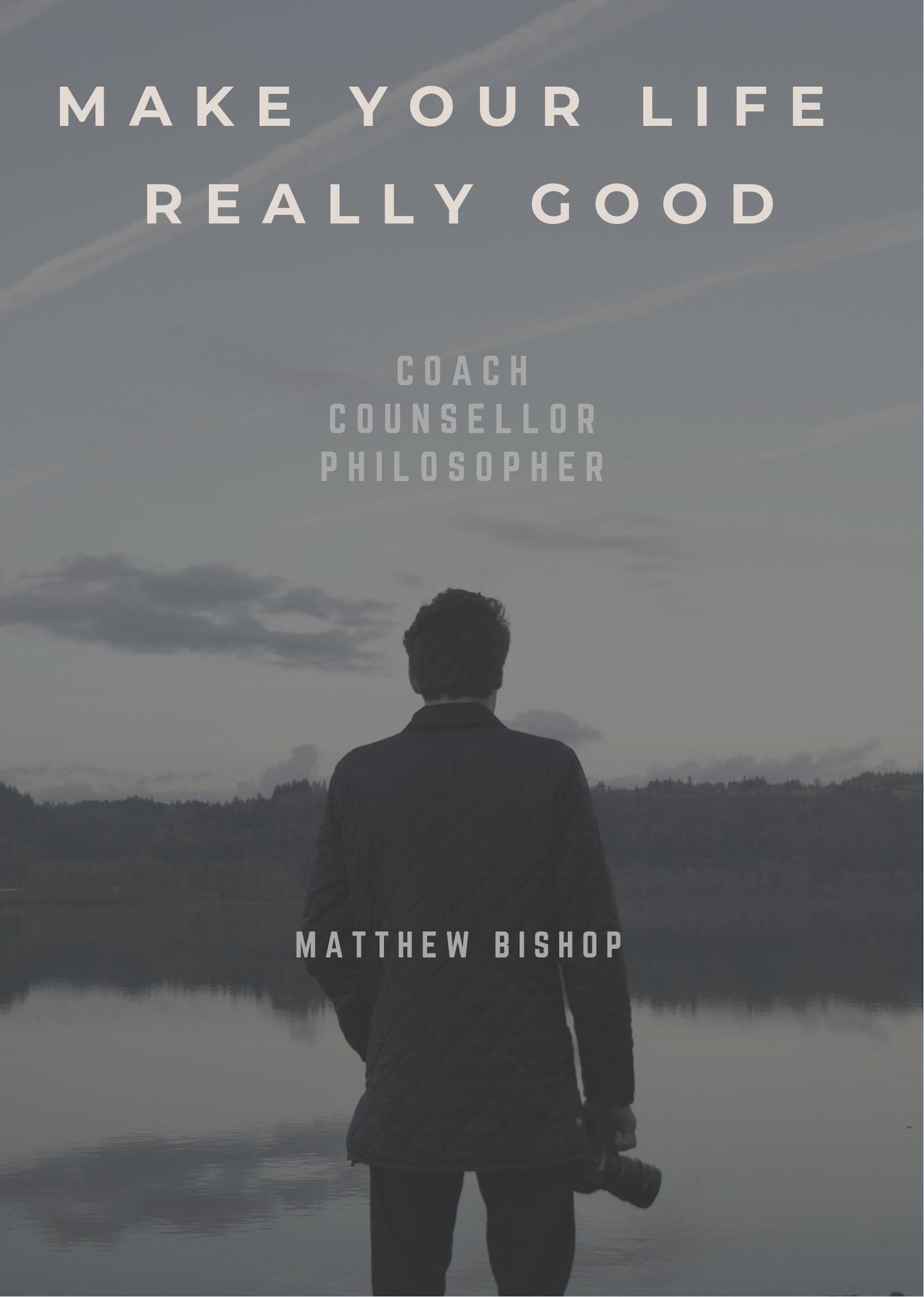


MAKE YOUR LIFE REALLY GOOD

COACH
COUNSELLOR
PHILOSOPHER

MATTHEW BISHOP



This book will give you the tools you need, to shape yourself into the person you want to be.

And the person you want to be, is capable of creating the life you want.

I've spent my adult life learning how people become that person and create that life, both in myself and in my work with others. I've been a monk, a philosophy lecturer, and for the last decade a counsellor and coach. This book is the distillation of 20 years of practice especially as a coach and counsellor, and is a resource for my clients. It's also for people who may want to work with me for it conveys the essence of what I do even if my work is, of course, more dynamic and broad than a short book can convey.

This book is also written for anybody to use independently, for I have a theory of marketing and business which is based on loving what you do, giving generously from that place, and trusting that the other benefits you seek will come along for the ride. This model works. I want to create my own small happy world and for that I need money, but beyond that I want to live my passion, which is the art of making life better and helping others to do that.

This book is divided into five chapters:

1. Focus on your Strengths
2. What do you most want to do?
3. Who do you want to be?
4. Create that life, be that person

5. Your mindset or philosophy of life

I want to help you get a vision of who you could be which is clear, realistic, and which you love and which inspires you to action.

And I want to show you what works to become that person.

The ideas and practices I offer do work. As simple as that. If you do them, you will change. If you do them deeply, you will change deeply.

If you want to find out more about how I help people achieve their deeper goals in life, go to my [website](#). You can also follow me from there on social media.

The core of my work is this question: What would happen if you took radical responsibility for how you think, how you feel, how you act, and what your life looks like? You are more capable of transforming yourself than you realise. Imagine finding out how far you can go. I want to help you do that.

Matthew Bishop

Maryborough, Victoria

Spring, 2019

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Focus on your strengths



Most of my internet presence these days regards my coaching. But I've also been a therapist for over a decade, and have counselled literally thousands of clients. In that work I've talked many people back from bridges and helped them rebuild their lives. I've supported parents who found their children dead by suicide, spending years helping them want to be in the world again. In these workshops of pain I have learned a lot about the human mind and heart which

can be applied not only to healing *but to making life positively good*. Here is one of the biggest things I've learned:

There are things that are in our control, and things that are out of our control.

As we all know. But....

People don't realise just how much out of their control the out-of-their-control things are.

And, people don't realise just how much in their control the in-their-control things are.

You have far less power, and far, far more power, than you realise. The second fact is why I insist that my clients take radical ownership of their thoughts, choices, and how their life looks, and to see how far that ownership can take them in recreating everything.

When we treat the things which are out of our control as in our control, we become irrationally guilty and full of anxiety. But when we fail to see how much things are in our control - and this is where we get it most wrong - we fail to take deep ownership of ourselves. If somebody were to try to enslave your body, you'd fight tooth and nail. And yet you give your heart and mind over every day like a slave to be determined by events and people external to you.

Free yourself. If you take a mindset of radical self-ownership and you entrench it through practice, you can radically transform your life. In this book I am going to give you the tools to do that. But the essence lies in re-orienting yourself to everything which is good, true, beautiful, and powerful in you and in life. And so the self-knowledge we will work on is not focused on what's

wrong with you, but what's strong, good, and great about for we're in the business of building, of making better.

Because I am concerned with the good in life and building from it, rather than obsessing with what's wrong, I am drawn to a field of psychological research known as Positive Psychology. It was initiated by Martin Seligman when he was head of the American Psychological Society. As the name suggests, Positive Psychology represents the effort by psychologists to stop focusing always on how life goes wrong, and instead to study how it goes right. This research has shown that when it comes to growth and success, one of the most important things you can focus on is your strengths. That stands to reason, because your strengths are by definition your best qualities for getting things done. Hence my approach is highly strengths-based. We will start this book with a look at your strengths before we proceed to your goals in the following chapters.

Positive psychology researchers have boiled down all human strengths to a list of 24 essential ones. They have also developed an assessment which measures the presence of all 24 *in you*, ranked from the most to the least present. The assessment is free and can be completed at [here](#). Please go and complete that assessment, and then return and keep reading.

How did you go? Research suggests that your top five strengths are particularly important. In my professional experience that's correct: if you focus on your top five you can make much greater progress toward your goals. Plus you are likely to enjoy the journey much more and to feel great about yourself as well - something I will say more about below. For now I will share an example from my own life, of how my top strengths enabled me to achieve my goals even while my lower strengths failed me.

Here are two photos of me in my early 30s, taken six months and 30kg apart:



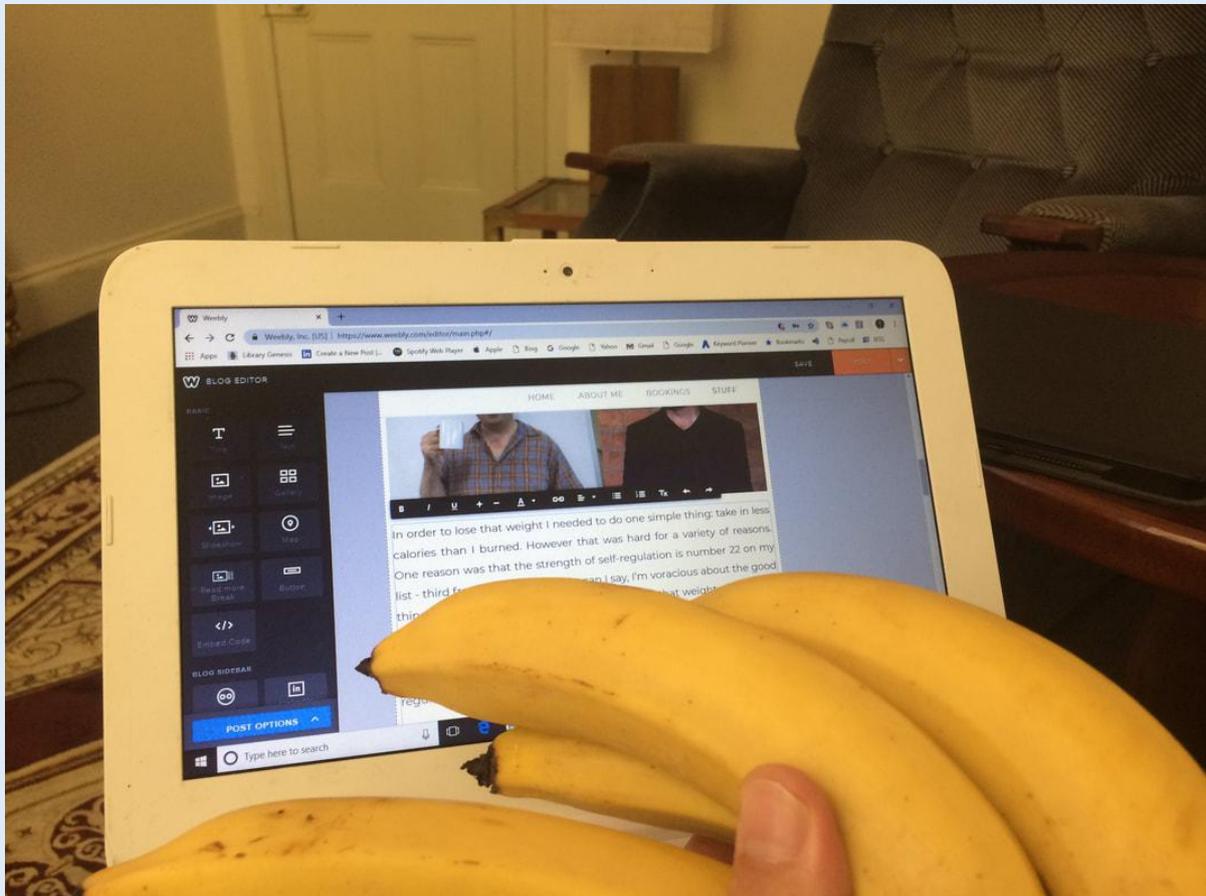
Anybody who has lost significant weight knows that life is much better afterwards. And they'll know that losing weight involves this one simple trick: take in less calories than you burn. But I found that hard for several reasons, the most important being that the strength of *self-regulation* is number 22 on my list - third from the bottom! (What can I say, I'm voracious about the good things in life.) I'm 41 now and I've kept the weight off for years, but it has not been easy; I live in a century-old cottage by a forest where I keep a warm kitchen, making my own bread and butter and jam. I love long lunches at pubs with friends who laugh deeply; as deep as the pints of ale. I have an addiction to chocolate. I have to admit it: I'm an animal. So, beast that I am, how do I moderate my caloric intake when I'm so weak in self-regulation?

I use my top strengths.

Here are my top five:

1. Judgement
2. Creativity
3. Love of learning
4. Perspective
5. Honesty

And here are the bananas I bought this morning, one for breakfast and the other for snacks today as I write these words in my Melbourne office:



I went to a Coles servo half an hour ago to get my \$1 morning coffee (don't shame me). But I'll tell you the truth: I really went there because they have a coffee and muffin deal. God I wanted that carb-filled ball of goodness. That sugary shit-fest of joy. But it's, like, 700 calories! So what's a man to do when he has such low self-regulation and a voice in his head is whispering "You only live once, Matty!"

He uses his top strengths.

Straight-out self-denial doesn't work for me. So first I overcame my temptation by using my strengths of *judgement* and *honesty*. "Yes, I desire that muffin right now, but I am fooling myself about 1) how much I want it, and 2) how

pleasurable it will be, and 3) how long the pleasure will last. I am also 4) undermining my desire to be slim, fit, and healthy.

I then used my strengths of *creativity* and *perspective*. Creativity includes imagination, so I *imagined* what it would be like a few minutes after eating the muffin when I felt the pain of remorse. Then I imagined myself a year from now, overweight and with all the consequences of that. If we think of a carrot and stick approach, well this was the stick. Then I imagined what it will be like to feel great and look great a year from now. That's quite a carrot. (A roast carrot, with gravy, potatoes, pork, and apple sauce...oh wait!) I let that last image sink in, using my imagination to make my desire for the healthy choice *feel stronger* than my desire for the momentary pleasure.

As you can see, creativity in the form of imagination is really powerful for me - it's one of my top strengths. By means of it I can conjure up strong images and feelings. I can reflect by means of honesty, judgement, and perspective on what is best for me, and then apply my imagination to turn that judgement into a powerful desire, a desire which is more powerful than the temptation. And so I can use my strengths to *intentionally* self-regulate even though self-regulation in itself is a weakness of mine.

And so I stood there while the coffee poured and the muffin looked at me, and I was strong. In fact I felt good. Instead of the muffin I reached for a bunch of bananas. Bananas of victory!

Some people won't relate to my example and that's fine. This is about using *your* strengths, not mine, and I've merely illustrated an example of how to do that. My point is that you can achieve a lot if you come to know yourself in your strengths, and then use them more widely and deeply to achieve your goals. If I had tried to regulate myself like a conscientious person then I would have failed. I would be 30kg heavier and gaining in both weight and unhappiness. Instead I did what I'm naturally good at, and so I lost it all and have kept it off, despite my love of food. Don't focus on what you're not good at, instead use what is powerful in you to achieve what you want.

Of course what I did at the servo was more intuitive than how I just described it. When I work with people I get them to do the strengths assessment and then guide them to develop a strengths-consciousness: to become aware of their strengths as they reflect and act, and to apply their strengths to banal challenges to increase their awareness and skill in using them. In time they too don't have to think about it, they just step into a strengths-based perspective in whatever they do.

To see how your strengths serve you, take up your pen and consider one of the bigger challenges you have faced and overcome.

- What did you *think* and *do* which enabled you to succeed?
- How did your top strengths show themselves in what you thought and did?

That's a carefully crafted question - in fact it's gold - and I suggest making a habit of asking it. The form of the question is perfect for not only for clarifying your strengths, but also for replicating and broadening your use of them, expanding your power across wider domains of your life.

If you want to take things further, try this week applying your strengths to something which challenges you most days. Maybe you want to be more patient on the road. Or to use your time better on the train. Or to be more attentive to your partner when they get home. Take up your pen and brainstorm some of your daily goals or challenges, and reflect on how you would apply each of your top five strengths to achieve them.

As you proceed through this book remember that it is your strengths which are your best bet for achieving your life goals. That's because they are you at your best. But they are also you at your most happy. The work I am guiding you to do is not a chore, and it's vital to recognise this. If you find it a chore then

you're doing it wrong. I am trying to guide you to surf the growth edge of all that is best in you. Experience the thrill of that. Enjoy it.

What do you most want?



These days I do less counselling and more coaching, but I do both and love both. Over the years I've practiced various forms of philosophically-oriented counselling and have built a reputation in an approach known as Existential Therapy. I published a lot of writing about that which attracted many intellectually or spiritually minded people. It was in this context that I saw Jack. Jack (not his real name) had become deeply despondent, and came to see me because, he said, he thought I might be intelligent enough to understand his problems and offer guidance.

Early in the first session Jack threw out this challenge: "I can't get better until you give me a really good reason to find life meaningful!" He went on to explain how he suffered because of certain philosophical and ethical problems which he thought nobody else took seriously. After half an hour of hearing what he had to say we sat silently, and then I responded. I said that I could not give him any answers that would satisfy him. But I told him honestly that, as I listened to him speak, I got the impression that his profundity was an excuse for avoiding life. I got the impression, I said, that he was fundamentally idle, and I suggested that what he needed were not intellectual answers, but rather

responsibility and action. He liked my frankness and apparently decided to test this out: we got to work.

Over the following months I helped Jack deepen his relationships with others and find work that was meaningful to him. In this context his despondency started to lift, but something else happened also: he stopped caring so much about his philosophical questions. He admitted it: in his case his profound questions were (as with his despair) just expressions of his disconnection from meaningful responsibilities and activities.

Most of us have a profound need for meaningful work and love, and when we lack them we start to lack meaning. We fall into despair, or fear, or anger. Some people will then spend hours or years analysing the problem, rather than enacting an answer. As I've said elsewhere: if you're despondent, and you're not suffering a psychological disorder, then perhaps you should spend less time attending to your despondency and more time focused on what it points to. For it shows a lack of something positive which you need to create. Work out what that is, and start creating. If you're unhappy because you're not living the life you want, forget psychological or philosophical analysis and simply start building that life. Creating and building is precisely what Jack did. And creating and building is what this chapter is about: working out what you need to build into your life to make it a meaningful, strong, and happy one.

But how do you know what's meaningful for you? It starts with desire.

In this chapter you will clarify your deeper desires. Then you will turn them into goals. With clear goals you can create a (flexible) plan, mapping how you might want your life to look over time. Of course the world will send unexpected things your way - both good and bad - and you may change your perspective and values over time, but a well-lived life involves the courage to know what you want, so you can do what you can to make it happen.

Clarifying your Desires

To clarify your deeper desires, take your journal and find a quiet place. We're going to do an imaginative exercise called a *deathbed meditation*. That's right, Kids: shit just got real!



Sit comfortably so that you do not strain in any way. Focus on your breathing, feeling it deepen and slow down, and count each breath up to ten. Then begin.

As you read this, imagine the scene I am describing, trying to experience it in your mind.

Step ahead in time, a short number of decades from now.

You are in a hospital room.

You are on your own.

White sheets.

The curtains are drawn.

It is night.

Bright florescent lights.

A monitor beeps quietly.

You lie on your back, wrinkled hands at your side.

Your breathing is laboured.

You cannot feel your feet.

Your body is tired and heavy.

You know you are dying.

And that you have little time.

You will die during the night.

This is your final reflection.

As you look over your life, questions form in your mind:

If I could go back in time - say, back to 2019, and start again from there - what would I do differently?

What do I wish I had done, now that it is too late and my life is over?

What do I wish I had done differently with relationships and love?

With work?

With my talents, my passions?



Take your time sitting with these questions. When you are done, open your journal and write down everything that came to mind. You might divide the page into three categories - relationships, work, passions - but either way just write down everything; we will organise your responses in a moment.

Turning your Desires into Goals

We will now turn your desires into goals. Take up your pen again and write a heading - "Life goals" - and then reduce what you have just written into some kind of essence. Boil it all down, so to speak, into a few or half dozen answers. If it helps, finish these sentences:

*The things I most want **to do** with my life are _____.*

*The things I most want **in** my life are _____.*

Do your answers resonate deeply with you? These desires define the direction your life can take. This is not an intellectual exercise, nor is it about what you *should* do; it's about what you deeply and actually *want*. So try to feel your way into the question and into your answers, to discern what resonates with you. When you have finished writing, then return and continue reading.

You may find that there are multiple paths in life that you would like, for example maybe yes to kids, maybe no. That's fine, in fact that's good! You're discerning what things you'd like, not what thing. And as I often say, if you're stuck in a dilemma between two good choices, you're going to make a good choice (unless you get paralysed by choice and choose neither)! And as I say, these goals, this plan, is not rigid, or at least it doesn't have to be. It's a set of signposts for living intentionally and hopefully achieving some things you genuinely want. Ultimately you will miss out on some, and if you place too much weight on external things to make you happy and your life meaningful - which we all do - then you will be afraid. Once you realise and learn how to

generate your happiness and meaning from within, which is the only place it truly can come from, then all that fear drops away and life becomes more of a game. The things I teach in this book lead to that outcome, if practiced in a sustained and right way.

...

Okay, so it's important to define your goals, but you won't get far toward any of them if you don't take action. So let's break yours down from long-term goals into medium-term aims which you can take action towards.

Medium-term Aims

Medium-term aims are precisely that: aims which you can achieve in the medium-term, as a means to achieving your long-term goals. For example if you want to become a successful engineer then you will need to complete a degree.

Take the most important life-goals which you have just written down and imagine that a year from now – the medium-term – you are on your way to making them happen. To work out what you will be doing differently, or doing more of, or continuing to do, finish the statement below for each of them:

In order to achieve this life-goal, a year from now I will be ____.

(Describe things you will be doing, places you will be, et cetera).

Okay, so now you have defined your deeper desires which show your ideal direction in life. And you have turned them into goals so you can create a long and medium-term plan for how to achieve them. There is one final exercise for this chapter, and it is vital.

Daily Action

This is how I sometimes define the work I do with people: aim at the best life you could create, and do the things every day that make that happen.

Just as you have designed medium-term aims defined by your long-term goals, you can create daily practices which lead to those medium-term aims. Daily practices are particularly important because the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. All you have is the present moment, and a vital concept I will communicate later is that you need to become the person you want to be in this very moment. That's the means to becoming that person and living that life over the long-term. Daily action is something you do everyday, and it's something in particular that you do in the present moment.

Take out your journal again and brainstorm about what it might be important to do every day to achieve your aims and goals. And then reduce your answers to an essence - three or six - that you probably need to do, and realistically will do, every day. Write them down on a list that you will easily see. Some of them you will do by setting time aside, while some will be things you do in the course of your day, like changes in how you interact at work.

It's at this point that people procrastinate, and it has to do with the mental knots they tie themselves in. When you learn how to centre your mind in the present moment, and how to set up some small, simple structures in your day, you stop procrastinating. But that's a topic for another book.

Gosh, I've really got you working, haven't I? Of course if you were embarking on a fitness program, or if you were starting a business, I imagine you would do precisely the kinds of things you've done in this chapter. Surely your life deserves the same level of attention and effort?

As you go about all of this, remember to do things which express and use your strengths. Don't focus on your deficits, focus on what you are good at and what you love and what is meaningful, so as to create a meaningful life you love.

Focus on positive goals and on taking positive action, rather than defining what you *don't want* and *won't do*. Nature abhors a vacuum; don't negate, instead fill your life with the good stuff. (You should not get rid of bad habits, but rather replace them with something better). If you take this path then, a short number of years from now when you are on your deathbed and looking back, you will be filled with joy and gratitude for how things have turned out. But more importantly than that, you will feel this way all along the journey and not just at that destination, for the path I am guiding you along is about creating a life you love right now. Begin now to do what is needed, begin now to gain a sense of direction and meaning, hope, and happiness.

None of this planning should be taken as fixed and final; it's your life and you can change your mind. Plus, shit happens, and it will happen to you. Including the unexpected good shit. Nonetheless it's important to try to "know thyself" - to know what you deeply want and to work toward making that a reality.

Who do you want to be?



In the last chapter I invited you to face life with the courage to change what you can. I also acknowledged that there are things which are out of your control. Have you ever noticed that you are full of strength and wisdom when things are going well, but the second things go badly you can fall into a heap? It is often in hard situations that our character is shown. Although there is no shame in being knocked down, but how you respond over the longer-term shows who you are (or rather, who you are choosing to be). What kind of person are you in bad circumstances? This chapter asks you who you really

want to be regardless of circumstances. It also asks who you want to be regardless of what you have in your life. What do you want your life to *mean*? What *values* will define you?

The aim of this chapter is to help you:

- Get clear on who you want to be.
- Create a plan to make yourself into that person.
- Take action and make it happen.

...

I live in central Victoria on the edge of a town called Maryborough (I've been using photos of my home in this book). So I'm local to the events of a memoir which has deeply affected me since my early 20s: Raimond Gaita's *Romulus, My Father*. I highly recommend this beautiful book which was also made into a film. I often lend copies to my clients and I do that for several reasons, one of which is the sense of life which *Romulus* embodied and which Rai communicates. As the blurb on the back cover says:

"Romulus Gaita fled Yugoslavia aged thirteen, and came to Australia with his wife and their son soon after World War II. Tragic events were to overtake the boy's life, but Raimond Gaita has an extraordinary and moving tale to tell of growing up with his father in country Victoria. *Romulus, My Father* is the much-loved story of how a compassionate, honest man taught his son the meaning of living a decent life."

That last sentence captures the power of the book. Half way through, Rai writes that “The philosopher Plato said that those who love and seek wisdom are clinging in recollection to things they once saw. On many occasions in my life I have had the need to say, and thankfully have been able to say: I know what a good workman is; I know what an honest man is; I know what friendship is; I know because I remember these things in the person of my father.”

You might like to read the book as inspiration for reflecting on the meaning of your own life. I refer to it here because it’s an example of the influence which people can have in our lives when they embody the values we admire and desire. For now I'd like you to find a quiet place, open up your journal, and reflect and write about these questions:

Think about that passage from Romulus, My Father. Who has been this for you in your life?

In what ways?

What were the values they embodied?

How did those values influence you?

How has that helped you in hard times?

How has it helped you in good times, to make life good?

Finish this sentence: “The meaning of their life was....”

It's really important to have people who exemplify where you want to get in life and who you want to be. Recently one of my clients in her early 30s realised that she and her female friends hold negative stereotypes of middle-aged women. She realised with distress that this meant her own future was a bad and depressing place in her imagination. I responded by leading her to reflect on powerful and inspiring middle-aged and elderly women in her life. We dug deep into what gave them their substance as people. After doing this my client's sense of her own future profoundly shifted. The philosopher Iris Murdoch said that we are creatures who make pictures of ourselves and then come to resemble those pictures. Truer words have rarely been spoken. This applies to the people we admire and hold in our mind: we become like them. So they help us not only to create a good future for ourselves, but to feel good and hopeful about it even while it's unwritten and uncertain, because they have lit the path for us through their own example of a good life.

Now it's time for another meditative reflection.



Again go to a quiet place and make yourself comfortable.

Let's start by reflecting on the mystery of time.

Notice that what happened twenty seconds ago is now in the past.

And how that sentence you just read is now in the past.

And that this *word*...

...is now in the past.

Time is spinning by. Can you feel it?

Last time we stepped into the future, to your deathbed. This time we will step into the future again, to your deathbed, but we will keep going. That night of mortal agony passes and you are dead. Let's keep going: days pass, your funeral happens, a year is past, and then ten years have gone by since you have died. The world is a decade along in fashion, technology, and life. You are a mere photo on a shelf.

Imagine you have great-grandchildren.

Imagine they are asking about you, ten years after you have died.

Asking about what kind of person you were.

And somebody is answering their questions.

You can hear every word.

They are talking about who you were from 2019 onwards, because for some reason you became a different person from then on. They are describing the kind of person you became.

It's good to hear the things they are saying.

Imagine the details.

What is it about you that they are admiring?

What gave your life its purpose and meaning?

It could be your humour, your passions, your kindness, a moral quality, or something else. Imagine the details.

When you are ready, write down the things they are saying.

Take your time reflecting and writing before moving on.

...

Once you have finished writing down what they said, consider what values are expressed in their description of the kind of person you were. To help you with that, write responses to these questions.

What made you proud in their description of you?

What do you wish was different? Why?

What do you need to change about yourself to become more that person?

What do you need to do differently from today onwards?

How did your top five strengths show themselves in that way of being?

Now try to reduce the things that give purpose to your life to a short-list, a few that capture it all. As in the last chapter, boil them down so you can formulate them as goals or aims:

The purpose of my life is to be _____ .

You can write a single sentence, or a paragraph if you want. Here is an example of what I might write:

“The purpose of my life is to be a decent person – to respect others and see them as real; no less real than me. It’s also to take responsibility for my own life and to make it good, because I value a joyful life for myself, and because I want to be generous and good to be around, and because I simply love life for itself. Another purpose of my life is to be truthful: to try to see deeply and clearly, to pay attention and reflect. Another purpose of my life is to be alive to the beauty of the world and of human life. In short goodness, truthfulness, and aliveness to beauty are vital to the purpose and meaning of my life.”

Notice that I defined my purpose in positive terms: What I am, rather than what I am not. It’s of little value to say, “I am not selfish” or “I dislike selfishness.” It is more important to positively define your values, for then you can aim at them and live up to them. Plus your motivation will be love: love of something good. Rather than hate: hate of something bad. This is a profoundly important point. The words *reactive* and *creative* contain the same letters in a

different order. Order your mind so that you live a creative life rather than a reactive one. Those two ways of living are radically different and lead to very different outcomes, both inwardly and outwardly.

In the previous chapter I helped you with the process of planning what you want in life as a set of long-term goals, medium-term aims, and daily actions. You can do the same with your purpose in life. Again take up your pen and answer these questions:

Life goals: *Who do I want to be as a person?*

Medium-term aims: *What will I be doing a year from now, to embody that?*

Daily actions: *What do I need to do every day, starting today, even starting right now, to be that person straight away?*

In my suicide counselling work I was often deeply struck by the capacity of people to go through suffering, and even to be shattered by it, and then to emerge better. Pain can warp us if we let it, and it can be very hard to resist such warping because our psychological defenses instinctively use anger and hate to protect us. Nonetheless, as conscious beings with higher values we can choose better. Consciousness transcends determinism. Even through deep pain we can become the opposite: strong and compassionate and wise even in the face of a betrayal or loss or tragedy which could reasonably have embittered us. I have seen this many times with people who had attempted suicide only a short time before I worked with them. Greatly energised by their fearless leap into death and then unexpected survival, some of them found powerful reserves of courage they didn't know they had, through which they proceeded to rebuild themselves from the ground up. They had passed through a dark night of the soul, but found it within themselves to aim for something higher, and so they became better than ever before. It was through such work with such people that a question started to arise for me which eventually defined my work: what if we could draw on that incredible energy

and power to grow and build, not only in terrible times, but in good times as well. What if you and I could draw on it right now to make our current life much, much better?

You may have experienced that profound power within you, ready to hand when you faced a shattering experience. It was there in you *precisely because you have it inside you now*. But instead of using it right now, you choose the safer and more comfortable path, as opposed to the good, beautiful, strong, meaningful life that is your potential. Be quiet for a moment and listen. Is there a clock ticking in your house? Look at your phone, is the time now different to when you sat down to start reading? Every second that passes you are closer to death. I invite you to picture the best version of who you could be. And the best life you could live. Why not try making that a reality? You don't know just how far you could get. There's literally *nothing better* you could do. And don't worry, you'll soon get a chance to rest in peace.

Create that life, be that person



Imagine that on your deathbed, you realise you never did those things which really matter.

Imagine that when your great-grandchildren ask about you, there's nothing to tell.

I said that a guiding question in my work is: What is the best life you could live, and what do you need to do every day to make it happen? In the last two chapters we have focused on getting *clarity* about what you want and who you want to be. Now we move to *doing* what it takes to achieve those things. As

the ancient Greek warrior Antilochus wrote, “we don’t rise to the occasion, rather we fall to the level of our training.”

What is training? It is the repetition of an action to the point that it becomes natural, while honing and deepening and improving it. In this chapter you’ll learn how to train yourself so you develop the habit of being who you really want to be. You are already that person at moments and there is no reason you can’t sustain that with training. Your old self is really just a set of habits, and so it drops away. You shed it like a skin, like old clothes which won’t fit anymore over your new body, or your new way of being.

When I was 17 years old I moved to Melbourne and made a living as a drummer for two years. There were no drum teachers where I grew up in the dusty hot Mallee. My brother and I would spend the entirety of our pocket money on a blank cassette and record Jazz from ABC radio. We’d analyse the music inside-out and then I would sit in a tin shed in the heat for hours after school every day, practicing my backside off. I did this because becoming an excellent musician gave me joy, because music gave me joy. Later as a therapist I was always fascinated by the fact that somebody would pay for my time and come, week after week, yet put in no effort and do no work. That’s like paying for music lessons but never practicing. And then complaining that you make no progress. Not only is it a waste, but you’re missing out on all the fun. Personal growth as I teach it is fun. At least, it feels good. It feels good in the way that entering increasingly into music feels good. It feels good in the way that being courageous feels good, especially compared to the old habit of cowardliness. Creating something new feels good. It feels much better than the old empty safety. Creating something new but also very good feels even better. Being the kind of person you want to be, and keeping that up as a habit, feels good.

As I recently commented to somebody, it’s like:

- Step 1: Practice being your best self on a daily basis, because it creates a wonderful life in the future.
- Step 2: Practice being your best self on a daily basis, because it is a wonderful way to live right now.

So I'm not offering boring exercises whose value lies solely in some future outcome which will arrive by degrees. Rather I teach my clients how to find the qualities they need inside themselves right now, and then to step into the world from that place. And then enjoy the rewards of that, such as the better feelings, and let that guide you to step even more into the world even more deeply from that place. Get hooked on the feeling of pleasure and meaning. Get hooked on this joyful way of living. I'm offering you a technique which will bring about that immediate change, even if it's deepest effect is seen over the longer-term as you become the person you want to be to a far greater degree. After sharing that technique I will offer a second practice which takes more time, but which is simple and highly effective once it becomes a habit. These two practices have been very powerful for myself and my clients, and can do wonders for you...if you do them.

Be That Person

It's as simple as that. I will show you how to be the person you want to be, right now.

Method actors become somebody else by embodying that person's qualities, inwardly and outwardly. How can they do that? Because we all possess the full spectrum of human qualities within us, we just need to tap into them. You have the traits of a murderer and a saint within you right now, it's simply a matter of tapping into different qualities within yourself. The qualities you current possess - or rather which possess you - are merely products of happenstance and repetition. Who you are is a narrative fiction, a story you simply keep telling and acting out. You can become who you want to be right

now by stepping into different qualities within you, and stepping into out into the world from that place in you. So I call this technique, Be That Person.

Our power to embody new qualities and emotions on command can be seen in an exercise that I often use with my clients. I start by asking them to feel as depressed as possible. I get them to fully embody that, and after a few minutes of being slumped in their chair, eyes dim, breath shallow, I ask them to remain that way...while now feeling joyful. Typically they can't do it. Then I have them shake off that feeling, perhaps through jumping and smiling. I wait fifteen minutes while we talk about other things, and then without connecting it to the prior exercise I ask them to stand up and embody a victory stance, entering into feelings of success and joy. Then I ask them to maintain that powerful posture and big smile, while feeling depressed again. Once again, they struggle. They struggle to feel joy in the depressed posture, and they struggle to feel depression in the joyful posture. They struggle even though they easily cultivated each of these feelings at different times during the one hour. And so by means of this exercise I show people by experience that they can cultivate emotional states on command. As I said above this is because they already have those qualities within themselves, they just need to access them. It's getting to the point now where I can turn certain wonderful qualities on like a switch. Which means when I get despondent, for example, I can switch that off by replacing it with something far better, that comes from an even deeper place within me than any feeling of despair. You can become highly skillful in doing all of this. You can tap into any quality inside you, and you can apply your strengths in such a way that it doesn't matter whether you have the talent you think you need for manifesting those particular qualities. Here are the building blocks of becoming skillful in manifesting the qualities you want, and so becoming - or rather being - the person you want to be.

The first part of this technique involves

- breaking down the qualities you want into their many *components*
- focusing on all the components that are *within your control*.

Imagine that you are a shy person and want to become confident. In our session I might ask: if you were confident how would you hold your body - your posture, your hands, your feet, your shoulders and so on? How would you breathe? What would you be doing with your face - your eyes, mouth, and so on? How would you talk in terms of tone, pauses, et cetera. What would you be thinking if you were confident? What things in your environment would you typically notice? What might you be wearing, and how would that change in different contexts? If you had a confidence-inspiring song in your head, what would it be? We could keep going, but see how I am breaking confidence down into all its *components*, with a specific focus on those aspects which are in your *control*. You pay attention to those aspects which are in your control so you can enact them by choice whenever you want to.

Once you have prepared yourself with those two steps, you move into action and...practice, practice, practice, enacting all your chosen components of confidence as much as possible. You go out into the world and do that. You use the experiences of your day as opportunities for enacting the components of confidence, for stepping into the mode of a confident person. This is your training. As you progress you'll realise that tapping into the qualities you want is not so hard or complicated, and that what held you back was fear.

Think of all the banal social interactions you engage in on a daily basis. Do you speak with the service station attendant in a sheepish voice, looking down and mumbling your way through the interaction because you seem to lack confidence in social situations? From now on, practice looking them in the eye and speaking in a low, confident voice and with a smile, telling them to have a good day. You will do this imperfectly at first, but you will get better at it. And you might not care about your confidence at the service station - you came to me because you want to develop confidence at work - but you will progress much faster if you use every opportunity to enact being a person who has confidence.

Are you a man who is nervous around women but who wants to begin dating? Start holding sustained eye contact while interacting with your female colleagues. Of course get clear on the difference between staring or creepiness

versus warm, confident, respectful attention, but then practice, and notice how better your dates go (and how much more you are liked and respected at work).

You can turn your days into endless opportunities for becoming the person you want to be. You can practice by using real situations, starting with the least threatening and then raising the stakes by degrees. When you do this you are not using other people, you are simply bringing a certain part of yourself to the fore when you interact with them. There's nothing wrong with making an effort in how you present yourself to others - we all do it, the service station attendant included. There's nothing wrong with bringing the best of yourself to a situation. Eventually as you lose your attachment to your old habits such as shyness, and fall in love with how your life looks and feels when you're confident, you'll take even more courageous leaps and your growth will be exponential. If you are my client you may find yourself laughing in the sessions as you recount the things which used to make you cry.

I've used the example of shyness and confidence but of course this applies to any quality. I've been doing this work for years now and can attest to its power for many clients. If you do it consistently it transforms you. Walking the talk, I can say personally that it has certainly transformed me. I suffered a lot when I was in my 20s and early 30s. I often felt that life would eventually overwhelm me. I felt trapped by negative emotions. These days, after years of personal work of the sort I am describing here, I am a far, far stronger and happier person. I am able to step into who I want to be when I am around others. And I am able to choose my emotions and perspectives, switching them on and off as desired. I am much more a "master of my soul," to use an ancient phrase. As a consequence, my outward life is so much better: dream home, dream job. My dream, not yours, but you can work out your own path. And for that, this stuff works. You can change who you are. There's a swathe of evidence for it in psychological research, but people around the world have been doing it for thousands of years, from Buddhism in the East, to Stoicism in the West. The tools are there, they are plentiful, and the skills can be learned just as you learn a musical instrument or a new sport, and the feedback and rewards are immediate: this feels damn good! Personal transformation is not a chore, it's

serious fun. Ultimately it's less about tools and skills than you think, as you become natural at this.

If/Then

Viktor Frankl was one of the great psychotherapists of the 20th century. But that came later. In 1944 he was a Jewish prisoner in the Nazi death camp Auschwitz. There his parents and pregnant wife were murdered, but he survived. He wrote of his experiences in his profound memoir *Man's Search for Meaning*, which I highly recommend. In that same book he also set forth his therapeutic approach - existential therapy – a theory developed and tested in the death camps. At one point in the book he writes, “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” That is the core of the next technique. I'm going to teach you to reprogram yourself.

Much of your behaviour is on auto-pilot: an automatic response to a stimulus. A particular situation will trigger a particular reaction in you, without you even thinking about it. Clearly this is an issue when your reaction is bad, unhelpful or not as good as you want. Fortunately, as Frankl points out, there is a space for self-awareness between the stimulus and your response, where you can choose a different response. By becoming aware of this space in theory and then practice, you can train yourself to replace your old response with a new, better one that in time becomes automatic. You can hack your mind and reprogram it. This is what the *If/Then* technique is all about.

I note as I write this that some people may feel this stuff is too complex to grasp or put into action. When I explain this to people I'm very concrete, and act it out or draw diagrams so that it makes easy sense. But I think it's worth laying out the theory here so that people who work with me can understand the fundamentals of change. And of course so those who will never see me can do this work on their own. In the next chapter I will build on the theory I offer here, to show you how you can reshape your entire life by design.

Let's break the technique down:

- Consider a *behaviour* you want to change for the better.
- Consider the *context* in which you want that change to occur.

Now take that context and call it the IF.

And take the desirable new behaviour and call it the THEN.

The technique is simple: IF that situation occurs, THEN you perform the new behaviour.

And every time the situation occurs, you perform the new behaviour. Over and over.

The result in time is that you are still triggered, but in a good way: what previously triggered a bad response now triggers the new, good one. Eventually the new behaviour becomes programmed in, automatic, habitual, natural. You've hacked your psychology. You've rewired your brain. You've created a new way of being.

Let's take an example.

Situation: Person is rude to me.

Old response: I get angry (or depressed, or anxious - whatever it is for you).

This becomes:

Situation: Person is rude to me.

New response: I recognise that their rudeness is about them, not me, and I don't get drawn into it, even inwardly.

Now let's analyse this technique using examples from your own life so you can learn to use this the technique on yourself. The idea is to become skillfully natural at it, in the same way that techniques on a musical instrument become natural through practice.

Open your journal and draw two lines from top to bottom, dividing the page into three columns as per the photo on the next page. Title the first column *situation*, the second *negative response*, and the third *positive response*.

In the *negative response* section, write down some negative or neutral actions you want to change. Spread each one out by a few lines (because we will use this page in the next chapter where you will add more writing).

In the *situation* section, write down the context in which each negative response occurs - the situation or stimulus which triggers it.

You can do those two sections in either order, starting with the situation and then the negative response, or the negative response and then the situation - whichever stands out to you.

Now, in the third section, write out what you want your new, positive response to be. See the image on the next page.

Situation	Negative Response	Positive Response
Computer Malfunctions	Crack the shits Complain to others	Breathe, perspective Smile, focus on fixing problem
Traffic is heavy	Stressed, judgemental, pull dangerous manoeuvres	Breathe, perspective Accept out of my control, take pleasure in driving with courtesy
Many bills come at once	Typically I will	

Remember Frankl's words? "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." The stimulus is the situation you have chosen. The space is, if you like, represented by the vertical line dividing the sections. It symbolises your ability to pause, reflect, and step into a different response.

So how do you put this into practice? Imagine an example:

Situation: Somebody tries to manipulate you by guiltng you.

Negative response: You get stressed and angry; you feel trapped; you tell yourself you're a victim of their manipulation; you remember how one of your

parents always did this which left you resentful; and you think about how there are so many “toxic people” out there.

Positive response: You take a deep breath, recognise what they are doing, and recognise that this is their game and you don't have to play. You choose a better way of responding - not out of superiority toward them, but by focusing instead on who you want most to be, on how you want to react both inwardly and outwardly to such things, and by stepping into that as per the previous technique.

Once you get good at this, you will become skilful in dealing with bad situations, especially those you have trained yourself for. They will serve as a prompt for you to choose positive responses - to step into being the person you really want to be. This is a beautiful thing because *it means that the situation which was an obstacle to you being a better person, now becomes the means for you to become that person. The problem becomes the means to the solution. What stood in the way becomes the way.* You're not only hacking your mind, you're hacking reality.

As you deepen this practice you will realise that the real problem for you is not bad things or people out there, but rather the fact you so easily hand your mind over to others, that you are not truly in yourself. You let your reactions be determined by other people's behaviour or events, which are out of your control. If somebody were to come with chains, wanting to trap you and make you a slave, you'd fight to the death. But everyday you hand your mind and heart over to such slavery. And you blame them for that. You have the power to take radical ownership of yourself, and create yourself as you want to be. You can choose how you feel and act, independently of circumstances. You can choose to be a strong, happy, admirable person. The techniques I am sharing here are part of how you do that.

Put this book down and reflect on some stimulus and response patterns that you would like to change. Consider ones which occur daily or at least often.

Then take your journal and set them out according to the three categories: situation, negative response, positive response.

In doing this exercise you may focus on eradicating bad responses. But remember the ethos of our work and don't stop there. Whether your automatic response is bad, neutral, or even good, how about cultivating some *really good* responses? Pause and consider this. Here is how you become the person you want to be. You can train yourself not only to be undisturbed, but to be great, using anything and everything as a stimulus. Why not treat this as a new hobby, or rather passion, like taking on a musical instrument. If you do so, you will transform your life. It was once said that most people die with their music inside them. Not in your case, not if you want to: in your case it's time to make music.

Let's take an example of that approach, using both our techniques to show how they work together to create change. Imagine you are trying to become more successful in your career. Imagine that your work involves sales and people. You are confident and friendly, and yet you lack something...and it occurs to you that it's that something which people call charisma. You realise that becoming more charismatic is the key to further success. Yet charisma is something you either have or don't have, isn't it? Maybe not. Taking your cue from the first technique, you can start by breaking the charisma down into elements which you can enact. Charisma has three main components: power, warmth, and presence, and you already have the first two - "you are confident and friendly" - but you see that you lack *presence*. So you decide to develop it as a new response to the various situations in your job. You choose a series of situations, for example whenever you encounter certain staff or clients, and you use that situation, that stimulus, as a prompt to start brief conversations in which you really pay attention to others as people, asking them about themselves with honest interest and genuinely hearing their answers - being present with them. Over a short time you increase and expand this quality throughout your interactions, and soon your sales improve or your employees are performing better, you feel more engaged in your work, and people just feel that...it's good to be around you.

So far in this book we've created some clarity about who you want to be, and what you want to do or have in your life. I pointed out that when people try to change their life and create the happiness they want, they often try do it with far less knowledge-gathering and planning and structure than they use for other things like fitness and business - things which though important, are less important than your meaningful and happy life. And as you can see from this book, there are simple yet powerful ways to change, and if you use the appropriate knowledge, structure, and training, you can radically change yourself.

We're going to finish this book with one last chapter where we look into the engine room of both happiness and change.

Your mindset or philosophy of life



In this final chapter we'll move from goals and practices to the big picture, to your *philosophy or life or mindset*. I will help you craft that. Your mindset will be both the captain and the engine of change in your life.

Why focus on mindset?

Your thoughts shape your emotions and actions.

Over time this means that your thoughts shape who you are.

And so they shape what your life comes to look like.

Your thoughts - your mindset - are something you can examine, choose, and create.

And that means you are free to choose and create how you feel, act, what kind of person you are, and what your life looks like.

Some of the consequences of your choices will be immediate, while some will unfold over years.

You have the power to choose thoughts that make you happy, strong, fulfilled, good, successful. Now, and across the long-term.

In this chapter I will show you how your mindset shapes you and your world, and how you can change it for the better. Welcome to the heart of our work.

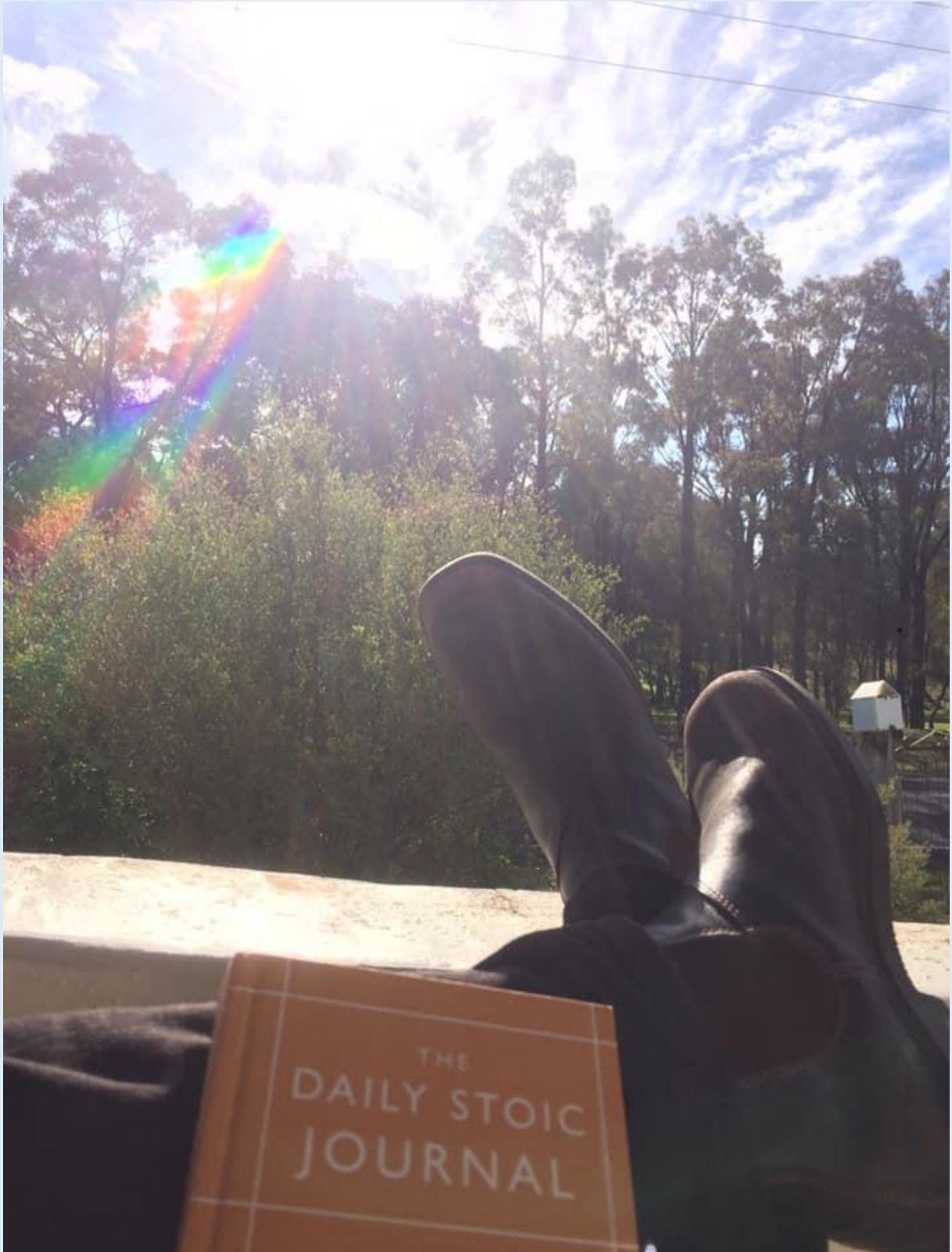
Mindset is a modern word for something ancient: your philosophy of life. The word *philosopher* means *lover of wisdom* in ancient Greek. An ancient philosopher is somebody who loves and cultivates qualities like wisdom, courage, resilience, goodness, happiness, and flourishing. These days philosophy is mostly done by academics whose primary interest is theory. But ancient philosophy was about facing hardship well and making life good. It was done by people who combined reflection and action. Among the most famous of these ancient philosophers some were soldiers, some craftsmen, others businessmen, some slaves, and one an emperor.

In my work I draw on ancient philosophy and modern psychology, combining them as you'll see in a moment. I studied and taught philosophy at The University of Melbourne but decided to become a coach and counsellor, in part

because I wanted to practice philosophy as a helping profession aimed at guiding people in creating good lives. That's why I studied a counselling degree - which is about challenges in living - rather than psychology - which is more about mental illness.

Philosophy and especially Stoicism have shaped our thinking for two and a half thousand years. For example modern psychologists help people improve their mental health by having them change their thinking, in order to change their negative emotions and behaviour. They learned this from Stoicism as some of them admit. But the Stoics went further; they did not limit themselves to overcoming problems. Stoicism is about creating a life of profound meaning and happiness through the finding courage to change what you can, and the cultivating wisdom to accept what you cannot. It works at creating a mindset defined by qualities like courage and wisdom, which transforms your whole way of being. We will use Stoicism and its modern psychological off-spring to help you craft your philosophy of life - your mindset - so you can transform yourself.

My favourite Stoic philosophers are Marcus Aurelius, who was one of the greatest emperors of Rome, and Epictetus, who was a cripple and a slave. These men understood the challenges of life. One of Epictetus' most famous sayings is, "people are disturbed not so much by things in themselves, but by their beliefs about such things." It's not so much the situation which disturbs you - indeed another person in this situation is not disturbed - rather it is how you see the situation. The psychologist Albert Ellis transformed psychotherapy based on Epictetus's idea. At the heart of his approach Ellis developed a formula for breaking down and applying Epictetus' insight, which he called the *ABC model*.



The ABC model:

A = Activating Event (the thing that happens).

B = Belief.

C = Consequences (such as how you *feel* or *act* in response to what happens).

“People are disturbed not so much by things in themselves, but by their beliefs about such things.” People are disturbed - suffer negative emotional consequences - not so much by activating events, as by their beliefs about those events. It is your beliefs more than events themselves which lead you to your negative emotions. The word belief is used broadly here to include perception, perspective, interpretation...all the cognitive stuff.

Now this is one of those truths which most people know or at least would agree with, but which they know intellectually rather than as a lived truth. Most people feel and act as if there is *only* the Event and the Consequence:

Activating Event: somebody is rude to me.

Consequence: I get angry.

Absorbed in anger, a person assumes that it is the natural and logical reaction. They forget that while they get angry, a second person may get depressed, a third anxious, and a fourth might even experience a positive emotion...all in response to *the exact same event*.

What leads these different people to respond to the exact same event in such different ways? It is B: the Belief.

To illustrate this, here are three examples of the one *same event*, but with *different beliefs* in each case, which lead to three different consequences:

1.

Activating Event: somebody is rude to me.

Belief: Rudeness expresses somebody's attempt to stand over me, and must be fought against.

Consequence: I get angry.

2.

Activating Event: somebody is rude to me.

Belief: people will always be rude to me and there is nothing I can do, I am helpless and will always suffer this way.

Consequence: I get depressed.

3.

Activating Event: somebody is rude to me.

Belief: their behaviour is about them, it says nothing about me, and need not effect me.

Consequence: I don't react to them. Perhaps I also feel pleasure at my ability to respond this way, and so experience greater self-esteem and a general sense of happiness...as a consequence of their rudeness!

Another way of picturing the ABC model is to think of it as an equation:

$$A + B = C$$

An event + your beliefs = your reaction.

This is the code behind how you feel, what you do, and how your life comes to look. Again this means you can hack your life, you can transform yourself. Pause for a moment and let this sink in. Many of your negative emotions and behaviours - which feel permanent, or which feel caused by things outside your control - are arbitrary, and you can change them. Many of the problems in your life, you can change! And not by years of intense therapy or by sweat and pain. But by insight, and the repetition of that, by stepping always into your insightful perspectives which make you feel better both now and in the long-term. And this not just about negating problem thoughts and negative consequences: you can change average or good thoughts and things about yourself into great things. Welcome to the workshop of your mind and heart.

So we have this ABC model. It is used by psychologists to help people improve their mental health, and is derived from Stoic philosophy. The wonderful thing about the ABC model is that, despite it being a psychological tool, we can reverse engineer it. We can use it in the other direction, to understand and create your philosophy of life or mindset.

The ABC model shows us how your mindset shapes you.

But it can also be used as a tool for reshaping your mindset.

Which means it can be a simple yet profoundly powerful tool for reshaping yourself and your life.

To do all of that, let's think of the:

Activating Event as the whole of life insofar as you encounter it.

Belief as your *philosophy of life* or *mindset* (your beliefs as a whole).

Consequence your whole life: who you are and what your life looks like, inwardly and outwardly.

You exist in the world and encounter it as so many events - so many things, happenings, and people.

You interpret and experience that encounter through the lens of your beliefs.

And respond to that encounter through the lens of your beliefs.

A bad set of beliefs - a bad philosophy or mindset - can reduce your whole life to a living hell. In response to all events you can become a bitter, depressed, or anxious person....

A good mindset can take you further into happiness than you ever hoped. You can respond to the people and things you encounter in ways that make everything better. You can respond to risks with courage. You can respond to obstacles with creativity and action. You can respond to the bad in good ways. You can respond to the good by creating more good. You can be an engine for positive creation no matter what the circumstances.

Your mindset shapes you, but in doing so it circles back and creates your world. How so? You are in a feedback loop with the world; you get what you give. Approach the world with optimism, creativity, hard work and so on, and

certain things will happen. Because you made them happen. Because you co-operated well with reality and let good things in. And because other people now like you more and so want to be around you and want to include you in good things. But approach life with cynicism, destructive emotions, laziness, resentment, and so on, and see what unfolds.

Your future will unfold in large part due to your your mindset. And as I said in an earlier chapter, creating a better future by embodying better qualities, means that you make things better right here and now, at this moment.

Of course, as Epictetus also said, “There are things that are in our control, and things that are outside of it.” Life contains many things which are *not in your control*, both good and bad. There is tragedy and there is malevolence, and both can cut you down. But they don’t have complete power over you. Viktor Frankl in the Nazi camps shows us that, as does Alexander Solzhenitsyn in the communist work camps. As Muhammad Ali said, there’s nothing wrong with being knocked down, it’s staying down that’s bad. Resilience is something that unfolds over time. Rising up is often a journey you go on. What I am talking about in this book is what is in your control. You can radically change your mindset, which means you can radically change your life. The people I used to work with who had tried to kill themselves had experienced much that was outside of their control. Some of it was very cruel, and at first it had shattered them so profoundly that they tried to die. Fortunately in each case their attempt didn’t work, and having caught their breath they were able to take a second look at things. They were able to make a different choice. Some chose to accept what had happened, tolerating their pain with compassion and wisdom, while putting their focus on what was good and in their control. They seemed to conclude that if things could fall so low, maybe they should see how high they could reach. Powered by the energy of the initial explosion - an event which was now interpreted through their new mindset - I saw some of these people radically change their lives.

Let’s put this into practice.

In the last chapter I offered two techniques, the first which I called Become That Person, and the second IF/THEN. These can be used in mindset development. For they can be used to train yourself not only in outward habits, but in inward ones too. You can create a new mindset and new responses not only to events out there, but to events in your mind. This is where I often suggest people focus their efforts, because it is where most of the action happens in your life. It is also where most of your suffering happens. And so it is where the possibility for training most happens in your life. We will spend more time here on the IF/Then technique, but in my practice I think most in terms of Becoming That Person so let's touch on that first.

Events include things in the present, things in the past, and things in the future. The second and third exist inside your mind: in your memory, anticipation, and imagination. The life going on inside your mind can be like a soap opera. For example when anticipating and imagining the future, your thoughts run freely through a litany of fears that turn into anxiousness, despondency, or anger. All of this is happening while you sit in your chair apparently doing nothing. Most people don't realise how much of their life is lived through their imagination, but also how much power they have in their imagination, and the radical consequences in their life of exercising that power. You are exercising more choice than you realise. You are facing your imagined scenarios with a certain mindset and certain qualities, though they are typically cowardly or unhelpful ones. You can step into a new mindset and new qualities, just as I suggested you do in your life when cultivating a quality like confidence.

Take the example of you anticipating some potential bad event which frightens you. You're imagining it happening, but also imagining yourself being overwhelmed. It's pretty horrible, and it effects you inside and out. Well you can treat this like any present event - and in a sense it is a present event of a certain kind, for the imagining of it is happening right now. When you become aware of what you are imagining and how you are responding to it in your thinking and imagination, you can choose to remain in your current mindset of fear, or you can change that. You can choose to see it through the lens of courage. For example you could make a choice that, no matter what, you will not be overwhelmed, but rather you will handle all such events. Then you imagine yourself actually handling this apparently terrible thing which you are

imagining. You can even take it further and imagine yourself growing stronger through this challenge. And imagine creating more meaning in you life through how you face with this suffering. Don't imagine those simply as outcomes or vague statements, but imagine what you would do, what attitude you would take, that would make this apparent curse into a blessing.

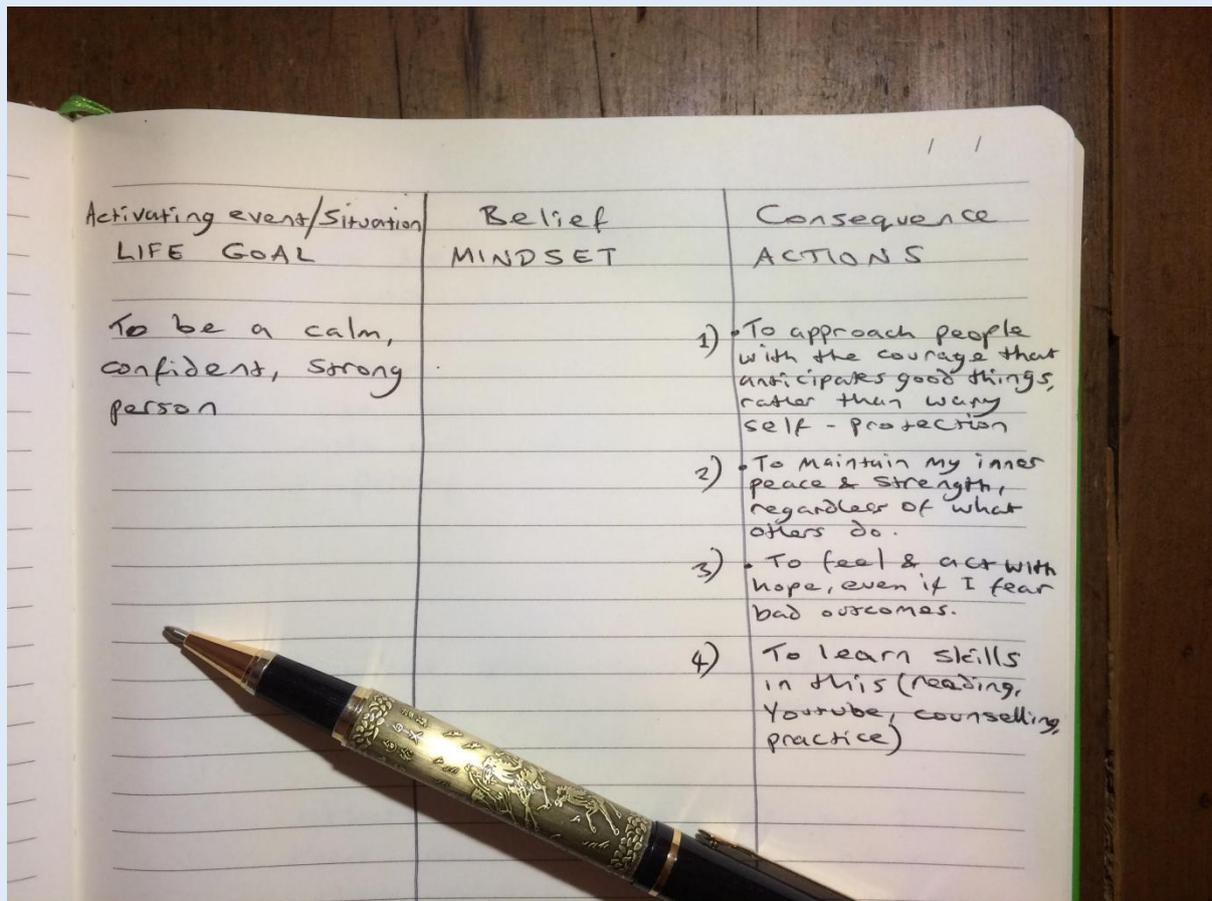
Now let's develop your mindset by integrating the ABC model and the IF/THEN technique. Open up your journal. For a warm up exercise you're going to apply the ABC model to what you wrote in the last chapter, where you divided the page into situations, and negative responses, and positive responses. Go to that page, and in each case divide the situation and its responses according to the ABC model by reflecting on and then writing down the Belief (B) which lies between the situation (A) and each response (C):

Situation	Negative Response	Positive Response
<p>(A) Computer Malfunctions</p>	<p>(C) Crack the shits Complain to others</p> <p>(B) Everything will turn to chaos</p>	<p>(C) Breathe, perspective Smile, focus on fixing problem</p> <p>(B) This happens often & I always handle it.</p>
<p>Traffic is heavy</p>	<p>Stressed, judgemental, pull dangerous manoeuvres</p> <p>(B) I'm going to be late & be judged. People are idiots.</p>	<p>Breathe, perspective Accept out of my control, take pleasure in driving with courtesy</p> <p>(B) This is out of my hands. I want to be mature. Safety is more important. We're all in the same boat.</p>
<p>Many bills come at once</p>	<p>Typically I will</p>	

When it comes to your current negative responses, you are describing beliefs you already have. These beliefs might be conscious but often they are not - they have gone underground in your mind, as unexamined and implicit assumptions. To see what they are you will have to use implication: your reaction to the event will imply what the belief is.

By contrast, when it comes to your new positive responses you are not *discovering* what beliefs you have, rather you are *choosing and creating* them. Mindset development is above all an act of free choice and creation. My own criteria for the beliefs I choose is that they should be as *true* as possible, and as *beneficial* as possible. So for example if two beliefs seem equally true, yet one is pessimistic while the other is optimistic, then I choose the second given that optimism generally serves me better.

Okay, so you've had some practice at analysing how negative beliefs lead to negative responses, and how positive beliefs create good ones. We're going to get to work on creating your mindset. We'll continue to use the ABC Model to guide you, and we'll use your life-goals, medium-term aims, and daily actions. I want you to go to a new page in your journal and divide it into three sections, and title the first section *Activating Event or Situation*, the second *Belief*, and the third *Consequence*. And I want you to add a second title to each section: first *Life Goal*, second *Mindset*, and third *Actions*. The photo on the next page gives an example:



Now write down your life goals, spaced out on the page. Next, as per the photo, write down some of the corresponding daily actions or medium-term aims which you wrote about in previous chapters.

Then write down the mindset you will need in order to perform those actions, to achieve each life goal. You can see that the order of things is starting to shift here, reflecting the feedback loop of a mindset where not only do you shape how you feel and act in your world, but you shape your feelings and actions in a way that in turn shapes your world. According to the ABC model take the goal as an (A) event - that is, as a possible situation you could create as your goal. And then write down the kinds of (B) beliefs or attitudes you will need to inspire the (C) action you must take to make the goal happen. If you need more room to do this exercise then use another page by numbering the actions and aims as I have done in the photo. As an example of the beliefs or attitudes you might write down, in response to 1 you might include statements such as:

“While people are a mixture good and bad and so I need to be wise when I trust, nonetheless there’s a lot of good in others, and I will regularly encounter it if I approach people in the right spirit.”

In response to 2 you might include:

“What others think and do is out of my control, but I can control my perspective and actions.”

And also, “I am able to hold my own when challenged or threatened - I am much stronger than I realise, if only I will trust myself and know my strengths.”

In this exercise you are developing your mindset, but you are also seeing its power, for as I have said: not only is mindset for responding well to the world as you encounter it by creating good responses rather than bad ones, it is also about creating yourself and your world: your actions are the consequence of your beliefs or mindset, but they also lead to the situation you are aiming for: your goals for your life.

At Alcoholics Anonymous people recite The Serenity Prayer:

Grant me the courage to change the things I can,

The serenity to accept the things I cannot,

And the wisdom to know the difference.

The Serenity Prayer is pure Stoicism. You will encounter things in life that you cannot control. Your mindset will be vital then, so that you live well with those unchangeable things by maintaining your strength and values and wisdom. Of course you will also encounter aspects of life that you can control, and your mindset will be vital then so you can step up and change your life for the better. But even in the first situation - the things which are out of your control - you can create great change in yourself and your life precisely through the attitude you take to them. For as Marcus Aurelius wrote, “The impediment to

action advances action, what stands in the way becomes the way.” Remember what you learned to do in the last chapter, creating IF/THEN ways of hacking your psychology to turn your negative triggers into positive ones. And in this chapter you have learned to shape your mindset in order not only to shape how the world affects you, but to shape your world in turn. Mindset hacks reality. Imagine if you made your desire for success in life stronger than your fear, and built your mindset around that? Imagine if you really did ask yourself, honestly, what you most want in life, and what the highest and best life might be for you, and then shaped your mind with courage and determination and energy to aim constantly at it? Imagine playing that game....

A good mindset is like a glass prism which refracts light. The light that goes in is the world as you encounter it. It is filtered according to the qualities of the glass. The light that comes out is what your life looks like.

Conclusion

We've explored your strengths. We've explored what you want in life. We've explored who you want to become. We've explored two fundamental practices for making these happen. And we've looked at your philosophy of life - your mindset which guides and shapes and creates who you are and what your world looks like. The longer I have worked as a counsellor and coach the more I have been struck – blown away - by our capacity to rise to our challenges and to create lives of courage, beauty and worth. We read books about heroes facing drastic times, but those same people are here, among us. I meet them in my work. Most have not been tested in the ways which get written about, but the human spirit shows itself nonetheless. We all have this in us, you and I included. It's our human nature. That's why, despite all the suffering of life, it's good to be alive. It's also why we should hope and strive: we each have far greater capacity than we realise to make our lives far more wonderful than they are. I say this from *experience*: from what I've seen in my work, and in my life. I hope this book helps you on your own journey of creating a wonderful life. Good luck.

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For more on what I do, see [here](#) and follow me on social media. I design different courses and programs to help people develop the qualities to thrive in different areas of life.

