



leading yourself:

SUCCESSING from the Inside Out

Patrick Mayfield

Leading Yourself:
SUCCEEDING from the Inside Out

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Blurbs

Before publishers' blurbs were invented, authors had to make their reputations by writing.

Laurence J. Peter

Sometimes I read a book and I'm impressed by the substance and the knowledge of the author. Many times I read a book and I find it refreshingly practical, but perhaps lacking in rigour. Rarely do I read a book that combines the substance and practical application in a way that this book does. It draws on solid themes found in cornerstone publications such as Sharmer's Theory U and Csikszentmihalyi's Flow. However it makes it practical, normal and accessible for everyone. I found this book incredibly useful personally and have implemented many strategies as a result of reading it for this review. I can't recommend it highly enough to you.

David Elverson
Consultant and Author of *Engaging Leadership*
Culture and Creating a Culture of Overflow

Its a really interesting read, and I've identified lots of areas of application for myself!

This concept of closing open loops by note-taking has proved really useful to me - after reviewing your first draft, I started making lists in an intentional way, and it has really helped!

Katy Dusting, Project Manager & Technical Pre-Sales Consultant

In the complex world of self- management too many solutions work by offering help and advice on external actions only with scant regard for the primary internal issues of self- awareness and motivation. Patrick's book brilliantly avoids this error, rather he delves deeply and yet clearly into the individuals personal makeup of identity, emotional intelligence and relationships to examine the real determinates of our work performance. He successfully holds up a mirror to anyone willing to look below the surface and really master their internal mechanisms. Full of great insights there are also a multitude of practical applications in each chapter. This is not only a powerful how to book but a route map for personal transformation. I recommend it highly.

David Webster, Faculty Member of ESSL and
author of *Your Royal Identity*

I seem to be at the point in my life now when I have the increasing urge to ensure that I achieve all that I am able to and want to – the need to leave a legacy. That calls for self-leadership, the subject that Patrick addresses throughout this excellent book. There is so much in this work that I could comment on – the relationship between space, time and energy; the need to address clutter in our lives; and the encouragement to re-engage with classic tools such as pen and paper, and to-do lists. It's that type of book, full of ideas, concepts, ideas and tips, all of which address ways in which we can better lead ourselves.

I like this book a lot, and I believe that it is incredibly helpful. I think you will like it too, and I am pretty sure that you will also find it very, very helpful.

John Edmonds, Head of Training at
www.pearcemayfield.com and co-author of PRINCE2

*If you feel that your daily challenge resembles eating an elephant then this book is for you! With holistic explanations and empowering tools and techniques, this is for everyone who wants to drive their personal projects and productivity, irrespective of job role, seniority or experience. With *Leading Yourself* it's possible to overcome the tyranny of busyness and turn from victim to victor.*

Adrian Boorman, Countertenor, Impresario and Sales Manager

We all suffer from a common problem. The lack of time to get things done has been a constant battle since time immemorial and, despite the promise of paperless offices, computer-assisted work places and too many household devices that will save us time, the very opposite has happened. We have less time now than ever to do the things we need to do.

In the workplace this means we have a tendency to use our time ineffectually and inefficiently with the consequence perhaps of not always doing our best work. Sometimes we are having to make do with our second-best, time-limited efforts. Patrick has addressed just this issue and decided that there are ways to reduce the risk of ineffectual and inefficient work and helps us to spend more time doing the work that delivers – the results we really want are achieved more often. He offers a number of techniques, with their validation, as to how to address the issues we face in everyday life.

There have been many versions of books like this and I have read several of them, being only too aware that I suffer from many of the issues Patrick describes. This one though, is the first one that I have read and immediately thought it could help reduce the likelihood of these common problems rearing their ugly head. It is the first time I have actually tried some of the suggested techniques (of which there are many) virtually immediately and to good effect. Lists are a very powerful tool and Patrick's way of utilising them is but one small element that really delivers.

Take the time to read this easily-read book and you too will find nuggets of advice and guidance that will help you to spend more time doing the things you want and need to do, rather than those foisted upon you by others, by circumstance or by accident.

Thank you Patrick for the time you have given back to me!

Andy Taylor FAPM, FBCS, CMC
International Management Accreditation Consultant

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About the Author

Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another: "What! You too? I thought I was the only one."

C. S. Lewis

Patrick Mayfield is the author of *Practical People Engagement: Leading Change through the Power of Engagement*, co-authored the 2007 edition of *Managing Successful Programmes*, and was a contributing author to *The Effective Change Manager's Handbook* (2014). He is founding Chairman of pearcemayfield. He writes a popular blog at www.patrickmayfield.com and is a frequent speaker and coach.

Foreword

We keep moving forward, opening new doors,
and doing new things, because we're curious and
curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.

Walt Disney

I vividly remember my transition from Medical Student to Junior Hospital Doctor, it was a profound shock and I felt somewhat unprepared despite my 5 years at Medical School. And I was not the only one; as far as I was aware all 120 of us who graduated together at Bristol in 1982 were thrust into a world of extreme busyness and responsibility, literally with people's lives in our hands as we worked up to 136 hours per week. "How do we cope with this?" was a common thought.

We were well prepared in terms of medical knowledge and skills, but how to manage yourself to remain holistically healthy so that good medical practice was maintained and developed was not something we had been taught. We needed to learn the art of "Leading Yourself" and oh how useful this book would have been!

Fortunately most of us learned relatively quickly and survived as more senior doctors coached us through the rigours of hospital life. But I had friends who struggled enormously under the weight of responsibility and expectation.

We had to learn what was vital to the lives of our patients and prioritise that with our resources of time, knowledge and skills. Next we distinguished what was a threat if left unchecked and then we moved on to the things that would enhance and enrich the lives of our patients. Our own time and energy management became paramount in the delivery of life saving and enriching care.

In *Leading Yourself* Patrick Mayfield has set out great principles with very real practical application to the issue of how your most important resource, namely yourself, your knowledge and your training can be utilised to maximum effect and satisfaction. I recognise within it wisdom that it took me years to acquire in the various walks of my life, and I also recognise wisdom that I have not yet acquired.

It is a truly great book including issues around personal time, space and energy, issues of your “very soul” which should not be neglected and issues of relationships. All of these are vital and will enrich your own personal life and also the lives of those around you.

I have had the privilege of getting to know Patrick as a friend over the last year or so, and I can commend him and this book to you, he doesn’t only “talk the talk” he also “walks the walk”.

**Dr Pete Carter MBChB, Medical Doctor,
Director of Eastgate (www.eastgate.org.uk) and author of *Unwrapping Lazarus***

Preface

The best way to become acquainted with a subject is to write a book about it.

Benjamin Disraeli

This book came out of a growing concern in me. This concern is about the creeping culture of overwhelming busyness. I see it everywhere. In some business sectors, the trade-off has become an understandable, if not excusable, transaction. For example, if you work in some parts of the financial sector your rewards have been huge, but in exchange the firm owns you 24/7. Yet this is creeping more widely, where the financial rewards are not all that significant. Only yesterday I was talking to a social worker, and she told me of the increasing demands on her, demands that now require a win-lose trade-off with her family, in order to give the time she needs to keep up with her case work. The teaching profession also seems to have fallen prey to this systemic conspiracy of busyness, and everyone loses, particularly children.

I hate it. I will not accept it as normal. It might be more and more usual, but it is not normal or healthy. I wanted to make a stand against this growing culture and this book is the result.

And I see overwhelming busyness far too much in my own clients. Excessive busyness means they don't get the best value out of me, or that they don't get me at all.

A few years ago, an international publishing group asked me to develop a workshop that came to be called *Organising Yourself More Effectively*. I borrowed approaches and techniques from the world of project management and change management and scaled them down to the level of the individual. I was pleased, then surprised, by the warmth of response from delegates. This workshop gave them clues to dramatically improve the quality of their lives, both work and personal. It was a surprise, as I had always regarded "time management" as pretty basic skill.

Also, I had assumed that what I did was normal: constantly working on my own effectiveness, searching for new techniques and tips. A recent Strengthsfinder assessment showed me that this was typical of someone strong in "Ideation." It seems that the vast majority of us keep with old patterns of working long past their usefulness.

I knew from our research into high-performers that people can *choose* to distinguish themselves, and most of these traits come from internal self-development. The high-performer is more likely to treat themselves seriously as a work-in-progress rather like an entrepreneur is constantly tweaking their start-up enterprise for performance improvements. What I hadn't realised was that this connected to recent growing trends in the world affecting all sectors of enterprise from the military and governments to business and media actually scaled down to the individual knowledge worker, you and me. New drivers in our work environment now demanded a reassessment of the ways we have been used to organising our personal work. Twentieth-century work wisdom was not keeping pace with the new demands on us.

A final, but major, factor in writing this book has been my experiences over the last year or so at ESSL, a sort of faith-based leadership academy on steroids. This school showed me in vivid ways how the performance I brought to my work was liberated or limited by the 'self' I brought to it, and the clarity of what kind of a mission or destiny I thought I was pursuing.

This is not a spiritual book, but it could be. My fear is that the people I am writing it for will be too busy to read it. For those that do, my earnest hope is that you achieve some of the liberating breakthroughs I enjoy.

I am a writer. And the best way I know how to help you is to write about this "road less travelled."

Travel well.

Patrick Mayfield
Harwell, Oxfordshire
October 2016

Dedication

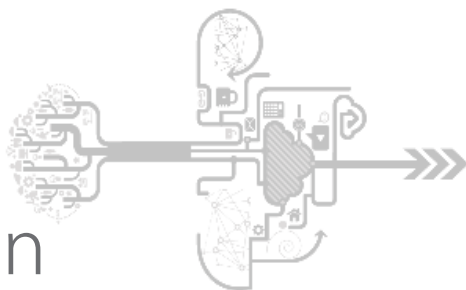
I would like to dedicate this book to two groups of people:

To the faculty and students of ESSL, including and especially my wife, who have all built into me in profound ways. Much of the credit for what is written in here is due to you all.

To the reader, whom I have sought to serve in in every sentence. If you find greater freedom and fulfilment through these pages then I have achieved my goal.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction



Busyness is a great enemy of relationships. We become preoccupied with making a living, doing our work, paying bills, and accomplishing goals as if these tasks are the point of life. They are not.

Rick Warren

Too busy to think straight

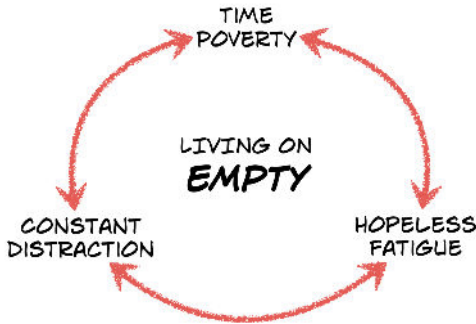
Do you remember a time when your work just flowed? Was the result something in which you took pride? I'm sure it was good work. And what kind of feelings did you experience during and after that work was finished? Joy? Satisfaction? A greater regard for yourself?

If you are like most of us, such moments can be all too rare. The usual experience for many is that work is a struggle.

Then there's the matter of time. Do you have enough time? Again, most people I talk with in business are time poor. There never seems to be enough time in our working day. In many workplaces, there seems to be a pressure to work longer. And there is a cost to our private lives.

My guess is that you have a lot of distractions in your work. This doesn't help you focus or allow you to do your best work. Now, there are some practical steps you can take to protect yourself from distractions, steps that will help you focus better.

And I wonder if you are, to some degree, weary with your workload. Maybe you are even feeling overwhelmed. If your tiredness is more extreme and you have felt it for some time, then you might even be losing hope that it will ever get better. Here is a vicious cycle I've observed in past times in my own experience and also in that of many of my clients:



Well, from what I have learned and practised, I'm pretty confident that I can help you break this syndrome.

This is not like many self-help books. You will know the sort of books I'm referring to: the ones that operate at the superficial level of this technique or that. The solutions that I explore in this book are far deeper than merely using an app or a technique. Yes, you will find a number of techniques referenced and explained, many of which could give you immediate and remarkable improvements to your work.¹ For example, one exercise early on in this book helped one of my clients reclaim about 10 hours of her working week. Nevertheless, the key insight you will find here is that this is about self-leadership, the self we bring to our work. It is about how we lead ourselves, rather than allowing ourselves to drift or be driven.

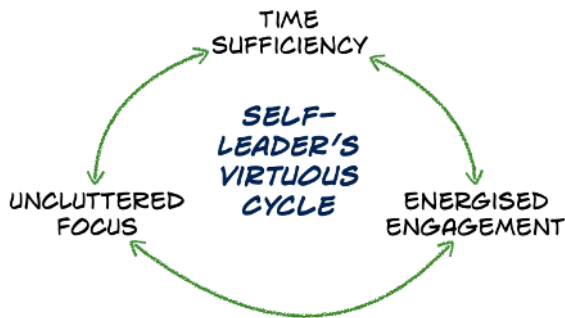
This approach comes out of research I and my colleagues conducted into the lives of exceptional change leaders. Our conclusions were:

- Lasting and prevailing improvements in our work experience and the results we get are drawn from within;
- We can all grow into this exceptional way of working; and

¹ See Appendix A.

- This approach and the working skills that come out of this inner place are more vital than ever. The world of work is now far more turbulent on a sustained basis than it ever used to be. It is more brutal than it ever has been. In fact, I know of no other viable and sustainable way of working in today's environment.

As well as the techniques, I will share breakthrough principles and concepts for engaging with your work. Apply these principles, adopt this mindset, and you can enjoy a more pleasurable and positive pattern of working. I want to help you get back to those times or moments when you were able to do good work, your best work. Sometimes we all need someone to come alongside us and remind us of experiences that, for some reason, we have lost and maybe have forgotten altogether. So some parts of what we will cover may feel like meeting an old friend. My aim is to make your experience look rather more like this:



Other elements of this book are likely to be quite new to you. In these cases, take your time - some of that precious time I will help you get back! Experiment with these new approaches. I will provide practical exercises for you throughout.

We are all different. I respect your uniqueness. That is part of discovering what leadership academics call your “personal mastery.” Some techniques and approaches will suit you very well. Others less so. I want to respect your uniqueness and not make the exercises in this book prescriptive. However, we all master what is useful to us by practice until it becomes natural to us. We will look at this in more detail later.

As a knowledge worker, I will show you how we can care for and nurture our brain, the main piece of equipment we use in the course of our work, whilst becoming better, more productive and more effective.

I know that from my own area of business, there is a strong bias towards technology rather than how we think, and how our thinking informs our behaviour. When I visit project management conferences, for example, vendors stress the need for this software or that app, rather than a mindset that works. From what I have seen and experienced, I'm increasingly uneasy about that bias. So in this book, we consider concepts, principles and practical techniques rather than software. Sorry to disappoint you; it would be all too easy for me just to promote a software package that I claimed would revolutionise your life.

A Better Way

Many of us are waking up to these better ways of working that are far more rewarding. We consistently produce good work. Good work is not merely surviving, but growing and becoming more resilient in an increasingly challenging world of work. At the same time, we bring to the world our best work. We think what we do now is our best, but as we grow in self-leadership we do something we thought we never could: we produce even better work. We practice self-leadership at two levels at least.

1. The physical level

This is the level that we see and can measure. At the physical level, it is about personal order, personal organisation, how we order our private world.² And because it is personal, many of us are inclined to resist someone else telling us what to do and how to do it. Others find themselves intrigued about how people do this “organisation thing” differently. As we will see, it is possible to make huge improvements in our personal productivity, as well as significant improvements to overall satisfaction in our work, by some fairly simple changes to the way we work. So we might call the first level of self-leadership *techniques of efficiency*.

2 Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World* (2003).

People who intentionally lead themselves use tools and techniques. There is a physical practice of certain habits and rituals that can pay huge dividends in our productivity. For example, there are techniques about how to limit our current focus, and habits like the daily heads-up, that I will explain later, that all make a huge difference to people's daily work experience and outcomes.

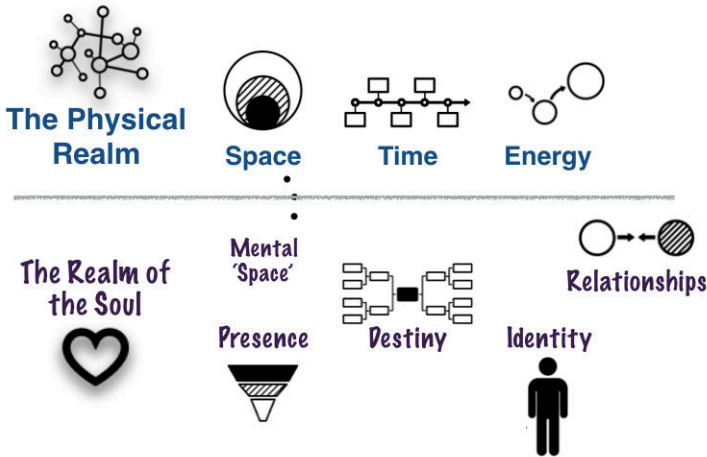
This level is probably the more superficial level of the two, but it is one that we all can immediately understand and apply in our own contexts. It is the level of quick wins. Immediate, positive feedback is important to us in motivating ourselves to persevere, what psychologists call our *intrinsic motivation*. Otherwise, after a short period, we get discouraged, give up, and drift back into old habits.

The Section in the book called *The Physics of Self-Leadership* deals with this level. It's the physics of self-leadership because we learn to manage our own lives, the way we achieve good work.

2. The mental and emotional level

This is our inner world, our thought life. We can choose to examine our thoughts and emotions. Our self-perception, our identity, emerges as more important than we might at first realise. Do we see ourselves as captives or as free people who can lead ourselves? This area of identity is supremely important. Our identity, our ability to be present in our work, our ability to imagine better futures for ourselves and those around us, and our clarity about our own purpose, our destination, all are huge areas that can make or break our use of the techniques and tools at the physical level.

This is the realm of the soul. We will explore these areas in the Section on *The Soul of Self-Leadership*. We do our best work when we master the deeper issues within us:



For as [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he...

Proverbs of Solomon 23:7

The realm of our soul is pivotal to how we function. The soul, our intentional thinking and emotions, can draw upon the reality of our spirit, whereas the interaction between the body and the soul is much more two-way.

For example, most of us are aware at some level that when we are tired, we can be tempted to depression; so the state of our physical body can affect our emotions. When we are acutely stressed by an external threat or acute pain, we can find our cognitive agility somewhat impaired: we say things like, “I can’t think straight.” Also, our soul can have a great effect on our physical health. There is growing medical evidence, for example, that an unforgiving and hateful attitude towards others can damage our bodies through arthritis and immune system disorders. The opposite is also true: if we choose to be thankful and appreciative, it can energise us and often can even reverse disease in our bodies.

Personal mastery & inner leadership

Very often a change of self is needed more than a change of scene.

A.C. Benson

As we noted above, these two levels of self-leadership are what the leadership academies call personal mastery.³ What exactly is personal mastery? Essentially it is about our leadership of ourselves, our inner leadership. This has to do with more challenging areas of our internal thoughts and our habits, at the level of the soul. When we consider how we maintain commitments we make to others, whilst being able to focus on the matter at hand, this is a matter of personal mastery. Another example is when should we consider saying “No” to a request from another person? We can change our own habits, grow in an awareness of our personal boundaries, and a grow in a sense of personal mission. This is called by some as emotionally intelligent self-management, as in the work of Daniel Goleman.⁴

For the reader who is keen to focus on the more challenging aspects of self-leadership, I would caution that there is much in the first level for all of us. *The Physics of Self-Leadership* is the area of quick wins and these are important as we seek to motivate and encourage ourselves to replace old habits with new ones.

Nevertheless, I agree that leading ourselves well is far more than a few productivity techniques.

³ Leadership programmes and academies around the world commonly now have a module on “Personal Mastery” and the outcomes from this area on the lives of delegates are often very impressive.

⁴ *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More Than IQ* (1996)

Summary

So in this introduction, we have looked at the combined effect on our working lives of:

- Time poverty
- Constant distraction
- Hopeless fatigue.

This is living on empty. My aim is to help you lead yourself to a life of good work, where you enjoy:

- Time sufficiency
- Uncluttered focus
- Energised engagement.

This will not be primarily through technology. It has to do with looking at ourselves as complete human beings, body and soul. In this book we will look at:

- The physical level, the level of our external world and organising strategies; and
- The soul of self-leadership, the internal level of our own identity, thought patterns, and our sense of destiny.

The first level is the level of “quick wins”, whereas the level of the soul is where enduring changes to our performance come from.

Reading a book is not for everyone, so I have also designed and developed an online course here (<http://patrickmayfield.thinkific.com/courses/time-freedom>) that will help you work through some of these practices and techniques.

In the next chapter, we will look at the major shifts in recent years in the world of work and how this affects how we grow and produce good work.



CHAPTER 2

The Turbulent World of Work

I don't think we are in Kansas anymore, Toto.

Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz"

Is this normal?

In the West, commentators say we live in a knowledge economy; an economy that has shifted from creating wealth through physical production of food and machinery to that of creating value through design and innovation. However, this knowledge economy is being disrupted. There have been some seismic changes in the typical work environment, much of it perpetrated by people like me working in the IT industry. What I knew as normal after I graduated in the mid-1970's is vastly different from what it is today. And my personal disciplines have had to adapt to follow the reality of this changed environment.

One source of confusion is that we have inherited what was accepted practice in knowledge work, so-called "desk jobs", from that previous era and we are finding that much this practice is no longer relevant.

Most of us have focused on the tremendous advances in technology and our efforts to adapt to new social phenomena like email and smartphones. I would suggest that looking down through the reach of human history, these phenomena are still “new.” And I’m not sure we have yet fathomed the optimum ways of exploiting these tools. Knowledge workers like me are still adjusting. In fact, normal for me is to be continually re-appraising how I work in the light of each new app or system.

However, the changes that affect the environment we work in go far deeper than technology. In this new world of work, technology is in some ways the tip of the iceberg. Another aspect of this change is that we are not totally aware of what it has been doing to us in the pursuit of accomplishing our work. Effects have been both profound and gradual, gradual enough for most of us to be like that frog in the kettle: the water has warmed up so gradually that we are not even aware that we are in danger of being boiled alive.

... and then the world changed ...

Deborah is a manager of a UK hospital. She works with other managers and clinicians, where her role is to meet certain operational targets for patient admissions to beds. Over recent years, she has seen the pressure increase on her and her colleagues. The number of performance objectives her hospital have been challenged to meet have risen from about nine to forty-three. She finds that much of her work is complicated by rising costs of medication, as well as complex issues around releasing beds, where many of her patients are elderly and need to have arrangements made with other agencies before they are discharged from the hospital. She is liaising with ambulance crews, cleaning staff, nurses, as well as local social workers. Recently matters came to a climax when one of her wards was closed due to MRSA. She finds her days are filled with rushing to one meeting after another. Many of her clinical colleagues complain they do not have time for her. Her partner sees the long

hours she works. She tells him that when they are over this next crisis things will calm down a little. He no longer believes her, and she is beginning to doubt this herself.

Deborah, and many like her, are becoming aware that work life is now more brutal than it used to be. This is no longer mere nostalgia. There seems to have been something of a sea change in the culture of work, or an ambush, more like.

How we do good work is becoming more than a lifestyle choice. It's becoming a critical concern for many of us. Like Deborah, the stakes seem to be higher now. Old ways of working now risk leaving us overwhelmed in this turbulent, increasingly aggressive environment. What is the alternative? Are there new ways of working that are relevant to the times we live in now?

Yes. Fundamentally, this is the purpose of this book.

There is hope. There are good work strategies emerging that can help us operate at our best and more effectively in this turbulent world.

Further, we need to achieve more than mere survival. What we will explore here are approaches that will not merely buy us time, to help us get by, but will take us beyond that to help us thrive and prosper. We *need* that hope.

But this is not the orthodoxy of the industrial age. In that age, apprenticeships were set up to equip men - and it was nearly always men - in the skills of an industry. A young man, entering the light engineering industry, for example, would expect to be mentored by a master over a number of years. The master would be careful to expose the apprentice to a series of tasks that had graduated levels of challenge. The apprentice would learn by doing.

Now, for the vast majority of us, there is no one to show us how to live, work and grow to our peak performance through the equivalent of an apprenticeship. There are no clear learning paths, supported by a mentor, to grow us in skills appropriate to this turbulent age. Instead, most of us learn by trial and error. Few of us feel able to discuss with colleagues the ordering of our inner world.

The VUCA world

In order to gain a vital insight into what new approaches we need in our work, in our inner leadership, we need a better understanding of this turbulence. So how do we make sense of the sort of common experience that Deborah and others are discovering as the new normal work environment? Well, the answer may come from an unlikely source: the US Army.

After the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 it was followed by a period of confusion. NATO countries no longer faced a known enemy. All armies, to a greater or lesser extent, define themselves by the enemy they seek to vanquish. In the years following in the 1990s British tanks rusted on parade grounds in western Germany, no longer relevant for an enemy that seemed no longer there. So who was the enemy?

During the mid-1990's, the US military college began to describe the new world's characteristics. They called it VUCA, an acronym for a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous world.

The world was now much more Volatile. Situations could change much more rapidly than hitherto. This was partly driven by the advance of global communications technologies and mass media. News - and attacks - could now spread much more quickly and widely.

It was also somewhat more Uncertain. Whereas we could draw up plans several years into the future in past decades, that now felt more and more unrealistic. It is like driving down a well-known road, but now it is in a thick fog. We might know the road fairly well, but there may be obstacles in the way. We cannot see that far ahead anymore.

This environment was now also more Complex. In complex systems, we can act on one part of the system and get an unexpected response in another part of the system, or multiple effects from the same action. Linear causal models were now too simplistic in predicting what might happen.

And finally, there was more Ambiguity. Is that a simple shepherd in the desert or an insurgent? The world now seemed less black-and-white. We use to know who the "bad guys" were. They flew flags, and they arrayed themselves in front of us in clear battle lines. Now we are not sure who they are or where they are.

As the military explained their way of making sense of the world through this VUCA analysis, businesses and non-military government organisations began to claim that they too were in a VUCA environment.

And indeed, so it has proved to be. The world witnessed the volatility of the dot-com bubble bursting in 2000, due to the growing “internet of things.” Overnight we can find ourselves redundant or suddenly without key business relationships that shaped our work life. This was followed by the volatility of the 2008 world banking crisis. Now the UK is experiencing the volatility of Brexit - leaving the EU. The US is experiencing a series of racial shootings, seemingly sparked by each other. And France has endured awful terrorism in Paris and Nice. And so it will go on...

A growing sense of uncertainty about the future has arisen with competitors coming to market with new products in shorter and shorter periods of time. Whereas Nokia was the dominant force in the mobile phone market, very quickly it was overtaken. Uncertainty makes us hesitant about any kind of work planning. Does this mean all planning is now redundant?

Complexity began to express itself in examples such as moving call centres off-shore. This often resulted in more customer calls being unresolved, resulting in more work back at the core organisation. An academic used to know all the literature in their area of expertise, and was aware of work in associated areas, was connected to other leading academics in that area; now they find themselves unsure whether someone else has already worked through a particular topic that they are about to publish.

Ambiguity means that business leaders are unsure whether a new entrant to a market is a threat or an ally to their business model. For me as an individual, should I use a particular cloud service to store my valuable data, or will I discover it is vulnerable to some damaging cyber-attack?

It seems that we have moved from the relatively steady state world of the 1980's to the VUCA reality of the 21st century. In terms of the reach of human history, we are still in the early pioneering phase of discovering a new social order, particularly as it reflects on the secret world of the high-performing knowledge worker. We are still figuring out the best way to thrive in this VUCA world. I suspect that much of our work conventions, conventions we regard

now as essential, will not survive for much longer. New organisational models and management approaches are emerging to respond to the VUCA world. For example, we have seen the rise of Agile management, Management 2.0 or even Management 3.0¹ as some people call it.

Emerging New Ways of Working

New approaches are emerging at the level of the individual knowledge worker. New patterns of work are beginning to prevail, and those that adopt them, and make them their own are emerging as performing more highly.

For example, there is a surprising phenomenon in the context of the promise of the paperless office: a revived respect for paper-based note-taking. I now have a paper notebook with me all the time. I have experimented with early hand-held devices from the Palm Pilot through to the amazing iPhone, willing them to work for me. But I am now a firm believer in the “both-and” mindset of paper notebook alongside my electronic devices. The question is now how do we make these complementary through a simple, repeatable workflow, rather than wasteful duplications of the same records on different media.

Another example is that some of the practices of Agile project management have been translated for the individual in helping us shape our personal work. Agile and Lean offer a rich vein of techniques and approaches that can scale down to the work of you or me.

In my own personal journey, I have studied how to improve my own skills and self-organisation for most of my career. There is something about always working on myself that appeals to me. I’ve discovered it can pay huge dividends. I have had the honour of leading Pearce Mayfield, a learning and development business in the field of business change. We equip and empower change leaders, project and programme managers, and corporate strategists. As part of this, in our company, we are students of how adults learn and improve their performance. Lifelong learning is one of our values.

1 See Jurgen Appelo (2011).

This has led me to a number of key insights. For example, a crucial stepping stone in making the leap to becoming proficient in leading oneself well is being able to prioritise one's workload. Now, this isn't new news, but the way each person does this can be very different. I discovered clients who once prioritised their work using conventional ABC category techniques, but then became overloaded, and abandoned prioritisation altogether. This is throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

As you will see, in many respects the laboratory for much of this book has been me. I have road-tested all the approaches, techniques and practices included in this book.

What High Performers Do

We gained some of the key insights a few years ago when John Edmonds and I embarked on some research into high-performing programme and project managers. We'd noticed some chatter on the internet about getting into the minds of High Performers. The argument ran something like this: "If only we could work out the mental crib sheet (checklist) of High Performers, then we could codify that, follow it and more of us could achieve high performance." This comes from the perspective of classic cognitive psychology, the idea that we are shaped by our thoughts.

So we designed a research project around two key questions:

1. Did all high-performing project managers have this mental checklist? And, if so,
2. Was it the same?

We studied a population of programme and project managers over a period of six weeks, sending them questionnaires each week. At the end of the six weeks, we interviewed them and their line managers. We repeated this the following year with another group.

At first, we were a little disappointed. Yes, we were able to identify a small sub-group of high-performers. Yes, they all did appear to have a mental checklist... *But these were all different.* No two high performer lists matched exactly.

However, we did see some fascinating patterns of behaviours. These set the high-performers, or “Alphas” as Andy Crowe calls them, apart from the majority.² There were four:

Self-aware

They were all self-aware. We asked our volunteers, “What are you top five most important features that you focus on when you manage a programme or project?” Many could not give us five. But some did, including the high-performing sub-group. This indicated a habit of routinely reflecting on priorities and thinking.

Personal time margins

The Alphas all created and protected personal time margins. We tracked their use of time over the six weeks, and what consistently emerged among the high performers was the discipline of keeping some discretionary time back that no one else could touch. When we eventually asked them why this practice was so important to them, they sometimes replied as if we were stupid (which we probably were on this subject). The Alphas clearly thought this was obvious. They saw the future as more uncertain, less manageable, than did the majority. They were unwilling to commit to even a week’s planning without some personal time contingency. What if something unexpected happened, which it invariably did? They had a margin to draw upon.

When we asked those among the majority what they did when something unexpected but significant broke upon them, they had one of three strategies:

1. work late
2. work weekends or
3. allow other commitments to drop off the end of their to-do list.

2 *Alpha Project Managers.*

This personal margin appears to give our Alphas some resilience in the context of some pretty volatile programmes and projects. The actual amount of margin did vary; sometimes it was as much as a day a week, other times it was as little as a couple of hours, but none of the Alphas allowed others to fully schedule their week.

Leaning to action

They displayed consistent evidence of a leaning to action. We tracked their weekly activities, and they had a proclivity to take initiatives, to test things, to “poke” the system and see what happens. The Alphas were always taking the battle to a project rather than being driven by it.

Leaning to people

Finally, we saw another pattern in how Alphas used their discretionary time: they had a leaning to people. They spent far more of their time margin in moving towards key people in and around their projects than did the majority. Their actions spoke louder than their words: they put a high value on people engagement, on communicating and conversing effectively with important stakeholders.

We didn’t see any evidence that the Alphas were more gregarious or extrovert than others, simply that they had learned from experience that communicating well was critical in their delivery of a successful outcome.

We were not able to prove any causal relationship between their high-performance and communication skills, but there is an extremely strong correlation.

So if these were strong emerging traits in high-performers, surely the rest of us could take advantage of them too, couldn’t we?

No one is responsible for me but me

I am free, no matter what rules surround me. I am free because I know that I alone am morally responsible for every thing I do.

Robert Heinlein

There is a systemic problem in many work cultures: one that I call the **dependency mindset**. This is the attitude that says, “My skills development is somebody else’s responsibility.”

Whenever I see the dependency mindset it always concerns me. Occasionally in a workshop, someone might take the “teach me” attitude: “I’m a bucket, and you need to fill me with your training.” Ultimately no one can manage you but you. No one can take responsibility for your learning and development but you. The fact that you are still reading this means that to some extent you already agree with me. You are making some effort. You are taking that responsibility for yourself by exploring new thinking.

The novice will say, “Teach me.”³ That’s OK at the novice level. Beyond that, the knowledge worker needs to own their personal development. They need to pull that learning to themselves.

Our brains have incredible power. Most of us don’t even realise that we have it. One particular faculty of the human brain is to stand outside of our thinking and observe it. We can think about our thinking.⁴ Reflect on that for a moment; it is quite extraordinary. We can stand outside ourselves in our imaginations and observe the narrative of our own conscious thoughts.

Please face this now: no one but you can care for your mind, your thinking. All of us must own our own thinking habits. My invitation to you is to join me on a journey of exploration into the incredible powers you already have.

Nor can this journey be undertaken by those who believe they have reached their limit or who believe they are a victim. If you believe you have no more potential, you are probably right. If you believe you have more to learn and can achieve more, you will.

3 See Chapter 10 for a discussion on the different levels of self-leadership, including a definition of ‘Novice.’

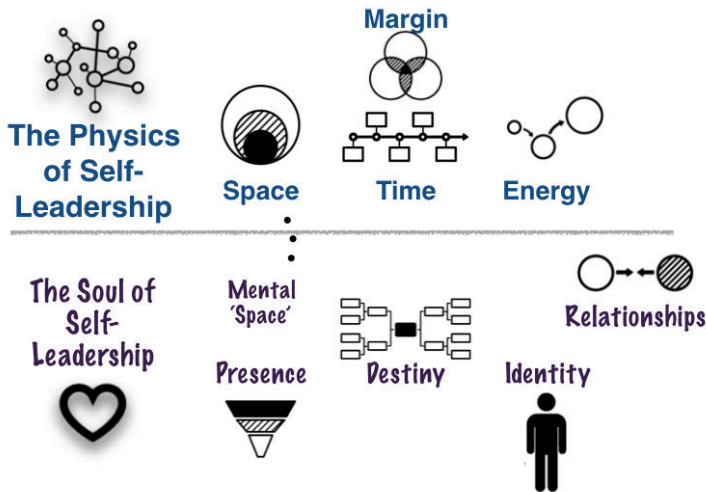
4 See the later chapters on Identity and Presence.

As we take responsibility for our own learning, believing that we are capable of much more, we will notice ourselves changing from a knowledge worker to a wisdom-mobiliser; a wisdom-mobiliser is able to make better sense of this turbulent world and so make better choices.

Michael Hyatt calls this “The Power of Choice.” You don’t have to be the victim. You may not have a choice in this present moment, but you can set your intentions and, over the longer-term, you will be able to exercise the right choices and benefit from them.

The main elements of this book

This diagram shows the main elements of the rest of this book:



The two major sections are *The Physics of Self-Leadership*, dealing with the tangibles of self-organisation, and *The Soul of Self-Leadership*, which treats the internal world of someone moving towards high performance.

The first section, the **Physics** of self-leadership, covers:

- **Margin** or slack, which is vital in any system. We will explore how keeping good margins or boundaries are a bedrock of improving our performance, as well as providing a valuable “shock absorber” for the unexpected in life. This is towards the top of the diagram because margins position us to use our time, space and energies optimally. The ability to create time margins, as we saw with our research, is a strong indicator of achieving high performance.
- **Space**, the external and internal (mental) space, and the abuse of that space, which is clutter. Tending to our mental and physical space positions us to perform better in all areas of life.

- When it comes to how we use **Time**, there are some key concepts and systems explored. Time is a non-renewable resource and so needs to be respected as such.
- Whilst many people focus on time management, our personal **Energy** is an area that we must manage and nurture. Some would argue that appropriate use and enhancement of our energy levels is even more important than attempting to “manage” time. I agree.

The Soul of Self-Leadership in the next section includes five chapters that deal with the more fundamental - below the surface - issues. These are dealt with under certain headings, but they are all profoundly interrelated. They are major themes of gaining personal mastery:

- Growing in a strong sense of personal **Identity** becomes more important than the novice might initially recognise. A strong sense of who we truly are allows us to exercise our freedom powerfully. We tackle a growing disease: endemic and chronic excessive busyness. There is a destructive kind of busyness; it creates a form of slavery that we might have considered to be part of the normal of present-day knowledge work. It is not. But we must approach it from a more powerful sense of our own identity.
- So the next chapter, **Presence** explores the power of living in the here and now and operating from this place. Our ability to reflect enables us to make sense of present reality, of our own internal scripts that continually run through our heads. We look at practices such as Meditation, Mindfulness and Prayer as means of gaining and maintaining a healthy sense of presence.
- Our **Destiny** is something we discover along the way. For most of us, our destiny discloses itself as we become more assured of who we are and become more self-aware. So Destiny or a sense of personal purpose or mission grows out of Identity and Presence.

- We look at the **Relationships** around us. As we move towards freedom, those significant relationships we all have will sometimes seek to inhibit or object to our new expressions of freedom. Some of these objections may be valid correctives. However, many are unhelpful attempts to make us conform to other's measures of immaturity. So we need means of protecting ourselves from unhelpful conformity.

Exercises

Throughout the book, you will find short exercises. You may want to just skim these as you read through for the first time - as I do - and come back to them later. This is part of managing our own learning. We all get greater value out of learning if we practice new concepts and approaches. Treat the exercises as an opportunity to practice.

Growing in self-leadership

The chapter on **Growing in self-leadership** will map out a generic journey into greater freedom and personal mastery. We will identify five stages where we get better at acquiring and honing our skills.

Your action plan

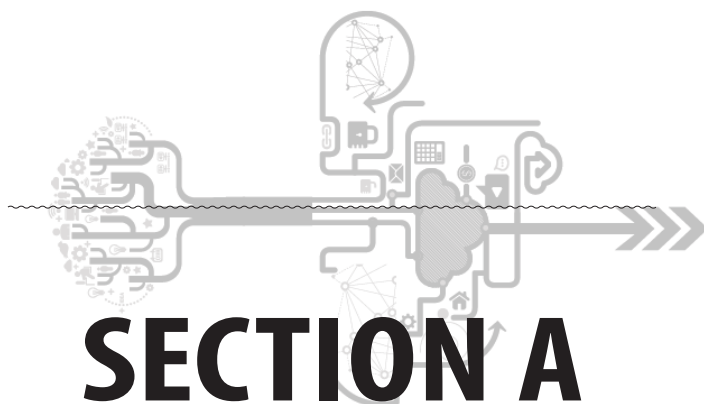
There is a final chapter - **Into action: towards a life more powerful** - on how to put some of the contents of this book into Action.

Now, you don't need to follow this book in sequence. Please jump to chapters that interest you. You are free. However, the order I have laid out the chapters in this book does have a logical sequence.

Summary

In this chapter, we have considered some of the forces at work in changing quite radically the world of work.

- The world we work in now is more
 - » Volatile
 - » Uncertain
 - » Complex and
 - » Ambiguous
- There are emergent new work strategies that can give us hope of not just surviving, but prospering.
- High performers give us a clue as to what these strategies might be:
 - » Being more self-aware: thinking about our thinking
 - » Building in margins into our lives
 - » Leaning to action
 - » Leaning to people.
- Ultimately, though, each one of us must take responsibility for ourselves and not be dependent on others to make things happen for us.
- Self-Leadership happens at two levels at least:
 - » The physical level, the physics of space, time and energy
 - » The inner world of the soul, our identity, knowing our destiny, being present, and how we handle relationships.



The Physics of Self-Leadership



Space, Time and Energy all act on each other to some extent.

Space is not merely how we order the external world of our personal space.

Just as important is how we order our interior mental space; our conscious thoughts and commitments.

In the chapter on Time, we consider what is usually labelled “time management”, about stewarding the flow of the non-renewable resource of time.

Finally, we look at taking care of our personal energy, how to work with its cycles, and how to develop rather more of it.

Onto paper: your notebook

Whether they realize it or not, many people approach computers and tablets with a state of mind less conducive to learning than the one they bring to paper.

From an article titled “The Reading Brain in the Digital Age: the Science of Paper vs. Screens”, Scientific American

As we go through the exercises in this section, you will notice that there is a heavy emphasis towards using a physical notebook, and writing your notes and lists with a pen or pencil. This is deliberate.

For the purposes of these exercises, you will find fewer distractions than on your PC or laptop, tablet or phone. You will enjoy a different level of focus and concentration. Trust me.

I want you to experiment with the experience of beginning your day with all devices off or on silent. Some of my clients have found this simple practice becomes a major breakthrough in developing better habits of good work. Some have immediately gained a new sense of confidence that they can shape their work environment rather more than they had believed possible.

Please don't think I am against technology; far from it. My colleagues can testify to this. I love technology, but we can over-rely on it.

Once you have practised these techniques on paper, you are free, of course, to take what you find valuable in what follows and convert them to electronic files, or migrate them to suitable software. I may even offer some suggestions on particular software and apps that have helped me.

A frequently asked question on my workshops is:

“Can I use electronic systems to write things down?”

Yes, of course, but please note three things:

1. I encourage you to use analogue stationery to get you practised. Continue with this for a few days. I recommend 28 days.
2. Technology is not always available when you need it: you find yourself in a place without wifi, batteries run out, systems crash, etc. So I recommend having a notebook with you all the time so that you can capture any thought as it occurs to you.

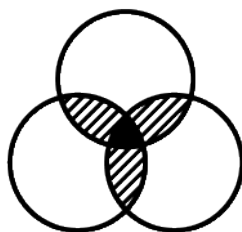
3. Technology itself can become a distraction. Initially, make the capturing experience as clean and as frictionless for yourself as possible.

So I urge you to practice with pen and paper. I find most people get used to this very quickly. They usually find it freeing. Some even enjoy the return to paper and pen after so long working exclusively on electronic systems. In fact, I've noticed a growing trend of people carrying and using paper notebooks as a legitimate working lifestyle.

Treat this advice as giving you permission to return to the joy of an analogue system.

CHAPTER 3

Margin



I deliberately try not to fill my calendar. I choose not to say yes to everything. Doing so would make me too busy and less effective at achieving my goals. I always want to have some margin of time in reserve, time I'm free to spend in any way I choose, including doing almost nothing at all.

Scott Berkun, *Mindfire: Big Ideas for Curious Minds*

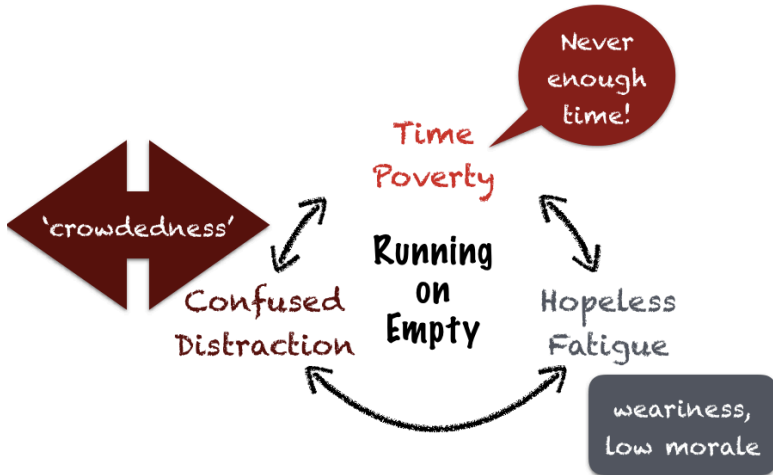
Julia is running on empty. Right now she is aware of high levels of frustration. She is annoyed with herself and the world. Her desk is a mess. Her PC desktop is also a mess. Her home is a mess. She is annoyed with herself that she wastes so much time hunting for the right piece of information.

But she DOESN'T HAVE TIME! Everybody around her seems to be making demands on her. She is worried about disappointing people. There is pressure on her to work later at the office. Her childminder is beginning to complain. Her children are already showing signs of resignation. She can't let herself think about such things right now. "Get this one project out of the way and then it will all be different," she keeps telling herself.

But she is so TIRED. She wakes up tired. Everything seems like so much more of an effort these days.

Julia is, in fact, living in the zone of “running on empty.” She experiences an extremely anxious vicious cycle:

Julia’s Vicious Cycle



Does this sound familiar? In fact, as I have interviewed people, I have found that most of us have dwelt in the zone of running on empty, where there is a vicious cycle of distraction, urgency and fatigue. This is not a life we choose to live, certainly not on a long-term basis. Some have tried and had nervous breakdowns or, in extreme cases, died before their time.¹

The remedy begins with creating margins for ourselves in the dimensions of space, time and energy. We can achieve very little before we do this. The path to good work is first to clear that path.

¹ As I was writing this, news broke of the third senior Swiss executive in recent months who ended his own life, ostensibly part of a brutal bullying, high-demand work culture.

Slack in the system

Slack at all levels is necessary to make the organization work effectively and to grow.

Tom DeMarco, *Slack: Getting Past Burn-out, Busywork, and the Myth of Total Efficiency*

In order to grow, we need space. In fact, we need some margin. In his book, *Slack*, Tom DeMarco uses the illustration of the slide-tile game.² The game works because one of the cells in the 4x4 matrix is empty. The tiles can be moved because of that empty space. There is slack.



He observes that modern management “wisdom” would look at the empty space, describe it as wasted space, and immediately seek to fill it. If it were filled with an extra tile then all the tiles would immediately be fixed; the system would be frozen in its current state.

This picture has resonated with me down through the years. Almost always when I assess a client organisation for its readiness to change I find an absence of slack - the spare capacity to make that change. Clients seem to expect everyone to make the change in addition to their “day job”, despite everyone being fully loaded.

So before we can move or grow, we must have slack or margin in our lives, otherwise, we will experience being “locked in” to a stream of activities and behaviours. Our margin can be expressed in terms of any or all of Space, Time and Energy.³

Personal margins are a major antidote to stress and a route to resilience. They can provide a valuable “shock absorber” for uncertainty. Many of us don’t recognise the need for these margins at first, so we don’t provide them for ourselves or neglect protecting them.

² Tom DeMarco, *Slack: Getting Past Burn-out, Busywork, and the Myth of Total Efficiency* (2001).

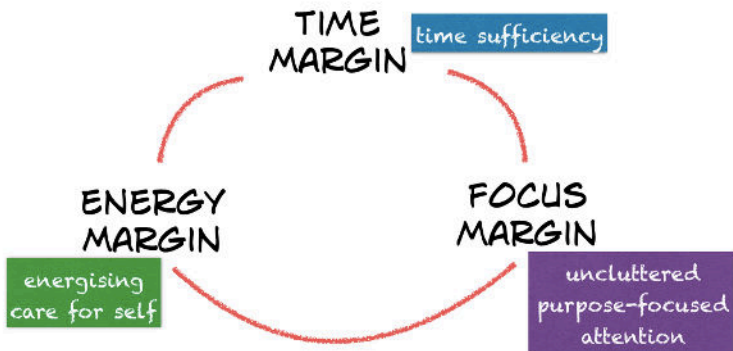
³ In fact, margin can - and should - include financial margin (savings), emotional margin (regularly experiencing joy), and spiritual margin (staying connected with what is eternally significant).

For example, we can provide ourselves with:

- Space margins, by clearing our workspace. Less obviously this might involve clearing up some storage or clear the desktop on our personal computer.
- Time margins, by blocking out time in our day or week where we choose how we use it.
- Energy margins, by attending to our personal fitness and scheduling a rhythm or variety into our working day that synchronises with our energy and attention cycles.

Julia's work lifestyle above was that of a victim. She could move to freedom, to a powerful work system, if she creates margins in all three dimensions:

THE POWERFUL PERSON'S VIRTUOUS CYCLE



As we shall begin to see, placing healthy margins into our lives builds a platform for future growth and effectiveness. Without margin in our workspace, in our calendar, in our health, and in our finances, we allow ourselves to be contained and shaped by life rather than acting upon it.

Handling Surprises

I had left it too late. The traffic was bad, worse than I thought. It was unexpected, even for the Heathrow area. I found myself running the quarter-mile from security to the departure gate in Heathrow for my Rotterdam flight. I got there just two minutes after the gate was closed. I had missed my flight. I vowed I'd never made that mistake again.

That was twenty years ago, and I now would still rather wait in an airport than experience that stress, disruption and disappointment again. I build in time margins. I weigh the notional “wasted” time in airports - and it is never really wasted - against the risk of missing a flight.

Life never goes quite to plan. We are taken by surprise by the unexpected. These can range from mild interruptions to life-changing events; they can be either pleasant or unpleasant.

As we considered above, building margins into our work patterns helps us cope with the unexpected. They give us resilience to surprises. Higher levels of personal mastery have a realism about them. One high performer told me that the unexpected always happens, so he allows for it.

Resilience comes partly with providing margin. However, merely providing spare time is not a total solution. The unexpected needs to be assessed. Sometimes this kind of triaging helps us merely to note that threat, opportunity, unforeseen issue or inspiration, and we decide we can come back to it later. Other times, we can become aware of recurring patterns. This is usually a signal that there is a deeper root cause that we need to investigate.

Your forgetfulness doesn't make it my emergency!

Andy Taylor

When we assess surprises carefully, there is a category of surprise and urgency that may not belong to us. It is someone else's urgency that they are trying to transfer onto us. We can easily be seduced into accepting it, especially if it comes from a powerful person, such as our boss. Whatever the source, we need to develop strategies to protect ourselves from other people's urgency.

In Appendix A, I've included the classic Eisenhower Decision Matrix, much valued by the late Stephen Covey. Quadrant III is the category to look out for: the Unimportant/Urgent. We need clear personal boundaries to guard our time against theft from this kind of urgency. For example, a colleague has suddenly run out of space on their desktop computer. In that moment you might be focusing intently on your Most Important Task (MIT). Unless they are working on something critically important to you, you might choose not to be distracted by their emergency. You politely say, "Give me an hour and then if you still have a problem, I'll see what I can do." They had a responsibility to monitor their own storage. You might help them later, at a moment less inconvenient to you - like in an hour. Working with our margins, our priorities and our boundaries doesn't make us uncaring, just responsible.

Exercise: Looking for margin

Take a few moments to consider these questions. Write down your answers below:

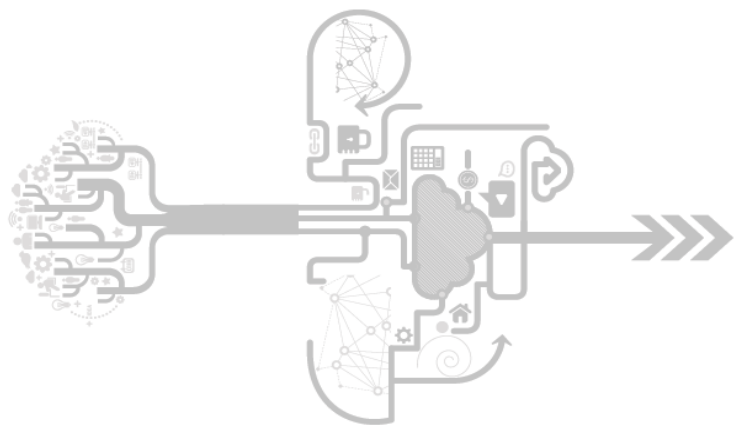
- What is the physical space like that I work within? What negative effects is it having on my productivity? What would I like to change?
- What are all the outstanding commitments, the work still to be completed, that are buzzing around in my head right now? How are these distracting me in this present moment? How might I get these thoughts out of my conscious mind?
- In my week ahead, where is the slack? Is it enough for my best work? How can I create more time slack?
- How is my level of physical energy? Am I getting unreasonably tired? What exercise could I do simply and easily?

Summary

In this chapter, we've looked at the critical role of margins in our lives.

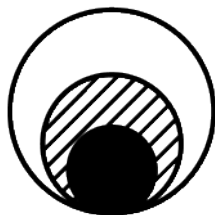
- High-performers have learned to create and guard their margins.
- Margin is the necessary slack in the system. Any change is certain to fail without it.
- When we find ourselves running on empty, it is usually because our margins are absent or depleted.
- Without margins we are vulnerable to surprises throwing us off course or even destroying our efforts.
- We need to provide margins for ourselves to do our best work and to grow.
- We need margins in:
 - » Our working spaces, both physical and electronic.
 - » Our schedules and diaries; our time.
 - » Our health, in our bodies.
 - » Our finances.

So margins are the first thing we should attend to in becoming more effective.



CHAPTER 4

Space



We need space to do our best work. The opposite of space is crowdedness or clutter. In this chapter, we consider both external physical space and the internal mental space of our conscious thinking.

Our external work space is obvious but not as trivial as we might first think. It can impede our ability to grow in doing better work. If it is cluttered, it will distract us. Clutter will trip us up.

There is also an internal space in our thinking. We must learn to identify internal clutter and rid ourselves of it. Internal clutter will also impede our progress in self-leadership.

The link between clutter and distraction

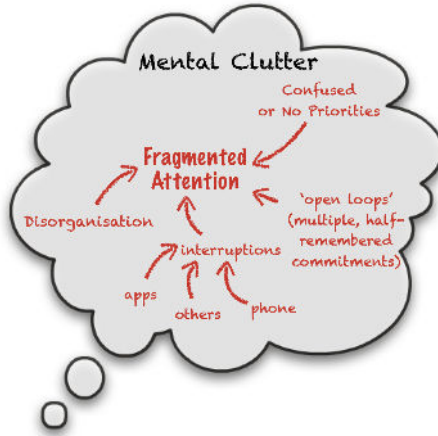
It's human nature to get distracted by minor issues. We play Trivial Pursuit with our lives. Henry David Thoreau observed that people live lives of "quiet desperation", but today a better description is aimless distraction. Many people are like gyroscopes, spinning around at a frantic pace but never getting anywhere.

Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*

"Don't distract the driver." So the sign read on a bus I was on. I had to agree. My safety rested in the ability of this driver to focus on the most important task in that context: the road and everything related to it needed to be scanned constantly as we were moving.

As a knowledge worker, though, isn't my ability to attend to what I am doing my first priority?

Consider this diagram:



The sources of our distraction are many. The diagram shows a key source to the left is physical clutter through disorganisation. Then to the right, we have the internal, mental and emotional drivers that distract us.

If we don't know what comes next because we rely solely on other people driving our agenda, then we are likely to live without priorities. So when we are offered choice, we have nothing to guide us as to which comes first.

Then there are those nagging, half-remembered commitments we have made in our work and private lives, from multiple sources. David Allen calls these "open loops"; commitments we may not have recorded anywhere, hoping we will not forget.¹ Without realising it, we entertain these open loops that become a major source of mental distraction.

And we are interrupted when we attempt to work. The potential sources of interruption have multiplied in this turbulent world. We have phones that no longer merely ring when someone calls us, but ping when there is an email coming through, or a post on Facebook, or on LinkedIn, or whatever the app may be. Designers of communications software and social media make an assumption that our default preference is to be notified audibly when there is a message. After all, these designers have developed the world's most amazing app for us, haven't they? Why wouldn't they assume that is the case?

1

David Allen, *Getting Things Done: How to Achieve Stress-Free Productivity* (2002).

Finally, as we try to work, to produce the best from our minds, we have a sense of dis-ease in our minds that we are not giving our best; for most of us, we experience this as low-grade anxiety. For some it becomes so acute it contributes to burn-out.

So if we allow our work environment to shape our work, we are setting ourselves up for unproductive distraction.

Exercise: Dealing with distractions

Take a moment to list all the distractions you have been aware of during your last working day:

- List all these distractions out now.
- Jot down not only the distraction but also a short note on how it has affected your performance.
- What could you do to defend yourself from these distractions in future?

Keep this list with you for the next few days, and add to it whenever you become aware of anything that is distracting you. The first step to dealing with a distraction is to become fully aware of it and how it is distracting you.

Physical clutter

Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery

We become aware of clutter in our working environments when we can't find that paper or that particular tool. These moments reveal the presence of clutter that has grown around us whilst we weren't looking. So we take matters in hand and tidy up.

Most of us develop systems and habits of order in our physical working space. This avoids the tedium and wasted time of constantly searching for things. Without routines of tidying, after a period of time our space becomes untidy again. So we need to order it again. This seems to be an example of the second law of thermodynamics in action: if left to itself, everything reverts to chaos.

So what? Well, this external clutter seems to have an internal effect on our mental focus and clarity... and that really does matter. We can deny this is true, but research seems to show otherwise as we will see below.

Some of us resist tidying for reasons of busyness. We tell ourselves: "I'm too busy right now. I'll get around to this later." This is usually a false economy. It is better to move to the discipline of maintaining an orderly space.

Some of us resist tidying because we have developed an unhealthy emotional attachment to objects that no longer belong in our workspace. So we need to be aware that external physical clutter is linked to internal emotional forces.

I recall watching a reality TV programme called "Life Laundry" a few years ago, where an expert tackled the physical space problems of chronic hoarders. The host of the programme was an expert because she was a skilled counsellor who was able to walk her clients through a very visceral bereavement process from the stuff to which they had become attached. Time and

again, her clients needed to address internal emotional issues, such as bereavement of a loved one, before they could proceed to dump material they had hoarded for no practical reason.

For this reason, I am not going to judge other people's clutter. But we need to face up to the reality that denial is not a strategy. Denial might yield a payoff in the short term to avoid pain, but it is harmful in the long term. If we recognise an unhealthy attachment to a crowded environment in ourselves, it could be a sign of something deeper, and we might need to seek help from someone we can trust and take into our confidence.

Let me make one qualification: some temporary clutter is inevitable. So I am not advocating an 'always-clear' desk policy. In most instances, this is just getting legalistic about the whole matter. We all have to find our own balance in ordering our external space. One of my reviewers observed that the opposite of clutter - permanently clean and clear spaces - could be a sign of another kind of emotional imbalance: obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Recently, many have found Marie Kondo's *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying*¹ very inspiring and helpful. The KonMari method is about tackling clutter in the right order, keeping what you love and doing it all at once. In all honesty, I can't say that I have yet achieved the "doing it all at once" bit, but it is a really helpful exploration of how we can engage with the physical spaces we live and work within and make them work for us.

Our physical work environment

In their book, *Peopleware*, Tom deMarco and Tim Lister describe some research they did as part of the Atlantic Software Guild in the late 1980's.² They wanted to settle the argument that software developers always seemed to have when they gather together in bars: "Which software language is more productive?" So they set up a controlled experiment. After the research had run for two or three years, they had, in the end, gathered results from 92 organisations across North America, the UK and Scandinavia. The experiment involved pairs of programmers in each organisation testing each other's work and measuring the time to achieve "bug-free" solutions to the same coding problem.

1 Marie Kondo, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying*, Vermillion, (2011).

2 Tom DeMarco and Tim Lister, *Peopleware: Productive Projects and Teams*. 3rd Edition (2013)

When the results came back, the research team was quite disappointed. Apart from Assembler (a machine code-level language), which emerged as very slow to develop, all the other languages - Pascal, COBOL, Fortran, C, etc. - appeared to perform more or less the same; there was no statistically significant difference between them.

However, what did become very apparent was that there were huge performance differences between organisations. When it came to the experience level of a programmer, there seemed to be no correlation with performance after about six months' experience. Also, there appeared to be no correlation between performance and salary. So De Marco and Lister were approached by the poorer performing organisations, those in the fourth quartile, wanting to know why they were performing so badly compared with others.

What was more surprising were the factors they discovered that were found to have a substantial effect on performance:

- It seemed to matter who the programmer worked with. If it was a high-performer, the partner seemed to raise their performance to match. Conversely, if the pair mate took forever to finish, so did their partner.
- Workspace: it seemed that desk space below a certain threshold impaired the programmer's productivity. It seemed that external space allowed internal clarity.
- Ability to defend oneself from interruptions, such as being able to silence one's phone or divert it, and to protect oneself from needless interruption.

The Code Wars research concluded several things that I believe still hold true today. Most of all, our working environment matters. We need uncluttered, non-distracting space to produce our best work.

Our ability to have uninterrupted thinking time, the ability to "flow" in our problem-solving and creativity is more a factor of our external space than perhaps we might first credit. DeMarco describes the concentration of a software programmer like a diver who takes a period of time to dive to the sea floor. When we are thinking through something deeply and we are interrupted it is rather like the diver being hauled back to the surface again.

A recent study of 4,963 adults by Florida State University found that an unclean workplace and exposure to mould, lead or loud noises reduced clear thinking. Joseph Grzywacz, the Norejane Hendrickson Professor of Family and Child Sciences and lead researcher on the study, was quoted as saying, “There are real things in the workplace that can shape cognitive function: some that you can see or touch, and others you can’t.”³ We showed that both matter to cognitive health in adulthood.”

Mental clutter

Perhaps the most damaging clutter is of the invisible kind. It is mental clutter. It is the habit of abusing one’s conscious thinking by keeping to mind all kinds of matters in addition to the job in hand. With poor working practices, most of us have got into the habit of leaving litter lying around the conscious area of our brains. It too can become cluttered.

We allow our thoughts to fly in and out. We keep coming back to those commitments we must not forget, those worries that keep surfacing. We distract ourselves because our internal mental clutter is so noisy. Some of us may have lived so long this way that it strikes us as perfectly normal, something that could not be changed even if we wanted.

Communications engineers have a measure called the “signal to noise ratio.” They know that there will always be some noise on the telecommunications line. The engineer does not try to eliminate noise completely, but rather to reduce the noise and amplify the signal, so that there is now clear communication. This is a useful metaphor. Life doesn’t necessarily shout louder over the noise so that we hear what is important. Sometimes we need to reduce the noise of what is not so important.

What if there was a way to reduce clutter and so dampen the internal noise in our conscious thinking? What if we could adopt some simple personal practices that allowed us to give our full attention to the matter in hand?

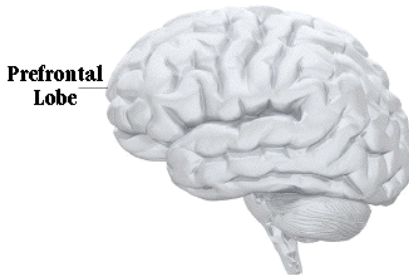
Well, there is a very simple way.

A (very) rough guide to your brain

The human brain is a wonderful thing. It starts working the moment you are born, and never stops until you stand up to speak in public.

George Jessel

When it comes to the matter of conscious thinking, the most critical part of the brain is the pre-frontal lobe. Here your brain processes all conscious thinking. It is crucial to our higher-order thinking. Think of it as our limited mental space. It is so limited, that our brain is designed to move thoughts out of the pre-frontal lobe to make space for other conscious thoughts. David Rock described it this way: if the space in our pre-frontal lobe is represented in monetary terms, it would be the few coins in our pocket or purse, whereas the capacity of our whole brain would be equivalent to the entire US economy.⁴ This is why habits are so functional, where the pre-frontal lobe can trust other parts of the brain to remember a routine or a piece of information, whilst it consciously gets on with something else.



Our habits are functional.⁵ They are a brilliant way of the brain hardwiring practices so that we do not need to consciously work on them all the time. The path to personal mastery can be viewed as developing new, better hard-wired habits, leaving our thinking space uncluttered.

⁴ David Rock, *Your Brain at Work : Strategies for Overcoming Distraction, Regaining Focus, and Working Smarter All Day Long*. HarperBusiness (2009).

⁵ See Charles Duhigg's *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do, and How to*

This is critically relevant to the higher levels of skill acquisition we will explore later, where intuition and “flow” play a much bigger part in our daily performance.

Mental de-cluttering & focus

We can de-clutter our minds and so enhance our mental focus. Rather than obsess about removing all mental distractions, we simply work on this signal to noise ratio in our conscious thinking. We can all do this, irrespective of what we might initially believe.

The basic strategy for clearing the noise of clutter is to get commitments out of our head and onto some external record. Initially, I advise doing this on paper.

Getting our open commitments, our “open loops”, out of our heads and onto some list of commitments only works if we commit to returning to that list regularly. This is because our conscious brains can only relax and let go of the open loops, as long as it can trust us to bring these commitments back to attention later. If I prove myself untrustworthy of going back to those records in a regular cycle, my conscious brain won’t be relaxed enough to release those commitments. My brain hasn’t learned to trust my new habits.

So a key important dimension of de-cluttering our lives is in the area of our conscious thinking. The idea is to allow us to use our neocortex to focus on one thing at a time. It is a more effective way of thinking and working.⁶ We will practice habits of removing interruptions, distractions and other thoughts onto paper, allowing us to come back to them later.

I’ve found it helpful to consider a commitment, say to pick up an ingredient for supper, as not worthy of cluttering up my conscious thinking. So I will capture it somewhere. If I do this, my productivity boosts. My brain thanks me. I’ve replaced these old cluttering habits with superior new ones until I am not conscious of them anymore.

Change, Random House (2013).

6 See the discussion on multi-tasking in chapter 5.

Exercise: Create your to-do list

So, do yourself a favour; begin to de-clutter your brain with a simple list. Here are some tips:

- Using a notebook, simply jot down as many items that concern you, your 'to do' list. Don't censor what you put on this list right now. Just list things as they come to mind.
- Become aware of all the jobs awaiting you, the approaching deadlines you must meet, the projects awaiting you, the commitments you have made to other people.
- Don't restrict yourself to work matters. Your private/home commitments are valid. Put them on your list.
- Don't try to list them in any order of importance.
- Simply list as many items as you can until you think you have 'emptied your head.'

Why lists?

In *The Checklist Manifesto*, Atul Gawande explores the power of the humble checklist.⁷ From his experiences as a surgeon working for the World Health Organisation he showed how checklists began to reduce, sometimes quite dramatically, errors in routine surgery across the world, how aircraft have lists for particular contexts, including emergencies, that store the experiences of many previous flights, allowing flight deck crew to focus on what matters most in an emergency.

When I read his book, I was struck by how haughty I have been about the simple list. In this turbulent world, a technique like making and reviewing lists seems far too simple, doesn't it? Yet lists work. Lists are powerful. The checklist is a particular type of list, but many of the benefits of checklists are true for other kinds of lists as well.

Perhaps, in using more sophisticated tools, we make this area of personal organisation far too complicated.

⁷ Atul Gawande, *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right*, Metropolitan Books (2009).

It seems to me that lists work both in their creation and in their review. They help simplify workflow and clarify communications within teams. They also allow a sense of personal flow in our own self-leadership, allowing a quiet confidence to grow in our daily routines.

In-trays: we all have them

We noted earlier in this chapter that our space becomes cluttered. How does that happen? It is because we all have In-trays, channels of stuff that flow into our private world. We may still have a physical In-tray on our office desk where people drop off the post, printed reports and magazines.



We also have the less visible In-trays of email, of messages from social media and so on. With the growth of communications channels and apps, we have created another attention challenge for ourselves: our attention is now fragmented across multiple media, our email Inboxes, LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp... the list goes on.

These are all flows of messages and materials into our lives representing other people's requests and demands for our attention.

If we are to gain control of the noise coming into our lives we need build in some regular practices of review. This will involve at least an agreement with ourselves about how frequently we review a particular In-tray and the rules we apply to what is relevant.

Exercise: List your In-trays

Using the Table below:

- List all your In-trays - physical and electronic.
- Estimate how frequently you check them.
- Note how you check them - scanning for important messages, etc.

In-tray	Frequency of Check	What I look for
<i>e.g. work email</i>	<i>e.g. four times a day</i>	<i>e.g. urgent client requests</i>

Other people's to-do list for you

When I was a boy, my mother would give me a list of jobs to do. I learned the discipline of doing them first and doing them quickly so that I could “get my life back” and enjoy the rest of my day.

In our day we have other people giving us their to-do list. It is called the email inbox. The problem for me used to be that I would apply the same strategy to my email inbox as I had done with my mother's list. This didn't work when my daily emails into my inbox rose above about 20 or 30. I found myself spending most of my day responding to these messages. My irritation would rise as people replied to my responses before I had finished. I would fail, and get behind, facing two-day old emails in my inbox. This bothered me. It bothered me too much.

I realised that I had been seduced into shaping my working day around other people's agendas. I became totally driven by my emails. I've discovered in my workshops that most other people have been seduced in this way from time to time.

Is this always bad? Not necessarily. Some people are in a support function and a rapid response to an email question is part of their performance. Others are part of a project team, particularly a virtual team - spread geographically - that may be using email to coordinate their work and ask on-the-fly questions. In these cases, always scanning the email inbox is an important part of their job.

But for the rest of us, this is not the case. Also, we may have an addiction to checking our inbox frequently. This is something only each of us can answer honestly. So how do we get back ownership of our work schedules? I suggest two things:

1. Do not start your day looking at your inbox. Instead, spend that time planning your day and identifying your most important work, or even beginning that important work while you are fresh.
2. Do not treat email as a medium of urgency. Email has a way of making us feel we need to respond instantly. We do not. I recommend planning on reviewing your inbox twice a day, no more.

Otherwise, email can become a major source of distraction.

Optimal focus

Steph is a senior partner in a law firm. She is a senior partner because she has learned to create space around herself: an environment conducive to allowing her optimal focus when her work requires it.

Externally Steph has been able to create a protected workspace. She has two: one at her chambers and one at home. Her preferred workspace for uninterrupted work is home. She has created appropriate, predictable order. For example, she uses three tickler files: one labelled A-Z for current cases, one with pockets labelled by month, and the third labelled 1 to 31 for days of the current month. When she first started using these files in chambers, her colleagues teased her. They called it, “low-tech” and “from the Ark.” But it works for her. She is mature enough to know that one particular system does not work for everyone.

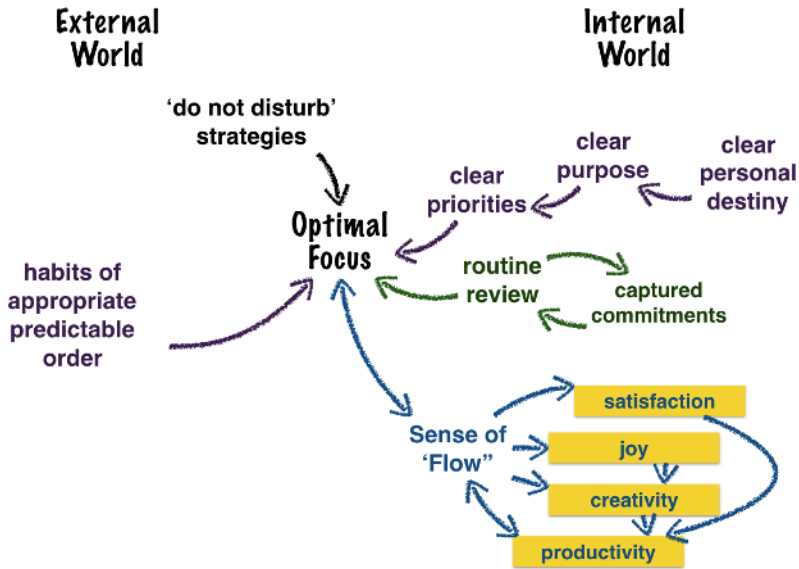
Steph’s maxim is “keep it simple.” Anything more complicated would be a distraction in itself. She has a Windows-based laptop because that syncs well with the corporate client system in her practice. She mirrors her physical filing with a similar file structure on her laptop. Rather like always having a place for your car keys, she always puts similar items in the same places, and rarely has to waste time fishing around for them. She also has a Day-to-a-page Diary that doubles for her daybook. Her colleague, Frank, says he has a better daybook using the bullet journal system, but she doesn’t care; hers is a system that is appropriate for her style of working.

When she needs a period of focused effort, she will shut her door. The shared PA knows that signal and will help protect Steph from interruptions when her door is shut. She also puts her desk phone on 'divert' and switches her smartphone to silent; she hasn't yet learned how to silence all the alerts on her phone. Her informal 'contract' with the world is that when she working from home, she will never be uncontactable for more than four hours, and when she is in the office, that reduces to an hour.

Steph carries forward a list of priorities from day-to-day in her Day-to-a-Page Diary. She could have a simpler system, but she will refine it later. She treats her system as a work-in-progress, periodically tweaking it. As she migrates her commitments each evening - this is when she thinks about the next day's work - she will often abandon a task as no longer relevant and change the priorities as new cases or emergencies arise.

Since she adopted this personal organisation system, Steph has found she can connect with a pleasurable emotional mix. As she began to focus more consistently, more deeply and for longer periods, she experienced what some call "flow", a heightened state of engagement in her work. With that came feelings of enjoyment and satisfaction. As well as realising she is more productive, she is more creative in being aware of other strategies her clients could consider. She has become much in demand.

Instead of the Clutter syndrome we reviewed earlier in this chapter, Steph's environment looks rather more like this:



Internally, the diagram above is the mirror opposite of clutter.

Regarding priorities, notice that these are also informed by each project's purpose. In the next chapter, we will look a little deeper into the reasons for particular work items. This will help further clarify our priorities. Later, in *The Soul of Self-Leadership*, we will consider how priorities are clarified and grounded in a growing sense of our personal destiny.

The basic strategy for removing the 'noise' of the open loops, is to capture them, to record them somewhere, then to build on that self-organisation discipline with another: routinely reviewing these commitments.

Exercise: Your focused world

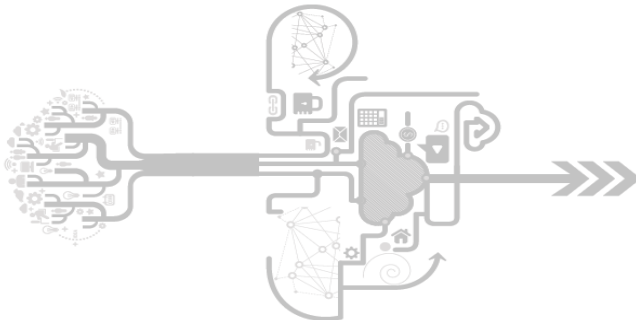
Now try this. Take five minutes, and jot down some notes as things occur to you:

- Imagine yourself in your perfect workspace. Don't limit yourself to what presently seems practically possible; dream big.
 - » What would it look like? On your desk? Around your desk?
 - » What kind of PC, desktop or laptop would you use, and how would you manage its storage?
 - » Where would you physically store your paper files and records?
- How will you protect yourself from interruptions?
 - » In-person interruptions?
 - » Telephone interruptions?
 - » Email and app interruptions?
- Now imagine you are working on an important piece of work you have been looking forward to working on.
 - » What do you notice as you work?
 - » What does it feel like?

We will return to the subject of our imagination later but, if you did this exercise, and imagined your ideal work environment in some detail, you are well on your way to creating that as a reality.

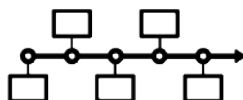
Summary

- Our external and internal spaces affect our ability to do good work.
- Distraction is the opposite of focus, and clutter is a major source of cognitive distraction.
- The first step in dealing with distractions is to become aware of them.
- Clutter in a physical workspace impairs our productivity.
- We may be less aware of mental clutter, those unfinished, half-remembered commitments.
- We over-estimate the capacity of our conscious thinking to handle several things at the same time.
- Mental de-cluttering is about exporting the 'open loops' onto some kind of record.
- The simple list is very powerful.
- Most of us have multiple In-trays, even though we don't always recognise them as such.
- The email Inbox can become someone else's to-do list for you.
- An organised and de-cluttered physical workspace, as well as mental cognitive space, frees us to focus optimally and do our best work.



CHAPTER 5

Time



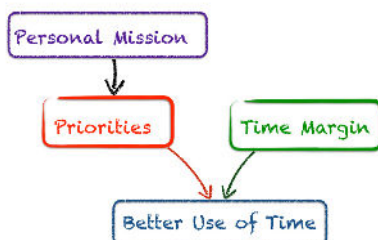
I love deadlines. I love the whooshing sound they make as they fly past.

Douglas Adams

Time poverty, a belief that we don't have enough time, has an urgent, stressful and anxious quality to it. That is its grip on us.

Clearly, many of us are engaging with time in a poor way. In this chapter, we will take a good look at how we use time and what approaches are available to help us use our time more effectively.

This diagram illustrates an important context in the better use of our time. Where we provide ourselves with time margins, and where we consciously choose between our work by prioritising, then we are likely to use our time more effectively. Priorities themselves become clearer where we have a clearer understanding of our own personal mission.¹



¹ See the chapter on Identity in the section on *The Soul of Mastery* for more on our Personal Mission.

A one-time offer

Isn't this really what is called time management?

Yes, but the concept of 'time management' doesn't really make sense. Consider this: to talk about managing time is about as meaningful as a fish managing water. We are in time. We can't manage it. A more accurate term, although a little clumsy, might be "time stewardship." We can steward our day if we choose. Time has a way of just, ... well, ... passing.

Don't we all know something about time management?

There is a reason why we all need to return to this subject. We all experience a sense of drift in our time disciplines. We are all recidivists. It is healthy for us to come back to our use of time regularly and assess critically whether we are using our time optimally.

Isn't this pretty basic stuff for a book on self-leadership?

In the physics of self-leadership, time is often the dimension of early wins. When we look at our time usage again, this perspective yields some pretty obvious adjustments that can give us huge leverage over other areas of our lives.

We can easily overlook a fundamental of time: it is a non-renewable resource.² We will never have today again. This makes it different from other resources.³ Someone once said that learning how to live well is rather like learning to play the piano watched by a concert hall audience. So how we understand time and how we use this non-renewable resource becomes vital in developing our self-leadership.

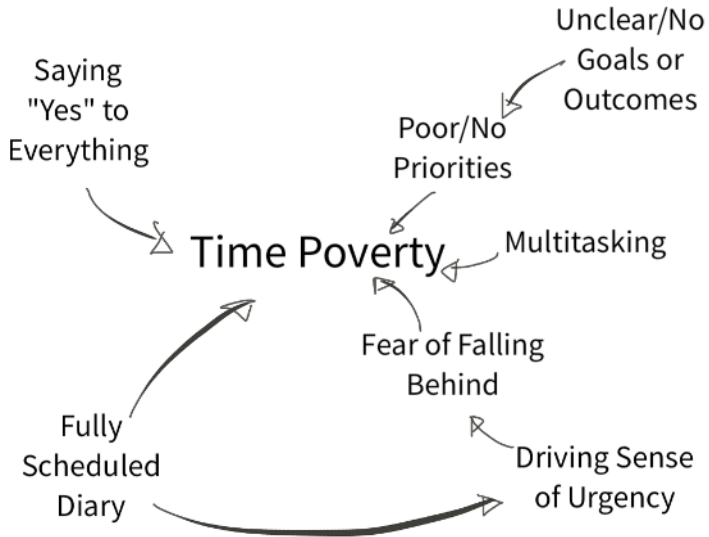
So, who stole my time?

I've noticed a growing phenomenon of time poverty over the last twenty years at least. Younger people entering knowledge work have assumed time poverty is normal. I don't believe we should accept it as inevitable. Nor should we accept that it is healthy.

2 I know there are aspects of quantum physics that refute that time is non-renewable and linear, but I am discussing this in the context of our day-to-day, hour-to-hour working lives.

3 One of the reasons I believe that the movie *Groundhog Day* was so intriguing to many is that we watch a man fated to live the same day over and over again. During the course of this repeated living one day, the so-called "Groundhog Day", the hero learns, adapts, and eventually he grows. If you haven't yet seen this great movie, I suppose I should have given a "spoiler alert." Sorry.

Consider this diagram, the equivalent of the Clutter/Distraction diagram in the previous chapter:



Time poverty doesn't come from one single source. It has multiple drivers. In that sense it is complex. As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, a lack of clear priorities leaves us open to becoming time-poor. Multi-tasking, so well-accepted in many work environments, has been shown by research to create more errors and waste more time than it appears to solve. Yet some of us are so addicted to it and to the false sense of heroism that goes with it that we refuse to agree with the evidence. Then there is a lack of time margin. A fully scheduled diary is the evidence of this. Finally, we respond to time poverty with another blend of negative mood music, the anxiety that we are falling behind, and that we will never hope to overtake our workload. Much of this is driven by what Charles Hummel calls "The Tyranny of the Urgent."⁴

Instead, we need to bring a self-confident identity to situations where we are urged to over-extend ourselves. We need to be able to say, politely but firmly, "No" to work requests. It appears that many of us fail to do that.

Exercise: Taking stock of your week

As in all other aspects of life leadership, reality is our friend. It's helpful to take a long, hard look at how we really spend our time. I recommend completing a log of our working week. In a manner of speaking, the Heisenberg principle operates here: as soon as we observe our use of time we begin to change it. It bumps us out of the swirl of our activities and helps us to stand back to take an honest stock of the reality of where our time goes.

So for the next week, track your use of working time. Expect to recover time as you do this.

You can use the following time log to help you. I don't recommend going into greater detail than 15-minute chunks of time; anything more detailed will become too onerous, obsessive even, and you might not complete this important exercise.

<i>Day:</i>	<i>Mon.</i>	<i>Tues.</i>	<i>Weds.</i>	<i>Thurs.</i>	<i>Fri.</i>	<i>Sat.</i>	<i>Sun.</i>
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0815							
0830							
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<i>Day:</i>	<i>Mon.</i>	<i>Tues.</i>	<i>Weds.</i>	<i>Thurs.</i>	<i>Fri.</i>	<i>Sat.</i>	<i>Sun.</i>
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The myth of multi-tasking

I was leading an *Organising Yourself Effectively* workshop for a global client. I began to challenge the accepted convention of multi-tasking. Whilst most in the room quietly agreed, one delegate, a former nurse, challenged me quite warmly on this. She maintained that multi-tasking was essential in nursing and she felt that multi-tasking for a nurse was evidence of their competence. In a busy ward, they were expected to cope with several things at the same time.

The problem with this conviction is that research does not support it. It is a popular, firmly-held myth.¹ Studies have shown, among nurses in particular, that where people attempt two or more tasks at the same time, their productivity drops and the number of errors increase. The Dreyfus brothers' research showed that it was not multi-tasking that distinguished the proficient nurse, but rather their ability to read situations for previously unnoticed patterns, and to prioritise from experience.² Instead, experienced nurses observed that novices would behave like 'rabbits in headlights' when two demands were made upon them; the competent knew which to attend to first, and which had to wait. In this respect, nursing is no different from other forms of knowledge work.

Multi-tasking is not doing many things at once
so much as doing more things badly.

Quoted by Andy Taylor

Multi-tasking is an enduring myth. We can't do it, and we shouldn't attempt it. Rather we should look for the optimal, in-the-moment flow of that most important one thing.

¹ See Dave Crenshaw's *The Myth of Multitasking: How Doing It All Gets Nothing Done* (2008).

² See chapter 10 for a fuller account of their findings.

Limiting your work-in-progress

Though I am always in haste, I am never in a hurry, because I never undertake more work than I can go through with calmness of spirit.

John Wesley

Lean manufacturing and agile practice seek to limit the work-in-progress, the work going on at any one time. Think of our capacity for work-in-progress as a pipe that our actions flow through like water. This seems to be a strange counter-intuitive phenomenon: the narrower our pipe, the faster water appears to flow through it. On any particular day, the less amount of work I take on, the faster I seem to get work done. I find myself pulling more work forward into “today” than I had committed to do. This seems to be a key to higher productivity. This could be to do with the limited capacity of our pre-frontal lobe that we considered earlier.

Using techniques such as Personal Kanban, I have learnt to limit my ambitions about what I can cover in a day.³ If I commit to attempting a smaller number of tasks, it not only helps motivate me but also speeds the work across my desk.⁴ Frequently I find that I can complete those tasks and more in a day. This builds in me a sense of overcoming the waiting giant of pending work.

The reverse is true. I can discourage myself if I am over-ambitious in what I think I can take on in a day, and fall far short of this. Over-optimism in estimating, either in our own work and in £multi-billion projects is a well-documented bias in human thinking. It’s now a recognised cognitive bias called the optimism bias.⁵ We need to compensate for it. This will require a conscious attempt to develop a new working habit.

³ See Appendix B.

⁴ My copyeditor, Elaine Taylor, remarked that it mirrored what she had done for years: setting herself 1 task for the morning, 1 for the afternoon, and 1 for the evening. “It feels so good if you actually achieve more than that!”

⁵ This is even recognised by the UK’s HM Treasury, in their Green Book for budgeting and planning through business cases. See Flyvbjerg, Bent (2011). “Over Budget, Over Time, Over and Over Again: Managing Major Projects”. In Morris, Peter W. G.; Pinto, Jeffrey; Söderlund, Jonas. *The Oxford Handbook of Project Management*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 321–344.

Exercise: Limiting your work-in-progress

We can choose to limit the number of active tasks or projects we work on at any one time. This is a significant concept that we will return to later. We will consider later why limiting our work-in-progress is important for a personal effectiveness.

For now, though:

- Make another list: this time of all your current work.
- Ask yourself, what SIX projects or work items do you need to have at hand?
- Now try to reduce this list to THREE, for the next working day. Could you do that? If not, why not?

Thinking outcomes

One of the most powerful approaches to stewarding our time better is to change our perspective in order to look at whatever we are working on from the point of view of its **outcome**. We can ask ourselves: what will it look like when this activity or project is finished? What should it look like?

There are a number of benefits from this small shift:

- We move from a state of busyness - a sense of being driven by our to-do list of activities - to one of moving towards the **results** we want to achieve.
- We clearly link what we are doing now with future **benefits**. This holds before our consciousness the link between this activity now and its purpose or meaning to us.
- Related to these first two points, it can reveal **waste**. We are more likely to identify redundant or wasteful activities when focused on the outcome and so eliminate them. We are more likely to identify easier, more direct means of moving towards that outcome. We drive out the clarity of our own reasons. Sometimes, as we go on, we can find ourselves at a loss to identify any real benefit. This can sometimes help us ditch work or projects that really are questionable. If we can't find a reason, then the work is a wasteful distraction.
- We begin to **motivate** ourselves, with so-called intrinsic motivation, by the promise of the implicit benefits to us in the outcome. For example, as I write an email to someone, I can easily stay focused on getting the email sent, the transaction. However, if I take a moment to clarify my outcome - this email should move that person towards an action - then I am more encouraged to engage in the activity more positively and creatively; I might make the language rather more empathetic.
- Both results and motivation come from outcomes being essentially **evidence-based**. This is crucial in our shift from busyness to mastery.

Here are some examples of personal tasks/activities, outcomes and benefits:

Task	Outcome	Benefit
<i>Call Mike</i>	<i>pleasant breakfast meeting with an old friend</i>	<i>- generative: Mike always brings fresh ideas - contacts: Mike is well-connected</i>

Notice:

1. The outcomes are all described as an end state or an event.
2. Out of one outcome, there could be several benefits.

One technique for describing outcomes to do with people affected by our work - so-called “stakeholders” in the language of project management - is the simple technique of the **user story**. For a fuller description of the user story, an Agile management technique, see Appendix A.

Timeboxing into next steps

In the previous chapter on Space, we reviewed all the distractions and interruptions in our work environment. It is possible for most of us to protect ourselves for a limited period from interruptions, but maybe not for any protracted period of time. For most of us, this is unrealistic.

Consider a span of uninterrupted concentrated work. Our concentration span is not limitless and will decay after a short period. David Allen suggests we apportion our time into twenty-minute chunks.⁶ This approach is similar to an agile project planning technique called **timeboxing**. The project schedule is divided into a number of separate time periods (timeboxes), with each part having its own deliverables, deadline and budget. In Allen's method, the next 20-minute timebox is called the "Next Step." He argues that 20 minutes is a feasible length of time for most people.

I find the suitable length of a timebox varies from one person to the next. If we are not interrupted, some of us can work for significantly longer periods than 20 minutes; some less. I believe with practice, we can work to longer time spans of uninterrupted periods of concentration.

What about larger pieces of work?

We can call these our personal projects. We then need to timebox them into smaller Next Steps. Professional project planners do this using techniques such as prioritised requirements lists, product backlogs, work breakdown structures or product breakdown structures, depending on which method they use. The general approach is the same: decompose the project into smaller, manageable pieces of work.

Allen suggests that any personal project needs to have both an outcome and also a next step. He argues that we do not need an exhaustive list of all the bits of work right through our project, as we would imagine in most project plans. The only criterion is that we have one Next Step that moves us closer to realising the Outcome. In fact, we find the following Next Step often emerges as we finish the previous one.

So, to discover the Next Step on our project, we ask ourselves the question: "What one practical thing can I do to move me towards my outcome that is 20 minutes or less?"

6 *Getting Things Done*, op. cit.

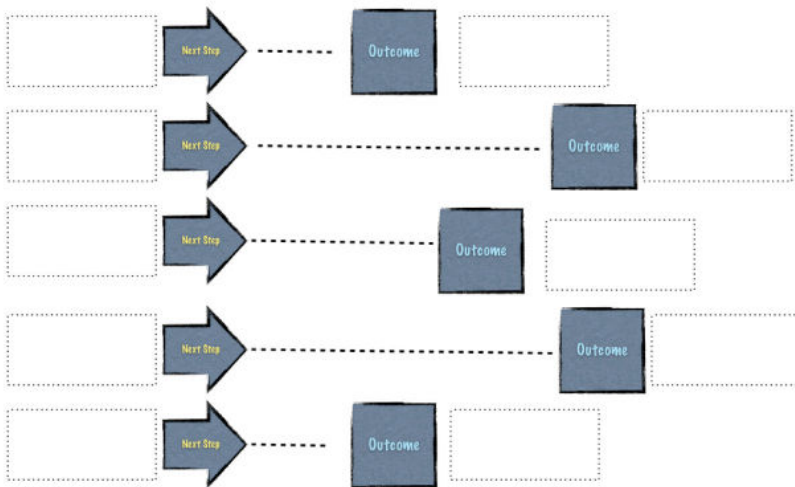
A fuller explanation of the Getting Things Done system can be found in Appendix A. Also, many people find that the Pomodoro Technique, also in Appendix A, is very useful during each Next Step of a larger project.

Exercise: Your projects list

What about work that takes you more than 20 minutes? Try this exercise now.

Using the template below:

1. Describe FIVE of your project outcomes.
2. Write for each a 'Next Step' that will take you no more than 20 minutes complete.



Time mastery and personal purpose



From this diagram, we recall how a better use of time is made possible by providing ourselves with time margins and clear priorities. Priorities help us decide which task is more important, and often we choose to do that as our Next Step.

Priorities come from our current context. My priority is different on a Saturday morning at home from when I am just about to chair a Board meeting. We need to choose for ourselves as we grow in our own identity and sense of destiny.

As novices and beginners, we may have had those supervising us to give us moment-by-moment priorities, but true freedom comes through connection with our clarity on our personal purpose, as we will see later in the chapter on Destiny. Good leaders provide us with clear purpose and reasons why we do things. However, as we grow in authority, influence and self-leadership, there comes a point where we no longer need to be told by someone else what our purpose might be; we provide that purpose for ourselves. This is one indicator of maturity. As the diagram shows, the most powerful and motivating purposes that drive our work are those that come out of a growing and clarifying sense of personal mission.

Exercise: Priorities

By now you should have your to-do list and a projects list for larger pieces of work. In this exercise, I invite you to think about your current priorities.

This is a positive, non-judgemental exercise; there are no right or wrong answers to this. You decide. It is also a reflective exercise. Other exercises have been designed to build towards a complete self-organisation system. This is different; it is an invitation to help you practice developing your own “prioritisation muscles.”

So here is what I would like you to do:

- Select the most important pieces of work from these lists, important to you, that is.
- Copy these onto small sticky notes or index cards.
- Lay these notes out on a large surface and order them in a single column in order of importance.

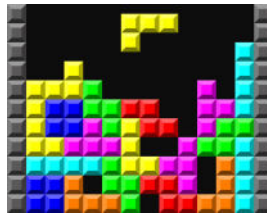
If you find this exercise difficult, that’s good. It is bringing to the surface some issues you may have sought to avoid. It tells you there is work for you to do here to achieve greater freedom.

Distinguish those tasks between the **MUST DO’s** and the **SHOULD DO’s**. Reflect on the reasons why you have put certain work in each category. This can help you clarify your personal mission.

The power of pull over the problem of push

As we noted above in the discussion on limiting our work-in-progress, we are tempted to take on more work than we can reasonably achieve. Even if we achieve the peak of our potential productivity, there is still likely to be work that we never get around to doing. Even the knowledge of this reality can trigger feelings of stress. We feel driven by that huge mountain of work that we will never reduce, perhaps even in several lifetimes.

One client told me that his to-do list grew to such enormous proportions, growing faster than he could complete tasks that he added, that he said he felt like he was playing a game of Tetris that was speeding up the more he played. So he abandoned it.



Screenshot of the Tetris
Computer Game

There is another way of looking at this reality. As creative leaders, we can regard that mountain of pending work as something we **pull** from, rather than something we are pushed by into excessive busyness and guilt. We change our view from being victims to being people who choose what to work on at any given moment. There is a huge psychological difference between feeling that we pull work through as opposed to feeling pushed or driven by it. This is a key concept to one of the most powerful techniques in the workplace: Kanban.⁷

Imagine our prioritised list of tasks. Knowing our purpose, we pull from that list the next task (our next step) suitable for our context in the here and now.

For example, it could be that my most important task is to call Angela to commission her for an important piece of work. However, my context is not right for me to do that right now: it's 9am GMT, I'm in Oxford. Angela is based in Phoenix, Arizona. Clearly, the optimum context is later in my day.

7

See 'Personal Kanban' in Appendix A.

But my context allows me to pull another, not-quite-so-important task from the list, which is writing an article for Maya, my social media marketer. Maya will need that copy tomorrow. Doing it now gives me - and Maya - a helpful time margin in case she has any questions on what I have written or she asks me to make adjustments.

In this way, I am free to make moment-by-moment, context-specific judgements as to whether I choose to do this task or another. I am allowing myself to operate in higher-order intuitive prioritisation, rather than religiously working through a day plan that may not be relevant after an hour.

Also, I have the satisfaction of seeing work completed, as I pull tasks from my “Work-in-Progress” column (what I am working on right now) to the growing “Done this Week” column. Seeing this encourages and motivates me. I see progress and achievement, even if I have not sensed it from other places.

Exercise: Create your Personal Kanban

Use this template to record your Personal Kanban. If you can, use small sticky notes that you can re-position across the board.

On my workshops, I find that the Personal Kanban technique is just about the most popular self-management system of all.

1. List your Next Steps/Actions in the left-hand column.
2. Prioritise these tasks. Put the more important/urgent tasks towards the top.
3. Choose to pull no more than three notes/cards into the “Today” column.
4. As you complete each of these notes, pull them over to your “Done” column.
5. If your work means you are now waiting on someone else, pull that note over to the “Waiting For” column.
6. At the beginning of each day, review the “Waiting For” column, and if necessary pull notes back to the “Today” column.
7. Repeat 2 to 5 for Today.
8. At the end of the week clear down your “Done” column, congratulating yourself.

NEXT STEP	TODAY	WAITING FOR	DONE THIS WEEK

Exercise: More lists⁸

Try this. In your notebook, create a page each for:

- Threats
 - » Bad stuff that might happen, what we usually mean by a “risk”
 - » Anxieties. Ask: “What should I be worried about?”
 - » Other people’s concerns.
- Opportunities
 - » Good stuff that might happen.
 - » “We could ...” and “... also we could.”
 - » As yourself: “What if I couldn’t fail?”
- Issues
 - » Stuff that has happened. Breaking news.
 - » Other people’s advice, suggestions and ideas.
 - » Complaints.
 - » Changed decisions, by you or others.
- Inspiration: such as our Ideas & Dreams
 - » This is sometimes called the Someday/Maybe list.
 - » “Would it be good if I could ...”
 - » Creative daydreaming.

⁸ You will have noticed by now that I’m a great fan of lists.

This last list is the place to capture moments of inspiration. I find inspiration comes at awkward moments. I have learned to trap them with a pocket book I carry with me, or record an idea using my smartphone.⁹ In the Getting Things Done (GTD) system, David Allen calls this the “Someday/Maybe” list, a list where there is no commitment by you to action these ideas. The Someday/Maybe List (labelled “Inspiration” in the diagram above) is personal but allows ideas to be captured and left.

Sometimes leaving the idea to marinate for a day or two is enough to reveal that it is a bad idea; maybe events have overtaken it. Sometimes it can spark a better idea. However, the opposite could also be true: an idea could become more attractive with the passage of time.

Writers often store ideas for stories, articles or blogs in such lists.¹⁰

Take a few moments now to enter a few ideas. Allow them to be captured in this way as well. This will also help you clear your head.

As with all these lists, the important habit is to surround them with is the ritual of returning to them and reviewing them regularly.

Routines, habits and systems

Scott Adams advocates creating organising systems. For example, he has Dilbert with a rotational clothes system. Dilbert never has to choose what to wear, it's just what comes up next... without having to think about it. Similarly, my daughter-in-law shared recently how when she orders her weekly groceries to be delivered, she then prepares all the vegetables for the main meals that week; she finds this easier and more efficient with a young family.

Cognitively, this is creating external systems that allow us to develop habits. Habits, as we have noted, are powerful. They can help de-clutter our conscious thinking, allowing us to focus on “more important” matters at hand.

9 I seem to get a lot of ideas when I am walking in the countryside near my home in Oxfordshire. No doubt this is because there is so much oxygen pumping through my brain. It is useful in this context to use my smartphone to record that fleeting idea. I may get funny looks from dog walkers or passing cyclists, but I don't care. I could have captured a gem of an idea.

10 If you are a writer, Scrivener is a great tool for storing such ideas.

New York choreographer Twyla Tharp talks about the power of routine.¹¹ Her routine is to get into a cab at 5:50am that takes her to the gym. She calls it her ritual. “The ritual is not the stretching and weight training I put my body through each morning at the gym: the ritual is the cab. The moment I tell the cab driver where to go I have completed the ritual.”¹²

So far we have touched upon some systems other people have developed: David Allen’s GTD system, Personal Kanban, and so on. As we practice these, we not only modify and tailor them to suit ourselves, but we also embed them with our rituals and habits.

There is a practice in some basic disciplines. Without practice, we won’t be changed. It is about laying down new neural pathways, transforming our own thinking patterns.

What are your rituals?

Do you need to develop one or two?

Tip: Be like Twyla Tharp: don’t make your ritual or system too elaborate, rather merely enough to create momentum.

The ritual of the Daily Heads-Up

I’ve noticed a pattern in my own work as well as in the writings of most commentators on productivity. It has to do with the daily or circadian cycle of work.

I call this is the ritual the **Daily Heads-Up**. It is similar in some respects to the Daily Stand-Up in Agile teams, where, in a rapid development, the team pauses and gathers together daily, usually at the beginning of the day, to review progress over the last day, problems and issues encountered, and to agree on work over the next day.

I’ve found this kind of circadian rhythm very powerful in my own self-organisation.

Here are some salient features of the Daily Heads-Up:

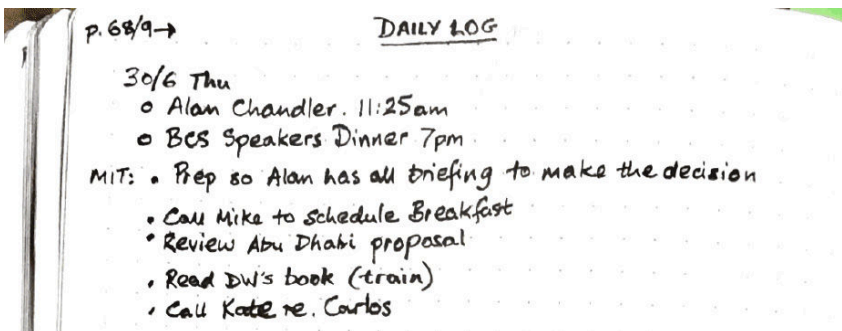
¹¹ Twyla Tharp, *The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It for Life* (Simon and Schuster: 2006).

¹² Ibid. p.14

- **Review** my commitments from the **previous day's** Heads-Up. This is helpful self-accountability and learning. For example, I have learned my daily personal bandwidth and so limit this list to what I have learned, from experience, that I can cope with as my daily work-in-progress.¹³ This will alter radically depending on what I am doing. For example, if I am delivering a Workshop, most of this is postponed until the Workshop has finished.
- Identify the **Most Important Task** (MIT) that I must complete over the next 24 hours. I usually write the outcome for this task; it's worth the effort and connects me to the benefits.
- Identify **two additional actions**, and rephrase them in positive, tangible ways that can be time-boxed within, say 25 minutes. If these are part of a larger project, my question to myself is: "What 25-minute step will move me closer to the project outcome?"
- **Add two more non-work actions**, so that I am not limiting my awareness to business matters alone.
- **Add any events** or meetings in my day.

I tend to do this the night before *or* first thing in the morning.

Here is an example of a Daily Heads-Up entry:



Exercise: Create Your Own Daily Heads-Up

So drawing down from your various lists, compose your own Daily Heads-Up. Create your Daily Heads-Up down the left-hand side of a blank page, leaving the right-hand page blank for the moment.

The balance between planning and just doing it

The ultimate intent in all this planning is execution; just getting it done. Timeboxing large personal projects can often be a way of overcoming the overwhelming paralysis that can affect us with a large project. It should get us started.

However, we need to beware of the opposite: putting so much effort into planning we deceive ourselves in the other direction. Planning itself can become an obsession or even a way of putting off just doing it.

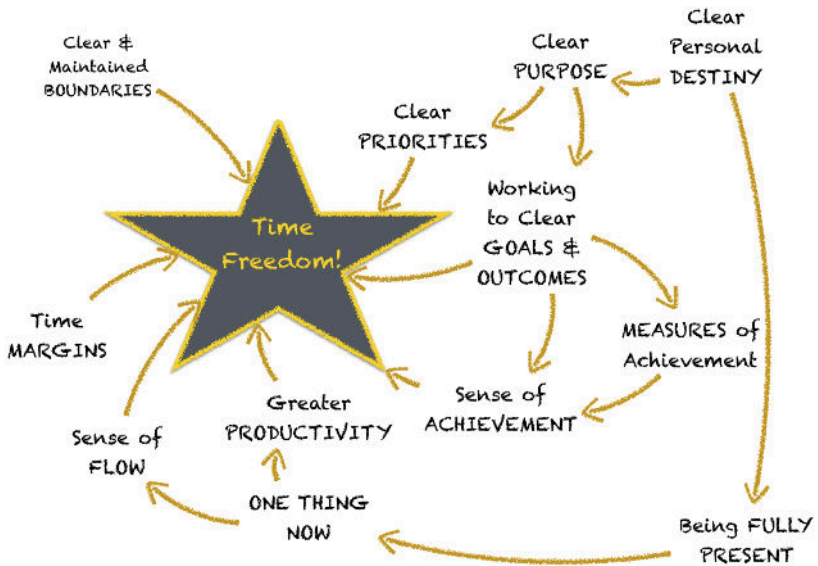
One of my reviewers pointed out:

There could be an argument that says the time spent doing the planning and work associated with timeboxing would be more usefully spent completing the work: “performance prevented by perpetual planning” – my 4 Ps!!

I agree. Who can tell? Only you can. We are all different. What is the optimal balance between planning and execution? Only you can come to that conclusion by being scrupulously honest. Section B will explore ways you can do this with integrity.

Time Freedom

Earlier in this chapter, we considered the problem of time poverty, and how this is driven from multiple sources. Some of the concepts and techniques in this chapter help us free ourselves of time poverty towards something more like this:

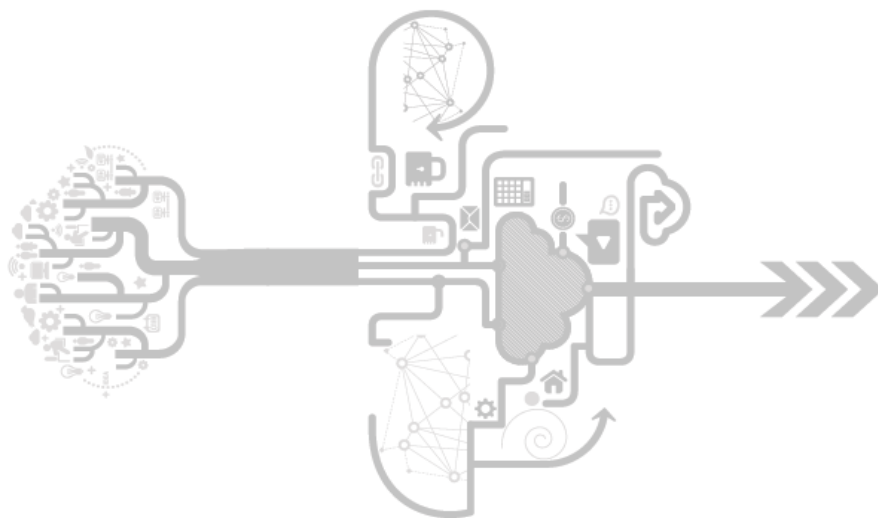


We will look at some further practices in Section B, *The Soul of Self-Leadership*, that yield somewhat more time and a superior quality of work.

Summary

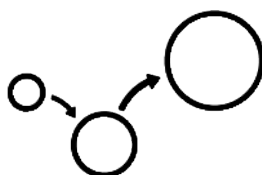
- Time poverty is a major, complex issue. It has several drivers.
- Time poverty is common, but neither normal nor healthy.
- The strategy to free us from it is through:
 - » Claiming time margins
 - » Better prioritisation, informed by a clear personal mission.
- It is rather more than “time management”, it is “time stewardship.”
- A week’s self-audit of the use of time will reveal much. And we are likely to make beneficial adjustments immediately.
- Multi-tasking is ruinous to our effectiveness, so we shouldn’t do it.
- When we limit our work-in-progress we discover less is more.
- Becoming clear on the outcomes of what we commit to doing:
 - » Helps move us from a focus on mere busyness
 - » Connects us with future benefits
 - » Identifies potentially wasted time
 - » Is intrinsically motivating
 - » Calls us to work to verifiable results.
- Where we work for another person the user story can be a helpful technique.
- Chunk larger work into timeboxed sprints called Next Steps.
- These larger pieces of work - “personal projects” - can be listed with outcomes and next steps for each.
- Priorities have a strong link with our identity and our destiny.

- “Pulling” work rather than being driven by it is much more satisfying.
- Personal Kanban is a popular technique to experience this “pulling” rather than being pushed by work.
- Surprises are initially catered for by margin.
- Rituals, habitual sequences, are very functional in personal organisation.
- The ritual of the Daily Heads-Up is very powerful.
- We need to be self-aware about the right balance between personal time planning and getting on with it.
- We can lead ourselves from time poverty to time freedom.

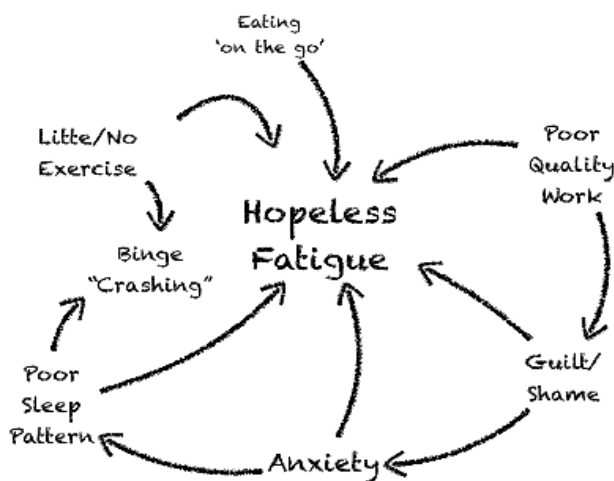


CHAPTER 6

Energy

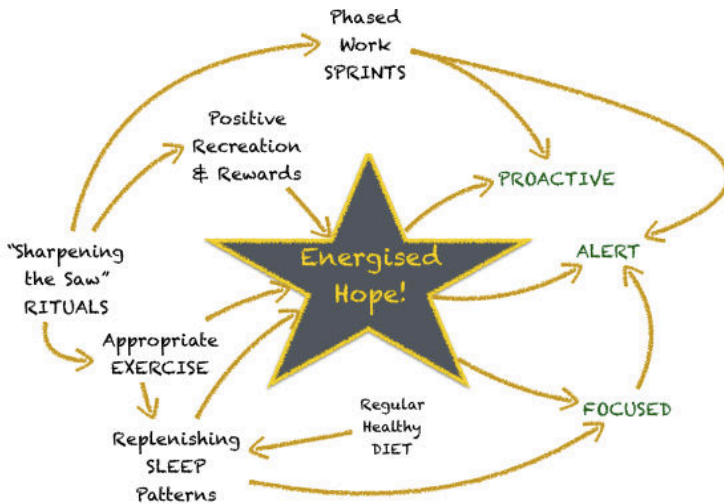


Whilst many people might focus on time management, we must also care for our energy. Good work requires energy. We might visualise the cause-and-effect system within hopeless fatigue as looking something like this:



Hopeless fatigue can be driven by a number of physiological factors, including poor diet, lack of exercise and poor sleep patterns. In turn, the sense of urgency can make hugely negative inroads into us when we are tired, fuelling emotions such as fear, anxiety, guilt and shame, to name but a few. Guilt and shame tend to be driven because we perceive enough to know that our work is poor.

However, we can choose to turn this around towards a very different personal system that is generative, that of energised hope..



Again, there is a strong link between energy and our hope, in this case positively. An appropriate exercise regime coupled with a good diet and replenishing sleep patterns, allows us to perform physically better. The endorphins from this better lifestyle drive up not merely our physical energy levels but our sense of overcoming the challenges we face. We become more hopeful. We become more self-aware of our energy cycles so that we might re-order our working practices to take advantage of these by working with these patterns in phased work sprints. All this produces an outcome in us that combines a more proactive attitude of ‘attacking’ our work, whilst allowing our thinking to be more alert and focused. I prefer to manage myself in this pattern of working. Wouldn’t anyone?

Yet fatigue and the growing sense of hopelessness that comes with it can creep up on us. Energy is an aspect of work that is not often thought about or discussed. So consider this: are signs of low energy or low productivity in those around us always a sign of laziness? By no means! A case can be made that attending to our energy levels is more important than managing our time.

The Human Performance Institute (HPI), a Florida-based organisation, has for years been helping top-flight athletes achieve higher performance.¹ Their claim is that they can improve the performance of such an athlete by as much as 20%.

How can they measure this? Well, in the upper echelons of any sport this is actually very simple; it is the number of tournaments each client wins each year. What is particularly intriguing about HPI is that they achieve this almost exclusively *without working on the technical skills of their clients*. For example, HPI improved the golfer Mark O'Meara's ability to win more tournaments without reference to his swing or his putting technique. So what did they work on? HPI's framework addresses the client's:

- Physical exercise, diet and sleep patterns.
- Mental techniques of focus, concentration and visualisation.
- Emotional aspects, such as self-management or "self-talk" and auto-suggestion.
- Spiritual meditation techniques such as prayer and contemplation.

HPI's contention is that if we want to do better work, we should manage and improve our energy, rather our use of time.

Our oxygen-hungry brain

Apparently, the brain is the most oxygen-hungry organ we have in our body. The brain only represents something like 2% of our total body weight, yet medical science says it uses 25% of all oxygen used by our body. Compare that with the 12% used by our kidneys and 7% used by the heart.

One of the phenomena we notice in our face-to-face training is that, although delegates may not be physically active, if the learning design confronts them with multiple new concepts and frames of reference in quick succession, it can quickly become physically exhausting. Their brains are burning up

¹ Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, *The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, Is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal*, (Free Press, 2003).

so much. Good learning strategies help learners by having regular periods of consolidation of new information with existing understanding and allow frequent re-energising changes of physical state. So, the body's ability to pump oxygen through the student's brain becomes quite vital.

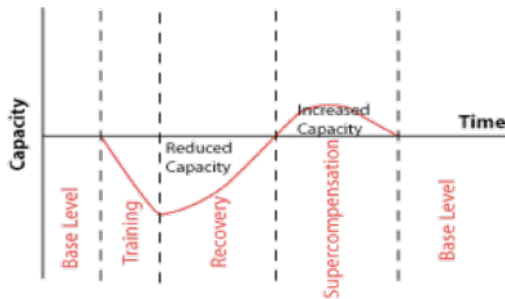
The way we optimise this is through simple cardiovascular exercise, like walking, running, swimming or cycling. For over fifty years now, fitness experts have proven the value of cardio-vascular fitness regimes, not just in preventing heart disease, but in lengthening our attention span, in optimising our focus, and in providing us with a general sense of well-being.

And there is a decay that goes on if we don't exercise for several days. Our energy levels get lower, we become less attentive, ideas seem to come us to less easily, we generate fewer creative solutions.

For example, this particular section was composed as I was walking, getting ideas for how I would phrase this topic in this book. As we exercise, we can sometimes get our best ideas. I suggest you carry around an audio recording device as you exercise.² Most people have a recording app on their phones. Some of my best ideas come as oxygen is pumping through my brain as I exercise.

The stress-recovery cycle

HPI observes that every bodily system has a stress-recovery cycle. The system could be the heart pumping several times a minute, or a particular muscle group. The length of a system cycle could vary (for example, the heart beats multiple times a minute, whilst the brain generally has a daily recovery cycle), but they all share the same stress-recovery cyclical shape. By managed exercise, the stress in the cycle is slightly increased and the recovery becomes more rapid.



2

I'm not sure yet how you do this for swimming ... :)

As a result, because of this managed cycle at several levels, HPI clients began to outperform their opponents. For example, the tennis player, Monica Seles, would find herself in the third and final set of a match against an opponent of an equivalent technical ability, but she would win because she could return her heart to resting rates between serves. Now that's quite an edge.

Is stress really our enemy?

HPI went to work with other groups, such as American football teams and the FBI Hostage Unit. However, when they began to coach business people they encountered a structural problem: they found many such clients didn't have work patterns of stress-recovery but rather were chronically stressed, always-on, 24/7. Work cultures dictated a full-on flat-line, not stress-recovery.

As Dr Jack Groppe of HPI says, "The only time you find a biological system flat-lining, is when it is dead!"

Now this is a serious hidden issue in many organisations. There is chronic stress and therefore chronic exhaustion. The more self-aware people in such organisations have their own strategies for ensuring recovery: holidays, time out for a walking break, even taking sick leave. Sometimes, the biological systems take over for them and they naturally fall sick, often when they go on vacation. But overall such organisations are not collectively healthy.

Chronic busyness becomes an accepted culture. When we are seeking to engage individuals or groups in such cultures it gets tough. Are they lazy or are they exhausted? Good engagement in these cases is to become consciously counter-cultural. This means insisting that some of these people will need to get more help, to back-fill some jobs so they have the time to give to getting the outcome they want.

So, stress is not the culprit; but chronic stress is. There's a big difference between the two. Momentary stress is functional and is the way our body uses to galvanise us to fight or flight. We can harness stress moments to propel us to greater degrees of personal mastery.

However, we were never designed to live in on-going states of stress. There is a growing body of medical research linking persistent states of anxiety with all kinds of physical and emotional diseases.

What we have sleep-walked into doing is creating institutional environments of knowledge work that are totally unsuited to the way we are designed to live. We expect managers to sit behind desks most of the day, above all to present the same kind of engagement to their work throughout the day, and if there is a push on, extend that into the evening.

Productivity cycles

So, given the evidence on stress and recovery cycles, we need to consider whether we might have sympathetic productivity cycles during the day and during longer cycles also.

Consider these questions:

- Which time of the day are you most productive? Do you know why?
- Which time of the week are you most productive? Again, do you know why?

It could be that there are certain patterns or rhythms to our working life of which we are not fully aware. If we are not aware that there is this golden period during the day when we present our best selves, it is quite possible that we squander that time with trivial engagements. What if we were to cherish those moments by positioning ourselves to do our best work, making sure we protect ourselves from all other distractions? Would that make a difference to our productivity? It could make quite a dramatic one.

I would describe this as working with the flow of our day or our week.

“Please don’t ask me to exercise!”

I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

David, Psalm 139

Science has long recognised the reality of the mind-body link in health. Dysfunctions in our emotions and our perceptions can cause physical disease. As we noted above, there seems to be a link between corrosive stress and some forms of disease. So how we think does affect how we physically feel and how the physical realm occurs to us.

This link flows in the other direction as well. How we physically manage ourselves can also affect our thinking. If we take care of ourselves, if we eat well, exercise well, and sleep well, our thoughts improve, our focus and attention improve; our mood becomes more positive; we are able to experience a level of joy as exercise releases endorphins into our brain.

Many times I have been reluctant to exercise. Yet, when I return to an exercise regime, I am surprised to find it so pleasurable, and it positions me to engage with the rest of my day much more effectively.

My intention in writing this is not to make you feel guilty or some kind of failure if you don’t exercise. Quite the opposite. I’m offering you a route to greater effectiveness and productivity in your life. Ultimately you must choose.

Some of us will have physical disabilities or limitations. It’s not possible or even appropriate for all of us to exercise in the same way or to the same degree. As I write this, I’m 64 years old and I know there are physical challenges I can’t attempt now that I used to be able to take in my stride. But my age teaches me to respect that hidden physical margin in all of us: *stamina*. I can no longer rely on the stamina of my youth to carry me through the day. I have to respect my stamina, to be aware of it, and whenever and wherever I can, to build it up.

Physical exercise is part of our overall stewardship of our own lives.

Exercise and diet

I didn't make it to the gym today. That makes five years in a row.

Anon, as quoted by Bill Johnson

The trick is to figure out what exercise regime can fit into your day. Can you join a gym? Is there a pleasant place to walk nearby? Is there a safe route to run or cycle nearby?

There has been a spate of fitness apps and devices recently; pedometer apps, bracelet devices that can synchronise with software on our PC or phone. These are designed to help motivate us with goals. If these do motivate us to exercise more intentionally then we take advantage of them. They appear to work for some, but not for others.

Some of these apps allow our progress - or lack of it - to be monitored by others. This kind of accountability can be very powerful in motivating us to change and motivating us to keep going when we feel inclined to stop. Accountability is a bigger subject than we can deal with here. As a general principle, positive accountability with the right person or group can be extremely helpful in replacing old habits with newer ones, and get us out of a rut.

The science to show the causative effects of different foods is building. Diets high in fat, high in carbohydrates can make our minds and our bodies sluggish.

The Japanese drink very little red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or the Americans. The Italians drink excessive amounts of red wine and also suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or the Americans. Conclusion: Eat and drink what you like. It's speaking English that kills you.

Sergio Pizziconi, Italian Ministry of Public Education

Sharpening the saw

Stephen Covey listed “Sharpening the Saw” as his seventh habit of highly effective people.³ It comes from a story he used to tell:

He walks through a forest and he comes across two lumberjacks felling trees with old-fashioned hand saws. He immediately noticed that one lumberjack had felled significantly more trees than the other. Yet, as he watched, he noticed that this first lumberjack would frequently stop, sit down and sharpen his saw. Covey noticed that the man also recovered himself from the exertion of felling trees as he did this. The second lumberjack took no breaks, instead pushing ahead, even though his saw was obviously getting blunt.

“Why don’t you sharpen your saw,” he asked the second lumberjack.

“Are you crazy! I haven’t time to do that! Can’t you see how behind the other guy I am?”

This story chimes with how many of us feel. The tyranny of the urgent won’t let us work with our natural stress-recovery cycles, even though they are more productive in the long run. We are panicked into busyness.

Covey argues that we should consider the physical and the mental (what we call here *The Physics of Self-Leadership*), as areas for sharpening the saw, but the Emotional (*The Soul of Self-Leadership*) as well as the Spiritual are also candidates for improving ourselves. (See the diagram below.)



Change or die!

Joy is a more powerful motivator than fear.

Dr Dean Ornish

Achieving an enduring change of habits is easier to believe than to see in practice. Evidence of how rare our capacity to permanently change comes from research into people who have fatal lifestyle illnesses. Where someone has a life-threatening heart disease that has been brought about by lifestyle (poor diet and low/no exercise) the physician's advice is usually, "Change or die!" If we were told by our doctor that unless we permanently changed our lifestyle we would die, would we change? Most of us would think that we would.

Then, most of us are probably wrong.

Over the last fifty years or so the statistics have been pretty consistent: only **one in nine** of us will permanently change our lifestyle. The rest of us revert back into old ways after a period of as little as six weeks. And we either have surgery or ... die.

However, pioneering research from Dr Dean Ornish has reversed this trend quite dramatically. Offered 200 patients, all eligible for heart by-pass surgery or other extreme forms of invasive surgery, by one of the American medical insurance companies, he and his team achieved a result where 80% of this group still maintained healthy lifestyles two years after the six-week programme was over. How did he achieve this?

- The change was **radical** and **repeated**. Patients were put onto a scrupulously low-fat diet and given daily exercise regimes. This meant they experienced the benefits of weight-loss and fitness very quickly. Soon patients found they could do things they thought they would never do again, such as run for a bus, or play with their grandchildren. This “quick win” strategy helped these patients reframe their view of the “cost” of diet and exercise from the risk of dying to a pathway to a fuller lifestyle.
- The change was supported by **reframing**. Each patient went through a programme of guided visualisation and meditation techniques, where they developed the ability to “see” themselves well again.
- The change was supported by attending bi-weekly **support groups** of fellow patients, where each person shared their progress, their victories and their struggles.

It seemed to be the combination of these three aspects that sustained people to form new, life-saving habits. Everybody seemed to win, including the medical insurers who saved an average of \$100,000 per patient who returned to health.

Exercise: How can I achieve this?

Pause for a moment. Consider the following steps:

1. List your desired health goal. (For example, run a 5K race.)
2. Consider how you might get peer group support for this. Is there a group you could join that is also attempting this goal?
3. With a qualified medical or fitness practitioner, work out a radical route to getting there, one that will encourage you with early results.
4. Practice prayer and meditation. Visualise the new, healthier you. Imagine what you will be able to do that you can't do now.

Summary

- Hopeless fatigue comes from disregarding or abusing our personal energy.
- Good work requires energy.
- Chronic fatigue brings a sense of emotional hopelessness.
- Our brain is oxygen-hungry and so knowledge work is physically tiring.
- The natural rhythm of all bodily systems is one of stress-recovery.
- We've created work cultures that expect us to be "always on" - flatlining.
- Acute stress is functional: chronic stress is dangerous.
- We can improve our energy levels - sharpen the saw - by regular exercise and good diet.
- We are very poor at making sustained lifestyle changes unless:
 - » The change is radical enough to see early differences
 - » We regularly "see" the better outcome of the change in our imaginations
 - » We are supported in maintaining the change by others like us.

SECTION B

The Soul of Self-Leadership

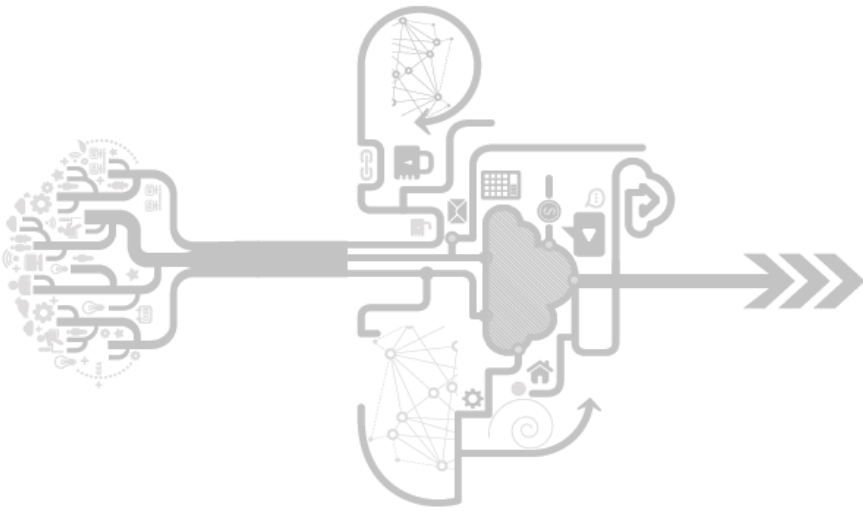


Our birth is but a sleeping and a forgetting,
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home

William Wordsworth

The previous section dealt primarily with the visible; this section deals with the invisible, below-the-surface matters of our inner lives and self-perceptions. It is the inner world of self-leadership. Working through this section will require a high degree of reflection and personal honesty.

Matters of the soul may be less visible but they are powerful. We can neglect the soul, but this will inhibit our move to achieving our best. Without these soul elements, I doubt anyone can rise to excellence. Whereas a strong sense of personal identity, an ability to be present in the moment, a clarity about our calling, and working in a supportive environment all boost our progress towards doing outstanding work and lead us into greater and greater effectiveness.



CHAPTER 7

Identity



"I once thought that truth was eternal, that when you understood something it was with you forever. I know now that this isn't so, that most truths are inherently unretainable, that we have to work hard all our lives to remember the most basic things. Society is no help; it tells us again and again that we can most be ourselves by looking like someone else, leaving our own face behind to turn into ghosts that will inevitably resent and haunt us. It is no mistake that in movies and literature the dead sometimes only know they are dead only after they can no longer see themselves in the mirror; and as I sat there feeling the warmth of the cup against my palm, this small observation seemed like a great revelation to me. I wanted to tell the man I was with about it, but he was involved in his own topic and I did not want to interrupt him, so instead I looked with curiosity toward the window behind him, its night-darkened glass reflecting the whole café, to see if I could, now, recognize myself."

Lucy Grealy, *Mirrorings*

In this excerpt from the late poet Lucy Grealy, we see described a life that had mostly found its identity from outside sources. In this passage she was beginning to question that picture and to ask herself who she truly was. This may seem a rather uncomfortable meditation, but it holds out to us a powerful opportunity to discover our true self and to live from it.

It becomes even more poignant when we learn that Greal, at the age of nine, contracted a rare form of cancer, which at the time had only a 5% survival rate. The treatment she underwent involved the removal of her jawbone, and extensive reconstructive surgery in the years following. Her work, including *Autobiography of a Face*, explored her own identity in a culture that places such a premium on one's visual appearance.¹ And yet she brought to the world an identity that gave us beauty, in the form of prize-winning poetry.

All our best work, comes from a sense of our true identity. This is far more important than most of us realise. Our identity is crucial in our move towards freedom. From a healthy self-identity flows so much, including a confidence to exercise our individual freedom. Knowing our true identity provides us with the strength to tackle our bad habits of chronic busyness. As we grow in a value for ourselves we move from consorting with slavish habits to ones we choose. We present to the world a better, truer version of ourselves.

As the prince grew from an infant into a child he became aware that he was not like other boys. He learned that the place where he and his family lived was not their home. He was an alien in a strange land.

His father spoke often to him of who he really was, calling out the prince in him. He didn't yet understand the word "exile" but he knew he belonged somewhere else, and that he was of noble blood. The child began to carry himself differently from others, because he was growing into who he truly was. The boy began to live from another country, another identity.

There is some comfort in captivity, in staying in our own victim's prison of work, in claiming that we cannot change. History is full of examples of people who been outwardly freed but continued to behave as slaves; they were still prisoners on the inside. The Israelites might have left Egypt but from the account in Exodus, Egypt hadn't seemed to have left them. Our internal prisons can be more powerful than any external ones.

So we need to grow in a greater, truer, image of ourselves if we are to handle our freedom effectively.

1 Lucy Greal, *Autobiography of a Face*, Harper-Collins (1994).

Tale of Two Identities: Slave v. Free

How can we tell if we are internally slaves to what we have been told? This is a deep and difficult question. Slaves are victims. Some of us live our lives with a victim narrative running through our heads, blaming the rest of the world for all our problems. This does not free or enoble us. Consider this table:

A Slave/Victim Identity	A Free Person's Identity
In their role, position or function; in their comparative status to others	In their uniqueness
In their performance; in pleasing their master	In who they know they are
Feeling dependent on circumstances, feelings and approval	In choosing how to react to each situation from who they are
Provided by their owner/master	Provided an intrinsic identity, supported by a loving upbringing and supportive community
In what others say, particularly their critics	In what a loving guardian or parent has told them; in what they choose to believe about themselves
Has no choice, or is uncomfortable with choice	Delights in expressing themselves through powerful choices

Please note: **our performance is not our identity**. Most business people I meet have a hard time understanding this. When they do, they begin to move in freedom.

There are some crucial life questions that we all need to grapple with:

- Who am I... really?
- Who is God... really?
- What is my potential... really?
- What am I particularly gifted to accomplish?

With the last question comes a caution. If we define ourselves by what we do, by how well we perform, we can easily return to the slave-victim mentality. However, gifts in certain things can lead a trail of breadcrumbs that can help us identify our own uniqueness.

We can enjoy a safe, loving community of others, who seek nothing but the best for us. I am fortunate to have such a community of dear friends; people I can trust to speak graciously and positively into my life.

Others around us, including those who wish to control us, will be quick to tell us their opinions, but ultimately we need to find those answers for ourselves. Listening to what the world tells us and agreeing with it can become another form of captivity. We need to develop a wisdom to discern between the two kinds of community.

Don't let the world squeeze you into its own mould, but
be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Romans 12.2 (J.B. Philips translation)

Uniqueness

Have you ever noticed that many business mindsets and systems reduce us - you and I - to the status of a commodity. They dehumanise us to a 'human resource.' It's simpler that way. The manager does not need to concern herself with the unique DNA of each one of us. Planners can simply move us around as rows on a Microsoft Project plan, or as a contribution to 'headcount.' Easy, eh?

However, this spills over into the way we can regard each other, including ourselves. We can stop valuing our unique identity and begin to ape the bland corporate identity we think we should have.

Know thyself.

Plato

In those two words is a lifetime's discovery. We are like explorers of a country that slowly reveals itself. We can be semi-aware of some aspect of ourselves until we find ourselves in a new context that reveals more.

For a number of years I worked in the centre of Oxford, a place rich in history. I thought I knew the locality well. My office was on St Aldates, opposite Christ Church College, a busy place where tourist walking tours would begin. So when two friends visited me from Scotland, I decided to take them on one of these tours.

Within the first ten minutes I was stunned with new revelation, overwhelmed about insights and history to this place I thought I knew. Since then, I've looked at St Aldates, Christ Church College and Old Tom tower very differently.

Our growth in self-awareness can be a very similar experience at times. We can be amazed by what we learn about ourselves.

So, how can we take the equivalent of a walking tour of *ourselves*? One way is to take a good personality profile assessment. I recommend a non-judgemental, positive assessment such as Strengthsfinder or the less well-known AEM-Cube®.² For example, when I took the AEM-Cube, my report revealed and validated how I approached certain areas of my work, with or without passion. I was able to understand better why certain kinds of routine work just bored me. When I took the assessment alongside other members of my management team it was even more revealing. It gave insights as to why we worked well as a team, what the major contributions of each member were likely to be, and where our perceptions of each other came from. This greatly helped us as individuals, affirming our uniqueness, as well as helping us work even better as a team.

2 See Tom Rath's *StrengthsFinder 2.0: A New and Upgraded Edition of the Online Test from Gallup's Now Discover Your Strengths* (Gallup Press, 2007). Also the AEM-Cube© Copyright Human Insight. The AEM-Cube was developed by Professor Peter Robertson and set out in his book, *Always Change a Winning Team: Why reinvention and change are the prerequisites for business success* (Cyan, 2005). Readers can access this through www.patrickmayfield.com

Exercise: Write your identity

Please take some time to do this exercise. It is probably the most important exercise in this book. You may choose to get away for a period from your home or workplace. This can allow you to think clearly and objectively.

You will find it extremely powerful if you write down your own answers to these questions before reading through the rest of this chapter. These are deep and personal questions, so use a medium you are comfortable with that is secure from prying eyes so that you can be scrupulously honest with yourself. This medium could be your private physical journal or notebook, or it could be a password-secured file on your computer; it doesn't matter, as long as you are satisfied that no one else will see it.

So consider these questions:

- What is the best version of myself? Who am I proud to be?
- Who is God? What is He like to me? (Even if I don't believe in God) how does that make me feel towards myself?
- Putting aside the opinions of others, what am I really capable of accomplishing?
- What are my strengths and my talents?
- What have been my proudest moments ... so far?
- If I could achieve anything, what would I really like to do?

As you address these questions, you may be aware of a little voice telling you,

"Don't be silly. You can't really do this! You can't really be that!"

If you hear this voice, or something like it, tell it to **shut up!**

If you wish, you can tell that voice that you'll come back to it later if you need to. Work on these profound life questions now and you will get so much more out of the rest of this chapter. In fact, you will get much more out of this book, and your life.³

I promise you.

³ One tool that can help you with this is Dr Caroline Leaf's 21-day Brain Detox system. See Appendix A.

The enslaving effect of busyness

It's amazing how much information is coming at us most of the time through technology, the media and the busyness of the world around us. I've decided that the world probably isn't going to change, so I have to change. I'm learning how to keep my mind on what I'm doing, rather than thinking about several things at once or what I want to do next.

Joyce Meyer

Your greatest danger is letting the urgent crowd out the important.

Charles Hummel, *The Tyranny of the Urgent*

Before exploring our identity further, let us consider the opposite. What happens to lives lived without a strong internal conviction of who they are, this strong sense of their own identity? Take the case of Andy.

Andy works in the UK banking sector. He has been in banking twenty years, mostly in branches. He has seen a huge shift in the ways banks work; shifts that have included an erosion in personal face-to-face time with customers, and an out-sourcing of “customer service” to an off-shore company in India. His bank is now a target-driven culture where he feels he is being controlled at a more detailed level. The irony is that he is more controlled now in a more senior position than when he was a junior branch manager twelve years ago. He works long hours in order to reach his targets, and much of his time is spent responding to more and more detail on why his area seems to be falling behind. He is in “survival mode”, having long since forgotten any sense

of pleasure in offering a customer service. Customers now seem to him more of a threat than an asset. Their conversations take up his valuable time. His patience with them is wearing thin.

Andy's experience illustrates how the climate of busyness is one of the most enslaving atmospheres in the modern workplace. In this climate, it is all too easy to allow ourselves to become over-extended. Where is the freedom where a woman works 70 or 80 hours a week and comes home after her children have gone to bed, missing important moments in their young formative years? Children are robbed of their mothers and fathers by these systems of busyness. The important is lost to the urgent.⁴ In dealing with the conspiracy of busyness, we are looking to free ourselves. This is why our work earlier on margins was so important. It gains us space to think, to lift our heads above the noise and the traffic and take stock. This is an essential dimension of true self-leadership, of being able to do our best work.

Potential

"Mindset change is not about picking up a few pointers here and there. It's about seeing things in a new way. When people...change to a growth mindset, they change from a judge-and-be-judged framework to a learn-and-help-learn framework. Their commitment is to growth, and growth takes plenty of time, effort, and mutual support."

Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*

We have considered our journey in terms of growth. This has been deliberate. There seems to be a principle in all living systems that they either grow or decay.

⁴ See the Eisenhower Matrix in Appendix A for an important distinction between what is important and what is urgent.

Professor Carol Dweck is a researcher into motivation and personal development. She has concluded that individuals can be placed on a continuum according to their implicit views of where ability comes from.⁵ Some believe their success is based on their innate ability; these people are described as having a fixed mindset. Others, who believe their success is based on hard work, learning, training and doggedness are said to have a growth mindset.

We may not be aware of our own mindset, but our actions betray us, particularly when we encounter failure. If we operate from a fixed-mindset we dread failure; it is evidence that our ability is poor. However, Professor Dweck maintains that if we have a growth mindset, then we are more inclined to tolerate failure, more because we realise that we can improve and learn from it.

Dweck makes a very compelling case that the growth mindset allows us to live a less stressful and more successful life. If we think we have a finite capacity, even more thinking that we have now reached that capacity, then this is a profoundly self-limiting belief. If on the other hand, we believe we have the potential to grow more, then we achieve more. This chimes with what Henry Ford once said:

If you think you can do a thing or think you
can't do a thing, you're right.

Henry Ford

Fantasy and lies about identity

In moving towards a superior self-identity, we can't pretend ourselves into believing we are free people. Testing times come to us all, and it is in these times that we must be sure. Tricks of the mind will not help us prevail when the going gets tough.

Many self-help gurus and motivational speakers would like us simply to rehearse positive affirmations arguing: "Just say, 'I am getting better and better, every day, in every way', whether you believe it or not, and it will work."

Not so! When such statements do work, it is because we become convinced of their truth about ourselves.

Receiving praise

From time to time, people praise me. I have learned to discern genuine praise from flattery. I particularly value it when it is given in the context of some kind of evidence, even more, when someone gives it to me in writing.

I am British, and a particular affliction of being British, it seems, is that I have been victim to false humility. Even worse, I have been religious, where the worst possible sin in religious circles is to be proud. Both are nonsense, of course. Pride is evil but, in my efforts to be humble, I have often dismissed praise. This is a stupid thing to do, and sometimes it is also a somewhat insulting to the person who genuinely offers me their gift of objective praise.

One practice I believe everyone can do is to keep a private success file and to review it regularly. What goes in my success file are notes people have written to me when I have done good work, or when the “me” I have been to them blessed them in some way. This helps me get a rather more balanced and objective view of myself. It is particularly helpful whenever I have been besieged by self-doubt. I can read the file which tells the lie to my feelings. The file gives me the evidence.

Again my caution is to distinguish carefully our performance from our identity. Rather like in a painting we can recognise the uniqueness of the artist, in our best work we can sometimes recognise our uniqueness. The artist is not their art, but the artist expresses their uniqueness *through* their art.

I recommend you start your own “Success File” now.

Gratitude

Gratitude is a dialysis of sorts. It flushes self-pity out of our systems.

Max Lucado

Our Creator shall continue to dwell above the sky, and that
is where those on earth will end their thanksgiving.

Seneca Nation

I have been very blessed in my life and rewarded with good friends
and good health. I am grateful and happy to be able to share this.

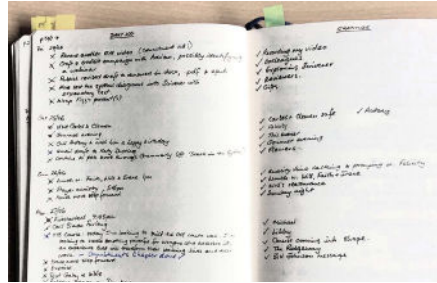
Eric Idle

The quote from Max Lucado above is profound. There is something about being grateful and carrying thankfulness that is really quite cleansing and empowering.

And it is strange that the more we notice those things, events, and people we are grateful for, the more they seem to build into our own identity rather than diminishing it. We might at first think that being thankful for others might in some way diminish our own identity. Paradoxically the opposite happens. We begin to recognise ourselves in all that we are grateful for. It brings out something quite fine in us.

People say that owners look like their pets. Maybe that is what being consciously thankful does. As we express thanks, we become a little bit more like that which we truly appreciate and love.

I keep a gratitude list as part of my daily routine. The way I do this is in my own variant of the Bullet Journal, I have my daily commitments on the left-hand page and things I am thankful for on the right-hand page.⁶ I aim to find at least five things every day for which to be thankful.



My Gratitude List on the right page facing my Daily Heads-Up Page

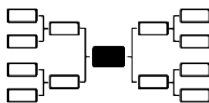
This has a powerful effect upon me. I find it makes me more positive, more appreciative, more open to joy. It stirs up my intrinsic motivation and encourages me to shift the lens through which I see the world, seeing it as a more hopeful place. I also find it undermines any temptation I might have to procrastinate. I am less hesitant in many ways because I keep myself accountable to giving thanks on a daily basis.

Summary

- Our best work comes from a sense of our true identity.
- Seeing ourselves as free is vital in moving towards greater freedom.
- Without a self-awareness of a strong identity we are vulnerable to enslaving busyness and urgency.
- A growth mindset should be part of our identity.
- Our self-identity needs to be grounded in reality, not some self-help make-believe or fantasy world.
- A Success File will help you gain a positively objective assessment of yourself.
- Gratitude is extremely powerful in changing how the world occurs to us and in how we see ourselves.

CHAPTER 8

Destiny



The best way to predict the future is to create it.

Abraham Lincoln

This quote from Lincoln identifies something not many people seem to be aware of: whatever we are experiencing now is, to a greater or lesser degree, a product of our choices earlier in life.¹ By recognising this truth, we can begin to make consistent choices to shape the future we will step into.

There is a growing movement in business that posits a future that calls to us.² And somehow we can respond to that call. We bring to that future a sense of destiny. This destiny helps us filter and prioritise at the deepest level. We gain a confident clarity about what is “important”. It connects with a purpose or personal mission. It informs one’s own life strategy, what is and what isn’t relevant.

Our destiny is discovered on the journey, as we pay attention to our hearts, our passions. A deep sense of self-awareness grows in us, a mindfulness that helps us identify our calling, our true vocation. It comes out of our true selves. When we are connected with a personal destiny, we don’t just produce good work, we produce our best work.

¹ There are exceptions, of course. I am mindful of those for whom choices were made by others – the child who was handed over for adoption, the spouse who was left alone because the other walked out, and so on. They are, to a greater extent, where they are because of the choices made by others. However, we tend to blame other external factors far too much for our own fortunes. This leads to a victim mentality.

² This is called Theory U. See Otto Scharmer’s *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges*, Sol (2007).

Destiny and fatalism

One use of the term “destiny” can return us to the state of being captives. To say we are destined to something can mean we are fated to live out a certain kind of life. Fatalism in all its forms seeks to imprison us in its philosophy. It comes in many guises. Communism has so controlled individuals in the cause of the collective that many gave up on any ambition and resigned themselves to living out a certain destiny. This breeds a kind of institutional dependency where we expect the state to do everything for us, including providing for us a career. There are also fatalistic religious belief systems, such as some expressions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism and Calvinism. We have no choice; because it’s karma; it will happen if Allah wills it; it’s what the priest says; and we are predestined to do it anyway, so we have no choice. We end up believing through all these systems that we have no choice about our destiny.

This is definitely not what I mean by “destiny” in the rest of this chapter. I mean rather the glorious liberty of human beings being able to step into a destiny of their choosing. Freely choosing our destiny somehow resonates with the very core of who we are. It does indeed “call” to us.

Choosing our destiny

There is something in all of us that recognises our fulfilment, that we are moving towards something that we were made for. The ability of human beings to choose one thing over another is so glorious, is so awesome that some people, operating from a victim mindset, are fooled into believing that choices are somehow a burden.

Allow me to reframe choice. When we make choices, conscious choices, we can step towards that which resonates with our innermost being, which resonates with our soul, and our understanding of our true calling. That’s when we are most glorious, when we are most fully alive as human beings.

Also, I have come to see that our destiny is an emergent thing. Our destiny isn't something we receive nicely parcelled with ribbons on our 18th birthday. Our destiny is something that most of us struggle to see more clearly for most of our lives, and it emerges as we choose, experiment, and sometimes fail. This struggle does something profound in us so that we become better able to see the future that calls us. As we step towards the automatic doors, we find they open. We discover a delight in doing something that we are actually equipped to do.

Psychologist Roy Baumeister talks about the moment when someone realises they no longer want to do the job they are doing, and it seems to come out of the blue. He calls this the crystallising of discontent. I'd like to submit that there are opposite moments as well: crystallising of content.

Personally, I remember being asked to speak at a government conference in 1993 at Harrogate, Yorkshire. It was daunting. But over the fear, I enjoyed the preparation and delivery. It occurred to me that I could speak publically, and speak well. It was a defining moment in my career. A crystallising moment.

But our destiny isn't something to be confused with our performance because then we can fall back into measuring our destiny and measuring our identity by how well we perform.

This is more about discovering the destination, the goal, the prize.

Exercise: What if I couldn't fail?

Stop everything you're doing now, and ask yourself this question:

If I could be whatever I wanted to be, if I could do whatever I wanted to do, what would that be?

If there were no constraints on my time, my resources, my abilities; if I had all the money I needed, if I had all the opportunities, all of the help, all of the friendships and connections that I needed, what would I like to do?

What if I couldn't fail?

The point of this exercise is to free ourselves to dream, not limit ourselves, not to censor and shoot down ideas too quickly as unrealistic. Most of us set the bar for ourselves far too low.

Meaning and Purpose

“Life is never made unbearable by circumstances,
but only by lack of meaning and purpose.”

Viktor E. Frankl

In my estimation, *Man's Search for Meaning* is one of the greatest books of the twentieth century.¹ It was written by Viktor Frankl, a psychotherapist and an Austrian Jew, who had the misfortune to be alive during the Nazi takeover of Austria. On 19th October 1944, he and his wife Tilly were interned into Auschwitz. As he was being processed into the camp, the guards confiscated and destroyed his life's work, his manuscript on his therapeutic work.

He appreciated later that in that moment he made what would become a life-saving commitment: to re-write and finish his manuscript when he got out of the camp. Many of his compatriots were in various states of shock and denial, believing that the Nazis could not do without them. Frankl, however, was enough of a realist to know that this was an awful place and that not many would survive. Being a student of human nature he set himself a research project, with the question: “Given the choice, who would survive?”; that is, of those who were not simply executed, who would prevail in the camp?

His conclusion was quite remarkable. It was not necessarily men over women, nor young over old, nor strong over weak, nor those “useful” to the guards over those who were not, nor even the religious over the non-religious. The only common denominator he could identify in those who kept going through it all were those that *all had something to live for outside the camp*. By contrast, if someone vested all their hopes in their loved ones and these loved ones were also with them in the camp, and they died before their eyes, then he observed that these people literally gave up the will to live and died themselves. It seems that hope from meaning was an indispensable element in any human being if they were to prevail.

¹ Viktor Frankl (2006) *Man's Search for Meaning. An Introduction to Logotherapy*, Beacon Press, Boston, MA.

Frankl himself did survive until the Allies liberated the camp. After the war, he developed a new form of psychotherapy, of returning people to emotional health, call logotherapy. This comes from the greek word logos, meaning “word” or “meaning”. A logotherapist’s focus would be to find meaning in their patient’s life, and having done so, help the patient build health upon that meaning.

Of course, we are not in such desperate circumstances, but Frankl’s story illustrates *in extremis* how we all can become quite careless of fundamental meaning and purpose in our lives. As we rediscover our meaning and the reason why we keep going on this planet, it begins to build into us a resilience that nothing else can provide.

More than that, a purpose helps us make clear judgments between those pursuits that are important and those that are not. The stronger our connection with our purpose, the more immune we become to the distractions of other things.

My conviction is that everyone was created by a loving God for a purpose and we can ask Him what that is. He tends to reveal that to us as we step out and attempt things, and gives us a stronger and stronger passion that is unique to each one of us.

As we considered in the previous chapter, ultimately the way out of aimless busyness is an ability to focus on our true selves.

We all need to answer the ‘Why’ of our work and our existence.² Leaders are particularly effective when they can provide that ‘why’ to us, giving our work a meaning that transcends merely making a living.

Frankl came to the conclusion that we can endure almost anything as long as there is a big enough why.

² See Simon Sinek’s *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, Penguin, 2011.

Exercise: Driving Out the Meaning

For this exercise, you will need a list of your current projects and the results from the “What if I couldn’t fail?” exercise. If you haven’t done the “What if I couldn’t fail?” exercise, it will be better for you to complete it, before going any further with this exercise.

Take five items on your to-do list and place them in the left-hand column of the table below. I have illustrated how this is used here.

Then, for each project, ask “why” or “so what”. Write that answer in the next cell to the right.

Then ask “why” or “so what” to what you have just written.

Do this five times in all. See the worked example in the table below.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Why?/So what?</i>	<i>Why?/So what?</i>	<i>Why?/So what?</i>	<i>Why?/So what?</i>	<i>Why?/So what?</i>
<i>e.g. Create an online training course for personal mastery</i>	<i>This is core to the leadership academy’s curricula</i>	<i>Personal mastery is to do with inner leadership</i>	<i>Market research shows this is powerful</i>	<i>It’s hard to lead well when you own life is chaotic</i>	<i>Leaders are at their most powerful when they lead from within</i>

The Five Whys³

3 Explore the Five Whys technique in *Practical People Engagement*, in understanding the real benefits to stakeholders in changing to new ways of working.

The above exercise makes use of an approach called the Five Whys, a technique similar to the task-outcome-benefits table covered in chapter 4. It was formally developed by Sakichi Toyoda of the Toyota Motor Corporation as a way of discovering the root cause of a problem in manufacturing. Since then, the technique has also been used, as here, to discover the real meaning or benefit of the work we do.⁴

The Five Whys technique helps us to recall the power of the “why” question, something I’ve found as a parent most children discover soon after they learn to talk. We may have been taught that the bald “why” question is rude, so we may have lapsed from asking it. At the other end of life, there is the jaded old man, who has seen a lot of new things fail, so his question is similar: “So what?” Both questions are powerful in testing the meaning of our work. We should do this regularly: “Why should I do this? So what if it was completed?”

There are two additional features of the Five Whys technique that are worthy of note here:

1. Five is not a magic number. We might satisfy ourselves with the root meaning or root cause in fewer than five why's or it may take more.
2. There may be more than one answer, and there very often is, to the why question. So, in the example given in the above exercise, the answers to the first why might have looked like this:

Create an online course for personal mastery	Because it is part of the leadership academy's core curriculum.
	Because the response to the Organising Yourself More Effectively workshop indicates that this is likely to be a popular course.

Note also that the User Story has embedded a subtle answer to the “why” question.⁵

Asking the question “why” regularly and routinely of the work are inclined to take on is healthy. It knocks us out of a habit we all fall into of being carried along by our commitments. This leads to being driven by demands on us, whether imposed by others or by ourselves. We can drift back into being victims.

Revisiting our priorities

Novices are innocent of any sense of priority; until they learn to know better, everything appears to them as having the same importance. The way we organise ourselves may be from our novice days, and so is almost certainly not serving us well now. So if we have progressed at all in self-leadership, we will be more aware that all work is not equal.

We grow into a better understanding that everything that demands our attention is not of equal importance. However, old habits can hold us back.

It is time to organise ourselves differently.

Certainly, the Eisenhower Matrix is a technique that works well in helping us compare the weightiness of our work, but only as we are clear on our calling.⁶

Once we have a clear destiny and purpose in our own mind, our true priorities begin to reveal themselves easily.

⁵ See Appendix A. It is the “so that I can...” section, which gives the underlying reason why someone might want a particular feature.

⁶ Appendix A.

There was a time when I took some pride in a large number of qualifications that I was approved in as a trainer: PRINCE2 project management, Managing Successful Programmes, Projects, Programmes and Portfolio Offices, Change Management, Benefits Management, etc.. But there came a moment where I had to take stock of how these qualifications were inviting opportunities into my life that, although worthy in themselves, were displacing my own sense of calling, to do more strategic work and do more writing.

‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

Jesus, as quoted by John in Chapter 15 verses 1 and 2 of his gospel.

Growth often comes when we prune the good - not just the bad - in our lives so that the best in us can come forth. The mature person knows that just because they can do something doesn't mean they should. Greg McKeown explores this powerfully in his book, *Essentialism: the Disciplined Pursuit of Less*.⁷

Exercise: Finding our destiny

If we challenge the self-limiting beliefs we have about ourselves, we gain a hopeful, positive outlook on life. Discovering our destiny then becomes so much easier. Here are some questions that may help us all begin to search out our true vocation:

- When did I last feel fully alive?
- What is the most enjoyable and satisfying part of my work?
- Which famous person do I most admire? Why?
- If money was no object, what would I like to do?
- What particular issues around me stir me to anger and make me want to do something about them?
- What particular recreational activity do I love?

- As I observe myself over a few days, say a week, what activities did I look forward to and find particularly energising and rewarding?

Then there are those we trust, our friends and perhaps close family members. If you have someone you could call a “soul mate”, great! Find people who will honestly, but positively, speak into your life and lovingly challenge you.

Drive

Much of what we have considered so far requires a degree of self-motivation, so-called *intrinsic motivation*. Where does this come from? Daniel Pink did us a service in pulling together the social science around this in his book, *Drive*.⁸ How we motivate others as well as ourselves is somewhat surprising. Pink has distilled it down to three things:

- Autonomy
- Purpose
- Mastery.

The call to self-leadership in this book, to personal mastery, is couched in terms of moving to personal freedom. Autonomy is deeply attractive to us all. We not only do better work when we are not closely controlled, but we will motivate ourselves to do it. Pink shows how many major recent innovations - Wikipedia, Linux and Apache servers to name but three - are phenomena all generated by people working for free, of their own volition, for the fun of it.

We have seen earlier in this chapter how Frankl realised that we can endure almost anything as long as there is a strong enough purpose.

And we all like to get better at what we do, to be rewarded by a sense of greater mastery. This gives us a strong sense of personal satisfaction. We look at this process more in Chapter 10.

If we dig deep enough for autonomy, purpose and mastery, we will find the encouragement within ourselves to keep going.

Personal Mission

So, a sense of personal mission begins to lead us to shape rather more clearly what we aim to contribute to this world. Consciously we begin to stop doing certain things and giving ourselves to our primary calling.⁹ All good strategy helps us say “No” to certain things in favour of the most important pursuit. In fact, this self-aware, self-confident series of “no’s” creates even greater margin in our lives.

8 Pink (2009) *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us*, Riverbed.

9 See the Stop Doing List technique in Appendix A.

Exercise: Writing my personal mission statement

Jim Collins suggests these thinking on three questions:

1. What are you deeply passionate about?
2. What are you genetically encoded for — what activities do you feel just “made to do”?
3. What makes economic sense — what can you make a living at?

Write some ideas down now in your journal.

Don't agonise or seek perfection. Don't be too critical of what you write. Just get some ideas down and promise yourself you'll come back to this later.

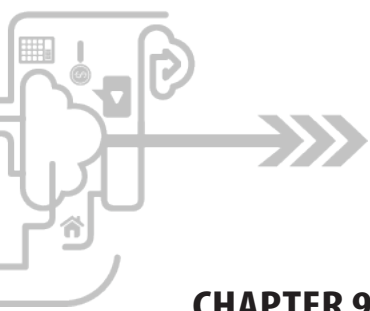
We will return to this exercise towards the end of this book.

Summary

- We can choose our destiny, not as a fatalistic inevitability, but as a powerful choice.
- There are always plenty of people to tell us what we are capable of becoming, or limit us by saying what we are not capable of becoming, but it remains our choice.
- Our destiny can emerge over time.
- Our destiny is not the same as our performance.
- We must base our hope and our trust in the future carefully, not in something that is transient and may not be there when we need it.
- We must find meaning in our work or else change our work.
- Meaning draws us to our destiny, our true calling.
- Techniques like the five whys can help draw out the meaning in our work.
- Leaders prove a “why” to those that follow them, so self-leadership means you provide your own “why”.
- Ultimately our destiny clarifies what our priorities should be.
- Self-motivation comes from:
 - » Autonomy
 - » Purpose
 - » Mastery,

This book is about gaining all three.

- Writing down a personal mission statement and occasionally reviewing it can help us clarify our destiny.



CHAPTER 9

Presence



Destiny gives us a destination, but presence helps us to travel well. Presence brings us out of autopilot, to live in the ‘here and now’ and enables us to use the ability we all have of being able to “stand outside of ourselves” and observe our own thoughts, to discover our destiny and purposefully move towards personal freedom.

Our ability to be present is strongly linked to our ability to experience joy and fulfilment. Partly this is because we develop an ability to qualify and censor the various other ‘voices’ that so seek to define our Identity and our Destiny for us.

In this chapter we will look at a number of practices, each tending to be alert to the past, the present and the future.

Self-awareness

One of the secret strengths of the greats is the habit of examining their own thoughts and thinking habits.

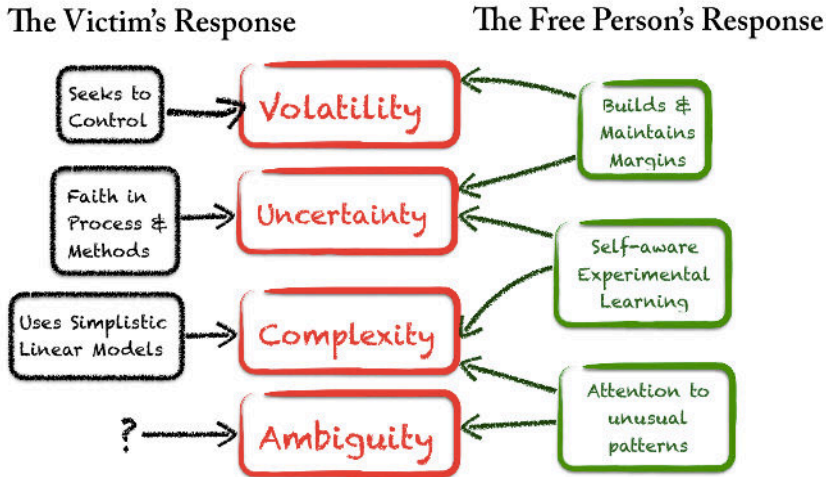
Just think about this for a moment. What other species on this planet thinks about it’s thinking? There are indications that some animals can learn. However, we humans seem to have this unique faculty of self-awareness, of being able to observe our own thinking, to “stand outside” of ourselves.

Now consider the amazing difference that humans have been able to achieve on this planet. Self-awareness is, I believe, key. This is a God-given ability to achieve greatness in ourselves.

We learn through this process. We don’t merely learn by experiment, but we are able to evaluate our higher-order thinking and reflect upon whether how we think about the world can be improved.

This is another key in moving to mastery.

Self-aware learning appears to be a basic strategy for all of us in engaging with the uncertainty and complexity of our working world. As this diagram shows:



So how can we develop our self-awareness? Once again we must regard ourselves as complex human systems. Simple, separate categories will not serve us well. Yet here are some key, interrelated practices to consider:

- Journaling as a medium for intentional reflection and self-awareness.
- Respecting our imagination and using it more than perhaps is considered appropriate in business.
- Meditation, mindfulness and prayer to help us become practised in living in the 'here and now', to become better at recognising reality, both within us and outside us.

We will look at each of these practices now.

The battle between our ears

We noted earlier that for knowledge work, our main tool is our brain. So too is our major work of self-leadership, intentionally leading our thoughts and our emotions. De-cluttering our conscious minds of too many things is only part of this work. Self-leadership also about tracking, challenging, correcting and improving our thoughts and emotions.

We are not our thoughts and emotions. Viktor Frankl understood this when he was being tortured.¹ The much-revered Gautama Buddha apparently did not.² Frankl describes even in torture how he observed in himself this very small gap between the action on him and his reaction. In that gap, he found freedom, despite his dreadful circumstances. He overcame.

We can see our true, essential selves. We can observe our thoughts and feelings, observing them and challenging them. This is crucial in our move from being victims, particularly of our emotions, towards becoming truly free people.

An example of this emerged from the research of Dr Brené Brown. In her lucid and honest *Daring Greatly*, she identified in her interviews an internal narrative among some of her research subjects called *foreboding joy*.³ This is an emotional thought response to joy along the lines of: “Well, I know from experience that this won’t last long. In fact, I will have to pay for this later. Something bad is sure to happen to me.” Part of liberating ourselves from this lie is to identify it and then challenge it. For myself, I recognise foreboding joy. I used to buy into it, but I no longer consort with it in my thinking. It has no purchase in me. Instead, I choose to believe that I can carry enduring joy in my life, and so I experience it. Frankly, living in continuous joy is a superior way to live.

This internal dialogue of our minds contains much that shapes our view of the external world, and therefore our ability to engage effectively with it. It is a powerful lens through which we experience reality.

¹ *Man's Search for Meaning* op.cit.

² Buddha wrote in his Dhammapada: “We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts.” This is repeated in the following phrase. However he did go on to write: “Your worst enemy cannot harm you as much as your own thoughts unguarded.” Christians, by contrast, are taught to take their thoughts in hand as part of their own soul’s development; for example, see Paul’s second letter to the Church in Corinth, chapter 10 verse 5.

³ Brown, Brené (2013) *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*, (2013) Portfolio Penguin.

For the despondent, every day brings trouble;
For the happy heart, life is a continual feast.

Proverbs of Solomon, 15:15 (New Living Translation)

Thinking at “the speed of write”

I write nearly every day. It’s one of my routines. I keep a personal journal. I usually write in it shortly after starting my day, while my mind is fresh. After reading scripture, I pray by writing my thoughts to Father God. Usually, he replies and I write down what I think he is saying to me. So my journal becomes a sort of record of our conversation. Of course, you don’t have to have my faith to keep a journal.

I remember when I first began, the advice of Bill Hybels was helpful.⁴ I used to begin each daily journal with the reflective word: “Yesterday...” I remember I struggled at first to think who my audience was. Then I found both my audience and my voice. Both came with practice, not immediately. I believe it is so for most matters of the soul.

“Thoughts disentangle themselves when
they pass through your fingertips.”

Dawson Trotman

I believe this observation by Trotman is quite profound. How do we reflect? How do we make sense of the noise in our heads? I find writing is a key medium for me. I handwrite my journal. This slows me down. I begin to “think at the speed of write.” It can become very powerful as a route to greater self-awareness, greater mindfulness.

For me, writing is a creative exercise. All creatives know that their first attempts, their first draft is usually poor. They learn to live with that fact and to not let it deter them.⁵ They develop mechanisms for allowing the critic within them to come back later to “review the rubbish.”

⁴ Hybels (1998) *Too Busy Not to Pray: Slowing Down To Be with God*, Inter-Varsity Press.

⁵ This is another instance of the battle between our ears.

I have come to like certain stationery. I now enjoy writing; it is a pleasure. With the right stationery, it's as if the pen just flows. It's a private joy.

Michael Hyatt talks about “taking the role of the journalist” and this is partly the benefit of journaling for me. It helps me take a more objective assessment of my experiences. I get it out of my head and onto paper. Then I can assess my thoughts and reactions rather more critically.

I have found this to become a powerful way of learning. We learn to review and adjust our behaviours accordingly. This practice can then be built into the early review part of the ritual or our Daily Heads-Up.⁶

Exercise: Journal entry

Try this, preferably with a notebook and pen. If you prefer, use the space below in this book.

- Time and date your entry.
- Write this question out and then answer it: “What comes to my mind when I read this part of the book is...”
- Aim to write for five minutes, without interruption and without editing what you write. No one but you will see this. Just... write.

How was that experience?

Set yourself the goal of writing an entry, however small, every day for the next 28 days. Then see what happens. Write to me and let me know.

No doubt you may write something you do not consider good, but write long enough and eventually you will surprise yourself with insights and rich observations.

The power of our imagination

Dreams are today's answers to tomorrow's questions.

Edgar Cayce

Nothing in this world is created before it is imagined. An artist creates twice; first in their imagination and then in the physical realm. An architect visualises her structure with sketches and plans, and then builds it. We think in pictures.

“But I don’t have an imagination.” We all have an imagination. If you can worry you can imagine. Worry is negative imagination. Anyone who can worry about the future has an imagination. The question is, “Do I choose to use my imagination positively or negatively?”

Without an imagination, we simply couldn’t function. Say, for example, you asked me at my office how to get to the car park behind Costa Coffee, I would easily be able to give you directions. “Go right out of the Park. At the roundabout turn right, the last exit, then proceed over two mini-roundabouts...” and so on. Now I had not deliberately committed those directions to my memory, so where did that information come from? I was picturing the journey I would take in my mind’s eye. I was thinking in pictures. I was imagining. We use our imagination this way all the time without realising it.

We all imagine. Good film directors use the audience’s imagination to engage and grip them with the story. In Hitchcock’s movies, for example, he created suspense not so much by showing the audience a threat, as by implying it through the imagination. Marketers use teaser campaigns, playing on our imaginations to engage our interest before displaying their newly launched product.

Neurologists maintain that the brain cannot distinguish between a physical memory and something vividly imagined. That potential can be both positive and negative. For example, a fifteen-year-old girl sees herself in the mirror and thinks she weighs twenty stone when in fact she weighs eight (!).

Our imagination can distort our perceptions. Imagination cannot be ignored, but it can be harnessed. We can cultivate a professional imagination where we “see” positive futures. For example, the technique of writing outcomes that we introduced in the chapter on Time does just that, it invites you to imagine.

Yet commonly business cultures do not encourage the overt use of our imaginations. “Get real,” we might be told. “Imagination is for children.” This is nonsense. This is really an invitation to be unimaginative in our work, to produce sub-standard work.

With knowledge work and the move to personal freedom, we must learn to harness our imagination with intent. This is self-leadership. One definition of a leader is someone who holds the tension between current reality and a beneficial future, which has to be imagined. Imagination is, therefore, an indispensable faculty of leaders.

Exercise: Imagine...

This chapter is mostly to do with living in the present, but a positive use of the imagination can help us undermine fears of the future in the present.

- Consider your next twenty-four hours and identify the most challenging moment that you anticipate. (Note: your negative imagination, perhaps.) It could be a meeting, or a phone call with someone you find very hard to get along with, or some assignment you are not finding easy. Settle it in your mind.
- Now consider your ideal outcome from that moment. Imagine that moment as a successful outcome. See yourself and the others involved. Notice how you feel, how you carry yourself.

That’s all. Make a note of your imagined outcome and compare it with the reality of how it went.

Although the outcome will probably not have exactly followed what you had positively imagined, consider this question: Were you better prepared or worse for that particular event?⁷

The chances are, you will have found the encounter went better because of going through this exercise.

Self-reflection and self-absorption

When we consider self-awareness, this is not an invitation to become self-absorbed, or worse, self-obsessed. For most people, we err on the side of not noticing ourselves carefully enough. Yet we can become too self-absorbed, not considerate enough of others - I know this because I am a driver! But this is not self-awareness, the critical assessment of our own thoughts and mental scripts.

Self-reflection should always have the intent of acting upon oneself as necessary. We notice ourselves, our thoughts and our feelings because this is evidence of the way we engage with the world. When we observe our internal narratives, our 'self-talk', we are then able to challenge it and make adjustments.

⁷ You can develop this even further. Sir Clive Woodward attributes at least some of the success of the England rugby team winning the World Cup to his forcing them to think through any eventuality that might arise during a game. If we were 3 points up with 10 minutes to go and got a penalty here, what should we do? And so on.

Meditation, Mindfulness and Prayer

If you surrender completely to the moments as they pass, you live more richly those moments.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh

Meditation is a disciplined exercise of something like our imagination. In recent years, we have seen the rise of mindfulness in business, as if this were something new. Christians, Buddhists, and long before either of them, Jews, have routinely been practising what has been called mindfulness. The only differences are:

1. It is now seen as relevant to business and self-leadership; and
2. It is secularised so as not to offend atheists.

Mindfulness techniques can be very simple and powerful. If you are interested in mindfulness practices, I recommend you attend a session led by someone experienced and qualified.⁸

There is one other technique that is from the wisdom of the ages: prayer. Prayer is simply purposeful and relational meditation via the context of a conversation with a loving, personal God who knows us intimately.

These practices can be extremely effective in bringing us out of ‘auto-pilot,’ the state where my wife talks to me as I’m writing this, and then I haven’t a clue what she just said to me. I was not present with her. I missed something important, and it was more than merely the information she was trying to convey.

As a leader, I find this a constant struggle. I need disciplines such as these to bump me regularly out of the future or the past into what’s happening now.

Celtic spirituality speaks of the ‘thin places,’ those places on the earth where heaven seems palpably present, places such as Iona and Lindisfarne. These are places where the believer can be jolted into a different way of seeing the world. These thin places are geographical.

⁸ There have been some cases where people have left mindfulness practices more disturbed, in a worse state than they started. If you are under certain kinds of medication or have had recent mental illness, I would strongly advise seeking advice from a trained practitioner or medic first.

In the dimension of time, there is an equivalent experience to the thin places. If we consider the time continuum of the past, the present and the future, the thin moment is now; it's this present moment.

The use of our imagination, using various visualisation techniques is usually focused on the future. The use of meditation and mindfulness practices help us focus on the present moment. The use of journaling tends to help us reflect on the recent past, although it can be used to focus on the present moment. Prayer is ubiquitous, helping us focus across our time span, although when in worship we tend to be in the present moment. It seems that our growth towards mastery is helped by living more in the present moment.

Presencing Techniques: Past, Present & Future



Also, there may be inhibiting experiences we bring into our present from the past, self-limiting beliefs that we have owned from what others, usually authority figures, have said about us, that we need to analyse and overcome. We can do that by journaling and prayer (as in a conversation with the living God) that release us to greatness.⁹ This diagram shows how these different techniques or practices work on our interpretation of the past, our awareness of the present and our anticipation of the future.

⁹ I find many people operate from a limited “religious” paradigm of prayer. As such it appears, rightly, irrelevant to gaining a sense of Presence. This is one tragedy that religion has done to us, robbing us a vital expression of our humanity except in the most extreme situations.

Eliminating hurry sickness

Ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.

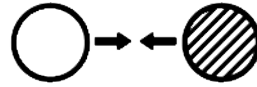
Dallas Willard

When we consider these practices of Presence, such as journaling, meditation, mindfulness and prayer, they really go in the opposite direction of something we call hurry sickness. These practices require us positively to slow down. There's something quite powerful in doing the opposite to this urge to constantly hurry in our lives by choosing to do the very opposite.

And suddenly we find that what drives us through hurry sickness isn't so strong at all. And that's another step towards our freedom.

CHAPTER 10

Relationships



If your emotional abilities aren't in hand, if you don't have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can't have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far.

Daniel Goleman

Our ability to lead ourselves well brings us, sooner or later, to the relationships we have with the people around us. The effect of the relationships with people with whom we live and work makes a considerable impact on how we order our private world.

Unless we are parents of young children, we cannot truly manage other people, they need to be considered differently from other areas of personal freedom.¹ We can manage how we engage with them and work with them to help us on our journey.

¹ For example, there is the oxymoron in project management literature of “stakeholder management”. This is nonsense. Good luck with trying to “manage” an external person or group that you have no control over! Instead, my book on this - *Practical People Engagement* - always uses the concept of ‘engagement,’ which is more honouring to those around us ... and more effective.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence, or EQ, has made huge inroads into the way we conceive of becoming more powerful in the workplace. People who achieve more are not necessarily more intellectually capable (IQ). The discriminator seems to be EQ. It has been described as having four fundamental components:

1. Self-awareness, which we've talked about in the chapter on Presence.
2. Self-management which might be also called self-leadership.
3. Social Awareness.
4. Social Skills.

In this chapter, we look at the latter two, Social Awareness and Social Skills.

So EQ is the ability to be more socially aware, to 'read the room', to empathise with someone, to sense the atmospheres people bring with them, to be students of body language and the micro "tells" indicating where people are trying to exert power over us, or signalling something else quite subtle.² It is the faculty that people can develop as part of being able to survive and prosper as a social being.

Evidence suggests that the younger, "digitally native" generation needs to learn these skills even more. They may be more digitally literate but some reports suggest that children and adolescents who spend five hours or more on screen are 40% less empathic. If so, we are looking at a generational time bomb of a generation ill-equipped to reach its higher potential.

If we are to progress in good work, we have to recognise the power of relationships to impede us in our move to freedom as well as to propel us. People pose both a great opportunity and a great threat towards our progress to doing our best work. Some relationships lead and support us to greater creativity and breakthrough by collaboration in teams and through positive, supportive accountability. Other relationships are intrusive, controlling, even abusive, seeking to make us conform to their standards, their way of doing things, following their priorities.

² This is tricky in the virtual world, where we are physically remote from people. However, there are advances in video-conferencing platforms that continue to erode the barriers to rich human engagement.

From my own conversations, I find most people have had at least one relationship that has attempted to control or abuse them. It could have been from their boss, a parent, a sibling, a co-worker, or even their spouse or partner. Whatever that relationship is, our first step of freedom is to become aware that it is abusive to us. The second is not to consort or comply with it.

In extreme cases, we must extract ourselves from that relationship. Danny Silk puts this very well when he talks about different boundaries.³ Consider a meeting we are part of with our co-workers, when one of our colleagues feels compelled to be emotionally uncontrolled and express his anger with us in front of our boss and our peers. It feels like we are under a personal attack. What should we do?

I cannot set out the exact steps to take that would be guaranteed to work in all such situations, but I believe the first thing to do is to **pause**. This allows a breathing space to observe our own emotions, but it can also help to break the state in the room. We choose not to engage with the argument but exercise our self-awareness as we sit quietly, rather than to react in anger.

Then, when we are given our say, we hold a mirror up to them, showing them what we see, and the feelings we are tempted with in this moment.

We then make it clear that we are not complying with the image that they are trying to project onto us. We do not accept we are a fool, although we may have done something foolish. (There is a big difference: one is to do with our identity, the other to do with an act of foolishness, perhaps.) We do not accept that we (our identity) is incompetent, or whatever. We may not need to say these things, and in some contexts, it may be better not to. However, in the way we react, we do not comply with their image of us as a fool or as an incompetent.

If we still need to, we explain that the way they have put this to us is unacceptable to us and say, "If you continue in this way, I'm going to leave this conversation until you are able to have a conversation with mutual respect." This is calling them to be a better version of themselves. We must be prepared to exercise our freedom from abuse by leaving that meeting, whatever the consequences.

3 Danny Silk (2015) *Keep Your Love On: Connection, Communication & Boundaries* Loving on Purpose.

Good sense may be recovered in that meeting. On the other hand, it may not, so there is a price we must be prepared to pay for our freedom. Remember, we are not seeking to control others in the cause of exercising our freedom. Freedom is not a zero-sum game: "It's my freedom or yours." No, we seek freedom that is contagious to those around us, even those who seek to control us.

Someone has once described the workplaces we live in as psychic prisons.⁴ Interactions and commerce between individuals are done on the basis of compliance, coercion and fear. When we are in that atmosphere day after day it is hard to recognise it for what it is. It is legitimised. It becomes "normal." But it reduces everybody involved to prisoners.

The path to freedom is to extract ourselves from that and to demand - in a non-aggressive way - that dealings with us are not mediated through aggressive manipulation. Our freedom is also exercised by not consorting with others' emotions. If they get angry with us, we can choose not to react with anger or fear. If they attempt to bully us, we can choose not to comply with their bullying tactics. If they threaten us, we can choose to walk away without fear. We then become dangerous to the bully, and he has to re-evaluate his own strategy. I tend to agree with the assessment that most people who are bullies have fear within themselves. There is something of the coward in them.

It is amazing how often, when I don't consort or comply with these kinds of threats, with this kind of negative culture, it comes round to adapt to - but not necessarily 'adopt' - my values of civility.

It does require courage, a quality not discussed enough in business, in my opinion.

Now what I am not saying here is that we are the centre of the Universe and that everybody must fall in step with us. But I am suggesting that the way we behave and carry ourselves through conflict has more influence than we might at first realise. Many people will be watching us in that defining moment. When we begin to step out and break states and shift atmospheres, when we cut short certain unhelpful emotional narratives, by not complying with them or feeding them, suddenly dramatically positive differences can happen.

⁴ Gareth Morgan argues that 'human beings have a knack for getting trapped in webs of their own creation' (*Images of Organization*, 2006, p. 207) and he uses the 'Psychic Prison' metaphor as a means of encouraging people to 'think outside of the box'.

Relational Boundaries

As noted already, boundaries are limits we set for ourselves that exclude other things. When it comes to the matter of relationships we must all learn to apply boundaries. If we were totally transparent and intimate with everyone it would be unhealthy, socially disastrous even. So we have learned a complex way of assessing others to determine who we will let into our boundaries. A healthy identity requires healthy relational boundaries. Knowing who we are will express itself in being careful who we let into our confidence, and careful as to the degrees of confidence we entrust to others.

This becomes rather more explicit for us as we learn to deal with relationships through the internet. We learn to make overt decisions on what to share with people depending on the circles they move within, and how much we trust them.

The “Stop Doing” List is one way we can explore and state objectively what our relational boundaries might be.

Email & relationships

Paul was a programme manager whom I coached a while back. He worked from two different sites and might only visit the site where most of his team worked perhaps once or twice a month. We discussed his frustration with how email was pulling his day out of shape. I suggested he only look at his emails twice a day, and that he filtered carefully those emails he replied to.

When I had a session with Paul a couple of months later he told me that he had not only done as I had advised but that he had also decided on a nil response policy with his programme team. He didn't reply to *any* internal emails.

His colleagues compensated for this by choosing moments to come and see him. He also began to institute short routine one-to-one meetings with all of his direct reports.

Paul found initially that his team complained that he was very remote. He persevered and very quickly began to gain a greater confidence within his team. He also remarked how much more information he was picking up by these face-to-face meetings. Plus he was more productive during his working day.

It bears repeating that email as a communications medium, is pretty recent in human history. We are still adapting as a society in how to use it optimally.⁵ Also, there is a plethora of communications apps from instant messaging to more complex social media platforms. For the sake of simplicity, we will consider email here and consider how these approaches can be translated into other media.

Many of us, when we first got hold of email, began to use it as a sort of instant messaging service. We perhaps sent a short email and we expected a reply by return of receipt, which was immediate. We expected, in effect, an electronic conversation in almost real time.

Most of us have learned that, *on the whole*, a superior way of using the medium of email is not by doing that, but rather by rationing how frequently during the working day we look at our email inbox, as Paul did.

Because email is a social medium, this has an interesting effect on others. After a while they begin to adapt to our habits, recognising that we cannot be relied upon to reply instantly. So on subsequent occasions, they moderate their expectations of how rapidly we will respond. They wait for us. If we are consistent in our behaviours, particularly in honouring our commitments to reply to a certain category of email, then most will trust us enough to wait.

The exception to this is what I encountered on one of my workshops, where a rather domineering boss expected my delegates always to give an instant response to their email. Moreover, the nature of their job required them to be 'on call' as it were, to respond instantly to support requests. Now, that is a different matter where the context is one of service urgency in terms of the functional role that that person is carrying out.

⁵ A lot of the behaviours we now see around email in particular, and the internet, in general, were evidenced in the 19th century with the advent of the telegraph. See *The Victorian Internet* (1999). Thanks to my son, Antony, for drawing this to my attention.

But for most of us, we don't need to comply with the implied tyranny of the urgent in an email. I've found in my own experience that if someone wants an instant response from me, they will do something outrageously old-fashioned, like picking up the phone and calling me, or even walking over to my desk and asking for a moment of my time. Again, my previous behaviour may or may not have counselled them to expect my full attention to their urgency. They had learned that an email might not produce an instant and immediate response from me.

So how we *respond* to people who frequently email us will counsel them on how and how quickly we might respond in future.

In some office cultures, they ration a certain period of the day, usually first thing in the morning, for fun, interactive use of email, text, IM, WhatsApp, Slack, Yammer or whatever the team's preferred communications medium might be. And during that period, there's a free-for-all where there are jokes, laughter, competitions, a sort of riffing on a team spirit, which builds a sense of positive social cohesion. However, this all happens well if it happens within some overtly-agreed boundaries, either time boundaries or topic boundaries, or both.

Praising others

We looked at praise in chapter 6 (Identity) as a means of gaining a positive, healthy self-image of ourselves. We also need to consider how we mobilise appropriate, timely recognition and praise in our relationships with others.

Generally speaking, I have found that there could be more such praise and encouragement in most organisations I work with. I find my clients are often starved of positive affirmation. Appropriate praise is a major route for encouragement. Quite apart from the influence it gives us, praise helps us do better work in all kinds of ways.

Usually, I have found senior managers are reluctant to praise their people because they fear a rise of arrogance or of misunderstanding, or that performance will drop off after someone is praised. There are at least two other possible reasons:

- Is it a practice they are unfamiliar with?

- Does the superior feel they might be exposed as being inadequate if they praise their subordinates?

I once had lunch with the director of a major department in a local government organisation where I worked at the time. He was at least two grades higher than me, but to his credit was accessible and talked with whoever was useful to him.

I admired what he was doing. I told him so. Then I asked him if ever he was praised by the local politicians or his peers.

“Never,” he told me.

There was a moment poignant sadness that hung in the air. This man was starved of appropriate praise.

Some may object that if someone is paid enough then that is their reward; that should be good enough. I disagree. We all need appropriate praise, otherwise, we find ourselves working in a very distorted world of social feedback, where we only hear the negative about ourselves. Over time, this can damage our legitimate passion for the job or even our self-identity.

Praising people may be a new skill we need to develop, perhaps as part of developing our own identity. I remember Bill Hybels, the leader of a twenty thousand-strong faith organisation in Barrington, Illinois, telling me that he has had personal “Senior Pastor” notecards printed, and when he catches someone doing good work, he handwrites a short note of appreciation to them. Often he will find that note pinned up on their cubicle months later. It means a lot to that person.

If you write praise here are some guidelines:

- Keep it short. Don’t eulogise.
- Keep it factual.
- Explain how it made you feel.
- Leave it at that.

Exercise: Praise a colleague

Try it with a co-worker. Catch them doing something admirable, and write them a note. If you feel confident enough, write them a hand-written note. It will mean more than an email.

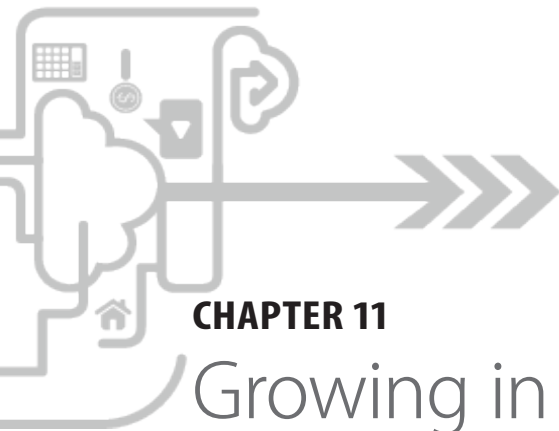
There's so much more

There is much more in this area of relationships that we could explore. Suffice it to say that it is beyond the scope of this book which is primarily focused on our own inner leadership towards doing good work. Nevertheless, it is recognising that distractions and distortions in our private world often come through relationships but so too come opportunities for a breakthrough, in our own lives and the lives of those around us.

Summary

- How we engage with others is part of self-leadership.
- Other aspects of EQ, social awareness and social skills can help us here.
- The key is to identify and maintain our relational boundaries.
- Our use of social media and email also requires relational boundaries.
- A key social skill is being able to praise others appropriately.





CHAPTER 11

Growing in Self-leadership

As we have seen, our ability to do good work is an expression of our ability to lead ourselves. But how do we grow in this?

There is a path towards what is called mastery. It seems to apply to different skills. We will explore the stages along this path. First, we will consider how we grow in the mastery of any skill, such as playing chess, riding a bicycle, managing a project, or competing in a sport. Then we will see how that translates into our journey towards greater self-leadership, or personal mastery.

Mastery and the path towards it

You've got to learn your instrument. Then, you practice, practice, practice. And then, when you finally get up there on the bandstand, forget all that and just wail.

Charlie Parker

The word “mastery” has an unfortunate connotation with the domination of others. We reject that meaning here. Rather, we are concerned with another deeper, more positive, meaning of the word “mastery.”

The dictionary definition of mastery is:

- *knowledge and skill that allows you to do, use, or understand something very well* (Merriam-Webster)

- *command or grasp, as of a subject* (Dictionary.com)

As in the Dictionary.com definition, there is the common expression of “having mastery of a subject.” As we will see, there seems to be an over-emphasis in education on the acquisition of knowledge rather than experience.

In 1980, after some research into how to train US Air Force pilots in emergency situations, brothers Simon and Hubert Dreyfus proposed their model of skill acquisition.¹

The original Dreyfus model is based on four binary qualities:

- Recollection (non-situational or situational)
- Recognition (decomposed or holistic)
- Decision (analytical or intuitive)
- Awareness (monitoring or absorbed).

For any skill they considered, the Dreyfus brothers identified five generic stages towards mastery:

1. Novice

The novice has a non-situational recollection, decomposed recognition, analytical decision, and monitoring awareness. This means that the novice recognises the world of this skill outside of any context and learns to recognise elements, not realising they may be part of an interconnected system. If they have to make decisions, these will be made using whatever analysis they are conscious of, and they work hard to pay attention to everything that is going on. In the language of Gestalt psychology, this is very much in the area of “conscious incompetence,” and it is *hard work*. It is hard work because the novice attempts to keep most their work in their conscious brain, their pre-frontal lobe. And it’s exhausting.

¹ Stuart E. Dreyfus and Hubert L. Dreyfus, *A Five-Stage Model of Mental Activities Involved in Directed Skill Acquisition* (February, 1980), University of California, Berkley.

2. Advanced Beginner²

The advanced beginner has a situational recollection, decomposed recognition, analytical decision, and monitoring awareness. Here the person is beginning to control their skill and to recognise different results in different situations. “I need to do this in this context, and something different in another context.”

3. Proficient

As a person becomes proficient in a skill they have a situational recollection, holistic recognition, analytical decision, and monitoring awareness. The proficient learner now begins to see a wider “system” in which they operate. They appreciate that they may affect other parts of that system and vice versa. The proficient practitioner may feel they have “arrived”. They think they “get” this system, but their understanding may still be partial and fairly book-learned.

4. Expert

The expert practitioner has a situational recollection, holistic recognition, intuitive decision, but still a monitoring awareness. At this level, experience and practice in different situations bring the expert to a point where they access and value intuition. This is what some athletes describe as the experience of “flow”, but it can appear to the novice as “breaking the rules.” An expert chess player, for example, no longer wins by working out mathematical probabilities, but by “seeing” greater patterns, and acting on them.

5. Master

The master practitioner has a situational recollection, holistic recognition, intuitive decision, and absorbed awareness. The master now moves at the highest levels of systems awareness, at ease with intuitive responses, and is drawn to unusual patterns as their conscious focus in new situations.

² The Dreyfus brothers also called this stage ‘Competence’. I prefer ‘Advanced Beginner’ since it does not confuse with another meaning of ‘competence’ I use elsewhere. Also, as a label it is more obviously distinct from the following stage of proficiency.

So, using the Dreyfus model, we can regard ourselves as somewhere on this journey towards personal mastery. As we will see, people can stop developing that skill at any of these stages. Someone can settle at level 3, for example, and progress no further. We could represent the five stages as a sort of graph of performance against time like this:



In Appendix C at the back of this book, you will find an illustration of these five levels in terms of the skill of riding a bicycle.

When we consider the skills we need to develop in self-leadership, it is important to see that there are certain stages we travel through as we hone and develop this life skill. Becoming aware of where we are on this model can encourage us to keep going, and where we need to pay attention in order to grow to the next level.

Five personas towards personal mastery

Let us endeavour to live that when we come to die, even the undertaker will be sorry.

Mark Twain

Now let's consider five people, each at different stages of developing mastery. The five people are personas, types of people at different stages of developing their personal mastery in better working.

In my earlier book, *Practical People Engagement*, I explained the power of the persona: creating a fictional individual who might represent a large group. A persona can help us get into the mind of a group in a very powerful way. Here we shall consider the levels of skill acquisition by considering each level as a different persona.

1. Ned the Novice



Meet Ned. Ned is a novice at self-leadership. Ned's key operating question is: **How do I do my job?**

So he looks for the rules. The rules are crucial to Ned; he sees them as vital to understanding what his job is and to surviving in it. A job without rules doesn't make sense to Ned. If there is a job to be done, it must have one right way to do it. There must be rules

Ned tends to pay attention to artefacts: the documents and tasks of his job description. Rules are there to help him write the documents and do the tasks properly.

If the skill were riding a bike, Ned would be able to identify a bike from other modes of transport.

When it comes to personal mastery, we find Ned focused on writing emails, reports, press releases and so on. He looks for the document templates and examples of good documents, and for the rule books. Ned begins to cut and paste from good example documents, irrespective of how relevant the example is to the context of the original example. If he attends meetings, he is keen to know what the transactions are, the decisions made, and in particular what this means for his work.

He doesn't write down much, if anything, about his own priorities and work plans, and keeps much of what is important in his head. His desk is like his mind, very cluttered and he spends a lot of time searching for things, and feeling guilty when he forgets something important.

His recovery cycle is in the evening when he goes down to the bar with other workmates to talk about the day and caricature the bosses.

2. Becky the Advanced Beginner



Becky, on the other hand, is now an Advanced Beginner. She has a different operating question than Ned: **What do they need to do for me?**

This is because Becky is becoming aware of different contexts, different situations. She once was a novice but has grown to understand that she operates in a wider system, in a bigger context than she understood when she was still a novice. She has a sense of being part of a wider system, but her concern is how work is passed between her and other members of her team, the hand-offs to her by others in the process, the interface between her work and others.

If the skill were riding a bike, Becky could do it, but she would be wobbly. She would be a danger to herself and to other road users. But she just needs practice. Her focus is still very much on staying upright, and very little else.

When it comes to doing good work, Becky now values defined process. It is the way she makes sense of different contexts. For her, the process is king. She has learned accountability to others in her process. So she understands her own role well. She has learned to operate with some fluency. She is tempted at times to think this is ultimate mastery.

Becky may look down on Ned because she realises Ned has no sense of his context within the system or process. Becky does, and this makes her proud of her fluency and her context within the system.

Becky sees the value of working on workflows. She will appreciate the GTD system, for example, because it is a well-worked system.

If anything, Becky is a little too concerned about others she interacts with. She will spend a lot of time in her email, looking for ways to correct and chase others. As time goes by, she gets frustrated because more and more people are not replying. She might wonder why.

Also, she is vulnerable to all kinds of alerts on her computer and her phone. Because of the unchallenged urgency in the way she works, she will give each alert immediate attention. As her day slips away, she becomes more frustrated.

She does have the beginnings of a priority system, but it is entirely without reference to context. So she will work on something when it might be better if she gave herself to something else. Her boss has noticed this and is working on it with her.

Becky does have an ordered desk, but her computer is still hopelessly cluttered. She still takes a fairly reactionary attitude to where things are stored.

3. Paul the Proficient



Paul is proficient at his job. He is now beginning to take a holistic approach to the work he does, and can connect some of it to the goals of his organisation.

Paul is competent in his job. He sees himself as a hero. He sees that when he was a novice or an advanced beginner, he didn't appreciate passion. He now regards passion as a "good thing" and politics (possibly) as a "bad thing", but both as real parts of his working landscape, rather background noise to the proper work of a rational workplace. Paul now sees himself as an agent of a cause. He connects to the vision of his leaders. He "gets it". He is able to translate strategy into his own practical actions. His blind spot is that he assumes he is acting on a *static* system. He doesn't see himself as part of that system, and he doesn't see that the system itself is changing.

In much the same way, Shakespeare's Romeo was proficient in a limited sense he pursued Juliet, to the exclusion of everything else. He was very adept at wooing her. But his downfall was not considering the wider consequences of winning the heart of a maiden in a hostile house. ("What was he thinking of?!")

Paul does place greater importance on those things the rulebooks hardly ever mentioned - relationships. He is focused on whom he is pursuing - the person he is seeking to persuade. He studies them, how they behave, what their responses might be like. In communications, he is learning empathy, studying how the person he is seeking to influence will react.

If riding a bike were the skill he was developing, Paul would now be at the level of competence in handling a bike. He could pass certain tests. He would not be a danger to other road users, but they might be to him. He would not necessarily have developed the skill enough to anticipate what other road users might do.

In his work, Paul is beginning to see beyond his email. He uses the phone and face-to-face as more common media. He gets the need to use and develop his social skills and is an avid user of social media.

He thinks outcomes, but in a limited sense. His frustration is when he invests so much of his time in a particular engagement and the other person walks away.

Paul is connecting to what gives him joy in his work. He is becoming more aware of where his true strengths lie. He is still learning to say "No" to things, and can still spread himself too thinly.

Paul hasn't yet given much attention to his physical environment and still keeps a number of "open loops" in his head. He is learning to commit more things to writing, though. He uses Personal Kanban as an organising technique.

4. Erica the Expert



Erica is an expert. She has made a major shift in her thinking. Where Paul habitually operates in a universe where he is at the centre, Erica recognises it is not all about her. She engages with people around her as a servant. She continues with a strong sense of good practice, good procedure, with

a sense of mission, but she is much more *adaptive* in how she does things in the different situations that she encounters. She recognises impediments to the outcomes she seeks to achieve with their colleagues and clients and seeks to remove them.

Often her old rulebooks are invaluable; when they are, Erica rarely needs to consult them since she has gained fluency in them. However, she learns a confidence even where there seem to be “no rules.” She now understands that the system she works within is dynamic, so whilst she is clear on her end game, she understands that there might well be several routes to achieving it. She brings her passion to achieving these ends but she is also alert to the fact that others may not share her passion, and she regards these signals as important pieces of information.

At the expert level, Erica can now handle a bike to urban bicycle courier level. She can keep herself safe in some pretty dangerous and rapidly-changing contexts. She keeps good internal maps of her city so that, if she encounters some obstacle or congestion, she can work out an alternative route as she goes. She has a high degree of spatial and external awareness.

In her office skills, Erica is much more self-aware of who she is and confident of where she has achieved success. Now she reflects far more and is looking for the unusual patterns. Although she is exposed to a wide variety of contexts in her daily work, she still limits herself to a fairly narrow focus of learning and self-development. She has learned not to spread herself too thinly. She has made a very conscious connection between caring for herself and caring for her clients and her outcomes: she “puts [her] own mask on first before putting someone else’s on.”

Her boundaries are clear, and she takes care of herself physically and emotionally.

She has well-established rituals and a well-ordered work environment. She takes care of her stuff, so her stuff helps her routinely yield great results.

5. Martha the Master



Martha is a master. Her enterprise is like building a city, a grand design or a new level of business capability, that she alone cannot build; so she recruits others to help her. She doesn't feel the need to be expert at everything, but she does bring a deep sense of ability across a range of city-building challenges. This means that Martha places a high value on recruitment - getting the right people into their mission. They place great importance on "getting the right people on the bus."³

If riding a bicycle were the skill, Martha would now be a world-class athlete, where the bicycle is an extension of herself. She would lead a team in, say, the *Tour de France*. She would be at the peak of her skill.

Martha has a vision for a complex system and builds towards it. She is much more than a Grand Architect, though. Her mission of building a city is accompanied by a strong sense of purpose. She thinks beyond a system, beyond outcomes to wider impacts. As part of this, she is focused on sustainable, as well as transformational, change. What she is building is transcendent. She sees herself as not merely building artefacts but, more importantly, building and shaping a culture.

For Martha, then, mastery in any competence is merely a means to an end. She acquires skill as a means to help her achieve that end. Paradoxically, being a "master" as a status means very little to Martha. She is focused on her purpose, not on her own mastery.

Martha sees herself as building a legacy that she hopes will outlast her. So what motivates her is not merely enhancing her career, but creating something good that will outlive her.

Martha uses high-order visionary skills, but draws others in to co-create that vision, the picture of that better future, because she recognises commitment is greater when someone sees a part of themselves in that future. So she works a lot on identifying her own and her city's/organisation's values. She promotes the principles by which relationships and commerce will happen within that organisation or city. She is gripped by exploring a unique vision for her city.

³ Getting "the right people on the bus" is one of the key elements in Jim Collins' *Good to Great*, where he explores how good companies make the transition to becoming visionary organisations

Her work is more *on* the business rather than *in* the business, and Martha is careful not to get drawn into areas that would deny her space for the truly important.

Martha has a carefully refined and intuitive sense of how to move towards something as important, as a priority in the moment.

How each persona grows

If gaining personal mastery is a learning journey, what does that journey look like at each stage? It can look very different to the novice, the advanced beginner, the competent, the proficient and the master. Let us consider what is relevant for each persona, and therefore what they feel they need to access when they are in each of these stages.

How Ned, the Novice Grows

As a novice, Ned grows by being trained, by being introduced to different ways of doing his job. He understands reality through the grid of the Rule Book. If reality does not line up with the rules, then it should. Ned will seek to adjust reality to the Rule Book. If he can't, then Ned will still diagnose reality in terms of the rules. He will “park” anomalies and try to ignore them. For Ned, everything not catered for by the Rule Book is illegal. It's just wrong. This can become all too stressful for Ned at times. So he can look somewhat inflexible to those around him, even legalistic at times. But it's just because he is trying to survive. He is at the beginning of mastering a particular skill.

Ned is focused primarily on his own work. Since he sees work as essentially about producing artefacts, documents, he will look for document templates.

Also, training with clear “right” answers is what Ned looks for. Ned has a felt need for training. His conscious incompetence is so great that he welcomes any opportunity to understand the rules better. He tends to cooperate with “push” solutions, when someone like his manager recommends or “pushes” him onto a training course. Credentials are a good motivator, as Ned has a strong felt need to gain some credibility among his peers. The key here is to feed Ned training that plays to his few reference points. It is important that the training solutions are clearly relevant to his current challenges and so these are introduced in a timely way.⁴

⁴ We have found in pearcemayfield that the best delegates are the ones who have struggled with particular challenges we are exploring in the class for a short period of time before coming on a course. These people have strong reference points in the workplace.

Ultimate mastery for Ned is when he can teach that Rule Book that is for him authoritative, his “Best Practice.” He will train others in his Rule Book. He might even be invited to speak at professional novice conferences and criticise other rulebooks, and diagnose problems in terms of his Rule Book and his templates.

The rest of us need to be careful: many trainers are simply glorified advanced beginners, maybe even novices themselves.

How Becky, the Advanced Beginner, Grows

Becky grows by translating abstract concepts into practical steps, reflecting on her experience and refining her understanding. She learns not just how she is to operate, but also how others are supposed to operate in a system as well. She is now concerned about how other members of her team operate. Often she begins to criticise other team members for not handing work over to her as fluently as she would like. She can also be very critical of Ned, who brings pure theory to the discussion and is stuck in matters of form and content. Becky values her experience as a differentiator from being a mere novice.

Becky also grows by acting in small ways on the process to improve it. She loves systems like Six Sigma and seeks to apply this meta-Rule Book onto every part of her organisation. She views her system as her “secret sauce”, her edge in tackling any work problem.

Sometimes Becky will take a novice under her wing and coach them. This helps her to grow as well, partly because she learns at a deeper level if she has to explain something thoroughly, and partly because the novice will ask her pertinent questions she may never have considered before. At this level of skill acquisition there is a heightened appetite for qualifications and to be active in specialist professional bodies. Becky values being in safe environments with peers in the same roles from other organisations. This helps her validate the challenges she has, and it is easier for her to learn from others she respects about the solutions they have found to systemic problems.

Training is still useful to Becky, particularly where it exposes her to a wider systemic context. For example, she was trained as a software developer in Agile project practices as a novice. In her Agile training, she was taught techniques such as User Stories and Planning Poker. When she is exposed to a programme

management course, she gains more from the training if her previous learning is validated and “fits” the new map of programme management, which she sees as a wider picture. Such training invites her into a personal paradigm shift, a wider, richer understanding of her environment.

How Paul, the Proficient, Grows

Paul sees himself on a mission to act on individuals and on the system to change them. He particularly values conferences with inspirational speakers who use a language he can relate to in his own context. He is amenable to more specialist courses and workshops to help him overcome a particular pattern of problems that he has come to notice.

Paul grows more now by taking small experiments, small risks. He learns from these small steps. He begins to develop his own political map of the people around him and their power. He grows in an understanding that the place he works in functions as much by relationships as it does by any process, and he too can develop these relationships.

Paul still engages with the world with linear models in mind. (“If I do this, then they will do that, and then this will happen.”) He develops new tactics. He learns by moving towards people and seeking to influence them.

Paul finds coaching from others more experienced than him extremely helpful, in that they open up his awareness through challenges and questions. He is ready to appreciate and gain from training and workshops. It could lead him into related areas of training such as change management, in influencing skills, emotional intelligence, and stakeholder engagement, so that he develops a wider mental model of the kind of arena he works within. Often Paul values mentoring and coaching in overcoming the particular barriers that frustrate him. He is also likely to access learning objects via YouTube and MOOCs.

How Erica, the Expert Grows

Erica has learned to value learning by getting out there, by practice. She is aware that her best learning is in execution. She enjoys purposeful improvisation. She enjoys the adventure of engaging with people in different situations. She learns by reflection, by research, conversation with peers, and by approaching her work with a sense of empirical humility: that is, she tests things with assumptions, whilst being willing to accept that her assumptions might be wrong. She learns

which tests are safe in each context, and which are not. She learns with other experts in discussing these things and sharing experiences. She begins to meld her own strategies with her own personality. These strategies aren't so rigid that they can be distilled into rulebooks but they do have Erica's personal signature all over them.

Regular top-up training days or a well-crafted leadership academy with action learning in smaller groups can be extremely effective for someone at this level of mastery.

Erica is now a thoroughly self-directed learner and is willing to research for herself online and in her reading. Where she can, she enjoys relevant seminars, webinars, and conferences.

How Martha, the Master, Grows

When she is at this level of mastery, Martha may well access all the other modes of learning. She accesses these learning opportunities with a kind of glorious humility.⁵ She prefers to learn through high-trust relationships in small group summits, sharing ideas, breakthroughs and visions. She has developed a network of other masters and specialists in other areas, and she "pulls" the learning and encouragement from these people. She values specific, relevant, short summaries or seminars.

Martha draws encouragement from other masters as well as by building into the lives of the experts, the competent, the advanced beginners and the novices in her own city. Coaching others and articulating her approach and vision to others is also a major way she develops her mastery.

With such a grand ambition, Martha recognises that there are emergent patterns and themes within her city and in the wider world that she could not have anticipated. She doesn't feel the desire to ignore or control these emergent patterns, but rather to identify them, learn about them, and exploit them. She leans into the future and is a student of it.

⁵ Alexander von Humboldt, the great German geographer, even as an old man could be found sitting at the back of the lecture theatre in the University of Berlin. Often the lecturer would reference von Humboldt's own work. If asked why he was doing this, his reply always was: "Lest I missed anything in my youth." He was an example of lifelong learning, if ever there was one.

There is a cumulative understanding as we go up these levels. Lower-order practices and tools are not always abandoned as we grow; sometimes the tool is reframed into a wider perspective.

For example, with email, the novice may see little more than his email inbox. As he focuses on the important and his priorities become clearer, the sequence of messages in his inbox becomes less pivotal. The heuristics he uses - the rules he evolves and applies to filtering all his incoming messages - change; he now scans email in a different way. He moves from being driven by incoming email and chooses which matter to respond to on a more rounded set of priorities that comes from a deeper personal clarity of his purpose. People who communicate with him regularly notice this and they are implicitly counselled that he does not use email as an instant messaging service; in turn, they learn to trust him to respond over certain matters at a time appropriate for him.

What stops us moving towards mastery?

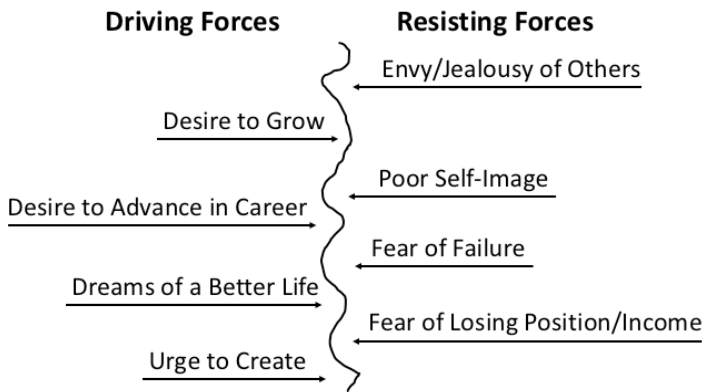
The shift in language from “What are the problems?” to “What are the impediments?” is significant. “Problems” may arise from unhappiness for any number of reasons. “Impediments” relate to goals. “What is preventing us from delighting clients?” An airing of impediments focuses the discussion on what is getting in the way of reaching the common goal.

Stephen Denning, *The Leader’s Guide to Radical Management*, p.179

David is an HR professional working in the health sector. He has been in his present position for four years and he finds there is an increasing challenge in just getting through his work. He would like to move more into other areas of management but he is afraid that his boss will think him disloyal. She has already made it clear that she would not welcome any suggestion of his moving to another part of the organisation. He feels trapped. He now begins to feel that it is not worth the

risk. In any case, he does not feel he can get any further in his career. He's thought about beginning a cycling business on his own, but he doesn't think he can make it, not with a family and a hungry mortgage to feed. He feels stuck.

These are common inhibitors along the road to mastery: fear, poor self-image, fear of failure, fear of vulnerability, envy/jealousy, hypocrisy/pretence.⁶ David's dilemma is worth expressing as a force field diagram (below). Unless he does something, David will be stuck.



This is a common experience for us all. The forces that bear on us can keep us where we are, in a kind of stand-off. As we try harder, the forces that resist our moves to change our situation often seem to increase and overwhelm us.

The insight of force-field analysis is this: rather than push harder against the resisting forces, often the most effective approach is to *weaken* those resisting forces, and then a good change happens naturally.

We will look next at two particular features in the learning journey that can inhibit our progress: inappropriate stretch and fear of failure.

⁶ Notice that none of these inhibitors are due to lack of innate ability. It is rarely the case that "I can't do this" is true.

Stretch

Man's mind, once stretched by a new idea,
never regains its original dimensions.

Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

The gap between what we can do now and what we need to do can also be an inhibitor to moving towards mastery. Learning anything new has some risk involved. How much risk should we take in growing in any skill?



Some play it safe. This is understandable. Wounds from past experience inhibit them from attempting anything new. However, this is very self-limiting. We will never come near to our full potential with hesitation as a life strategy.

Then there is the other extreme: radical recklessness. Clearly, some people are an accident waiting to happen, recklessly trying every switch on the flight deck. There are those who adopt a pretentious front, but they don't fool most people for long. Most of us can tell a fraud.

There is a happy medium. There is a zone between these two extremes where learning new levels of skill is appropriate. There is such a thing as appropriate stretch, appropriate self-challenge. Think about how parents encourage a young infant to learn a new skill like walking. They don't get frustrated by the infant falling. They understand that this is part of the learning process. Instead, they encourage the child to make another attempt and praise them for their efforts. In this supportive environment, the child learns a new skill.

So who encourages you when you fall?

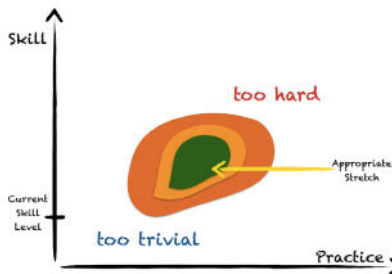
Or what about resuming an exercise regime? Many have injured themselves by attempting too much too quickly. Others abandon routines that didn't show results quickly enough.

As adults, we find that we move into environments that aren't that supportive of mistakes. In fact, some work environments are positively hostile towards any kind of mistake and inhibit healthy experimentation. If we fail, emotionally we fear we will die. In these places, people just keep their heads down and get on with their current level of competence. Such places do not encourage people to grow.

We must find our own ways of creating appropriate self-challenge, of observing and encouraging ourselves.

In business, many are seeking their own learning through Google, Amazon, Lynda, YouTube and other places. The problem here is often the stretch is inappropriate. I can't tell you how often I abandon a YouTube video because the stretch is not appropriate for me, for where I am in my learning journey. Like the porridge in the three bears story, too often it's too hot (too hard) or too cold (too trivial).

Unless there is an appropriate stretch, we never learn and we never grow new skills. So it's not merely a matter of "Just in time" training, it's also about appropriate stretch in that moment. And that's not an easy thing to serve up to a stranger.



When it comes to the matter of personal organisation systems, for example, we need systems that are neither too simplistic nor too elaborate. For example, I came across one system advocated by plannerholics.com recently. Although no doubt it is very worthy, is far too elaborate for me.

Failure

Everyone has the right to be a sucker once.

From the movie, *Two Mules for Sister Sarah*

An essential aspect of creativity is not being afraid to fail.

Dr Edwin Land

“Failure is not an option,” one sometimes hears, usually from some aggressive, Alan Sugar-like senior person.

Actually, I agree, but probably for a very different reason: failure is not an option... because it's a necessity.

I doubt I'll ever meet anyone who has developed mastery - in any field - flawlessly. In fact, failing seems to be an essential experience for development. It appears that when we fail with the right attitude, the act of failing can be the source of a major breakthrough. It jolts us into seeing the world differently. When we reframe reality then we are able to adapt and adjust our behaviours accordingly.

The paradox is that fear of failure can become one of the biggest inhibitors in developing higher levels of mastery. Most adults hate failing, and so avoid overtly learning contexts. Edgar Schein calls this inhibitor the “learning anxiety”.⁷

Then there is the issue of the severity of the fail. Clearly, all failures are not the same; some are catastrophic, some are minor. Some are in areas of the unknown, some are surprises in familiar areas of activity.

How we fail and where we fail seems to be important also. We can make major breakthroughs in our learning if we can devise safe experiments. We are not sure what the outcome will be. We do know that if we get it wrong, the failure won't be catastrophic and we will live another day. We will also be wiser. The experience will be valuable. Reflecting on why we failed could yield valuable insights.

Psychologically, though, we have a bias to avoid failure. We have what's called a loss aversion bias. We see failing as loss, and we tend to focus more the avoidance of loss, rather than the opportunity of gain. This is not always rational but it is hardwired in the way most of us emotionally react to the possibility of failure.

If we can learn to fail in the right way, to the right degree at the right moments, though, these experiments can turbocharge our progress towards mastery.

We have a motto in pearcemayfield: "Fail fast; fail cheap." We know failure cannot be avoided; we are fallible humans. The issue is rather to harness the experience of failing to our benefit and adapt accordingly. This develops within us what I call empirical humility.

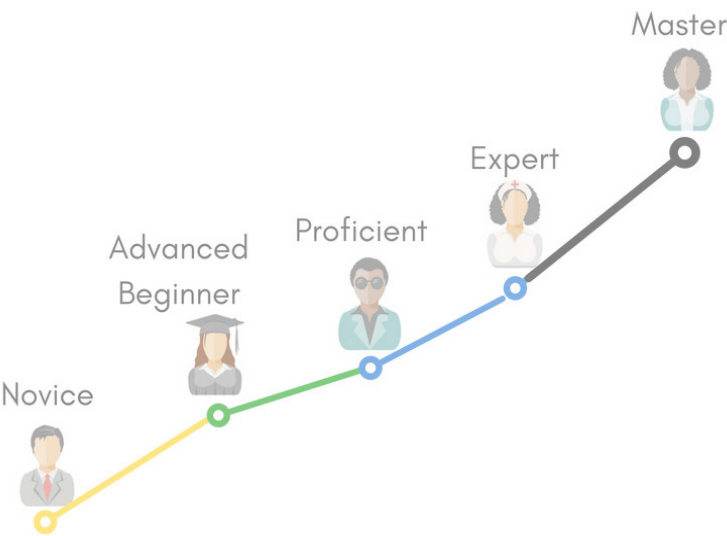
We test, we try. Sometimes we fail. So we use that evidence to adapt and try again.

The definition of stupidity is to try the same thing and expect a different result.

Albert Einstein

Summary

- We grow in “personal mastery” in a certain way.
- The Dreyfus model has identified skill acquisition at five levels:
 - » Novice
 - » Advanced Beginner
 - » Proficient
 - » Expert
 - » Master.
- Each level has its own characteristics of engaging with work.
- We grow from level to level in different ways.
- We need to recognise in ourselves any reasons for resisting our growth to personal mastery.
- We learn best with appropriate stretch.
- The way we deal with failure and frame it is also very important in our growth to maturity.



CHAPTER 12

Into action – towards a life more powerful

By now some of the passages in this book should have stimulated you to action. That was my intention as the author. So, here are some more practical exercises with which to continue your journey towards better self-leadership.

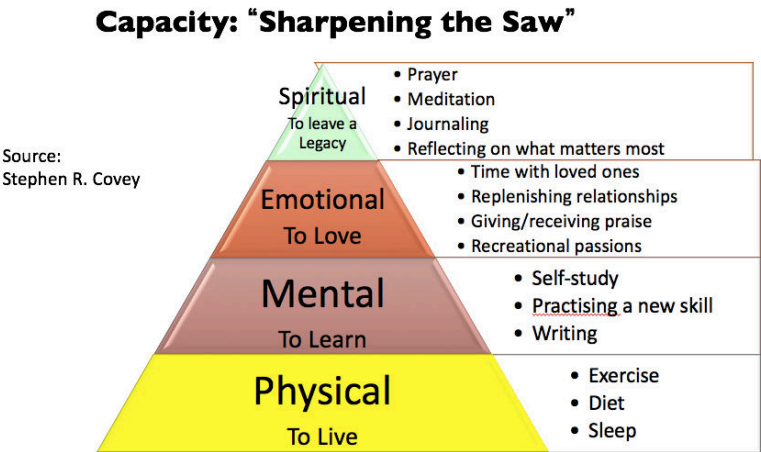
As you work through these questions, take your time. This is an invitation to deep reflection, to help you consider what is most important to you. Enjoy the reflection and maybe come back to these questions later.

If you would rather fill in a template, email me and I would be happy to send you one.

I hope you find these exercises and questions helpful.

Working on yourself

We considered this diagram earlier:¹



On a scale of 1 - 5, rate yourself now against each of these levels:

		1 (poor)	2	3	4	5 (great)
Physical	Exercise					
	Diet					
	Sleep					
Mental	Self-study					
	New Mental Skill					
	Writing					
Emotional	Time with loved ones					
	Replenishing relationships					
	Giving & receiving praise					
	Enjoying recreational passions					

¹ See “Sharpening the Saw” in the chapter on Energy, from Stephen Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

		1 (poor)	2	3	4	5 (great)
Spiritual	Prayer/ meditation					
	Journaling					

Revisiting your personal mission statement

In chapter 8 we did a small exercise based on Jim Collins’ three questions. Here we go deeper. Take time to answer each of these questions careful. It doesn’t matter if it takes you two or three sessions to complete this. These are important questions.

First, imagine you are attending a funeral. You see many familiar faces there. The service starts, and then you realise it is your funeral (!).

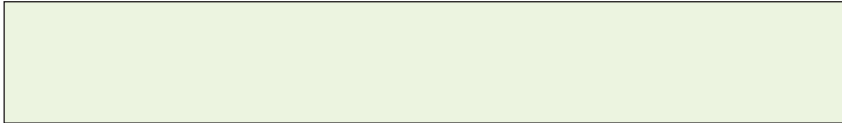
Think for a moment: what would you like people to say about you at that event? Choose someone from your family, a colleague from your workplace, your club or church, and someone from another circle or community you are part of.

Person	My role or relationship with them	Their tribute


Now consider, who has served as a **positive role model** for you, and has made a significant impact on you? Why? Why did they do it?



What qualities does this person/did they have that you would like to emulate?



What other qualities in other people do I most admire?



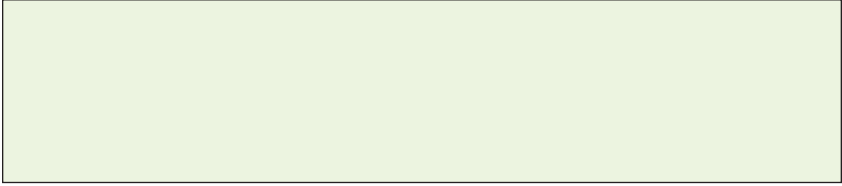
Possessions

What do I want to possess? These may be physical things (such as a sports car) or abstract (such as contentment).

List the five most important to you:

Roles and Activities

What do you dream of doing? What can you imagine yourself doing that you haven't done so far?



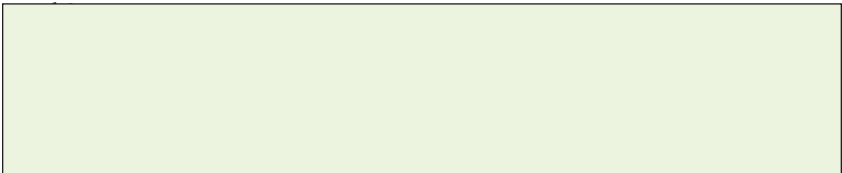
If money was no object, what would you choose to do?



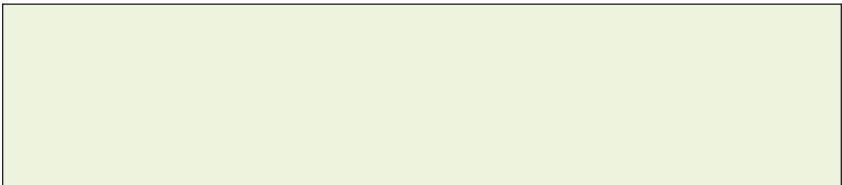
In the work you do now, which activities do you consider to be of the greatest value?



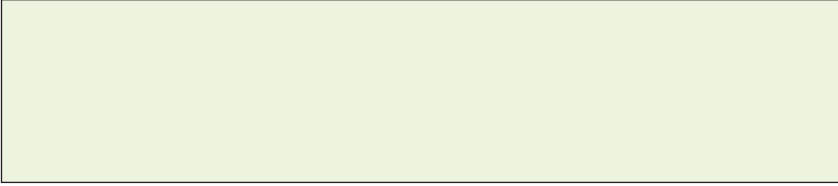
In your personal life, which activities do you consider to be of the greatest value?



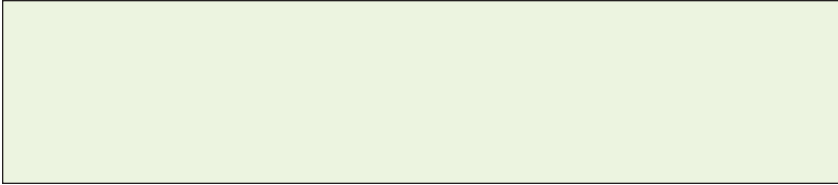
What do you consider to be the most important legacy that you will leave to others?



What talents do you have, either developed or undeveloped?



What are the things you would like to do but you've been "overruled" by life or by others?



Now let's pull all of these thoughts together into an Action Plan.

Action Plan

Use this Action Plan template as you go forward.

The Outcome I want to Achieve	My Reason Why	My Next Step to Achieving This

A final encouragement

I wrote this book to serve you. Please let me know where you have found this book particularly helpful and why. I'm learning as well.

My passion is to help you to freedom and creativity in you work, that work becomes for you a key expression of your uniqueness and purpose.

I leave you with a couple of final reminders:

1. Try out as much as you can from this book. If a technique or tool doesn't work for you, abandon it. If you find something better, abandon what you had been using. Find your own method and routines that serve you in personal mastery. Then let me know.
2. If reading a book is only partly helpful for you, check out my website - www.patrickmayfield.com - for further ideas and resources, not least the Time Freedom online training programme - <http://pearcemayfield.thinkific.com/courses/time-freedom> .

I wish you well on your journey in leading yourself well.

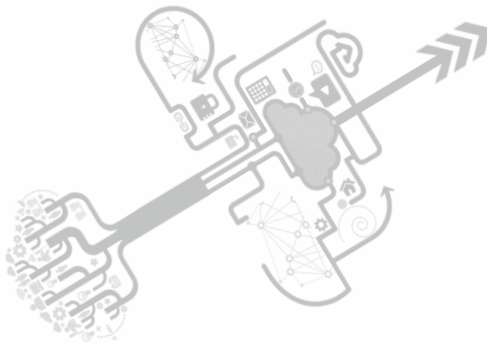
Yours ever,

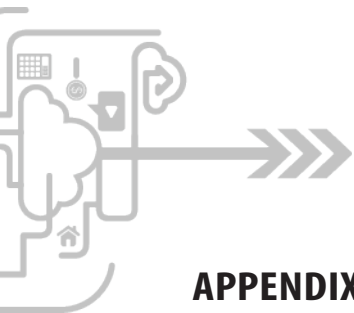
Patrick

Harwell, Oxfordshire

August 2016

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APPENDIX A

Personal Organisation Systems & Techniques

Introduction

This Appendix collects together a number of systems and techniques that help us live out the practices in the book. In fact, many of them have been referenced earlier in this book. Each of the topics in this Appendix appears in alphabetical order. So, although I am a convert to the Bullet Journal, and it appears first, there is no priority system implied in the order here.

The Bullet Journal system

Ryder Carroll, a designer based in New York, developed this self-organising system based on a notebook, in 2012. This is intriguing in itself: Carroll is a digital designer and yet his breakthrough was using an entirely analogue system, a notebook and a pen.

I quote from an interview he gave to Evernote (<https://blog.evernote.com/blog/2015/08/03/how-ryder-carroll-designed-bullet-journal/>) in 2015:

I had a learning disability that did not allow me to focus very well. It's something that I've been challenged with for most of my schooling. Notes started as either a blank page with no template or as a super rigid template which I didn't understand or enjoy.

I had short bursts of very intense focus, so I had to figure out a way to capture things very quickly. I would later try to revisit what I captured, but couldn't find anything. Solving this problem was an iterative process, and each step was intended to address my own problems.

My solutions came from solving my own challenges.

Quite apart from the Bullet Journal system itself, I highly commend Ryder Carroll as an example of someone exploring how to do their good work better. He designed this system to be a to-do list, a diary, a notebook, and a sketchbook. He has developed a very good website at bulletjournal.com to explain this system. Also, I would recommend his YouTube channel where he shares video updates on hints and tips and variants.

In summary, the bullet journal framework is made up of four elements:

1. **Rapid logging** – a system of taking notes very quickly using page numbers, titles, and different bullet icons to distinguish steps you have taken with tasks. Carroll has refined a short-form bullet notation. This takes a little bit of learning, but it is worth the effort. After a while, you will find, as I did, that you develop your own variant bullet types.

2. **Modules** - these allow you to organise your notes in different ways. For example, at the beginning where you add the titles for all your topics so you can quickly refer to them later. There is a Future Log, Monthly Log, and Daily Log.
3. **Monthly log** - this a month-on-a-page list your make of your monthly tasks.
4. **Migration** - copying over only the most relevant items from one week or month to the next.

This last point is interesting. Copying is actually a winnowing process. You ask yourself as you copy, “Is this item *still* important for me to copy.” Some of the tasks or ideas just naturally atrophy and don’t ‘make the cut’ to the next copy. Other items might transform into something more relevant, exciting or insightful.

The copying is also part of self-accountability. The bullet journal process requires you to review in a clear cycle all of your self-commitments.

It is important to know the scope of the Bullet Journal system: it’s about the notebook. So as a system, it doesn’t have the reach of GTD, which considers your intrays, your paper filing systems, and workflows between them.

Nevertheless, I like the Bullet Journal for its elegance and resilience.

Finally, I would emphasise what Carroll said in a recent video on YouTube:

“Make the Bullet Journal work for you.”

The Eisenhower decision matrix

President Dwight D. Eisenhower was someone noted for his productivity. He is said to have said, “What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important.”

His decision matrix was later popularised by the late great Stephen Covey, who stressed that the power of this matrix is being able to differentiate between urgency and importance.

		Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	I	ACTIVITIES: Crises Pressing problems Deadline-driven projects	II ACTIVITIES: Prevention Relationship building Recreation New opportunities
	III	ACTIVITIES: Interruptions Some phone calls Some mail Some meetings Popular activities	IV ACTIVITIES: Trivia Some mail Some phone calls Time wasters Pleasure activities
Not Important			

Urgency and importance are not the same, nor are they opposites, so a task can be both urgent and important. Likewise, something can be important and not urgent.

Instead of a list or column of tasks, the matrix suggests we place tasks onto a two-by-two matrix with four quadrants.

- The **Important/Urgent** quadrant is to be done immediately and personally. We don't want to live too long in this quadrant as it is the quadrant of stress. See the chapter on Energy.
- The **Important/Not Urgent** quadrant is where we search for an end-date and we do this personally. Covey counselled that the most effective life is lived more in this quadrant.

- The **Unimportant/Urgent** quadrant is usually somebody else's urgency, and a potential source of time theft. We should delegate this work wherever we can to others.
- Activities in the **Unimportant/Not Urgent** quadrant should be dropped unless you use this as 'recovery' time.

Urgent & Important	Important but Not Urgent
Urgent but Not Important	Not Urgent & Not Important

If you are interested in using this technique there are software tools that support it.

This system comes in at the Proficient level of skill acquisition. This is a more sophisticated means of assessing priorities compared to the A,B,C priority list, and requires a deeper sense of what is "Important".



The GTD System

“GTD” stands for Getting Things Done, the brainchild of David Allen.¹ It is a simple system for organising oneself and has a huge following internationally. GTD can be used with paper media or electronically.

The GTD system, in essence, is as follows:

1. Get things off your mind.
2. Make a list of your outcomes and actions.
3. Organise these appropriately.
4. Review your lists.
5. Make informed choices about what to do (or not do).

Putting these things into practice and making them a habit takes some effort.

Allen says that his Getting Things Done system essentially is not about getting things done, but is rather about appropriate engagement. It is how people focus upon and manage and how they are engaged with a matter that makes them productive.

His system is made up of three paradoxes:

The first paradox is that in order to manage the complex and volatile world that we live in, we need to adopt and practise three simple core principles:

- a. Capture your thinking.
- b. Make outcome action decisions.
- c. Use the right maps.

We will explore these further below.

The second paradox is that learning this system feels very awkward, unnatural and unnecessary at first, but those who persist very quickly find themselves in a state of ‘flow’.

The final paradox is that GTD is made up of some fairly mundane practices, all of which will allow you to live in the flow.

¹ David Allen (2002) *Getting Things Done: How to achieve stress-free productivity* Piatkus.

Essentially productivity is not about managing time, but managing one's engagement. We can do nothing about time, but we can increase what Allen calls our 'psychic bandwidth', by ridding ourselves of distractions, and so allow a greater throughput of work.

Getting things off your mind.

The first step in GTD is blindingly simple: capture every thought using pen and paper. Capture anything and everything that has your attention and concern.

Outcomes and actions.

The next step is to consider those items you have captured that will require several steps to complete. We will call them projects. A Next Step in GTD is any action that will take you no more than 20 minutes.

When you think about it, there are very few things that can be completed and ticked off completely within 20 minutes. The implication then is that most of us have several personal projects in progress in any given week.

There are two aspects to these projects that are crucial in GTD, and which you need to define:

- The **Outcome** of the project. An 'outcome' is any change in the world as a result of your project. An outcome is often considered in terms of an adjustment or change in human behaviour. By thinking about the outcome, you are thinking beyond your project to the beneficial difference it will make.

It helps you think about what "success" means for your project. Ask yourself, "How will things be better when this project is completed?" In doing so, you motivate yourself towards it and prevent yourself from being absorbed in pure busyness.

For example, if my project is "To build a garden shed", then the outcome might be "I will be able to store my garden tools and equipment in a safe and dry place, where I can find them easily."

However, if you can't think of a positive outcome for your project, this also might be helpful: it could cause you to question why are you doing the project in the first place! If you come to the conclusion it has little or no value, you could stop it and move onto something more worthwhile.

Try to keep your outcome to one simple sentence.

- The **Next Step** is the next action you must take to move you towards that outcome, that will take you no more than 20 minutes. This creates a practicable momentum in the project. With GTD, you don't need to plan all the steps, just the next one. Why 20 minutes? Allen believes for most people, anything longer than this could be broken down into two or more steps, and the longer period might not be so feasible. So for the garden shed project, my next step, might be:
 - » measure the available space for the shed, or
 - » search garden shed website for budgeting.

By focusing on the Next Step, it helps you generate a very productive forward momentum.

Mind Mapping

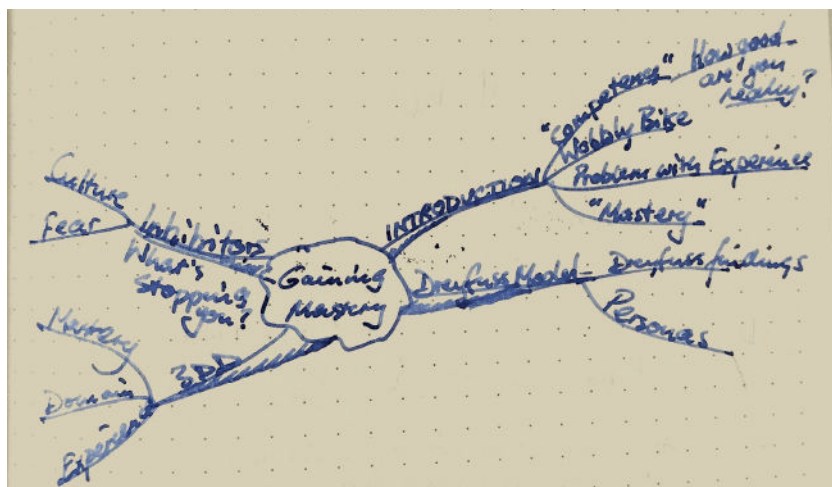
In the 1995 I qualified as a “Radiant Thinking Instructor” by Tony Buzan, the author of Mind Mapping. Tony has produced multiple books on Mind Mapping.

Essentially a Mind Map is a physical note-taking and note-making technique designed to mirror the associative nature of the way we are discovering our brains work. It has the idea or topic at the centre, preferably with a strong colourful image, and the mind mapper radiates out from that image, as thoughts associate with it.

I use Mind Maps on paper and on computers. Buzan is associated with iMindMap (www.imindmap.com), which I use. I also use an open source free version called MindMup (www.mindmup.com).

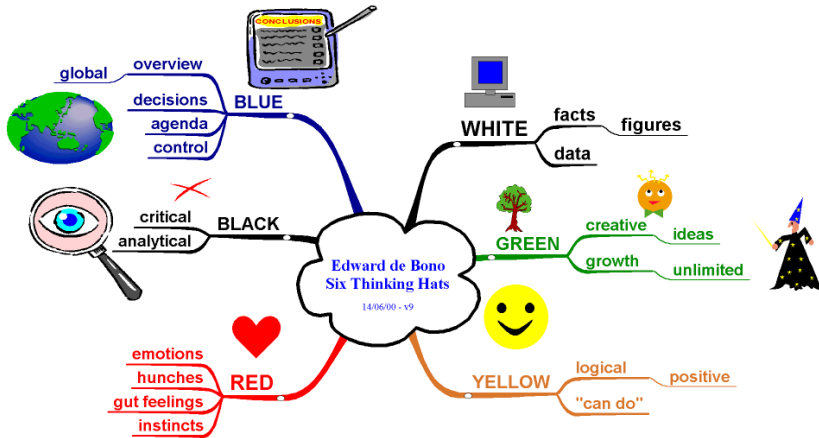
Personally, I find Mind Maps helpful in note-making, that is on getting my own ideas down and organised. Often I do this when organising my thoughts before a public presentation.

Here is an example of a quick pen sketch of a Mind Map in my notebook, planning a presentation I was to give:



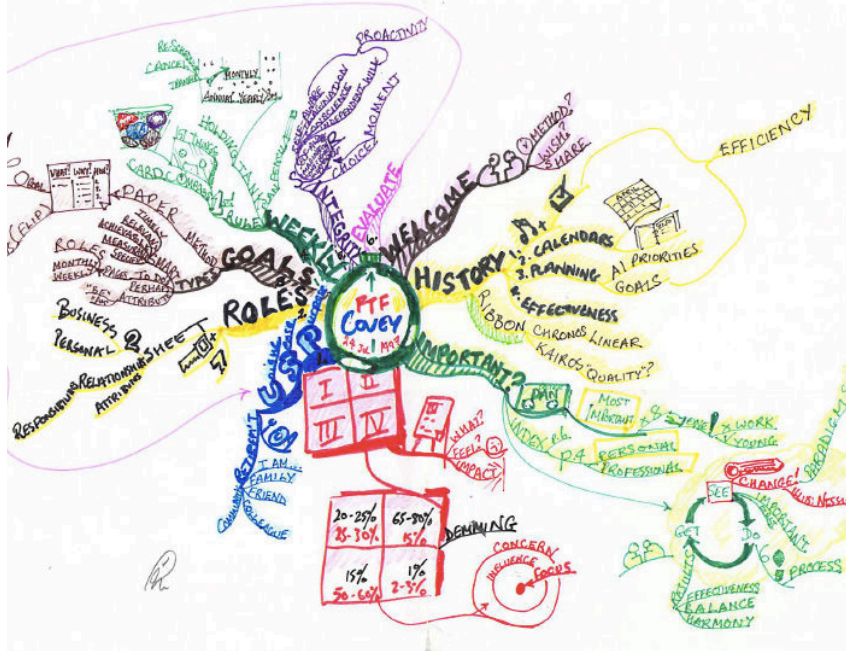
I find this form of Mind Mapping very helpful in “creative” or note-making mode; a quick graphic sketch getting my ideas down on paper. This scrawl does not mean much to anyone else, but it helps me shape my own thinking, seeing the whole presentation structure at a glance.

This next example is a Mind Map generated with a computer software programme by my friend and associate, Helen Whitten. The topic is Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats.



This example is very clear, but I feel it lacks the memorable uniqueness of hand-drawn Mind Maps. However, Mind Map software has the advantage of restructuring branches 'on the fly', of linking elements with text or other maps.

This final example is a hand-drawn Mind Map I drew a few years ago of Stephen Covey's First Things First. It was drawn landscape. Each major branch represented a theme, a basic ordering idea, and was drawn in a different colour.



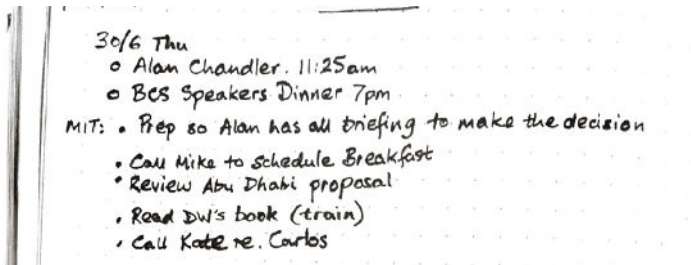
If the first example was a quick sketch, this is a more considered, “Sunday Best” Mind Map. It takes time to craft but is a great way of assimilating the essentials of, as in this case, an important book.

MIT - the most important task

I think in terms of the day's resolutions, not the years'.

Henry Moore

'MIT' stands for most important task. The idea is to capture one task for the following day and describe its successful outcome. This seems to help the mind work subliminally on the task and prepare us optimally for the task when we do it.



This is an example of one of my own Daily Heads-Up entries, and it includes the MIT "Prep so Alan has all briefing to make the decision." It is phrased to suggest a positive outcome, personally attributed to me, so I am already imagining how I might brief Alan well in the time available. This is much more powerful than merely putting down an entry such as "Prep for meeting."

All levels of skill can find value in this, but the Advanced Beginner can really propel themselves forward by using this technique, and practising the skill of prioritisation that lies behind it.



Personal Kanban

Wikipedia defines ‘Kanban’ as Japanese for signboard or billboard. It is used as a scheduling system for lean manufacturing and just-in-time production methods. Originally it was a physical board with cards placed in slots in columns on the board. Taiichi Ohno, an industrial engineer at Toyota, developed Kanban as a means for operations teams to improve manufacturing efficiency. The technique and how it can be applied to our personal organisation, the so-called Personal Kanban.

Kanban has two simple rules:

1. Visualise everything.
2. Limit work-in-progress.

Items that are ready and waiting for processing are stored to the left in a column labelled “Ready”. This would be the equivalent of our to-do list, items awaiting action by us. We can prioritise items in the Ready column by putting the higher-priority items towards the top of the column, and those of lesser priority lower down. In this way, the column allows constant and intuitive re-prioritisation.

The next column is labelled “Doing” in our illustration below. This where

Ready	Doing	Pen	Done
Complete End of month report	Discuss with Eva defects in logging process	Request Sanjiv to fix the drop-out problem	Report to Steering Committee
Reply to Mary about SIG Forum invitation	Carlton: plan	Proposal to Sancil Ltd - Helen	Call Andre about next month's seminar
Prep Agenda for Team meeting	Chair stage gate meeting		Skype with Jasmin
Cameleon: Design brochure of launch event			Appointment with dentist
Cameleon: Check invitees with SK			
Supplier review with BJ			
Arrange coaching session with Alex			
Card to Melanie			

we “pull” work from the ready column.

A Personal Kanban would have “Today” as the “Doing” column. Here the second rule applies. “Doing” or “Today” is work-in-progress, and should be strictly limited.

Once work is completed, it is pulled from “Doing” across to “Done”. Personal Kanban often uses the label “Done this Week.” And this column is cleared down at the end of every week.

As stressed in the chapter on Time, there is something very powerfully motivating by the concept of choosing and pulling from the Ready/To Do list, rather than being driven by it.

Although the Personal Kanban can be used at whatever level of personal mastery, it fits very well with the Expert’s growing appreciation of intuitive prioritisation and flow.



The Pomodoro technique

The Pomodoro technique is a time management method developed by Francesco Cirillo in the late 1980s. He was revising for examinations at university and used a kitchen timer in the shape of a tomato (‘pomodoro’ in Italian) to chunk his revision time into shorter attention spans. The technique breaks down periods of work to 25-minute intervals called ‘pomodori’ separated by short breaks. The method is based on the idea that frequent breaks can improve mental agility.



There are five basic steps to implementing the technique:

- Decide on the task to be done.
- Set the Pomodoro (timer) to 25 minutes.
- Work on the task until the timer rings; record with an x.
- Take a short break (3-5 minutes).
- Every four ‘pomodori’ take a longer break (15-30 minutes).

I use an app on my laptop called “Pomodorable”, which also records the particular activity or project. This record can be useful for estimating similar kinds of work later.

It’s simple but effective. I recommend you try it.

Everyone can benefit from the Pomodoro Technique, the Novice included. It is simple in concept and easy to use.



The RACI matrix

The RACI matrix is a simple but powerful means of a small team seeing what everyone's role is in a process or a small project.

Task name	SJ	RR	SV	GY	PM	ATB	CK
Manage Sales				C	A	R	
Book Clients		C		A			
Develop materials	C	R	C	I	A		
Print materials				R	A		C
Agree Dates	C	C	C	R			
Deliver	R	R	A				

The matrix contains the team tasks in the left-most column, and the team members across the columns at the top, as shown in this example. Then each person's contribution to the team is either:

- R - responsible for doing the task
- A - authorising the task as complete
- C - consulted about the task
- I - informed about the task and its completion.

R,A,C,I make up its name: RACI matrix.

The RACI matrix is simple but effective for team collaboration on a repetitive workflow.

The RACI Matrix is something that a process- and role-oriented level of mastery, the Advanced Beginner, appreciates.



The Someday/Maybe list

In *Getting Things Done*, David Allen recommends the Someday/Maybe List. It is place for ideas, projects and tasks that we may not be committed to doing, but nevertheless want to capture.

As with other lists, it is important not merely to create the list, but also to develop the habit of regularly reviewing it.

The Advanced Beginner can benefit from the Someday/Maybe List. She finds it takes pressure off the moment, and allows her to focus on the job in hand.



The Stop Doing list

[M]ost of what we say and do is not essential. Eliminate it, you'll have more time and more tranquillity. Ask yourself, is this necessary.

Marcus Aurelius, Meditations

The difference between successful people and very successful people is that very successful people say 'no' to almost everything.

Warren Buffett

As we have considered in Limiting Work-in-Progress in Personal Kanban, less is more.² Extraordinary productivity comes from narrowing down our field of engagement at any given moment. One of the most effective approaches for helping me to do this has been what Jim Collins calls the "Stop Doing" list. It comes out of connecting to your personal mission.

1. What are you deeply passionate about?
2. What are you are genetically encoded for — what activities do you feel just "made to do"
3. What makes economic sense — what can you make a living at?

² See chapter 5, Time.

Other people I admire for their wisdom in doing good work advocate this. For example, Michael Hyatt calls it the “Not-To-Do List.” He argues that it helps us focus on the essentials in our life, and avoid over-extending ourselves.

I would suggest that the Expert level would particularly appreciate this technique, as it requires a strong sense of self-awareness of one’s personal mission.



The User Story

User stories are a popular technique as part of agile software development. However, they can be used for all kinds of projects as well as for personal organisation. The technique has grown out of a sense of frustration with the abstraction of written requirement specifications. It is not a story as such, but rather a single sentence, often written on a sticky note or card.

The user story is written in the first person of an operative or user of what the project will deliver using this structure:

**‘As’ [user] ‘I want to’ [goal] ‘because/so that’
[reason].**

So for example, a user story might read thus:

‘As a potential customer, I want to have confidence that the people I’m dealing with can be trusted and to know how the shipping of my order is progressing so that I might buy more from them later.’

Often a user story is hand-written and pinned to a board in the project room, written at the beginning of a dialogue with a representative of this stakeholder group, and forming a key part of the conversation. User stories can often begin life as part of a stakeholder analysis workshop.

Think of a user story as complementary to traditional specifications, not as an alternative.

Ask: ‘How will we know when we have delivered the sort of experience you want?’

If you are delivering your work to others, it is probably more effective to work with them on writing user stories together. This shares ownership and creates buy-in by the other party.



The Proficient practitioner greatly values the power in the User Story to empathise with the person considered.

The “Waiting For” List

This can be used as a Kanban column, as a separate list in GTD or the Bullet Journal system. Essentially it is used as a personal reminder of commitments other people have made to you, and as a means of getting back to them if they have not responded after a certain period.



The Advanced Beginner appreciates a process and the hand-offs within that process, so she will value the “Waiting For” list as a place to park the list of tasks and people that she has delegated out to others, and use it to chase them.

The 21-Day Brain Detox Plan

This is an online app developed by Dr Caroline Leaf, a cognitive neuroscientist and author of *Switch on Your Brain*. She has developed this app that helps the user to “target” a negative thought pattern and replace it with a positive one. She describes this as



The 21 Day Brain Detox Plan™ is an online daily guide that takes only 7-10 minutes of your time each day. I will walk you through each of the 21 days, guiding you and coaching you to a toxic-free mind.

I’ve used this myself and gained benefit from it. You can find it here: <http://21daybraindetox.com/>

APPENDIX B

My Workbench Today

Do not wait; the time will never be 'just right.' Start where you stand, and work with whatever tools you may have at your command, and better tools will be found as you go along.

George Herbert

What Materials Do I Use?

Here are my current working tools and techniques at the time of writing. I'd like to think that part of my own learning to work better is to review regularly what tools and techniques I use. So this list will continue to change over time, I'm sure. Ask me in six months and it could be significantly different.

Notebook - Leuchtturm1917 A5 - dotted grid

I like the Leuchtturm1917 for several reasons. I use a form of Bullet Journal, and this particular brand of notebook already has numbered pages and an Index at the front.

Pen - Lamy Safari cartridge pen

This pen is cheap and cheerful, good value for a cartridge pen. As I use an ink pen like this, over time it becomes an old friend. I counted and right now I have four safari pens - don't ask - and an up-market Lamy that was a present from my wife, which I use exclusively for my private daily journal.

MacBook Air

This book was composed on my MacBook Air. I love it, although I'm beginning to do more video blogging now and I know that I will need to migrate upwards to a dual-processor desktop for that eventually.

iPad

I find the iPad is used by me more for sketches (I like 53 paper) and for capturing articles using Evernote.

Trello

Trello is a free-to-use web application for kanban. I use Trello for my Personal Kanban (on MacBook & iPad).

Pomodorable

This is the Pomodoro app I use on my MacBook Air. There are others. Let me know if you find a better one.

Evernote

If you haven't tried Evernote, I urge you to try it on the free plan.

Evernote is a superb environment for storing notes, web clippings, of all kinds. I'm a premium user and I've never regretted the decision to subscribe to the extra features. It allows me to upload 10Gbytes a month, and I never get close to it. It has become my research hub and archive. Any important email can be forwarded to Evernote and I have access to it permanently.

Evernote has put a lot of thought and work into this product, ensuring it is secure and resilient. They have recently invested a lot in moving the system away from Amazon servers onto their own cloud platform. So Evernote is not a nine-day wonder.

What's more, unlike OneNote, it is a non-proprietary system. My Evernote database syncs across all my devices, Apple and Android.

Scannable by Evernote on iPad

This scans paper documents, as well as pages of my notebook into Evernote from my iPad camera, easily and without fuss.

Fuji Scansnap

A scanner machine I use for scanning paper sheets into Evernote or elsewhere on my Mac.

Scrivener

I now use Scrivener for all my major writing projects, including this one. Scrivener is an amazing tool for writers, although it does have a steep learning curve. If you are thinking about taking on a major writing project, I believe your learning curve will be rewarded with the comprehensive power of this tool.

I also use Scrivener for composing my online courses. I find the Corkboard view in this application particularly helpful in designing the key learning objectives and sequencing individual modules, before recording them.

Adobe InDesign

This powerful desktop publishing application has an even steeper learning curve than Scrivener, but again it's worth the pain. I use it to compose all my ebooks and paperbacks now. It gives me greater control over the visual look of the page.

Google Calendar

I use this because I have an Android Phone. I don't think it matters whether you use Apple's Calendar, Google's or Microsoft. The decision is likely to lie with whom you most need to coordinate with.

So I have my calendar synced across my smartphone and laptop.

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Check out my Personal Productivity bookstore on Amazon (UK only) : <http://goo.gl/aflaCP>

Other Useful Resources

Artefact Cards

These little cards can be enormously helpful when there is a need to be creative, and use something tactile. <http://artefactshop.com/>

Trello.com

Online free-to-use Kanban software. We use Trello at pearcemayfield and think it's brilliant.

Training Courses & Workshops

Organising Yourself More Effectively

This is available in three ways:

1. As a face-to-face workshop.
2. As an online distance learning course.
3. As an online live virtual classroom.

Introduction to Agile

If you are intrigued by User Stories and Kanban, then this 1-day workshop is for you. You will learn how these tools are used in the context of a fast-paced, high-energy project.

Stakeholder Engagement

This workshop uses some techniques covered on OYME around the area of influencing other people. Built in response to our research findings into high performers, this is a powerful workshop.

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As with most works of this size, I must share the credit but none of the defects with many people.

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