

## STEP

# 1

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## Reclaim Your Mentality

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To see with one's own eyes, to feel and judge without succumbing to the suggestive power of the fashion of the day, to be able to express what one has seen and felt in a trim sentence or even in a cunningly wrought word. Is that not glorious? Is it not a proper subject for congratulation?

**ALBERT EINSTEIN, 1934**

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**R**ARE IS THE PERSON who becomes rich working for someone else. Rarer still is the inventor whose ideas get through the scientific peer-review process or the revolutionary artist loved immediately by the critics. How many companies that are household names today were created by a consenting group of people sitting in a meeting room? Companies as diverse as Disney, Mattel, and Apple started in a home garage and were driven by the inspiration of just one or two people.

Being successful in anything requires a high degree of individualism. Individualism requires control of mentality. I'm not going to insist that you can change yourself with positive thinking; that can help you feel better about the

life you have, but ultimately what you want is a better life. That's what I'm going to help you with.

Reclaiming your mentality is about becoming the person you were born to be—an individual with the power to think for yourself and with an unlimited potential to achieve great things. Getting out of the quicksand of your life means you must recognize yourself as one among the flock, and win back your identity through control of mentality. It can be the difference between life and death.

## A Matter of Life and Death

**B**Y 1970, THE DOCTORS called Audrey a walking miracle. She called herself “one of God’s little works in progress.” Born in 1929, in Liverpool, England, a decade before World War II demolished half the city, she was always a pretty, petite girl, with black, wavy hair. Although Liverpool was a blue-collar working city, her family enjoyed a middle-class lifestyle, and Audrey was the apple of her father’s eye.

At the outbreak of the war, she refused to join the thousands of women and children who were evacuated to the countryside. Instead, her father dug an air-raid shelter at the end of their small garden. Because of its strategic importance to the war effort, Liverpool was the most heavily bombed city in England aside from London. Every night from September 1940 through the final German blitz in January 1942, the family huddled in their damp shelter as the world above them shuddered.

Audrey’s neighbors were some of the four thousand lives lost. However, her home survived two direct hits from incendiary bombs. The family escaped physical injury, but her mother’s nerves were shattered. While her father continued his risky engineering work at the port, Audrey took over running the household.

Although life remained tough in the late war years, the family returned to a normal routine. Each evening when the clock on the mantelpiece chimed six o'clock, Audrey made a mug of fresh tea and hurried to the garden gate to greet her father as he returned from work. One sunny evening as she waited for him to appear round the corner at the end of the street, a huge explosion rocked the sidewalk. She watched as a fireball rose into the sky above the port. The mug slipped from her hand and as it smashed on the floor she knew intuitively it was bad news.

A munitions ship in the harbor had exploded just as everyone was heading home. Audrey's father survived the initial blast, but eventually died from his wounds.

Well-meaning friends and relatives wanted to put Audrey and her brother into care and her mother into a rest home. Audrey fought them all to keep her family together. With no income coming into the household, a younger brother to look after, and a mother who had withdrawn from the world, she left school at thirteen years of age and made money by scrubbing the steps of the wealthy. Her bubbly personality and the cheeky sense of humor she inherited from her father endeared her to her customers. Soon she was trusted to do their laundry and housework. At sixteen, she took a job in a factory.

After several years, with her mother recovering and the war behind them, Audrey was promoted to a supervisory role. She had enough income to start a savings account and plucked up the courage to go to a bank. In a time when a bank manager was as revered as a doctor in the community, this took nerve for a young woman.

Observing her discomfort, a young bank teller came to her aid, completed the paperwork, and helped her open an account. Chatting nervously, Audrey realized they had been at adjoining schools before the war. She agreed to meet him for afternoon tea the following weekend. Two years later, they married.

The bank teller, Harry, was a restless man. Having completed his conscripted service in the Royal Air Force, he found it difficult to adjust to a regular working schedule. He left the bank and tried his hand at several businesses. Friends and relatives criticized the couple. There was a postwar recession in the country. Work was hard to find, and in the views of others, Harry had turned his back on job security. People thought they had lost their senses and were not shy about saying so.

Although the criticism angered Harry, Audrey ignored it in the same way she had ignored those who told her a thirteen-year-old girl could not keep a family together. Literally barefoot and pregnant, she was at Harry's side as they sold fruit and vegetables from a market stall. The business started well, but they expanded too quickly, renting a larger stall and purchasing a bigger van. When the operation failed, Harry, a reasonable handyman, turned to making coffee tables and ottomans for wholesale trade, and Audrey learned how to wield a drill.

By 1962, they had three hungry children to feed, and the debts were piling up. An eviction notice arrived. They rented a shop next to a railway crossing and lived in the three rooms above it. The shop was named after the three children, but it was in a poor part of town where the locals could not afford Harry's furniture. More debts came due, and another eviction notice arrived.

They bundled their three children and all their belongings into an old truck and escaped the city. This only increased the volume of criticism the young couple received from everyone they knew, especially their parents. When the children questioned why everyone was angry with Dad, Audrey brushed it aside. "They just envy our freedom," she told them. "Life is an adventure. Who knows what tomorrow will bring?"

The truck coughed and spluttered through the countryside until it choked to a stop in a small village, deep in the Welsh

countryside. Locals pointed out a vacant but derelict farmhouse. Hardly daring to believe their luck in finding tenants, the owners accepted a meager monthly rent.

Built in 1601, it had the original boulder walls and black slate floors. The windows were cracked and the roof needed serious repair. A breeze howled through rotted window frames and coated everything with ancient plaster dust. Ever the optimist, Audrey told her family they had found a bargain. She set everyone to work turning it into a home, and somehow managed to feed the family from pots hung over a wood fire.

Leaving the confines of the inner city for the open space of the countryside was like entering the pages of *The Chronicles of Narnia* for the children. Harry found a regular job as a meat truck driver. Audrey made fast friends in the village. Life for the family was on the upswing, but the criticism in letters or over the phone never let up.

Having lived in Liverpool her whole life, Audrey thrived in the clean air and open countryside. A lover of animals, she had soon filled the farmhouse with stray lambs, rabbits, cats, and two old donkeys who wandered up the lane one day. With wild berries, herbs, and elderflowers in abundance, the larder was stocked with homemade jellies and chutneys. The children ate apples and plums off the trees and became adept at growing vegetables.

In the winter of 1969, while having a stand-up wash in icy water, Audrey found “a few lumps and bumps.” After a period of hospital visits, the family doctor warned Audrey she had advanced breast cancer and had less than six months to live.

In those days, the pronouncements of a doctor were like voodoo curses. If he said you were going to die, people accepted it. Mention of the nearest cancer hospital brought sharp intakes of breath. “She’ll go in upright and come out horizontal” was the general sentiment of the villagers. The word *cancer* was only

muttered under the breath, and many of the isolated villagers feared it was contagious. When they saw Audrey walking down a lane, people changed direction, and the ignorant pointed. No one wanted to befriend a woman with a death sentence.

The main cause of these habitual reactions was unprecedented media coverage of cancer deaths in the 1960s. People who had worked in the shipyards had been exposed to asbestos for decades. In Liverpool, everyone knew someone who had died of lung cancer. Smoking was still fashionable, and now stars of stage and screen were making mournful headlines. Adding drama to the fear, stories of children fighting leukemia, previously absent from the news, started to feature prominently in the national press.

Audrey and Harry agreed to keep the news secret from the children. Unable to handle the burden, Harry told his oldest child, a daughter, and admonished her to keep it to herself. Within an hour, she told the older of her two brothers, and that night he whispered it to the youngest.

A dark cloud descended over the previously happy household, but Audrey refused to accept that she only had a few months to live. She considered it not as a threat to her own existence but to that of her three children. What stronger power exists than that of a mother protecting her young?

She told anyone who cared to listen that nothing was going to stop her from living long enough to see all three of her children grow up and safely leave her nest. She refused to match the gloomy expressions around her. She berated relatives for their lack of fighting spirit. She walked to the village shop every day until the locals stopped treating her like a leper. She even refused to let the reverend include her name in prayers at Sunday service. She refused to react in the way other people expected.

Seeing the frightened faces of her children, she called a family meeting. She told them, "No one tells me when to die. I decide

that, and I alone. I am not leaving until I am good and ready. If any of you try using this as an excuse to skip homework or feel sorry for yourselves, you'll have me to answer to." Seeing such steely determination, no one dared argue.

One day, the middle child spied her through a half-closed door when she was alone in the kitchen. She grimaced in pain, dropped a dish she was washing, and rubbed her chest. Sighing, she looked out of the small window up to a gray sky. As if admonishing a naughty child, she wagged her finger at the clouds. "If you think I'm leaving now to come see you when they're not even grown, you've got another think coming! I am not done here yet. When I am ready to leave, I will let you know. Until then I have work to do."

Audrey confounded the medical experts when she made a rapid recovery from a mastectomy operation, followed by several courses of chemotherapy and radiotherapy. The hospital staff liked her because she always had a smile and a joke to offer. She was genuinely interested in them. She knew all about their love lives, their families, and their birthdays.

Despite having a worse prognosis than many of the people around her, she encouraged other patients to be positive. "What if we are going to die?" she would ask. "At least enjoy those candies your visitor brought in. No one on their deathbed was ever heard to mutter that they were glad they left that last chocolate in the box!"

When she lost her hair as a side effect of the chemotherapy, she had everyone in the hospital try on the wigs that were offered. When even the stiffest of the oncologists completed his ward round with blonde pigtails dangling down his back, the place was in an uproar. When Audrey's natural hair returned, it was completely gray, and she cried for the first and only time.

She saw that some of the other patients did not get many visitors, and the hospital food was limited. At home, the kitchen



was turned into a bakery, and the children were taught all the necessary skills. She taught them to cook, and supervised as they took turns making the Sunday roast dinner for the family. Subtly, while providing better food for the lonelier patients, Audrey had ensured her children could take care of themselves. Perhaps because they were enjoying the cookies she always handed out in the outpatient clinic, the doctors extended her life sentence to three years.

Just as things were improving, she suffered another form of cancer, and it was like receiving a second death sentence, even while the first was being served. More operations and treatments prodded at her spirit, and different doctors confirmed that she really did only have a few months left to live. She told them they had it wrong the first time, and this would be no different.

At the same time, Harry lost his job. Work was scarce, and after a few months of trying to find alternatives, he gave up looking altogether. With welfare support limited, Audrey found a part-time position, serving behind the counter of a busy delicatessen in the nearest town. The money was not great, but she was able to bring home leftover meats, pâté, bread, and cheese for the family. She developed a network of relationships with other shopkeepers, and enjoyed interacting with customers. She said it gave her something to take her mind off herself.

The country was in a deep recession, and the government had slowed production down by enforcing a three-day working week for manufacturing. Everyone endured rolling electric blackouts in the winter of 1974. For Audrey's family, this was not an issue. Their utilities were often severed due to nonpayment, so they had learned to cook just as well on an open fire. With the food network Audrey had established in town for leftover cuts from the butcher's shop, and expired food items from the bakers, the family ate better than most. Despite her illness and

circumstances, she let nothing get in the way of caring for her children.

The cancer spread to the bones in her spine and femurs. When she could not get a ride into town, she walked the five miles to and from work every day. It was a tough walk for a fit person, but it was a test of endurance for a woman using a stick to disguise a limp.

Despite the pain, she enjoyed being with nature. Whenever school was out, one or more of her children would keep her company.

As her movement deteriorated, some customers could be rude when she took a long time to complete their order in the shop. She would throw out a joke like “I should take less gin with my cornflakes in the morning” and not let anyone’s bad manners make her focus on the disability.

She built up a loyal clientele at the shop, and business was never better for the owners, who were now regular visitors to the farmhouse. After school, her children would visit the shop, and help out with chores. In many ways, the shop became an extension of home . . . only warmer!

The doctors gave up predicting her demise. When they told her how ill she was supposed to feel, she would shush them with a wave of her hand. It became like a game. Whenever someone told her something bad or tried to show empathy, she developed the knack of deflecting it with a joke. Then she would reach for a better thought, as if being positive deleted the negativity of others.

In 1978, Audrey’s daughter joined the police force, fell in love with a colleague, and married within a year. Just nineteen, the newlyweds found jobs and a home just a short drive away from the family, so they could visit easily. The youngest child joined the Royal Air Force. After finishing basic training, he took a position that allowed him to be home every weekend.

The middle son joined the Royal Navy College. Audrey was intensely proud because working-class children rarely qualified for the officer training. One day, she asked God for an extra favor. She had agreed to stay alive long enough to see her children fly the nest safely, which technically they had all done. Now she decided she wanted to see her son graduate as an officer.

In 1980 and 1981, Audrey needed several more courses of chemotherapy and two operations to repair her deteriorating bones. The pain medicine turned her physical features into those of an elderly woman, but her spirit and sense of humor were untouched.

Despite the discomfort of a 300-mile trip in a vehicle that was falling to bits, Harry and Audrey traveled to their son's graduation. The Queen Mother was the guest of honor. With her legs invaded by cancer, Audrey still managed a perfect curtsy. Audrey knew now she could leave in peace, but she had one more task to complete.

The newly minted naval officer took compassionate leave to return home with his parents. Audrey was failing and needed weekly trips to the hospital for pain medicine and chemotherapy. He took his turn taking her for the treatments.

At the hospital, they were met by Audrey's favorite nurse. The son watched as they greeted each other with bear hugs and exchanged jokes. For the son, it was love at first sight.

Audrey died before their wedding ceremony. She insisted on dying at home in the derelict farmhouse she had come to love. A bed was moved downstairs to the lounge, and the family took turns living in the one room during her last days.

Sitting next to her on the bed, the naval officer held her hand as she drifted in and out of consciousness. He felt her grip tighten. She opened her eyes, and seemed alert for the first time in days. She smiled and looked over to the window. The

age and pain washed away from her features, and she let out a small cry. It was not one of pain but more like that of a little girl in delight.

“Dad!” She shouted. Expecting to see his father entering the room, the son looked up. No one was there. Audrey gestured to the window. “Son, this is my father, your Granddad William. You have never met before, but he knows all about you. Say hello.” The son waved at the air. “He says I still owe him a fresh mug of tea.” They were her last words that she spoke to him.

The farmhouse was in a village of less than 100 residents, but more than 200 people attended Audrey’s funeral in May 1982. The twelfth-century church had never been as full. The family recognized the villagers and some of their friends, but more than half the congregation were strangers to them.

The attendees included some of Audrey’s childhood friends from Liverpool. As there had never been any mention of it in her letters, most were under the impression that her illness had been sudden. Several customers from the shop she worked at were there.

At the back of the church sat Mr. Garrad, a hard man who everyone in the village gave a wide berth. His wife had committed suicide many years before, and he raised his three boys on his own. An intensely private man, no one knew much about the family. Fighting to control his emotions, he confessed to Audrey’s family that for years she had secretly given him food and clothes for the boys, and had often sneaked down to his house to help with cooking or housework when he was forced to work late. Afterward, he placed fresh wildflowers on her grave every week.

A girl the same age as Audrey’s daughter was inconsolable. She explained how her mentally ill father had refused to allow “just a girl” to wear anything but rags to school. She was teased so mercilessly that she played truant. Audrey had secretly taken her

daughter's spare set of clothes once a week to the delicatessen where she worked. There she had arranged for the girl to change from the rags before and after school. Now a grown woman, she added, "I owe your mother everything!"

Audrey's body is buried on the brow of a hill at the edge of the graveyard, from where there is an unobstructed view across the fields to the farmhouse.



Although Audrey was never rich monetarily, she achieved something far more important in her life. In my personal and business life, I have met few people who so perfectly understood the power of controlling their mentality. If this kind of control can put off death for fourteen years, imagine what else it can do.



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## Master of Mentality

### WHAT IS MENTALITY?

**A**UDREY WAS MY MOTHER, and I am the middle child. Thirty years later, I am still happily married to Audrey's favorite chemotherapy nurse. How my mother reacted to her situation inspired me even at a young age. When I was growing up, she was always telling me to pause before I spoke "to give your reaction time to sort itself out." It was sound advice, and I still try to follow it to this day.

Because she was in control of what she allowed into her mind and then managed her thoughts quietly, she always chose her reaction to anything carefully. I remember being beside her hospital bed when some doctors whispered her prognosis amongst themselves but loud enough for us all to hear. I watched her eyes as she computed what they were saying, and then how she took her time to compose herself before speaking. The way she thought was not as important as the way she reacted to her thoughts. Her reaction changed the outcome for herself and all those with whom she interacted. She gave strength to everyone around the hospital bed and, in so doing, gained some herself.

My abiding memories of my teenage years are not of her chronic pain but of all the laughter in our home, her great cooking, and our stumbling walks in the country. That is because she refused to let things inside and outside her mind dictate how she was supposed to react. She wanted family life to be normal and to complete her duties as mother.

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When it comes to battling disease, there is mixed evidence for the power of mind over matter. It is also unfair to give the impression, as some writers do, that because a person chooses not to fight their illness that it makes them weak or wrong. The connection between the body, mind, and spirit is too complex for anyone living currently to comprehend. People have a right to choose their reaction, whether it is to fight or accept. I have, however, worked with cancer patients for more than twenty years. I have seen many of what the doctors described as “walking miracles,” and the only difference I was able to detect between them and their fellow patients in almost identical situations was their control of mentality.

My mother used her situation to teach me many things, and she always had a philosophical phrase to throw at me. She told me to take nothing at face value, to seek my own truth, not someone else’s version of it. She told me over and over again to look the world in the eye and then I could be anything I wanted to be. Most of all, she taught me that my thoughts and reactions are my own responsibility, and that only I can decide how to feel about anything. “No one can make you *feel* sad or angry,” she would admonish. “That is a choice you make for yourself as a reaction to the situation you perceive. You can just as easily choose to ignore or laugh about it.”

Even now, I do not have her sense of mentality control, and I often let my emotions rule my head. Every now and then though, I remember her advice, pause a moment, and choose a different reaction. Just those small changes in behavior have completely changed the outcome of my life.



Over the years, I have read dozens of autobiographies of famous men and women who could be considered self-made. At first, I approached their life stories with cynicism. I expected to find a key advantage that they had and that I did not, such as a family connection or a financial helping hand. What I found, however, were mostly disadvantaged people who developed an unshakeable belief in their ability to control their lives. They didn't conform to what the world expected of them. They stood out from the crowd, and when presented with the same challenges as others, chose a different and individual reaction. With their evidence and my mother's coaching I began to change my life.

As a child, I suffered from sectarian bullying, and at one time felt the weight of the world on me. One of the first biographies to inspire me was that of a woman known as Madame C. J. Walker, who was born in 1867 to parents who had been slaves. She started life with almost every disadvantage you could imagine: born on a plantation, orphaned, married at fourteen, then a single mother when her husband abandoned her. She had every excuse needed to talk herself out of her potential for success, and I felt a similar predilection for a life of mediocrity.

For a black female entrepreneur today, the barriers to success are many; back then, they must have seemed insurmountable. In 1865 and 1866, state governments in the South enacted laws designed to regulate the lives of the former slaves. These measures, differing from state to state, were actually revisions of the earlier slave codes that had regulated that institution. Some common elements appeared in many of the codes:

- Race was defined by blood; the presence of any amount of black blood made one black.
- Employment was required of all freedmen/women; violators faced vagrancy charges.

- Freedmen could not assemble without the presence of a white person.
- Freedmen were assumed to be agricultural workers and their duties and hours were tightly regulated.
- Freedmen were not to be taught to read or write.
- Public facilities were segregated.
- Owning of guns, and in some states a knife or fork, was forbidden for freedmen.
- Violators of these laws were subject to being whipped or branded.

From this background, however, an uneducated, persecuted, female daughter of slaves became, according to *The Guinness Book of World Records*, the first female self-made millionaire in America.

I was struck by her unshakeable belief. Just like my mother, she refused to let the outside world determine how she was supposed to think and react to any circumstance. I realized that my perceived hardships were nothing when compared to Madame Walker's.

As a child, I used to play cowboys and Indians, mimicking the atrocious Hollywood twist on history in mock gunfights around our farmhouse with an imitation Colt .45. Many years later, I read Samuel Colt's story. His mother died when he was eleven, and his father's business failed soon after, sending him into despair and the family into poverty. His situation was not so different from mine at a similar age, and I was struck by how he refused to use it as an excuse.

In every biography, I recognized how each person had to become a master of their mentality in order to get out of the quicksand of their life. Key to that control was their ability to think and react as an individual, and not as a group, society, or trend dictated.

Using the same self-control, I have changed my mentality from one of poverty to that of a multimillionaire, and my lifestyle with it. I changed thoughts of expecting to fail to ones of anticipating success. I overcame issues of self-esteem to attract my soul mate. When I was twenty-nine, I also chose to ignore doctors who told me to “get my affairs in order,” which was their politically correct way of telling me I was about to die. Two days after surgery, I checked myself out of the hospital, and drove 200 miles to start a new job. The abdominal stitches had me bent double like an impression of the Hunchback of Notre Dame, but as I stumbled around the new office, I claimed it was a soccer injury. That was more than twenty years ago. To escape the feeling of being in quicksand, controlling one’s mentality is the first essential step.

I began this part of the book with a quotation from Albert Einstein, one of my heroes. What fascinated me most about Einstein’s life were not his many scientific achievements, but his contributions to society. During the last twenty-two years of his life, while J. Edgar Hoover and his FBI conducted a top-secret campaign against him, he was actively and passionately involved in numerous struggles for social justice, especially antiracism or what he called “America’s Worst Disease.” At the time, Einstein’s outspoken support for those attacked by fascism abroad and McCarthyism at home often made front-page news, and he was vilified at every opportunity by a negative public relations campaign orchestrated from Washington.

All this was on top of being condemned by his scientific peers as a lunatic, before technology caught up and his theories were validated. Like Madame C.J. Walker, Samuel Colt, and Audrey, Albert Einstein was a *master of mentality*, and I offer this definition and equation in his honor:

Mentality is defined as a habitual mental attitude that determines how you will interpret and react to situations. The mentality equation has three elements:

- **The situation** (what we see, hear, smell, taste, sense, and what the media or people in our lives can make us feel about any of that),
- **The thought** (triggered by how we are made to feel), and
- **The reaction** (how we choose to discharge the emotional thought).

## **Situation + Thought = Reaction**

The quality of our thoughts is important, and books on positive thinking tend to stop there. It is, however, the next step that determines a path of success or frustration: how we react to what we think. Under normal circumstances, we don't exert any control over what we see and hear from the people around us or through the media. Our thoughts tend to be triggered by an automatic emotional response to what we see and hear. Then we react, and for most people it is habitual.

If you have not managed to control any of the sensory input or the thoughts that they trigger, then you let your reaction be influenced by the situation. You have placed responsibility for your life in the minds, opinions, and influence of the outside stimuli. They tell you that you have six months to live, and you die. They tell you the economy is in free fall and you decide it is the wrong time to start the business of your dreams. They tell you you'll soon qualify for assisted living, so you determine that you are too old to go back to college.

To get out of the quicksand, you have to filter what you allow into your mind so that your decisions belong to you as an individual, and not to the fashion or trend of any group. You must choose your own thoughts and the reactions you have to them. You must become an individual again, something most people have not experienced since birth.

## HOW MENTALITY IS FORMED

The moment we are born is the most pure in our entire lives. We have seen and heard nothing. Therefore, we have nothing to contemplate or to react to. We are born an individual, and with unlimited potential. One second later, a well-meaning giant with a hand the size of a spade smacks us on the bottom. It is commonly taught that we don't feel pain in the first two weeks of life, but still it startles us. Because of the rude awakening, and the fact that we realize in the same moment that we are away from the warmth and security of the womb, we react. To our parents, our cry is the greatest sound in the universe (until that first sleepless night at home!).

Most parents do not know the secrets of success, so our newborn state of mentality is unguarded. Like a paper towel soaking up water, we absorb everything we sense in our environment. On the one hand, we learn quickly. On the other, we cannot filter anything. We take in the feelings and moods, the opinions and reactions, of those around us. Our state of mind fills up quickly, and most psychologists agree that our mentalities change very little after the age of five. We quickly cease to be individual as we conform to the family around us.

As we age, we usually develop the same habits, and react the same way to outside stimuli, as those we are associated with, such as our parents, school friends, coworkers, or sports and television idols. We mimic their behavior and take on the same values as the groups to which we now belong. We are attracted and repulsed by similar things. The result is that we continually seek experiences that reinforce our learned group behavior and beliefs.

We are encouraged to be team players in a culture of democracy in which the decision or victory goes to the person with the

most votes or highest score. In business, we find ourselves in an endless round of meetings in which consensus is the goal, and the lone dissenter is looked upon as a troublemaker. Our culture today shows little tolerance for the genius or the singular voice or anyone who might react unconventionally. Before long, most people will lose all sense of self.

The American dream, however, was not built by a think tank. The country grew on the backs of pioneers. Individuals, armed with little more than an idea and an unshakeable will to survive, achieved unprecedented success in a fresh, new country.

You might be reading this book on a device invented by Apple Inc., a company that is valued at more than \$500 billion today, as I type these words on another of their life-changing inventions. Apple's success is attributed to the pioneering spirit of Steven Paul Jobs.

Steve was put up for adoption just after he was born. His adoptive parents named him and brought him up in California. When he was eleven, Steve simply refused to go back to school because he was bored, and his parents moved him to a different school that offered electronics classes. He never conformed to what the world expected of him. He developed a reputation as a loner and had what his teachers called "an odd way of looking at things." He had issues with some teachers, who could not accept that he did not want to fit in with the class mentality that challenged nothing being taught to them. Like Einstein's teachers thought of him, Jobs's high-school teachers considered him disruptive.

In a 2007 interview with *PC World*, his partner Steve Wozniak revealed that they first met during Wozniak's college years, while Jobs was in high school. "We both had pretty much sort of an independent attitude about things in the world, we were both smart enough to think things up for ourselves and not have followed the common disregard of the day, like counterculture.

Steve was more a part of the counterculture thinking and I was really disclosed to it.”

This individualism pattern followed Jobs into the workplace, where his manager at his first company, Atari, considered him “a nightmare to work with.” When Jobs and Wozniak developed their idea of a personal computer, both Hewlett-Packard and Atari rejected their idea as ridiculous.

Had Steve Jobs accepted the common opinion that surrounded him, who knows what would have become of him? History shows that he had an unshakeable belief in his own mind.

This individual went on to change the lives of a billion people. Had he conformed to group mentality or peer pressure as a child, we might never have heard of him, and you would not be reading this on your mobile electronic device.

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Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma—which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.

**STEVE JOBS**

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More than once in my life, I have also been called “a nightmare to work with.” I have been told by dozens of people that I had my head in the clouds. Employers have reprimanded me for not toeing the company line. My peer group has ridiculed my lack of experience and unique business models. Yet here I am, a serial entrepreneur, writing this book. I do not dare put

myself in the same pioneering bracket as a Madame Walker or a Steve Jobs, but it has been a blast of a trip just the same.

One of the secrets has been to control my mentality. It might all sound as if we either have to become a genius or a spiritual master. We do not. Reclaiming mentality is simple and anyone can do it, starting right now.

## RECLAIMING MENTALITY IS SIMPLE

Most people ignore a book's introduction. We pick it off the shelf, form an opinion of the title, read the back cover, and scan a few sentences of chapter one. The process of deciding whether or not to read it takes about eleven seconds. With that in mind, I kept my introduction short. If you skipped it, let me reiterate two key points.

### #1. The Power of Three.

The number three has been significant throughout human history. It is the tripartite nature of the world as heaven, earth, and waters or the three phases of the moon. It is human as body, soul, and spirit. Whether it's the Holy Trinity or the Yin-Yang-Tao, any person can understand and apply a concept through an appreciation of three simple steps.

Think of a television. It is a complex thing, but if we understand the three simple steps of the on/off switch, channel button, and volume control, we can all have an enjoyable viewing experience. We don't have to become expert in the science of fluorescence.

So it is with understanding the concept of success. Everything in life can be understood enough to be useful to us when it is broken down into a few key principles. We need neither the



detail nor the expert knowledge to get the benefits from a subject. When it comes to success, I believe you need to understand only three things.

The smell of a freshly baked loaf of bread excites me. (Well, different things excite us as we age!) Learning a lot about individual ingredients is useful to a professional chef, but I just like to eat fresh bread. I don't need to understand the chemistry that takes place in the oven in order to satisfy my hunger. So too you don't need to grasp anything deeper than the need to control the inputs into your state of mind in order to pull yourself out of the quicksand.

After I started my first company, there was not enough money in the business to justify drawing a wage. I subsidized myself by doing a couple of consulting projects on the side. For one, George Rathmann was the company chairman, and in 2002 I was invited to meet him for an interview. In 1999, here's how *Forbes* magazine described George Rathmann:

George Rathmann is the Bill Gates of biotechnology . . . Like his high tech counterpart, Rathmann has an uncanny knack for timing: He pinpointed a new industry ripe for rapid growth, one that needed both a technologist and an entrepreneur. Like Gates, he built the single most prosperous company his industry has ever known, the Southern California-based Amgen . . . And like Gates, he has become a legend in the process, taking on, at times, a godlike aura in the eyes of industry insiders . . .

After only a brief stab at retirement, Rathmann became CEO of a second startup, the Bothell, Washington-based biotech company Icos. This is where the lives of Rathmann and Gates literally met as Gates was convinced to invest in biotech. In 1990 Gates invested \$5 million in Icos, and in subsequent years invested more than \$17 million. Icos became the largest biotechnology company in Washington before being sold to Eli Lilly for \$2.3 billion in 2007.

Over dinner, he grilled me more than I had expected. I wanted to impress him but seemed to be failing. Then his wife arrived as we were selecting desserts. With a twinkle in her eye, she asked, “Has he been giving you a tough time? He said he was going to be hard on you to see what you are made of! I felt sorry for you, so thought I’d rescue you before you get indigestion.”

With his cover blown, the interrogation became a general discussion on the secrets to business success. When I was getting into detail about plans for my company’s future, he held up his hand to stop me. “You don’t know what business you are in until you get into the business!” he said. “Don’t get bogged down in the detail. Just get started. The rest works itself out.” It is one of the best pieces of business advice I have ever received.

In the same spirit I offer it to you here. I may provide a lot of detail in the three simple steps. Take George Rathmann’s advice, and once you get the concept, just apply it without worrying too much about the details of how or why it works.

## **#2. Change a Little, Change a Lot.**

The second piece of good news is that only small changes to mentality are required to make giant improvements in your quality of life. The metaphor I use to understand this is to think about a pool table that is neatly set up for a new game. The solid and striped balls rest in formation at the far end of the table, and have little to no purpose when they are resting. Your intention, however, is to turn the rack of inert balls into something different. The cue is your mentality, and the white ball’s movement is the reaction to your thoughts.

The very slightest change in angle between the tip of the cue (mentality) and the surface of the white ball has a vastly different impact on the outcome. Make the wrong angle, as I sometimes do when starting a game, and the white ball flies off the table,

while the rack of balls remains untouched. I am left feeling frustrated. If, however, I change the angle of the cue only slightly, the white ball smashes the rack of colored balls all over the table. It is a dramatic difference in outcome from a very small change in the angle of mentality, and the success of it feels fulfilling.

So too it is with changing your quality of life with these principles. Change a little and you can change a lot. In learning to control your mentality, you do not have to wear a purple kaftan and drink herbal tea all day. You simply have to make small, often subtle alterations to the way you think and react.

When you are sitting in front of your bank's lending officer, who is challenging your lack of business experience for the venture you want to start with borrowed money, how you react to the criticism or challenge determines whether you get the loan or not. It sounds obvious, but I have steered clear of investing in dozens of bright ideas simply because the person who was presenting to me reacted defensively or negatively to something I asked. Investors more often invest in the jockey (entrepreneur) than the horse (idea). There is no shortage of horses, but winning jockeys are hard to find.

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Like it or not, there is a thing that can be called The Millionaire Mentality. There is a frame of mind which puts an individual a long way ahead on the road to success.

J. PAUL GETTY

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## THE SUBTLE SECRET TO RECLAIMING MENTALITY

When asked her opinion on a particular conflict, Mother Theresa said, "I am not *against* war. I am *for* peace." In that marvelous

statement is the distillation of a dozen subjects from quantum physics to theology, and it is the essence of this first step. If you read the rest of this first step, and grasp nothing more than the meaning of this sentence, you would have enough knowledge to make a big difference in your life.

Yes, it starts to sound like feel-good ideology, but some of the world's most hardened industrialists promoted this mental imperative long before any self-help guru caught on to it. Andrew Carnegie was forced by poverty to seek employment as a bobbin boy in a cotton factory, earning \$1.20 a week. He rose to be the world's wealthiest man with a personal fortune equivalent to \$7 billion in today's value. He exhorted man (it was a macho world back in the 1850s) "to aspire to individualism, to ignore all that was missing in his environment, and to seek only improvement in *what he wants*."

We must change our thoughts from being *against* things we don't want to being *for* things we do want. It is that simple, just like I promised it would be. That is the subtle change in angle of the cue to the ball, and the outcome will astound you. It is, however, far from easy because it is a lifelong lifestyle change. To introduce that small change in our lives with consistency so that it becomes habitual, we first need to understand some of the key properties of thoughts and words. Understanding these properties will allow you to be more mindful and skillful in handling your mentality in critical situations.

## Properties of Thoughts

Many teachers of success theory base their philosophies on the premise that everything in life begins with a thought. They miss a key part of the creative process. *Nothing* is what comes first. Everything starts from nothing, including a thought. This may

sound odd coming from the mind of a hard-nosed businessman. It is, however, a self-evident and scientific fact. Every successful business comes from nothing. Every creative idea springs from nowhere. Before somebody had the idea, it did not exist.

In my own experiences, the ideas for companies and investments popped into my head quite out of nowhere. It is important to realize this fact because in most cases people are just too busy to notice. They could pop up while a mother is tearing her hair out getting the kids ready for school. The ideas never stood a chance, crushed by the anxiety of racing to meet the school bus. Perhaps they arise while watching television, but the images of a Wall Street crash will destroy them before the thinker even notices.

In my own cases of good ideas, they remained in my head, and became reality only because I had learned to have stronger control of my mentality. The world screamed through the television at me that it was a crazy time to start something new, and everyone I knew, other than my wife, didn't think I was capable of succeeding. Without knowing the techniques to control mentality, the ideas would have been crushed in moments.

The concept of nothing is difficult for us to compute mentally. As soon as we try to conceptualize it, we give it identity and form, and it ceases to be nothing. In essence, we destroy it by thinking about it. So let's not try too hard. The only thing to contemplate, and the only reason I make the distinction, is that because everything comes from nothing, then in nothing must be all of potential. The closer, therefore, we can get our minds to a state of nothing, the more potential for success we would have. We will come back to this in step two.

A thought is a thing that you created out of the nothing. Thoughts can be identified by modern imaging techniques as waves of electrical energy flowing in the brain. Having been created, thoughts have three fascinating properties:

## 1. Thoughts are high energy.

First, we must accept that all things have energy, which can be scientifically identified as a frequency of vibration at a quantum level, or a small footprint in the ether, or indeed, waves of electrical impulses.

Over the past three decades, *string theory* has increasingly captured the imagination of physicists. Hundreds of researchers around the world now hammer away at its equations every day. They consider it the greatest step forward in science since Albert Einstein and Max Planck introduced the key ideas of relativity and quantum mechanics about a century ago. It is what Einstein described as “like reading the mind of God.”

String theory holds that everything in the universe is composed of tiny vibrating strings of energy. In this view, every particle in your body, every speck of light that lets you read these words, and every force of gravity that pushes you into your chair is just a variant of this one fundamental entity. The denser something is, the lower its vibration, and the smaller its footprint.

On our world, humans interpret a stone as being denser than a tree, and vibrating at a slower frequency. A tree is denser than a human. After nothingness, a thought is the least dense thing in our experience. Therefore, its first intriguing property is that it has the highest energy of anything we can conceptualize. It can kill or cure, invent a nuclear weapon or a romantic moment.

## 2. Energy cannot be destroyed, so no thought can ever be deleted.

The Law of Conservation of Energy is a law of physics that states the total amount of energy in an isolated system (such as a thought) remains constant over time. It cannot be destroyed, and it does not deplete if we simply

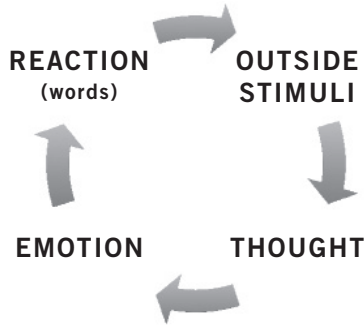
forget we had it. Einstein's theory of relativity shows that mass is energy, and the two are interchangeable. Energy becomes mass and vice versa. A thought has no other role than to try to become its physical equivalent (mass). Therefore, because their energy remains conserved, the reality of your life experience today is the result of the thoughts you emitted in your life up to now, regardless of whether you remember having them. You may not accept that accountability right now, but I hope by the end of this book you will both understand and accept that your current experience is the result of prior thoughts and your reaction to them.

### 3. Thoughts are neutral.

The third, and somewhat disturbing, property of a thought is that it has no consciousness with which to assess the merits of itself. The thought itself does not think. It does not judge itself as good or bad. It simply exists as an isolated system. Therefore, all thoughts, whether we consider them good or bad ones to have, contain equal power to become reality.

Ah, there's the rub. Every thought eventually becomes its own experience, energy converted into matter, without considering if that is good or bad for us. This is why control of mentality is critical to your success. Whatever you are *against* becomes your experience, and you get extra helpings of what you did not want: more dead-end job, more stupid boss, and more boredom. Whatever you are *for*, more of that comes your way. The only solution is to have more *for* thoughts than *against* thoughts, and to make those *for* thoughts bigger. That is the simple lifestyle change required to control mentality.

## Properties of Words



Lincoln scholar Douglas L. Wilson wrote: “To approach Lincoln’s presidency from the aspect of his writing is to come to grips with the degree to which his pen, to alter the proverb, became his sword, arguably his most powerful presidential weapon.” He noted that President Lincoln “responded to almost every important development during his presidency, and to many that were not so important, with some act of writing. Every word spoken, every line written was carefully mapped out.”

Theodore C. Blegen wrote, in a study of Lincoln’s writings: “He respected the power of words, and he wrote and spoke with clarity. He was able to put profound thoughts simply. He was sincere and earnest. He had both dignity and humor. He could rise to a lofty eloquence that has not been surpassed in the history of oratory. His language was pungent.”

When not in control of our mentality, our immediate reaction to a thought is usually to issue words, whether texted, written, or verbalized. We may react in other ways such as kicking a wall, crying, or laughing, but most times the habitual reaction issues in words. When we are emotional, the tongue can react like a semi-automatic weapon in the hands of a poltergeist. It is an issue for us because all words immediately trigger images.

In 2011, researchers demonstrated, by implanting electrodes directly into a part of participants’ brains, a striking method to



reconstruct words, based on the brain waves of patients who were thinking of those words. The technique, reported in *PLoS Biology* in 2012, relies on gathering electrical signals directly from patients' brains. Based on signals from listening to patients, a computer model was used to reconstruct the sounds of words of which patients were thinking.

A research team at the University of California, Berkeley monitored the brain waves of fifteen patients who were undergoing surgery for epilepsy or tumors, while playing audio of a number of different speakers reciting words and sentences. With the help of a computer model, when patients were presented with words to think about, the team was able to calculate which word the participants had chosen. They were even able to reconstruct some of the words, turning the brain waves they saw back into sound on the basis of what the computer model suggested those waves meant.

For example, if I tell you to try not to think of an elephant wearing pajamas, an image of just that flashes in your mind. You can't read, hear, or say "elephant wearing pajamas" without imagining it. Our brains are wired to trigger images from words and words from images instantaneously.

*A news bulletin just in says a highly placed person, close to the scene of the incident, and speaking on condition of anonymity, reported that the allegedly drunken elephant, wearing pink pajamas, tripped over a stone, crashed negligently into a tree, and rolled hopelessly out of control down a hill before plummeting into a raging sea.*

Because of the use of emotive words, that image will stay in your mind even longer. The combination of words and emotive language has a powerful effect on our brains. (It is, however, a story with a happy ending because elephants are remarkable swimmers and have been known to swim across oceans. This elephant turned up safe and was found innocent of all charges.)

There are many books available about the power of words. The only property that concerns us in the *Three Simple Steps* is that words trigger images, images trigger thoughts, and thoughts become reality. We must consider words as magic bullets that carry the power to create or destroy. Cast like a spell from a voice, pen, or keyboard, they have the ability to make or break us. They also have the power to energize or diminish anyone at whom we fire them.

Being aware of the properties of thoughts and the power of emotion-laden words gives you the toolbox to control mentality and maintain individual thought.

Imagine this scenario: you are sitting down to watch your favorite television program when a 30-second commercial tells you about a quick loan that can take away those expensive monthly credit card payments. Although you have no interest in the offer and see it for the snake-oil solution it is, that outside stimuli immediately creates in your mind an image of the credit card bill you received a few days ago, the one you have hidden in a drawer in the hopes it will go away.

You immediately think about how much you hate being trapped in debt. The thought *debt* is launched with the emotion of being *against* it. Without you realizing it, you just increased your burden. That thought has no option but to become the material equivalent. Even though it was triggered by outside stimuli, it is still your thought, and the material equivalent comes back to you as the source of the thought. Something will happen in your environment to continue your sense of outrage at being in debt. A storm might rage that night and you wake next morning to find you have the only house on the street that lost some roof tiles. Because you have no cash, you also have no choice but to go further into credit card debt to fix the damage.

You curse out loud. "This sucks! I hate being in debt." The words shoot into the universe with only a little less power than

thoughts. Those words trigger further images of you not being able to afford a vacation this year or the look of disappointment on your child's face when she can't have the brand of shoes she has been craving. The images happen so fast that you are barely aware of them.

The result will be that the experiences that show up in your life ensure you cannot afford to go on vacation, and your daughter is ashamed of her shoes. You might now feel like putting your foot through the television screen whenever that advertisement reruns, but it is a lot easier just to change how you react to your thoughts. The responsibility for them is yours. You own the thoughts and words. The difference between being in or out of the quicksand is merely taking responsibility for how you react to what you think. *Simple.*

Before I fully understood this, a friend and I worked in the same place. We had similar backgrounds, lifestyles, and challenges. She has watched me climb out of the quicksand and live an adventure that could be a book on its own. She, however, still works in the same job, one she now claims to hate. Her lifestyle has diminished in real terms over the years, and she is mired in debt. A doctor recently prescribed antidepressants for her.

Over many dinners, we have debated the importance of managing mentality. For some reason, she has never grasped this critical point about needing to direct one's own thoughts and words.

"How can it be?" she asks, "I don't want to be in debt. I hate debt. I'm fed up with always having to watch the pennies. When I don't want it, why do I keep getting it?"

I explain that the thought about not wanting debt manifests as a physical match of itself . . . the situation of not wanting debt. Something will happen in her life that will increase the hatred of debt. It is often an unexpected repair bill, but sometimes it's a "too good to refuse" offer for a piece of clothing, kitchen utensil, etc. Equally, it could be the tearful eyes of her son when

he wants a new bike to be cool like his friends. She can't stand to see him upset, so she uses the credit card to buy what she cannot yet afford.

The more we think about not wanting something, the more we are against it and reinforce that situation in our lives. The answer is simple, but my friend refuses to change. If she managed the thoughts in her head, created images of things she really did want, and carefully controlled what she said in person or over social media, her life would improve.

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## A Tip to Help

Although simple to conceptualize, it is not an easy thing to do in practice because we are all creatures of habit. To help me to remember the power of my thoughts and words, I borrowed a trick from my favorite classic novel, *Far From the Madding Crowd* by Thomas Hardy. Set in a time when word of mouth was the most common way to communicate and lack of clarity could be life-threatening, Gabriel fails to impress the woman he secretly loves: “Well, Miss—excuse the words—I thought you would like them. But I can’t match you, I know, in mapping out my mind upon my tongue.”

Mapping your mind onto your tongue is a great way to visualize mentality control. When that credit card bill arrives, you should replace your angry thoughts with a smile. Take a pause, and a deep breath, and think about your reaction. Map it out on your tongue with the same care as if you were drawing directions for someone. Say to yourself something like “I am debt-free, and celebrated my last credit card payment with a glass of my favorite wine, purchased with cash.”

Even though that is not your current experience, by thinking and speaking about what you really want, what you are *for*, rather than what you are *against*, you create the possibility of a better

outcome. Better thoughts go out into the universe. The words you used have triggered even better images of a happy family sharing in your success, and the emotional feeling of a weight lifting off your shoulders. All those new thoughts and images have no choice but to become your reality. It might not happen overnight, but when consistently practiced, this small lifestyle change will have dramatic effects on your experiences.

Some might say this all sounds mysterious, but it is the basic physical law of conservation of energy. People generally accept it holds true in the laboratory or in nature. They do not, however, usually consider how it must hold true in their own lives. To get out of the quicksand, create better thoughts and words. That is all it takes. Until you habitually do this, it will prove hard to reinvent yourself and get that better life you want. Start with small steps in situations that we encounter many times a day.

## **Change a Little, Change a Lot, Every Day**

Most of you can recall a time when you were feeling perfectly well, and then a colleague at work says, “Are you feeling okay? You look tired.” Suddenly, a picture of you looking tired flashes in your mind, with gray skin and bags under your eyes. Perhaps a memory of when you were last sick cuts in. You recall you went to bed late last night, and although you had not felt tired until then, it makes sense that you should. Very quickly, those thoughts change into their material equivalent. I have lost count of the number of times I have overheard this sort of conversation, and then the recipient says something like “Now that you mention it, I do feel a bit weary.”

- If you don’t feel well or do feel tired, never tell anyone that. Instead, tell them “I could use more energy” or “once I am fit and healthy, I’ll be fine.” Every time you

say something like “I’m feeling depressed” or “I feel down today,” you are simply adding to your burden, albeit unintentionally. I had an appointment yesterday in which the person attending to me told me twelve times in twenty minutes how depressed she felt because of a personal crisis in her life. With every statement I could see the weight pressing down on her. A normally tall, straight, attractive woman, she looked stooped and weary. As much as I felt sympathy for her, I wanted to cut out her tongue to save her.

- Avoid use of limiting words such as “cannot” when referring to yourself. Instead, reach for a higher energy statement such as: “When I can . . .” Avoid using the words “perhaps,” “hopefully,” “one day,” and “maybe” because when you use those words, what you are really saying is “I’d like to but I can’t,” and the universe hears your thoughts clearly.
- Eliminate destructive words such as “hate” from your vocabulary. For instance, replace “I hate it when that happens . . .” with “I prefer it when . . .” Again, we do not need to be perfect, and I mess up plenty of times. We just need to attempt a few small changes to make a big improvement in outcome. Before I wrote this section, I was with a friend who kept telling me how much he hates his job. He has been telling me that for almost fifteen years. All those words can do is trigger thoughts and images that return to him, so he gradually finds himself getting more of what he doesn’t want.
- Begin and end every process of communication positively. Today, this is especially important when using electronic media. It is imperative that the last thing you type is a positive word leading to positive thoughts. So many people just sign off with an initial when a small

positive word will work wonders. Try “Best,” “Keep smiling,” or “Cheers.” Because you wrote it, you get the benefit. The recipient reads it, gets an image of a smiling friend, and now they get a positive jab too. Little changes, big outcomes.

- Begin and end your day positively. Before you go to sleep at night, thank yourself for a great day. When you wake up, the first words in your head should be something like: *I feel absolutely fantastic, and I know today is brilliantly successful for me.*
- When no one is within earshot, speak the words aloud. This may feel at first like the onset of insanity, but soon you’ll be able to afford the best psychiatrists that money can hire.
- Whenever something irritates or depresses you during the day, take a deep breath, and silently pump yourself back up with an affirming statement. (Editors rightly admonish writers like me about overuse of adverbs and adjectives. Written sentences are better for their omission. On the trip to success, however, they are your best friends. They add emotion to the thought. Saying “I feel well” is acceptable for a novel. In life, saying “I feel absolutely, amazingly, vibrantly healthy!” takes you to a higher level of energy. It pumps you up faster. It is a really, really, really great thing to do.)

So far, we have analyzed the equation in reverse order, and some readers might consider the information on controlling thoughts and words as only a little different than extolling the virtues of positive thinking or the power of positive words. This is, however, something that you can begin right now and change your life. It requires no monetary investment, no time, and only a little effort. From this moment on, before you speak, take a

little breath, smile, pause . . . and then map out your better thoughts in stronger words onto your tongue. Just try it for a day and see how differently things work out for you.

In my experience, people often come to grips with this aspect easily, but very quickly something negative happens at work or home or they take notice of something emotionally draining that is on television, and all the good work is undone in a flash. Controlling our thoughts and words is part of the essential process, but it becomes much more powerful if we can manage the stimuli that trigger them as well.

## CONTROLLING SENSORY INPUT

A thousand things can cause you to have a thought and react with a word, but we only need to make small changes in our lifestyles to achieve great things. In this step, we are concerned with only two main sources of stimuli.

One of the main influences in our immediate environment is the chronic complainer. Nothing unites people more closely than a common dislike, which means we often find ourselves bonded to people who are *against* something or someone. That becomes a downward-spiraling energy wave, leading back to quicksand.

The other main influence is the media, in all its forms. Some of it may be harmless entertainment, but whether selling a product or an ideology, it is clear that political, religious, and business institutions understand how to sculpt common thinking. The people who work in those institutions may not know they can control their own destiny, but they are fully aware of their ability to make groups of people behave in a certain way. They go to great effort and expense to invade your environment and march unopposed against your mentality.



Why should we care about these influences? It is because thoughts must become matter that returns to the owner of the thought. So, if you see something in the media or hear something from a person nearby, that causes you to trigger a negative thought-image, and the material realization of that comes into your life, not the thing or person that caused your thought.

The problem is compounded by the simple fact that, in order to influence us, people or media must hold our attention long enough to create a reaction. Fear paralyzes. It works better than any other emotion to keep us entranced long enough for whatever message they have. Media and people tend to hold us fixated by making us feel anxious, perhaps with gossip, a rumor, or a dramatic headline.

The effects of fear are important to understand if you want to get out of the quicksand. As soon as you feel fear, the amygdala (a small, almond-shaped organ in the center of your brain) sends signals to your autonomic nervous system, producing a wide range of effects. Your heart rate increases, your blood pressure goes up, your breathing gets quicker, and stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol are released.

Robert Sapolsky, a professor of neuroendocrinology at Stanford University, has focused his research on issues of stress and neural degeneration. He has won many honors for his papers that show links between long-term stressful life experiences, long-term exposure to hormones such as cortisol, produced during stress, and shrinking of the hippocampus area of the brain.

The hippocampus is a mass of neurons, each with multiple branch-like extensions (dendrites and axons) that make connections (synapses) with other neurons all across the brain. The hippocampus is also one of the few regions of the brain known to be able to produce new neurons, a process called neurogenesis.

Professor Sapolsky has shown that enduring a high stressor,

like watching fearful news or listening to someone spread a stressful rumor at work, for more than thirty minutes, negatively impacts the hippocampus in various ways. To begin, sustained exposure to higher than normal levels of cortisol results in the pruning back of the number of branches and synaptic connections of hippocampal neurons. By a variety of mechanisms, these conditions also increase the rate of cell death in this region of the brain.

As if this wasn't bad enough, recent research is demonstrating that sustained increases in glucocorticoid levels also have negative effects, impairing the hippocampus's ability to create new neurons. Over a period of time, all of this results in the shrinking in size of the hippocampus with associated declines in cognitive function, including the ability to retain new information and adapt to new situations, *which is exactly what you don't want when you are attempting to reinvent your life.*

Fortunately, according to Sapolsky, the negative effects of excessive stress can not only be stopped but reversed "once the source, psychological or physical, is removed or sufficiently reduced." Simple! Change a little, change a lot.

## Chronic Complainers

Think about the day you have had so far. How many times did someone complain about something to you directly or within your hearing? It may have been a trivial matter like the weather or something significant they saw in the newspaper such as the state of the economy. How often did you automatically join in? Did you start a chat by having a little moan about something? Think about all of your Twitter posts, texts, and emails and which of them were critical of a thing or person.

Although the criticisms may be slight, they accumulate in the course of a day into an avalanche of negativity that raises anxiety.

It is scary when you stop to think about it and realize how many of the words being mapped out are negative. Whether verbal, written, or electronic, they have the same impact.

Many people revel in gossip and rumor mongering. It bonds them quickly and is the easiest way to make allies. Because it's so contagious, we can slip into the habit innocently. It holds groups together like glue, and you cannot reinvent yourself as part of a group. The aim is for you to become an individual again.

Gossip is toxic to our mentality. Every time we allow a complaint into our brains, it triggers a negative thought that has no choice but to return more of what is being complained about to us. If someone bemoans the economy, and you think "I agree with that," then events will transpire in your life that give you even more reason to moan about it . . . even though you did not initiate the topic and were thinking of something completely different earlier.

Another good exercise is to sit with friends or family and listen to their comments as you all watch a soap opera or reality television show. Almost everything is negative because the shows are designed and written to trigger that reaction. I did this with two relatives once and counted more than a hundred negative statements from them in less than a half hour.

Every criticism is a form of being *against*. As painful as it is to consider, whatever someone is against comes back like a boomerang to the thrower, which increases exposure to the harmful effects of stress even more. Of course, if you say something positive, that shows up in your life also, but the challenge is that nothing unites people more than a common dislike. Positive people are a rarity and, unfortunately, most successful people must walk a solo path.

If you reached the end of your days, then added up the beneficial vs. harmful thoughts and came out 51 percent to 49 percent in favor of beneficial, you would have lived a grand

adventure. Most people, however, would be more than 80 percent negative, and their lives would be a reflection of that. Our aim with this step is just to shift the balance more toward neutral. If you doubt it, spend a day and a night keeping score. Make a note of every positive comment you hear and every negative one. It will shock you.

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This is a national and cultural disease in the Western world. We are a society of complainers. I am not complaining about it. I am just stating a fact. I find complainers a source of amusement, and usually tease them mercilessly by reacting completely differently to the way they expect. In a recent comment on this subject in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, I read:

Our complaining begins to curdle, to turn back on itself, poison the heart, turns us nasty and low. It shifts from merely being a national mood or general temperament into a way of being; a wiring, deep, and harmful, and permanent.

That writer was onto something, because whatever we allow into our minds begins to rewire our neural networks. A recent study, published in *Behavioural Brain Research*, September 2011, conducted by researchers from the Department of Biological and Clinical Psychology at Friedrich Schiller University in Germany, measured the neural effect of negative and positive words versus neutral words. This functional MRI study showed positive vs. negative words led to increased activation in the ventral medial prefrontal cortex, which is associated with risk, fear, and decision-making processes, while negative vs. positive words induced increased activation of the insula, which is thought to impact perception, motor control, self-awareness, cognitive functioning, and interpersonal experience.

In business, I am always looking for the “so what” aspect to everything. *Don’t give me facts and features—tell me the benefit* is the

mantra of any successful sales consultation. With these sort of studies, I am often left with a “so what” feeling, like a great film without a conclusion. What does it really mean?

In his book on neuroplasticity, *The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science*, Norman Doidge, M.D., states plainly that the brain has the capacity to rewire itself and/or form new neural pathways—if we do the work. Just like exercise, the work requires repetition and activity to reinforce new learning.

So complaining repetitively can become a wired thing in your brain, deep and harmful. We can all think of someone who seems incapable of speaking without complaining. The good news is that by controlling mentality, the damage does not have to be permanent. Even better news is that in the second part of this book, we will spend time on rewiring our neurons to the way we *want* them to be and completely reversing the damage already done.

The tendency for Americans to complain comes partly from a chronic sense of disappointment. Americans are naturally outgoing and optimistic. Expectations are generally high. If you have been to the United Kingdom, you’ll understand the contrast with British pessimism.

Americans are the only people who are genuinely surprised and disappointed when politicians do not keep their promises. In other countries, people are just relieved if their leaders get through their terms of office without being mired in a sadomasochistic sex scandal. Americans expect the economy always to be growing, house prices to rise continuously, and everyone to be better off in the future than they are now. Because life is a series of peaks and valleys, it sets up a rollercoaster of feeling excited and let down. It is important to recognize this because the trip to success is more undulating than linear.

As an Englishman who moved to America, however, I have a different perspective and find little to complain about. I have

lived in five states, each one a different cultural experience. If I don't like the weather, I can simply move to a place with a better climate instead of complaining all the time about the one I inhabit. No one dictates where I have to reside. I need no visa to move.

Education is available to all. Everyone can get a degree, even if it is in hamburger technology. Those with degrees in hamburger technology become professional servers. This is the only nation that has waiters who smile when they serve food. Go to England or France and then complain to the waiter that your food is a little cold and see what happens. Go to Spain and tell the *maître d'* that you are tired of waiting for service. You'll be seated at your table a year from now. Americans have service down to a fine art.

Restaurants deliver quality food to your front door at night and on a Sunday! Stores are open when people need them, like after office hours. Grocery stores burst with a mind-boggling variety of foods. The checkout people are friendly, and someone packs your groceries into bags for you. On top of that, sales tax is less than 20 percent, which is the rate in more than thirty-six countries around the globe!

When I left England, not only did I have to pay 18 percent sales tax on everything, but my income tax was at a rate of 48 percent with 8 percent compulsory national insurance. For every £100 I earned, I could only purchase £26 worth of groceries with the disposable income I had left. Now, that is reason to complain. In America, however, I live in a state with no income tax and a sales tax under 9 percent, but everyone I know complains about their taxes.

When I go to a public place in America, no one is allowed to attempt to kill me with cigarette smoke. I can walk on the sidewalk without being ankle deep in litter, or having to dodge presents left by dogs. Cursing is practically a capital offence,

and nudity is not allowed at the beach. (Okay, so not everything in America is better.)

Gasoline is a fraction of what it costs in European countries, and Americans can have a car for each foot. I can drive almost anywhere. I can effectively live my whole life in a car, never starve, and end it at a drive-through funeral parlor.

Best of all, an immigrant like me, one with no identifiable skill, can come up with an idea to start a business. I can succeed simply because I have control of my mentality. No one cares from which class of society I came. No one minds if I had the right schooling or family connections, which are so vital in other countries. In America, absolutely anyone can do and be anything they choose. What is there to complain about?

What happened to the American pioneering spirit, the can-do attitude? Almost everyone reading this book will have ancestors who came from somewhere else, clothed in little more than a will to succeed. Where did that spirit go that is so rarely seen in America today? Everyone seems afraid to get out of the quicksand these days.

I came to America believing in the possibility of the American dream. It was a while before I bought a television or newspaper, so I never heard all the people complaining about the dream being dead. If you ask me, the American dream is alive and well. You do, however, have to get out of the quicksand to find it and live it.

Here is a simple task that will open your eyes. Tomorrow, make a conscious effort not to join in all the complaining or to start a complaint yourself. When you hear someone complain, tune out. Turn the radio station to a positive channel. Avoid the coffee station at work, and go get some fresh air at lunchtime. When anyone around you tries to bait you with a chronic complaint, smile and excuse yourself. When someone on the phone is complaining of a health or other problem, make a quick excuse and put down the receiver. Don't get sucked into a negative discussion,

just for this single day. At the end of the day, compare how much more energy you have that day to the day before. Check your mood in the evening. Don't you feel happier and lighter? Don't you feel like you really could reinvent yourself today?

## Tips for Dealing with Complainers

### 1. Become self-aware.

The first step toward recovery is to recognize when you are about to complain. Every time you feel a complaint coming on, no matter how trivial, stop yourself. You cannot delete a thought, but you can have a better thought. When you catch yourself in the middle of a complaint, stop, and then reach for a better thought. My wife used to go window-shopping with a friend. Looking at something she desired, her friend would always comment, "Oh, that's nice, but I could never afford it. It is crazy to spend that much on a piece of clothing. Look, that's a whole month's wages. Insane!"

Like me, my wife knows to control her state of mind. She would pause before commenting, "That will look wonderful with my black trousers, when I can afford to buy it." If you were to visit both homes and inspect the closets, you would see the outcome of this small change in mapping thoughts out on her tongue. My wife has beautiful clothes. Her friend still shops at the thrift store and bemoans the fact that she cannot buy nice things. There is nothing wrong with that, but it does not have to be her experience.

### 2. Redirect the conversation.

One of the hardest places to be aware of your mentality is during spontaneous conversation. First, you must



catch yourself in the act of negativity and stop the words of complaint before they come out. Then consciously replace what the *old you* would have said. Imagine you have just walked into the office:

COLLEAGUE: Hey, man, how's it going?

OLD YOU: Not bad. You?

COLLEAGUE: Tired. Weekend is not long enough.

OLD YOU: I hear you. Sick of this weather. I can't remember the last time we saw the sun. I spent all last night shoveling the drive. My back's killing me.

COLLEAGUE: You're getting old, man. What can you do? You going to the staff meeting later?

OLD YOU: Nah, got too much to catch up on. Got to get Jim those market reports or he'll be on my back all day.

COLLEAGUE: He's a pain in the ass.

OLD YOU: You got that right.

The energy created by this early morning exchange is low. Misery loves company, and the two of you feel like comrades, united by a common dislike of the weather and Jim. Read it again and you will count twelve complaints in that one small exchange. We have dozens of conversations like this every day. Knowing the importance of mentality, the *new you* would take control of the situation this way:

COLLEAGUE: Hey, man, how's it going?

NEW YOU (pauses, maps out words carefully): Fantastic, thanks. You?

COLLEAGUE: Tired. Weekend is not long enough.

NEW YOU: I could always use more energy as well. I hope we'll see some sun this week. That'll give us a boost.

COLLEAGUE: You bet. You going to the staff meeting later?

NEW YOU: I'd like to. It will be good to catch up with everyone after the weekend. But I must get some reports to Jim beforehand.

COLLEAGUE: He's a pain in the ass.

NEW YOU (pauses, maps out words carefully): I'm sure he needs them. I should have done them last night, but I started shoveling snow off the drive and ended up building a snowman with the kids. What a blast! They loved it. Well, better get started. Have a great morning, and see you later at the meeting.

The difference in energy created for you is remarkable. The language is positive, the images and thoughts creative. You will not feel as bonded to your colleague, and don't be surprised if he tries to bring your energy down later. Right now, he thinks aliens have taken over your body. You will, however, feel your day is off to a better start. If you consciously try to control a dozen conversations a day, reaching for positive words and thoughts as often as you can, you will create a storehouse of powerful energy.

### **3. Be kind to yourself.**

We are not trying to be perfect. We all trip up and fall back to the habit of complaining. Whenever I play or watch my favorite sport, which is soccer, I seem to leave everything I know about *Three Simple Steps* behind. To err is human. It happens. When it happens, smile and start afresh. Treat it like a game.

**4. Smother a negative thought with a positive image.**

If I am leaving the house and the thought comes to mind that the weather sucks, I immediately input a different image. A picture of a lazy summer day spent lying beside a babbling stream flashes in my mind. Imagination is our savior. Replace every negative thought with a positive image. It takes only a moment.

**5. Don't try to convert anyone.**

Keep in mind that those around you feel comfortable in the company of a fellow complainer. If you try to stop them, you will likely succeed only in alienating yourself. In effect, you'll give those people more to complain about because they will target you. When trapped in the midst of complainers at a business meeting or a social engagement, simply choose silence. Let their words float by while you think of something more pleasant like a lovely day at the beach, the feel of your favorite pet's coat, or the soft kiss of a loved one. Eventually, people will stop trying to draw you in because you don't react the way they expect and need you to react. Like-minded people attract each other, and opposites repel. Before long, your common circle of associates will be refreshingly different.

**6. Distance yourself when possible.**

When people around you start criticizing someone or something and you can escape, excuse yourself and take a break somewhere quiet. If possible, go outside for fresh air. Think of something pleasant before returning. Remember, your life is at stake. You have to take this seriously. Don't let the negative influences of

others pull you back into the quicksand. Often, I have stood up from a meeting table and turned to look out through a window while the complainers continue to vent their feelings behind me. It is a bit like breaking a séance circle, and the complaining soon stops. When it does, I sit back down.

## **7. Wear an invisible “mentality shield.”**

Imagine an invisible shield like a glass cloak descends from the sky and lightly covers your whole body. You can see perfectly well through it, and only you know it is there. It is made of the highest positive energy. Nothing anyone says can penetrate it. Negative emotions simply bounce off. You can imagine their words hitting it and exploding into meaningless letters. Their complaints disintegrate into nothing. No one in that room can get thoughts or images through to impact your state of mind.

This technique is used by many of the world’s top athletes to protect themselves from the negative energy of a hostile crowd. I find it particularly useful in business settings. I never enter a meeting room without my shield in place. I also use it frequently around certain friends and family members who can be the source of most of the chronic complaints in my life.

## **8. Create a private retreat.**

Mentally retreat to a private, special place in your imagination. For me, this is a ribbon of soft, white sand about one hundred yards across, arcing through a turquoise lagoon. While appearing interested in whatever sights and sounds are before me, I can walk my two miles of sand. I find this technique useful if stuck in the company of complainers at a dinner or while commuting and traveling. It

especially helps when something in my travel schedule goes awry. If a plane is delayed on the runway, for instance, I retreat to my island while everyone around me gets more and more heated and negative.

What is your private retreat? It could be a sailboat or a warm cabin on a mountain summit—whatever makes you feel relaxed, positive, and at peace with yourself and the world around you. The more often you do this, the more detailed your private retreat becomes in your memory. By distracting your mind this way, you keep the door firmly shut to the negativity around you. The best aspect of this trick is that one day your retreat turns up in your physical reality. I mentally walked that ribbon of sand a hundred times before I got to do it for real. This is the joy of control of mentality. When one becomes so adept at it, even idle daydreams get to be experienced.

## 9. Transfer responsibility.

Finally, on the occasions you find yourself pressed back against a wall while someone rants and raves about all the injustices in their life, throw the responsibility back at them with, “So what do *you* intend to do about it?” In most cases, the complainers don’t actually want a solution. They don’t even want sympathy. They just want to react by venting anger. Throwing that question to them will stop them in their tracks.

## Media

In *The Shipping News*, Lasse Hallstrom’s adaptation of E. Annie Proulx’s best seller, there is a scene in which the local newspaper editor confronts reporter Quoyale about his inability to find a storyline. Billy takes Quoyale to the edge of a cliff:

BILLY (EDITOR) [Points at dark clouds on the horizon]:

It's finding the center of your story, the beating heart of it, that's what makes a reporter. You have to start by making up some headlines. You know: short, punchy, dramatic headlines. Now, have a look, what do you see?

BILLY: Tell me the headline.

QUOYLE: Horizon Fills with Dark Clouds?

BILLY: Imminent Storm Threatens Village.

QUOYLE: But what if no storm comes?

BILLY: Village Spared from Deadly Storm.

Almost all television news and newspapers exist to sell advertising space. If they fail to do that, the news media fail to exist. To get good prices for the space, they need to guarantee an audience to their advertisers. To do that, they must grab our attention with a dramatic headline or image that draws us in and then hold our attention long enough to get to an advertisement. Fear is generally their weapon of choice. Who can resist watching a live car chase, a battle scene from a war zone, or the threat of a tornado in the area? At this point, you might think it's all harmless, but any sensational headline or news story has the potential to induce fear into our systems.

The challenge we face with regard to the news media is that the brain does not distinguish between that which is real and that which is imagined. Watching a scene of carnage in a war zone causes some of the same detrimental stress effects as actually being there ourselves. The fear response we have in front of the television is the same we would have in the real situation. Of course, it is diluted somewhat by the safety net of our home, but people addicted to the news are subjecting themselves to chronic stress every time they tune in. Day after day, they take their dose of news and induce a cascade of destruction in their neurons.

To make matters worse, everything you see and hear in the media triggers images in your brain. If you watch a news report about a crime, the pictures in your brain are a reaction to the horror you are observing. Your eyes take in a stranger on the street being mugged, which at first might seem inconsequential. The emotion you feel, however, is not because you recognize the stranger but because you know how you would feel if that happened to you or someone you know. Many times, I hear people say “I don’t know how I’d cope if that happened to me.” The moment they say it, they imagine it, and those thoughts remain out in the universe with the potential to create exactly what they don’t want. Every time you watch something fearful on television, you also place your life at risk because your thoughts have the propensity to convert to matter and come right back at you.

You should understand I am not antimedia—far from it. Media are simply vehicles for transmitting messages and can be valuable assets in our quest for knowledge and success. I enjoy a comedy, an educational documentary, or a film as much as anyone, and I watch a lot of sports. The key is in being selective in what media messages you allow into your brain, and then how you choose to react to them.

For instance, if you are in debt, then you should avoid those advertisements that offer debt solutions because of the effect on your thought generation as we discussed earlier. If, however, you desire to own a top-end Mercedes-Benz, then not only is it acceptable to watch those advertisements, you should record them and play them over and over until, instead of the actor in the driver’s seat, you start to see yourself. You should call the toll-free number to request a brochure and more information. Then read the car reviews in the newspaper. Find your local dealer and go for a test drive. You should watch any show or film in which the car manufacturer has paid to have their vehicle used by the actors. The point is that we must be selective in what

we allow into our minds, manage what we think about them, and control our reactions. We avoid what we are *against* and seek out what we are *for*.

Media marketing attempts to influence our behavior in remarkably simple ways. An unguarded state of mind can be shown an advertisement of a sexy girl, who appears attracted to a man smoking a particular brand of cigarette. As he watches, the viewer knows it is a carcinogenic poison. He knows his nicotine-stained hands, poised to hit the channel-change button before a girl in a bikini showed up, would turn off any female who looked like the one on the screen. His breath would send her to the nearest bathroom. His reaction, however, is to reach for a cigarette because he subconsciously fears being undesirable.

In my father's case, his reaction to this type of advertisement was to send me out to the store to buy some more cigarettes. When I was six, in the days when there was no age limit required for their purchase, he would send me to the corner store for an extra pack of his favorite filter-tipped brand. I once forgot what I had been sent for and brought home half a dozen eggs, a ball of wool, and some oranges. Audrey appreciated the wool, but a man deprived of his nicotine fix can launch eggs and oranges like missiles.

Media can also be vehicles for propaganda. Anyone with an idea that they want to share with others becomes a propagandist. The father of propaganda, long before the days of television, was Joseph Goebbels. In a famous 1928 speech on the means and power of propaganda, he stated:

Propaganda stands between the idea and the worldview, between the worldview and the state, between the individual and the party, between the party and the nation. At the moment at which I recognize something as important and begin speaking about it in the streetcar, I begin making propaganda. At the



same moment, I begin looking for other people to join me. Propaganda stands between the one and the many, between the idea and the worldview. Propaganda is nothing other than the forerunner to organization. Once it has done this, it is the forerunner to state control. It is always a means to an end.

Propaganda in any format can erode the individual mindset, and we have to be aware of its influence on us. Are the opinions you have on various matters your own or have they been comfortably fused into your mind by propaganda?

I often have this discussion with a relative who has strong opinions about the members of the Royal Family in England. Her opinions have changed over time, depending on the images shown in newspapers and on television. I have met many of the Royal Family personally and formed my own opinion of them from those interactions. My impressions differ markedly from anything you would read in a tabloid newspaper or that my relative repeats thereafter as her own opinions.

When I remind my relative that she has never met these people, she will vehemently defend herself and her right to her own opinion. She admonishes me, even though in reality, her only source of information is what she has seen or heard through various media, often reinforced by her friends who share the same opinions.

In reality, since 1997, there has been a concerted public relations campaign run by a prominent global advertising agency, and costing millions, to repair the image of the Royal Family. The goal of the campaign was to “reposition the family into a unifying force.”

In the same way as someone from Joseph Goebbels’s time would distribute pamphlets to a crowd, the religious, political, and business institutions in our high-tech world use all the vehicles of modern media from television to social networks. The

aim is to form a state of mind, bring like-minded people together, and create a specific reaction. That might be to cause you to send a donation, vote a certain way, or buy a product. It could also be to encourage you to buy a house you can't afford or invest unwisely in daily stock trading with the money you could have used to start a business of your own.

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In the mid-1980s, prior to the innovation of satellite television, I lived in the United Kingdom, where I was quite satisfied with three television channels. After heated debate, the government allowed a fourth network to start broadcasting. They needed innovative programs to draw audiences and picked up American football. A one-hour highlight show ran on Monday nights and, for the first time, Brits started to get into the game.

The program quickly got the highest ratings in the lineup. At the end of the season, the producers pulled a coup with the first live showing of a Super Bowl. Some friends and I got into the excitement and threw a party as Chicago played New England.

Our first mistake was miscalculating the time difference. The game kicked off at close to midnight, by which time most of us were highly inebriated. The second mistake was that no one realized there would be so many commercial breaks. A one-hour game took three hours to play. We had been used to the condensed highlights show and did not expect the game to be so fragmented. Brought up on soccer and rugby, in which the games flow without commercial breaks or time-outs, by the end of the first quarter, no one remained conscious.

When I moved to America, I wanted to follow the sport. I could not, however, get beyond the number of commercial interruptions that seemed, to me at least, to be thinly disguised military propaganda. I was not judging it. I didn't have an opinion on the merits of US foreign policy, but I know propaganda when I see it, regardless of who produces it, and I don't allow it into my brain. I found it hard to tune out the jingoism and enjoy

the sport. Hitting the mute button is not sufficient to protect my neurons from all that shock and awe.

Whether it is an army recruitment advertisement or a military commander involved in the coin toss, all those images can be dangerous to your state of mind. Most people, however, consider them harmless and think of themselves as being immune to the impact because they are seemingly passive background images. If your mentality is unguarded, they are anything but passive.

Nothing demonstrates the power of media marketing or the extremes of habitual reaction like that of a soldier going off to war. A poorly educated farm laborer, who knows nothing more than the art of tending dairy cattle, watches the threat of terrorism every night on the television news, absorbs the glorification of war in a stream of macho army recruitment commercials during his Sunday football television ritual, and drinks in his favorite reality television show being beamed live from the deck of an aircraft carrier. His reaction is to leave his farm, don a uniform, and travel to a place he could never have found in an atlas. Acting on orders, he shoots an “insurgent” because he believes his freedom on the plains of Ohio is threatened.

The insurgent was also a happy, world-unwise farm worker, tending goats in his own country. His unguarded state of mentality was convinced by different propaganda that was shouted from a shrine to react to a perceived threat. He left the field that his ancestors had farmed for centuries, strapped an explosive vest to his chest, and went to greet the “infidel” who just showed up.

As fellow farmers, with individual mindsets and opinions, the two should have had a lot in common. The possibility exists that, under different circumstances and with controlled mentalities, they could become friends, and share their farming stories.

More than ninety million people tuned into the 2012 Super Bowl half-time show to see a bunch of commercials. Forty-four

percent of all female and thirty-one percent of all male viewers of the Super Bowl claimed to tune in just to watch the commercials. Most of them probably considered it harmless entertainment and thought they would be immune to its impact. If it were so harmless then why would advertisers be willing to spend \$3.5 million for a 30-second commercial? Throughout the game, more than 100 commercials aired. In one advertisement, I counted the word *debt* mentioned ten times. If that advertisement was played five times during the game, it pressed four-and-a-half billion footprints of debt-thought into the ether, all of which, by the law of nature, must return back into the lives of those who generated them.

In an average year, a five-year-old sees forty thousand media advertisements. How does that impact a child's unguarded state of mind? Over a lifetime, how has that impacted adult mentality and eroded individual thought? Statistics show that advertising expenditures for debt reduction programs and weight loss products have grown exponentially in the last few years. At the same time, personal debt is at unprecedented levels and obesity is a national issue. But which came first?

Metaphors in several popular self-help books compare the mind to a fertile garden. The owner diligently uproots the occasional weed of negativity to replace it with a flower of positivity. New Age xylophones chime in the distance, hummingbirds flutter overhead, and readers everywhere reach for the stomach medicine.

In reality, we live in a complex, noisy world where negativity is all around. Controlling one's state of mind is more than keeping up with the weeding. It is like defending ourselves against the venomous plants of John Wyndham's 1951 novel, *The Day of the Triffids*.

When I was a child, those monsters terrified me. Whenever I think of negative media, that is what I imagine. For the uninitiated, triffids were tall plants with a deadly, whip-like, poisonous

sting that enabled them to paralyze their victims and feed on their rotting carcasses. Advertising agencies must love that image. The marketing manager's sensational, 3-second headlines grab our attention, and hold us immobile while whatever message, subliminal or otherwise, is inserted into our neurons.

Everywhere you go, they lie in wait. Along the freeway, triffids crawl over advertisement boards to tell you how overweight you look today, how unattractive your bald patch, acne, or wrinkles appear, and how much better you would feel if you took out another high interest credit card for the joy of the reward points and to pay for the cosmetic makeover that you desperately need.

In the airport, they slither from television screens with messages of fear and doom. Behind newspaper stands, they spew out gloom about an economy on the brink of collapse while the rich, fat bankers escape. "Who in their right mind would go against the crowd and want to reinvent themselves in such a climate? What mad individual would think of starting a company now?" are the opinions you hear just after another great idea for a company of your own popped into your head.

In fact, as previously mentioned, sixteen of the thirty companies that make up the Dow Jones Industrial Average were started during a recession. These include Procter & Gamble, Disney, Alcoa, McDonald's, and Johnson & Johnson. After every recession, there is an upsurge in the pioneering spirit that is unique to America. I started my first company right in the middle of the 2001–2003 recession. There is no such thing as a bad time to start over.

When discussing the influences of media messaging with any group, I always get the same reaction. Everyone in the room knows what I am talking about. No one disagrees with me. Then, each person looks accusingly at everyone else. I can tell that each person thinks he or she is the only one immune to the influence. That is how we react to any form of propaganda. We

recognize that our enemies use propaganda against us, so we filter that out. We don't expect propaganda to be coming at us from within our society, so we innocently let it in, and it can impact how we react as the next story shows:

Liverpool is a city of fewer than a million residents, but it boasts the eighth richest sports club in the world: their main soccer team. Soccer is like an elixir that runs through the veins of everyone.

A few years ago, a tabloid newspaper printed front-page photographs of a famous soccer player as he left an alleged brothel.

The day after the tabloid photographs, a local radio station ran a report in which two witnesses recounted having watched the soccer player and his fiancée arguing in a city center park. They told how the soccer player pleaded his innocence, but with front-page photograph in her hand, the girlfriend screamed accusations. In a gesture of anger, they said, she wrenched off her engagement ring and threw it into the flowerbeds.

That afternoon, the same radio station transmitted a live report from the park, where police had been called to quell a riot. After hearing the first bulletin, a crowd of enterprising locals, wielding spades, forks, and metal detectors, descended on the area. The flowerbeds were churned into a mud bath. Turf war broke out as, like pioneers in the Gold Rush, people staked claims to different patches of garden. A dozen victims were rushed to the hospital with head injuries from spade duels. One opportunistic youth relocated a bulldozer from a building site. He was arrested not just for the theft but for charging the others by the hour for his digging services.

Later, it emerged that the first bulletin had been severely edited. The reporter's full story included the news that once the soccer player had left, the girlfriend returned to the park to retrieve her ring. The editor thought it an unnecessarily long piece of journalism, and cut the story off at the point the ring

was discarded. The radio station made a formal apology, but more than sixty budding entrepreneurs spent the night in jail.

No one is immune. I am suggesting that you be aware of the potential negative impact on your mentality of not controlling sensory input. Be selective. Remember, small changes in behavior produce big changes in outcome.

## Dealing with Media—Steps to Take

### 1. Selectively turn off the television and radio news.

Because we want to reduce the release of stress chemicals on our neurons, and almost all news stories are about something frightening and negative, avoid watching or listening as much as you can. You will be surprised to find that you still remain informed because it is impossible to escape completely. That is okay. What you are trying to avoid are the negative emotions that accompany the sensational headlines; if you find that you can't switch off the channel, then at least mute the volume. After a few months, you will find this is liberating. Some people describe it as a weight being lifted from their shoulders. That is because they no longer have all that fear and anxiety increasing their stress levels, and destroying their neurons.

### 2. Avoid advertisements that trigger negative images in your mind.

Different things will be a source of fear for different people, so you have to be selective. For instance, if I see an advertisement today for a credit card, it does not bother me because I am no longer worried about debt. Twenty years ago, however, my internal stress reaction would have been very different when the emotions of debt were being spewed from the television. I had to learn to tune those out of my life.

Think about how you respond internally to certain types of commercials, and how that might impact your neurons. At the very least, mute the television and look away when any of those advertisements come on. Your life is at stake, so why risk it? For your favorite programs, use the DVR, and fast-forward through the commercials that might affect you.

They are not all bad, of course, and many are pure entertainment. I always get a laugh out of the quack ones that sell miracle metal bracelets without ever making a medical claim. "I used to have arthritis and now would never be without my bracelet" or the countertop ovens that have such poor insulation "you can even boil up some vegetables just by placing a pan on the top." The point again is to be selective; small changes in habit result in vast improvements in outcome.

My favorites are the cigarette advertisements from the first half of the twentieth century. When advertising was unregulated, those companies could make any claim they wanted. "Seven out of ten doctors recommend our brand of cigarettes" is a classic. The best I ever saw was a magazine page that showed a cartoon drawing of a double-decker bus hurtling toward a naïve couple who smiled at us from the page, unaware that in just a few seconds they were to be crushed. The tagline was *Go on . . . have a smoke!* The inference was that we could get run over by a bus at any moment, so why not just enjoy oneself. Apart from the absurdity of it, what made me smile the most was that the advertisement did not favor any particular brand of tobacco. Smoke anything, it screamed . . . a chair leg, the bus exhaust . . . just smoke something before you die!



### 3. Seek independent reporting.

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To succeed, all propaganda has to be popular, and has to accommodate itself to the comprehension of the least intelligent of those whom it seeks to reach.

ADOLPH HITLER

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We all know that people's mentalities can be easily manipulated because we can see it in everyone else. The danger is we never see this same vulnerability in ourselves. If the knowledge that all network news and newspapers are merely tools of someone's propaganda is news to you, start to read alternative versions of events as presented by independent journalists. Here are the two I follow most closely and recommend for their politically neutral and objective investigative journalism:

- *John Pilger (johnpilger.com)*: Pilger has won an Emmy and a BAFTA for his documentaries, which have also won numerous awards in the United States and Europe. His articles appear worldwide in newspapers such as the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Mail & Guardian* (South Africa), *Aftonbladet* (Sweden), and *Il Manifesto* (Italy). He writes a regular column for the *New Statesman*, published in London. In 2001, he curated a major exhibition at the London Barbican, *Reporting the World: John Pilger's Eyewitness Photographers*, a tribute to the great black-and-white photographers with whom he has worked. In 2003, he was awarded the prestigious Sophie Prize for "30 years of exposing injustice

and promoting human rights.” In 2009, he was awarded the Sydney Peace Prize. His latest film is *The War You Don’t See* (2010).

- *Greg Palast (gregpalast.com)*: He is the author of the *New York Times* and international best sellers, *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy* and *Armed Madhouse*. Palast is Patron of the Trinity College Philosophical Society, an honor previously held by Jonathan Swift and Oscar Wilde. Palast directed documentaries covering the US government’s largest racketeering case in history and the investigation of the *Exxon Valdez* disaster. He is the recipient of the George Orwell Courage in Journalism Prize for his television documentary, *Bush Family Fortunes*.

#### **4. Reach for a better image.**

Any time you catch yourself reading a sensational headline, make a point of retreating to the private mental place you have created. Force yourself to smile and contemplate that pleasant image or memory. It is essential to counter the energy drain that just occurred when you let something fearful into your mind.

#### **5. Keep your eyes facing front at the checkout counter.**

Do not pick up that gossip magazine at the grocery store checkout counter. Don’t read the cover headlines. Hard, isn’t it? Those gossip triffls screech the loudest, and they have you corralled into a small space with no escape. Those publishers pay a lot of money for that prime space. They are, however, poison to your state of mind. When you read the headline about that A-list actress who has put on the pounds, your mind triggers images and emotions about weight gain but not about

her—about *you*! The thought “weight gain” goes out into the universe, and guess what is coming back to you? If you slip up, quickly imagine something positive. Perhaps see yourself as the slim, fit, attractive person you desire to be. But it is so much easier on your mentality to avoid looking at those gossip magazines in the first place.

## **6. Notice the real love all around.**

Recently, I was sitting in a hotel lounge with a business associate. He watches television news avidly and, like many people, he believes that his favorite channel has no hidden agendas. We have had fun discussions about that. I point out that the owners of the channel are also one of the biggest manufacturers of war machinery and weapons in the world. He insists that if there were something to criticize about a certain foreign policy, the channel would do so. The fact that they never have and instead promote certain conflicts with catchy ticker headlines eludes him.

I have yet to find an unbiased television news channel anywhere in the world. One time, I saw the same news story presented three different ways by the same network in three regions, the United States, Europe, and Asia. Same story, same channel, but each interpretation was massaged to appeal to its audience.

A news story flashed behind me (I always sit with my back to hotel and restaurant televisions if I can), and like a cat spotting a stray mouse, his eyes locked onto the ticker tagline. Whatever it was, it made his blood boil, and he made some comments about the state of society and what we are becoming. I stopped him, and asked him to look around the lounge. I asked how many

people were arguing or fighting. When he admitted there were none, I asked him how many people were holding hands, cuddling, smiling, or laughing? The answer was everyone. That is our real world. He got the point, but before long his attention snapped back to a new ticker tagline.

It is good to remind yourself that the world is not the place of disappointment, hate, and crime portrayed by the triffids. If you are one of those people obsessed with certain daytime movie channels, where all men supposedly hate women and want to hurt them, switch channels now. You can only watch a woman being physically attacked and held hostage so many times before you start making it a point to keep one hand on the pepper spray whenever a guy approaches. I have lived in man-ville for more than forty years, and I have met many more men terrified of women than the other way around!

The romantic comedy *Love Actually* has a charming introduction that makes a great point about the world around us being one of love. Voyeuristically, the camera watches people as they exit the customs area in an airport, to be greeted by friends and family. All we see are expressions of utter joy. That is the real world. No one is creeping around in fear of being victimized.

The film begins with a voiceover from Hugh Grant's character commenting that whenever he gets gloomy with the state of the world, he thinks about the arrivals terminal at Heathrow Airport and the pure uncomplicated love felt as friends and families welcome their arriving loved ones. Grant's voiceover also relates that all the known messages left by the people who died on the 9/11 planes were messages of love and not hate. The film then tells ten interrelated love stories. If the state

of the world as portrayed by what you see on television has you in a depressed state, I recommend you watch this movie, then spend a few hours at an airport arrivals area.

In an airport or hotel, I take special notice of the people around me. I see laughter, love, and people caring for one another. There is an inordinate amount of hugging going on. Next time you travel, look around and see how people are behaving. That is our real world, not the one you see on a television screen.

Start today to be selective about what you watch and listen to. As much as you can, start to separate yourself from the complainers. If nothing else, remember the one subtle change in behavior is to no longer be *against* things you don't want in your life but to be *for* things you do want. That has made a huge difference in my life of mentality.



## My Life of Mentality

**W**HEN I WAS TWELVE, I joined the state-run, comprehensive high school. It was five miles from my village, but the bus trip lasted more than an hour because it stopped at a dozen mountain hamlets. The first day passed uneventfully until the return ride home. Suddenly, I was yanked out of my seat by a dozen brutal hands and dragged to the back of the bus. A gang of bullies, all several years older than me and a good deal bigger, held me down while other kids stripped me half naked and wrote obscenities in ballpoint pen on my torso, arms, and legs.

As bullying goes, it was humiliating but relatively harmless. What shocked me, however, was that as a heavy knee crushed my head into the worn fabric of a seat and I was forced to stare down the center aisle of the bus, I saw a dozen adults, who had spent the day shopping in the town and used the bus for free, sitting rigidly while doing their best to pretend they couldn't hear or see anything. Sharp pens being dragged across vulnerable skin are painful, and they must have been able to hear me as I struggled to free myself. Among my fellow travelers were people from my village and half a dozen kids I thought were my friends. No one moved. Even the bus driver, who could see all the commotion in his rearview mirror, did nothing.

When there was no more room to write on my skin, I was allowed to return to my seat. I tuned out the chanting and laughter coming from behind. When the bus pulled up to our stop, I walked the last mile home with my sister as if nothing had happened despite the fact that several of the bullies were still jeering around me.

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At home, I told my parents that the first day had gone well and then ran upstairs to the bathroom. We were poor, and I knew how hard it had been for them to afford the school uniform. I feared the bullies had torn my shirt and that I would get into big trouble for it. Fortunately, there was only minor damage. It was 1972, and Audrey was very ill at this point. The last thing our family needed was something more to worry about.

Like most kids who are victims of bullying, I felt the fault lay with me. I had been bullied at my previous two schools. In Liverpool, I was often in trouble at home for losing items of school uniform like a school blazer, cap, tie, and even a shoe. Older boys from the “posh” school stole them from me, but I was too ashamed to admit it to my parents. This time the tormenting felt systematic and more menacing than before. I believed something weak, ugly, or low about me must have caused their tribal behavior.

I stripped and tried to wash off the ink, but it was at least two weeks before the graffiti was completely gone. We did not have a shower set up in the house, and I was only able to erase the marks from my arms and stomach. As I stood in front of the mirror, I had two thoughts. The first, illogically, was about how neat the handwriting and artwork were, considering the difficulty of the bone-shaking bus ride. The second was the recurring image of everyone else working hard at looking the other way, and how united they were in their persecution, and how much like an outcast I felt.

I know now that I was targeted for two reasons. First, we were an English family living in Wales at a time when “foreigners”



were not welcome. Although Wales shares a close political and social history with the rest of Great Britain, it has retained a distinct cultural identity and enjoys a degree of separate government. We had moved there four years earlier and arrived in a village where generations of the same families had always lived. The locals rarely traveled more than a few miles, and although they could speak English as well as their native tongue, they refused to do so around us. Being considered foreign, and coming from a city considered working class and with a reputation for petty crime, we were unwelcome.

In 1972, the television blared out nightly news about richer English families “invading” Wales to buy up weekend or vacation homes. The increased demand raised prices until they were well out of reach for young, native couples. Images of angry mobs torching recently purchased “outsider” homes made for compulsive viewing on the nightly bulletins. Who can tear their eyes away from newsreel of a burning house or a forest fire? A fringe political party increased the tension with their calls for the English to be ousted, Wales to be an independent nation, and their distinct and ancient language to be first choice.

It was sectarian racism, and I was targeted by the bullies on the bus with the same fervor as the television news had glorified. The fact that my family lived in an abandoned farmhouse that was barely fit for any human habitation was irrelevant to my tormentors. Their unguarded mentalities absorbed the images on television, and their habitual reaction was to act out their version of lynching on kids like me.

Second, being poor was difficult to disguise. Having odd-sized shoes of different styles on each foot was a bit of a giveaway. To make matters worse, on a Monday morning, the class teacher handed out food stamps for free school lunches to the kids whose parents were receiving welfare support. The half a dozen of us who made the long walk up to her desk under the

eyes of our classmates might as well have had “untouchable” written in white chalk on the backs of our black blazers. For the simple reason that nothing unites people more than a common dislike, poor kids are also usually the victims of bullying.

My parents had received a welfare subsidy for the purchase of school uniforms, which only ran to two shirts, one tie, one blazer, a pair of trousers, and one pair of shoes. It was sufficient for most of the school year, but that first winter, the water pipes to our farmhouse froze. It was impossible to bathe properly, and we mashed snow in the bath to make water for cleaning our teeth and for Harry’s shaving.

During the day at school, I was soccer mad. I ran around the playground like crazy, kicking at a tennis ball, which was the only ball I had to play with, until the school bell rang. I reluctantly returned to lessons, red-faced and sweaty. After a few days of this, and without the ability to wash my skin or clothes at home, I must have smelled like old kippers. Before long, someone taunted me about it. I reacted angrily, got in a fight, and that was like flicking a switch that united everyone else against me. Even those girls and boys who had been friendly up until then joined in the like-minded taunting.

After a few days, I learned to keep bathing materials in my locker at school. When no teachers were watching the physical education area, I ran to the changing rooms and showered quickly. I learned to play soccer with a naked torso even in the freezing weather. *Skins* we called it, and all the poor kids were first to volunteer to play on the skins team, regardless of the weather.

Kids can be cruel and geniuses at hiding things from their parents. Despite my only having the washing problem for a short time and having genuine reasons for it, I lived for years with the knowledge that the kids behind me in class or walking the corridors were making fun of me by pinching their noses

and making gagging noises. Girls shunned me as if I were a leper. I remember many nights staring into the bathroom mirror under a bare lamp bulb to find what it was about me that made me so abhorrent to them.

I was not alone. Other “untouchables” were targeted for other reasons, and we just had to grin and bear it. For a while, I let the taunts impact my self-esteem, and my schoolwork deteriorated. Before that first winter, I had been the top male student. Within a few months, I had fallen to twentieth out of thirty. Below me were most of the other untouchables, all of us systematically bullied and shunned by the rest of our classmates. Candy and allowances were stolen. My blazer was ripped off my back and urinated on, and then I was forced to put it back on. When I could, I fought back. I usually won a one-on-one fistfight, but that seemed only to strengthen the group bonded against me. I felt ashamed and sure that something about me deserved the punishment.

One night in 1974, the phone rang at home. It was a rare event because the phone bill was usually unpaid, and most of the time we were without a working line. My father assumed the role of answering the phone, and we tuned into the tone of his voice. This call was clearly bad news. To my surprise, he called me to the hallway and said the call was for me. It was the headmaster, and he solemnly informed me that a classmate, Simon, one of the untouchables, had committed suicide with his father’s hunting rifle. He was just thirteen, and I was stunned. The headmaster probed me to see if I had any idea why he would have done this, and I realized that he thought I was one of Simon’s tormentors. Someone must have suggested it, and because we were poor and “foreign,” I was a good fit. I was horrified but politely answered his questions.

Simon’s death had another profound effect on me. He had been a quiet, soulful boy and immature compared to his peers. Whether bullying played a role in his death, no one could say

for certain, but I was determined not to let anyone get under my skin that way. Fighting back against my tormentors had not helped, so I chose to simply keep out of everyone's way.

At that age, I was a voracious reader. The town library became a sanctuary for me, and it was a place where I was treated as an equal and where my status in society and shabby clothes went unnoticed. None of the bullies were ever likely to cause me trouble there. At lunchtimes and on Saturdays, whenever I was not playing soccer, I would spend hours in the library reference department, where I discovered a whole section of biographies of famous and self-made men and women. The first one hooked me, and after that I became an addict.

The librarians got to know me and my taste in books and suggested many an inspiring read. I do not remember all their names, but their dedication and help has always been appreciated. With the launch of this book, I am donating a free copy to every library in the United States. Hopefully, *Three Simple Steps* will end up in the hands of a kid like I was and be an inspiration to take control of his or her destiny.

If you are a kid reading this sentence right now, understand that you are full of unlimited potential. No one can determine your path but you, and everything you want is possible. Learn to control your mentality, and you will succeed. In a bizarre way, being an outcast can teach you the power of individualism, and that can be the foundation of a self-made life. If you are being bullied, consider reading biographies of successful people such as Ranulph Fiennes so you can learn how others turned their situations into what made them successful.

Sir Ranulph Fiennes is an adventurer and holder of several endurance records. He served in the Army for eight years including a period on counter-insurgency service while attached to the army of the Sultanate of Oman. He later undertook numerous expeditions and was the first person to visit both the

North and South Poles by surface means and the first to cross Antarctica on foot. In May 2009, at the age of 65, he climbed to the summit of Mount Everest. According to the *Guinness Book of World Records*, he is the world's greatest living explorer. One would assume that he would have been first to be recruited to any boy's gang. As a child, however, this "man's man" struggled at the hands of bullies:

Such remorseless nastiness squeezed every last trace of self-confidence from me. At one point, I stood on Windsor Bridge and contemplated throwing myself off. I didn't go through with it, but I can understand why some children feel so bad that they think about suicide. It lasted for about two years . . . Looking back, I can see that Eton inadvertently built *individualism*. You either conformed or realized there was no way you could conform. Once you realized you could not conform, *it strengthened your ability to be an individual*.

Other famous people who have described the torment of bullying and how they overcame it include Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Michael Phelps, Pierce Brosnan, Christina Aguilera, Tom Cruise, Kristen Stewart, Winona Ryder, and Sandra Bullock. They are all *individuals* who learned the power of controlling their mentalities to become successful.

Although the library became my safe haven, I was fascinated to read about the lives of people who had far more to overcome than I did. I was inspired by their unshakeable belief in their individualism and how they refused to conform to the common thinking of their time. Most of them described mental and physical tricks that they used to shut out the world that screamed at them, and many of the men and women in the books shared one technique in particular. Then I saw it being used on television, and I gave it a go myself.

In the mid-1970s, I enjoyed watching golf and tennis tournaments on TV. I think it was the isolation of the player and the fact that it is one person against the opponent, the course, the crowd, and the critics that kept my attention on those particular sports. I loved watching sports stars who were unmoved by the hostility in the crowds around them. Men like Björn Borg and Jack Nicklaus were heroes to me. Sevy Ballesteros had turned professional at just sixteen years old. Now, here was a kid half Jack Nicklaus's age and only a year older than me, playing alongside him with the same implacable calm.

After a successful round, the interviewer asked Ballesteros how he coped with the pressure of playing with such icons and with the raucous crowd that followed them. Politely, he explained that he came from a family of gifted golfers, and he had been taught a technique whereby he imagined a thick glass jar descending from the sky and covering him completely. Inside his glass jar, he said, he was able to shut out the outside world, stay centered, and achieve anything.

The interviewer seemed uninterested and went on to ask more mundane tournament-related questions. I literally jumped out of my chair with excitement. Although it used modernized imagery, his technique was the same one I had read about in many biographies. Some called it a deflection spell; others called it a mental shield.

Everyday thereafter, I walked to the school bus stop using a different route than my siblings. This required climbing a fence, crossing a muddy field, and rejoining them half a mile away. They probably thought I was in a grumpy teenage mood. What I actually did during that detour, however, was to imagine that a huge glass cloak descended from the sky and completely covered me as I walked. By the time I rejoined my siblings, I was fully protected inside this shield. I imagined all slurs and taunts bouncing off the glass or exploding on impact.

The effect of this simple trick was astounding. I felt powerful and impervious to any insults. No one could hurt me anymore. My schoolwork returned to its higher standard. I played better at sports. For the first time in my life, girls seemed willing to interact with me. It was as if someone had flicked a switch, and I had changed my persona overnight. Gradually, my self-esteem improved. I gained confidence and, perhaps because I was no longer focusing on it and certainly no longer *against* it, the bullying simply stopped.

Then in 1976, Sevy Ballesteros came in second in the British Open and captured the world's attention. I watched his performance, and true to his interview, he was so calm under pressure. I have used this technique ever since, a trick I call my *mentality shield*. Whether in investor meetings, public speaking, or just in a crowd at a concert, it protects me from external stimuli that I don't want in my mind. Over the years, I have studied a wide variety of religions and disciplines and I find a form of my mentality shield in all of them.

In the same year Ballesteros achieved fame, it was time for me to choose a career. University was not an option I ever considered because we were poor. England did not have the retail and restaurant infrastructure of America, so working one's way through university was not an option and scholarships were not as available back then.

All of my ancestors had served in the military, and many had experienced the horrors of war. My father had been in the Royal Air Force, and his father had served in the army. Growing up in the farmhouse, military service was certainly glorified. Prints of fighter planes and bombers adorned the walls. The fire utensils were held in empty ammunition shell-cases. We played in the loft with old gas masks and tin helmets. Plastic models of planes and tanks were the common birthday or Christmas gifts handed out. I had dozens of them. We watched any television movie or

drama that had to do with the war, and there were lots of them through the sixties and seventies.

When friends and relatives visited, the conversation turned to the war years within minutes. They were all brought up similarly, and their like-mindedness reinforced their beliefs. Seated at the dinner table, I lapped up every story. It all sounded like a great adventure. Years of external stimuli had rewired my neurons sufficiently so that I never really considered any career option other than the military. My siblings were similarly wired and joined the Royal Air Force when they turned sixteen. I don't think they ever considered an alternative.

Every Sunday, so long as the utility bill and weekly television rental fee had been paid, Audrey and I looked forward to watching a program called *Holiday*. It is the longest running travel review show in the United Kingdom, and in the mid-1970s, it was at its peak. Audrey had never traveled farther than the shoreline. Harry's only trip overseas was a military deployment to Egypt. For the poor, a holiday abroad was a distant dream, and we looked on with a mix of fascination and envy. I wanted nothing more than to be able to see some of those exotic places one day.

I figured I could at least get to see some of the world as well as have a career if I joined the Royal Navy. A documentary series called *Sailor* was a big television hit at the same time. The camera followed some young officers as they struggled to build their early naval careers. Their lives seemed so glamorous and so far removed from my own as they traveled to all kinds of exotic locations. I decided that was what I wanted to do.

Everyone but Audrey laughed at me. No one in our family history had ever been "officer class." In the 1970s, the military academies were elitist, and the Royal Naval College had produced a high percentage of the country's political leaders. Only the sons of titled people were typically admitted.



When I mentioned it to the school career advisor, she pointed out that no one from the province where we lived had ever been admitted to an officer academy in any of the military branches. Instead, she showed me a brochure of a chicken-packing plant in the next town and suggested I apply for an apprenticeship. Fortunately, I was wearing my mentality shield that day and gently deflected her offer.

People around me were quick to point out that I hardly offered the appropriate school or family connections, and my accent clearly marked me as lower class. Everyone thought I was stepping above my station, and I think most were worried that I was setting myself up for a fall.

The radio blasted the latest doom and gloom about the economy, which was decimated in the mid-1970s in the United Kingdom. Military commanders were threatening to quit because of the severe budget cutbacks. The Royal Navy announced it was cutting two thousand positions.

Fortunately for me, I never listened to the radio news. In my spare time, I was always outdoors or down at the library. Despite never having any money and not once succeeding at any venture, my father was obsessed with business and financial news. When he turned up the volume to listen to a talking head tell how bad the state of affairs had become, I went for a walk in the woods. I was not smart enough at the time to know I was protecting my mentality. I just preferred to be outdoors. It probably saved me because I never let any outside influence dilute my dream of becoming a naval officer.

Pestered enough, a parent will break in the face of a child's insistence. Realizing I would not let go of the desire, Audrey made an appointment for me to visit the Royal Navy recruiting offices in a town thirty miles away. Despite the pain in her bones from the cancer, she insisted on making the trip with me. She put on her best outfit and I wore my school uniform, but we still looked ragged.

Three bus routes and a long, painful walk through town later, we arrived at the intimidating building. A tall, fit-looking officer stood behind a huge oak desk as we entered the meeting room. He was in full uniform, sword at his side. When he spoke, his eloquence startled me. I felt my mother shrink back as we took seats opposite the desk.

The officer looked down his nose, took in Audrey's threadbare outfit and while still standing, pronounced the following sentence, which even to this day I recall word for word: "Her Majesty's Royal Navy always applauds ambition. However, I feel it only fair to inform you that we have, how may one put it delicately, certain standards. It would be quite wrong to raise this young man's hopes."

My mother blushed, and I wanted to punch him for humiliating her. I stood to leave, but Audrey's firm hand set me back in a seat. Her eyes bore into the officer, and he had to look away. She insisted he give me an application form. The man made a token protest, but my mother stared him into submission. Years before, I had seen her put God in his place, so I began to feel sorry for this mere mortal. I doubt he had faced enemies in battle more determined than Audrey was in that moment.

Sometime after that trip, I was in a classroom when the teacher began asking if everyone had made their minds up about careers or universities. When I stated that I had applied to join the Royal Navy College, the teacher choked back a laugh. Several of my classmates tittered. The teacher made some comment about there being a fine line between ambition and arrogance. I was no longer bothered by other people's opinions, so added no more explanation. I had started to develop that unshakeable belief in my ability that I had read about in the lives of so many self-made people.

Two months later, when everyone but me had forgotten about the trip to the recruiting office, a letter from the Admiralty arrived.

It stated that my application had been accepted. I was invited to the Admiralty Interview Board in London to be tested mentally and physically. Most people we knew were shocked by it and quick to point out that it was probably a token gesture. Some said it was a politically correct move so the military authorities could not be accused of bias against people from working-class families under our new socialist government.

Having never been away from home before, it was a daunting prospect for a sixteen-year-old. Audrey ordered a suit for me from a catalogue that offered weekly payment terms. It was a gray pinstripe with flared trousers and I looked like I was either going to a wedding or a Valentine's Day massacre. I made the trip alone by train and bus.

Everyone else who had been invited to the tests was older than me, and I was the only one with a working-class accent. I realized, however, that the perceived prejudice was in my mind only. I had been brought up to believe in the class divide, but at the Admiralty, everyone treated me as an equal. I made fast friendships and have fond memories of that week. I had no idea how I performed, but I gave it everything.

I realized quickly that the tests were about character. Some of them seemed designed to cause the candidate to fail, and I noticed quite a few had a hard time with not being able to complete their tasks. I had control of my mentality by then and I understood that the test was not about winning but about remaining calm under pressure. With my mentality shield in place, staying unflappable was now second nature. After every question or challenge thrown my way, I would pause before choosing how to react. I mapped my mind ever so carefully out on my tongue.

Months went by with no response from the Admiralty. Everyone around me either tried to console me or tease me about not making it. Out of the blue, a second letter from the

Admiralty arrived. Because I was not yet of age, it was addressed to my father, and we all gathered in the lounge as he read out my sentence in a formal manner. I had been accepted to the college and, in addition, had been offered a rare scholarship.

Two years later, when I was the appropriate age, I entered the naval college as a midshipman. Joining me in the line of arrivals at the college in 1979 and wearing the largest name badge I had ever seen, was *His Royal Highness—The Midshipman—Prince Andrew*, the middle son of Queen Elizabeth II—someone I had only seen before in news footage. He looked even more nervous than I felt. Quite unnecessarily, he introduced himself. We shook hands, but I was so unprepared, I could not think of a thing to say. I think I just grunted. I do, however, remember wondering what that recruitment officer would have made of the scene.

To have been transported from the derelict farmhouse to the higher echelons of the Naval College is in itself a rags-to-riches story that's the stuff of fairy tales. The success was purely down to my decision to control my mentality. I was beginning to feel that I could do anything, but I still had the daunting prospect of surviving military training, which had a notoriously high drop-out rate.

Military officer training is a proven process of character building. From beginning to end, the intention is to form new mentalities and to mold everyone into the like-mindedness of the required style and standard. Orders have to be given and obeyed without deliberation. It is indoctrination, but not so different from the way our mentalities are formed in civilian life. The differences are that the recruits are fully aware and eager for it to happen, and the time constraints intensify the process.

I realized early on that our backgrounds didn't matter at all. The process was to crush every ego to dust, and then rebuild

characters quickly according to some traditional blueprint. That intensity makes the process necessarily brutal. At times, sleep, nourishment, and even time to breathe are luxuries. I found, however, that being in control of my mentality was a great advantage. I let nothing anyone said or did shake me from my intention of succeeding. When I screwed up and was bawled out by a senior officer, it did not bother me like it did others. I recognized the process for what it was, and most of the time I was wearing my mentality shield anyway.

From thousands of applicants, several hundred were invited to the Admiralty interviewing process, and only one hundred made it from there to the college. Two years later, only five of us were left to graduate. Along the way, people were rejected when they failed academically. There were no second chances. Some could not take the physical or mental regimen and left of their own accord. The majority simply had not been tested beyond their known endurance before, and their characters failed them at crucial times.

An unexpected benefit of the physical side to the training was that I became much fitter. Being an outdoors type as a kid and a decent amateur-standard soccer player, I was already in reasonable shape. The Navy's training, however, added muscular strength and stamina. Before long, I broke into the soccer first-team squad. On my debut in an away game against an army base, I scored the winner in a 2–1 victory and never looked back after that. A month later, I was chosen to play on a navy select team that was to tour military bases in Germany and Holland.

I was nineteen but had never been in an airport or stepped on a plane. All I knew of the countries was what I had seen on those *Holiday* programs on television that I watched with my mother. Finally, I was getting to live my dream of travel. What everyone had said was impossible was now my reality. I was traveling around Europe, while playing the game I loved, and with

the glamour and salary of being a naval officer. I didn't think life could get much better.

Every military branch has its equivalent of the "week of hell," a harsh survival and endurance course designed to test anyone to the limit. My test came at the end of the first year and we were airlifted to a bleak mountain in the middle of a snowy December.

After route marching for the third day in a row without much sleep or food while carrying equipment that was deliberately weighted down with wet sand, I saw grown men cry. Every few miles, a mental or logistics test awaited us. It was as diverse as building a bridge out of the equipment to cross an impossibly swollen river or walking naked through an almost frozen lake to get clothes and equipment across without letting them get wet.

The worst torture is the offer to end the endurance. All day and all night, our transmitters blared at regular intervals with offers of a warm bed and food if we were only to ask for it. Anonymity was assured, and each morning our group got smaller. During the night, several always left quietly and without prejudice. I never saw them again.

In that week, five of our group suffered exposure and were airlifted off the mountain. Two broke bones. One collapsed, claiming not to be able to move another inch. Although it was explicitly against the rules, we carried him and his equipment for the next two days until he was removed from the exercise on health grounds. We also had to carry the equipment of all those who had left for any reason.

At night, we slept for a few uneasy hours under a tarpaulin. Our breath froze on the inside of the tarp so that it took all our remaining strength to fold it up small enough to carry. Just as REM sleep arrived, an explosion, or a megaphone would always rouse us and we would have to break camp.

Sleep deprivation is a known method of torture and I lost all sense of place and time. My feet were so blistered that they

looked reptilian. Yet inside my mind, I felt calm and confident. The outside world ceased to have form or meaning. It was just a matter of taking one more step, then another.

When I finally reached the target destination after eight days with my few remaining colleagues, we were a day later than expected. I assumed the other groups had made it safely and were back at the college in the dry and warmth. The receiving officer, who was not too pleased to have been made to wait another day in that bleak landscape, informed us that our group was the only one to make the destination.

I often think about that week, and I try to find some common denominator in those who survived, and in those who gave up. There is nothing obvious. One was the son of a Right Honorable politician. He was fit, well spoken, and a hit with the ladies. One was a vicar's only child, mild-mannered and introverted. One was the pragmatic son of a senior police commissioner. We were all different shapes and sizes, some more academically talented than others, all from completely different backgrounds and up-bringsings. None of us had ever been tested like that before. During the whole week, however, we all had an unshakeable belief that we would make the destination. None of us ever doubted it, and we never had to encourage each other.

We encouraged the others in our group, tried hard to talk them out of quitting, and carried more than our loads to give them a break. When the snow became a blizzard, we walked faster. When the pains in our empty stomachs caused some to double up in agony, we started singing. Whatever stimuli smacked our mentalities, we carefully chose our reactions. I believe that is why we made it to the destination. It is the only thing we had in common. We controlled our reactions to the extreme situations around us.

After a couple days to recover, I was called to the Captain's office. As I expected, we had been followed and monitored every

step of the way by seasoned special troops. Our conversations had been recorded, and a report had been compiled on our performance under duress. It was like that all the time. Officers are constantly being assessed, inside and outside the college. The report was fair, and I had been assessed with average marks. The Captain told me that there was something in the assessment to indicate potential leadership skills, but he wanted to test some more. Just like that, I was promoted, not on merit, but as a test; the next morning I found myself in charge of a division of forty people.

I was still in the character-forming phase of my training and had developed no leadership skills or talent that could make me useful as a divisional leader. I was nineteen but with a baby face that made me still look like a schoolboy. Yet there I was with yellow bands on my uniform, addressing a room full of older, hardened personnel. Just like back at the high school, I was aware of the whispers behind my back from the veterans who thought me too green to succeed.

I was given a book of standing orders and personnel reports with a summary of the divisional performance. It was so much information to digest, that I mostly just scanned the pages. Even doing that, it was obvious that the division had issues. Out of five divisions, their performances placed them fourth, but historically they had regularly been at the top, and the hierarchy was not happy.

When I addressed the room, I could feel everyone's tension. Initially, I was not sure how they would accept such a young, inexperienced leader, but I saw in their eyes a complete lack of confidence, not in me but in themselves. It felt as if they were ashamed. I realized that they needed someone to encourage them. They did not care so much who I was, where I was from, or how old I was, so long as I could help them look good again.



Initially, there was some complaining and finger-pointing, and everyone had a desire to analyze what was going wrong. Their mentalities were *against* many things, including their failures. In reading the biographies of great men and women, many attributed their success to being able to cut through the detail of complicated projects and focus on key points. Men like Henry Ford and Andrew Carnegie ran businesses for which they had no qualifications or history. Then they would hire experts in each key area to form a tight group of functional leaders. They also shunned too much analysis on the past for a focus more on what the company desired to achieve. Those tycoons were always *for* something. I used the same idea.

I broke the divisional tasks down to its three key elements of logistics, engineering, and seamanship. Then I read through personnel reports to find people who could be the expert functional leaders. Some of them took a lot of cajoling, but I encouraged them to follow my approach and break their function down to its three core elements, and recruit experts in each task, all the while encouraging each task leader to break their task down into its three core technical details and recruit skilled people to perform them, etc. I had no idea how to do any of the things I was asking them to do because I had yet to be trained for them.

I stopped the downward spiral of what everyone was *against* and got them thinking about what they were *for*, which was to be the best division again. To be the best, each had to be the best in his role, either as a functional leader or a technical worker. It was a success, and within six months the division was ranked number one in all parameters.

All of the hard work was done by functional and task leaders. All I did was change their mentalities a little. At no time was I popular because it was a new approach and a lot of hard work. I was not used to leadership and realize now that I was not at all flexible or considerate of feelings at the time. I was told by one

of my peers that I was even the subject of restroom wall graffiti for my strict discipline in the turnaround. I was not there to win friends, however; I was there to win. The cynics in the division did their best to disrupt the program, but I was able to shut out their negative energy sufficiently to focus on what we were aiming for. Without even knowing it back then, I was becoming a master of my mentality.

The benefits of this success paid off almost immediately. Suddenly, the hierarchy saw promise in this pauper made good. I started to get my pick of assignments, and I chose anything that meant travel. I spent six weeks as a guest of the British Embassy in Paris. I took command of a picket boat and sailed up the Rivers Seine and Marne. I spent two weeks as a guest of a famous champagne family at their chateau. On my first trip at sea, I visited Cyprus, Turkey, Malta, Italy, Madeira, Gibraltar, Greece, and Africa.

I got to play soccer in every country and made many foreign friends. All the time, I kept reminding myself that if I had not controlled my mentality, I would have let others talk me out of this adventure before it began. I could see the power of mentality control with every step I took. I remember a gloriously sunny day in January, standing on the flat-topped rock that holds the Acropolis of Athens, 500 feet above sea level, and thinking to myself, "I did this. I made this happen."

That ability to control mentality was soon to have its hardest test. After I graduated, with the award of college colors, two experiences combined to change my life quickly. Both shocked me. Having been so immersed in my adventure, I had given little thought to the outside world. For the graduation ceremony, I had arranged to meet my parents at a local hotel. I walked straight by Audrey without recognizing her. In the time since I had last been home on leave, her cancer had worsened. She looked like a wizened old lady, barely able to hobble along with the aid of walking sticks. Not only was the sight of her a shock, I

was stunned that I had become so self-involved with the navy project that I really had given her condition very little thought. It was like a slap in the face.

After the ceremony, I took compassionate leave, and on the first day that I took her to the hospital for her chemotherapy, the second experience slapped me even harder. I saw my future wife and fell head over heels in love.

My leave lasted six weeks before the navy started to insist that I return. I had been assigned a terrific job at sea on the newest frigate. My four fellow graduates were green with envy. In those six weeks, however, something had changed inside me. I realized I was intoxicated by the travel and glamour, but not necessarily dedicated to the service as much as I should be. Instinctively, I knew I would resign my commission, because the navy demands that it become your mother, wife, and family. There can be no half measures or partial commitments.

Even during my brief naval life, I had seen so many servicemen suffer broken hearts while away on duty. The “Dear John” letters, as we called them, happened every week. The thought of my mother dying while I was away, after all she had done for me, was too much. Additionally, I couldn’t get the image of my future wife out of my head. I knew I was going to marry her. It is impossible to explain that feeling, but for any cynics reading this, I can tell you for a fact that love at first sight is as real as the American dream. Don’t let anyone try to tell you different.

After weeks of sleepless nights, and with my bosses heaping pressure on me to return, I made my decision. I told no one else for fear that they would try to talk me out of it and traveled down to the port as normal. Everyone from my ex-teachers, my family, and friends, to the local newspaper reporter were now following my career. The pressure of letting all those people down weighed heavily. The train journey passed while I was in a trance-like state.

Aboard the frigate, the Captain tried his hardest to talk me out of my decision. He was so sure of the mistake I was making that he broke the strict rules and let me read my career performance reports. In one was a wonderful line that commented on the strength of my *mentality*. I had to smile. I almost cracked. I was seconds away from changing my mind, but I resigned my commission.

I was bombarded by criticism from all quarters. People's biggest concern seemed to be their fear that I was following the same pattern of behavior as my father and his father. Some of the rhetoric was vitriolic.

No one stopped yelling at me long enough to allow me to explain, and I learned another important lesson with regard to control of mentality. One of the harder things to accept when it comes to taking control of your destiny is that sometimes the only way to stop the negative external stimuli is to shut it off. That is easy when it comes to a television or radio but hard when it comes to people. Some people were so persistent in their criticism that, for my own sanity, I had to shut them down. A phone call cut short or an unanswered letter, and those people exited my life forever. It would not be the last time I had to do that, but it is always hard to let go.

Over the next few months, I continued to take Audrey to the hospital for her chemotherapy appointments, but it took me a long time to conjure up the courage to ask my future wife on a date. A few weeks before Audrey died, she asked me, "Is she the one?" I did not need to answer. She smiled, and whispered, "I'm glad."



This is the conclusion of Step One. This step needs to be the first to be mastered because, to escape the quicksand, you need to start thinking and reacting according to your own instincts. It

is the way to rediscover the pioneering spirit with which you were born. Intentionally or otherwise, the media and people in your environment wire your neurons in a like-minded manner, unless you consciously start to change that process. The changes are simple, but not easy, because you must consistently control your mentality.

With the gentle encouragement of my publisher, I have revealed intimate details about my life that many of my friends and family will read for the first time. I am an intensely private person and this was an uncomfortable process, but necessary. So many self-help books are written by people who don't practice what they teach, and the writers have often not encountered success before their book starts selling well. That lack of credibility has always bothered me. Authenticity is essential if this book is to be of real value to you, and that necessitates it being so personal. Parts of my life story are the best testimony to the power of these principles.

If you start to make small changes in your thoughts and reactions, you will get out of your version of quicksand. I did, and I am no different than anyone else.

Step Two shows you what to do once you are out of the quicksand. In all those autobiographies I have read, what separates the successful from the crowd is a winning idea. Step Two shows you how to rewire your neurons to put yourself in a position to have those moments of insight.

