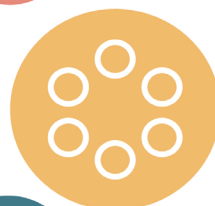


BRADLEY HOOK



RESILIENCE

MASTERY



**11 Keys to Upgrade
Human Performance**



RESILIENCE MASTERY

11 KEYS TO UPGRADE HUMAN PERFORMANCE

BY BRADLEY HOOK

Resilience Mastery
11 Keys to Upgrade Human Performance
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Learn, play and lean into feart

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine the movie of your life. Is it fuzzy and out of focus or masterfully crafted? Does the storyline flit haphazardly or is the narrator driven by a sense of purpose? It doesn't matter whether the movie of your life is a comedy, tragedy, drama or epic adventure – what matters is that you get to act, produce and direct. The mission from a resilience perspective is to never allow our movie to become pointless, or mundane.

Life as theatre is not a new idea. For thousands of years Hindus have viewed existence as a great drama, unfolding in endless cycles, each actor playing a part in the performance, unaware that they are all, in fact, dreams in the mind of the creator. The ancient Greeks also regarded life as a play. The word person – derived from *persona* – means the mask we wear.

Human consciousness is a flash of curiosity in a vast, unfathomable universe. None of us asked to be here and yet here we are: trying to make sense of biology, time and each other. Perhaps we are apertures through which the universe experiences itself. Or maybe there is no real meaning and the earth produces people, as an apple tree does apples. Life diversifies and becomes ever more complex because the underlying drive to survive is powerful in a vast, cold universe. We encode stories into DNA lest we forget the journey life has travelled on to bring us to here, now. Congratulations. We made it.

Seeing life as a drama, or from a more contemporary lens, a movie, or even a video game, encourages us to cultivate a sense of purpose. In a world where threats are increasingly abstract and abundance, for many, is taken for granted, it's easy to slip into apathy and despair. Imagine how our ancestors would look at us now. They fought for our freedom and safety and we lock ourselves to screens in echo chambers of the attention economy.

Resilience is being proactive: absorbing shocks, growing through trauma, building supportive networks and being effective.

Using the metaphor of a movie is helpful because stories reveal the human struggle. Through stories we recognise the capacity we all possess to encounter obstacles and emerge stronger than we were. This is the archetypal tale. We revere those that triumph over adversity. Resilience is the journey of the hero. This book tells many heroic stories. It encourages us to push the limits, be creative and move steadfastly toward our goals. To do this requires preparation, practice and courage.

Unfortunately, few of us are trained in the art of crafting a great story, never mind constructing a fulfilling life. Ancient Greeks devoted entire schools to the philosophy of living. From the Stoics to Sceptics and Epicureans, scholars and everyday folk embraced methods for reducing suffering and reaching their potential. Resilience continues along this path by mapping out a framework for human flourishing, bringing a scientific lens to factors that underpin success, happiness and wellbeing.

Resilience is not just grit, or the ability to bounce back from adversity. It is a learned and skilfully executed web of competencies that form both a safety net and springboard to success. It is an upgrade to the human operating system that offers us choices in a demanding world. Some people use resilience like vitamins, establishing disciplined daily routines to support high performance. Others use resilience like aspirin, executing learned skills and behaviours on-demand, or when times get tough.

Understanding high performance

The Resilience Institute surveyed over 20,000 people to understand what drives resilience in individuals and groups across the world.

11 key factors were identified. These range from the obvious – focus, purpose, optimism, assertiveness and bounce – to the less expected – sleep quality, vitality, presence, decisiveness, values alignment and fulfilment.

Our definition of resilience is the learned ability to demon-

strate bounce, to continually grow, to build strong connections and to cultivate the conditions for flow. We draw no distinction between work and personal life. A resilient person breaks down life's challenges into achievable tasks, prepares biology and environment, then works with focus and determination. Things go wrong for them as for any of us, but they rely on their ability to bounce, recalibrate and recover. They engage with their whole being: physical, emotional and cognitive, dynamically playing to their strengths and working to mitigate risk areas.

A changing world

Humans are falling behind the evolutionary curve. Over millions of years we evolved in direct response to our environment. From the first flickers of life some 3.1 billion years ago to our more recognisable human ancestors around 250,000 years ago, we engaged in a precarious wrestle for survival. Through fitness, cooperation and ingenuity we survived and thrived.

We used our prefrontal cortex (the front of the human brain) in bursts, innovating, strategizing, seeking homeostasis in a dangerous world. Then came agriculture and, much later, industrialisation. From free ranging animals we became farm fed, dependent on food and information generated by entities with whom we have little direct connection. We increasingly seek out more abstract forms of work in order to secure our livelihood. We have changed our environment and we are adapting to it, but slowly. The information revolution brought us global connectivity. Just over a decade ago the iPhone gifted us access to all information ever published, via a screen in our pockets. We became obsessed. And stressed. Even our noisy minds are often not our own. We seek comfort in – and feel outraged by – the ideas of others, which fill infinitely scrolling feeds upon screens wherever we go. Screening is the new sitting, and both have eclipsed smoking as health hazards of our time. Our biochemistry is manipulated by behavioural scientists and user experience designers, employed to conjure the dopamine rush

of likes, follows and retweets, and the cortisol spike when the network goes quiet.

Descartes said, ‘I think therefore I am’. We propose, ‘I am, therefore I think’.

Let’s nourish the I. Bring it back to now. To where life happens. To where we are, whether we like it or not.

Let’s take control of the movie. Get back in the director’s seat, turn up the background music and change the lighting. Time is ticking. The hero – that’s you – is ready for adventure. Let’s dive in.

**A journey of
a thousand
miles begins
by turning
this page**



FOCUS

***In all areas of spiritual development,
you need both analysis and focus.***

The Dalai Lama

Focus is the ultimate success accelerant. It is the number one factor distinguishing the most from the least resilient people. In Resilience Institute research¹, 94% of the top decile report a strong ability to focus. Only 4% of the bottom decile manage to stay focused. To achieve our goals, improve as individuals, expand our consciousness and create a better society, we must be able to focus on what's important. The ability to focus, like all factors in this book, can be improved with dedicated practice. Whether the goal is to run a marathon, launch a business or write a novel, learning to maintain focus and ignore distractions is pivotal to success.

Focus as a life goal

For Buddhist monks and Zen practitioners, cultivating focus is central to growth as a human being. They dedicate their time and effort accordingly. Take for example the Dalai Lama. Each morning he trains his mind for the day ahead with a meditation practice. He begins around 3am and, after his breakfast at 5.30am, returns to meditating for another three hours.²

Buddhist monks have developed rigorous routines to pacify the so-called “monkey mind”. The purpose of this is to attain states of awareness unencumbered by distracting thoughts. They might be considered the elite athletes of focus, able to exert attention on something as simple as the breath for hours at a time. We don't need to go to such extreme lengths to build

attention control but understanding the mechanics of focus and mastering the ability to focus on demand are key to gaining momentum in life.

Many people feel that finding happiness is their primary objective, and they are disappointed when it doesn't last for long. Happiness is a vague concept – like stress – and is, for the most part, transient. Satisfaction and contentment come from having accomplished something meaningful. Whether it is a solid day's work, a significant milestone or finishing a major project, a feeling of accomplishment provides real happiness. We enjoy the sense of relief when a worthwhile struggle has passed. If we have grown in some way as a result of the struggle, we value the journey even more, and respect ourselves for having persevered.

To build momentum there is a simple hack: ruthless focus. Focus is the stepping stone to a state of flow. It is the difference between lacklustre efforts and achieving major goals. It's the difference between unfinished to-do lists and a relaxing evening with loved ones. A scattered approach to the day's work can leave us scrambling to tie up loose ends after dinner, while focus allows us to work more productively, achieving key tasks in fewer hours and enjoying leisure time by design: relaxing, socialising or working on our side hustle. The focused individual achieves their New Year's resolutions, while others throw in the towel in February. To become the person we want to be and to live the life we've imagined is almost impossible if we are unable to maintain focus on our key priorities.

So what does it mean to be truly focused? What does it look like in action? And, most importantly, how can we cut through the noise of modern society and cultivate focus in our lives?

What is focus?

The successful warrior is the average man, with laser-like focus.

Bruce Lee

Focus is a competence that can't be taken for granted. In a noisy world, the skill requires both strategy and effort. To focus means to concentrate our conscious awareness on a single task. It happens when we hold attention on one thing at will and with intensity. Imagine the expression on an Olympic gymnast's face before she launches over the vault, the wildlife photographer silently waiting for an animal to emerge from the jungle, the pianist hunched over the keys for hours. We know it when we see it – yet it can seem difficult to achieve that kind of sharp intensity ourselves.

Bruce Lee, the actor and martial-arts master who founded the Jeet Kune Do kung-fu style, was renowned for his masterful ability to focus without reacting to distractions. Although he only lived to 32, he is regarded as one of the most influential martial artists of all time, renowned as a champion fighter and acclaimed as a movie star.

By the time Lee turned 18, he had already appeared in 20 films. He is best known for his starring role in *Enter the Dragon*, which ignited a major trend of martial-arts films in the United States, and established Lee as a legend in the martial-arts world. He was a student of philosophy, a poet, a director and a father of two. His long list of successes did not come easily but demonstrate what one human being can achieve when they perfect their ability to focus.

Lee understood that focus would not come without practice. He planned his days around routines that kept him disciplined and motivated. He prioritised quality nutrition, experimented with many methods of physical training and, most importantly, he practised honing in on a single goal and working towards it without distraction. He stated that he allowed his attention to flow like water: when an obstacle or distraction arose, he simply redirected his focus back to his goal, like a river flowing through rocks and continuing to the sea.³

As Lee demonstrated throughout his life, the ability to focus requires physical health, motivation and deliberate practice. Unfortunately, the modern world makes following his exam-

ple challenging. But if we understand what distracts us, how it affects us and how we can change our environment, we can improve our focus and discover the profound benefits.

A distracted society

If we let ourselves, we shall always be waiting for some distraction or other to end before we can really get down to our work.

C.S. Lewis

If you feel like you're surrounded by distractions, you're not alone. Our society has become an increasingly difficult place to sustain focus. External influences are constantly vying for our attention. From emails and smartphone notifications, to social media and binge-watchable clips on YouTube, it can feel impossible to focus without interruption. It's not your imagination, and it's not because you lack self-discipline, it's because human beings have never been exposed to such extreme information density, and it's changing the way we think. Tristan Harris, an ex-design ethicist at Google, who has since founded an organisation called Time Well Spent, warns of the impact the attention economy is having on us, to the point of claiming we no longer know our own minds.⁴

Harris, who worked at Google for almost three years as a "Product Philosopher", would know. He believes what he calls "our lower-level vulnerabilities" are being exploited by Silicon Valley firms who are actively competing for what they view as the scarcest and most valuable resource in the world today: human attention. He compares online engagement design to "bliss-point" combinations of fat, salt and sugar that food companies have developed to hook consumers.⁵

Employers are also competing for this attention resource, while inadvertently contributing to the noise – think workplace Instant Messengers and open-plan offices. Then there are our family and friends, often the ones most in need of our attention,

who are unfortunately at the end of the queue, especially after a busy day.

The rise of ADHD

Today in the US, ADHD is one of the most diagnosed neurodevelopmental disorders of childhood.⁶ In 2003, 7.8% of US school-age children were diagnosed with ADHD. By 2011 that figure had risen to 11%. That's one in 10 school-age children in the US diagnosed with ADHD.⁷

A child can end up with an ADHD diagnosis if they present a persistent collection of three specific symptoms: inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity.⁸ Basically, if a child has trouble focusing on a single task, becomes extremely restless when they're expected to pay attention and consistently makes hasty choices without thinking of the consequences, they could earn a diagnosis. It's especially difficult for children with ADHD to focus in school, and they typically earn lower grades than their classmates. The disorder can affect individuals well into adulthood, and medication is often prescribed to manage the symptoms.

Why have the rates of ADHD increased during the past 15 years? There are several theories. Diagnostic methods have most likely improved and talking about mental health issues has become less taboo – perhaps making both parents and children more open to asking for help. Some believe that doctors are over diagnosing. One study showed how fixing sleep routines significantly reduced symptoms of ADHD.⁹

Normal behaviour, like a child not wanting to sit quietly at a desk is being considered abnormal, instead of acknowledging that a classroom environment is far from natural for a young animal – of any species!

Some evidence suggests that children with ADHD have an easier time focusing when they are playing outdoors. However, our kids are spending less time outside than previous generations. Instead, they're spending increasing amounts of time

using smartphones and tablets, which are potentially addictive, with lasting effects on neurochemistry. Kids who use technology before bed also struggle with disrupted sleep cycles, which makes it harder for them to pay attention in class the next day.¹⁰ It's not hard to see how these findings might also signal a risk to children without an ADHD diagnosis, and for adults.

Focus and ageing

As we age, we lose some of our ability to focus. Research shows that older adults are more easily distracted than young adults.¹¹

There are two separate processes occurring when our brains are focused. The attentive process gives us the ability to concentrate, while the suppression process is what enables us to block out distractions. We need both in order to focus. But as we grow older, the suppression process becomes less effective.

Studies show that our ability to focus actually begins to decrease in our early 20s. We're able to concentrate just as well, but because of the changes in the suppression process, we're not able to block out distractions like we used to. This only becomes more noticeable as we age, so if we want to learn effective attention control, the sooner we start the better.

Digital distractions

Ignoring distractions in today's highly connected world is no easy task. We've become habituated to hyper-connectivity and feel the pressure to respond immediately to incoming emails and messages. Many messaging apps display when a message has been both delivered and read, meaning that the recipient feels obliged to submit a timely response. This extends to the workplace, where ubiquitous access to communications tools means that employees email each other throughout the work day and outside of work hours, expecting fast responses and normalising these behaviours.

On top of social expectations to keep our phones on hand at

all times, we also receive regular push notifications from applications that lure us back to the device. Every time our phone pings or vibrates, we stop what we're doing and shift focus. Even if we don't swipe through, our attention has already been interrupted and this has as much impact as checking the notification itself.¹²

These endless digital distractions are eroding our ability to focus, and the problem may be even worse than we think. Researchers studied employees in office settings to see how often they switch from one screen to another. In 2004 we looked at a single screen for three minutes before switching. Now we spend less than a minute looking at a screen.¹³ The number of screens in our lives has multiplied and it is not uncommon for us to own a laptop, tablet, phone and even a smartwatch, often all within easy reach.

Why is this modern technology so distracting? One reason is that every time we see a notification, our brains release dopamine, a chemical that provides a fleeting feeling of happiness.¹⁴ That explains why we get so excited when we see that someone has liked one of our posts or commented on one of our photos.

We're not really addicted to our phones – we're addicted to the neurochemical stimulation they deliver. But the feeling fades quickly, and we become locked in a vicious cycle of craving. Receiving notifications doesn't bring us a feeling of long-term fulfilment, but we crave the short-term pleasure over and over again.

Researchers have found that some young people report experiencing a so-called phantom phone phenomenon. They feel their phone vibrate in their pocket or hear it ring, but when they check, they haven't actually received a message.¹⁵

Who hasn't checked their phone out of habit recently? Research suggests we're checking them, on average, 2,617 times a day.¹⁶

Multitasking

Checking our phones and switching screens every few minutes is a form of multitasking.¹⁷ When we're multitasking, it can feel like we're completing two tasks at once, and therefore saving time and energy. But we are wired to be mono-taskers, and for 97.5% of us it's impossible to effectively split our focus between two or more tasks.¹⁸

Consider talking on the phone while answering emails. We end up pausing several times in the conversation to ask the caller to repeat themselves, or we stop typing when we decide that the person is saying something important. We're not really doing two things at the same time, we're rapidly switching between two different actions, making ourselves less efficient overall.

Multitasking gives the illusion of productivity, but it is not a productivity hack, it's a bad habit. It increases our levels of the stress hormone cortisol and can actually lower our IQ over time.¹⁹ Poor sleep, increased worry, procrastination and reduced impulse control are further undesirable consequences of trying to perform multiple tasks simultaneously.²⁰

The benefits of focus

Human beings, it seems, are at their best when immersed deeply in something challenging.

Cal Newport

Will Davison ranks as one of Australia's most successful supercar drivers.²¹

In order to win a race, Davison has to maintain near-perfect control. One small error could mean losing, or crashing. Some of his races can last up to 12 hours, so he needs to be able to stay focused for hours on end.

Davison prepares for the demands of supercar racing by following an intense physical and mental training regimen. He exercises every day, including lifting weights, biking and running.

He also makes time for endurance training and has competed in triathlons and Iron Man competitions together with his wife. Davison's workout sessions don't just train his body, the intensity of his regimen leads to "super compensation", enabling him to perform competently under extreme duress.²² Hardcore physical conditioning allows elite athletes, soldiers and racing drivers to remain calm and focused under the most demanding conditions.

Davison has become a champion because he understands the power of what has recently been termed "deep work".

Cal Newport, author of the best-selling book *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World*, defines deep work as 'the ability to focus without distraction on a cognitively demanding task'. If we can regularly perform deep work, we learn new skills in a shorter amount of time, while producing higher quality output as we progress towards our goals. Deep work, according to Newport, is the 21st-century superpower. Not only does it improve productivity but makes us happier.

Overlapping deep work, focus is also essential for getting into a flow state. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of the classic book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, says that flow is a state of 'deep enjoyment, creativity, and total involvement with life'.²³ When we get into flow, we're in the zone, on form and totally engaged.

This is when you hit your stride in a race and barely notice the other runners around you; when you sit down to write a chapter of your novel and can't take your fingers off the keyboard; when you're tackling an important task with co-workers and become so absorbed that an hour or more simply disappears... that's flow.

In flow state our skills match the challenge and we're motivated, creative and intrinsically rewarded by the experience. The benefits are immense, and focus is the gateway. A scattered approach to life will rarely find us flow.

We've established that focus can help us avoid distractions, be more productive, achieve goals and enjoy the process, all

while setting us apart from the competition. But given the challenges in our highly connected world, how do we cultivate greater focus?

How to improve focus

My success, part of it certainly, is that I have focused in on a few things.

Bill Gates

By committing to a few basic lifestyle adjustments, it's possible to stay focused on our most important tasks throughout the day, get into a flow state, and prioritise deep work over shallow multitasking. But we can't just will ourselves into being focused, we need to set up reliable systems and create an environment that is conducive to focused attention.

Get sufficient high-quality sleep each night

Staying focused during the day starts the night before. As we'll see in subsequent chapters, sufficient high-quality rest is integral to resilience, and with regard to focus it's not difficult to see why. Exhaustion can wreck our cognitive performance²⁴ and relying on caffeine to buoy us through the week is no lasting substitute.

Sleep experts tell us that we need seven to eight hours of well-structured sleep per night. Any less and the impact is quickly measurable. In fact, sleep is three times more important than the rest of your wellbeing program.²⁵

Check out Chapter 10 to understand how to set the optimal schedule for high-quality sleep.

Eliminate decision fatigue

We all know how it feels to be physically fatigued, but even if you've never heard the term decision fatigue before, you've probably experienced it. Researchers have proven that decision fatigue exists and has real and lasting consequences both

in terms of the ability to be productive and on our impulse control.²⁶

Mel Robbins, the popular motivational speaker and author of bestselling *The 5 Second Rule*, reiterates that understanding decision fatigue – and how to avoid it – is one of the keys to achieving both short- and long-term goals.²⁷ Working to improve focus will improve the strength of our willpower, but willpower is a finite resource that decreases with every decision made throughout the day.²⁸

Ever notice how a productive morning can devolve into an aimless afternoon, and how the ability to make clear decisions wavers? Beyond physical fatigue, it could be decision fatigue kicking in. When we've spent an entire morning making a series of decisions, from what to have for breakfast to what to wear, which item on the list to tackle first to what to say to a new client, we can easily find ourselves struggling to maintain momentum in the afternoon. The famous Israeli judge study shows how this can occur with serious consequences. Prisoners who appeared in court early in the morning received parole about 70% of the time, while those who appeared late in the day were awarded parole less than 10% of the time.²⁹

Most people aren't aware of decision fatigue, and this is why we end up feeling disappointed in ourselves when willpower wanes.

How can we eliminate unnecessary decisions from our daily routine? With some careful planning, it's easier than expected. Using weekends and nights to prepare in advance will help us stay more focused during the week.

This can apply to business and domestic tasks. For instance, take some time each Sunday to plan meals for the week, go grocery shopping and spend a few hours batch cooking and refrigerating or freezing dinners and lunches. This eliminates the need for decisions after a busy workday. On weeknights, write a to-do list, plan out clothes for the next day and organise equipment needed for work so there is less to worry about in the morning. Steve Jobs wore the same outfit every day for good

reason. Less decisions means more energy reserved for what really matters.

Digital automation can also help. Imagine the blog writer who, in addition to writing compelling content, needs to source photos, publish the post and share it across multiple social channels. Doing this manually every day will burn through a lot of time, and the more minor decisions the blogger needs to make, the less energy remains for complex or deep work tasks. Instead, the blogger might dedicate a few hours to planning and researching content, and then two days per week to writing. She then uses automation tools, such as those found in WordPress, to schedule blog post publication automatically over the course of the week. Social media automation tools like Sendible can then automatically detect newly published content and share to all social channels instantaneously.

Other digital automation tools like IFTTT (If this then that) and Zapier allow us to take a programmatic approach to common tasks, from email handling to smart home control, and even checking whether it is a good day to go surfing. For example, I program IFTTT with this script: ‘If the waves are 4 foot or larger and the wind is blowing from the west, then send a text message to me’. IFTTT checks the surf forecast every 15 minutes and texts me when the surf conditions meet my required criteria. I no longer need to check the surf report manually because I know that when conditions are good, I’ll receive a text message.

Through automation, we employ technology as a decision maker and avoid diluting our focus. Artificial intelligence promises to take this far beyond our current capability by executing intelligent responses to complex decisions in real-time. For example, the waves are good, so reschedule meetings in my calendar, order more surfboard wax online and call an Uber to take me to the beach. Or maybe the robots will all just go surfing themselves.

Having templates on hand for basic tasks is another useful hack. For example, imagine a small business owner who regularly pitches clients in the same niche. Instead of writing up

unique email responses every time, he sets up automated message sequences in a CRM tool. He simply clicks in the enquiry, customises if necessary and sends, knowing that he's used the best and most comprehensive reply possible. The CRM can then automatically follow-up the lead based on user triggered events, or lack of them.

Use a block scheduling method to avoid multitasking

As we've seen, attempting to multitask inhibits our ability to focus, and means we'll accomplish less. Over time, a habit of constantly multitasking can seriously hinder progress towards our goals. We may find ourselves in a state of general confusion – mindless busyness – where we reach the end of the week without actually having completed anything meaningful. For many, this is the first step towards our resilience being compromised. This is a cognitive risk.

Relearning how to focus on a single task at a time is like training a muscle. It may feel difficult at first, but it will get easier the more often we try.³⁰

The way we structure our to-do list can help us stay on track and avoid switching from task to task. One method is to simply make a list of everything that we need to do throughout the day and start from the top. The more disciplined among us might define whether tasks are urgent or important and then prioritise their list accordingly. However, neither of these approaches sets us up for optimal focus.

To mitigate the multitasking risk and encourage deep work, give block scheduling a try. Block scheduling involves grouping similar tasks together and reserving specific times to tackle each block. Throughout a typical workday, there are a variety of tasks we need to complete, and they will likely fall into a few distinct categories. By blocking off chunks of time for similar tasks, we're able to perform deep work, perhaps even get into flow, rather than bouncing from one unrelated task to another.

On the average work day many of us start with checking

emails, then gradually build up towards the toughest tasks. This is exactly how we end up experiencing decision fatigue. Try reversing this. Start with tasks that require creativity or concentration first thing in the morning and then move on to easier work, like replying to emails or attending meetings. Avoid checking emails numerous times per day – rather assign time blocks for administrative tasks and turn unnecessary technology off in between. In Silicon Valley the idea of Monk Mode – named because advocates completely disconnect for a set period each day – has gained popularity.³¹ Practitioners become monk-like in their focus (remember the Dalai Lama’s schedule) in order to accelerate progress.

But everyone is slightly different. If you experiment with block scheduling, pay attention to where and when you focus best. For many, peak alertness occurs around 9:30am and is a great time to schedule an hour for Monk Mode. Allocate the most important tasks for these moments.

Remove distractions

As we learnt earlier in this chapter, current research shows that digital distractions are eroding our ability to focus. But most of us can’t go totally off grid. Thankfully, there are plenty of methods and tools we can use to eliminate distractions. We may not be able to ditch our smartphones, but we can definitely avoid the temptation to check Twitter in the middle of the workday – or at 2am.

Make use of the do-not-disturb option on your smartphone, turn off notifications or put the phone on silent. Ensure vibration mode is deactivated. Be deliberate about interacting with technology. We don’t want to get into flow state only to be distracted when a friend texts about weekend plans. Hide phones in drawers and check for any important messages in between tasks or when taking a break. Even then, remember anything that isn’t urgent can wait until the relevant time block. If you wear a smartwatch switch off all notifications permanently.

Having email, text messages and social notifications on your wrist is, in my opinion, the highway to hell. If you use your smartwatch for exercising, protect the experience – don't let a meeting request ruin your run.

What if you're online most of the day and you just can't help switching to Facebook once in a while? Deleting social media accounts is certainly a possibility, but since many of us use them for work and to keep in touch with family and friends, it's not always practical to go cold turkey. If good old-fashioned will-power is eluding you, try out a website-blocking app to restrict access to certain websites for a set period of time.

For example, if you know that you're especially tempted to check social media during that late afternoon energy slump, you can block Facebook and Twitter between 12pm and 5pm. Alternatively, you can take it a step further and block everything except a few sites that you need to whitelist. Perhaps toilet breaks are optimal times for catching up on social feeds. Research suggests that 9 out of 10 of us already take the phone to the bathroom. Tip of the day: you might want to think twice about touching someone else's phone as the devices are often infested with E.coli and other microbes.³²

People can also be a huge distraction, especially in open-plan offices. Consider establishing a protocol whereby if you are wearing headphones it signals that you would rather all queries come digitally. You could also book meeting rooms or work remotely for times you plan to get into flow.

Finally, it helps to eliminate physical distractions. A cluttered workspace may not seem like a big deal, but having too many items on a desk can pull focus away from work.³³ When working from home, ensure that the workspace is detached from the living environment and establish rituals to help you shift focus to your work priorities. For many, changing clothes or listening to motivational music provides a cue that work is now beginning.

Drugs

Smart drugs, so-called *nootropics*, prescription medication and psychedelics all promise to boost focus and productivity. Silicon Valley engineers espouse the benefits of micro-dosing psilocybin (magic mushrooms) and LSD³⁴, while students are using narcolepsy drugs to gain an edge in their studies³⁵. The legal use of narcolepsy pills by astronauts, surgeons and soldiers has encouraged many to go forth and source the medication from shady online pharmacies. While some of these cognitive enhancers have demonstrated benefits there are, of course, side effects, documented mostly on Reddit forums. Anxiety, panic attacks, anger, migraines and depression are reported. Educate yourself before dabbling in the dark side of focus. Self-proclaimed Human Guinea Pig, Tim Ferriss, advises caution when it comes to nootropics. Biohacker Dave Asprey switched from drugs to a ketogenic diet and recommends bulletproof coffee as the ultimate cognitive enhancer.³⁶ Bulletproof coffee is created using coconut oil, butter and coffee. It is oily, delicious and packed full of calories. Use with caution and as part of a carefully structured diet.

Regular coffee, by comparison, seems relatively tame, yet provides significant cognitive enhancement with comparatively mild side effects for most drinkers. Use with care and limit intake after 2pm if you have trouble sleeping.

Energy drinks and caffeine tablets are not recommended. In my opinion, a clear to-do list, good night's sleep and a morning workout are more effective than most stimulants.

Begin a regular meditation practice

You do not have to be a spiritual person to practice meditation, or enjoy the benefits. Various cultures have practiced forms of meditation throughout history and no matter what you do or don't believe in, there is sure to be a method that resonates. You may be most familiar with mindfulness meditation,

which has become popular and accessible with the advent of apps like Headspace. The popularity of meditation is no fad, with numerous studies showing that it can help to relieve stress, reduce feelings of anxiety and depression, boost mood and improve the ability to focus.³⁷

There are dozens of meditation methods and it can be both fun and frustrating finding one that suits you. As a total beginner, you may find meditation challenging without guidance so attending a course or downloading a meditation app are good ways to get started.³⁸ Apps like Calm, Headspace and the Resilience App include selections of pre-recorded guided meditations designed for everything from falling asleep to dealing with anxiety.

The process of meditation really is as simple – and as difficult! – as maintaining attention on one point of focus in the present moment – be that sounds, sensations, the breath, a mantra – and when you catch yourself thinking about something else, return attention to the focus point. It is not avoiding thinking, as commonly believed, because thoughts will always naturally come and go. Rather, it is the act of recognising drift and controlling attention at will. And it does get easier over time.

Historian Yuval Noah Harari recommends two hours of meditation per day for optimal results.³⁹ For many of us this is almost incomprehensible. However, even a much less time-intensive approach can yield noticeable benefits. Research shows that as little as 5 to 10 minutes a day for a few months can result in lowered inflammation⁴⁰ and an increased sense of wellbeing.

What's the easiest way for most people to include meditation sessions in their daily routine? Lock in time before bedtime or shortly after waking up. Think of how often we grab our phones before we go to bed or right after we wake up. What if we reserved those precious minutes for a meditative practice instead?

Meditation teaches attention control. Having learnt how to recognise distracting thoughts, we notice them arise during the work day and can confidently pause, focus on the breath, then

return to the task at hand. This is real-time resilience and the basis for living mindfully.

With time, bringing our full attention into the present moment is something that becomes a way of life. See Chapter 6 – Presence – for more.

Final thoughts

It is how we choose what we do, and how we approach it, that will determine whether the sum of our days adds up to a formless blur, or to something resembling a work of art.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Modifying our routine and environment to cultivate focus can seem uncomfortable at first, and it always remains tempting to submit to distractions. With concerted effort we can build up attention control and apply it to life at will. This is a major component of resilience and a sure-fire way to accelerate success.

Rate my current ability to focus

How important is focus to me?

Which three skills, used daily, would improve my score?

☐

Remove distractions

☐

Improve sleep habits

☐

Avoid multitasking

☐

Eliminate decision fatigue

☐

Meditation

☐

Regular breaks

What would my score be if I became a master of the three skills I have selected?

Imagine myself successfully using these skills every day.

How do I feel in my body?

.....
Which emotions am I experiencing?

.....
What am I thinking?

.....
What am I willing to start tomorrow?

.....
How will I remind myself?

☐

Phone reminder

☐

Written note

Register your commitment and get inspiration at:

<https://bradleyhook.com/mastery>



PURPOSE

There is no passion to be found in playing small – in settling for a life that is less than the one you're capable of living.

Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela lived a life that was nothing short of revolutionary. He grew up in a segregated South Africa during apartheid, under a government that was able to legally discriminate against black citizens. While white citizens enjoyed many privileges and advantages under this system, other racial groups were oppressed.

Acting out against this system usually resulted in severe punishment, imprisonment and even death. As a black man, Mandela was considered a second-class citizen, and he knew fighting against the government would have serious consequences.

From childhood, Mandela dreamed of living in a democratic country where everyone was treated equally, so he decided to dedicate his life to his people's fight for freedom and equality. He worked tirelessly to change South African society and was identified by the regime as one of the leaders of South Africa's anti-apartheid movement. The government labelled him a terrorist and his continued political activism led to imprisonment in 1964. He spent 27 years in prison but during those years he never gave up on the idea that South Africa could become a better place for everyone. He always said that he was prepared to give his life for the cause, and he meant it.

When he was finally released in 1990, Mandela returned to

the world of South African politics. After the apartheid system ended in 1994, he became the President of South Africa, earning the distinction of being South Africa's first black head of state and the first elected in a fully representative democratic election. In his inaugural speech he signalled that violence and retribution were not options, despite the prime years of his life being stolen by the previous government, saying: 'All South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity – a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.'

Upon the news of his death in 2013, world leaders mourned the passing of an icon, whose example set a new benchmark for non-violence.

How was Mandela able to stand up against prejudice and discrimination for decades without wavering in his convictions? How was he able to endure 27 years in prison without letting go of his hopes for the future of South Africa? How was he able to overcome so much hardship and adversity and continue pressing forward until he realised his vision?

Mandela had a strong sense of purpose – so strong that he was able to set aside his ego and dedicate his life to a singular pursuit that was larger than him. Throughout history, great leaders have proven that in order to change ourselves, our communities or our whole world, we must find a sense of purpose that keeps us motivated no matter the challenge.

What is purpose?

The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honourable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Purpose is the *why*. It provides us with a reason for doing something that engages our emotions, igniting a strong sense

of motivation and determination. Having a purpose gives us confidence and clarity, reducing external noise and providing us with a clear vision.

Without purpose, the movie of our life becomes a gratuitous ride to nowhere. We look back and wonder why we got lost in a noisy, rushed, pointless drama. The number 1 regret of those dying in palliative care is reported to be, 'I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me'.⁴¹

We can use logic and reason to strategize and justify our actions, but a life of purpose provides both inspiration and meaning. With purpose, we are driven by the limbic system (our emotions) rather than the neocortex (the rational brain). Emotions are more powerful drivers of action than thoughts, so finding a purpose – the *why* – is the starting point around which a good and resilient life is constructed.⁴² To explore the power of purpose, consider the person working in a high-pressure consulting firm, earning a sizeable paycheque. On paper, life is good: they have the house, the car, the family and status they thought would make them happy. However, there is an insatiable niggle that something is missing. What happened to the childhood dream of really making a difference? One day, after a health scare, this person quits their job and accepts a much lower-paying position within a non-profit. There are some side effects, such as not being able to afford extravagant holidays, but the result is more time, more freedom and a sense of purpose gained from being part of a committed collective. The person wonders why they waited so long. For someone else, they might feel claustrophobic working in the non-profit, so they follow their purpose, which is to unravel the world's most complex problems within a top consulting firm. They make the move and wonder why they waited so long.

A powerful purpose transcends the individual, usually requiring a sacrifice of time, money and relationships. Purpose provides focus and motivation during times of adversity. It keeps us moving at the end of a marathon when our legs are

about to buckle. It is the reason a parent will apply for an extra job to provide for their children. Volunteers are driven by purpose when spending their free time at animal shelters, nursing homes and community events. Purpose is what keeps political activists, revolutionaries and protestors devoting their lives to causes that may not benefit them personally but could change the course of history. Purpose is the small flame we carry, even in times of darkness. It's the voice that whispers 'don't give up', and 'I can do this'.

The hero's journey

Mythology is to relate found truth to the living of life.

Joseph Campbell

Humans are storytelling apes, with narrative providing a method for sharing values, building culture and conserving wisdom across generations. Storytelling evokes an emotional response – we empathise and imagine experiences as if we are the characters portrayed. Digging deeper, we discover that many of our most popular stories share similar patterns.

Here is a common story structure: the subject embarks on a quest, meets mentors along the way, experiences small victories, encounters larger setbacks, considers giving up, then remembers their purpose and gathers the strength to proceed and triumph over adversity.

Sounds familiar? So many classic stories have these elements in common that mythologist Joseph Campbell identified them as part of The Hero's Journey.⁴³ It's an archetypal story pattern about the human struggle that has been applied to countless narratives, both ancient and modern.

The hero's journey typically begins with the hero receiving a call to adventure. This is the moment when they decide whether a challenge will become their purpose, and they often doubt whether they are up for the task. Along the way, they seek mentors who assist them on their quest, and although they may be

tempted to quit at some points in the journey, their sense of purpose continues to propel them forwards.

We're all on our own hero's journey. Our sense of purpose is the compass that guides us along the way. But unlike the heroes in these stories, our journeys haven't been written yet. We have the power to change course and realign with our sense of purpose at any time. The challenge is to adjust our own narratives and behaviours and to live with conviction. Doing so can change everything.

The benefits of finding purpose

He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Jewish author and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl spent three years living in labour and concentration camps during World War II. During this time, he lost everything: his possessions, his career and his loved ones. He endured hardships that are unimaginable to most people, while witnessing the Nazis commit horrific acts of cruelty. It is impossible for most of us to comprehend the suffering that Frankl experienced. He was lucky to escape with his life and when he was finally released at the end of the war, Frankl returned to his native Austria and began giving lectures on psychological healing and finding meaning in the darkest of times.⁴⁴

Frankl eventually published reflections on his experiences in his book *Saying Yes to Life in Spite of Everything: A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camps*, which became world famous under its English title *Man's Search for Meaning*. He aimed to explore whether or not it was possible to find meaning and purpose even in the midst of unfathomable trauma. His conclusion? Even great suffering holds meaning. Love and devotion to our fellow human beings will keep us going in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. He even suggested that we need to experience serious challenges in or-

der to feel fulfilled, stating: ‘What is to give light must endure burning.’

Having a sense of purpose can elevate our lives and take us from serving ourselves to serving others. When we approach a goal without a sense of purpose, we’re more likely to give up when faced with challenges. But when we have a real purpose, tied to strong emotions, determination can propel us beyond even seemingly insurmountable setbacks.

Experts like Frankl witnessed first-hand how purpose can make or break humans in the most dire circumstances. But how can having a sense of purpose change our day-to-day lives?

Achieving goals

Setting goals is the easy part. Even thinking about how we plan to achieve them can be a fun process. We imagine ourselves getting up early to go for a run every day. We tell ourselves that we’ll put a portion of every pay check into our savings until we have enough set aside for that dream trip. We feel motivated during the first week of our new routine, especially when we picture how glorious the end result will be.

But that early burst of motivation doesn’t last forever. Many people give up on their goals early on. Gyms are often crowded in January, but only a few of us persevere through the rest of the year. What’s the difference between the people who keep pushing forward and those who throw in the towel?

One major distinction between these two groups is whether or not they write down their goals. Simple as it sounds, the benefits of writing down goals is actually backed by data.

A study conducted at Harvard University showed that the 3% of graduates who had written down their goals were earning, on average, 10 times as much as the other 97% of the class combined.

Dr Gail Matthews, a psychology professor at the Dominican University in California, carried out a fascinating study on goal setting in 2016.⁴⁵ Participants included students, entrepre-

neurs, lawyers, artists and people from many other professional backgrounds. She divided the 267 participants into two groups: those who wrote down their goals on a regular basis and those who did not. The results? Those who wrote down their goals were 42% more likely to achieve them than those who didn't.

However, Matthews found that it was necessary for participants to write down their goals on a regular basis. Continuously updating goal logs and re-evaluating progress was key to success.

Award-winning Australian educator, Ian Hutchinson, re-iterates this in his teachings, saying simply, 'Clarity creates control'. Working with Ian for over a decade, I can testify to the power of clear and consistent goal-setting. Ian is a master at gaining momentum, constantly assessing whether projects align with his purpose and then chunking them down into achievable tasks. Together we created a web app called Goals Unlimited which later became part of our popular toolkit, meCentral.com.

In the digital age there are countless tools designed to help us make sense of goal-setting. Just as the types of goals we pursue change, so will the systems and processes that support our achievement of them. A vision board might work for some while others need project management software.

Purpose keeps us going

Having a sense of purpose motivates us to overcome obstacles on the path to achieving our goals. This doesn't only apply to major challenges and can help serve as a north star when encountering small things that cause us stress on a daily basis. When we know that we're serving a greater purpose, dealing with minor inconveniences doesn't throw off an entire day. We're able to execute practical bounce skills to deal with everyday stressors in a healthy, proactive way. Over the course of our lifetimes this has major benefits.

Studies now show that there is more to living a long, healthy life than simply eating well and exercising. Researchers have

found that people who believe they have a purpose in life actually live longer. Furthermore, they have lower rates of disease and more physical strength in the later years of their lives.⁴⁶

Researchers began looking into the connection between purpose and physical health in the late 1980s. A report published in *JAMA Psychiatry* showed that seniors who agreed with the phrase ‘I feel that I have goals and something to live for’ had better grip strength and faster walking speeds than seniors who did not.⁴⁷

Other studies have revealed that seniors who felt that they had a sense of purpose also had lower rates of common debilitating diseases like Alzheimer’s and dementia, and they were less likely to suffer from heart attacks or strokes. They also had longer life spans on average.⁴⁸

Why does having a sense of purpose help us live longer, healthier lives? It could be related to minimising biological distress. When we confront a challenge, our cortisol and adrenalin levels increase. This is normal and necessary – without enough challenge we slide into apathy and boredom – however, if we’re constantly distressed over a long period of time our immune response may be compromised, leading to inflammation. Chronic, long-term inflammation can lead to suffering, ranging from aches and joint pain to serious illness.⁴⁹

When we are able to cope with distress and respond effectively, we reduce the risk of chronic inflammation. This is the foundation of resilience. Individuals who feel that they have something to live for are more likely to take care of their physical health, connections with others and mental wellbeing, bolstering their ability to deal with adversity, in a virtuous and uplifting cycle.

Another study published in *Psychological Science* involved 6000 participants who were asked to evaluate what they felt about their purpose in life.⁵⁰ The researchers followed up with the participants 14 years later, and they discovered that people who agreed with the statement ‘Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them’ had a 15% lower mortal-

ity rate within the 14-year period. Researchers also controlled for other important factors that have an impact on mortality – such as age, gender and emotional well-being – and a sense of purpose still proved instrumental.

Did this only apply to people who found their purpose at a young age and then spent their lives chasing it? No. It turned out that it doesn't matter if we find our purpose at 15, 50 or 75. Figuring it out at any point in life still made a difference.

We're all fascinated by stories of people who discovered their purpose early and went on to achieve great things. As we get older, we may feel discouraged if we haven't figured out our own purpose. We might struggle to find a career that suits us, accept jobs that aren't quite the right fit and wonder what it is we're really working towards. As time passes, we may question whether or not we'll ever uncover our purpose. But purpose is timeless and can be evoked at any age. Someone could find their dream job in their 50s, excel at a new creative hobby in their 60s or spend their retirement volunteering, engaging in work that provides immense meaning.

It is never too late to find a purpose. As we get older, we may discover a passion that we never considered before, along with a whole new reason to tackle each day with enthusiasm.

Purpose in action

Being the richest man in the cemetery doesn't matter to me. Going to bed at night saying we've done something wonderful, that's what matters to me.

Steve Jobs

What does it look like when someone allows their purpose to take them to new heights? How can one human being with a strong sense of purpose change our culture?

For a modern example, look no further than Steve Jobs, the co-founder of Apple, Inc., the company that revolutionised consumer technology. Jobs wasn't just passionate about creat-

ing technology that functioned well, he was passionate about beautiful design. He was the creative mind behind the iMac, iPod, iPhone and iPad. He is known as one of the leaders of the personal computer revolution of the 1980s, and he's the reason we are able to carry thousands of songs, movies and apps in our pockets today.

Jobs had a modest upbringing. His birth parents put him up for adoption and he lived an altogether ordinary existence with his working-class adoptive family. He was a loner during high school but showed a keen interest in electronics. Although he was accepted to the prestigious liberal arts school, Reed College, he left soon after because he felt that he was wasting his parents' money.

After dropping out of Reed, Jobs began working with the video-game company Atari and became enthralled with Eastern mysticism. He travelled to India for several months, began meditating and experimented with psychedelics. For a brief period of time, he considered living in a monastery but eventually returned to California and continued working with Atari.

Upon his return to California, Jobs and business partner Steve Wozniak began experimenting with new ways to make technology accessible to the general public. First, the two developed a device called a blue box, which allowed users to make free long-distance calls. When sales of the illegal blue box took off, Jobs and Wozniak knew they had accomplished something major: they had proven that they were capable of beating big tech companies at their own game.

Jobs and Wozniak designed the first Apple computer in Jobs' garage and while many dismissed the product, the pair secured investors and were on their way to building a multimillion-dollar company. The Apple II became one of the first popular microcomputers for the general public. As the years went on, Jobs brought the iPod, the iPhone and the iPad to the market, stunning consumers with modern, sleek, user-friendly design.

Before Jobs, technology products were most often designed by engineers and tended to be chunky and functional, rather

than optimised for user experience. But Jobs had a mission: he wanted to blend technology and art, and in order to do that, he decided to give the personal computer a whole new aesthetic. He didn't just want to innovate in terms of functionality, he wanted beautiful user interfaces and gorgeous typography. Jobs wanted to show consumers that technology could better their lives. He lived out this purpose each and every day.

There's no doubt that Jobs had a difficult climb to the top. At one point, he was famously ousted from his own company. But through it all, he never stopped imagining what he could create – thinking differently and innovating relentlessly. In his time away from Apple he co-founded Pixar, which revolutionised animation, producing ground-breaking films like *Toy Story*. Jobs' proves that having a sense of purpose can transform your life, and the lives of those around you, if you have the courage to completely dedicate your life to it.

How do you find your purpose?

Effort and courage are not enough without purpose and direction.

John F. Kennedy

It's clear that having a sense of purpose is the key to living a life of meaning and that it can help us live a longer, healthier life. But many people are confused about how to find their purpose in the first place. How do we discover the thing that drives us? How do we decide which path is the right one?

It can be a difficult process. Some people are lucky and discover a purpose when they're young, while others stumble upon their purpose seemingly by accident. If we want to be proactive, there are several strategies we can use to bring us closer to our purpose.

Reconsider what we already do

Most of us do things that serve others – this is the founda-

tion of business. Affecting small changes in the lives of those around us may not seem grandiose or glamorous, but it means more than we realise. For example, someone working in IT doesn't simply work in IT, they assist people and companies every day by solving complex problems. An elementary school teacher doesn't just stand at the front of the classroom and assign homework, they shape the minds of future generations. Even a waiter doesn't just put food on tables, they help people celebrate special gatherings and create positive experiences for their customers. No matter what we do in our day-to-day lives, we can infuse it with a stronger sense of purpose and keep in mind that we all contribute something special.

Our purpose doesn't have to align with a job title

Our jobs take up 40 hours of our time each week – if we're lucky! It's understandable that when many of us think of what our purpose could be, we think of our jobs. We might assume that in order to fulfil our purpose, we have to secure employment in a certain field, or that all of our paid work must revolve around our purpose. For some people, this turns out to be true, but for others, it's simply not feasible. And that's okay. When we limit ourselves to the idea that we have to turn our purpose into our career, we can miss out on opportunities to develop ourselves and pursue our purpose.

Many novels have been written on lunch breaks. Albums have been recorded on weekends off. Non-profits have been started by people who never saw a cent for their charitable efforts and never needed to because they already had a day job. There are large volunteer groups that have no paid staff, but still do amazing work for their communities. In addition, there are people who feel that their purpose has nothing to do with labour at all, they simply aim to be a guiding light for their relatives and friends. Be open to the possibility that purpose might not translate into a pay cheque, and that this doesn't make it less valuable or meaningful.

Think back to childhood

Kids have no limits on what they can imagine. They wear whatever strikes their fancy, make up games all day long and dream of being whatever they want to be. Whether they picture themselves being actors, artists, dancers, doctors or astronauts, they allow themselves to believe with all their hearts that they can accomplish whatever they set out to do. But as they get older, they are often met with discouragement. Someone might tell them they're not smart or skilled enough to pursue a particular vocation, while others might tell them that they'll never make any money doing what they love. Many people dismiss their passions as childish notions, only to realise they neglected their real purpose until later in life. Alan Watts famously asked, "What if money was no object?"⁵¹ This is why it is so important to ask, "What do I desire?"⁵¹ and take the answer seriously.

If you're still struggling to find out what your real purpose is, it might be time to take a walk down memory lane. Who were you before the world told you who you should be? What did you want to do before anyone imposed limits on you? This is a powerful exercise that can reveal passions you nearly forgot you had. If you're having trouble remembering, talk to your parents or an older sibling – they may be able to provide some surprising insights. Or get yourself to a festival. There's no doubt that gatherings such as Burning Man can ignite new purpose as we immerse ourselves in melting pots of creative human mayhem. It also gives us a chance to be children again. Cross-pollination and exposure to art in any form can provide inspiration.

Embrace the unknown

Embracing the unknown means trying out new things and letting go of old habits. We can't discover a new purpose if we're stuck in old routines. Sometimes we need to be willing to let go of people, behaviours and places that are holding us back from reaching our potential. Instead, we need to place ourselves in

environments where we can discover and fulfil our purpose, ideally surrounded by those who will support us on the path. Furthermore, we need to consider which behaviours might be preventing us from achieving our goals. These may include anything from diet and exercise to sleep schedule and destructive relationships.

Sometimes, our purpose is only revealed after making a major life change. This could mean ending a toxic relationship, moving to a city where we don't know anyone or quitting a job and travelling the world. Courage will be required. As Steve Jobs famously said, 'You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something — your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.'

If you've been sensing that it's time to give your life a complete overhaul, it could be because you're on your way to finding your purpose. Trust your intuition. It's never too late.

Serve others

People who have found their purpose are not simply doing things to satisfy their own ego, they are often working towards causes that are bigger than themselves. When someone sets out on their hero's journey, they are making a sacrifice for the good of other people. The world famous motivational speaker Tony Robbins has made this a core focus of many of his lectures. Robbins explains that the Latin root of the word hero is *servo*, which means "to serve". He extrapolates that leadership is to serve and heroism is to be a servant of something greater. If we want to find our purpose, we should consider dedicating our time and energy to enriching the lives of others.

If this seems overwhelming, start small – it is not necessary to solve all of the world's problems right from the start. Try getting involved with a volunteer group in the community, of-

fering to help people with projects they're working on or simply reaching out to family and friends when they need a helping hand. Spend time assisting people who have a strong sense of purpose – their enthusiasm will enrich you, and they will appreciate your support.

Final Thoughts

The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honourable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

We all have a choice to make: we can live for ourselves, or we can live for a greater purpose. Purpose is at the core of a meaningful life. People who live with purpose have a reason to get up each morning and greet the day with confidence, knowing that every new day represents another chance to serve the world in their own way.

Finding a sense of purpose can feel like a daunting task. But there is no rush. We can discover our purpose at any age. It is never too late to set out on the hero's journey and see what the path has in store. Remember, the key to finding purpose is figuring out how we can best serve others. When we live with this in mind, everything else falls into place.

**Purpose is
the 'why'.
Service is
the 'how'.**

How purposeful is my life right now?



How important is purpose to me?



Tick three items below that would improve my score:

☐

Try to serve others

☐

Make a life change

☐

Redefine my work

☐

Volunteer

☐

Revisit my dreams

☐

Explore new interests

What would my score be if I successfully achieved the three items I have selected?



Imagine myself living with a strong sense of purpose...

How do I feel in my body?

.....

Which emotions am I experiencing?

.....

What am I thinking?

.....

What am I willing to start tomorrow?

.....

How will I remind myself?

☐

Phone reminder

☐

Written note

Register your commitment and get inspiration at:

<https://bradleyhook.com/mastery>



FULFILMENT

The art of fulfilment is the ability to experience not only the thrill of the chase but also the magic of the moment, the unbridled joy of feeling truly alive.

Tony Robbins

In recent years, neuroscientists and positive psychologists have gained remarkable insights from studies of our brain, biochemistry and nervous system. In 2004, Tibetan monk Matthieu Ricard stunned researchers when he participated in a study at the University of Wisconsin. While monitoring his brain during meditation, they discovered what they believed to be the strongest gamma brainwaves that had ever been observed in a study. Furthermore, his left prefrontal cortex was positively buzzing with activity compared to his right.⁵²

What does this mean? Gamma brainwaves are the fastest brainwave frequency, with the smallest amplitude of all observable brainwaves. Low gamma brainwave activity is often correlated with anxiety, depression and difficulty learning new information,⁵³ while high gamma brainwave activity, often observed in monks and experienced meditators, is associated with feelings of happiness, fulfilment, compassion towards others; and even a feeling of oneness with people around us and the universe itself.⁵⁴ Some scientists have referred to gamma brainwaves as nature's best antidepressant, while others associate high gamma activity with peak performance and being 'in the

zone’ – or in flow state.⁵⁵

After participating in the gamma brainwave study, the media dubbed Ricard “the happiest man in the world” and eagerly sought his advice for living a happy life. But in true Ricard fashion, his answers were probably not what most people anticipated.

Ricard has always chosen the path less travelled. He was born in France to successful and influential parents, his father was the renowned French philosopher Jean-François Revel and his mother the painter Yahne Le Toumelin. As a result, he was raised amongst the French intellectual elite where he gained insights that would eventually lead him to choose an unconventional path.

In his 20s, Ricard studied molecular genetics at Institute Pasteur, earning a PhD in 1972. It was during this time that he became enthralled with Buddhist teachings, sometimes questioning whether or not to continue his education, find a job or pursue something completely unconventional. He spent time travelling through India and ultimately relocated to the Himalayas, becoming a monk in his 30s.

Ricard began writing to share his perspectives with the world, and in 1997 he published his first book in collaboration with his father, titled *The Monk and the Philosopher: A Father and Son Discuss the Meaning of Life*. He published consistently over the next 20 years including the bestselling *Altruism* in 2013.

While Ricard spends most of his days either working on his Karuna-Shechen humanitarian project or in isolation, he is also a gifted public speaker. His Ted Talks “The Habits of Happiness” and “How to Let Altruism Be Your Guide” became viral sensations receiving millions of views and widespread mainstream acclaim. Most recently, he published the book *A Plea for the Animals* and his collection of photographs *An Ode to Beauty*. His proceeds go directly to the Karuna-Shechen project, providing healthcare and education to communities in India, Nepal and Tibet.⁵⁶ He is close friends with the Dalai Lama and even serves as his French translator. Ricard’s work, philos-

ophy – and remarkable brain functionality – have touched the lives of millions and his revelations on happiness and fulfilment have challenged people to reconsider what gives life meaning.

He says that beginning a dedicated meditation practice is the first step for anyone who wants to cultivate a more positive outlook on life, recommending that people commit to two 20-minute sessions of compassion meditation to start and end their days. This form of meditation involves focusing on a feeling of all-consuming love for the duration of the session and then trying to carry that sense of joy throughout the day.

But there is more to it than just meditating. Ricard says that if people want to experience true happiness, they need to prioritise personal flourishing. This means finding self-fulfilment by positively affecting others – embodying the ideal of “compassion in action.” When we grow and change in order to positively transform the world around us, that’s where we find real fulfilment.

Despite his designation as the world’s happiest man, Ricard emphasises serenity and fulfilment as being most important aspects of existence. What is fulfilment, and what does it really mean to live a fulfilling life?

Defining fulfilment

If you devote yourself entirely to a noble pursuit, there is no way you cannot find beauty and fulfilment.

Daniel Gillies

Fulfilment goes hand in hand with happiness and contentment, but these concepts are not the same. Fulfilment is a deep-seated awareness that we’ve achieved or contributed something meaningful. It’s the feeling we get after nailing a goal we’ve worked towards for a long time, something into which we’ve invested blood, sweat and tears. Most often this achievement has a positive impact on people beyond ourselves. It is upon the hero’s journey – especially during times of adversity,

struggle and discomfort – that the seeds of fulfilment are sowed.

Fulfilment isn't synonymous with pleasure. Consider a scenario. It is Friday night and after a stressful week the lure of fast food is stronger than that of the supermarket and cooking at home. We place the order, peel back those paper and cardboard wrappings and enjoy a few moments of salt, fat and sugar bliss. Sure, we know it's not the healthiest, but our bellies are full and our wallets are only a few dollars lighter. Plus, there are no dishes to wash. That's pleasure: a fleeting feeling of satisfaction experienced when we indulge in fast foods, shopping sprees, a few extra beers or an extramarital affair.

Now, imagine deciding to make a positive change to the way we eat. Grocery shopping is unavoidable, so we make a list and spend a few minutes meal planning. We decide that tonight we'd like to make our partner's favourite dish. We head to the farmer's market and pick up all of the ingredients. We enjoy chatting to the vendors, who tell us about how they grew the food. We spend an hour in the kitchen chopping, simmering, roasting and garnishing. When dinner time rolls around, we're a bit sweaty and the apron is covered in stains but we can't wait to taste the final result. Our partner raves about how delicious the meal was and we spend some time cleaning up the kitchen together. We feel full, satisfied and proud of our efforts. The meal was healthy and the ingredients purchased from trustworthy sources. That's fulfilment: we've accomplished something meaningful and shared it with others. We may even remember that meal and talk about it again sometime.

A teacher feels fulfilled when she spends days running through a tough math concept and finally sees that Aha! look on her students' faces. And the student feels fulfilled when they understand a topic after struggling through homework for a week. An athlete feels fulfilled not when they win an easy game, but when they give it their all against an intimidating opponent and play better than they ever have before, regardless of the final score. A volunteer at an animal shelter gets a sense of fulfilment when the rowdy stray they've been working with for

a month clicks with an adoptive owner who can keep up with their energy and provide a loving home. A businessperson feels fulfilled when that big contract that they've persevered with for a year results in a client who is elated with the result.

We find fulfilment when we invest significant effort towards something important, most probably in the service of others. We feel fulfilled when productivity and purpose meet sacrifice and self-growth – when our external and internal worlds have aligned. Fulfilment isn't happiness, but we must build a fulfilling life to experience true and lasting happiness. This is why Matthieu Ricard believes that fulfilment, not happiness, should be the goal.

Why do people feel unfulfilled?

Boredom is the conviction that you can't change ... the shriek of unused capacities.

Saul Bellow

In order to be genuinely happy, we must start with pursuing a purpose that has the potential to be fulfilling. But despite all of the research on happiness, mindfulness and positivity, many people still struggle to lead such a life. Although we must all accept a certain amount of personal responsibility for our own circumstances, some researchers believe that the way Western society is structured is contributing to this lack of fulfilment.

One would assume that people in wealthy, developed nations would feel happier and more fulfilled. After all, most of them have their basic needs taken care of, so they can spend more time pursuing goals that interest them rather than worrying about where their next meal is coming from. However, the data reveals a different story. People in richer countries report higher rates of loneliness⁵⁷ and depression⁵⁸ and in recent years, those numbers have been increasing rapidly. It seems like Ricard's warning that money cannot buy happiness is true. What is really at the root of this crisis, and how are our modern lifestyles

preventing us from finding a sense of fulfilment?

Rising rates of depression

Depression is a serious disorder that affects millions of people worldwide. There is no one single cause and two people with depression may exhibit wildly different symptoms. Depression may be triggered by a specific event, such as a divorce, a significant loss or while dealing with financial troubles, but some people experience clinical depression that seemingly springs up out of nowhere. They may have a decent job, close friends and prioritise physical health, yet begin noticing symptoms. Over time, they might struggle to shake persistent feelings of sadness or emptiness, become more irritable, have less energy and lose interest in their favourite hobbies. People with clinical depression often have trouble focusing, sleep too much or not enough and gain or lose weight as their appetites fluctuate.⁵⁹ Some feel aches and pains, while others are convinced that there is no purpose trying – or continuing – because nothing will ever get better again. It is a dark place, devoid of hope.

It's important to understand that while lifestyle choices can contribute to symptoms of depression, we can't expect a depressed individual to simply snap out of it or recognise that the problem is "all in their head". It's not. Medical professionals agree that depression is a real and debilitating mental and emotional disorder that typically requires one of more forms of treatment, with options including talk therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy or the use of medication prescribed to manage symptoms.

However, depression is not solely the problem of the individual suffering. People living certain cultures seem to be more prone to depression and other mental distress diagnoses. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 15% of people in high-income nations experience an episode of depression at least once in their lifetimes, compared to 11% of people in low-income nations.⁶⁰

Despite being the wealthiest nation on the planet, the US has higher rates of depression than anywhere else on earth. Research from the health insurance group Blue Cross revealed that there has been a 33% rise in depression across all age groups since 2013, and 4.4% of Americans received a diagnosis of depression in 2016.⁶¹ This may not seem like a significant slice of the population, but the current rate is almost certainly higher: this statistic only includes people with commercial health insurance and an official diagnosis from a medical professional. Many still struggle in silence.

There are several theories about the mental ill-health epidemic, including that we're spending too much time in front of screens rather than interacting with other people, and over time, this means that we have fewer real social connections.⁶² As a result, when times get tough we feel like we don't have anyone to turn to.⁶³

When we have a strong sense of community, mutual interdependence between individuals helps us feel part of something greater than ourselves. But when most of our interactions are digital – and our neighbours are strangers – we'll naturally feel more isolated, disconnected and defeated.

What we're looking at on those screens can also affect our sense of fulfilment. Social media takes us on a journey through the best moments of everyone else's lives: the birthday parties, the tropical holidays, the nights out and the leisurely afternoons. While observing the ubiquitous photos of legs stretched out before infinity pools we're not seeing the late-night study sessions, the long hours at work to needed to pay for those holidays, the break-ups and Friday nights spent eating take out and watching Netflix alone. Dr Phil warns against comparing others social masks with our personal truth. Carefully curated online personas – and we're all guilty of this – project us as caricatures of who we want to be. At the same time trends like the "sad-fishing" phenomenon make it difficult for people to talk about their struggles on social media, as they risk condemnation from friends and followers who may say that they're simply fishing

for compliments, comfort and affirmation.

When we barely consciously extract that screen from our pockets and begin scrolling a feed, we commence another cycle of comparing our lacklustre reality to other people's brightest moments. We fall into the comparison trap that Matthieu Ricard warns us about, thinking that if only we had as much money and free time as others have, we will be truly fulfilled. But the actions that bring us a real sense of fulfilment are rarely glamorous or flashy enough for Instagram.

News overload

The 24-hour news cycle may also contribute to feelings of hopelessness.⁶⁴ When we're constantly exposed to information about war, violence and injustice, we're more likely to experience distress, especially when we feel powerless to affect change over obstacles that seem insurmountable.

The media understands that in order to attract views – or sell newspapers – they need to trigger a strong emotional response in the consumer. Humans are hard-wired to react to threats in our environment and so the media exaggerates negative news, creating a distortion that drives us to consume the content, inducing what Stephen Pinker calls “a sense of gloom”.⁶⁵ News, according to bestselling author, Rolf Dobelli, is toxic to our nervous system, triggering a limbic response that increases cortisol and contributes to distress.⁶⁶ He recommends abstinence from news as the basis for a good life.

Understanding that news is created by people in media companies, who are awarded bonuses based on user engagement, helps put in perspective their objectives. We may not need to disconnect entirely to find fulfilment, but recognising that the front page is designed to manipulate our nervous system certainly helps us understand media intent in what is otherwise a remarkably good world.

The individual vs the collective

Excessive screen time and the news cycle aren't the only risks to our fulfilment. Some researchers believe that cultural differences also play a role.

Developed nations such as the US, Canada and many countries in Western Europe are known as individualistic cultures. People who grow up in these cultures often view themselves as independent of their culture, because society is composed of interpersonal routines, situations, practices, social institutions and social systems that are fundamentally individualistic. They imagine that their personality would be the same no matter what their situation, because their own traits are more powerful than societal influences. As such individuals within these regions define themselves based on the most prominent aspects of their own character and career.⁶⁷

On the flip side, countries such as Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Indonesia are known for having collectivistic cultures. People living in such cultures often define themselves in terms of their relationships with others and there is a high expectation that they will remain close to their families, providing support to them throughout their lives. Those who grow up in collectivistic cultures expect that their thoughts and behaviours would change somewhat if they were to move somewhere else because of external influences.⁶⁸

Today, people living in individualistic cultures are typically more likely to struggle with mental illnesses like depression.⁶⁹ While we don't need to move to Asia to experience the power of collectivism, a visit to an island like Okinawa, which is the longevity hub of the world, might be inspiring. Of all the habits and rituals practiced, *Moai* or social support groups that last from childhood into the 100s, are non-negotiable.⁷⁰

Being part of a collective or community and consciously work towards the greater good is a gateway to strong connection. Social clubs and volunteering provide a wonderful opportunity to experience collectivism in action. Whether it is a book club,

jiu jitsu classes, or cleaning a polluted river, we can all benefit from establishing a network of trusted relationships and shared experiences.

It is worth noting that the individualistic cultures rank higher in creativity than the collectivists, so balancing connection with individuality might provide an optimal platform for wellbeing and innovation.

Money and fulfilment

The most amazing philanthropists are people who are actually making a significant sacrifice.

Bill Gates

Someone who set the bar for success in the information age is Bill Gates. Gates is one of the co-founders of Microsoft – the world's largest PC software company – and was a major driver of the personal computer revolution of the 1980s. He is an entrepreneur, philanthropist, husband and father of three. Featured in the *Forbes* list of the world's richest people since 1987, Gates earned the designation of the richest man in the world for the first time in 1995. In July 2017 he was surpassed by Jeff Bezos but with a staggering net worth, to the tune of \$95 billion, he is still the second wealthiest person on the planet.

Despite this affluence, Gates has a message for those who believe that money can buy happiness, fulfilment or even an admirable legacy: they're sadly mistaken.

Gates notes that many billionaires want to keep their money in the family and pass their wealth down to their kids. 'You're free to do that,' he says. 'But I think when you're that successful, ideally, you pick a disease, pick a cause and I think you'll get a lot of fulfilment.'⁷¹

Gates and his wife, Melinda, run the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, a charity that works to improve public health around the globe and stop the spread of deadly yet preventable diseases. They are currently working with the global service

organisation Rotary International to eliminate polio in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nigeria. They have also donated large sums of money to reducing the rates of malaria in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, and they hope to eventually help eradicate the disease completely. Along with Warren Buffet, Gates founded a campaign called The Giving Pledge, which encourages ultra-wealthy people to dedicate the majority of their wealth to philanthropy. Through their foundation, he and his wife donate \$4 billion per year to public health and educational programs in developing countries, and an addition \$500 million to charitable causes in the US.

‘Once you’ve taken care of yourself and your children, the best use of extra wealth is to give it back to society,’ says Gates. ‘It’s rare to have a job where you get to both have a big impact and have a lot of fun. I had it with Microsoft, and I have it with the foundation. I can’t imagine a better way to spend the bulk of my time.’

Monks like Matthieu Ricard have few possessions and little need for money in their daily lives. On the other end of the spectrum, billionaires like Bill Gates have more money than anyone could ever need. Yet both agree that true fulfilment cannot be bought, and that helping others is the best use of our time and money.

Most of us aren’t monks or billionaires. Even in the midst of our busy lives, can we find time to dedicate to a fulfilling cause? Building a fulfilling life can seem challenging, but everyone can begin with a few key steps.

The path to fulfilment

Your long-term happiness and fulfilment depend on your ability to fulfil your soul’s unique purpose and to fill the place in the world that only you can fill, making the contribution that only you can make.

Rod Stryker

Here’s the tricky thing about finding fulfilment: the feeling

comes after the fact. When we're in the thick of a challenge – sometimes exhausted and discouraged – we're probably not feeling fulfilled. Imagine the firefighter battling a blazing bush-fire in blistering heat. But when we've come out the other side stronger, knowing that we've made a difference, that's when the feeling hits and, in that moment, we recognise that the effort was worthwhile. This means that in order to feel fulfilled, we have to take action. We won't get there by daydreaming, brainstorming or planning.

Figuring out what truly brings fulfilment doesn't mean overloading ourselves with difficult tasks and hoping that our efforts will be meaningful in the end. There are a few things we can do to seek fulfilment deliberately.

Purpose

To experience a sense of fulfilment, a great place to begin is with presence and gratitude.

All too often, we allow ourselves to become distracted by things that don't really matter. Even when we're trying to deep dive into a hobby that we love, we often get side-tracked by infinitely scrolling newsfeeds, watch-next recommendations and push notifications. We live in a distracted world and if we want to pursue the activities that leave us feeling fulfilled, we have to stay present, both to choose those activities and to be able recognise the value we're gaining from them.

Staying present also helps us look beyond our own ego to see how we can better serve others. The ego is an identity that we construct for ourselves, an image that we feel we must maintain, defined by what we want others to think of us. When someone critiques this image that we've so carefully crafted, we feel attacked. Bestselling author Eckhart Tolle says that to purposefully and meaningfully serve, we must set aside our own ego. When we live to satisfy the ego, we end up spending our time dwelling on the past or worrying about the future without embracing the present.

Learning to stay “in the moment” requires constant practice and recalibration. Indeed, presence is one of the most important factors underpinning resilience mastery – find out more in Chapter 6.

Gratitude

After presence, the next step in seeking fulfilment is gratitude. Most of us have plenty to appreciate, yet we rarely take a moment to pause and acknowledge all of life’s brighter aspects. Positive psychologists call this “hunting the good stuff”.

In experiencing fulfilment, we naturally feel gratitude for all of the people and circumstances that helped us along the way, especially the challenges that we overcame. Making a gratitude list every morning or evening to reflect on everything that is helping us get where we want to be is a simple way to counter our bias toward the negative. Multiple studies demonstrate the benefits of gratitude on our wellbeing and happiness.⁷²

Resilience

While resilience is the outcome of successfully applying the factors listed in this book, there is a virtuous cycle whereby high resilience drives increased performance in each of the factors. Such is the interdependence of these skills and competencies. Pursuing a fulfilling life requires resilience. A fulfilling task is rarely easy: we feel most fulfilled when we overcome a significant challenge. If we want to face challenges in life courageously, we require resilience and, more specifically, the ability to bounce back from adversity fast. Resilience can be learned – as you are discovering in these pages – and although it can be challenging, resilience helps us improve the quality of our challenges.

Figuring out what fulfils us

True happiness is not attained through self-gratification, but through fidelity to a worthy purpose.

Helen Keller

Fulfilment is what motivation will become. Like motivation, it is a feeling. To create it we need to engage our emotions and allow feelings to be our guide. If the path to fulfilment seems daunting, here are a few suggestions to provide a guiding light.

Live your purpose

We've discussed this at length in the previous chapter, but purpose and fulfilment are intrinsically linked. When we find our purpose and begin working towards it, we feel the most fulfilled. If we're not already living in alignment with our purpose, it's time to take small steps towards making the change. Even when it seems we're a long way from the dream job, dream city or launching that business venture, simply making steady, incremental progress towards the goal will give us momentum and the sense that we are on a journey. Fulfilment comes from action.

Volunteer

It's worth repeating that the only way to live a genuinely fulfilling life is to engage our talents in the service of others. As Tony Robbins says, "The purpose of life is to grow and to give."

Pro-social activity has a raft of benefits so try getting involved in a local volunteer group that supports a worthy cause. It may feel intimidating at first, especially when we have very little experience volunteering, but everyone has something useful to offer. For those who prefer being outdoors, cleaning up the environment is a wonderful activity, not to mention being great for our health.⁷³

If time constraints make it impossible to volunteer, it is still

possible to support a cause or project. Perhaps your budget allows for donation to a charity or sponsorship of a project through crowdfunding. Even a few dollars each month can make a big difference over time, and knowing that your money is going to someone who may need it more than you can feel very satisfying. Crowdfunding projects such as those creating new technology or producing a film often offer incentives to those who fund their initiative. Being part of a movement – creating action in the world – is key to fulfilment.

Embrace DIY projects

While fulfilment usually involves serving others in some way, it can also mean doing something for ourselves. For example, many people find that growing their own food, mending their own clothes, fixing mechanical issues in their homes or cars and even something as simple as concocting their own skincare products to be fulfilling activities. When delving into the world of DIY projects, we may discover new talents that we didn't even know we had, and having mastered something new, we can offer up our services to friends and family.

Recently I embarked on a project to build a tropical fern garden along a shady and drab wall behind my house. What began as a minor undertaking resulted in multiple trips to the garden centre, mild sunburn and a severely strained muscle in my back. However, I now have an oasis in suburbia: a place where I routinely sit and relax, feeling almost like I'm in a forest or Balinese villa. The fern garden now has its own timed irrigation system so that the plants stay hydrated despite the scorching summer weather in New Zealand and even when I'm away. This result is testament to the fulfilment a seemingly trivial idea can bring. Note: I'm happiest when sharing the garden with others.

Mentor someone younger

There is a reason why so many successful people become coaches, mentors or consultants. Once we have achieved a cer-

tain level of success, many of us no longer see others as a threat. Rather, we wish to see them succeed and flourish.

Sometimes, we hold ourselves back from mentoring or helping others because we don't feel like we're qualified enough. We question whether or not we have the requisite authority to dispense advice. But we don't have to be a millionaire, famous entrepreneur or professional life coach to mentor someone. In fact, some of the best advice comes from friends, associates, family and teachers – not gurus at the top of their fields. We don't have to be experts to help someone in a way that could change their life.

Do you know anyone in your field who is in the same place you were a few years ago? Can you tutor kids who are struggling with subjects that you're passionate about? Do you have a niece or nephew who is going through a rough patch and needs some advice? Mentoring someone can be a highly rewarding and fulfilling experience, especially when they begin to see some success in their own endeavours.

Reframe difficult situations

A fulfilling life is rarely an easy life. That doesn't mean we need to torture ourselves, but people who are genuinely fulfilled often derive joy from tasks that require significant time and effort.

When dealing with difficult situations, a powerful tool is reframing the negative into a positive. Instead of focusing on pain or frustration, we consider how much we're learning from the experience, how it can make us stronger and how we will be much better equipped to handle similar situations in the future. Reminding ourselves that challenge builds character, and that no matter what's going on, there is always a silver lining, shifts perspective from negative and nudges towards positive.

Journaling can also be a powerful tool for changing the way we think about challenges. Writing about what we're experiencing can stimulate different perspectives and understanding

about how our setbacks are going to benefit us in the long run. Research shows that journaling also reduces anxiety and can help us deal more effectively with stress.⁷⁴ Keeping the journals for later reflection can spark a sense of fulfilment when we review just how far we've come.

Learn new skills

Gone are the days when a degree was the end of our learning journey. In a rapidly changing world we need to acquire new skills continuously simply to stay relevant. Emerging fields such as Digital Psychology and techno-anthropology are testament to our collective progression from flint to the wheel to the transistor.

Humans have succeeded due to our propensity to experiment, learn, improve and share. Achieving mastery in any domain is no easy feat but it certainly provides one with a sense of fulfilment. Write down all of the areas you are interested in and then pick one to master. It could be a topic in this book or an obscure pastime from childhood. Whether you choose bird watching or learning how to be more positive you'll never regret time invested in enriching yourself.

Youtube, Coursera, Udemy, Masterclass and Teachable are all places people go to learn new skills in bite-sized chunks, from the comfort of home. The Blinkist app offers short summaries of leading books for those who wish to explore many ideas before committing to a path.

Final Thoughts

It is not in the pursuit of happiness that we find fulfilment, it is in the happiness of pursuit.

Denis Waitley

Society teaches us that money, objects and influence will bring fulfilment but it's only when we begin to look beyond those things that we comprehend a more robust meaning of the

concept. Figuring out what fulfils us doesn't happen overnight. When we follow our purpose, serve others and bravely work towards meaningful outcomes we start to experience those moments of quiet appreciation. Eventually we can laugh at all the trials we've been through and all of the times we nearly gave up. We understand why we needed every setback and that the obstacles were, in fact, an essential part of the journey. Our pattern recognition improves and we're more likely to seek out goals and experiences that will result in future fulfilment.

How fulfilled am I right now?

How important is fulfilment to me?

Tick three items below that would improve my score:

☐ Learn new skills

☐ Be more grateful

☐ Be more present

☐ Volunteer

☐ Mentor someone

☐ Try reframing situations

What would my score be if I successfully achieved the three items I have selected?

Imagine myself living with a strong sense of fulfilment...

How do I feel in my body?

.....
Which emotions am I experiencing?

.....
What am I thinking?

.....
What am I willing to start tomorrow?

.....
How will I remind myself?

☐ Phone reminder

☐ Written note

Register your commitment and get inspiration at:

<https://bradleyhook.com/mastery>



OPTIMISM

***I'd rather be an optimist and a fool
than a pessimist and right.***

Albert Einstein

In life, change is the only constant. How we view it is up to us. Some of us consider change a threat and react to it with pessimism. Others view change as an opportunity and embrace – or create – it with enthusiasm.

Albert Einstein is regarded as one of the most accomplished scientists ever to live. He developed the theory of relativity, which revolutionised modern physics, and his mass-energy equivalence formula – $E=mc^2$ – has been dubbed the world's most famous equation. In 1921, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for his discovery of the law of the photoelectric effect and his enormous overall contribution to theoretical physics. During his lifetime, Einstein published more than 300 scientific papers, and his name has become a synonym for the word genius. After his death, scientists even studied Einstein's brain to investigate whether anatomy can explain why some people demonstrate extraordinary intellectual capabilities.

Einstein faced much adversity on his journey. From lacklustre academic performance to money and marital problems, then a son with mental health issues, he was familiar with suffering. When Adolf Hitler came to power in his native Germany, the Nazis began targeting Einstein's work and he was listed as an enemy of the regime with a \$5000 bounty on his head. He and his wife needed armed guards for their home, and he began working on a way to leave Europe permanently to ensure their safety. He was able to secure a position as a resident scholar at

the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton and became an American citizen in 1940.

Because Einstein possessed extraordinary critical-thinking skills, one might assume that he was a pessimist. On the contrary, he was a self-proclaimed optimist. Until his death, he continued to work for the good of the human race, including warning scientists and politicians about the dangers of inventions like the nuclear bomb after witnessing the devastation they can create.⁷⁵

Perhaps his optimism was just as necessary for his achievements as his intelligence.

Optimists are often stereotyped as silly and unrealistic, while pessimistic people are seen as rational and logical. Looking on the bright side can be associated with naiveté or ignorance but the research is clear: an optimistic outlook helps us achieve goals, improve society and live longer.

What is optimism?

Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.

Thomas Edison

An optimist feels certain that with enough effort, they can achieve what they set out to do. They believe that difficult challenges are worthwhile and work proactively towards positive outcomes. Essentially, optimism is the belief that the future is bright, and that choosing to think positively about a situation will make us happier and more successful in the long run.

The optimist is the underdog athlete who believes that their team can beat the best players in the league. It's the indie filmmaker who knows that their work has the potential to make an impact, even on a shoestring budget. It's the author who chooses to self-publish and hire their own editor after being rejected by agents. It's the activist who never backs down from a difficult

conversation with someone who thinks differently than they do, because they know that hearts and minds can be changed. It's the student who decides to follow their dream of becoming an artist rather than settling for something safer. Optimists look at situations realistically – but not worse than what they are – and they believe that they have what it takes to succeed.

Meet the optimists

It isn't all over; everything has not been invented; the human adventure is just beginning.

Gene Roddenberry

It is easy to dismiss optimism as a sure-fire path to disappointment. As optimists travel through life and gain more experience, do they inevitably become more cynical and discard their positive outlook? Are success and optimism compatible in the real world?

As it turns out, yes. There are plenty of highly successful optimists. These people have tried, failed and tried again, holding on to hope in the midst of serious adversity. No matter how many times they've been discouraged, they have committed to their positive outlook and pressed on. For many, their hard work and optimism pays off. And they aren't just dreamers who haven't had a taste of the real world yet – they're entrepreneurs, CEOs, celebrities, engineers and business moguls.

Oscar Wilde famously wrote, 'We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.' Let's meet two individuals who are quite literally looking at the stars – and optimistically formulating plans to get us there.

Elon Musk: Radical innovation

Elon Musk, the CEO of Space X and Tesla and the chairman of Solar City, describes himself as an optimist. For Musk, even the sky isn't the limit: he's determined to see humans become an interplanetary species. Some suggest that he's dreaming too

big, but he has already accomplished things that many deemed impossible.

Musk was born in South Africa, and by the age of 10, had taught himself computer programming. At 17 he moved to Canada to attend Queen's University, before transferring to the University of Pennsylvania, where he earned degrees in economics and physics. He intended to complete a PhD in applied physics and material sciences at Stanford University, but after spending only a couple of days in the program, he realised that he did not need the qualification to begin his entrepreneurial career. He dropped out and began following his true passions.

After several years of co-founding companies, including the likes of PayPal, that were acquired by larger corporations, Musk founded Space X, an aerospace manufacturer and space transport services company, in 2002. A year later, he founded Tesla, Inc., becoming the product architect for the company's electric vehicles and solar manufacturers. In 2006, Musk founded Solar City, a solar energy services company, and in 2012, he proposed an ambitious new project known as the Hyperloop: a high-speed transportation system that could take passengers from one major city to another at speeds upwards of 700 miles per hour. In 2018 Musk unveiled a prototype tunnel design, developed by his newly formed Boring Company, which plans to build an underground tunnel network beneath LA.

Through these companies and projects, Musk hopes to change the world for the better. He wants to fight climate change by promoting the use of sustainable energy sources, and he is making it cheaper and easier for average consumers to switch to clean energy. What's his most ambitious goal? Ensuring a future for the human race by establishing a colony on Mars.

He continues to invest in projects that bring futuristic technology to life because he believes that these inventions can be used for the good of humanity.

Despite the naysayers, Musk is excited about the prospects of the human future in space. 'You want to wake up in the morning and think that the future is going to be great, and that's what

being a spacefaring civilisation is all about,’ says Musk. ‘It’s all about believing in the future and thinking that the future will be better than the past. And I can’t think of anything more exciting than going out there and being among the stars.’

Peter Diamandis: Encouraging innovation

Peter Diamandis believes that fostering healthy competition between highly motivated individuals can inspire incredible results. Diamandis is an engineer, physician, entrepreneur and founder of the X Prize Foundation. He is also the author of the two best-selling books *Abundance: The Future is Better Than You Think* and *Bold: How to Go Big, Create Wealth, and Impact the World*.

Diamandis developed an early interest in science, offering lectures about space exploration to family and friends from a young age. He decided to follow in his father’s footsteps and become a doctor, so commenced his studies at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), with a focus on biology and physics. During this time, he co-founded Students for the Exploration and Development of Space. Diamandis graduated with a degree in molecular genetics and went on to attend Harvard Medical School, but couldn’t forget his goals of furthering space exploration. He paused his medical studies for several years to conduct research at NASA, also earning a master’s degree in aeronautics and astronautics at MIT. Diamandis co-founded the Space Generation Foundation, worked as the managing director for the International Space University and became the CEO of the micro-satellite launch company International Micro Space. Remarkably, he also returned to medical school to complete his studies, earning his MD from Harvard.

After several years of working on projects intended to propel human beings into space, Diamandis realised that he needed a new way of encouraging the brightest minds on the planet to join his vision. He founded X Prize with the goal of incentivising individuals and companies to find solutions to major global

problems. He believed that public competitions would inspire and motivate innovators, pushing them to create breakthroughs faster than ever before. His instincts have proven correct.

Participants in competitions funded by the X Prize Foundation have invented vehicles that were eventually flown into space, devices that can help clean up oil spills and save wildlife, fuel efficient cars and motorcycles, and sensory technology that can help users monitor their vital signs and detect health problems before they become an emergency.

Diamandis knows that optimists like himself can't be afraid of failure, and that failing doesn't have to ruin an optimistic outlook. He also knows that society will often discourage optimists, even ridiculing their ideas and vision. But society depends on optimists to improve life for future generations.

'Right now, and for the first time ever, a passionate and committed individual has access to the technology, minds, and capital required to take on any challenge,' says Diamandis. 'In today's hyperlinked world, solving problems anywhere, solves problems everywhere.'

Obstacles to optimism

It's the will that's awakened in the darkness, that brings us to a more permanent light.

Doniel Katz

So, if a certain level of optimism is necessary for success, why do many of us default to pessimism? Research suggests that that pessimism is a survival skill, driven by the need to remain on high alert for potential threats. So what comes naturally to people is pessimism.⁷⁶

But just because we might be hardwired to be more pessimistic doesn't mean that we need to spend our lives expecting the worst. Our environment is no longer as threatening as it once was and researchers are accumulating significant evidence pertaining to the benefits of optimism for our health and well-

being.⁷⁷ Perhaps looking on the bright side – or at least giving it a chance – is not such a bad idea after all?

Understanding the obstacles to optimism provides the first steps toward cultivating a more positive mindset.

Negativity bias

Here's a situation you may recognise. After investing a solid month working on a project with a few other dedicated co-workers, you are certain that the boss is going to be delighted. You've pulled all-nighters, headed into the office early and spent countless hours on it. You and your co-workers seemed to form the perfect team, and you couldn't be happier with their cooperative efforts. Except for one or two minor quirks, you can't think of anything that could have been done better.

When it's time to present the project, the whole team is beaming and, thankfully, so is your boss. She's pleased with everything you've shown her, and is definitely going to give a glowing performance review this quarter. However, she does point out one issue that you and everyone else on your team seems to have overlooked. It's a detail, but important to her. She says she's extremely satisfied with your work, but sees room for improvement

As the workday comes to a close, you're relieved that your hard work did not go unnoticed, but you can't stop criticising yourself for not catching that one mistake. If only you had spent a couple more hours going over everything ... if only one of your co-workers had double checked that data before wrapping things up ... if only you hadn't missed that one detail, you would be happier with the outcome. Somehow, it seems like you've forgotten about all of the positive feedback from your boss, and all you can hear are echoes of that single critique.

Does this scenario sound familiar? At some point, we all fall into the trap of negativity bias, which is when we assign more importance to negative experiences than positive ones.⁷⁸

We might receive numerous compliments, yet a single neg-

ative comment can result in rumination, distress and sleepless nights. Our negativity bias is so strong that, in the workplace, we need up to six positive interactions to balance each negative one.⁷⁹ When the ratio of negative to positive increases, teams break down and individuals become less effective.

In our personal relationships, researchers found that around five compliments are required to compensate for each critique.⁸⁰ This is called the “magic ratio” and aligns closely with the workplace research. In essence, we’re inherently biased towards focusing on negative occurrences and require a significant counterbalance of positivity to thrive.

Of course, we do need honest feedback – ignoring constructive criticism and only focusing on compliments can stunt our development and progress towards a goal. However, research shows that when negative feedback outweighs the positive, we are prone to pulling away from the source of negativity and “shopping” for positive confirmation instead.⁸¹

It seems that whether we are optimists or pessimists, positive interactions are essential for a good life.

Expecting the worst

Have you ever heard the idiom, hope for the best but prepare for the worst? While on the surface it may appear to be cautiously optimistic advice, it is inherently rooted in a fear of the future. Hope is powerful but implies that the outcome is largely beyond our direct control. Preparing for the worst is a risk-averse approach to life that may lead us to miss opportunities.

We live in an age of rapid change, complexity and unpredictability. Preparing for the worst is often an almost impossible task that requires a tremendous investment of energy and often results in worry or anxiety. There are simply too many variables both within and beyond our spheres of influence for us to accurately predict future events. Anxiety about the future can trigger a freeze response like procrastination and, as a result, we might do nothing, or over-analyse situations and miss opportunities.

Those with cautious, analytical behavioural styles typically experience higher stress levels as a result.⁸²

Preparation is essential for success but always preparing for the worst can hinder progress in many endeavours. Instead, agility – being present and willing to respond to challenge dynamically and in real-time – is a worthwhile consideration. Developing agility requires learning to delicately balance risk with innovation, while building the confidence to act decisively.⁸³ This exuberant attitude is an antidote to risk aversion and offers a calm base from which to approach a challenging world.

Of course not everyone can escape preparing for the worst. In some contexts – think first response, infrastructure, military and medicine – worst-case planning saves lives. But in business if we spend too much time focusing on what could go wrong and too little time focusing on what could go right, we end up buried in bureaucracy, compliance and safety. Having worked alongside several business analysts I've witnessed negativity bias in action. Projects that might have been launched in weeks took years and were often outdated or obsolete shortly after release.

A powerful approach recommended by Stoic philosophers is negative visualisation. This technique requires us to imagine the worst possible scenarios for the future: your business has failed and you're left homeless and alone. Instead of prompting us to prepare for this eventuality, the approach was designed to liberate us from our fears and attachments so that we can be grateful for what we have and live fully now. It is a practice of deliberate appreciation and promotes action and presence over fear.

Survival instincts

As mentioned, our tendency towards pessimism is a survival instinct rooted in evolution.⁸⁴ For our ancestors, simply venturing beyond the cave could result in an untimely end at the jaws of a sabre-toothed tiger. Focusing on threats paid dividends. In more recent times, pessimism paid off for many people. Jar-

ring, pickling and preserving food in case of a harsh winter was never a bad idea. Fortifying cities against invaders provided protection. We had to be tough to survive, and failing to account for potential problems could have serious consequences. Psychologist Dr Martin Seligman believes that the Ice Age bred and selected for pessimism, with humans who expected and prepared for hardship being the ones most likely to propagate their genes.⁸⁵

This kind of pessimism can still serve a purpose today. Imagine living on the coast, and discovering a major hurricane is headed towards your area. There are still a few days before it makes landfall and meteorologists aren't sure if the trajectory will shift, so there remains a small window for action. An option is to hunker down and pray that it makes landfall in a different location. Or you could pack up the car and hit the road to stay with friends. The optimistic approach of waiting may work out just fine but, in this case, assuming that the worst will happen is clearly the safer option.

Statistically, however, the industrialised world has never been safer.⁸⁶ Most of us live longer and less eventfully than ever before. Many of today's dangers are difficult to prepare for: the economy might falter, a plane might crash or we might get caught up in a terrorist attack. We struggle to comprehend the true likelihood of these threats and so pessimism becomes a safety blanket against a seemingly dangerous outside world. But real risk is mostly imagined and the walls we build often become our cages.

How the media fuels pessimism

Whoever controls the media, controls the mind.

Jim Morrison

People who spend a significant amount of time tuning into the news have a more negative outlook on life.⁸⁷ Scanning the headlines each day, it's easy to understand why. Bad news sells

because we're wired to pay more attention to things that are dangerous or threatening.⁸⁸

Negative news can significantly change our mood. According to British psychologist Dr Graham Davey, negative news can not only make us more likely to see our personal worries as more threatening and severe but can also make us anxious or sad. As a result, we become more attuned to negative or threatening events, and start to see ambiguous or neutral events as negative ones.⁸⁹

The stories reported by the news may also shift our beliefs. For example, the news always highlights plane crashes but rarely mentions car crashes. Consequently, many develop a fear of flying, even though it is far less risky than driving on the road.⁹⁰

Over time and with constant exposure, we don't just experience negativity bias as individuals, our society develops a collective bias towards negativity.

The 24/7 news cycle

Upon introducing the 24/7 news cycle, networks suddenly had to fill more hours with updates. To increase viewer engagement, networks cram coverage of the same, often tragic or scandalous, events back-to-back. All that changes are camera angles and expert opinions as breaking stories build over the course of days or weeks. Flip to another channel, and it's mostly the same. The formulaic editing, music, tone – and even the beautiful presenters – are carefully selected to lure our attention away from real life and towards the nearest screen. Increased media competition means that producers are under pressure to maintain and grow their audiences and they've optimised their approach.

It might make us feel as though we're staying informed but, unless exposure to news is inspiring us to take action, hanging on to every word of the 24/7 cycle is a detrimental lifestyle choice. We suffer physically through increased cortisol and mentally because news makes us feel like helpless observers in

a hazardous world. There is little explanatory power in news and so events are added to our own mental maps and models of the world with disproportionate significance.

As author Rolf Dobelli explains, “A car drives over a bridge, and the bridge collapses. What does the news media focus on? The car. The person in the car. Where he came from. Where he planned to go. How he experienced the crash (if he survived). But that is all irrelevant. What’s relevant? The structural stability of the bridge. That’s the underlying risk that has been lurking, and could lurk in other bridges. But the car is flashy, it’s dramatic, it’s a person (non-abstract), and it’s news that’s cheap to produce.”

In his most recent book, *Enlightenment Now*, author and cognitive scientist Steven Pinker argues that despite what the media may show, life is getting better for the majority of people around the world.⁹¹ In recent years, the world has become more equal, people are living longer and healthier lives, more people are embracing a humanist, egalitarian outlook; and advances in science in technology mean that even those in developing countries enjoy a higher quality of life compared to previous generations. Although our world is far from perfect, the media rarely offers airtime to positive developments or opportunities for us to make positive change.

Staying connected to the news is a personal choice but, as with all consumption, it should be balanced with time spent out in the real world. Be sure to review reliable statistics before sinking into a pessimistic world view.

Social media

Can spending too much time on social media cause someone to adopt a more pessimistic mindset? The answer, based on mounting evidence, is yes. People who spend a lot of time on social media are more vulnerable to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.⁹²

When scrolling down the feeds, we might easily assume that

the lives of everyone we follow are better than ours. Combine this with the gloom of the news cycle and our own seemingly mundane lives, and we have a toxic cocktail of input that is likely to drive us towards pessimism, apathy and beyond.

Manipulative marketing

Marketing and advertising can make us more pessimistic, too. Many advertisements may seem benign, but they're predicated on stoking a sense of fear: fear that we may be missing out on something better than what we already have, or the fear that we've been doing something wrong all along.⁹³

Think about it: no marketing campaign would be successful if the message was 'You're just fine as you are, keep up the good work!' Advertisers have to nudge us towards self-doubt in order to get us to purchase their products.⁹⁴ We're bombarded by advertisements hundreds of times per day, whether driving past billboards on the morning commute or seeing a sponsored post on Instagram. Websites track our activity and show us ads about items we've searched for. It's incessant and manipulative. With advertisers constantly hinting that we're doing things wrong, or that we are not complete without the latest gadgets, we can quickly get lost in the ultimately futile struggle to accumulate things. Comparing ourselves to the characters in cleverly formulated ad campaigns – think perfume posters and car ads – is a sure-fire pathway to pessimism.

How to be optimistic

How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.

Anne Frank

Being an optimist in today's society can feel like an uphill battle. But with a little time and practice, anyone can cultivate an optimistic mindset. When we appreciate every little thing that comes our way, expecting the best becomes second nature

because we recognise the potential in everything, even the challenges. But where to start?

Reframing situations

Reframing is a technique used in therapy to help individuals find different meaning in events by considering them from multiple perspectives. It is one of the most powerful tools available to assist in maintaining an optimistic outlook. When we adjust our point of view on a given situation, even though the facts may remain the same, a conscious shift is made in how we perceive it. Reframing helps us convert problems or threats into opportunities of which to take advantage. Accordingly, we are less likely to feel pessimism, hopelessness or resentment, and our prevailing attitude becomes more optimistic.

A scenario might play out something like this. We're delivering a seminar for a large client on an important topic and spend days rehearsing for the event. The big day comes and the organiser advises that participants have been given the option of watching the seminar via web connection from their desks. Turning up to an enormous auditorium it is shocking to discover only four people in attendance. One is the sound technician and one is managing the live stream. The workshop is awkward to deliver and feels like a disaster. The reframe is that we employed humour when asking for audience participation. It was great to practice the content on a large stage and to consider the needs of remote viewers. What an excellent way to practice an important presentation. Note: this actually happened.

Hunt the good stuff

Used as a part of resilience training in the military, "hunting the good stuff" is a method for counteracting negativity bias and deliberately cultivating positivity and gratitude.⁹⁵ When we make a conscious decision to hunt the good stuff, we pause and seek out the positive elements, even in the midst of a difficult situation. Sometimes, the positives may not be obvious,

but with practice, we can find the good in almost any situation. One of the most accessible ways to begin is by recording three good things each day in a journal. Often the negative events of a day are what stick in our minds. By forcing ourselves to look for the good we can redress this imbalance and focus more on positive events. This needn't be an individual pursuit. Asking our children and partners to name the positive things that happened during the day can improve the family's resilience and positivity.

Practice mindfulness

Practicing mindfulness, or mindfulness-promoting activities like meditation and yoga, are not immediate tickets to optimism, but can certainly help.⁹⁶ This is because they teach us how to monitor our thoughts and view experiences objectively. With practice we are able to stay calmer, gain perspective and reap physiological benefits, including improved immune function.⁹⁷ Discover more about mindfulness in Chapter 6 – Presence.

Spend time with positive people

There's a popular saying that suggests we're the average of the five people we spend the most time with. We may notice that when spending time with friends who complain frequently, we end up complaining more often, too. We've all heard that misery loves company, and when we hang around negative people for long enough, it can become seriously draining. Emotions are contagious,⁹⁸ so if the people we surround ourselves with never seem to be happy, chances are we'll end up feeling the same way. Think of a toxic workplace and how even one negative influence can suck the energy from a room.

On the other hand, if we spend time with positive, resilient individuals, their outlooks will influence and motivate us. Equally, be a motivator to those who look to you for inspiration.

Conscious media consumption

As we've seen, watching the news, using social media and overexposure to advertising can all contribute to a pessimistic outlook. However, we don't need to unplug completely and ignore what's going on in the world. Network technology has brought us together, enabling us to, quite literally, live in each other's pockets. Being informed, thinking for ourselves and staying abreast of the world's latest changes are important for agility.

How can we stay connected without sacrificing our mental health? When it comes to media, we need to be conscious consumers. Find a few news sources that consistently deliver trustworthy information, and spend just a little time each day getting updated on what's happening around the world. Don't forget the local news, which is generally less sensationalist and more community-focused. Limit the amount of time spent on social media and be deliberate about who and what gets followed or filtered out. Treat digital interactions as you would personal ones and remember the magic ratio – five positive to one negative for a happier life.

Healthy lifestyle choices

When it comes to optimism, don't underestimate the power of healthy lifestyle choices. It's hard to wake up in a good mood when we've had only four hours of sleep and know that several cups of coffee will be required to claw our way through the morning. Eating healthfully can also be a major mood booster. Numerous studies have shown that eating fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds, legumes, cacao and foods rich in omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids can all help fight feelings of depression by providing the brain with the nutrients it needs to produce chemicals like serotonin and dopamine.⁹⁹

The rapidly emerging field of research into gut health suggests that diet is essential in maintaining a healthy intestinal

microbiome, which appears to influence behaviour as well as health. Fermented foods like kimchi, sauerkraut, tempeh, kombucha and certain yogurts are good sources of healthy bacteria called probiotics, which replenish and rebalance the gut ecosystem. Exercise also helps boost mood by increasing endorphins and reducing cortisol and adrenalin. It is a proven remedy for both depression and anxiety.¹⁰⁰

Getting fit doesn't require joining a gym or purchasing the bizarre contraptions featured on late-night infomercials. Simply walking outdoors for a few minutes each day is a great start. See Chapter 5 – Vitality for more.

Final thoughts

A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.

Winston Churchill

When we've been taught that optimism is naive or pointless, when the media is always sending messages that the end is nigh, when we wonder if being hopeful will leave us feeling disappointed, it's easy to give in to pessimism. But not only does our society need optimists, individuals need to hold on to optimism, for their own mental health. And contrary to popular belief, a positive outlook and confidence in the future doesn't equate to ignorance.

Although optimists might be mocked sometimes, the truth is that everyone has an optimist somewhere inside them. It's the little voice that tells us not to give up when the deck is stacked against us. It's the encouragement we give to our child. It's the innate human drive to make things better, to reach for the stars.

Don't ignore the inner optimist. The people who are crazy enough to believe in the impossible are the ones who end up making it possible. Change is the only constant and how we view it is a choice. Smile - you've got this.

**We're all in
the gutter,
but some
of us are
looking at
the stars**

Oscar Wilde

How optimistic am I right now?



How important is being optimistic to me?



Tick three items below that would improve my score:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Seek optimistic friends | ☐ Reframe situations |
| ☐ Hunt the good stuff | ☐ Be mindful |
| ☐ Manage media exposure | ☐ Improve my lifestyle |

What would my score be if I successfully achieved the three items I have selected?



Imagine myself living optimistically...

How do I feel in my body?

.....
Which emotions am I experiencing?

.....
What am I thinking?

.....
What am I willing to start tomorrow?

.....
How will I remind myself?

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| ☐ Phone reminder | ☐ Written note |
|---|---------------------------------------|

Register your commitment and get inspiration at:

<https://bradleyhook.com/mastery>



VITALITY

***There is a vitality, a life force,
an energy, a quickening, that is
translated through you into action,
and because there is only one of you
in all time, this expression is unique.***

Martha Graham

At the age of 96, Charles Eugster was dubbed “the fittest senior citizen on the planet”.¹⁰¹ But Eugster was not a lifelong exercise fanatic. In fact, he did not commit to his intense fitness regimen until he was in his 80s.

‘I looked in the mirror one morning,’ he said. ‘And I didn’t like what I saw.’ He decided to join a bodybuilding club and hire a personal trainer to get back in shape. The new training program took Eugster further than he could ever have anticipated. He began trying out several different sports, from running to wake boarding to rowing. Then he started setting world records in his age group, and he won multiple medals at the World Masters Regatta. Overall, he won more than 100 awards during his twilight years, and at the age of 93, he gave a TEDx talk in Zurich titled, “Why bodybuilding at age 93 is a great idea”.

Eugster was not just athletic, he was enthusiastic. He spoke about age discrimination against senior citizens who wanted to continue working. He encouraged elderly people to stop letting age hold them back. He told young people to continue exploring their talents and never stop learning, and to remember that although our culture idealises youth, growing old can be just as

fulfilling.

He continued chasing after his goals with vigour until his death at the age of 97. Eugster accomplished more as a senior citizen than most people accomplish in their entire lives, and he never let age discourage him from going after what he wanted to achieve.

Eugster understood that living life to the full means cultivating and exuding vitality. Vitality may seem like a vague concept, but knowing what it means to live a life of vitality can help us achieve incredible things.

What is vitality?

I often say that the opposite of depression is not happiness, but vitality.

Andrew Solomon

The word vital means necessary, and vitality relates to life force itself. Someone who lives with vitality is tuned into their wellbeing and devoted to nourishing themselves through lifestyle, environment, thoughts and action. They're exuberant and their presence lifts the mood of those they engage with. We all aspire to vitality, whether we realise it or not. Vitality is the opposite of death. The beauty industry, wellness treatments, and most of the products lining supplement shelves in health shops promise a quick fix. But vitality can't be bottled.

There are many overlapping components that drive optimal wellbeing and an integrated approach enables us to choose how we structure our lives in order to reap the benefits. A good starting point is with physical health.

Without a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, exercising and taking time for self-care, apathy and exhaustion can easily replace vitality.

Vitality in action

What does it look like when we live with vitality? What sets some people apart from the crowd?

Arianna Huffington, who co-founded the major media company Huffington Post, subsequently launched the popular wellness website Thrive Global and now sits on the board of directors for companies like Uber. Huffington, who is a mother, author and public speaker, understands that living with vitality is all about prioritising health in order to reach our goals.

When Arianna launched Huffington Post, she overworked herself to the point of passing out at her desk from exhaustion.¹⁰² She thought that if she wanted to succeed in the competitive media space, she would need to spend every waking hour at her desk, building her business. “I hit my head on my desk, broke my cheek bone, got four stitches on my right eye,” Huffington told Oprah Winfrey. “I was very lucky I didn’t lose my eye.”

She realised she was overdue for some serious lifestyle adjustments. “By any sane definition of success, if you are lying in your own pool of blood on your office floor, you’re not successful,” Huffington said.

Arianna incorporated four very important habits into her daily routine. First, she does her best to ensure that she gets eight hours of sleep each night. Second, she meditates every day. Third, she sticks to a workout routine that she enjoys. And fourth, she eats a healthy diet. Huffington says that as long as she sticks to these habits, she notices that she is more productive, happier and more energetic. She has gone from simply surviving as a business owner to thriving as a billionaire. And she promotes the same principles for employees working within her companies.

Cultivating vitality does not have to be a complicated process. As Arianna Huffington shows, starting with the basics can take us a long way.

Losing vitality

To ensure good health: eat lightly, breathe deeply, live moderately, cultivate cheerfulness and maintain an interest in life.

William Londen

Physical health is the platform upon which emotional and mental health are built. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides a model for mapping the foundational importance of vitality. We first have to fulfil our basic physical needs – food, water, sleep and shelter. The next priorities are safety, security and a sense of social belonging. At the top, we find self-esteem and self-actualisation.¹⁰³ Physical health may seem obvious as the basis for a good life but the past few decades of research on public health reveal that many of us are struggling.

Worldwide obesity has tripled since 1975.¹⁰⁴ The World Health Organization says that while our lifespans are increasing, we're not necessarily enjoying a better quality of life in our old age than our parents.¹⁰⁵ How can we age with less suffering and disability? What are some factors we can address immediately so that we add value to society in our old age, rather than being a burden, or relying on expensive care solutions?

Bright lights and manufactured foods mean we're not getting enough sleep and we're eating bucketloads of refined sugar every year. We're spending too much time at our desks and not enough time moving our bodies. The impact is clear: over the course of a lifetime, these habits are making us sick. Medicine might keep us alive but nothing compensates for suffering and disability.

It is sobering to note that US life expectancy has declined slightly since 2014, largely due to an increase in suicide and drug overdoses.¹⁰⁶

Lack of sleep

Lack of sleep is linked to many chronic diseases and con-

ditions, such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, obesity and depression.¹⁰⁷ A 2016 study found one-third of US adults get less than seven hours of sleep per night, which falls outside of the recommended range of seven to nine hours.¹⁰⁸ This sleep deficit impacts cognition, emotion regulation and can result in increased inflammation.

Working long hours, stress and anxiety as well as too much television and device time are all linked to not getting enough sleep.

Convenience foods

Cooking healthy meals is not a priority for many people. On top of time constraints, there are also millions who live in “food deserts” – parts of a country where fresh fruit, vegetables and other healthy whole foods are not easily accessible or affordable.¹⁰⁹

Add to this the desirability and accessibility of packaged foods. Advertising glamorises junk foods that offer excessive calories, yet low nutrition. Food scientists have spent decades figuring out how to balance the perfect ratios of sodium, refined sugar and fat in their processed products to keep us coming back for more.¹¹⁰ These processed foods are engineered to overwhelm our senses and eclipse anything found in nature.

Added sugar is hidden in everything from fruit juice to bread to yoghurt. A can of soda, a sports drink or an iced latte are consumed instead of water, adding hidden calories to our diet and pounds to our waistlines. We fall victims to what podcaster Joe Rogan calls “temporary mouth pleasure” instead of considering the ramifications of what we consume.

It’s no wonder that rates of obesity worldwide continue to rise. Making healthy choices in the supermarket can be tough when the odds are stacked against us, and understanding food basics like Glycaemic Index are skills we don’t learn in school. Michelle Obama laments the decline of Home Economics class, where attendance has fallen by 40% in the past decade.¹¹¹ As a

result, many young people don't feel they have the skills to cook for themselves and so their diet is left in the hands of packaged food manufacturers, restaurants and the ubiquitous fast-food outlets that line the main street of nearly every town in the world.¹¹²

Sedentary lifestyles

When we're working 40 plus hours per week and struggling to maintain a social life, we may lack motivation to hit the gym or head out for a walk. Many of us consider exercise to be difficult so, after a long day, we can't think of anything worse than attempting something that will further drain our resources. But human beings did not evolve to spend vast amounts of time activating the thinking part of the brain, while the rest of the body remains inactive. It's a bizarre concept when you consider the evolution of our species. Leading a sedentary lifestyle can be dangerous in the long term, even if we manage to maintain a healthy weight. Some research suggests that sitting for eight hours or more each day is as dangerous for health as smoking.¹¹³ To obtain and maintain vitality, we need to get our bodies moving.

Preventable diseases

When we neglect physical health, we place ourselves at risk for chronic diseases that can drastically reduce our quality of life. Diseases like cancer, diabetes, dementia and heart disease are often viewed as genetically predetermined or an inevitable part of old age, but that's only half the story. Of course, genetics have an influence on our overall health and disease risk, but so do the decisions we make about our diet, sleep schedule and exercise routines. Eating too many processed foods and refined carbohydrates, getting too little sleep, and neglecting exercise can increase the risk of many diseases that may not have cures, but are often preventable through consistent lifestyle choices.¹¹⁴

Anyone can change

When the mind is controlled and spirit aligned with purpose, the body is capable of so much more than we realise.

Rich Roll

What if our lifestyle and habits are preventing us from living with vitality, but we're not sure we have the power to change? What if we've never tried to commit to healthy habits before, and don't think that we have the willpower to stick to new routines?

When first making these shifts it's easy to slip up but, with practice, healthy habits become essential and non-negotiable parts of our lives. In fact, the benefits are so obvious that the habits become a reward unto themselves. Need proof? Just consider Rich Roll's story.

Rich Roll is an ultra-marathon runner, a public speaker and proud advocate of the plant-based lifestyle. He's also a husband, father of four, recipe creator, podcaster, best-selling author and an inspiration for millions of people around the world. He's best known for his popular memoir, *Finding Ultra: Rejecting Middle Age, Becoming One of the World's Fittest Men, and Discovering Myself*, and his impressive results in some of the world's toughest endurance competitions, including the EPIC5 – a gruelling series of five ironman-distance triathlons on five islands of Hawaii in under a week – and the Ultraman World Championships.

Browsing Roll's impressive resume, one might assume that he spent his entire life training to be an elite athlete. After competing on the swim team at Stanford University in his twenties, Roll wrestled with addiction after graduation. He disconnected from family members and close friends, struggled to hold down a job and even spent time in jail. After going to rehab, completing therapy, and getting sober, Roll was overweight and physically unhealthy. His wake up call came when he found himself barely able to walk up a flight of stairs the night before his 40th

birthday. In that moment, he knew that he had no choice but to make a change.

The next day, Roll woke up with a new sense of purpose. He was ready to take on life again, to reclaim his remaining time on earth and to reach his full potential. After two years of training and eating a whole-foods, plant-based diet, he began competing in endurance events, surprising many by placing in the top 10 at various Ultraman events and earning a spot in *Men's Fitness* magazine's list of the world's 25 fittest men.

Roll hit rock bottom, but his quest for vitality saved his life. It's not necessary to go to such extremes to cultivate vitality for ourselves but inspirational people like Rich Roll and Charles Eugster prove that we can transform our life for the better at any s.

Secrets of vitality: life in the Blue Zones

Eat your vegetables, have a positive outlook, be kind to people, and smile.

Kamada Nakasato

In the noisy modern world of cities, technology and manufactured food supply, there are many potential obstacles to designing a life that supports our wellbeing. The middle aisles of supermarkets are full of high energy convenience foods; we often live too far from our workplace to walk or cycle; the addictive nature of screens can isolate us as much as connect us; and many medical professionals are more focused on treating diseases than preventing them.

But there are places in the world where the vast majority of the population live long, healthy and happy lives. These are communities that have figured out a recipe for vitality and longevity – and the ingredients are surprisingly simple.

During his research into communities where the majority of residents live longer, healthier lives than average, author Dan Buettner, in association with National Geographic, identified

five longevity hotspots, which he called Blue Zones. Not only do people in Blue Zones regularly live into their 90s or past their 100th birthday, they also have lower rates of diseases like cancer, diabetes, heart disease and dementia.

The Blue Zones are scattered across the world: the small Aegean island Ikaria in Greece, the Seventh Day Adventist community in Loma Linda, California, the Italian island of Sardinia, the coastal town of Nicoya in Costa Rica and the Japanese island of Okinawa, where the women live longer on average than any other population on the planet.

In many ways, people living in Blue Zones don't fit the stereotypical image of what it means to be healthy. They don't go to the gym and they don't spend hundreds of dollars on superfoods at health food stores. They don't drink protein shakes or take supplements. They don't track their steps with Fitbits or rely on meditation apps to learn mindfulness. Many of them even relax with a glass of red wine at the end of the day. Yet they enjoy longer life expectancies and lower rates of disease than the majority of people on earth. What are their secrets to vitality?

Physical health

People living in the Blue Zones eat plenty of whole, unprocessed plant foods without additives or preservatives. While they do consume some animal products – for example, the Okinawans eat small amounts of pork and fish on special occasions, some Adventists include eggs or seafood in their diets, and Ikarians and Sardinians enjoy some goat and sheep's milk products – their plates are usually full of plants. While many people worldwide view meat, eggs and cheese as dietary staples, people in Blue Zones treat them as luxuries or complements to an otherwise plant-based diet. Numerous studies provide further evidence linking a majority plant-based diet to longevity and overall good health.¹¹⁵

Most people in Blue Zones don't have gym memberships, but

they get plenty of exercise from physical labour, walking and gardening. For example, many Sardinian men are shepherds and they can easily walk five miles each day while tending their flocks. Adventists in Loma Linda enjoy going for brisk hikes and joining group-exercise classes.

Preventative medicine and the use of supportive herbs is also important for many people in Blue Zones. For instance, the Okinawans maintain medicinal gardens where they grow anti-inflammatory herbs like ginger, turmeric and mugwort.

A common lifestyle feature shared by people in Blue Zones is that they typically secure between 7.5 to 8 hours of quality sleep each night. Getting enough sleep is essential for a strong immune system and recovery from stress. Failing to get enough sleep can contribute to cognitive decline. Perhaps this is why, among other factors, people in Blue Zones have a significantly reduced risk of Alzheimer's and dementia.

Mental health

While physical health supports mental wellbeing, perhaps even more important is having strong community ties and a reliable support system. People living in Blue Zones prioritise spending time with their families and maintain close friendships, often with the same group, throughout their lifetimes. A separate review of 148 studies (308,849 participants) indicated that the individuals with stronger social relationships had a 50% increased likelihood of survival.¹¹⁶

Another common thread amongst Blue Zoners is that they live with purpose. Keeping a purpose in mind doesn't mean they never get upset over small inconveniences or setbacks, but it does make it easier to face obstacles with optimism and perspective. The Okinawans refer to this sense of purpose as *Ikigai*, while the Nicoyans call it *plan de vida*. Both of these phrases can be roughly translated to "why I wake up in the morning".

No matter what you call it, purpose provides the fuel to make each day a stepping stone towards our goals. For more on Pur-

pose, visit chapter 2.

Spirituality

There is another possible reason that people in Blue Zones live so long. Almost all of the people in these locations belong to a faith-based community and attend spiritual gatherings at least once a week. Many of them have daily spiritual practices or rituals, often embedded in their routines for decades.

This is not to say that someone must believe in a higher power in order to live with vitality. And spirituality does not need to imply religion. In fact, it's worth noting that across these five different communities, people hold wildly different spiritual beliefs and some do not believe in a higher power of any kind. Denomination doesn't seem to matter, but having a regular spiritual practice is noted in almost all of the longest-living Blue Zone inhabitants.

Life in a Blue Zone

Dr Ellsworth Wareham, who lived to 104, provides a wonderful example of how healthy habits can prolong life. Wareham was a Seventh-Day Adventist who lived in the Blue Zone of Loma Linda, California. He stopped performing surgeries at the age of 74 but, for the next 20 years, continued driving the 60 miles to Loma Linda University Hospital to train new residents and assist with operations.

Wareham remained lucid and cognitive until the time of his passing at home in the presence of loved ones. Despite injuring his spine in a car accident, he had no chronic health conditions and walked up and down his stairs several times per day for extra exercise. Wareham was happily married and valued being part of a strong community with a shared faith. During his lifetime he achieved recognition from two US presidents, the king of Greece and Saudi royalty for his charitable work around the world. He performed Pakistan's first open heart transplant in the early 1960s.

Wareham credited his longevity with two choices: keeping a positive mindset, and eating a vegan diet for 50 years. Many other people who live in Loma Linda are either vegetarian or pescatarian, and the largest supermarket in the area does not sell meat. Wareham says that eating a plant-based diet and focusing on the positive things in life helped him stick around for more than a century. With plenty of studies to back him up, his Blue Zone lifestyle is a great example of what is possible.

Create a life of vitality

Take care of your body. It's the only place you have to live.

Jim Rohn

We don't have to live in a Blue Zone in order to make positive changes and achieve vitality. The steps are simple.

Eat greens

As we saw in the previous section, the majority of people living in the Blue Zones eat plant-based diets and obtain most of their calories from whole, unprocessed carbohydrates like fruits, vegetables and legumes, along with healthy fats like avocados, nuts and olive oil. While meat consumption is undoubtedly an excellent way to obtain nutrients we recommend Michael Pollan's sage advice, 'Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.'¹¹⁷

Aim for a balance of whole carbs, protein, and fats, with an emphasis on fresh veggies and leafy greens. We definitely don't need to become vegan, but treating animal products as a treat rather than a daily staple is useful approach. Avoid processed carbohydrates like white bread, baked goods, pretzels and potato chips, which contain little more than empty calories that contribute to weight gain and insulin resistance. Starchy junk foods might seem satisfying in the moment, but they leave us feeling hungry again shortly after. Some starches like baked white potatoes and sweet potatoes are part of the Blue Zone

diets but should be a side dish rather than the main meal.

Oats, brown rice, beans, lentils and quinoa all have benefits and can be tasty and affordable additions to healthy meals. Including some saturated fat in our diet is nothing to worry about. Emerging research shows potential benefits of low carb, higher fat – or ketogenic – diets for weight loss, reducing inflammation and even improved focus.¹¹⁸

Avoid refined sugars that can send blood sugar peaking and crashing, leaving us “hangry” and irritable until our next meal or snack. Low carbohydrate snacks such as almonds, carrots or cheese are good choices to tide us over until mealtime. A piece of high-fibre fruit, like an apple is better than a candy bar. Avoid tropical fruits which, while delicious, also cause a sugar spike. Save them for treats, ideally when you’re in the tropics, where they grow naturally.

While all forms of sugar will essentially be absorbed as such into the body, experiment with dates, honey, coconut sugar or a drop of maple syrup as sweeteners that offer a slightly better nutrition profile than sugar. When it comes to sugar substitutes, stevia, found naturally in the *stevia rebaudiana* plant, is thought to be better than the sugar alcohol (sorbitol, xylitol, etc.) family of sweeteners, which can be difficult to digest. Artificial sweeteners, such as aspartame, are a grey area and something most dieticians recommend we avoid. Blackstrap molasses can be used in baking and, unlike refined sugar, contains nutrients like iron, potassium and calcium.

Try to cook most meals at home in order to avoid consuming hidden sugars, MSG, sodium and potentially dangerous cooking oils from restaurants and fast food outlets. And try the Blue Zone hack for weight management, which is to stop consumption when you feel 80% full. It can take a few minutes to feel totally satiated after eating a meal. By stopping, we allow the nervous system to catch up, thus receiving a clearer signal from the body.

One other factor that is just as important as choosing healthy foods, is choosing water over sugary juices or sodas. Coffee,

green tea, herbal teas and vegetable juices are packed with antioxidants and have benefits. Beware of fruit juices and read the label before assuming that packaged smoothies really are as nourishing as they promise to be. Mostly you'll discover they are comprised of apple juice concentrate, which is another way of saying they're full of fructose, or sugar.

Prioritise quality sleep

We've seen how our dependence on technology, and associated light pollution, is making it difficult to get enough sleep each night, as well as affecting the quality of our sleep. We also know that getting quality sleep on a consistent basis is key when it comes to reducing the risk of mental illness¹¹⁹ and diseases like Alzheimer's and dementia.¹²⁰ Sleep also strengthens the immune system.¹²¹ Clearly vitality without quality sleep will prove elusive, so what can we learn from the routines of people in Blue Zones? Simply aim to fall asleep before 10pm and wake up naturally around sunrise. It's really that simple.

If you're struggling with sleep then avoid looking at screens for at least one hour before bedtime. Blue light emitted by screens and technology stimulates the suprachiasmatic nucleus – a region of the brain responsible for controlling circadian rhythm. Darken your home and put down the phone for immediate and often surprising results.

Securing three deep sleep cycles per night can have a transformative effect on our wellbeing. Gamify sleep by tracking deep sleep cycles and seeing if you can improve sleep quality through biofeedback. Many apps and devices offer this functionality. Chapter 10 contains a thorough explanation of the schedule and habits that contribute to high-quality sleep.

Move the body

Most of us spend more than half of our waking hours sitting.¹²² If we want to live a long life rich with vitality, it's important to stand up and move.

People living in Blue Zones may not do Crossfit or yoga, but they get plenty of exercise by moving naturally. Like them, we do not need to become a bodybuilder or run marathons. Going out for an evening stroll, stretching after waking up, walking to the shops instead of driving... all of these activities add up over time.

Remember, the key to fitness without incurring injuries is starting light and moving naturally. Not much can beat a hike in nature. Wearable devices like Apple Watch and Fitbit help us keep track. Fitbit's 10,000 steps per day guideline is something most of us should aim to achieve.

Put family first

People in Blue Zones spend significant portions of their time with family. They keep aging parents and grandparents nearby or at home, they commit to a life partner and invest in their children with time and love. They know they can rely on a solid support network in times of adversity.

Many of us prioritise career over family. Some relocate across the country or world and lose touch with friends and relatives. We often get caught up in the maelstrom of everyday life and unintentionally neglect our spouse and kids. Blue Zone evidence suggests we pause and reassess. Sharing mealtimes and securing technology-free family time can increase our vitality.

For those with relatives in faraway places, technology can be a blessing. While no replacement for face-to-face contact, regular phone or video calls can help foster connection, improving both their quality of life and yours.

Spend quality time with friends

Family bonds are only one part of our support network and it's often said that our closest friends are essentially our chosen family. This is especially true for people who no longer live close to their relatives. Many people living in Blue Zones maintain close friendships for decades. For example, Okinawans create

moais, groups of five friends that commit to each other for life.

Having close friends is essential, but the type of friend also matters. Blue Zoners choose – or are born into – communities that encourage healthy behaviours. Called the social proximity effect, we are more malleable than we realise, always influencing and being influenced. Habits and emotional states are transferred directly from one individual to another by mimicry and emotional contagion.¹²³ As motivational speaker Jim Rohn said, “You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.” Pick friends who support your vitality rather than drain it.

Commit to a spiritual practice

For people are committed to a spiritual practice this is good news but, if that’s not our bag, does it mean that we have to devote ourselves to an organised religion?

Of course not. It’s important to remember that spirituality and religion are not synonymous. At its root, the word spiritual comes from the Latin word *spiritus*, which means breathe. Each breath you take literally connects you to the universe. Science shows us that we are not separate from each other, or the world. As we zoom in to the level of particles and waves there are no boundaries between ourselves and the objects we perceive with our human eyes. As astrophysicist Carl Sagan said, “The cosmos is within us. We are made of star-stuff. We are a way for the universe to know itself.”

Perhaps that is what spirituality is all about – recognising that we are part of something greater than the chattering, ego-centric mind. Whether this requires a contemplative practice, gratitude or even just intermittent reminders is for each of us to decide.

Monks, yogis and all religious devotees dedicate significant time to quieting the ego and experiencing a sense of union through meditation or prayer. However, spirituality is accessible in a myriad other ways. Watch a sunrise or sunset over the

ocean. Get into flow state through movement or music or art. Pet an animal. Laugh. Love. Share. Perform a random act of kindness.

As a surfer, I find that riding waves is what I'd call a spiritual practice. My book *Surfing Life Waves* tries to explain how the surfing experience both connects us with nature and induces flow state. The front part of the brain goes offline and gliding along waves seems timeless, effortless and selfless. My documentary *Waves of Freedom* shows how surfing has been used as a therapy for people with PTSD.

By dissolving our ego, we feel a sense of union with all things. No doctrine or set of beliefs is required for this. Simply breathing, noticing the passage of thoughts and awakening to the joy of nature are enough.

Find a sense of purpose

People living in Blue Zones say that having a sense of purpose inspires them to start each day with a positive outlook. As we saw in Chapter 2, purpose is what motivates us to put healthy habits into practice. Purpose is what will keep us on track on those days when we simply don't want to get out of bed and face the day. A sense of purpose is at the heart of a life of vitality. When we know that taking care of ourselves will benefit others and help us be of service to the world, we'll feel inspired to take better care of our body and mind.

"Wine at 5"

Excessive drinking is detrimental to health, but studies of Blue Zone populations suggest that moderate drinkers actually outlive non-drinkers. Four out of five Blue Zone populations drink responsibly on a regular basis, primarily choosing local wines and enjoying a glass during meals. While researchers are divided, there is some evidence that a glass of red wine can provide some health benefits. Red wine contains antioxidants called polyphenols, which can help protect against heart dis-

ease, while a compound called resveratrol, which reduces LDL cholesterol, helps prevent blood clots.¹²⁴

Final thoughts

He who has health has hope, and he who has hope has everything.

Arabian proverb

Cultivating vitality can feel like an uphill battle. It might mean sacrificing the convenience of fast food for a cooked meal, spending an hour after work at a yoga class rather than watching Netflix, or making an effort to get out into the community instead of using social media.

But as life in the Blue Zone shows us, the benefits are worthwhile. Start small and build reliable habits incrementally. Anything worth doing takes effort, and developing personal vitality is one the greatest investments we can make. It is integral to helping us reach our potential.

How do I rate my vitality right now?

How important is vitality to me?

Tick three items below that would improve my score:

☐ Eat more greens

☐ Improve my sleep

☐ Exercise more

☐ Prioritise family & friends

☐ Align with purpose

☐ Live like a Blue Zoner

What would my score be if I successfully
achieved the three items I have selected?

Imagine myself living with optimal vitality...

How do I feel in my body?

.....
Which emotions am I experiencing?

.....
What am I thinking?

.....
What am I willing to start tomorrow?

.....
How will I remind myself?

☐ Phone reminder

☐ Written note

Register your commitment and get inspiration at:

<https://bradleyhook.com/mastery>



PRESENCE

Unease, anxiety, tension, stress, worry – all forms of fear – are caused by too much future, and not enough presence. Guilt, regret, resentment, grievances, sadness, bitterness and all forms of non-forgiveness are caused by too much past, and not enough presence.

Eckhart Tolle

Being present is the opposite of being distracted. It is a state where we are calm, relaxed and receptive to the world around us. Presence is a state of ease. We are engaged in the moment without clinging to it, and, while thoughts about the past or future may arise, we don't allow them to hijack our attention.

What can we learn from individuals who have mastered the skill of presence?

Thích Nhất Hạnh is a long-time peace activist and practitioner of engaged Buddhism.¹²⁵ He is also the founder of several Buddhist meditation centres under the Order of Interbeing. In the 1970s, he was strongly opposed to the Vietnam War and, after leaving to travel and lecture about peace and meditation in 1975, North Vietnam denied him the right to return. He remained in exile until 2005, when he was finally granted permission to enter the country again. His most famous work is

his book *Vietnam: A Lotus in a Sea of Fire*, but his soothing poem *Walking Meditation* might be the best example of how he relates the concept of presence to his readers.

We will walk. We will only walk. We will enjoy our walk, without thinking of arriving ... Then we learn, that there is no peace walk; that peace is the walk; that there is no happiness walk; that happiness is the walk.

Hanh's understanding of presence – enjoying the moment without considering what will come next, without attaching any labels to the present or any expectations to the future – has helped him navigate the many obstacles he has encountered. He may not have desired an audience of millions, but his quiet confidence has drawn people from all around the globe to his teachings.

The difference between presence and focus

Pausing to be present with the life energy coursing through your body is living poetry.

Jennifer Williamson

It might seem like being present and maintaining a strong focus are one and the same. While these concepts are inter-related, they are distinctly different.

To focus is a deliberate action while to be present is a state of awareness. Focusing requires energy, while presence requires us only to be alert and open to our surroundings. Focus is the intentional application of attention whereas presence allows us to choose from options available to us. Focus takes us into the world whereas presence brings the world to us.

In the beginning, being present may require effort because we are accustomed to the persistent lure of distractions. With deliberate practice it can become our default state. Alternating between the ease of presence and the intensity of focus, or flow state, is the foundation for a great life.

Imagine sitting high up in the stadium at an evening foot-

ball match. The teams are fierce rivals and tension is high. The players are tentatively passing the ball to each other, waiting for an opportunity to break through the defence. Ok pause for a moment. Presence enables us to take in the whole game: the players and their tactical formations across the field, the crowd, the ambience, the music, the spectators on either side of us, the night sky, the breeze. We get a sense of life in motion. Focus is filtering out all extraneous information and homing in on the ball as it moves around the field. Through selective attention we create a necessary bottleneck that enables us to ignore unwanted stimuli in order to prevent our prefrontal cortex from becoming overloaded.¹²⁶ It is almost as if the crowd no longer exists. This is a very different experience to the wide-angle view of presence.

Distraction or multi-tasking are the antithesis of presence and involve rapidly switching focus: think checking Facebook on our phone, looking at the big screen, glancing back at the game, uploading a selfie to Instagram, wondering whether the queues to the bathroom are long, checking to see if anyone has liked that photo on Instagram, contemplating texting a friend... then missing the goal that was just scored. Sure, there's a replay on the big screen, but there's no option to replay most of what happens in our lives. If we miss out, we miss out.

Why can't we stay present?

*Do not dwell on the past, do not dream of the future,
concentrate the mind on the present moment.*

The Buddha

Being present sounds like it shouldn't be too difficult. But if it's really just a relaxed state of awareness, why can it feel so challenging? The information density of modern life means we are surrounded by distractions, both incidental and by choice.

Technology

It is estimated that we are exposed to 34 Gigabytes of information every day. Our brains are capable of processing around 120 bits per second.¹²⁷ By that estimate, our focused attentional bandwidth is around 0.64 Megabytes over a 12-hour period. When confronted with a veritable waterfall of information it is no wonder that we dart from feed to alert to push to email. We're novelty-seeking creatures drowning in information.

Most of us have experienced how technology like smartphones can drag us from the present moment and away from what we're doing.¹²⁸ By reviewing screen time reports or downloading a usage tracking app onto our phone we can start to get a sense of how many times we're reaching for the device in a day.

Despite our addiction, smartphones are an incredible invention. Just one hundred years ago an iPhone would have seemed like alien technology, or magic. Only in the realms of science fiction could people use one small screen to send messages to their friends, see and hear distant loved ones, manage their businesses, capture and share high definition photos and videos, transfer money, buy anything from groceries to property – and access almost all information that has been published in the history of the world. A study of Millennials, who deliberately use their phones up to 150 times per day, shows that 72% feel that smartphones improve everything from friendships to work-life balance and understanding on projects.¹²⁹

But while smartphones are invaluable tools, they're also a risk to presence. When we feel awkward in a given situation, we reach for our phones. When we feel bored for a moment while waiting in line, we reach for our phones. When we can't fall asleep at night, we reach for our phones. It becomes an escape reflex that lures us out of the present and into addictive virtual worlds. The impact can extend beyond ourselves – studies show that parents with smartphone addiction are more likely to have kids with behavioural problems. Researchers have labelled the

issue “technoference”.¹³⁰

Increasing anxiety

In recent years, rates of anxiety are increasing in so-called developed countries, notably the US, where anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness, affecting around 40 million adults or almost one in five people.¹³¹ Globally an estimated 275 million people experienced an anxiety disorder in 2016, making it the most prevalent mental health or neurodevelopmental disorder.¹³²

Anxiety is a term that covers a great deal of psychological ground, from sporadic nervousness around a specific issue through to generalised anxiety disorder where the person feels anxious most days and often struggles to remember the last time they felt relaxed.¹³³ While anxiety is certainly not new to the human condition, it seems contrary to the safety of modern life that rates of suffering are escalating to epidemic proportions. At its root, anxiety involves a difficulty to focus on the present due to worries about the future or past.

When we feel anxious, we pull ourselves out of the present by imagining events or issues that may not occur. We can’t relax because we’re trapped in a state of sympathetic nervous arousal, meaning we’re in freeze, fight or flight mode. The body wants to get us out of the difficult situation but it can’t because the situation is imagined. Symptoms can include increased heart rate, sweaty palms and shortness of breath.¹³⁴ For some people, anxiety is a powerful motivator, inspiring action and urgency, however prolonged distress can result in inflammation and more serious mental health disorders, making us feel unwell and dragging us far away from a state of presence.

Poor health

Exhaustion, sugar cravings and the effects of a sedentary lifestyle are all risk factors that can impact our ability to stay present. Instead of being able to find presence, we’re distract-

ed by feelings of fatigue, weakness, and hunger. See chapter 5 – Vitality.

Rumination

Rumination happens when we focus our attention on the causes of our distress without seeking positive resolutions. For example, a project we're working on ends abruptly and we're told our services are no longer required. It is natural to seek an explanation for the events that have occurred. Rumination is when we replay situations in our minds, looping over past events to try to discover meaning. We may latch onto certain ideas and attach emotions to them. We mull over past conversations, scrutinise our performance, agonise over emails and notes. Often, we'll come to a conclusion that doesn't align with reality. We blame the project manager for inefficiency and decide the CEO never liked us. We develop animosity towards others and may even imagine vivid revenge scenarios. This is rumination. In reality, the budget was impacted by external factors and the project needed to be stopped. The leaders are feeling the pressure and not communicating as they usually would.

Rumination keeps us from being present and results in us revisiting the same thought patterns repeatedly. It has been linked to anxiety and depression.¹³⁵ Remember, the more we practice something the better we get at it. Rumination is no different – we become masterful ruminators in no time and it takes real effort to find a way back.

Busy-ness

We live in a demanding world. Most of us have jobs – sometimes more than one – plus families, friends and priorities like exercise or learning new skills. It is easy to get trapped in cycles of busy-ness – dashing from activity to activity and not quite gaining the momentum or results we desire. Taking a break is so unintuitive that when we do sit down to relax the first thing we do is reach for a phone.

Busy-ness is not a new affliction. In his 1670 book titled *Pensées*, the brilliant French mathematician Blaise Pascal wrote, “All of humanity’s problems stem from man’s inability to sit quietly in a room alone.” Thinking, talking and rushing around can give offer a false sense of purpose. Life seems eerily quiet when we tune out and turn off.

Productivity is good, but busy-ness is a risk to our wellbeing. It can leave us agitated, unfocused and fatigued. Adam Alter, marketing and psychology professor at NYU, suggests that we have less ‘stopping cues’ than previous generations. For most of history when people finished work, their tools and technologies remained in the office, or field. Now we carry access in our pockets. When our grandparents finished reading the news they folded the newspaper and were done. Our newsfeeds are endless.

Quiet moments of presence are easily sabotaged by an abundance of stimulation and a feeling that we should be doing something rather than nothing. We may miss opportunities due to our perpetual distraction. We may miss out on much of our lives.

Becoming more present

In this moment, there is plenty of time. In this moment, you are precisely as you should be. In this moment, there is infinite possibility.

Victoria Moran

Presence delivers us back to the wide-angle perspective of life, allowing us to reprioritise, recalibrate and renew. While the modern world presents many distractions, there are ways we can bring ourselves back to now.

Embodied health

Our bodies live in the present moment, even if our emotions and thoughts drift into the past and future. We can engage our

bodies as anchor points to presence by shifting state, tuning into our biological rhythms, noting how our bodies reacting to the places our thoughts go. If our bodies are distressed we receive powerful signals to take action in the present moment. Illness and injury are stopping cues most of us can't ignore and the reason why we are permitted to take time of work to see doctors and recuperate.

With the body offering such a powerful mechanism for presence, it makes sense to cultivate wellness and enjoy the positive feedback loops that follow. It may sound cliché and repetitive, but diet, exercise, and sleep are the building blocks of resilience. We struggle to reach mastery without nailing these essentials first.

Every time we open our refrigerator or pantry, we have the opportunity to choose a meal that will either drain or boost brain function and make it easier to attain a state of alertness. Research shows that diet is the leading cause of both death and disability in the United States¹³⁶ with physicians acknowledging that food can be medicinal and that our grocery lists make a big difference to mental health.¹³⁷

So, which foods should we be putting in our shopping carts? Start by following the recommendations outlined in chapter 5 – Vitality, then consider some known “brain foods” such as walnuts, berries, eggs and even fatty fish. For a plant-based alternative, avocados and flaxseeds are also packed with essential omega-3 fatty acids and give smoothies a healthy boost. Try flaxseed oil in salad dressings and coconut or MCT oil, which can benefit those on ketogenic diets.¹³⁸

Coffee and tea are healthful in moderation but it is worth tracking consumption and observing the effects. Caffeine gets the heart racing, so if we already deal with anxiety, it can exacerbate the issue.¹³⁹ Try ditching caffeine for a week or two and see if there is any difference in presence and clarity. Herbal teas like chamomile are a soothing alternative, so keep a few bags on hand for challenging days.¹⁴⁰

Recognise and seek help for anxiety

Whether we experience rare bouts of nervousness or suffer from more severe anxiety, the first step is to recognise the experience for what it is. There are treatments available if anxiety leads to suffering. Whether we simply want to implement some lifestyle changes or speak with a therapist about options, it's important to take the step and reach out for help. There are solutions including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and meditation that consistently produce great results. Moving the body in nature and finding flow state through activities like walking, running, gardening or surfing can help us avoid drifting into thoughts of uncertain futures.

Breathe into the present moment

Many people find that when they react to challenging circumstances they take shallow, quick breaths, activating a sympathetic nervous response and making themselves feel more threatened. Without sufficient biological insight we may not even realise that this is happening.

There are certain breath practices that can have a positive effect on the nervous system and our overall sense of wellbeing. For example, square breathing, is a strategy that has been used by the military and athletes to calm, focus, gain control and manage stress response. It's a technique we can execute at any time to let our nervous system know that we are ok. Simply breathe in counting 1, 2, 3, 4; stop and hold your breath counting 1, 2, 3, 4; exhale counting 1, 2, 3, 4. Take 3 to 5 breaths as needed.

Our recommended technique extends the exhalation component. This type of breathing activates the "rest and digest" state in the body (by triggering the Vagus nerve and activating a parasympathetic nervous response). Breathe in to the count of 4, pause, then exhale for 6, or perhaps even 8 seconds. Repeat for at least a minute.

Concentrate on keeping the chest soft, the shoulders relaxed and feeling expansion across the lower ribs on the inhalation. This is referred to as diaphragmatic breathing, also called belly breathing in yoga.

Practising breathing exercises for a few minutes each day will help establish a baseline of calm and build confidence using breath as a response to challenge. It is one of the most important skills we can learn.¹⁴¹

Mindfulness and attention control

Just as we saw in the chapter on Focus, establishing a meditation practice delivers numerous benefits. But what if you've tried meditation and just can't seem to get into it? Don't worry, there are ways to develop mindfulness without committing to a formal meditation practice.

Because meditation and mindfulness are often used in a similar context, confusion about the difference is understandable. Where meditation typically refers to a formal – usually seated – practice, mindfulness is available anywhere, anytime and with anyone, by simply being fully engaged in the here and now. This requires noticing both the external world, how we feel in our bodies and our thoughts.

Most of us structure our lives around rituals and habits, many of them performed on autopilot. Do you remember brushing your teeth yesterday? How about making your coffee this morning? Staying completely engaged and aware while completing these rituals is a way to develop presence and appreciate the moment. You might also explore simple habits like mindfully making your bed.

Admiral William H McRaven is a former Navy Seal known both for his accomplishments in the military and his motivational speeches. His most famous piece of life advice is to start each day by making the bed.

Why is this such important advice? McRaven says it's a small act that, if done right, will get us on track for more small wins

throughout the day.

Do you simply throw your blankets over your bed as quickly as possible in the morning before rushing out the door? Could you give yourself a few more minutes to slowly and carefully make your bed? Can you be fully present as you arrange each pillow and fix your sheets? Even if the day goes badly, as Admiral McRaven acknowledges will certainly happen sometimes, you'll return home to a beautifully made bed. A bed that you made!

We can apply this approach while completing other domestic tasks. Rather than listening to an album or a podcast while cleaning the kitchen, how about focusing on where we place each item, how everything is organised and even the colours and textures of the objects we're handling.

Washing the dishes by hand is potentially cathartic. Listen to the sounds of the running water and notice the way the suds feel. Pay close attention to each dish. Instead of drifting off into default thought patterns keep returning to the task at hand. This exercise prompts us to slow down, and can bring a feeling of calm and serenity. We may even begin to look forward to washing the dishes! Anything can be a form of moving meditation if we set our mind to it.

Over time, it gets easier to engage in simple tasks without drifting away. Eventually, we can carry this mindset with us throughout the day. Being present goes hand in hand with staying calm, and if we work on both simultaneously, we'll be better equipped to handle high pressure situations.

Make technology work for you

As we've seen, technological distractions can wreak havoc on our focus and ability to stay present. Think about it: who would you rather have a conversation with, someone who can't help but check their notifications every five minutes, or someone who manages to keep their phone in their pocket the whole time?

While technology is a major risk to presence it also offers tools that can prove helpful in becoming more present. As well as the meditation apps we've discussed there are mindfulness timers that you can set to chime at certain intervals to remind you to come back to the present moment. Setting reminders and scheduling meditation time into your calendar is another way to use technology to help you stay on track. Apple Watch intermittently prompts the wearer to breathe, and presents a mesmerising flower graphic that expands and contracts with a soothing haptic rhythm.

Whenever you're on hold or waiting for something to load online, instead of opening another browser or starting another task, simply relax into the moment. Turn your waiting time into a micro meditation session by simply observing the flow of your breath.

Developing a commanding presence

No valid plans for the future can be made by those who have no capacity for living now.

Alan Watts

Being present influences how others perceive us. This brings us to a second meaning of 'presence'. Beyond simply being 'present' in the moment, the idea of having a powerful 'presence' describes the impact we have on the people we live and work with. Most of us have met a person who exudes a commanding presence. It would be easy to assume that they were born this is unlikely. Politicians, athletes, speakers and celebrities develop a powerful presence because they've spent more time practicing staying calm and engaged in high-stakes and complex situations. Notice their posture, their breathing and their facial expressions. Biology plays a huge role. Combined with a sense of purpose (Chapter 2), strong alignment with one's values (Chapter 11) assertiveness (Chapter 9) and decisiveness (Chapter 7), you have all of the ingredients required to

command the attention of others.

Each one of us needs to work to unlock our own unique version of presence so we can influence better outcomes and achieve our full potential.

Final thoughts

It's only when we truly know and understand that we have a limited time on earth – and that we have no way of knowing when our time is up – that we will begin to live each day to the fullest as if it was the only one we had.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

Imagine your body as an anchor that can bring the ship of your mind back to a safe harbour. The more you practice being mindful, more effective your anchor will become.

Manage your surroundings and practice rituals that bring you into the moment. Control your consumption - food, information, ideas. Take notice of what's going on around you and stop to smell the flowers every once in a while. Be aware of distractions and breathe yourself back to now.

Adjust posture and experiment with your social presence. With practice, you'll see the difference in how the people you meet respond to your words and actions. Being around someone with a powerful presence inspires others to be the best versions of themselves. Go forth and lead the way.

**Live totally and
live intensely,
so that each
moment
becomes
golden, and
your whole
life becomes
a series
of golden
moments.**

Osho

How do I rate my presence?



How important is being present to me?



Tick three items below that would improve my score:

☐ Breathing techniques

☐ Meditation

☐ Manage technology

☐ Manage anxiety

☐ Improve diet

☐ Make my bed

What would my score be if I successfully achieved the three items I have selected?



Imagine myself living with presence...

How do I feel in my body?

.....
Which emotions am I experiencing?

.....
What am I thinking?

.....
What am I willing to try tomorrow?

.....
How will I remind myself?

☐ Phone reminder

☐ Written note

Register your commitment and get inspiration at:

<https://bradleyhook.com/mastery>



DECISIVENESS

Decisiveness is a characteristic of high-performing men and women. Almost any decision is better than no decision at all.

Brian Tracy

When world champion surfer Kelly Slater catches a wave, he doesn't hesitate. Just like the water itself, his movements are fluid, intuitive and seemingly effortless.

In the 2015 Hurley Pro, held at Trestles in California, Slater took off on a relatively small wave and aimed his board at the breaking lip. Upon impact he projected several feet into the air and commenced an incredible spinning aerial manoeuvre. However, while in the air, the board came unstuck and flew away from his feet. As Slater fell back into the water he somehow discovered himself directly above his board, which was facing the right direction, planing toward the beach. He vanished for a moment as he disappeared beneath the foam and then emerged, standing up, to complete several more manoeuvres before finishing the ride.¹⁴²

The judges gave Slater a below average score because they judged the move to have been incomplete but fans worldwide considered the feat miraculous. It is this decisiveness in critical situations that has made the 11-time World Surf League Champion a household name. Slater holds the record for the most championship competition wins, has been both the youngest and oldest surfer to win world titles and is widely recognised as the greatest surfer of all time. He began surfing at the age

of five, and started winning age-division championships on the East Coast of the USA when he was 10.

What makes Slater such an incredible surfer? Which qualities have allowed him to excel at his sport? What makes him the greatest surfer at all time?

Beyond his years of practice, competitive nature and physical dexterity: he is supremely decisive. Over the course of his career we've seen him perform the impossible by making split second, often last minute, decisions that his competitors couldn't match. Tactically, Slater is unrivalled, exemplifying how a person can respond to critical situations with catlike agility and confidence. Watch him recover from death defying free fall drops at places like Teahupoo in Tahiti to see decisiveness in motion. How can we embody this quality in our own lives?

What is decisiveness?

Decision is the courageous facing of issues, knowing that if they are not faced, problems will remain forever unanswered.

Wilfred A Peterson

Decisiveness is the ability to make decisions quickly and effectively. It is the opposite of indecisiveness, which is a cognitive symptom of depression.

Many of us have been taught to carefully weigh up our options or risk being impulsive. What is the difference between deliberation, impulsiveness and decisiveness. Are there developmental milestones along the path of decision-making?

Indeed there are. The difference between decisiveness and impulsiveness is expertise. The impulsive person acts without truly understanding the potential consequences of their decisions or the merits of any of their options. They act based on strong feelings, not facts or experience. They may experience a subsequent feeling of regret. The decisive person already has a deep understanding of the task they're undertaking and as such

they don't always have to stop and think about what they're going to do next. They trust that their logic and intuition is going to lead them in the right direction.

There's no doubt that most successful people have mastered the art of decisiveness¹⁴³ but for the rest of us it can be a struggle to be quite so bold. We might find ourselves procrastinating on a task instead of choosing to get started; we might have an opportunity to try something new and unfamiliar, but hold ourselves back from making the decision to do so; or we may just feel overwhelmed by our options when we need to do something as simple as purchasing a product. Many of us find a number of half-written emails open at the end of the day. This is indecisiveness and what we want to avoid.

In order to become more decisive, we have to understand why so many of us resist making decisions in the first place.

Obstacles to decision making

Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you that you are wrong. To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires courage.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Why does decision-making feel so difficult at times? Why do we get waylaid on the journey toward our goals? There are a number of pitfalls that can curb our decisiveness.

Analysis paralysis

In a world of endless choices, analysis paralysis holds us back from making quick decisions.¹⁴⁴ Most of us can think of a time we've found ourselves in the supermarket staring at a shelf of similar products without being able to confidently select one item. We may choose something and then wonder if we made the right choice. We may leave it and choose nothing at all. That's analysis paralysis, and when it occurs it can be frustrating at best and debilitating at worst.

Analysis paralysis, also called the Paradox of Choice, happens when we have more options before us than we can reasonably evaluate, and there's no way that we can accurately judge the pros and cons of each choice.

We often think that when people have lots of choices, they're happier. This is not usually the case. Too many choices can trigger procrastination, anxiety and even inaction. We simply can't know whether our choices will be good ones and so we get trapped into considering the implications of making a bad decision. This triggers a fear response and we freeze – become paralysed – in the face of impending danger. In reality the danger might be nothing more than an aisle of breakfast cereals or selecting an insurance policy.

Is analysis paralysis getting worse in the modern world? Almost certainly. We're confronted with an endless stream of new information and our brains can't keep up. For most of human evolution, we made decisions that would enable us to survive. We were present and embodied – focused on avoiding threats and seeking out sustenance and novelty. Choosing between five different types of meat just wasn't an option for our ancestors – unless, of course, they were masterful hunters. Now, we're bombarded with an endless array of choices, from how we spend our time to what car we might drive.

FOMO and FOBO

What if we are worried about missing out? Fear of missing out – or FOMO – is the antithesis of decisiveness and symptomatic of a world with too many opportunities. Instead of taking time to get to know a potential romantic partner we simply swipe left – popularised by the dating app Tinder – and move onto the next option.

People are as disposable as products in this gamified world of novelty and reward. Being constantly connected means we compare everyone else's best moments with our own, mostly mundane, lives.

When we are trapped in FOMO or analysis paralysis, we can easily end up feeling indecisive, or even depressed. FOBO – a fear of being offline – is an extreme version of FOMO, where attachment to a device is more important than anything else in life. Even momentary disconnection could mean missing out on a notification. Technology addiction is perhaps one of the greatest factors impacting decisiveness, focus and fulfilment in the world today.

Resisting our intuition

Many of us never learn to trust our intuition. We're often encouraged to be rational and to use our minds, rather than gut instinct, to solve complex problems. However, trusting your gut can be taken literally. Our brain and gastrointestinal systems are connected by a network of neurons, chemicals and hormones that form an information superhighway.¹⁴⁵ The central nervous system is always in communication with the gut through the sympathetic and parasympathetic branches of the nervous system. These neurons communicate back and forth with the brain to communicate hunger, danger and stress.

The gut microbiome also has a major influence on mood. This is because the condition of the microbiome can impact our levels of serotonin, an important neurotransmitter that signals feelings of happiness. Serotonin levels can change mood and behaviour, and having chronically low serotonin levels contributes to mental illnesses like depression and anxiety. That sinking feeling you get in the pit of your stomach when something bad happens? Butterflies before an important meeting? That's the gut-brain axis at work.

But many of us disregard the subtle signals of our biology – our interoception – or quieten them with drugs, fast food and alcohol. We seek extrinsic feedback more than intrinsic. We trust other's opinions, or worse, other's social personas, more than our own instinct. We ask Google instead of thinking for ourselves. Safety lies in following the herd. But herd mentality

rarely leads to mastery.

Pessimism

Pessimism occurs when we think that negative or worst-case scenarios are inevitable. In this mindset we may disregard all possibilities and get stuck in a perpetual state of doom and gloom. Optimism – as seen in Chapter 4 – is about seeing things as they are but not worse than what they are. Getting stuck with a pessimistic worldview severely restricts decision-making and may result in lost opportunities, rumination and confirmation bias. We all know someone who says, “this always happens to me.” Expecting the worst will more than likely result in the worst. It is a self-perpetuating cycle.

Lack of self-confidence

When it comes to serious decisions, change is scary. It's perfectly natural to feel this way. Even just thinking about trying something unfamiliar can stir up feelings of discomfort. While considering the change event, our nervous system assumes that we're in danger, so it tries to protect us by shifting into sympathetic arousal – freeze, fight, flight mode. To avoid the prospective danger – even if it is only imagined – we seek the relative safety of inaction.

Imagine deciding to ask for a pay rise. Instantly we become uncomfortable. Stress hormones flood the system. We may stand up and walk to the boss's door only to become overwhelmed by fear. The safety of stasis is greater than the risk of embracing change, so we shuffle back to our desk in self-pity.

No matter how experienced and knowledgeable we are, any choice we make involves a little bit of faith in our future circumstances.¹⁴⁶ No-one has a crystal ball. With the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous nature of the modern world, finding confidence to make decisions can feel more difficult than ever before. The fact that our lives are shared online may also increase the fear of failure and amplify self-doubt.

Becoming more decisive

Good decisions come from experience. Experience comes from making bad decisions.

Mark Twain

Intuition is often described as some kind of mystical sixth sense but there is actually nothing magical about it. What we sense as intuition is actually the brain – including the gut-brain axis – on autopilot, comparing the current situation to past experience and cumulative knowledge.¹⁴⁷

Nonconscious processes such as intuition operate not only in routine activities but also in complex decision-making. We often find reasons for our decisions without fully understanding the emotions that drive them. Learning to recognise resistance to change as opposed to an intuitive red flag will help us to make progress.

Honing intuition involves careful observation, pattern recognition and presence. When Kelly Slater catches a wave, he's able to trust his intuition because he's been in the same situation thousands of times before. He recognises the variables that constitute a good wave and evaluates these in relation to his physical position and skill set. He's not just getting a good feeling and then blindly hoping he's right, he's putting all of his surfing experience to work in a single moment.

Anyone can take steps to develop their own intuition and become more decisive. It requires trust that the feelings signalled by our cumulative experience of life are the right ones. The process can be challenging, but science shows that there are significant benefits – including better decision-making – when trusting the gut.¹⁴⁸

Deliberate practice

We're all familiar with the phrase 'practice makes perfect'. However, repetition won't necessarily improve our skills to an expert level. The quality of practice is what counts, and re-

search shows that dedicated and deliberate practice results in mastery.¹⁴⁹

We can all think of areas of our lives where we don't feel entirely confident. Perhaps we doubt our technology skills and feel apprehensive about exploring the advanced menus within a software application. Even though we use the software daily, we never feel totally competent. That's practice without pushing deliberately into discomfort. Maybe we don't connect with new friends or love interests because we're not confident in our conversational ability. Or perhaps we don't give it our all on a sports team because we don't trust ourselves to perform under pressure.

In scenarios like this, we can't expect that one day we will wake up and suddenly have the confidence to be a power user, an eloquent speaker or decisive player. Deliberate practice requires that we set clear and incremental goals, push ourselves beyond comfort, allocate specific time for training and obtain coaching or clear feedback. Take an athlete's approach to life: practice, review, recover, improve.

Get into a flow state

As mentioned in Chapter 1 – Focus, “flow state” is when we are immersed in a task, with a high degree of precision, without thinking too much about the finer details.¹⁵⁰ In flow state, we're able to filter out the world around us and hone in on the task at hand. Our responses to challenge become automatic, fluid and intuitive. Our creativity is heightened, self-doubt drifts away and decisiveness becomes second nature.

Often when you observe an expert at work, they've entered flow state. Whether it's an athlete playing the game of their life or a dancer on stage, they're not making very many conscious decisions as they perform. They exhibit real-time mastery of the skills they have learned as a result of practice and rehearsal. Deep neural pathways, forged through repetition, enable them to disengage the prefrontal cortex – the thinking centre of the

brain – and respond to challenges effortlessly in the moment.

Getting into flow state isn't something that happens by accident. We need a clear and specific goal combined with the appropriate skills to meet the challenge. The flow zone is a delicate one: too much challenge and we slip into anxiety, too little challenge and we may become bored. From sales calls to surfing big waves, we can all find ways to build flow into our lives.

Take an athlete's approach to finding flow by setting one clear goal per day and allocating 30-60 minutes to achieving it. Do this before checking email or getting caught up in business as usual tasks, if you can. Flow is the gateway to a more decisive life.

The power of positive thinking

An optimistic and curious mindset broadens our perceived options. A pessimistic outlook may help us avoid risk and danger but it can also limit growth and opportunity. Cultivating an optimistic outlook can aid decisiveness if we're clear about our purpose – see Chapter 2 – and our values – see Chapter 11.

Develop self-confidence

Sometimes we hesitate to make decisions because we doubt our ability to handle the consequences, whatever the outcome may be.¹⁵¹

When we develop self-confidence, trust in our own intuition will blossom too. Self-confidence, like intuition and flow, is also related to experience and expertise. Progress in one area will inevitably lead to progress in the other.

Being decisive isn't just about being confident that we're able to make smart decisions. It's all about knowing that we back ourselves, for better or worse.

Standing up straight will shift us biologically into a more confident and assertive posture. Breathing slowly helps activate the prefrontal cortex, rather than being stuck in the freeze, fight, flight reptilian brain. Knowing when to enlist the help of others

and when to make decisions alone comes with practice. Being prepared to fail and make mistakes means that we recognise our propensity for growth and that we're confident in our ability to adjust and make better decisions in future.

Most important, self-confidence comes from owning the decision. When we make a decision and are prepared to back ourselves with excuses, we're probably making the right choice.

Act fast

Some people advise that smart decision-making has to be a long, drawn out process. Sometimes, it absolutely should be. We want to do some research before choosing which car to buy, which apartment to rent or which venue to use for a big event. If we wanted to adopt a dog, we would learn about different kinds of breeds, dog-training techniques and housebreaking tips first. There are plenty of situations when taking our time to make a decision is sensible.

But often we hesitate even when making small decisions. We've all noticed someone that we wanted to talk to, waited while deciding what to say, only to miss our chance when we find they've left the room. We've seen an opening for an amazing job, waited for days to try to work up the courage to write up a cover letter and send in an application, only to discover that the job posting has been taken down or that the position is no longer open for applications.

Research shows that when it comes to decision making, acting fast is often the best way to get what you really want. Motivational speaker and author Mel Robbins is a huge proponent of her bestselling five-second rule.¹⁵² By reducing decision lag, she turned her life around and has helped many others do the same thing.

What is the five-second rule, and how can it help us make decisions instead of missing out on opportunities? Basically, Robbins states that if we're faced with a decision or a task, and don't act on it within five seconds, we can kill any motivation we

might have to act at all. Are there situations this rule doesn't apply to? Sure. We wouldn't follow the whim of moving to a new city within five seconds of thinking about it. But when it comes to making smaller decisions throughout the day, there's usually no need to hesitate to the extent that most of us do.

For example, imagine someone who's usually pretty quiet at work meetings. Even when they have ideas that they think might be important, they're not sure if their co-workers and manager will listen or not, so they tend to keep their mouth shut. Sometimes, they feel like they're on the verge of speaking up, and then someone else chimes in with a topic that steers the conversation in a whole new direction, and they realise that they've missed their shot.

Now, let's apply the five-second rule to this situation. Our usually quiet person is at a meeting, and an idea comes to mind that they really want to bring to the table. They're nervous, but they take a calming breath, remember that the uncomfortable feeling is temporary, and begin to count down: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Before the five seconds is up, they act on the instinct and speak up.

How does the five-second rule work so effectively? It's because our brains spend most of the day on autopilot, and if we want to snap out of existing habits and make decisions that bring us closer to achieving our goals, we have to override our innate resistance to change and our tendency to deliberate. We can't change our circumstances if we're running on autopilot because our typically negative response to potential discomfort will seed all manner of excuses and reasons not to act.

When we force ourselves out of autopilot and take action, rather than simply allowing external circumstances to play out, we begin to develop an internal locus of control. We don't let other people and outside situations dictate the path of our life.

While we may not want to use the five-second rule for life-changing decisions with far reaching consequences, we can certainly use it throughout our typical daily routine. Imagine how much time we could save simply by not hesitating, procrastinating and sweating the small stuff.

Focus on priorities

We saw earlier in the chapter that one of the biggest obstacles to decision making is analysis paralysis. We've also seen how decision fatigue can reduce our productivity and focus. How can we pare down our choices and eliminate some of the stress from decision making? The answer is to get completely clear on our priorities and use these as a guiding light to make decision making more straightforward.

How many of us have trouble committing to plans for the weekend because there are so many events on that we're just not sure what to do? Or stand in front of the wardrobe for far too long every morning because we feel pressure to dress a certain way and are nervous about what people will think? How long do we deliberate over options at the supermarket or in an online store?

These examples might seem trivial, but all can be made easier if we're clear ahead of time on the parameters with which we wish to define our lives. Purpose, values and clear goals can help us be more selective about what we really want.

And don't forget, that from traditional marketers to social media influencers, there are a large number of people who are bombarding us with different options designed to make us spend more money. We have to consider the effects that advertising has on our decision-making process. When it comes to supply and demand, advertisers do their best to manufacture demand: if we had never seen ads for certain products, would our quality of life really have been any worse without them? Being clear about what we really need, and who is profiting from our insecurities helps us gain perspective.

Use the crowd to help quickly assess options – Amazon reviews, TripAdvisor and Yelp are all ways of gathering intelligence. Never shop without a list. Never commence work without clear objectives and bite-sized tasks.

Tackling the problem of analysis paralysis by getting clear on our priorities can help us learn to trust ourselves and filter

out the noise. Abraham Lincoln is quoted as having said, “If I had five minutes to chop down a tree, I’d spend the first three sharpening my axe.”

Sharpen your axe by getting super clear about what needs to be done.

Final Thoughts

When you have collected all the facts and fears and made your decision, turn off all your fears and go ahead.

George S Patton

The decision-making process can be intimidating, yet decisiveness is a key aspect of resilience and success. Anyone can learn to be decisive. Even if you find yourself hesitating over every decision that you make now, there are plenty of opportunities for you to put your intuition to the test and learn to trust yourself. Every time you experience deliberation or procrastination, note down details about the situation and review it later. Be as specific as possible. Were you overloaded, unprepared or simply out of your depth? Perhaps you were exhausted after a poor night’s rest. What can you learn from the experience?

By getting clear on your priorities, improving skills through deliberate practice, developing confidence and cultivating a positive attitude, you can begin to make decisions effectively and with ease.

**No fear, no
hesitation,
no surprise,
no doubt.**

Miyamoto Musashi

How do I rate my decisiveness?

How important is being decisive to me?

Tick three items below that would improve my score:

☐

Clear priorities

☐

Act fast - 5 second rule

☐

Develop confidence

☐

Finding flow state

☐

Positivity

☐

Deliberate practice

What would my score be if I successfully achieved the three items I have selected?

Imagine myself living decisively...

How do I feel in my body?

.....

Which emotions am I experiencing?

.....

What am I thinking?

.....

What am I willing to try tomorrow?

.....

How will I remind myself?

☐

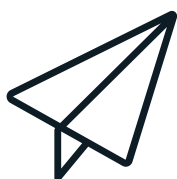
Phone reminder

☐

Written note

Register your commitment and get inspiration at:

<https://bradleyhook.com/mastery>



BOUNCE

The human capacity for burden is like bamboo – far more flexible than you would ever believe at first glance.

Jodi Picoult

Sheryl Sandberg seems to have it all. You may know her as the COO of Facebook, or the author of the best-selling book *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*. She encourages women to break down barriers in the workplace by stepping up and taking on leadership positions. Sandberg herself is a leader, and she has leaned in to every opportunity she's taken: she has two degrees from Harvard, she was the first woman to sit on Facebook's board, she's a billionaire and she was named one of *TIME*'s Most Influential People.

But after the success of Sandberg's first book, she was faced with one of the most difficult trials that anyone can experience: the loss of a partner. In 2015, Sandberg's husband, Dave Goldberg, died unexpectedly due to a heart problem. Naturally, she needed plenty of time and space to grieve the sudden loss of her husband, and she was unsure where life would take her next.

Sandberg could have lost momentum, or put her life on hold. She was already enormously successful and could have spent as much time as she wanted in mourning, retired from the public life. Instead, she decided to use her experience to help others. In 2017, she published her second book, *Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy*, which is about developing resilience and managing grief.¹⁵³ Since its release, the book has sold millions of copies, helping individuals and families around the world learn strategies for dealing with

adversity.

Sandberg's choices exemplify resilience but, most importantly, Sandberg proves the importance of knowing how to bounce back, even after we've hit rock bottom. Developing the capability to rebound from adversity is useful both in crisis and while navigating everyday inconveniences. No matter what happens, there is always a way to bounce back. But first, it's necessary to understand what "bounce" really means, how to recognise when we're on a downward spiral and what to do in order to come back up.

Bouncing back

No matter how much falls on us, we keep ploughing ahead. That's the only way to keep the roads clear.

Greg Kincaid

Stephen Hawking is recognised as one of the most brilliant scientists of our time. He passed away in 2018 at the age of 76, while still serving as the director of research at the Centre for Theoretical Cosmology at the University of Cambridge.

Hawking was a cosmologist, theoretical physicist and the author of the book *A Brief History of Time*.

Despite his success, Hawking faced a seemingly insurmountable challenge just as his career began. While completing his doctoral degree, he was diagnosed with ALS, a motor-neuron disease that is typically fatal, and doctors estimated that he had two years left to live. When he found out that he had the disease, Hawking fell into a deep depression, wondering if continuing his studies and completing his research was even worthwhile. But his supervisors and colleagues encouraged him to continue.

Hawking listened, and although he began to have difficulty walking unsupported and lost his ability to speak, he finished his doctoral program and continued to invest his time and energy into research and making scientific literature accessible to the general public. He was able to communicate through a

speech-generating device that he controlled initially with a hand-held switch but, as his disease progressed, required use of a single cheek muscle instead. Hawking defied all medical predictions and lived for more than 50 years with ALS, continuing to work, fathering three children and lecturing around the world until his death.

Most of us will never have to go through what Stephen Hawking did, but if he was able to successfully continue with life and career after losing nearly all muscle control, we all have the capacity to be more resilient than we think.

Bouncing back from small knocks is relatively easy. In fact, many of us have to do it several times per day. For example, if we work late then oversleep by a half hour we might feel frustrated, tired and anxious but we can resolve to get organised, take a few calming breaths, and still manage to present our best selves. On the other extreme, serious adversity, like accidents, addictions and loss, can take years to overcome.

The key to bounce is recognising adversity as a natural part of life and understanding that the fear, anger or sadness we feel is simply an emotional response to the challenge we're facing. It is important to notice these signals and commit to making necessary adjustments that will improve our situation. A step forwards is a step forwards, and over time, we can usually make it back to where we started or beyond, with renewed resolve and a fresh outlook.

While some people naturally seem to have an easier time bouncing back than others – see Chapter 4 on Optimism – this does not mean that the rest of us are unable to navigate adversity skilfully. In fact, becoming resilient and bouncing back are skills that anyone can learn. All it takes is self-awareness, a willingness to tweak some behaviours and plenty of practice.

Taking responsibility

Jocko Willink has experienced extreme adversity. He served in the military for 20 years and led SEAL Team 3, Task Unit

Bruiser, the most highly decorated US special operations unit of the Iraq War. A charismatic leader, Willink found that after retiring, companies started contacting him to see if his experiences on the battlefield could translate to the corporate world. He agreed, and his career as a business consultant, public speaker and podcaster took off.

Willink is the author of the bestselling book *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win* and a children's book called *Way of the Warrior Kid*. In addition, he's a husband, father, surfer and never misses an intense pre-dawn workout – for evidence simply follow his Instagram account @jockowillink. What drives his success from the battlefield to the boardroom?

Willink is adamant that we need to assume complete ownership of everything that happens in our lives.¹⁵⁴ Born on the battlefield in places like Ramadi, Iraq, his philosophy suggests that blame gets us nowhere and the only way to succeed is to be accountable and move forward. This does not mean that every bad thing that happens to a person is their fault, but it does mean that if something affects them in a negative way, it's their responsibility to find a solution. This no-excuses, no-hesitation philosophy has served him well at every stage of his career.

The total responsibility approach may seem too intense for some people, but what Willink is saying actually comes down to a basic principle: when life knocks us down, we can either give in and make excuses, or be responsible and get back up again. He realises that his outlook is extreme compared to others, and he doesn't call his philosophy Extreme Ownership for nothing.

We don't necessarily have to hit the gym at 4:30am to be resilient and we don't need to experience combat zones to be a leader. But perhaps when we're caught in a downward spiral it's worthwhile recognising that no matter the reason we're struggling, changing life for the better is going to be our responsibility. Is it always fair? Unfortunately, no. Can we adjust, learn and grow from the experience? Absolutely.

The downward spiral

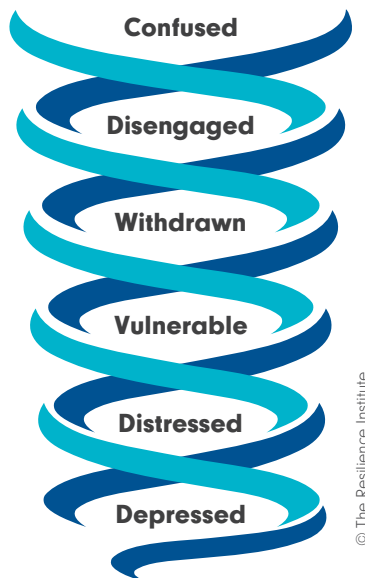
Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising up every time we fall.

Confucius

The Resilience Institute's development framework includes the 'downward spiral', a visual representation of six significant stages that can occur when an individual's resilience is compromised. These stages don't necessarily happen in a perfectly predictable sequence. Sometimes a major event like a loss or accident will send us straight to depression, while other times we'll find ourselves depressed without even realising things have not been going well.

If we want to learn how to stop a downward spiral in its tracks, it's useful to understand how it starts. The first stage of the downward spiral is when we're getting so busy that we can't focus on simple tasks, never mind our goals or purpose.

If this continues over an extended period of time, we may start to lack motivation and, eventually, feel unwell. Notice the sequence of mind, emotion and body as we make our way down.



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Cognitive risk: confused

The first step on the downward spiral is simply confusion. The prefrontal cortex region of our brain –our executive attention centre – becomes quickly overwhelmed in a busy world. Human evolution hasn't equipped us with the capacity to deal with the information density of modern life, and this is why we may find ourselves in a state of stress or confusion more often than we would like.¹⁵⁵ When our brain is overloaded, we can become agitated with the people around us, or experience anxiety about future events. Many of us find ourselves procrastinating and worrying, rather than tackling the tasks at hand.

Being in a confused state doesn't necessarily mean that we're confused about our circumstances, it just means that we've got a lot to manage, we're exhausted or there's a surplus of information that we're unable to process. Confusion is the very first stage of the downward spiral, so developing the self-awareness to recognise when we're confused gives us options to respond more effectively.

Most of us are able to avoid confusion when things are running smoothly. However it only takes a few extra emails, complications at home, illness or fatigue and we can find ourselves at risk. The signs can vary from person to person, but one thing is for certain: if we don't act to change our circumstances when we become confused, we can easily slip into the second phase of the downward spiral.

Cognitive failure: disengaged

While confusion is a cognitive risk, becoming disengaged represents cognitive failure. When we're disengaged, we lose attention, begin daydreaming and experience attention blinks. We zone out.

One of the most frustrating aspects about disengagement is the feeling of being ineffective. Often the workload continues to increase while we find ourselves relatively debilitated, some-

times down internet rabbit holes with no idea how we got there. We mindlessly click, scroll, worry and ruminate. This is the opposite of presence. When we're in this state, we might berate ourselves for being lazy, but the truth is that laziness isn't the same thing as being disengaged. When we disengage, it tends to be borne of fatigue or fear – and often a combination of both. It's a protective mechanism designed to conserve precious resources.¹⁵⁶ When our brain starts sending the signal that we are totally overwhelmed, we switch to a kind of 'low power mode' to conserve physical and mental energy. Taking time out is encouraged but sometimes, when we don't, the body will do it for us. Long periods of disengagement can send us further down the spiral, to where our emotions trigger alarm bells.

Emotional risk: withdrawn

The above two stages of the downward spiral relate to our cognitive state. We go through these phases because our pre-frontal cortex isn't able to handle the overload we're facing.¹⁵⁷ However, as the spiral continues, our emotional state shifts and we may withdraw.¹⁵⁸

Withdrawing from the people in our lives is an emotional risk. Perhaps we've made a mistake, or procrastinated to the point where we receive negative feedback from a manager. Sometimes we lose a deal or end up working late into the night and not achieving the desired outcome. Fear, anger, sadness and craving may become dominant emotions. We might avoid phone calls and decline invitations to attend meetings or social events. Some of us maintain a brave face at work but withdraw from family and friends. Many people can tell when someone else is withdrawn, and our friends and relatives might feel concerned.¹⁵⁹

When we enter the withdrawn stage of the downward spiral, it can be difficult to engage in casual conversation. Our emotions and thoughts are typically focused inward and we may find it difficult to relate to others, especially someone who is in

a positive mood.

Strong connection underpins high resilience, so withdrawal is a serious risk.

Emotional failure: vulnerable

Prolonged withdrawal may lead us into the fourth phase of the downward spiral: vulnerability. In this context, being vulnerable signals emotional failure. We no longer have the motivation to drive us toward activities that are important to us. We give up. The world seems unmanageable and beyond our control. When we're feeling vulnerable, we may start to self-neglect and self-sabotage. We may let healthy habits slip, start spending time with people who we know aren't good for us and give in to impulsivity with food, alcohol, drugs and money.¹⁶⁰

In vulnerability we seek out short-term fixes, things that will make us feel temporarily better, but won't actually solve the problem. Spending too much time in freeze, fight, flight mode is not good for us. The body steps in to alert us that things are not ok.

Biological risk: distressed

Over time, stress and anxiety can trigger physical symptoms of distress. When we are overloaded and unmotivated, our vitality may be compromised.

How can we tell when we're in distress? Sleep problems are one of the most obvious signs.¹⁶¹ We may find ourselves struggling to fall asleep, wondering why we can't rest despite feeling exhausted at the end of the day. When we are distressed for a long period of time, the extra cortisol in our bodies can actually suppress our immune system, making us more susceptible to colds, coughs and sinus infections.¹⁶² We might also notice that we're experiencing more frequent headaches, digestive problems or other aches and pains.¹⁶³ Our instinct is usually to try to band-aid these stress symptoms, but covering them up and ignoring what is happening upstream. Attempting to push

on without making positive adjustments can be a recipe for disaster.

Biological failure: depressed

Depression is the final stage of the downward spiral. There is not one single cause for depression: it can be caused by biological, social or psychological factors, and, for many people, a combination of all three.¹⁶⁴

Depression is characterised by a wide range of physical and mental symptoms. We might experience a complete loss of interest in most of the things that we used to enjoy. We might also experience a loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping or exhaustion and feeling the need to sleep for most of the day.¹⁶⁵ Depression can be accompanied by feelings of intense, persistent sadness for some people, while others simply feel numb, i.e., they don't experience many lows, but they don't experience any highs either. For some, this can feel even worse than sadness.

Going into a downward spiral does not mean that we will experience depression. For some it is a major health event, like a heart attack, stroke or suicide. There has been a 33% increase in suicide in the US since 1999. The bottom of the spiral needs to be taken seriously.

Identifying a downward spiral and understanding how to rapidly bounce back is a resilience master skill.

Rapid bounce

Although the world is filled with suffering, it is also filled with the overcoming of it.

Helen Keller

There's no doubt that the further down the spiral we descend, the more difficult it can be to rebound. But no matter where we're at, there is almost always a pathway back. The downward spiral does not need to last forever and, although it is completely normal to go through all of the six stages, we can choose not

to linger there if we have skills and strategies that enable us to recalibrate and move forward.

Some of us find bounce easier than others and there is no magic formula for traversing adversity. However, some practical action steps can accelerate the bounce process.

Confused? Simplify...

It's easy to get overwhelmed. Sometimes, the feeling passes after just a few minutes of rearranging our to-do list and getting organised, but other times, it can persist for months as responsibilities continue to pile up. We may feel overwhelmed during an exceptionally busy day at work, or we may get gradually more stressed after taking on new commitments and sacrificing our free time.

It's important to address confusion early on, because if we attempt to keep pushing forward without taking steps to simplify things, it's likely the spiral will continue.

First, we need to take a realistic look at how much we have taken on, and what we can actually handle. Review ideas already discussed throughout this book, such as getting clear on priorities, scheduling time more effectively and focusing attention on one thing at a time.

Now is not the time to attempt multitasking. It's time to eliminate distractions, stop switching screens and for putting on the noise-cancelling headphones, ideally with a motivating soundtrack.¹⁶⁶

We benefit from taking time to get organised each day and not overestimating capacity. When we have a long list of things to do, viewing at every task simultaneously can be overwhelming, so write down the top 3 and focus only on these.

Plan heavy-duty and important tasks for the first 90 minutes of the day and protect that time ferociously. For many of us the first 90 minutes is biological peak alertness and the whirlwind of email, calls and meetings should wait until afterwards.

Disengaged? Refresh...

When we find we are tuning out, it is time to refresh. Even if it feels like there is no space in the schedule to tap out for a few minutes, the benefits almost always outweigh the investment. Remember, the prefrontal cortex, is more like a turbo than a long-haul engine. Use it in bursts, then rest and reset.

Sometimes, simply going outside and changing the environment can provide the rejuvenation we need. A stretch, healthy snack, some sunshine and a power pose can all combat fatigue and prepare us to embrace our workloads with renewed purpose and clarity.

Schedule micro-breaks as integral components of your daily routine and reap the rewards in re-engagement.

Withdrawn? Connect...

If we notice that we're feeling isolated, whether by default or design, we can take action by seeking a safe connection. A phone call or friendly text might be enough to remind us that we are not alone. A group fitness class or community gathering are great ways to build prosocial support and reconnect us with other humans.

Sometimes when we're feeling withdrawn, it could be because our body and brain are signalling that we need some time to rest. Introverts may withdraw after spending too much time in social situations without adequate opportunity to recharge. In conflict, withdrawal can be an effective strategy to take stock of the situation and avoid destructive outbursts.

Use withdrawal wisely and take time out if that is what is needed. Importantly, once we feel sufficiently refreshed it is time to reconnect with the people in our lives. It may seem awkward at first but stay present, use eye contact and be optimistic about the outcome.

Vulnerable? Renew...

When we've reached the vulnerable phase of the downward spiral, it is time to be firm about taking defined steps to reverse the situation. What we need more than anything is to reignite motivation and passion for life. Getting away from our day-to-day routines can help kickstart the change. Not only is it difficult to feel renewed unless we've taken a decent break but our vulnerability drives us to seek out short-term fixes, so stepping back might be necessary to gain a more holistic view of what is happening and what needs to change.

A long weekend with no devices can help us to recover. Yoga and mindfulness retreats can also be beneficial. Focusing on micro-habits is useful if serious life changes are not possible. Wake up and stretch, floss teeth, make the bed, jog for 5 minutes. These are all tiny habits that improve wellbeing. Once they're embedded in the routine then append other new habits to those that have stuck. A five minute jog can eventually become a marathon – and an incredible feeling of accomplishment – with dedication and daily practice.

Distressed? Commit to long-term changes...

When we're feeling distressed, we can't rely on simple, quick fixes. The value of a healthy diet, sleep and exercise routine cannot be overstated. Meditation and yoga can be valuable tools to help body and mind heal. If extra motivation is needed, an impartial advisor, such as a health or life coach will prove invaluable. They can help pinpoint blind spots and risk areas, then directing our attention towards improving specific aspects of life.

When we're feeling distressed, we may not necessarily need the help of a therapist. However, obtaining an objective opinion on the situation from a professional certainly can't hurt, and can give provide the extra help you need. Just remember to deal with what is happening upstream rather than masking the

symptoms with pills and creams.

Depressed? Get professional help...

When it comes to symptoms of depression, we may not be able to solve the problem with self-help strategies and support from family and friends. At this point, it is a smart idea to get some professional help. There is no shame in discussing your situation with a doctor or seeing a therapist, and opening up to an objective third party can help us get assistance without risking judgment from people who don't fully understand what we are experiencing.

Getting a diagnosis may feel like a huge relief. If talking face-to-face with a therapist is daunting, there are now several options for online therapy. This can also be a more affordable choice for some people, and you will not have to take time out of your day to drive to an office and back.

Therapy is not the only way to ease symptoms of depression. Exercise, sleep, practising mind-body modalities such as yoga, healthy eating habits and getting out in nature are all valuable.

Learning new skills, reading inspiring books and deciding to cultivate a growth mindset will speed recovery.

Remember, many small tweaks provide the springboard we need to bounce back up the spiral. There is no magic solution, except self-awareness and willingness to take corrective action.

Final thoughts

Resilience is all about being able to overcome the unexpected. Sustainability is about survival. The goal of resilience is to thrive.

Jamais Cascio

Sometimes, bouncing can feel impossible, but in order to accomplish anything meaningful, we have to learn how to overcome setbacks and emerge stronger. This is called post-traumatic growth. Learning to bounce is a key aspect of becoming

more resilient. Every successful person has had to navigate adversity many times on their journey. Bounce is a learned skill and anyone can become more resilient with dedication.

Embrace challenge and notice how body, emotion and mind respond. Real-time resilience is taking ownership of the situation and then making small tweaks so we're constantly pushing toward the top of spiral, where dreams become reality.

How do I rate my ability to bounce?



How important is bouncing to me?



Tick three items below that would improve my score:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Simplify my life | ☐ Refresh - take breaks |
| ☐ Connect with people | ☐ Renew myself |
| ☐ Seek help, make changes | ☐ Get professional help |

What would my score be if I successfully achieved the three items I have selected?



Imagine myself bouncing effectively and fast in adversity...

How do I feel in my body?

.....
Which emotions am I experiencing?

.....
What am I thinking?

.....
What am I willing to try tomorrow?

.....
How will I remind myself?

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| ☐ Phone reminder | ☐ Written note |
|---|---------------------------------------|

Register your commitment and get inspiration at:

<https://bradleyhook.com/mastery>



ASSERTIVENESS

To be passive is to let others decide for you. To be aggressive is to decide for others. To be assertive is to decide for yourself. And to trust that there is enough, that you are enough.

Edith Eva Eger

Nasima Akter is not your typical surfer. She did not grow up in Hawaii with parents who put her on a board before she could walk. She didn't spend her childhood riding waves in Australia or along the Californian coastline. In fact, Akter is from Bangladesh, a country where few of the world's surfers would think to go chasing swells. But she made a name for herself in the waves off Cox's Bazar, a fishing village on the southeast coast. It was here, on the world's longest beach, that Akter discovered a love of the ocean and narrowly escaped an unthinkable path that her parents had laid out for her.¹⁶⁷

How did Akter, a young woman in a conservative Muslim country, where many women are discouraged from even swimming in public, become an internationally recognised surfer? Her journey to the sea began when she was a child, after her family kicked her out of home for refusing to earn money as a prostitute.

Akter was at a loss for what to do, and she knew that as a woman, her options were limited. But she was determined to find another way. One day she watched as Jafar Alam, the man who kicked off the surfing culture in Bangladesh back in 1995,

caught wave after wave at Cox's Bazar. She approached Alam and asked him if she could use his board and learn how to surf.¹⁶⁸

Akter was a natural and she picked up surfing with ease. But respect did not come so easily. Some of the men in the surfing community were uncomfortable surfing alongside a woman. While some people on the beaches cheered her on and encouraged her, others called her derogatory names, and a few men even dropped out of the surfing club, unwilling to accept that a woman could match their skill level.

None of this deterred Akter from paddling out day after day and, after practising for some time, she began beating the boys in local competitions. Inspired by Akter's success, other girls joined her in the water, and now, Akter leads a group of young women who love surfing just as much as she does.

When documentary filmmaker Heather Kessinger read about Akter's story, she knew that she had to share it with the world in the form of a documentary, *The Most Fearless*.

How was Akter able to stand up to her family as a child and declare that she was not going to give in to desperate circumstances? What gave her the courage to approach Jafar Alam and ask him to risk his own reputation by teaching her to ride the waves of Cox's Bazar? How did she work up the strength to enter the boys' competitions rather than giving up and sitting on the beach? What quality enabled her to stay strong in the face of adversity, to ignore the cultural pressures that dictated she should stay home and be a traditional wife?

The answer? Assertiveness. Over and over again, Akter had to advocate for herself, to set herself apart from the crowd without apology, to go against what other people expected from her and to follow her dreams. While there are people like Akter who seem to be gifted with an assertive spirit from a young age, any one of us can learn what it takes to assert ourselves and get what we want out of life, even when it feels like the world is working against us.

What does it mean to be assertive?

To know oneself, one should assert oneself.

Albert Camus

Think of the last time that you asked for something you wanted. Did you waver when someone else tried to get you to cave on your requests? Did you accept an alternative without really fighting for what you wanted? Did you leave the conversation feeling like you'd just been duped into agreeing to something that didn't actually satisfy your original request? Or did you come prepared with various defences for your position, communicate respectfully, stick to your guns and walk away knowing that you had just succeeded?

Many of us are too passive when it comes to getting what we want out of life. We hesitate to say what's on our minds, we hold ourselves back from asking for the things we need and we are quick to give up after just a bit of pushback. In order to obtain what we really want, whether it's a raise, a new career path, a first date, a great deal or even respect from others, we need to be assertive.

Being assertive is more than simply being confident. When someone is assertive, they are secure in who they are and what they want. They can stay calm under pressure, they are willing to try again after a failure and they carry themselves in a way that makes others take notice. It's a combination of high self-esteem, self-awareness, body language, tone of voice and the willingness to get up and try again after a setback.

Have you ever negotiated for a higher salary at a job interview and let the hiring manager know that you were worth a certain investment? Have you ever been responsible for managing a team of people and coached them to become better, more productive employees under your leadership? Has there ever been a time when someone disrespected you, and instead of slinking away, you stood up for yourself and earned an apology? These are just a few examples of what could look like to be assertive.

The four communication styles

The basic difference between being assertive and being aggressive is how our words and behaviour affect the rights and wellbeing of others.

Sharon Anthony Bower

Why do some people struggle to develop an assertive communication style? Some people are naturally shy and timid, and it requires concerted effort for them to develop assertiveness. Some people become frustrated when they feel like they can't openly ask for what they want, so they slip into passive-aggressiveness instead. Others think that in order to secure the outcome they desire they have to be a bully, or act with aggression. There are four major communication styles,¹⁶⁹ and while yours might feel hardwired into you, whether that's genetically or culturally, we can all learn to improve. Being clear on the four styles so you can recognise them in action is a great starting point for learning to communicate more assertively.

Aggressive

Consider the school bully who intimidates others, or the boss who thinks that he can get his employees to work harder through intimidation? This might be effective for a while, but, in the long term, will destroy trust and isolate the aggressor. In nature and dictatorships aggression might hold the key to success, but in a highly social, connected society it is not going to win many friends.

Of course, when we feel threatened, aggression might save our lives, but for the most part, bullying, intimidation, trolling and hostility are behaviours of the past, to be used with caution.

Passive

On the other end of the spectrum from aggression is pas-

sivity. When we use passive communication, we hold back on defending ourselves for the sake of civility and we avoid rocking the boat just so that we don't have to deal with disagreements or fallout. Have you ever been discussing a topic that you're passionate about with someone who held a completely different view and simply ended up sighing and saying, 'I hear you, let's just agree to disagree'? Have you ever dealt with mistreatment by a co-worker over an extended period of time and avoided going to HR just so that you didn't have to deal with the conflict? That's passivity in action, and while it may help avoid conflicts, it won't help us get what we really want in life. Passive communicators usually ignore their own needs and wants for the sake of accommodating others.

Passive aggressive

Most of us have been passive aggressive before. We end up communicating in this style when we don't feel secure enough to express how we feel or confident enough to ask for what we want. This can result in misaligned behaviours where we say one thing and do another. Or we dream up plots to foil our perceived enemies while not necessarily acting upon the dreams. Often we'll engage in complex scheming, gossip, sarcasm or sabotage. However, these are not effective ways to get what we want or to persuade anyone to be on our side. It typically ends up pushing others away earning ourselves a reputation as being difficult or a gossip-monger. Passive-aggression is a low trust behaviour.

Assertive

Finally, we come to the assertive communication style. This style is authentic, honest, attentive and flexible. It helps us to earn respect, achieve our goals, network effectively, and make progress in our personal and professional life.

What are the hallmarks of the assertive communication style? Here's the defining quality that sets it apart from all of

the others: when someone communicates in an assertive way, they stand up for themselves without putting down the needs and considerations of others. They make the case for their request or point of view while displaying empathy for others and their perspectives. However, they do not back down from their own position just to avoid conflict. They will happily engage in disagreements without backstepping on their own position. They will be willing to change their view or objective if they are presented with solid evidence that another option is better, but they won't capitulate to the first person who gives them a bit of pushback.

Assertiveness is regarded as the most effective communication style when it comes to getting what we really want out of an exchange. No matter what our goals are, we need to practice being assertive in order to achieve them.

What stops us from asserting ourselves?

To live self-assertively – which means to live authentically – is an act of high courage. That is why so many people spend the better part of their lives in hiding – from others and also from themselves.

Nathaniel Branden

Throughout our lives, we're sent mixed messages about how to communicate. When we're young, we're taught that independent thinking is a good thing, but that we have to defer to the authority of adults for safety and permission. We learn that conflict and disagreement is uncomfortable and that going against popular views in a group can quickly earn us an outcast status.

We see that people who act in an aggressive way can intimidate others into doing what they want, and we confuse this for real respect. We're told that we should learn to stand up for ourselves, but when we do, we might also find ourselves standing alone – and humans are tribal creatures who instinctively avoid rejection.

It can be difficult to unlearn these beliefs and behaviours as

we grow older. Young men might be taught that being aggressive is the best way for them to get ahead, while young women are socialised to be more passive and to set aside their own needs for the good of others. In a changing world where some require safe zones and others embrace hate speech, many adults have no idea how to assert themselves, or how to ask for what they want without feeling rude or risking condemnation.

However, in order to achieve what we want, learning assertiveness is integral to success.

Assertiveness in action

Assertiveness is not what you do, it's who you are.

Shakti Gawain

When the going gets tough, Bear Grylls gets excited. Saying that Grylls loves the great outdoors would be an understatement. Born in Northern Ireland, Grylls rose to fame as the star of the television series *Man vs. Wild*, which centred around his efforts to survive in dangerous situations, far away from any civilisation. The series ran from 2006 through 2011 and during that time Grylls wrestled alligators, scaled cliffs, ate insects and eyeballs, ran through a forest fire, waded through river rapids and parachuted from helicopters. It seemed like he could survive anything, and no matter how bad the circumstances got, he kept pushing forward. Most recently, Grylls hosted a series called *Bear's Mission* that features celebrities undertaking an overnight adventure with him. He also now works as a motivational speaker.

Grylls was given the nickname Bear by his sister when he was just one week old and from youth onwards he was passionate about pushing his body and mind to the limit. His father taught him how to climb and sail and, as a teenager, he learned skydiving as well as earning a black belt in karate. After he left school he travelled around Europe, India and Nepal, where he hiked through the Himalayas. Intending to join MI5 he enrolled

in university to study German and Spanish. He then joined the British Army Reserves, where he became a survival instructor, becoming adept at everything from handling explosives to living in the desert – and even surviving a free-fall parachuting accident in Kenya.

Grylls has climbed Mount Everest, circumnavigated the UK on a jet ski and crossed the Atlantic Ocean in an inflatable boat, amongst other feats unimaginable to the majority of us. How did Grylls survive all of these adventures and live to tell – often filming – the tale? He trained relentlessly for years and kept his eyes on specific goals, choosing priorities carefully and assertively navigating adversity. Grylls is quoted as saying, “The line between life or death is determined by what we are willing to do.”

Assertiveness comes from action. Grylls is clear about what he wants, confident and willing to defend himself if necessary.

Chances are, you probably won’t find yourself stranded in the Arctic, in the middle of the Atlantic on a dinghy or stranded on a tropical island with only a pocket knife and a plan. But think of it this way: if Bear Grylls can survive all of these quests and come out thriving, we can embrace the same mindset and enter that job interview prepared to espouse our best qualities. We can ask that special someone out on a date. We can set boundaries and tell an employer that what they’re asking for is not acceptable.

History has been written by those brave enough to make their voice matter.

How to become assertive

You must be your own leader now. You must contain the spirit of our time in your own life and your own nature.

Laurens van der Post

Becoming an assertive person can take some time. It’s important to be patient throughout the process, because acting in

an assertive manner can feel awkward and foreign at first. Start with a few basic strategies to stay motivated and score some early wins.

Body language

Your body language is just as important as the words that come out of your mouth, and improving posture will dramatically change the way you communicate and the way that others see you. Jordan Peterson, author of the popular self-help guide *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, even titled the first chapter of his book “Stand Up Straight With Your Shoulders Back”. Studying dominance hierarchies and stature even amongst crustaceans, Peterson makes a case for mimicking confidence physiologically in order to benefit from the improved biochemistry associated with assertive posture. Peterson is a master debater, managing to stay present, composed – and upright – in formidable situations, even when being grilled by journalists on live television.

When we physically demonstrate a willingness to take up space, using body language that people associate with confidence and authority, it signals a level of self-assurance and assertiveness.

According to Amy Cuddy, a social psychologist at Harvard Business School, everyone should spend two minutes power posing before heading to a job interview or giving a speech. What exactly is a power pose, and why does it matter? Power poses involve keeping your chest and head lifted, your arms held high or your hands placed on your hips. Forgetting what others think for a moment, Cuddy believes our nonverbals govern how we think and feel about ourselves, i.e., that we can use our bodies to change our minds. Studies show that power posing has an impact on confidence and may also influence changes in hormone levels.¹⁷⁰

Tony Robbins, the world’s foremost self-development coach, has talked for decades about the importance of changing phys-

ical state in order to shift emotion and focus mind. So why not practice a few power poses in front of the mirror to see if you feel any different? It's free, it's easy and it could be the first step on your road to resilience mastery.

Tone of voice

When a confident speaker delivers a lecture or TED talk, they sound relaxed, authoritative and secure. On the other hand, we've all cringed when witnessing a terrified person stammer their way through a speech. Perhaps you have been asked a question in a group conversation and experienced a mental block or stumbled through an answer that you later regret? Watch an experienced politician and you'll notice that they speak with completely different tonality and cadence to someone who is afraid.

So what does an assertive tone of voice really sound like, and is it something we can learn? With some investment, there are coaches who can help us develop this skill. But unless the goal is to become a public speaker, a few simple tricks can help.

First identify situations that make you feel uncomfortable. Think back to specific instances when you felt intimidated or when your words weren't interpreted in the way you intended. Now, practise some short sentences, finding the perfect pitch, noticing when you veer towards soft and passive or loud and aggressive. Record yourself using an app on your phone. Speak clearly and try not hesitating too long before making a point. Invest some time into this step, even if you feel silly. By practising ahead of time, you'll be better prepared to use your chosen tone of voice in live situations.

Now think about how you project your voice. Our strongest, most socially attractive and natural voice comes from the diaphragm, rather than the chest, mouth or nose. Learning to speak from the diaphragm requires that we breathe properly. Try singing, laughing, humming and yawning out loud to get a sense of how to project sound from the diaphragm. Then

record yourself speaking between long, slow, diaphragmatic inhalations. Play back the recording and compare to previous attempts. Perhaps when the sound of your own voice is no longer irritating you've discovered your most resonant tone.

Before implementing any changes in important situations such as at work, experiment in low-risk environments, such as in dialogue with a shop assistant. Be patient and courageous. Most of us need plenty of practice before we're able to make the leap to using an assertive tone in challenging situations.

Combine your practise with scripting, which we'll discuss next, because if you find yourself at a loss for words, you will come across as unsure. Before you engage in an important conversation, get clear on the objective and rehearse the conversation in your mind.

Finally, if you're doing any kind of public speaking, you'll want to vary pitch, volume and tonality to avoid sounding too monotonous or flat. And remember, even if you have mastered an assertive tone, your body language is still critical. Combine powerful posture and strong tonality for maximum impact.

Scripting

Have you ever found yourself caught off guard by another person's arguments? Sometimes we can sense our position wavering in a negotiation or debate because we don't have the mental scaffolding or evidence to back up our perspective. It happens to even the most experienced communicator and unless you're a fast thinker or have a gift for clever witticisms, it is possible to find ourselves floundering for something to say. If you want to avoid this scenario, scripting can be a useful technique.

If you've ever stood in front of your mirror and tried to practise what you were going to say to someone, you're already somewhat familiar with the concept of scripting. When you script a conversation, you anticipate the other person's defences and arguments and prepare your own responses to them.

Don't assume that the conversation will follow a set direction, anticipate several main arguments that they might make, and take some time to come up with solid counterpoints. Drawing a mind map can be useful for visual learners. Aligning your arguments with your personal values or purpose is a great way to ensure that you stay on track. Remember your 'why' – or intent – is often more compelling than any 'how' or action plan. Being able to return to the why of your argument can help you stay focused and assertive.

After scripting out a few different scenarios for the conversation, rehearse key points in front of the mirror, or with another person who can role play with you. Resist the temptation to use filler words like um or uh, which project an air of nervousness and can make you sound unprepared. Eliminating filler words is one of the fastest ways to sound polished and assertive – use pauses instead.

Recording a video with your phone can also provide valuable insights into your tonality, posture and delivery.

All of this practice will help you commit several different arguments to memory before the actual conversation, so that when you receive pushback, you will stay cool and composed under pressure.

Putting it all together: the LADDER technique

The minute another person is choosing and managing our goals for us, we have left self-control behind.

Danny Silk

We've been working on body language, polishing tone of voice and scripting important conversations. Let's say this is going well but now we want to amplify our approach. The LADDER technique¹⁷¹ lays out several more steps to help build assertiveness in negotiation.

Look at your needs and set your goal

Establish a sense of clarity for yourself before you enter the conversation. Assess your needs and clearly define what you want to accomplish. Be honest about things that you are willing to negotiate or compromise on, and anything that you can't afford to concede. It's also important to consider how your requests or goals could affect others if you succeed in getting what you want. Remember, being assertive isn't about winning without regard for other people. It's about clearly communicating your own needs while being open to hearing legitimate arguments from another point of view.

Arrange a meeting

Arrange a time and place to speak to the person. If it's someone at work, you will want to be especially formal and respectful, but if it's a close friend, you don't have to send them a Google calendar invite! Make sure that you're both committed to meeting up. Explain to the other party exactly what you want to talk about so that they're prepared in advance.

Define the problem

This step is fairly self-explanatory and begins with clearly articulating the problem to the other person. This is often easier said than done, especially if their actions or behaviours have caused you distress. You might find yourself censoring your own words before they even come out of your mouth. Try to resist the urge to be passive, but on the flip side, don't feel like you have to come out of the gates swinging. Be calm, balanced and rational. A conversation is like a game of tennis – do you want to serve an ace or have a rally? Remember they may have a few aces up their sleeve as well.

Describe your feelings using “I” messages

This is one of the most important factors in assertive com-

munication. When communicating in a passive manner, we often end up not speaking for ourselves, just presenting evidence in a way that seems observational. The other person may not even recognise how important the topics are to you.

Use “I” messages to describe your feelings about the current situation. Starting sentences with the phrases “I think...”, “I feel...” and “I believe...” lets the person know that you’re not trying to criticise them or push them to think in a certain way, and it’s not a personal attack on them, you’re simply explaining your own thoughts and feelings. Using “I” messages means that you are taking responsibility for your own thoughts and feelings rather than blaming someone else.

Express and explain

At this point, the other person has heard you lay out your problem and describe how you feel about it. They’ve also heard what you’re hoping for them to do in response. Sure, there’s a small chance that they’ll simply agree with everything you have to say, and you won’t have to compromise on anything or elaborate on any of your points, but don’t count on it. Remember, they’re entitled to explain their own perspectives and self-interests, too.

Be patient and allow them space to voice their opinion. After hearing them, pause if necessary and then elaborate. Thoroughly articulate the reasoning behind your original statements so that there is less chance of ambiguity or misunderstanding. Give plenty of evidence and examples to support your perspective.

Reinforce your remarks

By now, you may have reached a point in the conversation where you’ve hopefully come to a mutual understanding, and you’re able to negotiate on a few small points and move forward from there. But if you’re still on the receiving end of some push-back, it does not mean that you automatically have to concede your position. Reinforce your most important statements, and

be clear about anything that you aren't willing to compromise on.

Remember, this does not mean being rude, insulting the other person or being too forceful. Remain secure in your convictions. If you can't come to an agreement that suits your needs, you are free to walk away from the conversation and pursue your goal in a different way. Being assertive isn't about making people bend to your will. It's about being persistent in your quest to achieve your goals. Sometimes several conversations are required to achieve a mutually acceptable agreement.

If all else fails, remember you can always end a conversation on a respectful note, thank the person for their time and be on your way.

Final thoughts

I have the right to be treated with respect by others. I have the right to express my feelings and opinions. I have the right to say no without feeling guilty. I have the right to ask for what I want.

Beverly Engel

The idea of becoming a more assertive person can sound daunting. If you've been too passive in the past, it's understandable that you may fear setting solid boundaries, speaking up for yourself and putting your own needs first. As you become more assertive, people in your life may be surprised to see this side of you. If you always find yourself taking a backseat for others it's worth considering whether they have your best interests in mind.

Don't be afraid to speak up when some injustice has been done, or when you need to defend your position. In the words of Bear Grylls, "You only get one chance at life and you have to grab it boldly."

As you begin to work on yourself and become more assertive, you will find that you win the respect and admiration of others, and somehow, the opportunities you've wanted for

so long will come naturally. That's the real magic of assertive communication.

How do I rate my assertiveness?



How important is assertiveness to me?



Tick three items below that would improve my score:

☐ Self-awareness

☐ Improve my posture

☐ Scripting

☐ LADDER technique

☐ Set clear goals

☐ Voice tonality

What would my score be if I successfully achieved the three items I have selected?



Imagine myself living assertiveness...

How do I feel in my body?

.....
Which emotions am I experiencing?

.....
What am I thinking?

.....
What am I willing to try tomorrow?

.....
How will I remind myself?

☐ Phone reminder

☐ Written note

Register your commitment and get inspiration at:

<https://bradleyhook.com/mastery>



SLEEP QUALITY

Sleep is that golden chain that ties health and our bodies together.

Thomas Dekker

Tom Brady is widely known as the best quarterback of all time. He is one of only two players in the history of the NFL to win five Super Bowls and he is the only player who has won them all while playing for the same team, the New England Patriots. He's also the oldest player to win the title of Super Bowl MVP at age 39. At the start of his career, Brady was not regarded as a future superstar. He was a late draft selection for the Patriots and while many doubted his abilities, he proved himself right away. Since becoming the starting quarterback for the Patriots in 2001, the team has broken several records, including achieving an 18 year winning streak within the AFC Eastern Division.

Over the years, sports commentators and fans alike have wondered when Brady's skills will decline. Football is a rough sport, and many players retire early because of the toll it takes on their bodies. Some speculated that Brady would call it quits much earlier on but he, like Kelly Slater in surfing, shows no signs of slowing down.

In order to maintain his performance at the highest level Brady is committed to a disciplined fitness and nutrition regimen. His training schedule is not for the faint of heart and he is careful about every bite of food he puts in his mouth.¹⁷² He is a huge fan of healthy protein shakes, eating plenty of vegetables and staying hydrated throughout the day. Although he's not strictly vegetarian, he eats a primarily plant-based diet and he has even launched his own line of vegan snacks. He also regu-

larly practices meditation.

But these diet and lifestyle choices aren't the only secrets behind Brady's success on the field. Even when Brady isn't awake, he is preparing himself for success the next day.

'I firmly believe that sleep and recovery are critical aspects of an effective and holistic training program,' Brady says. 'Proper sleep has helped me get to where I am today as an athlete and it is something that I continue to rely on every day.'

So, what is Brady's pre-sleep routine? He turns off screens and does a series of cognitive exercises that help him de-stress. He always makes sure that he is in bed by 9pm to ensure that he secures a full eight hours of sleep. A dark room is important, so any blinking lights from digital devices are turned off or covered up. After years of implementing this routine, he is able to wake up at the same time without an alarm each day.¹⁷³

If Brady showed up on the field exhausted and worn out each day, he would never have achieved the same level of success in football. Brady's intense focus on perfecting his sleep schedule proves that while diet, exercise and mindfulness can get you far, sleep is critical to a healthy life.

A healthy sleep routine

A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor's book.

Irish Proverb

What does a healthy sleep routine actually look like? Many of us are squeezing in six hours of sleep each night, rolling out of bed feeling groggy and chugging two cups of coffee in the morning to force ourselves to wake up. A routine like this will not support resilience mastery, and may have long-term negative side effects.

Most adults find that they feel best after seven to eight hours of uninterrupted sleep, and experts agree¹⁷⁴, so planning our daily routine around achieving this is essential.

For truly restorative sleep, we should aim to turn off all screens and digital devices at least one hour before bedtime. What's the importance of shutting down screens long before we get into bed? Is a quick scroll through our phones for a few minutes after we get under the covers really so bad? Turns out it is. The issue stems from the blue light emitted by smartphones, laptops, tablets and televisions, which confuses the brain into thinking that it is still daytime.¹⁷⁵ This disrupts production of melatonin, the sleep hormone that helps us to feel tired and relaxed at the end of the day. If we are not producing enough melatonin, we may feel restless and energised when actually what we want to do is fall asleep. Therefore, it's best to turn off tech at least an hour before planning to fall asleep.

While it's true there are "larks" and "owls" among us, most experts and advocates agree we should aim to be in bed, ready to go to sleep, shortly before 10pm to align with our natural circadian rhythms. If you can't manage this due to travel or a conflicting schedule, count backwards from the time you need to be wake up and set a bedtime that will allow you to secure those critical seven to eight hours of rest.

Regularity is important and researchers agree that it is best to go to bed and wake up at the same time on weekdays and weekends. While it's perfectly fine to adjust bedtime by an hour or two for special events, making a habit of sleeping in on the weekend will make starting the next week difficult. This can result in a feeling of sluggishness and exhaustion – also called social jet lag – and is responsible for a spike in hospital admissions on Monday mornings.

Healthy sleep habits are inseparable from healthy daytime habits. Stress, diet, exercise and ability to relax are all factors that interplay with our ability to secure a good night's sleep, so it's important to think holistically and not compartmentalise quality sleep as something separate from life.

Why are we exhausted?

A ruffled mind makes a restless pillow.

Charlotte Bronte

It's true that most of us aren't getting enough sleep, but why is this happening? From overloading our minds to sleeping with phones near our beds, modern lifestyles are putting us at a disadvantage when it comes to achieving this crucial resilience factor.

Chronic stress

If we're distressed, there's a good chance that we're also having trouble sleeping. When we experience chronic stress, our cortisol levels are elevated. With a normal circadian rhythm, we experience a spike of cortisol when we wake up to get our bodies moving and again in response to challenges we face during the day. These cortisol levels should slowly decline in the evening as we relax and get ready for bed. However, if we are experiencing chronic stress on a daily basis and struggling to sleep because of it, we might experience a spike in cortisol at night without experiencing a similar spike in the morning. This can make it harder to fall asleep at night and to get out of bed in the morning.¹⁷⁶

Furthermore, stress can make it difficult to get enough sleep because we can find ourselves defaulting to rumination or anxiety the moment the lights are turned off. During the day, we may be able to distract ourselves from the sources of our stress, but at night the mind turns to the things that are causing us to worry. Besides making falling asleep difficult, stress can result in unusual dreams or even nightmares that wake us during the night.¹⁷⁷

Lifestyle choices

It might seem obvious that an espresso after dinner can

disrupt our sleep but the connection between what we eat at lunch and our slumber is not something that springs so readily to mind. Eating a healthy and nutrient-rich diet improves our brain health. When we don't eat well, we miss out on nutrients that provide the brain with the right chemical environment to produce the neurotransmitters that it needs to maintain adequate sleep. A nutritious diet also provides the building blocks for other minerals and proteins that are needed to create the amino acids that are involved in sleep.¹⁷⁸ One study found a low fibre and high saturated fat and sugar intake to be associated with lighter, less restorative sleep.¹⁷⁹ Another found that insufficient sleep is associated with increased caloric consumption, poor dietary habits and obesity.¹⁸⁰

Being dehydrated can disrupt our sleep as lack of water dries out the mouth and nasal passages, which can increase snoring. We may also experience leg cramps, which can wake us.

A lack of exercise can also contribute to poor sleep – and it's a vicious cycle as a poor night's sleep will negatively affect the following day's work out. Being exhausted is proven to reduce exercise participation.¹⁸¹

Caffeine

Drinking coffee or green tea, or even eating too much chocolate close to bedtime, can affect the quality of sleep. Caffeine is a stimulant, and while drinking a cup of coffee in the morning or a mug of green tea in the early afternoon is unlikely to keep you up, consuming within six hours of bedtime could block sleep-inducing chemicals in the brain and increase adrenaline production.¹⁸²

When we typically fail to get seven or more hours of sleep and subsequently feel constantly tired, it is easy to develop a dependence on caffeine. Some people even take caffeine pills to keep them alert throughout the day. When someone who is dependent on caffeine doesn't get their fix, they can experience headaches, exhaustion, anxiety or irritability. So, while moder-

ate caffeine intake is not associated with any recognised health risk, too much caffeine can have a negative effect on overall health, not just sleep.

Screen addiction and blue light

It is well known that our digital devices emit blue light that interferes with the brain's ability to produce melatonin. However, many people still use their phones immediately before going to bed, or when they wake up in the night and are unable to return to sleep. While the phone provides temporary distraction, it can make sleeping even more difficult. Besides the blue light, it's possible that whatever content you view, however innocuous, might stimulate the brain when you're actually seeking the opposite.

Many of us also reach for our phones first thing in the morning. It's becoming more and more common for people to use the alarm app on their phones rather than using an old school alarm clock to wake up. When you reach for your phone to turn off the alarm, you might immediately feel the urge to check social media instead of getting out of bed and starting your day. This can disrupt a morning routine and result in time wasted when you could rather be exercising, meditating, getting ready for work without rushing, or simply enjoying a healthy breakfast.

Sleep disorders

Sometimes, it can seem like we're doing everything else right during the day, but when our head hits the pillow, suddenly we feel either too anxious or too alert to fall asleep. On the other hand, we might have no problem falling asleep, but find ourselves waking up in the middle of the night, or feeling like we haven't slept at all when the alarm rings.

If we tend to wake up in the middle of the night, we might not be getting quality sleep, even if we're in bed for eight hours. This is because the body needs to go through various stages of sleep several times each night and when we wake and can't

fall asleep again, it interrupts this natural process. William C Dement, one of the world's leading sleep researchers, and the founder of the Sleep Research Center at Stanford University, helped classify the five distinct stages of sleep we experience in cycles throughout the night. After a series of a "slow-wave" or "deep" sleep stages, during which the body temperature and heart rate fall and the brain uses less energy, we enter REM, or rapid eye movement stages. This is when we experience dreams.¹⁸³

Sleep disorders like insomnia or sleep apnoea can keep us from getting enough sleep, night after night. It may be difficult for an individual to pinpoint the cause of their insomnia, and in cases like this, a trip to the doctor might be necessary to obtain a clear diagnosis. Insomnia and sleep apnoea are both chronic issues that can interfere with quality sleep for years on end if left untreated. Not all sleep problems are caused by lifestyle choices, and if you know that you're taking good care of your body and mind on a daily basis, yet you still can't get a proper night's sleep, a medical professional may be able to help.

Side effects of lack of sleep

Tired minds don't plan well. Sleep first, plan later.

Walter Reisch

One or two nights of poor sleep won't hurt too much, although some sleep scientists like Professor Matthew Walker, who wrote the bestselling book *Why We Sleep*, say that even one night can be a catalyst for all kinds of health problems. However, life happens and we are likely at some point to stay out late with friends, work into the small hours, or struggle to adapt to a new time zone while traveling.

These temporary lapses in a good sleep routine are something we can recognise and fix. But if we're up late night after night and can never seem to secure seven or eight hours of sleep, we're eventually going to suffer. The effects of lack of sleep get

worse and worse over time, so if you find that you're relating to any of the following issues, your sleep schedule might be the culprit.

Struggles with mental health

Sleep and mental health are related. Sleep deprivation is known to affect psychological state and mental health and those with mental health problems are more likely to have insomnia or other sleep disorders.¹⁸⁴

Conditions like depression and anxiety can be caused by a variety of factors, but sleeping too little, or too much, can actually make both conditions worse.¹⁸⁵

Weight gain

Our bodies produce a hunger hormone called ghrelin that lets us know when we have eaten enough. Sometimes we miss this signal by eating too fast, while other times we ignore the signal and reach for that extra dessert anyway. In both circumstances we're likely to feel uncomfortably full as the body struggles to digest an oversized meal. But what if the body stops signalling properly when full, inadvertently causing us to overeat? This can happen if we're not getting enough sleep.¹⁸⁶

In order for the body to properly produce and regulate hormones, we need to be getting consistent quality sleep. When our sleep schedule is thrown off, we tend to feel hungrier and, without serious discipline, may end up overeating, even if our activity level has not changed. If you have a few pounds that you just can't seem to shake, you may want to consider whether sleep is a contributing factor. Increased impulse control is another benefit of a good night's rest.

Raising risk of disease

Lack of sleep doesn't just put our health at risk in the short term, it can also set us up for more problems down the road. Ac-

cording to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), lack of sleep is known to be a contributing factor for many chronic health conditions, including diabetes and heart disease. Getting too little sleep over the long term has also been linked to diseases like Alzheimer's and dementia.¹⁸⁷

It's no surprise that sleep supports immune function. While asleep, our immune system releases compounds called cytokines, which have a protective effect by helping fight inflammation and infection. Research has shown that insufficient sleep increases the amount of inflammatory compounds in our bodies,¹⁸⁸ some of which are associated with conditions like asthma and allergies.

Poor performance at work

A lack of sleep nearly always results in difficulty focusing the next day. Studies have shown convincingly that students who do not get enough sleep end up with lower test scores.¹⁸⁹

Sleep doesn't just affect our ability to perform tasks, it can also affect the way we interact with other people. If we're tired and irritable, emotion regulation and empathy are compromised and it can be a real struggle connecting and collaborating. If we feel like we're on the verge of falling asleep, how can we make it through a discussion or contribute good ideas? It's simply easier to succeed at work when we're running on a full battery.

It's clear that brain and body need sleep. So, if we want to live a long, healthy life, we'll want to spend about a third of it with our eyes closed.

How to create healthier sleep habits

It is a common experience that a problem difficult at night is resolved in the morning after the committee of sleep has worked on it.

John Steinbeck

If sleep has been an issue for years and you feel like it is a lost cause, you're not alone. For many people, fixing sleep is the first and most important step towards improved health and well-being. The effort is worthwhile and quality sleep can support resilience more than any other factor in this book. Fixing sleep was the most important part of my own self development. I encourage you to explore ways to prioritise your own sleep starting tonight.

Talk to your doctor

If you're experiencing problems with sleep apnoea or insomnia, you don't have to struggle alone. Start by talking to your doctor about what's keeping you up at night. Even if you have no interest in taking medication to help you sleep, a doctor may be able to suggest natural remedies, lifestyle changes or other forms of treatment or therapy that can help. If you think that you need more intensive help, your doctor may be able to refer you to a sleep specialist.

Manage your stress

What we do in our daily life, including habits, attitudes and behaviours, has a direct impact on our ability to switch off and relax. In a demanding world, each one of us needs to find ways to deal with an inevitable feeling of stress and overload. Sometimes we've been distressed for so long that we consider the state to be normal, or we believe it's just an inextricable part of modern life. It doesn't have to be this way and it certainly doesn't warrant losing sleep over. Experiment with methods to manage your stress response so that you can process thoughts and emotions more effectively, leaving you relaxed and able to ease into sleep. Some experts like Tim Ferris's have elaborate pre-bed routines including hot tubs, sauna and drinking exotic tea mixed with raw honey. Some people prefer the simplicity of journaling – either before going to bed, or first thing in the morning. A simple practice that has been shown to improve

sleep is noting ‘three blessings’ – acknowledging three things that went well over the course of the day – just before bedtime. Gratitude shifts us into a more relaxed physiological state and is a great way to end another day.

Yoga and meditation are also valuable practices when it comes to stress management.¹⁹⁰ While the exact time you practise during the day is less important, you could consider combining yoga and meditation into your routine before bed as an aid to de-stressing before closing your eyes. It’s a great way to become more present and to connect with your body at the end of a long day. If Tom Brady can do it, so can you.

Follow key dietary guidelines

As we’ve seen, sleep quality can affect what we eat and, in turn, our diet can affect sleep quality. So, what should we eat to improve the odds of a good night’s sleep?

First and foremost, examine dietary habits and ensure you eat a healthy and nutrient-rich diet, paying particular attention to avoid processed or sugary foods. Review the recommendations in the chapter on Vitality for an overview of what a nutrient-dense diet might include.

Are there any foods that you should avoid eating before bedtime, or any foods in particular that might help you get a better night’s sleep? While it’s more about the macronutrients of your overall diet than munching exact foods just before bed, bananas, almonds, honey, oats and turkey are often cited as beneficial for sleep. Alcohol, cheese, spicy food, fatty foods and coffee are usually listed amongst those you should avoid. For your dinner, try to eat a balanced meal with healthy fats, limited protein and carbohydrates mostly from vegetables.

If you’re especially sensitive to caffeine, avoid eating chocolate too soon before you go to bed. Furthermore, be careful about desserts that contain coffee or espresso. If you’re out to dinner, and you’re offered a coffee after the meal, decaf is a less stimulating option.

There are some teas that some people find help them fall asleep, including valerian root, chamomile and St John's Wort. If you find yourself feeling anxious at bedtime, even the ritual of making a cup of tea and mindfully drinking it could have a calming influence.

It is generally believed that it's better to give yourself plenty of time to digest your evening meal before going to bed, but don't eat too early either as you don't want to go to bed feeling too hungry or to wake up in the night with hunger pangs. If you find you need to eat something before bed then make it a small snack of the sleep-promoting variety. A spoon of Greek yoghurt is a good option that contains tryptophan, an amino acid that can help you to feel drowsy.¹⁹¹

Exercise

Physical fatigue is one of the best ways to secure a good night's sleep. The body responds fantastically well to challenge. It grows stronger, leaner and faster the more we use it. Exercising early in the day can dramatically improve the chances we'll sleep well that night. It seems counterintuitive but waking up at dawn, stretching and going for a run might be the best way to prepare us for bed. It's not glamorous but the best advice often isn't. For many, myself included, yoga improves sleep. In a study by Harvard both sleep quality and quantity was improved when participants maintained a yoga practice for eight weeks.¹⁹²

Take control of technology

This is a major key to getting a good night's sleep, and there are many strategies that you can use to reduce your overall screen time and exposure to blue light.

While it is important to cut screen time in the hour before bed, this doesn't have to mean a blanket ban on all digital devices. In fact, there are some notable and useful exceptions to this rule. Many e-readers, like the Kindle, do not emit blue light, or have a setting that will allow you to switch to soft yellow light.

Reading before bed is a great way to relax and set yourself up for sleep. Paper books and candlelight might be best but are not always practical or safe. If you do choose an e-reader, turn it to lowest possible brightness setting.

If you have a smartphone, you may be able to dim the blue light by switching to night shift mode. This can be useful if you know that you need to use your phone before bed for a specific purpose, like setting an alarm. In New Zealand we have an interesting dilemma. Nicknamed ‘the shaky isles’ we experience many small earthquakes every day, and there are active volcanoes that could erupt at any moment. We have apps that can warn us of imminent threats – like a tsunami resulting from an offshore quake – but these require a phone to be switched on beside the bed.

I like to reduce exposure to phone radiation wherever possible, but also be prepared for disaster. So, if you want to get really nerdy like me, you can buy a smart lightbulb and use an app like IFTTT to trigger it if a quake over a certain scale happens in your vicinity. If there is an earthquake the smart bulb in my room switches on.

If you need to keep your phone connected overnight, definitely disable unnecessary notifications an hour before bed, ensuring that they will be silenced until morning. I would argue that turning off notifications altogether is a great way to ensure we use our technology deliberately and do not get sucked into the endless vortex of digital distraction.

The phone can be a useful alarm clock, especially if you’re interested in tracking your sleep cycles. An app called Sleep Cycle tracks your movement through the night using the microphone and then maps out deep and REM cycles for review in the morning. It also wakes you up during a REM cycle so you rarely suffer sleep inertia from being ‘alarmed’ during deep sleep. If you find your phone too tempting at night it might be worth investing in a low-fi alarm clock and charging your device in another room.

Laptops also emit blue light. If you rarely find yourself work-

ing late, this may not be a major concern but if you have no choice but to stay up late and work, or if you set your own hours and enjoy working when others in your house are sleeping, you can download software that will limit the blue light coming from your screen. An alternative is blue light blocking glasses. With these you don't have to change any settings on your devices, and you won't have to give yourself a cut-off time for using technology. Remember, however, that whatever you're engaging with on a screen may still be mentally stimulating. And beware of lights like the fridge light, bright bathroom bulbs and LEDs indicators on devices. These can all wake us up by signalling to the body that morning is here and it is time to get rid of melatonin.

Plan your sleep routine

Anyone who has ever had a baby will know how important the bedtime routine is. Without it chaos ensues and we all suffer. At what point in our lives do we suddenly believe we are exempt from the same process. Babies enjoy a bath, story, lullaby and quiet, dark room. Granted, success varies, but this is certainly a recipe for a better night's sleep than Snapchat, a bottle of wine and simultaneously watching YouTube videos and Netflix.

Consider simple rituals, such as dimming the lights, to signal that it is time to shift state. Make 9pm the time for reading and 9:45pm the time to brush and floss teeth – perhaps by candlelight to reduce light exposure. At 9:55pm we focus on long slow breathing to calm down our bodies and minds. Honour these rituals and they will help you to relax even in the midst of stressful life circumstances. Your goal is to wind down, tell your body that you are safe and that you have permission to let down the guard and move into a time of healing and rejuvenation.

Create a cosy environment

Similarly, it's important to consider the physical and aesthetic conditions that will promote the best night's sleep.

Is your mattress too firm or too soft? You're going to spend seven to eight hours each night on your mattress, so make sure that you're totally comfortable on it. Our ancestors may have slept on grass, or in branches, but we live in an age where researchers dedicate their lives to helping us secure a great night's sleep, so be discerning. A quality mattress can cost a lot, but when you think of how important sleep is for your quality of life, buy the best you can afford. A good mattress is an investment in your health, and it will last for years. Also make sure your pillow is suitable for your height and preferred sleep position¹⁹³ and will allow you to breathe easily throughout the night.

Ensure the temperature in your bedroom is optimal for sleep, this tends to be around 18-21°C (65-70°F). If you find that your room is usually too hot or too cold at night, adjust the thermostat accordingly, change your bedding, or get a fan to cool down.

Turn off or cover up any lights in your room that might disturb your sleep. If the room is still not completely dark you may also want to consider using a sleep mask or investing in blackout blinds. These blinds are thicker and sturdier than average and are available in completely opaque fabric. Blocking out all of the excess light at night can really help on the journey to quality sleep.

Some people report that using a diffuser with essential oils such as lavender can be relaxing. Aromatherapy won't fix any major sleep problems, but infusing your room with a soothing scent might make a small difference.

Listen to something relaxing

If you find that no matter what you do, your mind starts racing as soon as you close your eyes, you could try listening to something relaxing in order to help you fall asleep. Try a guided meditation or some gentle music. You could also try using a white noise machine.

If the idea of someone telling you to relax and meditate

through your headphones sounds like too much pressure, you could listen to a podcast instead. There are several podcasts dedicated to helping people fall asleep. Drew Ackerman hosts the popular *Sleep With Me* podcast, in which he talks about random subjects in a soothing voice to help the listener take their mind off their own troubles and simply fall asleep.¹⁹⁴ Ackerman himself suffered from insomnia for years and now he is dedicated to helping others.

Final thoughts

Man is a genius when he is dreaming.

Akira Kurosawa

Many of us don't recognise and prioritise the importance of sleep. Even when we're eating well, exercising, meditating and mastering every other area of a busy life, sleep can suffer. In fact, some of us might even lament the fact that we have to sleep at all. Edgar Allen Poe famously remarked, "Sleep, those little slices of death — how I loathe them."

But we should treat those eight hours as a gift. It's a time for us to rest, recharge, consolidate memories and heal so that we can wake up feeling our very best the next day.

How do I rate my sleep quality?

How important is sleep quality to me?

Tick three items below that would improve my score:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Limit technology | ☐ Create a sleep routine |
| ☐ Manage stress | ☐ Improve sleep environment |
| ☐ Exercise in the morning | ☐ Seek medical help |

What would my score be if I successfully achieved the three items I have selected?

Imagine myself sleeping well and waking up refreshed...

How do I feel in my body?

.....
Which emotions am I experiencing?

.....
What am I thinking?

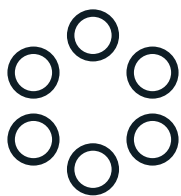
.....
What am I willing to try tomorrow?

.....
How will I remind myself?

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| ☐ Phone reminder | ☐ Written note |
|---|---------------------------------------|

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VALUES ALIGNMENT

Kindness is my only guiding star. In its light, I sail a straight route. I have my motto written on my sail: 'to live in love'.

St Therese

St Therese of Lisieux avoided the limelight. She never aspired to fame and did not have a grandiose view of spirituality. She claimed no secret knowledge of divine truths or ability to perform miracles. Instead she invested her energy with unwavering dedication to small acts of kindness. Her short yet remarkable life continues to inspire millions of people around the world. St Therese was a saint for the people.¹⁹⁵

Born in 1873, Therese lost her mother early and was raised by her father and nine older siblings. She decided to pursue a religious path as a teenager, becoming a nun at the age of 15. It was in the Carmelite community of Lisieux, Normandy that Therese spent countless hours studying scripture and reflecting on her own personal relationship with God. She realised that as a mortal human being, she occupied a very small part of the universe and that in the grand scheme of things she was but one person out of millions who had already lived and died. She decided to find beauty and meaning in her own smallness, and this line of thinking lead her to write a philosophy which she called The Little Way.

St Therese believed that small actions performed out of love each and every day would bring us closer to God. It was not necessary to experience divine visions, achieve enlightenment,

or become a monk, nun or priest. Instead, the philosophy was based on simplicity and practicality. St Therese referred to her own acts of kindness as scattering flowers, which eventually earned her the name The Little Flower.

St Therese lived by her core values until the end. She died at the age of 24, after a long and painful battle with tuberculosis. Despite moments of struggling with her faith after falling ill, she never let go of her belief in God or in the potential for cultivating kindness in the human spirit.

Today, St Therese is widely known as one of the most important saints of modern times. She exemplified compassion, humility and love. Her only hope was for everyone to scatter flowers for each other each day, and little by little, they would make the world a better place.

St Therese did not live a conventional life and she left the world far too soon. But even as a teenager, she figured out one of life's most basic truths: in order to live well, we must live in alignment with our values. Her integrity when it came to standing by her values is what left such an impression on, even after her passing.

What does it mean to live in alignment with values?

To attain inner peace you must actually give your life, not just your possessions. When you at last give your life – bringing into alignment your beliefs and the way you live – then, and only then, can you begin to find inner peace.

Peace Pilgrim

Saying that we should live in alignment with our values is easy, but how do we align in everyday life, both through times of opportunity and times of challenge? In the popular self-help book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, author Stephen R Covey suggests that in order to live a successful and happy life, one must live by a set of solid principles. People who have achieved immense success – think Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Warren Buffett – have all stated that success is greater than money,

material possessions or academic credentials. It's not about the size of our home or the number of holidays we've taken. At end of the day, success is reflecting on a productive life, lived in alignment with our principles – the things we value. Our principles are the anchors that keep us grounded during life's storms. They are our North Star and the litmus test we use for decision-making, especially in the midst of adversity.

When we live in alignment with our principles, our everyday behaviours exemplify the things we value. This is often easier said than done, but those who are consistent gain respect and admiration from others. People who abide by a strong set of principles are generally the same people who leave a lasting positive impact on this world.

What does it look like to live in alignment, to stay true to ourselves even when it seems like the world is against us? Let's meet the father of modern surfing, Duke Kahanamoku.

Born in Honolulu in 1890, Duke dropped out of high school to earn money to support his family. He spent his free time on the beach at Waikiki and sent ripples around the swimming world when, as a relative unknown, he smashed the American freestyle record, swiftly earning himself a place on the USA swimming team. A remarkable talent, Duke competed in three Olympic Games between 1910 and 1924, repeatedly setting the world record in the 100 meter freestyle and winning several medals. He was a gallant sportsman who valued the 'aloha' spirit of his homeland. Aloha means "the breath of life" and it is a sacred Hawaiian way of living, encouraging people to treat each other with love and respect.

The Dukes Creed

In Hawai'i we greet friends, loved ones and strangers with Aloha, which means with love.

Aloha is the key word to the universal spirit of real hospitality, which makes Hawai'i renowned as the world's centre of understanding and fellowship.

Try meeting or leaving people with Aloha.
You'll be surprised by their reaction.
I believe it and it is my creed.
Aloha to you.

Duke Paoa Kahanamoku

Despite experiencing racial discrimination due to his darker skin and struggling financially due to remaining an amateur athlete, Duke embodied the aloha spirit, sometimes even slowing down mid-race to allow his competitors to catch up with him.

Despite his success in the pool, Duke's true passion was surfing – an ancient and sacred pastime that had been at serious risk of dying out in his homeland. When Protestant missionaries arrived in Hawaii, they considered surfing to be a sinful activity and, along with many other aspects of Hawaiian tradition and religion, tried to erase it from the culture. Were it not for the tenacity of Duke and a few other dedicated locals, surfing – the Hawaiian sport of kings – might not exist today.

World-renowned for his swimming prowess, demand for Duke's attendance at competitions and exhibitions around the world increased. He embarked on several world tours both to give swimming demonstrations and to share his passion for surfing. He was the star of the world's first surfing exhibition at Freshwater Beach in Sydney, Australia, in 1915, demonstrating not only how to ride waves but also how to shape boards from local wood. He gave similar demonstrations everywhere from New Zealand to California, planting the seeds of what would become a global subculture.

Duke was inducted into the Surfing Hall of Fame and, when Hawaii became a state in 1959, was named an Ambassador of Aloha. Throughout his life, Duke continued to surf on traditional Hawaiian surfboards, staying true to his roots, and the aloha spirit.

Duke could have forgotten his values and lived life passively, allowing the missionaries their way or becoming angry at his

own circumstances. Instead, he stood by his principles, embodying aloha and not only preserving Hawaiian culture, but sharing it with the world.

We can either go through life with vague and flexible principles or we can stand firm even when the world seems against us. Recognising common obstacles to values alignment is a good first step.

Obstacles to alignment

True freedom is where an individual's thoughts and actions are in alignment with that which is true, correct and of honour – no matter the personal price.

Bryant H McGill

Artists and creatives are known for boldly living by their own sets of values, even when it means going against the grain and being ostracised. For example, Banksy, the world-famous street artist started down an unconventional path in Bristol, England in the 1990s. He knew that in order to create works that truly embodied the spirit of rebellion, he had to be a rebel himself. Banksy hid his identity and worked outside of the system as he developed his signature stencil graffiti style. Even as his popularity grew, he continued creating on his own terms, serving up radical social commentary through his street art. Banksy still works in relative anonymity and does not sell photographs or reproductions of his art. He is staunchly against consumerism and the way that he has approached his calling reflects this.

Has it been easy for Banksy to pursue this path? Of course not. But the fact that he has always maintained his own style and stuck to his values is part of the reason that he has gained international respect and why people are so fascinated with him and his work.

In practice, living in alignment with our values is not always simple. Sometimes, we don't defend our values when criticised. We may find that we give in to peer pressure when we are the

only one in a group who holds a belief. Sometimes many of us act completely against our own values just to take a certain job or fit in with the crowd. No one is perfect, and we all act in ways that contradict our values at times. The media loves stories about celebrities and politicians who stray from their path.

There are many reasons why we fall out of alignment. Recognising them gives us the opportunity to adjust our behaviours in real-time.

Social pressure

As children we indulge in creative play, letting our imaginations run wild. The future is an open book and it feels like anything is possible. We dream about becoming astronauts, superheroes, rock stars and magicians. The adults in our lives may even encourage these ideas.

As we enter puberty, we start feeling the pressure to conform. Conventional education enforces a set of rules, along with a formula for academic success. Social acceptance suddenly becomes a burning desire, as we gaze into a future that seems beyond our control. We notice that people who stray outside the lines get left out or made fun of. So we either rebel and face the consequences or do our best to conform, even if it makes us unhappy.

University can be an enriching or confusing time and we're soon out in the world, small fish in big ponds, possibly laden with debt and the prospect of a career path that is misaligned with our values. I've met lawyers who realised that they'd rather teach mindfulness to kids – and end up doing it beautifully.

The social pressure to conform to other people's values can be confusing in our twenties. Work exposes us to individuals much more experienced than ourselves, all with different values and perspectives. Sometimes we change as we learn and grow, sometimes we outgrow the people we know.

If our espoused values put us in opposition to a social group or community, we often face negative consequences. In an age

where one comment on social media can be misinterpreted and spread out of context in seconds, it's easy to see why many people feel apprehensive about speaking their minds and living authentically. Sometimes it feels like life is easier if we don't have to choose values for ourselves and rather just follow the crowd. Outrage culture exemplifies this tendency.

Inconvenience

If we value being kind and then find ourselves gossiping, we're directly contradicting our values, which ultimately doesn't feel good. Equally, laughing at someone's misfortune to fit in with a group, does us no good.

But let's look at a more complex example that many of us deal with on a day-to-day basis, in a situation that is nearly impossible to avoid. Many people care deeply about the environment and want to live sustainably. However, countless people also have no choice but to rely on a car in order to get to work. Unless we have an electric car powered by solar panels, we're polluting the atmosphere and contributing to global warming on a daily basis. But if we can't walk, bike or take public transport to work, we don't have any other option. It's unrealistic to expect someone to walk 10 kilometres down a busy highway each morning and evening.

Many people have no choice but contradict their own values in some way each day. We might care about health but consult to a tobacco company. Or we value kindness and find ourselves shouting at our own kids at bedtime. Sometimes, it is difficult for even the most committed among us to live completely by their values.

A common scenario is that we compromise our values to avoid conflict or rejection by friends, peers, and even loved ones.

Fear of loneliness

Human beings are tribal creatures.¹⁹⁶ It is for good reason

that we crave approval and validation from others. Throughout our evolution being included was quite literally a matter of life or death. If the group cast us out, we had to survive alone in a dangerous environment. Although this is not generally the case anymore, our brains still prioritise social acceptance. And while it's true that periods of loneliness aren't life threatening, being lonely and isolated for too long have negative outcomes for our mental health.

Living by our values means that we might find ourselves standing alone at times. This feels uncomfortable because we evolved to be part of a tribe, and when we no longer have protection from the group, we panic.

Seeking validation from others is not the path to true happiness so we all need to develop the courage to contradict popular opinion and risk being disliked. But it's also true that we're always going to want to feel accepted and loved. Sometimes, taking the initiative to stand alone and carve our own path will lead us towards others who share our values, but there are often a lonely first few steps on that journey.

Self-doubt

When living by our values leads us outside of the crowd, it's only natural to experience moments of self-doubt. After all, when no one else seems to be on our side, it's completely normal to wonder if disagreeing with the mainstream opinion means that we're in the wrong. If we don't feel confident and secure in our choices, we might end up going back on our principles.

How to align with your values

Just as your car runs more smoothly and requires less energy to go faster and farther when the wheels are in perfect alignment, you perform better when your thoughts, feelings, emotions, goals and values are in balance.

Brian Tracy

It's clear that living by our values often means choosing to take on extra challenges. It means speaking our mind even when no one else in the room shares our opinion. It means accepting that we might be lonely at times, that we probably won't be the most popular person, that we will feel misunderstood. But over time, we will find our tribe. We will see the ways in which we can positively influence other people, and eventually, realise that living by our values was worth all the effort. And it's not just about our influence on others, living by our values makes us feel more fulfilled and satisfied, even when we're pushing back against popular opinion.

What if we recognise that we've been living in opposition to our values for quite some time, but we're unsure of how to change? Or what if we feel like we've drifted for so long that we can't describe what our true values are?

It's never too late to discover our values and start living by them. We can make this change at any time. Be patient, understand that the shift won't happen overnight and that we'll need reminders – and maybe even mentors – to help us along the way. With dedication and courage, we can construct an entirely new life, one designed around core values.

Discover your true values

If you have the uneasy feeling that you're not truly living by your values, you'll need to take some time for self-reflection and self-discovery. It may take a while to determine what your core values really are. If you're wondering where to begin, it may be helpful to just sit down with a pen and a blank sheet of paper.

Start with the basics. Most of us can agree that we value our physical and mental health, our families and our friends. But we can go beyond that. What qualities do you strive to bring to every situation? Again, you can start with the basics. Write down a few traits that you would like to be known for. When you imagine yourself at your best? Do you exemplify integrity and honesty? How about compassion and kindness? Do you

value the pursuit of knowledge and the keeping an open mind? What would you like people to say at your funeral? What can you not live without? If you had two months to live, how would you spend your time?

Of course, most of us would say that we value similar positive attributes, but it's important to consider values that are relevant, practical and deeply personal to you. Perhaps some of the factors in this book resonate as values for a life of resilience mastery? Write down 20 or 30 values and then trim that list to five. Bestselling author Dr Brene Brown recommends selecting only two values so that they are easy to recall and live by.

Evaluate your lifestyle

Once you have a better understanding of the values around which you want to design your life, you need to honestly evaluate your current lifestyle to see how it matches up. Let's say that you wrote down that you value your health. It's then important to track how you spend your time each day and fact check for compromise or contradiction. Are you spending an hour or two on social media or binge-watching shows on Netflix when you could be at the gym? Do you have a tendency to oversleep and rush to work instead of maintaining a regular wake-up time and preparing a healthy breakfast? How about the habits you repeat every day? Do you often take the lift instead of the stairs? Do you opt for fast food instead of nutrient dense, home-cooked meals? Drink that extra glass of alcohol to numb the nervous system? All of these small habits can add up over time.

Your habits are a reflection of what you value and the person you are right now is a culmination of those habits. Congratulations, you're almost at the end of what I hope is an enriching book, so the fact that you value self-development is clear. May I take this moment to acknowledge you and the choices you made that lead you here.

Let's take a look at another example of getting values aligned. What if you wrote down that frugality and minimalism were

two of your values? In this case, it would be important to look at where your money is going. Many of us open our wallets without thinking twice about it, yet what we spend our money on is a serious reflection of our values. Are you regularly spending just for the sake of convenience, when a little preparation would help you save money? Do you buy unnecessary items simply for the dopamine rush of acquiring something new? Are you keeping track of what you spend and sticking to a budget, or are you simply spending in the moment and hoping that you save some money some day? Are you taking the time to research your best options when you make a purchase, or are you buying items without considering quality and longevity? Do you spend money out of boredom instead of getting creative with free options for entertainment?

Evaluating habits can be an eye-opening exercise. Realising the many ways in which we contradict our stated values each day can be humbling. We're often quick to judge others without acknowledging how often we make mistakes. But at the same time, we shouldn't judge ourselves too harshly during this process. Follow Matthieu Ricard's advice and aim for compassionate action, including compassion for ourselves.

Pay attention to negative feelings

When you're trying to make some changes in your life, but you haven't quite implemented all of your new habits yet, you might experience something known as cognitive dissonance.¹⁹⁷ Cognitive dissonance is an uncomfortable experience. It occurs when we recognise, on some level, that we're being hypocritical, but we're simultaneously trying to justify our own hypocrisy. It can be tempting to brush these feelings aside for the sake of positivity but for self-improvement, it's crucial to pay attention.

Notice negative emotions and label them. Is it discomfort, fear, sadness or guilt? If a situation or choice feels wrong it probably is – for you.

There are times when two choices are both equally valid;

one option might just be the better fit for a certain person. For example, there are plenty of women who choose to go back to work after having a child, while others choose to stay home for a longer period of time. Neither choice is morally right or wrong. As long as the child is being raised in a happy, loving way, both options are fine. But how the choice makes the mother feel is a strong indicator of values alignment.

Remember that the world needs all kinds of people. If we all thought or acted the same, it would be a very boring place indeed. If your choice is not hurting anyone, you don't have to feel guilty about going against the mainstream.

Begin forming new habits

The most challenging – and most rewarding – part of the process is undoubtedly forming new habits. This will be difficult at first, but the effort will be worth it in the end. Whether you now know that you truly value the pursuit of knowledge, and you want to make it a habit to read one new book each month, or you've realised that you value mindfulness and want to incorporate meditation sessions into your routine, this can be a time of exciting, positive change.

At first, it will can be easy to stay motivated each day, but this initial enthusiasm may fade. Give yourself time to adjust. There is no rush unless you decide there is. And if the change feels awkward at first, don't give up. It can take a couple of months or more before a new behaviour becomes automatic, depending on the behaviour, the person and the circumstances.¹⁹⁸ Be confident that as you map the new habits into your daily routine, what initially takes effort will soon become effortless once it's automatic.

It can definitely be useful to track your new habits. You can use a journal, app, whiteboard or pencil and paper to tally marks of how often you're practicing. As the weeks go by, you'll see where you're measuring up and where you're falling short. And when you see all those tally marks lining up, you'll know that

you're on the right track. It doesn't matter if you mess up every now and then. Building better habits is not an all-or-nothing process.

Be patient

Figuring out what you really value can take some time, and implementing the changes required to live in alignment with these values longer still. If you find that nothing seems to come to you at first or that the changes are hard to make, this does not mean that you have lost yourself, or that you have no hope of finding a set of principles that you can live by. You won't be adrift without an anchor forever.

If you're familiar with the idea of a mid-life (or even "quarter-life") crisis, you'll know how many people reach a breaking point where they can no longer remain out of alignment with their values. They endure the messy process of rediscovering themselves, and often emerge with a clearer understanding of how they really want to live. Of course, the values they choose may not be popular!

There might be a key moment when you realise that you need to change, or you might slowly nudge towards alignment. Every journey is unique so be curious, courageous and patient. Change takes time.

Enjoy the transformation

As time goes by and you change your habits, routines and behaviours to line up with your values, you will inevitably notice some major changes occurring in your life. You may find that you lose some friends, but you'll also gain some. You may realise that your job isn't a great fit, but you'll probably find that an even better opportunity was right around the corner. You may look back and regret time wasted on a path that wasn't meant for you, but you will be proud of yourself for finally forging your own unique path.

Above all, you'll notice an increase in self-esteem and securi-

ty in your own beliefs. When you practice what you preach, your confidence is unshakeable.

Final Thoughts

With the right alignment, everything you want makes its way into your experience. You are the keeper of your own gate.

Esther Hicks

Living by your values in a world that will try to discourage you from doing so takes courage. But deep down, everyone does have that courage. Don't let yourself be dissuaded by the worries of what other people may think. It's hard to shake that instinct, but over time, doing what makes you happy without needing validation will become your new normal. Whether you value fame, fortune, kindness or sustainability is your choice. Nelson Mandela said, "May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears."

Remember, you only have one life to live. Make sure that you're living it for you.

How aligned am I with my values



How important is values-alignment to me?



Tick three items below that would improve my score:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Evaluate my habits | ☐ Create habits around values |
| ☐ Discover my true values | ☐ Notice negativity |
| ☐ Evaluate job fit | ☐ Identify misalignment |

What would my score be if I successfully achieved the three items I have selected?



Imagine myself living aligned with my values...

How do I feel in my body?

.....

Which emotions am I experiencing?

.....

What am I thinking?

.....

What am I willing to try tomorrow?

.....

How will I remind myself?

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| ☐ Phone reminder | ☐ Written note |
|---|---------------------------------------|

Register your commitment and get inspiration at:

<https://bradleyhook.com/mastery>

**You make
your own
luck if
you stay
at it long
enough.**

Naval Ravikant

CONCLUSION

Do you want to know who you are? Don't ask. Act! Action will delineate and define you.

Thomas Jefferson

Many people ask, “Where do I begin?”

There is a gap between understanding a concept and doing something practical. If you're finding yourself in a state of inertia, choose a simple task and get started immediately. This might be a single calming breath. Remember, even the longest journey begins with a single step. If you're overloaded and in a downward spiral, do nothing. Literally. Stop and take some time out. Recovery is the most underrated element of resilience. If you're at the top of your game, help someone else and create a friend for life.

Change is accelerating and this causes anxiety if we are not present and optimistic. It is not surprising that we are in the midst of an anxiety epidemic. News media warns that threats abound even though research shows that we live in the safest and most prosperous era in human history. Light pollution and screen time make it difficult to get a good night's sleep. Lack of recovery means we have trouble focusing. We are distracted and connected to technology yet disconnected from our tribe. Existence is high bandwidth and low stakes. Mistakes no longer equal death but our nervous system does not know that.

We're using outdated hardware in an upgraded environment. We're easily swayed by group think and clever marketing. Food scientists have discovered bliss points that make manufactured food irresistible. Behavioural scientists and UX designers have discovered technology bliss points that addict us to devices.

At the core of our nervous system lies a freeze, fight and flight response. None of these help us in a brave new world. To be effective and to reach our dreams we need presence, purpose, vitality and focus. We need to upgrade the quality of the challenges we tackle so that we can align our actions with our values and purpose.

We're all going to age and we're all going die. Life has been around for 3.1 billion years. This is our flicker of light. This is our time. Are we going to spend this precious glimpse of the universe ruminating about the past and worrying about the future? Will we over-activate outdated nervous responses, causing ourselves inflammation and disease. Or are we going to embrace this time with ferocity and gratitude?

Resilience mastery says that we will be proactive in calming our ancient nervous systems. Tell our bodies that everything is alright. Most of the threats we face are not high stakes, we don't need to fight or run away. We can ease into high performance, gently shifting focus to our most important tasks. We'll create routines that support optimal vitality. We'll trust intuition, be decisive and find fulfilment in achievements both significant and small.

Keep trying. Life is short. Your efforts count. Make them count. We extract vast energy from the earth to sustain us, so what can we give back? What is our legacy? What will we leave behind? Leaving no trace is fine. That's preferable. But perhaps we want to leave a trace. Maybe we want to make things better.

Along the journey of life don't forget to acknowledge your greatest teacher – the one who is with you from birth until death, the one who is reading these words. The hero of this journey.

That is you.

**Wishing
you vitality,
motivation
and a clear
mind.**

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