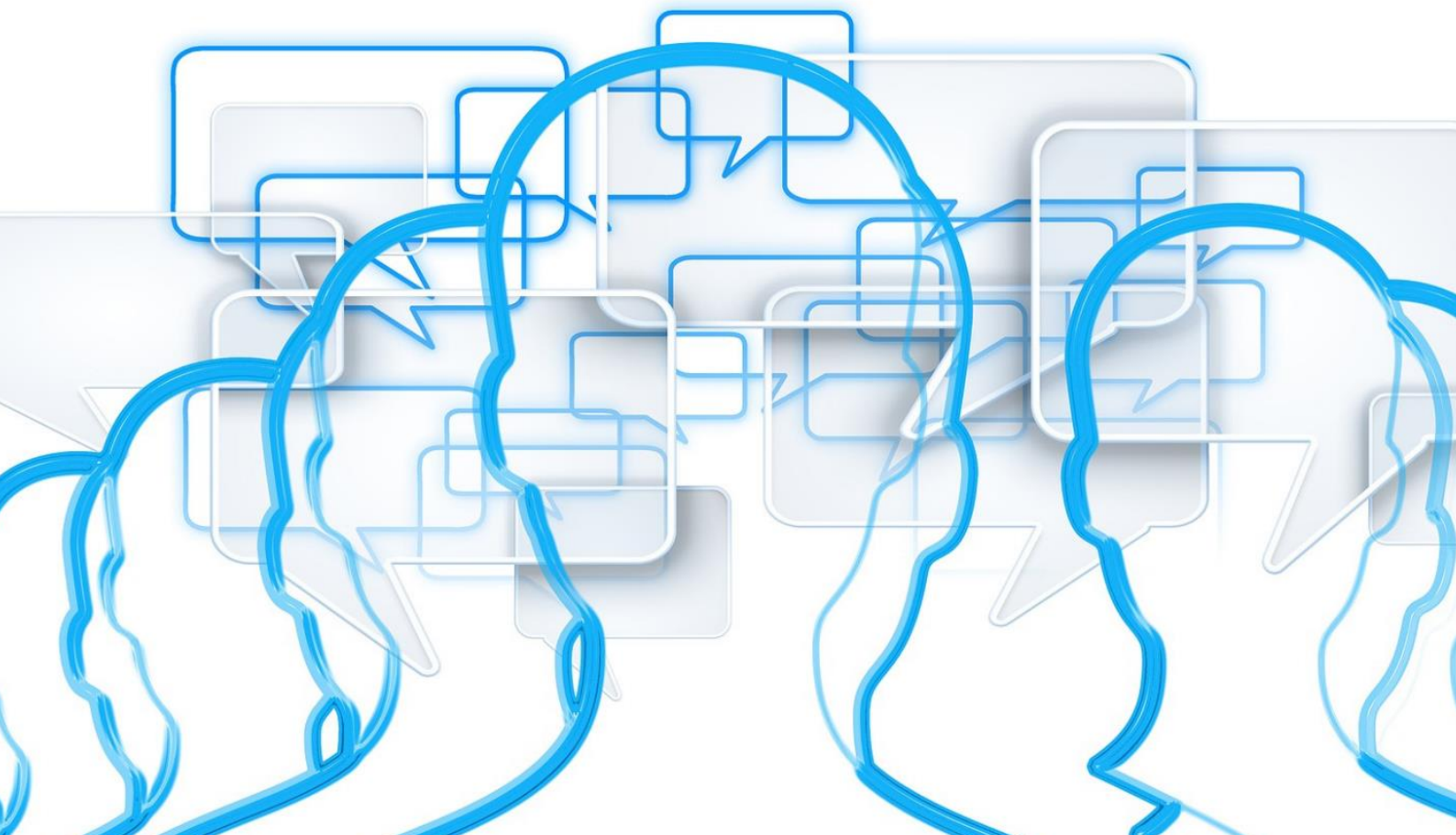


THE FIRST STAGE OF ESCAPING A TRAP IS
TO REALISE YOU ARE IN ONE

THE OVERWHELMED MANAGER

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

BY MARTYN DAWES



**“To escape a trap, first you must
recognise you are in one.”**

About the Author

Martyn Dawes is a Coach, Author, and Senior Manager, currently working in the Health and Social Care Sector.

Martyn has spent many years in what is often described as one of the most stressful jobs you can have. Life as a Prison Governor was certainly eye-opening to a variety of experiences, most of which he does not want to ever experience again! However, during that time he was introduced to a new paradigm for living, which, quite literally, changed everything for him overnight.

Often described as ‘Coming Home,’ Martyn offers unique and bespoke coaching to anyone who is having difficulty with Stress, Overwhelm, Anxiety or a disconnection from their true identity, and has a true desire for change.

To find out more email: martyn@martyndawes.co.uk

The Overwhelmed Manager

How to Read This Book.....	5
Before You Begin.....	8
The Call to Action	10
The Day It All Changed.....	12
What is Overwhelm?	14
The Role of the Brain.....	19
A Trip to the Cinema.....	26
Processing Information.....	27
Kanizsa’s Triangle	29
Reacting or Creating?	33
Are You a Dead Fish?.....	35
Why Not Just Get a New Job?.....	37
The Beginning	42
A New Paradigm.....	44
It is EXACTLY what You Think It Is.....	45
The Missing Link.....	46
Inside OUT vs. Outside IN.....	52
Case Study One	55
Case Study Two	57
Fatal Attraction.....	59
Changing Thoughts	61
Overthinking.....	63
Overwhelm and Overthinking.....	64
When Silence Really Is Golden	66
We All Experience Different Realities.....	67
What Are You Worrying About?.....	69
The Rollercoaster of Life.....	70
Feelings. Nothing More Than Feelings	71
Your Feelings Are Just A Guide.....	73
Live is Life.....	76
Inner Resilience	78
The Role of Thought When You Are Overwhelmed	80
The Human Operating System	84
Start at the Beginning – with You	86
Courage or Action?	87
It's Not All About YOU	88
Coaching Lionel Messi.....	89
The Leaf and The River	90

The Overwhelmed Manager

You Are an Olive!	91
The Golden Buddha	93
Have You Got the X Factor?	94
The Story of ‘You’	95
Start with Yourself	98
Relationships with Others	100
Who You Truly Are	101
We Are Energetic People	102
The Diamond Within	103
Be More Cat	105
Some Staff Don’t Like You	108
Breaking the Downward Spiral	109
Being Visible	110
Change to Order	112
Who is Leading?	114
Life Behind Bars	116
Ask Them, Tell Them, Make Them	119
Setting Clear Boundaries	120
People Driven vs. Process Driven	121
Being Liked vs. Being Respected	123
Doing What Is Right vs. Doing What Is Easy	125
Appreciation	126
Criticism and Auditing	128
The Problem with Time	130
The Gift Is The Present	132
Problem Solving and Decision Making	136
Decisions, Decisions	139
Dealing with Complaints	140
Effective Complaint Procedures	143
The Pareto Principle	149
Effective Email Management	151
Time Management	153
A Presidential Approach to Time Management	156
Delegation	161
Keep it Simple. The 5-15 report	166
Things to Remember	168

How to Read This Book

.....
“It's like a finger pointing away to
the moon. Don't concentrate on the
finger or you will miss all that heavenly
glory.” – Bruce Lee.
.....

Surely reading a book is simply reading a book?

Not quite, I need you to approach this book differently if you are going to get the maximum benefit that I have planned for you.

When you listen to music, you don't try to understand the musical notation. You don't picture the notes on the page, the production of the piece, or the composition. You just **enjoy** the music.

You are Listening for a Feeling.

Music has the power to affect us emotionally. You enjoy the **feeling** a piece of music gives you as it can harmonise with your current mood or induce a new mood experience. I remember when I was younger, before my brother and I would go to a soccer match, I would play a particular album (*Wishful Thinking* by Propaganda) to 'Get me in the mood' before leaving the house. The high-octane beats, driving rhythms and drums really got my blood flowing, and put me in the right frame of mind to enjoy a good game.

You often play 'mood music' to help you achieve or sustain a particular state of mind as you recognise its power.

I want you to read this book like you listen to music. If you get a nice feeling when you are reading a particular section, but don't understand it, don't worry - the letters are already weaving their magic, like the notes of a song. When you read without trying too hard to understand, you can 'Get out of your own way,' and as I stated earlier, 'When you do that, miracles can happen.'

Lastly, consider getting yourself a coach to be a guide as you work through these pages and beyond. An effective coach will point you to the brilliance you already possess but may have forgotten.

The Overwhelmed Manager

As your guide for these pages, I know with absolute 100% certainty that you have the capacity to live a happy, peaceful, and full life. When working with clients, I point them towards this understanding.

This has led to many life-changing moments, such as this one:

“All of a sudden, I feel my life is coming out an uncontrolled sky dive and I have found the parachute rip cord. I am starting to believe I am going to enjoy the rest of the glide back down to earth and it's going to be in a safe place.”

As your coach and guide for these pages, I am going to ask you a simple question. Why not record your answer here and review it again after you have finished this book?

Imagine you were to wake up tomorrow and a miracle had occurred overnight that gave you the life you dreamed of. How would you know?

What would you see?

What would be different?

How would you feel?

Record your answer here:

The Overwhelmed Manager

You may become aware of an intense desire to put this book down, to dismiss it or come up with an excuse not to carry on.

This is good!

Subconsciously, your mind is processing millions of pieces of information every second, and it has an objective - to keep you safe.

It may already be sensing danger.

It may be aware that reading these words are already challenging long held beliefs, beliefs that have protected you very well on your journey through life. But these beliefs are what have brought you to this point today, to you picking up this book, and admitting you need help. It realises this book will challenge the status quo, and your mind wants stability, reassurance.

It has helped you survive so far and anything that challenges your established view of the world can be seen as a threat to your very existence. It is trying to protect you, it is doing the best it can in the circumstances, but it is time to acknowledge that its best has not been good enough.

Before You Begin

Welcome!

You have made a wise investment. Investing in yourself, your growth, your mental and physical wellbeing, and personal happiness is rarely wasted.

Before you start it would be a good idea to take a measure of where you are now. This way you can note improvements as you work through the book.

Score each following statement from 0-10 where 10 is Strongly Agree, and 0 is Strongly Disagree. I have left a couple of blank lines so that you can add your own statement if you wish, to make it more personal and relevant to you.

Emotional State	Score
I regularly feel Overwhelmed.	
My relationships suffer because of my poor mental state.	
I have no peace of mind and cannot relax or switch off.	
I am on medication for low moods, anxiety, depression, or other mental health issue.	
I am using alcohol, recreational drugs, or another addiction to help my mental state.	
I feel I cannot do anything right.	
I feel guilty when I have time off from work.	
I feel like a failure.	
Total Score:	

Insights and Breakthroughs

You may have personal insights and breakthroughs when going through this book. Those 'AHA!' moments when you start to see things differently. If you are anything like me, you will forget them so it is best to write them down as soon as you can.

As you have them, record them here. Don't worry if you are unsure whether to record it or not. If in doubt, write it down.

My Insights	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

The Call to Action

This Book is a Call to Action

What would it be like to be able to:

- Understand and control those feelings of Overwhelm?
- Remain calm in stressful situations?
- Have those difficult conversation calmly and easily?
- Find more room in your heart for love?
- Mend those damaged relationships?

I am going to show you how a basic understanding of these 4 areas will change the way you see life forever. They will help you reduce stress, feelings of Overwhelm, and anxiety-based issues, gently and effortlessly.

I am offering you one simple promise - If you begin to 'see' even the most basic principles outlined in this book, then you can **start to enjoy a completely new experience of being alive.**

For too long you have been suffering. I am here to gently and peacefully show you a different way. This book will be challenging, inspirational and life changing. But there is a secret to this book, hidden messages not written on the page. These messages may come to you when you least expect them:

- In the shower.
- On a walk alone or with friends.
- Driving your car.
- In the middle of the night.

They will pop into your head and you will notice them because they will seem different, perhaps fresher, more exciting, or just have a different feel to them. These messages are called **insights**. They will come when you **stop** trying to look for them, when you least expect them.

As I mentioned earlier, don't forget the record these at the start of this book to help reinforce the new understanding that will unfold.

.....
"When you get out of your own way,
miracles can happen."
.....

SECTION 1

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF OVERWHELM

The Day It All Changed

This is how it happened for me.....

I had been working as a Prison Governor for many years but enjoyed exploring aspects of personal or spiritual development, especially around stress and its effects. I had felt what I now know to be 'creeping stress' over many years without really realising what was happening to me psychologically and physically.

This type of stress creeps up on you like a thief in the night. It is said if you put a frog in a pan of cold water and gradually increase the heat it will not jump out, eventually boiling to death. Creeping stress is the same. It sneaks up and overwhelms you until one day you burst into tears because you have run out of tea bags. Like a boiling kettle, the pressure has to escape somewhere.

Whilst working as a Prison Governor I was also coaching. I used a more traditional transformative model which was a little confrontational, but ultimately I did get some great results. My reputation was growing.

And then something happened.

A friend of mine convinced me to go to a short presentation. It would be around 1 ½ hrs with a 15 minute break. Those 90 minutes changed everything...

I was a firm believer that we had to identify triggers from the past, work through and resolve the issue and then move on with positive thoughts and affirmations. The presenter, a guy named Ian Watson, was explaining that none of that was necessary, that we were already whole and mentally healthy, and we need not pay attention to our thoughts too much. This went against everything I believed to be true and I couldn't agree. Whilst trying to remain respectful and polite I challenged Ian, and one by one he calmly and confidently answered my questions.

To be honest I struggled with the whole thing and went home thinking the evening was wasted.

And then something remarkable happened.

The next morning I awoke and felt a bit 'out of sorts'. I could not describe how I felt. I wasn't ill but, and I have no other way of describing this, my head felt different.

I phoned my friend and told her that I was feeling odd. What she said really surprised me. She said,

The Overwhelmed Manager

“You’ve got it haven’t you”

I had no idea what she was talking about so I asked her what she meant.

“You’ve got the understanding!” She replied.

I put the phone down and just stood for a bit. It felt a bit like this,

‘Nothing had changed and yet everything was different.’

To this day I still use and hear this phrase from my coaching clients. Some get it quickly and powerfully, whilst others slowly, over a period of weeks, the way we experience reality has changed, it has shifted and like learning to ride a bike, you can occasionally fall off, but you cannot unlearn it.

And what you get is a completely new experience of being alive.

So let’s start at the beginning.

What is Overwhelm?

About Overwhelm

The feeling of Overwhelm is not uncommon and is not a unique condition in itself, but rather made up of a variety of single factors that go to make up that all-consuming Overwhelmed feeling.

Imagine you have a bottle, and you start to fill it with these individual factors. You can deal with quite a lot of these factors yourselves, but as the bottle gets more and more full, it begins to overflow. The question is, what are you putting into your bottle?

- Stress?
- Fear?
- Anxious feelings?
- Negative view of life?
- Negative view of others?
- Overwork?
- Constant and persistent tiredness?
- Doubt?
- Low self-esteem?

Much like a computer programme, the information the mind receives determines the programme that it runs. It really doesn't care what programme it is; it just runs the programme.

If you are programming your brain with unhelpful data, you can always change the programme. **You are in charge.**

About Stress

Stress is your reaction to perceived physical, emotional, or mental pressure.

When you get stressed the body releases chemicals that signal the fight or flight response. These chemicals help the body produce energy, ready for taking quick action.

It can be good in short bursts - for instance, escaping from a position of imminent danger - but over a long period of time will have a detrimental effect on the body. The constant, steady stream of cortisol and adrenaline into the body means that they have

The Overwhelmed Manager

nowhere to go, they just build up. All that 'nervous energy' sitting in the body has no place to go. No wonder we feel wound up and emotionally charged. The excess energy soon starts to find a way out in physical symptoms.

Physical symptoms of stress can include, but are certainly not limited to:

- Physical pain.
- IBS.
- Constant tiredness.
- Persistent headaches.

Why be Concerned about Stress?

Excessive stress in your life can have the following effects:

- It affects your relationships.
- Energy is put into what makes you **unhappy**, rather than spending time on creating happiness in your life.
- It saps energy leaving a feeling of constant tiredness.
- You become negative and pessimistic.
- It can affect you physically and become detrimental to your natural bodily functioning.
- It can cause high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, and heart disease.
- Research estimates as much as 90% of illness and disease is stress-related, including ulcers, allergies, asthma, and migraines.
- It can exacerbate pre-existing health conditions.

Unmanaged stress is increasingly common in the workplace, especially in the Health and Social Care sector. In this arena managers have 360° stressors. These come from:

- Staff teams and subordinates.
- Relatives.
- Residents or service users.
- Managers above you.

As a quick test do you:

- Rest adequately?
- Eat well-balanced meals?
- Take breaks?
- Rebuild energy resources with time off?
- Exercise regularly

Looking after yourself is an essential part of everyday living.

Causes of Stress

We each handle stress in our own unique way, but here are some of the most common causes:

Fear

Fear can create stress including:

- Fear of failure.
- Not being able to get the job finished.
- Decisions to be made that can go wrong.
- Problems you feel are difficult to solve.

Uncertainty

Uncertainties can cause individual stress. Forward planning has a place, and we like to know what is coming up for us in the future. Stress often accumulates because there are so many "unknowns".

Life is filled with uncertainty. It always has been, and always will be, regardless of how hard we try to ignore it. At the time of writing this book, the world was experiencing a pandemic which caused major changes and upheavals in many professional and personal lives. It is discomfoting not to know what is going to happen, particularly if your control of the situation is impeded through:

- Government policy.
- Illness.
- Decisions made by others.

Uncertainty can cause feelings of helplessness, which leads to stress.

Attitudes

Your unique attitude and perception of life will influence your reaction to stressful situations. If you feel that what you are doing isn't worthwhile, then some of the everyday problems you face can be seen as challenges.

However, negative feelings - feeling trapped or stuck, can cause stress and promote frustration rather than motivation.

Perceptions

As you will see through this book, previous experiences can determine what internal resources you feel you have for dealing with life's challenges as they arise. The degree of stress you experience is affected by your **perception** of your ability to deal with stressful situations. In fact, it is *you* who determines if a situation is stressful, or not.

The Overwhelmed Manager

Perception is affected by:

- Your personal values, self-esteem, competency in the role you are undertaking, and personal needs.
- Your understanding of the fundamental principles of living, where your experience is coming from, and how current experiences are affecting how you feel.
- Your past experience in handling stressful situations, outcomes, and the rollercoaster of life.

Change

You live in an everchanging world, even positive changes can cause some stress. Moving to a new house or getting married all require periods of adjustment as you get used to new environments. Planning for a trip or holiday can be stressful as you try to make the necessary arrangements.

Changes you see as negative are easier to spot. A change in career, your working life, the introduction of new policies or procedures that seem to add to your workload.

Change requires adjustments.

These can be adjustments in your outlook, your expectations, your working practice requiring different working patterns, your workplace, and to your relationships with others. No wonder it can get stressful!

Anxiety Lives in the Future

Anxiety is often driven by anticipating the future. You worry about the outcome of future events, which you understand to have outcomes that are 'right' and 'wrong.'

By living in expectation, you are anxious about how any outcome will affect you, emotionally, financially, physically, or psychologically. You have a set of criteria that need to be fulfilled for any event to be successful, but who sets the criteria? More often than not, it is you. You then kick yourself for not meeting your personal expectation.

And so, your expectations are set. When something so important as personal happiness and inner peace of mind are on the line, and the stakes are high, no wonder you get anxious. So many things can go wrong.

Depression and Fear Lives in the Past

You relive old events in your minds repeatedly, perhaps hoping for a different outcome. Why?

The Overwhelmed Manager

Overwhelm is the inability to control external events. When overwhelmed, you have a tendency to overthink situations and events, which makes matters considerably worse.

When you fall into feelings of overwhelm, you start to suffer.

Your relationships will start to suffer, whether these are:

1. Professional relationships.
2. Personal relationships.
3. Your relationship with self.

How Can You Tell if You Are Overwhelmed?

What are the signs and symptoms?

Here are some but they are by no means a complete list:

- You experience difficulty in concentration.
- You are easily distracted.
- You get worried or dread having to make decisions.
- Your problem-solving ability is impaired.
- You have poor time management, putting in more hours than are necessary. as you struggle to adapt to the workload.
- Your health becomes affected.

The obvious answer for this is to try and control what is happening around us. Unfortunately, as we shall see, this is a trap, which we *all* fall into again and again.

When you try to control events around us, in a desperate attempt to prevent feelings of overwhelm you are shouting at the actors on a TV screen because you don't like the movie.

Trying to control the uncontrollable is simply not going to work. You have no control over the actions of others, even if you think you do, and little control over anything else.

But there are things you can do. The understanding I introduce you to in this book is the first big step on the road to a happier, more peaceful way of living.

The Role of the Brain

The Fast and Slow Brain

In his seminal book *Fast and Slow Thinking*, Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman introduces us to the two-brain system.

The two-brain system is not suggesting two separate brains, but rather two systems that run simultaneously.

System 1

System 1 is the Fast Brain. It is quick, efficient, and mostly involuntary. It will kick in mostly when we feel under threat or extreme stress. Its function is to protect us by responding automatically and take away our decision making in the moment.

Have you ever said or thought:

'I wasn't thinking, I just did it.'

'I responded automatically.'

This is System 1 in full flow.

System 1 will take what is visible as the only evidence available, ignoring any hidden information.

Together with the brain's amygdala, System 1 evolved in response to the need for instant action, e.g. 'Look out, it's a tiger!'

The Amygdala

The Amygdala region of the brain is not only responsible for our fear or stress responses, but it is believed to play a pivotal role in memory. It is believed that stressful situations are 'tagged' for future reference. In doing so we give ourselves a better opportunity to survive as we have learnt from past, highly emotional experiences. We can build up a library of responses allowing us to take quick, decisive action without the need to 'think things through.'

System 1 is fast, automatic, and intuitive. It will learn repeated patterns, so they become involuntary.

Consider this.

The Overwhelmed Manager

When you first ride a bike, you consciously and actively learn how the pedals create the momentum that keeps you upright, how the handlebars are used for steering, and how the brakes will stop you moving, but you need to put your feet on the floor to stop yourself from falling over when you come to a standstill.

Over time though, System 1 takes over. You don't have to think about how to ride a bike, there is no need to relearn the essentials every time you get on, everything you need is there, locked away in the memory banks, ready to go. It makes life simpler, easier, and more effective. If you had to relearn how to ride a bike every time you got on it, then it would not be as much fun, and waste an awful lot of time.

However, System 1 also locks away things such as fears, phobias, and recognition. It wants to help. If we remember we are scared of spiders then it can kick in and react instinctively without us having to decide if we are scared of spiders first.

If you have ever been driving and suddenly became aware that for the last few seconds you haven't been concentrating, System 1 has taken over.

Driving in heavy traffic or through a busy city is a System 2 task.

System 2

System 2 is the slow thinking partner, it is concerned with analysis and reason. It will think things through and consider choices. It is slower, steadier, and more informed.

System 2 mostly defers to System 1, especially in stressful situations that require instant action. It can compute more complex mathematical problems. It is logical, calculation and conscious. System 2 activity is activated when we do something that does not come naturally and requires some sort of conscious mental exertion.

Intense System 2 thinking will produce a bodily response. Your pupils dilate, heart rate increases, and you become irritable if interrupted, as you need to stay focused on the task in hand.

Have you ever witnessed somebody intensely concentrating on a particular task? You want to get their attention and may call their name, but it goes unheard. You call again, louder this time, and suddenly they look up. They seem annoyed to have been disturbed or you made them jump.

Watch a child playing with a toy, thoroughly absorbed in their fantasy world, and then try calling to them. It can take several attempts, but they are not deliberately ignoring

The Overwhelmed Manager

you. In his book, Kahneman writes that “Intense focusing on a task can make people effectively blind.”

Whilst System 1 will quickly jump to conclusions, System 2 recognises that not everything is as it seems.

A common example used to demonstrate the two systems is the following puzzle. Do this **quickly** in your head:

A bat and a ball together cost £1.10. The bat costs £1 more than the ball.

How much does the ball cost?

What was your first answer?

System 1 will come up with what it thinks is the most likely option quickly and efficiently. Most likely it would answer 10p. It seems the most sensible quick solution.

System 2 will stop and deliberate. It will think about the answer.

The correct answer is the ball costs 5 pence. The bat costs £1.05 which is exactly £1 pence more than the 5 pence ball. Together the cost is £1.10.

The System 1, or Fast thinking brain has tricked you. It has given you false information, but don't think that System 2 will not do the same!

Amygdala Hijack

When you feel threatened and afraid, the amygdala - as the heart of System 1 - automatically activates the fight-or-flight response. Triggered by emotions like fear, anxiety, aggression, and anger it will send signals to release stress hormones that prepare your body to fight or run away.

On the System 2 side are the frontal lobes. These lobes, part of the cerebral cortex, are where thinking, reasoning, decision-making, and planning happen. They are consciously controlled by you.

When you sense danger or extreme stress, the amygdala will go into fight or flight mode, but simultaneously the frontal lobes are making sense of what is happening and trying to logically come up with the best solution to what is in front of you. Dependant on the perceived danger or threat level, one will override the other. If the threat is not great or immediate, then the frontal lobes will take over to make a more rational decision, but if the threat is strong and immediate, the amygdala will run the show.

The Overwhelmed Manager

Whilst this fight or flight response suited early man, nowadays there are fewer physical threats, but considerably more psychological threats as we cope with the stress of modern-day life.

When the fight or flight response is activated in the face of stress it can cause illogical overreaction. This is due to “Amygdala Hijack,” a phrase coined by psychologist Daniel Goleman in his 1995 book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*.

The amygdala literally takes full control, ‘hijacking’ the frontal lobes, disabling the rational System 2 thinking and activates full fight or flight mode.

The Symptoms of Amygdala Hijack

The fight or flight response activates the release of two hormones direct from your adrenal glands into your blood stream.

The first, cortisol, is a steroid hormone that will directly affect the body’s main functions - whilst the second, adrenaline, is a stimulant that prepares the body for reaction.

These hormones do a number of things to the body, including:

- Increase energy by releasing more blood sugar.
- Open up airways so you can take in more oxygen.
- Enhance your vision through pupil dilation.
- Increase the blood flow to your muscles to help increase speed and strength.

This will lead to you feeling:

- Rapid heartbeat.
- Sweaty palms.
- Goosebumps.

‘Amygdala Hijack’ will often lead us doing things we wouldn’t normally do and regretting our actions afterwards.

Remember how we described the amygdala playing a role in memory?

It will remember your responses to save response time in the future. An inappropriate response that led to survival can lead to a repeated pattern following the same response.

So, How Can You Stop an Amygdala Hijack?

To effectively stop Amygdala Hijack, you need to be able to override System 1 thinking and activate System 2. This will take persistence, and practice, as it is an automatic function. You need to relearn and reprogramme this function, much like rewriting a computer programme.

Being aware of your own bodily responses to certain situations can really help. After an event, review it to see what happened. By becoming aware of your triggers, you will know when they are being activated.

When fight or flight mode is activated, your aim is to take back control, to do this you will need to slow your thought process down and 'calm down.' Pay attention to your breathing, slow it down and notice the breath as it enters and exits the body.

Tell yourself that what you are feeling is an internal reaction to external events, and the internal reaction may not be logical or the most sensible thing to do.

The adage of 'counting to 10' is actually useful advice in these situations. It gives you valuable seconds to take stock and break the spell.

Try to come up with different solutions to the situation.

How to Prevent Amygdala Hijack

The best and easiest way to prevent Amygdala Hijack is to become aware of what is happening in the first place. Nothing else will work quicker than understanding where your experience of reality is coming from. We will discuss this in more detail later in this book.

You can prevent or stop an Amygdala Hijack by breathing, slowing down, and trying to focus your thoughts. This allows your frontal cortex to regain control. You can then choose the most reasonable and appropriate way to respond to the situation.

Practice these techniques regularly to help prepare you for stressful situations.

The Overwhelmed Manager

SECTION 2

“REALITY IS MERELY AN
ILLUSION, ALBEIT A VERY
PERSISTENT ONE.”
– ALBERT EINSTEIN.

A Trip to the Cinema

When we go to the cinema, we make a conscious decision to suspend belief for the duration of the film. In doing so, we open ourselves up to a whole new world of experience where literally anything can happen.

From that freshly opened opportunity, we allow ourselves to experience all the feelings we want, safe in the knowledge that it is just a scene being played out in front of us. But even here we get caught out - I know people that still won't swim in the sea after watching *Jaws* for the first time, and that was released in 1975! It *still* affects their lives over 45 years later.

Jaws was a fictional story, yet it still holds power over people's lives because they accepted it to be true.

The World Health Organisation estimates that 3 million people die every year from alcohol related causes. I have never heard of people being too scared to go into an off-licence.

Do you know how many people died of a shark attack in 2020? Just 10.

We can be very subjective about what we start to believe. But what if we aren't be given the full facts to start with?

Processing Information

We process approximately 11 million pieces of information per second. Now that is a lot and most of it is going on unconsciously, in the background. For instance, we may suddenly feel cold, but we are not consciously monitoring the room temperature.

Of those 11 million, how many pieces of information do you think we can **consciously** process per second?

It's around 40.

That means that we rarely notice 10,999,960 pieces of information that are affecting us in any given moment. This is why the brain fills in the gaps, it creates false memories and optical illusions as it tries to make sense of what is happening around us.

But it gets even smaller. Recent research has found that we only actually interact with 3 - 4 pieces of information. That's why we break down phone numbers into groups of 3 - 4, for instance.

So, while it's busy filling in the gaps and quickly processing information, the brain will draw on all of its past experiences, and the belief system it has developed during your time on earth, to make sense of what it is experiencing.

The Warehouse Effect

Light is delivered in waves and across a broad electromagnetic spectrum. How much of this light spectrum do you think is visible to the naked eye?

Whilst there is a lot of conjecture around the subject, the broad answer is the tiniest proportion, around 0.007%.

Let me put that another way... We do not see 99.993% of the light spectrum.

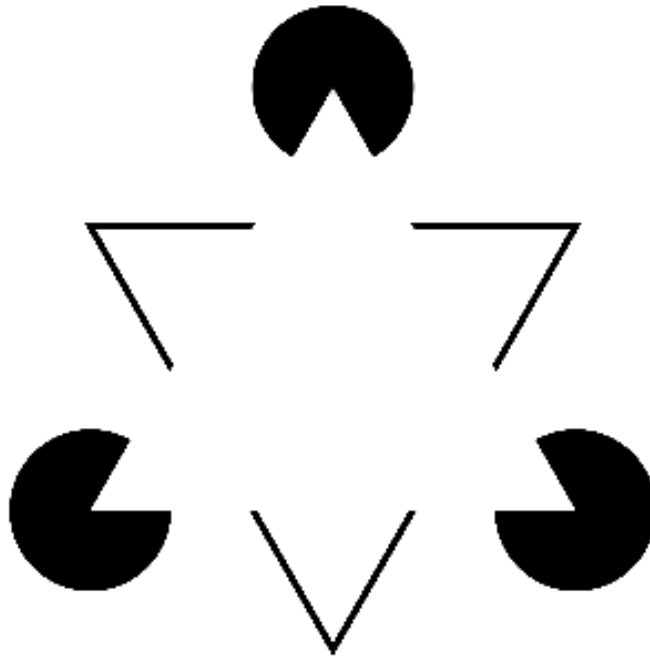
Now, I don't know about you, but I want to know what I am missing. It is like going into a huge warehouse and turning out all the lights. When it is pitch black you get a small torch out of your pocket and shine it into the darkness. Everything you see is what you believe makes up your world, but we are only seeing a fraction of what is out there. Similarly, we do not hear everything, just what we are capable of picking up as humans.

The Overwhelmed Manager

But it is not just those things that we physically cannot see or hear. As this book will demonstrate, our focus is subjective. We create our experience.

Kanizsa's Triangle

Can you see the white triangle in the middle of the shape below?



It doesn't exist, you have just made it up.

Your brain has taken what it is seeing and 'filled in the gaps.' It has created a shortcut to make sense of what it is seeing but, in doing so, is presenting you with false information that you now believe to be real.

Can you see the inverse black triangle?

Again, it doesn't exist. You made that up as well.

What about the 3 large black circles?

Same again. The black circles appear to be occluded with the white triangle but are in fact 3 'Pac-Man' style drawings, not discs at all.

We are making it up, and the mind is telling us it is true.

And we fall for it over and over again.

And it's not just optical illusions where the brain will play tricks on us. It will take liberties, create shortcuts, and tell us what we think we are experiencing, which can be very different to what is actually happening.

Cognitive Bias

Two bystanders witnessing an incident will often give very different accounts of what happened. This is due in part to Cognitive Bias.

We *all* have Cognitive Bias. It is a strong preconceived idea, or mental shortcut, that helps us process information much more quickly, and helps us make sense of what of the reality on front of us.

Another way to think of them is system errors. They interfere with our subjective thinking, overriding what we are seeing and experiencing, with what we **think** we are seeing and experiencing.

Cognitive Biases originate from our own perceptions or belief systems, largely based on past experiences. They affect the way we think and behave in certain situations, as well as our decision making and problem solving.

Both System 1 and System 2 have Cognitive Bias.

At the time of writing, there were 146 recognised Cognitive Biases. Whilst I will not go through all of them, it is worthwhile to recognise the main ones.

Belief Biases

These affect our personal belief system, decision making and how we behave as people.

Bias	Description	Tick
Anchoring Bias	We 'anchor' on a specific piece of information when making a decision, to the detriment of other factors. Marketeers take advantage of this bias and we constantly fall for it over and over again. Price anchoring is common - 'Big Price Drop' supermarket promotions are common. When you go to make a charitable donation for a friend's cause and there are already donation sizes suggested - this is anchoring. If you were going to donate £5, and the suggested	

The Overwhelmed Manager

	donations are £20, £30, and £50, then you are more likely to increase your donation to more than £5.	
Confirmation Bias	Confirmation bias is when we see, remember, and interpret information in such a way that it confirms what we already believe. Our expectations will affect how we see reality.	
Conservatism Bias	When we are presented with new unequivocal evidence, we do not adjust our beliefs sufficiently. We can cling to a long-held belief simply because it is <i>our</i> belief.	
Exaggerated Expectation Bias	We think things will be much worse than they are. (How often do we do that as we lay awake at night?)	
Frequency Illusion	When you learn something new and then start to see it everywhere. For example, a new fashion or a new song.	
Illusion of Control	The tendency to overestimate your influence over events.	
Plan Continuation Bias	We often fail to recognise that a plan is no longer suitable for the outcome intended.	
Stereotyping	A common bias. This is the expectation that a member of a specific group will have similar behavioural traits, with limited information about that individual.	
Unconscious bias	Also known as 'Implicit Biases,' these underlying attitudes and stereotypes affect how people interact and engage with others because of underlying perceptions about that person or group. This will often occur automatically as the brain makes instantaneous judgements of others based on past life experience.	

Social Biases.

Altering your perception on an individual or collective based on their social identities.

Bias	Description	Tick
Authority Bias	This tendency attributes greater accuracy to the opinion of an authority figure such as a manager, doctor, or teacher.	

The Overwhelmed Manager

Bias Blind Spot	Not recognising your own biases or overstating the biases you see in others.	
Group Attribution Error	When you think that a group decision (such as a staff group) reflects the decisions and opinions of all members of that group, despite contradictory evidence. Or, that the individual characteristics of one group member reflect in the group as a whole.	
Naïve Realism	The irrational belief that we see reality as it really is. Anyone disagreeing with us are clearly misinformed or irrational.	

Memory Biases

These either emphasise or impair our memory recall.

Bias	Description	Tick
Choice Supportive Bias	We can have a tendency to remember one's choices as better than they actually were.	
Cryptomnesia	A memory is mistaken for imagination.	
False Memory	Imagination is mistaken for a memory.	
Misinformation Effect	Things happen after an effect that affect our memory of it.	
Negativity effect	We have a greater ability to recall memories of negative events than we do of positive ones.	
Self-Relevance Effect	We recall memories about ourselves better than similar ones relating to others.	
Spotlight Effect	The tendency to overestimate the amount that other people notice your appearance or behaviour.	
Zeigarnik Effect	Uncompleted tasks are remembered better than completed ones.	

Now go back over the list and tick all of those biases that apply to you.

If you think none of these relate to you, read 'The Bias Blind Spot' again.

Reacting or Creating?

Something happens and you must choose one of two things; you can choose to **React** or **Create**.

If You React:

You are taking action against something that you believe may be affecting you in some way, usually emotionally, at a feeling level.

For example, you lose your job. You may start to worry about (pick any that relate):

- How you are going to pay your bills.
- How you are going to find another job.
- How unfair it was, and how it should have been somebody else.
- How you feel so crappy about losing your job.
- You notice how your self-esteem suffers.
- You are starting to feel angry and low in mood at the same time.
- You start kicking up a storm of thought about how hard it is to get another job and start to believe it to be true.
- The world hates you and is unfair.
- You will never get a job at all; let alone a job you enjoy and want to do.
- Everything is pretty shit.

If You Create:

You take the opportunity that the time allows to think about all the cool jobs out there that you could apply for. Yes, you may feel a little anxious but realise there is so much abundance in the world that you just need to notice it and allow it to flow to you.

- You start noticing opportunities around you and move in that direction.
- You create opportunity by talking to people and sharing your skills and experience.
- You rewrite your CV for the job you would love and send it to relevant employers.
- You notice that you may feel a little anxious but remember that it is just a product of anxious thought and nothing else.
- You remember that losing your job does not mean anything about you.
- You are kind to yourself.
- You set about meaningfully creating something that you really want in your life.
- As you notice new opportunities you start to notice more, and realise they are all around if only you would look.

The Overwhelmed Manager

- Everything still looks great.
- You retain inner peace.

Creating rather than **Reacting** is a process that uses the same letters, but with very different outcomes.

This book is about **Creating**:

- Creating a new future.
- Creating peace of mind.
- Creating a new experience of being alive.

Are You a Dead Fish?

How many times do we describe a significant other as 'my rock'? We can often get caught up into believing that relationships are static entities, when in fact they are fluid and ever changing.

A dead fish is described as someone who is emotionally disengaged and unresponsive.

A dead fish sits on the water and can only **React** to what is happening. It will bump into rocks and logs, and get caught up, eventually coming to rest where it will deteriorate and rot away.

A live fish, however, will **Create**. It will choose which channels to swim, it will swim upstream or downstream, it can avoid large immovable objects as it continues its journey.

Which fish are you?

The dead fish? Subject to the whims and changing moods of others, simply going with the flow, no questions asked?

Or the live fish? Plotting your own course, constantly creating, working on new strategies, changing direction according to the current.

**“Why should my happiness depend on
the thoughts in someone else’s head?”
- Ralph Waldo Emerson.**

Happiness is already ours - it is inherent, part of the system. But all too often we give it away cheaply. When we **React**, we are giving our happiness away, when we **Create**, we are recognising the childlike creative qualities we have already discussed earlier in this book.

A key happiness factor for us is our relationships, both with ourselves and others.

Relationships need to be constantly worked on to stay alive. Like a fire, they have a danger of burning out unless tended too and fed. When we feel Overwhelmed, our relationships are more likely to struggle. It is ironic that the very moment we need to strengthen and work on our relationships is the moment we retreat into ourselves and cease to communicate effectively.

The Overwhelmed Manager

There is a universal truth though - the only certainty you have for change is through changing yourself. Through this act, you will find that your world around you will shift and change according to the actions you take in your own life.

If you are depending on others to change for your own personal happiness, then it can never work - you are looking in the wrong place.

Happiness doesn't come from outside you, it's an internal job.

So if we feel unhappy in our current job or career, why not just get a new job?

Why Not Just Get a New Job?

We all love that 'first day' feeling. Remember the first day back at school after the summer break? New uniform, new school bag, new pencil case with an unbroken ruler, compass, and protractor (or am I just showing my age here...?) Or the first day in a new job: fresh hair style, new shoes, and outfit to match, new dreams, and a world of possibility.

When times get tough, we can often be distracted into thinking the grass is greener in the other field. We start looking at options to change our situation as we think that this will solve our immediate problem or make us happier.

This distracts us with

- Wasting time searching for jobs on the various career websites.
- Updating our CVs to pass to potential employers.
- Demotivation from our present work.

And, more often than not, it simply isn't true.

Because, if it were true, nobody would change job. Think about it, if a new job solves all our problems, then we would stay in that position for ever. It just doesn't work.

Of course, I am not saying you always need to stay where you are, never take new opportunities and promotions, and not look for betterment, I am simply saying that looking for a new job, as a means to **make you happy**, is not a long-term strategy and will more likely only produce very short-term benefits.

We start a new job and are happy and excited for a while. We meet new people, learn new skills. Everything is shiny, new, and different.

However, before long the doubts start to creep in, the feelings start to return, the stress starts to build as the honeymoon period of your probation, and being the new person is over.

You are no longer new, no longer a novelty.

You start to return to old habits and old thinking patterns. The work starts to pile up again, relationships start to suffer and so you start to look for a new job...

The Overwhelmed Manager

What if you went into your current job as if today was your first day? Imagine the excitement, the challenges you want to overcome. Seeing everything fresh, with a fresh batch of ideas and thoughts, not overcome from past experience and negativity.

Ask yourself, *'What would I do if this was my first day?'*

Why not try it? Just for today. Start at the beginning.

Let's Check in and See how We are Doing

Emotional State	Score
I regularly feel Overwhelmed.	
My relationships suffer because of my poor mental state.	
I have no peace of mind and cannot relax or switch off.	
I am on medication for low moods, anxiety, depression, or other mental health issue.	
I am using alcohol, recreational drugs, or another addiction to help my mental state.	
I feel I cannot do anything right.	
I feel guilty when I have time off from work.	
I feel like a failure.	
Total Score:	

The Overwhelmed Manager

SECTION 3

A NEW EXPERIENCE **OF BEING ALIVE**

The Beginning

A Fresh New Look at how We Create Our Moment-by-Moment Experience.

Where we think our Overwhelmed feelings come from:

Example 1

- Someone is really rude to you.
- You generate a corresponding feeling, such as anger.
Therefore:
- Someone has made you angry.

Example 2

- You receive notice that your workplace is going to be inspected next week.
- You start to feel anxious and worried.
Therefore:
- The inspection is making you worried.

Example 3

- You have heard that an old friend you haven't seen for a while has passed away.
- You feel sad.
Therefore
- A friend passing away has made you feel sad.

Seems really simple, doesn't it? An external event, that is an event that is happening 'outside of you' in the 'real world' has generated internal feelings.

But what if that is *not* what's happening?

What if the feeling was not coming from the 'outside world'? Seems impossible, doesn't it?

Let's look at Example 3 again.

A friend has passed away:

- You recall all the fun times you have had, some of the experiences you shared together, and how they made you laugh.
- You feel sad.

The Overwhelmed Manager

- A friend passing away has made you feel sad.

But this experience is not happening right now, in front of you. It is relating to a past event. A friend has passed away, it is a historical fact. It no longer exists.

It seems obvious, but we can *only* experience this moment of reality right now.

And now it is gone.

And here is a new moment.

And now it is gone.

And on.

And on.

And on.

We only ever experience this moment. The rest is thought-based: memory or anticipation.

So where do you think that feeling of sadness is coming from?

It cannot be the event that is making you sad, because the event does not exist in the present moment. It can only lead to one logical conclusion:

Your sad feelings are being generated through your **thoughts**.

And whilst this seems an obvious conclusion in this instance, what if this were true for *everything*?

A New Paradigm

What if we were living in a misunderstanding of where our experience was coming from?

In this section I am going to introduce you to a new paradigm, a new way of thinking and seeing the world. Nothing less than a new way to understand how your reality is created. It could just change the way you experience the world around you, forever.

'If we do what we have always done, we will get what we have always got.'

Sometimes something comes along that challenges our very perceptions of life. This happened for me about 6 years ago and things have never been the same.

For instance, during the time of The Bubonic Plague, it was believed that holding a posy of flowers to your nose gave you protection against The Plague. It was also believed that the sickness was carried via bad smells, so Doctors would wear elaborate headwear with long beaks stuffed with flowers to protect them, this is how they earned the nickname 'Quacks.'

Of course, we now know that The Plague was not carried by smells, but by fleas who bit infected rats.

But at the time this information was unknown, hence the posies. Once we learned something new, we moved on. We discovered that infection just did not work like that and adjusted our belief system accordingly.

There are people today that still believe the Earth is flat, despite the overwhelming evidence against this theory.

.....
**Just because you believe something it
doesn't make it true.**
.....

Just as believing The Plague was carried by bad smells, or the Earth is flat does not make it true (if you do discover the Earth is flat, I will need to rewrite this whole section!)



It is EXACTLY what You Think It Is

A Nightmare Scenario

Have you ever had a nightmare?

Waking up in the middle of the night, thoughts are racing through your head.

You sit up straight, eyes wide open. Staring ahead, trying to breath. You feel scared, anxious, worried.

Your body is experiencing a physical reaction to the mental stimulus. These reactions may include:

- Heart pounding.
- Pulse racing.
- Sweating.
- Goosebumps.
- Adrenaline pumping through your body.

The fight or flight response has been activated and is in full danger mode.

But wait a minute! You suddenly realise something:

It was just a nightmare after all.

It seemed so real, but it was all happening in your head.

Phew.

The body starts to settle down as you come to understand what has happened. It was just responding to thoughts.

Those feelings of being scared, anxious and worried, those physical reactions were not a response to the event, because the event didn't exist in 'real life.'

They were a response to *thoughts*.

What if that was all that was ever happening? What if we suddenly realised that all we were ever feeling was a response to **thought**, and *not* the outside world.

Wouldn't that be a game changer?

The Missing Link

.....
“Thought is the missing link that literally
everyone is looking for.”
– Sydney Banks, *Philosopher*.
.....

To understand Overthinking, firstly you need to understand the role of a crucial component in the process. The role of **thought**.

To begin with, let's start by doing a simple exercise:

I want you to remember an event. Something visceral. Something real. Something that still gives you an emotional reaction when you think about it now.

Have you got that event in your mind? Can you see it clearly?

Once you've taken some time to remember this, take some time to consider how it makes you feel.

As you sit there thinking about this, take some time to reflect on how you're feeling? How strong is the emotional reaction now?

Once you've taken some time to consider this, ask yourself the following questions:

Where 0 is No Emotional Reaction, and 10 is a Strong Emotional Reaction, how would you rate your remaining emotional reaction?

Enter Your score here: _____

How long ago was the event?

Now ask yourself, where is that feeling coming from?

It can't be coming from the event because that's not happening now. This is a big clue towards how we fall into a misunderstanding over and over again.

Emotion doesn't originate from the event itself; it originates from your reaction to the event.

**“Your emotional response is telling you
nothing of the outside world.”**

I understand how difficult that statement is, so let me explain further.

When remembering an event, you wished had never happened, you may experience negative, potentially disruptive emotions. But, as you are discovering, that feeling was not generated from what was happening, as it wasn't happening at that time. It was being generated by your thoughts about what happened.

“You live in Thought-Based Reality.”

Your feelings, or emotional response are only ever telling you what you are **thinking**, not what is happening around you.

This is true with **everything**.

Your feelings are only ever generated by thought.

Here's another example:

2 people are walking down the road. One has a strong fear of dogs, the other loves dogs of every size.

A dog steps in front of them. One freezes with fear, the other runs to stroke the dog. **If their feeling was coming from the dog, they would both have the same reaction.** But they don't. One is terrified and has the corresponding feeling of fear. The other is delighted, thinking 'Oh look, a lovely dog, I am going to stroke it.'

They are both generating very different feelings via their thoughts. The situation remains the same - a dog steps out. The end.

So why is this important? It changes everything. It tells you that **thought is generating your experience**. It tells us that, moment by moment, your thoughts dictate your emotional response. One gives way to the other.

And here is the first step in understanding this **Thought-Based Reality**.

You may be thinking, 'But if the dog wasn't there, they wouldn't have had the reactions they did.' Of course, you would be right. However, if the dog was not there, and they

both closed their eyes and thought about the dog, one is more likely to have a strong emotional reaction than the other, without the dog even being present.

**"You are not feeling the outside world,
you are feeling your thinking."**

You Are Not Feeling the Outside World, You Are Feeling Your Thinking

As the examples above show, you are creating your experience through thought. Where we get caught out is the fact that we would not feel the way the way we are feeling if the situation was not happening.

And that is true to a certain extent, but it doesn't change the simple fact that we are feeling our thinking. Feeling follows thought. Always. 100% of the time

If you are still stuck about this principle, then go back to the examples above. Your emotion was generated from your thought about the event. I bet if you sat and thought about an emotionally charged situation that happened in your past, you could still experience a feeling generated response. That feeling is coming because you are thinking about the situation.

And the good news is that it is the same for every feeling you are having, ever.

And this understanding is liberating. It means that what is happening around you can only affect you if you think it can.

**'It is not your thoughts that get you into
trouble, it is what you do with them.
It is your thoughts about your thoughts.'**

Just because you have a thought does not make it true. We all have thought processes which we cannot control. Thoughts will come and go, we cannot stop them, and it's useless trying.

We often make the mistake of thinking of thought as 'ours' and therefore it must be true. And whilst it is true that we do have personal thought that we generate and control, a large amount of it is simply stuff that drifts in and out of our heads uncontrolled.

The Overwhelmed Manager

Do not think of an elephant.

I bet the image or thought of an elephant sprang immediately to mind.

You cannot control thoughts, but you *can* understand what they are.

Thoughts will just appear in our head and then we must decide how true it is for us.

However, we often think that we have a 'truth' and then a thought about it. We simply get it the wrong way round.

Let's go over that again as it is an important point.

What we think happens:

- We understand a fundamental truth.
- We generate a thought about it.

What actually happens:

- We have a random thought generated in our head.
- We decide if it is true.

Why Can't I Just Think Positive Thoughts?

Surely that would make you feel better?

Well yes it will, in the short time. But how long can you keep that up? It's exhausting, and very soon we slip back into our old pessimistic ways. But what if we really understood the **nature** of thought, we realised it for what it is.

Imagine laying in the grass on a warm summer's day, looking up into the sky. You notice clouds pass by, coming and going, forming and reforming.

You notice some of the clouds are forming familiar shapes and patterns. One looks like the old schoolteacher who told you that you would never amount to anything, one looks like the first person who really broke your heart, another one looks like a giant spider, and you have a phobia of spiders.

You decide that you are going to try to change the shapes of the clouds to make you feel better. Picking one cloud, you concentrate really hard in the attempt to turn it into the shape of your first car - a car you loved - which brings back so many memories, a

The Overwhelmed Manager

sense of freedom and how you felt so happy driving friends to the beach on hot summers days.

Regardless of how hard you concentrate; you simply cannot shape the clouds in the way you want. Stubbornly they remain the unchanged. All we can do is notice what shape they are taking. As we notice what shape they are taking, we can choose which ones we interact with.

We become the noticers. We become the ones who simply experience and decide how we are going to process that experience.

Like clouds, our thoughts simply come and go; it is us who decide what we are going to do with them.

Remember:

It is not your thoughts that get us into trouble, it is what you do with them.

It is your thoughts about your thoughts.

We cannot control which thoughts enter our heads, but we can choose which ones we pay attention too and interact with.

Would You Deliberately Get on the Wrong Bus?

Imagine you are standing at the bus station. Three buses all lined up and ready to take you home. It's been a long day and you are tired.

Written down the side of the first bus in large letters reads the words:

'My life sucks, I am a loser and will never be happy.'

Not happy with that bus, you walk to the next one. Emblazoned on the side it states:

'Everything always goes wrong for me. I never have any luck.'

Deciding to leave that bus as well, you head towards the third. The message down the side is a little more friendly. It simply states.

'Things are getting better. Every day I see improvements in my life and personal wellbeing.'

The Overwhelmed Manager

All three buses are available, they are all going to your destination. Your choice is which one to take.

You haven't made the buses; you are simply deciding which one you will ride round in for a while.

It is the same with our thoughts. Thoughts will come and go, it is up to us which ones we interact with, which ones we have as our constant companion.

I Can Only be Happy When...

I call it the '*I Can Only be Happy When...*' Trap.

- *I can only be happy when I am successful.*
- *I can only be happy when I am financially secure.*
- *I can only be happy when I find love.*
- *I can only be happy when I have a successful career.*

If we are constantly looking outside of us for things to make us happy, we are looking in the wrong direction.

If the above were true, then:

- *All successful people would be happy.*
- *All rich people would be happy.*
- *Everyone in love would be happy.*
- *All people enjoying a successful career would be happy.*

But we know this is not the case.

How many 'successful' people have taken their own lives?

We know not all lottery winners are happy, some say it is the worst thing that has ever happened to them.

Happiness is an inside job, we don't have to get it, we give it away.

Inside OUT vs. Outside IN

Do you know where your experience is coming from?

The Magic Spectacles

As we grow, we start to form our view of the world. It is our view and ours alone as it stems from our experiences, and the stories we are telling ourselves about these experiences.

Do you remember the fear of dogs we discussed earlier?

Using the example above that you were attacked by a dog as a child. You are now obviously scared, and so you try to avoid them. After all, you don't want to be attacked again. Just seeing a dog reminds you of the traumatic event you have suffered.

Congratulations, you now have a fear of dogs.

Now, imagine all these beliefs and stories we tell ourselves are stored in a pair of Magic Spectacles. The spectacles we wear act as a filter, reminding us of what we know to be true. Embedded in the Magic Spectacles is your fear of dogs, so when you see a dog, you are reminded of your fear and instantly become afraid.

You are walking down the street with a friend and happen to see a dog. You look at the world through your Magic Spectacles and remember that you have a deep fear of dogs. You instantly start to become afraid and want to get away from the dog as soon as possible. The dog looks on, an innocent observer, after all, he takes no part in story apart from simply existing.

Fortunately, it's the same for everyone. They are looking out at the world through their Magic Spectacles. Your friend loves dogs, their magic spectacles remind them of the family dog they had when they were younger and all the fun times they had playing and going on walks.

The dog remains the same, but we each have a different experience of it - dependant on our past experiences - and what we now believe to be true. Or, to put it another way, what our Magic Spectacles tell us. The dog has nothing to do with your feelings, other than just being there. Your experience of it is coming from your thought, creating an emotional response. It just really, really looks like it is coming from the dog.

The Overwhelmed Manager

Your feelings are only ever telling you what you are thinking, not what is happening around you. Repeat that to yourself as it is important.

So, we create our day-to-day experience based on our beliefs and view of the world. Again, this is largely based on what we see and hear.

The Camino de Santiago is an ancient pilgrimage route of over 850 kilometres, stretching from the French border across northern Spain. I have been lucky enough to walk the last 260km 3 times. Each time I managed to achieve what I now call 'The Camino Feeling' – a feeling of freedom. It occurs when you let go of worrying what others think of you. Walking 20+ kilometres a day with other pilgrims in close proximity, I would often put on my headphones and listen to my Camino playlist – specially chosen tracks for walking. To the horror of my son who was walking with me, I would then proceed to sing at the top of my voice. I didn't really care who heard me. Nobody seemed to mind, indeed some joined in. I got a reputation as 'The Singing Pilgrim.' It felt great.

On one occasion I was walking through a large Spanish town, singing at the top of my voice, and the walker in front of me kept turning around - probably to see who the nutcase was. Eventually she slowed down and, walking alongside me, just started singing with me. No words were spoken, but a connection was made. It was liberating.

So often we adapt our behaviour because we fear what others will say or think. However, others will only see you through their Magic Spectacles – their personal view of who we should be, act or behave. This is not truth, just their opinion, their viewpoint, and we receive their view of us through ours, which also is not truth! So why should it matter?

We stifle our expression for fear of being ridiculed. When you lose that fear, magic can happen.

'You don't have to be brave if you're not afraid.'

When we wear our Magic Spectacles, we are making judgements from the tiniest portion of information that we receive, forming a view and projecting that view back out into the world. No wonder we get it so wrong sometimes.

What you see is not truth, it is simply *your* truth.

But what if this wasn't the end of the illusion?

What if we were not really seeing at all?

Let's put on our Magical Spectacles and go back for another look at the dog.

The Overwhelmed Manager

Are we actually really seeing the dog?

Of course, we are...

... Aren't we?

The dog is standing right there. Can you see him?

The truth is this, and it feels stranger than any fiction, I know:

Light is hitting the dog. It is bouncing off the dog and entering your eyes.

As this light enters your pupil, it hits the retina, located at the back of your eyes. There it is converted by specially adapted cells, called Photoreceptors, into electrical signals.

These signals are sent via the optic nerve to the brain's visual centre - the visual cortex. From here the signals are converted back into an image. Your brain is a learning machine, it will deduce what the image is based upon from past experiences and evidence.

Your brain tells you it is a dog.

You are not seeing the dog.

You are seeing your brain's interpretation of electrical impulses.

Your brain has to make sense of what it sees, to interpret these electrical impulses. But don't forget you are wearing your magic spectacles!

Your brain sees the dog and triggers *your* experience. Everything you experience is filtered through your likes and dislikes, fears, and phobias, hopes and dreams.

“You are not experiencing what you think you are experiencing. You are experiencing what you THINK.”

Put this down. Reflect. Let this sink in and reread if you have to. It may take some time to sink in.

Give yourself a little time.

Case Study One

The Chicken or the Egg?

“Mary” came to see me about her irrational phobia of eggs.

Fried, poached, boiled, or scrambled, they were all the same. It didn't matter. Just seeing them turned her stomach so badly she felt violently ill. No eggs - cooked or otherwise - were allowed in her house.

It was a Friday evening. We had a lovely chat.

I asked her when this first started. She told me of sitting near a man at work once whilst he ate an egg sandwich. She vividly described the egg around his mouth and how disgusting this was.

From this one incident grew a whole belief system. It had become a rock-solid element embedded in her Magic Spectacles.

She *knew* it was crazy but also knew there was nothing she could do about it.

A phobia of eggs does not seem that problematic, but it meant:

- Whenever she went for a meal with anyone, no matter how large the group, *nobody* was allowed to order anything with an egg.
- She and her partner had not been out for breakfast in over 20 years, and her partner loved a decent breakfast.
- There were no eggs in the house.
- Nobody in the family had ever eaten an egg for breakfast.

It was affecting her social life.

Embarrassing, but just part of who she was.

I asked her to think of an egg on a plate and rate the emotional reaction she had right then and there. It was high! A straight 10/10.

I then asked her where the feeling was coming from. She told me it was the egg, but I explained how this was impossible as there were no eggs present.

The Overwhelmed Manager

I explained how she was only ever feeling her thought, not the outside world, and fell quiet for a while.

She looked at me quizzically. I had challenged the very heart of her belief system and shown it to be the liar it was.

On our next session she told me that on Monday morning, following our session, she and her partner had gone for breakfast and he had eaten fried eggs in front of her.

There were now eggs in the cupboard.

20 years of Overthinking and illogical belief had been erased in 45 minutes.

Remember what we discovered earlier: We live in a thought-based reality.

Case Study Two

A True Story about Exam Stress

Sitting on the sofa in front of me was a coaching client. She was tense and wound up about an upcoming exam.

Over the phone a few days before, my client had explained that she had a really important exam and that she was so stressed about it she felt physically sick. We set the appointment and I asked her to bring her textbooks with her.

Now sitting in front of me, the big pile of books in front of her, she looked at me expectantly.

'How do these books make you feel?' I asked.

'Tense, nervous,' She replied, 'I need to start reading them again'.

Looking at the pile I knew this was an impossible ask.

'Do you know the subject?' I said.

'Yes,' She replied, 'but I need to do something, and it can't hurt, can it?'

'Go and take any one of the books from my shelf,' I told her. She got up and chose a book, handed it to me and sat down.

I opened it out and laid it flat. Next to it, I laid out one of her textbooks.

'Tell me the difference between these two,' I said, pointing at the two books.

'Well, one is a textbook. Just looking at it makes me feel stressed. The other is just a random book.'

'Actually, both are exactly the same,' I said. 'Both books, yours and mine, are a series of letters, formed into words and sentences. There is no difference between the two. You read the ink, and a thought occurs, which in turn creates a feeling. Both books are just ink *on a page*. They have no power to make you feel anything. You create the feelings you are having as an indication of the thoughts you are having in the moment. That is all.'

The Overwhelmed Manager

She looked at me for a moment. Pondered what I had said and then something quite extraordinary happened – she looked at me in disbelief and suddenly exclaimed, 'Oh my God, I'm making it all up!'

Then, right in front of my eyes, my client visibly changed. She seemed to become ten years younger. I had not seen anything like it before, or indeed since. She was so wound up it had physically aged her, and I watched those years melt away.

'How are you feeling?' I asked.

'Great,' She said, 'And a little foolish. The only worry now is that I know I will be taking the practical element in a room of professionals, all taking the same exams simultaneously, all more qualified and intelligent than me.'

'And...?' I said.

'Well, they will be watching me. They will think I'm stupid.'

'So, they will be taking an exam – which they want to pass – and you think that they will be watching and judging you throughout?' I challenged.

'I'm making it all up again, aren't I?' She smiled.

The next morning, she sent me a message. It stated that she felt fantastic. She was no longer stressing over the exam and felt positive about the future.

Two days later she took the exam – 3 Straight A's.

She had created a view of the world that did not exist, except in her own thought. Once she realised it wasn't true, she didn't have to believe it everything changed.

Fatal Attraction

Some months ago, I went swimming. The pool was empty, and I enjoyed some quiet time swimming up and down the length of the pool. After a few lengths, I was joined by somebody else. I soon nicknamed the gentleman 'Mr Splashy.'

Shattering my peace, he splashed up and down the pool making a right old racket. I tried not to let it spoil my enjoyment and, knowing that it is only my thoughts causing any feeling of irritation, I tried to ignore it and was mostly successful.

Soon, I retired to the steam room. I could still hear him outside but as the heat of the steam room started to soothe and relax me, I drifted off into a daydream. This daydream lasted about ten minutes, before, once again, I noticed the sound of Mr Splashy.

I was surprised – not because he was still making the noise, but that I hadn't noticed it during my daydream. By turning my attention away and thinking about something else, the disruption was no longer part of my experience of reality. Mr Splashy was still there, splashing up and down, but was not part of my experience anymore. It was an insightful moment. Not a massive 'Aha' moment, but one of those little insights when suddenly a particular problem you had been mulling over resolves itself.

In that moment I understood that what we notice, focus on, and think about, creates our experience of reality. Why not stop reading for a moment and take that in? Because the implication is huge. So, I am going to repeat myself:

What we notice, focus on, and think about creates our experience of reality.

Let me explain it another way.

I was giving a presentation a few weeks back and I asked the group if any of them believed in angels. About a third put their hands up. I asked this group if they saw evidence to back up their beliefs. They all said yes, they see it everywhere. I asked the non-believers if they saw any evidence of angels. Of course, they said no, they didn't. The believers found the evidence and brought angels into their experience, the non-believers did not. It is as simple as that.

I once had to give a presentation to senior managers on the subject of focus and results. I told the delegates that I was going to teach them something important – why my wife is good at spotting wildlife.

The Overwhelmed Manager

This had the delegates scratching their heads and looking at me quizzically and so I started my presentation.

We often to take short breaks on the Isle of Mull. It is beautiful and the wildlife is just fantastic, with White Tailed Sea Eagles, Golden Eagles, Seals, Deer, and our favourite, the Sea Otter. My wife is a bit of an otter fanatic and our trips will see us visiting our favourite sites for a little bit of otter spotting! And boy, is she good at spotting these elusive creatures. This is not just a result of having good eyesight – she can detect ripples in the water, sleek shapes moving gently amongst the waves, subtle differences that simply pass me by. Because she notices these things, she experiences more of them, and the more she experiences, the better she becomes, and the more she notices.

A client was telling me about a friend who was terrified of being a passenger in a car for fear of accidents, even though her partner was a perfectly good driver. My client could not understand why. I simply said, 'I bet she has noticed a lot of near misses though.'

'How did you know?' My client asked.

I explained that, as her friend was so frightened, she would look out for accidents, noticing anything resembling a near miss. In this way she was reinforcing her thoughts and bringing car accidents into her reality. She saw them everywhere, validating her belief that driving was dangerous and best to be avoided. She did not cause them, her repeated thoughts simply became her belief, (remember a belief is just a thought we have over and over again), which subsequently became her experience.

Your experience of reality is shaped through thought and thought alone.

Changing Thoughts

Many of you may be starting to realise the impact of your own negative thoughts on creating your experience of reality. But some of you may be stuck:

'How can I stop myself thinking these thoughts?'

'I can't stop myself it's too hard.'

'I can't get these thoughts out of my head.'

So, let me ask you something – why do you write to-do lists? Why put contact numbers in your phone, or send yourself little reminders?

When you go to the cinema or theatre and have paid good money for seats, you are unlikely to sit thinking about stuff. You have paid for some escapism, to let go of your thinking just for a short while.

Fundamentally we realise the transitory nature of thought. It is fleeting. It will only stay if you give it room and board. Letting go of thoughts is what we do naturally every day. It is second nature. We just forget it is.

The key is not to try too hard to change your thoughts. As I stated earlier, you cannot control your thoughts, but you can control the thoughts you interact with.

When I first came upon this new understanding, I used distraction as a method to help me not get caught up in a feeling arising from thought.

One day I was driving and had pulled up at a junction. A motorcyclist turned into the road I was pulling out of and gave me a particularly dirty look as he went past, presumably for some driving infringement he thought I had made. This made me cross, very cross in fact. I pulled out and was making my way down the road thinking how dare he look at me like that, I had done nothing wrong. In fact, I was winding myself up quite nicely. I needed to distract myself.

I turned on the radio and started to sing along to the song playing, and it was working until I saw another motorcycle coming towards me. I immediately started to feel angry again. 'Bloody motorbikes, think they own the road,' and soon I was working it up and up again in my head.

It was then I had quite a big insight. This second, innocent biker was feeling my wrath, through no fault of his own, as I directed my anger towards him unnecessarily. I laughed out loud as I realised what I was doing. I was directing my anger inappropriately. In fact, to make matters worse, I actually had no idea if the earlier

The Overwhelmed Manager

motorcyclist had given me a dirty look, he was wearing a full-face helmet! I had made up a scenario, believed it to be true, and was acting on my thoughts and consequent emotional response. All totally made up in my head!

Overthinking

You're driving home at night. Your headlights pick out the road ahead. You're tired and just want to curl up in front of the fire with a nice hot cup of tea. It starts to rain. You switch on the windscreen wipers. As the wipers do their work, you hardly notice they are there, clearing the screen and ensuring you have a clear field of vision, wipe after wipe.

Imagine, for a moment, if you stopped watching the road and started to watch the windscreen wipers instead.

What do you think will happen?

It is not going to go well. Taking your attention from the road ahead to watch your wipers is not advisable, but in a metaphorical sense, we do this every day.

Life happens all around us, and we navigate life like we drive a car. If we tried to pay attention to every detail, it would be impossible. Our brains simply would not be able to cope. We have to take a wider view.

Imagine that something has happened. You start to kick up a thought storm about it. As you think more and more, you can sense your emotions start to rise. Anger, jealousy, embarrassment, and other emotions start to appear as a result of your thoughts.

Dissecting what has happened and going over it again and again is like watching the wipers. It is simply not an effective way to navigate life. By realising that life happens, and our feelings are only generated from the thoughts we are having, we keep our eyes on the road ahead, navigating our route safely.

Next time you drive, and it starts raining, don't watch the wipers.

Next time something happens, don't kick up a thought storm. Whatever you are feeling, let it pass.

Overwhelm and Overthinking

The feeling of Overwhelm is exactly what you think it is. I mean this in the very literal sense.

Overthinking has the power to take any situation and turn it into a crisis. It is not a great strategy for success, or a peaceful mind.

How often have you lain awake at night worrying about a particular issue or upcoming event? After hours of turning the scenario over and over in your head, you eventually drop off back to sleep. Waking up the next morning, you realise that actually it wasn't as bad as you thought it was? You realised you were creating something out of nothing. As my father used to call it, 'Making a mountain out of a molehill.'

When you are anxious, you are able to jump to conclusions in a single bound! Overthinking becomes habitual - worrying about the future and regretting the past.

You take a simple scenario and turn the thought over and over in your head, and as you turn it over, it grows bigger and bigger, and the solutions become more and more obscured by the fog in your brain. I call it The Snow Globe Effect.

The Snow Globe Effect

How often do you Overthink everything? Once a week? Once a day? Every hour? But what can you do? You have a problem that needs solving and that needs some thought. Doesn't it?

You take an upcoming event, a conversation you need to have, a decision you need to take, and think, and think, and think, building and building it up in your mind. Eventually *you create* a monster.

And then shout 'Help, it's a monster.'

Think of yourself as standing in a snow globe. The snow is your thoughts.

You have a tricky issue to solve, and your mind is racing with trying to generate solutions. You are anxious to please everyone and are worried about any perceived negative outcomes. You feel Overwhelmed with the enormity of it all and are making yourself sick with worry.

This is like shaking the snow globe you are standing in.

The Overwhelmed Manager

When you shake a snow – globe, the snow rises and obstructs the view. It's the same with Overthinking. How can you possibly resolve a situation with all that snow swirling around?

So, what is the best strategy with Overthinking?

Put the snow globe down.

If you had a hotel, and a group of rowdy customers come in that you knew were going to cause trouble, upset the peace, take up a lot of your time, upset the other guests, and generally make a nuisance of themselves you have a choice.

Would you allow them to stay or not?

Overthinking is allowing those guests to stay, and then complaining that you don't enjoy their company, and you run around exhausted as you pander to their every whim.

When Silence Really Is Golden

I live in a busy urban area.

Last week, after a year most people would like to forget, we threw everything into a car and drove 8 hours to the beautiful Isle of Mull on Scotland's west coast.

We arrived at our accommodation at about 6pm and after unpacking walked down to the local bay. Even though we were on the main road from the Ferry Terminal at Craignure and the largest town of Tobermory we were struck by one thing.

As we sat looking out to sea I turned to my wife and said, 'Isn't it quiet'. It wasn't just quiet; it was a silence you don't get to experience it built up areas. It was calm and peaceful and in turn we felt calm and peaceful.

But we didn't achieve that state by 'doing' anything.

It was not the ABSENCE of noise that got us to that state. It was the ALREADY EXISTING presence of silence. It is always there. The noise is layered on top.

And so it is with our minds. The already existing state is that calm, peaceful feeling, with the noise of thought layered on top. It is that thought that creates the background hum of noise that is so constant we don't notice it.

Until it is gone.

So what do you need to do?

The answer is simple. Nothing. Because the act of 'doing' just creates more noise. Try telling yourself to think less and see how far that gets you.

The first step is to recognise the nature of thought. That one thing alone can change everything.

We All Experience Different Realities

You call a staff meeting.

You have a set agenda to get through and make a start. You hate staff meetings as they have the capacity to lead to a whinge-fest.

Despite some shuffling and huffing and puffing from staff, you get through it relatively unscathed.

You feel relief. The meeting went well. You went unchallenged and staff were generally accepting of what you said.

One tick in the 'successfully achieved' box.

Afterwards, you hear grumblings. Staff are talking about how poor the meeting was, how you never addressed their concerns, that it was just you reading from a script. They felt unheard, unloved, and unrecognised.

Naturally, you are upset. That wasn't how you felt it went at all. In fact, you have spoken to some staff since the meeting and they said they thought it was a good meeting as well, and that everyone had been given the opportunity to air their views.

So which version is true?

Is it your version of events, or the staff version of the meeting?

Let's look at it another way:

An incident occurs in a high street. A couple of young black youths are fiercely arguing with a middle-aged white businessman. It quickly gets out of hand and a scuffle ensues.

Police are called to attend and take witness statements from everyone.

Some young black youths that witnessed the incident describe how the businessman was out of order, how he had pushed one of the teenagers in an unprovoked attack.

A white housewife describes how she saw the businessman fend off the youths with an outstretched hand, in an effort to keep distance between them.

The Overwhelmed Manager

The events remain the same, unchanged, and permanent. But each individual experience of the event is different because we all see things differently. We all have different views and beliefs, carefully built over many years until they become true **for us**.

But this truth is only our truth. It is only how we perceive things to be. In fact, it is not really true at all.

Rumi, the Persian scholar and philosopher recognised this when he wrote his famous poem with the often-quoted lines:

**“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and
right doing, there is a field.
I’ll meet you there.” – Rumi.**

In this, he is pointing towards what lays beyond our thoughts of right and wrong, good and bad.

We decide what is right and wrong, in the same way we see our own version of events, filtered through our own, seemingly rock solid, belief system.

Remember, we are wearing our Magic Spectacles, filtering our experience moment by moment.

What Are You Worrying About?

Children have fantastic imaginations. They can play for hours using just their imagination alone.

Adults too have a fantastic imagination, although we often misuse this and put it to work by worrying. We have a fantastic ability to imagine all sorts of creative reasons to worry.

We worry about what will happen at some, quite often undetermined, point in the future.

We worry about what others think of us.

Children don't do this. A child will lie on the ground in a supermarket having a major tantrum because they want something **now**. They don't care about all the people looking and stepping around them. They haven't yet learnt to worry. They are living in the present moment.

Worry is something we acquire later on, usually in school, when we start to form social groups and develop our understanding of social status and peer groups. We want to be liked, respected, and to fit in.

Now, in modern times, the pressure is even more intense as social media becomes one of the main forms of communication. As our young people grow and develop their sense of self, a sense of identity, they become acutely aware that they also need a social media presence.

In the film documentary *The Social Dilemma*, social media developers and executives explain how their creations are designed to draw us in and keep us engaged. We become trapped in the endless scrolling of our social media newsfeed, a newsfeed explicitly developed to hit our emotional buttons and shape our very needs and wants.

The *nucleus accumbens* is the part of the brain responsible for craving. It becomes active when it anticipates reward, like playing a slot machine. When we scroll through social media, we are 'rewarded' with some new information. Many smartphones have a pull-down effect that will refresh the newsfeed, a move designed to activate this part of the brain as we anticipate fresh posts.

And as we see the 'perfect lives' of others in the social media spotlight there is a danger that our own lives can feel inadequate in comparison.

The Rollercoaster of Life

The original rollercoasters relied on the momentum of the car to get it around the track. We would sit in the car and head around the track until we reach the end.

We ride the rollercoaster of life, and experience all the twists and turns, ups and downs. We enjoy the ride and all the corresponding emotions of fear, elation, and exhilaration.

When the car hits the bottom of a dip, we don't suddenly stop the car, get out and try to fix the 'broken' car. We allow the journey to continue up the other side. We instinctively know that we are in the car for the duration of the ride, and we *will* get round the track.

There is nothing to do, nothing to fix.

Ride. Experience. Ride. Experience

We don't sit in the car and think 'I shouldn't be scared.' We enjoy the feeling of being scared, that is the whole purpose of the ride.

Until the ride is complete.

It is the same with life. Except this time, we *decide* if a feeling is OK to have or not. We label them good and bad feelings.

What if we could just enjoy the ride instead?

When we learn not to be afraid of our feelings, it opens up a new world of opportunity.

Feelings. Nothing More Than Feelings

**“Feels like I feel too much,
I’ve seen too much,
For a little while,
I want to forget,
I wanna be numb.”
- Numb by The Pet Shop Boys**

Every day we experience a multitude of feelings. We can feel sad, scared, frustrated, joyous all in the space of a few hours.

Which are the ‘right’ feelings to have?

Is it OK to feel scared?

Doesn’t seem ‘right,’ does it? Nobody likes to feel scared, do they?

Why then do so many of us watch horror movies or tense thrillers? Why do we bungee jump or ride rollercoasters. We will often do things that make us feel scared, so why is it ok to feel scared in this context and not others?

Is it OK to feel sad? We never want to be sad, do we?

So why do we enjoy *Marley & Me*, or *The Notebook*, or other sad movies. We know there will be parts in the movie that will make us cry and still watch it anyway? So why is it ok to feel sad in this context and not others?

When we experience a feeling, we also decide whether it is acceptable in that moment. It is the result of that decision that causes the discomfort. We tell ourselves we shouldn’t be feeling a certain way. But why not?

If we are to experience all of life’s ups and downs, then why filter that experience?

In their song The Pet Shop Boys are stating that they would rather be ‘numb’ to feeling than feel how they are in the present moment. This is the classic misunderstanding, the mistaken belief that we are feeling something *other* than thought in the moment.

The feeling is just the feeling. We decide whether it is right or wrong. It is a matter of personal choice.

Experiment

Take a moment to stop what you are doing and listen. Really listen to the sounds around you and see what you start to notice. Bring your attention to something that you haven't heard before, perhaps a background sound.

Did you notice how the noise became more noticeable when you started to focus on it? You have not created the sound, but you have now drawn it into your experience, where it will stay until it either stops or you stop noticing it.

What else are we not noticing?

Do you remember the cinema from earlier? I talked about how you can go to the cinema and experience a film safely knowing that the world is just a made-up world, that you're just watching a film on the screen. The film is just a projection of information, pixels on a screen, and we interpret that to generate a feeling. And each experience is unique to use as individuals.

You can try to change the film, but this simply cannot work as it is not where your experience is coming from.

“You Get More of What You Focus On.”

Do you remember the Cognitive Biases I introduced earlier in this book?

Let me remind you of some of these:

Confirmation Bias is when we see, remember, and interpret information in such a way that it confirms what we already believe. Our expectations will affect how we see reality. In other words, we are seeing and hearing what we expect and as you have seen, we make a lot of this stuff up. Our brain fills in gaps that simply aren't there. Not only are we experiencing what we are noticing, we are experience what *WE think* we are noticing.

Remember Naïve Realism? The irrational belief that we see reality as it really is. Anyone disagreeing with us is clearly misinformed or irrational. But we don't see reality as it *really* is, we see it how *we* think it is. And that is a massive difference.

Your Feelings Are Just A Guide

.....

“Thought is constantly creating problems... and then trying to solve them. But as it tries to solve them, it makes it worse because it doesn't notice that it's creating them, and the more it thinks, the more problems it creates.” - David Bohm, Physicist.

.....

Your feelings are telling you nothing about the ‘outside’ world. Simply what you are thinking in the moment! That simple understanding is a game changer.

Imagine you’re driving on the motorway and the car behind you is way too close. Annoyed, you change lanes and allow the car to pass. Situation over.

However...

We often allow ourselves to hold onto the situation, winding ourselves up about such thoughts as: What an idiot the driver was, how dangerous it was, and that people like that should not be allowed to drive. We recount the incident to our friends and colleagues, and still get the same feeling, the same emotional response as if it was happening.

The thing is, the incident is long gone, in fact it was over the minute you changed lanes, but your thinking, and only your thinking, is keeping it alive. By retelling your story, by playing it out again and again in your mind, perhaps even adding in how you could have handled the situation better, you are keeping the thought and all the associated feelings alive.

Now, imagine this is happening with all situations that have an element of stress in them.

Let’s imagine you have an exam tomorrow. You may have already started to worry about it. Worry always comes from thought, so you may already be thinking things such as 'What if the questions are too hard?' 'I am not good at exams,' 'I don't know enough,' or whatever your favourite negative self-talk is. You start spinning this around your head, faster and faster, getting more and more anxious, and you're not even sitting the exam yet.

The Overwhelmed Manager

I am not saying that there is no need to prepare for the exam, but merely to see it for what it is. The exam is just a piece of paper; it is just words on a page, like your favourite book. As a piece of paper, it has no power over you except the power you give it, through your thinking about it. It is only your thinking about the exam that's causing the emotional response, not the exam.

So, when you begin to understand it is just a thought, you may begin to allow the thought to drift off. You only keep a thought alive when you focus on it. A thought is like a balloon - if it is not serving you any purpose, let it go. If it reappears, let it go again. Your brain will soon get the idea and start to do it naturally.

Feelings arise from the thoughts you are having at that moment. That is all you need to know. They are a gauge. A barometer. A measure that is only intended to tell you how you are thinking.

Feeling sad? Then you are having sad thoughts.

Feeling angry? Then you are having angry thoughts.

You can only ever experience the feeling of your thoughts. Not the exam, or the driver. Ever. No exceptions.

We all have thoughts. It is how we experience our world. Thoughts come and go like clouds pass overhead, or the headline news or sports results scroll across our television screens.

It is a fact that you can only ever experience life as it is now - history is gone and cannot be changed, and the future is yet to come. However, your present can only be experienced by how you think about it. No exceptions. What you see, hear, taste, smell and feel are all a result of your thought process, so there is a lot going on in your head.

So, when your head is full of muddy water, what is the best way to clear it? Well, the best way of clearing muddy water is to let it settle. that is, to stop spinning your thoughts around and around.

Earlier I explained how your happiness comes from your thoughts and is not the result of external events. If we allow these external events to stir up our thoughts, we can easily become Overwhelmed. Letting go of our thoughts sounds really hard but is easier than you think.

Just Because You Have a Thought, it Doesn't Mean You Have to Act on it

Have you ever thought, 'I could murder him/her,' or another absurd thought that you are definitely not going to act on? You aren't going to do it, but the thought is still there. Just because you have a thought, does not mean it is true. We have all sorts of nonsense going around our heads all the time, but we can sometimes take one of these thoughts and make it true to ourselves. After all, a belief is simply a thought you have over and over again.

Understanding that we are living in the feeling of our thinking, and not the feeling of outside events, is one of the most liberating moments I have ever had. It means I control life; it doesn't control me.

This doesn't mean that I will never again feel stress, anger, frustration, or happiness, joy, and love, but I understand where they come from, and that they will pass, just like clouds in the sky, unless I choose to hang onto them. Which we all do – sometimes for years.

Live is Life

“Life is a Contact Sport.”
– Sydney Banks.

One thing is sure – your life will have its high points and its low points. Times when we feel on top of the world, and times when we feel things just can't get any worse.

Have you ever wondered what life would be like without the contrast? Imagine if you were never to be sad again. You could only ever feel happiness. Sounds great, doesn't it? Happiness would become the new normal. How about if you ever only could feel sadness?

Without a contrast to compare it with, it would be a pretty meaningless existence. It would be like having up without down, or light without dark. How would we know if we are having a life of endless joy, if joy is the only state we felt? Joy would not be felt as 'joy' but as 'normal,' 'everyday' and, eventually, 'mundane.' We want to experience the contrast. This is why we ride rollercoasters, watch horror movies, or listen to sad songs, to feel exhilarated, scared, or sad.

A pioneer in the field of this new psychology, Sydney Banks said, “Life is a contact sport.” Things will happen and we experience a correlating feeling. And this is okay. It need not mean any more than that. If a loved one passes away, we feel grief. If we come into an unexpected amount of money, we may feel happiness – but every feeling passes. Try holding on to a feeling of total happiness. You simply can't. Life happens.

One day you literally jump out of bed, eager to get on with the day and life is good, and another day you don't seem to have the energy to brew a coffee.

The constant is the day. It will never change. It is just a set period of 24 hours that contain a series of events that we think make us feel an emotion. But, as we discovered earlier in this book, it is not the event that gives us the feeling, it is our thoughts about the event. And that is liberating because it means we are free to change our thoughts and experience something new.

The day does not make us feel a certain way. It will come along anyway. The feeling is not coming from there. Our thinking about the event provides our experience of it, 100% of the time.

The Overwhelmed Manager

We have very little control over the events that come along during our day, and the feeling we get about those events are only ever an indication of our thinking at that time:

If the event feels stressful, it is because you are having stressful thoughts thinking about it.

If the event feels joyous, it is because you are having happy thoughts about it.

The feeling is only ever an indication of our thinking in the moment.

Inner Resilience

Remember the Snow Globe?

The hidden key to Overwhelm is actually the opposite of Overthinking.

Wisdom.

Wisdom *knows* what to do, how to react, the correct action to take, the right path. Wisdom is known in many forms but for this tip I will call it intuition, insight, or gut-feeling.

Wisdom is that small voice trying to be heard amongst the cacophony of others in your head. You all have wisdom, it is inherent, it is built into the system, but how can you possibly access your own wisdom with such a noise going on?

It *wants* to be heard but the problem is this...

Overthinking is the full orchestra in your head, playing the 1812 overture, including cannons!

Wisdom is the triangle in the orchestra. It wants to be heard. It has big ideas, dreams, and goals, it will show you the way, but is drowned out by the trumpets, drums, and full string section!

Stop interacting with it, let the snow settle and the picture comes into view. Let your thoughts settle down and wisdom can be seen because the natural property of the snow globe is clarity. It will tell you what to do.

So, the best advice is do nothing. Because when you stop playing with, interacting with, and building your thoughts, they *will* settle down. Just like the snow globe.

Even if all you ever took from this book was the idea of slowing your thinking right down and allowing that small inner voice through, that would be worth it

Try to stop a thought and you may as well try to stop the rain.

Thoughts will come and go.

Good thoughts and bad thoughts. Happy and sad thoughts.

The Overwhelmed Manager

A thought appears in your head. You now have a series of choices to make:

- Is it true?
- Do I have to act on it?
- Shall I 'play' with it for a while?

The answers are:

- Maybe it feels true to you, but that doesn't make it true.
- No.
- If you want. Will it be helpful?

It is what we do with our thoughts that matters. We can choose to believe them, discard them, do something because of them, or work them up in our heads until we get to the point of Overwhelm.

The thought doesn't care what you do.

The Role of Thought When You Are Overwhelmed

I had gotten myself into a bit of a state. I felt stressed, anxious, and yes, overwhelmed. I know that I am not the only social care manager to have felt this, unfortunately it is a feeling we experience all too often.

It was in the midst of the pandemic and I had been asked to manage a care home temporarily. Not long after arriving, my two senior managers had tested positive and were isolating, closely followed by two more key members of staff, leaving just me and the administrator. It had been a few days and I had been getting myself wound up.

The stories I told myself were unhelpful:

- I can't do this alone.
- It's all too much.
- I can't do everything.

Then, one night on the drive home, I had a simple but massive insight.

I realised I was feeling the way I did because I was missing my key players. It wasn't the home, or the work, but the **feeling of coping alone**, without anyone around to help.

This sudden realisation stopped my thinking in its tracks, and I *immediately* felt better. The situation hadn't changed, but the way I thought about it had, so now everything seemed different.

When I slowed my overactive thoughts down, I found I could cope. Maybe not as much work got done, maybe some things got put on hold, but I managed to get through it.

I had succumbed to Overthinking, and when I got out of my own way, I found my feelings of Overwhelm had been lying to me all along.

My Overthinking created a feeling not just in my head, but in the care home itself. In my fractious state, I had become short with staff, snappy and not nice to be around. This had affected the staff, and that was unforgivable.

Once I had the realisation, there was nothing for me to do. I had resolved the situation and done all the required work. My mental wellbeing was innate, I just allowed it through.

Let's Check in and See How We are Doing

Emotional State	Score
I regularly feel Overwhelmed.	
My relationships suffer because of my poor mental state.	
I have no peace of mind and cannot relax or switch off.	
I am on medication for low moods, anxiety, depression, or other mental health issue.	
I am using alcohol, recreational drugs, or another addiction to help my mental state.	
I feel I cannot do anything right.	
I feel guilty when I have time off from work.	
I feel like a failure.	
Total Score:	

The Overwhelmed Manager

SECTION 4

START WITH YOU

The Human Operating System

A computer, tablet or phone will come with an operating system which receives regular updates designed to keep the computer running at optimum levels. Within these updates are Security Patches, designed to keep the equipment safe from damage and deal with external threat.

You are the same. However, the upgrades are specific to us as individuals, as are the Security Patches embedded in the upgrade.

You are born with pre-installed Software; version Human 1.0. Kindness, Love and Compassion are built in and you know nothing else.

As you grow and experience reality, you start to get your first updates, even from a very early age.

You ask your parents for a 'treat'. 'No,' they reply, 'you haven't been good enough, You don't deserve one.'

The next upgrade comes with the Security Patch 'Good things need to be earned'. You start to learn of limitation and lack

You experience your first love, and subsequent broken heart. It really hurts and you vow to yourselves never to let that happen again.

The next upgrade includes Security Patch 'be careful who you love, and protect yourself from hurt'. You learn to put up walls and only love conditionally.

You enter the world of employment and earning.

The next upgrade includes Security Patch 'You need to earn more to be secure and happy'. You learn that happiness is dependent on financial security.

You keep getting updates and Security Patches. These are generated from your experience or listening to others you respect or rely on for information. This includes your news sources, teachers, doctors, parents, your boss etc.

Recent Upgrades may include the following Security Patches

'Nothing comes easily' 'You need to work at being happy' 'Be careful who you trust'

Or a variety of other Security Patches specific to you.

Over time the Upgrades and Security Patches slow the system down, become obsolete or simply crash.

But...

The Overwhelmed Manager

Underneath all the upgrades, below all the Security Patches, Human 1.0 is still there, whirring away, underpinning everything.

You can reset whenever you want, but it may mean deleting the Security Patches you believe are keeping you safe.

When you reset your phones, tablet, or computer you go back to the original 'clean' version. It is the same with us.

Kindness, compassion, and love are built in. it is part of the operating system, it's just that sometimes it is buried beneath layers of additional data.

Start at the Beginning – with You

When I go into a new business, I am often confronted with the same issue.

“It’s the staff, they won’t do what I tell them.”

I always reply in the same way, and it is a very uncomfortable truth.

It’s *your* fault. *You* are the problem.

You are letting them get away with it.

“But they should respect me, I am the senior / manager / (insert your own title here).”

“They **should**, but they don’t. And that can only ever be your fault.”

“Can I bring them to you, and you tell them what to do?”

“You can, but that will not solve the problem, only give a very temporary solution. *You* need to gain control: I cannot do that for you.”

I spent over 20 years working in prisons, over 15 as a manager or governor. As you can imagine a prison is a highly charged, highly emotional, and extremely stressful environment. It taught me some very useful lessons along the way

Contrary to popular belief, a prison can only run on the goodwill of the prisoners. Prison staff are outnumbered, and mostly do not have the same moral code as a prisoner. A prisoner may be prepared to do anything to get what they want. A prison officer needs to learn people skills quick!

Sometimes it feels that we need courage to move forward, and we anxiously wait for that courage to arrive in order to take action. But what if that was the wrong way round?

Courage or Action?

**“The greater part of courage
is having done it before.**

**Do the thing, and you shall have the
power.” ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson.**

We often think we have to have courage to do something we are nervous about, or fearful of. This is not true. You have probably heard of the term, ‘Feel the fear and do it anyway,’ well there is truth in this. But we do not have to have courage and then do something, we can do things and then learn to have courage.

Do you remember learning to swim, or dive from the edge of the pool? It seemed so scary at the time. I vividly remember standing at the edge of the swimming pool, hands outstretched, scared witless about diving in. It seemed so complicated, so difficult.

Of course, it wasn't. I learnt quite quickly and soon loved to dive into the clear water. I didn't have to have courage to do it, I acknowledged my fear and did it anyway.

The courage did not come first, the action came first, heavily disguised as courage.

As a prison governor, you have to do 'duty days.' On these days, you have to ensure the effective running of the prison and deal with any incidents that arise. Many of these incidents were horrific. I will not go into details as they have the capacity for inducing nightmares, suffice to say I dealt with some truly horrendous situations.

Part of the day was to visit all parts of the prison, known as 'rounds.' Going onto a large, busy wing, in a suit, made you stand out! Very often I was mobbed by prisoners requesting, demanding, and sometimes threatening. And sometimes this would make me nervous. I went through a period where I did not want to go onto the wings because I knew what could await me.

But I went anyway, I had to, it was part of the role. And 99% of the time it was fine. The vast majority of prisoners just want to get their heads down, have a quiet life, and don't cause any bother. The majority were funny, friendly, talkative, unthreatening. But in the midst of our fear, we can create pictures and worst-case scenarios that prevent us from doing what needs to be done.

Over the years I conducted hundreds of Duty Governor 'rounds.' Out of those only a very small number actually had something happen. I didn't always have courage when I did my duty governor 'rounds.' But I did it anyway.

It's Not All About YOU

As managers, we feel an innate sense of responsibility towards our clients, customers, staff, and our company.

It sometimes seems that everyone wants a piece of you.

When you are in the middle of it all; firefighting, dealing with situations, being a friend, manager, counsellor etc. it is easy to get caught up in it all. I do it all the time and am sure you do too. But the key is this:

Don't take it all personally and make it about you.

We all do it. We get caught up and can't see the woods for all the trees in the way.

We get confused, anxious, and mistakenly think we aren't good enough, can't cope, or are a failure. You are not failures.

Take a helicopter view, instead of being in the centre, trying looking down at the situation from above.

Again, if you were starting again on day 1, what would you do differently?

Do that.

As we'll see, you can challenge others more easily if you take your personal feelings out of the equation, if you don't make it about you, if you focus on the facts not the personalities.

And don't forget to breathe.

Coaching Lionel Messi

Imagine you are a performance coach and Lionel Messi, the best football player in the world, comes to see you. Lionel has been at the top of his game for many years, his skill on the ball, gameplay, and deep understanding of the game of football is exceptional. He tells you that he is suffering from a drop in form, he is not scoring as many goals as he used to and is suffering from a lack in confidence which is affecting his game.

You have two options:

- You can put in place a programme of training to sharpen his skills, counselling to address his lack of confidence, and a series of lessons to help with his gameplay, or;
- You can remind him he is Lionel Messi.

When Lionel remembers who he is and what a remarkable football player he is, he can play at the pinnacle of the game. Once his head is clear of crappy thoughts of self-doubt, he is free to play with clarity of thinking, full of confidence.

It is the same with us.

I had been working as a successful transformational coach, specialising around weight loss for several years, when I attended a short presentation on mental wellbeing. The presenters introduced attendees to a simple understanding, so simple in fact that I dismissed it almost instantly.

Then something curious happened. The next day I awoke and just felt a bit 'out of sorts.'

It was a bit like this;

'Nothing had changed, but somehow everything seemed different.'

It sounds dramatic, and to be honest it was. I walked around with a smile on my face, not quite understanding why I felt so different.

From that moment on, my approach to coaching completely changed - I only ever coached from this new perspective, nothing else seemed to make sense anymore.

The Leaf and The River

Imagine we are leaves sitting 'in the flow' of the river of life. We can ride the river effortlessly and enjoy the journey. However, on the easy journey floating downstream, you will inevitably get stuck or caught up in the many obstacles on the way. Rocks, debris, a sudden change of direction in the course of the river, overhanging branches, can all trap you unexpectedly.

Thoughts begin:

- 'I'm stuck.'
- 'I can't complete my journey.'
- 'Nothing ever goes right for me.'
- 'I am not good enough.'
- 'Why is it always me?' etc.

Some go to counselling to discuss all the reasons why they are stuck; some will flounder around not achieving much but causing a bit of a scene. We start to have feelings about our 'stuck-ness.' It feels too painful, and we may need something to 'take the edge off.'

At this point we look for help. Some people turn to the GP to prescribe drugs or turn to other distractions (drink/drugs/sex etc.), anything that can help them forget they are stuck.

In fact, all we need is a gentle nudge back into the flow, one that involves:

- No mess.
- No fuss.
- No guilt.
- No shame.
- No need for analysis.
- No need to sweat it, get angry, or feel bad.

Nothing, but to continue the journey, because on the river of life, we will all occasionally get a bit stuck.

The nudge can come in many forms; something you read or see gives you a sudden flash of inspiration, a friend may help make sense of it all, or your feeling subsides as you see the situation for what it really is.

You Are an Olive!

When I was young, I hated olives, really hated them. I couldn't understand how anyone could eat them. Disgusting things.

Then I gradually started to get a taste for them.

It started by dipping bread in olive oil and grew from there.

Now I love olives, can't get enough of them. I eat them stuffed with pimento or garlic, I eat them whole, pitted or sliced.

The one constant in all this is the olive. It hasn't changed. From the olive's perspective, there are 4 kinds of people:

- People who just hate olives and that won't change.
- People who will grow to love olives, acquiring a taste over time.
- People who can take them or leave them, it doesn't really matter.
- People who love olives.

You are an olive:

- Some people just won't like you, no matter what you do.
- Some will grow to like you over time.
- Some people are indifferent to you.
- Some will love you.

You will feel all these things towards other people as well.

“As a comedian you can't please everyone. If you try, you'll end up pleasing no one and saying nothing.” – Ricky Gervais

Ricky Gervais, the multi-award-winning actor, writer, and comedian knows that some people will love his work, and some will hate it. He accepts that and carries on. He also understands that the haters will attack him and his work but does not let it bother him. He genuinely understands that he is an olive and not everyone will like him.

The Overwhelmed Manager

When you realise you are an olive and for you there are 4 kinds of people, then there is no pressure to be an apple, or an orange, because you are an olive and perfect just as you are.

The Golden Buddha

In the 1300's, a giant gold Buddha was cast for a Siamese temple. Unlike more common gold leaf statues, this one was made from solid gold, weighing in at over 5 tons. Nobody knows the exact details, but it is believed to have been located in the then Siamese capital of Ayutthaya.

At some stage, due to the threat of an attack from the Burmese army, the Buddha was covered in clay and glass fragment to protect its true significance.

When the new capital was established in Bangkok, the statue was relocated there, but eventually the temple housing the statue fell into disrepair and was closed.

Still in its disguise, and with everyone unaware of its true value, the statue was again relocated. This time to Bangkok's Wat Traimit temple. It was left sitting in a basic building with a tin roof.

In 1957 a group of monks were given the task of rehousing the giant Buddha to another new building. In the process of moving the statue a crack developed in the clay and, concerned, one of the monks inspected it further. Peering into the crack the monk noticed something gleaming back at him. Slowly and carefully, he chipped away a little more and the true nature of the giant Buddha was revealed.

It is the same with us. We cover up our true selves with artificial layers and labels and then 'forget' who we truly are. The solid gold statue beneath.

So here I am, hammer and chisel in hand, chipping away.

Have You Got the X Factor?

Have you ever watched one of the TV talent-shows, such as *X Factor* or *Britain's Got Talent*?

Do you notice how some people seem to connect to the audience and have a stage presence, whilst others attract the derision of the audience before they even start?

The singers who really feel the song and sing with true feeling and emotion create an atmosphere from the energy they are creating.

This is because, in that moment, they are truly connected with themselves, with who they really are, and that energy shines brightly. This is picked up by others.

You don't have to be a performer though. Ever noticed how some people just seem to attract others like moths around a flame? We clamour to be near them without realising why, other than it just feels nice to be in their presence.

We are recognising their connection to themselves at an unconscious level, and that is a very attractive quality that we intrinsically recognise.

When we hold our first-born child in our arms and look down into those innocent eyes, we can be engulfed with such an overpowering feeling of love it can be Overwhelming. That feeling is our true nature and when we are close to that, close to our true selves, then that is noticeable to others on a conscious and unconscious level. It can be a fleeting moment but fills our soul and fills the room.

When we are connected to who we truly are, we attract the seekers, the dreamers, the achievers, the good things in life.

When we feel hatred, fear, bitterness, then we not only drive those things away, but attract negativity into our lives.

The Story of 'You'

So, who are *you*? If you were raised in a completely different culture, would you be the same person you are today?

If you grew up having different experiences, would you hold the same values?

Let's take a really simple example – imagine, as a small child, you were attacked by a dog, and quite understandably, developed a fear of dogs. This experience goes into your memory, and your fear of dogs becomes part of your 'view of the world.'

You have other experiences and 'life lessons' as you are growing, forming your own personality and view of the world. It's like programming a computer – it will learn from the information that it receives. Your world view gradually takes shape, your consistent thoughts become your beliefs, your beliefs become what you focus your attention on, and your reality starts to take shape. You have created the person you have become through the stories you choose to tell yourself.

- 'I am scared of dogs.'
- 'I won't amount to much, my teachers told me so.'
- 'I will never be successful.'
- 'I cannot cope.'

These thoughts become your beliefs and eventually, who you really are.

Now, how would you feel if I called you stupid, worthless, or fat?

How would you feel if I called you that every day for a week, a month, a year?

I would imagine that, by then, many of you would start to believe it. It may affect the way you interact with others, how you see the world, and what you believe to be true...

So why do it to yourself?

When you are indulging in your favourite negative self-talk this is exactly what you are doing.

- 'I'm not good enough.'
- 'I'm useless.'
- 'I can't...'

The Overwhelmed Manager

Your consistent thoughts become your beliefs, so what *you* tell yourself becomes your reality because *you* believe it to be true:

- 'I really am not good enough.'
- 'I really am useless.'

You don't have to fall into this trap.

Your Labels

I want you think for a moment about the number of labels you wear every day.

I will give a few examples to get you going.

- Husband/Wife.
- Sibling.
- Employee.
- Manager.

Now let's get a bit more interesting.

- Depressed.
- Worthless.
- Insert medical term here (autistic, asthmatic, cancer sufferer / survivor).

Let's get some emotional labels going:

- Positive.
- Pessimistic.
- Angry.
- Frustrated.

These labels need to be accepted to become part of you.

What labels do you give others? Are they true, kind, necessary?

Now, which ones are true? Which ones are really you?

Imagine you have a post-it note pad in front of you.

On each sheet you write what you are and put it on the wall in front of you.

The Overwhelmed Manager

Relationships: Brother, sister, wife, husband, mother, father... etc.

Career: Carer, nurse, cook, gardener, accountant, lawyer... etc.

Feeling: Angry, happy, sad, frustrated, embarrassed... etc.

With all of your post-it notes covering the wall you turn off the light, so the room is in darkness.

You pick up a torch and shine the light on each of the different post-it notes.

You are none of the notes. None of those things that you think define you.

You are the light.

Surely the Antidote is to Use Positive Self-Talk?

'I am awesome.'

'I am completely loveable.'

'Today will be a fantastic day.'

The problem with this is the difficulty in believing what you are saying, especially in the early days of using positive affirmations. In this instance, it is far better to use small steps to produce consistent incremental change.

Think of it like rungs on a ladder. Imagine the ladder looks like this:

- My life is perfect in every way.
- My life could not get much better. I have mostly everything I need.
- I feel good. Things are great.
- Things are improving, I feel hope.
- The light at the end of the tunnel is a tiny pin prick, but it is there.
- I am feeling neutral, neither happy nor sad.
- Things are never quite as bad as they seem. I may just be okay.
- This will pass eventually.
- The black hole I am in is so deep I will never be able to get out.

If you were on the bottom rung and trying to use the affirmation 'My life is perfect in every way,' it would simply not resonate with you, and therefore would be unbelievable – rendering any change almost impossible. However, to move from rung 10 to 9 or 8 may seem possible, believable, and therefore achievable. It is an easier step to make.

Move up the ladder a step or two at a time for lasting, realistic change.

Start with Yourself

**“You must be the change you want to see in the world.”
– Mahatma Gandhi.**

Change Starts with You

A member of staff approached me once to complain about the attitudes and behaviours of others.

“What are you going to do about it?” I asked.

“I can’t do anything” she replied.

“So, I am taking it that your actions at work are always perfect, you never do anything wrong, and always act with the best of intentions,” I said before adding, “Because, being honest, that is not what I see.”

She was a bit shocked. The business had a whinge culture, which permeated the air and led to negativity and poor morale.

I invited her to take responsibility for her own actions, to ‘be the change’ she wanted to see, and to lead by example. This is not an easy vision to sell, it goes into the ‘long term change’ section described above. It was not the last conversation we had on the subject, indeed, at the time of writing we are still having these conversations, but they are taking a different turn - more coaching, more inspiring, and she is responding differently. I hear it in the way she talks to others, and herself.

When I’m coaching, I don’t try to change others. I am inviting them to look at the world around them differently and seeing what shows up for them. At the beginning of the book, I inserted a Bruce Lee quote.

“It’s like a finger pointing away to the moon. Don’t concentrate on the finger or you will miss all that heavenly glory.” – Bruce Lee.

The Overwhelmed Manager

When coaching, I am guiding you to recognise your own internal magnificence and inviting you to see it for yourself.

When challenging staff in the way I described above, I am in no way condoning the actions of others that were also doing wrong.

We cannot change others. We can invite them to behave differently, to act in a way that is conducive to a happy and healthy workplace, but change? That is, and always will be, an inside job.

Trying to change others is like trying to change the course of a river. We can spend a lot of energy doing it and rarely achieve much. A river will take its own course and may change over time with little interference from the outside world.

Change Lies Within You, and Only You

You cannot seek to change others, or even your environment, in order to gain happiness. We've already seen why:

- That is not where your happiness is coming from.
- If you change somebody else in the mistaken belief it will make you feel happier, you will live with the underlying worry that any change cannot or will not be sustained.

“Change comes from agreement, not from making someone else wrong.”
– Steve Chandler.

Once you change the way you look at things, and understand where your experience is coming from, then true change will occur from within. It will be effective, lasting, and profound.

It's impossible to 'acquire' happiness from somebody else.

Relationships with Others

Everyone Will Have Their Own Version of You

Everyone has a different version of you. The man on the bus, the passer-by, your partner, your boss, your children, your staff, *you*. **Everybody**.

Your version of *you* only exists for yourself, and even you don't know who that really is. **There are thousands of different versions of you out there**. In the minds of the people you swore at and cut up in traffic, those who you have performed random acts of kindness to, those who you are no longer on speaking terms with, and those who adore you for who you are.

Who is it that holds the true version?

Is it your partner? Is it your staff? Is it your boss, or is it you?

You are not the same person to anyone, and this version of you is constantly changing in the minds of yourself, and others. This is also true of everyone you meet. They have thousands of different versions as well.

When you have an argument, it is not **you** against **them**. It is your version of yourself against their version of you. And they are doing the same. It is much like two avatars fighting.

Don't forget the Magic Spectacles. When people look at you, they are seeing them through the belief system embedded in their Magic Spectacles. If you grew up with embedded racist views, that would affect the way you see people around you. Somebody may not like you just because you remind them of somebody else! They have created already created a version of you in their own minds.

What other people think of you is no concern of yours.

It's simply their perception of you. So why worry?

Rather than this giving you permission to be uncaring and selfish to everyone you meet, it instead gives you freedom to love unconditionally, even those who upset you the most.

Who You Truly Are

If you have a child, cast your mind back to the first time you held that child in your arms.

Think of the Overwhelming love you had as you held the child, looked into their eyes, and felt that true **connection**.

If not, recall a time when you felt so full, so alive, that you could burst! You felt, just for a split second, that you could conquer the world, achieve anything, do anything. It was so fleeting. If you could keep that feeling forever, how wonderful would that be.

When I managed a Nursing Home I once worked with a wonderful nurse. I won't name her to spare her blushes. We had to go and assess a lady in hospital to come into our nursing home. We entered the ward and identified the elderly lady. I went straight to the charts to have a look at what had been written and start the assessment. The nurse went to the bedside and knelt down.

She reached out and started to stroke the lady's hair. She talked to her in low, soft tones, telling her everything was going to be alright, that we she would look after her. It was like she was whispering to her very soul. It was beautiful.

And I stood there transfixed. Watching, caught in the moment. A wave of emotion started to well up inside of me and I needed to brush a tear from my eye.

What I had experienced was true, deep, loving connection. From one human being to another. The nurse did not know the lady, but we do not need to know someone to connect on such a deep level as this.

Even now, writing this, I am still experience emotion rising up as I recall that moment.

That **feeling**, that sense of **connection**, is who you truly are, beneath all the stories we tell ourselves, beneath all the labels we give ourselves, beneath all the crappy thinking.

Pure, unadulterated love, even the staff member you dislike the most, we are all made of the same stuff.

We Are Energetic People

**“We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.”
– Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.**

When we look at an iceberg, we see only the tip. The much greater part lives beneath the water and cannot be seen.

It's the same with us. The bit we see - our physical reality - is who we define ourselves by, yet it's only a small part of who you truly are.

The universe is created from energy, a universal energy that pervades all things. It started as a tiny amount of energy particles that exploded in the 'Big Bang,' and went on to form galaxies, worlds, and everything in between. The same energy that forms us also forms a galaxy, a planet, a tree, and every other thing, living or otherwise. We are all made of the same stuff. We are literally made of planets and stars.

Of course, as we grow and start to form opinions of the world through our experiences, we start to build our own belief system. A belief system layered up through our relationships, education, religion, and interactions with others. If you grew up in a loving supportive family, your belief system would be very different to that of someone growing up in an atmosphere of abuse and intolerance.

Dr Wayne Dyer, a well-known author and leader in the field of self-development, said “a belief system is nothing more than a thought you have had over and over again.” Just because we have a thought does not make it true. Wars are fought over such matters – we think we are defending our beliefs, but as a belief is just a thought, we are only ever defending our own distorted view of reality, as is everyone else.

We are not our thoughts and never have been. We are made of universal energy, and so, like a tree, cloud, or flower, we're already perfect. We just think we aren't.

The Diamond Within

.....
**If only our eyes saw souls instead of
bodies, how very different our ideals of
beauty would be.” ~ Unknown**
.....

As a Social Care Manager I have encountered the struggles and situations many other managers find themselves in, a real rollercoaster of emotions.

However as a coach I have the privileged position of tapping people on the shoulder and being there to see them wake up, and it is beautiful. I see it in my clients all the time as they start to wake up to their own perfection, and truly understand the implications of a whole new experience of being alive.

But this is not a chapter about how great I am, it IS a chapter about how great YOU are.

Don't believe me? Imagine this:

Imagine you are a diamond and you have a pack of address labels.

Over the years you write something about yourself on each label. Something you think is true. Labels such as mother, brother, wife, boyfriend, employee, carer, manager etc. Then you start to write more personal labels, depressed, anxious, addicted, not good enough, failure.then tired, failed relationships, overwhelmed, can't cope.

And as you write each label you carefully wrap the diamond. It quickly becomes obscured as more and more labels are added. Thousands upon thousands of them over many, many years. You come to believe so fervently that you ARE these labels that these labels solidify and become fixed to each other, hardening to absolute certainty. Before long you naturally forget all about the existence of the diamond within. The labels make up the whole, and are all that is visible to the eye.

But the thing about labels is that they are fragile. They can be ripped, torn, burnt and defaced and when this happens it can be really painful. So we turn to antidotes for the pain, alcohol, drugs, attention, and other addictive behaviours.

And then one day, somebody gently, lovingly and joyfully explains to you the truth. And you suddenly see it for what it is.

The Overwhelmed Manager

You are, AND HAVE ALWAYS BEEN, the diamond.

And we know diamonds are tough, virtually indestructible, and full of beauty and wonder. So much so that they are highly valued in society.

You my friends are not who you think you are, not even close. Like the diamond you are whole, perfect and beautiful, desperately believing the lies that you are not.

Be More Cat

We have a gorgeous ginger tom cat called Stan. He loves to sit on laps and be stroked. And we love stroking him, it's a win-win situation.

When we stroke him, he purrs loudly like a pneumatic drill, and when we stop, he stops purring – simple.

He enjoys being stroked and shows his enjoyment. When he is not being stroked, he stops purring. Now I'm not a cat whisperer, but I am pretty sure that when we stop stroking him, he doesn't start to doubt himself. He doesn't question himself asking:

'What am I no longer being stroked, am I unlovable?'

'What have I done wrong? I sat like a good cat.'

'Did I not show my appreciation enough?'

'What do I need to do to make me feel happy again?'

He simply stops purring, and that is all, because Stan lives in the moment. He understands (I think...) that this moment is all there is and if something pleasurable happens, like being stroked, then he can just enjoy it in that moment.

We should all do more of that. Live in the moment because that is all there is. 30 seconds ago no longer exists, and neither does one minute from now.

We only have this moment. There is nothing more. It can really seem like there is, especially when we get wrapped up in our thinking. But it is impossible to re-experience the past, or pre-experience the future. Our feelings arising from past events, such as guilt, fear, shame, or embarrassment can now only be experienced when we think about them. Similarly, when we think about the future and worry about what may or may not happen, we are proving that we can only ever feel our thinking.

100% of our feeling is created by thought in the moment.

Let's Check in and See How We Are Doing

Emotional State	Score
I regularly feel Overwhelmed.	
My relationships suffer because of my poor mental state.	
I have no peace of mind and cannot relax or switch off.	
I am on medication for low moods, anxiety, depression, or other mental health issue.	
I am using alcohol, recreational drugs, or another addiction to help my mental state.	
I feel I cannot do anything right.	
I feel guilty when I have time off from work.	
I feel like a failure.	
Total Score:	

SECTION 5

LEADERSHIP AND **STAFF MANAGEMENT**

Some Staff Don't Like You

There. I've said it. It's out in the open and cannot be unsaid. You have seen it and now it can't be unseen.

I have a theory about staff groups. I call it the Love/Hate Ratio and it goes something like this:

- 10% will think you are the best thing since sliced bread.
- 10% will think you are an idiot and don't have a clue what you are doing.
- The rest don't really care or have an opinion about you at all.

Once you accept the basic truth in the principle, perhaps with a slight adjustment to the numbers, and realise that **no matter what you do those figures will remain the same**, then you're free to act with **integrity, honesty, and strength**.

The unfortunate fact is that wishy-washy, indecisive managers who spend their time trying to keep everyone happy rarely do well.

When you stop worrying what everyone is going to think about a decision you make, it leaves you free to make the right one, even if it means upsetting people in the short term.

As a responsible manager, the decisions you make will upset someone, somewhere.

It is a requirement of the role, and not a fact about you. This fact will never change.

Breaking the Downward Spiral

If you are in a negative relationship with somebody and want that to change, you can't wait for that to happen.

One of you has to break the cycle and it's **unlikely to be them**. You can spend hours debating who is right or wrong, but this just prolongs the situation and doesn't help anyone.

As I have said before, and will say again, **change starts with you**.

Going back to my prison days, I would often say to new staff 'You are in charge of the situation.' Another person may shout at you, may try to intimidate you, but you always remain in control of yourself, and how you are managing that situation.

If you don't like the way it is going, change how you are dealing with it.

The definition of madness is often quoted to be '**Doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results.**'

Breaking the downward spiral is completely within your control. It is not weak to make the first move, it is a sign of strength. It is showing that you are taking responsibility for what is happening and will drive the necessary change.

The alternative is to wait for the other person, and you could both be waiting for a long time.

Being Visible

Be Everywhere at Once

When the numbers are against you, as they are in a prison, you have to learn how to make your presence felt. People need to know when you are around, and even when you aren't, for them to think you are.

This is a simple trick. A care home I had been put into, as a turnaround manager, was rated 'Inadequate.' During an unannounced inspection from the regulatory authority, staff told the inspectors that I was always around, constantly checking, and guiding. This was untrue and a physical impossibility. What was true was that, when I was around, staff *knew* I was there. I made my presence known in my own way. I was loud, interacted with the staff, and was quite gregarious. The trick was they knew I was there. They *noticed* me.

But we shouldn't be surprised. This is Confirmation Bias in action, and in this case, was engineered by me.

Staff believed that I was around more. They started to notice me because I made them aware of my presence.

**“What the human being is best at doing
is interpreting all new information so
that their prior conclusions remain
intact.”
— Warren Buffett.**

If they think I am always around, they will notice those times I am, and this confirms their view.

I once heard a radio programme in which they were taking listener telephone calls.

One caller phoned in and described how a robin would follow him around the house.

Whatever room the listener was in, the robin would be there, tapping on the window, getting noticed. He wondered why this was happening.

The presenter explained what was actually happening. He did not mention Confirmation Bias, but this is what was happening. Whenever the listener went into a

The Overwhelmed Manager

room *and* the robin was there, he **noticed**. He didn't notice all the times he went into a room and the bird was not there, just the times it was. This **confirmed** his **belief** that the robin was following him around, when in fact it wasn't.

He had created an experience that wasn't true.

How often do we do that?

Change to Order

You Can Only 'Order' Short Term Change, It Is Not a Long-Term Strategy

I am going to use a simple, easily identifiable example just to illustrate the point, but the underlying principle remains the same in most situations where you are promoting changes to behaviour.

Imagine you have a nice parking spot right outside the front door of your business. One of your staff members, "Joe," always comes into work early and takes the spot every day. He has been doing it for years and it has almost become his spot. He sees it as one of the benefits of getting to work early.

You also have another staff member, "Jane," who has just started working in a different department. Jane has difficulty walking and can only manage very short distances. She has to park further away and struggle to get across the car park.

Calling Joe into the office, you tell him that he cannot park in that spot anymore, and that he must use another further away. You give no explanation.

Day 1 – Joe complies.

Day 2 – Joe complies.

Day 3 – Joe forgets and parks in his usual spot.

Day 4 – Joe parks in his normal spot.

Day 5 – Joe parks in his normal spot.

Timeframes may differ but the theory remains the same. You have simply told somebody what to do, but they have years of habit behind them, and change doesn't come easily. You might think that Joe should do as he is told, and you are probably right, but people are people, habit becomes normal behaviour, and people forget.

Using the same scenario, you call Joe into the office and explain your 'problem.' You explain that there is a member of staff who has just started but cannot walk very far and needs to be able to park closer to the door. Joe may immediately offer to park somewhere else, but as you have explained the **reason** for the change, he is more likely to understand why he should park elsewhere and comply in the longer term.

This is a simple example but highlights the point that if you want your staff team to act differently, they need to understand why it is important or required.

The Overwhelmed Manager

Let's ramp it up to a whole new vision for your business. You want to become more customer friendly and really focus on the service you are providing.

Long term change takes:

- Commitment.
 - You need to be able to consistently sell your vision to your staff team over the period you need to change the happen in.
- A clear vision.
 - Staff need to understand why the change is necessary. and, better still, how they will benefit from any changes.
- The ability to sell.
 - You need to sell your 'vision' for change in order to obtain 'buy-in' from your staff group. If they accept the change, and your vision, it is far more likely to succeed.
- Agreement.
 - Your staff group need to agree with what you are trying to do.

Or it is going to be very difficult.

Who is Leading?

My particular area of expertise is turning around care homes that are struggling, that may have dominant militant staff groups, and a poor reputation. To be honest, it is not rocket science. The staff may look militant to some people, but usually I find they are crying out for strong leadership and clear guidelines. Whilst your business may be different the core concepts remain intact.

Do you tell your staff what to do, or inspire them to be their brilliant selves?

In any staff group you will have the 80/20 split. I go into this in more detail later in the book, but it is known as the Pareto Principle: 20% of A has 80% effect on B.

In this instance, I am going to go a step further. I am going to split the staff into 3 groups. These splits are different in every social care setting so the figures are a generalisation, but you will get the point.

Group A:

20% of your staff will come to work and try their very best, work their hardest, and love their job. They will be there because they want to be there. These are your A Team. You can even split this group down further to the real leaders, and those just doing a great job. This group are your most loyal, hard-working, and dependable staff. This is the group that will be the first to buy into your vision for the future, of how the business will develop. They are your flag wavers.

Group B:

60% of your staff just want to come in, do their job and go home. They are the workers, the doers. Solid, dependable, and reliable. They are not going to change the world but will come in, work steadily and properly (mostly), and go home.

Group C:

20% of your staff are the troublemakers, the rabble-rousers, the sowers of the seeds of dissent. They will take 80% of your time and cause 80% of the trouble. Like Group A, you can split this group down even further. Amongst this group, you will have leaders and followers, the doers, and the side-line shouters.

It is worth identifying these leaders. They can have the quickest, most visible impact in any business. They might not even recognise that they are leaders, but a leader can still be a leader, even if they are leading in the wrong direction! It is worth spending some time on this small group, as the impact it will have will be greater than trying to

The Overwhelmed Manager

convince those who are already your champions. Can you identify those Group C leaders?

Staff will move between groups, depending on the direction you are taking, the decisions you are making and how you are managing, so you need to keep a constant finger on the pulse of the business.

Life Behind Bars

My times in the prison service taught me some valuable management lessons that I carried forward and still use today. As a young officer, I watched and admired how the more experienced staff dealt with difficult and challenging situations. They were masters of controlling situations, and experts in the field of managing others.

One of the early lessons was dealing with emotionally charged situations. Knowing when to react, and when to step back and give somebody space served me very well throughout my time, when other, more hot-headed staff would react without thinking (Amygdala Hijack) and make a difficult situation considerably worse.

Dealing with Difficult Situations

Working with young offenders was a great classroom to learn this skill. The prisoners aged 18-21 were young men, impulsive, often angry, and frustrated. Their pent-up tensions would often be released in a tirade of abuse towards you, sometimes in a threatening manner. Dealing with these situations I learnt:

Use Your Voice

As an antagonist got louder and louder, I spoke more and more softly. This one act could quickly diffuse a situation, calming things down quickly.

Find Some Common Ground

Find something to agree on. There is always something. Even if that something is seeing how or why they are angry.

See Their Side

Even if you do not agree with them 'I can see how/why you feel this way' is a good starter. Understanding why they may be feeling as they do and telling them that is showing empathy and compassion.

Give Yourself Time

This is something I still do now. If a member of staff is upset or angry, trying to reason with them, probably when they are using purely System 1 thinking, is completely pointless and a waste of everyone's time. Remember, the Amygdala Hijack means they are unlikely to hear you effectively anyway.

Allow them to vent, even if you're in front of others. Let them go as they storm off. Reassure any witnesses that you will deal with the matter. Allow a period of time to pass and then go and see them. Speak softly and slowly, use the points above. 90% of the time, they will apologise, they may even go into more detail about why they are upset. It can be something completely unrelated, illness in the family, stress, family, or money worries.

The thing you think they are upset about is often *not* the thing they are upset about. It is just a useful trigger for them to get some of that pent up emotion out.

Giving yourself time is allowing both you and them to access System 2 thinking which is calmer, more rational and considered.

Open Hand Gestures

Simple but effective, especially if things are getting a bit heated. Open handed gestures, with arms out to the side, show you are not being aggressive and can work on an unconscious level.

'Don't Waste Time Fighting Battles That Are Not Worth Winning'

This piece of advice was given to me very early in my career by Professor David Wilson, now a well-known criminologist. He was my governor when I worked in a high security prison, over 25 years ago. I learned a lot from David, although he probably won't remember the young, impressionable officer I was then.

I remember clearly why this advice was being given. It related to the introduction of staff name badges with a photo. The union was getting a bit hot under the collar about it. Some staff were refusing to wear them.

It was a battle not worth winning. The standing joke was 'I don't want prisoners to know what I look like!' Funny, but true.

The Overwhelmed Manager

This should not be mixed up with fighting for a justifiable cause, however low the odds of winning. When Rosa Parks, a black 42-year-old refused to give up her seat on her way home from work in December 1955, she was fighting a justifiable cause. Racism.

That cause was **worth winning**, and still is.

But it is not worth fighting battles, and expending energy on 'causes' that just aren't worth it.

If you find yourself saying things like 'I don't care, but it is the principle of it,' then look at your motives.

Is it really worth winning?

'Manage Your Manager'

Excellent advice I still use regularly. I remember a new operations director that had joined the company and I was starting to clash with her. I must admit, I am not an easy person to manage, but things were not going well. I am sure she dreaded her visits as much as I was starting too.

One day on the phone she was explaining her workload for the week, as she was trying to schedule in a visit. It was full. Packed. Travelling up and down the country dealing with a multitude of problems and issues. I could tell she was exhausted.

I saw myself as the problem. I realised just how busy and stressful her role was and resolved to make her life as easy as possible.

From that moment onwards I offered to help wherever I could. I went out of my way to be useful, to try to reduce her stress and workload. Unsurprisingly, the relationship changed immediately.

I had changed the way I was with her, and automatically she changed as well.

Understanding what your manager's priorities are enables you to keep you one step ahead of the game. They will come to value you more, and in doing so treat you differently.

In return, you are responding to the positive feedback and praise. It makes you feel good, and we all want more of what makes us feel good right? So, we try a little harder.

Ask Them, Tell Them, Make Them

One piece of advice I received as a young officer and passed on during my service was this: **Ask them, Tell them, Make them.**

By following these 3 simple steps **consistently**, you can overcome any unruly staff group. This method gives you a means of escalation, there is always somewhere to go.

Ask Them:

Always the first step. Tell them what you need doing and why. Explain the importance of the task. They are much more likely to respond to a request when you 'ask nicely.' Don't simply bark orders or instruction. They are human beings, treat them as such.

You have asked and nothing has happened. Your instructions have not been carried out.

Tell Them:

Give them a clear and direct order. Don't mess about. I usually say something like "Don't mistake this for a request." It is light enough not to be threatening, and clear enough that it leaves the staff member under no illusions. Explain the consequences of non-compliance clearly, but essentially, *you must* be ready to go to the next step, or this whole exercise is pointless, and you will never have control.

You have told them and still nothing has happened.

Make Them:

Obviously in a prison this had a very different connotation, but it is surprising how rarely I had to use it. This is all about consequences. You now *have* to take the necessary step. The staff will get the message **really quickly**, but only if you keep to your word. Whatever it is, do it.

This will obviously depend on what the task was, and how the staff member has behaved before, but there *must* be consequences. Do not be afraid to use disciplinary action. It may take a lot more work in the short term, but this is an area where you are looking for long term change. I promise you it is worth the effort.

Setting Clear Boundaries

My quickest dismissal in a business was 15 minutes after first entering the premises. Not something I am proud of, and this was in very special circumstances, but the message soon got around. 'Don't mess with him.'

I lived a 2-hour drive away, but for the next few days I got in at 8am, the start of the shift time. All those who were late were met by me and we had a 'conversation.' If I could get to work on time after a 2-hour drive, they had no excuse for tardiness.

This led to a universal truth I accidentally realised for myself.

Staff are happier when they have clear boundaries - when they understand where the edge of that boundary is, and the consequences of overstepping it.

With a clear framework there are few grey areas and little room for doubt. Your staff team will become aware of what they can and cannot do. If you have policies, use them, and adhere to them. If you have a dress code, use it. Make sure staff use it. I have found that concentrating on these small areas bring exponential benefits. In other words, the bigger problems start to resolve themselves.

If staff are not following the rules, then I hate to say it, but you are the problem

At the other end of the scale is the reward structure. Do you reward the staff enough? Do you encourage, praise, and recognise them?

If not, then start now. If you do, double your efforts. **They respond really well to praise and recognition.**

Only this week, following an unannounced regulatory inspection that had gone really well I wrote to all members of staff on duty. It was short paragraph simply stating how much I valued their input that day, that they all worked together and pulled together as a team, and that I appreciated their efforts. I included everyone, no one was left out. The cooks, cleaners, administrators, everyone got a letter.

Later that day, there was a knock at the door. One of the cleaners came in. She was quite emotional. She told me that she had worked in that business for many years and that she had *never* received a letter. Cleaners were often overlooked. She thanked me from the bottom of her heart. I was approached a little later by another member of staff. She told me the place was buzzing, and that the letters had gone down really well. I was taken aback, but not surprised. The letters took me about 20 minutes to write, but the value I got from them, oh boy, that was so worth those 20 minutes.

People Driven vs. Process Driven

Is your business Process Driven or People Driven? How do you know the difference?

Which is the 'correct' way?

In a people driven business, as the name suggests, it is the 'people' who make things happen. You may have good staff around you, but what happens when someone is absent?

People Driven

Signs you are managing a People Driven business:

- Tasks get (mostly) completed but can be missed occasionally.
- You worry when your key players are not in.
- Staff teams work very differently dependant on who is on duty.
- You are constantly having to chase and nag to get things done.
- You worry when you are not at work, as you know things will get missed when you are not constantly checking.
- Your workplace is full of 'Do this. Don't do that' type notices.

Managing a People Driven business is emotionally and physically draining. It requires a lot of checking and monitoring and the pressure is often on one person (normally the manager) to hold everything together.

Imagine that your deputy manager goes on a two-week holiday. In your setting they may be responsible for things such as:

- Weekly Medication Audit.
- Rota.
- CQC notifications.

And a whole lot more.

What happens to their work? Is it automatically picked up by another? Or does it fall by the wayside? Do you dread them being off?

Is there a structure in place for staff to follow on a day-to-day basis, or does it seem like they are making it up as they go along?

Do your staff argue amongst themselves about what should be done, and when?

Process Driven

Signs you are managing a Process Driven business:

- The day runs smoothly, irrespective of who is on duty that day.
- You don't have to worry about what is happening on your days off.
- Staff do not rely on key individuals being on duty to make things happen.
- There is no need for notices to be dotted around.

In a Process Driven environment everyone knows what they are doing. There may be times when this is not the case - such as emergencies, having new or agency staff on shift - but the atmosphere is calmer and more productive.

Being Liked vs. Being Respected

As a Senior Social Care Manager, if I go into a care home, I can always tell if the manager is in control.

There is one tell-tale sign. Can you guess what it is?

Notices!

A4 notices stuck to doors, windows, everywhere.

Curled up at the edges, browning with age, sometimes even handwritten.

The worst kind, and I see these more regularly than I would like too, are simply signed:

'The Manager.'

Or even worse than that, if it is possible:

'Management.'

I am not talking about the necessary informative notices - Health and Safety Information, practical instructions, etc. but the sorts that are completely unnecessary and used purely to excuse the manager from taking control and tackling poor behaviour.

'This door must be kept closed.'

'Please leave this room / area as you would like to find it.'

Don't this, Do that.

It is all so depressing.

But why?

Because a sign is an easy way for a manager to say they have relinquished control.

'It's not me saying it, it's the sign telling you.'

It gives managers an easy way out. It's the cheap, lazy, ineffective option.

The Overwhelmed Manager

A 'real' manager would explain to staff why something should or should not happen, and then monitor compliance. But if you are avoiding confrontation, then it is far simpler to say, 'The sign says so,' rather than 'I said so.' Because if *you* say so and then non-compliance continues, you have to do something about it, confront staff, and change their ways.

This can be uncomfortable for some. They want to be liked.

As a manager your job is not to be liked, it is to be respected. They are two very different things. A manager striving to be liked is highly unlikely to earn the respect of their staff. They will see the inequalities, the dithering decision-making, whilst you try to understand what the path of least resistance will be.

A manager who is respected is much more likely to be liked. Not by all admittedly, but more people will like a respected manager, than respect a manager trying to be liked.

When you are trying to be liked, you are trying to be something you are not. It feels inauthentic. It creates a friction in the body, it feels fractured. You are no longer being true to yourself and trying to fit into the mould of others.

However, when you are your warm, authentic, true self, people can sense that. They are drawn to it, like gathering around the warmth of a fire.

Because let's face it, we can normally tell the difference between the real thing and a fake.

Doing What Is Right vs. Doing What Is Easy

Are You Keeping the Peace, or Providing Clear Visible Leadership?

Let's take an example you may all have experienced.

Staff rotas! (Cue ominous music...)

Rotas are often the result of several years of staff getting their own way, especially the noisier ones.

You know they are not fit for purpose, so you will need to rewrite them to suit the business. This is going to upset some staff, although, for many, it will be better. Obviously, you will take preferences into account where you can, but the needs of the business come first.

In this scenario, not being a people pleaser is a massive advantage. When you understand the principle I introduced you to earlier, you will know that the Love/Hate Ratio will remain roughly the same, no matter what you do.

This will leave you free to make the *right* decisions, not the *easy* decisions. By taking yourself out of the equation, your decision making becomes better, much sharper and more focused on the right outcome.

Before making a decision ask yourself,

"Am I doing what is right, or doing what is easy?"

If your answer is the latter, then you are probably making the wrong choices.

Appreciation

Being Appreciated

.....
“The deepest principle in human nature
is the craving to be appreciated.”
- William James, Psychologist and
Philosopher.
.....

How many times has someone ever confided in you that they have a problem - too many people appreciate them and it's making them feel uncomfortable?

I thought so - Never!

Unlike love, appreciation can rarely be mistaken or misconstrued. Expressing appreciation for someone is a really powerful act. We will all feel underappreciated at some point in our lives, and if you are reading this book, it is highly likely you feel it too.

If you want to change the relationships around you, then appreciation is a sure-fire way of kickstarting that process. People love appreciation and being appreciated.

When the context is appropriate, why not experiment and tell people how much you appreciate them and value having them in your life? I did this as an experiment myself and was blown away by the responses of the recipients. It really strengthened existing relationships, helped new ones grow stronger, and started to repair the broken ones.

Showing appreciation needn't be to people you know or work with. I was once on holiday and really needed to use the bathroom. I saw some public toilets and with a feeling of dread headed towards them. There was a queue of people and the toilets were obviously well used. I prepared for the worst...

The facilities were overseen by a single worker who had a tips basket and charged everyone a small entrance fee. I paid and in I went. I found the toilets to be clean, and well stocked up on all the essentials, which was a pleasant surprise.

When I came out, I approached the attendant. I thanked her for keeping the facilities so clean and well cared for. I told her I really appreciated her work. She beamed with pride.

The Overwhelmed Manager

She felt good, I felt good, everyone was a winner.

How often do you tell your staff how much you appreciate them? It is so easy to focus on the negatives and ignore the positives.

Criticism is easy. Making long lasting change is much, much harder.

Criticism and Auditing

Criticism is easy. Anyone can do it.

Now I am not talking about professional critics, food critics, film critics etc. but those people who just find fault with everything. We all know them - the moaners, the grumblers, and the downright disagreeable.

Anyone coming to my office to criticise others will be directly challenged on their qualification to judge others.

As one member of staff said to me after coming to complain about someone,

*'I hate coming to see you, you always make me **think** differently!'*

There is obviously a distinction between whistleblowing or reporting wrongdoing and moaning or complaining. This is often a fine line which a skilled manager who knows their staff will be able to unpick.

I hate being audited but recognise it's necessary. Auditors can often find things that we cannot see, as we are too close to it.

Have you ever been in someone's house and thought 'How can people live like this?' You notice the dirt and dust, the things that are out of place, and you see this because you are an **outsider looking in** with no emotional attachment.

Brace yourselves, but people may feel exactly the same when they come into your house. When we get up close, we often fail to spot the obvious, we just get used to it. A few years back my wife and I were looking for a new house. Going to view houses was a real experience. Going in the front door, sometimes we just wanted to turn around and walk out. But the house owner has not deliberately decided to live in this way, and if they have, who are we to say what is right and wrong? It is harder to find fault in your own environment than it is in others, simply because we get used to our own mess, it becomes acceptable.

An auditor is a fresh pair of eyes, a potential house buyer if you will. It is their job to find things you have missed.

We can, and often do, take criticism of our care home, or social care service personally. We think that is a direct personal attack on ourselves.

Imagine a quality audit in your particular service. There are two ways of looking at this:

The Overwhelmed Manager

- A direct attack on you, your management style, and your ability as a manager.
- An opportunity to find the gaps in service provision and then try to fill those gaps and improve your service overall.

I would love to say that I am always in the second category, but often still find myself getting annoyed, angry, or frustrated with the auditor, which indicates that I have slipped back into the first.

I find myself thinking, and sometimes saying (!) things like:

'You come and try to manage this service for a week.'

'Anyone can audit and find fault, that's easy.'

Or challenging the findings.

Whilst we can challenge factual information we should never slip into the personal arena.

- Don't take things personally. See it as an opportunity for service improvement not a judgement on your personality.
- Don't make it personal about the auditor either. They have a job to do.
- Getting upset, angry or frustrated is not going to achieve anything, except increased blood pressure.

The Problem with Time

Time is not all it's cracked up to be.

Do you ever notice how time flies when you're busy? And really drags when you are bored or waiting for something?

The old saying 'a watched kettle never boils' seems to ring true in the same way as how time seems to slow down to a crawl as we wait for our much anticipated holiday.

We think of time as a unit of measurement of, well, time, the amount of lapsed seconds, minutes, or hours we have to complete what needs to be done.

In fact, time is a measurement of *distance*. A day is the approximate measurement of how long it takes the earth to rotate on its axis from 1 point to another. From this measure of a day we then split it down further into hours, seconds etc. But it was us who decided to measure time in this way. In this respect time is a man-made concept. And a concept we repeatedly use to beat ourselves up.

'I haven't achieved x in this unit of man-made measurement'

From this can come a whole narrative of how we should be achieving, how we are obviously no good at our jobs, why must we continually fail, or whatever your flavour of self-criticism for the day is.

So knowing that time is simply a measurement, let's go back to the beginning. Time 'seems' to speed up when we are busy and slow down when our minds are not busy whirring away, building up stories and filling our heads with so much stuff we no longer have any concept of time, place or sense of rationality.

Surely then the answer is to slow time down by emptying our heads?

Well, sort of. It would certainly be a good place to start.

We can think like this if we want:

'I don't have enough time', 'I don't have enough time', 'I don't have enough time', 'I don't have enough time', 'I'm so busy, I'm so stressed', 'why don't I have enough time?' 'I don't have enough time', 'I don't have enough time',

Or we can choose to do something different.

The Overwhelmed Manager

The first stage is to **stop the narrative above**. Give ourselves a bit of **breathing space**, start telling ourselves a different story.

Slow down our overthinking.

You will be surprised at the difference this one small act can make.

Let's look at time another way:

What is more important, the musical notes or the space in-between? Seems like a strange question doesn't it.

The space in-between sets the tempo, or speed of the music. The more space the slower the music will appear to be. More notes, closer together creates a speed, a 'busyness', increased tempo.

Now swap musical notes for thoughts?

What happens now?

More thoughts create busyness, increased tempo.

Let's create more space in-between the thoughts.

There are better ways to manage the tasks we need to complete, but it will be difficult to find those answers when we are so busy up in our heads telling ourselves we can't.

The Gift Is The Present

My wife will sometimes say, “You are not listening to me.”

“I am,” I reply, and to prove the point will often give her a quick rundown of what she has been saying.

Of course, as is frequently the case, she is right and I am wrong. I am HEARING her but not LISTENING. And there is a big difference.

It is often said there are 2 types of listening,

1. Listening to Understand
2. Listening to Reply

My assertion is that the second of these is not really listening at all, but hearing, like we hear background music, we are aware of its presence but not really listening to it at all as we are so wrapped up in our own thought process.

In my opinion there is a third, more powerful type of listening,

3. Listening to Connect

This Deep Listening, with a clear mind and open heart is a powerful process that can have a profound impact on both listener and the person being listened to. It opens up a strong connection, a shared, felt experience. It creates a space of power and beauty. It may be a strange concept, but that connection can convey messages without a single word being spoken. A quick YouTube search for Eye Contact Experiment can show you the power of simple connection.

But it goes far beyond that. When we listen to connect, we do so with a clear mind, and in that space we can access our own innate wisdom, love and intuition. We know that our best ideas coming to us when our minds are ‘less busy’ such as when we are in the shower, and so it is with this form of listening. You will be surprised at the depth of your own understanding when listening from this place.

I recently heard that if you want to increase your impact with a client you are coaching by 100%, increase your listening by 1%. I tried it, and it works. Listening to connect is a lost art form.

And for the one being listened too, not only is there a sense of connection, but a real sense of ‘being heard,’ a sense of being present in the moment, and really mattering.

The Overwhelmed Manager

Listening to Understand is good. It is a step up. But trying to understand can get in the way. Listening to Connect clears the way, and in that clear space, miracles can happen.

Why not try it. Listen to what is being said with no agenda, without trying to understand, with a clear mind, and see what happens.

Let's check in and see how we are doing

Emotional State	Score
I regularly feel Overwhelmed.	
My relationships suffer because of my poor mental state.	
I have no peace of mind and cannot relax or switch off.	
I am on medication for low moods, anxiety, depression, or other mental health issue.	
I am using alcohol, recreational drugs, or another addiction to help my mental state.	
I feel I cannot do anything right.	
I feel guilty when I have time off from work.	
I feel like a failure.	
Total Score:	

SECTION 6

EFFECTIVE **MANAGEMENT**

Problem Solving and Decision Making

Manage the Problem, Not the Emotion

You've been there - you need to have a difficult conversation and are dreading it. The member of staff you need to speak to is truculent, aggressive, and difficult to manage. You break into a cold sweat thinking about it.

There is a secret to having these conversations and it is this:

- Stick to fact. Don't indulge in speculation or rumour. This will give you confidence in what you are saying.
- Address the issue, *not* the person.

"Joe" is always late. He is a difficult staff member to deal with, but his lateness is becoming an issue. Other staff members notice you are letting him get away with it and your credibility is suffering. Deep down you know you are avoiding a meeting as it is going to be challenging.

When you meet Joe, you decide to stick to the facts. He is constantly late. and this affects service. Nothing else. You tell Joe his constant lateness is having a knock-on effect to your service and cannot continue.

Focus on the *behaviour*, not the person. By doing this You are removing the emotion from the meeting. You will find it is easier for Joe as well.

"Joe's" lateness does not make him a bad person. Keep focused on the fact of *how* it affects Your service. Nothing else.

Don't Make It Personal about Them

You can tackle a difficult conversation by addressing the issue, not the emotion, and by sticking to the facts.

When you are addressing the facts of an issue, you are de-personalising it, and this helps to reduce the emotional impact of the meeting. By not 'Making it about them' you are not directly challenging their value as an individual. You are not insinuating that whatever they have done makes them less of a person, you are simply dealing with the situation.

"Everyone is doing the best they can with the resources they have available."

The Overwhelmed Manager

I love this statement, accredited to Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). Although not an 'NLP-er' I keep it in mind nearly every day and find it a great help and inspiration.

The person sitting opposite you is doing the best they can with the emotional resources they have. It does not mean they are better or worse than you, just different. Unique. They are doing the best they can, even if it is not good enough for what you need right now.

Let's take staff members arguing in front of a customer and using inappropriate language.

Example 1: “You really let the service and yourself down, *your* terrible behaviour has to stop. I can't believe *you* would act in such a way.”

This example challenges the individual directly and is likely to elicit a defensive response. A form of defence is often attack!

Example 2: “Using inappropriate language and arguing in front of a customer is always unacceptable. This needs to stop immediately.”

Example 2 is clear, concise and to the point. It focuses on the behaviour and is not directly challenging to an individual's sense of self-worth.

In the same manner, don't make it about you either. As I explained earlier, you are simply dealing with the issue.

Remember from earlier in this book. **Anxiety lives in the future.** It is born from expectation. It is the '*I can only be happy when...*' trap.

- *I can only be happy when I am successful.*
- *I can only be happy when I am financially secure.*
- *I can only be happy when I find love.*
- *I can only be happy when I have a successful career.*

So, your expectations are set. When something as important as personal happiness and inner peace of mind are on the line, the stakes are high. It's no wonder you get anxious. So many things can go wrong.

And they do.

Your stress is born from the notion that there is a right and wrong outcome.

The Overwhelmed Manager

If you realised that even the notion of right and wrong is something you make up - which changes day to day - then there would be no need to worry about outcomes.

Decisions, Decisions

Sometimes we can get all caught up in our Overthinking, regarding a decision that needs to be made. We procrastinate because we don't want to get it wrong or make matters worse than they are.

A decision may have 2 or more options. If there was only 1, then there would obviously be no decision to make. We start to analyse which course of action we should take. We may write lists or consult our friends -many of which will have their own strong views on what you should do.

But what if there was no 'right' or 'wrong' decision? Wouldn't this take off some of the pressure, and allow ourselves time and space to make the decision we feel most comfortable with?

The reason we procrastinate is often that we feel there is only one correct course of action, when, in fact, they are all 'correct.' Each decision and subsequent course of action simply leads to differing outcomes – that is all. We don't need to judge or measure the outcome, just decide on a course of action, and act accordingly to whatever shows up. If we don't like what is showing up, then make another decision, another course of action.

When we start to observe that there are no right or wrong outcomes but just different ones, the pressure is off.

That allows the magic to really start to happen. We already know intrinsically what we should do, but we drown out our inner voice in a storm of Overthinking.

Dealing with Complaints

I have worked in Health and Social Care for many years. It is an emotive subject and feelings can run high.

Putting a loved one into the care of another is such a difficult and highly charged decision to make. Somebody is giving you their most valuable, treasured item and saying, "Here, please look after this." Expectations and feelings can be sky high.

They are right to demand high standards, we all want to give the very best service.

But we have all experienced those 'difficult' relatives. The ones who are never satisfied, for whom nothing is right. You dread the car pulling into the car park, or the number coming up on the caller display. You know you are in for a hard time again. Bracing yourself, you await the inevitable and sure enough the relative heads straight for your office.

As they launch into their usual tirade, a complaint about something really trivial probably, you really start to listen. A hidden voice starts to be heard. You can hear it in-between their words, the untold message, the reasons left unsaid:

'I miss my mum.'

'I feel so guilty.'

'I'm really hurting.'

'I promised never to put her in a home.'

'I am so ashamed I cannot look after her myself.'

They want you to look after their loved one exactly as they would. Of course, you cannot do that, you never will. You are not them. They are confused, guilty, ashamed, and all of those emotions need to be released somewhere, and you are an easy target - the unmade bed, the meal last night, laundry.

Understanding that what a 'difficult' relative is saying is often not what they are really meaning is a big leap forward, not least for our own sanity.

But what about difficult residents, or staff?

The concept remains the same. People are fighting personal battles we know nothing about. All that anxiety and stress needs to come out somewhere, ask yourself a question.

Are you making yourself an easy target?

Complaints as an Opportunity

I once commissioned a Retirement Village. The village was beautiful, the apartments were lovely, but for some, there was always something wrong. The wintergarden was too cold (it was unheated and meant to be that way), the greenhouse was too hot(!), the café and corner shop were too expensive (these were third party operators), and the car park did not have enough spaces (it did, just not enough close to the front door.)

I have to admit, the constant moaning by the small minority was getting to me. I was feeling under pressure and stressed.

.....
“When you change the way you
look at things, the things you look
at change.” – Dr Wayne Dyer.
.....

The above is one of my favourite quotes, and so I decided to change the way I looked at complaints. I reframed them.

A Belief is Just a Thought We Have Over and Over Again

By constantly seeing the negative side of a situation, we start to adjust our belief system and eventually something becomes ‘true’ for us:

- Customers are difficult.
- I hate this job.
- Things never go right for me.

One of the ways to escape this is through **reframing**.

With reframing, the facts remain the same but how we choose to see them is deliberately adjusted or shifted to a more positive or helpful view.

An example could be seeing a problem as a ‘challenge,’ and then taking them on as something to be solved.

The Overwhelmed Manager

In the Retirement Village I reframed complaints as 'Opportunities for learning and service improvement.'

Guess what, it really helped me! It helped my mental state. I felt more relaxed when dealing with a complaint which helped me see things more clearly.

I would ask myself, what can we learn from this? Is there an opportunity to improve the service we deliver? I took action as a challenge to myself and, unsurprisingly, the service did improve, relationships improved, I improved.

It was a win-win-win situation.

We can choose to look at complaints as an opportunity, or an anxiety causing scenario. Whichever one we chose will affect how we react to it, and that will invariably affect the outcome

Effective Complaint Procedures

Good complaint procedures and management are an essential part of any business.

When did you last praise average customer service?

It is an expectation that when we enter into a transaction with a business, no matter what the transaction is, that everything will go smoothly.

Good customer experience will go unnoticed. When did you last say to a friend,

'I purchased a shirt last week, the tills worked perfectly.'?

Customer service starts to become noticeable at the extreme edges of the experience.

The customer experience scale:



Dreadful ← → Outstanding

As your customer moves up towards Outstanding, or down towards Dreadful, they are more likely to interact with you in some way and report their experience to others.

The red zone is the danger zone, and this is where a customer is more likely to complain, or worse, not complain at all.

If a customer receives poor service and does not let you know, how will you know what needs to be improved? Feedback is essential to any thriving business and negative feedback is still feedback.

Being receptive to customer experience, no matter who the customer is, can help you:

- Prevent damage to reputation.
- Reduce financial loss through compensatory measures.
- Improve customer experience.
- Aid team learning.
- Develop customer relations.
- Aid continuous improvement.

The Standard You Walk Past is the Standard You Accept

I love this saying. It was coined by Lieutenant General David Morrison of the Australian Army during a speech for International Women's Day in 2013. He was referring to how women were being treated in the army at that time.

The phrase though goes far beyond this narrow, yet essential parameter.

How often do we notice something wrong and simply walk past it?

- A piece of litter on the floor.
- The behaviour of a colleague.
- An overheard conversation.
- Something in the wrong place.

By walking past without acknowledging or dealing with it, we become part of the problem. The message we are telling ourselves, and others, sometimes unconsciously and sometimes overtly is:

'I accept this behaviour or condition.'

It becomes intrinsic, and before long standards are slipping - personal, professional, and environmental.

Yet we lead busy working lives. How is it possible to correct **everything**?

You can't, but your team can. It is a cultural response.

When *'The standard you walk past is the standard you accept'* becomes part of your vision, and the staff start to buy into it, then change can really happen quickly.

This is not just about challenging yourself. If you see a member of staff walk past something that is not right without doing anything about it, then this should be addressed there and then. If you don't, then you are part of the problem.

A quiet life is the easy option. It is lazy and ultimately unsatisfying.

See it. Challenge it. Change it.

Especially the small things. These are easy to start with, and yet have a big impact. You start to notice that if you start challenging these small things, many of the larger things will start to correct themselves.

Outstanding Customer Service

As a coach I always have 3 major objectives in mind:

- Service.
- Service.
- Service.

Don't **overpromise** what your service or product will do, and then really over-deliver.

There is a YouTube video called *Taxi Terry* by Scott McKain. Go and watch it now. Whilst it is a bit dated, the underlying message remains relevant. After a most unusual taxi ride, Scott went on to write a book, *The Seven Tenets of Taxi Terry* (McGraw-Hill Education. 2014).

The Seven Tenets are these:

- Set high expectations, then, exceed them!
- Delivering what helps the customer . . . helps you.
- Customers are people, so, personalise the experience.
- Think logically, then act creatively and consistently.
- Make the customer the star of your show.
- Help your customers to come back for more.
- Creating joy for your customer will make your work, and life, more joyful!

I particularly love that last one. Creating joy in the lives of another will always be impactful on our own lives.

When It All Goes Wrong

Dealing with a complaint need not be difficult. Essentially any complainant wants the following things:

- a. To be heard.
- b. To be taken seriously.
- c. Some form of outcome.

If you take these things seriously immediately, very often you can stop any escalation right there, and 'Nip things in the bud.'

Done correctly, in some circumstances points **a** and **b** can lead to a very informal outcome. If the complainant feels they are heard and feel confident that you will take

The Overwhelmed Manager

action, often they will not want to take things further. This will depend on the severity of the situation.

Points **a)** and **b)** can determine **c)**.

If things need to be taken to the next stage, then you need to progress into a more formal resolution process.

The Complaints Resolution Process

The key elements of complaints resolution:

Listen

Not the 'eyes rolling here-they-go-again' type of listening, but show you are listening. Make good eye contact, take notes, repeat what the complainant has said back to them to make sure you understand what you are saying.

Key phrases:

- 'So, what you are saying is...'
- 'What you are telling me is...'
- 'What I understand is...'

Don't Prejudge

Even the most troublesome customers often have valuable and valid points to make.

Complaints are Information

What we choose to do with that information is up to us.

Empathise. Look for the Common Ground

Putting yourself into their shoes and seeing the world through their eyes gives you a better perception of the problem. Look for the learning and opportunity for

The Overwhelmed Manager

improvement, rather than the complaint itself. You do not need to agree with everything being said, but you can understand.

Key Phrases:

- 'I understand how that must make you feel...'
- 'I can see how you would think that...'
- 'I can see how that would look to you...'

None of the above admit liability but do give you the opportunity to agree on some common ground.

Thank the Customer for the Opportunity

Complaints are feedback. Where is the opportunity for learning?

- Ask what they want to be done about it.
- Solve the problem.
- Deliver on your promise.
- Follow up.

The Serial Complainant

Sometimes, no matter how good your service is and no matter how hard you try, you simply cannot please a customer.

Maybe they don't want to be pleased. Maybe they are one of those people who are never going to be happy for their own personal reasons.

Are they damaging your business? Take action.

It is an unfortunate fact that social care managers can, and often do, get caught between different factions of a family playing out their arguments and squabbles using your service like a pawn in a game of chess.

If there is no chance of a successful resolution, and the constant complaints are damaging your reputation, damaging staff morale, and drawing in other families, then you may need to consider serving notice.

The Overwhelmed Manager

Trust is a two-way street and a breakdown in trust between a service or manager and a family or service user, may require a parting of the ways. It may be painful in the short term, but lasting damage can be avoided through decisive action.

The Pareto Principle

Known also as the 80/20 rule, the Pareto Principle is the idea that 20% of your efforts bring 80% of your results.

- 20% of your customers make 80% of the complaints.
- 20% of your staff cause 80% of your problems.
- You spend 80% of your time dealing with 20% of your work.

It, therefore, follows that you can save time and energy by focusing on the most effective tasks.

Identify Your Goals

What are you trying to achieve?

- Increase sales or occupancy?
- Reduce complaints?
- Increase your businesses weekly income?
- Better rota management?

Pick the Most Important Goals

Identify those goals that are most important to you. Why are they important? Which ones are the most achievable?

List the Tasks That Will Help to Achieve Those Goals

List all of the tasks you can think of that will help you achieve the desired outcome. For example:

- Everything you can do to increase occupancy or the number of service users.
- What can you do to help reduce complaints?
- How can you manage your rota better?

Keep an open mind and get creative. There are no stupid ideas at this stage, write them all down as they come to you. You can always cross them out afterwards.

Prioritise Those Tasks

When you have your list of tasks, prioritise them.

- Which actions will have the greatest impact?
- Which actions are the quickest to complete?
- Which ones are the easiest to accomplish?

Put them in order.

Put Your Focus on Those Most Important Tasks

Look at those tasks and identify which ones are worth spending time on and which ones can be ignored or discarded. Choose the top tasks with the greatest impact. In theory, this should be a small number from a long list.

Bear in mind that it may not be a straight 80/20 split. It could be 85/15 or 90/10.

By focusing your efforts on a small group of high impact tasks then you are saving time, energy, and focus.

Delegate What You Can

Look at your team around you. Who can help you?

You can do a lot, but 2 or 3 can achieve more. Read the section on delegation below to get ideas of how to delegate effectively.

Apply the Principle in Other Areas

What other areas in your life could you apply the 80/20 rule too?

- Fitness and exercise?
- Relationships?
- Maintaining Friendships?
- Family Life?

The least important actions will tempt you because they're often less uncomfortable to perform and still give the illusion of making progress.

Effective Email Management

Email can be an effective means of communication, but how often do we spend too long managing and replying to emails? These tips will help you deal with your emails more effectively.

Delete Promotional Sales Messages

When I get a promotional sales email, I *always* click unsubscribe. I often reply with the following message:

'Please remove this email address from your database. This is a GDPR request and will be monitored.'

This often (but not always) does the trick.

Unsubscribe from Newsletters You Never Read

Again, hit that unsubscribe button. These are often hidden in small print right at the end of the newsletter. Newsletters are often just sales letters in disguise so if they are not serving a purpose, unsubscribe. It takes 30 seconds and saves time in the future.

The vast majority of these newsletters are on automated mailing lists and removal is a straightforward task.

Auto-Set Filters for Certain Senders

You can easily set automation tools. By using filters, you can label, sort or direct emails into different folders, allowing you to target and prioritise incoming emails.

There are courses available to show you how to do this, or YouTube has a multitude of video guides. Just search 'Outlook tutorial' and choose from the plethora on offer.

Read and Reply to Emails at a Set Time Every Day

Setting a specific time, or times of day, frees you up to focus on other tasks. If you are constantly watching your email box, this can quickly turn into a poor time-management habit.

Have a Set Signature on Your Emails so You Don't Have to Write Your Name Every Time

It is simple to set up a signature. A Google search for your particular email client (E.g., Outlook, Gmail, etc.) will bring up hundreds of videos and instruction on how do to so. This not only looks more professional but will save you time typing your details at the end of each email.

You Don't Have to Reply to Them All

How many of your emails actually demand a response? When you do reply, how many of those responses actually get an acknowledgement or thank you?

If you are CC'd into an email, it should be an indication that a response is not required, but you are invited too if necessary.

If an email is not relevant to you, then do not feel the need to send a response.

Time Management

When Less Really is More

You see *that* pile on the desk. The one you have sorted through countless times. The one you are trying to get to the bottom of...

I am going to let you into something I discovered about that pile, and still amazes me today.

Many years ago, I was a prison governor. A stressful and demanding job. My desk was always full, and I worked harder and faster to get to the bottom of my pile of papers. Then one day I had a realisation. It really hit me.

It is Never Going to Happen

I can shuffle and shift the papers, but I am *never* going to get to the bottom. It was a real lightbulb moment. So, I stopped trying. I worked through what I could, and at 5pm I would leave the office. I would leave that pile just as it was.

And guess what happened, it will come as a shock! Hold onto Your hats! Make sure you are sitting down.

Here goes...

Nothing.

Nothing happened.

Zip, Zilch, Zero.

Except...

I stopped chasing my tail. I got home on time. I spent my evening relaxing. One by one my colleagues picked up on it too. Soon, most of us were doing it.

That one action probably did more for my mental health than any other single practical action up until that point. It really took the edge off.

So, the next time it gets to going home time, and you are staring at that seemingly endless pile, know this.

The Overwhelmed Manager

It is endless. It is relentless, you will never reach the bottom.

Are you easily distracted?

I know I am. When trying to write this book, I could, and regularly did, find a million things to do other than what I should be doing.

'Ooh my phone pinged.'

'I think I will make another cup of tea.'

And worst of all...

'I will just check Facebook/LinkedIn/Instagram.'

These social media sites are designed to suck you into their world, press the right buttons to engage you, and keep you trapped in the vortex.

Distractions are time eaters. You know they are and still do it anyway. You are making a choice to be distracted and it is usually for a reason. So, what is that reason?

Typical reasons include:

- Not understanding the task.
- Being bored with the task.
- Not liking the task.
- Feelings of inadequacy.
- Feelings of insecurity.
- 'Insert your reason here.'

Meet SID

SID is a time waster. He will take you and engulf you in distractions, eating away at your time and ensuring your tasks are never completed on time.

SID = Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions.

You need to get a piece of work completed and you 'suddenly remember' that you must:

- Put the rubbish out.
- Make an important phone call.
- Check if XXX has replied to your message.

The Overwhelmed Manager

- See if anyone has engaged with a Facebook post.
- Take the dog, cat, budgie for another walk.

It is all the same. A means of avoidance. But once you get to the bottom of *why* you are avoiding then you can start to make progress.

When writing this book, I was unsure of how I wanted it to look. In the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey states -

“Start with the end in mind.”

I didn't know what the end would look like but wanted to get writing anyway. But how could I write when I didn't know what the layout would be, how the chapters would be ordered, even what the chapters should look like? The confusion this brought about in my mind meant that I would use distraction of a means of escaping this predicament.

SID is a master procrastinator, a time thief, and will mislead you into wasting time in more ways that you thought possible.

A Presidential Approach to Time Management

As a manager, you have a busy life. You head into the office with a clear idea of what you want to achieve that day, and before long it all goes out the window and you are back to firefighting mode again, caught up in the issues of the day. You never catch up.

Is this you? I would guess it is at least some of the time. It is emotionally and physically draining isn't it.

The 'Eisenhower Matrix' was inspired by President Eisenhower, a President well known for his ability to stack up accomplishments. He was Gallup's *Most Inspired Man of The Year* no less than 12 times.

Eisenhower knew the difference between Important and Urgent.

The Eisenhower Matrix is for you if you:

- Spend all day firefighting.
- Are busy all day but feel like nothing gets done.
- Often go home feeling like you haven't achieved anything.
- Have long term goals that never seem to progress, or progress really slowly.
- Can't seem to delegate effectively.

Step 1 is to print the Matrix.

Step 2 is to fill in the box as you go through the day. As you do each task write it into the box **you feel is most relevant**. I have put some examples to give you an idea.

The Matrix contains 4 boxes:

- **Important and Urgent.**
- **Important but Not Urgent.**
- **Urgent but Not Important.**
- **Not Important and Not Urgent.**

Just write in a quick outline of the task. Before too long you will start to build up a picture of what you are spending your day doing. Be honest and ruthless. **This task comes into the Important and Urgent Category**

The Eisenhower Decision Matrix – Version 1

As you go through the day right each task you do into the box you feel is the most relevant.

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<p>E.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deadline Driven Tasks. Last Minute Preparations. <i>True</i> Emergencies. Pressing Client Issues. 	<p>E.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning. Relationship Building. Empowering Others. Strategy and Goals.
Not Important	<p>E.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interruptions and Distractions. Most emails. Some Calls. Non-Emergency Crises. Unimportant Requests. 	<p>E.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Media and Escapist Activity. Junk Email. Some Emails. Some Calls. Internet Surfing. 'Busy Doing Nothing.'

The Eisenhower Decision Matrix – Version 2

As you go through the day, write each task you do into the task box and then tick the relevant rating. By the end of the day, you will have a clear picture of what you have been doing during the day.

	Task	Important and Urgent	Important and NOT Urgent	Urgent and NOT Important	NOT Important and NOT Urgent
08:00					
08:30					
09:00					
09:30					
10:00					
10:30					
11:00					
11:30					
12:00					
12:30					
13:00					
13:30					
14:00					
14:30					
15:00					
15:30					
16:00					
16:30					
17:00					
17:30					
18:00					

The Eisenhower Matrix – Evaluation

To quote Bing Crosby, are you:

“Busy doing nothing, working the whole day through, trying hard to find lots of things not to do?”

Have you completed the Matrix? If not, I urge you to go back and do it before going any further. It really is a worthwhile exercise.

- **Important** and **Urgent**.
- **Important** but **Not Urgent**.
- **Urgent** and **Not Important**.
- **Not Important** and **Not Urgent**.

Now it is time to look at that Matrix and take action.

Box 1: Important and Urgent – Do It!

These are tasks that need to get done quickly. So, act now, tick these off. But a word of caution, too much time dealing with issues in this box can lead to long term stress and burnout.

If you are feeling Overwhelmed, you are likely to be spending too long in this box.

Look at your list again, are *all* the tasks **Important** and **Urgent**? Can any task be moved to another box in the Matrix?

Box 2: Important but Not Urgent – Schedule It!

This is where dreams live. The stuff you want to get done but is often drowned out by tasks in Box 1.

This box is where you accomplish your goals and get to focus on opportunities and growth.

By attending to this box more consistently you can help reduce Box 1 tasks in the long term.

Box 3: Not Important and Urgent – Delegate It!

These tasks are often set by other people and rarely move you closer to your longer-term goals.

Examples would be:

- Constant interruptions from staff.
- Constant checking of emails.
- Some meetings.
- Some phone calls.

This box contains many tasks that are not meaningful for you and have assumed deadlines or deadlines attributed to someone else.

Spending too much time with tasks in this box distracts from other, more meaningful ones. Sometimes you have to say 'No' or delegate to others.

Box 4: Not Important and Not Urgent – Delete It!

Full or rabbit holes and timewasting, this box is where you spend your working time on wasteful activities, such as checking Facebook, avoidance activities and online browsing.

This is not about what you do in your own leisure time, but what happens in the workplace whilst you complain of Overwhelm.

Understanding where your time is being spent can really help you in the long term. Completing this Matrix will highlight those tasks you are doing which could be delegated to others, and even those these that you can stop doing altogether.

Delegation

How good are you at delegating? It is an essential strategy for any manager, but one we most often avoid.

If you have completed the Eisenhower Matrix, it is likely that you will have noticed a number of tasks that you are doing that could be delegated. But many managers find it hard to delegate, preferring to do the work themselves

The only way to make sure things get done right is to do it yourself, right? Well, there comes a time when you can only do so much in one day. Delegate to others by starting with the Box 3 tasks above.

Learning to delegate allows you to grow as a person. When you delegate effectively, you can improve your life all around because you're no longer a one-man band that's trying to entertain the world on your own!

Delegating at Work

You might find it tough to delegate at work, especially if you feel like no one can get the job done as well as you.

Rest assured, though, that others can do a quality job, but only if you give them the opportunity. They may not do it in exactly the same way as you would have, and that's okay! **At some point you need to let go of perfection and allow others to help.**

If you have staff available at work, or the ability to outsource work to other companies and individuals, then you have the makings of a great team that can help you grow and succeed.

Consider delegating these tasks:

- Anything that involves data entry.
- Repetitive tasks, such as photo copying or filing.
- Fact finding missions and data collection.
- Writing.
- Audits.

It's up to you to decide which functions can be fulfilled by someone else. Once you've chosen a person capable of the task, it's time to consider some detailed plans.

Always ensure that your instructions are clear. Provide details and examples of the end result that you expect, and don't focus so much on the steps they need to use in order to get there.

If needed, you can check up on the people doing your tasks. **Ask how things are going or tell them that you expect progress reports every day or week.** This will help you to maintain a handle on whether or not things are on track.

In the end, you must maintain trust that everything will turn out right. While everything may not be exactly as you expected, delegation can still save you lots of time, stress, and headaches.

Delegating at Home

Yes, you can apply your delegation skills to your home life as well. You certainly don't need to come off as a dictator, but you can have family meetings in order to get a better idea about everyone's expectations.

Write out a list of all the home tasks that need to be completed. **Decide a fair distribution of who will do what and maintain some clear deadlines.**

Don't forget that your children can complete some of the simpler tasks as a part of a chore schedule. Consider some type of reward, especially if you expect the little ones to be active participants. It's a great motivator to reward each other every so often. If everyone has done a great job, consider a family dinner out to relax and let loose.

Evaluate the Results

Whether you're involved with a plan for work or home delegation, **it's important to evaluate the results.** If you're especially upset about how something has turned out, think about what you can do differently next time in order for things to go according to plan.

Remember to maintain trust and awareness about what is going on around you. Delegation can be a full-time job in itself, but when done right it can provide an improved lifestyle for you and everyone around you.

Delegation Strategies for the Control-Freak

Do you have a team around you who is fully capable of getting things done, but instead of delegating, you try to do everything yourself? If that sounds like you, there's a better way.

Delegating tasks can be so difficult for some people. They act like a micro-manager who ensures that they see, do, and be everything. It's hard for them to let others share the load or the glory. **Maybe the control-freak is you.**

You may have tried to delegate tasks in the past. Perhaps the quality of work wasn't good enough to suit you, so you ended up redoing everything. There's no sense in delegating tasks in the first place if you know you'll end up redoing them, right?

Here are three problems you might be using as excuses for not delegating:

1. You feel you can do the job better yourself.
2. There's not enough time to train someone else to do the job.
3. You feel like you have to redo someone else's work.

If you're facing these challenges, perhaps it's time to look at some strategies you can use to find success in delegating.

Consider using these delegation techniques:

Face the Truth

If you feel you can do the job better yourself, take time to think things through.

Other people may not do the job the same way you would, but that doesn't mean they won't do an adequate job.

The people on your team may be eager to do a great job and only need your encouragement, rather than for you to take over.

Train Your Staff

Perhaps those working with you do need some additional training. This shouldn't be a reason to do everything yourself.

The Overwhelmed Manager

Look at the need for additional training as a means to be better prepared in the future. **Short-term training now can have a huge pay off later on.** If you take the time to train your staff now, they'll be better prepared for the next project.

Relax

There's no sense in letting pressure for perfection bring you undue stress. While perfection would be great, it's usually not expected.

Give yourself a break. It's just not possible for you to do everything yourself, nor should you want to.

Other people can do the work even if you don't think they'll do as good a job as you.

Follow a Successful Plan

If you're the head of the team and certain tasks are critical for the success of the project, you may want to do the major work on those. However, the more routine tasks could be passed along to other people on the team.

Delegate the Task Itself

Don't dictate the way in which it's completed.

Assign Tasks Based on Strengths

Perhaps you could let one person do research, assign converting raw data into a spreadsheet to another person and designate a good writer to write the rough drafts of the reports.

You can still be in control of the final report by pulling all the data together into a solid finished project.

Require Progress Reports

These could be at specified deadlines over the course of the project. If they're having problems meeting the deadlines, instead of assuming they're not going to get the job done, ask them if there's anything you can do to help them meet the next deadline.

The Overwhelmed Manager

Expect that your team will do a great job and you won't be disappointed. People usually rise to our expectations.

Finally, **give praise and positive feedback** when the project is finished.

Instead of being a control-freak, decide now to let go of some of the responsibilities. Look for ways you can use the talents of your co-workers in the future. You may find that working with a team and delegating tasks makes your job much easier and the atmosphere at work much better for everyone.

Keep it Simple. The 5-15 report

The 5-15 report is a report that should take no more than 15 minutes to write and 5 minutes to read.

Origins

It was first thought up by Yvon Chouinard, the now 80-year-old pioneering founder of Patagonia, a company famed for its environmental ethics and its engagement with employees' and managers' well-being.

How It Works

Each week, everyone on a team spends 15 minutes writing a templated report sent to the team's manager. The manager takes 5 minutes to read and respond to each report, and 15 minutes to collate their own feedback for their manager. This continues up the chain. Done right, it provides those at the very top of even the most complex company a weekly snapshot of what's working and what's not. from the point of view of all their employees.

5-15s usually follow a set format and are often divided into bullet points below a set of headings:

- Highlights of the week.
- People met with.
- Challenges.
- Plans for next week; and
- Plans for the next four weeks.

Other possible categories include "Lessons Learned" or "Areas for Improvement."

The beauty of the process is its simplicity and swiftness, and also the format, which allows those who might find it hard to bring up an issue even in a one-on-one meeting to air it in a "safe space."

Managers says they enjoy reading the achievements of their teams and will try to solve challenges then and there. f not they can include them in her own "challenge" section.

Try it using the template below or make your own.

The 5-15 Report

5-15 Report for the week of:

What I have accomplished.

What's working?

What's not?

How am I feeling? What is the climate of the team/group?

Good idea (what one thing will make the biggest improvement in my life, work, or the organization?)

What concrete steps will I take to make this happen? By when? Action plan.

Please add this item to the agenda of our next meeting.

Date:

Signed:

Print:

Things to Remember

These Are Some of the Takeaways from This Book All in One Handy Place

- We live in a thought-based reality.
- When you get out of your own way, miracles can happen.
- If we do what we have always done, we will get what we have always got'
- Just because you believe something it doesn't make it true.
- *"Thought is the missing link that literally everyone is looking for."* – Sydney Banks, Philosopher.
- Your emotional response is telling you nothing of the outside world.
- You are not feeling the outside world, you are feeling your thinking.
- It is not your thoughts that get you into trouble, it is your thoughts about your thoughts
- You are not experiencing what you think you are experiencing. You are experiencing what you *think*.
- What we notice, focus on, and think about creates our experience of reality.
- *"Change comes from agreement, not from making someone else wrong."* – Steve Chandler.
- *"We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience."* – Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.
- Are you doing what is right, or doing what is easy?"

Where to Next?

I hope that you have found this book useful, not only in managing your work-life, but also in your relationships and life outside of your workplace.

You have started on a journey of self-discovery. If you would like to continue then I promise you it is worth it. I would recommend the following resources:

Inside Out Revolution – Michael Neill (Hay House, 2013)

Clarity – Jamie Smart (Capstone 2013)

The Story of You – Steve Chandler (Career Press, 2006)

Results – Jamie Smart (Capstone 2016)

50 Ways to Create Great Relationships – Steve Chandler (Maurice Bassett, 2017)

The Enlightened Gardener – Syd Banks (Partners Publishing 2018)

Whilst self-learning is always worthwhile, a personally guided journey of discovery, change and growth can improve results exponentially. Using the core concepts in this book, 121 coaching can provide results that are quicker, deeper and more profound than the written word can manage.

If you would like to find out more about personal coaching options for you or your organisation, then please email martyn@martyndawes.co.uk to book in a friendly, impactful, conversation.

Taking the first step can be the hardest, but a journey always starts that way.

Let's Check in and See How We Are Doing

Emotional State	Score
I regularly feel Overwhelmed.	
My relationships suffer because of my poor mental state.	
I have no peace of mind and cannot relax or switch off.	
I am on medication for low moods, anxiety, depression, or other mental health issue.	
I am using alcohol, recreational drugs, or another addiction to help my mental state.	
I feel I cannot do anything right.	
I feel guilty when I have time off from work.	
I feel like a failure.	
Total Score:	

We can all get that overwhelmed feeling from time to time. But what is it? Where does it come from? How can we prevent it? How can we feel better in our day to day lives?

Written in short sections with an easy to read style, *The Overwhelmed Manager* gives practical advice to social care managers in a way that is accessible to all.

'.....has really helped, and I'm normally not a book reader but this one I've struggled to put it down'

' It's fantastic- I couldn't put it down'

'I'm a quarter of the way through this book and its affected my subconscious self. I keep finding myself stopping and questioning my reactions'

'Great book really enjoying the read and working on some of the points it's raised.'

For further information visit:
www.theoverwhelmedmanager.com

ISBN 978-1-7399444-0-7



9 781739 944407 >