Potential**

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# WHAT COULD BE

THE 7 FREEDOMS OF YOUR FULL POTENTIAL

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Contents

Introduction.....	4
1. Freedom of Composure.....	8
2. Freedom of Voice .....	33
3. Freedom of Pursuit.....	58
4. Freedom of Passion .....	82
5. Freedom of Creativity.....	105
6. Freedom of Rationality.....	129
7. Freedom of Connection .....	153
References.....	178

### INTRODUCTION

Believe you can and that anything is possible. This is the only step if you want the secret shortcut, the answer in the back of the book, and how to double down and execute. Believe you can do anything.

If you doubt or have a more profound, unsettled reaction to that statement, the rest is written to help you understand the most common disabling thoughts and emotions that hold people back – what’s going on when simply making up your mind doesn’t work.

If there’s a tug-of-war between decisions and behavior, a conscious decision is like choosing a supermodel for your team. Should you choose this mission called becoming conscious, your job is to determine how these freedoms might apply to you and your individual life experience – not if, but how, because it’s human nature to deny them away. This personalization will lead to your unique perspective, your own set of superpowers, and your opportunity of a lifetime.

What you can’t do is take the pill, fire the silver bullet, or in any way be passive in this process.

If you are here solely for enjoyment and entertainment, we’ll treat you like a child and monitor you accordingly. To take full accountability for controlling your freedoms is to truly become an adult, no matter your age.

Consciousness is your birthright, but it’s not your born nature. As a child, you can build sandcastles in the air, as children should do. As an adult, you use your life experiences to lay foundations under them. As Henry David Thoreau said, “If you built castles in the air, that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.”

Freedom is earned through the ability to accept that there is no such thing as powerlessness, only power that is untapped.

### YOUR UNTAPPED POWER

With freedom comes responsibility. The power to become free is available to everyone, but power isn’t something to be taken lightly. It’s not a power everyone wants, and that’s okay – freedom isn’t gifted, it must be earned.

For every freedom, there is a shadow side, a way of manifesting that distance and wisdom would not choose, that parents wouldn’t choose for their children, and that we wouldn’t pick for our friends. Perhaps in your own past, you will identify some reasons for outcomes that were beyond your accessible control at the time – you were not conscious enough, not adult enough, to have behaved any better, no matter your age at the occurrence.

If these ways of manifesting are your default ways of behaving, then the mere act of shining the light of consciousness on them might vanquish cobwebs of history and the invisible lessons you need to unlearn.

Society draws a line between children and adults based on age, but criminal cases show that this distinction is variable from person to person. What if this variation is something we can understand more generically, if also more specifically?

For myself, becoming an adult with full responsibility for my behaviour, I felt like a child at a birthday party, blindfolded and venturing forth to pin the tail on the donkey after just being spun around and around.

As an adult, I had complete freedom and no idea how to use it. Chasing happiness, or at least enough joy to offset the life I was working to afford, I wound up at the dead end that would become the turning point often referred to as rock bottom.

## What Could Be

How do you chase happiness and end up hospitalized with depression when you are so skilled at decision-making that you have the certificates and awards to prove it?

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### YOUR RIGHT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

It was the portal to allow me to suspect my mind and all its products, and into that portal came information that lit the way out.

It's all about mastering the freedoms you have by right of consciousness, because for every freedom, there's a high road and a low road, like snakes and ladders in your mind. Consistently taking the ladder is using consciousness to its fullest capacity.

Mastering the snakes and ladders in the mental game of thought is the key to unleashing your full potential. These snakes and ladders turn your mind into a maze, but when you understand the terrain, you can map the journey in the way that suits you. It's all about regaining control and taking back power from automatic and unconscious thinking and behaviour.

Consciousness may be singularly human, but it's also human to be confused by what consciousness is and how to use it. It's essential to be able to reflect on your thinking and think differently, but what is standard is to accept the products of the mind as they are.

One of those standard ways is to go with the flow of society. Society seems to reward the bubbly, overscheduled, bobble-headed social butterfly, while the quiet rebels make history.

When it comes to quiet rebels, many people are unaware of the distinction between shyness and introversion, and why it matters. Call yourself what you want, they say; you'll always be aloof in my books.

When you don't comprehend the differences of the labels, it's you who suffers, when you have no idea that there are different types of quiet people. Indeed, if you don't know that some people prefer silent solitude, you suffer from a deficit in your theory of mind.

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### YOUR THEORY OF MIND

The difference matters because a shy person will finally get the chance to speak up and blindside you - it's only a matter of when, where, and how severely you will be damaged. They are waiting for their turn because they aren't good at cutting into the conversation.

When my career and livelihood were on the line, I couldn't cut into the conversation.

It happened late in my career when I was having a hard time aligning instructions and expectations. One of these times was being sent in to find opportunities, and to me, as a Six Sigma Black Belt who is supposed to find opportunities without spending money, automation was off the table. Automation is purchasing technology and reaping the rewards of a good return on investment – the bare bones of business.

I was baffled when my colleague suggested automation as a solution, and everyone cheered Bravo. The money allocated for raises went solely to him; I received nothing. I was told that if I wanted a raise, I had to make my voice heard, and that my opportunity to do so was at our quarterly presentation.

## What Could Be

Practicing beforehand, my colleague was supposed to discuss the first few slides, and then I was to take over. In practice, it went smoothly twice.

On the day of, my colleague continued talking and dominated every attempt I made to take back control and reclaim my portion. My leader, sitting there, didn't intervene either. Three others witnessed me being bullied by my colleague and said nothing. Everyone knew what I had at stake.

Afterwards, I was so upset, I packed up quickly and left. I'd not gotten a word in edgewise, and now my career was on the line, because who was she? Useless and voiceless.

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### YOUR UNIQUE EXPERIENCES

No matter my experiences, I hold firmly to a principle that all souls are equal and should be treated as such.

The theory of mind describes the ability to understand that what is in your head is only in your head, which is true for everyone. Predicting and explaining others' behaviour requires knowledge that a difference can exist between what they think, what you think, and what each of you presents externally.

Your theory of mind can only reflect the diversity you've encountered. Perhaps you've never met an introvert or realized that you are one yourself. You knew you weren't shy, nor aloof. You were focused on ideas, not people. The label of introvert frees you from shame; the notion that you became introverted because of your early experiences with people frees you to find the community in which you'd happily attend all the parties, all day, every day.

At our most fundamental level, we are instinctual, driven by our programming. Biological urges and everything we've learned about what to do about them create that voice in the head that narrates our lives or silently drives our actions. If you've read fiction or paid much attention in English class, you know that the narrator's voice is critical to how the story unfolds.

We all have a story to tell. Many of us heed our doctors' advice and prognoses. When we do that, we give them the power to determine the ending. If you don't like that ending, you get another doctor.

But what if that doctor agrees with the first one? You must question your thinking, and the insights you discover may lead you to your healing, whether physical, mental, or emotional. Your journey to complete control of consciousness is also a journey of healing for many.

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### YOUR SEVEN FREEDOMS

Freedom of composure comes with mastering your biological instincts: from controlling your body to mastering your mind's preference to deny the parts of you that are uncomfortable to admit. With freedom of composure, you start to hear the truth in the criticism, see the shadow in the mirror, and sit still when you want to escape.

Second, freedom of voice comes with embracing thoughtful response and rejecting immediate reaction. Actions speak louder than words, and walking away and staying silent may be new actions for you in old situations. Rather than creating noise to drown out your opposition or bolster your position, you might find yourself protesting loudly where before you had no words.

To develop freedom of pursuit, you must reject innocence and embrace inquiry. As a student, did you learn to question and test knowledge or to swallow and repeat? Traditional education sets up a trap because expertise,

## What Could Be

information, and systems themselves aren't perfect. With inquiry, you transform the teacher-student relationship into a master-apprentice one. In the latter relationship, the amateur asks good questions and keeps the learn-teach-learn cycle spinning.

Fourth, freedom of passion is embracing service and rejecting agendas. It's easy to get caught up in recruiting people to our means, and seeing only our good intentions, while paving the road to hell. Pursue your passions, just not with blind individuality. Freedom of passion is knowing how to direct those excellent intentions toward a collective goal that benefits all.

Next, freedom of creativity embraces abstraction and rejects reductionism. Reductionism consists of sticking to what you can see and prove, while abstraction makes room for what has never existed before—but might. It is not to be limited by what you already know, and that's the essence of imagination.

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### YOUR FINAL FRONTIER

Freedom of rationality is rejecting intuitive reductionism in favor of conscious navigation. It is the acceptance that there is Truth, and there is white space. The inability to prove or disprove anything means an open playground of possibility, not a vacuum of nothingness. In that white space, you feel the excitement to roam and explore, not the fear and pressure to fill it.

Reductionists wait for the proof. While they wait, those with creative minds get to work and play. Intuitive information is coming to you clearly and distinctly. You only have to know how to hear it and follow it.

Freedom of connection is the rejection of spiritual attachment in favour of conscious surrender. The new Truth is that we are all connected. Molecules share electrons. The things we feel are solid and concrete aren't that way when you look very closely. Recognizing our dependence on this planet and one another, we consciously navigate forward through cooperation, collaboration, and mutual support.

Religious wars are fought by spiritual minds locked in attachment to their status, doctrine, and possessions. They want to win, so there has to be a loser. Freedom of connection means you aren't tied to a specific outcome or paradigm – you've surrendered.

Peace of mind comes with acceptance, response, inquiry, service, abstraction, connection, and surrender. These seven practices hold the keys to your complete freedom.

When you consistently choose new behaviours, people notice your personal growth on the outside. Instead of repeating the old program of doing, being, and believing, something new comes forward—a new you. Not merely what's practical, but complete mind mastery is to answer the call from the universe: "Want to come out and play?"

Perhaps that's what could be. What could be more fun?

### 1. FREEDOM OF COMPOSURE

Freedom of composure is rejecting instinctual denial in favor of conscious acceptance. If you've ever tried to meditate but don't, your body is in charge, not your mind. Uncomfortable thoughts will arise, and instead of greeting them, your body protects you with the denial of them until you take back the power to accept whatever may occur consciously.

Meditation is tuning your attention internally. It's following the breath, noticing the thoughts that arise, the triggers behind them, and the actions they demand. Instead of complying, you notice and start creating the space between the thought and the action. With consciousness, become the master of thoughts instead of the servant.

Yes, it's difficult. No one said wielding power was easy. It's a world of bright, shiny things vying for your attention, making you highly distractible and thinning your power.

When you aren't present, you miss a lot of important information. A lack of information will impair your decision-making, whether you approach it as a statistician or with your unarticulated sense of knowing from your right brain. First, gather the information, then determine how to handle it.

As Daniel J. Levitin says, "Instead of reaping the big rewards that come from sustained, focused effort, we reap empty rewards from completing a thousand little sugar-coated tasks."

Technology has proliferated our to-do lists. Unimportant things give us the feeling that we are progressing. You might be spending time and energy on small, simple, straightforward things, but it is the complex things that have not yet existed that will lead to your unimaginable breakthroughs.

To master your instinctual mind, you need to know the reality of how decisions work and the nature of the forces that conspire to make this work rare and remarkable, but completely doable.

### THE ELEPHANT AND ZERO DEGREES OF FREEDOM

Have you ever seen a massive, full-grown elephant restrained by a mere rope?

This feat is accomplished by training them at a young age. When elephants are small, trainers use a heavy chain around their ankles to keep them from running away. The elephant tries to escape and learns that he is not strong enough. It may not take the first or second time, but after numerous futile attempts, experience ultimately prevails over will. The defeating lesson has been learned, and the chain is no longer needed.

As a fully grown adult, the elephant has long since forgotten that there was ever such a thing as a chain. For that matter, they've long forgotten their lust for adventure, their instinct to roam, and their desire to break free. All that is required is the feeling around their ankle to which they've grown accustomed.

The elephant forgot, and elephants are renowned for their long memories.

Like elephants, we operate under certain limits that are laughably small when you know where to spot them, what they look like, and have the courage and humility to confront them. Like that elephant, you can break free – all it takes is a little unlearning of old lessons you've long forgotten but are now in the position to question, learn differently, and use the power you always had to break free.

## What Could Be

Zero degrees of freedom is a mathematical concept. It happens when there is no room for variability or independent choice. When you came into this world, that's how it was for you: no choice on the lessons you learned on the fly, so far back that you can't remember.

Composure is managing your body; the challenges are invisible, insidious, and personal.

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### YOUR PERSONAL REALITY

You came into this world with biological programming, including the ability to learn quickly with a brain like a sponge, absorbing information without filters or questions. Over time, learning proceeds like road construction, building on what is already there. Of our brains, they say what fires together wires together. Through repetition, what was the best reaction at the time becomes an instantaneous and automatic behaviour. We call it personality and grow into it with minimal interference.

When we don't like something about our personality, we can change it. First, it requires noticing that something about the way we are isn't working for us. This alone is very difficult as the ego is adept at blaming others, explaining things away, and seeing a perspective that doesn't require anything to change. Moreover, the people and situations in our lives support the status quo, as any change brings uncertainty and threat.

Personally, change can bring uncertainty and threat, as becoming a beginner again, as the new choice makes you, might threaten a reputation or an image.

Unlike elephants, we have language. We can protest. We say, "Not me." Especially when it's to an accusation that's unflattering.

Voltaire once said, "Language was invented to hide feelings." To truly understand someone, you must understand their feelings, and in doing so, you will learn who they are. More helpful, you will know where they think limits exist and where they feel they don't. What's true for them may also be true for you – or it may be a rope of your own that suddenly snaps.

As humans, we have consciousness. We can use consciousness to seek rationalizations, justifications, and denial, or see those choices for what they are – a postponement or delay that one day might lead to a dead end.

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### YOUR CONSCIOUS CHOICE

Or, we can choose a different perspective and follow it with a different choice.

We can also use consciousness to realize that change is possible and within our control. It's up to us and our will to do something different to create a better future than the pattern we've been following. We can open up options to new, incredible experiences and opportunities that only require you to notice that you are stronger, smarter, and more strategic than you were when you were a baby, absorbing all those unfiltered lessons.

Beliefs about who we are, what we feel, and what we should do start when we are babies. Psychologists can tell stories of the importance of the first few years of a child's life that can scare potential parents into becoming helicopter parents, which comes with its own set of problems.

The truth is that all parents try their best; however, every parent makes both small and big errors. For my friends who are helicopter parents, it was the moment they realized they were about to send a kid to college unprepared

## What Could Be

for life. Suddenly, the clarity was that they had overcorrected for their own neglectful, distant parents when raising their children.

Big mistakes include abuse, neglect, and other horrors, while parenting advice is rife with practices that used to be mainstream but are now classified as bad suggestions. Big mistakes also include society telling everyone they should become parents, while apathy and duty don't create the best nurturing experience for a child.

Abuse and trauma leave scars that may not manifest until adulthood and later. Ironically, the more intelligent you are, the better you can concoct an explanation to make sense of it all, postponing the inevitable day when the truth brings your house of cards crashing down.

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### YOUR ADULT SELF

Every single parent does their best, but mistakes are made. Genuinely wonderful parents hang their heads knowingly; bad parents try to glare me down, especially if they haven't yet met their parents as mere people.

We all want to believe our childhoods were perfect and our parents excellent, but denial will keep you tied to a reality that isn't working for you. Respecting your parents doesn't mean keeping them on a pedestal; it means accepting that no one is perfect. Remember - you can think it, but don't have to say it. All you have to do is reject the denial, if only in your mind.

It's the joy of adulthood to be your parent and make your own decisions about how and when to do it, including if. Your parents did their best, and now it's up to you.

Adulthood is achieving an independent sense of self. Stepping into adulthood is not dictated by age. Many people age without ever truly becoming an adult. Some seventy-year-old sons are still expecting their ninety-five-year-old mothers to tell them what to do. On the surface, this appears loyal and respectful; however, it may also be lazy and codependent.

The child's self-esteem is based on what others say. They may spin it in a dizzying array of ways, but they are outgoing in the most extreme sense, getting a sense of self from their reflection in others' eyes.

The child lives by adapting to feedback, the adult lives by values and principles. The child is unconscious, the adult is conscious. With their dependence on the outside world, the child's emotional experience is shaped by it, choices are influenced by what others might think, and actions are guided by who is watching. Children seek advice, while adults seek information.

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### YOUR INSTINCTUAL DENIAL

If your natural born instincts protect you with the automatic, "Not me," today, you have technology to help. You can block out what you don't want and let your feed fill with things you've already indicated are items of interest. With the click of a button, you can delete people who express an opinion you don't like without wasting a second on the curiosity to understand the other side.

You can pour fuel on that fire of external definition and validation. More than ever, technology has tightly controlled what information we allow into our world and how we act. We let it make most of our most important decisions, like who and what to let into our lives.

## What Could Be

The default choice has already been made for you. It manages your privacy settings and filters your search results. It suggests people you want to meet and groups you want to join that agree with the history of what you've done before. It will never disturb you or send you anything you've said you don't want. It surrounds you with an echo chamber of comfortable choices and keeps out anything that might upset your apple cart.

Or you can emerge from that environment. If you want a different future, you must let new information and people come your way. You have to choose differently on purpose. You have to spend time with yourself and your thoughts when you'd rather scroll through your phone.

In a world that values productivity, "doing nothing" hardly stands a chance. What might be seen as "doing nothing" is actually the hard work needed to regain your composure. You'll discover better ways, more meaningful relationships, and, most importantly, learn to appreciate the peace and calm that exists outside the chaos that has always been within you.

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### YOUR CONFIRMATION BIAS

We can find proof for our beliefs, even when they are wrong, when we don't know what they are, and even when overwhelming evidence shows the contrary is true. It's called confirmation bias because we can confirm, validate, and approve our beliefs while rejecting common sense in a world where most things are treated as black-and-white or firmly monochromatic. With enough creativity, perspective, and critical thinking, you can often be at either pole.

It's an instinctual reaction. You are designed to stay alive, and that means acting before thinking. Information must travel through the action center to get to the thinking center. Brain scans indicate that there can be up to 10 seconds between deciding and becoming aware that we've chosen. By design, you are supposed to be safely panting, wondering what that thing was that sounded like danger, long before you ever get enough details to name and claim your fear.

In that lag between gathering information and making decisions, your brain is not looking for reasons you might be wrong. You are not doing an analysis. You are looking for evidence to support the decision as the right one. You can; why were you right to do that? Maybe once you ran and then realized it was only a car backfiring.

We seek information on why that was the right approach, and we select language descriptors that align with our perspective.

With that filtered narration in our awareness, we find logical reasons for being wise and right, which strengthens the familiar emotion, creates the predictable feeling, leads to the expected mood, executes the recognizable personality program, and manages the external perception of reality.

Confirmation bias is your brain telling your ego, "Oh yeah, boss, you're so smart and right; can I have my bonus now?"

### THE POWER OF ATTENTION

With consciousness and the insight that you are likely more wrong than you know, you let a healthy amount of self-doubt creep in. Your freedom emerges from being present with your attention, helping you see as much of reality as possible, shine a bright light into the blind spots, and adopt a mindset of humility.

## What Could Be

Maybe the universe is unfolding as it should, in all the moments when you feel otherwise. Perhaps you can do more than hope or distract yourself with novelty and the next new thing.

Newness and distractibility team up to feed your multitasking habit, leading you into dopamine's loop of unrequited pleasure.

Dopamine, a neurotransmitter released in the brain, helps us perceive rewards and take action toward achieving those goals. Researchers pivotal in its discovery implanted an electrode in a rat's brain, gave it control, and observed it activate the electrode repeatedly, on demand.

Initially, they thought they'd discovered the pleasure center. Then, they made the rat cross an electrified grid to activate it. The rats would do so at the sacrifice of their feet. What kind of pleasure do we chase at the price of pain? Addiction.

It was not pleasure the rats sought but the *promise* of pleasure. It is a very different thing from absolute pleasure itself. It doesn't matter if your addiction is to sugar, shopping, or social media. You are looking for something and settling for relief instead of reward.

Across society and generations, attention spans are decreasing. That's a problem because it's an inability to dive deep, and nothing of consequence can be understood, solved, or improved on the surface. Attention is your power to hone – not to give away or relinquish.

Only then does it become clear that much action is simply unconscious denial draped in convenient distraction.

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## ANTISOCIAL MEDIA

Researchers have found that almost 40% of our speaking time in social situations is spent sharing information about ourselves, while very little is spent soliciting or giving advice. It's our own opinions that matter – not informing or improving them, but simply sharing them.

When we share our opinions, we engage the brain's reward systems. Using functional magnetic resonance imaging, researchers observed that the mesolimbic dopamine system, which registers reward, was far more active when people talked about their opinions than when they spoke of others<sup>1</sup>.

To give you an idea of how good this feels and how much we want to share, researchers have found that people often choose to self-disclose rather than accept small monetary payoffs. It's not 'A penny for your thoughts.' It's closer to: 'Here's a two-pence. Will you listen?'

Social media lets you share your opinions without financial cost. Users collect people like points and tell everyone about their numbers as if it matters. To some, it does - it's easy to believe that the more people you can count, the more books you can sell, the more opportunities will come your way, and the more doors will open for you.

In reality, social media hijacks your dopamine by making you believe that you are accomplishing something. If you are chasing success while settling for popularity, you may not have a clear enough vision of what success would look like for you. Instead of connecting randomly and quickly, success requires you to define it first.

Would it surprise you that all those "likes" you received were from people who didn't even read your post but are merely playing the social game? When you tune into the truth about why you are spending time and energy on any platform, you may realize that better hobbies exist.

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### MASS MISINFORMATION

To understand any industry, follow the money and head to its source. News programming relies on advertising to cover costs, including salaries, offices, and marketing. "If it bleeds, it leads," because they want you to stare transfixed at the screen.

To sell advertising, the media uses our natural, underestimated motivation to satisfy our curiosity. Novel and unusual events, not baseline noise, capture our attention.

When we follow the media, our information dashboard is full of novel, curious, and eventful content. The familiar, boring, everyday occurrences go unnoticed and unrepresented. Unfortunately, we often make decisions based on our dashboards as if they were complete and accurate.

After the September 11 attacks, everyone's perspective shifted, prompting us to make different choices. One notable change was in our preferred transportation: few wanted to fly, and many turned to driving, even after flights resumed. Gerd Gigerenzer, a psychologist from the Max Planck Institute in Berlin, studied this collective behavior change. He found that the shift lasted about a year, after which typical patterns returned.

Our dashboards have been updated, but the baseline risk remains unchanged. We perceived air travel as more dangerous, but travelling by car remained far riskier. Whether it is fear or a misunderstanding of the statistics, Gigerenzer was able to calculate the exact number of people killed in car crashes as a direct result of the switch. The number was 1,595.

Watching the news will make you think you are more likely to die from a terrorist attack, war, or a mass epidemic than from all the dull realities that don't make the news. What's common isn't on your radar; what's noteworthy is. Your attention is drawn to the novel and eventful, leading you to increase risk when you attempt to reduce it.

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### CONVINCING CONSUMERISM

In 2006, the United States and Western Europe were three times as wealthy as they were in 1950. When a society is more affluent, self-defeating behavior rises. Drug abuse, obesity, inadequate savings, and crime all rise.

Affluence breeds impatience. The more money you have, the less willing you are to demonstrate your adult values. Money doesn't corrupt; it reveals. It gives you the time and space to take a breath and look around to see what else you might want.

In the triangle of constraints, you can have any two of cost, quality, and time, but not all three. For example, you can get it fast and of high quality, but you will pay for it. Those who count their pennies sacrifice their time or quality of life for a lower price.

In your life as a consumer, patience is a virtue. If you don't have it right away, you can still obtain it affordably and at the desired quality. You invest your money and wait until you have enough to cover the cost. If you can't wait, you rack up debt and the sleepless nights spent trying to pay for what you no longer desire. Impulsive purchases often lead to buyer's remorse, whereas anticipation typically predicts satisfaction. Impatience undermines your well-being.

Pressure to purchase keeps the economy going. At Christmas, you are supposed to buy all kinds of unnecessary items to decorate your home and give to other people. With that social pressure, money is spent, and jobs are

## What Could Be

created, but people go into debt, mounds of garbage are produced, and many gifts are received with the question, “What am I supposed to do with this?”

When you pay attention to why you are going with the flow, you sometimes realize you want nothing to do with it.

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### MISLABELING EMOTIONS

In 1974, researchers had male subjects walk across a bridge and then talk to an attractive female at the other end. In one condition, the bridge they had to walk across was stable. In the other condition, it was the rickety bridge that some people preferred not to use.

The co-ed shared a story about the research she was conducting and provided her phone number in case subjects wanted more information later. Those who did call her later were far more likely to be the brave souls who crossed the rickety bridge.

How do you feel after you cross that rickety bridge? Your heart will likely beat quickly, your palms will be sweaty, and your cheeks may even be red. Are you scared or attracted to that scientist? Two emotions that are easily confused are fear and arousal.

Of course, no one would think that the bridge had anything to do with it.

A teenager on a contestant show was asked if she was nervous. She responded that she knew the feeling was the same as feeling excited, so she chose to call it excitement instead. She knows, as a teenager, what I didn't know until middle age. Labels matter, and you have the power to choose—a powerful choice.

Growing up, it's the difference between the caregiver who asks, “Gee, why are you feeling so badly today?” and one who sees the same and chides, “Stand up straighter!”

Our emotions are influenced by history and the environment, but we find internal, rational reasons for our behaviour. We perceive ourselves as independent, aware, and rational individuals, but the environment can easily control us. Without knowing this, we continue down life's roads, reacting to our environment while making sensible, well-thought-out plans.

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### OVERCOMMITTED AGENDAS

There are enormous demands on you at the moment. We wonder if you read the post, opened that email, or saw that video, because you don't have time to comment, reply, or share.

Attention merchants can hijack your attention because they know things you don't about how you make decisions. Things like fear, pain, and the potential for loss will get your brain chemistry going, and even when you say, “That doesn't work on me,” they are laughing all the way to the bank with your data.

Attention is a powerful source of energy. If there's anything true about quantum science, we know that anything is possible until someone looks. If you've noticed, anything related to energy will also be related to commerce. Make no mistake: your attention is a powerful source of commerce.

If Opportunity knocked right now, would you have the flexibility and time to greet it? If your earliest meeting availability is two weeks from now, you might be living in the past. It was two weeks ago when 'now' showed up.

## What Could Be

That is living behind the times, with zero flexibility and no time for opportunity. You'd likely be angry at Opportunity for interrupting you and getting in the way.

When we ruminate about the past, we relinquish control over our attention. There's a difference between rumination and reflection. Reflection is learning from it, because if it caused fear, pain, or loss, it's your job to figure out how to avoid that next time. Ruminating produces only feelings, not insights.

There's a time and place for everything, and you might need to make it.

With presence, you're able to linger in the moment, without rushing to the next thing or constantly checking the clock. Instead, you pick up on intuitive clues and focus your energy.

### THE NATURE OF DECISIONS

According to brain scientist John Medina, as he states in his book *Brain Rules*, our human brain "appears to be designed to solve problems relating to surviving in an unstable outdoor environment and to do so in nearly constant motion."

But today, most of us spend time executing pre-determined activities while sitting comfortably indoors.

It's the complete opposite.

Economics was founded on the idea that humans are rational actors. To be a rational actor means that we understand the consequences of decisions and seek to minimize the bad and maximize the good. It's a model that likens us to walking computers, programmed with what matters and functioning correctly.

And it's completely wrong.

In 2002, Daniel Kahneman's work, in collaboration with his partner Amos Tversky, won the Nobel Prize in Economics. Their work proved that, faced with choices, even those trained to behave like an emotionless, analytical Spock do not always succeed in pulling it off. Instead, we are predictably irrational.

This new reality shook the foundation of economics. Now, there is a study called behavioural economics. This discipline examines what people do, rather than what they should do, before making decisions that matter. It is a science based on reality, not theory.

Don't believe it? That would be because of the illusion of consciousness. Consciousness wants you to think you are in charge, that mistakes aren't something you make, and that your view of reality is complete and the only one there is. This is the default way that consciousness works. To keep you alive, large and in charge, by keeping you unaware of all the work that is being done behind the curtain, without your awareness.

Luckily, you can change how you use consciousness, and that's the gift of being human.

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### A BASIC SEPARATION

The brain is composed of three main parts. The oldest part of the brain is the reptilian brain. It's responsible for the instinctual decisions that keep you alive. It's your fight, flight, freeze, or fornicate manager.

Next is the mammalian brain, which governs feelings and emotions. Finally, you have the neocortex, the part of the brain that controls cognition and language.

## What Could Be

The problem's core is that emotions arise in one part of the brain and are later labelled in another. Like silos in organizations, parents in divorces, and your intentions and actions, a lot gets lost in the middle.

The separation between language and emotion also means there is a lag between the chemical creation of the emotion and our awareness of it.

More often than not, we get both the cause and the label wrong without knowing just how incorrect we are. This is the reason for every human being's fundamental irrationality.

Knowing that you cannot trust your emotional experience, or what you label it, can be both scary and liberating. It's terrifying because you've likely relied on your feelings to navigate situations. You trust your gut, are crystal clear with your anger, and know who you love. Excellent!

It's liberating because it reminds you of the times when you realized you should have trusted your gut and didn't (or should have), lost your temper when you shouldn't have, and broken your heart because you trusted the wrong person.

Since it's human nature to think that knowing better means doing better, now you know better than to trust your perception as an accurate and complete reflection of reality. It's tough to stay present when we learn new things, so we repeat lessons more than once, but it's never too late to learn something different.

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### A LITTLE DISCOMFORT

The problem is, most of us have an amplified aversion to pain.

Pain is discomfort. It's the boredom of waiting. It's the frustration of someone or something getting in your way. It's the uneasiness of facing what you are trying to avoid. Yes, it's the broken bones, too, but emotional pain shouldn't be dismissed or minimized.

Success is answering the question, "How much can you endure?" while knowing that quantity isn't everything.

Cameron Diaz, the actor known for her role in *Charlie's Angels*, says that the trainer's first words to her and her co-stars were that they would learn to love pain. Pain means growth, and growth means moving toward your goals. Pain means progress, even if no one can see it happening.

When you know that you will come around the bend only to embrace the haters and wrongdoers, you can finally try loving them while it's happening. Turning the other cheek always seemed like a tall order until you can unravel why you might be enthusiastic about pain.

It's the ability to tolerate a little pain when you look in the mirror and don't like what you see, and to do something about it. It's the ability to respond rather than react, to choose and follow a strategy, even if there's an easier way to pass the time.

Nothing reveals character like a challenge. It is up to you to choose what pain you will embrace. Embracing the emotional pain of losing someone frees us to remember the joy in the good times and the blessing of the entire relationship that might not have happened if the butterfly had taken a different route. It is better to have loved and lost than to never have loved when it truly is love.

### A SIMPLE STRATEGY

The problem is that most of us have an idea of love based on our experiences, rather than ideals.

Psychologist Walter Mischel gave preschoolers the choice of one marshmallow now or two if they could wait for a short time. Then, he followed these children through their lives.

Mischel concluded that the ability to delay gratification leads to success in life, specifically the ability to wait for rewards. The children who proved to be able to wait seemed to carry that success forward. They had better relationships, more stable lives, and reported higher degrees of satisfaction. Those who didn't or couldn't wait for the second marshmallow had higher obesity rates and below-average academic performance.

Importantly, it's what they did while delaying gratification. One kid licked it but did not eat it – a highly creative, if dubious solution. Others knew the strategy of out of sight, out of mind, and they did all kinds of things to avoid seeing the marshmallow. They demonstrated creativity, self-awareness, and proactive behaviour.

Acknowledging a weakness and taking steps to address it is an impressive act throughout life. Unfortunately, there's no getting around the time it takes to do it and the personal accountability to make it happen.

Maybe these kids had parents who taught them strategies. In contrast, the others were raised in the opposing schools of laissez-faire or willpower, where one parent would often shrug and dismiss intervention with, "What can you do?" Another parent commands and scolds, while the third parent teaches inner experience and how to deal with it.

Self-awareness, creativity, and proactive behaviour don't come naturally with age, but all three can be developed. It's the simple ability to predict what will happen, take steps to change that outcome by applying knowledge of the system, and collect your reward.

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### A LITTLE REBELLION

In caveman days, getting rejected from the group meant certain death. In those harsh conditions, as an individual, you couldn't survive for very long. For this reason, we are all built to feel pain from rejection.

Neuroscientists have discovered that the pain of social rejection activates the same brain regions as physical pain. Whether on the grade school playground, in the high school gymnasium, or at the yearly performance review, the pain of rejection cut deep and felt just as accurate.

Back then, whether you were a baby or a cavewoman, you couldn't choose who those people were. You were born into a group and needed that group to sustain you. With reliance, other people are your double-edged sword – they are your best survival tool and your most imminent threat.

However, it might be a hardwired instinct we no longer need. These days, you have more than 7 billion people from whom you can choose your clan. Researchers have proven that the learned fear-of-pain response can be repressed. We can relearn because we decided to. We use our conscious will and determination, our stores of courage and confidence, and we strive to persist until we achieve our goals, find our place, and encounter the people who will support us.

## What Could Be

In organizations, the pain of rejection manifests in the disorganization of the mission. It's not that people don't understand what is expected so much as having been given a whole host of alternative motivations and sanctioned actions with enough ambiguity to justify any consequences.

That's the luxury of being human – we can tell ourselves stories. We can question ourselves, observe our actions, test our thoughts, and keep everything to ourselves until we decide what to do. It's all thanks to the gift of consciousness and how you use it.

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### A LITTLE RISK

Your risk appetite is probably higher than your brain can tolerate. If it evolved for survival back when we lived in caves, nowadays, it's like having the gas gauge indicate that you are almost out of gas when there is still a quarter of a tank. It's thinking that a hunger pang will kill you when most of us carry enough fuel to walk across the country. When you are famished, the feeling and what you react to is the signal; fat is the visible inventory of pre-eaten meals.

Back then, risks were much more significant. There were no hospitals and lifesaving technologies available when things went awry.

I've been the kid to say, "What's that?" when asked if I was hungry. The amusing thing? No one could tell me what it felt like, only when it should happen. "Eat your dinner," they say. The government will even tell you what, how much, and when if you'll listen. Or, you can reclaim your freedom of composure and tune into your body's signals.

From my personal, highly biased surveys, a large portion of the population is unaware of what hunger is or when they last experienced it. They are duped by thirst, boredom, distraction, novelty, and a wide variety of other emotions, but not hunger. There are motivations galore for ignoring your body when you seek to find them; solutions abound when you desire to right them.

"Hanger" is when you haven't eaten and are about to lose it on someone. Your bottled rage comes to the surface because you ran out of the energy you were using to keep it down. One day, when you are more stable and secure, you might process this rage into anger, but right now, you'd better increase your glucose levels for safety's sake.

### THE POWER OF ACCEPTANCE

The gift of consciousness allows us to escape irrationality by answering the question: "What are you actively denying that you need to accept?" What makes people crazy is trying to make something make sense that just doesn't, no matter how hard you try, and your mind can try very hard.

The first step is to accept that you are part of what happens to you. Life doesn't happen to you. You are a part of every decision, every event, every trauma, every success, and every failure. No matter where you go, there you are. You evoke reactions that have nothing to do with you, yet inspire responses that have everything to do with you. You set events in motion and make things happen.

With 28 addresses, job titles, organizations, cities, and other sources of variation, I know what the environment was like and what I was like. For every perception, there is a flip side that will open your interpretations toward a more helpful view.

## What Could Be

Acting with composure means accepting the differences between one's intention and execution, as well as the external perception of oneself. It's powerful to realize that those three things can be different and separate. There's your intention, there's your actions, and then there's the reception.

To achieve greater success in life, we become more precise and accurate with our intentions, more strategic and tactical in our actions, and we help clarify our goals for observers earlier and more effectively, allowing them to intervene and assist as needed. Or judge more appropriately afterward.

What's true for you can be true for anyone else. Halon's razor says to assume stupidity before malice. I say, assume laziness first, then stupidity, then malice. First, they must care, then learn; a malicious character does neither.

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### RELENTLESS REFLECTION

What are you if you are a time-starved individual locked in a chronic state of distraction? When decisions are unbalanced, they tend to wobble until they spin fully out of control. Relentless reflection will help you see where you may have approached past decisions in an unbalanced fashion.

It takes time and awareness to process our feelings. I used to do it while painting, and people thought I was an artist.

Painting, for me, is a process of discovery, a way to connect with my right brain and give it a voice. My right brain had something to say and needed a way to express it. While the right brain lacks words and logic, it does have colour and form.

It doesn't disappoint me, although the code is uniquely mine. I once produced a painting that looked like a pink flower, but every petal was a bleeding heart, a dewy tear, or a crumpled heap of a person. Pain and suffering were laid out in hot pink. While people commented on its beauty, I couldn't stand to look at it, so I gave it to someone who had caused me a lot of psychological damage. She thanked me for the gift.

Long-form handwriting is a different experience from typing. In these slower, more creative moments, you can pay attention to the knowledge that is coming from your right brain.

Art was not my only avenue. I introspected while running, and people thought I was getting my exercise. I did it in yoga class while I followed the postures.

If you leave only the left in charge, you will seek power over people instead of a nurturing, collaborative one. Numbers, complex analysis, and logical objectives will rule, rather than qualities that cannot be easily measured or defended.

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### INVISIBLE EVASIONS

When we know we are avoiding something, we call it procrastination; what do we call it when we don't know we are doing it?

Avoiding pain is a hardwired motivator. It's your brain trying to protect you. You must only tell it once; the trigger mustn't be huge. When you are a driverless body, your experience of pain is in charge. Please don't try to spot it; it is too insidious to notice because it is behind your back, pushing you forward, and you don't have eyes in the back of your head.

## What Could Be

We know the pain can be minor, yet it insidiously continues to drive behaviour because of a trick played by Dr. Edouard Claparède. In the early 1900s, he treated a woman who had suffered a brain injury. This injury prevented her from processing new information. Even though he worked with her daily, he had to introduce himself whenever they met.

One day, he placed a thumbtack in the palm of his hand. This time, when he shook hands with her, she suffered a painful prick. After that, she refused to shake his hand at every subsequent appointment.

From what you've already learned, she couldn't articulate why. She gave reasons, but never mentioned a tack. You already know what creative explainers we can be, and this patient was no different—internal rational reasons when external environmental conditions were the cause.

In other words, we are motivated to avoid repeating painful experiences without realizing we are doing it. Just like Claparède's patient, you might have suffered some painful surprises in your past and avoided them ever since for reasons that make perfect sense to you, even if they are not factual or genuine reasons.

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### MISDIRECTED EMOTIONS

In an interview with Marie Forleo, Simon Sinek recounts the story of his visit to Afghanistan, which began with a rocket attack just after landing and culminated in his second bestseller, *Leaders Eat Last*. He says, "As anyone in a war can tell you, you have all the right feelings but not at the right times." Maybe you didn't go through a war or cross a rickety bridge, but delaying and confusing feelings can happen to you, too.

Confusing feelings confuse reactions and responses. It's more likely that we take the boss's verbal tirade, go home, and give it to our partner, who then turns around and picks on the kid, who then kicks the dog. Scientists have traced the bullying epidemic back to parents who complain about their jobs at home. Scientists have also traced the suppression of anger to cancer, but your options are not limited to swallowing maltreatment or passing it forward.

It's a radical idea to go ahead and get angry with the people who deserve it. Give it back to where you got it, dose for dose, without reservation.

What you can but shouldn't do is pretend you don't have feelings and that no damage was done. Your feelings matter just as much as anyone's, most of all to you. You cannot be Spock, but you can be the boss of you.

Anger is a motivating emotion. You can use it to do something if something needs to be done or figure out what to say if words need to be found. At the very least, don't let it whip you around all over the place or cause collateral damage to the people you love.

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### HYPER-EFFICIENT WASTE

You may be so busy avoiding things that you are very busy avoiding them.

Efficiency is getting things done quickly. There is such a thing as going too fast. Maybe your grandmother told you, "Haste makes waste." Hyper-efficiency is a reactive behaviour that appears productive but wastes time.

Hyper-efficiency is a smokescreen of activity. It's being busy, so you don't have time to do what you know you should be doing. Sometimes, what we know we should be doing is introspecting, answering our questions, and

## What Could Be

listening to the answers with the same rapt interest that we would give to our loftiest celebrity or the most appropriate expert.

Staying busy allows us to avoid acknowledging painful truths. We try to prevent ourselves from realizing that we know what we know, especially if the knowledge is that everyone else sees the shadow you've been hiding, and the gig is up.

Smoking, mirrors, spinning, and reputation management all consume time. We all do it; we are taught to put our best foot forward. Fake it until you make it.

We say we don't have enough time, and it's our priorities that we don't want to discuss. We can never have more time; we can only choose our priorities of how to spend it.

You may be too busy to decide on purpose. Not your purpose, your brain's, the one that controls your fight, flight, or freeze response.

Running from pain might be the reason for your packed agenda, short attention span, and penchant for immediate gratification. You can brag about it all you want – the rest of us know it's polite to pretend that we don't know better.

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### PROTECTING ACQUISITIONS

When we head off running, it's twice as likely to avoid losses rather than chase potential gains. Even when the potential gains are much more significant than anything you could stand to lose.

Losses are tangible, which makes them painful. You had something, and now it's gone. You can feel the emptiness of where something used to be. If you want to see this in quick action, watch the reaction of the auction house when Banksy's painting starts to self-shred after being sold for \$1.4 M. That's a loss in action until the buyer decides they have gained a unique piece and a story to go with it. Phew, that could have been expensive. Whatever it takes to protect our hard-earned acquisitions.

Gains are abstract. You can imagine, predict, investigate, and research. And still, you will be entirely wrong when you get there. To everyone who has had an ambition or a plan, they've had one turn out surprisingly different. You learn about probability and risk, and nothing is specific.

When it's happened to you, do you fight for what might be or what was? In your brain's world, the tangible, concrete realities draw your attention, not the abstract possibilities.

We work harder to avoid losing something we already have than to gain something new or better. If you have all the productivity in the world to achieve, you might have to give up some diversions or low-value activities to get there.

When it comes to things to consciously gain and protect, you can aim for higher and better uses of your time and choose your battles wisely, for the greater good, instead of failing to notice the damage, consequences, and descriptors that you don't think apply, but could be argued.

### INSTINCTUAL MIND MASTERY

Freedom of composure comes from rejecting instinctual denial and choosing conscious acceptance.

## What Could Be

When you don't like what life is handing you, you will instinctively deny it. Listening to the narrator in action, you notice a particular storyline that is swift and sure and leaves no room for doubt.

As humans, there were times we weren't tall enough, didn't know our words, or didn't realize there were other options. We have all built inventories of so-called stuff that we deem impossible and things that people like us don't do, can't win, and won't accomplish. Like these little ropes holding you back.

These ropes are opinions, not facts. Look for the proof; the investigation can snap its power. Hardship produces nuggets, and if you haven't listed your most trying times as the best things that ever happened to you, then you haven't squeezed them hard enough yet.

The truth can only remain buried for so long. Mum is a problematic word to keep; it's the first word of many babies. What has been done over the years cannot be undone overnight. While we talk of "overnight success," the term is an oxymoron created by the media, and like all things created by the media, it's designed for consumption, not knowledge.

To catch your narrator in action, you listen not only to the storyline and everything we learned in English class about tone, details, and point of view, but also to the specific words you choose. Your vocabulary reflects your mindset as much as it reveals the information and content at your disposal.

Meditation and mindfulness offer opportunities to tune in to your inner narrator and reveal your instinctive way of perceiving the world.

You must notice the words you use, the experiences you share, and the perspective you take.

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### UNLEARNING CLASSIFICATIONS

At the ripe age of thirty, I found out I was an introvert.

As a new hire, I took my Myers-Briggs assessment. Myers-Briggs is a personality type indicator that reveals your standing on various spectrums, including introversion. According to the mother-daughter team who developed the assessment, the opposite of introversion is extroversion, and everyone is somewhere between the two.

Introversion scored 1 on the assessment, and extroversion scored 20.

I scored a 1.

According to Susan Cain, introverts tend to be quiet. Marti Olsen Leary says they have an advantage in thinking more deeply. They are drained by social interaction, but Jennifer B. Kahnweiler says the introverted leader is possible.

As a self-identified introvert, I agree with these esteemed authors. I prefer to keep my opinions, thoughts, and observations to myself. I'd rather be learning than telling. I am certainly happier uninvited to parties, social gatherings, and any place where the conversation has all the substance of air. It's practical: you can't get that deep when you have that much breadth to cover. If this describes introverts, you can call me that.

An extrovert once said, "You must have absolutely nothing to say." He assumed that nothing was happening in my head if I wasn't clamouring to speak. True to the form of opposites, if you wanted to know what was going on in his head, listen to what came out of his mouth. Resist the urge to elaborate because no one can think and speak simultaneously.

## What Could Be

While it is empowering to know your classifications, it's liberating to realize that you don't have to be stuck there if it's not working for you. You can learn why you had those preferences, and you can understand what's so enticing about the opposite.

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### SAFETY FIRST

Once I'd said, "No, thanks, I'd rather be alone." I almost lost an eye. The bad people I'd encountered in my life triggered my instinctual behaviour of hiding in the library and denying social needs. Safety, first.

Could it be that I'd merely been around the wrong people, and not all extroverts are energy vampires who suck the life out of me? Everyone else isn't out to take advantage of me or control me? They aren't all out to turn violent or abusive, in a matter of time?

As I explored the core of my perception, the truth of where my energy came from became obvious: open-minded, spiritually-oriented people, however few and far between they may be. With that realization, the difference between people and ideas evaporated. I achieved my best by learning to relate to people regardless of how they identify, and by discarding the labels that hindered our relationships.

What could be is no such thing as an introvert or an extrovert – people have different goals in life, some are here to be entertained, some to lead, some to be led – there are many choices, and you need to be clear on yours, because it's what's behind every decision you make.

Open-minded people who want to fight for democracy, for freedom, for fairness? Cool, where do I sign up? Ah, the Conservative Party of Canada, as I heard in Pierre Poilievre's rally cries.

First, I read Poilievre's biography, tuned into his work, and watched his performances. Then, I handed over my money to become a card-carrying Conservative after a lifetime of being raised a Liberal. The day he lost his seat, I wore his sweatshirt that read "United for Freedom" because I still believed in the man and the message.

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### DELIBERATE ACTION

We all think we're free from bias, and it's what's holding us back. The so-called free-from-bias effect is the only way to explain why people believe these thinking problems exist, but don't have them.

An introvert asked me, "How do you get anything done?" Life could be paralyzing with all the listening, observing, and analyzing I was constantly doing.

"Slowly," I told him. "Usually, things are raining down around me, crisis galore, and I'm wondering how I got in this mess as the first step of getting out of it. Sometimes it's faster than everyone else, and sometimes slower but effective."

Sometimes, fifty percent slower. Two years after graduation, I was on a path to earning my Six Sigma Black Belt certification. My first project was supposed to take four months.

It took me six months. On the other hand, the difference between getting it done and being effective is the difference that results in a call from the CEO. "What are you doing differently?" he wanted to know, sparking a twenty-year passionate pursuit of a good answer. At least I actually crossed the finish line.

## What Could Be

Taking deliberate action instead of responding to the crisis has everything to do with not getting sucked into the drama of narrating what is happening and the potential implications of it. To put an end to the narration, start with, “Okay. Now what am I going to do about it?”

Switch off the panic alarm, get out of crisis mode, and take control of the moment, because the present moment is all you have. When you get to the root cause of why this is happening, you suddenly realise the one small thing that needs to be done.

Or you can waste all your time and energy responding to every new unsettling detail.

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### ACCURATE CALCULATIONS

Sometimes, the degree of speed is hard to calculate. One retrospectively embarrassing moment was snowmobiling. Hanging out the night before, everyone announced where they would go the next day.

After a group announced their plans, I asked, “What will you do after lunch?”

It wasn’t my intention to be the jerk in the room; it wasn’t my first time, and every time, I hope it’s my last. I’d done that route six or seven times and knew it took me 3.6 hours.

The following day, we rode together. I finally found out what had taken so long.

As a snowmobiler, this is what I know about energy: If extroverts get their energy from other people, the most they can ride at a time is about twenty minutes. Then, they stop, chat, check directions, sip water, and get bundled again before the next ride. Mostly, socialize. It’s a people-refuel.

As introverts, my friend and I rode for 3.6 hours solid. Thumbs up and thumbs down at turns, but we were riding, not talking.

At nine that evening, my sled didn’t lie: it had been running for just over 3 hours, although we’d been on the trail for a long day. I told my friend that I was bailing. We left together and were tucked in not long after.

At 3 am, we were awoken by the rest of them rolling in.

On a snowmobile, everywhere you look is nature’s whiteboard. If there is something in your craw, you cannot ignore it.

So, you stop. Mainly to avoid whatever your mind would like to bring to your attention in that silent aloneness of riding.

Today, your ability to get anywhere is tied to your ability to be in your head, with your thoughts, and having zero ability to distract yourself.

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### REAL QUESTIONS

How do you put up with yourself when you’ve deflated a room full of enthusiastic adventurers?

Someone once said, “Don’t worry, she returns to being a girl when her helmet comes off.”

## What Could Be

I'm here to say, no, I don't. I do go back to looking like one. I've been asked how to ride, but what people want to know is how to manage their minds. I want to master it; some want to control it. For everyone, we need to manage it at least.

As an introvert, I learned not to judge a book by its cover, and I learned not to judge people by their covers, as we are all supposed to know. I also learned that it's one of those lessons that adults say but then don't do, because it's an unconscious brain mechanism that occurs without conscious awareness. Until you start paying attention to the words you use and the people you direct them at.

The difference between introversion and extroversion is an orientation to ideas or people.

Scientists also agree that humans are social animals. To me, introversion doesn't look very social. You must find option C when two things are correct but don't add up.

There is if you look long enough, listen hard enough, and pay close enough attention.

I ask, what if the idea is the person?

Suddenly, people become fascinating sources of energy. The spectrum between introversion and extroversion hinges on whether your early relationships with others were energizing or draining.

I know I've had both kinds.

Which experience are you thinking about when you are answering those questions on the personality test? What if your circumstances in life have prevented you from meeting people on the other side of the spectrum?

### MASTERING YOUR WORDS

I remember saying, "No, thanks. I'd rather hang out by myself." It was right before I almost lost an eye.

My lesson was not to say that out loud twice and to be cautious around little girls with long fingernails. To me, it is a statement of preference, yet to someone else it sounds like a rejection. Rejection hurts, whether you are on the receiving end or the boomerang end.

All change requires going through a period of adjustment. Things get worse before they get better. If you want to learn to improve, you must let go of the band-aid solution you have there now. It means losing some performance before seeing an improvement. Sometimes, we turn around and go back.

If, instead, you have inner faith that it will improve, trust in the process, and support of people who care about and invest in your success, the effort will be worth it.

When you master your words, information becomes readily available, and decisions are straightforward. Whatever is stuck eventually comes loose.

You must be willing to accept some uncomfortable truths about human nature. On the other hand, the marshmallow kids might have been singularly gifted at enduring discomfort.

Not pain, just discomfort. Not for long, just for a couple of minutes.

If you think a book will never try to take your eye out, you've never fallen asleep while reading a hardcover. You may not have met an interesting idea that keeps you up at night. Yet.

## What Could Be

You might be suffering from the ideas that wake you up at 3 am instead.

Is discomfort and a couple of minutes keeping you from your happy place? It is all relative, and it's all up to you.

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### TRICKY TEMPTATIONS

I never intended to be a snowmobiler. I was raised to be a cross-country skier. With respect, I spared my dad the stories. All parents and leaders have the problem of being the port in the storm, the fallible human being, and the source of discipline. Balancing those demands exhausts me, let alone signing up for it for a minimum of eighteen years.

Long, straight stretches on skis exhaust me, too. Those downhill were the fun part of crossing the country. Snowboards improved on skis, and Whistler improved on Ontario until, finally, there was a summer day with the sunroof open.

In the back of a Chevy Avalanche, I gazed up through the sunroof on a leisurely drive through the back roads.

"How high do you get on this jump?" one in the front asked the other one.

"See that bark missing?"

Laughter up front was matched with piqued interest in the back. What was this sport called? When I'd heard about snowmobiling and tried it at a friend's cottage, it had nothing to do with air or jumps or laughing, for that matter.

I learned that to convert someone, you need to figure out what's in it for them. But who told these two about the best change management practices? It's complex stuff, but marketers do it all the time. It's taught in sales books.

Listen; act like you heard what they said. Someone must have heard me mention my love of defying gravity.

It turns out we all crave being heard and appreciated. A craving motivates us. It doesn't matter if the result is good or bad; it's all about having a reason to break your inertia.

Once you know how to satisfy a craving, you are off. But what is the craving that you are satisfying?

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### TANTALIZING TRAPS

Going after a short-term craving is doomed.

To my delight, an editor contacted me about turning my blog into a book. We talked in person, and I'd filed the conversation under "looking forward."

When the day arrived to move forward, I was on my way to Etobicoke. I crossed a boundary into Mississauga, remembering the time I'd told someone that I'd never do that again.

As my integrity came into question, I took everyone around me down with me. Not all forward motion counts as progress. I took the next exit and picked a parking lot to send an apology and my regrets to the potential editor. Then, I turned the truck around.

My integrity was my intuition in action. This potential editor had already demonstrated they knew the terms and conditions of sharing and what they had agreed to keep secret, and had immediately rushed to share juicy off-limits details with me. When they do it with you, they will do it to you.

## What Could Be

With that knowledge, I knew my juicy secrets wouldn't remain that way, and no contract could protect them, and no payment high enough to relinquish them. My ego and publishing dreams would have to wait.

Juicy secrets are so share-worthy and, by implication, by accident, so prevalent. Social media adds fuel to the potential fire. Then, you try to Google something, and everything you can find is only an echo, with the source nowhere to be seen.

Marketers use ego to get you every time, and contracts are only written to be argued. I have yet to find arguing a pleasurable activity. Now, discourse toward truth, on the other hand, I'm in.

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### UNREQUITED PLEASURE

I learned to keep my words to myself the hard way.

When I first heard about Gaspé, it was a painting in my grandmother's television room celebrating the spot and moment of her second engagement.

The second time I heard the name, it was whispered in snowmobiling hangouts, like Ontario should be ashamed. Wide trails, regular grooming, fabulous seafood. Over the chicken wings and pavement scratching, I asked, "Where is this Gas Bay?"

It's where you ride infinity loops up and down mountains, with long rides on beaches and cliff jumping just for fun. It's a gasp, eh?

However, the city itself left me gasping.

Arriving there involved navigating through the subdivisions, dropping into the parking lot of a hockey rink, attempting to cross an intersection with a stoplight, and stopping in a parking space in front of a curb. If you did that on skates, you'd want to tiptoe—an added option for a Skidoo that I didn't have.

When I finally opened my helmet for a gasp of air, I forgot I was wearing earplugs. And I was a bit deaf from a day of listening to a combustion engine. My helmet was still on since I'd only opened the face.

I might have said something about advising people not to come to Gaspé, while all the service staff who make a living from people visiting Gaspé were milling around in the parking lot.

Said might not be the correct verb. As such, the restaurant was out of the question.

It's challenging to keep juicy secrets to yourself. The urge to spill feels instinctual and addictive, even though you know it's going to work out badly, you can hardly stop yourself. Addiction is chasing the promise of pleasure and perennial disappointment.

At any moment, you can stop.

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### EXPECTED BEHAVIOUR

Leaving the next day required crossing a busy highway. Unfortunately, I'd underestimated the steepness of the bank when I went over the top of the snow on the shoulder and headed down the other side. My helmet slammed the kill switch on the sled with my face.

## What Could Be

There I was, in the right lane of traffic, entirely at a standstill. Unfortunately, the electric start had quit the day before. As a girl, I didn't bother learning to pull-start the thing. I let someone do it for me.

So, there I was, stopped, in the path of a courier's truck.

I could only see the top of his hat. As a member of the company's National Quality team, I was aware of his priorities, and looking up wasn't one of them. He had targets, and they were tight. The best time to enter the data he needed was on this straight stretch of highway.

This was before any related laws. Laws are created because a threat is required to get people to change.

For sure, that wasn't the process. For sure, management didn't want that to be the process. Additionally, certain events that occur in a boardroom are reflected on a scorecard and have consequences. It would be nice if they were all the same thing, but they usually aren't even close, in my experience.

Instead of thinking that I should probably be less deer-in-the-headlights and more action-oriented to save my tail, I thought about how I got into this predicament in the first place. It is raining down, and still, I can't help but start with, "So, when did this all begin?"

Life is wonderful when we spend time with people who have mastered a different set of skills, especially when those skills complement our own.

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### POSITIVE THOUGHTS

Life isn't so wonderful when you forget that there is reality, words in your head, and words in everyone else's head that are entirely different. Sometimes you need to be freed from your automatic narrative. The truth sets you free, but first, it will piss you off.

For me, it was reading about how all decisions originate in the lizard part of the brain and how this translates to the absurdity of my career. Teaching people how to make mathematical, logical decisions only taught them better ways to convince others that their way was the best, even while they thought they were using the tools and following the statistics.

It was pervasive and extreme. Companies went bankrupt. Executives got fired. You've seen the plastic wasteland in the ocean, the fragility of supply chains during the coronavirus pandemic, and the dire warnings about the unsustainable growth paradigm that this world operates under. Yet, justifications for decisions are found, made, and solidified.

Hearing these explanations pissed me off. Did they think we weren't privy to interpretations of our own? Because I could certainly see a different way to describe things, even to talk of timelines of inevitability spanning years. Could have seen it coming, I would have said, for a long time.

Anger is power. You know that from the surge you feel in your body. Consciousness is the gift of intentionally directing it. Like a firefighter, anger is your hose, and it's your secret superpower when you know how to plant your feet, hold on, and aim. Don't tame it; direct it.

Positive thinking isn't looking on the bright side with rose-coloured glasses. It's the thought that you can make a difference. If you don't like it, the question is, "What will you do about it?"

### THE CEO OF YOU

Think of information going through you like a letter to the CEO of an organization.

First, someone receives it, like your senses picking up the information. It is accepted, sorted, and prioritized before it is forwarded to the administrative assistant.

That assistant might or might not open the mail and forward only a fraction. There's always a limited capacity. There are always clear priorities to guide assistants toward the choices they don't have time to make themselves.

At the executive level, decisions are made to either continue as planned or make a correction based on this new information.

As you might appreciate from this analogy, the decisions you deliberate over are a small portion of the total choices, but they can have a significant impact.

How you deliberate over decisions is just as the CEO deliberates. Who matters when you decide? What are the criteria you use to make decisions? From there, what information do you use to rate those criteria?

The interesting thing about big decisions is that they end up being ordained by the small decisions you are happily outsourcing. While you maintain the impression and feeling of being in control, your choices are being made for you.

At every given moment, your body is collecting information through your senses. This information enters your brain stem and first enters the oldest part of your brain. Also known as the lizard brain, this part of the brain is responsible for keeping us alive. Here, emotions rule, behaviour is automatic, and information is inaccessible by conscious means.

As the executive of you, how much capacity do you have to review and request changes to the status quo, and how much do you want to be involved in the operations? Some things are really fine without you.

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### FROM WORRIERS TO WARRIORS

If you're a Matrix fan, prepare for the blue pill. To transition from worrying about something to taking action is to find your freedom of composure. Composure isn't the ability to keep calm and continue as if unaffected by life's events. It is the ability to decide how to respond and prevent your body from reacting, at least on the outside.

I'd spent my career at the altar of science and logic. I joined the engineers, who collectively agree to help aid humanity's progress by accepting what people do and using design to ensure that something better happens when required.

When a crisis strikes indoors, we want to get outside fast. How do you run when you are running from something? Go ahead, imagine it, or act it out.

You run with your arms out in front of you. For that reason, engineers agreed to design doors that open out with "panic bars" instead of doorknobs. Pull to enter, because you might be freaking out on your way out.

Left to our own devices, we would all yell at the guy who was first in line and didn't pull fast enough. Jokers call that kind of thinking and behaviour "Darwinism." Marketers use all this knowledge to ensure you run through their

## What Could Be

door. I heard recently that my friend lost her son to Marketing. Yep, off to Laurier he went. It's so sad, but if you worry about individuals, you cannot save the masses.

The primary objective of this book is to introduce you to this knowledge. You may not decide to become the pinball wizard of your world, but you might want to know at least when you are falling prey to other people's games.

I know I'd rather be the hunter, not the hunted.

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### LIBERATING ACCEPTANCE

Machinery breaks down, and Skidoos are no different. One day, the breakdown occurred in the most convenient location – beside a service station. The following day, the service included getting picked up at the motel and dropped off at the trail.

Snowmobiling involves dressing for conditions that start at negative temperatures. Then, we ask you what kind of wind chill you can stand today because that will be your maximum speed. Layers upon layers make thrills on the trail and for short durations inside.

Including inside trucks on the way to getting dropped off at the trail.

Hot under the collar, I'd extracted a promise that we'd stop soon to cool off in the breeze. I set my dashboard to display the clock and watched the time tick away.

After 35 minutes, I wondered what was wrong with stopping at that place. In another 15, I thought that was an odd way for a tree to grow.

In an impossible way, suddenly defining a line between the grey of the sky and the grey of the snow I'd failed to see.

Looking back and forth at the trail and the dashboard, my eyes constantly adjusted and readjusted. As it turned out, there was much I'd failed to see.

Getting hot under the collar and getting angry seem to go hand in hand for physiological reasons. As temperatures rise and we get hot under the collar, so do tempers. Domestic abuse and assault increase with temperatures, as does civil unrest and violence between groups. What you wouldn't notice on a moderate day might lead you to road rage in the heat of the summer.

Or over a cliff in the middle of winter.

Keeping calm and carrying in might require you to take a break when you need one.

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### TAPPING POTENTIAL

It's true: You have untapped potential. If the idea that you are only using a fraction of your brain haunts you, rest assured, this myth isn't true. But the myth is believable and lives on because of our shortcomings and the unexplained abilities we observe in others.

You are using your whole brain, just not to its full potential.

## What Could Be

Genius might be the ability to take radical accountability for your actions and do the right thing even when no one will know.

I should not have to explain to any man that a hug is not an appropriate request of another colleague. If something so bad happened that you need one, seek one from wherever you would typically source such a thing. Yet, I had to watch the documentary *Miss Represented* to understand why everyone – men and women – thinks it's okay to treat women as sexualized objects.

Pressure, bait-and-switch, and taking a mile when given an inch are out. Permission, radical accountability, and being mindful of others are in.

Someone 6'6" demonstrated that they could hear me loud and clear despite earplugs, heavy machinery, and a sizeable gap between my body and his. From that moment on, anyone who was shorter and tried to lean on me, complaining that they had to violate my personal space or touch my body to hear what I was saying, could take a few steps back.

Thanks for the respect; it makes you look and act so much brighter. Plus, I'm more likely to share what I know instead of having a reason to keep it to myself. Facilitators and people like me call it silent dissent, and trust me, you'll never figure out when it's happening to you.

Doing the right thing always leads to the right things happening.

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### ULTIMATE QUALITY

The history of quality is a story of continuous improvement. It's both the moral and the reason. The premise is that poor quality is costly, especially when good ingredients are in the wastebasket. What a waste.

Continuous improvement started with quality control. Products are inspected, measured, and tested at the end of the manufacturing line. Substandard products were reworked if possible or discarded. Quality is achieved because the bad products aren't shipped. Control is containment. Off the line, they go to waste while the customer unknowingly incurs the costs.

Quality control improves customer perception of quality, but perception isn't reality. The added processes at the end of the manufacturing line and before the customer received the product were costly. They added resources from space, including people, tools, and equipment, as well as the most precious commodity of all: time.

To improve quality control, you apply what you learn to prevent mistakes. The right ingredients and steps produce good results in the kitchen, and the same principle applies to factory floors. It was called quality assurance.

Quality assurance ensures the machine is set up correctly, the raw materials meet the requirements, and all factors are in place to produce a product that meets the final specifications.

Designed quality came next. Quality moved from the manufacturing floor to the engineers' and product designers' offices. Goodbye steel, hello plastic. Forget 15 parts; here's just one.

The more integrated quality becomes in everything a business does, the more profitable it will be. Quality is not an addition; it results from design decisions, manufacturing actions, and marketing promises. Anything you must correct, catch, or make up for later adds cost and time.

It's time to inspect our thinking, because Quality has always taught us that if you can predict it, you can prevent it.

### TAKING NOTES

Richard Branson attributes much of his success to his practice of note-taking. The most valuable tool that he takes everywhere is his notebook. "I could have never built the Virgin Group into the size it is without those few bits of paper," he said in a 2006 interview.

Notebooks were also a favourite of Leonardo da Vinci. His notes, drawings, studies, ideas, and inventions were all recorded in his notebooks. Over 7,000 pages still exist; you can even turn some pages online.

Typing isn't note-taking. Students who took notes on laptops performed worse on conceptual questions than those who used more traditional methods.

When you take notes, the mind is engaged at a level that listening or recording does not achieve. Researchers have found that students who take short-form notes perform better on immediate and delayed recall and on comprehension of the material than students who take more extended notes or receive teacher-provided notes.

Taking short notes requires deciding what is essential and putting it in your own words, which forces you to focus, engage, and understand.

Being present will expose opportunities you would have otherwise missed. You will notice the non-verbal communication in the room, the things that should have been said and weren't, and learn what to trust from the people in the room.

When was the last time you had to perform a task, and did you wish you could remember how you did it the last time? Your notes might jog your memory. Scientists keep daily journals of every detail so that when an experiment works, it is more likely to be repeatable. In manufacturing, these ambient details can shed massive light on chronic problems.

Don't be surprised if your written words become one of your most valuable assets.

## 2. FREEDOM OF VOICE

Freedom of voice is rejecting psychological reactions in favor of a conscious response. If you've ever found yourself uttering words you don't mean, your vocal cords are in charge, not your mind. Uncomfortable words will arise. Sometimes you blurt them out unintentionally, sometimes you tell unintentional lies. Take back the power to use your voice consciously.

Finding your voice is not just about knowing your words, but the intention behind them. It's knowing them at the exact time and place you need them, in the style that you'd call all your own, in the way that doesn't make you ruminate later about all the things you wish had come out of your mouth and stay awake agonizing over the ones that did.

Abraham Lincoln said he had no time to prepare five-minute speeches but could speak for an hour at any time. Bloggers write reams of copy that are never read because audiences want your two seconds, and you haven't edited what you want to say to such a fine point yet.

Words clarify over lips and pencil tips. Your conversations aren't for entertainment and enjoyment but for growth and development. Seeking to understand other people's perspectives, opinions, and information helps you define your own.

When you hear a statement, you immediately know if it's true. Your gut wants to keep you safe, so it will not like anything new, risky, or daring. Unfortunately, the truth doesn't much care about your opinion and what you'd prefer.

Use your head to evaluate the information's quality, and your heart to decide whether it is relevant to you. Keep writing until the trivialities of life disappear, and that noise in your head is gone. One day, the thoughts in your head sound a lot like advice from someone you can trust.

## THE FROG AND TINY LITTLE CHANGES

Did you know that you can boil a frog alive? Please, don't attempt this; take my word for it, as I did, from the person who told me. If you put a frog in water and keep gently raising the temperature of the water, the frog can jump out, but won't, as long as you are slow and steady with the increasing heat.

We might have created tiny, detrimental, and unnoticed changes to the point of no return to the planet, and we have nowhere to jump. In our personal lives, we may yearn for nature, yet we reside in a city that continues to expand its sprawl with each new development.

If I asked you to put your hands out, you could tell which hand I put a paper clip in and which I put the brick in. However, if I first put bricks in both your hands, you'd be guessing which hand I'd also add the clip to. Magicians exploit our inability to notice these small details and our misplaced confidence to deceive us every time.

As humans, we tend not to respond appropriately to incremental changes, even though we often fail to recognize this about ourselves. When you are hypothermic, you should know that first, the shivering stops. Finally, you will begin to feel as if you are hot, to the point of removing clothing, assisting the freezing process of your death.

What's a scientific fact for temperatures, bricks, and paperclips is true with relationships and other situations in which we find ourselves, but would never place ourselves. Small, slow, and steady wins every time. We get

## What Could Be

invested, and the investment matters, because what you won't accept on a first date is not worth mentioning after years of marriage.

Small, slow, and steady contains enormous power.

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### YOUR EARLY EXPERIENCES

In the famed marshmallow experiments, Walter Mischel tested kids with marshmallows and followed them through life. Those offered one marshmallow and were able to wait for a second by not eating the first were more successful in life.

It seemed that the ability to exert willpower or self-control was essential for success. Maybe it was the ability to distract themselves, problem-solve, strategize, or develop the skill of distraction.

Then someone asked, "What if those kids believed in the second marshmallow as they believed in the tooth fairy?" If it were their life experience that people don't follow through, that promises are not kept, that people cannot be trusted, it would be dumb to wait.

The kids who didn't wait were unsuccessful in life because they lacked the circumstances that invisibly contributed to success, hope, and a more positive outlook: supportive and nurturing conditions.

As someone who stored my Halloween candy to last until Christmas only to be robbed of it, I say, rock on. I'm still a saver, but now I have offense and defense. Live and learn, and be conscious of the lessons you learn.

When you answer that personality questionnaire, you are drawing on past events and your reaction to them. When you don't question those early choices and expose the circumstances, you will continue doing what you've always done and being who you always were.

You will never get the chance to see how the other side lives, loves, and experiences life.

You might even say, "I knew it," while you did nothing to change a predictable, unwanted outcome.

Sometimes doing what you've never done is the delightful choice you've never been able to imagine.

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### YOUR GAME OF LAZINESS

In my experience, cultural, political, and other forces at work lead people to adopt strategies that seem entirely functional to them, that would shock any sane outsider.

Consultants have the reputation of thinking they are more intelligent than you and, therefore, their way will be better than yours. All they do is decide how they would do it if it were their job, and that's their recommendation - do it my way.

Take my word for it, just as I will take yours when you say everything is fine, and I can see otherwise.

If you don't mean to lie, we can discuss that. If you think you are getting away with the lie and that's working, I can play along.

But when that denial game of laziness gets tiring, I think you'd like the way I play laziness. I add a massive dollop of ambition, and like salted caramel, it's the perfect combination of two things you thought never went together.

## What Could Be

The brain is wired to conserve energy, and that means we are all wired to take the lazy way out. It takes effort to find a better way, and sometimes that effort is wrapped in patience. As I saw it, my success was directly proportional to how long I could remain open-minded and silent, which might look like laziness to the outsider.

Apply laziness to the desire to take action to produce change. The longer you can investigate without taking action, the deeper the root cause and the tiniest change required. The best game of laziness is to determine the slightest, steadiest, slowest change you can control, while always remembering that you cannot control other people.

What change, exactly, do you need?

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### YOUR ABILITY TO FIT IN

In the famous 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 the others all gave the same, but incorrect, answer, the subject followed suit an alarming 38 percent of the time. Throughout 12 trials, 3 out of 4 participants yielded to the majority at least once.

After that, subjects estimated that they had changed their answer by only a tiny fraction of the amount they genuinely had.

Brain scans now reveal that when people conform to group expectations, they actually change their minds, rather than simply going along for the sake of conformity<sup>i</sup>. It depends on how much your relationships matter to you. It's how much you are invested, or in how much you depend.

As Clifford Nass and his team discovered, we will even lie to protect the feelings of a laptop. We keep the raw, unwelcome truth to ourselves. Our relationships stay protected, no matter the uncertain but inevitable price. Of course, some people cannot lie, and some consider it immoral.

Some prefer the periphery. Asch found that 25% of participants consistently defied the majority, and 95% adhered to their initial answers at least once.

Innovators tend to be risk-takers<sup>ii</sup>, motivated by independence, financial gain, and intellectual challenge, but not by job security or responsibility. The term "innovative employee" may be an oxymoron.

If you look around and no one else is jumping, you might not either. If you base your decisions on internal knowledge rather than external cues, you might save everyone. Don't look to everyone else; look inside yourself.

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### YOUR LEADERSHIP TALENT

After successfully closing one project, I was "rewarded" with a role on another. In two weeks, I transitioned from a lifestyle where I worked from home with one or two phone calls per day to being in the office every day, surrounded by dozens of people with endless questions, comments, and a need to interact, accompanied by a two-and-a-half-hour commute each way.

I went from a happy place to a living nightmare. My reward ended up costing me almost everything I'd put in the category of "things that make life tolerable" and some of the best people, too.

I asked, "Why am I being punished?" My question was met with shock and repulsion, and when I was told it was supposed to be a reward, I was equally shocked and repulsed.

## What Could Be

A promotion from someone who couldn't imagine that I might have a definition of happiness completely different from hers. Still, knowledge of psychology, the appreciation of human diversity, and what makes an organization profitable aren't understood by those in power.

Failing to account for the difference in your mind and the difference in someone else's mind results in conflict too frequently. Society values the compliant citizen, and managers seek to hire the dutiful employee; yet, this approach leaves untapped human potential unexploited, going to waste.

It feels horrible when it happens to you, and you will be bored, drained, exhausted, or frustrated. Happiness is freedom from those who seek to torment you. What if you aren't the introvert that you think you are, but an exiled extrovert trying to make peace with the chronic rejection in your life?

Of course, you can also come from a position of power and pretend that their preferences don't matter in comparison to your own, but that will likely backfire.

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### YOUR PREDICTABLE FUTURE

There will be an inevitable mutiny when they finally call you a bully to your face. To break through, one is a loner, two are an anomaly, but three start a movement. Three remarkable individuals who don't need to fit in are enough to change the world.

Do you have your two wing mates?

Failure to find a resolution will erode your wellness until you become stuck and are no longer appealing to any other manager. I went from being a prized employee to being laid off in short order, promptly following that promotion I didn't want and those working conditions that didn't support my way of working or thinking. It's a diverse world out there – finding the right fit has never mattered more to all parties involved. Everyone's talents and contributions matter.

When you start counting down the days until retirement, hope that you remain employed long enough to get there, because your performance will diminish while smart and hungry young things are waiting to take your place.

Personality is not fixed. If your personality is holding you back, consider changing it. It may require considering a different audience and distancing yourself from your family of origin. It may require you to identify what you want, specifically and thoroughly. You can speak up and say, "No, that's not me anymore."

Children grow up, and the day comes when roles become reversed. Subordinates get promoted, and you might be working for them one day. Employees like me exist and are used in others' agendas all the time. The question is only a matter of when, not if.

It's never too late to grow up. Watching old people become new people is a sight to behold, and anyone can do it.

### THE BLINDNESS OF DISHARMONY

Hanlon's razor states, "Never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by stupidity." Yes, managers and human resource professionals appear to be mean indeed. However, they'd rather you call them mean than stupid.

If anyone ever thought that human resources (HR) is about getting the most out of people, then they don't understand management science. The role of HR is to protect the organization from government legal

## What Could Be

requirements. Humans are a resource, and the law exists to make sure they don't get exploited, because business exists to get as much out of their resources as they can.

Left to their own devices, you wouldn't have a minimum wage, nor roads to get to work, nor hospitals, because the taxes paid by businesses go to providing these services for their workers. Still, businesses also employ accountants to ensure they pay the least tax possible.

If the philanthropists behind Amazon really want to give their money where it is deserved, they would have paid their employees more money and paid their fair taxes. If they'd done that, they wouldn't have billions to give away now. With the right government, there would be problems for philanthropists to solve.

HR is not for the people; they are against the people – people who might sue and have the right to do so. When a CEO appoints this department to oversee all employee-related matters, you have the conditions for a toxic culture and all that entails. Often, disharmony exists beneath the surface, beyond what most people notice.

If people are actually mean last, because it takes conscious, directed effort, and stupid because it takes effort to learn anything, then first, they are lazy. We simply do what we're told and go with the flow, in a state of blind disharmony.

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### REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

Everyone would choose to be called mean rather than stupid, even if most bosses do not know the individual preferences and personalities of those reporting to them. Instead, they fill in the answers with their opinions, wishful thinking, and broken dreams.

A different manager once said to me, "Travelling all over the country must be so much fun." I disliked the way it consumed my evenings and weekends, and I constantly fretted over my house, which was unattended and dearly missed. In short, no, I did not find it enjoyable.

Most people don't bust open the reputations of things with the truth. You enter because of the reputation and become invested in keeping it. My mother did me a service when she told me that "kids ruin your life." It was apparent, especially after the divorce, but when some say that being a mother is the most important thing a woman can do, many silence their doubts.

It's too bad that too much of society sees motherhood as a requirement of being a woman and parenthood as a duty to the economy. It's all about growth. More, more, more. Is that a worthy goal, because when does it end? It's quantity, not quality.

I see mothers struggling with the chasm between what they were sold and what they experienced, chained to a reality they cannot unwind. Every kid deserves the chance to be wanted and welcomed, but today the average childhood experience falls far short of that standard. Being in the system isn't a predictor of success; rather, it's an extra challenge to overcome. Shouldn't that be the other way around?

If kids have been raised for hundreds of generations, shouldn't we know better how to do it and pass that knowledge along much more effectively?

### PAINFUL REALITIES

Quality parenting should be something that we've been able to master, like education, justice, and so on, at the level of improving the collective experience called life.

All artists peer across this chasm between what they imagine and what they produce. Your kids don't mimic your nature, follow in your footprints, or pursue your goals. Indeed, they are little people all their own, and you are responsible for helping them into adulthood. How well of a job are you prepared to do?

This chasm is everywhere, between what you intend and what you produce.

Dalio writes in his book *Principles*, "After seeing how much more effective it is to face the painful realities that are caused by your problems, mistakes, and weaknesses, I believe you won't want to operate any other way."

The trick is to see it, because we can all look the other way.

Unfortunately, most people are blind to their painful realities. Psychologists use "cognitive dissonance" to describe the mind's ability to protect your self-esteem by ignoring when you caused a problem. You find a reason to reject, to hate, to retaliate instead.

Your body knows, though, so it's out of your control. Mere words incite you to violence, rage, and uncomfortable, out-of-control thought processes. You can decide how to handle it, but once you know it's there, there's no going back to the bliss of ignorance.

I believe Dalio is right about your lack of desire to operate any other way, and I also think he would agree that wanting and doing are two vastly different things.

If you have achieved a work-life balance, then you might be ready to try a mind-body balance. Meditate on what this moment is to teach you, find the lesson, and expand your perception.

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### EMOTIONAL ENERGY

One person calls me 'stubborn' and another 'principled'; one says 'aloof,' and another says 'self-contained.' One set implies a need to change; the other suggests something of value worth growing. One set drains, the other empowers.

One woman I know constantly talks about trauma, her own and that of people I don't know. No matter how I try to steer the conversation toward brighter, lighter, more energetic topics, it steers back to bad things.

In her analysis, she identifies as an introvert because social interactions tend to drain her energy. Yes, for sure, but what if you noticed what topics you are bringing to the table and the energy you are spreading?

In my experience, discussions about sensitive topics can be draining, whether they occur in your mind or are expressed out loud. The words you use matter as much as the topics you choose.

If you want to find your extrovert, think of something new you've just learned and how much it helped you. Can't wait to tell someone, right? To find your introvert, identify and solve a problem that's been bothering you. Guess what that does? It takes you to your inner world, the library, and your journal until, guess what, aha! Now you're an extrovert because you want to share it with everyone. Like that, no more fixed labels, but world changers at work on reality.

## What Could Be

Every thought, every memory, every emotion comes with specific energy. If you don't like the energy you are experiencing, you need to examine how you are creating it. Extract the wisdom from the painful memory, and all that is left is the memory – not the pain.

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### SETTLING SCORES

People seek power to fill a hole in their past. We might all have scores to settle, but we tend to pay them with a proxy, not the source.

When you do that, you only amplify your problems. The manager said, "My dad always wanted me to be an engineer, but now I have seven reports to manage."

Add that to, "I always wanted a Black Belt on my payroll."

I don't know if that manager found the acceptance from her father that she wanted. I only know I went that route and didn't find it myself. The CEO who wanted to feel like one of the big boys went bankrupt playing that game.

People play games, and many of them are predictable.

Once, I discovered that the data used to make expensive, long-term decisions was generated from people telling you about their mistakes. The term I used was "self-reported defect data."

Unfortunately, I laughed in front of the person who had invested a great deal of money in setting up a system that relied on people telling the truth when they screw up.

They expected employees to follow the rules like robots and forgot that they might have minds and motivations of their own. When you run a blame-and-shame game instead of one focused on learning, adjusting, testing, and embedding, people will lie, and results won't materialize.

No one wants to be yelled at, penalized, or fired. What's not funny is being expected to be a compliant, unthinking robot. They always find a way to get them back for assuming they are stupid.

When everyone has a score to settle with someone above and below them, no one is attending to the customer. Customers start to find better solutions. Suddenly, no one has a job.

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### POWER MONGERING

In *The 48 Laws of Power*, Robert Greene writes that you are never supposed to outdo your boss. Leave if you can't throw the game while making it look legitimate. Otherwise, you will make them feel stupid, and they will get mean. Marilyn Monroe said, "Women need to know how to play golf, piano, and dumb."

I wanted to say that instead of cutting jobs, why not eliminate unnecessary assumptions and misguided decisions? In my experience, nothing determines an organization's cohesion more than how defects and opportunities are measured, reported, and communicated. Without cohesion, there is no organization within the organization. For a while, I played dumb instead.

Now you choose: Should I join those who exploit ambiguity, or sort the grey into black and white? One side looks for the truth, while the other side recognizes what they can get away with.

## What Could Be

Ignorance is the choice to remain uninformed. It's often informed by the belief that everything you need to know you learned in school, and everything you need to know is on the news. Both of these beliefs depend on how you define 'need.' If you are okay alone, you will never need to dumb yourself down for the sake of others.

My mother told me I was never going to have any friends because I made everyone feel stupid. While I did my best to tank my grades and keep my knowledge to myself, I realized that I could find people who are smarter than I, who could never feel stupid because they know they aren't. I sidled up to the brown-nosers and let them look down on me all they wanted while attempting to stay away from anyone with shaky self-esteem.

I can't make you feel anything – that's entirely up to you.

### THE NATURE OF PERSONALITY

Emotions are chemical cocktails. We can produce them through imagination just as much as through experience. Memories are relived in our bodies because that chemical cocktail can be produced by thought alone, and we always seem to have something on our minds.

There is a story about two monks who arrive at a river. A woman needs help crossing, so one monk picks her up and carries her safely, and then they all proceed.

Hours later, the second monk says, "I can't take it anymore! Why did you pick her up when we are forbidden to touch women?"

"You point at me?" the first monk says. "I might have picked her up, but at least I put her down long ago. You've been carrying her this entire time."

Carrying stories can be exhausting, reminding ourselves of our moods and the reasons behind them. A mood is evidence of mental baggage, unprocessed histories that remind you that you failed to notice something important about the event at the time. Perhaps you didn't have the time, language, distance, or perspective that you needed then, but that was then.

A mood is a historical event, and time has marched on. It was a bad experience, and grumpiness has set in, with many reasons to be cranky, because no one wants to hear about it or be around that energy.

After years, it's called a personality trait.

Moods and dramas can make us feel like our situations are beyond our control and the result of someone else's actions. They give us excuses and blame rather than guilt and shame.

Excuses and blame mean you think the other person needs to change, whereas guilt and shame are designed to make you change. Sometimes we are correct, and sometimes we are lazy.

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### DRIVERLESS BODIES

We are almost in the age of driverless cars, and Clifford Nash was concerned about how that would work, as he thought it would be similar to our current experience.

Let's say you want to go to the airport. You get in your car, which does okay in your neighborhood because it's always there, and you settle in. You take out your phone, narrow your focus, and drown everything out. On the highway, traffic gets a little thicker, maybe rain sets in, and you haven't looked up once.

## What Could Be

Suddenly, something happened, and the robotic driver now needs help. You're on! Like in high school, the teacher called on you, and you didn't hear the question. You are entirely unprepared to take over when the robot requires your assistance.

Maybe the cars won't be like that, but you are, and life is like that. If you've ever had a passenger snap you out of it, or if you've read a book and can't remember what it was about, you've been a driverless body at some point.

Instead of seeing the reality before you, you are looking at what has happened and what might happen in your mind. While you do that, your attention isn't on the present.

Your perception can only be on one at a time. When washing the dishes, does it matter that you are looking back and forth between the plate in your hand and the meeting that took place earlier that day? Perhaps not. Does it matter when you are behind the wheel? Most assuredly. How often are you behind the wheel in your life?

Losing things, being absent-minded, and being mentally absent are ways to waste your time, miss lessons, and believe in nonsense. When you aren't present, you are a driverless body.

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### PERSONAL REALITIES

In the early years, you weren't yet burdened with language. All you had to do was stay alive; your brain came with that programming. Programming is like breathing, keeping your heart beating, and millions of constant reactions that keep you alive.

As you developed, you developed ways to get what you needed. Meeting those repeated needs with tried-and-true strategies sets you up for repeated behaviours that create the same moods and reactions in others.

No one is in your head or body to tell you what you are feeling. Your personality determines how you name those confusing emotions, as it shapes your perception.

Fear or arousal, excitement or nervousness; you decide, or rather, your automatic program chooses for you. When you are an automatic program, anyone can pull your strings and get you to behave as they want you to, while you think you are a free agent.

As adults, reactions are pre-programmed preferences we call personality.

A fixation on your stories and moods solidifies your personality by adhering to a reality that's all your own. Your personal reality is your personality. You choose what to observe and narrate, and do it consistently. Dr. Joe Dispenza says, "Your personality creates your reality." As H.M. Tomlinson said, "We see things not as they are, but as we are."

Your reality can lock you in without you even knowing it. Invisible limits prevent us from seeing ways to improve our situations. If you can't feel what you feel, you also can't feel what they believe, so your attempts to connect with customers don't add up to sales success. Customers who are ready, willing, and able to pay go unserved. Businesses collapse, jobs get lost, and people end up lonely and depressed, thinking there is nothing to do but suffer or settle.

### PRE-PROGRAMMED DISTRACTIONS

The well-entrenched routine rules society. We all get caught up in our time-wasting dramas and seek escape in distraction.

On autopilot, we ruminate about the past or fixate on the future without being in control of the experience. We cannot control our mental focus on the past or the future, so we worry about pending meetings when we should focus on the immediate traffic.

If you are distracted for a moment, repairing the damage can take you a month.

Technology is helping us build these utopian worlds while we live in a dystopia. We block out people and information that don't align with our past choices without realizing it, limiting our futures. We stick to what we know and like, and call ourselves open-minded. The more commonplace our lives are, the more we can go with the flow and leave defaults unquestioned.

Feeling unsure about the next moment isn't a feeling most people choose to pursue. It's the opposite of boredom, but some might have the same physiological response and call it anxiety.

Automatic action is designed to save our lives when the threat is a predator. Today, many of us have our survival reflexes engaged due to our overscheduled and overcommitted lives. We react to the beeps and buzzers of technology, meet more people in a day than we would have known in a lifetime, and navigate a world of concrete, plastic, and steel—quite a long way from the wilderness savannah that our brains were designed to handle.

The gift of consciousness is the ability to notice that our body is moving and the mind is not engaged, or that the mind is engaged on a hair trigger. When it works that quickly, ensure you are safe, and then stop and actively wonder what is happening.

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### HARDENED CHOICES

Over and over, like cement, you harden into someone people have come to know and expect, just as you create a world of familiarity. Then, by the time you are 35, you've decided the window for personal change has slammed shut. People have either chosen to put up with you or move on. Set in their ways, we say.

By the time we are 35, scientists estimate that historical choices have already programmed our lives. Technology and media help protect your carefully curated bubble, making you inaccessible to new information or to stepping out of your comfort zone. I hope it's comfortable and not just familiar.

However dysfunctional it might be, we keep the pattern on repeat while complaining about being lonely, broke, or bored. And indeed, we are never lazy, mean, or stupid. Never. Nor would we admit that we are bragging – we are grumpy, of course, not happy.

In the world of mutable personalities, when we see personality as fixed, we struggle.

Being led by hardened choices results in irrational behaviour that touches every aspect of your life, large and small. It's not just the moments you chastise yourself for a bonehead comment or maneuver. It's your plans for tomorrow and ten years from now. It's what you believe you can accomplish and can't. It's in your relationships, conflicts, hopes, goals, and personality.

## What Could Be

You don't want to be the executive who says that "Family matters first" without the quality time to prove it. If you aren't tracking your time on purpose, you might mistake how much time you spend in each area.

If your life is a blur of distraction, drama, and noise, then it's possible that there's a feeling, a conclusion, and an action because of what happened last time, all without your conscious consultation.

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### RELEVANT DIFFERENCES

Solutions and opportunities are within our reach, but we give up because our strategies are rooted in irrationality. They were never going to work, so don't feel bad that they didn't.

I recall a sweltering summer day at home, with my mother leaning into the refrigerator to cool off. I decided to tell her how hard the compressor was working and how much heat it was producing. I asked her to please shut the door for everyone else in the house.

My science teacher might have been proud that I listened in class, but my mother wasn't appreciative. This began a long personal journey on how to share information with people without it backfiring on me.

It was one of the lessons I learned the hard way in life about the things you are not supposed to say. If you do, you will trigger violence in your direction. Either you need to be taught, or it will be from someone who isn't trying to teach you anything but acting out of pain, fear, or loss. It's funny how it feels the same.

The person with good intentions, the person with the triggered baggage, and I all define violence in our own ways. Still, we must create a universal understanding and appreciation of accountability to eradicate it. After all, it doesn't do any good if I point the finger at someone who thinks they are wearing the white hat.

What you notice today might be a difference between what you say and what you feel. What you say because you think you should say it, and what you'd say if there were no consequences. How much of you is going along with the flow, and how much of that is rational?

### THE POWER OF RESPONSE

Anger is a motivating emotion. It can motivate you toward immediate revolution or toward tiny changes that add up over time, like compound interest. The former is a reaction; the latter is a response. It's not the emotion that's "bad," it's how you use it. To respond is to contain and focus that anger until your plan is crystal clear and bulletproof.

To respond is to feel the fear and do it anyway. When you have thought about the plan in advance and evaluated and mitigated the risks, you can do new and different things, and can re-label "fear" as "excitement."

As someone who was raised to think and vote Liberal, it's the adult me who changed my vote. At the very least, make sure you do some homework before you vote because the government has more impact on your life than you might believe.

When you discover the truth about why you are making the decisions you are making, you either are at peace with it or you change it. One tiny little change that changes everything from a life of reaction to living with conscious responses to the truths you've accepted.

## What Could Be

You can master your emotions. Emotions are chemicals that dissipate. If you can take deep breaths, count, divert your attention, or do whatever it takes to outlast those seconds, you'll start breaking the cycle. Learn to surf through temptation and practice self-acceptance in the process. Don't judge; notice and go on.

Jumping is possible when you spot a better bowl – first, be sure it's not all a trick of recruitment, a spin on the facts, or a misperception of the totality of the future that's about to unfold.

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### THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

In a manufacturing environment, I applied my newfound skills with variation to produce charts showing that one shift performed significantly better than others. While this was part of the gossip, it was unionized, and I was on the other side. In many ways, this was a landmine that no one had dared to step on, but everyone knew it was an issue.

I dared. I printed out the data and pinned it to the breakroom wall.

Not the boardroom wall, but the breakroom wall. Informing the union is entirely different from telling the management.

Reality ensued. The worst-performing shift was angry, and they had reasons to explain why. The best-performing shift polished their fingernails on their puffed-out chests and were happy to explain why. I eagerly took notes and swapped sides like a journalist.

Upper management wanted to tell me what to do next, having just informed me that I was doing something of consequence. Unfortunately, upper management wanted to know who to blame. To upper management, graphs are not conversation-starters but things you produce only after you have a position. I disagreed, and my actions spoke louder than my words ever could.

After listening silently and patiently to the directives and orders from upper management, I went back to my office and exploded. My success cost me my freedom? Now that what I'm doing is working, they want to tell me what to do? Do they not hear the Catch-22 of it all?

My manager listened silently and patiently, taking lots of notes, and said, "Now, what are you going to do about it?"

It is the perfect question to swap a psychological reaction for a conscious response, a reminder that no one took my permission away; they were trying to trick me into giving it away.

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### THE REALITY OF CONSEQUENCE

When everyone operates on what they know is accurate, rather than what they know they can get away with or what they can force others to do, then we will have people prepared when speed, complexity, and abundance no longer allow for the old ways. We can have people acting with accountability, regardless of their title or position in the hierarchy.

That's what I propose. The idea splits audiences down the middle: those who are obedient, dutiful, and loyal, and want to be told what to do, and those who are strong-minded, principled, and ambitious, and enjoy the chance to prove what they can do. It's a polarizing idea that perfectly suits my strategy.

## What Could Be

If people don't understand the consequences of their actions, and I choose to spend time with them, the risks they allow into their lives become blind spots for me. Before letting someone have my back, I must know they can manage it. Otherwise, I get shot in the back, and an apology will do me no good.

It's happened. It was a game of laser tag disguised as a team-building event. I was partnered with someone who told me, "I used to be an assassin, you know!"

Perhaps as such, he thought it fitting to tell me about our strategy. Not ask, tell.

His actions indicated that he did not think of me as a partner, an attitude I was aware of from the first question he'd asked me in the interview—just one red flag.

Unfortunately for me, the game had already started. While he drew diagrams on the wall, I was left without any moves, then promptly shot in the back and eliminated.

Excellent strategy, I have to say, as I never even raised my weapon. Or said a word.

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### THE PROPAGATION OF CULTURE

In my life's journey, I stepped out of the land of machines and into the land of man without realizing the enormity of that step.

In the land of machines, the powers that be complained that two of us were always together. Our agreement was that we'd do my job in the morning and his in the afternoon. Our skills offset each other; his union status made my life easier, and my management status made his life easier. It was efficient and effective, and completely unwanted.

In the land of man, teams were everywhere; the company of the same people was inescapable, the composition seemingly random without much consideration for the people who composed them.

Teams are typically governed more by culture than procedure. Culture is the stories that are shared and the morals that they represent. It's finding out that the organization has one policy but that your manager doesn't support it; it's discovering who is entitled to what privileges and why, who got fired and why, although that information requires whispered gossip.

On the team survey, I answered accurately but stood alone. If I scored 0 out of 10 for every response, a colleague rated 10 out of 10. I called her and asked why everyone on the team had mispronounced her name. Everyone gave her a whole extra syllable. Where does that show up in her assessments of the team performance that she'd rated as perfect? Should I mention that she'd told me she put up with it because she gave up? She gave up on being treated with respect. 10 out of 10 - now that's perfection. Perfect what? You can decide.

The truth was that we weren't a team – we merely all reported to the same person, but our results were individual, not interdependent.

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### THE MASQUERADE OF OPTIMISM

Silence masquerading as rosy optimism doesn't compensate for the daily realities that hurt you and the team's performance.

## What Could Be

To me, it seemed that teams were inescapable weapons of mass destruction. They kill ideas, accountability, and people like me. But in most organizations, there is no way to compare team output with individual production.

In my experience, problem-solving is most effective when led by individuals, rather than teams. However, we can't do everything alone, so at some point, businesses must deliberately foster collaboration.

Crucial details like that matter because a team that isn't a team will never function as one, and no laser tag in the world will solve that problem.

Now, I use words like bullets, with a laser scope of an assassin who will not tolerate collateral damage. Although I am most accurate and precise with a bow and arrow, it's a cumbersome weapon best suited to more spacious battles.

If you aren't supposed to bring a knife to a gunfight, then you need to get your voice heard if you want to beat the bullies, abusers, and oppressors of the world. They win by simply assuming you aren't going to say anything. Lucky for you, you learned a thing or two about how to spell the word think. But don't get tricked into the battle; win the war.

I don't want to be moody around the people who made me miserable – I want to determine who did what and act accordingly. The former is passive-aggressive, and the latter is radically assertive.

They say that sticks and stones will break your bones, but words will never hurt me; names will never break me. Such lies they spread, and in doing so, they seem to permit those with vile words and the intent to harm others.

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### THE PRECISION OF COMMUNICATION

If words didn't harm, then people wouldn't be scared of what I might say. If names didn't break, the labels I put on a chart shouldn't lead to a conversation about who to fire. They fear they went along with things that are now making them look dumb, and it's all my fault for pointing it out.

Shoot the messenger. It's called the Semmelweis effect, and even if you eventually calm down and agree, expect the freakout, the violence, and the need for running shoes.

Words can heal when they start conversations. Names can build when they communicate strengths and highlight where this person is ideally placed.

My first day at the office was a firehose of a lesson in the red flags I'd ignored during the interview. As one person after another came to my cubicle to whisper stories of damage, revenge, and plots in play, I felt like a life raft, and I didn't want to drown.

To improve, I introduced them to "Now, Discover Your Strengths." As a team, we all did. I analyzed the results, which showed that one person's strength in one area would conflict with another person's strength in another area. With insight and foresight, it was no problem. For a couple of weeks, there was a radical improvement.

The manager became a green-eyed monster. She said, "You might as well work from home, or you will just keep looking for more problems to solve."

Studies indicate that content is not the king of communication. Body language is king, tone is queen, and words are mere serfs. People will tell you what they want you to think, while you might pick up something entirely different from their tone and body language, if you are present and paying attention.

## What Could Be

“No problem,” I agreed.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL MIND MASTERY

Freedom of voice results from rejecting psychological reactions in favor of a conscious response.

When you have an opinion about reality, your mind distorts what you perceive through it. Observing your behaviour, you notice a pattern of triggers and reactions; some call it personality. Others remind you that it's just your reality.

To catch your editor in action, you observe what you do and expect about how the future will unfold and how the world works. You apply everything you learned in art class about seeing what is there and everything you learned in history class about having captured only one perspective out of a possible 360. Maybe two, if your parents disagree and you listen to both.

Meditation and mindfulness offer opportunities to observe how you've behaved, how others may have influenced you, and to identify areas where you can turn predictable into preventable. Both give you the time, distance, and ability to edit the stories that your narrator is telling, because not all of them are helpful or true.

Daniel J. Boorstin has said, “The greatest obstacle to discovery is not ignorance – it is the illusion of knowledge.”

There is a distinction between bragging and complaining, which can sound the same. You know the difference when you try to help the first people, and nothing happens. They don't read the book, meet the person, or get off the couch. The second group can't jump at the shortcut fast enough.

A positive 'no' opens up possibilities for a better future and respects the other party. When we disagree poorly, it's an attack on the other person, and it hurts the relationship. A positive 'no' gains power when it comes from a place of an authentic 'yes' to something truer, more significant, or bolder.

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### A SINGLE SET OF WINGS

In 2010, Red Bull's Formula One team tested a new front-wing design at Silverstone. They brought two sets with them, one for each of their drivers, Mark Webber and Sebastian Vettel. After several practice sessions and extensive data collection, the engineers determined that the wing provided an advantage.

Then, Vettel smashed his off. The remaining set was intact and installed on Mark Webber's teammate's car. With two drivers and only one set, who should take advantage of the wings?

As trained scientists and engineers, they looked to the data. Christian Horner, the team principal, states that the decision was based on the team's championship position, qualifying times, and driver feedback. His goal was to select the driver who would give the team the best advantage to win the most points.

Red Bull gave Vettel the wings. At the time, he ranked 12 points above Webber in the championship, mathematically closer to the first-place podium. They also claim he drove microseconds faster in qualifying. However, that edge is easily explained by the difference in the fuel loads they carried. Gas is heavy.

Webber had a predictable reaction, broadcasting his emotional response over team radio. I was right with him. I remembered the day my younger brother ate all my Halloween candy, which I had strategically hidden under my pillow in the top bunk. Everyone laughed when he couldn't get down and was caught chocolate-handed. Everyone? Not me. Humorous wasn't the way I saw it.

## What Could Be

With the wings for the final qualifying round, Vettel scored the coveted pole position for race day. Without them, Webber qualified second and would start beside Vettel on the grid.

Fifty-two laps later, it was Webber crossing the finish line first. Over the radio, he asked, "How's that for number two?"

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### A COCKTAIL OF EMOTIONS

The win earned Webber 25 points. Vettel came in seventh, earning only 6 points. With those results, Webber was number two to no one, having launched himself firmly into first place in the overall championship. How *is* that for a number two?

Whatever tiny advantage the wings provided, Webber didn't need them anyway. He required his emotions to create the fierce drive and focus to win. Or rather, the dose of adrenaline that is released by anger, anxiety, worry, or fear.

Adrenaline increases muscle tension and speeds up breathing. I'm sure they are developing the tech and apps now. Still, data-based decisions don't work when the targets are living, thinking and innovating human beings who will never fit your models of rationality, logic, and the things you can measure.

When it's all about people, you can't just throw facts and figures around.

F1 is motorsport's best. They are at the forefront of technology. Budgets are not an issue. Tiny fractions that make a difference are an issue.

Yet as the Red Bull wing drama unfolded over the three days, opinions and bets circulated across the internet, on team radio, and in fans' living rooms. I bet on Webber, being a number two myself. Some people were as straight-faced as the Red Bull engineers.

It was a duality that separated people who lived and believed in two different realities: one, the world in which you are supposed to do what you are told, and therefore, people behave, I behave, and the data will be the best way to go. These are the believers in the rational world, the old world, people who bottle their emotions, ignore their intelligence, and follow protocols, expectations, and leaders.

Data seems to work until it all explodes in your face.

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### WORKING WITH EXPLOSIVES

At DuPont, I learned that if you are going to make explosives and want to hire employees, then the side of the factory facing your house should be made of wood, while all others are brick. Your mistakes are your risk, and you will bear the brunt, making you worthy of the title 'superior'. These actions spoke louder than words that safety matters.

After engineering, I learned the concept of "Six Sigma" and earned the designation of "Black Belt." It involved utilizing data, advanced statistics, and predictive modelling techniques to inform quantitative business decisions. In theory, it works perfectly.

## What Could Be

In machines, data-driven decisions work because the processes are tangible, repeatable, and permanent. We can measure anything if we disagree about the quality, speed, or cost. Sometimes we can take it to a lab and check it all day, and the person doesn't matter. As a young female engineer, I could use data to make a point.

When it is determined that the person matters, we make it right. The short person can't do it, so remove the height requirement. Since the forgetful person forgot, we created a checklist. Since the distracted person wasn't paying attention, we added alarms and lights to help them stay focused. And on it goes.

Data doesn't work when you leave the machines behind and venture into service. In this land of men, a woman told me about when she removed her jacket. What was once tangible, permanent, and repeatable has now become invisible, fleeting, and unique – impossible to measure, prove, or explain, so you find ways to trick minds.

Suffice it to say that data didn't work everywhere, but neither does the jacket trick, should you need to try it. It's a business development idea, but to me, boob jobs don't qualify as progress.

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### A MINEFIELD OF AMBIGUITY

In math, your teacher marks your paper, and if they dislike you, you can still pass the course and even excel in it. In other classes, the teacher had better get his apple every morning, however he'd like it served, because his options for retaliation are endless.

That apple-demanding teacher doesn't have to be out to get kickbacks or immoral. The grey zone might be tiny, but it's there, and it's where bias plays out. Parents have favourites, even while trying to ensure that their actions are fair and equal. The truth is evident to a casual observer.

We treat other people as we think they invite us to treat them, regardless of what is logical or our articulated principles.

In Six Sigma, data is used to minimize sources of variation. There are only six ways things can be different: Man, Measurement, Material, Machine, Mother Nature, and Methods. If you think Mother Nature can't be influenced, that's where time comes into play, and time changes everything.

As a society, we seem to have agreed that the good guy finishes last. Not even a second. Last. That's what we say, and why would we brag about that? People can be bribed with money, status, and several other things, which means that the good guy doesn't always win, but we are all waiting for our turn to exploit the system.

My time spent at that altar of logic says no. 'No' was my first word, and I am good at using it. I have several shades of 'No.' Here, I mean the one that means I am not changing my mind, and neither is the rock-solid foundation of science upon which it is based. The silver screen agrees with me: the good guy should prevail.

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### PRODUCTS OF CONDITIONING

Laws that govern society are opinions formed and passed by people, not physical laws; however, we often seem to forget that they are opinions, not absolute knowledge. What starts with an opinion can be a permanent fact of life, while what's morally wrong in one culture can be perfectly acceptable in another.

Like divorce, it starts with a law that gives words to an agreement previously unspoken. That tacit agreement then instantly changes as the game becomes documented. New strategies are devised. Then, we worry about who wins the game and forget about the initial partnership.

## What Could Be

Divorce is created to provide an escape for those who justly deserve it. What was once justice is now a function of who is richer, more intelligent, or stronger. As I learned from a mechanic dealing with rust daily, “No such thing as an ironclad prenup.” As I learned from everyone who has divorced, “Only the lawyers win.”

Opinions are not knowledge but powerful products of conditioning that can't be ignored or taken lightly. Power is something to learn to control, like the hero in the movie who always seems to find someone to show them how and give them a safe place to practice. Since then, the internet has emerged, where people use words as weapons to express their opinions.

We enjoy discussing ourselves, our opinions, and our experiences. More people are blogging than there are readers for all that content. Songs get uploaded and are never heard. We buy books not to read them, but to be the kind of person who owns them, because we think we already agree with whatever they have to say. Take it from a writer: Buyers are few and far between, but readers like you are rare and remarkable.

### DISMANTLING THE SILENCE

When you are an employee, someone else rules your world. If you have to swallow your words to keep your job, that's exactly what people do. I'm the one who gets sent in and makes a massive difference because I can dismantle the silence and translate it into acceptable problems, emotion-free root causes, and practical solutions.

When everyone is “just doing their job,” the customer doesn't get served. I've heard every excuse as an explanation, including, “Well, that's the customer's fault, and they'll learn to come back later.”

It's a red flag for your business when you blame those who have given you money. After all, you took their money and called them customers, but no one wants to be pointed at and blamed for things that had nothing to do with them.

If I've liberated employees' voices, I've also crushed them. I was once an employee with bills to pay, and I know firsthand. I can tell you that once voices are crushed, they don't always come back. Some words are lost forever.

Peter Schjeldahl wrote that he was left deeply confused because he was unaware of being the rich kid and didn't understand that both his bullies and his suck-ups weren't reacting to his true self. His mother didn't explain it: “Because people shouldn't be like that.”

Oh, but they are, and we mistakenly refer to the latter as friends, employees, or students. Like my colleague with the name that no one got correct, optimism in the face of facts doesn't help anyone.

We do it with books, covers, clothes, people, skins, and souls. We make conclusions based on appearances and think we're so smart and correct. When you join Toastmasters, people don't get the opportunity to dismiss you so easily. They have to hear you speak.

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### PUBLIC SPEAKING

As a Toastmasters participant, I did not enjoy my first speech. The provided topic for everyone's first speech is an icebreaker, five minutes to introduce yourself.

As a private person, I realized I had an orientation away from people for a reason. Why would I want to share fodder for them to aim at me? Couldn't I talk about anything else? I got it done, if not well.

The second speech was slightly improved, but by my third speech, everything was different.

## What Could Be

In the third speech, I stumbled upon a topic I wanted to discuss, and it wasn't about me, my opinions, or my stories – it was about everyone else and what we shared in common. After that, I wanted to sign up for all the speeches, seek out microphones everywhere, and possibly turn professional.

With that newfound experience and perspective, I withdrew from Toastmasters. Job done.

With newfound glory, I finally felt what it meant to identify as an extrovert. Being social might be about the audience, the subject, and the preparation.

When you learn the word 'lesbian' because kids on the playground are pointing at you, talking about your mother, and whispering behind your back, you start conceptualizing the meaning of serenity and authentic selves.

As in, "God grant me the courage to change the things I can, the serenity to accept the things that I cannot, and the wisdom to know the difference."

In Steve Jobs's 2005 commencement speech at Stanford, he said, "Don't be trapped by dogma, which is living with the results of other people's thinking."

Because you can't choose your family, you can select the company you keep, the books you read, and the fingers you point. Perhaps you can even choose your kid's school.

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### PRODUCTIVE CONFLICT

Achieving a voice of your own is a result of social interaction. Family and parents have a significant influence, but so do friends, societal trends, and even popular culture, all of which shape identity.

You know as much what you are as you know what you are not through the mirror of these external influences. It's books and people who show you who you are. You know what you agree with and what you want to learn more about.

Books are merely other people in a condensed, edited, and accessible format. They are written by people, for people, about experiences they had or lessons they learned that they thought were worth sharing with others in the best way they knew how.

Nowadays, marketers are all about branding and getting you to develop a personal one. A personal brand is an identity. The problem is that brands are permanent, and people are not. Players, owners, and fans come and go, but the team's brand stays the same. If you try to fake it until you make it, you may never be able to remove the dings on your reputation.

Your sense of self is mutable, and you should maintain that flexibility with age if you'd like to mature and not merely pass the days getting older. A healthy sense of self constantly changes and adapts to new experiences and information. Even at sixty, people have shown the ability to transform successfully, according to the Mills Longitudinal Study at the University of California, Berkeley.

Security is good until it becomes a cage. Encouragement and reinforcement enable individuals to emerge from an identity transformation with a sense of independence and control. Without that support, false preferences might mask buried uncertain desires.

### ASSUMED PREFERENCES

Our opinions help us navigate a world of ambiguity, but problems arise when we forget that they are mere placeholders for facts yet to be revealed. Advice to follow your heart and find your passion is often misunderstood and misappropriated when baseless, rigid opinions accompany it.

Assumed preferences might have been genuine once, but you have more information, can guess better, or may have learned. They might have been wishes others had for you, but not your own. Or maybe you checked that box off the list and haven't yet found the next one. If you've used up all your creative energy and intellect and are still stuck, it can feel like you will never get out.

Science suggests that reflecting in the third person helps you learn the lessons of your experiences appropriately by creating distance. Try this technique if you can solve everyone's problems but your own. Look in the mirror, listen to yourself, and take your good advice.

Until then, pay attention to your vocabulary and the ideas you give power to with the words you choose to use, the things you say about yourself, and the people you choose to populate your inner circle. Edit as required.

From stress to boredom, overwhelm, and frustration, you feel it before you know it. The question is, are you in touch with what you were thinking when that emotion arose?

Making time to reflect is a worthy and productive use of time. When we sit down with pens and paper to strategize our goals, we are fixated on the future, but deliberately in control of the experience. Talking or journaling about past events helps us make sense of the past purposefully. Without that work, suppressed experiences have the annoying habit of popping up unexpectedly and unwelcomely.

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### REQUESTING FAVORS

Sometimes, getting unstuck is as easy as being open to receiving help. While we are often eager and happy to help others, asking for help can be a difficult task.

Adam Alter explains in *Drunk Tank Pink* that environmental cues can trigger unconscious behaviour. When those cues prime values of freedom and independence, we are less likely to ask for help.

Ben Franklin advised asking for favors rather than assistance because it tricks people into thinking you are worthy of progressively larger favors in the future.

At Dupont, they told me that my inability to ask for help would eventually hinder or stall my career. I shelved the comment, thinking I would ask for help when I needed it, and only then. Thank you very much.

Until then, I will not disclose vulnerabilities, as it would give the competition an edge. It was a perfect mindset for the service industry, where such proof is never found, yet managers love to force this kind of intimacy, hug it out, and call themselves a team. Undesired feedback is so easy to dismiss.

Being able to ask for help is like a superpower. Spencer West discusses the challenges of asking for help as he climbed Mount Kilimanjaro despite being without legs. Caroline Casey outlines how difficult it was, and she is legally blind. Our reactions to either would be, "Well, of course, I'll help you!" Asking felt hard for them, and we didn't understand their reservations.

## What Could Be

When you can ask, you can take whatever you do to the next level. You can solve more complex problems, connect with new people, and boost productivity. Like all extreme benefits, however, they don't come without a cost, and that cost is the vulnerability that demands your courage.

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### UNPACKED BAGGAGE

Until something collapses—the marriage, corporate career, daily habits. Perhaps we are too busy to notice that nothing changes outside the daily noise. When something breaks, rush in with the replacement spouse, career, home, hobby, or hero. Check and move right along.

You've also met others who cling to a definition of themselves despite the apparent damage it causes. They tell you in advance how they will hurt you, how they've hurt everyone, and how they will continue to do so.

Maya Angelou said, "When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time." Don't hope for better, or explain it away. Take the facts for what they are.

Maybe you change jobs, and while there is a sudden, drastic change, it's not long before you are settled into a routine and drive to work without remembering the commute. Ah, there you are, the same old you. Was that what you wanted? At some point, denial doesn't work anymore.

When that finally happens, you must live through the experience you have been stuck with, intellectually, emotionally, or instinctively. You open that baggage to find out why it matters to you so much before you can finally put it down.

With praise and punishment, or avoidance and lack of accessibility, parents unavoidably leave emotional baggage in their children, as there are pros and cons to every model attempted throughout the generations. As an adult, it's baggage you must unpack.

Personal growth involves the discipline of listening to yourself when you have time to hear, and scheduling it so that you aren't trying to capture your attention when it should be focused on the moment. If the best ideas come to you in the shower, consider that it's because it's the only moment that you aren't distracted.

### LABELLING FOR EMPOWERMENT

I let my friend ride around with a yellow underbody protector for two years and waited until the sled was sold before I shared the meaning of a "yellow belly" with hoots of laughter.

Sir Ken Robinson said that the school system produces graduates who live in their upper left brain, slowly prioritizing and valuing analysis, data, and logic. An entire population seems to need to reconnect with their bodies and core intelligence, as they may be ignoring vast amounts of information.

My professional career was evidence that I had successfully converted. Then I had to learn to meditate, practice yoga, and engage in other activities to remember how to reconnect with my body and tune into my inner voice of truth, my entire being, and anything resembling intelligence.

Emotions are information. They are not good or bad, but feedback lets you know where and when to direct your attention. When you can pay attention as the moment demands, you can easily and always make better decisions.

Start by editing your narrative toward positive labels or more specific ones. Drop the word "nice" as I've tried to, because it doesn't really say much.

## What Could Be

Your future actions will hinge on your choice of vocabulary. Science proved that labels matter to the degree of success in life and your concept of free will.

If your stomach is flipping around, don't think of yourself as nervous. Think of yourself as excited, remind yourself of the proof that you are ready for this moment, and you will leave that yellow belly at home. Mind your labels, as your emotions are complex and you have a choice.

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### FROM FOLLOWERS TO LEADERS

It takes conscious intervention to rise above the ordinary and see past the labels and expectations. To use your consciousness to question yourself about how you label others, what you expect from them, and how they treat you is to raise your standards for relating.

When you don't, you live in a state of constant survival, constantly protecting yourself from how others might hurt you – in pure survival mode with sources of stress unconscious to you.

When it's gone, you feel light giddiness that we call a light-hearted feeling. With light in your heart, you choose power over force, soul over ego, and the ability to thrive instead of accepting survival.

Red Bull engineers know drivers are moody, and everything changes after the first corner. What do you already know while acting like you don't?

It's time to start noticing the influence of emotions, people, progress, and the environment, and stop acting like data, expectations, education, and personality are so easily labelled.

On a Skidoo, I know that if I'd only ridden for twenty minutes at a time, I never would have found my groove or known I had one. During those first few minutes, I think about how cold something is as I scan my body and muscles from head to toe. Finally, I get in the groove where I forget where my body ends, and the Skidoo begins.

Riding became meditative. All that silence and white space was an invitation to everything I was trying to actively deny, suppress, and forget.

After 30,000 kilometers, I finally saw the grid, with x, y, and z axes, parabolas, and intersecting lines that come together, multiply, and divide.

Instead of seeing sham, drudgery, and broken dreams, I know the universe unfolds as it should, with miles of fair warning.

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### DESIGNING ENVIRONMENTS

Design is a reliable tool you can use to guide your instinctual behaviour.

Just like you take sidewalks, highways, and bridges, you can plan your environment to help you get where you are going faster, no matter where you are destined.

Engineers use design to ensure people are protected in panic-inducing situations. They ensure that doors open outward. Policymakers ensure that exit signs are well-marked and share a universal symbol. Some are red, while others are green. Some are words, while others show a picture. That's just in my city. I'm sure variation only expands the greater the geography.

## What Could Be

Maybe there's been a time when you didn't know what it was, but suddenly, there is a space.

Marie Kondo suggests restricting your environment to only items that bring you joy. For some people, the minimalism of environmental triggers can be overwhelming for their minds. Suddenly, white space becomes everywhere, and your brain treats it like a whiteboard for everything you're trying to suppress.

For me; it was the snow-white landscape, forced to process my thoughts because there was no getting up, no distractions, and no avoiding it. Triathlons have a reputation for attracting contestants who have a lot of inner work to do.

While practicing biking, swimming, and running, inner work is an integral part of the game. You have no distractions for those hours. You can't keep your mind occupied with music, scenery, or sensations for long. At some point, you notice your inner voice and decide to fire that coach and get a better one.

Psychologist Philip Zimbardo discovered the extent to which the environment can dictate behavior. Over just a few days, well-behaved students were transformed into seasoned correctional officers and helpless, hopeless prisoners, a fate chosen at random before the experiment began.

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### COLLABORATIVE OFFICES

Steve Jobs used design to break people out of silo-based collaboration. Sure, every company has a shared cafeteria, but so did high school, and cliques endure. Getting people to interact is a design trick.

In the office, everything is fleeting, invisible, and unique. There is no proof of anyone's argument. When discrepancies arise, debate ensues, and hierarchy prevails. Even things like policies are mere pieces of paper that get replaced when the right person catches a whim.

Leaders needed a solution to this echo chamber of doom. We all want our sandbox in the collective playground, also known as roles.

Role design is part of the solution to this collaboration problem when the stakes are high—livelihoods and reputations—and when we recognize that people are motivated by two opposing interests: to conform to the group and to pursue their agenda. Unfortunately, all the hard work of good design is undone with “all other duties as assigned.”

Role descriptions define our boundaries and form a legal basis for the working arrangement. Hiring managers use role descriptions to attract individuals capable of performing the required work. Then, they must interview them to determine if they are capable and, more importantly, fit.

Again, design comes to the rescue. We design questions in advance to extract the information we need while avoiding being tricked by thoughtful preparation and answers that sound good. We use matrices to compare and contrast candidates, quickly identifying the ideal candidate, what types of bonuses they prioritize, and the immediate onboarding and upskilling plan they require.

A business that runs like clockwork runs like clockwork, like clocks do—with innovative design nestled between clear intention and precise execution.

### PRIMED INDEPENDENCE

In one experiment, students were given complex problems to solve. The experimenter explained the task, mentioned they would be available to help, and then left the room. Some students were in the presence of an unmentioned pile of Monopoly money on the corner of the desk, while some were not.

After 4 minutes, 75% of those not in the presence of the fake cash asked for help, whereas only 35% of those in its presence did.

Seeing money, even fake money, enforces your independence, and you ignore the proffered help.

Jennifer Winter at *The Muse* writes about her journey from thinking of help as a four-letter word to recognizing the power of asking for help. We believe that struggle will be rewarded and working long days to finish, but bosses don't want to see that. Their response is more likely to be, "Why didn't you come to see me sooner?"

The hero mentality rewards individual heroes, and no one wants to be weak or rude. Wayne Baker, in the Harvard Business Review, states that asking for help is "often perceived as a sign of weakness or ignorance."

In every relationship, there is an emotional bank account, and reciprocity is the expectation, but just like Enron accountants, some people are crafty with their ledgers.

Winter writes that you don't want to ask for help only to be asked, "Did you try X?" and realize you haven't. Maybe their asking for help is passing the buck; laziness and exploitation are a part of life.

Asking for help is a superpower, and like a comic book hero, you will start to see that the real hero isn't the one who can do it alone but the one who can bring as many people along as possible without stepping on or harming anyone.

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### DIRECTED ANGER

My second year snowmobiling, I told a group where we were headed the next night. I overheard him say, "She'll never make it today; it took us two days to get there."

Around what we call 'the witching hour,' I checked in and snapped a photo of the Chic-Choc peaks from my balcony. I sent it with the caption, "How's the drive, boys?"

Never say never, James Bond said. Anger is a motivating emotion. Don't judge it. Contain it. Direct it. And then win it and take the victory lap. I took a cue from Mark Webber and used emotion for good.

Actually, it was a really fun day. That anger evaporated as soon as my intentional mind took over.

Like Webber, focus and an "I'll show them" mindset might be your most reliable path to success. Of course, you'd have to know what you want out of life, and that part might not be so prominent. Sometimes I see it as my job to stand up for women and girls everywhere.

I can do it, just like Rosie the Riveter. When that became inconvenient, did you expect us all to go back to thinking and behaving as we had before the war effort? Unfortunately, women wanted to remain in the workforce and found themselves torn between two attractive choices.

## What Could Be

Choosing to respond to a challenge with well-directed anger is better than self-directed anger. It shows up in what you call yourself. When I hear someone say, "I'm such an idiot," my usual response is, "Don't you dare talk to my friend that way." Now that you are my friend, I beg the same of you, even if I can't hear what goes on in your head.

### 3. FREEDOM OF PURSUIT

Freedom of pursuit is rejecting intellectual innocence in favor of conscious inquiry. If you've ever found yourself going through the same experiences, while everything about it has changed, then your patterns are in charge, not your mind. Uncomfortable situations will arise, and if you do what you've always done, you will get the same outcomes you've just shown that you've outgrown.

Finding your own pursuit is not just about knowing where you are headed, but being conscious of the complete reality of that destination, for there are always requirements and drawbacks.

In 1974, Noelle-Neumann postulated the spiral of silence theory: our willingness to openly express our opinion depends on how we perceive the public's opinion. If we don't express our views, we hope others will assume we comply. Albert Einstein said, "If A is a success in life, then  $A = x + y + z$ . Work is x, y is y, and keeping your mouth shut is z."

The default mode of pursuit is looking for proof to support your claim. The gift of consciousness is taking the higher road, asking how you might be wrong, and acknowledging your mistakes. It intentionally looks for evidence that you might be harmful; sometimes, you can't find any. That's when you know you're right and that confidence is unwavering and strong.

No matter your pursuit, your journey is one of continuous learning. Asking questions about the unknown, instead of looking for proof of what is already known to exist. It's taking the adventure rather than the well-travelled path. With conscious inquiry, your gifts are curiosity, openness, and bravery to venture into the ambiguity.

Consciousness breaks habits, not willpower. Shed light on the facts that break the ties that bind, whether personal, societal, or global.

#### THE BULL MOOSE AND REPETITIVE LOOPS

Most people don't know that you will walk in a circle if you get lost in the woods. A large, imperfect circle, but a circle. Moose do it. It takes them about two days. That's the secret to moose hunting. Find one, mark his circle, and then be there at first light on the first day because, like parade day, you won't be the only one scoping for the best spot on a day that comes but once a year, and in reality, once in a lifetime, in this current points system.

Getting lost in loops happens. Being trapped by feelings and unprocessed events is far too easy, but when you know better, you do better. Time alone heals nothing.

It takes a compass to get somewhere, especially when you have a destination in mind. The same is true with your thinking. It takes having a process to follow so you don't get in a loop that goes around and around. With projects, you spend time making a plan, and then navigate reality with that plan in hand. In your life, you need goals and plans to accomplish them which will serve as your compass.

In a loop that goes around and around, there is the Earth itself, both as it spins and goes around the Sun. Yet, look closely, and notice the unpredictability within the charted loops, which may force you to adjust your thinking, upgrade your tools, and expand your comfort zone. Which loops are you continually going around, repetitive thoughts or things you tell yourself that keep you trapped in predictable discomfort?

May you upgrade your comfort zone to one that is genuinely comfortable, rather than familiar. Maintaining your composure and using your voice will make it far more manageable.

### THE FIRST FRAMEWORK

Part of my hunting course included language. If you are overheard saying certain things, people may form the wrong impression. Some of them even say, “If you want to eat meat, stop killing animals and get it from the grocery store like everyone else!”

When I went to work for Maple Leaf Foods, I realized the line between farming and hunting had become so thin that it had disappeared. If you want to eat meat, there’s a big if at the beginning of the sentence.

Hunters help maintain a herd displaced by society, where numbers must be carefully managed to make up for the land we’ve procured.

It’s one way to hunt by being where you know they will be. It’s another way to make them come to you. Fast forward through generations, and you get someone like me saying, “If you want to spend less time and money hunting, plant a farm, like mankind!”

Hunters and gatherers become farmers, and deer that come to eat your crops are a menace.

There are hierarchies and order, no matter where you go or what you do. Some are determined by birth, others by who arrived first – these are just two of many possible factors. Most of your time and effort will be spent on hierarchies, order, and your place within or outside them.

As I’ve learned, it’s better to be the hunter than the prey, and the best way to win is to know their game better than they know it. Look like a student while being a teacher, a follower while being a leader, and be a wolf in sheep’s clothing.

Don’t be the deer caught in the headlights.

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### AN INFECTED PERSPECTIVE

Language matters because it influences and controls others, if only through impressions. We are taught what labels to use and what emotions to attach to those labels. Some families call it stubborn and scorn, and others laugh and applaud the fortitude.

After all, we all innocently trust what we’re told and what we see, while some people learn that masks, lies, and secrets are the way to navigate life.

If we talk to a colleague who is feeling down, we sacrifice our current good mood. Consciously, we might join her on her level when we find out why she’s feeling that way, but it’s more unconscious and automatic than that.

It’s not just your empathy that leaves you feeling bad. You are built to mirror others, and are aptly named mirror neurons, which synchronize others’ expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements. When you mirror someone else’s actions, you trigger similar emotions within yourself.

Seeing someone smile at you will likely make you smile back due to the activation of mirror neurons and social norms of etiquette. Whatever works to make you happier, although it is much easier to catch and pass along negative emotions than it is to see and pass along positive ones.

What’s difficult is not passing along the negativity. When you’ve been wronged, you want to retaliate, and the desire is like a hot potato—you want to get rid of it immediately. Do it because it’s the right person, or don’t

## What Could Be

because you are more prominent, but do not contain it. Grow it and unleash it on someone smaller and unsuspecting. It's within your power to break the path of least resistance and prevent violence from contaminating the community.

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### AN UNADULTERATED NATURE

You are a catalyst in any situation – your presence alone makes things happen.

In chemistry, a catalyst speeds up a reaction. It might provide a surface area for a reaction to occur, much like rolling out a dance floor, or reduce the energy required to get things moving, much like putting Bruno Mars on stage.

When you come into contact with people, they are all affected similarly. It's your vibe or your affective presence. It isn't connected to your character traits: someone can be bubbly and cheery but consistently bring people down.

When people use the words "genuine" and "authentic," they think about the impact they consistently have on others. It's about you doing you.

Identities cause us to act. When scientists asked, "How important is it to you to be a voter?" they got 96 percent turnout, compared with 82 percent when asked, "How important is it to you to vote?"<sup>iii</sup>

In a way that is not confrontational at all, void of any attitude, and innocently curious, who do you think you are? If unsure, you can begin with the events you tend to set in motion.

We can instigate change. In my past corporate life, it was often characterized by red tape and bureaucracy. Empowering an employee means taking power from those who have more than they can use and giving it to those in the right place at the right time.

The #MeToo movement has exposed what might be only the tip of the iceberg of people who said no. When you say no and address the behaviour, you have no idea how many people you might be saving from future harm, who might be experiencing the same thing as you, and you have no idea.

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### THE EVIDENCE OF ALLEGIANCE

In 2001, I completed my corporate training. After all that work, risk, and ambiguous promises, I was supposed to be happy with a lateral transfer.

The only way I could compute that was the traditional story: wrong age, wrong gender. Plus, there was the long story I told myself about my unlikability. A mental loop of my mother slapping me across the face so hard it sent me tumbling down the basement stairs while saying, "No one will ever like you because you make everyone feel stupid."

Cue the newfound evidence of my repetitive program that told me it's a social world, not one of merit; it's about egos and feelings, not data and evidence. As Maya Angelou said, people remember how you make them feel – nothing else.

Like that, the 11 pages of options on Workopolis held better potential, each promising a fresh start, a new possibility instead of the loop of the same old, same old that I'd come to know so well.

## What Could Be

At the time, I thanked Jack Welch, who said, “If you want to save a million dollars a year, get a Black Belt on your payroll.” Compared to the salary, it was a no-brainer in terms of return on investment. Unfortunately, the proof across the Six Sigma industry didn’t materialize; no one falls for that line anymore.

I started to notice why. Other Black Belts would gather a bunch of certified experts, decide what the problem was, gather the data to prove it, and baffle the leadership with their newfound data presentation skills. With approvals granted, they would execute like a project, congratulate themselves on their hard work, and then wonder where the savings went.

Then, they would repeat the same cycle, chasing the expert’s opinion every time.

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### THE SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY

Most are happy to have rules, white coats and experts to follow. It liberates everyone from personal responsibility.

In 1961, Stanley Milgram demonstrated our willingness to relinquish power in his quest to understand how ordinary Germans could have committed such atrocities. Healthy, well-adjusted people were quite willing to inflict massive, even deadly, electric shocks.

Milgram’s experiment required participants to administer a memory test to an actor on the other side of the wall. When the answers were wrong, a person in a white coat would tell the participant to deliver a shock. For each incorrect answer, the dial went up 15 volts. The end of the dial was labelled “XXX.” At the researcher’s instruction, participants turned the dial to the end.

This person in a white coat was simply a “teacher”; this was merely an experiment with nothing at stake. Although some subjects were tormented and passive-aggressive with their actions, they followed through with the instructions.

By 1974, Milgram had replicated the results with the broader American public in 18 variations. Breaking authority, he found, takes seeing the effect of two other people with you, having to personally force someone to do it, or watching authority break down, such as watching an argument between two authority figures.

Another insight from Milgram’s experiment came later. When subjects objected but were told, “You must go on; you have no choice,” experiments terminated. Just priming a subject with the word ‘choice’ may have helped them realize they had one.

In the modern world, we’ve pushed as much discomfort out of our lives as possible, which has made us miserable and unhealthy. The long, slow drain of bland repetition and blind obedience drives us to seek excitement through our palate and full bellies, virtual worlds, and vicarious entertainment.

### THE POWER OF BALANCE

Sometimes, processes and over-governance are maintained and followed when rationality dictates rebellion. Older generations often say “they” instead of identifying the individuals who are accountable and able to navigate change.

Centralia, Pennsylvania, has been burning for over 50 years. While many factors could have prevented it from starting or spreading, bureaucracy would often hinder any resolution when it was identified as a crisis.

## What Could Be

Like many procurement departments, the city officials adhered to the standard three-bid process. In this instance, the competitive bid process took three precious months while the fire continued to burn and spread. By the time a contractor was selected, it was too late.

Bullies can use their opinions compellingly. Being able to boss people around thrills them, and they certainly seem to enjoy it – while it lasts. When leaders state an opinion, they challenge subordinates to disagree.

If you do, do it carefully.

As a child, I really wanted out of piano lessons. I didn't like them. I'd also seen a boy my age on the front page of the newspaper in front of a piano on a vast stage. I thought, whatever this is about, this is his thing, not mine.

On that swing, I begged for higher intervention, as I swung my heart out on a swing set. All of a sudden, a windstorm blew in a whirlwind, and when it was over, there was no more piano book where I'd left it. For some reason, having lost the book was the ticket out of lessons altogether.

With that experience, I read everything the library had on ESP, parapsychology, and related topics. Whether it was a coincidence or under my control, I wanted to know.

Real power is speaking last and cheering when you hear, "I don't know, but I will find out."

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### RESPONSIBILITY DILUTED

In the early 1980s, John Darsee fabricated data and published false studies. These publications carried not only Darsee's name but also those of prominent department heads. When the facts came to light, it was clear that people were being given credit for authorship without proper due diligence<sup>iv</sup>.

Introductory psychology textbooks eternalize the headline announcing the murder of Kitty Genovese. "37 Who Saw Murder Didn't Call the Police. Apathy at Stabbing of Queens Woman Shocks Inspector." Her attack lasted more than half an hour, and no one intervened to stop it<sup>v</sup>.

In 1964, this study laid the groundwork for the bystander effect. If other people are available to help, we assume someone else will intervene and give us permission to keep calm and carry on. Intervention requires effort, understanding the risks, and believing you can surmount them.

Imagine sitting in a room when smoke enters. When alone, researchers found that we report it 75 percent of the time. With three others, that propensity to report goes down to 38 percent. If those others don't seem to share our concern regarding the smoke, reporting drops to 10 percent<sup>vi</sup>.

Dilution of responsibility occurs even when those people aren't real but only imagined. When researchers primed participants with the presence of groups, participants showed greater affiliation with words such as "unaccountable." Even when the others cannot help, we excuse ourselves from doing so<sup>vii</sup>.

Empathy levels have declined over the past 30 years, particularly in the last decade<sup>viii</sup>. Adding fuel to the fire is the record level of self-reported narcissism<sup>ix</sup>. Empathy and understanding have limits, and supply seems to be dwindling while the need only increases.

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### POPULARITY PERPETUATED

If there's a reliable way we relinquish responsibility, it's when we choose what's popular.

## What Could Be

For things with intrinsic value, popularity is random, as demonstrated by a study involving over 14,000 participants and an artificial “music market.” While the worst songs rarely did well, and the best seldom did poorly, the performance of anything in the middle was anyone’s guess<sup>x</sup>. Early random advantage snowballs, but it could have been any decent song.

Studio executives, book publishers, and talent managers make their living on intrinsic value. They pick one and invest effort in strategizing to gain popularity, rather than focusing on initial quality.

The best will likely rise to the top, and the worst will likely sink to the bottom. For the majority, a meritocracy where quality and success are correlated is a myth. In the mainstream, it’s not what you know; it’s who you know. You can seek to meet the right people and craft an exemplary reputation, or you can be rare, remarkable, and unmistakably doing your best.

Herding behaviour occurs when we look to our peers to determine what to do, rather than independently seeking information and making an informed decision. We act like someone else did the analysis and can copy their answer.

Common-minded people coming together will solidify and move toward a more extreme point<sup>xi</sup>. As the group's opinion becomes clear, group members become more reluctant to bring up items of contradictory information. Instead, only additional supporting information comes to light. When we unthinkingly follow, bubbles form, and markets crash.

To break groupthink, simply referring to them as “people in a group” instead of “a group of people” liberates individuals to be as bright as they would be on their own<sup>xii</sup>.

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### FIERCE COMPETITION

If you are lucky enough not to have experienced it, people can turn into animals in meetings. Like watching National Geographic, all of a sudden, people start behaving to validate or change their status within the structure, earn allies, defend their lines, and protect their vital information.

Depending on the level of security, it can become quite intense. If jobs and livelihoods are in doubt, expect voices to rise, fingers to pound the air, and shoulders and chests puffed out to take up maximum space.

Some don’t even know they are doing it. Some do it preemptively, as if they expect the other side to do worse, so they bring their wickedest just in case. Some read Jordan B. Peterson’s first rule and think following the rules is a good idea.

To stand with such a posture because you read about it and are doing it is to use the force of will. One problem with doing that over time is the production of stress hormones because the heart and mind are not in agreement. There is a lack of coherence when using the current term.

A second problem is that it is an act of dominance. If I read Peterson’s rule and you did not, I will passively dominate you, and you will passively submit to me. That behaviour starts as rude and ends with oppression and violence when the oppressed finally fight back.

Today, it seems that everyone is dying to be heard. While everyone might want attention, not everyone has the emotional well-being, skill or resources to be competitive.

## What Could Be

Standing tall because you radiate calm confidence in your heart also means you have the compassion to pack it away when encountering a timid person, making you relatively rare and remarkable.

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### VILLAINOUS JUDGES

Each profession has a rank, an expected lifestyle, and an associated reputation. We don't choose our careers based on the activities we are best suited to perform, but rather due to the random opportunities and our preconceptions about them as they arise. We want to know who was right or wrong, good or bad, higher or lower.

We are constantly rating and ranking, and when Mark Zuckerberg harnessed this inner drive, he became a legend.

Judgment creates stress, boredom, and frustration because you are rallying against the way things are for a different way you wish they were. In short, you are fighting reality. When you let go of judgment, much of the noise of your inner voice disappears.

When you want to judge, look up, not down. Look up to mentors and people who have accomplished what you want to achieve, and judge what you need to do to make your reality match that future.

Judge for yourself what a better future would entail, what experiences you want to have, how to define success, and even if you feel what you think you feel. If you don't have a future that you are working toward, you need to discover it because if there are futures you don't want, it implies there is one you do. Virtuous dreamers take down villainous judges with grace and ease.

Inspect your preferences, and explain to yourself what's so bad about what you actively avoid to see if your case holds any merit. Emotional wellness requires tuning into your thoughts and feelings. You must know that you have a stance, an idea, and an opinion on a topic. It's paying attention so closely that you know the difference between aspirational truths, their truths, and your truth.

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### PEACE ENFORCERS

In my family, peace was something you kept, not created. Unfortunately, false harmony is not a valid form of peace.

False harmony is peace imposed rather than the result of a process that considers the needs of all involved and how best to serve them. It is moved in top-down hierarchies, where the one at the top tells you what it is, whether you agree or not. In fact, should you speak up to disagree, they might look straight at you and start speaking more forcefully. If you haven't heard, your opinion doesn't matter to them, and drowning you out is their goal.

Having a voice and using it isn't something people do. Some are shocked to hear that they are allowed to speak up. Some would say it's not their place – and sometimes they are right. Life may appear more straightforward when you go along with everything, do what you are told, and not complain, but how are you evaluating 'easier'?

For myself, there were decades between when I realized I had something to say and when I finally could say it. I wouldn't characterize any of those years as 'easy,' but in relative terms to the level of difficulty it was to go through the long process of discovery, there is a certain lack of effort that could be characterized as easy, but using the word 'lazy' would be more accurate.

Realistically, here's what happens with new ideas. You see, hear, or are alerted to something that feels like a shock and a sense of danger. However, it isn't because no one else acts as if anything is amiss. You are feeling one way,

## What Could Be

and your environment isn't providing you with a way to rationalize the emotion away. To this moment, pay all your attention.

### THE NATURE OF THE MAINSTREAM

Women don't ride. I saw the evidence myself in the lack of a wiper on my glove. If women can't wipe their visors, they must not need to see where they are going. Imagine the market if they did.

When everyone is a leader, the entire organization can respond with speed, complexity, and abundance. For the world to become that way, we need everyone to be a leader, regardless of job title, employment status, or citizenship.

For every strength, there is a way to use it for good and another way for evil. For instance, both Lex Luthor and Superman could be described as strategic. When my StrengthsFinder test revealed a strength of strategy, I showed it to my sister, who instantly said, "Manipulator!" Well, I hope not anymore. I can attest that we can use our strengths in various ways.

You don't even know your strengths until you notice that other people struggle where you don't. Or rather, you expect other people to accomplish what you know you can do, and when they fail, you think they are dumb, lazy or mean.

Imagine that the people you think are dumb, lazy, or mean are not; when you flip your perspective, you will see your own strength. Now, go love all those people for pointing out your genius.

Instead, you will be tempted to polish your weaknesses, do the work that feels difficult and requires effort, and work for every dollar you make. I did it with statistics and did a good job; now, what I do feels so much better.

The objective isn't to introduce flexibility but to maximize their use. When I say we need to optimize their use, imagine God standing beside you and saying, "I didn't give it to you to use it like that."

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### PASSIVELY INVISIBLE

Over the years, I've learned to keep a poker face and act entirely calm when I feel like the child watching the emperor parade naked down Main Street while everyone else is commenting on his clothes. Try not to laugh or show shock; instead, practice your poker face and ability to contain your emotions.

When I am called in, it is never the team performing poorly that does so. Let me say that again. Never. It is their manager. The person is unsatisfied with the results, and the explanations are starting to sound like excuses; time is running out. Not "help us," but "help them."

Helping people who don't want or think they need help is always my first trick—convincing them to let me. This happened three times at the end of a cross-country flight. The reality is, whoever I'm there to meet thinks I'm there to gather evidence to get them fired.

Initial conversations always include a discussion about how I know my job. If you know your job, we are set for success, because my job is not your job. If you don't know enough, I have nothing to work with.

This is about transparency and the courage to answer my questions as truthfully and honestly as possible. We both have mastered different aspects of life, and working together is the only way to win.

## What Could Be

Eventually, those looking for cost cuts realize they can axe both of us and be doubly ahead. Showing up is half the battle. Getting some of your opinion in the game makes it worth the sweat, and often, you can show them how to grow revenue instead of always looking for more sales and increasing the spending on marketing. Sometimes, they even listen.

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### SHOCKING DECLARATIONS

My mother told me that kids ruin your life, and I didn't feel the need to check for myself. I observed that it was a valid truth for her, discovering that many other moms would never admit it, even if they fully agreed. Daniel Gilbert studied it.

According to Gilbert, having kids ruins your happiness if you consider happiness to be the simple pleasure of enjoying yourself. Kids certainly will prevent you from self-indulgence 95% of the time, he says. However, if you define happiness as spending time doing something worthwhile, children can be your answer.

Having kids isn't the only way to spend time doing something worthwhile. Happiness is to dedicate your life to accomplishing something difficult.

Some people write books like my mom wanted to and didn't. Some people do both. The key is to know yourself and not to do anything because someone told you that if you did, an inevitable result would follow. What if they are wrong? There are few guarantees, and you only have one life to live.

Someone asked me, "Who will care for you when you are older?" We have an economy that's slowly but surely monetizing every relationship available, so save your money and spend it on the relevant professions if that's your concern. I've found that anchors of duty sink all relationships.

Indeed, if you expect so much from your kids, you may be unfairly putting pressure on them to make your life meaningful, like passing the buck forward. I've tried to network with adults who spent the entire time talking about their children and their associated accomplishments, not a word about themselves or the business they were supposed to represent.

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### EXPENSIVE ADVICE

Developing the courage to believe in your voice when it's been silent for so long comes with time, success, and practice—some things we actively avoid because someone said so. The difficulty is knowing what lore is and what advice is. To whom should you listen, even when it hurts, and whose hurtful words should you laugh at?

As human beings, we seek solace from ambiguity. Adopting best practices is easier, faster, and cheaper – until something better comes along.

The first time I went into business for myself, I handed over my entire business to other people. A career coach advised me to become a consultant; another handled my design and website, someone else set up my marketing materials, and yet another coached me on sales and delivery.

When I went out of business after three years, I discovered that everything about my experience was standard. There was nothing out of the ordinary about it; no one would have contradicted the advice I was given, yet it didn't hold water.

## What Could Be

Ten years later, I took an entirely different approach when I learned they were still giving the same advice but not telling people they were on a short-term doomsday trajectory. Why should you pay or get charged for advice that doesn't work?

Because what people buy is a lack of accountability. It's not my fault that the first business of mine went under; I had nothing to do with it. It was built for me when I needed it. However, I didn't know then what I know now. I wanted solace from doing the work myself, and that's exactly what I paid for. Laziness and a lack of preparation may lead to best practices, but they aren't ideal.

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### LIFE'S UNIVERSITY

When we adopt religious practices, we adopt a way of seeing the world and making sense of things we can't understand. The same is true for handing over our health to our doctor, our behaviour to our parents, and our willful trespasses as being beyond our control.

Adopting other people's answers unquestioningly or scratching the surface of why it's the answer will always bite you. It's because experts don't know and can't articulate anything. That's the nature of being an expert. It's become unconscious and automatic. Of course, they will answer your question and assume they have told you everything. You presume you heard everything and that you got the context right as well.

Ambiguity is only scary in your brain. In survival mode, your brain looks for things that might leap out and get you. When you turn off survival mode, ambiguity is a place to reflect and find the voice that is truly your own.

What you might label as adversity would serve you better if you named it life's university. People teach you who they are, but they cannot tell you who they are. Experience tells you how life works, science tells you what can be proven, and spirituality lets you connect the dots any way you want.

In the false harmony of a top-down hierarchy, people sought me out on my first day and shared their grievances and heroism with me. Their leaders tell me about their great engagement surveys, so I ask these people how they reply. "Are you kidding me? I know the right answers and how to protect myself." If you want the comfort of knowing what to expect, be assured that it may not be comfortable, but it will be familiar.

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### ASPIRATIONAL LEGACIES

Once, an HR manager told me about organizational values, to which an operations manager had to clarify: "They are more like ideals, not things we do." Everyone is continually operating under darn lies and statistics. Few know how to distinguish the three and deal with them appropriately.

That's how the truth hurts—the growing pains we experience from it. After that incident, I started writing everything that didn't make sense.

Within weeks, I developed a reputation for "always writing everything down," although no one was interested in what I wrote or why I did so. In one section of my notebook, there was a line down the middle of the page with "Things They Say" at the top of one side and "Things They Do" at the top of the other. Some pages were dedicated to individuals, others to departments, and all were committed to finding ways to experience less pain in my life. To see the truth and not get caught up in lies or fall for statistics.

## What Could Be

Lies are difficult to remember because they don't make sense, whereas the truth snaps into place as you've always known it. We communicate our hopes and ideals, but live by values and principles. If you believe what people say, you may often get blindsided.

Researchers have found that excessive Facebook use is linked to a decline in overall happiness. But are their lives as rosy as they look?

Rest assured, you can trust online profiles. Our profiles don't reflect our idealized selves; they reflect our true personalities<sup>xiii</sup>. While they may only show the shiny side of life, according to Sam Gosling, one of the researchers and authors of Snoop, they are the best source for accurately determining someone's personality.

Understand both for effective collaborations.

### THE POWER OF RADICAL RESPONSIBILITY

In 2004, I received a prognosis of blindness within 6 months. My doctor had explicitly said I would hand him my driver's license as his Christmas present. On my way home, I thought about driving home and how I wouldn't be doing that again.

At the time, I was working as an Innovation Project Engineer for a small company in rural northern Ontario. I was living off the grid on a lake in a park, where bears, raccoons, and moose were more prevalent than people.

To me, it was a hard-earned heaven. I thought I was thrilled. I found out my problem was categorized as a stress-related disease and realized that my body was anything but happy.

I sat with myself in something I call an inner board meeting. I asked myself, who was doing this and why? After many hours, maybe a few weeks, I had an insight.

With it, I got to work on a better solution. Going blind was solving a problem. What problem? What would be a better solution? It's a good thing that this was the root of my profession, always asking this of people who think I'm there to fire them. I'm just there to interfere with my questions of, "Why are you doing that? Why don't we try something else instead?"

Finally, with the sweat off my brow instead of my body doing it for me, the problem was solved, and I stopped the blindness in its tracks. Phew.

Emotional wellness involves cultivating an optimistic attitude; the only way to approach change is with a positive outlook. Loving is merely an action of pure interest and engagement, and it must start with you loving yourself enough to pay attention to the whispers of intuition.

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### FAVOR OR PUNISHMENT

You can think, "Why me?" and expect pity or compassion. Or you can think "Why me?" and expect Sherlock Holmes to provide some evidence from your past behavior, clinical and factual, without judgment, and without argument.

In the documentary e-Motion, one case involved a woman who was certain she wanted children. "With every cell of her being," she said. Not every cell. An inoperable tumour in her brain was diagnosed that was affecting the hormones of pregnancy, ensuring she didn't have children. With that insight, she went through the long, slow

## What Could Be

process of realizing that she didn't want children and that the tumour had done her a favour. With that final insight, the cancer disappeared. Job done!

Your body might be doing you favours that you don't fully appreciate.

Most people would have accepted the doctor's prognosis. Radical is accepting the responsibility to create a different future. Radical is rejecting the doctor. Self-healing is impossible if you believe in the white coat's authority and the doctor's superiority.

Regardless of whether you decide to finish the work, it requires time and commitment to feel what you didn't want to experience and think about what you didn't want to know. I can tell you it's worth it and that professional help is always available.

If you'd like a professional to guide your journey with the right questions, be there for you so you don't have to be alone, or help pull you out of the dark places you expect to encounter, go for it. It's just another service from a professionally trained individual, so don't let uncomfortable labels be a barrier to a better place. Think of them as a consultant for your mind instead of a therapist if it's easier for you.

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### FATE OR EMPOWERMENT

We give away our power when we hand our fates to others. If I caused my problem, I could also stop it. As more and more diseases, including cancer, are attributed to stress, radical acceptance is coming to terms with the genuine emotions of your life.

Clarity of language forms the basis of communication. A difference in native language is obvious, but when we do share the same tongue, we forget the problem is still there.

The thesaurus makes us think words are interchangeable. As books become obsolete and literacy rates plummet, the precision of language seems to matter more than ever. The thesaurus is there to help you achieve precision and accuracy in your language.

You may find that you need to be accurate and precise about the generalities, while being fairly general about the activities. While that sounds hard to imagine, working on books introduced me to the insider's view of the world of words. There are writers, editors, authors and journalists. Writers study a craft and hide behind editors who filter their messages, words, and structures. Authors are messengers who use writing as a means to an end. A journalist is driven by curiosity and a desire to understand the world and its people.

We pick up the language, but it's in a conversation where we find out if we share the same meaning or understand what we're talking about. Conflict happens when we react to a word based on our definition, not the speaker's intended message. We craft our messages without the benefit of a thesaurus or a dictionary.

If you've ever thought up phrases you wished you'd said at the time, don't lose them. Now, more than ever, it's a time to have a voice and use it.

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### RELATIVITY OF LANGUAGE

As newborns, we scream our lungs out, and everyone cheers. As three-year-olds, the tables have long since turned. By learning and using our words, we navigate language through trial and error.

## What Could Be

Trial and error starts with learning the difference between hot and cold. As a multi-certified process improvement consultant, I explained to executives with master's degrees that the word "fast" wouldn't be specific or accurate enough for a goal.

The word 'fast' describes rising temperatures. Here, speed is being measured in decimals. For people in Canada accustomed to thermometers within a 60-degree range per year, it fails to have the intended impact. Human beings are relative, and Canadians are no different.

Fast describes glacial melt using meters and years. Fast describes a Formula One racer using miles and seconds.

It's not just numbers and qualitative words that introduce unnecessary murkiness to our communications. It's the way language changes. There was a time when 'gay' meant 'happy.' I recently realized that 'follow' means that someone has allowed someone else into their technological feed, not that they are aware, sold, and committed to someone else's principles. Following no longer has anything to do with sharing an opinion.

Opinions people love to share; ignorance, not so much, yet merely not knowing a word's precise and accurate definition is enough to spark a heated debate.

Forget about the facts of statistical analysis, and the rare few who know about samples and populations, and the process of concluding. Seeking to understand the other side requires not being triggered by their perspective. Try, "Why do you say that?" instead of "No, you are wrong." You might be correct, but patience is a virtue, so don't rush to the punchline.

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### WHAT WILL THEY SAY?

We observe the actions of others and ask, "How did he just do that?" Yet, for all the ways you can answer that question, we do not explore it. We chose credulity over inquiry.

Some people think you only ask a question because you don't know the answer, whereas the rhetorical one assumes you aren't bothered to find the answer. I wonder if they had teachers who genuinely wanted to know where things went wrong in the information transmission process, or examiners who asked questions to determine whether the answers were correct or incorrect.

You can't learn and grow when you can't ask questions or make mistakes. When we ask questions, we take a risk. We risk exposing what the other person might think. Do they think we are asking because we don't know the answer?

Credulity is a tendency to be too ready to believe something is genuine. We gulp down what the teacher feeds us and do our best to live by the training we've received, like it or not.

Asking questions without credulity is a way to regain control: "Who do you think you are?" It's a question that speaks to status and power, not merit or fact.

The enlightened argue little because they realize there is nothing to say on the matter. Nothing. Differences reveal the cracks through which light passes.

Other people act as mirrors in our lives. They help us determine who we want to be, what we want to believe, and what we want to do. By seeing them, we can make decisions without suffering the trials, tribulations, and

## What Could Be

investments it takes to try them on. Instead of doing what we've been shown, we can rise above our nurturing and choose who we want to be.

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### LOVE IN MOTION

To try different realities is like trying on clothes—you have to know what you can alter, what comes in a different size, and what doesn't change, no matter what. There are three distinct parts: three ways to understand the differences between you and others to help expand your appreciation of diversity.

In meetings, the first person with confidence, rank, or expertise to state an opinion can get the whole room into a popular frenzy, while the one guy with the key piece of information can't get a word in edgewise.

Popularity isn't good enough to substitute for merit, and it isn't good enough to serve as a bar of performance. We need contributors, not critics or charismatics.

It's a contribution when you clarify, expose, or build. As a project manager with teams numbering hundreds, I developed a new rule: if you agree, stay silent. You can click the thumbs up on the internet, but in reality, that pressures other people to join in, assuming you did your homework.

You find and develop your voice through what you experience, share, and express. You don't do it by polishing your speech, hiring an acting coach, and delivering your best performance.

Life is not to be performed; it is to be experienced. It might take some time; if you are lucky, that's what you call a life. It's a time bucket for you to figure out what you'd like to contribute to the collective conversation.

Seeking entertainment will keep you silent, like a good little audience member. Seeking education will keep you in the academic world, like a good little student. You may not need a piece of paper for the HR manager; you need food for your mind, no matter what you choose to do with your time.

### INTELLECTUAL MIND MASTERY

Freedom of pursuit is a result of rejecting intellectual innocence in favour of conscious inquiry, as a journalist might.

Believing in authority makes you an easy student but a poor learner; a well-behaved citizen but a pitiful leader; a dutiful child, not a responsible adult – no matter your age.

To catch a journalist in action, you notice the side you are taking, as a journalist is supposed to report the facts, and only the facts, without bias. Yet, to whom should we look for an example? Accept your partiality and question your loyalty.

Meditation and mindfulness are opportunities to notice the sides you take and the rationale for them. Is the rationality indeed your own, or are you biased in a direction because you haven't thoroughly thought about it?

There was a time I was a photographer. For a photographer, I took strangely few photos.

In the darkroom, a process was at work. A frame-worthy photograph might start in a camera, but then there were the negatives, the enlarger, the developer, the stop bath, the fixer, and one impatient day, the drying time.

## What Could Be

With experience, a negative that lacked the right tones and composition could be corrected. Focus and point of view could not be corrected. With multiple steps, trade-offs and compensations, a mental flow-inducing process has become digital. And rampant. There are GoPros, videographers, and cameras everywhere.

While time eliminated the chemicals, the process became something to engineer. It's also one that applies regardless of what you do in life or how you live it.

One step always leads to the next, and there is some permanence to what has come before. However, the present moment is always malleable, before it becomes a figment of your imagination and you move on to the next step.

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### DEVELOPING AUTHENTIC MERIT

There are things we learn to appreciate, and things we learn to respect, but when merit is genuine, there is no teaching required. Awe is ingrained, and excellence is something you strive for but never achieve.

As a child, I thought cheesecake was revolting, having been prepared for a sweet taste. After developing a taste for it, I became an expert cheesecake baker with a fistful of recipes. After that, I learned about the milk industry and found myself thinking that cheesecake was revolting, but I couldn't bring myself to believe it tastes bad.

If our tastes in food can change so dramatically and drastically, why don't our choices in our behaviour? We have just as much information, with the two fattest sections in the library being the cookbooks and the self-help section.

It could be a lack of tantalizing pictures in the self-help section.

To fill the gap, we create vision boards with images of how we'd like to behave until that becomes our new normal. We find practice fields until we get good at it. Maybe we find Captains to protect our sandboxes.

What you choose to do with your life, your time, and your energy is mainly about your tastes and preferences, and not letting time, people, or anything other than your internal experience dictate when you are ready to settle.

Follow your passion, but let your head and gut have a vote too. When that happens, it's challenging to get it wrong. It isn't easy because working to improve is a pleasurable experience called 'flow,' and getting into flow is easier when you're doing what you're naturally talented at.

The difficulty might be trusting that you will find a way. Excellence is magnetic in all forms, particularly in the financial realm.

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### NAVIGATING HILLY TERRAIN

On the snowmobile trail, the leader pulled over to convey some important information. There was a pointing to the trail. Then a hand in a wavy motion.

Perfect. According to my literacy in hand waving, hilly terrain was coming.

Imagine my surprise when I realized the vital part of the wavy motion – it went down first. I thought we'd definitely do some climbing and then go downhill. I did not expect the ground to drop out from underneath me while I continued forward. For a short time, anyway. Then there was the gas cap in my face....

## What Could Be

The next thing I can tell you is that I was sitting on my sled in the middle of the trail. Two things gave away my recent flight – my sled had stopped running. The second was rather odd. My hands were outside my handlebar muffs.

My handlebars are heated, but that's not enough. Over the handlebars is a bag, or muff, to keep my paws toasty. Clearly, at some point, I let go, and then, I grabbed back on. Clearly, at another, I'd landed—safe and sound.

I bet that was cool. I might never remember.

To think, I might have missed it all if I'd landed some stupid promotion at work that I wasn't that excited about in the first place. I might have been sitting in a boardroom, with the stress on the first part of that word and bored out of my mind, instead of losing my mind somewhere in the air on a trail.

Some people think I should take offence to being told I would not become CEO because I did not wear a size 42 tall. Instead, I know stockholders, as I am one myself. Prejudice exists because we are cavemen seeking security and protection.

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### CREATING INSTANT IMPRESSIONS

As cave dwellers, it was the big and tall that were better positioned to save us. Physically dominant leaders were a good idea.

Today, looking up to big, tall men is an insidious aspect of society, one that progress will eliminate and replace with a preference for a more reliable first impression.

Stockholders are a lazy bunch. We make money by doing nothing, absolutely nothing. If you are jealous of the banker's hours, try the investor's hours. We show up occasionally to pick, then sit around.

Retirement to an investor is the day you can live off your dividends. We expect business leaders to tell us what to expect and then deliver on their promises. We don't bother looking into how the company is run or even what it does. All we do is look at past performance and assume it will continue. Like first impressions, and that's a good enough rule to make you wealthy if you can follow it.

Today, I hope that we'd prioritize intellectual dominance over physical dominance for leaders. The meek shall inherit the earth, and the meek went and learned how to code, how to design, and how to use consciousness as a God-given blessing. One day, we will learn not to judge based on appearances, and until then, we might decide on a different stereotype for a leader.

Above all, a better future is one where we use our consciousness to make different decisions, design better solutions, and dare to be bolder.

What's not good enough for a book is not good enough for people. We must get beyond first impressions, even while the industry for creating and marketing them grows.

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### EMBRACING LONG TAILS

I'm not typically the person who gets excited by a present that prompts more shopping, and it would seem that engagement rings fall into this category. When I was given a gift that led to more shopping, I complained about it.

## What Could Be

It was an old sled. I needed something new, head to toe. No, there was nothing to borrow. I bought my new snowmobile suit in black and blue – not a good idea, as I learned later. It even came with matching gloves and a long list of other accessories labelled as necessities.

After laying out that dough, I didn't want my stuff to be taken by someone else. I looked for a Sharpie to complete the phrase in the lining: "This jacket belongs to". I didn't find the Sharpie, but I got sharp enough to realize that I didn't need to worry about my stuff being confused with anyone else's gear.

Finally, the one day that I saw another woman, I found myself pushing my way across a crowded bar to meet a perfect stranger. Pretty bold, for an introvert. Especially considering the brand she was wearing.

In a competitive world, people want to know if you are with them or not. Our labels didn't exactly make us from the same community. I hoped she'd look past the labels and see what we did have in common – no one else with whom to share the bathroom.

Hardly ever in my life have I waited for the bathroom, although I hear it's a common problem for women worldwide. Once, I attended a conference, and next door was a nurse's conference. That might have been the only time. It's a good thing I wasn't an architect – my skewed view on the world might have propagated this problem.

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### HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

After introducing myself, she said, "I don't do what you do."

I laughed and excused her impressions. We form instant impressions because they are now or were at some point in time, based on fact. Some engineers work for Affordability, while others work for Thrilling. You can't have both, and a world of pure capitalist competition would mean some people wouldn't even get to ride.

And then there would be no one instantly recognizable, and immediately known to be worth crossing a crowded bar to meet.

Labels have always mattered; gender has always mattered, and the side you choose always matters. You knew it, whether it was for a job interview, a first date, or meeting the parents for the first time. Just be prepared for the universal lie: "Hey, I know you."

Some people take pride in their labels. Others cover them up with duct tape. When I asked what about the situation, I was told, "Hey man, if I can get passed by a girl, I'm backing the wrong brand."

It's a confusing statement, and not only when you are both the man and the girl in that sentence. Yeah, go ahead, it's all about the brand. It's not me, it's the machine. Thank those gods over at Skidoo, even if they aren't so thankful for their riders.

It started during a Six Sigma Black Belt class, back when I thought snowmobiles were smelly, loud, and boring. Well, two out of three isn't that bad when 66% is a passing grade.

It was time to learn of the Pareto principle, what you might know as the 80/20 rule, and might now be the 99/1 rule. The instructors informed us about an old project where warranty claims were excessively high, prompting an investigation into the causes.

### THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

With the data, they selected the worst of the worst. With delight, they discovered that a mere handful of customers were responsible for the vast majority of the claims expense.

Pare down, and pare down some more. Such is the tool, the end of the lesson, and we went to lunch.

Years later, I learned the next chapter of the story from the other side. What do you do with those riders who cost you vast expenses in warranty claims on worn-out parts? Well, they don't get invited to become advanced product testers. They received goodbye letters instead – 'you are too expensive; we can't afford your coverage.'

They failed to see any opportunity on the other side of the story.

If you've ever heard that the robbers are always ahead of the cops, these guys were too. It seemed possible to rinse and repeat. When you order a new snowmobile, you are a new customer, and your previous history is unattached to your new file.

Welcome to your fresh start. Some believe in second, fifth, or tenth chances, while others are powerless to find their weaknesses. If it's coming at you externally, it's a threat, and if it's from internal design, it's a weakness, but both are hiding in plain sight, waiting to be seen.

All I can say is thank you for creating a safe space to make mistakes, when everywhere else, there is a video camera, a social account, and an opinion.

Mechanics say, "Nothing lasts forever." Not even reputations, along with a brand-new number.

Every organization asks, "Who are you?" and they must pick an identifier. Many organizations assign you a new number; some use your name. Choose wisely, or you may have no idea who you are serving.

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### RELYING ON PHYSICS

On a highway, when you are about to overtake someone, they tend to speed up suddenly. On a snowmobile, you learn that everyone is buying the new sled because it is fifty pounds lighter than everything else on the market. You look around and realize that you are fifty pounds lighter than everyone else on the trails.

The best rider doesn't win: the lightest, richest, boldest one does. That's the nature of figuring out which variables matter, and then maximizing them, to summarize the punchline of data analytics and Moneyball. If there are trade-offs to be made, then we don't maximize, we optimize. Sometimes it's a compromise; sometimes, it's like music.

One of the abiding rules when riding with a partner is to stay together. Whomever the leader passes, they do not do it without the second coming along. Second, when it's time to pass, please do it. Rules are not the same as lessons. Rules are permanent, immutable. Lessons, well, you might miss one, but don't repeat it.

My second lesson in snowmobiling was, "The throttle is your friend." Now is not the time to discover that the function of the brake is far different than what you might imagine in your head. Since it only stops the track from spinning, it would throw you out of control, and maybe take me with you. On a snowmobile, I want to tell this guy to keep his eyes on the trail and not on me, because it's about to turn.

## What Could Be

With a machine being a machine, if we are shoulder to shoulder in a corner, I'm the one with more throttle left. It's pure physics and stature. My throttle is your friend, too, because you just got passed by a girl who was merely following the unwritten rules.

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### FORCIBLY NOT LOOKING

In snowmobiling, leadership is about patience. It looks like a lot of waiting. There's the waiting you do to make sure everyone notices the turn before continuing. There's the waiting you do for everyone to get ready after someone asks, "I'll show you the way, but can the girl make it?"

That was this morning, but now, it's just him and me. Somewhere behind us is our group, and we are waiting in silence, watching the shadows grow longer, straining to hear any echo of a motor.

*Scientific American Mind* magazine told me about the five ways to die. One way is to head in after the last one, thinking you are somehow immune to what claimed the previous one. As a chemical engineer, this fate hit home. Seeing someone at the bottom of a tank, you think you'll rescue them, because you can't see that the air in the tank isn't air at all. Then there are two. The innocent hero becomes the next victim.

As a learner, I'm pointed toward the highway, not even pretending that I'll head back to save anyone. The best I can do is get help.

Since you didn't think I'd even make it this far, I'll get help, and you can try your heroism on for size. Good luck with that. Don't worry; my throttle is your friend too – you can depend on me.

With enough hard practice, we can all master anything. The Six Sigma level is between the two: 3.4 defects per million opportunities, or  $3.4 \times 10^{-6}$  defects per opportunity, which corresponds to a 99.9997% defect rate. There are enough adjectives, skills to pursue, and talents to develop that it's all about effort and math. In business, they are called niches.

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### PASSIVELY SCANNING

First, let's forget the statistics. The value we all contribute through our work matters equally, even if society reimburses people in unusual and sometimes disheartening ways, indicating that money and mastery are distinct.

Your brain is programmed to perceive anyone different from you as inherently a risk, and risks are often viewed as inherently evil. How's that for a pessimistic lens on meeting new people? Yet, new people are how you stumble on happiness, genius, and luxury.

You can instead use consciousness to evaluate how you categorize people, what they might think and why they might do things. With enough effort and determination, you can truly master anything, including developing a hero mentality, overcoming stereotypes about people, and overcoming your impatient need to be productive.

It's the signs, the marketing, and the advertising on which you cannot depend. They are there to block out the scenery and break your mind.

On the trails, I'd seen the signs. On the internet, I'd seen the pictures. One day, I secured the promise that it would be early so we could finally stop there.

## What Could Be

Too bad I didn't check if "there" actually existed. It was finally 2:30 in the afternoon, and we were looking beyond the gate, with empty gas tanks. Here, we'd also stay and get gas, yet the gate hadn't been open all season, apparently, not for 10 years. A fire claimed our destination about a decade earlier, so you do your research instead of trusting the marketing.

Now, the sign indicated that gas was another 70 kilometres away. To the left was an option that was supposed to be 40 clicks, but the year prior, we'd met the new owners, who had decided to "make the route more interesting." Was it 40, or did they turn it into 80?

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### ACTIVELY BARGAINING

Debating options as you do in a logic problem with real consequences at stake, we unanimously decided on the unambiguous option. Toss the risk analysis out the window and go for what you know to be sure.

In Bible class, I remembered a story about a drop that went farther than expected. I made a deal that if this drop could go farther than expected, I wouldn't look at the gauge and try to catch the nature of the trick. Eyes forward, make it last. Deal?

Soon, the sunny sky darkened, and thick clouds rolled in. Snowflakes began falling—sticky ones. Not long after, the snow presented new challenges—challenges engineers call drag, which uses up more gas.

I said to no one in particular, "Hey, if we're going to pull this off, we'll need to see a groomer very soon." Also, seeing a groomer would mean that someone would know we were there, someone who might have an ounce to spare.

Not a couple of corners later, a groomer came from the opposite direction.

Did I want an early morning or more freshly groomed powder? It wouldn't be the first time I had worked hard to get something only to realize I wanted something different the entire time. Sometimes, you only know when you get it.

Making promises is an industry. It's made it a struggle to focus and sort information from noise. People like me make critical decisions based on what they see with their own eyes, without conducting further research, and put lives at risk without a second thought.

Where we place our attention matters, yet we all give it away. This is alarming because an entire generation can't pay attention long enough to solve a problem or recognize danger in time to avoid it.

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### NEGLECTFULLY WILLING

Change might be one of the hardest things to do. We carry on when we have the sneaking suspicion we shouldn't. We say yes to avoid hurting the other person, only to end up hurting ourselves in the process. That's not what they want for you, and that's not what I want for you.

The most insightful thing my therapist told me was why my cat wasn't the lap warmer I wanted. I didn't know we were discussing that problem. She said, "Well, if you don't pay attention to your cat, doesn't she get up and leave?"

Hunh. And such is how discoveries are announced. Not Eureka, but that's funny.

## What Could Be

Her wisdom continued. “So, if you don’t want to think about that idea or feel that emotion, ignore it. It will get up and leave.” I was still counting the number of times my cat had gotten up and left, and I didn’t know what got in her. Oh, yeah.

Willpower is the control we exert to do or not do something. It follows when we realize we want a future different from the default one ahead of us, and requires us to do or not do something in the present to achieve that end. Once you realize that, a few things will affect how much willpower you will have at your disposal.

You might think you have willpower for different things in different ways, but it’s just one resource. Use it up resisting sugar in your morning coffee, and you don’t have the same amount when donuts greet you at work. Give yourself points for resisting the sugar in the coffee, cash them in on the donuts if you play such games of judgment.

### THE PULITZER PRIZE WINNER IN YOU

Emotional wellness includes the ability to seek and provide support. That’s what an advocate for change does, by definition. Everyone will have a different baseline from birth throughout life. It’s not fixed. It’s guided by what you believe, remember, and think.

This cycle is governed by and manifests emotional experience. We refer to habits as deep or beliefs as ingrained, using metaphors to describe the associated emotional response. This depth can be achieved once, with a highly impactful effect, or through multiple and frequent imaginings.

If you stop and feel the emotion right before you do that thing you are trying not to do, you will feel the effects of dopamine. That itchy, anxious, focused anticipation of something is the unsettling thing causing you to act.

Dopamine is a chemical released in the brain. It helps us see rewards and take action toward those goals. Researchers pivotal in its discovery implanted an electrode in a rat’s brain, gave it control, and watched it repeatedly activate that electrode.

Initially, they thought they’d discovered the pleasure center. Then, they made the rat cross an electrified grid to activate it. The rats would do so at the sacrifice of their feet. Now, we describe that behaviour as addictive. It’s not pleasure they were seeking, but the promise of pleasure.

Since then, people who want your money and attention use it to their advantage. If you can’t put down Candy Crush, put away your credit cards, or keep crap out of your shopping cart, it might be dopamine to blame, but you’ve got the willpower to rise above it.

To derail dopamine, you have to believe you can. Then, work on convincing your body that your mind is in charge. Be the boss of you.

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### FROM AUTHORITARIANS TO SAGES

Inappropriate behaviour takes all forms; sometimes, a little reminder that we’re all human goes a long way.

Knowledge changes constantly. In high school, I was taught some things that are no longer true. In biology, we learned that the nucleus is like the cell’s brain. Dr. Lipton has proved otherwise. In chemistry, the electron is the smallest particle. Now, we know it gets much smaller until there’s just space.

## What Could Be

It used to be that knowledge was the constraint. Then it was hello, internet. Relationships were a constraint; it's not what you know, it's who. Hello, social media, and the ability to connect to anyone, as long as you are connected to someone.

Today, humanity is facing big problems. The generation that will help solve those problems plays a leadership role, but lacks the attention span to fulfill it. Collectively, we are down to mere minutes of focus. Therefore, we need a generational solution.

Baby boomers, write a blog, get interviewed on a podcast, and let them record you while you do what you do if you have to. This is a preemptive thank-you for advancing the collective.

Next, we need your actual relationships and genuine introductions. A solemn gesture of gratitude to you, nothing is more precious than our social network.

Please stop so that this generation can bear the burden of the world we created. Don't take any action. Put down the phone, turn off notifications, and don't be afraid to be left out. We're all here to help; no one is in this alone. While Mars might be a potential option, no one is planning to leave anytime soon. And the places where you can run, or ride, are becoming fewer, shorter, and more crowded.

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### EMBRACING INQUIRY

On my sled, suddenly, there was a funny sound.

I'd tried to say something but didn't know the appropriate hand signal. Instead, I'd stopped, where it was clear that I hadn't stopped because I was stuck. I hoped my shrug was big enough and that my moves conveyed, "Hey, I have something to tell you."

I'm not an actress.

Instead, it was like trying to pick up my skittish little kitten. I take one step forward, and she takes one step back.

I got an impatient "C'mon" from the sled's owner, so I complied. Ride it like you stole it, I was once told. Perhaps thieves don't care about potential mechanical issues.

Impending mechanical problems tend to worsen, and this time, I was stopped in the middle of the road, with an oncoming green Jeep. This time, I made a new deal. "Start again, and I'll jump the bank and shut you off for good. Promise."

So, on the other side of the bank, I waited. And waited.

Later that day, as the story was told to the audience at the bar, it was clear that those who had declared that they didn't speak English might not have been telling the whole truth. Otherwise, why were they laughing at all the right places?

But then, the locals never let tourists in on everything.

Leaders can use intentional design to surround themselves with the right people. Some are good at the things at which you are not. Some are good at the same things you are good at, and have other key differences that will help you check your analysis.

## What Could Be

First, you have to let the questions in.

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### PRIORITIZING SAFETY

At DuPont, I learned the importance of safety first.

Safety first means starting every meeting with that subject on the agenda. Whether it is news, tips, or statistical reviews, every meeting begins with safety.

If you want to keep your fingers, you remove your rings. Every day, when I went to work, I took off the ring I'd earned by right of my engineering degree. It was put there as a solemn reminder of the oath I took, but there I went, taking it off like a married person about to cheat.

At work, I wore a fake wedding ring so everyone would consider me off-limits. It didn't work, or at least not as effectively as I had hoped. Today, I wear no rings, not because I don't want to be mistaken for a married person, but for an engineer. Managing first impressions might be for everyone's safety.

That's how we arrive at names, as we need to refer to something or someone in conversation. There was Luck Lake, because it was so full of fish that I'd caught one in the flank and landed it, another by forgetting about my hook dangling in the water while I messed with the anchor, and I always had to leave because limits had been reached. I wasn't the first to think of such a thing because it was named when I finally found it on a map.

In snowmobiling, never book your hotel room in advance. When you think you have a destination in mind, machines break down, the weather rolls in, and that's if you are lucky. One thing is sure: book a room in advance, and you will have a story to tell about how you arrived much later than planned, if at all.

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### DISAGREEING POSITIVELY

In psychology, there is a subconscious defence mechanism called projection. When we don't like what we're feeling, we often assign the feeling to someone else. If there's ever been a time when someone blamed you for doing or being something that seems way off the mark to you, consider whether what they said was true for them. For example, someone with adulterous feelings might accuse their partner of cheating on them for no apparent reason.

As a kid, I often lost my temper when I perceived that things weren't fair. Life isn't fair, I was told, usually by the person I was accusing. We can decide that unfairness is something we must accept because of its pervasiveness. Or we can rally to change it.

Since my youth, life has become more just. With deep gratitude, I thank the fighters for fairness who came before me. Not too long ago, as a woman, I couldn't have become an engineer, a homeowner, or even have a bank account. I couldn't be childless and single by choice.

Yes, life is not fair. I see it on the road all the time. The drivers race to the front of the merge lane, ignoring the long line of respectful drivers who merged earlier. One time, with words like bullets, I even yelled out my window, "Do you think you are more important than everyone else?"

If you ever want to test how enlightened you are, head out on the highway on a Friday afternoon in the summer, during an extended weekend, in a car with no air conditioning. Tempers rise with the temperatures, and crowding likely doesn't help.

### DISARMING TEMPTATIONS

Temptations bombard you; some are designed to infiltrate your mind or your wallet.

Our problems stem from the notion that we must take action on temptations, hold on to emotions, and experience life in a preconceived manner. To derail dopamine, you have to believe you can.

You can put down that game controller; you don't have to light that cigarette or eat that donut. It gets easier over time, and you must know and remember that. Self-acceptance and surfing the urge can go a long way toward maintaining willpower.

Acting as if something positive has occurred and conjuring the corresponding feeling has sometimes yielded successful results for some individuals.

If saying one thing and thinking another is possible, there must be a way to have more than one mind. Willpower is the ability to internally say 'yes' to one thing while saying 'no' to something else. Can you find the alignment of one mind, and therefore, no need for willpower?

If you can't be united, is there a compromise that is good enough? Once you are consistent, thinking about a future at that level makes it easier to ratchet tighter toward your ideal of perfection, like the smokers she describes. No matter what you do, don't give up. There is always another strategy you haven't tried; the next one might be right. Go for consistency instead of perfection, and you will eventually get there.

To achieve a goal, be self-aware and act intentionally. Know what you are chasing and what discomfort you are trying to avoid, and is it worth putting it off?

For all your logical answers, the helpful ones are the emotional ones about learned prevention and avoidance.

If you want all the willpower you can muster, find an agreement with which every cell can agree.

#### 4. FREEDOM OF PASSION

Freedom of passion is rejecting societal agendas in favor of conscious service. If you've ever found yourself going after goals you couldn't remember forming as your own, you might be serving someone else's agenda. You can certainly choose to do that, as long as the decision is a conscious one. For too many, we find ourselves on never-ending treadmills chasing a carrot that never gets closer.

Freeing your passion is not only about knowing what makes you happy, but also about understanding why it does, with a why rooted in inspiration, love, and humility. It starts with a basic incomprehensibility. Stanislas Dehaene has said, "Innumeracy might be part of our normal human condition." Raw numbers can be complex to grasp mentally.

For all of Sir Richard Branson's success, Virgin condoms were a failure. He knows and has all the proof you may require. Almost, but not entirely perfect, as names may be. I once read that women married for the sake of their last name, doodled imaginary new names, and changed their names to claim their own identities. Nowadays, everyone knows it's all about the branding, and you don't have to get married to select a new name.

I tried to call Virgin to tell them I didn't want their texts either, but they sent me another text asking about my experience. Then I received a text message instructing me not to call due to higher-than-normal call volumes.

The second step of effective collaboration is to create a psychological zone of safety that allows them to speak freely. Put transparently, they are allowed to speak first, not after you've stated your opinion. Reprimand people for keeping their thoughts to themselves, not for having an imperfect contribution. Discussed based on the parameters of value, rather than on who said what.

#### THE SNAPPING TURTLE AND THE FAILURE OF GOOD INTENTION

Snapping turtles were part of everyday life at one of my many addresses. I'd go fishing in my canoe after work, and instead of catching dinner, I'd cut my line and let the turtle keep my worm.

When turtles breed, they head for sandy shores, sometimes on the other side of a highway. Tourists often pull over and attempt to help the turtle cross the road.

One day, in her attempt to help the turtle, a tourist was run over by an oncoming vehicle that wasn't expecting to see a person on the highway, let alone one attempting to stop traffic for a turtle. Turtles have tough shells and are relatively easy to avoid due to their limited ability to evade, but a person is not so easily avoided, especially in the bend of a curve.

We all grieved for one woman who wanted to help but had no idea what she was doing.

I've often wondered how many turtles had to start over. Some people would put them back where they came from instead of where they were headed. Perhaps they lost all their bearings and became fundamentally lost, even though they were safe and sound.

They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Yet, we intervene with the confidence that it will only take a minute, and we know exactly what we are doing. To live and let live is so difficult; other people's problems seem easier to solve than our own.

## What Could Be

Maybe the point is not to look like the one in need of help. To be humble is to remember that the solution might not be so simple. To come from inspiration or love is to follow their lead, not take it from them.

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### THE INNER CIRCLE

If we all have a brain optimized for caves, we all have a set number of relationships we can manage. Those management skills aren't always obvious.

Once, I was excited to reconnect with an old friend. However, all that excitement evaporated when I heard, "Yes, I've been driving by for years, always thinking 'I should call her.'"

Obligation is not a feeling I want directed at me, nor is it something I want to inspire in others. Later, I realized 'friend' was the wrong word, as I'd been called "buddy."

Buddies might be a thing other people like to have, but in my world, a buddy is an unreliable flake. Buddies think they shouldn't offend anyone and seek to make everyone their friend, but a nice guy isn't kind when they lack the backbone to tell the hard truths and do the unpopular things.

I learned the art of negotiation from a master, and I can simplify everything I know down to the basics, like the orange crop. We thought we'd both won because we decided to split it. They and we needed it, so we thought divide and conquer if we agreed to settle for half of what we needed.

We lost. The reality we never discovered was that one side needed the pulp and the other needed the rind; therefore, we could have obtained everything we needed. Unfortunately, we sacrificed our needs, thinking that made us winners.

Some relationships are better off severed. The most challenging part of love is that we grew up thinking we knew what it was because we had no other box to put it in. We accept a specific contract for love and how we get it, even while suspecting the terms and conditions and forgoing all negotiations.

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### AN UNACCOUNTED EXCHANGE

Relationships are like bank accounts. When we meet someone, we are well-behaved and exchange small talk. A "Thank you" is a deposit I make to you, and you put it in my credit column. You say, "You're welcome," and I put a credit in your column; we're now happily net equal.

This is equality: I get, you get, and the ledger is balanced.

It doesn't sound delightful to account for actions in relationships the way you would for money. However, some people watch their pennies, while others think in millions. The best strategy is to check your boundaries.

Our boundaries are often learned organically rather than deliberately set. I grew up assuming that my job was to sacrifice for everyone. When there wasn't enough to go around, I got the smallest plate, the crappiest bedroom, and the cheapest activities.

As an adult, I realized redrawing my lines was up to me. I didn't have to put up with a ledger where I always felt like the loser, and my needs weren't being met, especially when I realized that people don't always recognize or credit my efforts.

## What Could Be

My moment of insight was when one of these takers called me cheap. What? Coming from you? No way. In that way, I woke up to being taken advantage of while thinking of myself as generous.

Some people misattribute your efforts to the wrong column and use incorrect labels to gaslight you. The care I was spending to help someone through a rough period of their life was giving me a chance to feel important and needed. Just like that, I was taken advantage of. With insight into the lack of reciprocity I received from this person, I ended that relationship and raised my expectations going forward.

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### THE INSTITUTIONALIZED OPTIONS

One of the biggest misconceptions of my early career was the field of Human Resources. It wasn't until I took courses to start my own business that I realized the department's role.

When your resources are people, you consider learning and development to facilitate growth. Yet, history also shows that one may think of exploiting resources and profiting from those who are less fortunate, less talented, and less well-equipped for success.

The role of government is to provide the conditions for its citizens to succeed. In business, this means protecting its citizens from exploitation without hindering the motivations of those individuals who would pursue entrepreneurial paths. It's a delicate balance; like all balances, the option is optimization.

To optimize, you aim to impact those entrepreneurs as little as possible while setting minimum standards. Then, the profession of Human Resources is formed to ensure businesses' compliance with these minimum standards.

Learning and development are things you'd like to maximize. Not only does this attract top talent, but it also enables them to stay ahead of the competition by providing access to resources and opportunities to apply what they are learning, while accepting that all learning comes with mistakes.

Managing risk and ensuring growth are two paradoxical goals, yet they both involve your people, so they get assigned to the same department. When a paradox exists at a personal level or internally within a department, we don't arrive at option C. Instead, we bury the paradox and take the path of least resistance.

One typical result is a toxic environment. Growth and development result from privilege, not a reliable and trustworthy system. What is reliable is the torment of HR within the bounds of the law, as they aren't cautious about hiring, but are laser-focused on their firing.

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### THE INSIDIOUS SYSTEM

Don't fall for the press during the recruitment process about "their great culture." All cultures are great when you belong, and there's no such thing as a bad or good one, just games you are willing to play and ones you can't be bothered by. Like high school, where there are cliques and gangs, and either you pick one and stick to it, operate like a social butterfly, or disregard them completely, so is every organization. Navigate accordingly.

Active discourse arrives at option C. It occurs when two competing parties are motivated to create peace by finding a mutually beneficial solution. Sometimes, it requires changing the system or redesigning the institution's structure to meet its intended purpose.

Fully understanding the difference between the travel brochure of your profession and the function it serves within society before you invest your time, money, and future in it is crucial for conducting informational

## What Could Be

interviews and thorough research. Yet, for any high school student facing these critical decisions, a million other essential decisions and activities vie for their time. Who has time for informational interviews? Assumptions and reputations are used instead.

Doctors believe they are dedicated to healing and helping people. Decades later, they realize they are pill pushers employed by drug companies and that people are just mechanical guinea pigs for profits to make a rich person richer. They pay a high cost to get there in both time and money, and they also have some of the highest suicide rates.

Teachers who think they will educate children, only to discover they are being pushed into a curriculum, are also in for a future of frustration. Politicians who believe they will serve might be dismayed to find out exactly whom they serve.

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### THE INDUSTRIAL MISCONCEPTIONS

Insurance is another misconception about an industry. You pay for the feeling of security, and when you want the reality to manifest as promised, you realize it's a business, not a bank. Profits come from paying customers, and investors are paid first. The entire point is to take your money and never return it.

As an engineer, I signed up to help humanity with the potential of zero recognition. It's because a successful engineer is an invisible engineer. Work with the flow and reality of human nature while making the high road easier to take. That was my travel brochure for the profession. However, by the time the professionals surrounded me, I decided it wasn't a group of people I wanted to join.

Children are inquiring about how to finance their secondary education, and I'm wondering why. Why bother getting such expensive paper to hang on the wall? When it's nothing but a device to filter your human resources, maybe your human resource professionals need to stop taking such tired shortcuts, like demanding certifications and proof that hoops have been jumped through.

Unless, of course, you are using them as a proxy for proof that this individual is compliant and does what they are told, no matter how nonsensical the instructions.

In business, we recognize the need for data to drive effective management. Often, the collected data comes from the fastest and easiest methods, which are also the most unreliable.

Have you ever stood on the scale, jiggling this way and that, to get a lower number to display? Data is susceptible to manipulation at every stage of collection, analysis, and communication. Whenever we have an opinion on the outcome and a way to serve that opinion, the farther from the truth you should expect that number to be.

### THE DENIABILITY OF FACTS

"You cheat when the rules are flexible or not very clear and when you have a conflict of interest or reason to have a biased perception of reality," says Dan Ariely of Duke University and author of *The (Honest) Truth about Dishonesty*. It doesn't take much creativity to game a metric, and the more creativity a person brings to their job, the more flexible their moral boundaries tend to be<sup>xiv</sup>.

One of the contributing factors to Target Canada's failure was insufficient data<sup>xv</sup>. Business analysts responsible for the store's supply chain were struggling with a new inventory system that was unfamiliar to everyone. The data would be used to pack shipping containers, fill distribution centers, and supply stores; however, the data was

## What Could Be

missing or inaccurate. Managers would pull reports from this system, then contact the appropriate business analyst to request an explanation for the issue. To avoid this kind of heat, these business analysts were able to game the system to make it appear as though their products were in stock.

It's not just creativity, but overconfidence can also trump the facts. The inventory situation and numerous other issues were identified and addressed before launch. Employees hoped the launch date would be pushed back to allow time to repair the systems. The information didn't crack the confidence. One former employee said that the mentality was, "If there's any team in retail that can turn this around, it's us." Ultimately, Target reported a loss of almost \$1 billion from its Canadian venture.

When you become aware of how much data is corrupt, fake, and missing, you learn to discount it when you want it and deconstruct it when it's thrown at you.

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### IGNORING STATISTICS

Economists refer to the money people are willing to pay for lottery tickets as a "stupidity tax." According to Daniel Gilbert, the odds are equivalent to flushing your money down the toilet. So why do people buy them?

You don't have anticipation or hope if you just flushed your money down the toilet. You know someone has to win, and you always see winners. Not everything that matters can be measured or included in statistical analysis; yet, numbers should add significant value. Buying hope is a logical transaction, if perhaps not the most effective way to obtain it.

We prefer stories over statistics, and our propensity to avoid them is quite a tale. Math anxiety is real, and being bored by data is common, but did you realize just how unmoving numbers can be?

Fans are great at ignoring the facts. In one study, fans consistently predicted above-average success for their favourite teams, regardless of their track record.<sup>xvi</sup>

Compelling numbers should motivate action, but that has not been Dr. Atul Gawande's experience. With his checklists, surgical morbidity rates reduced from 1.5 percent to 0.8 percent. The rate of any complication dropped from 11% to 7% with the use of checklists<sup>xvii</sup>. His success translated into an adoption rate of only 20 percent. What is wrong with the numbers?

Just like we chose story over fact, we chose words over numbers. In a before-and-after preference test, participants chose "75 percent lean" ground beef over "25 percent fat"<sup>xviii</sup>. After they had tasted it, the preference was smaller but still there. In case you are wondering, that ground beef is the same thing, no matter which statistic you prefer.

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### HANDLING ANALYSIS

Gawande's numbers don't mean much until you know they translate into approximately 243 lives saved, equivalent to the audience at an average movie theatre.

Science is not the affirmation of a set of beliefs, but a process of inquiry that builds a testable body of knowledge, constantly open to rejection or confirmation. Imagine if we could bring more of that into business.

The concept of science is associated with rationality, impartiality, fairness, and, ultimately, the pursuit of knowledge and truth. Just thinking about science can trigger moral behaviour. Being primed with science-related

## What Could Be

thoughts increases adherence to ethical norms, future altruistic intentions in real life, and philanthropic behaviour towards a stranger<sup>xix</sup>.

However, knowing a scientific approach doesn't mean you will use it. Author Gerd Gigerenzer tells the story of an economics professor who must decide between two opportunities. Turning to a friend for advice, the friend reminded him he was skilled in pro and con analysis. The professor replied, "Come on, this is serious!"

Even an analysis starting with good, clean data does not guarantee a solid conclusion. Just as we prefer not to hand control over to data, we recoil at the thought of letting some tool decide for us. Any factual analysis, such as a pro/con comparison, can feel like a relinquishment of control to the facts, to an undesirable solution, and to a fate that lands in our laps. Like that professor, we all strive for control in any situation.

Consider that the secret power of Six Sigma isn't the statistics or the analysis. The statistics are susceptible to gaming by those contributing to the numbers, as well as the analysis and interpretation. As they say, there are lies, darn lies, and statistics, and everyone has a stake in the outcome.

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### ENTRENCHING BELIEFS

Organizations don't optimize for individuals and their strengths; they optimize for the well-rounded employee. First, you must prove that you can handle the nitty-gritty, day-to-day tasks. If you can, then they will expand your scope and responsibilities. Slowly, they expect you to evolve from a tactical master to a strategic master as you progress upward in the organization.

But people don't change. Unresolved emotions are buckets of unresolved information. Get the info, let go of the emotion. Then, create a plan based on the new facts and feelings you have discovered.

The old-school of change management still teaches the top-down method, with leadership that dictates and expects compliance. I was in a presentation when the people around me started leaving. Their reasons? "This will never work in my organization," several said. A couple of them said, "I have millennials." The old ways of command and control no longer work, and it's not just because generations have become rebellious.

Instead, there is a hierarchy, and then there is a game of snakes and ladders. Some people are ready for the next promotion, while others are on their way to being fired, and some have no desire to advance. Yet, stagnation is also frowned upon and disallowed.

When those in decision-making positions also participate in this invisible game of snakes and ladders, the concept of "organization" within an organization begins to break down. It doesn't work because there aren't enough disengaged people to comply with orders, and too many have ideas that haven't been exposed or addressed. If they can't be fired or sidelined, they are treated disparagingly until they leave on their own, taking whatever merit their perspective had with them.

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### OVERWHELMING INFORMATION

With the pace of change we are experiencing today, the leadership style of command and control, shame, and segregation is no longer practical.

In the past, information was accessible only to the wealthy and well-connected. In high places, they should have long-term visions and strategies that are better than others, but only because of their access to people and information.

## What Could Be

That kind of access and privilege is no longer available. Now, an illiterate front-line worker might have the insight you need to crush the competition, but he can't write an email. You look down on anything he could contribute merely because of the status of his position, but what if that was precisely why his input is valuable? Hierarchy should exist as a product of necessity, a result of the interconnection of processes, not as a status symbol.

Predicting the future and creating strategies and tactics to make it turn out differently is time and skill, not experience and talent. Today, you need everyone to monitor and react, including sharing what they've seen and what they think it means.

When status disappears, listening becomes an activity again. Silos soften, and collaboration becomes natural. Perhaps a different structure and vision work for your organization, but you need an organizational design to ensure your system of people operates correctly.

Our desire to understand and control our world leads us begin plans six months in advance. By the time we reach the halfway point of the year, we're pursuing solutions to issues that were problems a year ago, but now something else is on fire. As Levin puts it, "we always overlook variables that we simply didn't consider in initial planning. Or, circumstances and events beyond our control that we couldn't anticipate may require us to shift gears."

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### SPINNING STORIES

Have you ever suggested something to someone, only to have them blame you when it doesn't go as you thought it would? Even when we give feedback with the best intentions, we must trust that the other party will accept or disregard it as they see fit and own the outcome they choose, only to have it turn out badly, and they say, "You told me to do this."

When you ask for feedback, the door of criticism seems to swing wide open. The word "feedback" invites someone to look inward, and that makes it all about them, rather than about you. Instead, ask for advice. The change in the word invites them to become your accomplice and collaborator, rather than an evaluator.

Under exhaustion, a competitor suddenly sounds like a friend. "I'll ride behind you for a while to see if I can give you any tips." Under frustration, a wealthy friend says, "I wish I were rich enough to blow belts as you do." Under threat, our judgments of others are not favourable<sup>x</sup>. These are the times we rip people down to look better by comparison or scoff at the value of something we don't have.

It's natural to look to your down-and-out friend when you've just had a fall. We surround ourselves with people who make us feel better about our lives.

Building ourselves up by pushing others down is one strategy. Another is to inflate what you do have artificially. Cosmetic surgery, resume padding, and living on borrowed credit are some of today's accepted practices. After all, you have to make the most of what you have. If you aren't going to reach number one due to your size, consider going where being small is an advantage.

### THE CURRENCY OF EXCHANGE

I grew up thinking that if I wanted company, then I had to go along with their plans. As an adult, one of the things it took the longest to accept was that there were people in the world who wouldn't try to gain status over me, look at me like a means to their end, or spend their time telling me what I should think, do, or be.

## What Could Be

If you believe that you get your energy from something, then check in with yourself to see if you are genuinely energized or are just repeating what you've been told. In a world that prizes extroversion, obsession with social media, and material appearances, you might find that you innocently got caught up in the wrong belief about where you get your energy.

The systematic bias toward extroversion is insidious. Your parents push you to make friends. Scientists tell everyone that human beings are social creatures. Introverts are cast as outcasts who don't fit in and are worthy of your snubs.

They are telling you what you should be, do, and have, as if they were in your skin and knew how it felt. Remember, they are not, and labelling your emotional experience and processing your feelings is your job.

Since beliefs rule your world, hang in there until you are an adult, and then live your life your way. Hopefully, you can express your ideas, creativity, and passions early and easily in life.

Being "meh" with your opinions, goals, or values is like relying on a wet paper bag. When you need it to do its job, it fails. Hopefully, it wasn't a glass vial of the last drop of medicine that could have saved you.

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### BANK ACCOUNTS OF PURPOSE

Nature abhors a vacuum. There is a perfect fit for you. A reality in which you thrive. For every unnecessary source of pain, frustration, and distraction, there is a reality without them.

What would replace them if they were gone? It's a difficult question that asks you to articulate what you do want, while you notice only what you don't.

Many of our sources of pain, frustration, and distraction serve a purpose. They are there because we need them, or because we have designed them to be there. When I was first told this, I was irate. How can I be contributing to my problems?

Yet, that's the way it works.

I couldn't have saved my sight without first taking responsibility for my situation and the actions I both didn't do and did do. I didn't ask enough questions; I felt what I wanted to believe, and I naively trusted people to be honest and act with integrity.

That's how I saved my sight. Recognizing I was causing my physical pain and suffering, and the willingness to take reparative action.

What are you getting out of your pain and suffering? You might have to write a book to find the answer. Writing a book compels you to check your research, clarify your point, connect your dots, and explain yourself. Good work to do when you know there's something faulty going on with your thinking.

You know what's true in your heart. Follow the truth, and you won't go wrong. You have to see what you love. It is more helpful to feel what you love, because your head is attempting to convince you of answers that sound good, and using that label 'love' in all the wrong places.

### OWNING YOUR ENERGY

It is always within your power to find a different way to think about it, to love the things that you feel are in your way, are causing you harm, and are making things difficult.

For me, it was one August. Within four weeks, my water supply line ruptured, and my vehicle was stolen.

My mechanic said, "Phew." The vehicle was an old, crumbly, rust-bucket that I didn't want to accept needed replacing. Who steals a rust bucket? A family of three was living in it at the time it was found. I was upset for many reasons, but I was also overwhelmed with gratitude for my home.

When it came to my water line, I was pleased that insurance covered most of it and, mostly, that it didn't happen in the winter. I was delighted that they avoided cutting down a tree, and thankful that the work was done so quickly and smoothly.

What if the bad things that happen are in your best interest? What if my rusty frame gave out while I was driving on the highway? Would I have survived, and how many other people would have been hurt, held up, or worse? You never know what you avoided or what role you played in someone else's life.

Some people say, "I hope it doesn't rain." Some people pray that it won't rain. Other people say, "I am so happy and grateful that it's going to be sunny." Still fewer sit down and imagine the experience of that sentence, and they don't get up until they feel it in every cell of their body.

Own your energy by focusing on a clear intention with a positive emotion. With that cloud of energy around you, the currency of all your exchanges will improve.

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### PAYING IT FORWARD

Trying to sell my first house was a challenge. After a year of being on the market, I was reading *Eat, Pray, Love* and trying the technique that worked for Elizabeth Gilbert.

I wrote a love letter to the person who was looking for a place just like mine and didn't know it existed. Hey, it said. I'm over here.

The letter never left my journal. An offer showed up within a week. Whatever works, the engineer in me says, for the price of a piece of paper and a few minutes, is something I can risk.

I wondered about how policing and governance would work in a world where people have the intentional power to create in the material world. How, then, can you prove that someone caused an accident by thinking about it, or however they did it?

There is a spectrum of intention, and the universe is busy serving those who are clear with their order and pure with their intentions. The higher your intention, the faster and more reliably you can expect it to be delivered.

Like me, the universe does not like to be told how to do it. I like to be told what problem you want solved, and as long as I solve that, no matter how I do it, I can do what I want. When that's the deal, we can get very clear with your order, and I promise both your surprise and your happiness.

## What Could Be

Earning their trust was the challenge. They assume you have intentions that won't play out well for them. When you know we are all connected, hurting you hurts me, so why would I do that? Your energy is a boomerang, and it's coming right back to you, whether or not you believe in karma.

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### DEFENDING YOUR TERRITORY

If we are going to let emotions and biology do their thing to filter people, reality, and everything else on your behalf, you might want to be at least aware of what it's doing.

Otherwise, it might be you who is the one who is being presumptuous, surrounding yourself with people who feed your ego, and ignoring all the warning signs along the way. You wouldn't want that, and I've learned that not everyone knows how to read the warning signs.

Warning signs aren't as apparent as road signs all the time. Some people ask God for guidance without considering how He might be trying to communicate with them. You certainly don't want Him to lose His patience while you get frustrated that He hasn't answered you yet.

Getting the right people is the first step. For all the reasons someone might be promoted or hired in an organization, there's no argument that we want the best person. The arguments begin when we define 'best.' Proxies are always necessary. It's only when we verbalize them that we can correct them.

One HR manager told me, "The person that I can find the fastest who won't embarrass me."

Some use data and matrices to codify a time-tested, easily improved, and quickly adaptable system. Others use their gut. A majority relies on the proximity of connections on LinkedIn, the strength of the recommendation, or the unobjectionable answers to behavioural questions.

Meritocracy exists when the idea that the best is agreed upon and moves forward. Merit, or how good it is, is what rises to the top. You may believe the world at large, business, or your organization is a meritocracy, but if you look closer, you might see that the advantage of being the best does not remove or achieve it.

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### LIKE FRIENDS AND MONEY

We are happy to do some things, but for others, if you pay us to do it, it takes all the fun and motivation out of it, and can even be completely off-putting. In a world of exchange, we live in two. Confuse the two markets at your peril. As social beings, we have norms that govern these exchanges.

Our inner circles can be our best protection, source of information, and priceless investments, or they can be our weakest links, unreliable data, and sources of unrecoverable waste.

Choose and treat carefully. With an inherent orientation to all things social, human beings are preoccupied with relationships and how those relationships compare to those of others. Like money, like friends, and the two shall never meet.

Unfortunately, in efforts to grow the economy, we've monetized relationships. While the well-known and often debated transitions involve parenting, education, and child-rearing, the impact extends beyond families. We used to turn to friends for advice, but now we hire life coaches. More and more, it's friends or money – your choice, and it isn't easy to know the difference.

## What Could Be

For me, it was buying a house on a lake. Suddenly, I had all kinds of friends who wanted to come and visit me. While they range on their scale of generosity, it's obvious when you move, and then you never hear from them again. For someone to like you for your true self, and not the collateral benefits you bring, is indeed a true friend.

When it comes to people and the information that they are capable of providing, do your best to imagine a black box instead of a face, a robotic tone instead of an attitude, and you will be less likely to miss the truth, no matter who is revealing it.

### THE POWER OF SERVICE

A lack of passion makes everything drudgery. Drudgery is burnout. Drudgery cannot be overcome with will. Love makes all the difference. When you can love, all limits seem to drop away. Giddy, you think you can survive on no food, no sleep, and you can't wipe the smile from your face. Freedom of passion is never losing that feeling of love.

You can only feel your way out of this one. Gut instinct is not a question of whether or not to trust it, but rather when to trust it.

Trust your gut to protect your security, and remember that security is a cage. The unfortunate part about comfort zones is that they are defined by our familiarity with them, and not by how comfortable they are in general. Would you like a cage at the present moment, or wings? Trust your gut to give you a cage, trust your heart to provide you with wings.

Social media is fundamentally based on the reality that we'd pay people to hear and appreciate us. We do; they are called therapists.

We think social media is free, and we know we pay in terms of privacy, but did you also realize the price you pay for your self-esteem? Social media extracts a price based on external validation. We warp our opinions to get more likes or followers in that light. We hand out hearts when we have hardly even glanced because that's our job on social media.

Imagine the power of actual, genuine engagement, followers who share ideals, and connections that go deeper than appearances. That's the power that sparks revolution, with you or against you.

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### ELITE QUALITY

Thanks to that cave-dwelling brain we have, the number of relationships we are ideally suited to manage is a maximum of thirty. That was the limit of your clan or tribe, and you needed to know whom to trust to make the clan sustainable. Back then, people were no more self-aware than they are now.

You are going to run into the guy who thinks he is woke while he oppresses everyone in the room with his opinion. Be prepared for the woman who thinks she is everyone's best friend, yet always spreads herself too thin; therefore, no one trusts her. Then there is everyone else who smiles pleasantly while they keep the truth of what they know to themselves and let you discover if any of it is true.

It's no different today. You can be an extrovert who hasn't yet found your community, an introvert who hasn't yet encountered bullies, abusers, or other problems to solve, or an ambivert who is genuinely happy to go with the flow. Draw your circle the size you want, where you want, and around whomever you wish to. Use chalk if that's what works for now.

## What Could Be

You may have close friends or family members who love and know you well. You may want to shop around for alternatives while testing them. However, those people may have a bias that is not necessarily in favour of the truth. Remember that and inquire for information, not opinion.

Acceptance of your truths brings your whole self into existence. You might have made mistakes, acted out, or experienced powerful negative emotions that scared you and were told to suppress. When you have commitment and curiosity, you create a safe environment to ask the bully about the lousy emotion and what information it has to share.

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### TESTED TRUTHS

It's a difficult choice to choose differently from the community we call home. When you do move, you leave your community and enter a new one. Doing that gives you the ability to compare. Until you have had two experiences, you have no way to compare and no way to see what choices have been made on your behalf.

The nature of society and community is that we agree to get along. That agreement comes with some terms and conditions written down, many revealed through the nature of gossip, and some so ingrained that you can't see it until you get halfway around the world and forget about language altogether.

Never forget that the people around you influence your behaviour, but parenting is a job with a defined end. The finish line isn't at the end of your life as a human being, nor at 18, as laws would indicate. It's not when they become obedient.

Instead, the finish line is when the child knows their inner truth. When they feel 'yes' and can say it, and the same applies to 'no'.

People are not dogs. They are not supposed to do what they are told to do by any other human. They are supposed to do what they know is morally right, and that's a gift given to every baby (barring the psychopathic, as that's what makes them psychopathic).

If you think you are supposed to follow laws, who rewrites them? A moral citizen does obey the laws not because they are following laws, but because the law happens to encapsulate moral behaviour. Like the chicken and the egg, the order can be questioned all day long, but they are never the same. A moral citizen doesn't follow laws, because one day, following the law may require immorality.

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### SHARED BELIEFS

It's the morally convicted who change the laws.

You might be like Rosa Parks, tired of standing. You might be like Dr. Joe Dispenza, tired of medical answers that aren't solutions. You might be tired of playing a role that never felt fun.

When it comes to the people in your life and what you are tired of, there are new boundaries that can be negotiated, but nothing happens until you accept that you are tired of the way things are now.

You'd like to resign from your position as Chief Maid and Cook, but someone is telling you that if you don't, too, it makes you a lesser mom than she is. It's a tired story that only drains your energy. When your opinion is formed by what feels good and what feels bad, you are back in your body, aware of how things feel.

## What Could Be

When it comes to the messages of your community, you don't even have to move, and you can change all the beliefs you live by if they aren't serving you. You also get to decide that you aren't in competition with anyone, and that your opinion of yourself matters more than anyone else's opinion of you.

What feels good and what feels bad is a matter of perspective over time. Westerners would eat ice cream and say it feels good, ignoring the sugar crash, the brain fog, and the extra weight it causes. They attribute bad feelings to fatigue, senior moments, and sleepiness, but fail to recognize the connection between them.

Good and evil are not in the moment, but what endures. Embrace your full life as a whole, not as a series of fleeting, unconnected, meaningless, and trivial moments, but as a powerful opportunity to invest in a critical few.

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### SOLO ENDEAVORS

Once you've acknowledged and accepted the uncomfortable aspects of your nature and learned that they are entirely within your ability to change, you are left with questions about what to change about yourself and how to do so. There's something you know for sure that you have to change. It might be a label, a story, or a reality.

First, there's the work of going internally that no one else can do for you. You must connect with your emotions and allow them to express themselves fully in a safe, secure space. Write it out, dance it out, feel the energy and take the information. That's all it is.

Using words and a pen is a helpful way to get started. At some point, you will get beyond reporting mundane social facts, run out of items on your to-do list, complete the list of everyone who's ever wronged you and misjudged you, create a list of things you haven't yet done but would like to do, and so many more lists until you arrive at the necessity to answer questions you've successfully avoided with your list making, storytelling and mundane updating.

You can't formulate a plan, search for information, or ask for instructions until you can pinpoint what bothers you the most about your current situation. If it's a million things, write them all down. If it takes you eight journals, so be it. You might want to get started.

You. Have to. Change it. You are the only one with the answers. They are locked in your emotions. You have to feel your way out of this one. You do it with mental fortitude, grit, and will to get to know yourself as no one has ever done.

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### EGO PROTECTION

We will do anything to protect identity - that well-crafted, if not entirely accurate, representation of ourselves. When our identity is at stake, the ego comes to its defence.

Ego is often thought of as an inflated sense of importance, vanity, and pride. We call people egotistical when they favour themselves over others, but it's so much more than that. Any feelings of inferiority or self-hatred also arise from the ego. If you have chronically low self-esteem, your ego will rally to protect it. For those with high self-esteem, their ego works to enhance it.

You can think of ego as a construction of you based on what you think and believe about yourself. It's not necessarily true, but it was in place before you had the maturity and gumption to design it for yourself. As a product of the mind, it is as much about what other people say about you as what you've decided to accept as truth.

## What Could Be

As Eckhart Tolle says in Oprah's Life Class, "the ego loves to strengthen itself by complaining." According to author James McCrae, "My ego was the voice of dissatisfaction and attachment inside my mind."

You can also think of your ego as the voice that will keep you safely in the lines. It'll tell you that your dreams aren't worth it, you don't deserve it, and you'll never get there. The ego lies. It helps you close your eyes to negative self-concepts or things you find too severe to handle.

The end of stress comes when you choose reality over ego. You accept what is, instead of complaining about what your ego thinks should be happening. You observe yourself as who you are, not what you've come to believe about yourself. And with that calm mind, you make better decisions.

### SOCIETAL MIND MASTERY

Freedom of passion is the result of rejecting societal agendas in favor of conscious service, as a philanthropist might.

When you have a desire to help others, you want to ensure you aren't paving the road to anyone's hell with your good intentions.

To catch your philanthropist in action, you notice the benefit you are trying to create and see how this goal serves your agenda. Your need to help serves a need of your own, and consciousness ensures everyone's needs are being met functionally.

Meditation and mindfulness offer opportunities to become aware of the tendency to impose your views, values, or goals on others or things, and to see how you can genuinely assist them as they've requested. You need to make deliberate room to check in with your thoughts and feelings about how things are going. If you need someone to help teach you the skills and be company for you while you do it, there's no judgment here. We can all use therapists, mentors, and masters.

External perspectives can help you steer clear of wishful thinking, black-and-white analysis, disaster-scenario envisioning, and other ways our thoughts can get out of control.

Emotional wellness isn't just about feeling good; it's about doing good for society while taking care of yourself and navigating that society.

Feelings are a nonverbal language of information. Everyone has different levels of ability when it comes to transforming this flow of information into knowledge. This ability is called emotional intelligence.

If you've ever watched a Marvel movie or read a superhero comic, you've heard about the evil mastermind, the genius villain, or the brilliant bad guy. You can use your skills to manipulate other people, but you lack the empathy to care how your victims will feel, or precisely because you lack that empathy.

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### EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and express human emotions effectively. All human emotions, including love, anger, and happiness. It means being free of depression, and it also means that no suppression, self-denial, or repression is occurring. Rosy-eyed optimism and projection aren't helpful either.

It isn't just being on the upper side of the equilibrium most of the time; it's knowing how to get back up there faster. When you know how to get back up there, minor hits don't keep you down. If they happened early enough,

## What Could Be

they just taught you the ropes. Being able to climb out fast means taking as many jumps as you like. When bad times happen, as they inevitably do, people are there to help pick you back up, and we are resilient on our own.

Being out there, taking the risk, bracing for the possible failure, planning for and expecting the best, that's a wellspring of emotion. You've felt it and called it butterflies in your stomach, or you've felt it and called it pure adrenaline and excitement. However, your label matters, and since you don't know how things feel for anyone else, maybe you've been mislabeling it all these years.

Altruism toward the human race is a natural, ingrained drive. We are motivated to procreate in a way that leans toward the selfish side, but it stems from a deeper desire to ensure the species' success.

Creativity and expressiveness are personal needs. The oldest cave paintings date back to a time before some of the tools you and I use today, giving you an idea of how ingrained and deep the need is. If history doesn't convince you, maybe a few hours on the internet will, as you check out billions of people's expressions all over the world.

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### SIGNIFICANT NEEDS

The next need is that of significance, when all those people on the internet are hearing crickets. They assume they don't matter because no one is reading their content, even as they hear how easy it is to find things and how quickly they can go viral. Healthy people often find significance in places beyond their own, more likely in the real world.

The need to connect and feel a sense of belonging is a fundamental need we all share. We all want someone to see us, our real, unvarnished, unfiltered selves, and accept who we are. We want them to care for us and let us care for them.

While it's commonly said that it's a more connected world than ever, it's true, but those connections are hollow. Fame is a hollow feeling because people stop seeing you and only know the brand.

The need to feel in control is also fundamental, at least the perception of it. You can meet this need both internally and externally, believing you made it happen or that someone or something else did. The former is much healthier. Thinking you didn't study enough is far more nutritious than thinking the professor has it out for you.

The last need is that of new experience, or variety. We can't live day in and day out with the same conditions or moods. As we started, high emotional wellness doesn't mean being happy all the time. It means knowing you aren't feeling that way, why you aren't, and how to fix it so you can feel as good as possible.

Emotional wellness means you are not your feelings; they are just things that come and go, like the news on television. Sometimes you want to pay attention, sometimes it has nothing to do with you.

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### IMMEDIATE FEELINGS

Emotional wellness starts with the ability to understand what you are feeling, and it's not such a fundamental skill.

I remember asking my mother what "hungry" felt like. When I read weight-loss books later in life, a common theme emerged: to begin tuning into genuine feelings of hunger and distinguishing them from habit, desire, boredom, escapism, and other factors. I realized then that I might not have been the only kid who didn't know what hungry felt like. Instead of receiving training to do that, people are told when to eat, what to eat, when to work out, and how to diet.

## What Could Be

The first part of emotional intelligence, being self-aware or tuning in to one's thoughts and feelings, is an accomplishment. It's realizing you might and sometimes will lose things.

When Buddhists grasp this concept, they realize that they will always miss the moment. Good or bad, that moment is gone. They don't get all jumpy when things are great, and they don't moon when things aren't. They are on an even keel of "this too shall pass."

The Buddhists are right. The moments always pass.

Despite declarations to the contrary, we don't want life to go smoothly. We want to hit fast forward to get to the interesting parts. When things go according to plan, they aren't interesting.

To get a laugh, comedians end the sentence or the story in a way that you didn't see coming. You aren't laughing because the joke was hilarious; you are laughing because you didn't realize you weren't smart enough to see that coming. So, it hit you. The punch line hits you out of nowhere. You are knocked down by your failure to anticipate the ending of the sentence or the story.

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### UNJUDGED REALITIES

You can't be happy, everything-is-unicorns-and-roses all the time. You'd get bored. I think you can still enjoy the good times, accept when they end, and delight in them when they resume.

Think of the last fun party you attended. When did it stop being fun? I'm going to wager it wasn't when the hostess threw you out because you were swinging in the chandeliers. I'd bet it was when you weren't having fun anymore. More appropriately, it was a respectful time after arrival, if that came after the feeling of wanting to leave.

We need the night to balance the day, disappointments to appreciate joy, and hunger to know the pleasure of a full belly. We need a productive work period to sit back and enjoy the rest. We need things to unfold differently than we anticipated to pique our interest, even amusement.

Studies show that we are inclined first to be generous to others, but when we give it more thought, we withhold for ourselves. A better collective future requires understanding this balance. When you know what matters to you, you can align your actions and values. This alignment is what makes you authentic and enables you to serve with generosity rather than selfishness.

In a progressive society, you need that kind of optimistic testing and boundary-pushing. An individual with emotional wellness had to be at the core. Someone with that skill set is the type of person who sparks progress. Someone who recognizes that something isn't right for one person realizes how many others are similarly affected and pushes for awareness until a correction is made.

Ways and results cannot be separated. Quality is built into the cupcake, not added later, like icing, no matter what filters, editing, and marketing can accomplish.

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### POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

When young mothers make friends, it is with other young moms. It's not just because that's who they are meeting as they are waiting in doctors' offices, parking lots and playrooms. It's because they can use each other to create win/win solutions. Mom1 hosts the playdate so Mom2 can go to yoga, and they swap next week.

## What Could Be

Some moms are always hosting, some are always going to yoga. We make friends because one person fills a hole, a need, or a gap in our lives. We get something from it. But are we giving back in return?

It's incredible the amount of stuff you can handle and smile your way right through it. You are good at coping. If not, maybe you know what it's like to be somewhere you belong, where people are respectful and supportive. You are included in decisions that affect you. There is an easy rapport, so that crucial conversations are brought out into the open, and although uncomfortable, they are regenerative, and everyone comes out better.

The stress of that question leads to surrendering more than we might, just in case. The problem is that if you are doing the bookkeeping on a relationship, it is already in trouble. The frequency, depth, and nature of all your relationships deserve exploration for the attachments you have to them and what falsehoods you need to surrender about what you might be getting from them.

Ego rules survival, and the mind rules when you choose the option to let go of ego. Hedonic treadmills get unplugged. Letters behind your name get dropped. You become no body, who is no one, concerned with no thing, and that might make you supernatural.

### CHOOSING TO THRIVE

When you can welcome passion into your life, it may begin like a wildfire that frightens you, but you can contain it and use it like a dragon, or like a lighter in your pocket.

Reese Witherspoon discovered that Nicole Kidman's production company was also interested in the same rights. Instead of a bidding war, they talked partnership. When you seek to survive, you divide and conquer. When you desire to thrive, you niche and partner.

What a concept. With this groundbreaking insight, that we can all get what we need, bigger pies are baked instead of arguing over the crumbs and pits. Unlike the limited bank in Monopoly, we can build a larger bank, but be careful: unchecked growth is cancer, and the economy is not immune.

As partners, we can make a bigger difference, share each other's audience, and benefit more people. Money is always a means to an end, and you should be intentional about the end you seek if you'd like to thrive.

Ego steps aside to reveal that your opinion, though robust and informed, is irrelevant. It's irrelevant when you are an entrepreneur seeking to solve a market need. Your opinion doesn't matter when it's someone else you are attempting to win into your world, woo into your life, or wrangle into your business.

The opinion that matters is theirs, but your opinion seems better, quicker, easier, and it comes with the added advantage of extra dopamine to make you feel good.

That short-term satisfaction fades as quickly as cotton candy. You build the business, but no one comes. You line up divorces and failed relationships, but you don't know what you're doing wrong. You have no one with whom to celebrate tiny personal victories.

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### CHANGING THE CLOCKS

Once, I was a project manager in charge of changing the time when society decided it could save sunlight. Today, it's a costly endeavour that deprives people of sleep and creates jobs that could be automated.

## What Could Be

Mainframes are large, legacy computers typically found in large, established companies. They store all kinds of things, mostly items that people have forgotten how to create, and usually, even what is there.

When we change the clocks, we take everything offline, someone recodes the time, and then we bring everything back up.

Like stopping a human heart, but with a machine, technology, and the entire organization's operations at stake.

Like surgeries, there are checklists, protocols, procedures, back-up plans, and people to call when things go haywire. Do expect things to go haywire, since who knows what's connected to what in these old mainframes filled with legacy applications. There's no anatomy diagram to follow. Sometimes, there are organs, I mean software, that no one knew were there.

As a project manager, when my phone rang, it was only because things had gone haywire. My phone rang—a number from India, promising doom.

That morning, we set our performance target by collectively praying that all our customers would sleep in. Worldwide. Every single one of them. For at least half an hour. On the one day of the year that you are least likely. We weren't done springing forward yet, but hopefully, everyone would sleep in. It was a Sunday, after all.

Forty-two minutes later, everyone was allowed to wake up. Science suggests that praying is effective, but it can be stressful as a project plan. Since we were technically green, I wouldn't even have to report anything out of the ordinary. Good luck next year, project manager. It's not going to be me again.

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### LEARNING THE LESSONS

If you want to know why you slept soundly instead of being woken by the cold sweat of your insurance rates increasing to cover new equipment, you're welcome. It's also not going to be skimmed off the top of your investments, added to your commission fees, or itemized on your statements. Yes, that job could be automated, but then what would you do with the people, and how would you pay for the technology?

Close calls are always followed by lessons learned, and even when it's a sure victory, there is always a way to make it easier, faster, and better next time. This time, we learned about something called dynamic switching, but man, was it expensive.

If you think changing the clocks is no big deal, please consider the team that has to work through the night twice a year, the equipment required for two hours a year, and, frankly, the need to get the world onto a universal, simple time system.

Ginger Rogers did it backwards and in heels. I've met parents who paid attention in meetings, despite sick kids in the hospital. Moms who didn't get a wink but are keeping their eyes on the PowerPoint. Some dizzying performances are pulled off every day, and no one applauds the miracles.

Going against your nature is sure to court stress. When we choose what others want us to do, we risk burnout. Burnout is ultimately a mismatch between a person and their job. We often try to get by without the resources we need. We do things against our principles because it's the way they want it done. We stay in jobs where we lack the control we need. All of these lead to burnout. Beyond the obvious, what need is being served by staying?

### SEEKING SIGNIFICANCE

In ordering a beer, Dan Ariely and Jonathan Levav found that we order one beer when we do it silently. When we do it publicly, a need for individuality emerges. We switch up our beer orders as not to copy anyone else. The drive is so strong; you might even end up ordering a beer you don't like.

Everyone seeks uniqueness to some degree. Some people have a naturally high need for uniqueness, while others tend to want to blend in with their surroundings. Everyone has their level of discomfort in the sequential beer ordering game.

You likely were not taught to be yourself. Most of us have a detrimental belief that it's more important to fit in. Your parents might have chided you for being a lemming in high school, but that was because they didn't like those friends. Above all, they taught you to co-operate, follow orders, don't make waves, be nice to everyone, and on it goes. It's faster and easier than teaching kids to think for themselves.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs places the need to self-actualize at the top of the pyramid, like a summit to be conquered. At the foundation are the necessities of life. Food, shelter, and water are the basics of survival. Three billion people – half the world – live on less than \$2.50 a day. As of 2013, eighty percent of the population is below the poverty line.

Self-actualization is the realization of your potential. To get there, you must start by being authentic. Then you need people to help you get there. People who score high on authenticity tend to have better resources for dealing with setbacks, feel more secure in their ability to meet life's challenges, form deeper relationships and develop a stronger sense of self-worth.

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### FORCED PHASES

The power in Six Sigma, if there was one, was in the defined phases. DMAIC, the acronym of Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control, slowed people down and, when it worked, helped them tame human nature. When we realize we have a problem, the immediate urge is to eliminate it. This temptation of crisis drives people into action, often in a knee-jerk manner.

The Define step is asking, "What problem am I trying to solve?" Getting clear and specific makes people realize what they were running off to would have been ill-advised. The second step in measuring is ensuring that your data is related to facts and truth.

Analysis is the step that's usually done mentally, and therefore, lopsidedly, or it paralyzes people who have skipped the earlier two steps. Improvement is about conducting scientific experiments to ensure it makes a positive change. Control is about guaranteeing the solution's sustainability. Things change over time. A robust solution accounts for this change.

Liberating your passion requires feeling it. In the face of adversity, we discover our character and the injustices we can't tolerate. When you think about it, you can't help but talk about it. You can't help but want to share it – a vision for something better with the other people who could benefit. The experience of being oppressed makes you say something if it's all a matter of time. Passion is being more afraid of not doing something than the fear of doing it.

## What Could Be

Your story is how you tell it. Make it informative, empowering, or entertaining, but don't let it bring you down, victimize you, or cast you in a role other than the hero. Find the upside in your story, even if you have to flip everything you once knew and thought you believed on its head.

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### UNCHECKED AMBITIONS

They say to follow your bliss, which seemed to be the end of the instructions. When I graduated as an engineer, I thought I had finally achieved my goal of becoming a painter. Wait, what? Yes, I took a month before starting my career and filled canvases to hang on my plain white walls, which I wasn't allowed to paint.

All through university, I doodled gowns. After graduation, I got a personalized label and sewed up a storm before I realized fashion doesn't fulfill me either.

I spent all my spare time reading books like Barbara Sher's *I Could Do Anything if I Only Knew What It Was*. With no debts to my name and full-time employment on a career track, I had no idea how I could last until retirement, so I immediately started maximizing my RRSP contribution room and containing my expenses.

Travel? Forget it; I'd rather retire. Entertainment? Forget it; I'd rather retire. It was no life, and I had no idea why I'd worked so hard and spent so much money to attain it.

About 15 years ago, I took the StrengthsFinder quiz developed by Marcus Buckingham. First, I read all 34 strengths and knew which ones I didn't have—Woo, for instance. The test results revealed that I have Achiever, Focus, Learner, Ideation, and Strategy, although I forgot the order.

Today, as I work to complete this, I am using those five strengths. That is some free-flowing passion and what living should feel like.

Your test results may not provide a clear indication of how to allocate your time effectively. For me, fully utilizing my strengths every day is the fulfilling experience I sought. Don't check your ambitions at anyone else's door but your own – you might be the best boss you ever had.

### MAINTAINING THE MOMENTUM

While I am a fan of Jim Collins' book *Good to Great*, history hasn't been kind to it. Two of the companies that form the backbone of the Collins model are Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. For those who are unfamiliar, they met their demise during the subprime mortgage crisis. Fannie Mae, one of the examples in the book, was also discussed by Nassim Nicholas Taleb in his book *Antifragile*. Taleb recounts an incident in which an insider shared internal data with him, revealing the inevitability of the collapse.

It is easy to dismiss *Good to Great* in its entirety. As the columnist Harvey Schachter writes, leaders "move deliberately, not pronounce grand strategies, find what is working and push hard to attain consistent momentum."

Everyone else relies on charisma. Charismatic individuals are often promoted without much question. When they are around you, you feel a sense of specialness. They seem to take your comfort zone and make it even more appealing. Out of their mouths come things you expect and want to hear. They tout visions and significant change, and everyone gets on board – just like the Titanic.

Schachter's conversation with Collins reveals that he offers no advice and asks question after question over two half-day sessions.

## What Could Be

Not offering advice takes discipline for people keen to prove how much they know. When they don't raise their hands, it reminds me of the quote, "Better to be silent and be thought a fool than to speak up and remove all doubt." Asking questions and being curious about the answers is the missing ingredient in the transition from **Good to Great**.

For Collins, that's the frustration of genius at work – when it comes naturally to you, you don't notice, you don't value it, and you don't realize others don't have it.

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### FROM BULLIES TO ADVOCATES

The question "Why?" is the most powerful in a leader's toolkit, and charismatic people don't ask it. Perhaps as children, they witnessed their parents tear out their hair and become frustrated, and decided to drop the question for the sake of better relationships. As an adult Six Sigma trainer, I'd try to undo the damage, but I get nowhere.

They say no one likes change, but that's not entirely true. If it were true, we'd crave leftovers, never wish for a break in the rain, and the entire fashion industry wouldn't exist.

We love change when we control it, and we're pretty sure it will unfold as planned. On the latter condition, we can be pretty flexible, but what we dislike, and even this isn't exact, is that it's just an improvement; we do not like loss.

Unless it's weight, and only to a certain point, before we start getting anxious again.

With loss, each of us embarks on a unique emotional journey, shaped by factors such as our personal history, life experiences, and temperament. Perception is individual, meaning that I record one version that differs from the one you record, even when we experience the same event simultaneously. When that happens, why do we bother arguing over what happened?

Shout out to my exes, my oppressors, my abusers, and everyone else who seemed to exist to ensure I found my voice. Getting control of my face was very difficult, but it was also necessary for professional reasons. Everyone knew what I was thinking in meetings because they could see it on my face. When I finally got control of this unconscious behaviour, it was because I realized that it was a power play that was working for me.

Why get rid of what works?

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### DELIVERING SERVICE

I learned the concept of a degree of freedom in engineering. It is the number of choices available to you. In engineering, you learn how to see them, separate them, label them with letters, and then use mathematics to describe how they relate and interact. To me, it was like a spirograph in three dimensions.

As letters turn into numbers, degrees of freedom tick down. Being squeezed is the elimination of all freedom. It is paying the tow truck driver whatever he asks because he is the only one there. I don't think anyone likes being squeezed, and take it from an insider, for some businesses, it is the business plan.

Freedom- that's my game. Every day, I wake up grateful for it. My work is aimed at increasing global freedom collectively.

Now it's up to you.

## What Could Be

I didn't spend my life looking in mirrors, but appearance is first and pervasive to everyone else. I forget what I look like, but it doesn't do anything about my Betty Boop nicknames, the disappointment people tell me they had when they realized that I wasn't a stripper, and the executives who asked me if I could change my photograph because my smile seemed to spark a thought that they couldn't bring themselves to move past to get on with the conversation.

I'm asked to speak for groups, and I'm thrilled to have the chance to share my message; yet, no one takes notes or asks a question. The men didn't hear a word I said, and the women all wanted to know who I thought I was. Without a theory of mind, we assume that if I have an agenda, you must have one too, and there's no way I'm falling for your story of service. What's in it for you?

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### USING BECAUSE

It can be uncomfortable to have to explain yourself. It's even more painful when you search and come up with answers like "because it's my job" or "because that's what I was taught."

It's incredibly easy to be tricked by the word "because". Ellen Langer showed that it doesn't matter the reason, just the word.

In 1978, Langer found that about 60% of people would be so kind if you asked, "May I use the Xerox machine?"

If you ask, "May I use the Xerox machine because I need to make copies?" the compliance rate increases to 93%, and if you say, "May I use the Xerox machine because I am in a hurry?" you'll achieve 94% compliance. She found that you'll get compliance as long as the reason isn't alarming.

In my world, I watched a charismatic leader fall for the phrase "because." We were finishing up our Black Belt training (not my first or last around this ring) when our CEO came to encourage us and be available for questions.

Eight of us were interested in the same question and were the only ones to raise our hands. "Why didn't we have projects to work on during training?" The CEO responded, "Good question," and passed it on to his direct report, who oversaw such matters.

"Because for some of them, their first day with us was the first day of training," he said.

It was four months later, and we still didn't have one. As a leader, if you are tricked by "because", you could fall for some doozies. Not only was our start date under his influence, but the projects could have been assigned to us on the very first day.

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### MISDIRECTING EMOTIONS

No matter how we feel, we need to understand and recognize the energy we bring to any exchange with another person, because it's contagious. If you spread negativity, judgment, and attitude, you might quickly find yourself in your own elite company.

Recognizing the emotion, allowing it to be your experience, and then letting it pass are healthy ways to manage it. Emotions are fleeting chemical experiences. It's when you think about them, ruminate, and hold on to how badly it feels that it's unhealthy. Studies have shown that rumination leads to cancer.

## What Could Be

Becoming at peace with your fleeting emotional state can help you navigate decisions more effectively, foster stronger relationships, and even lead to a healthier body.

The tyranny of productivity is over. Instead of quantity, the emphasis is on the quality of time you can bring to your work. You will get more done when it's high energy than when you are mopey and drained from a hard day.

The trick is mastering your energy, not your time. Certain things give you energy, while others drain it. Fill your day with those energizing things; you will always be ready for the next one. Try to get through a whole day of drainers, and you will drag yourself to bed without dinner.

Only you know what gives you energy and what takes it away. Acceptance is non-judgment. It is what it is.

If you haven't lived it, you don't know, so you can't judge. It's about letting everyone be who they want to be, as long as they maintain respectable boundaries. Respectful boundaries, however, arise from social wellness. The ability to be yourself and not judge the mirror comes first. When you can judge the mirror, the neighbour is a piece of cake.

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## CREATING TRUST

The most significant barrier to excellence is a lack of trust. Trust is comprised of two key elements: competence and character.

Trust isn't a blanket of optimism. It's knowing what to trust. Understand your people well enough to know what they would do in a particular situation, then place them in a position where they can do the right thing - the things that come naturally to them. That requires curiosity, a mutually beneficial kind of curiosity.

Leadership is not about having power over people. The new way is about building trust, credibility, and believability. Creating trust means you send one message, not two or three. Your body language, words, tone, and actions are consistent and match over time.

Being credible means that you have put in the work, done your time, and aren't slacking off anytime soon. You are ready, willing, and able to do what you say. Believability stems from knowing what to do and why to do it, because you understand the consequences of not doing so. You aren't unthinkingly following instructions. You've been there, come back, and lived to tell the tale.

Three times. Ray Dalio agrees. When I was taught the importance of the three times, it was because of them, not you. Do it once; everyone will write it off as beginner's luck. Twice, and you get the benefit of the doubt. Three times, you've proven it. Fail on try three, and you go back to being lucky, which is not believable.

Being authentic requires daring. You must dare to hear your inner voice and tackle it for the truth. Then you have to dare to let down some people whom you had falsely held up in the first place. It's a lot easier when you know what you trust.

## 5. FREEDOM OF CREATIVITY

Freedom of creativity is rejecting imaginative reductionism in favor of conscious abstraction. If you ever tried to share something you've experienced, only to know that no one would believe you, then the voice of the common has choked your internal voice – the one that existed before anyone told you how things are supposed to be. Sometimes, the supposed “way things are” just isn't.

You seek to explain and will not rest until you find the reason, the pattern, the way it all makes sense. But what if you resisted the impulse to connect the dots so quickly? When you can let the facts simply exist, a whole new way of seeing the world emerges and shows you what a limited perception you used to use to interpret and understand the world as you experience it.

Richard Prince said, “I never had a penny to my name, so I changed it.” I held onto that postcard for years, thinking that the message was to put in the work to change the story. I put in the work and changed the story before I realized that it's all about the identity, the name, and the attachments.

It seems the older we get, the more attached we get to our stories about how things are the way they are. Yet, knowledge marches forward. Times change. Sometimes, even people change.

Sometimes it's as easy as changing your name. Women know this, as generation upon generation they've discarded the last name of the most important man in their life as they step into a new phase where it's all about a new most important man.

To master your imaginative mind, you need to know the reality of how assumptions work, and ensure you don't get your exercise by jumping to conclusions.

### THE WILD TURKEY AND LINES NEVER CROSSED

When I wrote my turkey hunting exam, I tiptoed through a class of hunters there to learn about moose hunting. While they learned and debated which weapon and bullet to pick, I answered my questions, got my perfect score, and tiptoed out.

Learning about turkey hunting involves knowing not only what weapon to use but also the difference between allowable targets and those that closely resemble them.

How things look matters a great deal; many professions are dedicated to upholding this belief, and no human ever needs training on making a first impression, harboring a prejudice, or perpetuating a stereotype.

Cindy Crawford says she was enrolled in chemical engineering, but when she looked around, she didn't see anyone who looked like her. When I was enrolled in chemical engineering, I thought that no one looked like me either, but I thought, “So what?”

Everywhere I went, I kept forgetting my appearance, but that's all anyone could see. From hunting to engineering to city living, I can't help but notice that if I'd been different on the outside, I would have had a completely different life.

The skin you are in plays a more significant factor in your life's trajectory than the self that occupies it. To me, that says a lot about the state of potential in the world we live in today. We know appearances can deceive, but when

## What Could Be

will we overcome them? Instead, knowing that appearances matter, we buy the creams, shop the labels, and use the mirror.

Going so far, you might even opt for surgery, camouflage, or new options. To me, surgery is painful, expensive, and time-consuming; camouflage is highly situationally dependent and, therefore, unsustainable, but new options are something I'm trained to find, compare, and even select.

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### PRIMARY IMPRESSIONS

While building my business, one of my paid advisors said, "Who are you to think you can create a course on innovation?"

While I wasn't paying to be coddled, I wasn't paying to be disparaged either. He was well aware of my business innovation award and the track record that went with it.

I can create anything I want; how well I do it is another story, and selling it is still a third.

In business, what you create doesn't matter; it only matters what you sell. The difference between Picasso and van Gogh isn't the quality or quantity of their creations – it's in Picasso's superior ability to sell. Picasso was rich and well-connected; poor Vincent is best known for cutting off his ear.

People don't buy based on merit; they buy based on social credibility, marketing, packaging, and reviews. To sell innovation, you need a reputation that matches or a friend who knows all the right people.

To sell innovation, you need to be Disney, Steve Jobs, or some other recognizable name when there is no such thing as letters to follow that would have you believe. Sometimes, the credibility comes first, as it does when you say doctor to a postgraduate. Proof, right up there in the introduction, if you didn't already notice the white coat.

Merely wearing a doctor's white coat is good enough to improve your performance on attention tasks, according to studies by Hajo Adam and Adam Galinsky, who coined the term encllothed cognition, because the same effect does not hold if you think it's an artist's coat.

Selling isn't even about solving a problem or satisfying a need – it's about providing membership with the other buyers.

Who cares about ability? Not the market. Most books that are purchased are never even cracked.

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### FIRST LESSONS

In Montessori, I learned how to colour. The assignment was to pick a shape and a crayon, then color it in. After failing twice, I learned to press so hard that direction changes are indiscernible. That way, you can color parallel to the lines of the square without failing because "You changed directions."

No, I didn't abandon my approach. As a child, I learned that you can fail at colouring. After that, I learned you can cheat in art class. As a teenager, I won the art award even though I cheated in portrait drawing. Or rather, I feel I cheated because I used a ruler, a calculator, and my left brain.

As an adult, I learned what Montessori was supposed to be about, and I firmly hold on to my impression of "supposed to be."

## What Could Be

We all believe our eyes, even if our brains know better. Sometimes, we should take a moment to intervene, because if the world were one where seeing is believing, we wouldn't have quantum physics. We wouldn't know there is so much more to the world than you can see.

As an adult, I wonder what that teacher would have done if I'd picked a circle and spiraled my crayon around and around. I could ensure strokes never overlapped, but it would have required constantly changing directions – this I learned in physics.

In midlife, I found the book, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, by Betty Edwards. This was the first time I realized that, just like yoga, process matters, and it's not all about the product. Art isn't about what things look like, or even how it makes a viewer think or feel – there's the market, and then there's the skill, and often in life, they exist independently.

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### PACKAGING MATTERS

From the time of the Trojans, packaging and impressions have long been used against people. In my case, I went networking for the right programmable microphone, and I wasn't shopping for technology.

I'm accepting what I cannot change, no matter the pearls, the suit, or the hairdo.

Once, there was an accountant in charge of the paint line, automotive parts, but also landfill. A part was given three chances before being sent to the garbage. Profits and losses revealed a story different than the performance figures that the accountant was offering. When he went on vacation, I was sent in to find the disconnect.

I discovered that in his ledger, parts were either good or bad. They weren't excellent, good, and phew, and didn't distinguish between early bad, bad but saved by manual improvement, or reveal any detail about where something went wrong. The costs varied significantly depending on how much time, material, and man-hours each piece required.

Of all the questions I've struggled to answer, this was the most difficult. How do you tell an accountant that his counting is off? He yelled at me in a room full of people about how dare I, and afterwards, I hid somewhere and cried. The plant went out of business. He apologized as an aside, in private, but it was too little, too late. I simply did as I was told, without realizing that I was operating behind his back.

After I shared this story, all the men's eyes were on the floor. Then they say, "Well, I'll be happy to be your microphone. I don't like to do a lot of work, so why don't you do the work, and I'll talk. Would that work for you?"

What doesn't work for an employee serves just fine for an entrepreneur.

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### NAÏVE IDEALISM

All I wanted was to do what I do, get paid appropriately, and not be treated poorly. I'd bullishly held on to my naivete about what should be versus reality and set about creating it. Age and gender should not matter; we made it illegal to matter, yet of course it does, and we know it, and that's why it's illegal.

Yet, without compliance, what is law? It's ridiculous to pick every single battle of inequality, especially when it's all you, all uphill. Changing what's real into what should be isn't an easily won war.

## What Could Be

Instead, I'd had managers take my work and attempt to present it without understanding it. At the end of the payday, the proportions for who got what piece of the benefit never seemed to add up. Most of the benefits were lost in translation, and desperate people did desperate things.

If gender, race, personal connections, and other biases didn't get in the way of collaboration and working together, we'd see how two heads are better than one. With an open market and clear strengths and weaknesses, we can collaborate successfully to achieve what I'd always thought was the intent of a career: fair wages, fulfilling contributions, and positive impacts.

Society wants you to be smooth, well-rounded, and easy to manage. Being easy to manage means you are compliant. Being well-rounded means performing adequately, comprehensively, and inclusively. Smooth means you are not rough. It's simply the default, typical, and expected way people normally behave.

Rough means you bash some things and cause change. Being an individual means you are self-defined with the kind of precision that would pop a balloon if need be.

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### THE EARLY WARNINGS

Vanishing bees are an early warning sign that significant problems are on the horizon. Bees are used to pollinate crops that have grown so large that bees are uninterested, but pests find them magnetic. Insecticides are used to control pests, but are subject to minimal testing before they are introduced to the food supply. Bees appear to accumulate the effects of these insecticides. An entire food system stands to fall - one that wasn't so healthy in the first place.

The process of experimentation and the discovery of knowledge should result in disproved and proven hypotheses. When something is proven correct, or a previously incorrect claim is debunked, researchers are quick to publish their contributions. However, when results fail to meet expectations, those studies are less likely to be published.

When researchers fail to publish, others waste time and resources travelling the same roads without informing anyone. Some even refer to these as "failed" experiments, even though the only actual failure is due to the process and premise, not the result.

History has shown that new ideas are initially greeted as strangers: first with fear and hate, then with trepidation, and eventually as acquaintances, before being accepted by the open-minded as friends. We still say Pick up your phone, even though it's not holding anything down anymore. It's a turtle's process.

In 1982, *Helicobacter pylori* was discovered to cause most ulcers, not stress and spices as previously thought. However, doctors continued to prescribe Tagamet and antacids. Fifteen years later, the CDC launched a public health campaign to raise awareness. In 2005, the scientists who discovered the bacterial cause of the disease won the Nobel Prize in Medicine or Physiology<sup>xxi</sup>.

### THE CHANGING BASELINES

At one time, so-called knowledge included such facts as the world is flat, women are incapable voters, and no one would want a personal computer.

Today, this is laughable because the baseline of fact is fluid. The knowledge kaleidoscope shifts because some people argue, others want to see things differently, and some people imagine beyond the boundaries of today's world. This fluid is only flowing faster.

## What Could Be

Your grandparents were taught things in school and didn't have to worry about whether those "facts" would remain throughout their lives. Your parents had no idea that would happen to them, and kids these days need to learn more about finding and testing the truth than they do about memorizing it.

Finding the truth is the point of the scientific process. However, even scientists struggle to get the facts straight. They are just as prone to biases as regular humans. A scientist's conclusion and livelihood might be too close for comfort. For anyone, a survival bias may amplify the problematic thinking and behaviours already at work.

Researchers receive grants to do their work. The funding comes from the government, private individuals, or those with a vested interest in the outcome. Pharmaceutical-backed research yields four to five times as many favourable results as government-backed research.

Today's kids spend two minutes learning letter formation, compared to two generations ago, when roughly an hour a day was devoted to it. This frees up fifty-eight minutes to learn what your parents didn't know and can't teach. Calligraphy has always been a valuable skill, and maybe it's not for everyone.

Facts define a sandbox where theories can roam free. You can have yours; I can have mine, and as long as proof is stable, we can both have fun with imagination and possibility.

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### THE MODEL OF THE UNIVERSE

If the eighties were about keeping up with the Joneses, today's goal is to keep up with knowledge. Don't confuse stupidity with difficulty keeping up, because busy doctors are asking, "What's a biophoton?"

When new knowledge emerges, science must absorb it. It does this within a hierarchical pyramid. Differences in one level give rise to the next, so when new knowledge is discovered, all the levels above it must accommodate it.

Math is at the bottom of this pyramid. Newton needed math to solve his problems with planets. He was interested in physics, but didn't have the necessary math skills. Once calculus was developed, physics could then solve its problems.

In school, you were taught a mechanical model of physics. You studied mass, distance, and tangible things. Even the atom, with its hard nucleus and electrons in orbit, appeared tangible.

Since then, the study of the atom has revealed it to be space with miniature tornadoes. Physics now studies vibrations, waves, and probabilities as it updates its model.

Physics deals with matter, but there are different kinds of matter. The various types of matter give rise to chemistry.

There is a distinction between living and non-living entities in chemistry, which gives rise to the field of biology. There are other living things, which in turn give rise to more disciplines.

In medicine, these changes require incorporating the mind into what they previously studied only as a body. The observer matters.

Albert Einstein said, "Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity, and I'm not sure about the universe." In the future, we will look back and see things we can't imagine now, and may we be smart enough to laugh at some of the things we hold dear as facts today.

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### THE FUNDING OF INFORMATION

The paying party dictates the news we receive, the research that gets funded, and even what's taught in school, but it's not the only way money and information intersect. Most of what we've learned about human nature comes from studying the WIERD, if only because it was more economical: The White, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic students.

Researchers are clever folk, and they take painstaking care to be scientific. However, the price for the most accurate results often requires an astronomical sample size. Instead of scientific purity, they get the best sample they can afford. In psychology's case, they turn to the student body, who are eager to earn a few extra dollars for their participation. Student bodies were not diverse, as higher education was a privilege, a privilege of the WEIRD.

When you study WEIRD people, your conclusions can only apply to WEIRD people.

Recently, I watched a TED talk. They studied men for a prolonged period, and then articulated a conclusion that began with the word 'people'. I commented, "I don't think you can study 'men' and make conclusions about 'people.'"

A man wanted to know why yet another woman has to pick things apart.

Call me a feminist, but this was about my voice as a scientist or a statistician.

The reality of logic is that you cannot extrapolate. You can include women in your study, or you can conclude about men, but it's unscientific to leap to the general when you study the specific. It's not something I think; it's something I know.

When it comes to knowledge, be cautious about what you think you are certain of. Where no proof exists, who can be wrong? In your world, you are the master, but outside of that, you will need facts as your foundation.

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### THE FOUNDATION OF FACTS

Anyone pursuing the development of their voice and listening to others as a means of self-definition needs to be able to separate facts, perspectives, and conclusions.

Facts are the foundations of opinion. From there, we are allowed to have our perspectives. From there, we conclude.

Conclusions can be controversial and debatable, especially when presented as facts. With Jordan B. Peterson's **12 Rules for Life**, there are a few facts I would debate. It's controversial for Peterson to argue that women's highest purpose is to let men take care of them while they raise babies, but it's not new, nor is it a fact. It's merely one perspective.

Unfortunately, I met people who assumed that if it's in a book, it's true, especially when the author is a professor. People think that the 'rules' are like physics, rather than a mere misappropriation of language and implication of marketing. Publishers operate their businesses like any other, rather than serving as gatekeepers of knowledge.

What we are not allowed to pick and choose are facts. It's a reality that facts are not as straightforward as you might imagine. There is so little that is irrefutably known. Many debates are not in pursuit of knowledge but a ring of competition like any other. A debater is unattached to a position and committed to winning.

## What Could Be

You shape your beliefs by the facts you choose, just like everyone else does. It's called confirmation bias. You will find information to prove what you believe, even if you are not aware of what you think.

Loosen your grip on what you think you know for sure, but use your surety as a lens to focus on your beliefs. You will quickly notice that everyone has a few that are ill-formed, controversial, or debatable.

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### THE UNCHARTED HERO

Joseph Campbell says we all get a call to adventure, and mine was literal when the CEO called to ask me what I was doing differently. The question defined an adventure, and made me realize that everyone else was doing something different.

In specific audiences, I realized I knew more about statistics than they did. If I told them this number means you are safe, and you should go for it, they would go for it. If I told them a different story, they would go for that. With this reality, I realized that everyone else was pursuing someone's agenda, but in my case, all those agendas had already been pursued.

I was naïve enough to think I was supposed to solve the problem to which I'd been assigned while everyone else was maintaining and managing relationships.

Early in my career, I argued in meetings, saying things like, "That's not in this company's best interest." People looked at me strangely while I stood alone. They knew what I did not: there is no such thing as a company that will have your back. There are only people.

Today, a CEO would pat himself on the back for having such a strong culture that a new employee would know what is 'right' rather than just execute orders.

With the will to persevere in relationships, social life, and organizations that were arguably toxic disorganizations, I started actively choosing my sides and managing my terms and conditions.

A heart full of emotion directed at the logic of customers, the pride of my superiors, and the ability to sleep well at night. Through my journey, these were lost and replaced with frustration and insomnia, a void of customer surveys or concerns, the jealousies and fears of human beings.

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### THE MISTAKES OF MASTERS

We don't watch Superman take all the medals in the Olympics. Of course, he could, and that would destroy the entertainment. I've read about athletes who chose one sport because it's about competition, not winning by a laughable margin.

If your urge to dominate is so strong, by all means, do go and find your sport and spare innocent society members. That's called getting your needs met. Use your time on the bench to reflect on why rank attracts your attention and the nature of genuine competition.

I've also read about the founders of the LPGA, who collaborated as much as they competed. The mistakes happen when you forget that your best competition is your worst enemy, and that's the one you can never escape – yourself.

## What Could Be

If your urge to build your endurance is your point, pick your lane and give it all you've got. I've read about a woman who can hold the plank position for four hours. There's another woman who can row for weeks and weeks. You need to develop your endurance, so choose a playground where you want to master the skill and learn how to overcome the pain, the repetition, and the elimination of all else.

Complex problems are solved by identifying what the experts all agree will never work. It's Clarke's Law: when an expert says something is impossible, they are likely wrong. Get all the experts to tell you that your idea is impossible independently, and you've hit pay dirt.

When you think you know how to solve a problem intuitively, rather than through analysis, it's likely that you don't know at all. All you can do is empower the people involved and stop telling, forcing, and pushing them to do what you want – if solving the problem is what you desire.

### THE DEFINITION OF PROGRESS

Good project management undoes every problem-solving attempt. There are projects, yes, and then there are problems. A project has a budget, timeline, and scope, but not problems.

You don't know where a problem is going to go, so how can I agree to a scope? I pull a thread and follow it. How long will it take? Beats me. What will you need? I have no idea. A problem manager says, "Let me get back to you, in real time, ok? I'll tell you as soon as I know." However, there are only job postings for project managers.

There came a point in my career when we weren't solving problems. We were doing what the leaders would do if they had our skills and hands. That way, they could define budget, timeline and scope as the business desired, yet it was far from a solution.

We were executing tasks even if things had changed to such a degree between the telling and the doing that any sane person would stand there asking, "Seriously?"

Turning problems into projects is too slow a solution to be effective. There's a Steve Jobs quote about hiring smart people and then telling them what to do. On LinkedIn, one manager wrote that they had finally had enough, because what else are you supposed to do?

You trust them, you tell them what they need to accomplish, you listen to the requirements they say they have, the obstacles they say they face, and you rally resources as you can, since you have more at your disposal. Having more resources and seeing farther is the point of having someone to whom to report, not because there is or ever was such a thing as a 'superior.'

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### EGOIC CONTROL

One of the tools in the Six Sigma toolkit is the Design of Experiments. Design of Experiments, or DOE, is a deliberate approach to setting up trials to test different settings of variables, with the shortest possible testing time. This is the tool to help you test new ideas rapidly.

Typically, the go-to approach is to try one thing at a time and see what works. This can be exhausting, draining, and often does not reveal the proper solution. Usually, things are related, and you need their interaction to understand their significance, but you won't discover this when testing individual factors.

## What Could Be

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

Not everyone has the confidence to trust the process, to hand their fate over to automation. In one DOE competition, with half an hour remaining in a 24-hour challenge, one of my group members thought he could improve upon the code running on the computer. To my complete shock, he grabbed the controls and started randomly guessing.

Just like that, our team had no results to provide at the end, disqualifying us entirely. When we enter crisis mode and don't understand the power of our ego, we think that we are the only ones who can do it. Move aside, everyone and everything else, I have to be at the controls. It's a quick and easy test to eliminate potential leaders.

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### INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

Daniel Kahneman called this trap of human nature the biggest one, the one he'd eradicate if he could. Daniel Pink takes the opposite perspective, saying that the trait he admires most, because he sees it so rarely, is intellectual humility. Intellectual humility is the willingness to recognize that what you think and what you believe might be wrong. Ray Dalio calls it the most important lesson of his life.

When it's your time to step up to the plate because you are the one who knows more information, has more experience, or is in the right place, it's your job to speak up and take down the fearful control freak who wants command of the situation.

When it's you who is doing that, stop, look around, and see who is the best person who can advise you at that moment. If you need to clamp your lips, do whatever it takes to keep from derailing the best choice of action from coming out. It might need to come from the shyest person in the room, and if that's their weakness, it has nothing to do with the value of their voice, so help them now. Find them and ask them if you must.

When you lead your professional life with the knowledge that you might be wrong, you go on an adventure to tap into the fluidity of knowledge and laugh at the notion of being able to hold onto it. You appreciate the moments when you discover you were wrong about something and get to replace it and update your worldview.

When it's more important to understand than it is to be right, you dare to explore, experiment, and play with knowledge. What if letting go of being right is what will make it come true more often?

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### WHY EXPERTS NEED AMATEURS

Arthur C. Clarke's Law held the clue to the answer to the CEO's question. This first law states, "When a distinguished, but elderly, scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong."

To solve a problem when all the experts are stuck, find the thing that makes them all say, "That will never work." It's not good enough to get 99% of them to say it. This is where perfection is the bar, and nothing less will do.

Perfection is required sometimes, but not often. Interestingly, I want 100% of them against me, as long as it's not a popularity contest but rather one where the results speak for themselves. Otherwise, I have no chance, literally. The only solution is the one no one will believe will work.

## What Could Be

When you're driving down the highway and hear a strange noise, and things start acting weird, what do you do?

If you say 'speed up,' 100% of the experts will tell you it will never work. Try saying just how much faster you want to take things. Here, the throttle is our friend, friction is our heat-generating saviour, and volume is how we will laugh all the way to the bank.

When those with power say okay, act like you just robbed a bank and got away with it. Pack up as fast as you can and get out of there.

Because the only other woman in the room will come to her senses and ask, "Wait a minute. For just how long?"

Well, there's a question that cannot be answered with data, but with culture and intuition.

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### DECODING CULTURE

In one organization, it is an offence that will get you fired, and in another, if you don't do it, you will get fired. In both organizations, the paperwork appears the same, the policies align, and the people are just as ethical. To what do they collectively agree?

Culture is the personality of an organization. For organizations, culture is the code that dictates the behaviour we expect in certain situations. The R&D department in one organization was a hush-hush library of an introverted party, but at another, it was an air-gun blast of an extroverted after-five. Saying "We have a great culture" tells me nothing about which one you think is great.

It is human nature to see an injustice and feel angry, motivated to harm the perpetrator. Babies do it. Depending on your level of maturity, you begin to understand what society and others expect of you. Do not hit. Use your words. Be ashamed.

To flip an experience, you have to see things differently—a perspective shift from the one everyone else sees.

No matter our nature or our nurture, something can happen to a kid that shouldn't happen to a kid. If the kid thinks they deserve it, they get sad. If they feel they didn't deserve it, they get angry. The difference lies in whether they deserved it. What we think we deserve is, for everyone, a function of self-esteem.

What if the way out of your depression is to get angry at the things that made you sad? Good thing depression causes you to want to do nothing but stare at the wall—a good whiteboard to imagine how you might be seeing things upside down.

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### STIGMAS AND JUDGEMENT

To learn a lesson means accurately interpreting cause and effect and knowing how to apply that relationship in the future. It's easy to miss the lesson; even military flight instructors get it wrong.

The Nobel laureates Kahneman and Tversky reported that pilot trainees typically excel in one maneuver but struggle with the next. Since instructors praised trainees when they performed well and then criticized them when the next maneuver was unsuccessful, they concluded that criticism is the most effective response to successful maneuvers.

The events were indicative of a statistical truism. If the first measurement is extreme, the second will be closer to average. If the second is extreme, the first will have been closer to the average.

## What Could Be

Kahneman and Tversky conclude, “This true story illustrates a saddening aspect of the human condition. We typically reinforce others when their behaviour is good and punish them when their behaviour is bad. By regression alone, therefore, they are most likely to improve after being punished and most likely to deteriorate after being rewarded.”

In terms of photography, it means not measuring each step to see if it's right, but using each one as a dial toward perfection and knowing when it's completely futile. When it's completely futile, you might be on to an innovation.

There was one time when I shocked the exposed film during development, and the evidence was irreparable. Out of the roll came an award-winning photograph of bark that appeared three-dimensional.

Another whoops-turned-win was printed upside down. A third was the result of not realizing I'd used two pieces of paper, instead of just one.

Learning from experience involves honing focus, memory, and attention. It also requires letting go of your stigma of failure and starting to see innovations to explore and problems to solve instead.

### THE OPTION TO THRIVE

For me, the choice to become a chemical engineer was more about keeping options open than knowing where I was headed. Suppose the career counsellors had told me that I'd be headed to densely populated areas. In that case, I might have reconsidered the plan.

Instead, I was lucky to find a job in a small city that was willing to hire me. One day stretched into another. My classmates turned to goals such as getting married, buying a house, and having children. Well, I was on a path toward home ownership until one fateful day at work.

One person bought a house; another called it a land anchor. Glee spread through the office. Leaders were whooping and carrying on as they'd just earned a trophy.

As I listened, I realized the leaders were celebrating that this star employee wouldn't be leaving anytime soon. Likely never. No bonuses, raises, or other promises would be required to convince this person to hang around – they'd locked themselves in. Should they then have children and enroll them in school, well, draw up the retirement papers now. The following two decades are virtually a certainty.

It was an eye-opening experience because I'd been moved around and pulled out of schools numerous times. At that moment, I realized all I'd both lost and gained through the instability. It's challenging to be thankful and angry at the same time, so we take an emotional journey called grief. “Good grief,” said Charlie Brown, and he was right.

Staying in one place seemed more like prison than a secure future. Like Ray Dalio, I feared boredom and mediocrity more than I feared failure. Optimizing security results in a cage. On the other hand, optimizing freedom results in wings—a maximum ability to go anywhere.

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### THE ROLE OF THE AMATEUR

If you need to design an experiment because you have numerous ideas and can't determine which is best, proceed and gather the data. If voting is still being used to determine the best idea, then start using matrices to focus on the criteria that determine the best idea, and the system of measurement you will use to compare them.

## What Could Be

Your job as an amateur is to act as if this new way of doing things is completely normal, until it becomes so. As an amateur, you get to be the champion of new practices. You get to ask questions that experts fear might expose things they are assumed to know. You get to be naïve, and you can use that to everyone's advantage.

That is, if you dare to speak up and not back down when your questions prove inconvenient, uncomfortable, or impossible to answer.

Your endurance tells everyone who is in charge – your mind or your body, and when the tug of war is over. Willpower is a skill, not a talent. Focus is yours to control.

It's the one ability you need to be more effective—the ability to do it. To decide in your head and then make your body follow. Now. Of your own accord. It tells us all how long you can live with yourself. The point at which you stop is when your mind gives in, and your body prevails. You made the decision but didn't follow through.

Don't confuse your role as an amateur because you aren't the expert you wish you were. You have a job to do now, and that's one you can master.

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### THE WRITING ON THE WALL

Freedom of creativity requires an extensive database of experiences. If you were to program software to be creative, for instance, to create a new chair, one way would be to give it many examples of chairs, let it draw conclusions about the rules of a chair, and then produce a new combination that doesn't yet exist.

Your mind can do that, too. I thank my lucky stars for the diversity of my experience, one I might not have chosen if I had to do so myself.

When I was snowmobiling, I heard about a terrible accident requiring a woman to be airlifted out with two fractured tibias. "I guess she didn't see the signs," I said.

Someone behind me said, "What signs? I didn't see any signs."

How do you warn the next guy of a trap when you have nothing at your disposal? You use what you do have. You use footprints and broken branches.

Hear others when they try to warn you, and recognize that they are doing their best. Increase the opportunities for the universe to communicate with you and tune into what it tries to tell you. What if there is a God, and he's been whispering in your ear your entire life? There is that voice of wisdom if you are creative enough to hear it.

The emperor wasn't wearing any clothes, and it took a child to point it out. As the amateur, you might be the only one in the room who can say what everyone is thinking or mention what everyone is seeing. What you see and realize that other people might not see might be the most critical observation of the century.

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### VAGUE PRINCIPLES

One of the phrases I hear in conflict management circles is, "Do you want to be right, or do you want to be happy?" This phrase implies that false harmony is a viable option, like pasting a smile on your face or faking an orgasm.

I prefer to ask, "Would you rather be right, or do you want to be principled?" Being principled means that you may sometimes act in a way that contradicts your words. As you strive to live by your words and do what you say, you

## What Could Be

develop the rare skill of self-awareness, making necessary apologies, and articulating those principles accurately and precisely.

Holding on to the sense of being right is a natural human response when the brain is consumed by fear, pain, and loss.

When it comes to principles, Ray Dalio sets the stage. He wrote the book *Principles*, which includes a call to action for everyone to write their own. Writing them out forces you to get accurate and precise. Then, he argues, we can engage in debate and learn from one another.

Before my physics final, the final words of wisdom called to me were, “You cannot push a rope.” Like a rope, people who don’t know their principles coil when pushed. I’ve never meant to do it, but I’ve put people on the spot with questions I thought were simple; in retrospect, nothing is simple when you are put on the spot.

After I wrote my principles, I knew what fights I wanted to pick and how to avoid getting triggered by the wrong ones. I felt armed with words like bullets, just as ready to face Goliath as to go first and alone into a volcano. It was about the process, as much as about the product.

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### TRANSPARENT ANSWERS

There is a curve of growth and change. It describes how growth initially proceeds at a slow pace. Then, a critical point is reached, and growth takes off on a steep upward trajectory. When the next critical point is reached, growth slows until it drops off altogether.

In business, it’s the startup phase. Then, you achieve the perfect fit between what you say, what you do, and how you do it, and your business is complete. You make profits, become more efficient and effective, and continue to grow your profits. Then, all of a sudden, the market becomes saturated, sales dry up slowly, and people get laid off. Middle management disappears until finally, the executives are dividing up the pension fund and filing the bankruptcy papers.

People seemed to get upset when Jeff Bezos declared his intention to ride the curve and not jump. Whether you are an investor or an employee of Amazon, you can’t say you weren’t warned. You can tell that you expected him to change his mind, but he was unable to carry through.

It’s about learning, teaching, growing, and contributing. At first, you try to accept things that you’ve been successfully denying, and nothing happens. You feel worse than before because, somehow, things were your fault, and you don’t know why. Then something clicks; and rapid growth occurs before the next plateau.

You weren’t stupid, you were instinctual. Then you weren’t stupid, you were psychological. Then, you weren’t stupid; you were intellectual. After that, you weren’t stupid, you were societal, and now, you aren’t foolish but imaginative.

This is the freedom of creativity – explaining things to yourself, given the relevant facts. While I’m transparent about the answers I’ve discovered, it’s the culmination of a long process of learning, teaching, growing, and contributing.

### INCONVENIENT DIFFERENCES

Technology has put us on the threshold of a new kind of inequality: the inequality of reason. When you know about the inequality of reason, you can use it, and it can be used against you to incite conflict, wars, consumerism, servitude, and the status quo.

The future is in the hands of those who seek and teach themselves new skills, like how to ask new questions, build new insights, and develop their wisdom.

If nothing happens to you in life, you don't develop resiliency. If you always get what you need, you don't develop strategies, ambitions, or grit. The point is to master the lessons, and that requires work. This is the work they refer to as inner work.

Sometimes we find ourselves in the same situations repeatedly. At other times, we realize our perceptions were distorted or incomplete and recognize what we missed. The next time we find ourselves at the same crossroads, we choose differently. These are the aha moments in life, where something clicks, and transformations happen.

For that to happen, you must be aware of how transformations occur without your knowledge, permission, or intention. They are happening because you are a human being with a brain that wants to help you survive. Today, you have the choice to thrive, but it's a choice you may not have imagined exists for you to take.

For all the information you can find about what you cannot do, you can be the one who defies the statistics, writes the new rules, and shows everyone how it's done. If it enables, empowers, or energizes you, consider it a sign to investigate and continue doing so. If it inspires rage, hate, or retaliation, move away and find the anger, injustice, and differences that inspire you to create progress.

### IMAGINATIVE MIND MASTERY

Freedom of creativity is a result of rejecting imaginative reductionism in favour of conscious abstraction, as an artist might.

Relying on past data for future decisions is becoming less reliable. Change is becoming increasingly complex, and the future is becoming less and less reflective of the past.

When you have a desire to make sense of the world, you are blessed with creativity and imagination; yet, you adopt traditions. Noticing the artist in action, you recognize the urge to produce, to be in action, and to be climbing a ladder at all times.

To catch your artist in action, you notice the way they see causes and effects that don't surprise you, confirm your worldview, and lack all creativity. You become aware of your distaste and accept taste as a personal, individual experience.

Meditation and mindfulness offer opportunities to become aware of the meaning of a quantum world—a universe that emerges from nothing—and an individual who is here for a reason.

You may be fully aware of knowledge, but not yet conscious of what to do about it. One talented rationalizer is hiding an unpaid debt from her husband. It's not hers, according to her, because her partner incurred it in a previous marriage. Yet, the courts ruled it her responsibility, and the banks have her name on it, yet it's still not hers, she declares.

## What Could Be

I applaud her creativity, but this is an example of freedom from rationality. Freedom of rationality means connecting the dots in any way you want. It is not eliminating the dots that you don't want to exist.

It might be in her refusal to accept the legal terms of marriage. Fifty, fifty. Whatever you think you agree on may not be stronger than the law when all that agreement goes south.

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### THE POWER OF ABSTRACTION

Fundamentally, stereotypes are trying to help you sort and filter people quickly, so you know what to trust. You'd want to get that right, wouldn't you?

We all have stereotypes, and some of them are outdated. Some of them are helpful, like people wearing hoods pulled over their faces with sunglasses and their hands in their pockets, are people you don't want to meet. Or take a drive in your Dodge 3500.

Tim Bosma was a prominent figure in the news in 2013. He'd listed his truck and disappeared with the two men who showed up to test drive it. His wife had told Bosma to accompany them on the test drive, because they didn't want it stolen.

To steal that exact vehicle was precisely what the criminals were there to do. They'd abandoned an earlier target when he'd mentioned his time in the Israeli army, doing "you don't want to know." The two men showed up at night, and who checks out a used vehicle in the dark? No one with good intentions.

What is eerie is the conversation and events that led up to him getting in and driving away. His wife and neighbour watched them drive off and said, "I think that's the last we'll see of him."

It was. Yet, they'd done nothing to act on this instinct that they knew how to verbalize. They all knew. They knew they knew, and yet, no one said, "Hey guys, why don't we do this tomorrow. Why don't you come back then?"

Why? Because we fear rejection and social faux pas more than we fear ignoring our inner wisdom. We are taught that external matters are more important than internal ones, and yet, internal wisdom will save your life when you listen to it.

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### SILENCED SACRIFICE

Henry Ford said, "Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, you're right." Consider the last time you bought a car. You picked it because it was unique, then you started seeing it everywhere. We know that our interest in the vehicle did not automatically change the proportion or population of that car on the road, but that's what you decide.

Rational reasons won't change your heart, but they might help bring it to light, as they did for Benjamin Franklin's nephew. The nephew was struggling to decide between his two girlfriends. Franklin recommended a detailed data-driven analysis. The analysis indicated one choice, and his heart immediately knew the right choice – the other one.

Crafting your destiny begins with rewriting your history and understanding the profound impact it can have. If there is one thing that is certain, it is that there are many ways to convey it. There are many details to omit and creative ways to describe the same thing. You can cling to the obvious story, or the one that puts you in a favourable light, but there are many perspectives on the same events.

## What Could Be

Looking for who to blame is the default human nature. Evolved leaders look to learn from the incident; enlightened leaders apologize to the people they tried to shut down when events indicate they should have been listening.

However, it's all in the leader's identity – in their mental programming. If they are in default mode and content there, they will double down on their command-and-control culture. It's the default mode behaviour to command and control, and being a work in progress while learning to act above those motives requires genuine personal leadership to embrace.

When there is room for some abstraction, there is space for the power of imagination.

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### GOING IT ALONE

A knowledge worker is someone who uses their brain and mind to work. It's not everyone; it's not even role-specific.

I was a knowledge worker early in my career. But by the end, in my corporate job, the steps and outputs had become so codified that I was like a worker on an automotive assembly line, needed for skill and execution, not experience or input.

At work, what you initially decide to go along with on the first day, because you have bills to pay or some other reason, eventually becomes normal. There are lines to colour within, and then there is merely what someone said—some human.

Humans don't rule the universe, and they are prone to making mistakes, both individually and collectively. There is a great deal they don't know, and more that they think they do know but don't.

As Steve Jobs says in the documentary ***One Last Thing***:

*“When you grow up, you tend to get told the world is the way it is and your life is just to live your life inside the world, try not to bash into the walls too much, try to have a nice family life, have fun, save a little money...That's a minimal life.*

*Life can be much broader once you discover one simple fact: everything around you that you call life was made up by people who were no more intelligent than you, and you can change it, you can influence it, and you can build your own things that other people can use. Once you learn that, you will never be the same again.”*

Life is for you to bash into the walls and view as something to create. Forget about home renovations - make your life more comfortable.

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### PICKING A CARD

I discovered that I am the Greek Goddess Diana, the Roman Goddess Artemis, and the modern Wonder Woman. I am the Lady of Beasts and the virgin huntress, the protector of childbirth and wild animals. I am known to appear as a bear, the moon, a nymph, and a tree.

## What Could Be

I found out on April 19, 2019. It was a ceremony to celebrate goddesses and the full moon. Part of the ritual involved selecting one card from each of two decks. From one, I pulled Diana; from the other, I pulled Artemis. At home, in my reference book of Goddesses, I found out they were the same. It's statistically difficult to pull the same card from two decks.

Enough jokes. I never said I was a comedian. I said I was an engineer, past tense. A pursuer of truth, I pray at the temple of scientific method. As such, I have a well-informed basis for a foundation of reality.

As an introvert who sees no harm in keeping myself entertained as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else, I have a lot of fun with playing how to describe something, how to connect dots, and most importantly, what to forget as I re-imagine my personal history and find the benefits of all the costs I paid and the pleasures in all the pain I endured.

Trauma isn't what happened to us, but not having someone to talk to about what happened to help us process our human emotions. One day, you might become that person yourself.

There is a premature advantage in life for the older, craftier, richer, and mightier. It doesn't last forever. Nothing lasts forever. Not the metal of the strongest cages. Not the programming of the most well-intended society. Time changes, and takes everything with it.

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### EVERYDAY LUXURY

Organizations that thrive expect and demand leadership from every level.

I didn't want to come home and hear, "Aww, did you get a papercut at work today?" I've already fallen in love with, "Hey, can I tell you about the fire I put out today?"

Leadership means being a champion of merit, not an agenda. For everyone, that means finding their merit, growing and developing it, even codifying it if possible, and serving it up for the good of the collective. That's the point in organizing – so we can accomplish more together than we could on our own.

That's the theory. In reality, many individuals take on a role that allows them to do things they wouldn't otherwise do.

In a top-down organization, if the leader has 300 employees, then he can accomplish the work of 300 people, at most. No one does it to the leader's standard, so you will likely get much less.

In a merit-based organization, if the leader has 300 employees, they can accomplish the work of at least 300 people. In Ray Dalio's company, Bridgewater, he says the math is akin to  $1 + 1 = 3$ . With 300, you have skyrocketing potential.

When we get into debates with other people, the idea is not to prove you are right or find the holes in the opponent's case. It is to find the third. When we seek to understand the other side, we see the third.

As someone who's been locked in a room with the other side and told to find the third, it can seem impossible. In my case, my thing was based on a theory of freedom and independence. That if you treat people like adults and give them meaningful work, they do their best.

### SEEING PLAUSIBLE ALTERNATIVES

The other side was reflected in the name he gave it: BOSS. He came from a background of command and control, and if you don't order them around and keep them busy, people will run amok, and worse.

I knew we weren't going to be able to do that when he yelled in my face, so close and so wet, "I used to be an assassin, you know!"

Just like that, everything made sense to me. Desperate people do desperate things.

Beliefs are formed on experience. If he has never seen anyone acting with self-driven motivation, and if he does not act out of self-driven motivation, you can't believe anyone would. You are consumed with survival, and I'm championing a world in which survival is assumed. You can't thrive if you are faced with life-and-death decisions and are trapped in that mentality.

Being able to see and understand someone at such an intimate level as to know why they do what they do is a luxury of time and attention, but it doesn't come without work. In 2009, I started tuning into Oprah's Soul Series. With her, Eckhart Tolle told me that according to my definition of luxury, it was a choice available to anyone.

My definition, as published in *Better Homes and Gardens*, was, "Luxury is the silence and peace brought on by lack of worry."

Worrying is a choice. You can decide not to worry. It doesn't mean ignoring them; it means acknowledging them and making plans for the ones that aren't fake disaster scenarios, and celebrating the gift of first-world problems. With that insight, I realized I'd always marched toward luxury by taking action on my worries.

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### DOING THE WORK

With the problem of my quickly vanishing vision, the stress I'd had to solve was the lawn. I purchased my house in March. When there is snow all over the ground, I trust my agent and the pictures. Misplaced trust. She'd told me, "There was a storm that washed out the driveway, but don't worry, it's been repaired."

The driveway was repaired, but when it washed out, it covered the backyard in gravel. The backyard was not repaired. I couldn't stand to see that I'd not been smart enough to push through her saleswoman's answer. I'd been had. To stop seeing that several small-towners had conspired to trick me into a false reality, and I'd been too stupid to see it coming. To stop seeing gravel, why not just wipe out my vision?

Because it's a lazy, imprecise solution.

I ordered topsoil, grass seed, and a rake. I used by ATV and dump trailer from dawn until I had to leave for work, and then immediately upon returning home, pouring every spare minute and muscle into doing the work to save my vision.

You can pray to the universe, but do your end of the workload. You might be very upset with any other alternative that comes to pass if you decide not to act.

I believed in the reason and the solution, even if I had to implement them in the material world rather than the quantum one.

## What Could Be

Whatever works, the artist says. Art is secretive, while science is like my mom with my diary. Conclude what you will, while nature will continue to carry on defying your expectations, calculations, and experiments.

We all know what old relationships become – baggage. I pulled out the canvas I'd painted and smashed into smithereens, and now I have a lovely tote.

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### REPURPOSING STUFF

My mom taught me how to sew. Alternatively, if you prefer to decide for yourself what to wear, you can create it. Fine by me. I've always appreciated it when people tell me how to get what I want.

Science dictates the rules we cannot ignore. Engineering taught me about gravity, friction, and a whole host of ways in which energy and matter interact. Art taught me that none of those things are limits, but rather the ingredients of creativity.

Jackson Pollock, the famous painter known for his technique of dripping paint, was both a scientist and an artist. He may not have understood the principles of viscosity and fluids. Still, an understanding of these concepts is evident in his work, as seen in the ways he violated the natural pooling of liquids.

There is so much that goes into a painting that you will never see. That is art – doing the work knowing that no one may ever know or appreciate it.

The art of art is making the work disappear. Like a dancer makes gravity disappear, the artist is successful when the naïve observer thinks, "I could do that too," known as the Dunning-Kruger effect. The people who've tried it feel, "How the heck..."

To me, that art show was like Stephen King's *Needful Things*. For that reason alone, it was my first and so far, last. I thought I was exposing myself, but actually, it went the opposite way. Like everything, you don't see what is there until you stare. You think you saw, but if you did, you'd be able to draw it. Artists stare at nature until nature reveals itself.

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### IMAGINING NEW SUCCESSES

Before deciding how to proceed, assume you will be successful. Take a moment to assess what is truly worth achieving. Now you know how to answer the question of how, within the ways and means that are relevant.

In the material world, you are supposed to collect and hold onto as much status and belongings as you can, and yet, that's not what Oprah was doing. She was letting it flow through her.

Oprah wasn't stopping the flow of good fortune by putting it in her bank account and nowhere else. She was giving, donating, and sharing the spotlight, creating successful platforms for others and bringing as many people along as she could. Or so it seemed to me, according to the press. A role model for wealth.

In one experiment, researchers showed that people decide whether you are fair enough, and if so, you can be better off than they are. But if you are all about yourself, they will sacrifice their fortune to hurt you. Selfishness quantified.

Ignorance is bliss; people should let you be, but usually, they take it upon themselves to avail you of it. Are you waiting for the reward for your obedience and stellar performance?

## What Could Be

If everyone is trying to get back at someone, it might be the first teacher who looked down their nose in scorn, whipped out that dreaded red marker, and dropped that fat red cross on your innocent white paper.

Following someone's advice doesn't come with a return policy. It's your life, time, and resources on the line, and ultimately, it's no one else's skin in the game but yours.

When you stop caring about anyone else's use of the white space, conflict disappears into a matter of a difference of imagination and a lack of education.

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### LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Life would be easier if we could accurately learn from experience. As the earlier traps in your thinking accumulate, it becomes unlikely.

People think that if every department is running at an 80% performance level, then the customer experience isn't half bad. In reality, customer experience is a product, not an average, of the departments.

Let's say a customer deals with sales, operations, and accounting as they buy, experience and pay for your thing. They experience 80% multiplied by 80% multiplied by 80%, which is just enough to scrape by at 51%. Does that explain why they are angrier than you think they should be? Wait until they call customer service, and it dips down to 41%, if customer service is 80% as well. You've just lost a customer, and you blame it all on the poor call center. How's that for in it together?

As someone who has worked in call centers, I have remarkably little power to do anything. They can't give information on where it could be of use. Once, I generated a list of over 70 opportunities based on the idea of sharing information to create solutions instead of apologies. They asked me to bucket them into four categories, and then were relieved that they didn't have so many. Nothing had changed, but how we would talk about it.

No, they only had one problem, one that was a result of technology, processes, roles, responsibilities, and human nature. Just like everyone, everywhere, in every organization, no matter rank, department, or industry, they end up with silos, fiefdoms, and the misuse of power.

The main objective of a control chart is to remind leaders that what appears to be a change may not necessitate any action. People love to adjust, and the ripples cause tsunamis.

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### POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS

You can listen to other people's choices, and when you feel your gut roll with disgust, and your skin crawl, you know that they aren't right for you. What's right for them and what's right for you can be two different things, as long as they can coexist without detriment.

Can you feel your gut or your skin?

There was a phase of my life when I realized I was not in my body. Somehow, I'd get burns, bruises, and other physical evidence of something that happened, and I was too in my head to notice.

In the therapist's office, I learned how to identify what I felt, where I felt it, and to name it appropriately. I had to learn how to be, literally.

## What Could Be

Sir Ken Robinson's TED talk made me realize that it isn't just me, but rather a design flaw in the education system. Left-brained academics who are excellent at all things the industrial world needs from us: concrete skills and tangible efforts. Unfortunately, it's up to you to restore the balance both in your brain and in the world.

There was a time it was smart for me to conform to the rules. The rules were to get a professional career, work for a corporation, get a corner office, and retire with a pension. My rules for me never included a husband or kids, but they do for many women.

There comes a time when those rules no longer work. Or rather, they break down as you notice discrepancies.

When you notice them, you start your journey from a default skill level in using your consciousness, to one in which you now have to develop the ability to question what you used to take for granted.

### UNTHINKINGLY SEEING

Where science defines rules and natural expectations, the art of art goes beyond the known and defined.

My art teacher cried when I told him what I'd be doing with my time in university. I told him that being an artist is a hobby, not a career, just as I'd been told.

Always trying to help and be of service, my paintings were an extension of this mission. To help her on her mission to get married and have babies, I found a picture of two cupped, white flowers that seemed to be leaning on each other and pointing toward the external landscape. I thought this was a perfect representation of an ideal relationship. In blue and white to match her bedroom, I poured out my hope that she'd find the guy and create the family.

I said nothing of my intentions or anything else. When she hung it over her bed, I kept my celebration to myself. Shortly after, she was engaged and pregnant.

Then came the day she sent it back, along with the second one I'd made for her, one of a Black-eyed Susan propping up a bigger one.

We'd fallen out, and no longer a part of each other's lives, so I wasn't completely shocked to hear her rationale. "I don't want to explain the existence of you when my kids ask who painted this." Sure, I thought, that's how the subject of me will come up. Getting rid of a painting would eliminate them ever asking about an aunt, so went the theory.

I smashed both paintings to smithereens. When my dad saw, he said, "What a waste." I wonder if he had a clue what was wasted.

Later, I repurposed the fabric into totes. Sour past relationships become baggage, don't they?

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### FROM FREAKS TO RARE GEMS

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. I've written essays into every single painting I've ever created. People look and say, "That's nice." Or, "Very pretty." Sometimes they say, "I'd like it better if this were a different colour, and the composition more like this, and ..."

My mom ordered a painting. A rose, appropriately, but do it in a different colour to match her décor. Additionally, it is a unique opportunity to tailor it specifically for her, although it is the only blue rose I've ever seen.

## What Could Be

My dad bought one from my show, and I wondered how he knew it was about him when he bought it. It was innocuously titled, "Blue Poppy." I saw it hanging in his new house. I wondered why it was rotated 90 degrees from its intended position, but I didn't ask about that either. The fact that it looks bowled over to me is as fitting as the likely unintentional nature of it all. People are free to do as they please with their possessions.

There's a lot that goes unsaid in so many conversations; it might be the art of conversation. It is the source of my social stress, because I'm exploding with secrets I want to share, tricks I think you'd want to use for yourself, and all kinds of information that I am a human water cannon.

When you want to do something, people might ask you, "Who do you think you are to..."

As I've learned, and as this book intends to convey, life is full of information. Instead of taking it, you might be ignoring it, misinterpreting it, or denying it, but you don't have a lack of it.

We can reject information, categorize it appropriately, consume it dynamically, and integrate it when necessary.

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### REPRESENTING ABSTRACTION

When I first learned that my high school French might be required to save my vacation, I wished I knew more of it.

That day, we spent it in a hotel room. Yes, it looked leisurely on the outside, so let me spill the juicy secret of the drama on the inside.

On the inside was a guy who couldn't stop staring out the window, even though the rest of the pack had ridden away hours ago, and we'd made plans to regroup tomorrow. There was also a girl who thought, "I better explain how commas work in French so he doesn't have a heart attack when he sees the repair bill."

The next morning, we headed off to catch up. Unfortunately, after we overshot the trail and turned back around, everywhere I looked said, "Closed." On the feeder trails around town. The only motel. At the only gas station. Not just closed, but encased in plastic wrapping for the season.

Some wrangling later, deals for gas were secured, rooms were found, and there was finally time to wonder where the rest of the pack was.

Just then, I finally heard from them. The text read, "About an hour away."

Again, with the high school French, "Oui. Une autre chambre, s'il vous plaît."

At dinner, all my questions about what was taking so long were answered. I'd never seen those images captured in real life, but they certainly matched the ones I'd taken in my head. It just takes so much time to stop and take them, and then you never get to see the miracles.

Miracles are a shy sort who don't take much to having their picture taken. Especially, don't tag them on Facebook, for crying out loud. Are you trying to get someone fired?

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### OUTLASTING CONFORMITY

I'd long suffered from a sibling envy complex, wondering why I didn't have what I saw they had, until the day I observed it play out in front of me.

## What Could Be

One woman was telling me about her grandson, who caused her concern. He sounded like a depressed kid, for sure. Withdrawn and sullen. She invited me over to a birthday party to meet her clan, and so much became obvious.

First, the oldest son was at the threshold, with big hugs, squeals of delight, and smiles. Second came the subject of concern.

It was a good thing she told me, because I wouldn't have known. She ignored him, turning around before he even had a chance to reject her hug. There was a hopeful look, then a dashed one, and then the kid fell face-first onto the couch. No one went over to him. Love and concern are actions, not words, and no one was showing an ounce of what they knew they should be doing.

If anyone had cared about his precise predicament, an observer wouldn't know. In my world, I check on unresponsive people, but I don't mess with other people's kids.

It sure made something in my universe become crystal clear. With perfect clarity, I was him, back when enough kids were jumping around and doing dumb things that no one noticed the one who was quiet and composed.

Fairness is showering every kid with love and affection as soon as they walk through the door. Not just your favourite.

Fairness is listening to the plans and accomplishments of every kid, not just the ones in front of your face with something to show you.

It's knowing that some kids have no idea how to get what they want, need, and deserve.

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## PREFERABLE PERSONALITIES

You might prefer one kind of person over another. Parenthood doesn't allow you the choice, so if you can't treat everyone with loving kindness, don't have kids.

When in doubt, don't have kids. All systems are broken. You can either fix them or exploit them. You can tolerate them and ignore the malfunction, but that's not an option once you see it. It will either annoy you and prompt you to take action to fix it, or thrill you as you spot a shortcut and know how to exploit it, since everyone is doing it.

There's always a lower bar and a higher bar. Dr. Joe Dispenza will help you become supernatural. Ray Dalio will share all his principles for becoming fabulously wealthy and successful without compromising people or the planet. While I follow these two thinkers, I use the word to imply that I've read and appreciate what they stand for and how they do it. Health, wealth, and happiness informed by leading-edge science.

For an engineer, the bar of acceptability is if it works better than whatever is currently doing the job. A hammer is better than a rock; a garage of technological gadgets and heavy equipment is better than a hammer. Progress is better than perfection, but not all change in the name of good intentions constitutes progress.

There are lots of ways to get anywhere. This is what I know for sure. It comes from having worked with and for disorganized organizations. There were incredible leaders whom I couldn't personally follow.

More, though, and everywhere, were people who felt like I did, that their potential was untapped, unarticulated, lost along the way, marred with scar tissue, unrepresented by the products of our work, ruined beyond repair, and limited by what we were told to do.

### SOLVING REAL PROBLEMS

Want to solve a specific problem, and Google is full of answers. However, when it comes to addressing unique challenges, you must know how to solve any problem.

It's disconcerting to have problems. We try not to see them, and we're pretty successful at it. When we can no longer deny them, we describe them in more palatable terms: challenges, opportunities, issues, or difficulties. Whatever you call them, they remain things or situations that need to change.

What's even more disconcerting is the ambiguity required to solve them truly. Truly solving a problem is like driving through a snowstorm – you can only see a little way in front of you to know where you are going, you have to go slow because you don't know where the road is going to twist and turn, and you have to trust and relax in your abilities, your tools, and your commitment.

The real problem is often not the one on the surface, but something else that is causing that surface problem to appear. Addressing only the surface problem won't make it go away. Taking the wrong actions could exacerbate the situation, making it even harder to identify and resolve in the future.

Ideally, we'd like to find root causes. These are the events that happened as close to first as is possible to affect. Root causes are great and powerful, but they can backfire. Looking for "the one" can lead to searching the entire ocean, finding causes beyond your ability to impact, or analysis paralysis as you keep peeling the onion.

Instead, eliminate some major contributing causes to reduce the frequency, severity, or invisibility of the problem. Solving real problems is about consistently addressing these issues, focusing on the process, not the people.

## 6. FREEDOM OF RATIONALITY

Freedom of rationality is rejecting intuitive separation in favor of conscious navigation.

If you are feeling lost, congratulations. It means you are asking questions, seeing options. Not knowing which one to take is a privilege. Some folks never wake up and question the automatic paths they've taken in life. For Neale Donald Walsch, he was 53 years old.

In *Awakening Mind Part 1*, "Know Thyself," Walsch says, "It was very much as if I had been asleep really for 50 years. Walking around like a robot, just doing the things that I was taught to do from the time I was a young man, you know, I had a formula down: get the girl, get the car, get a job, get the house, get the spouse. A formula that I thought was how I was supposed to work until I got to be around 53 years old, and I realized that while I had done most of those things and had become professionally successful to a degree, that I realized that none of it mattered. I woke up somewhere around the age of 5, realizing none of this matters; none of this means anything. I was shocked to find how this literally meant, how pointless it all was."

People called me lost; I didn't argue. I was seeing the pointlessness of it all as well, but I certainly didn't want to be "found."

I felt that people were trying to pull me back onto that pointless track, to resume where I'd left off.

If you stay on the beaten path, you will never discover the thrill of adrenaline. Not all those who wander are lost. You want to bounce forward – not back. There is no going back once you've seen behind the curtain.

### THE HOMING PIGEON AND NEVER GETTING LOST

Scientists study homing pigeons to understand how they navigate back to their homes. Rupert Sheldrake recounts growing up watching pigeons return to their homes in Britain, regardless of where they were released.

Since science cannot explain how pigeons navigate home, scientists can postulate theories, all of which have been ruled out. It isn't familiar territory, the stars, magnetism, smell, or clock-dependent time. It leaves open space for anyone to fill with a way to connect the evidence with perfect rationality. It doesn't require credentials; it involves rationality.

Decisions framed as this or not-this will always lead to poor choices and regrettable decisions, no matter how many times you waffle. Binary options create strife and frustration. There are numerous degrees, and we can only see one or two, not the full 360 degrees.

As a student, I preferred addition over subtraction. On my test, I turned all the subtraction signs into addition signs with a stroke of my pencil, but because I assumed the teacher had a template for marking, I did the subtraction anyway.

I figured the teacher wouldn't even notice, and that my dream doodling would not make any difference. Instead, I noticed spit flying for several long minutes when she finally let me have it. I didn't figure it was the right time to discuss efficiency improvements for her marking process. Like I always do when I take a scolding, I stared at the floor and waited for her to scream, "Look at me while I'm yelling at you!"

## What Could Be

Templates, checklists, and maps help everyone stay on track and avoid getting lost. More, they help you ignore all the noise that really doesn't matter to your journey – like the immaterial doodles of a grade two student. What did it matter? Her point was simply lost on me.

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### THE FIRST LIES

Experts estimate that almost all of our decisions are rooted in the emotional unconscious, which appears irrational on the surface but is entirely predictable. The first few words of Dan Ariely's TED Talk convey a great deal: first, our behaviour is usually irrational; second, we all suffer from the free-from-bias effect.

We all have no problem observing irrationality in others, and therefore accept and believe the science. But then, we say, "You, but not me."

This refusal of the truth is nothing but another predictable flaw of human nature.

When I learned that scientists estimate that 80 to 99 percent of our decisions are unconscious and automatic, I thought it couldn't possibly apply to me. As an introvert, I was highly aware of my thoughts, and I was sure that made me far more in control than that small percentage. Presented with uncomfortable information, I did what we all do: I ignored it; I denied it.

The more intelligent someone seems to think they are, the less convinced they are that they have a human brain, and it might function just like every other one known to science. They believe they are rational. They are conscious of their thinking, they weigh options, and therefore think they are not subject to irrationalities. Perhaps they even hold Black Belt certifications and engineering degrees.

Can you handle the truth? It's more a question of how much you can handle. We all think we are better than average, unless we are clinically depressed. In my case, I wound up clinically depressed, which enabled me to be able to handle the truth.

The truth shall set you free, but first it will piss you off, so says Gloria Steinem. This is helpful when the way out of depression is to transmute sadness into anger.

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### A CREATIVE DENIAL

The more creative you are, the better you are at launching your defense. The more you've invested in your education or letters after your name, the more likely it is that you have deeper motivation. We all have egos to protect, and the easiest way to do so is to blame someone or something else as the culprit, rather than own our actions.

Healthy relationships are accountable relationships. If your intentions are healthy and peaceful yet do not produce healthy, peaceful results, you need to own the disconnect. Instead, we deny the damage and disregard feelings or feedback that go against our sterling assessments of ourselves.

Denial is a powerful thing. You can go on a cruise with people who believe the Earth is flat and are looking for the edge of it. Magicians and marketers know how to lead you into choices you think you made for yourself. For them, it's hilarious as they either laugh at you or laugh all the way to the bank with your money.

It's no laughing matter, though, when your emotional reality is ignored, swept aside, or minimized, yet that's what happens to those who are hurt by denied irrational behaviour. Put yourself and your emotional experience above

## What Could Be

all others, and you might find that there is no one in your world who will contest your rationality, because there is no one in your world.

Refusal to accept that you've made mistakes might leave you all alone – should leave you all alone, because fool me once, but not twice. You've educated people on what to expect from you, and they've come to expect someone who is completely irrational and in complete denial.

No matter how creative, intelligent, or educated you are, you are not immune to the biology of your brain.

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### THE CULTURED MANAGER

Every organization is a disorganized mess. If you are as naïve as I was and think you are there to help clean it up, you will be devoured by those who arrived before you and decided, "If you can't beat them, join them." Amid the mess is ambiguity, and in that fog, those with personal agendas are free to roam.

Others think they will win the game and redefine it, but by the time they arrive, they have worn the mask for so long that it has stuck. Don't hold your face like that – it will stay that way. Culture rubs off on you, just like people, and long after you've left, it's still there, informing how you relate to other people. You can survive a toxic culture, but not without getting infected.

The culture at work doesn't stay there, and it doesn't disappear when the payday does. The way you learn to evaluate people, change, environments, and information leaves a lasting impact and doesn't stay confined to the workplace, industry, or company.

To avoid embarrassing mistakes, managers must ask potential new hires for references. However, references are well-known to be carefully curated, carefully managed pieces of trickery. Who falls for references in a world of social media? At some point in the future, there might be a day when they are asked, "Could you have reasonably known?"

One day, the judge will declare, "Yes, you could have." Shocked and mortified HR managers will scurry like cockroaches when the writing is on the wall. When you aim higher than merely avoiding embarrassment, you might land among the stars.

Every manager shapes their team's culture through their words and actions. Hopefully, those two align, but when they don't, ambiguity arises, much to the relief of those with their own ideas.

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### AN INHERENT ANCHOR

When it comes to numbers, it's hard to change your mind. What is the product of  $8 \times 7 \times 6 \times 5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1$ ? Now guess the product of  $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6 \times 7 \times 8$ ? People are way off both times, but the interesting part is that they think differently each time. In grade school, we learned the order of operations in mathematics; yet, when people are asked to estimate the answers to two equations that are the same but in reverse, they give two different answers.

These are the same equations, and our estimates are off by a factor of approximately 10. The answers differ because when we estimate, we start at the beginning of the equation and adjust from there. In the first, we start at 56 and adjust from there; in the second, we start at 2 or 6 and inflate a similar magnitude.

## What Could Be

When it comes to numbers, our final estimates are closer to an arbitrary starting point. Anchoring effects are evident in legal judgments, forecasts, probability estimates, and answers to general knowledge questions. It works casually, subliminally, and even when we are told to ignore the anchor.

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

Anchors work so well that when Starbucks wanted to blow away the old price point for coffee, all they had to do was create a new anchor. They redefined the experience, language, and options. In doing so, they made a blank slate of comparison, setting the stage for a higher price. Five bucks for a latte, and you don't even get to say, "Small, medium, or large."

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### A BASIC INNUMERACY

Perhaps you were raised in the Imperial era and had to convert to the Metric System. Maybe you live in a world that adheres to only one system, but in engineering, we had a whole course on converting numbers between systems.

Williams-Sonoma introduced the first bread maker. With no prior experience with bread makers, we consider what else we can purchase for the same price. Introducing a second, cheaper version made sales take off. Which model sold? The cheaper one. The introduction of a luxury item suddenly makes the regular item look like a deal. Marketers refer to this tactic as the decoy effect.

Salespeople trick us into this effect by marking things down. However, your anchor isn't the first, stroked out the price; it's the price you'd pay right now. When an item goes on sale for the first time, we permanently revalue it to the new price. After it goes back up, even if it's still cheaper than the original, we no longer see it as a deal. I never see the regular price as the real price, because it's never one I'd pay.

Anchors have strong cognitive effects, perhaps because we aren't meant to stray far from where we were born – but we can. When it comes to numbers, you need a better basis than history and a more reliable tool than your brain. A calculator, perhaps.

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

Understand context and story, because without that, it's all just numbers.

### THE DIP OF KNOWLEDGE

In a quiz, Germans were asked to choose the larger city between Milwaukee and Detroit. Germans are more familiar with Detroit than Milwaukee. On the assumption that popularity relates to size, they choose Detroit. Americans, having heard of both and knowing some information about both, were harder pressed to determine the relative populations. A little knowledge is a good thing, but there comes a point where you are lost in what you think you know.

A child facing a marshmallow has met relatively few people in life. If this child cannot wait to eat it and earn two, it might be because of previous experience with unreliable treats, unreliable people, and rewards that weren't worth

## What Could Be

it. You don't lack self-control, as the researchers might conclude, but rather a rationality they can't imagine. Why wait? Your ability to hold out on the marshmallow depends as much on what you've learned as it does on your innate ability<sup>xxii</sup>.

You are human, flawed, and imperfect, and you assume you are better than average. That's what makes you human. That you are flawed and imperfect in a unique way can make you a genius if you are willing to work. It is also what makes you fascinating and fun, for perfection leaves us with nothing to do.

The work is to get through that trough of knowledge where you are lost in what you know for sure, and get to the other side when you've learned so much that you are unaware of what you know. You rely on intuition, then knowledge, then intuition again.

As a human being, you are never done learning. Be open to updating your conclusions, especially the ones about what you know, what you do, and who you are.

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### THE POWER OF NAMES

From only your name, people form an impression of you.

Names change the way others treat us. If your name sounds white, it might be worth as much as eight years' work experience, according to one study. You'd get 50 percent more callbacks to your resume than the same one with a black-sounding name. Add a middle initial for a sense of higher status and intellectual achievement.

Names have stereotypes. People were able to correctly guess the name of a face, given four options, much better than chance would predict<sup>xxiii</sup>. Katherines are more successful than Bonnies, and Bob has a rounder face than Tim.

The first letter of our names influences our preferences. Jennifer will likely move to Jersey, shop at J.Crew, and marry a John, Jeremy, or Jake<sup>xxiv</sup>. Implicit egotism is the term used to describe this tendency.

The alphabetical order of your initials matters too, as we've been trained in school. Late names jump more quickly at limited-time offers, likely because of years of training at the end of the roll call.

In 1994, John Hoyland coined the term nominative determinism after reading Jen Hunt's observation that authors seem to gravitate toward areas of research that fit their last name. In Hunt's article, she describes a urology paper authored by Splatt & Weedon<sup>xxv</sup>. Usain Bolt is fast, Lord Brain is the author of *Clinical Neurology*, and Jen Hunt was describing how to find research articles.

We prefer names that are easier to pronounce. We extend this preference to the individuals who own them with raises and promotions, and to the businesses behind the stock ticker. Think APPL, GOOG, and BUD versus MSTF, NDSN, and INTC.

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### THE VALUE OF THE STORY

If you want to convince people, use a story, not facts. People tend to prioritize narrative over accuracy<sup>xxvi</sup>.

Stories are the oldest form of information transfer. They are how knowledge was passed down from generation to generation. They were remembered and shared because they conveyed emotion and depth, enabling audiences to connect with the message more meaningfully.

## What Could Be

Mother Teresa said looking at the masses does nothing, but looking at one inspires action. A story helps us look at one – the protagonist, the villain, whatever character – and helps us see through the masses. Millions are dying of poverty, but give us a face, a name and a story and hearts and donations double.

Fiction helps develop social intelligence, but when it comes to policy, strategy, and other significant decisions, the story can have disastrous consequences.

The value of a story doesn't just hijack our focus; it inflates our perception of value. It's not just the object, but the story it holds. Someone paid exorbitant amounts for a sweater worn by George Clooney, gum chewed by Britney Spears, and breakfast leftovers of Obama's.

The best value for your money is a new experience. We have a story to tell, not just an object to show. With things, you can compare. Sometimes you win those comparisons, sometimes you lose. Experience, though, can't be compared as easily, and therefore holds value and maintains satisfaction.<sup>xxvii</sup>

We're not fighting it; we're using it. From promoting CEOs who excel at telling stories and educating MBAs on how to craft them, we're leaning into letting narrative lead the way.

In *Against Empathy*, author Paul Bloom makes a case for rational compassion. Instead of getting drawn into the power of story, we need to examine what is compassionate for humanity.

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### THE DAWN OF DECISIONS

As a Black Belt, we were trained to tell stories with daunting statistics and dare anyone to question us on the math. It looked modern, reeked of technology, and made bold promises to mature companies with thinning margins. No one suspected that it was only a story - one being told with graphs, but not separate from fiction, completely dependent on the author.

Choices were packaged in ways that hadn't been tested before. Decisions changed, and sometimes logjams were broken open and old ways were washed away with a breathtaking new way of doing something.

Pretty scary stuff for those mature managers who succeeded in the old ways. Some of those old ways were their ways.

With scary stuff, you can either confront it head-on and learn about it, or you can back away quietly until it's no longer a threat.

This generation, these mature managers who build the old ways, did so on the stable foundation of generations past. However, there is no longer any such thing as a stable foundation.

Past generations were not exposed to the diversity of choices we have today.

Geographically, earlier generations didn't disperse very far, often living in the same towns where they were born. Economically, they pursued the same livelihoods as their parents. Culturally, they shared the same beliefs and traditions and generally lived in a world where choices were either easy or predetermined.

Today's kids may face a paralysis of choice, a constant tsunami of change, and a whirlwind of information constantly coming their way. Like never before, the skill of decision-making is in demand, and luckily, more understood.

## What Could Be

Decision-making is simply a skill, one that you can be taught, one that you can learn, and indeed, one that you can – and must – master, because the other option is disempowering.

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### THE PARADOX OF CHOICE

Barry Schwartz introduced the concept of the paradox of choice. The paradox of choice is that more choices should make us happier, but real-life evidence suggests the opposite. More choices should lead to greater happiness, but it doesn't.

Having more choices makes the choice process more challenging. Life's choices are made without enough time or information when you need it, and tons of it when you are stuck. We agonize over decisions, and after the choice is made, we worry that we made the wrong one. More choice is a breeding ground for second-guessing, rumination, and regret.

Hospice workers report that deathbed regrets often include having taken the easy way through life. At the time, it might not look easy at all. Looking back, though, you see with a mature perspective not available to you at the time.

I think it's proof that we don't know how to make decisions, but it's a skill anyone can master.

More, if you don't, and someone is out to serve you happiness without asking you, they may simply limit your options to only two.

I'm not for a world where someone decides instead to reduce my options in the intention of making me happier. Imposing these kinds of false limits on someone is to oppress them.

That lens, of what is easy and what alternatives exist, might be perfect in hindsight, but foresight is an option. Sometimes it takes a leap of faith or a big push. Sometimes all you need is to be taught.

Some people emigrated. Some people moved across the country. Some people started entirely new traditions, careers, and ways of being. They made choices different from the ones presented to them on a platter, and some of them told the tale.

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### THE RESULT OF COMMUNITY

Sometimes, when opportunities are presented on a platter, we can't help but take them.

For me, if I didn't have a father demonstrating the career of engineering, the profession might not have crossed my radar, and if I didn't have a mother who was clear and direct with her experience of motherhood, I might have tried it on for myself. For me, spinsterhood was presented on a platter.

For Rosa Parks, the significant change was introduced on a platter of weariness. She sat down. In doing so, she and Martin Luther King launched a protest against the lack of freedom for black people in America. Big and small, the choices we make every day add up to the lives we live and the legacies we leave behind.

As a member of a group, you can always choose to be one of the leaders or the followers. One of the ones who stand up, or the ones who sit down. Be part of the audience or on stage, making things happen. Groups allow you to meet the needs of significance and servitude, but be conscious of how you are meeting those needs.

## What Could Be

Don't unquestioningly trust authority, popularity, or responsibility as pathways to good enough, but take it for what it is – a shortcut with a price. When the majority rule is sufficient, let it prevail. It's the least risky option, the safest way out, and the tried-and-true solution.

Learning lessons from the mistakes and successes of others is why we share stories. When we suffer or incur pain, we try to ensure that it doesn't happen to anyone else. When it happens to too many people, we accept it as a natural part of life's growing pains and take comfort in the fact that we are in good company.

### THE CHOICE TO NAVIGATE

Instead of learning to choose, we learn other ways to navigate life. We learn to respect our parents, yet obedience and respect are not the same thing. We learn to repeat after our teachers, yet blind acceptance and learning are not the same thing. We see what works for other people and copy it, yet that's not it either.

I tried to conform to society's standards but failed, telling my friends in Grade Eight that I felt empty. They laughed at me. Looking for the point in life hit me early, if it did take decades to find it. By choosing to navigate towards it, I hope I can help others who are trying to make it look right while feeling awkward and, at times, in total pain.

Everyone has a way. Men often have straightforward ways, thanks to both testosterone and size. Women have social and invisible ways of operating, lacking immediate access to power. Anyone can use posture, tone, and confidence as part of their way.

Some have no idea of their ways. Once, someone mansplained to me for 45 minutes. The things people have done to me to silence me have merely taught me the power of words and the dysfunction of automatic responses, when they essentially have no idea what they are doing, saying, or thinking.

In a world where someone always has an example of someone comparatively worse, the moral high ground is not hard to find, nor is it high enough.

For a world that has more choices in it than ever, our initial thought about happiness is not wrong – you just need to know how to navigate toward the right one.

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### SET BY BELIEF

Beliefs influence what you do and how you do it. We aren't always conscious of our beliefs, even though we repeatedly reinforce them.

Bruce Lipton argues that your DNA can be altered and expressed by your beliefs. In his book, *The Biology of Belief*, he discusses cellular memory and the concept of beliefs encoded in cells. Consciousness influences biology; biology, in turn, influences consciousness.

In Lipton's videos, his demonstrations appear to show that the strength of your muscles is proportional to the degree to which you believe your words. You can say what you want, but to be strong, you have to think it in your cells.

In her book, *A Change of Heart*, Claire Sylvia tells of her sudden test of willpower for foods she'd previously disliked. As a ballerina, she'd never craved chicken wings and other greasy foods, but this changed immediately following her heart and lung transplant. When she tracked down information about her donor, she found that such foods were his favourites.

## What Could Be

Psychosomatic illness isn't just in your head. According to neurologist Suzanne O'Sullivan, "Against all logic, people's subconscious selves choose to be crippled by convulsions or wheelchair dependence rather than experience the anguish that exists inside of them."<sup>xxviii</sup>

You have beliefs about effort that might not be serving you. A fixed mindset attributes success to talent, something you are born with that never changes. Instead, those with growth mindsets believe in the importance of learning and effort.

Beliefs determine if you see something as a threat or an opportunity. Changing beliefs can alter goals and outcomes, and this transformation can occur in an instant, as Lipton also demonstrates. If you are going to lug beliefs into the future, you might want to choose deliberately.

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### FASHIONING UP EXPECTATIONS

One study examining the power of expectation involved a taste test comparing balsamic vinegar-enhanced beer to the off-the-shelf version. Shockingly, the vinegar was a clear winner in blind taste tests, but the real lesson here is what happened when the samples' true identities were revealed – they started choosing the standard version.

If you want people to like the food you serve, choose fancy containers. The offer of coffee, accompanied by the option to add spices from fancy containers, led consumers to rate their coffee preference higher than usual. However, when those containers were broken, Styrofoam cups, people rated the same coffee as tasting worse<sup>xxix</sup>.

When teachers expect a student to perform well, they demand better performance and get it. In the same respect, a student expected to perform poorly will answer incorrectly when they know the answer, and are less likely to receive praise when they do perform well<sup>xxx</sup>.

The placebo effect works one-third of the time, including surgeries. The nocebo effect is the darker side. Women who thought they were at higher risk for heart disease were four times more likely to die, with doctors unable to detect any biological difference.

When patients are told about possible side effects of a drug, approximately 25% experience severe side effects even though they are only taking sugar pills. These included vomiting, memory disturbances, and ringing in the ears. Patients who thought they were getting chemotherapy threw up and lost their hair. They were only getting saline.

A similar effect occurs with a comparison of painkillers. For the same medicine, those who paid more report greater relief. If you expect to get what you pay for, a higher price may amplify the placebo effect.

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### BAGGING UP EMOTIONS

You know that rush of glee you feel in response to someone else's misfortune? You may not admit you have it, but it's hard-wired. Evolutionarily speaking, you recognize an opportunity that only exists because of that other person's misfortune.

Certain emotions serve as moral motivations, including shame, guilt, concerns about reputation, an honest desire to contribute to a better world, empathy, and compassion. Once you experience any of these, you must decide how to address them.

Suppressors of emotion deal with stressful situations by clamping down and masking their feelings.

## What Could Be

Brain scans revealed that suppressing emotions reduces facial expressions, but the amygdala and insula sustained activation<sup>xxxii</sup>. This sustained activation means the stress didn't go away. When you try to avoid it, you lose clarity over what you are feeling. The loss of clarity leads to the pain of inauthenticity and the long-term destruction of intuition.

Suppression doesn't work in the long term<sup>xxxiii</sup>. Suppressors avoid close relationships, suffer lower levels of self-esteem, are less satisfied with life, and have more depressive symptoms.

Studies have shown that suppression feels the same and triggers the fight-or-flight response. You get sucked into rumination – judging and feeling, instead of reflection – questioning and thinking. .

Instead of suppressing, reappraisal has been shown to decrease the subjective experience and leave no lasting consequences. It involves interpreting potentially emotion-relevant stimuli in a non-emotional manner. Compassionate reappraisal coping provides greater empathy and emotional forgiveness toward someone who has wronged you<sup>xxxiii</sup>. Changing your thoughts about a stimulus can alter its impact.

Everything about today is affected by yesterday, and so will tomorrow. With the effects of yesterday sticking around with such influence, please choose what you decide to believe about them carefully.

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### RISKING EVERYTHING

In the face of crisis, uncertainty, and duty, our rationality can completely disappear. The urge to take action is unbearable.

In 1977, Captain Van Zanten had just returned from a six-month safety course with KLM, underscoring the need for caution and calm, when he became responsible for a major air disaster, taking 584 lives.

As he was headed to Las Palmas for a refuel stop, a terrorist explosion closed the airport until further notice. Rerouting to Tenerife, the jumbo jet joined several others already there, at the tiny airport, with only a single runway.

The temptation of crisis began. Crisis is uncomfortable. A lack of control, a lack of knowing what is going to happen next, and the desire to regain control create a need for clarity and a return to the normal state as soon as possible, which in turn creates pressure to make immediate decisions.

The problem is that decisions are made regarding the future, not the present. Once a decision is made, human nature tends to commit to it, despite any contrary evidence.

Van Zanten made the initial decision to be prepared to take off as soon as possible. In a little over five hours, a mandated rest period would cause the passengers and crew to spend the night on the island. At the time, he might have thought that was the last thing he wanted to happen, until something else did happen.

Despite the co-pilot's interruptions that they lacked air traffic control clearance, Van Zanten revved the engines and lurched down the runway at the earliest moment. It wasn't until the last moment, too late, that the Pan Am 747 parked across the runway came into sight.

### AN UNCERTAIN CERTAINTY

While it feels like you see with 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.<sup>xxxiv</sup> You think otherwise because your brain fills it all in for you.

What you think you see with your eyes is the conscious visual system. Underlying that is the subconscious visual system. We are programmed to run before we understand the danger. The action comes from your unconscious visual system.

Suddenly, the snow dust cleared, and all of a sudden, there was a fence where I was expecting clear sailing for another few kilometres.

Consciously, I might have braced for the impact. Unconsciously, I wanted to get away from that fence with all my might. In doing so, I laid the snowmobile down for a handy, tight corner. How's that for genius design?

Beginner's luck works, and science can tell you why. Our perception of slope changes depending on whether we are staring down a steep slope as an amateur on a skateboard or looking up a steep incline while wearing a heavy backpack, in poor physical condition, or with declining health.

As a beginner, you have no idea what you don't know. Psychologist Dennis R. Proffitt 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.

Your experience informs your perception, and your perception, in turn, informs your experience. If you don't like your world, change what you expect to see.

### THE POWER OF YIELDING

History depends on who tells it. The locals who also do the journey, while carrying the luggage and guiding the way, weren't in the headlines. The women who did the math, the research, and the heavy lifting weren't in the bylines.

Like books and people, categorization saves time, but extracts a cost. People show you who they are, while telling you who they wish they were—separate words and actions. File appropriately under reality, wishful thinking, and hopeful dreaming.

Then look in the mirror and do it for yourself. Flip your frustrations into self-appreciation and start figuring out how to explain what it is that other people clearly don't understand that you do. If you aren't frustrated enough, find new people who will help bring it out of you. You'll thank them later. Seeking frustration instead of pleasure may not be how you were taught.

You might notice that you say you want things, but then don't want some of the things associated with them. You are hitting the gas and the brake at the same time.

Throughout my career, negotiating conflict, change, and other sensitive matters, I've learned that the more unclear the values and agendas are, the more prolonged and dramatic the conflict becomes.

The problem is that everyone thinks they are clear, but they say one thing and their actions tell a completely different story, which baffles everyone else.

## What Could Be

People have no idea how to help you, so they don't. Perhaps you'd like to stay right where you are. Only you can know what you want and why you are doing what you are doing. It's that information that will help you keep what you want, let go of what you don't, and get more of what would make you enthusiastic.

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### TWO TYPES OF RISK

People go to great lengths to avoid uncomfortable truths. The person who values peace may rush to shut down a conflict and settle for a false sense of harmony, only to become angry when it boils over again later. Someone who values equality may not realize they are oppressing others with their passionate contributions to a conversation. Another cannot see that their desire to protect their child from the realities of life has produced a teenager unfit to leave home.

No one is perfect, least of all the people we expect to be perfect: parents, teachers, and leaders.

One person admitted to me that he'd lied on a personality test. I was incredulous, so he clarified. "I didn't like the results. I didn't think it was me. So, I went back and changed my answers."

If the point of personality tests is to validate what you think of yourself instead of providing new insights, don't bother with the test. Just wait until other people stop thinking you are cute, funny, or harmless.

As a process engineer, I learned there are always at least three truths: the one on paper, the one management believes, and the real one. If you are an employee, it's the role description, the things they tell you in the interview, and the school of hard knocks your colleagues give you.

Finally, there is the authentic self: the honest reality when there is no one else to satisfy, impress, or care. Not the rose-colored one that shows up in your best behaviour, not the version of you that is trained to turn ugly truths into pithy positivity, but the one who strives, while knowing exactly where your feet are planted: in alpha risk, or beta risk? Do you assume you are right, or possibly wrong?

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### TRUSTWORTHY PRINCIPLES

It can be hard to remember that your perception of reality isn't the same as everyone else's. In the gorilla experiment, it was proven that some people saw the gorilla, while others were distracted by a task.

When people were asked to watch students throw a ball back and forth and count the tosses based on the colour of the shirts worn, many didn't notice another student walk into the center of the tossing game and then leave again – wearing a gorilla suit. Both groups are so sure of their experience of the event that they cannot fathom the possibility that they might be wrong.

You'd think a whole person would show up in your visual field, and he didn't. If you were wondering about the practical meaning of 0.1 percent of your visual field, there you have an idea.

Some people read a book all the way through, think through what they'd read, and sort through the information as it was presented through the lens of a journalist and maybe the tests of a scientist. Other people read along, and at some point, decide it's not resonating with them. The difference is between reading for education and reading for entertainment.

## What Could Be

Vague people are impossible to trust because we don't know what to trust them with. Their unpredictability is their predictability. That is, the only thing you can trust is that they will let you down, should you give them the opportunity.

Learning is personal because it is the act of learning, figuring out what you aren't getting and taking ownership of the gap. As you do so, you bring your foundational understanding of 'common knowledge' up to a more current definition. You also discover your beliefs, some of which you are going to want to change.

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### THE REAL HARD WORK

Saying yes to you means saying no to someone else, which can be either incredibly selfless or entirely selfish. If you are in doubt, and it's breaking your heart, you are selfless. If you are bursting with glee, you might want to pause and reflect. This is an ego-trip, in progress. When only you know that it is work and not play, it's progress.

If you are a woman, I'd bet there is a long list of people who you were trained to matter more than you. Your parents, children, and husband need support. If there is one thing that's difficult, it making their own needs a priority.

This is why the airplane safety instructions emphasize putting on your own mask first. You can't help anyone when you are the one in need. Additionally, while you are learning, you should refrain from teaching. When you are working on the solution, it's not yet time to use up your fifteen minutes of fame. Save it for when you are ready to help your ex-compatriots, who have chosen different problems to spend their time on.

We may all be heading to the same destination, but we each have our way, in our own good time, and we have chosen where to spend our time and attention. Surround yourself with people who are both ahead of and behind you on your specific journey, and let them help you identify and challenge your faulty assumptions. Try to listen to them when they point it out, or at least stay mum and let it sink in.

What hard work are you willing to endure? The trick is to find something that other people think is hard, yet it comes comparatively easily to you, and you are compelled to get even better at it.

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### HIGHER REASONINGS

The deliberation-without-attention effect is the phenomenon in which your visual attention is influenced by your mindset. When deliberating, an open mindset is helpful, but in implementation mode, your visual attention narrows and becomes more focused.<sup>lxiii</sup>

Norman Maier of the University of Michigan observed this effect with the two-cord problem. He set up a physics problem, then invited students to his lab to solve it. Two cords hung from the ceiling of equal length. The students were tasked with finding ways to connect them.

Importantly, the end of one cord didn't reach the other. Items in the lab could be used and were. The easiest solutions required tying one rope to a chair and bringing the other over, using an extension cord to make one long enough to reach the other and using a pole to pull one rope closer.

The last solution seemed to elude most of the students. Maier walked through the room, brushing one of the ropes into a swinging motion. Less than a minute after he did this, most students immediately realized the last solution – to use pendulum motion and swing them together.

## What Could Be

To solve more problems, you have to increase your fodder for intuition. “Geniuses are likely to exhibit extensive interests and hobbies, often contributing to more than one domain of expertise.”<sup>xxxv</sup>

According to a study published in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, MBA and graduate students who had lived abroad were more creative and better problem solvers than those who had never lived abroad. Study author William Maddox speculates that “the more you have to immerse yourself in a foreign culture, the more you have to change the way you think.” The less opinionated you become. Instead of seeing only your world, you can start to see the universality of humankind.

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### A TOTAL FAITH

Being able to accurately assess someone else's world is essential for influencing others, predicting their behaviour, and even judging your own abilities.

The frustration of genius is when you think that something that comes easily to you comes easily to everyone. What comes naturally to you, you assume is universal. That is, everyone else can do it too.

You minimize your inner genius because you don't realize it's a gift that not everyone else has. With enough community in your life, someone will point it out, or you will discover the value of it, or you might be fearful that it will make you stand out in a bad way. In some countries, it's called the tall poppy syndrome because tall poppies get cut down.

The problem is that other people fail you, and you get upset. Not randomly, consistently. You wonder how they could be so stupid, mean, or lazy.

Flip your perspective around, and appreciate your genius. You need these experiences to show you where you are different, in a valuable way. “The people who annoy you hold up a harsh but helpful mirror,” says Kaja Perina, editor in chief of *Psychology Today*.

Instead of automatically choosing family over strangers, down the dune was a girl who was afraid of ants, while I solved the problem with the sole of my shoe, and declarations of, “Dead, dead, dead.”

Is a girl who is afraid of ants the right person to deal with open wounds? Intuitive decisions are fast and reliable when they aren't clouded with all the things you were trained to do, intentionally or not. Sometimes the devil you know is not the best option, but a fear of ambiguity creates a world of suffering, as much as following the orders of authority.

### INTUITIVE MIND MASTERY

Freedom of rationality is a result of rejecting intuitive separation in favour of conscious connection.

To catch your genius in action, notice the lines you draw between yourself and others, whether or not you are above or below the line. You see your favouritism toward family, friends, and the nation, and how that creates a world of us-versus-them though we share one planet.

Depression is having no motivation, interest, or drive to move forward.

Accept that it's not you; you fell into a trap scientists might call predictably irrational. Usually, society puts effort into protecting people collectively from these things. We put in government, legal systems, roads, etc, to help

## What Could Be

smooth out or contain natural drives. When it's individual, or a personalized, unique series, it's our option to see where things could have gone differently, and at least yell to the next one, "Watch out!"

Over time, we build a makeshift bridge. One day, it becomes an engineering marvel, and people slow down at its apex to admire the view.

It all starts with one brave person seeing how it happened to them, how it might happen to someone else, innocent of everything but circumstance. What is the wisdom in your singular experience?

With a purpose, you have a newfound ability to march forward, or at least think differently when you replay memories in your head. Are you sure they went that way? Is that really why that happened?

Odds are better than you can imagine that the stories you tell are just that – stories. If the one you tell doesn't empower you, question the facts, perspective, and underlying moral. To state the obvious, doubt that you understand any of the characters.

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### KNOWING INNOCENTLY

There is a vast chasm between what you know and what you can express well enough to the next person so that they can understand it too.

Language isn't the only barrier. Even when speaking the same language, we aren't communicating. The words are close, but so much is lost in perception and characterization. It's one thing to know the definition, it's another thing to see it in action and understand what you are seeing.

You see someone who is aloof, an outsider. You call them shy and imply fear, and I call them introverted and imply disinterest; neither of us knows why we are discussing them behind their back without their input.

Knowledge is fluid. It's always pushing into new territory and raising questions we've never thought to ask, while simultaneously calling accepted truths into question. As new information comes to light, old information must be forgotten. Just as quickly as we adopt new information, we must discard outdated information. Classifications. Stigmas. Preferences.

Unfortunately, the beneficiaries of the status quo are the last ones who want to see it go. The masters of the old systems are the last ones who want to start at the bottom and the first to presume that is where they will end up.

Unfortunately, the beginners—the ones who have no idea what they aren't supposed to say, the ones who don't know the rules—are the ones who say what needs to be said. Out of the mouths of babes, they say.

Repairing relationships is never as simple as an apology, but we all know that by now. Over the years, I decided to remain mum unless I had something kind to say. It's not the same thing at all. Forward motion isn't unidirectional.

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### PLAYING WITH RHYMES

I can imagine the scene if I were only told about it. I can imagine it because my grandmother had a photo of the aftermath and put the date on it.

From the date, I guess that my mother had her hands full. It would have been two days before a birthday party for a four-year-old. She also might have had her 39-day-old baby physically attached to her.

## What Could Be

All mothers can realize they are overwhelmed, and they would be wise to take something off their plates; otherwise, they risk losing it all. A phone call ensued, and later, I was at my grandmother's house, passively asleep in her lap. My grandfather must have taken the photo.

"I captioned it 'Little Angel'", she said, "because your mother was calling you everything but."

Except that when I read her handwriting, I read, 'Lucifer Angel'. Perception is everything, as are the stories you tell little girls. Many little girls with curly hair are said to be the same few lines.

*There once was a girl with a curl  
When she was good, she was very, very good  
When she was bad, she was horrid*

My dad would pick a curl and twist it into perfection as he told me this story. One day, my grandmother admired my curls, and I thought of a way to fix them. I found a pair of scissors and cut it off. There, no more horrid.

Wouldn't it be that easy to change our character, the way other people saw us, or to give our loved ones what they want? The curl grew back. My grandmother kept the evidence in a frame, with the tell-tale school photo. If only all gifts could be so abundant, all satisfaction be so simple, and all impressions be so accurate.

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### ZOOMING INTO AWE

Abstraction opens the door to what might be true tomorrow.

As you find new abstractions, you become more accepting of things you cannot see, measure, or explain thoroughly, just like you turn on a light switch and expect the bulb to brighten, even though you can't fully explain how electricity works.

Awe inspires people to pull back, not zoom in. I thank goodness that I'm not a blond, beautiful bombshell - I complain about my inability to be taken as a brain, and the engineering ring on my finger was the hardware on my hand to suggest that I'd earned it.

I'm sure some people wonder, did she think? Did she earn it, or did she copy homework, cheat on exams, and float her way through group projects? I've learned that you can't read too much into a proof as it's presented.

My last wish is to be myself when I leave my house, not to decide where on the acceptable women's spectrum I will present myself. Should I be the CEO and wear a pantsuit, glasses, and put my hair in a well-contained bun? Perhaps I should be the single girl, choosing the flattering dress, letting my curls fall freely, and opting for contact lenses? For years, there was the engineer, wearing jeans and Doc Martens, and would you like a tool belt too? Just so you know, if you call it a star screwdriver, I'm not handing it to you.

With a three-bedroom house all to myself, the engineer is in the bedroom closet, the CEO is in the office closet, and the deluded romantic is in the third, along with the other remnants of creativity hiding there. Only one is allowed to come out and play at a time. Retirement created the grand singularity.

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### COMPARING WITH PEERS

We each believe in our ability to be better than average. When most of us think we are better than that, one of three conditions might be true: it's attached to your self-worth, the attribute in question is of importance to you, or it's against a single peer.

The exception to that "we" is depressed people. They have an accurate understanding of their position relative to the rest of the population. It's a finding that has been replicated in many studies, with different populations, on multiple dimensions, and with various measurement techniques, to the point where it is almost the diagnosis and definition of depression: relative to others, you aren't awesome, and that's not a fun idea.

Everyone inflates their online persona. We believe that those who engage in this behaviour are untrustworthy and hypocritical. When it comes to our profiles, we tend to portray our behaviour more favourably than we do that of our friends and acquaintances. Sure, we do it too, but we aren't like that.

However, if you've spent some time on Facebook, you don't walk away feeling better than the norm. You feel bad. Researchers have found that regular Facebook users tend to agree more than others that they are happier and better, and they disagree that life is fair. Furthermore, this included those "friends" who aren't known personally.

We judge our behaviour based on intention. You forgive all errors between action and intention, but don't give that generosity to others.

For others, we can only see actions and outcomes. Other people don't get the benefit of that internal story, or the things that can get in the way of a successful outcome. No wonder we all think we are better than average.

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### JUDGING BY BELIEF

Some explanations seem rational until you verbalize them.

Suicide is horrible, sure, smoking will kill you, but excuse me while I light up. Too much sugar causes my diabetes, but I have this pill, so give me that cake. We ignore the statistics and think we are somehow exempt from the fates we are accelerating.

We are irrational with our health, and money is no different. Coupon clippers will not have to worry about their RRSP charges. Our perception of money is relative, but its value is absolute. We drive across town to save a hundred bucks on a car, but not on a stereo. The money saved and spent on gas and time is the same.

Feeling good about virtue will lead you directly to vice. When students answered questions confirming their disapproval of discriminatory practices, they were subsequently more likely to exhibit discriminatory behaviour in a hypothetical hiring scenario. Having declared their intention to do what's morally right, they could then follow instinct.

***Rich Dad, Poor Dad*** explains why the rich remain rich, and the poor remain poor, largely because of differences in their underlying beliefs. We repeat family, community, and societal patterns unless we deliberately break out of learned patterns, traditional beliefs, and the old status quo.

You can't think cupcakes are horrible health bombs and still joyfully permit the ingestion of just one. Your true core thought about cupcakes is closer to joy than disgust. Joy wins, and willpower crumbles.

## What Could Be

You need to start behaving in a way that aligns with what you know about yourself and what you are currently learning. When you do, you can be open, honest, and sincere in close relationships.

### STAYING MINDFUL

Buddhists can cultivate mindfulness and regulate their body temperatures. Staying mindful in the moment, they refrain from playing the tape of repeated behaviours, programmed habits, and limiting beliefs. Being free of judgment is more than just a virtue; it's a path to better health.

Not knowing why something happens doesn't mean it doesn't. Scientifically, you can't prove something doesn't exist; you can only prove what does. It's up to you to decide for yourself if you want to accept it, reject it, or live in the mystery. Use the experimental process to test your truisms.

It might be rational to contain your anger at work, but holding it in might lead to cancer. Stress is thought to cause 90 percent of doctor's visits. The chemical causes blood vessels in your core to shut down. Blood goes to the arms and legs as you prepare to fight or flee. The shutdown of growth in your core under stress is used therapeutically to facilitate organ acceptance.

The problem with stress is that as it constricts blood flow to the core, it shuts down growth. You need growth to replenish and repair cells. Sustained stress is a sustained state of not repairing your cells.

Stress also shuts down your immune system and reduces blood flow to the executive function part of your brain. That's why decisions, when you are calm, are much more rational.

You may not even realize you're stressed until it's gone. Chronic stress feels normal, until one day, the optometrist is telling me that I am losing my vision to a disease known to be induced by stress. With that diagnosis, I knew acute stress, indeed, but that chronic stuff can undermine your health.

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### TIME FOR AN UPGRADE

On one long journey, I was feeling it. So much so, I started listing the reasons I hate snowmobiling in my head. Hate is a healthy and normal emotion to have toward a malicious force, and I could list numerous examples of such forces.

"Number one, I never get to see the wildlife." In my default position at the back of the pack, by the time I got there, whatever animal had just been there was long gone. I'd seen moose, eagles and wolves, but I'd only heard about bobcats and lynx.

Just then, a bobcat cut out in front of me. Or wait, was that a lynx?

"Number two, my water is always frozen, and I am always thirsty." I was sure I'd read about a heated glove box, which was currently and chronically filled with snow.

Just then, there was a shopping bag in the middle of the trail that couldn't have been lost long. In a red bag, in case I might miss the opportunity to quench my thirst with vitamins and water.

One is a loner, two is an anomaly, but three starts a movement.

"Number three, the rooms could be much nicer, like the one I had at the Hilton that one time." For the remaining kilometres, I dwelt on that hotel room. The jacuzzi tub. The massive bed.

## What Could Be

Then there was one room left in town. “Do you want it?”

Ready to take a manager, I plunked down my credit card.

Behind the hotel, just past the dumpster, was our room. The door jamb had been repaired at least twice. To one side was the restaurant's door. In between were stacks of empties, plastic bread trays and milk crates. Cigarette butts littered the snow.

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### JUST REWARDS

On the other side of that door was my suite at the Hilton. Complete with a four-person whirlpool bath, walk-in shower, and a king-size bed with marshmallow-like sheets. All for the same price as last night's room, which was conveniently located beside a busy highway with a bathroom floor big enough for two feet. Two small feet.

Thanks, Ville Marie. Also, thank you for the cougars I didn't see, and the ability to walk on water – it works so much better when it's frozen. Dr. Wayne Dyer says, “When you change the way you see things, the things you see change.” I kept the pen as a reminder.

Right now, you are surviving and doing a darn great job of it. Take a moment to reflect on what that means.

You got through so much.

It made you stronger, because now you know what you are capable of, what you wouldn't do again, and that there were times you kicked butt and no one else noticed. That means you should watch out next time.

Next time, it's not about surviving – it's about thriving. You've already proven you are a survivor. You've been there, done that. Now it's time for the next micro-step forward. The micro-step is merely to consider the difference that would result for you if you thought of the goal of life not as surviving, but as thriving.

If you think that Neil Armstrong's one step and the corresponding giant leap for humanity, put the micro-step at one end and the potential result at the other.

The truth is that no one truly survives life; you were never meant to. If that's your goal, you will fail. Sometimes, accomplishing the goal wasn't the point – the pursuit was the point. Now, for the real goal.

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### LOVING THINE ENEMY

One day, I was meditating on my hammock when I opened my eyes and received my instructions for what I was supposed to do. I know, not the way normal people plan their lives. When you've done the intellectual planning and still don't feel prepared, you take things to the next level.

When I opened my eyes, the clouds read MT, followed by the heart symbol. I took some time to interpret that instruction. Empty heart? I wondered, no, hoped, because I didn't want it to be the other.

Back when I got locked in with an assassin, the person who locked the door was MT.

You might have your own MT, whom you feel powerless to do anything about.

I knew I had to listen to the advice I'd asked for, so, begrudgingly, I started tuning into higher and higher emotions when I thought of MT. I realized she had her own traumas and was acting instinctively.

## What Could Be

Watching her and tuning into her program gave me the insight I needed to move forward with my life, regardless of whether she was involved. My bully became inconsequential to my pain and pivotal to my purpose.

Leading with your heart can be challenging. Everyone is on their journey, and we choose when and if we will answer our call to adventure. The trick is to keep your intentions to yourself and let sleeping bears lie, while guessing how the dominoes are likely to fall.

Looking back, you reflect on the people who facilitated the experiences that shaped you, revealing your depth, character, and values, and you express your gratitude with wholehearted appreciation.

Don't be surprised if it takes both time and distance before you can safely love thine enemy. Don't be alarmed if they aren't always people, but sometimes ideas.

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### LINKING COINCIDENCES

Once, I wanted a kayak. First, I purchased a house on the lake. Living off the grid on the lake, I'd spent time in the sun looking for a four-leaf clover. I'd tied saving my vision to the existence of my lawn, and as such, I always felt such gratitude for it. I thought it might also become a source of luck.

When I wanted someone, anyone, to tell me I'd be okay if I quit my job and tried to make a go of my own thing, it was my lawn that answered. My lawn is far from golf turf: two dozen four-leaf clovers, two five-leaf clovers, and one six-leaf clover for good measure. I handed them out to my colleagues, some of whom claimed they had never seen one before.

The process of making peace with tough emotions and flipping them around introduced me to an entirely new set of words, phrases, and sentences. I repeated this new vocabulary until it caught people's attention and yielded new results.

Just as the pandemic was about to strike, I was speaking on a panel at a career event. Another panellist told me she wished she had remembered her notebook to take down the nuggets I had shared. A member of the audience gave me the best compliment possible - "You are everything!"

Wholeness is what I was seeking, and everything sums it up. On top of the emotional journey is this experience. The light that radiated out from her as she told me this was the kind of light that I thought you only witness in heaven.

Here it was on earth, on the face of someone telling me I'd achieved my goal—a product of emptying my heart every day, in my words, actions and beliefs.

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### POSITIVE DISCOURSE

After the gift, there came a day when I had to buy my own snowmobile if I wanted to continue riding. A snowmobile is a significant purchase. Salesmen call it the puppy dog technique. Let them take them home and get used to it, and you've made your sale.

After I'd made the purchase decision for my white anniversary edition Skidoo and signed the paperwork, someone was in trouble.

"Everyone is mad that I let you buy an 800," he said.

## What Could Be

“Let me?” Triggered by my control issues, I missed his point since I had one of my own. It’s a dream to look back and be able to say you did it your way. It’s not easy, and we all want it.

When everyone is a trigger for a new way to look at things, you can look at everyone as if they hold a clue to a problem in your universe, especially when that snowmobile might be too powerful for a little girl.

Were we in a world in which we allowed relationships to govern our behaviour? Or was that the point of relationships?

As humans, we claim to love change, but when presented with rational, compelling reasons to change, we often resist. While we all argue over the future, change takes time. Years later, we look back and claim that we were always supporters. Knowing this happens, how can we make the journey smoother?

Business decisions can’t be mapped out with the kind of clarity we imply when we create decision trees, analyze statistics, or produce policies. Once we set out on a journey, our peers have become our peers, and that makes two minds more alike than the analysis can account for.

Prime your intuition, manage your network, and live and let live.

### A COMPLETE REBELLION

Accuracy and precision have their place, and memory isn’t one of them. For the most part, memories are imperfect and subject to change. Scientists estimate that about half of our memories are false. They are rewritten three ways: with recall, intentionally, and by the nature of the moment in which we are calling them up.

For that matter, how much does it matter if we all agree?

Yes, there are facts, and for that there is science, and the rest, shall we say, is history. His story, my story, your story...we all have stories. We might as well make them empowering, funny, or informative.

I followed my older sister and her friends as they slid down the sand dune. I put my hands out to slow down.

Something happened to my hand. I clamped one hand over the other, looked down at my sister and her gang, and turned toward strangers for help.

With a fat scar on my hand, I remember an older gentleman on a park bench with a handkerchief. A helpful stranger, despite lessons at school, at Brownies, and at home. With walks around the neighbourhood to point out the “Neighbourhood Watch”. I defied all lessons, and why would I do that?

Stupidity? Well, that’s one possible explanation. There might also be an infinite supply of alternatives that don’t involve a thesaurus and the word ‘stubborn’, but a genuinely different way of seeing.

There was certainly a lot of yelling, as I seemed to be hard of learning, much like trying to control the heat in a car with the fan knob – inseparable, but distinct, like agreeing and genuinely keeping one’s word.

What you want to remember is when you took a scolding when they should have been throwing you a parade.

### FROM SUCCESSORS TO PSYCHICS

Assumptions, opinions, and beliefs act like knowledge until you convert them into testable hypotheses. Daniel J. Boorstin has said, “The greatest obstacle to discovery is not ignorance – it is the illusion of knowledge.” To challenge assumptions, you need to be able to write a testable hypothesis.

Being able to form and test a hypothesis might be a skill you’d expect in a science lab, but not in a business environment. However, the world is changing.

The rate of change is increasing exponentially. According to the U.S. Census, the widespread adoption of electricity took 46 years, until a quarter of the U.S. population had access to it. For radio, it took 31 years; for the web, only 7.

Charismatic individuals nurture relationships and make others feel happy and at ease, which necessitates avoiding the discomfort of truth. They don’t get past the surface. Tell them something, and their response is what you want to hear. “That’s wonderful, so interesting, I agree!” they say.

Tell a curious person the same thing, and they ask, “Why?”

I know David Colcleugh is a curious leader. In 1999, he asked me what I was doing differently. First, he allowed, noticed, then asked – directly. Not through the grapevine and risk the telephone game.

I didn’t have a good answer then, but I spent the next chunk of my life working on a better one. Few leaders can direct 19 years of work based on one interaction. He’s authored a book, and I know he knows what he writes.

Leaders make innovative thinking a priority, according to Colcleugh. He says, “Ultimately, any organization’s effectiveness depends upon the quality of thought individual members develop and apply to their work, the quality of integration of thought throughout the organization, the productivity resulting from thinking effectively.”

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### APPLYING PARETO

I realized he was saying “skidoing” every time I said “snowmobiling.” I asked about the brand.

Bombardier makes it, he said. Only he said, “BOMB-ba-deer,” like the hunter he was, not “Bomb-bard-e-yay,” like the Air Force’s daughter I was.

“Except they tried to fire me,” he said.

He told me about a letter.

I told him about learning Maple Leaf Food’s version of Lean Six Sigma and the way they teach the Pareto principle. The trainers were from Bombardier, who had recently decided to cut their program and eliminate all their Black Belts and related personnel.

I explained that Pareto was someone who realized that 80 percent of the taxes were paid by 20 percent of the people, or so, and went on to prove that there is an 80/20 split in many things.

In the discussion of the Pareto principle, they mentioned reducing warranty claims. They obtained all their warranty data and kept taking the worst twenty percent, then the worst twenty percent of that, and so on, until only a small list remained.

That’s it, break for lunch. As mentioned, I never thought to ask what they did with the data.

## What Could Be

Skidoos are sold with a time-based warranty, but not a distance-based one. For some people, this sounds to them like, “If you can wear this sled out in less than two years, we will give you another one.”

Yes, and then we will send you a letter to inform you that your warranty claims will no longer be honoured. That’s how you fire a customer.

“Except it doesn’t work,” he laughed. Every two years for his entire life, he buys a new one.

Instantly, I spied a like-minded individual who thinks but knows not to say, “We’ll see about that.”

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### DELEGATING CHANGE

When asked whether you are better than average, you can easily find an instance when you were, so you say yes. You aren’t evaluating yourself holistically against everyone else on every dimension. Instead, I think that everyone is better than average at something.

The problem is when it spills over, called the halo effect.

When we think of the one thing where we are rare and remarkable, the evaluation spills over into other areas where we might be perfect, but not excellent. Seth Godin says “excellent” is the death trap of businesses. You want to be remarkable.

The way to being remarkable is to take the things at which you are perfect and find someone who is even better. They might be more skilled, they might have more time to invest in it, or they might be hungrier than you are.

Delegate what you don’t like to do because someone else’s passion can take it to the next level. Find and hire the subject matter experts, whether you give them the work, ask them to coach you, or take one of their courses.

Delegation is a scary thing for many leaders.

It’s not just that we think no one can do it as well as we did. We also worry that, indeed, they might do it better than we did. It’s not the outcomes that cause the fear; it is the loss of control. In one study, participants had the option of one machine-delivered shock or two self-administered shocks. Shockingly, 35 percent chose the double dose.

Control is the perceived ability to alter events significantly. In post-evaluations, when we attempt to assess how much control we have over a situation, we underestimate the power we have when things don’t work out and overestimate it when they do.

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### NECESSITATING INNOVATION

John Steinbeck states, “Man is the only varmint that sets his trap, baits it, and then steps in it.” We believe in several falsehoods that undermine our success, hinder our progress, and thwart our dreams.

After the Rev died, a distance could only be covered by doubling on a snowmobile not built for it. It wasn’t my first time on the back, but it was my first time there as a rider, not someone who rode on the back.

The difference was as different as analog and digital.

## What Could Be

On the back of a snowmobile, your feet are exposed to the elements and perfectly positioned for maximum wind chill. Women's boots are rated to -70, men's boots are rated to -40. Are men tougher?

Boot specifications will not settle that contest. It's the age-old division of gender roles. Men are up front, with one foot beside the motor and the other beside the exhaust. Running shoes would be fine, except for all the walking around to get gas, change belts, and discuss destinations over maps.

This time, on the back, I was watching the trail as if I were riding. I was gasping and making other noises of shock and awe, because this was not my thumb on the throttle. My thumb was more analogue, and this one was digital.

This difference is a dial versus a flip. A dial is analogue. A dial is excellent for volume. You can start softly, turn it up when it's a good song, turn it back down if it's not a singer you are a fan of...lots of options.

A flip is digital. Two settings. There is no ramping up and getting comfortable. There is "Are you holding on or not?"

What a question, when there is nothing to hold on to.

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### TESTING HYPOTHESES

There are lies, darn lies, and statistics. Listen to what people will say when you show them the level of defects or the level of perfection. The former starts from zero and counts up, while the latter begins from 100 and goes down.

To use data to make decisions, you need to understand what makes a testable hypothesis. Once you have identified any beliefs, assumptions, and opinions, they can be tested to find the truth. Any ambiguity can be resolved with clarity through a testable hypothesis. The facts help you make a confident decision and move on. To get there, we need to write a testable hypothesis.

In short, a hypothesis is a statement that could be tested on a true or false exam.

It can be an if/then statement, such as "If fines for texting while driving were increased, then fewer people would engage in that activity." You expect a particular effect, and your experiment tests the expectation for truth.

One statement, one concept, and one opposite, written as a definite statement, not as a question.

A reasonable hypothesis can be proven false. It's critical to know that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. You can find evidence to prove something exists, but you cannot prove it does not exist. You only need to find one black swan to confirm that not all swans are white, but you can't prove that purple swans don't exist.

A reasonable, testable hypothesis will state what will happen, such that when anything else happens, the experimenter will say, "That's funny." The oddities we want to explain away have the power to open new insights.

To challenge your limiting beliefs, you need to form testable hypotheses. A straightforward experiment with a reasonable hypothesis is much easier to design.

## 7. FREEDOM OF CONNECTION

Freedom of connection is the rejection of spiritual attachment in favour of conscious surrender.

Acceptance liberated you from the instinctual mind, marking the beginning of your journey. The last step is to surrender everything and completely liberate your consciousness from all that binds it.

Getting out of the spiritual mind is the freedom of not being tied to anything. When we let go and surrender, we live what we believe: we have the love, support, and direction we need. We live in abundance, enthusiasm, gratitude, and love. We disappear into the perfection of nature and realize it was always within us and a part of us.

Connected to nothing, surrendering everything, you see the humour in the paradox that you have everything and are everything. Tolerance for abuses of power is diminishing constantly, and awareness of psychological torment is likewise increasing.

Surrender occurs when there are no more questions left to ask. Achieving this level of mind mastery releases energy that science can measure, according to Dr. Joe Dispenza, who writes all about it in *Becoming Supernatural*.

If the universe is like the proverbial genie in a bottle that grants your commanding order to bring you what you asked for, in the way genies do it – however they want to – do you know what is coming back to you? Be careful what you wish for – it doesn't mean don't do it; it means getting specific and letting go of the details of how and when it will happen. You trust that it will, and that everything is unfolding to bring it to you and to bring you to it, ready, willing, and able.

Make sure you pack a sense of humor along with that trust.

### THE WATER NYMPH AND GROWING WINGS TO FLY

When I lived in cottage country, someone asked where people like me went on vacation. The answer was farther north, all the way to the gold mines.

Appropriately, I brought my fishing rod and my metal detector. As I headed toward the lake, someone said, "There's no way you will catch a trout in the middle of the afternoon. I've been here a month, and this I know for sure."

I said, "Well, I came here to do it, so that's what I'm going to do."

Less than half an hour later, my trout was becoming lunch while someone else's jaw hung in the dirt.

After lunch, I wanted to go to the gold mine with my metal detector. The guy said the same thing about gold, and I said the same thing about going through the appropriate motions anyway—and some not-so-appropriate ones.

Not everyone knows that their wedding rings will produce the right sound. When I ask your wife to hold my rock while I test it, I might only want you to hear the appropriate sound and draw the inappropriate conclusion.

Despite all of this, the highlight of that vacation was watching a bug crawl out of the water, plant itself on the dock, and crawl out of its skin. Then, it flies away. That's how a dragonfly is made, and yay, they do, because they fly around and eat up all the mosquitoes that were eating me up during the three hours that the transformation took. That was it – from water to air in a matter of hours. How do you like that for adaptability?

## What Could Be

Certain endings are inevitable. It doesn't mean you have to avoid them or that they will even be terrible, but do choose them with eyes wide open.

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### THE FIRST DEVIATION

When you live in a small town, your history defines your future because second chances aren't handed out freely. Like everyone else, you get undeserved credit and are blamed for things that had nothing to do with you. The right things are blown out of proportion, and motivations are all over the map. Who is this person, you wonder? What's true for you is true for everyone. We are not our reputations, but we use them like weapons against everyone else.

When you focus on how you do anything, the results take care of themselves. People can be tricked in the short term, but not in the long term, and the world is increasingly smaller and more transparent.

Through my experience, I learned that my mind has robust control over my body. My consciousness knows that my body is practical but not innovative. It protects whatever is on the inside that knows better ways to solve problems, but it doesn't wait for permission or ask for advice. Everyone agrees that when my mind and my body align, that power is at the disposal of my mind.

Doctors aren't always right. Parents don't always know. Teachers don't always have the answers. Laws don't deliver justice. Change is always possible, no matter what they say.

In the end, they are just fallible people, just like me, with imperfect marks, difficult relationships, and differences of opinion. Allowing for imperfection, ambiguity, and loopholes is faster and easier than defining the differences and negotiating the fine points.

We build new beliefs based on the latest results. The first time you meet someone who isn't abusive, exploitative, or waiting for you to order them around, you modify your belief about how people behave. Maybe you only substitute "most" for "all," but experience updates your worldview.

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### THE SAFE ASSUMPTION

Maliciousness amplifies pain. The pain from an electrical shock dwindles over repeated experiences, but not when you think someone is doing it on purpose<sup>xxxvi</sup>.

In practice, it seems people would rather be called mean than stupid. To be mean implies that you at least took control and made something happen, but the latter implies an incorrigible problem. You can learn to be kind, and of course, you can learn myriad ways to look, sound, and appear so much brighter.

When we are accused of malice, and the reality is that we were innocently naïve, it's often out of a failure of consideration. You acted with your interests in mind, worried about being labelled selfish and tossed out of the clan in your unevolved brain. Your enlightened consciousness can choose a different story or plan of action.

Our actions are increasingly impacting others in ways we didn't anticipate. As you progress in your career, the circle of people who identify as your peers gets more and more precise and, in doing so, gets smaller and smaller. As your world tightens around you, you must be more conscious and aware of the others around you, especially if you become a parent, a politician, or a manager.

## What Could Be

When there is a lot to go around, and we are sharing, we don't notice, nor do we need to care, about what other people are doing. But when supplies become limited and resources are tighter, all of a sudden, people's motivations get called into question.

Pretend it's the spoons in the drawer at the coffee station at work. One day, you notice there are far fewer than normal. Just to be sure, you take one and keep it on your desk. Is this malicious, selfish, or smart?

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### THE SHARED COMMONS

This concept is known as the tragedy of the commons. We abuse what is freely available, and then it isn't, and our abuse becomes personal and specific. Positions are drafted. Sides are taken. Policies are drawn. Tempers flare as some comply and some don't. Punishments are invented. Compliance is enforced. It's all very laden with conflict and expense. Indeed, there is a way to transform this known slippery spiral, especially since we recognize that this is our future.

We all have priorities in our lives that help us maintain our standard of living. That might be a job, a family or a home. No one's life is perfect; we all make trade-offs between essential and urgent. To choose between long- and short-term priorities, there will be more than one way to respond to accusations of failure, especially when that box wasn't even on your checklist.

Hunter Wood is one of the best skiers in the world, and an entire movie is made about his potentially last effort before he pivots toward a better-paying, less risky way of life. Dentistry, he says. Perhaps there's a pivot that doesn't have to be so drastic, arbitrary, or unappealing.

Transformations don't always have to be dramatic, visible, or entirely for the audience. You came here to live, so do it. Don't pretend you aren't tossing the dice. You aren't invincible. Let nothing be for naught. Let no life go without fighting for it, no mistake without learning from it, and no opportunity without squeezing it—nothing for naught. Full surrender.

We invite the treatment we receive, regardless of what it is or whether we intended it. We can also notice how we behave—or are predicted to behave—and check ourselves at the door.

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### UNNATURAL LIVING

When looking at the skyline of any industrialized city, the vast glass-fronted buildings, high towers, and abundant neon lights make us feel small and isolated.

City residents are at a higher risk of experiencing anxiety and depression, and their children face three times the likelihood of developing these conditions. Nearly one-third of schizophrenia cases might not occur if those individuals had been born in rural areas.

Researchers have found that the amygdala is more active in city-raised students under stress than in their farm-raised peers<sup>xxxvii</sup>. Villagers seemed almost unaffected.

The amygdala is that lizard brain. People with depression and anxiety show increased activity here. Chronic overstimulation, then, as a city dweller, might explain the increased risk. The hyperactive amygdala has also been linked to an increase in violent behaviour.

## What Could Be

Crowding creates more competition and weaker community ties through increased social pressure while simultaneously diluting the support system.

Researchers dropped stamped letters all over a campus. They found the ones that were picked up and posted near uncrowded dorms. 90 percent of the letters dropped around the low-density dorms were posted, but only 63 percent of the letters around the crowded dorm made it to a mailbox.

Clean air isn't something you will find in a city. Smog is detrimental to our lungs, but it also affects our brains. Studies with Mexican children indicate that air pollution causes not only lesions but also significant deficits in cognitive tasks<sup>xxxviii</sup>.

Cities are also noisy. Children from noisy towns have higher blood pressure than those in quieter cities. They are also more likely to fail cognitive tasks and give up before the allowed time has elapsed<sup>xxxix</sup>.

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### THE CAPACITY FOR SELF-DECEPTION

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. Everyone's world makes sense to them, even if it makes no sense on the outside.

We have worked hard to build a reputation, not just in our career path and recognized accomplishments, but also in the stories we tell ourselves and the descriptors we attribute to ourselves. Some of these stories are so old and well-buried that we are unaware of their existence. They are feeding our decisions without our awareness, from confirmation bias, and the fact that we find information to prove what we believe, even when equal information is available, to cognitive dissonance, and our ability to make sure that information is transformed in a way to keep an identity intact, however accurate or invented it may be.

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. We have the unconscious ability to spin-doctor facts to enforce what we already believe, as Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson tell in *Mistakes Were Made (but not by me)*.

We love our opinions, even more so when they've been shaken. Researchers show that after we've been rattled, we go on longer about our point of view<sup>xl</sup>. Professors Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler write about the backfire effect, "in which corrections increase misperceptions among the group in question." The more ideological, the more entrenched. The more creative someone is, the easier it is for them to explain away facts.

Gloria Steinem sums it up with "The truth will set you free, but first, it will piss you off."

### THE PERVASIVENESS OF PASSIVITY

Far more things are the product of randomness than we realize, but we also might not appreciate just what randomness is.

An organization will emerge when asked to plot 50 dots in a random pattern. In the 1930s, researchers observed that people could not devise a sequence of numbers that appeared random, nor could they discern whether a given string was random.

## What Could Be

If you've ever thought you were on a winning streak, randomness has fooled you. The hot hand fallacy forgets that each hand is, in fact, independent. Past performance does not guarantee future results when gambling with cards or coins is involved.

Too often, chance events are interpreted as successes or failures. Not for David Picker, though. The former studio executive said, "If I had said yes to all the projects I turned down and no to all the other ones I took, it would have worked out about the same."

Considering everything that can happen in the years from giving the go to opening weekend, he could be right. If that were true, any person in that job would perform just as well, and the value of making that call should be near zero, not the \$25 million they earn.

How much skill and the luck of random things falling into advantageous places isn't easy to determine, but it's safe to say those at the top get more credit and blame than they deserve. If ten movie executives tossed ten coins, chances are 2 out of 3 that at least one of them will get eight or more heads<sup>xii</sup>. It appears to be a streak and feels like skill, yet it's just a matter of chance.

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### CAUSES WHERE NONE EXIST

Rushing through the world, we use patterns and ignore details. Our skewed perceptions of what is there and what isn't don't just affect our choices at the moment, but also the larger patterns we think we see.

When faced with contradictory opinions, uncertainty, or other people's ambiguity, we often see patterns where none exist and embrace certainty when it is unjustified<sup>xiii</sup>.

Just as we fail to give randomness the credit it deserves, we see explanations for events that aren't there. The clustering illusion refers to the tendency to perceive patterns where none exist.

In the billowing clouds of smoke that poured out of the trade center on September 11, many people swore they could see the face of the devil. The very idea of a conspiracy theory is to find a cause where there isn't one.

Correlation without causation is on the radar of every statistician. Just because you can mathematically determine one variable from another doesn't mean the relationship is in the physical world.

Neuroscientist Michael S. Gazzaniga says choice blindness reveals the human tendency to generate explanations for events. In one specific experiment, participants chose between two photos based on the attractiveness of the people depicted.

In a sleight of hand, researchers would then offer the participant the one they had not chosen and ask why they had chosen it. The switch was detected in only 26 percent of the trials<sup>xiiii</sup>. Participants offered reasons for choosing something they did not typically pick.

In a weird understanding of odds, we seem to think that two events occurring together are more likely than one alone, the specific being more probable than the general. However, the probability that two events will never happen is greater than the sum of the individual probabilities.

### ECHOES OF PREFERENCE

Preferences aren't as stable as we think they are. In the above experiment, only a few minutes elapsed between the choice and the rationale being offered. Choices might not originate from free will, as we often think they do.

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

The Barnum effect describes the common phenomenon that might explain the popularity of horoscopes. A personality description matches us, but is vague and general enough to apply to anyone. People who read their horoscopes might be under this spell.

Athletes are well-known for their superstitions. If they break a streak while wearing new socks, they will keep wearing them until they can walk independently. Luck has nothing to do with the socks, but believing in causation might harness the placebo effect.

Stock charting is useless, but that hasn't eliminated any jobs. Research has demonstrated that analysis can't beat the market as far back as the 1960s. Financial economists Arnold Moore and Eugene Fama estimate that past stock prices explain only 3 percent of daily stock price variation. Of that remaining 97 percent, we've seen that randomness, popularity, and fluency play a part. It's not the forecasting that pays off; it's the commission on trades.

When you act because you think there is a relationship between what you see and what you think will happen, you might be better off doing nothing. Don't worry – time changes everything.

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### BUCKETS OF TIME

While we seem obsessed with the future, we are often terrible at predicting it unless we learn the tools and tricks, dedicate sufficient time, and verify our results with other authentic experts.

Imagining the effect of time is not something the brain does well automatically. We imagine them now, then apply corrections over time. In this way, imagining the future looks like the present when you guess it. And so wrong when you arrive.

No one changes overnight, and there's no such thing as overnight success. Yet, we don't always see the inner effort, late nights, and continual sacrifices that go into it. Nothing worth it comes without work.

Including rebuilding all your inner scaffolding to accommodate new truths.

You might think you always pick the slowest line, but we also forget the unremarkable times when the lines moved at a regular and predictable pace. Your perception of waiting isn't even accurate. Customers focus on the length of the queue rather than the speed at which it moves<sup>xiv</sup>. Length is much more visible than pace.

Your perception of waiting is also dependent on having something to do. Boredom makes time stretch, but engagement makes it shrink, just like you've always thought about the elasticity of time.

Planning for the future with focus and attention involves making accurate predictions and designs to redirect life toward what you want to happen. You must take the time to seriously consider your impressions of the future, rather than validating your hopeful plans.

## What Could Be

Unforeseeable, changing external forces that introduce randomness influence major and minor outcomes in everyday life as much as they do the larger arc of success in our careers, investments, and big decisions.

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### RATES OF CHANGE

Regarding how much we anticipate changing in the future, 18-year-olds anticipate changing as much as 50-year-olds do. The end-of-history illusion refers to the phenomenon in which people of all ages believe their lives have led them to personal growth and changes in taste, and that the journey is almost complete. We believe the future will not bring about significant change. And we are all wrong about it. If you feel the pace of life is getting slower as you get older, you are right. However, it doesn't slow down as much as you expect.

When someone says they can't imagine a future event, it's more likely a reflection of their limited imagination, rather than the event's likelihood. Without similar experiences in memory, they are difficult, if not impossible, to imagine. Imagination is a skill that requires development and nurturing, especially if you want to drop this false construct called time.

Mental imagery of time leads us to illogical errors and procrastination. We think of time as chunks, how we've falsely created that impression with weeks, calendars, and the like. When a deadline is in the next month, it feels like it's in a different bucket, so we think we have time before we even begin.<sup>xlvi</sup> We create false buckets of time and act as if they are real.

If you recognize that time is finite, aside from the implications of quantum physics, and that the pace of the future will match the pace of the past, then perhaps we can start planning more effectively, making better decisions, and predicting more accurately.

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### PLANNING TOMORROW

Stories are thrilling to live and fun to tell. Volunteers were asked to choose a vacation destination between two invented destinations: Medicoreville, where everything is average, and Extremecity, where everything is either the best or the worst. Most chose the extremes – the stories to tell.

Now, imagine that two tickets have already been purchased, and you need to cancel one of them. Again, the standard selection was Extremecity. Why would the most commonly selected also be the most widely rejected? We consider only the positive points when choosing and only the negative points when rejecting. All else is left out.

The PMI is an acronym for plus, minus, and the important one—interesting points. The benefits include that snowmobiling is an active form of meditation. The minuses are that it is expensive and loud. Interesting points include the ability to see windmills at the closest, safest distance and the ability to outrun wolves. Most people aren't interested in the former or have no use for the latter.

This is why the third column, with its interesting points, is so interesting. Just because analysis spits a conclusion doesn't mean you must go with it. It's just another data point to consider.

## What Could Be

With your heart and gut, you should immediately feel how they react to the news when analysis tells you one thing. Now you have three votes, and it's up to you to decide. When all are on board, you don't need willpower.

The best news is that making a huge difference doesn't take much time or effort. Think like a butterfly that flaps its wings in Brazil and causes a tornado in Texas. At least look at things from more than one angle before proceeding, if only to ensure it's not you in the tornado's path.

### THE INVISIBILITY OF PATTERNS

What we can't see both creates and hides patterns and causes.

Nearly four centuries ago, Francis Bacon wrote about how the mind errs and considered the failure to consider absences the most serious.

It's easy to draw inaccurate and misleading conclusions unless we are deliberate statisticians. When statisticians evaluate hypotheses to determine causal relationships between two things, such as a kid's hyperactivity and sugar consumption, they must consider three aspects of occurrences:

1. Yes/Yes, otherwise known as co-occurrences: Kids who are hyperactive and eat sugar
2. No/Yes and Yes/No, the non-co-occurrences: Kids who are hyperactive and didn't eat sugar and kids who aren't hyperactive and did eat sugar
3. No/No, the co-absences: Kids who aren't hyperactive and didn't eat sugar

When we conclude life events, we primarily use the first and ignore all the instances we don't see. For example, we conclude that sugar causes hyperactivity when all the data show that some kids are five times more likely to be hyperactive, whether they eat sugar or not<sup>xlvii</sup>.

Copernicus was brilliant enough to figure out that the Earth revolved around the sun, and he was also astute enough to avoid punishment for his idea: He distributed his work anonymously and was allowed to live.

Tall poppies get chopped down. Many cultures have their variations on this warning. If you stick out above everyone else, you will be attacked, resented, cut down or criticized simply because, in some respect, you were classified as superior to your peers.

We self-handicap when in doubt, but when we know we will soar above, what does an iconoclastic thinker, superior performer, or gifted athlete do?

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### BIASED BY OMISSION

In 2017, in Florida, a video captured teenagers jeering a man as they watched him drown. They could have saved his life. They did not, and they did not break the law. In Florida, there's no law against doing nothing.

What we don't see, we don't judge. Omission bias refers to the tendency to perceive harmful actions as morally worse than equally harmful inaction.

It's harder to notice when someone doesn't do something. Researchers distinguish between action and inaction, as different from harm caused by omissions, but confirm that the preference exists. They discovered that the effect of this bias is more significant when potential regret is present<sup>xlviii</sup>.

## What Could Be

The strength of this bias also depends on the position in the hierarchy. The lower someone is, the less we seem to hold that person responsible for acts of omission<sup>xlix</sup>. Status is irrelevant to the opportunity to commit a harmful omission, yet we seem to assign greater accountability to higher-status individuals.

When we are on our deathbeds, omission bias seems to disappear. Terminal patients feel regret for the things they did not do, the paths they did not take, and the priorities they ignored.

Errors of omission are common, but when imagining the future, the things we leave out might make all the difference. As you might discover for yourself a dozen years later, you wonder why you haven't graduated to the next level of relationships. Think about what you'd like to have for dinner. If you do this right after you've finished a big breakfast, you will have difficulty with the idea of even being hungry. The effect of our failure to adjust for the present when imagining the future makes you think you might not want dinner.

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### HIDDEN COMPETITION

In a global arena, citizens complain that foreign aid spending is too high. Wars are fought for religion. One country suffers problems with obesity, while another one starves.

We highly regard pride, loyalty, and patriotism, but these same values can also lead to conflict with our neighbours.

When the detectives first investigate the spouse, is there something you need to know about marriage?

We give preferential treatment to members of our groups and reserve our worst behaviour and meanest words for those closest to us, saving our most severe actions and harsh words for our loved ones. Parochial altruism is another term to describe this prosocial tendency. Fandom is another.

The power of this effect is evident in any sports arena. Spectators have a strong affiliation with one side or the other. Instant camaraderie occurs when they wear the same jersey and look out for each other, even when they don't have to.

It occurs frequently in society, and we refer to it as the way things work. It's who you know. Alums take a favour in hiring graduates from their alma mater. Find a connection, and you've got a way in with someone.

Humans don't learn this lesson until they are at least three years old. Most have it by four. Theory of mind is the cognitive capacity to recognize that others have mental states, including beliefs, intentions, emotions, and other mental states. You can't develop the ability to lie without it. Or empathize.

Until you are 18 or declared an adult, your parents are responsible for your actions. At 18, it's like it's a game for the new generation. Some of those kids were spending 18 years getting parental-provided advantage after advantage, while others were getting the opposite. At 18, a starter's pistol goes off.

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### THE ENEMY

Babies know it. When introduced to two puppets with different food preferences, they tend to prefer the one with the same food preference. Worse, they want the puppet who punishes the one with the other choice the best.

Experiments have shown that we tend to punish the other group even more than we'd like to help our group.

## What Could Be

Unethical behaviour between departments in organizations is not rare. One department can sabotage another. When there are competitive cues between groups, the priority is to harm the other group. While this improves efficiency within the group, it generates costly conflict<sup>i</sup>.

One study showed that introducing ranking increased performance. Social pressure motivates individuals to work harder when their output is the result of a team effort.

However, when there is an opportunity to sabotage, everything changes. If you can get away with it, human nature appears to try. Some, given a chance, will do anything to improve their rank. Without hesitation, some individuals will even incur costs to undermine a competitor's performance or artificially inflate their own.<sup>ii</sup>

Under a system of forced bonus distribution, it becomes detrimental if people have the option to sabotage each other<sup>i</sup>. Destructive behaviours are reduced when they are explicitly named "sabotage."

Researchers have also found that introducing a strong group identity reduces sabotage. However, this seemed to discourage peer sabotage but increased in-group rivalry<sup>iii</sup>.

In Jainism, achieving moksha, or enlightenment, involves severing all relationships. It is time to master that old game of whack-a-mole or stop referring to change for the sake of change as progress.

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### INVISIBLE INFLUENCERS

We can't be sure what kept the students from the crowded dorms from picking up and posting the letters, but they concluded it had everything to do with the environment.

Is a broken window a license to break another one? The broken windows theory postulates that otherwise well-behaved people are more likely to commit crimes in neighbourhoods with broken windows. We know that when there's a lot of trash in the parking lot, people are more likely to add their own.

In one study, researchers swept the parking lot clean and placed fliers on all the cars. Only 1 in 10 littered. When the parking lot was filled with trash (intentionally for the study), nearly half of the participants threw the flyer to the ground.

The belief that if everyone else can do it, so can I is the belief that leaves honesty boxes empty. Researchers changed the sign reminding coffee drinkers to leave their coins to one picturing flowers. It was a big deal until they switched that image to a pair of eyes. Imagine a pair of eyes on you, and you behave differently. Donations were no longer an issue.

Another reason people are less dishonest than they would typically be in ambient light is that if the lights are low, they are more likely to try to get away with something. Turning on blue lights, such as those on police cars, has proven effective in reducing crime.

The external environment influences your behaviour, but it also influences your genes. Twin studies enable us to examine the interplay between genes and environment.

### ENVIRONMENTAL IMPRINTING

Genetics is a poor predictor of disease. A recent summary of twin studies and their propensity to get the same disease has just been published. Across five countries, they found that genes cannot predict the likelihood of developing a disease. They were pretty close to useless.

While twins start out sharing the same genes, environmental influences shape individuality as they age. Scientists use this formation of individuality to separate genes from the environment.

If you are familiar with the television series Orphan Black, you've seen how clones can look alike yet have unique personalities. Genes interact with the environment to produce traits. They are more about expression than existence. Like switches, they can be turned on or off.

When activated, they produce proteins, which trigger a physiological response. You are never static, and neither are your genes. You are constantly interacting with the world around you.

If you don't like your life, change your world. Environmental cues trigger your thoughts, which trigger behaviours, and you end up stuck in the same old patterns. Use design to intentionally break or reinforce habits.

From the people you talk to, the walls you look at, and what's out your window, it all matters and is all at the command of design. Design that is yours to control.

Parents are the first creators of your emotional self. Whether or not they respond to you, how they do, all the stuff that gets wrapped up in the nature and nurture debate. Both are happening, but nature isn't picky. Whatever nature does or doesn't do for you isn't personal. With your parents, it's all about what's personal. It's all about them, and it's all about you reflecting on them, and it's all about them creating you, and they aren't done yet.

### THE POWER OF SURRENDER

The universe is made of waves of energy. Waves can be pushed, but not pulled.

Waves are better off ridden. If you don't know how to surf, lie on your back and float.

It was my first swimming lesson. If you can relax and float, you'll always be okay. If you try to tread water, you'll tire and drown. If you swim, ditto. When you are in trouble, float.

Relax in the grace of the universe, connect to the seat of your soul, and as a biophoton being, think light, not carbon; think diamond, not coal; think prism, not combustion.

Surrender to living and letting live. Different people have other minds at various times. So much so that when we meet someone who is where we are, we are thrilled. "Oh! A like-minded soul!" we delight.

So, why not look for those joys? Instead of noticing the mundane times you've run into someone at a different level and perspective and failed to get to know each other, move on to find the people who are looking for you.

Soul mates are people who are there to teach us a lesson. It may help you onto a new path and show you a part of yourself you haven't yet noticed. The people in our lives are there to love us into a new evolution of ourselves; sometimes, there's no way of being gentle about it.

## What Could Be

You've surrendered to the experience of life. It happens, and there's only the joy and bliss that it is happening! What's the alternative? Bad feelings from judging it or choosing the six-foot-under option.

We've learned that we can bounce forward, so recall that memory and surrender all that pent-up emotion that no longer belongs there.

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### WHEN IN DOUBT

We undermine ourselves when we are concerned about failing.

When we try our best and fail, we have no one to blame but ourselves. If we can't let that happen, we introduce a likely explanation. Self-handicapping refers to the tendency to take actions that undermine one's chances of success, and thereby produce something to blame in the event of failure.

Self-handicapping protects our impression of our competency because it works when we fail and when we succeed. Our self-esteem remains intact, no matter the outcome.

It also occurs when we have uncertainty about our abilities, particularly in the context of a future public performance.

Researchers asked subjects to complete analogies. Half received solvable ones, and the other half were impossible. After spending time on that task, an experimenter would give them the choice of a performance-enhancing drug or a debilitating drug before their next session.

Subjects who attempted the impossible analogies chose the debilitating drug 60 percent of the time, whereas the other group chose it only 19 percent of the time.

This effect happened only when the experimenter witnessed the choice and the impending result<sup>liii</sup>. In another treatment, when the choice of drug was kept anonymous, self-handicapping wholly disappeared.

When you're unsure about your chances of success but deeply invested in succeeding, be aware of your tendency to self-handicap.

Uncovering and improving ourselves is work. It's the work of growing old, not getting old. It takes time, and it's never done. Be patient, take your time, and recognize that we all have our elephants to contend with and work to do. Monks give up their possessions and don't seem to spend a moment worrying about what you think of how they look, while we all look to them for advice.

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### WHEN IN PUBLIC

Organizational transformations are notoriously unsuccessful, with reported failure rates of up to 70 percent. Failure is the well-worn path, the expected result, and maintaining the status quo is the path of least resistance when it's all about change.

However, no valid and reliable empirical evidence supports such a story<sup>liiv</sup>.

The goal isn't to succeed. The goal is to maintain status and group membership. The internal, individual goal is in direct conflict with the transformation if that is not the group's desire and objective.

## What Could Be

Transformations require someone to take the helm. Instead, transformations are staffed with too many managers and not enough leaders<sup>lv</sup>. Managers don't cause change; they ensure steady and smooth operations daily. Repetition and status quo are their zones. Self-handicapping is prevalent under certain conditions when we fear judgment from a group.

The ambiguity aversion disappears completely when the fear of negative evaluation by others is removed<sup>lvi</sup>. We are willing to explore, test, and fail in private. Still, there is no way to arrive at a better transformation strategy in private when the very nature of the solution requires the involvement of others. It will evolve slowly, as organizations do.

In the face of ambiguity, as long as you do what's expected, it's no one's fault, failure, or problem.

A stigma of failure might be at the heart of our fear of negative evaluation by others. Failure is advantageous for society because it encourages innovation and pushes the boundaries of what is possible. The boom in entrepreneurship in the United States compared to Europe is attributed to greater acceptance of initial risk<sup>lvii</sup>.

The fear of negative evaluation by others hinders innovation, but if we can change our attitudes about failure, maybe we can eliminate it.

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### WHEN FOR CERTAIN

There's handing over control out of fear of looking bad to our identity and fear of looking bad to others; then there are the times when it's wise to do so.

Control is defined here as the perceived ability to alter events significantly.

In an experiment to assess our ability to do this, researchers set up a situation in which two subjects were led to believe one was faster than the other. Both would receive the same shock if they failed the next test, but only one would do it. Who?

As expected, most chose the faster partner for the test, though not unanimously.

In another study, participants were given the option of one machine-delivered shock or two self-administered shocks, and 35 percent chose the double dose<sup>lviii</sup>.

If we perceive that a negative outcome is possible and will cause us to suffer, we will likely respond negatively to a perceived increase in personal control. That's, we are happy to give up power if there's a chance it will worsen our lives.

Consider the opportunity to lead a transformation. There's a chance of failure for even the most capable and prepared leaders. You will likely reject it if there's any hint that failure will lead to anything worse. A lower position and a secure salary may often outweigh the opportunity to develop new skills, make a meaningful impact on the company, and potentially earn more.

We are predictably wrong when we attempt to assess just how much control we have over a situation. We often underestimate our power when things don't work out and overestimate it when they do<sup>lix</sup>.

Accuracy doesn't matter because it's the extent to which we perceive it that matters in how we behave.

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### CRISIS OF AFFLUENCE

We carry stuff with us as evidence of our own story.

Our spaces are filled with so-called “identity markers”—things that remind us who we are, where we’ve come from, and, for some, where we are heading. We can let it go when we don’t have to prove it or remind ourselves of it.

When we fill our space with stuff, we suffer the consequences. Things don’t make you happy; things own you. The cost of ownership is always higher than the sticker price. The inventory itself is a cost. When something is sitting around waiting to be used, it ties up your capital and risks damage, obsolescence, or loss.

What makes you happy today won’t be enough tomorrow. You become accustomed to what you have, and your baseline adjusts.

Up to a point, more is more, but beyond it, more is less. Regarding salary, that figure appears to be approximately \$70,000 per year. When you eat, your appetite increases; you can’t imagine eating more after a certain point. That point for most of us is just past the point of inflection.

If we can’t help ourselves when the food is delicious, try resisting when it’s free. Amazon, for example, lets us buy more than we need, so we don’t have to pay for shipping. When something is free, the opportunity cost is invisible—the opportunity to do something else with all that time, space, or money. Shipping is never free—it is merely accounting, the creative mathematics of expenses.

Possessions speak volumes, so what do yours say about you? You might need an alter ego, secret identity or costume to bring out your best, but who needs possessions anyway?

Like everything, it’s up to you to decide whether take advantage of garbage day, Goodwill, or garage sales.

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### URGE FOR CONTROL

To some extent, we are all control freaks. Once we become old enough to realize that tomorrow is coming, we strive to control outcomes to improve the future, and know the world is different because we are in it.

Desire for control at a level higher than is realistically attainable is found to be depressing in laboratory settings<sup>lx</sup>. A lack of predictability towards adverse events also had depressive effects. This observation formed the basis of the contemporary understanding of depression. Being deprived of control can leave individuals helpless, passive, and withdrawn.

Control has such a strong pull that losing control is deadly—literally, the unexpected result of an experiment described in Daniel Gilbert’s *Stumbling on Happiness*.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that perceived control is beneficial for both mental and physical health. It enhances resilience, motivation, cognitive function, and overall life satisfaction. According to the 2013 World Happiness Report, it’s one of the six pillars of life satisfaction.

Increases in personal control can satisfy a need to feel competent and masterful. People feel better about accomplishments when they can attribute positive results to themselves. Planning increases your sense of control and life satisfaction, which tends to improve with age<sup>lxi</sup>. Life planners tend to slow down later in life, at the cost of their happiness.

## What Could Be

Control seems to stem from two sources: interpersonal and personal, or power and choice. Related but serving a common purpose, power and choice are substitutable for one another<sup>lxii</sup>. That is, we are happy to give up an option if it gives us interpersonal power, and are equally excited to give up power if it results in more choices.

Do you want to go far, or do you want to go together?

### SPIRITUAL MIND MASTERY

Freedom of connection arises from rejecting spiritual attachment in favor of conscious surrender.

When you have a desire to worship and know that a higher intelligence is at work, it's easy to get attached to religion. In society, how can you separate from it when "In God We Trust" is the foundation of your currency and court?

To catch your healer in action, you notice the science behind the tall tales and the morality behind the stories. You appreciate the creativity and initiative, considering that it might have all been one grand step toward consciousness and understanding how to utilize it.

Meditation and mindfulness offer opportunities to become aware of your attachment to answers you don't believe, but choose to uphold to protect certain status quos. Only you know your motivations, although by now, you know that's not likely how you will be judged.

Those who are self-aware learn their weaknesses and know what to delegate. When we are tired, we pull over and let the passenger take over the driving.

Handing over the reins protects the fragile self-esteem built on the wrong premise. When we have an undesirable weakness, it's even harder to deny when the public knows about it. Impostor syndrome is a phenomenon commonly experienced by accomplished professionals who sometimes feel fake.

One thing we can control is how much we learn from failure, the areas of our weaknesses and the joy of isolated practice.

Performance in solitude is one thing; it is entirely different when there is an audience, considering your need for social status, which can lead to two different performance levels.

In a world with billions of connected people, your happiness might hinge on finding a different audience – one that will cheer you on and demand no less than your best.

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### THE WILL TO RISE ABOVE

It's a new and exciting time of reconnecting things that always belonged together. Yet, in the name of progress, a division was made. Science went one way, religion another.

Now that we can align science and embrace spirituality, concepts that once required a leap of faith make perfect sense.

The placebo effect is the sugar pill phenomenon, where people get better in scientific studies because they think they are getting the real thing. One branch of science progressed in the face of that frustration: darn it, how will we eliminate the fact that these people are messing up the results? A second branch of science developed in response to that fact. Are people doing this on their own?

## What Could Be

Guess which branch has more marketing dollars, more institutional representation, and more governmental influence. Possibly the one you know about, the one taught in schools, and the one that fights over grant dollars.

It's a big choice, and your DNA is listening. Will you choose to express yourself in high-quality or settle for lower-quality expressions? Will you survive or thrive?

To survive is to be tired, drained, exhausted, and depressed. It wasn't what I wanted for myself, nor what I would settle for as an engineer deeply entrenched in the so-called quality profession. If that power were in my and your DNA, as science knows, I'm with the second group – the ability to self-heal and lead a high-quality life.

When you get through all the work, the world is your oyster.

Your oyster. No one else. Not the one your parents picked, society praised, or your pocketbook pleased. You see your path and know it's your own because it's a line all your own.

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### HIGHER LOVE

My dad told me that no one is better equipped to manage my money than I am. Retaining ownership and accountability for all necessary tasks is preferable to delegating them to others. My body, check.

It wasn't until 2019 that I read Lynne McTaggart's words in *The Field*, which stated that people can heal themselves before a doctor diagnoses them.

No doctor is always right; that's the point of second opinions. They are human, and the entire discipline is built on the backs of one human after another. This is true of anything that defines your current reality.

It takes a deliberate pursuit of improvement to change. You need a reason to improve. For many of us, that begins with our health. Like me, you face a pending disability or worse. You can put yourself in the hands of the experts while also knowing that no one knows you like you know yourself.

If that's not cool with you, why accept it? You don't have to disagree out loud. You might do what I did. Keep your mouth shut and back away slowly. When you are safely back on your feet, decide what you want to do about it for yourself.

They can keep their disease, but you cannot keep your discomfort about whatever it is that is making you uncomfortable. Have you pinpointed the lie you know you say to yourself? You are the only one who can diagnose what is going on. The way to do that is to be your best friend, only parent, and devil's advocate. Ask and answer yourself, however long it takes.

Life is time—nothing but time. Use it however you want, but do not pretend that anyone else is making the rules, setting your limits, or has all the answers.

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### WHEN WINNERS SURRENDER

Adlai Stevenson said, "Man is a strange animal; he doesn't like to read the handwriting on the wall until his back is up against it." Winners surrender when they realize their pursuit is no longer relevant or authentic.

When you are up against the wall, it's time to try something new. In *How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci* author Michael J. Gelb states that Leonardo recognized the importance of continuous learning. "Just as iron rusts from disuse and stagnant water putrefies, or when cold turns to ice, so our intellect wastes unless it is kept in use."

## What Could Be

Until you have tried something, you have no idea. When you have no idea, you have no empathy. Trying something new can increase your creativity, intuitive abilities, and the confidence to tackle even more challenging tasks.

Once-in-a-lifetime opportunities are something to seize. The trick is to recognize genuine opportunities and distinguish them from impostors. For instance, there will always be more jobs, but there won't always be that specific job offer. Unpack the opportunity into its components. From the components, you can assess if this opportunity won't come around again and what kind of rare opportunity you would characterize as a dream.

Every opportunity comes at a cost: time, money, and effort. There may be some research, investigation, training, study, or other preparation that accompanies the expectation of success. You need to have what it takes, with a little room to spare.

With age, we become less open to new experiences. It is the only personality trait of the Big Five to do so. Think of the glee of you at five jumping into the pool, and think of how you'd react today. Pools haven't gotten colder.

Remember the fun of the splash, not the shock of the chill.

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### POLISHING AND TWEAKING

No one wishes for depression, yet it happens. Suppose you stop viewing depression as a defect of a person and instead start wondering why it afflicts humanity. In that case, some interesting hypotheses emerge, such as the possibility that it is an evolutionary benefit. Some researchers believe that the body and the brain go into depression mode to solve significant problems.

Who doesn't see significant problems? Everyone else wears rose-coloured glasses, believing they are better than everyone else. They are practically stumbling over problems while saying, "What problem is that?" Should they get tripped up, they declare, "Yes, but that's not my problem," rubbing their bruises away.

If the problem impacts you, it's your problem. It doesn't matter whether you caused it or whether someone else is better equipped to solve it. Perhaps the best solution to your problem is to capture their attention.

As statisticians and risk scholars can tell you, a lot can go wrong between intention, action, and result. Several academics have quite a bee in their bonnet about executives taking credit for randomness. They like to prove the complete lack of correlation between their paychecks and their effectiveness.

Knowledge work has traditionally lacked a standardized methodology, making it difficult to assess. We assess the work's results, and even the results are difficult to determine.

I believe that if there were a proven methodology for conducting knowledge work as effectively and efficiently as possible, we could assess knowledge workers based on their performance relative to the standard, accepted approach. If they have a reason to deviate or innovate, yippie, here's your bonus. If they can't explain why they didn't bother with or skipped something, I'm sorry, but here's your performance improvement plan. First, master the basics; then, get creative and innovative, and take us all forward.

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### RATIONALLY GIFTED

Growing up, I was told, "Life isn't fair!"

## What Could Be

Even as a child, I could see that those people telling me they weren't complaining as I was were bragging. They were using the unfairness of life as justification for their unfair actions. Everyone wants to get ahead. However, I believe that as a society, we need to move forward together.

A fairer workplace creates a healthier culture. People are happier and more productive in better work environments, and businesses tend to be more profitable as a result. Investors receive the returns they desire. Happier, healthier people reduce the burden on the health care system. We all end up thriving.

I believe that we can transform society by transforming how we assess knowledge work. The people who stand to gain from this are at the bottom of the ladder. The people who stand to lose have mastered the game and now sit precariously at the top, propagating the culture that brought them there.

I say precariously because there's more on the bottom; without the bottom, the top has nothing to do. The top collapses when the bottom moves over to an organization that promotes fairness, efficiency, and effectiveness.

When I've seen liars, cheats, and thieves reach the top by reporting savings that don't exist, this collapse was inevitable. False savings create false stock reports, and we all know what happens when a stock is based on fake data. A correction happens.

I see a massive correction coming. We can take hold of it and surf the wave or be crushed by it. It's all our choice. The choice is rooted in how we want to assess the performance of knowledge workers.

We are all better than average - not in every dimension, but in our unique way.

### EMBRACING LIMITLESS POSSIBILITY

When you are weighing options to make a decision, your attention is broad, allowing you to be open to information. Once you've decided, your attention narrows and becomes more focused, and you start looking for information that supports it.<sup>lxiii</sup>

Signs of wealth can make us more independent, self-reliant, and selfish, but they are not the only factors shaping our future actions. Thinking about religion and science makes us more moral, thinking about a superhero makes us more confident, and thinking about age makes us slower.

Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) conducted an interesting experiment that illustrated this principle. Two groups were given equal opportunities to cheat during a test. The difference between the two groups was what they were doing beforehand.

Before the test, one group was asked to recall the titles of books they had read in high school, whereas the second group was asked to recall the Ten Commandments. Approximately 20 percent of the first group cheated, whereas the group primed with the Ten Commandments did not.

In a separate study, participants primed with ideas of science, logic, and hypothesis exhibited more altruistic behaviour toward others and adhered to social norms<sup>lxiv</sup>. Acting morally can enhance your physical strength and increase your willpower. As the study's authors suggest, "the best way to pass by the donut box at work is to give away your spare change on the way to the office."

Standing like a superhero in so-called power poses raises testosterone and, therefore, your confidence.

## What Could Be

In another study, one group was asked about their feelings regarding old age, while a second group was asked about current events. Compared to the second group, the group that discussed old age walked 33% slower than they had arrived.

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### PAPERING OVER ACCOMPLISHMENT

My mother told me about a writing award she had won. My dad told me it was the worst thing that ever happened in her life because after that, “she thought she could write.”

I won a writing award for a work term report I authored. I didn’t want it to be the worst thing that ever happened to me, but it was close.

On the morning of commencement, I received a letter informing me that I would not be able to obtain my degree because I had failed to meet the minimum number of work reports. Like someone who skates on the edge, I knew well when I was on the line and erring on either side. Like someone who’d just moved to a new address, I hadn’t kept up with my mail.

That was the morning I met my dean over the phone. At the same time, he was eating his breakfast. I might never have met him otherwise. Gallantly, he headed into school, checked my file, and confirmed my winning report was indeed written but missing.

He even apologized for the error. Hey man, counting just seems easy, and I did try staking through with the bare minimum.

While I would receive a paper with nothing on it, a program without my name, and a failure to be considered for any graduation awards, I’d go over the stage alphabetically, wearing a gown in my size. That’s something, and I thought it was only fair to share the source of my bias toward academia.

Decades later, I can confirm that one thing is for sure: you don’t need an award or a piece of paper to tell you or anyone what you can and cannot do.

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### BALANCING THE DILEMMAS

To work smarter, we must know how to balance innovation with tradition. We have to balance blocking out distractions and letting in information. We must let in some of the opportunities that knock, but not be bogged down by filtering the demands on our attention. The balance isn’t always precise.

There’s the gold prospector who stopped just inches short of the vein, and the aspiring actress who retired as a waitress. In one ear you hear, “keep going”, and in the other you hear, “why haven’t you given up yet?”

Rocky Balboa’s stories of dedication and perseverance captivate us, but the hard work is condensed into a quick montage. A bar of 10,000 hours is the amount of dedicated practice you must invest before becoming a master.

When repeated attempts are frustrated, we learn to stop trying. Elephant trainers rely on learned helplessness. Their adult power is never realized, and their perception of control is destroyed. The objective of adulthood is to realize that much time has passed, taking many of your so-called truths with it.

Whether to continue is a common question for those who dare to start and are in the midst of it. Kanter’s Law states, “Everything can look like a failure in the middle.”

## What Could Be

According to Dean M. Becker, president and CEO of Adaptiv Learning Systems, success hinges on resilience, “the ability to modulate and constructively harness the stress response—a capacity essential to both physical and mental health.”

Don't forget Arnel Campaner Pinedo, the Filipino singer who took over the lead for American rock band Journey. Misty Copeland is an African American ballerina who was told she'd never make it. Barbara Arrowsmith-Young is ***The Woman Who Changed Her Brain***. Everything is impossible until someone does it. What will you do?

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### INVESTING IN INNOVATION

Persistence is the act of continuing to try the same thing over and over. When does it become insanity?

If it's trying to ask someone out, crying wolf, or asking for favours, even twice may be too many times.

Perseverance is sticking to the problem without being tied to any particular solution. To know where you are going, but maybe not the details of how you'll get there. Try again, as long as you are deliberately learning from each iteration and using that knowledge to inform the setup of the subsequent trial.

Change isn't as difficult, painful, costly, or distant as you think. You only need to endure 20 seconds of fear, 5 minutes of journal writing, and read one book weekly to make a difference.

You can also imagine scaling the effects of the decision up to a larger timescale. Instead of imagining clogged arteries when considering fast food, imagine how crappy you know you will feel right after you eat it. Clogged arteries are the problem of a future self that may feel like someone else, but the person holding their guts in an hour is someone you know well.

A calming environment will also help you avoid immediate temptations. The slower pace might slow your internal perception of time, making you less likely to think that all opportunities are lost if you don't act now.

If it has anything to do with other people's thoughts, stick to it. That is, if those people aren't your trusted advisors. Be who you are, loud and proud. Buck trends, eschew popularity contests, and abandon the mainstream. Go against the grain with hearty determination, but don't ignore valuable feedback. If others tell you what you should do, check with your head and heart, then do what you think is right.

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### PURSUING OPPORTUNITY

Sometimes our conditions are so terrible that anything else would be an improvement.

Moving away from an uncomfortable situation can often lead to another, equally uncomfortable one. You have more time than you think you might to reflect on the exact nature of the right, worthwhile change, and let that be your north star to guide you through change.

To give any opportunity a fair shot, you must have the time, energy, and resources to pursue it. When estimating these requirements, be sure to include a contingency to account for unforeseen circumstances. Things tend to take twice as long as we think and cost more than we budgeted. When considering resources, these include your energy, creativity, and commitment. We can identify the time when something is essential, but be conscious of your priorities and avoid creating your own overwhelm.

## What Could Be

Pamela Slim writes about the tendency for people who dislike their jobs to engage in expensive distractions. Large houses, tropical vacations, and motorized toys make time away from work more enjoyable, but they can never compensate for the fundamental changes that need to be addressed. When your drive is toward accumulation and distraction, it's time to consider what you're trying to ignore and what you're trying to fill the void with.

Numbers like the dozen who initially rejected Harry Potter are held up as evidence of the need to persevere as much as of someone's shortsightedness. The world of publishing is unpredictable; any book is a gamble. A dozen tries are more than most people bother, but as Rowling says, why not keep trying when there's nothing to lose? If you want to write, you don't even need one.

It might be time to quit if these situations don't ring true.

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### DETACHING WITH POSITIVITY

First, there was the example illustrating the Pareto principle. Then, everyone around the table had, at some point, been fired as a customer.

Then, it was my turn.

My sled was in limp mode, and you can't limp around Gaspé. If you can't limp around Gaspé, you can't do the one thing that offsets the other 51 weeks of the year.

A reputation-cashing phone call later, and a replacement motor was ordered. A practice ride was scheduled. Not far from town, antifreeze started gushing. I started braking. Plastic started flying. Hands went searching. Two mechanics and a zip-tie saved the motor's life, thanks to a clamp that was never tightened.

This is why surgeons have checklists, but they are still not perfect. Neither are mechanics who are grumpy about doing a long, tiresome job when they have a whole book of easier, better-paid work. Neither are shop owners who made promises to long-time customers during a tiny seasonal window. Sometimes, mere hours. Vacations and winter are only so long.

Nothing lasts forever, the mechanic says. One day, the replacement motor will wear out as well.

Trading in my snowmobile proved difficult. Finally, a deal was made. When the owner laid his eyes on his new prize, he said, "Lady driven, my ass." Sometimes, that's where your assumptions bite you.

It's right up there with, "Well, this won't work because it didn't work last time," and will one day disappear along with "First woman/black/pick-your-label who finally broke through." While those celebrations are accomplishments worthy of note, one day humanity will view their superficiality as one of those unevolved things we used to do.

May we see the soul instead of the skin one day, for it's my assumption that's when the ladder of society will disappear into absolute universal equality.

### DEFYING CHAOS

When you work on symptoms, you will likely cause more problems for yourself for two reasons.

## What Could Be

Not only is the original problem still present, but it is also now more challenging to detect. It's gone underground, so to speak, because you've removed the indication that it is there. It will appear somewhere else and may not even resemble the original.

Two, you've likely created a new problem that could easily escalate. You've introduced change into a system that could respond chaotically.

In physics, it's simply the law of entropy: everything is trending toward chaos.

Mindfulness is now being taught in schools, but my concern is that we might be teaching it from the outside and not from the inside. For me, it was posture.

I hunched chronically. Everyone told me to stand up taller.

Guess what? My body was doing exactly what my inner world was doing. To everyone else, I was literally looking down, but no one asked me if I was depressed.

Attempting to improve your posture involves working on an external result, applying effort to a visible symptom. Working on whatever your emotions are trying to direct your attention towards is working on the root cause of the issue. Mastering your emotional experience by trying to take control of it ignores the root problem.

Consider the possibility that you were born into this life at this time and in this place for a reason. Quantum physics demonstrates that everything is composed of pure energy, and a significant amount of energy is required to convert it into matter. If your energy is turned into matter for a reason, what's the reason? To evolve, to learn, to experience?

Maybe it's not up to you to answer, but remember, you cannot push a rope – only chaos will result.

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### FROM HERETICS TO ANGELS

When you completely surrender all your choices about being, doing, and believing, you are connected to the whole universe. It is a feeling of utter bliss, as if things magically fall into place.

You experience something, and you have no words for it. It lasts longer than a déjà vu, where you feel you are in a play you've rehearsed. You've entered the mystical.

For Thomas Hartle, he swapped anxiety related to his inoperable colon cancer for serenity during his therapeutic use of psilocybin. He says, "It was very serene and comforting to me to realize that I could have consciousness and awareness that had nothing to do with this existence."

It will be short-lived when it happens because you will instantly return to being, doing and believing. You can't help it. It's such a jarring shift that you want to sit up and notice, and the action of sitting up and noticing makes the bubble burst.

Like the baby who spat peas across the room and laughed because, for a moment, it looked like you had the whole room in the palm of your hand, and as far as you know, it's the same as having the universe in the palm of your hand. You fall for the trap of thinking you're large and in charge, and, snap, like that, you lose it.

Whoops.

## What Could Be

Now that you've had the experience, you can't deny it exists and that holding on to certain things prevents you from returning to that kind of living.

Are those things worth it? Do you want to claim and defend that you have control, or genuinely do you have it?

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### EXPANDING CHARITY

Know to stay off thin ice because the cop pulls your gang over, and instead of giving anyone a ticket or anything, singles you out and gives you a long training session that only ends when you can repeat 2-2-2 and know it means 2 seconds, 2 minutes, and 2 hours to save your life should you crash through the ice.

Know your limits and play within them.

The two-hour part starts when you've sweated through your clothes, your bag is lost, and the sun is going down.

In 2 seconds, you gulp air. Instead of getting angry, you remember a rule about not going anywhere alone. Instead of obeying it, you take a wide turn so they'll know where you went.

In 2 minutes, you've approached an intersection you hadn't noticed on the way in. One way is more travelled, and down the other trail, there is a pack of riders on a social break. Instead of approaching a pack of unknowns who may or may not know about a lost bag, you take the path more travelled.

Over the course of a week, you learn not only their names but also about their families, friends, and key aspects of their backgrounds and daily lives. They learn about me, my medication schedule, doctor, home address, phone number, and my credit card number. I really fought that last one.

Although I worked with the National Quality Department as an employee for over a year, there was no way the agent could allow me to provide them with the card number when the shipping party dropped it off. I chose who to trust – the guys who found my bag and went out of their way to help me. About my employer, I couldn't say the same at all.

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### FAILING EXPERIMENTS

A failed experiment is when you cannot draw a valid conclusion or unknowingly draw the wrong conclusion, not when it doesn't turn out as expected.

In 2015, a report found that more than half of nearly 100 published psychology findings lacked replication, a genuine failure of the experiment. Psychologists are working to reform their field to reduce these failures.

Great minds think alike, which can be problematic when relying on peers to review your work. How many great minds does it take to be led into believing something, testing it, and finding the illusion before one of them stops the insanity?

Doctor Stubbins Ffirth wanted to prove that Yellow Fever was not contagious. Glossing over the details, he used fluids from patients in various ways and then spread the word of his ability to resist the disease. However, Yellow Fever is contagious in the early stages, but Firth's samples came from late-stage patients.

Experiments that rely on surveys are notoriously questionable. As Daniel Gilbert explains in *Stumbling on Happiness*, we tend to think much more highly of our future selves; therefore, when asked what we will do in the future, we often provide more positive than accurate answers.

## What Could Be

In one experiment, researchers aimed to demonstrate that movie theatres could sell healthy snacks if they were offered. They asked moviegoers if they would. Ask them what they want right now, though, and that's a different story.

As Isaac Asimov said, "The most exciting phrase to hear in science, the one that heralds discoveries, is not 'Eureka' but 'that's funny.'" In 1978, Arno Penzias and Robert Woodrow Wilson experimented with the Holmdel Horn Antenna. They eliminated all interference, finally accepting that the equipment was functioning correctly, marking the first recognition of cosmic microwave background radiation.

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### FLIPPING FRUSTRATION

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."

Your worldview is how you've made sense of the world. It's an accumulation of your experiences, knowledge and perspective. According to Wikipedia, it is "the fundamental cognitive orientation of an individual or society encompassing the entirety of an individual or society's knowledge and point of view."

When we are confronted with things that challenge our worldview, we must adjust our perspective.

Some of these stories are so old and well-buried, we don't even know we have them. They are feeding our decisions without our awareness. Confirmation bias refers to the tendency to find information that supports our existing beliefs, even when equal information is available.

"Sometimes it's not quite so obvious that the dream is the wrong size or colour, and shared for the dreamer," says author Augusten Burroughs. Be ruthless about what you are not the best at. Then, find someone better at that specific thing than you are. Hire them, follow them, copy their methods, and learn from them.

When things aren't working, admit it. You have your things to process. Call it meditation, think of it as thinking of nothing, as thinking so intensely about one thing that no other thought may intrude. When you ask yourself questions, I hope you listen to yourself intently and find that your answers are the most interesting thing in the world. If you are overwhelmed, stressed, drained, or exhausted, at least one thing is not working. You know it in your gut and your heart, if not in your head.

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### FINDING YOUR POTENTIAL

Your mind matters, for all the ways you are born unique, experience the world in your way, and form individual tastes, preferences, and goals, if only because you are a part of this world and connected to everything in it.

Maybe even as a society, we can stop trying to drug depressives back into productivity and their place in the workforce and instead help coach them through the unique problem they've seen and help them find a solution. I know there's no such thing as an unsolvable problem—some take longer than others.

Because if there is anyone who knows when you are spinning a web of a lie, it's your body. If you are trying to get away with something, you will want to get up and leave. To get away with it.

Your emotions, people, progress, and the environment are already doing it for you. Is there a "You're Fired!" that you need to say to someone, something, sometime, or some feeling of which you'd had enough?

## What Could Be

Who's the boss of you?

Here's to you, me, and all of us human beings who are better than average – if only in one way.

Process that. You might need 30,000 kilometres on three Skidoos, staring at the whiteboards of Gaspé, wondering why you ever forgot that strangers were the source of all good things and that people you know are the ones to be wary, or maybe that was just me.

I'm so happy to call you a stranger. Now that you know me, I hope you'll consider introducing yourself when you have a chance.

With such a wealth of choice and the singular, unrepeatable, unreplaceable soul and experience you have, your full potential is waiting to be discovered, honed, and enjoyed. Take back all your freedom and soar.

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