

**Take  
Control  
and  
Realise  
Your  
*Potential***



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**by Associate Professor Dr Peter Dingle (PhD)**

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BARKER DEANE PUBLISHING

## Take Control and Realise your Potential:

By Associate Professor Dr Peter Dingle (PhD)

[www.dringle.com](http://www.dringle.com)

Published by Barker Deane Publishing  
44, 23-25 Bunney Road, Oakleigh South  
Victoria 3167, AUSTRALIA  
[www.barkerdeanepublishing.com.au](http://www.barkerdeanepublishing.com.au)

First published by Barker Deane Publishing in 2011

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National Library of Australia Cataloguing in Publication Data:

Take Control and Realise your Potential

1st ed.

ISBN: 978-0-9871199-5-7

Cover design by Darren Cotzabuyucas

Formatting by Andrew Morgan

# *Who is Dr D?*

## **Dr D**

Dr D (or Prof Pete) has spent the past twenty five years as a public advocate, researcher, educator and communicator. He has a Bachelor of Education in Science, a Bachelor of Environmental Science with first class honours and a PhD. He has more than 100 scientifically reviewed papers, 9 books which have sold over 25000 copies each, and a team of researchers and students collecting data each year for the past 25 years. He conducts ongoing research into diet and nutrition, lifestyle and the role of a positive attitude on health, well being and productivity. Dr D is one of the rare speakers who conducts and presents his own professional research. He is internationally recognised and often quoted by other speakers.

In recognition of his excellence in teaching, he won the University's "Teaching In Excellence Award" in 2003, a finalist in the Australian lecturer of the year in 2009 and in 2001, he won the coveted Vice Chancellor's Award for outstanding community service. In 2003, Dr D was a co founder in the award winning Living Smart Program which won the WA adult education award in 2003 and the Eureka Award in 2004. In 2004 he was recognised with special commendation in the WA Environmental Awards and Greenhouses won the best education program and in the same year won the Conscious Living, Nova communicators award.

Dr D has appeared on the Media for the last 20 years as expert in environmental and health issues and recently presented in the award winning 7 week TV series shown on SBS. He is seen regularly on current affairs programs such as Today Tonight and ABC programs like "Can we help" and featured on 4 corners and the 7.30 report. He has appeared on occasions on Sunise, George Negus and other programs. He is a regular on Australian and New Zealand (TV3) TV and radio news and has presented a weekly radio program on 94.5, 96 FM, 6PR, ABC 720 and has extended segments on various ABC radio programs over the years from Launceston to the Sunshine Coast and Geraldton. He is reported weekly in the national media.

He uses his ongoing personal research plus discoveries drawn from top scientists around the world to constantly update his program, maintaining cutting edge science. Dr D has made public speaking an art. His presentations are enthusiastic and inspirational, entwined with memorable stories and spiced with a slice of magic. He interacts, motivates and challenges the audience and takes complex scientific information and converts it so that it is dynamic, easy to understand and informative.

Dr D is a Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) of the Australian Speaker's Association (the highest level of professional speaking) and a member of the Western Australian Society of Magicians. He is also a group hypnotherapist and motivational coach to some of Australia's elite junior athletes and business people. In his spare time he practices what he preaches, rides a bicycle to work, loves his family, the beach and the gym, juggles, meditates, plays with a unicycle and cooks a mean minestra (but not all at the same time!)



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has taken many years of research and much support to compile.

Foremost, I would like to thank my beautiful wife, Martine, for being my best friend and support in every way possible. Martine has been my rock, my sounding board and everything else, thank you. Mel, Matt and Ellie have been with me all the way through all the trials (literally) and tribulations. Thank you so much for being my family.

I thank my mother, Irene, who passed away at 88, and was an inspiration to people she touched. Thank you to all my past and present students, who have helped me carry out the research and collect the data which has been used in this book, and who are an inspiration for me. I always love the stories about my students going on to do new and marvellous things and I get pleasure in knowing I may have had a small part in that.

Thank you: Terry Power for our joint work and our book on goals. Lucy Sheehy for the research and your PhD on goals in changing people's behaviour. Jason Fox for your research, inspiration and help. And to some of my past research colleagues whose thoughts and work have helped me mould this book and my life—Catherine Baudains, Cedric Cheong and Miranda Brown.

I would also like to acknowledge the many thousands of people who have helped me learn along the way.

**Thank you**

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# PREFACE

This book was originally conceived as part of our research and a lecture series I developed from 15 years of research, three PhDs, working with three extraordinary honours students, dozens of my undergraduate students and my own life experiences.

A lot of people think this book is only for the people who succeed. Not so, it is a book for people who want to succeed—not just “the lucky ones” but also the ones who want to become lucky. Becoming lucky in life is more about inspiration and how to think than it is anything else. That is what you will get out of this book.

At a personal level, I have found the information I have presented in this book to help me at all times, in both the good and the bad. I started this book before my late wife Penelope Dingle passed away in August 2005. The trauma of this journey started 20 months earlier when she had a near miss with death as a result of her distrust in medicine and her belief in her spirituality. In June 2010, I was a part of a coronial inquest into my wife’s death and because of my high profile was the subject of an intense negative media campaign. Up until then I was a voice speaking out against the overuse of pharmaceutical drugs, processed foods and all the related vested interests that are killing us. I was a strong public advocate for common sense in health and environmental issues. I had three talks and 10 media interviews a week on top of my research and teaching at Murdoch University. I was too busy. Because of my high profile in Western Australia and my public views on health and medicine, I became the target of a huge vitriolic and bitter attack, both personally and professionally. The situation should not have even gone to the Coroner’s Court as she did not die as a result of her actions but some 20 months later after leading a fairly normal life. However, it did go to the Coroner’s Court and what should have been a personal matter became front-page news for almost two weeks and continued on for weeks after the trial until the coroner came down with no negative findings against me. Why the paper continued to report on the situation I can only begin to guess. It was very clear that the whole event was certainly not about truth and justice and it was also clear that I was the target.

The court process became almost unbelievable, with 25 years of building a reputation collapsing around me. I had always felt that I maintained some of my personal power through lots of meditation, journaling, the support of many hundreds of people, a healthy lifestyle and lots of other things I have written about in this book. But I was not prepared for the character assassination and blatant attack on me personally and professionally. While my healthy practises helped me through the 10 days in court and the two-and-a-half days being interrogated on the stand, I still felt shattered. So following my own instructions and the direction of my wife and family we went away on a long seven-week holiday. A lot of the time I spent reflecting on what happened and why, asking questions such as, “Should continue on with work or should I just sit back and be quiet?” I spent hours meditating each day and writing. I even began to write a book of fiction about what had happened (never to be published of course). By the end of the seven weeks, I was clearer than I had ever been. I had new goals, a different focus and a different way to do things.

I needed to get away to see that I was getting too busy and too caught up in my own self-worth. What was a disaster has become a blessing. Yes I still have lots of issues to deal with and I have not 100% fully recovered. But I do feel in control of my life again, maybe even more than before.

What I have written in this book has helped me so much that I truly believe it will also help you.



# PART ONE

## *Chapter 1*

### Introduction: The Reason

It appears that we go through life feeling very much out of control. It can feel like learning to juggle. We throw the balls in every which direction and to every possible height and then run around trying to catch them. At best we get some good exercise and stretching along with a bit of frustration. It appears to be out of our control: no matter what we do, we can't seem to catch the ball and to keep a good juggle going. As frustrating as it may seem it closely resembles how we go through much of our lives: out of control and never seeming to be able to get on top of things.

In learning to juggle, the art is not in the catching but in the throwing. By learning how to throw the balls into the air, one at a time in the right direction and to the right height, we develop the skills to juggle. Once we have learnt to throw the ball correctly we also know where it is going to land. Rather than running around chasing the ball it comes to you. In my lectures I highlight this by being able to throw the ball over my head and catch it behind my back or throw a ball under one of my legs or even land one on my head. When you're in control you know exactly where the ball is going to land, well at least most of the time. When you are out of control you are constantly running around trying to catch all those little balls that other people are throwing.

This book is a guide to help you take control of your life. This is a survival guide for anyone who is too busy to do all the things they want and need to do.

Would you like to be more effective and efficient at what you do on a professional and personal level? Would you like to fit all the things you need into your day and still have energy left over? Or perhaps you would like to come home from a normal day at work and feel calm rather than absolutely exhausted.

Well, you can, if you follow a few simple strategies outlined in this book.

By reading this book you will learn how to:

- Improve your productivity
- Improve your energy
- Improve your health and wellbeing
- Enjoy greater happiness
- Develop essential life skills
- Take control of your own life and health
- Put the important things in life first
- Optimise your success
- Dissolve unconscious blocks to being more successful
- Dissolve distracters and prioritise actions
- Remain focused
- Break through plateaus
- Be re-activated and inspired to make changes in your life
- Inspire and motivate people around you

And more...!

While these sound like exaggerated claims they will happen if you implement the information from this book.

### **How to use the book**

The book is divided into three parts. Part One sets the scene and helps you understand why we do things, whether through conditioning or choice. You'll see how we can change any negative habit by challenging ourselves and making a commitment. Part Two will get you thinking about what you really want out of life and provide you some of the tools to start taking you there. Part Three is about how you can apply the tools to maximise your potential. These are time-tested and scientifically proven techniques to help you get to where you want to be.

This book is about how to get everything you need in life and everything you want out of life. When you are climbing a mountain you can pull people down and step all over them, you can climb up on your own, or you can climb on the shoulders of all the people who have gone before you as beacons. This book is about you becoming a beacon.

## NOTES

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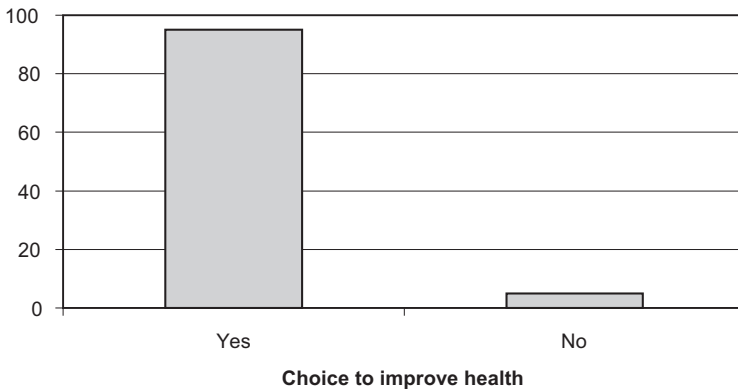


## Chapter 2

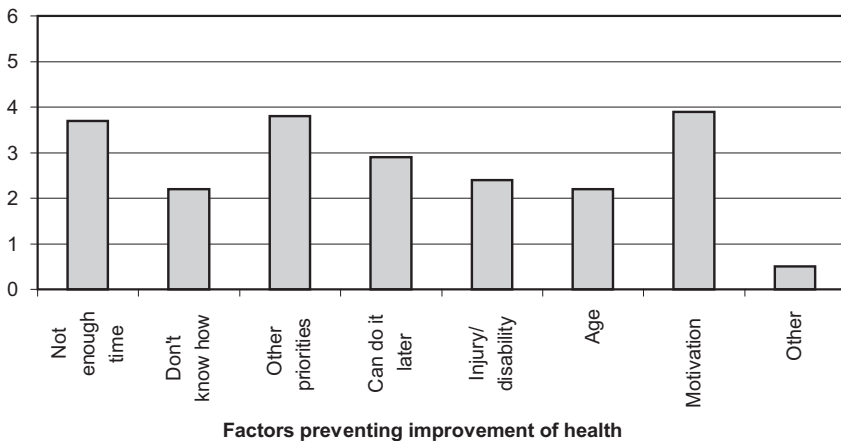
### Taking Control: The Five Cs

Without any doubt the most important part of this book is about taking control of your life. Using the Five Cs provides us with an understanding of why we do things and how to create change—permanently. Information alone is of little value. In fact we probably have too much of it, particularly poor quality information. Our research on health and environment has shown that only two percent to 10% of people will change if you give them information; these people are usually already open to change and are most likely to keep changing. The rest resist change even when they may be facing a crisis in their health, their relationships or some other aspect of their lives. Eighty percent of heart attack victims won't significantly change their lives. In one of our studies we found that information alone actually reduced the chances of participants implementing positive changes, even when the information was given in an interesting and stimulating way. Perhaps the participants felt overwhelmed and even a little guilty, so they did less.

We say we are too busy to make real change and we allow other priorities to take over. We become too caught up in our careers and money and as a result the real challenges in life are set by the wayside. Why does this happen? What's the real reason? The real reason is motivation. We are just not motivated to sustain the effort and after a few weeks or so of not making positive choices and substituting them again with negative ones, the negatives become the conditioned pattern or action in life. We know we *should*, but we seem to be able to justify poor choices. In the moment, it may feel easier to say, "Just one more piece," "Just one cigarette," "No, I'm too busy to go for a walk today," "I'm a bit tired" and so on. We make excuses.



This is despite the fact that repeatedly and consistently in my research people report that they want to improve their health, as shown above in the results of a survey of more than 500 people. But for one reason or another they just couldn't get around to doing the things that were going to get them to good (or even improved) health. The participants identified numerous factors that prevented them from getting healthier. While these were valid, they all had something in common: a lack of motivation. So the question isn't how do I put more hours in your day or give you more information on looking after your health, it's how can I help you get motivated. We all know that once we're motivated we can do almost anything. A simple example of this is if I offered you \$1,000 to go to the gym and do an hour's workout, you would very likely do it. We can find the time once we're motivated.



I believe that one of the reasons we allow our health to slowly decay is that we fool ourselves. We often perceive our health to be what it was 20 or 30 years ago, although we only have to look honestly at ourselves to see we've changed. It seems that the information we see in the mirror is overridden by our hope that it is not true, or that it's not urgent enough to do anything about it, or that we could do something about it if we really needed to. Our logic is overridden by emotion.

A friend of mine was running a weekend retreat and as the group set off for their walk one of the participants kept boasting about what he used to do in the army and how far he used to run and walk with a pack. He also had the largest backpack. Only minutes into the walk he had to stop. He couldn't continue. The others redistributed his pack amongst them, allowed him to rest, and then started off again slowly. He had been fooling himself for many years. I have seen this time after time and believe that many of us rely on our past memories to justify a poor level of fitness. How many times have you heard someone boast about what he used to be able to do in "the good old days"? It is time to take a reality check and come back to the here and now.

So how do we take control of our lives? The following chapters contain a review of thousands of scientific articles and thousands of hours of work by my own research team. Put simply, it comes down to the Five Cs.

**Conditioning**

**Choices**

**Change**

**Challenge**

**Commitment**

Each of these has two faces; each will have either a positive or negative influence or impact on us. When the influence is positive we have greater control over our direction in life, feel motivated and even inspired. When negative influences dominate our choices we usually feel defeated, as though we have little control over what is happening to us. Negativity can make us feel a victim of our circumstances. *The reality is we are victims of our conditioning and choices. We can still create challenge, change and commitment by under-*

*standing and changing our conditioning and our choices.* This is a creative and liberating process.

Having greater control over our lives makes us more resilient to the stresses of living. Stress-hardy individuals have a sense of control in their lives, a commitment to themselves and an ability to look for the positive effects of stress and change. Instead of becoming overwhelmed by circumstances they rise to meet the challenge. Stress-resilient individuals see change as a normal part of life. By contrast, stress-susceptible individuals feel powerless and see change and uncertainty as threatening. Research as far back as 1976 has shown the positive effect of giving elderly people in nursing homes more control over their circumstances. In this study, residents on one floor were given choices over such variables as breakfast menus, movies and which plants they would tend. On another floor, no choice in the matters of daily routine was given. Eighteen months later, those residents given choice and control were more active and happier and more of them were alive.

Imagine what would happen if you implemented this in your life now.

How frequently do you enjoy an absolute sense of joy and satisfaction? If you want more, take control of your life. Break out of your conditioning, make the right choices, challenge yourself and you will change for the better and enjoy more freedom.

## *Chapter 3*

# Conditioning

“Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” ~ Albert Einstein

Very simplistically, our brain is divided into three evolutionary levels. The earliest of these in evolutionary development is the reptilian brain, which has a long and strong memory. It favours ritual, routine, repetition and predictable rhythm. It governs most of our actions and doesn't respond well to change. By contrast, understanding and coping with change are parts of the mammalian brain and welcomed by the cerebral cortex.

The reptilian part of our brain is behind our patterning, repetition, habits and routines. It seeks certainty, not change. Our mind recognises patterns, learns them and repeats them. As infants and children we can learn almost anything with ease. We are born with the ability to process any language in the world. The earlier these circuits are established the easier the acquisition of a language will be. This learning by patterning is essential for our survival. Routines enable us to run our lives on automatic so we expend as little energy as possible on daily living, leaving us free to focus our energies on gaining knowledge and using our creativity. Routines and rituals provide a path through the ever-growing choices in our lives. More than 95% of our behaviours are habits and routines, which means less than five percent of our behaviour takes conscious thought and action. Patterning is an essential tool, as the number of approaches to and outcomes from any task is infinite. Being switched into patterning mode saves us expending enormous amounts of energy and time making every small decision. Recognising patterns means we don't have to constantly relearn and recreate. As Edward deBono puts it, there are many things at which we need only to be “brilliantly uncreative.” Once a pattern is learnt we no longer need to think about it. As you read this, you're on automatic—you don't have to think about the reading process or turning the page.

However, we have both negative and positive habits and routines. Some become so embedded and rigid that they are very difficult to change. As much as it is important to learn and remember, we must also learn to forget, to let

go of old patterns that are holding us back. We all have thousands (probably millions) of them.

We are each captives to our habits. These habits are learnt throughout our lives. Like chains, they give us something to grasp, but also keep us bound. Our past conditioning both holds us back and keeps us moving forward. How many times have we heard ourselves (or our kids) say, “I can’t do that,” only to look back and realise that we could have done it or that we can do it. Every time your conscious mind expresses, “I can’t do that,” your subconscious mind records it and makes it so. Then it rewards itself and continues to build on that conditioning. Sometimes our conditioning prevents us from even seeing opportunities until they’ve passed us by. The doubts are simply the results of our conditioning, our way of thinking. Any feelings of inadequacy or inability are leftover patterns of our conditioning.

We can condition animals to stay inside a light fence. A horse that is about ten times more powerful than a human can be controlled with a flimsy piece of rope. If you put a bunch of fleas in a container they will jump up and down as high as they can. If you put on a lid, they’ll hit the lid when they jump and they learn to make only small jumps. When you take the lid off, they continue to make small jumps. They’ve been conditioned. All through our lives we have lids put on us.

I recently met a lady who is passionate and successful at what she does. She is not rich but she is very happy, earns a satisfactory income and most importantly derives a lot of happiness from helping people. She’d had a rough upbringing without parents but had a loving grandmother. She also recently overcame a life-threatening disease and continues to inspire the people she helps. Her brother and sister succumbed to alcohol, drugs and the sex industry. They had much the same upbringing, but one saw it as contributing to her strengths, making her into what she is today, while the other two saw it as the cause of all their problems. Their perceptions of their situation determined how they responded. For one reason or another, one learnt optimism and the other two learnt helplessness.

Conditioning is a formidable type of control; what we learnt as kids when we were very young still determines much of our behaviour now. Have you ever

noticed how many of the habits and belief systems (mostly good of course) you've inherited from your parents?

The problem with conditioning is that today we use our ancient mind to control our 21st century actions. In the 21st century, we need to be able to adapt to rapid changes and to continually develop new skills. We need to strike a greater balance between our old reptilian love of conditioning and our modern life that demands rapid change.

In hunter-gatherer societies some 50,000 years ago, it was essential for kids, before they reached puberty, to develop all their life skills or risk dying. They learnt these essential skills from family and friends, people who cared for them and spent a lot of time with them, as well as from the environment around them. In support of this recent research has shown that the brain is incredibly malleable up until puberty. The brain grows and learns at an astounding rate between birth and age three. At birth it has a volume of half a litre. At age three its volume has tripled to one-and-a-half litres. As it grows it seems to absorb patterning with a sponge-like capacity. By three years of age, we have mastered the most difficult task of language(s) and many of the behaviours necessary for relationships. During this period the brain is greatly influenced by its surrounding environment. From the age of three to puberty, it learns all the essential survival skills, refining our communication, our ways of relating and much more. Place a young child in a rich learning environment and he will easily assimilate multiple languages (without any accent!), learn to play musical instruments and acquire learning habits that will last a lifetime. Once puberty occurs, the brain's plasticity decreases dramatically. The foundations of learning are laid early in life, which is why it's important to expose young children to languages, music and creative experiences. But this also means that what we learnt as kids and then filtered through our emotions now determines most of our attitudes, beliefs and behaviour even at old age—unless you actively, and I mean really actively, determine to change it.

Fortunately for us all, intelligence is plastic and modifiable. The brain retains its capacity for change throughout our lives. Research on stroke victims shows the brain has an incredible ability to rewire itself at any age and this rewiring can occur in minutes and perhaps even seconds. However, what came so easily

and without conscious effort as a child becomes more difficult as we age. Some of this is because of the loss of our brain's plasticity—for example, the brains of adults and children process language differently by employing different circuitry. Some is a result of our conditioning. Kids learn for fun and games; they call it play. But as we get older it's called practise or work.

As adults we tend to seek out people and circumstances that support and reinforce our earlier conditioning. Our reptilian love of habits and routines pushes us to go with the familiar. There is safety in what you know. History shows us that fear is one of the most powerful bonds to hold groups of people together. The more frightened people are, the stronger the group's cohesion. We see safety in sameness and fear what is different. This was the survival mantra for the hunter-gatherer, but no longer needs to control us.

This desire to keep our view of the world familiar even drives people to interpret information to make it compatible with their views. Research has shown if you give two people with very different ideologies the same information they will probably find something in it that will justify their view, even though it's opposite of the interpretation by the other person. Changing our conditioning after puberty is a great challenge and requires our conscious and consistent effort. My own experiences in working with different age groups also show that changing becomes harder as we get older.

Conditioning is also critical to whether we have an optimistic attitude. A person or even an animal can be conditioned to have more or less optimism. In one study, dogs were put in a small room and inflicted with mild electric shocks. The dogs tried to avoid the shocks in various ways, but there was no escape. After a short while the dogs simply sat down and did nothing. In the second part of the experiment, an easy escape was provided, but the dogs remained apathetic. These dogs were conditioned to believe they could not find a solution to the pain.

A second group of dogs was provided with an escape in the first part of the experiment. In the second phase, even when faced with no escape from the pain, these dogs continued to search for an escape. This group of dogs was conditioned to believe that they could find a solution and so they continued to search.



In a similar experiment, rats were made to swim in a container without anywhere to rest. A second group of rats was also made to swim but given a small ledge on which to rest. After a while, the first set of rats gave up and quit swimming. The second group had its ledge removed, yet continued to swim for twice as long as the first group. The second group continued to swim because they had the expectation of finding a safe ledge on which to rest.

The good news is that you can teach an old dog new tricks. Even the dogs that gave up and just accepted the pain were able to learn to look for an escape. It just took a bit more effort and the right techniques to encourage them.

There are many examples of people throughout history, and in the present, who have changed their conditioning. When Einstein was asked what led him to his discovery of the theory of relativity, he replied, “I ignored the axiom.” In other words, he ignored the established beliefs, the conditioning. Think about this for a moment: the evidence shows that the majority of working class kids will grow up to be working class adults. And it has nothing to do with IQ. Our conditioning has little relevance to the here and now because it is based on past information. If you consider the history of many Australian and American leaders, they’re not leaders because of their IQ, they’re leaders because they come from political families with an expectation that they’ll be political leaders. Our conditioning is so powerful that we often never question it.

More than 50 medical journal articles were written on why it was impossible to beat the four-minute mile. Roger Bannister refused to believe the research and consequently broke the four-minute mile in 1954. Now it’s regularly beaten. Athletes have learnt that the only real barrier to their achievements is the mind. As a result they continue to break world records and will continue to do so until such time as they think they cannot.

Breaking free of our conditioning and getting rid of old habits is not about having to give up all those things that give us comfort and security. Those things will be replaced with something better. Change and empowerment are about taking on a new life. Changing habits takes recognition that they exist

and that you can change them. Good habits are acquired and strengthened by practise. Turn the momentum in favour of good new habits.

To plod along without challenging our conditioning to allow our old, automatic patterning to control our lives. It has taken charge of us, determining what and how we think. This then becomes our behaviour. Change your memory and you can change your conditioning. You must stop to ask: is your memory in charge of you or are you in charge of your memory?

Despite the fact that I now tell my own students that the only silly questions are the ones we don't ask, I was conditioned not to ask questions. I developed a protective habit when I was younger not to ask questions out of fear of being ridiculed. It probably came from a teacher or parent telling me not to ask that silly question. It was certainly no longer a helpful habit, so I changed that conditioning. It's easier to change if you understand that your behaviour, attitudes and beliefs are just conditioning.

Conditioning creates our core beliefs and standards, and we need to recognise what is positive and beneficial and what is detrimental. Traditionally our conditioning comes primarily from our family, then our friends, our teachers and educational institutions, then others in our lives. There are also many other sources, some of them very powerful, such as the media.

### **Conditioning by the media**

One of my greatest concerns is the increasing role the media plays on reinforcing our existing conditioning. What is more, it is the major conditioning agent in our kids' lives. Most of the information we see and hear is via the media. Our perception of reality is filtered through the media, and the images and information we receive are often confusing and contradictory. The influence of television is profound, having the greatest impact of any media source. In some instances its influence is greater than all other media sources combined. Studies have shown that more than 90% of the communication in a home comes from television, and the plastic minds of young children are a ready sponge for whatever they are allowed to watch—usually negative role models and questionable communication. Many programs are peppered with continual put downs, criticism, aggression and negative statements. Throw in a bit of

humour and the message registers in the mind even more deeply. These shows may appear funny, but what are they doing to you and your family?

Another major problem is that the media reinforces the populist view. If it didn't, it would be too confronting and people wouldn't watch it. Most of the media produces the stories they think you want to hear. The media focuses on negative stories because negative stories sell. The ancient hunter-gatherer brain interprets them as a possible risk and tells you to pay attention, so you do. And because they rate well, the media continues to provide more negative stories. As a hunter-gatherer your heightened interest in any possible threat might have saved your life; now it makes you a captive audience, constantly bombarded with negativity.

While there is very obvious negative advertising, we are also subjected to the less obvious. Take cigarettes and alcohol, for example. Major tobacco interests have cut six-figure deals with movie producers for “product placement” of their cigarettes in movies. Actors can cut such deals as well; in the 1980s Sylvester Stallone signed an agreement with cigarette company Brown & Williamson for \$500,000. All he had to do was use their product in five films.

The thinking mind is exposed to a constant stream of negative news. The media presents us with much to worry about, despite the fact that what passes for news is often irrelevant, sensational and trauma driven. Media imagery also promotes discontent as it undermines self-esteem and personal relationships. We are bombarded by images of glamorous, unattainable “beautiful people” on a scale that has no historical precedent. These images lead to unreasonable expectations about the quantity and quality of relationships and sexual partners. One study found that men exposed to images of attractive women subsequently rated their commitment to their partners as being lower, while women exposed to images of high status men showed a similar decrease in the attachment to their regular partners. Women who are exposed to pictures of very attractive women begin to feel less attractive themselves, and suffer a subsequent drop in self-esteem. Similarly, men responded in the same way when exposed to images of dominant and influential males.

The quality of images on television today is such that, whether they are real or not, each time we watch such images the subconscious brain responds with

emotional arousal, as if we are having a real experience. The brain's right side specialises in dealing with images, the left side with words. When we see violent actions on television the images go straight to the right side of the brain. Very disturbing or violent images can stress the right side of the brain to the point of overwhelm. If overwhelm occurs, the language-based operations of the left side may also be affected. Television news can create levels of stress equivalent to the levels felt by the people actually experiencing what is being filmed.

Studies have shown a direct correlation between the number of hours of television watched and violent crime in adults and children. The more television watched, the more crime. A review of more than 100 of these studies shows that increased viewing of television and watching violent programs are associated with increased aggressive behaviour in kids. Fortunately, some research suggests that aggressiveness can be reduced by more than 25% by simply lowering a child's exposure to television violence. If we wouldn't expose our kids to such violent images in real life, why do we permit our children to watch them on television, especially when we understand that our children's brains respond as if the images were real?

And finally, television makes us lazy and numbs our motivation. We are entertained by exciting programs but don't have to take action or do anything ourselves. Even worse, we like to "veg out" and deliberately numb our minds. We need change and challenge. Not dealing with challenges doesn't make them go away. If we don't meet them we end up falling into a trough of procrastination. Procrastination literally kills. It is exhausting, it crushes you and it kills relationships. Television is one of the great procrastination devices. It's an excuse not to do things. Worrying about what other people do is an excuse not to live your life. We live in a culture of escapism where many of us would rather submerge ourselves in television than actually live our real lives.

## **School and work**

We need to exercise our talents and abilities and reach for our full potential. As children our exposure to emotional, physical, mental and spiritual patterns will determine much of what we do later in life. We can learn to have unlim-

ited potential through our upbringing or training. This is the reason schooling is so important.

Schools are another form of conditioning and not all of it good. There are many positive aspects of schooling and some schools are better than others. However, the majority of schools squash creativity out of our kids. The situation is no better in university—in fact, it’s many times worse. Our school system is based on the industrial, factory model and as such has a rigid system of control and a linear concept of how children learn. It is a very strong agent of social control and encourages conformity.

Ask any seven-year-old if she can sing or draw or dance and she will respond, “Yes!” Ask any adult the same questions and the answer will very likely be an embarrassed “No.” A scolded child becomes aware of her limitations and becomes unwilling to take risks. In school, many of us learn to either do it well or not at all.

The emphasis in schools is on competition rather than cooperation and the emphasis on learning is toward the critical, Socratic style of thinking. There needs to be a balance between cooperation and competition and there are many forms of thinking that we need to teach.

Our workplace is also a place of conditioning that reinforces many of our existing values and habits. We see others working long hours and getting promotions and think maybe we need to do the same. Working *hard* (not even “working smart”) is given value over and above family time and recreation—we think that we can’t be seen leaving the office before the boss. We learn to define ourselves by our jobs. So often the first question we ask people once we’ve been introduced is, “And what do you do?” The response usually establishes a person’s status and the basis on which we will continue the conversation. This is our conditioning.

## **Conditioning and the emotions**

The problem with our conditioning is that we are using the ancient, reptilian brain to control our 21st century actions. A part of that ancient brain is our emotional brain. Our emotional intelligence is governed by the limbic system

and influences how we relate to other people and our moods and motivation. Don't underestimate the power emotions have over all of us.

Conditioning is based on our experiences as well our interpretations of those experiences. Once these experiences have been filtered through our limbic system, a conditioned response may be the end result. Our interpretation may be one of pleasure or pain. If it's painful we avoid what we perceive created it; if it's pleasurable we may seek to repeat it. We are driven by our feelings. All our negative emotions are literally a product of our conditioning. They become reference points for the rest of our lives and so, for many of us, our past does determine our future. We can learn from our conditioned emotions and responses and use them or let them control us.

### **The power of negative emotions**

Negative emotions, which signal some pain we've experienced in the past, and which in the present hold us back from achieving or being more than we are now, indicate that change is needed. We need to listen and to pay attention. Negative emotions were essential for the hunter-gatherers to survive; such emotions provided warnings of danger and threat. Some of our emotions provide similar protection but we need to discriminate between which protect us and which are nooses around our necks. With our ancestors the negative emotions occurred and were experienced quickly, but not in the 21st century. Today, negative emotions accumulate into what we call stress.

For example, fear at night when we hear noises downstairs may be essential for our survival. Our adrenaline gets going and we get ready to run or fight. But allowing fear to stop us from going outside because we've heard news of violence in another city is not in the interest of our psychological or physical wellbeing. This is the ancient brain controlling our actions.

Fear is also used as a means of social control. A group coheres very quickly if its members think that they have identified a common enemy. This is our instinctive response to threat. History shows that we will adjust to all sorts of restrictions and even turn against people when governments incite group fear. Fear enables control and breeds more fear. Governments, interest groups, religious groups, unions and employers can all wield significant power by creating fear.

Negative emotions are costly to the individual and to business. Using a car analogy for maintaining the body, negative emotions are the unburnt by-products of fuel, the emissions we know as air pollution. We use immense amounts of energy for little benefit and we pollute the surrounding air with our negative attitudes and actions. There is an abundance of research showing that negative emotions can have serious adverse health effects. Their accumulation can cause headaches and other symptoms of stress and contribute to cancer and heart attack, not to mention the negative impact they can have on people around us.

The influence of negative emotions is particularly clear in top sport. If a top athlete loses control of his emotions, he risks losing the game. Top sport-people learn to use rituals that keep them in a positive emotional space. The rituals may be a simple thing such as yelling “Yes!” and thrusting a hand into the air in positive self-talk, giving high fives or finding a few mind-calming seconds with deep breathing.

The past does not have to determine your future. A successful person is not bound by her negative habits. Life is about overcoming the internal barriers we now know to be conditioning. Identify your conditioned behaviour as either positive or negative and begin to change it. Successful people do what unsuccessful people don’t do, even if they don’t feel like it.

## **Action**

Every day you should take some action to break out of your conditioning. Ask yourself a few questions. As you will see later it is not much good just agreeing or disagreeing with me, nor is it enough to just think about it. Now is the time to take a bit of action. Write down a couple of responses to the questions below.

Ask yourself: What conditioning is projecting me forward?

If you have difficulty with this, just listen for the words you use. Are you using words like “can’t,” “won’t,” “always” or “never”? List down some of the limiting words you use and then review them to identify the conditioning that is holding you back.

## NOTES

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## *Chapter 4*

### Choices

The choices we make in life, which include all our actions and behaviours as well as our attitudes and thoughts, determine the level of control we have in our lives.

Essentially we make choices in almost everything we do. I could even argue that death and taxes are choices. Choices are inherent in most of the things we do each day—from small choices, such as whether to have a biscuit for morning tea or deciding which way to go to work, to very significant decisions such as what work we want to be doing 10 years from now. However, it's not always clear to us how or why we come to these decisions. Brain imaging research shows that our feeling brain registers each time we go through the process of making a decision and we feel the conscious, projected outcome of that choice. That feeling then guides us to choose what seems best for us. Making choices that affect us directly stimulates more activity in the frontal lobes and activates more emotion, even though a particular decision may not seem to be emotional. All your decisions are filtered through your emotional brain. As a result, your final choice may not always be the best you could have made.

Very simplistically, all the choices we make can be classified as either positive or negative, and be beneficial or detrimental to our health and wellbeing. Negative choices are those actions and attitudes that result in destructive pressure or stress on our bodies and minds. These include poor decisions regarding diet and lifestyle as well as a negative or apathetic attitude. A poor choice in isolation may not be a major problem—for example, indulging in rich food over Christmas or when celebrating a birthday—but that indulgence repeated over and over again will result in significant problems. An accumulation of poor choices will have serious effects on our health. Weeks, months and years of eating the wrong foods will become habitual and will affect us adversely. The majority of chronic illnesses occur as a result of poor choices over a lifetime. No one puts on weight overnight, but many people gain weight over two or three or 10 or 20 years. That weight gain is the result of an ac-

cumulation of poor choices. It may be one can of soft drink per day, adding about six kilograms to our waistline each year, or the fact that we've stopped walking around the block or a combination of both of these. The outcomes of negative choices accumulate over long periods and over entire lifetimes.

The "pleasure choices" are fine; the problem is how frequently we repeat them. This is where the concept of everything in moderation does work; we just need to define moderation. For a hunter-gatherer, sweet treats would have been consumed monthly at most. In the 21st century, sweet things make up most of our diets. However, we still have the hunter-gatherer body. All too often I hear parents say they "just want to give the kids a treat" so what do they give? Another poor food choice is added to all the others already made that day.

We go through life with rose coloured glasses, denying that the choices we make have consequences for us. Too often our choices are expedient, rather than value driven, without our long-term wellbeing in mind. The illnesses that affect us later in life often have their beginnings in childhood, with the patterning and habits we learnt as children. A heart attack or stroke does not occur because of what you had for breakfast that morning or even that week. It's usually the result of poor diet and lifestyle choices over decades. Recent research on children involved in road accidents has shown that many children already have serious artery blockages as a result of their diet. Most skin cancers occur as a result of our childhood exposure. During childhood, we all thought we were indestructible.

Despite the tendency to make negative choices because they bring us some short-term pleasure, the research shows that the person who takes control through making positive choices is actually happier. When we make positive choices we have a greater sense of controlling our direction in life, are more motivated and may even feel inspired. Making conscious and positive decisions gives us more resilience to meet the stresses of living. Stress-hardy individuals have usually developed these attributes and instead of becoming overwhelmed by circumstances, they rise to meet challenges. They see change as a normal part of life. By contrast, stress-susceptible individuals feel powerless and see change and uncertainty as threatening.

The pleasure we gain from negative choices is relatively short-lived. The choices themselves often contribute to us feeling guilty and, after we've accumulated enough of them, feeling like a failure. When negative choices dominate we usually feel defeated, as though we have little control over what is happening to us. Negativity makes us feel the victim of our circumstances. The reality is we are victims of our choices. We are capable of creating challenge, change and commitment by understanding and changing our choices.

Conscious choice requires awareness. An unconscious choice is a *reaction* during which your conditioning and patterning are in control. A conscious choice is a *response*. Responsible choice puts you back in charge, in control, having the power to make better decisions. Real power comes from choosing with awareness. So decide to make choices that empower you and challenge you, not ones that leave you feeling disempowered and defeated. Before you make a choice, become aware of your intentions and consider the consequences.

I know people who wake up in the morning in good health and groan "Not another day..." and I know other people who are severely physically handicapped or have life-threatening illnesses yet say "Yes, another day!" The greatest handicaps we have are not our physical limitations, but our thinking. Once we recognise that this is our conditioning speaking, we have choices. What is the other option? To not wake up?

There are many situations where we see one person growing from their circumstances and another person diminished by the same situation. The only real difference was how they chose to respond. How we experience our life is our choice. When something is wrong you have two choices. You can worry about it or you can do something about it. You can go forward or backward. Worry will lead you backward.

It is our choice to see the things that don't work for us as failure or to see them as a learning experience. Maybe we can see them as little successes, although they don't feel like it at the time, with the understanding and acceptance that it's impossible to succeed fully at everything, every time. We learn more from failure than we do from success. I liken this view of life to a concentric circle that keeps expanding, leading to more opportunity, greater productiv-

ity, success and happiness. Poor choices, without learning from them, result in the concentric circle going in on itself, leading to more negative choices, anger, resentment, fear, unhappiness and a feeling of failure. Our “bad luck” is usually an accumulation of poor choices.

“Luck” also comes down to choice. Everyone has opportunity come their way, but it is the “lucky ones” who have their eyes open, see the opportunity and take the risk. Sometimes they don’t come out on top, but that doesn’t stop them from taking the next opportunity they see. They use past experiences as a springboard for being “lucky” next time. I lost a large sum of money in shares about five years ago. I was naive. The shares kept going up so I kept putting more money on them until the bubble burst. My experience was costly, but just that—an experience. I did not say I would never put money into shares again, instead I said I would not do it from ignorance. As a result, when the next opportunity came up I did some extensive research and invested in some environmentally sound shares. So far it looks like it will pay back that first loss many times over. Luck? Just a willingness to learn and still take a risk. Ask me about them next time you see me.

Today, right now, you need to take responsibility for the choices you make. You are not a victim of your circumstances, your conditioning or even your genes, as you will see in the next chapter. The experiences you have had are simply that, experiences you have been given or chosen; they are not who or what you are. You can create different, better experiences in your life by choosing differently. Those positive choices will bring you new experiences and change your view of reality. You can only grow from this. Each choice you make, no matter how small, shifts how you see and experience yourself and life. Each choice can offer something new and better. The life you have now is a product of the choices you made in the past. What you achieve in the future is a product of the choices you make today and tomorrow.

It is the choices you make, not chance, that will determine your destiny.

## **Action**

Every day, take some action to create new and better choices.

Ask yourself a few questions. Write down a couple of responses to the questions below. It is only through awareness that you can bring about the change you desire. So a few simple thoughts put on paper can make a big difference to your success.

What are some of the negative choices I am making?

What are some of the positive choices I am making?

## NOTES

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## *Chapter 5*

# Epigenetics: The Science of Choice

After spending billions of dollars unravelling the human genome, scientists have come to the realisation that it is not “all in the genes” and we are not locked into our genes. We are not a product of our genes; we are the product of the choices we make which influence our genes. We don’t choose our genes, but we do choose how they are affected by our choices.

Darwin himself recognized the importance of environmental factors in the evolution of a species. However, until recently half of the chromosome content, the regulating proteins, have largely been ignored. These proteins, which are chemically attached to the genes, cover them like a sleeve, which means that the genes cannot be read, making them inactive. Once the protein sleeve is removed, the genes can be read and duplicated. The sleeve of proteins provides an extra layer of transcriptional control and regulates how and when a gene can be expressed. The proteins are much like the driver of a car. The genes are the car and cannot do anything without the driver.

Genetic determinism, which is what we have been conditioned to believe, holds the position that our genes carry the blueprint of life and therefore everything is determined by our DNA. This leaves us the victims of our genetic inheritance. We’ve had these concepts instilled since our first high school science lessons and reinforced by the media and canonised in medical schools. If we fall victim to a disease, it’s in our genes. However, we now know that very few diseases can be blamed entirely on one or two faulty genes. Diseases that have a definite and specific genetic cause affect less than two percent of the population.

Genes in themselves do not determine our destiny. We can regain control of our own health and our lives. The study of epigenetics (meaning above genetics) provides the missing link between genes, the environment and the development of disease. Environmental influences including nutrition, behaviour, stress, chemicals, radiation and even emotional states, can change how genes are expressed and can silence or activate a gene without altering the genetic code in any way. Epigenetic changes are influenced by our exposure to

chemicals and our dietary habits, but that's not all. Studies in rats have shown that licking, grooming and nursing behaviour by the mother can affect the long-term behaviour of her offspring and can be directly linked to epigenetics in a certain part of the pup's brain, the hippocampus.

While you might be wondering what a rat study has to do with choices we make, it shows that by making the right choices we are no longer locked into anything our genes have written. You can rewrite your genes. It is a choice to be stressed, angry, upset, frustrated, happy or unhappy. Your mind can continue to expand and make new connections every day as long as you make the right choices. It really is up to you.

Looking at epigenetics from a more personal perspective, we can see that its implications underscore the need to eat nutrient-rich foods all our lives—lots more vegetables, fruit, pulses and nuts—as well as to avoid synthetic chemicals on the supermarket shelves. Remember, we all have these genes; it is whether or not they are activated that counts, and we have a lot of control over that.



## Chapter 6

# Change

“What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow: our life is the creation of our mind.” ~ Hindu Prince Gautama Siddhartha, the founder of Buddhism, 563-483 B.C.

Change is inevitable. We cannot stop it; everything will change. In physics the nature of all matter is change. Change is a natural state from the smallest subatomic particles to the universe. Everything is in a state of constant change. The cells in our body are constantly being altered, created and destroyed and so are we. There is no such thing as the “status quo.” Everything will change.

Change is inevitable but when it happens we seem so shocked by it. I have heard many stories of people who, after working in a job for 20 years, lose their jobs at age 45. Maybe they couldn't know in advance that the job was going to disappear but they should have known things were going to change continuously and prepared for *that*. It is a choice to see change as a crisis, something to bear with, something to prepare for or something that can challenge you.

The question is how to embrace change, to manage the effects of change, how to manage during times of change and how to create our own change. Not changing is going backward. You can't progress if you don't change. Doing what you did in the past will get you to where you wanted to be yesterday. To succeed tomorrow you need to do something differently today.

The reason we don't anticipate change is our conditioning, the rules and paradigms under which we exist. We think the world around us will stay the same or perhaps be a bigger version of what we have now. Growth and change in the world are not linear. Over time, the world does not simply get faster... it changes entirely, in complex ways.

### **Survival of the changers**

When Charles Darwin referred to “survival of the fittest” he was not referring to those with the biggest muscles or brains he was referring to the most

adaptable, the ones who can best cope with change. That is, those who are most flexible. In the research on centenarians, the ability to cope with change is one of the key factors in living a longer, healthier life free from pain and suffering. Having a flexible attitude reduces stress and reduces illness. Those who are the least flexible—those who cannot change—get stressed, become ill and die young.

In business those who don't change are the ones who lose their businesses. A willingness to change is fundamental to success in business. If something is not working change it; if it is working, build on your success and change it anyway.

Individuals and organisations faced with the same change will each have very different responses to that change. At one extreme, a person will take no action and at the other extreme another person will see change as the key to take action. Taking the positive path in change, you learn to create your own change. By focusing on your values and goals you create the change you want in your life. This practise prepares you for unexpected change, the change that is out of your control. As a result you are free to act rather than simply react. This helps you embrace the future to become a catalyst for positive change. If you take the positive path you help create your own future; if you take the negative path you have the future forced on you.

Change will happen. You can be a part of it or you can be pulled apart by it. Not changing has more consequences than changing. Procrastination is a decision not to make a decision and will distance you from your values and goals.

### **Why we don't change**

Why then, don't we change? My research shows that the two main reasons are: people either are or at least feel they are too busy to change; and a lack of motivation.

We are often so busy that we cannot find the time to invest in our own well-being and change. Closely linked with this is lack of motivation. If you have motivation you can overcome all other barriers. I believe that the reason we

lack motivation is that we are too busy to sit back and actually decide what is important. Instead we just keep plodding on in our lives in the direction that others have told us is good for us. We seem to be caught in a loop between low motivation and believing that we are too busy to create effective change.

Other, lesser reasons for not changing include:

Laziness

Fear

Societal pressure

Poor thinking

Not wishing to have discomfort

Denial

All of these boil down, one way or another, to conditioning. We tend not to change because the familiar seems easier and seems to require less effort. We become afraid of change, perhaps because we have little confidence in our own abilities.

Our society condones stability and frowns on change and as individuals we don't like people who change. We don't like change because it creates uncertainty. All our major institutions including schools teach that stability is good and change is not liked. The school system was originally established during the Industrial Revolution as a means to control kids. The majority of schools are still set up that way. Anyone who is different is frowned upon, ostracised and told to conform.

Many of our greatest changers in history were ridiculed in their day. Great thinkers, musicians, artists, inventors, and those involved in social and cultural change were labelled "crazy," "stupid" or "time wasters" by those in power, the ones who least wanted change because it could threaten the power structure.

Change does not come easily. Following patterns was what the hunter-gatherer needed to survive so all the energy was expended on making decisions and choices. Repeating the same patterns and rhythms every day is what the ancient reptilian brain loves: nothing out of the ordinary, one knows what is going to happen. The mammalian brain thrives on challenges and change.

Under pressure we are more likely to retreat into old patterns of the reptilian brain, including the negative thinking that prevents us from achieving our full potential, from changing and progressing in the direction of our values.

Throughout our childhood conditioning we develop our comfort zone. As we age, we fear stepping out of our comfort zone because we have created a perception of fear. We associate with friends, media and hobbies that keep us in our comfort zone and reinforce our conditioning. They are non-challenging. It is so easy to be negative; everything is just outside your comfort zone. It is this comfort zone that prevents most people from being successful in their lives. The problem with our comfort zone is that it continues to get smaller and smaller until we challenge it. Most people don't succeed because they don't challenge themselves. However, once you start pushing through your comfort zone, you become more comfortable with change than with complacency.

As a result, more and more people live the lives of others, particularly through television. We now get vicarious challenges through watching other people. Our society creates conditioning for an anti-challenge. To know life is not to live life. You have to do more than just know something or think about it. You need to act, to be a part of it.

A period of change is often associated with a period of disruption and discomfort—a period of chaos that seems out of your control. We can feel overwhelmed with the many changes going on around us. However, until we feel some discomfort with our circumstances we are rarely willing to change. Perhaps this discomfort is a message to change? But even with discomfort we find it hard or are still unwilling to commit to change.

Many people don't change because they fear the consequences: fear of success, fear of failure and fear of the unknown. Fear results in instability and an inability to move forward. Fear requires a constant input of energy and is draining to the body. To live in a state of fear of change is not *living*. Such a state requires you to focus all your energy into the future (what can go wrong) and the past (what has already gone wrong).

For some people it is easier to whinge than to change. The constant complainers in our society are those who are the most reluctant to change because they

feel that everyone else has the power and they don't. Even when they change their circumstances they still have the same problems because they forgot to change how they think. We are all in control of our own lives. Take control.

Denial and avoidance are often keys behind our unwillingness to change. These can be useful short-term strategies to get you through difficult times. However, in the long term they only compound the problem and restrict you from making changes. Perhaps the worst case of denial is doctors and nurses who work in the cardiovascular and cancer wards at hospitals but who smoke, eat junk food and don't exercise. Or politicians who deny environmental problems such as the greenhouse effect, despite the overwhelming evidence for the need to take urgent action. We are all guilty of denial and avoidance—some more than others.

We don't notice the change in ourselves or the change going on around us. Just like the frog in a frying pan. Frogs evolved in water and as such have few receptors for temperature. So if you put a frog on a hot frying pan, the temperature difference is considerable and it will jump off. If you put a frog on a cool frying pan and heat it up ever so slowly the frog will not notice the temperature change and will end up being cooked. Now as a person who does not willingly hurt any creature this is really just a metaphor for not noticing change. How stupid you might say, the frog is going to die. In many ways we are the same. We choose to ignore most information if it does not suit us (our conditioning). People are feeding themselves poor foods, not getting physical activity, engaging in negative choices in their lives and then are surprised when they get severely ill with Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, cancer or have a stroke. Some have life-disabling conditions of arthritis, diabetes or obesity and wonder, "Why me?" We see it happening around us all the time but think for some reason that it will not happen to us. Let me tell you now. I am sorry to bring this news to you but it will happen to you unless you change now.

What separates us from all other animals more than anything else is our ability to think, our consciousness. However, just having the ability to think does not mean we are thinking correctly. Many of us learnt poor thinking habits during childhood and still stand by them. Edward DeBono suggests that even highly intelligent people are often caught up in their own thinking trap, limited by

their ability to support and justify their position. Good thinking involves a willingness to be wrong and to look at options. Poor thinking involves trying to convince everyone else that you are right. Good thinking means asking questions, not telling people answers.

Our society and culture have to change to survive. To do that, we need to change our thinking—from fear and insecurity to caring and abundance. If all the great people in the world really did not want wars and poverty it would disappear. Instead many focus on themselves and say the things they are supposed to say and ignore the world around them, like the frog. But the sad thing is the frog knows no better as it is governed by its instincts and senses and we are not.

### **The benefits of change**

Change increases the risk and it also increases the reward. Change is a risk but no more than not changing. As much as we hate change it brings us the greatest rewards and deepest satisfaction. Without change you remain trapped in the past, locked into your conditioning. Change creates alternative futures that you can control. Change means trying to look at things in new ways. It involves an appreciation that something is wrong by recognising conditioning and poor choices. What you change now will pay off in the future. Your change will be so beneficial in hindsight that it will seem logical and you will wonder why you didn't do it earlier.

Change is about a constant commitment to improvement, constantly improving you and your business, setting new standards. Think of the results of change like compounded interest on financial savings... over time, it adds up. Every day, ask, "How can I improve a little more today?" Each day, begin to take control of your life and make positive choices to improve the quality of your life.

We can learn to embrace uncertainty. We need a willingness to let go of beliefs and opinions and assumptions of how things are. Once you begin to change you realise there are certain patterns to change that you can predict and use them to your advantage. But you can only do this once you are changing. From the inside, the patterns appear. From the outside there are not patterns, just fears.

In times of our greatest challenges, such as a major illness or the death of a loved one, comes our greatest pain and as a result our greatest opportunity to change. Whether emotional or physical pain, this is our greatest opportunity to grow. However, pain causes us to focus more on ourselves so it is much harder to change during times of pain. Our real rewards come when we change during these times.

## **Changing others**

In many situations people will talk about others who don't change, particularly in relationships. Marriages fail because one person expects the other to change. Often such change occurs only when the partner is threatened with divorce and, even then, the change is short-lived. These shock tactics rarely work unless a person is really open to change. People should never expect anything different from the person with whom they entered a relationship. It will work only if you both agree that you both need to change and you agree how to change. Relationships are challenging and people need to be able to work together to change. The same applies to relationships in the office environment.

The only way to positively influence someone else is through mastery of oneself. Address your own sphere of influence. Develop yourself first before trying to change others. If you change, the world changes. Any change you make influences the people around you and the ones around them, well beyond your circle of influence. Everything affects everything else to some degree or another. Change yourself and become an instrument of change for the world. The more energy you put into your change the more influence you will have. As individuals, making small changes can have big results.

You can change anything you want to change. In fact, the greatest changes in the world have come from one individual who was inspired... from great inventions and scientific discovery to social and cultural change. I know many ordinary people who have influenced thousands of people through their own changes. One friend of mine, Julie, got sick of all the food additives out there and the lack of information so she went on a five-year journey of discovery. She researched all the information and wrote a book called *Additive Alert*, which has sold tens of thousands of copies in Australia. She now speaks all

around the country and has a newsletter database of thousands of people who write letters and emails to companies about their products. And the companies are listening. This is one person with passion.

Don't worry about the things you can't change. The serenity prayer is still very useful now.

God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change;  
the courage to change the things I can;  
and the wisdom to know the difference.

You cannot change other people. It is not that other people will not change; rather the serenity prayer suggests you focus on yourself. Can we change the things around us? Yes. But only once we have changed ourselves. In fact, things will change around us as a result of our own changes.

In the business world, the 21st century is a period of incredible change and it is only going to accelerate so we have to be ready for it. It is faster than ever and less predictable. Being prepared for change means investing in your future, particularly in your career. Prepare for change in your workplace. Changes will be rapid, different, with more choices and increased competition. Businesspeople and businesses need to be able to be flexible, to change with ease and speed. Success means constantly improving and constantly changing.

Organisations change only when the individuals within them have changed. Change should be at the cellular level first, then at the organ level, then the organism level. However, it is easier to change the traditional organisational structure than it is to change the mental models people work within (their conditioning). The reason most change is not effective and has to be repeated is that we focus on changing the organisational models and not the conditioning of the individuals. A new model with the same old thinking is unlikely to succeed. Organisational change must first come through personal change.

## **Take charge of change**

Change begins with awareness. Awareness takes a little time and reflection. First take some time to just stop and get off the busy treadmill. You cannot



observe from the inside. Find some peace in your life to give you some inspiration and insight.

Start by changing your belief system. You can change; you can change anything you want to. Change is not a matter of ability or even will power; it is a matter of motivation. Inspiration is great but of little value unless it is converted into inspired action. When participants were asked to do a certain behaviour using will power, such as avoiding sweets or remaining in an awkward stance, performance and focus was always worse compared to control groups. There is no research to show that will power alone works on dieting. We need more than will power.

Spot your motivation to change your habits. Let anger, annoyance and frustration become driving forces for change:

To power not impotence;

To action not inaction; and

To change rather than acceptance.

Change the way you think, take control and plan. Complacency is the inability to plan. Plan to change your life, make a life plan. Before you begin on a life plan and establish your goals, make sure you have defined your values and you really know what is important to you. I have already talked about your values so make sure you have really thought about them and written them down. Start by changing the small habits first then the big ones will follow. Identify the shortcomings in your life so you can change them. Based on your values, what are the gaps between where you are now and where you want to be? Identify the gaps in all areas of your life. How healthy are you and how healthy do you truly wish to be?

## **Action**

Every day you should make some positive changes. They don't have to be big things. Start small and work to bigger steps. For example, if you want to start eating healthily don't change your diet overnight, just pick one thing every couple of days and support yourself in your new choices. Start by eating one apple a day. Do you know that research shows consuming one apple a day

reduces your risk of a heart attack and stroke by more than 25% compared to someone who has one apple a week? Then, when you have implemented this, add one banana a day. Notice how small the changes are and that they are focused on the positive. Of course when you have an apple and a banana a day you will start replacing some sugary processed foods. By the way, bananas are very rich in potassium and the research shows that the single biggest cause of high blood pressure is not salt in your diet but the salt-potassium balance. There are more than 25 good studies showing that increasing potassium lowers blood pressure. Apples are a source of potassium as well. See how just small changes can make a big difference? But don't expect all the changes to happen overnight. These are all long-term and together will lead you to really taking control of your life.

What can I change today? Make a list for each day. Write it down.

## *Chapter 7*

# Challenges

“The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty.” ~ Winston Churchill

“Every adversity, every failure, every heartache carries with it the seed of an equal or greater benefit.” ~ Napoleon Hill

“Your trials do not come to punish you but to awaken you.” ~ Paramahansa Yogananda

Challenges can at first appear painful but they can also reap fantastic rewards. Only when you are uncomfortable do you change.

We don't change unless we are challenged so this chapter is about the courage to examine and challenge ourselves. We have to make the choice, the conscious choice, to continue to grow, to continue to expand, to challenge ourselves. We have to actively pursue this, to remind ourselves, to remind our subconscious how we want to maintain and sustain our bodies and our minds.

To change is human; to challenge is to live life to the fullest. Challenges make us the best we can be. It is what took us out of the trees and has built cities and taken us into space. Challenge is what we aspire to as youth and admire when others aspire to it. Seeing someone meet a challenge touches the deepest part of our emotions. It is natural and fundamental to being human.

The reason that change and challenge are so powerful is that they enable you to take control of your life. Self-discipline results in self-esteem. Challenges make opportunities to create positive choices in our lives. They give us the best life we can have.

Successful people are the ones who have the ability to fully challenge themselves and their lives. The challenges keep coming and they keep meeting them. Sometimes the challenges are big, other times they are small. Behind every successful person are many failures. We need challenges to continue to help us improve in everything we do. We cannot improve unless we meet

the challenges. Oprah Winfrey, probably the most powerful woman on this planet at present, suffered abuse from an early age. She met her challenges and continues to do so. We are taught as a child to be realistic which, for a child, means do not dream and don't challenge. Well, Oprah did. Perhaps we should call this the "Oprah Effect" so it can continue to inspire people to challenge their circumstances and take control.

Challenging ourselves is one of the most important protective mechanisms we have. But it takes time, energy and focus. We grow only when we challenge ourselves beyond our normal limits and then recover. We build muscle and strength by systematically challenging our bodies. This causes micro-tears in the muscles which, after suitable recuperative time, become stronger. Our immune system also grows with challenges. As kids, we got all sorts of viruses; each was painful but our immune system developed because of it. There is also some evidence now that exposure to lots of colds and strains of the flu (viruses) in childhood may reduce the risk of some cancers later in life. Even when you challenge your hands with a bit of physical work you develop a callous, a protective layer of skin. There is overwhelming evidence that the more you challenge your mind the lower the risk of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease. Cancer and heart attack and stroke patients who challenge their disease live longer with better quality of life. In a study of 1,600 patients with 15 different medical problems, prolonged bed rest on average increased the recovery time of patients with diseases as diverse as back pain and cardiovascular disease. Patients who challenged themselves to get out of bed experienced a quicker recovery than patients who did not. If stroke victims use their "good" side, such as their right arm to do all the work, they can get by quite well quickly but will lose a lot of the function of the left arm. However, if they tie their good arm and challenge themselves to use their damaged arm, as hard as it is, then their chances of recovering the ability of that arm are dramatically increased.

Conversely, the opposite of maintaining our wellbeing is deterioration. Without active maintenance, our bodies and minds deteriorate and gradually break down. As young kids, we continually challenge ourselves but we soon learn through peer pressure that it's safer to conform and to be "cool." At

puberty we become conscious of everyone and we are told to make sure we are responsible. There are those who do still want to challenge the norm but that desire is squashed out of them. Maybe they want to change things that are not working. They can see the problem but don't know how to change it, which leads to frustration.

Challenging our thoughts, beliefs and actions is difficult. Challenging our routines and rituals demands energy and focus, whether it is avoiding certain foods or taking up an exercise program. Brain scanning has shown that change and challenges require energy. Sadly we are losing our desire to use our minds because it is a challenge. If you do simple tasks that involve only one brain hemisphere you greatly reduce your attention span. Challenges, complexity and novelty are the things that light up both hemispheres of the brain, grab your attention, and lead you to improved memory and ongoing learning.

Life will create challenges and we can make challenges. Difficult situations are often a way of discovering the cutting edge of what we need to change in ourselves. We can only succeed if we learn from our experiences and we can only learn from our experiences if we take risks. By learning about ourselves and recognising our limitations we expand our ability to respond effectively to any given situation.

How you deal with challenges and change is a matter of choice. We all have challenges and therefore the opportunity to make positive choices, however it depends upon how you choose to see that challenge. Is it your challenge or is it someone else's challenge? Some people challenge themselves while some choose to challenge others. The people who challenge others are the ones who blame everyone else for their woes. They always seem to be complaining about what other people did and how it has ruined whatever they are doing. Blaming someone else is not taking responsibility.

This is best described by my challenge spectrum, which has questioning at one end and blame and criticism at the other end. Questioning is about asking how we could do it better and learning from our experiences.

Questioning ----- Blame/criticism

This is where an individual takes responsibility for his own beliefs, feelings and actions. In the office, if you and others are working together on a project and it is handed in late, ask: "Is there anything else I could have done to help? Could I have mentored my colleagues or supervised some of their work?" If you ask these questions you can grow from them. If you blame someone else there is nothing that benefits you. At the same time don't take responsibility for the actions of others. A reaction of blaming others is dominated by your emotional brain and governed by your conditioning. I know one high-profile company with a senior manager who blames everyone for not being perfect. This person's choice to do this is personally, socially and financially destructive.

We all know some negative people, the ones who are always complaining about something or who do not take responsibility for themselves but are happy to blame other people or circumstances. A friend of mine recently told me a story of a person in his office who really brought the energy of the office down by constantly complaining. When this person went on sick leave the office lightened up and everyone reported how much nicer it was. However, a week later the negative person began ringing my friend to complain about the company. The person who continues to complain about her work has very low self-esteem and feels everything is absolutely out of her control. Yet it is her choice to work there. If you have someone like this around you give him or her your copy of this book.

If a person feels locked into a job because of his skills (or lack thereof), he can continually challenge himself and upgrade or change those skills. Why stop studying after your first degree or diploma or think the skills of one apprenticeship are enough? Relevant skills and education are fast outdated and there is no such thing as a permanent job anymore. In any year more than half a million people will change jobs in Australia. If you are about to retire why not consider studying at university? Why not come study with me? If your income is not high you will not be charged the higher education fees. Perhaps this sounds a little challenging... great!

By continually challenging yourself mentally you prepare yourself for the change that is going to come and for a gentle transition to where you want to

go. By challenging yourself you also open up more opportunities for yourself. I have a friend who has gone through lots of changes during the past few years but has coped with them very well. One of the reasons I put this down to is his ongoing study of history. It may not help his career directly but it has taught him that change is always occurring and people have used many skills throughout history to use the change to their advantage. Everything that is happening now has already happened at some time in the past and been reported. So why not learn from this? Have you ever noticed that the Bible, the Bhagavad Gita and other religious texts are replete with stories and quotes that are as relevant today as when they were first written? All you need to do is rephrase them in 21st century language.

Because challenges never disappear, we are better off meeting them rather than hiding from them all our lives. In the short term it may seem easy to continue to do what you have always done. It is too easy to continue to do the work you do without changing your habits to become more productive. However, inaction leads to more inaction until inaction takes control of your life. On the other side, action leads to more action and action enables *you* to control your life. Everything—from subatomic particles to solar systems and galaxies—is moving and in a continual state of flux and expansion. Inaction is moving, but backward, shrinking you while everything around you expands. Action is moving forward and expanding your horizons.

Albert Einstein said, “Life is like riding a bicycle; to keep your balance, you must keep moving.”

Don’t stop riding the bicycle of life.

What are your barriers to challenges? You may feel that you are too busy, lack skill, knowledge or commitment. There is always something stopping us. Challenge yourself physically, emotionally, spiritually and mentally. Challenge yourself mentally to learn a language, maths, different word games and quizzes or learn to remember 100 people’s names. Learn something new and different. Learn how to learn. I taught myself memory skills 10 years ago so I could remember 100 people’s names and then wrote a book on it. Why not write a book? Really, why not? Challenge yourself to improve all aspects of

your health, to spend more time with loved ones, to meditate each day, to do something different each day. There are so many things you can do and every one will expand your potential. You will find some areas to challenge in your life as you read on in the book. Just pick one or two areas and do it. Start with baby steps and work toward giant leaps.

Lack of challenge isn't just boring for our brains it is brain deadening and, as I have heard others say, "If you're not ripening you're going rotten."

### **Action**

Ask yourself a few questions. What are some of the things with which you can really challenge yourself? Things that have held you back, maybe something that can really project you forward or just something you have wanted to do for such a long time.

What are some short-term challenges?

What are some long-term challenges?



## *Chapter 8*

# Commitment

“There isn’t anything that isn’t made easier through constant and familiarity and training. Through training we can change; we can transform ourselves.”

~ Dalai Lama

“We are what we repeatedly do.” ~ Aristotle

One of the reasons I developed the Five Cs was to create and inspire a sense of commitment to the program you choose. There is little value in information or even brilliant ideas unless you act on them. We cannot rely on information alone. The level of environmental, dietary and lifestyle information and awareness has increased but it has not led to an increase in correct behaviour. In fact we could argue in most cases that our behaviour has gotten worse.

In many cases there is no relationship between knowledge, awareness and behaviour. People are now inundated with information and deal with this by ignoring most of it, especially if it involves change or challenge. In one of our studies where we provided information on its own, the health and environmental behaviour of participants became worse. With too much information and no tools to implement it, people can feel overwhelmed. Information can be effective if the only barrier is knowledge but if the barrier stopping action is something else, it is unlikely to work. By contrast, the group to whom we gave goals and other tools dramatically improved their behaviour.

It is fascinating that each year millions of dollars are spent on information sheets, and education and training programs that have little if any benefit. Information without a change and commitment program built into it is a waste of valuable resources. A lot of educational research shows that between two percent and 10% of the people will change as a result of an inspiring lecture or seminar (more for mine of course!) but 90% to 98% won’t. I would suggest that it is always the same two percent to 10% who change. Recently I heard that the government was going to do something about the poor state of our children’s health—produce and distribute fliers. It made me cringe. What a waste of millions of dollars. Fliers and information sheets only work to rein-

force the situation for those who are already doing it. The real heart of success in any program is identifying the conditioning, choices and challenges, and making a commitment to positive change.

### **Intention times motivation**

Change is really a matter of commitment or my formula of intention times motivation. So it is now time to make a commitment to change, to challenge yourself. The first commitment you have to make is to buy an exercise book or art book to document your Life Plan. I prefer one without lines on the pages but that's up to you. This book will be used to jot down your ideas, as well as to write down or draw your plans. As you will see later, putting pen to paper is essential. You can call it anything you want—a life plan, success plan, my future—just write something positive.

### **Commitment**

Various strategies will help you fulfil your commitments—including prompts and reminders, personal pledges, physical and emotional reinforcement and public pledges—but the most powerful strategy is writing them down. Prompts and reminders are great for short-term single acts and for keeping up the momentum, so put them in places where you will see them frequently. However, you are soon likely to become accustomed to them and not even notice them. Timing and convenience of prompts is important so that you continue to notice them at the important times. An example is to put a healthy eating message on the fridge or, even better, on the label of all the poor foods in your cupboards.

Writing it down and verbalising a goal externalises it and increases the chances that you will achieve it. The action of writing it down uses different parts of the brain and it also enables you to see your goals in front of you. Verbalising and sharing with others adds extra pressure to your actions through your social circles and constant reminders. The more reminders and the more active the reminders are, the more brain connections are made. To make a commitment to yourself that is effective you need to engage as many senses as you can and as much creativity as you can to the commitment. The more you engage, the more your brain makes connections to get you there. Repeat the changes you

are going to make and nod your head, put on a big grin, and when you finish saying it aloud say “YES” with a louder and more powerful tone. Engage your body and senses in positive action.

Share your commitment with positive people in your life so they can help you with your challenges, especially people you see on a regular basis. Share only with the ones who are going to keep encouraging you. Don’t share it with the negative people in your life. They will only pull you down to where they want you to be (most likely where they are).

In one of our studies on goal setting we had three groups: one group that received information only in a seminar, another that received the same information and were also taught goal setting, and a third group that received all that and wrote their goals down in the workshop. The first group performed about six percent worse in their behaviour. The second group improved their behaviour by around five percent. The third group, who wrote their goals down, improved their behaviour by around 19%. The small effort of writing the goals down made a big difference. Perhaps because it taps into another part of the brain to further reinforce the focus?

In another study we were running with one of my PhD students, Jason Fox, called Seniors Smart, we tested goal setting with seniors. Those who wrote their goals down in class were not only more motivated and more excited about the program, but also performed dramatically better on all measures including memory, improved physical activity, diet and acts to reduce their environmental impact. The small effort of writing the goals down made a big difference. So you are never too old to write your goals, or too young for that matter.

In an illuminating experiment, researchers compared the effects of writing in three different groups. In each grouping individuals were tested separately. The first group had a piece of paper to write on, the second group had a “magic board” where the writing was erased, and the third group was asked to simply remember what they were told. Each person’s commitment to the answer was tested. Those who had a permanent record by writing it down on paper achieved the highest performance. The ones who wrote it down on

paper owned it and were committed to it. The least committed and poorest results came from the individuals with only a verbal commitment. Individuals who only made a commitment in their mind were the most easily swayed. In another study, in which a group of women were asked to self-examine their breasts over the ensuing month, the group who wrote down the where and when had nearly 100% compliance, compared to 53% in the group who did not write it down, but had equally good intentions to examine themselves.

There is something almost primal about the act of writing. It is one of the human attributes that separate us from the rest of the Animal Kingdom. No other species has the ability to communicate effectively through writing. Since human beings first stood erect we have had a need to document aspects of our lives that are significant. Cave paintings dating back to pre-history illustrate aspects of life crucial to human survival. Our rituals, the Spirits that guided us and the food we hunted are documented in meticulous hand paintings or carvings on cave walls. Perhaps it is this same primitive desire today that drives us to write down those things of importance to us.

Get the message: write it or risk not doing it.

Remember the old adage, “The bluntest pencil records better than the sharpest mind.”

One proviso before you commit is to make sure you know exactly what you want. To do this read the next few chapters and do the exercises I have put there for you. They won't take long and you might be surprised by what you discover.

# PART TWO

## *Chapter 9*

### Taking Action Now

Now that you know how it goes the next step is to learn how to put the Five Cs into action.

Here are the tools. Cognitive behavioural programs, which literally mean thinking (cognitive) and action (behaviour) programs, are nothing new; they just have a new label. These programs have been shown to be very effective for a wide range of conditions, including developing a positive mental attitude and subsequent positive and productive behaviour. They offer you diverse and effective techniques, which you can implement in your own life and then share with others.

The cognitive techniques, which will help you develop a more positive attitude, include:

- Goal setting the Dingle way
- Mental dialogue
- Visualisations
- Focusing on the positive with a success and gratitude journal
- Emotional freedom techniques

Behavioural techniques include:

- Diet
- Meditation and relaxation
- Sleep
- Exercise
- Music
- Developing nurturing relationships
- Taking care of pets
- Positive substitution

You'll achieve more benefits if you adopt more than one of each of these techniques. Do two, do three, do more. They're not mutually exclusive. As I emphasise later, a person suffering from procrastination may require cogni-

tive techniques to break the procrastination cycle, as well as behavioural techniques such as eating well and exercising to keep their action going. Research has demonstrated the greatest benefits are derived from a strategy using several techniques from both Cognitive and Behavioural Therapies (CBT). In fact, the more parts of the body and mind that are integrated into the program, the more effective it is.

These techniques are more powerful than any drug ever available and the only side effects are positive. The areas where CBT have been shown to be very effective include:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Panic attacks
- Sleep difficulties
- Phobias
- Mood swings
- Substance abuse
- Eating disorders
- Drug abuse
- Alcohol use
- Smoking
- Sexual dysfunction
- Minor hassles in life
- Lack of confidence
- Anger management
- Low tolerance or frustration
- Procrastination
- Building self-esteem
- Time management
- Improving productivity
- And many more

This does not mean that we no longer have any emotions. Rather we feel and have responses appropriate to the situation: sadness rather than depression; annoyance rather than anger; concern rather than anxiety.

## *Chapter 10*

# Finding Out What Is Important

There is no doubt that we have certain real needs, such as health, nutrition, water, security and people. Once we have met these basic needs we have a choice to focus on our wants in life or more on our values. Unfortunately, we are so busy in our lives that we don't often get time to identify our core values. What is really important to us? We spend so much of our time responding to external demands that we can lose touch with our values and a sense of reality.

Our values are what drive us and give us direction in all our actions and thus enable us to make our actions consistent and focused. Discovering our values gives us the ultimate direction and decision-making process and can become a compelling driving force. Our values guide us in defining the most important things in our lives. They are the reasons we do what we do. Values enable you to become the person you want to be.

Discovering and following our values gives us the ease to make decisions, dissipates stress and gives us direction in life and motivation. Immense energy can come from one's connection with his or her deepest values. The opposite is also true. The biggest drain in our lives is investing energy in pressing matters that are not based on our values. Values save us time and energy. If we act consistently with our values, 99% of our decisions are made for us and our minds do not need to stress about whether we should take action or not. If it is consistent with our values, we take that action.

We don't require an internal debate on every decision and we don't have the debate each night whether what we did was right or wrong, or if maybe we could have done it better. As our minds can focus only on one thing at a time, it saves our minds flitting back and forward between various options and possible actions—getting caught up in the “monkey mind.” Our values give us our major direction in life. Stress dissipates when we identify our values and follow our passion. When we are consistent with our values we are healthy and well. It is when we are not consistent with our values that our health seems to turn against us.

Our values give us a strong sense of purpose, which buffers us from the storms of life. They are like the root of a tree, keeping us steady and grounded even in stormy weather. But they are hidden beneath the ground so that we don't see them, and sometimes we forget about them when everything appears to be happening above ground.

Our values become a major motivating factor and sustain us. Not knowing what our values are is like driving to an unknown destination without a road map. In the extensive research on goals, self-concordant goals, the ones chosen for personal reasons, achieved the greatest outcomes. Research on centenarians shows that positive values are consistent with living longer and enjoying life more. They are not saints, just people who live by their values.

### **Societal values**

There are many examples of personal values influencing the life and work of people, as well as, on the other side, societal values influencing how people live. The best example is people who go into the caring and nurturing professions, particularly nursing, teaching, social work, etc. These are all stressful jobs and these people often could be earning more money in business. So why do they do it? For most of them it aligns with their values. They are giving and caring. There is little doubt of the value of these careers, particularly if our family or we are in need of their caring. Our work and life should be consistent with our core values and bring us happiness.

Many politicians and business leaders have talked about values but I don't believe many of them have actually thought about them. There is a lot of emphasis on values in business although all too often these values are easily lost. At a leadership conference I attended some years ago, four of the six speakers were Australian. After five years, each of those Australians had been taken to court and was in jail or had a deferred sentence. That is not leadership.

A large multinational network marketing company that sells products often reminded people that the owners have more than enough money for themselves so the public should trust them. However, recently the owners were found guilty on multiple counts of tax evasion totalling millions of dollars. This is not uncommon, as greed can corrupt. Unfortunately, fear and greed are



the two most common negative driving values that are now preached either directly or indirectly and they have become a mantra for many people.

To exacerbate this, the media presents a distorted view of what our real values are, based on what the owners want, what the people who pay for the ads want, and occasionally what the readers and viewers need. Working closely with the media, I am frequently told what we can or cannot do, or some of my criticisms are edited out, for no other reason than they were not consistent with the values of the paper. In a recent land contamination issue the local state paper stopped writing articles on the topic because the articles were considered “anti-development.” Another example of media bias was trying to block my message by closing off all the local media to me in 2010. Then there is the use of ridiculous and emotive words and expressions like the “war on terrorism” to attempt to justify political motives.

The more governments and the media create a perception of fear and insecurity, the more we are willing to compromise our core value of true happiness. We become willing to put our core values that sustain us on hold, for a day until the night comes, for a week until the weekend, a year for a few weeks’ holiday, or even a lifetime for a few years at the end doing what we want to do. Fear and insecurity, whether real or perceived, take away our personal control. The more we fear something the more power we give to it and the less power we have. Most phobias restrict people from doing things, as does a simple fear of going out for a walk at night. We often base our security on something external. Safety comes from inside. How do we create safety that cannot be lost?

## **Finding our values**

The research on ageing and Maslow’s famous research on the hierarchy of needs highlight the drive for self-actualisation and self-realisation—that is, finding one’s creative and spiritual side. On average, as people age they become more spiritual, worldly, generous and interested in helping others while pursuing more creative endeavours. This is a departure from the very self-centred, materialistic ego view.

Our values should revolve around benefiting ourselves while benefiting others and the world. They should concentrate on things that sustain and nurture.

This means assessing our work and asking if this is really helping humankind. As a general rule, I would say, for example, the creation of weapons, tobacco and even junk food is not based on positive values. Each of these kills millions of people around the world every year.

We need to identify and define our values then find ways to reconnect with our values. Once we do this, we need to revisit our values on a daily basis. Ask the question at the end of each day: “Was my behaviour consistent with my values today?” Become accountable to yourself for your actions.

## **Pen’s Principles**

Through the passing of my wife and best friend many years ago, I developed Pen’s Principles. Pen was a mentor in my life and always challenged me to assess my actions and directions. She got me to think about the morality of my actions, and I developed questions to help to continue to guide me. These are a couple of quick questions I ask myself when I have a decision to make:

What would my best friend who really cares about me want me to do?

Will this action be positive or negative for people, plants, animals and the planet?

She taught me to love all creatures, and until we can we are not likely to love all humans, so wars and destruction will continue.

“The most important human endeavor is the striving for morality in our actions. Our inner balance and even our very existence depend on it. Only morality in our actions can give beauty and dignity to life.” ~ Albert Einstein

## **Deciding what is important in your life**

A couple of simple questions that will help you understand and focus on this more fully are:

What do you want to be remembered for?

Who are the people you most deeply respect and why?

As individuals, health is the most important thing we have. Think about that for a moment. If you get sick or incapacitated you will do almost anything

to get better (I've even heard people with a flu say they were willing to do *anything* to get better). People who are seriously ill will spend every cent they have to get well. Some cancer sufferers spend tens of thousands of dollars over weeks to have special cancer treatments. They are willing to sell their assets and go into debt, to do anything, if only they can get their health back. A friend of mine went in for a routine investigation but had her bowel punctured in the process and she developed serious internal infections, particularly of the respiratory system. She nearly died and remembers her words, "I will give everything just to be able to breathe." It's a pity that many of us leave concerns about our health until our body is screaming at us for attention.

Our relationships with family and friends must surely be next on our list. Yes, we need to survive and earn a living and we argue that we need to look after our families by providing extra material comfort, ignoring the fact that we are their mentors for life and living. More possessions and gadgets are not a substitute for a too-busy family member or parent. Your family is important to you. Most relationships that break up do so because not enough time and energy was spent working on the relationship. How many times have I heard it said, "I didn't see it coming"? Only because they were so busy with being busy.

Once you have reorganised your priorities, you will realise that the consumerism and status most of us are encouraged to pursue is rather empty by comparison, and that all the time and energy spent thinking or worrying about it is wasted time and energy. If you don't believe me then try this exercise. I call it 100 Answers and it is a simple yet very effective technique for getting to the deeper layers of what you want.

## **Action**

### **100 Answers**

1. Allow about 15 minutes and find a quiet space.
2. In your success plan book write the question, "What is important in my life?"
3. Then, without a break, write down as many answers as you can. You can repeat earlier ones; just keep writing and don't stop. Ignore the

grammar and spelling... just write. Try and think from an emotional perspective as well. If you get stuck try to write a few with your other hand. Just keep writing.

When you have finished you will find a number of themes that repeat and have a lot of overlap.

You can also use this technique to help sort out other issues in your life by asking questions such as:

How can I enjoy life more?

How can I be more productive?

How can I be a better person?

The questions can be about anything significant in your life.

In the next couple of pages write down questions that help you identify your values.

Compare these to the values listed earlier in the book.

What we really want in life is to be valuable, worthy and loving. Other values include being:

Constructive

Giving

Caring

Likeable

Genuine

Trustworthy

Honest

Compassionate

Creative

and:

Growing

Learning

Challenging

Listening

Sharing

and having, and enjoying:

Fun

Happiness

Integrity

## NOTES

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## *Chapter 11*

# Finding Happiness

“Happiness is the highest good, being a realisation and perfect practise of virtue, which some can attain, while others have little or none of it.” ~ Aristotle

You can only find peace of mind when you are congruent with your values. Be honest with yourself, or as Shakespeare wrote, “This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day. Thou canst not then be false to any man.”

Success does not bring happiness; happiness brings success. Life’s ultimate journey is happiness. Happiness helps us engage. The ultimate goal of success is happiness. All other aspects of success are either taking you on the path to happiness or distracting you. Success is an attitude that taps into your core values.

There are many paths to success but all of them require you to identify and follow your values. Many people seem to be living the quintessentially successful life but are slowly dying and decaying. I have known many business people who acted inconsistently with their values and as a result fell from their positions, often very hard and some even landed in jail. Disharmony occurs when your actions are inconsistent with your core values.

True success does not always look the way it is depicted by the media. I have two close friends, Jon and Gayle, both with degrees and incredibly talented, both capable of earning \$100,000 a year or more. Jon is a great cartoonist and Gayle is excellent with computers, hence they do a lot of work for me. By choice they live in the bush with the bare minimum, running a wildlife rescue service and caring for injured wildlife. They are developing environmental education programs about wildlife. They are enjoying truly gratifying success.

### **Developing a gratitude mentality**

What is gratitude? Perhaps we can comprehend it more easily through a gratitude and greed spectrum. We can visualise this quite easily: complete and utter gratefulness is at one end while total self-interest and greed is at the other.

Gratitude is an attitude about living, and can have an immeasurable effect on our experience of every day, every hour of our day, and even every minute of our day. Buddhist monks, who have learnt to derive their happiness from within, rather than from material benefits, are a living example of gratitude. Closer to home is the attitude of my friend, Leo. Leo was in a motorcycle accident and lost one of his legs. His other leg was impaired and causes him ongoing discomfort. Despite this, he is glad to be alive and glad to still be able to get around, work and be active. Recently he went snow skiing with a group of severely physically impaired men. His handicap was one of the least. The evening conversation revolved around how lucky they were to be able to go skiing. All these men focus on what they still have.

Recently, after floods in Queensland where houses were just swept away, it was amazing to see not just so many people coming to help but also, even more importantly, people who had lost all their possessions saying in TV interviews how blessed they are that they all got out in time and are alive and healthy. But let's not wait for a flood, some other natural disaster or physical injury. Learn to be grateful right now for what you already have.

Another true story about a resilient amputee comes to mind here. Carl, whom I know through my friend, Evelyn, lost his leg below the knee. This was back in the '70s and at the time Carl had a wooden leg. He and Evelyn were going hiking when Carl noticed the ankle joint of his prosthesis had come loose. He was unable to fix it so he asked to be driven to a hardware store. There he requested a hammer and a handful of nails. The proprietor brought them over and Carl promptly put his leg up on a chair and started hammering nails through his sock into the offending ankle. The proprietor fainted clean away! Carl still dines out on that story!

Focus on what you have: on the fact that you have a roof over your head, you can eat healthy foods, you have a job or, even if you don't, that you are capable of getting a job. Learn to appreciate your friends, family and the environment around you. Appreciate the little things you are able to do every day, simply because you can do them. Rather than focusing on a sore ankle or leg when



you go for a walk, or the fact that it's overcast or even raining, appreciate that you can still go for a walk. Gratitude is the appreciation of the simple things in life that we usually take for granted, the millions of things that occur each day yet go unnoticed.

We have the tendency to focus on deficiencies in other people. Usually it's a person in our family or a close friend who goes out of her way to help us. Instead of being grateful, we zero in on the one small aspect of the relationship that didn't work well, blow it out of proportion and blame the person for not caring enough. Focus on what others do for you (and what you can do for them), not on what they don't do. We can learn to be grateful.

At the other end of the spectrum lies dissatisfaction with what we do have and avarice for more and more. We always want more things. Consumerism encourages us to focus on what we don't have rather than what we do have. As a result we end up with a mental handicap worse than any physical one. The prime example of this is the totally materialistic person who believes pleasure and happiness can only be derived from money, status and possessions. The research shows that such a belief is ill founded and that, in many cases, the very opposite is true. A focus on material wealth is associated with compulsive spending, envy, low self-esteem and lack of generosity. Individuals whose primary focus is affluence and materialism are less satisfied with their lives as a whole, tend to experience a high degree of anxiety and depression, have a lower sense of wellbeing and greater behavioural and physical problems. Some studies have shown that adolescents who highly value material wealth have greater susceptibility to psychological disorders.

The happiness we all seek can only be achieved through self-control, not material possessions. Current research into the neurological markers of happiness supports this view. Of all people studied, Buddhist monks scored highest in the happy markers and seemed the happiest and most content. The left prefrontal cortex shows greater stimulation in people with a positive, happy outlook. And in these happy people, activity in the amygdala is inhibited. The opposite was shown for unhappy people. They have increased activity of the amygdala and greater stimulation of the right prefrontal cortex. Furthermore, those with greater activity in the right prefrontal cortex were more likely to

experience emotions of distress when shown a negative situation. Adults with increased right side prefrontal cortex activity were also more likely to report distressing emotions after watching films, compared to people with left-sided activity. It may sound obvious and clichéd, but your perception of the world is coloured by what's inside of you.

Money is only a tool to help achieve certain ends. It is a form of energy. We are conditioned to value it for itself and can easily create an economic prison for ourselves, in which we think we need more and more, and fear not having enough. Despite our increased wealth the divorce rate has doubled, teen suicide has tripled, reported violence almost quadrupled and depression rates have dramatically increased, particularly among teens and young adults. Yet our economic and political masters continue to tell us to work harder and buy more to keep the economy going. Material possessions come and go. In January 2005, I read all about John Elliot, the ex-millionaire, who has rubbed shoulders with the Queen and all the highest dignitaries in the country, but is now broke and in debt. The more you have, the more you have to worry about. You work harder and harder, creating an unbalanced life, leaving no time to enjoy the things you really should enjoy and all of a sudden, you're at the end of your life and you've missed it. I call this deferred living. Wants beget wants. I want therefore I am or will be.

Research has shown that material gain can only be used for limited motivation. It soon wears thin and has to be continually increased to maintain results. If removed it may become a significant demotivator. In one experiment researchers gave children a reward every time they engaged in a preferred activity. The children's interest in these activities quickly diminished when they became associated with rewards. Similarly adults working on puzzles were rewarded each time they completed them. However, their interest in the activity also diminished.

Modern culture places huge emphasis on material success. But this is nothing new; history is replete with stories of greed as well as those saying get your priorities right first. Despite the misuse of his name, Epicurus, a Greek philosopher living around 300 B.C., encouraged people to enjoy the simple things in life, particularly friends and friendships. He also taught the value of simple

foods, from where we have derived the word “Epicurean.” Epicurus had a large following; whole villages followed his philosophy of simplicity is better. The Epicureans believed that self-indulgent pleasures lead to pain in the long run. Science is now supporting this belief. Socrates believed that happiness was achieved through living a life that nurtures the soul and not through external achievement, wealth or status. Even more recently Einstein said, “I believe that a simple and unassuming manner of life is best for everyone, best for both body and mind.”

This is not to say that you have to forgo all material possessions. Rather, you need balance. Most importantly, appreciate the things you already have, particularly those that don’t cost money, such as clean air and water and access to beautiful beaches and countryside. These simple things really bring the most pleasure and happiness. Imagine not having them. Then you can learn to appreciate them.

When you make a conscious effort to move toward the gratitude end of the scale, you’ll notice that you feel better. When you really start to experience gratitude you also begin to realise the importance of giving, without any need or expectation to receive something in return. Many religious texts, including the Bible, expound the necessity of giving freely and unconditionally. Research shows that levels of serotonin (known as the “feel good” chemical in the brain) increase and your immune system is stimulated when you carry out an act of kindness or giving. You get the same effects if you observe an act of kindness or giving. That is why people who give get pleasure or, as the Bible says, “give, and it will be given to you.” The opposite is also true; greed and continually taking leads to increased dissatisfaction, disharmony and poor health. Physiologically, greed lowers serotonin and it compromises your immune system.

Other research has also shown that gratitude and kindness increase your wellbeing and life expectancy. Altruism reduces our focus on ourselves and appears to serve as a distraction from worries, whereas preoccupation with ourselves leads to anxiety and depression by increasing our concentration on our own problems. Researcher George Vaillant followed two cohorts of American men—graduates of Harvard College and men who grew up in inner-

city Boston—for 68 years and found altruism to be one of the major qualities enabling subjects to cope with the stresses of life. It also helps us live longer lives. In other research, a ten-year study of 2,700 Americans who volunteered with community organisations were found to have much better longevity than those who didn't volunteer. They were two-and-a-half times *less* likely to die from any cause as compared to the control group. Helping others also seems to result in a boosted immune system, fewer colds and headaches and better sleeping habits. Perhaps giving is the secret to a long, happy and healthy life?

Vaillant's research also shows that our priorities change as we age and pass through various growth cycles. Our focus becomes less about ourselves and more and more about others, our community and the environment. As we evolve, we're prepared to be more generous (though there are some individuals who get caught up in the "me" cycle and never grow out of it). Our sense of happiness seems to go hand in hand with this development, despite the fact that we experience more health problems and more bereavement as we age. We are more satisfied with what we have and our need to acquire more is reduced.

Even the guru of motivational, moneymaking books, Napoleon Hill, changed his tune as he aged and sorted out his priorities. His book *Think and Grow Rich* emphasised the power of positive thinking to make more money. However, much later in his life, he wrote *Think and Grow Rich with Peace of Mind*, emphasising values which money cannot buy and freedom from the feeling of want.

Life is precious and the best things in it do no cost a thing. I know this from my own recent experiences. When my late wife and best friend passed away, during her illness and her final days all I wanted was to spend more precious time with her. I slept by her side on a sheepskin rug, just to be there. Money and material possessions became totally irrelevant. I just wanted to enjoy the simple things of life with her, seeing her smile, a walk together, talking with one another.

## **Money and materialism**

We are taught to seek things that give us momentary satisfaction at the expense of our long-term happiness. We have become a culture of momentary satisfac-

tion seekers addicted to instant pleasures. Pleasure is short-lived; it comes and goes and we quickly become accustomed to it, whether it's a new toy, drugs or new relationships.

So many people seem to be caught on a hedonistic treadmill where they define themselves by their material possessions or by comparing themselves to others. They are doomed to failure because they will never catch up. They continue to focus on what they don't have. When Americans were asked in a national survey what they believed would improve their quality of life, "more money" was the most frequent response and the more, the better. In a survey of a quarter of a million students entering college, 75% reported that it was very important or essential that they become very well off financially, and that a very important reason for going to college was to make more money. Becoming very well off financially was ranked number one. Yet in a survey of 800 college alumni, those who professed values preferring a high income and occupational success and prestige versus having very close friends and a fulfilling marriage were twice as likely as their former classmates to describe themselves as "fairly unhappy" or "very unhappy." Other research has found that people for whom affluence is a primary focus tend to experience a high degree of anxiety and depression, a lower sense of wellbeing and greater behavioural and physical problems. Seduced by the thinking mind's attraction to material trappings, these people have subscribed to distorted values that can actually make them sick. A major researcher in the area of happiness, Myers notes that even though we are richer than before, we are no happier.

Midlife crisis occurs when someone realises their values are different from their current actions. Recent research from the UK suggests that more people are going through a midlife crisis at age 25 as a result of demands and personal expectations, particularly to pay for the expected lifestyle, and that more people are going through early burnout or opting out before they burn out.

At the other end of the spectrum are people who downshift or downsize. The research shows these people feel more satisfied with their lives but with one regret: that they didn't do it earlier. They have usually realised that there are other more important things that don't cost money, such as friends and family. Success and happiness are not things achieved at the expense of others; rather

they are things built with others. Happiness is something you share with others, the people on the journey. Having wealth and no real friends is not happiness and it is not success.

“A good reputation is more valuable than money.” ~ Publilius Syrus, 100 B.C.

### **Action**

Most mornings between 4 a.m. and 6 a.m., I sit out front of my house (weather permitting), meditate and compile a daily gratitude list in my mind. This one action cheers me up no matter what I am feeling. In addition when we are all sitting around at dinner time we say our normal blessing and now each of us shares with the others one thing he or she is grateful for today.

List 10 major things for which you are grateful that have occurred during the past 12 months.

List 10 things for which you are grateful that occurred, or you experienced, during the past month.

List 10 things for which you are grateful right now.

### **The “Gratitude Game”**

If you want to do this with your kids and help them build their resilience you can teach them the gratitude game. I developed this after teaching my daughter how to list the 10 things she is grateful for. The next day her friend was feeling pretty low so she got her to list some of the things she was grateful for and they made it into a bit of a game. They came up with 30 things and had a lot of fun doing it.

Here are the rules:

Start at the letter “A” and come up with something you are grateful for. This can be fun, crazy, outlandish, serious or whatever you want. It might be that you are grateful for apples, or not looking like an ape or maybe getting an “A” in your results. Then it is the next person’s turn and she starts with “B” and she might select breakfast or bees to pollinate the flowers or not burping in public. And so on to the next person and work through the whole alphabet from “A” to” Z.” Enjoy the fun and the positive focus.

## NOTES

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## *Chapter 12*

### The Art of Focus

Nearly all of the techniques mentioned in this book rely on one major principle, finding the focus you want. Many people focus on the minutiae of life and, as a result, get the minutiae of life. Learn to focus on the important things in your life based on your values, your “big picture,” and everything else will come, including happiness.

The busyness in our lives has created a sense of distraction and difficulty maintaining focus and attention. Society now demands that we have multiple tasks often with competing and conflicting interests and we take pride in our ability to multi-task and wear it as our badge of courage. As a result of these demands, our brains attempt to adapt by rapidly shifting attention from one activity to another, creating an almost pathologically short attention span.

When we do work we create energy, like a fire. A log burning on the ground sends heat and energy off in all directions depending upon the various winds and eddies. It is a bit like most people’s lives, going off in many directions at once and not warming anyone. When you put a log in an efficient structure like a fireplace it not only gets the smoke out of your eyes but it focuses the heat and warms you.

The brain capacity of modern *Homo sapiens* reached its fullness around 200,000 years ago and has changed very little since, and certainly not in the past 20 years. Research shows that speed and accuracy are often at cross-purposes in the human brain. For example, beyond a certain speed of presenting visual or auditory information, the memory becomes increasingly poorer compared to straightforward presentations of the same information. Our brain is being forced to manage increasing amounts of information in shorter and shorter time intervals. To cope with this the brain must restructure itself, causing changes in its functioning. As a result we often cannot exert control over our brain states. In the age of the four-second media bite, instant gratification and busyness help create the adult version of social ADHD.

Multi-tasking experiments have shown that not only do people perform worse on all projects while multi-tasking, but also waste valuable mental time and

energy. Despite all the myths, humans can focus on only one thing at a time. Performing two or more tasks concurrently splits that focus. With each shift in attention, our frontal lobes shift goals and activate new rules of operation. The amount of time lost between the brain's switching between tasks is dependent upon the complexity and number of tasks. The greater the complexity of a task, the slower the switches from one task to another—hence the increase in road accidents when using mobile phones while driving. Research on mobile phone use while driving has found that even hands-free phones significantly reduce reaction time in simulation exercises.

Try this: sit on a chair and rotate your feet in a clockwise motion. Then take your right hand and draw a big figure 6 in the air. You cannot do both things at the same time. Automatically your right leg stops circling or rotates the other way, the same direction as the figure you just made. If you find this interesting, you can rotate you foot counter-clockwise and draw a figure 9 in the air. The same thing will happen.

In a series of tests carried out at the University of London, an average worker's functioning IQ fell ten points when he was distracted by ringing telephones and incoming e-mail. This drop in IQ is more than double the four-point drop seen following studies on the impact of smoking marijuana. In one experiment, a 29% reduction in brain activity occurred in subjects who were mentally rotating tasks. In another experiment, volunteers took longer to do the same tasks if they mentally rotated between them versus focusing on each of the tasks individually until they were complete. In experiments when animals are taught to focus on one thing, a particular brain circuitry fires. When they are distracted by something else the level of firing on the original circuitry is diminished. Just like humans, they lose focus. The more interested you are and the more your attention is captured on a particular task, the more activated the particular mental circuitry.

These and many other experiments have led us to believe that despite what we want to think, our brain can only focus on one task at a time. Multi-tasking is inefficient. The only exceptions to this are tasks that appear to use totally different parts of the brain, such as doodling while listening to someone give a lecture.

The fact remains that our minds have not caught up with technology. We now live in a world very different from that which our minds were designed to inhabit. The resulting conflict is confusing our minds and slowly killing us. Focus does not happen without our intention and motivation; it takes effort and it also takes know-how.

The most important first step is to focus on the right thing. We attract what we put out into the world, so focus on what you want, not what you don't want. The more you talk about lack, the more you attract it. Shift to having, not wanting. When you focus on the positive—on real solutions—you get things done; you do things differently.

Many years ago I took a few friends of mine skiing. They were all novices so after a few hours getting used to the skis we went up the “kiddies’ slope.” The first person looked down this very mild slope and saw one lonely tree in the middle. There were at least 50 metres of open space on either side. But this friend said, “I don't want to hit that tree!” Despite her best efforts, she managed to miss all the open space and to hit the tree. Fortunately, she was going very slowly and was already on her backside 20 metres before the collision. I have no doubt that she hit the tree because she focused on it. You literally attract what you focus on.

Another example of this is your mood. If you focus on negative thoughts you instantly change your mood. If you focus on being depressed, you not only begin to feel depressed but also notice more depression around you. If you focus on happiness, you not only feel happier but also notice more happiness around you. In one study, researchers instructed people to focus on sad childhood memories; when asked to identify situations in a group of photos they selected negative aspects of the photos compared to a control group. This is called “mood congruence;” you literally feel the way you are focusing. On the other side, if you want to feel happy focus on some happy events and immediately your mood will change.

Einstein focusing on still objects did not discover Einstein's laws of relativity. Instead he imagined travelling at the speed of light. It wasn't focusing on the ground that led inventors to build the early airplanes. Focusing on illness is not the key to maintaining one's health. Focusing on being healthy and getting

the tools to get there is. This is why we will never win “the war on cancer.” It is not a war; it is healing a part of your body. Since we have waged “the war on cancer” we have seen higher rates of cancer and cancer deaths as well as younger and younger people getting the cancers. All “the war” signifies is a battle and a struggle that can never be won. Interestingly the many people who survive “terminal” cancer against all the odds are usually the ones who focus on things like gratitude and love, take on meditation and dramatic changes in diet and lifestyle.

The past 50 years of psychotherapy, in which many practitioners made the clients focus on their negative states, has done so much harm to so many people. I know too many people who have been crushed by psychotherapists continually encouraging them to relive the nightmares of the past. The science shows that these techniques do not work. Focus on the positive; focus on the present. This is also not to say to live in a dreamy world where you try to make everything positive; just don't focus on the negative.

A number of motivational health programs or change programs fail because they create negative goals. A great example of this is weight loss. To “lose” weight implies that there is something that you have to stop doing, something you have to give up. Similarly, the “Quit Campaign” where you have to give up smoking focuses on the negative. These programs could quite as easily be called the “Gain Life” program or “Get Health” program or “Live Longer” program, focusing on the positive rather than the negative.

### **We are what we ask: the power of questions**

One of the most effective ways of focusing thoughts is by using questions. Humans evolved with questions; in fact it is our questioning minds that have taken us so far so fast. Questions tap into the subconscious and super-conscious minds. Our minds continually ask questions (but not necessarily the right type of questions) in an attempt to further our survival. A two-year-old just asks questions: “Why, Mommy?” and “Why, Daddy?” This is his way of coming to grips with the world, finding out how it works and where he fits into it. At home, school and university, as well as in the workplace, we often condition people to stop asking questions. Once we stop asking questions we stop growing. Change this because the only way to learn is by asking questions.

Questions not only help us make sense of the world around us but also provide direction to our minds. The part of the mind that frames the questions is the prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex is like the orchestra conductor; it literally tries to direct the rest of the mind. One way it does this is by framing questions. An example of this is when you meet someone you know but can't recall his name and you repeatedly ask yourself, "What's his name?" Usually somewhere from five seconds to five hours later you recall his name. The prefrontal cortex created the question and directed it to the rest of the mind. It then went about answering the question behind the scenes but always working until the answer was identified.

Your mind is a little like an iceberg. At the top and above the surface is your conscious mind, directed and often dominated by your prefrontal cortex. Below it is the majority of your brain capacity, the subconscious and super-conscious that are always working behind the scenes. Yet at school and university we often teach people to focus only on the top of the iceberg of their mind: the conscious thinking mind, the modern busy mind.

We also often learn early on in life to use the wrong *types* of questions, such as, "Why me?" and "What's wrong with me?" and "How come this always happens to me?" Your mind then goes on answering these and comes up with as many reasons as possible. If you want to be more negative, ask these questions. If you want to keep procrastinating ask, "Why do I procrastinate so much?" If you want to keep a sloppy desk ask, "Why do I keep such a sloppy desk?" Whatever questions you ask, your mind will try to answer. Poor questions put your focus on the problem and don't help. Get the picture? You get what you focus on.

You can learn to ask the right questions and to bring them into your control as questions that focus on solutions. Geniuses constantly ask questions. Leonardo da Vinci, perhaps the greatest genius of all time, asked questions like, "What would it be like to fly or to travel underwater?" Einstein asked great questions like, "What would it be like to travel on a lightning bolt and what would I experience when I did?" All the great discoveries have come out of the minds of people asking questions and then, when they got their answer, asking more questions. The right questions create new possibilities and new futures.

All the top sports or business people have asked the right success questions:

How can I do better?

How can I use that idea?

How do I become more productive?

Ask questions on how to improve your life, relationships and work—how you can continually improve yourself. Ask questions to focus on solutions. The power of goals that I talk about in the next section is just another way of structuring the questions: What, When, How, Why, Who and Where.

## Chapter 13

# The Power of Goals

Having goals is fundamental to human behaviour. In fact goal setting begins in early childhood and stays with us for the rest of our lives. Setting and achieving goals is a process essential to our lives. It plays a major role in personality, motivation and mental health, hence my focus on goal setting as a fundamental aspect of wellbeing. In one of our experiments on goal setting, when our study participants met their goals in one area they also showed significant improvement in other areas, even those for which they had not set goals. They reported this transference into other areas of their lives improved their overall sense of wellbeing.

The research on the positive effects of goal setting is convincing. In a recent review, researchers who had been studying the effect of setting goals for the past 35 years found that goal setting increased performance on well over 100 tasks. The research involved more than 40,000 participants, in at least eight different countries, working in laboratory, simulation and field settings, in time spans from one minute to 25 years. The results are applicable not only to individuals, but also to groups, organisational units and organisations. In effect, the review found that goal setting is amongst the most valid and practical applications for motivation in psychology.

My own review of more than 600 peer-reviewed articles on goals and the writing of my book *Goal Getting* with Terry Power demonstrate, without a doubt, that having goals does work. They are incredibly effective tools whether you wish to improve your health and wellbeing or family life, finances or sporting ability. The research shows that if you set your goals well, then you'll be successful in achieving them. Behaviour modification programs that incorporate goal setting are significantly more effective and have more consistent results than any other type of intervention.

In a program designed to increase dietary fibre consumption, those who set goals consumed 91% more fibre than the people who didn't set goals. In fact, the single most important factor in a diet or weight loss program (healthy living programs) is having goals. A study of alcohol-dependent patients under

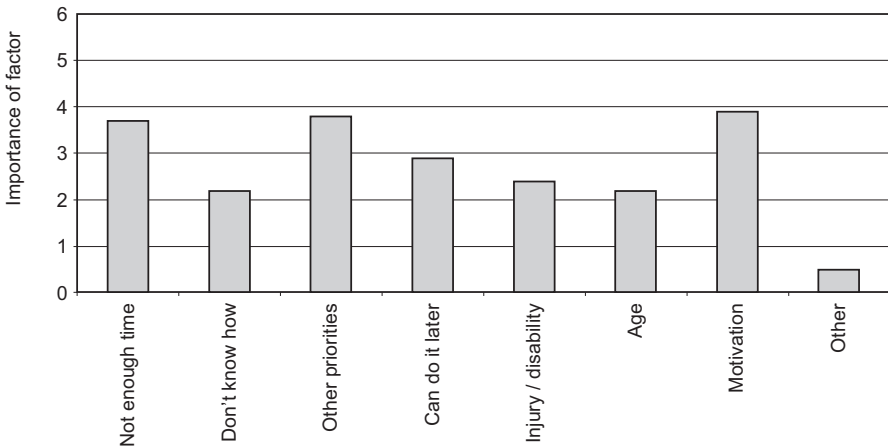
goal-setting instructions demonstrated a significant improvement in comparison to patients with no goal-setting instructions, while a study of diabetics who set goals increased their walking activity by approximately 3,000 steps per day above the baseline.

### **If goals work then why don't people set them?**

In spite of the success brought by setting goals, few people learn to set goals properly and consequently don't tap into their full potential. Some people, between two percent and eight percent, set goals naturally, but unless you know how to set goals you usually go through life only dreaming or making wishes. Most of our goal setting is done out of conditioning, without conscious thought and as a result is often doomed to fail.

In all our research on why people were not doing things to look after themselves it did not matter what topic we asked about, the answer came back exactly the same. People give the same reasons for not looking after their health, eating well, being more physically active, being more environmentally aware and not setting goals. The reasons include: no motivation, other priorities, not enough time and they can do it later. Essentially, they lack motivation but say they are too busy.

Well, the best way to get motivated is to set goals, starting now.



In other research we have conducted surveying thousands of people on the environment and health, people always thought that it was not a top priority now



but would be at some time in the future, usually in five to 10 years. They put off their concerns to tackle more critical issues now. Interestingly most people are so busy that they don't have a real perspective on what is important in their lives until a crisis comes.

Get the message? If you don't set goals now, you won't set them in the future!

The main reason goals don't work for people is they simply don't set them well. In some cases they have literally never thought about it, so their goals are just a loose bunch of dreams or wishes, much like a wish list for Father Christmas. But even those people who have read a book or attended a course on goal setting don't necessarily succeed because they have not been taught to set goals comprehensively and thoroughly. The most common reasons people don't succeed are that they don't write their goals down and they don't work on them.

Finally, goals don't work in isolation from the rest of the universe and everything else you do, so you need to think beyond your goals and build in an additional battery of support. If your goals are worthwhile, and they should be, what other forms of cognitive behaviour therapy can you use to support your goals? For example, I have people tell me that their goals never work for them or that they have no imagination. Yes, I get people who really believe this! So they need additional techniques, such as establishing a positive mental dialogue or Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) to get them over their initial barriers.

### **What goals do**

As mentioned earlier, the activity of a particular part of the brain (the prefrontal cortex) is essential in setting goals. A unique characteristic of humans is their ability to look into the future. The human mind, like no other, has the ability to create different scenarios and plot a course toward an envisioned future. The prefrontal cortex is instrumental in predicting what might happen. It's hardly surprising that the prefrontal cortex in humans makes up around 29% of the brain, compared to 17% in chimpanzees, five percent in cats and three percent in mice. Our capacity to plan enables us to build scenarios, expediting the achievement of our goals, without having to go through the physical

trial and error each and every time. This is a process that requires imagination and creativity as well as reasoning.

Goals work because they focus our thoughts, give us the tools to do the job, and motivate us to keep going by asking questions. Goals are not just a single thought about what you want. They are a comprehensive and ongoing process. To set meaningful goals, which you'll want to achieve, I suggest you ask six basic questions:

1. What do I really want?  
*(Values based);*
2. When do I want it?  
*(Be precise and set a specific timeframe to achieve your goals);*
3. How will I get it?  
*(Set down at least 10 smaller specific steps; these are the strategies and tasks);*
4. Why do I want it?  
*(Get personal here; really get into your values and keeping adding to this list);*
5. Who will help me get there?  
*(Living or passed, list people who can motive and inspire you or give you feedback); and*
6. Where will I do it?  
*(Find a place to inspire you, a supportive positive environment).*

I have seen many goal programs that don't cover these questions in any depth, or not at all, and so don't get results. Similarly, if you answer each of these questions with a one-line response you'll get a one-line result. Take your time and expand on them and you will achieve the result you really want. If you feel creative, make them into pictures and shapes. The more resources of your mind that you bring to setting your goals, the more powerful and real they will become. If you don't want to draw pictures, find some that are inspiring or express what you want, cut them out and create a collage.

The **What** gives you the direction and focus. Just make sure it is the right focus. Have you ever seen a moth just ecstatic about finding its goal in life, the local light globe? For hours it will keep banging into the light globe until it is exhausted or dead. The moth really just needed to be directed outside where it could orient itself to the light of the moon, its true goal. Many of us are quite busy hitting our heads against the light globe.

Always start your goal-setting process by establishing your values. What is really important in your life? I suggest you start with health, family and relationships and the rest will follow. Even within these areas you will need to work out where you really need to start.

Align your small goals in the same direction as your medium goals and your big goals, and even more importantly, focus your big goals in the same direction as your values.

Then write your goals and make sure they are:

1. Precise;
2. Positive;
3. Present (for instance, write “I am...”);
4. Personal (they are yours);
5. Purpose-driven and consistent with your values;
6. Challenging;
7. Achievable;
8. Small to big (make sure you include some big goals);
9. Written simply (don’t complicate your goals by using complex or confusing language);
10. Measurable; and
11. Flexible (always make your goals so they are flexible, as there are many of life’s circumstances that are out of your control).

The **When** sets the timeline for achieving your goals. Without a deadline a goal can often be put aside as something more urgent takes over. Without a timeframe you don't have a goal, you have a dream. Dreams are wonderful, but to turn them into reality you must turn them into goals, and giving your dream a deadline is part of the process of actualising that dream. Setting a timeframe for a goal gives it a sense of urgency and a reason to take action now. We set timeframes for most other things we do, so why not for goals? Diaries are a simple way of setting timeframes and are constant reminders that you have deadlines to meet. The more specific and precise you are in your goal setting, the more you increase your chances of success.

In one study participants were told to write a report on how they intended to spend Christmas Eve and to submit it within 48 hours. Half were told to specify exactly when and where they intended to write the report. The other half had no deadline. This group handed in only a third of the reports compared to the deadline group where 75% were handed in.

Similarly, when a group of non-exercising college students were given information on how exercise would significantly reduce their risk of heart disease, participation increased from 29% to 39%. However, when this information was followed by a request for students to designate when and where they intended to exercise, the participation rate went up to 91%. A group of drug addicts going through rehabilitation were asked to commit to writing a short resume before 5 p.m. on a particular day. None of them wrote the resume. By contrast, of the second group who stated when and where they would write the resume, 80% of them handed in the resume.

The **How** includes all the steps you need to take to really achieve your goal. These steps are strategies, tactics or mini-goals. Write down at least ten steps you'll take to achieve your goal and keep adding to them. The benefit of establishing the steps you need to take to get to your bigger goals is that each time you achieve one of the smaller steps, a message is sent to your brain that you are successful. Brain research shows that the part of the brain that is associated with rewards, the anterior cingulate cortex, becomes more active when we get closer to our goals. As a result we feel better and this reinforces striving toward our goals.

The best analogy is when you train a pet. Let's say you want your dog to jump over a stick. You don't put the stick one metre in the air and say, "Jump!" You lay the stick on the ground and when the dog walks over it you say, "Well done!" and reward the dog with a little treat. Then you raise the stick a few centimetres and do it all again. The dog learns a little at a time that going over the stick brings a reward. As you take the stick higher, you eventually have your dog jumping over a stick above its own height, with little or no need for rewards other than pleasant, vocal reinforcement. While I'm using this analogy, I must say that it always amazes me when I see a dog playing and the owner getting angry because the dog will not come to them. The owner growls and scowls, threatens to smack it and the dog still doesn't come. In fact the dog is less likely to come because it knows if it does, it will be punished. The dog is being taught to disobey by negative reinforcement. Rather than discourage yourself for not achieving your desired outcomes, encourage yourself with positive rewards, and set for yourself realistic and achievable goals.

The **Why** is the reason you have to achieve this goal and is the real motivating force. To have the most powerful effect it is important to make the reasons that you want to achieve your goals consistent with your values and to make sure they are your own intrinsic reasons. List down as many reasons as possible. The more reasons and the more important they are to you, the more motivation you will have. Write down at least 10 reasons to start with that you want to achieve a specific goal. The why gives you purpose and drive, so keep adding to your list to keep adding to your drive.

The **Who** are the people, alive and passed, who can help you, motivate you and inspire you. I like autobiographies of truly great people like Gandhi and Einstein. But I also seek out positive people who are living. These are my mentors and friends who will help me in my journey. I don't associate with negative people. Similarly, I don't watch TV and I do not like the way that so many people idolise our media personalities. Why should they; what have they done to make this world a better place? Of course some do, and I admire those acts. Find really positive people in your life and leave behind the negative and superficial ones.

The **Where** is the positive location that you use to achieve your goals. It is a place that refreshes you, motivates and inspires you and reminds you of your values and goals. This might be your office at home or work, a little place outside in the garden or your favourite retreat. I have my home office full of books I love with an aspect looking out onto a small water feature in my small front garden on a quiet street. Ahhhhhh! Remember the research above? Whenever you commit a time to do something, also commit the place—the where.

Then ask, where is each goal taking you? Always fit your goals into a long-term vision.

### **Share your dreams**

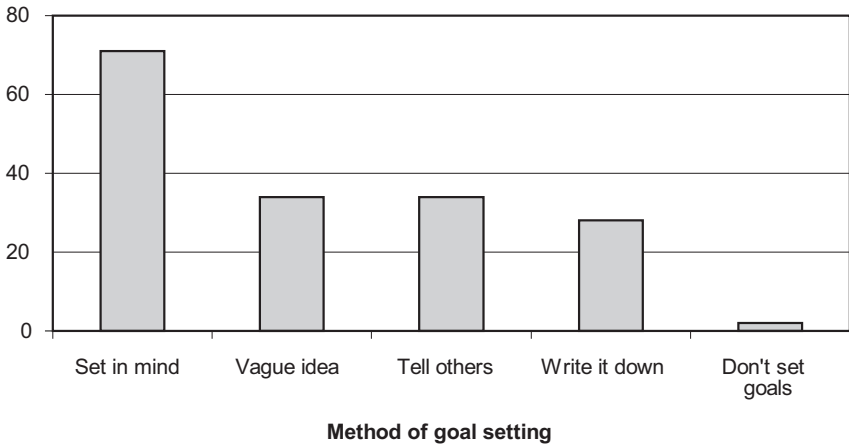
The more you tell people, the more likely you are to achieve your goal. My first book, focused on parents' and kids' health, I wrote in 10 weeks. I had a lot of the information already available and many bits already written in other places. But the reason I did it in 10 weeks was that I made a public commitment to a group of friends and we organised a seminar around that date for the release. Three to five hours very early every morning I wrote. Not only did I have a passion to do it but I also had a major commitment. Then I wrote down my goals.

### **Now write them down**

Now comes the real challenge, writing our goals down. It is easy to imagine our goals, even to talk about them but the real effort comes when we write them down. It's well established that when setting goals, writing them down dramatically increases the probability of realising them. The act of writing uses muscles and stimulates the release of chemicals in your body that cause thousands of extra connections in the brain to be formed. Writing stimulates different parts of your brain and every time you read what you've written, more neural pathways are formed, reinforcing the idea. If you repeatedly write something down, you'll keep reinforcing it. In fact, if you use colours and pictures and get a bit creative, the reinforcement is amplified, increasing your chances of achievement.

Despite the benefits of writing goals our research shows that just over 25% of people actually commit their goals to paper.

## When you set a goal do you usually:



Our research shows that many people spend huge quantities of time thinking about what they would like, at least at a superficial level, and very little time, if any, committing their desires to the printed word. A large percentage of our survey group had clear goals but only a very small percentage wrote them down. This day dreaming with lack of commitment was mirrored in the number of participants who actually attained their goals. Undoubtedly there is a reluctance to set our goals in writing. This lack of commitment uses up enormous amounts of energy to return little or no results. Writing, on the other hand, acts as a benchmark, a yardstick and continually reminds us of **What** it is and **Why** it is that we have committed to a goal.

Many people don't take this simple and early step. Overcoming this resistance is critical in the fulfilment of your goal. Interestingly, people will often go to incredible lengths to avoid putting their goal down on paper. They claim they can remember it anyway, or just thinking about it is enough for them. All our research indicates otherwise. Without the writing process there is a great risk that all your whats, whens, whys and hows will remain foggy and devoid of any clarity. The very process of writing down your goals solidifies your intention and commitment to having your goal become a reality. One of the simplest illustrations of this is the difference between a commitment written in a diary and one just verbalised. How many times have people made an arrangement to meet with you, but you find that they "forgot" or something else distracted

them and took priority. Sound familiar? The likelihood of them showing up is increased tenfold if these friends write their commitments in a diary.

The bottom line: writing your goals significantly improves your chance of achieving them. Evidence supports that your commitment to change by writing down your goals reinforces the behaviour changes necessary to realise your goals. Goals that are not written are little more than wishes.

Undoubtedly, your motivation and will to achieve your goals will fluctuate between white-hot desire and lukewarm apathy. With your goals written down, this matters less because the essence of what you want has been captured and continues to work for you. Once your goals are written, it's essential that you read and re-read your goals. Every time you see your goals book or, even better, see your goals posted on your mirror, it reminds you and deepens your commitment. The more times you see it and the more times you remind yourself, the more you are committed. It is a positive cycle of reinforcement.

The last word on goals: make them fun and pertinent. Start by developing your goals in areas that excite you and are fun. If you like reading, develop your goals around reading and you will find it will help set goals in many other areas of your life! Or if you have a penchant for a particular sport or hobby, set goals so that you integrate that interest area.

One young boy I was working with wanted to be a jockey, so the first goal we set was to be an excellent jockey. Out of that came the fact that it's a physically demanding job, so we needed to set some health goals. He needed a good diet so he'd have the necessary energy and stamina, and so on. Remember to start small and make it interesting.

## **Action**

Write down three goals: one short-term, one medium-term and one long-term goal.



## *Chapter 14*

# Language of the Mind

Language probably developed about 35,000 years ago and was the critical step for the development of our minds and everything about us. Language is an essential medium for all the activities we associate with the thinking mind, including conscious awareness and reflection, analytical and abstract reasoning, planning, anticipating and predicting the future, problem solving and skill learning. Words enable us to categorize objects and experiences as known or unknown, recognisable or unrecognisable, useful or irrelevant. In doing so, language controls our consciousness by filtering our world through a verbal screen.

Once consciousness emerged with full-blown verbal ability, the thinking mind was able to assert its dominance over the ancestral mind by engaging in an almost continuous internal mental monologue. Eastern traditions have often called this the “monkey mind.” The internal monologue not only makes us more conscious and more self-conscious, but it also alters consciousness by dulling our perceptions of the external world. We can become so preoccupied with our thoughts that we do not even hear what is being said to us, see what is in front of us or hear what is around us. We have all but forgotten how to be in the moment.

The thinking mind encourages us to think of ourselves as individuals and to separate us from everything else, to observe an experience rather than participate in it. Perhaps in this process of establishing this subject/object distinction, we came to perceive things in terms of their utility and purpose in relation to us.

One of the unique abilities of the thinking mind is to move forward in time mentally and foresee events that have not yet occurred. It has enabled us to anticipate and plan for our future needs by setting goals and to learn from the past. This cognitive time travel, however, comes at a price. Too frequently we don't just plan for the future but come to live in it. From our earliest awareness we're taught to think and believe that what counts will happen later on in life, when you grow up or when you have children, when you have your next

holiday, when you get a promotion or when you retire. We are trained that satisfaction will come at some time in the future and not to seek satisfaction in the present moment but to strive and expect the happiness to unfold at some future date. We therefore spend too much of our time missing the moment by living in the future.

Our ability to project ourselves forward and into the past has also created new problems. Rather than biological threats for the ancestral hunter-gatherer, we include all the threats that tomorrow will bring and yesterday's worries. We each have a mental monologue going on in our heads that evaluates who we are and what we do. For many of us, this monologue is often negative, criticising our actions and generally running us down. We all know this monologue. It's the voice that tells us how poor or bad we are and that what we're doing is stupid or wrong, or that we can't do that positive or challenging thing so we should stop fooling others and ourselves. It's particularly active when you are upset, annoyed or fatigued or when something in life goes wrong. If you can't see it yet, it is perhaps best recognised in the character Gollum in *Lord of the Rings*, when he was talking to himself and it seemed there were two of him. These are just two representations of his mind.

The thinking mind too easily spins out of control, creating exaggerated negative thoughts, pictures and scenarios. This was probably an evolutionary adaptation to help us avoid risks and keep us away from real physical dangers in our hunter-gatherer days. However, now the negative thoughts create negative emotions and stress. The stress in turn creates more negative emotions and the negative cycle is created. The thinking mind's mental chatter shifts continuously from past to the future, from fears to phobias, running through endless dramas and histories. The mental monologue creates noise that distracts us and prevents us from just being. It focuses on differences among us as well as separateness between the environment and us. Such mental confusion creates tunnel vision and triggers stress responses that can brew below the surface.

This monologue creates fears of the future: "What could go wrong and why?" It creates criticisms of the past: "What could you or should I have done but didn't?" It also exaggerates negative outcomes of the past. Our mental

monologue not only uses the terms “should have” and “could have” but also becomes obsessive and thinks in terms of “never” and “always.” It becomes catastrophic with concepts like “worst,” “terrible” and “horrible.” Over a period of time this type of thinking can leave a person feeling disempowered and quite devastated.

The negative beliefs about ourselves are only true because we choose to believe them. These include attitudes such as “I procrastinate,” “I am not assertive,” “I lack initiative,” and even “I am lazy.” Guilt is a major block to our personal and our professional productivity. Guilt creates immobilization over what should have or could have occurred *in the past*. It provides an excuse to not change, to avoid challenges and to cease attempting any form of self-improvement.

By contrast, worrying is focused on concerns of the future. Worrying is exhausting and, like guilt, it only *seems* easier than changing.

Our images of ourselves often create self-fulfilling prophecies in which our behaviour conforms to our self-image and our self-image then reinforces our behaviour. Our false beliefs become our truisms. Research has shown that what people believe is their state of health is one of the major predictors of living longer. Participants who rated their own health, independent of a medical assessment, as “poor” were three times more likely to die in the ensuing seven years than those who rated their health as “well.” Their perceptions became their reality. When you believe you are healthy, you take actions and set up a self-fulfilling process for that belief system.

We need to learn different methods of exerting control over our internal monologue. We can take charge of it and have it working for us rather than against us. We are essentially responsible for creating our own experiences of the world and how we interpret things around us, which in turn influence us and our thoughts and feelings. We need to separate out the cognitive junk, to rewrite the negative “software” and create a new set of unconscious attitudes. Once we learn to manage our thoughts and feelings, we learn to manage our lives.

Areas where changing this voice through cognitive restructuring can help include:

- Procrastination
- Depression
- Low self-esteem
- Jealousy
- Envy
- Anger
- Road rage
- Fear
- Panic
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Lack of motivation
- Laziness
- Excessive television watching
- Poor eating habits
- Poor sleeping habits
- ... and many more.

## **Cognitive restructuring**

One of the most effective ways of taking charge of your mental monologue is cognitive restructuring, in which the very first step is to identify your critical voice. Cognitive restructuring enables us to identify and step back from the negative feelings, rather than getting caught up in them. If we recognise our internal monologue, we can then challenge it and change it.

To identify the negative mental monologue, listen for negative messages and words such as:

- “Could have”
- “Should have”
- “Never”
- “Worst”
- “Terrible”
- “Always”

Get the picture? They're all the negative words tumbling around in our heads that degrade us and tell us that we are useless, hopeless, stupid and no good.

The monologue becomes *personal*, *permanent* and *pervasive*. It becomes personal because it is ours; we created it. Permanent refers to the continual, negative downward spiral that we create in our minds after a single negative event and relies on words like “always” and “never.” An issue is pervasive when it is generalised to everything around us to the point at which it can feel catastrophic.

Once you identify your negative monologue, set up a dialogue that deconstructs and counters the monologue, creating a more realistic and positive perspective. You can do this in your head, but it's much more powerful to write it down. Write the dialogue on a piece of paper. The best piece of paper is in your journal so that you can keep your notes all together. On the left-hand side, write down the negative messages. Then on the right-hand side write down all the reasons the messages are incorrect or inaccurate.

Begin to question your thoughts and your words. Ascertain their accuracy by using the questions below:

- Is it logical?
- Is it true? This will determine if it is really happening and if it is a current state. Ask yourself if the thought is really, really true. If not, list all the reasons it's not true and keep adding to the list.
- Get in touch with reality by asking yourself what you would say to your best friend if he undermined himself the way your inner critic undermines you. What would you say to him? Perhaps that's what you should be saying to yourself, rather than beating yourself around the head. So write it down. Become your own best friend.

What are the consequences of the negative thoughts? Continual catastrophising and increasing the three Ps. Put it into perspective by asking:

- How will I perceive this problem or issue in the future, in a year or two—will it be catastrophic or will it be insignificant?
- Has this, or a similar situation, happened in the past? What was the out come of that past experience? Was it so devastating and catastrophic,

did it really nearly kill me or destroy everything I had?

- What is really the worst thing that could happen in this situation?
- How important is this actual situation in my life?
- What *is* important in my life?
- Is there anything positive that I can find in this situation?
- What are some alternatives?
- Why could have it have happened?

This simple technique has proven to be extraordinarily powerful in changing people's way of thinking and their lives.

### **Externalisation of voices**

Another technique based on the same principles of cognitive reframing is to get someone else to play the role of your negative voice. Get him to provide you with the criticism and then argue out the same points identified above. But don't rehash the negative monologue; move on from it. One of the important aspects of these processes is getting the messages into the open. If they are left to recycle in the mind they take you further and further down.

Notice these techniques also use questions and change them from negative questions with negative answers to positive questions with positive answers.

### **Putting life into perspective**

An important part of many forms of positive cognitive therapy is putting our lives in perspective. We are the richest and best off of any previous generation of people yet we have more stress and mental problems than ever before. Whenever you want to put your life in perspective remember this little story. It is set in a small village...

A man loved his wife but found it hard living with the in-laws so he went to the wise man of the village and told him his troubles. The wise man asked, "Do you have chickens?" "Yes," replied the man. "Then bring these into your home," instructed the wise man. The villager did so but it did not improve the problem so he went back to the wise man. So the wise man asked him, "Do you have dogs?" and he replied "Yes." "Then bring them into the house," said

the wise man, so the man went away and did as he was instructed, but the problem did not improve so he went back to the wise man, who then asked, “Do you have cows?” “Yes,” said the man. The wise man instructed, “Well bring those into your home,” so the man went away and brought the cows into his home. But the problem still did not improve so a week or so later, frustrated and with a very full house, he went back to the wise man and said, “I now have my in-laws in the house, chickens all over the place, all the dogs and the cows and the situation is intolerable. Your suggestions have not improved my situation but rather made them worse. So what should I do?” To which the wise man replied, “Take all the chickens, dogs and cows and put them outside and come and see me in a week.”

One week later the man returned to the wise man who asked him how the situation was and he replied, “Much better, thanks!”

Now is the time to change your perspective and learn to appreciate everything you have. You are not the same person you were when you developed the patterns that now control you. Remember it is just your conditioning.

### **Action**

Listen for any negative voices, including some of the negative conditioning you wrote down earlier that is holding you back. Restructure them based on the information above. Write down the negative messages on the left and now write down, based on what you read above, why they are incorrect.

Negative message

Why it is incorrect

## NOTES

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## Chapter 15

### The Importance of Words

To change the way you think, change your language, your words, metaphors and stories. Your subconscious mind cannot tell the difference between fact and fiction, it just does what it is told. If it hears the words “useless” and “no good” or that you “always procrastinate” or “can’t do anything right” then it fulfils those messages. The mind then continually works on recycling the messages to make them a reality.

Words are very powerful messages and are the steering wheel of the modern mind, so make sure that you are in control of the steering wheel. The words you use to describe yourself, people, circumstances and events around you will determine how positive or negative your focus is.

Metaphors are one way we describe the world around us. These expressions, just like words and stories, are what humans relied upon for tens of thousands of years before writing was developed. The majority of the Western world could not read 100 years ago and 200 years ago only an elite few could read. Until the last century, our understanding of the world was based on stories, metaphors and the spoken word. Another example of the importance of words is that language, the words, come naturally while writing does not.

A common challenging situation I come across is the person who uses the right words in his goals, affirmations and visualisations but confuses his mind by using negative words and metaphors in his day-to-day language. He might argue that he is a positive person yet seems to be stuck in a rut. There are many examples of this, just listen for the words.

Change the metaphors to become positive messages. Explore the metaphor from different angles. We use negative metaphors for health: *fighting* infection, *beating* a disease. Make this into a positive message: staying healthy, living vibrantly, boosting your immune system. Use the statements “life is a journey” or “the dance of life” rather than “life is a struggle.”

Some examples of toxic metaphors in our lives include:

The “dragon lady” at home

The “old man” or “old woman,” referring to our partners in life

“Life is a battle”

“No pain, no gain”

“Nothing worth having comes easily”

Even negative or condescending humour—that is, humour at an individual’s expense—creates a negative message that sinks into the minds of the speaker and his or her audience (even if the “audience” is the family at the dinner table or co-workers around the water cooler).

We create generalisations to explain the things around us. However, our generalisations can also lead to biases and prejudices. Generalisations can be very powerful or very negative. Change the way you talk about something, you’re able to change the way you think about something, and by changing the way you think about something, you’re able to change the way you act on something.

Create congruence in your life. When your inner voice, spoken words and body language are all positive and heading forward, you will experience that congruence, also called “integrity” based on the term “integrate.” *What* and *whom* you integrate in your life is up to you, so make the best possible choices.

## *Chapter 16*

### The Power of Rewards

Rewards can become a powerful tool for changing your conditioning. We know from our research that past performance will influence the initial goals people set for themselves and will serve as a reference for future behaviour. Each positive experience sets up chemical, electrical and physical patterns in your brain, making it more likely that the pattern will be repeated. For a learnt association to become motivational, a person needs the impetus of the pleasure they obtained in the past to be convinced that by following similar actions they'll have more positive experiences.

So begin to develop positive experiences by providing yourself positive rewards. They need to be something you would like, but not anything so significant that the reward outweighs the experience itself. Build rewards into your life so when you achieve that goal or do something successfully, you have some extra positive strokes. What are your favourite healthy treats, foods, games, places, people, movies and activities? Some of my rewards are very simple but bring me great pleasure. Sitting down and having a quiet pot of tea in the peacefulness of the early morning while listening to the birds sing. Taking the time to stop my busyness and appreciate how good life is. Walking to the beach for a stretch and a swim, seeing sunset or sunrise, being with positive friends, reading a new book or even writing down my ideas for the next book I want to create. Rewards can be varied and needn't cost anything!

Rewards and incentives must be positively related to performance. By creating incentives you can influence your level of commitment. However, the reward system needs to be used judiciously. It's important not to set an expectation of reward every time the same behaviour is completed. Use rewards often enough in the beginning of your process of change to ensure the behaviour is repeated and associated with the reward. As behaviour progresses, greater behavioural change should be required to achieve the same rewards.

Rewards and incentives are just a form of positive conditioning. In what's called "classical conditioning," a person's action is directly associated with positive or negative experiences. Negative conditioning is valuable when you

can relate an event to some negative sensations and experiences to prompt positive choices and behaviour. For example, relating the early effects of smoking to coughing, feeling nauseated and experiencing headaches, or relating smoking with medium-term or long-term results, such as addiction, lung damage, heart attack, stroke or cancer. Not to mention the complete lack of freedom that results from any addiction.

“Operant conditioning” is when a person receives either rewards or punishment for his behaviour from another person. If he receives a reward, he is likely to repeat that behaviour. An example is the peer support and approval we might get in the office or the punishment inflicted in the form of rejection, isolation and derision. Remember the story of training the dog by using rewards and not training it by using abuse. The same happens with humans; if you yell at or abuse people they will only learn not to associate and not to listen to you. Create rewards for work well done. Sometimes just a pat on the back or a little note is what a person wants and needs.

Set up the rewards in your life, write them down and each time you succeed, reward yourself. Also share the ideas about what you like as rewards with other people. An acquaintance of mine once asked his daughter what some of the little things (rewards) were that she wanted to experience in life. His child listed being driven in a limousine. So when she succeeded at school the parents secretly organised a limo. This small but significant act became a positive story for the rest of her life, revolving around her success at study.

## **Action**

Make a list of the rewards you would like, both big and small. Then share them with your best friend or partner.

Each time you succeed make sure you reward yourself.

Find out what your best friend or partner considers a reward.

Find out what people with whom you work would value as rewards. You might be surprised and this knowledge may come in handy one day.

## NOTES

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## *Chapter 17*

### Finding the Positive in Your Life

There are many things around us that influence the way we feel and ultimately influence our behaviour—it may be something on television, something someone has said, even the way in which something is said or just “something in the air.” Identify the positive things in your life and put more time into them or add new things you enjoy to the list. Identify the negative things in your life and reduce these or the amount of time and effort put into them.

Media has a powerful effect on all of us and can be incredibly negative. Seeing violence on the news and in the movies reinforces negative states of mind. Our ancestral mind was not designed to see destruction and devastation every night of the week. Most of the media, the news and the current affairs programs work on approximately one positive program to nine negative ones because they know that negative stories sell. This daily barrage influences our thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Even worse, imagine the powerful impact such reporting has on the developing minds of our children.

For weeks after 9/11, adults and kids walked around in a zombie-like way, not because of the gravity of the situation—thousands of people die every day in equally ghastly or even worse situations. What made 9/11 worse was that the media repeated the scenes over and over and over again, hundreds of times and each time our spirits sank a little lower. Watching this type of coverage, the thinking mind exposes us to a constant bombardment of more negative news.

The more negative things we bring into our lives, the more negative we feel and the less control we have. In a study on the link between mood and perception, people were shown ambiguous drawings. Their mood would determine whether they would consider the drawing to be happy or sad. The pictures did not change, but people’s interpretations did. When they were feeling good they saw the pictures more positively and would identify more with the people they interpreted as being positive. When shown the same faces, children who had been abused reported more faces showing anger or fear compared to children who hadn’t been abused.

In another study, in which adults were asked to recall their childhood memories after watching videos, sad videos prompted them to recall more sad memories. Happy videos caused them to recall happier times. Similarly, research on attitudes has shown that if people focus on negative memories or negative words, or phrases or facial expressions that make them frown, they are more likely to continue feeling negative. Put simply, by focusing on negative images and words such as “I can’t,” “I don’t,” and “I won’t,” you become more negative. The opposite is also true and by using positive words and expressions you can lift yourself into a positive frame of mind.

One study asked people to read aloud many sentences containing words that cause the lips to purse together with the sound “oo,” which mimics a frowning facial expression. These people registered greater dislike for what they read compared to people who read similar stories but without the scowling facial expressions. Our own facial expressions can influence how we feel and, in turn, influence our perceptions. So smile! It’s good for you!

Find positive people, places, programs and pictures and surround yourself with them rather than the negative images on which our society seems to thrive. Illness past the age of 70 is correlated with thoughts individuals had during their younger years. More illness is associated with negative thoughts and better health with positive thoughts.

## **Becoming more positive**

You can change your conditioning through developing a positive attitude. This doesn’t mean you have to become a super-optimist; you just need to recognise and chip away at self-limiting conditioning. The benefits of being optimistic include:

- Better health
- Higher productivity
- A willingness to meet new challenges and take risks
- Better career
- Longer life



## **Action**

Make lists of positive:

People:

Places:

Books:

Movies:

Music:

Look out for and identify things that help make you feel positive. Surround yourself with them.

## NOTES

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## *Chapter 18*

### Make Life a Journey

The metaphor for making life a journey is appropriate. When I was younger I spent four years hitchhiking around the world, going to new places and seeing and learning new things. As a result I learnt there are three parts to appreciating travel. The first is the anticipation, the excitement and the preparation. The second is the actual travel. While it was great it also had its tough times like getting kicked off the train and stuck at the French border at 1 a.m. on a cold night because I did not have the proper visa. It was a cold sleep in the park that night. And then there is the third stage, looking back over the trip and reminiscing, “Wasn’t it great? They were such great experiences.”

You can’t change the past but you can change your attitude toward it. How you see the past has already been filtered through your emotional brain so you tend to remember the feelings associated with the past. However, we have a choice to see some positive and good in everything and to learn from even the most negative experiences, despite how tragic they were. Focusing on negative feelings will not make you feel any better but will make you feel worse. Focusing on some positive aspect does not ignore the past but it helps you move on in a positive direction.

Making life a journey is about seeking the positive and dispelling the negative in your life—appreciating things, not depreciating them; asking what can you learn from an experience, even if it was a major negative incident. A friend of mine recently received a letter from someone she was fond of who was highly critical and angry toward her. Instead of saying “I don’t deserve that” and getting really angry and sending off another angry letter she said, “Some of this may be true...” and asked herself, “So what can I learn?” Within a couple of hours of receiving the letter it became something that helped shape this person for the better rather than something that could have devastated her.

Through the pain of our experiences we have a choice to find the lesson, the positive side to it.

Yes I know there are some devastating events that affect us all. But you have a choice. Even if a loved one has passed away ask what would they want you to

do. I found a lot of strength in changing my life to make it more positive to do the things my best friend wanted me to do, but I was too busy to do. I still have a lot of pain but I also have pleasure from my actions borne out of a tragedy.

For many people the brain remembers the failures but not the successes. We need to learn from the failures without berating ourselves. You can develop a mastery response or a helpless response. If you are really upset with your situation, go to any ward of a children's hospital. This will put things in perspective. Take time to appreciate what you have today because many others in the world do not have it and you may not have it tomorrow.

### **Learn from your failures**

We can learn from our failures. The smart person learns from her successes and failures. In success you learn what to do. In failure you learn what not to do. Failure is feedback on precisely how you can improve; it is a source of information for future efforts and is absolutely essential for learning. It is a message to try another way. It is only when you accept failure that you can succeed. Use it as a guide. Failures enable us to readjust and get back on track.

Alexander Graham Bell founded the Bell Telephone Company when Western Union Telegraph rejected an offer to buy his patent. Remember that behind every great success are numerous failures.

### **Action**

Reflect back on some of the issues in your life and make them into lessons for you to become a better and more effective person. Lesson for the day: every day there are lessons to be learnt.

## Chapter 19

# Modelling

Modelling can be a very powerful tool for changing negative behaviours. The best example of this is how our actions as a parent are crucial contributors to our children's success. The power of other role models such as sports stars, pop stars, actors and peers cannot be underestimated, either. The ancient reptilian part of our brain is the master of modelling. This part of the brain shows us how to learn by observing someone else perform a task. Whether learning to walk or to perform complicated mathematical procedures, modelling saves huge amounts of energy and time if we have the right model. We learn most of our social habits through modelling, too, as well as our biases and prejudices.

Find positive models in your areas of interest and talk about why these people are positive. Get away from the media indoctrination of just admiring someone for his looks, money or career. Models and mentors should motivate and inspire you for what they have done and not what they are made out to be by the media or what they have in material possessions. Don't just follow what the majority are doing as it is unlikely to be the best path. Instead, model the successful people, the real leaders in our society. Don't rely on the so-called experts either, as history has shown that they also follow the majority.

Seek people who really make a significant contribution to this planet, not people who deliberately or inadvertently contribute to problems. Although I no longer ride horses, one of my mentors is Monty Roberts, the "horse whisperer." I admire the way he works with horses and other animals, with non-violent, gentle techniques. Through his deep love of horses and by being authentically himself, he has become incredibly successful. He is the Gandhi of the horse world.

I have many models and mentors—some in the area of health and wellbeing and others in the area of learning and still others in other areas. Each is a model for a particular area of my life.

As I mentioned earlier, I get a lot of joy reading biographies of great people like Einstein, Shakespeare, Gandhi, da Vinci and others. They are some of my role models.

Role models I have in the speaking world are people like Deepak Chopra, Wayne Dyer and Anthony Robbins. Each has characteristics that I admire and model and one of my professional goals is to be on stage with each of them. Two important models for me are David Suzuki and David Bellamy, who are continually teaching people to look after the planet.

Teachers are very important role models for us as we grow up and can sometimes influence us for our whole lives. The principal of my primary school was a man called Jack Ware. I think of him more now than I did at any time since I left primary school. His influence on me has been huge, but I only realise that now.

## Chapter 20

# Visualisation is Powerful

Visualisation is the process of actively making pictures in your mind to create the outcome you desire. Visualisation and mental imagery are like mental movies. At a very simplistic level you may close your eyes and imagine your home, or the face of a particular friend. This is how we use it every day in so many ways—in fact in everything we do. Prayer is a form of mental imagery. The use of visual imagery can also be used in a very positive way to generate a picture of what you want in your life. It might seem hard at first but the more you practise visualisation, the easier it becomes. You can use visualisation to create strong, positive mental images, which in turn reinforce a positive attitude.

Visualisation works by strengthening the mental pathways involved in taking a certain action and the body's ability to perform that action. It is a form of mental rehearsal. A person who is visualising can actually see himself completing specific actions. These actions can be improved upon until they become the best possible actions, therefore improving the skill of the individual. Create the perfect mental picture for the task that you want to achieve. Continue to refine the picture until you get to your destination.

Whenever we want to do anything, the areas of our brain for planning and movement are involved, followed by activation of the motor areas that carry out the action. The brain prepares the body milliseconds before it is about to begin an action. It formulates a motor program based on movements in the frontal and prefrontal cortex. Then onto the motor cortex where the movements are carried out. As you visualise, you can create the same process.

Back in 1931 an eminent scientist, Edmund Jacobson, observed electrical activity in muscles even when people were only *thinking* of using those muscles. There is now increasing evidence that visual areas of the brain are selectively activated during visual imagery and flow through to the parts of the body being visualised.

Research has demonstrated that the brain has similar activity in the cortex during both imagery and actual motor performance. It seems the brain is

stimulated in much the same way by actual performance and virtual or visualised performance. It follows that the more you visualise a situation, the more real it will feel to you and this in turn will reinforce your belief. In one study brain scanning of people watching certain activities showed neuronal activity in the same areas as if they were actually doing the activities, suggesting that the brain is already priming itself for the activities. Professional musicians have an increased activity of the prefrontal cortex while practicing music. This activity pattern also occurs while musicians are visualising themselves playing a concerto or while listening to music without any physical movement at all.

More than 100 studies have shown the benefits of visualisation as an effective performance enhancing technique. In one study, between 72% and 97% of elite track and field athletes used imagery to improve performance, while in some other sports it was used by 100% of athletes. Other studies have shown that professional sports players make significantly greater use of imagery, focusing, relaxation and other mental skills than novices. So why not do it the way the champions do it? Babe Ruth, the baseball player, often insisted on practicing his game mentally rather than sweating it out on the field with the rest of his team, much to the frustration of his coach. Time and time again, Babe hit the home runs for which he became famous, proving that his visualisations were integral to his success. The famous psychiatrist Milton Erickson instructed his subconscious mind to work out an editorial while he slept. He woke in the morning to find the editorial already written on the typewriter.

In one study, basketballers were separated into three groups. One group practised free throws, the second group used only mental visualisation with no physical practise, and the third group had the practise time off altogether. Not surprisingly, the third group got worse. However, the physical training group and the visualisation group improved equally. Imagine the benefit if you did both the mental and physical training.

In a study of 30-year-old adults who spent 15 minutes a day visualising the exercise of their little finger, they were able to increase finger strength by 35%. Similarly they were able to improve the muscle strength of their elbows by 13% through the same activity. In a similar experiment, 10 volunteers between ages 20 and 35 visualised flexing one of their biceps as hard as they



were able to. These volunteers showed a 13.5% increase in muscle strength after a few weeks and maintained that gain for three months after training had concluded. In a study at Manchester University, participants were separated into four groups. The first watched a video of themselves and imagined their own excellent performance. The second group listened to an audiotape of themselves playing golf, including the sound of their putts being holed. The third group read a manuscript of their movements, thoughts and feelings while mentally making a putt. The fourth group read a biography of Jack Nicklaus for 10 minutes each day. The results showed that reading about Jack Nicklaus increased participants' performance by 18%; reading a script while mentally making a putt increased performance by 30%; listening to a tape of holing putts: 47%; watching a video and visualising: 57%. In a study of 40 golfers, mental imagery increased golfing performance significantly. They holed more putts and when they missed, they missed by smaller margins compared to before mental training. Forget the golf practise and start the mental practise.

Put simplistically, the more you visualise the more you practise. To become proficient at something you need to practise; to become a “genius” in a particular area you need to practise perfectly for a minimum of 10 years. Every time you practise a skill the pattern becomes more entrenched in your mind, creating more neuronal pathways that support that pattern. Research has shown that, at a certain stage more of the brain activity for this pattern moves to the prefrontal cortex, literally short-circuiting the rest of the brain. It enables the person to perform the task a few milliseconds more quickly until the task literally becomes second nature. The only difference between the best in the world at something and the second-best are a few milliseconds. Whether it is a mathematical or basketball “genius,” the more milliseconds they save in the billions of tasks that take place in the brain, the quicker and better they perform.

Research has also shown that the mental rehearsal of planning and organising leads to significant increases in the actual time and effort people put into planning, resulting in greater success.

Once you have harnessed the power of visualisation, you can use it for almost anything. The more you use it, the more powerfully you'll imprint the desired

outcome in your mind and the more likely you are to actually achieve what you want. This of course goes hand in hand with actual preparation for the activity. Don't expect to pass an exam if you don't study well. Using visualisation in preparing for exams helps with planning and studying and will also reduce stress levels.

I suggest my students use positive images before sitting exams, giving presentations or playing sport. Visualisation can be used to prepare for any situation where you may come under extra pressure or need a positive outcome. Positive images can also help shy people in social situations. The first part of the visualisation is to create a positive picture of the success of an event, such as imagining the applause of the audience after your presentation, then people coming up to you and shaking your hand and saying, "Congratulations, that was excellent." The second part is to mentally rehearse the event in your mind. See yourself walking to the front of the room with a confident smile and body language, taking the centre stage, saying "Thank you" and giving your presentation. It is best to run through the major points of the presentation in your mind. It should only take a few minutes the first time and then when you have done it several times, it will become easier. The more you rehearse, the more you'll reinforce your ability to achieve the results you want.

I teach my students to imagine coming out of an exam with big smiles on their faces, using positive body language and yelling "Yes!" to symbolise their success. I encourage them to imagine the whole situation from the beginning—walking into the exam room straight-backed, positive, with smiles on their faces. The smile is very important. Then sitting down at the desk, shoulders back, taking a deep breath and beginning to write. I also get them to go through the mental imagery of seeing themselves studying for the exams.

Outside of my research, I work with top executives and athletes, once they have written their goals, to visualise the outcomes of their goals. The difference is amazing and the results begin to occur within days. Not only can visualisation be used for almost any purpose—sporting activities, business activities, relationships, lifestyle changes—but also it can be used anywhere. Mental rehearsals can identify problems and solve them ahead of time. Mental rehearsal helps you see opportunities by running through different scenarios in your mind before they occur.

## How to visualise

Make the situation as vivid as possible in your mind. Be specific when you imagine the activity and use colour and as many senses as possible—smell, touch, sound. The more real your visualisation, the greater the stimulation of your brain. The more you enhance a situation in your mind, the more powerful it becomes. Powerful imagery will help propel you to where you want to go.

## Setting the scene

Whenever you use any of these techniques set the background for maximum effect. I always try to relax, listen to some classical music and take a couple of deep breaths. This helps prepare your mind. Before writing this, I did some breathing exercises, meditated a little and I have some Mozart playing in the background now.

Visualisation is done by closing your eyes and concentrating on the point between your eyebrows directly above the nose. This is the prefrontal cortex area and is also known as the third eye, sixth chakra or Christ consciousness. What is interesting about this point is that it has been used for thousands of years for meditation and prayer, before humans even knew what the prefrontal cortex was.

Build some active processes into your visualisations. For example, if you want to get rid of some old emotions don't just see the emotions getting smaller and smaller in your mind but go through the actions of making them smaller or throwing them away with your hands so that you engage your body in the action.

Engage all your senses. Visualise the touching, smelling, hearing and tasting as well as the seeing. The more senses you engage the more of the mind you tap into. Create visualisations by using all of your senses. If you're creating a picture of success, feel the success. Napoleon Hill wrote in his classic *Think and Grow Rich* "feel the feeling of success." Use all your senses as you imagine how it feels to achieve your visualisation.

## Breaking bad habits

Visualisation can also be used by creating a strong negative association in your mind with a behaviour you want to eliminate. If you are trying to give

up junk foods, you can associate them with being nauseated, vomiting and having stomach cramps. If you can, make the picture so vivid that it creates a real sensation and the sheer thought of eating that food is enough to turn your stomach. Similarly, you can associate some foods with positive sensations and feel good about eating those foods, even without actually eating them. Do this with healthy, nutritious foods.

## **Affirmations**

I am not convinced that affirmations on their own work. I have not been able to find any scientific literature on their success although I see them in almost every self-help book. However, combined with other techniques such as setting goals and visualisation I am sure they can become a part of your success tool kit. If you use affirmations, do more than just saying the sentence or paragraph that you want to affirm. Commit to it. Stand in front of a mirror and speak with conviction and commitment. Engage your senses. Sing the affirmation, dance to it, draw it, touch it and smell it. Saturate yourself with the affirmation. Then repeat the affirmation hundreds of times each day.

Create active affirmations. Build the affirmation into actions leading forward by linking it in with each action you take. For example, when you are taking some herbs or supplements say the affirmations and visualise the benefit during the action of taking the herbs. This brings into play more of your senses and muscles and creates more neurological pathways that support your affirmation.

I regularly affirm many aspects of my life and build the process into my visualisation and goals. One area I have developed recently in my life is about my books. My affirmation is: “My books go out to inspire, motivate and heal. They are international bestsellers and sell tens of thousands of copies of each around Australia each year. I am divinely compensated.” I then take lots of actions based on the goals I have set related to my books and constantly work toward my goals with the affirmation as a basis.

We know a lot more than we think we do and have vast untapped reservoirs of ability. Imagery can create the pictures from which the subconscious mind will take guidance.

## *Chapter 21*

# Meditation

Meditation is my most favourite tool to help me deal with the ups and downs of life, no matter where I am because it is about learning to control the mind and not allowing it to control you. Meditation has been practised by most cultures for thousands of years. However, the first Western study was not until the 1960s at Harvard Medical School. Today, many doctors advise their patients to meditate in order to reduce stress or lower blood pressure and to help manage other health problems. Research has shown the benefits of meditation in reversing the effects of cardiovascular disease and ageing. From what I can glean from the scientific literature, meditation adds about five years to your “youth span.”

In case you're thinking, “That's not for me,” please know that it can help so many chronic health conditions. Meditation shows benefits for many conditions including: anxiety disorders, panic attacks, headaches, back pain, arthritis, cancer pain, other chronic pain conditions, gastro-intestinal problems such as irritable bowel syndrome, hypertension, angina and heart disease, menopausal hot flashes, premenstrual syndrome, infertility, and nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy. It has also been used to stabilise blood sugar levels in diabetics and reduce their recovery time after surgery, reduce the length of labour and discomfort during childbirth, strengthen the immune system to reduce upper respiratory infections and help cancer and HIV patients.

Meditation has been demonstrated to decelerate the busy neural activity in the frontal cortex. This probably exerts its therapeutic effects in part by quieting the emotional activity in the frontal lobes. During meditation, the alpha brain-wave activity typically rises during the first few minutes followed by increases in theta levels. It appears that the level of brainwave change is also associated with the length of time subjects have practised meditation. Theta is the key brain wave that changes during meditation and increases with the number of weeks practised.

Research shows meditation reduces the level of the stress hormones adrenaline

and cortisol. Elevated cortisol is closely linked with cardiovascular disease as well as other forms of chronic illness. In a study, people who meditated had decreased cortisol (the major stress hormone) during and between meditating. These levels remained lower even after meditation compared to people who did not meditate. Research shows that increasing meditation increases the activity of the left prefrontal cortex. Depressed, stressed or angry people tend to have greater activity on the right side, whereas the left prefrontal cortex is associated with happiness and relaxation. These studies have shown that people who meditate also produce more melatonin, the body's main sleep chemical, than people who do not meditate. Related to this is a study of insomniacs in which 75% were able to sleep after regularly practicing meditation. Another byproduct of anxiety and tension is a rise in the level of lactate in the blood. Meditation decreases the level of lactate in the blood, bringing on a feeling of calm.

Other studies have shown that DHEA (Dehydroepiandrosterone, also known as the “youth hormone”) is much higher in people who meditate. People who meditate regularly have average DHEA levels of people ten years younger than they are! Various studies have shown that those people meditating for more than five years had an average biological age that was 12 years lower than their chronological age.

Meditation also reduces activity in the nervous system. It stimulates the parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system; as a result the area of the system responsible for calm energy becomes dominant. When the body runs on calm energy it doesn't tire as quickly. When the parasympathetic nervous system is stimulated, a person is able to think more clearly and perform at a comfortable level for longer periods of time. Taking deep breaths and smiling also stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system.

The major benefits of stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system include:

- Improved thinking, clarity of mind, creativity and memory;
- Reduced cardiovascular disease;
- Improved sleep;
- Increased sense of relaxation;

- Reduced pain and reduced healing time;
- Reduced stress and anxiety;
- Enhanced psychological wellbeing;
- Enhanced self control, confidence and self esteem; and
- A longer life.

There are also many potential social benefits of meditation. In the 1990s, Professor John S. Hagelin brought 4,000 TM practitioners to Washington, D.C. He had designed an experiment to test the effects that mass meditation would have on homicide, rape and assault (HRA) crimes in the city district. The idea of the experiment was to reduce crime through reducing social stress, as it is a fact that 44% of Americans suffer from stress-related health problems. Meditation was conducted for fifteen to twenty minutes in the morning and again in the evening. The experiment worked on the theory of a collective consciousness in the community, so theoretically there would be a drop in communal stress also. During the course of the experiment HRA crimes dropped by up to 24.6% and overall violent crime rates dropped by 15.6%. It was estimated that if this experiment were continued for the long term, HRA crimes would be reduced by 48%.

Premeditated crime, such as robbery, was not reduced during the experiment, but unpremeditated, violent crime was reduced in proportion to the number of people meditating. This study was very thorough and built upon more than 100 previous studies. It's amazing to think we could reduce violent crime if more people meditated. The social benefits would be enormous, not to mention huge savings of taxpayer money. On this topic there are many cases now where meditation is used in prisons and has a dramatic impact on reducing violent and aggressive behaviour of prisoners.

### **Methods of meditation**

Probably most confusing about meditation are the different styles and the claims by some schools that their meditation is the only way (which sounds a bit too much like promoting a religion). Meditation can come in many forms. For example, the connection to nature (looking out on trees) by hospital patients can be considered a form of meditation. My perspective is that there are many forms of meditation and each has some benefit.

For those who have never meditated here's a very simple way to begin. Find a comfortable position, but not so comfortable that you go to sleep. Take a couple of deep breaths then slowly count backward from 50 to one. Slowly, concentrating on your breathing, start with 50; take another slow deep breath, 49; and another slow deep breath and so on. Continue counting, breathing slowly and deeply all the way down to one. Keep focused on your breath. If you get distracted, don't be flustered, just take your time and start where you left off. This technique is a simple but effective way of reducing the busyness of your mind.

Prayer is probably the best-known form of meditation. Every culture has adopted some type of meditation to suit its needs and desires. For example prayer is usually used to ask for help and guidance, whereas mindfulness meditation is used to release unwanted emotions and focus on the inner light.

The common link between all forms of meditation is the purpose of quieting one's mind. The idea is not to remove stimuli but to focus concentration upon one healing element. When the mind is at ease and filled with peace and tranquillity it cannot be stressed, worried or depressed and therefore can become refreshed and rejuvenated. A few good ways to start include:

- Meditate every day, beginning by meditating for just 10 minutes;
- Go to a meditation class;
- Borrow a book on meditation from your local library;
- Listen to a meditation tape or CD; and
- For those more spiritually inclined, visit a self-realisation centre.



## *Chapter 22*

# Increasing Your Fun Quotient: Laughter and Humour

“A clown is like an aspirin, only he works twice as fast.” ~ Groucho Marx

“A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor’s book.” ~Irish Proverb

Laughter really is the best medicine. Humour and laughter are integral to the social, physiological and biochemical health of all humans. Humour is associated not only with good physical health, but also with superior psychological and social adjustment. The benefits of humour include:

Stress relief

Pain relief

Stimulation of the immune system

Coping emotionally

Thinking creatively

Problem solving

Improved social interaction

Graceful ageing

Increased productivity

Physical fitness

Control of diabetes

Reduced risk of heart attack and stroke (but don’t laugh too hard!)

If the benefits of laughter could be bottled, they would sell for millions of dollars. Laughter has dramatic effects on decreasing stress and improving a sense of wellbeing. And interestingly enough, your display of happiness benefits the people around you. Even a big, fake smile can make you feel better because it will still cause chemicals associated with feeling good to flow through your bloodstream and nervous system. Laughter breaks the ice, bonds us, generates good will and dampens hostility and aggression. Humorous events provide important bonding experiences between people in close relationships.

Laughter as a relief from tension results when people laugh after a mentally or physically tense time has been relieved; the degree of this tension determines the “depth” of the laughter. When a situation that causes tension turns out to be harmless or mildly amusing, laughter accompanied by a switch from the sympathetic nerves to parasympathetic nerves of the autonomic nervous system occurs. This is important for good health and as a social lubricant, lifting spirits and encouraging smooth communication and cordial relations. Because humour also improves psychological wellbeing by allowing the release of emotional tension, humour helps us cope with depression and anxiety.

A major biochemical effect that results from laughter is a reduction of concentrations of dopamine, adrenaline and cortisol associated with stress response. This represents a reversal of the classic physiological changes that occur during stress. Laughter may also release endorphins, which may help reduce pain. One study found that laughter reduces anxiety and lifts mood, and that its effects are comparable to or possibly stronger than a bout of exercise of similar duration. Research at Stanford University demonstrated that the simple act of smiling and laughing provides some of the same benefits as exercise. Perhaps we can liken it to a form of internal jogging. Laughter is a motor reflex that requires the coordinated movement of 15 facial muscles and a change in the normal breathing pattern. Laughter increases blood supply just enough to provide our tissues with increased oxygen. During laughter, muscles in the head, neck, chest and pelvis tense and relax in a way that reduces stress, keeping the muscles limber and allowing them to relax more readily. That doesn’t mean you can stop exercising, just add laughter to your exercise regime.

Humour also increases people’s tolerance for higher levels of physical discomfort. In his book *Anatomy of an Illness*, Norman Cousins wrote about having been diagnosed with a debilitating and progressive disease that had made him bedridden with pain and stiffness. Once the specialists said there was nothing that could be done for him, Cousins decided to take things into his own hands. He rented a hotel room where he watched funny programs including “Candid Camera” and the “Marx Brothers.” He found that a good belly laugh gave him up to four hours of pain relief. Later, he supplemented this approach with vitamin C and virtually cured the disease. He was working within a few weeks

of beginning his unorthodox treatments. Millions of people have read his book and applied his technique. In a survey of 53 chronic cancer patients testing self-initiation intervention, they rated laughter as the most effective therapy. The use of humour directly as a health intervention is becoming common practise in hospitals, where clowns use visual and verbal humour to help in the healing process.

Laughter and humour also have major effects on the immune system. In one study, people with a poor sense of humour were found to have a greater suppression of immune function in response to stress. Laughter stimulates the release of certain neurotransmitters called catecholamines, which raise alertness and mental functioning. It increases the concentration of antibodies in the bloodstream, protecting the body and making it more resistant to infection and disease. A study was conducted involving 52 male subjects watching a 60-minute humorous video. The activity of natural killer cells, which assist in immune surveillance and cancer prevention, was found to be elevated in the subjects for at least 12 hours after watching the video. Other studies have found many other cancer-fighting components of the immune system stimulated after bouts of laughter.

One study found blood sugar levels to be lower in both those affected by type 2 diabetes and those without the disease when exposed to a 40-minute comedy show. This study correlates with a similar study in Japan, which observed significant drops in blood sugar levels in diabetics on days when they laughed.

In the business world, the main benefits of humour include increasing motivation, enabling learning and problem solving and promoting personal survival. Humour is associated with the limbic system, which functions in motivation and emotional behaviours in humans. Humour is also essential to health and wellbeing as well as productivity and achieving outcomes in a business environment. It does this through stress relief, relationship building, and enhanced managerial communication and effectiveness. Humour and laughter also produce beneficial biochemical changes in the central nervous system

Humour has been associated with improved ageing through improved physical, mental and social health. So go out and laugh.

## **Action**

Buy a joke book and learn a few jokes a night. Then share it with your friends. Even badly told jokes can be funny.

Watch some funny movies. I love reruns of “Candid Camera” and “The Big Bang Theory.” Make time to have fun and muck around, to play. Fun is underrated. It’s the source of much of our joy in life. One look at children at play is enough to confirm this. Walk around your workplace or home with a big, big smile and check out the reaction of others.

## **Other things you can do**

- Listen to positive and motivational tapes. Whenever you get down, there’s a tendency to start to worry. Worry leads to increasing worry. Before you know it, you’re on a downward spiral. An alternative is to listen to upbeat, positive material.
- Stop! Take the time each day to marvel at a sunset or pat a dog, encourage somebody, listen to your favourite music. So many of life’s joys are in the little things.
- Get and give lots of hugs. Hugs are the currency of love. Physical contact is an important part of wellbeing. Studies show that physical deprivation has many negative effects. It’s easily countered; hug your children more today.
- Do something each day that moves you out of your comfort zone. Smile at a passer by, go to the movies by yourself, be different. Take a chance on your wellbeing.

# PART THREE

## *Chapter 23*

### Improving Your Productivity and Achieving Peak Performance

Peak performance requires:

- Flexibility
- Endurance
- Strength
- Resilience
- Creativity

The challenge of peak performance is to manage your physical, emotional, mental and spiritual energy. A long time ago, I thought you had only to manage physical energy to be highly productive, for example such as consuming some nutritious calories. But I was wrong.

Have a think for a minute. Despite having lots of calories have you ever felt low in energy? Or are there times when you seemed to have lots of energy and someone gives you a job you really don't want to do, maybe your income tax and all of a sudden your energy disappears? Or you may recall a time when you had lots of energy but what you were doing went against your values or maybe someone raised an emotional issue that seemed to drain you. Your emotional or psychological energy is a product of your motivation. If our hearts aren't in it we simply cannot raise our energy. Lack of passion ultimately affects energy. Have you ever noticed how much energy you have for a project depends upon your passion for the project? Have you experienced how tiring it becomes when you are doing something that you don't want to do? For me it is marking exam papers. It puts me to sleep. However, writing my chapters and books really excites me so I have a lot more energy for it. In fact a whole day can disappear and I might not even notice it once I am writing. Sound familiar?

Stress and procrastination are great energy drains despite the fact that they do not manifest in the physical realm. That is why we need to build our energy

reserves in the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual realms. “Spiritual” does not have to mean religious; I take it to mean consistent with your own higher values.

There are many blocks to increasing personal, professional and business productivity, including procrastination, lack of vision, being too busy, having no motivation or direction, stress and more. However, these all stem from two major areas: the way we think and our energy management. In a very simplistic way the level of energy we have and the way we think influence all our behaviour and are therefore at the root of all our problems *and solutions*.

We develop a personal energy crisis where our physical, emotional, psychological (mental) and spiritual batteries are totally depleted and at the end of each day we feel frustrated and exhausted, leading to a negative, spiralling problem of communication breakdown and conflict.

A simple formula for peak productivity is:

Productivity = Energy + Motivation and Direction

So how do you achieve productivity? First understand that your physical energy is simply a product of many aspects of your life, including your nutrition. Athletes use many strategies to achieve peak performance. Top athletes use more of them and focus on them more because top athletes cannot afford to make too many mistakes. Businesses also cannot afford to make too many mistakes. Individuals work long hard hours but don’t use any of these techniques. The performance demands of most professionals outstrip those of most professional athletes. Athletes have a professional career of five to 10 years if they’re lucky.

To help understand this you also need to understand energy cycles that we go through and how they influence our energy levels along with our motivation.

## Chapter 24

# Improve Your Energy: Unleash the Energy of Your Atoms

As Einstein famously put it  $E=mc^2$ . An extension of this is that all matter is made up of energy. Human beings, too, are made up of energy: there is an immense amount of energy in *every* atom of our bodies. Max Planck, who won a Nobel Prize for his work on the atom, and who is considered the greatest scientific mind of his time, said: “As a man who has devoted his whole life to the most clearheaded science, to the study of matter, I can tell you as the result of my research about the atoms, this much: There is no matter as such! All matter originates and exists only by virtue of a force which brings the particles of an atom to vibration and holds this most minute solar system of the atom together ... We must assume behind this force the existence of a conscious and intelligent Mind. This Mind is the matrix of all matter.”

It is energy that is at the core of our ability to do work. Learning to manage energy can have dramatic transformational effects for both individuals and organisations. We spend time on technical and tactical skills including time management, but too often ignore energy. Without energy it is not possible to do the things you need to do, no matter how well you manage your time. Time is our most precious resource because one can never get it back; value it and add value to it by managing your energy.

Your brain uses up to 25% of your body’s energy. If that energy is low for one reason or another, our thinking becomes poor and we have to work harder and longer to get the same output as we can achieve during a higher-energy cycle. Our energy level is not just a matter of fuel in, energy out. It is a complex system of biological cycles, fuel and nutrients, negative and positive stress, recovery and our thoughts. To understand how our energy can change, think of the last time a negative thought drew energy away from you, leaving you feeling tired and de-motivated. A positive thought, on the other hand, can energise you and increase motivation.

### **Natural energy cycles**

Energy management is about understanding your natural energy cycles and

maximising your productivity by matching your task with your energy. You can match high-energy tasks with high-energy periods. Doing this requires that you find a dynamic balance between energy expenditure in the form of stress and energy renewal for recovery.

To understand the body's energy cycles it is best to look at the impact on infants and young children. They seem to have boundless energy until they hit an energy low then collapse, get upset, angry and cry. Every parent knows this scenario. The infant, if he can get over his irritability and tap into his energy cycle, then quickly drops off to sleep; otherwise, he gets more irritated. Does this sound like any adult you know?

It is important to understand that current work cycles, as well as eating times, are based on the economic model developed during the Industrial Revolution. These working and eating patterns and times were developed to get the maximum amount of physical and largely repetitive work out of people. Even the lunch break and tea breaks were designed for the factory line worker and are not as appropriate for the thinking office worker of the 21st century. We have lost touch with our natural energy cycles and related biorhythms, which are found for virtually every biological function, including heart rate, respiration, blood sugar levels and adrenaline.

## **Circadian rhythm**

Most people are familiar with their own “body clocks.” Bodily functions such as heart rate, metabolic rate, breathing rate and body temperature are affected by circadian rhythms. Although we have natural cycles, they can be disrupted by repeatedly breaking the cycle through the process called habituation, or through other means such as alcohol and drugs.

Ultradian rhythms are the bodily rhythms of less than 24 hours in duration. These rhythms, particularly those of 90 to 120 minutes, have been observed in sleepiness, vigilance, heart readings, day dreaming, as well as eating and drinking and urine excretion. Heart rate, hormonal activity, brainwave activity and muscle tension all increase during the first part of the cycle, then after an hour or so they begin to decline. After 90 minutes the body needs rest and recuperation. The recovery period is signalled by hunger, fatigue, poor concen-



tration, lack of focus and making mistakes. Therefore we are better off doing short bursts like a middle distance runner than doing a marathon of work by trying to sit at a desk for hours. Our concentration span is relatively short and if you accept that and understand it you will be able to be more productive. Even working for a few hours straight on a project can become a waste of time if you do not pay attention to your body rhythms. Your brain can literally become exhausted after a short period of time and factors like low nutrients and poor blood circulation can exacerbate the problem.

To get back in touch with our energy patterns we have to be conscious of how we are feeling. Very simply, there are four arousal states that I am sure you can relate to and are shown in the table below: calm energy, calm tiredness, tense energy and tense tiredness.

	Physical energy	
Emotional calm	<i>high</i>	<i>low</i>
<i>high</i>	Calm energy; can achieve anything, feeling in charge	Calm tiredness; relaxation, recuperation, rest
<i>low</i>	Tense energy; stress, fidgeting, restless leg	Tense tiredness; tension and anxiety, nervousness

Many negative psychological reactions can occur during naturally low energy periods, particularly if there are chronic stresses or problems. Without stress, a low energy may produce a state of calm tiredness, a more pleasant and relaxed state; however during periods of stress, low energy can result in low self-esteem, unrealistic concerns about personal problems, feelings of depression and other negative reactions. Understanding these states of energy and calm along with being aware of your body’s biological clock and natural rhythms can dramatically improve your productivity and health.

### **Matching your energy levels**

By understanding your energy levels during the cycles of the day, you can make assessments about which tasks are best performed at which times and for how long. High energy and physical tasks are perhaps best performed

when the body requires a boost of energy. Calm relaxed tasks such as creative thinking, reading and writing are perhaps best performed early in the morning (at least for me) when the body has energy but is still calm. Our activities can be juggled to fit our own energy cycles and patterns.

We need to learn to match our behaviour with our characteristic energy cycle. Matching tasks to one's energy level also reduces tension and improves one's overall mood. In an experiment in which subjects were asked to, over a 10-day period, rate a particular condition that was annoying them and causing them grievance, the level of expressed grievance was more serious in the afternoon. Regardless of the time of day, the problem was always rated as more serious if the person was in a tense tired mood and less serious if in a calm energetic mood. In studies where students have kept diaries, the results indicate gradually increasing levels of depression as the day wore on with the highest depression levels in the afternoon and evening. Pushing through to meet a deadline, you may eventually succumb to the particular fatigue and low energy at some later time—perhaps resulting in even more tension and some drama with other individuals. These subtle, negative mood states can have a substantial effect on behaviour if they persist. With this in mind it is important then to manage your problems along with understanding and managing your energy levels.

In the morning when you first wake, you are at a very low energy level and a high state of calm. This is a relaxed state that slowly increases over the morning and prepares you for your day. With the first signs of light somewhere between 4 a.m. and 7 a.m. (depending on the time of year) our bodies start producing cortisol, adrenaline and noradrenalin to stimulate the brain to a state of wakefulness. At this time our melatonin, our sleep chemical, is at its lowest. This time is low energy and a calm state and is the most creative and wakeful time when you can do your best work. I find this is the time for inspiration. The mind is alert but the body has not yet fully taken over and become ready for the “fight or flight” of day. Naturally this state lasts for an hour or so as our energy slowly increases and prepares us for the day ahead.

Your real, internal clock tells you to get up just before sunrise and go to sleep just after sunset. Many of the ancient texts and all cultures have their parables about the benefits of getting up early. You have no doubt heard that “the early

bird gets the worm.” My favourite is “*La mattina è la padrona di lavoro*” or translated, “The morning is the mistress of work.” Calm and low energy in the morning or evening is a good time to concentrate and focus. This is why many cultures have some form of meditation at this time. Many of the world’s geniuses also used this time to tap into the deeper recesses of their imaginations.

By not matching time to energy cycles, people lose a huge amount of productivity. Distractions can take up your whole day if you let them and this adds to the stress as it prevents you from getting the big projects done. To get around this many people work late into the night and through to the early morning. While your body can adapt to this, it is not healthy in the long term. You will notice as you age that you are able to do this less and less and you will slowly revert to early mornings and early nights. This is not old age! It is your body clock telling you to get back to normal because the other routine creates negative stress. Staying awake to the early hours after midnight can only be done on adrenaline (often coffee induced) overload. Not good. In addition, the most productive mental time, early in the morning (after a good night’s sleep), is lost as we go through a constant cycle of poor productivity and fatigue during the day.

The other benefit of understanding your biological clock and energy levels is that you can reduce stress and work better with people. High-energy tasks or confrontation during low energy periods can be damaging. It is best to program deep and meaningful discussions when you are in a high-energy period with mental alertness such as late morning. Taking on these tasks during a low-energy period can be soul destroying and end up in conflict. The worst time to raise a particular concern is straight after lunch or late evening. These times increase the chances that an issue will be blown out of proportion and that a discussion will escalate into a serious argument.

Some of the quick-fix mechanisms busy people use to alter their moods include: overeating, excessive drinking, smoking, illegal drug use, too much television viewing, self-isolation and other poor, dysfunctional routines. Don’t let yourself get caught up in these time- and energy-wasting habits. The best way to identify your own biorhythms is to keep a diary for about a week, in-

cluding the weekend. Record your energy levels and your moods. Then plan your days. There are times when demanding intellectual work should be done such as during calm energy states and times when poor intellectual performance can be expected during tense tiredness.

### **Action**

Keep a diary of your energy levels and the things you do to manage your energy level over a period of one week.

## *Chapter 25*

# Continual Learning

“The desire to know is natural to good men.” ~ Leonardo da Vinci

“An unexamined life is not worth living.” ~ Socrates

“Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death.” ~ Albert Einstein

If the three people above think it is important to learn, then it is. Unfortunately, governments, organisations and individuals often talk about the big costs of education and training but tend to ignore the massive costs of ignorance. By nurturing the individual’s capacity to learn and grow, an organisation will only enhance its future. Continual learning improves everyone’s lives and is the cornerstone of any civilisation. It benefits the individual and society as a whole. Like physical workouts, the mind also needs mental workouts. Learning new things is the key to mental vigour. Learning stimulates the neuronal networks, creates new dendrites and connections in the brain. As you continue to learn you expand your neural networks of your brain creating even more abundant connections. The richer, more varied and challenging the experiences and the more elaborate the neuronal connections, the greater the brain’s capacity.

Continual learning is a part of life. The first signs of someone ageing are they stop learning and think they don’t have to do it anymore. I know people in their 20s who are already dying. Learning is about challenging your mind and can be done at any age. If you think you can’t learn at an old age, it is true—you can’t because that is how you think. I have met people in their 90s who are learning a new language, one inspiring young 90-year-old was learning the Welsh language. I also know a couple of 80-year-olds who are studying for their first degree and even one studying for her PhD. Another advantage of this late life studying is that you won’t get hit with any study fees (in Australia at least).

What sets the human mind apart from other animals is that our minds continue to develop. The subtle difference in our genes is that our minds continue to interpret the environment around us and as a result can continue to change

our genes. This is the science of epigenetics, which I mentioned earlier, and it is why challenging the mind not only improves your life but also reduces your risk of Alzheimer's disease and other mental illness. This alone is good enough reason for continual lifelong learning.

We are all excellent natural learners. We learn to communicate, perhaps the most difficult thing we will ever do, to walk, to relate, and to socialise and it all comes naturally. But then we stop learning for fun and pleasure, it becomes a task that we have to do, something we have to achieve. It becomes a competition. All of a sudden learning becomes more difficult. Recapture the exciting part of learning again. What is it that makes learning hard and unpleasant? It can be the environment, the fact that you're no longer allowed to fail; it can be that every failure is seen as a negative rather than a stepping-stone to a positive.

Plan your learning and plan to learn well. By having the right attitude and planning your learning, you can save hours and hours of what may otherwise be wasted time. Set goals for the amount of time and the quality of time for your period of study. Visualise yourself successfully learning. If you get a negative internal messages about your abilities use the cognitive restructuring techniques mentioned earlier in the book to change them to positive messages. If you have negative messages saying, "You can't learn that," adopt one of the methods mentioned earlier in the book to change that negative monologue. If it feels like a challenge remember that if education were not a challenge it would not be worth pursuing.

To learn effectively you need to have a study environment that's positive, enjoyable and free from distractions. It also has to be a healthy environment. Put on some gentle music. Baroque music, such as Bach and the music of Mozart, has a very positive effect on brain waves and helps you to learn. Open the doors and windows to the study. Fresh air is critical to good brain function. Then when you have finished make sure to reward yourself.

## **Develop your learning skills**

We spend so much time learning without spending time learning how to learn. When you decide to learn more, do it smartly. As a lifelong student, I've spent

a great deal of time refining my learning habits to make them not only effective, but also good for my health! I've also spent time teaching myself learning skills such as speed reading and improving my memory and note-taking skills using mind maps. The little bit of time I've spent learning these techniques has been repaid many times over. I now teach these skills to my students, pensioner groups and corporate executives.

We rely on our memory all day yet we rarely try to improve it. Simple techniques can make a huge difference. Many groups I have worked with on improving memory have walked in with the ability to retain one or two names but walked out after an hour being able to recognise and name 40 or more people after only one meeting. A group of seniors with an average age of 75 years I worked with and studied were able to improve their name retention from an average of two people to an average of 35. The lowest score was about 12 and the highest score was the 50 people in the class. Of course when you find something you like learning about so much write it into a book. That's what I did about memory so if you want to learn more about memory get my memory book, *Improve Your Memory at Any Age*.

We all have the desire to learn. It is human. But in many of us our busy minds fill the gaps where learning should be. Tune up your mind.

## **Action**

Find something you want to learn, set a goal and set about learning it.

Learn how to develop your memory skills and acquire some memory techniques.

## NOTES

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## *Chapter 26*

# Constant Creativity

“We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” ~ Einstein

Creativity is a normal state of being. Find your state of creativity and it will enhance every aspect of your life. Your creative abundance gives you what you deserve. Our ability is relatively constant, how we use it is not and how we use it is the most important factor in what it does for us.

Most people now get paid for the quality of their thinking. It is logical then to make sure that we do the best possible thinking. Common traits of higher functioning for individuals and organisations include being more creative and a love of learning. From here all else can grow. Thinking creatively can generate fresh responses to old problems. By being creative we can perceive the opportunities that were not evident before.

Creativity is about challenging the ways we have been doing things. Creativity decreases with fatigue and busyness. People find their most creative time at their quietest time, often when they are not even thinking about a problem but their subconscious mind is working on it. Creative people have more rests and stopping during the day to enable their minds to focus and solve problems. A 15-minute nap is not wasting 15 minutes at work; it is creating 15 minutes of creativity.

Failure to take into account the productive mind will stifle enthusiasm and creativity. Rigid and inflexible thinking stops us from finding creative, simpler and better ways to do a job. Through greater discipline you get control; through control you get freedom. Creativity is about tapping into more of your ability. It is about an expansion of your consciousness. The expansion of consciousness is what constitutes true success. Creativity is about challenging the ways we have been doing things. Great thoughts come from connections. Creativity comes from the ability to make connections. Einstein maintained that it was his ability to look at problems in a childlike, imaginative way that was the secret to his genius.

Many of us live too much in the head dominated by the thinking mind. Have you ever wondered why we come up with the solutions in the middle of the golf course or even the middle of the night? Your subconscious mind works 24/7 and will come up with all the solutions you want if you let it.

However, not all learning is in our head. Having facts at your fingertips does not make you intelligent or a genius or creative. Most teaching methods focus on verbal and visual imagery and ignore natural realms of learning. Much learning around the world is done at a spiritual realm. All the saints of all the religions and followings have repeatedly said that real wisdom comes from within. Over 5,000 years ago the Vedics (wise men) of ancient India described what we would now call quantum physics and used the characteristics of individuals to describe their genetic makeup and develop medicines that are specific to that person, thousands of years before genetics was even coined as a term. We have only just begun to understand that and do that now with modern medicine... so how did they know that 5,000 years ago? Our bodies can be the best teacher and provide the best learning experience. You just have to learn to ask the right questions in the right circumstances and then listen.

Real learning is automatic, inevitable and inspirational. Learning can only occur in circumstances that are open and respectful of our individual needs. Nature has innate wisdom that we can tap into through the process of observation, engagement and quiet. Discover your own innate wisdom and curiosity. Just yesterday a young man of 53 said to me the first 10 minutes of meditation he has ever done has already changed the clarity in his thinking. He could not understand why he had not done it earlier.

Not tapping into the creative mind and spirit is wasted human potential. I once asked myself what I could do about all the misleading advertising and food claims I see. I posed the question a few times then in my next meditation a picture of a star came to me. I wasn't sure what it meant in the beginning so I asked more questions and I came up with the concept of StarFoods, a way of rating foods based around the shape of a star.

Another time I became so exasperated by the misinformation about nutrition I asked the question, "What can I do?" On the flight home from Sydney where

the nutrition conference was to Perth I came up with the concept of a new book, *My Dog Eats Better than Your Kids*. I then spent the next four hours on the plane writing it out then the next year finishing it off. Not only is it a creative title but also is the first picture book on nutrition that is based around a story and pictures of our dog.

Develop your creative genius. Put your subconscious mind to work, visualise your problem, and sleep on it.

### **Action**

Identify a challenge in something you have to do then ask yourself some questions and come up with some creative solutions. Take a bit of time to meditate on the questions. Then listen for the answer.

Ask yourself how you can do a particular task better. Ask lots of positive creative questions and allow time for your subconscious mind to answer them.

## NOTES

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## *Chapter 27*

# Changing the Way We Think: Poor Thinking Is the Disease of the 21st Century

“The ability to accomplish is all in the mind.” ~ Paramahansa Yogananda

“Men are not prisoners of fate, but only prisoners of their own minds.” ~ Franklin D. Roosevelt

Have you ever wondered why a problem seems to get worse despite the gravity of the problem and despite how many billions or even trillions of dollars we spend on it each year? Billions of dollars are spent on treating cancer every year and there are no reductions in the death rates from cancer. Once you take the ability to manipulate statistics out of the equation then there is no increase in length of survival. This is an example of poor thinking; as we know up to 90% of cancers are caused by lifestyle and environmental factors. It seems more appropriate to reduce the environmental influences including diet and lifestyle factors.

How we think not only afflicts our bodies with cancer and clogged arteries but also clogs up the arteries and eats away at our social system and the environment. The major disease of the 21st century is not cancer or heart attack, increasing crime or road rage or even enhanced greenhouse or species extinction. These are all just the symptoms and if we continue to treat the symptoms we will never solve the problems. At best you will reduce one of the symptoms but another more urgent and critical problem will immediately arise. The disease is the state that got us there. The major disease is how we think.

We could cut down our greenhouse emissions, reduce energy waste, reduce the levels of cancer and CVD by 30% to 50% if we reduced our meat consumption by 50% and ate more vegetables and fruit instead. But it takes a change in thinking. Another example of how poor thinking leads to cancer and CVD is that negative attitudes lead to stress, depression, pessimism and negative actions such as no exercise, poor eating, and an absence of all the other beneficial activities in life.

We filter everything through our minds, we create generalisations to explain the things around us and we filter the information we receive through these generalisations. These generalisations make it easy to participate in modern life, however we need to regularly question generalisations that we exist by, our belief systems and the way we think. These generalisations were great for the hunter-fisher-gatherer 100,000 years ago but do not work in our modern world.

The way we think and our self-talk not only limits how we think about ourselves but also what we can do.

Examples of poor thinking include:

- Narrow thinking
- Short sighted or short-term thinking
- Silver bullet solutions (technology)
- Self-centred, self-absorbed and egocentric thinking
- Focus on scarcity
- Materialistic thinking
- Thinking too much

Even critical thinking and expert thinking can become poor thinking. We see the world in terms of “yes or no,” “black or white,” “do or don’t” but it is really about infinite possibilities and shades of all colours.

One approach to solving problems is technology or what I call the “silver bullet solution.” But technology has never solved a major problem without creating another one, sometimes even worse than the first. There is no silver bullet. We have improved the efficiency of the car engine but now consume more litres per kilometre than ever before because the size of the car has increased and there are more cars on the road. Families are smaller but the cars are bigger and there are more of them.

Short-term thinking suggests that we can ignore the problem or that someone in the future will solve the problem, maybe the kids when they grow up. My own research shows that not only are the problems getting worse as we learn more about them but also the kids, as they grow up, become just as big a part

of the problem as we are. At the ages of 10 to 13 kids are very environmentally aware and very active. But that soon changes as they get caught up in all the same busyness of life and poor ways of thinking.

Linked in with short-term thinking are also vested interests. It is common to ask, “What am I going to get out of it in the short term?” no matter what it does to the environment or society or if it is really needed. So much of the medical system is now run under the direction of the pharmaceutical companies and so much literature is published in the scientific journals and even the courts on this bias. Everyone knows it yet still it seems to be an accepted practise.

Expert thinking and narrow thinking are also major problems. Over the last 50 years we have see an explosion of information and along with it experts who know so much about one thing they cannot see the bigger picture. The more we focus on the smaller picture the more we miss the big picture—a bit like trying to look at the moon through a microscope. We have so-called experts in medicine such as cardiac surgeons who know little about diet and lifestyle impacts on heart disease and die of heart disease at an age earlier than most. These are the experts. After a stroke, a friend of mine (aged 48) had to stop seeing his stroke specialist after a year or so because his specialist, who was 42, died of a stroke.

Underlying all this is the materialistic thinking. There is such a push from private industry and governments alike to buy and consume to improve our lives or for the sake of the economy that we have lost sight of what is really important in our lives. The simplest way to put this is that you come into this world with nothing and you will leave it for the next one with nothing. What we need first of all is clean air, water and food. Then comes a safe place to live and a sense of security. Then comes family and friends. These are our needs the rest are wants. We have few needs but many wants although most people find it hard to distinguish between the two. Hopefully the discussion at the beginning of the book helped you understand this a little more.

The “me” or self-centred thinking

Unfortunately our society supports a very immature mentality when it comes to gratitude. We need to reassess this. As we age we go through a process of

thinking about:

- Me, alone
- Me, and my friends
- Me, as part of my family
- Me, as part of society
- Me, as part of the world

Many of our top paid professionals encourage the “me, alone” attitude. We pay people huge sums of money to focus on themselves and then we justify it. Then for those in the giving professions such as teachers and nurses there is a mere pittance compared to other professional colleagues. In a society that rewards people for being selfish we end up with health, social and ecological dysfunction.

I have been fortunate to interview around 100 first-year students each year. With these interviews it became apparent that the motivation to study environmental sciences comes from their love of the environment and their desire to protect it and, for some, to work in it. By contrast my work with students in other areas often highlights their drive for the career and money they want.

By contrast, positive modes of thinking include:

- Peaceful thinking
- Abundant thinking
- Creative thinking
- Lateral thinking
- Challenging thinking
- Eco-centric or ecological thinking

Fortunately, many people as they age start to realise the problems with the way things are going and start to change their thinking. Research on ageing has shown that as we age we go through different phases of thinking. The thinking begins with a focus on the self and for most, but not all, broadens to “us” and even “them...” then later to the broader social and environmental systems. Those with narrow, self-focused thinking who remain so most of their lives tend to have higher mortality rates. The research on centenarians, those who



reach 100 in good health, show that they more often than not have a broader approach to their thinking with a strong focus on community and environment. As we age we become more community-, social- and environmental-oriented in our thinking. There are numerous accounts of top business people stating that they want to give back more now that they have retired. None say they wish they had a busier life or spent more time at the office.

### **Action**

Think in a different way. Use the skills you have learnt in this journey through the book to think about things in a different way, in a way that you have never thought of before.

## NOTES

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## *Chapter 28*

### **It's Your Life So Take Control**

“The trivial preoccupation of daily life does not satisfy our deepest needs.” ~  
Paramahansa Yogananda

We all want to be happy yet, whether we recognise it or not, most of our actions and plans are not taking us in that direction. Our collective minds have created the world we live in today. Just like our busy minds we have created busy lives. Fulfilment comes from the effort to succeed at your value-based endeavours, your wisdom-governed actions. Dissatisfaction with life occurs when we want something else other than what we already have. Living the way we do, we continue to harm ourselves as well as hurting the world around us. Our problems are not the life we have but our life circumstances that are created around our perceptions.

Most of our lives are a sequence of unconscious conditioned reactions. It is when we make conscious, positive choices that we are in control of our lives and free from ego attachments. The consequences of not changing our consciousness are insanity and disaster.

In the 1950s we thought that with innovation and new technology we would be working less in the next century. But now we are working even harder and we are busier than ever. What was originally designed to give us more freedom has entrapped us into a material life. While we are busier we have less time for our families, friends, neighbours, community and our own personal and spiritual growth. We are caught up in the passing pursuits of the material world.

Despite the media hype we are not on this planet to accumulate material wealth. We are here to develop ourselves and we have less time than ever before to do that. As a result more people go through a personal crisis. The material world is a mental busy state. The material world takes control of you. The material world is based in large part on only passing pursuits that our desires for quickly dissipate and need more of—like an addiction, an addiction to the material world.

We have more insecurity over national issues such as terrorism, but also over local crime and even worse, fear of not having enough. We have personal insecurities that we think we can fix by purchasing more things to make us look or feel better. Until it wears off soon after. These are just materialistic toys of distraction of the 21st century. And like a kid we soon become accustomed to them and want to move onto the next toy. This is a never-ending cycle of more wants that cannot be satisfied. Have you ever noticed that rich people who seem to have everything have more than their fair share of problems including some with major drug problems? Drugs are only an attempt to seek something that they can't get in the material world, despite all their wealth. They are only after happiness. But by focusing on the material world they risk moving further from happiness.

Drugs and television give us a temporary illusion of control of our mind. Instead these are deadening the mind. To control it means you feel better afterwards. These harm the mind. Our lives are unconscious insanity. TV prevents you from *being* and fills up your day with distractions from your potential.

Despite our growing material wealth we are no happier than any population before and we feel the most insecure that we have for more than 50 years. We have growing rates of chronic social, physical and mental disease. If you're not satisfied with the situation you are in now you will not be satisfied when it changes. We all need to be in the physical world to provide our needs and to have some simplistic wants, but we don't need to make the materialistic world the focus of all our thoughts and actions. Such material thinking can extend to our personal relationships: we often seek another person in our lives to fill a gap. The gap will always be there until we change our thinking.

Our focus on the future and the past are the roots of psychological dysfunction. (Young kids are in the present but we soon teach them to be in the past and future.) All the negative emotions only exist because you create them in your mind. These emotions do not rise out of conditions of life but conditions of the mind. Worrying is a negative strategy. Worrying is looking into the future and predicting a negative outcome. Rather than worry, create a set of alternative pictures or alternative outcomes for a situation, then build up and embellish the pictures that you want for the outcome and make the pictures

that you don't want as an outcome become smaller, less colourful; build up the positive picture, shrink the smaller picture. Head toward the positive picture that you create.

## **Our future**

As our mind consciousness increases so does our sense of wellbeing. Actions that help us do this by bringing us into the present include:

Expressing gratitude

Being generous without expectation of praise

Caring for pets

Caring for children—all of our world's children

Meditation

Love

Being conscious and in the present does not stop you from focusing on the future and setting your goals. Rather it enables you to control your future instead of your future controlling you. It establishes your values and helps you to plan. While our material desires can never be fulfilled our spiritual desires can be and all it takes is a little time—something we don't often feel we have in the 21st century.

Happiness comes from being in control of one's life. Beyond getting out of absolute poverty where you cannot feed or clothe yourself, materialism cannot bring any happiness. Materialism complicates our lives and makes it harder to find happiness. Most people talk about happiness but are too busy to try and find out what it is. People want to be happy but fail to do the things that really lead to happiness.

We need to practise self-discipline in everything we do. Through greater discipline you gain control; through control you achieve freedom. Being in control means not being distracted by the pursuits of the material world. We need materials to live and be nourished but not as a goal for our lives.

Changing the way we think creates new freedoms. In a state of security, confidence, competence, creativity and exploration, the human brain hums with efficiency and absorbs massive amounts of information almost effortlessly.

Our brains are really meant to hum when we are fully engaged.

When someone very close dies, all we ask is whether we could have been a better person or friend to that person. We wonder what we could have done better. Don't wait until this time, as it will surely come. Do the things now. The most important aspect is showing love, giving time and understanding.

You, or at least **how you think**, are the master of your own destiny. Plan for the future so that you are in charge and you can control it. Think of goals as your memory working in the future. Breaking old habits requires challenging your conditioning and then making it become the new normal.

Success is being prepared for opportunity. Overnight successes only ever happen after years of preparation. Being busy does not mean that you are productive. Work hard, die young. Work smart, enjoy more and live longer. Health, family and friends are not diversions from work. Productive work can only occur with a productive mind.

Big successes are the accumulation of lots of small successes, moment-by-moment, day-by-day and week-by-week. Be efficient, develop the right skills. Become effective and plan what you want to achieve and become.

**It is all up to you now. Take control and realise your potential because you are worth it!**



# Other Books by Dr Peter Dingle

**The 6 Week Healthy Eating Planner**

**My Dog Eats Better Than Your Kids**

**Is Your Home Making You Sick**

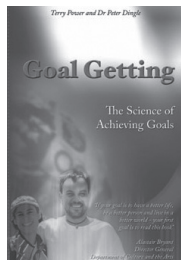
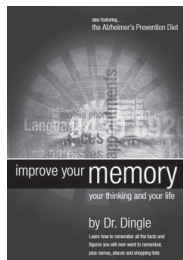
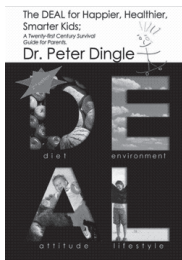
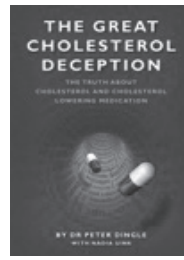
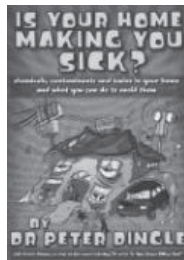
**Improve your Memory, Your thinking and Your Life**

**The DEAL for Happier Healthier Smarter Kids**

**Goal Getting**

**Dangerous Beauty Book**

**The Great Cholesterol Deception**



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# Dingle Talks and Presentations

- Take control of your life. The 5C's
- Why Busy People Die Young or The Big DEAL
- Resilience: Reduce Your Stress and Increase Your Productivity
- Overcoming Adversity
- The Science of Success: Goal Getting
- Manage Your Energy to Increase your personal and professional productivity.

## Testimonial about Dr Dingle's presentation.

*"Your workshop was the buzz of the office for several weeks and is still referred to at various times even 3/4 months after the event. The group hypnotism was very effective and people were amazed that it actually worked on them. I have noticed your books on various desks in the office with people referring to them or suggesting others borrow and have a read. We would love to get you back for another conference in the near future.*

*PS ... We are still waiting for the day when we all start barking and looking for our left leg. Regards".*

**- Vickie Douglas Head of Direct and Alliance Banking AMP Banking.**

## Other Resources

[www.drDingle.com](http://www.drDingle.com)