

IT BEGINS WITH YOU

TRANSFORM YOUR MIND
TO EXCEL AS AN
ALTERNATIVE LEADER

MARI WILLIAMS
THE MIND ARCHITECT

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“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?’ Actually, who are you not to be?... Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do... It’s not just in some of us; it’s in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

MARIANNE WILLIAMSON,
A RETURN TO LOVE

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This book is for you...

This book is for you, and other leaders like you. Whether you are (or aspire to be) leading a family, a community, a corporate team or a huge multinational, you know you want to empower yourself to excel in your leadership. Simultaneously, you have a desire to inspire greatness, to unite, empower and transform those around you, whether that's your children, or those who follow your vision, to be the best leaders *they* can be, too. You want to be respected for leading and communicating with honesty, empathy, and integrity, and for innovating and creating impact.

Being an average leader is not for you.

Because you're smart, you're fully aware that you need some tweaks to truly maximise your performance and fulfil your potential. You know you could push higher but even though you keep trying, something keeps holding you back. In your search for answers and solutions, you've become bored and dissatisfied with the standard leadership coaching, training and theories. You're looking for a new *alternative* approach that *really* works, from someone who *really* 'gets' you.

You might be struggling with:

- Continually repeating behaviours and beliefs that don't serve you well.
- Imposter syndrome, lack of self-confidence, or fear of failure.
- Stress, tiredness or feeling isolated.
- Worrying what others think of you.

- Emotional baggage from your past that you just can't shake.
- Making good decisions quickly, procrastination.
- Letting go of control – delegation, micro-managing, or feeling out of control.
- Conflict, communication and challenging relationships at home and work.
- Finding time to relax – a work/life balance.
- Generally, just not feeling good enough.

This book is for you because you're ready to elevate your performance *and fulfilment* to the next level, and you want to empower those around you to do the same; because you are courageous enough to do the inner work to shift those issues that are holding you back from becoming a true Alternative Leader.

This book will...

This book will enable you to maximise your performance across *all* aspects of your life: if you've been 'playing small', it ends right here.

Because you are a person first and a leader second, my process begins with you. It will give you the framework and tools you'll need to grow and develop, and positively affect *every single aspect and area of your life – fast!*

And its effects won't stop there.

Reading and engaging with the process of this book will not only **change** you for the better, it will also give you rock-solid **foundations** that you'll build on for the rest of your life, safe in the knowledge that whatever you build, whatever heights you reach, you'll be building from a place of **core strength**, encouraging and enabling others to follow in your footsteps, and leaving a lasting legacy.

This book is different from most leadership books. This book is *not* about squeezing a you-shaped peg into a square leadership hole; leadership cannot be contrived. It's not about identikit models, theories and tips; we can all spot a fake.

I have built upon 30 years of personal experience, and 15 years working 1-2-1 with leaders (parents, community leaders, corporate leaders, and influencers) enabling them to lead, love and parent confidently; to be happier every day and to create positive impact on those around them and the world.

This book will take you through my Five Principles of Alternative Leadership; a proven process that will provide you with the knowledge that

you need to change, and with practical exercises and tools designed to adapt to the unique *you*. You are likely aware that your unconscious mind functions in ways that you are not consciously aware of: for example, as you read this, you are breathing and your temperature is being regulated without conscious thought. However, your unconscious also creates whole systems of beliefs and behaviours that it *thinks* are protecting you. The problem is, those beliefs and behaviours may actually be holding you back!

This book will empower *you* to remove any such blocks and to create *your own* style of leadership: one that flows naturally from *you*, giving you self-assured confidence in any situation – whether you're dealing with stakeholders or clients, or leading your team or your teenager.

My Five Principles of Alternative Leadership will:

- Increase your capability to make fast, effective decisions.
- Give you the understanding and practical tools to manage conflict.
- Hone your communication skills so you can convey your vision with ease.
- Boost your resilience.
- Reduce your stress.
- Clear auto-pilot unconscious behaviours that are holding you back.
- Enhance your self-worth.
- Address taboos like anger and shame.
- Improve your energy.

- Leave you feeling in control.

This book will show you how to be an Alternative Leader.

What is an Alternative Leader?

“Leader is not a title you give to yourself.”

—SHEILA GEMIN, CLIENT EXECUTIVE PARTNER
AND CO-PRESIDENT

An *Alternative Leader* is one who leads from within; one whose influence will have positive impact on their followers (whether they're their team, community, family or friends) for years to come because of *who they are*.

They are an ally to their followers. They lead with honesty, empathy and integrity; seeing their ability to express their vulnerabilities as a key leadership strength. They *may* have a fancy office or title, but that's *not* what's impressive about them. What *is* impressive about them is the way they make others feel valued; the way they inspire people, and leave them feeling enthused, ambitious, and motivated, nurturing others to improve *their* leadership.

They know that they do not function in isolation, so they listen to their followers and learn from them. They give others respect and autonomy, knowing that their followers, whoever they may be, are the key to their own development and the impact that they can create in the world. They provide security. They exude quiet confidence. They are humorous, yet know when to be serious; they possess humility, creativity and vision. They can apologise, and adapt when things go wrong. They see value in each and every person.

What's more, they know with unquestionable certainty that they need to keep developing personally, to do the inner and outer work necessary so they can live up to the respect of their followers and be the best version of themselves.

Are you ready to be an Alternative Leader?

Foreword

by Sam Conniff Allende

A leader is something I've often been described as, something I always want to be, but it's also something I've very rarely felt I am.

Between you and me, I suspect I'm not alone in that.

I've been in the Leadership space my whole adult life, and thought I'd heard every argument, approach and 'new idea', and to be honest, that's how I felt as I began 'It Begins with You'. But it's very far from how I felt when I finished.

Leadership is a concept and a construct without physical form. It's an idea and ideal we covet so much that we give it life through misleading physical manifestations. Awards, speeches, inspirational Instagram posts, tough decisions, furrowed brows and power suits are just some of the icons we've created. But like a set of stock photographs, they can add up to a one dimensional, unachievable and often unhelpful narrative.

There's a paradox at play: it's possible to amass or achieve all those trappings and tokens of leadership, and still not feel like a leader. You might be on the podium, making a great speech, accepting an award, filled with inspiring Instagram-able quotes and wearing a cracking power suit, while also feeling like a total imposter. I'm speaking for myself here; but I also know I'm speaking for hundreds of other 'leaders' I've met, mentored and managed over the years who've earned their stripes, but can't see past their scars of whatever it is that holds them back.

You needn't be the same. Because, for once, this is a book about leadership that's all about you. It's also all about the truth.

This book is not a set of case-studies of real but unrelatable Heroes Of Industry, or searingly inspiring stories of survival against the odds: this is an in-depth look at you, that will unlock the leader you can be.

I've read every page of this book. I've done every (occasionally uncomfortable) exercise Mari sets. And I've not only emerged a better leader, but I've wished (profoundly) that I'd got hold of it a few years ago: this is a book that takes leadership to its necessary next levels, both deeper and higher.

As Mari points out, most people come to her in times of need, and she often wishes she could have got to them sooner. That's not to say this book is only for you if you're mid-crisis: I'm not, I'm post-crisis, and it's still the best leadership read I've ever read. If you are in crisis, or even just at a crossroads, I can empathise; and I advise you to embrace this book, give the exercises their space, and embrace feeling awkward and uncomfortable as well.

To put my advice in perspective, I want to share a story I think will resonate. It's of a moment in my life that came back to me as I read the book, wishing I'd held it in my hands back then.

One optimistic morning, a few years ago in my early forties, I got up early to begin a new chapter of my life: fresh coffee, clean shirt, tidy desk and the eternal over-promise of a new notepad.

I stared at the wall and realised I might as well be sat in my lucky pants for all anyone else cared. After two hard-fought decades of being The Boss, the leader, the award-winning entrepreneur, I was, like the Renegade

Master, back once again, alone... and amongst the silence, all-consuming anxiety knocked much louder than any opportunity.

How long could I put off ignoring the real problem - how to be a leader to myself?

As I sat there, trying not to be swallowed by fear, I felt a familiar feeling I'd been there before, and then it hit me: in my early twenties, I'd actually sat in a pair of pants, staring at an actual bedroom wall, having, in a moment of moral outrage, walked out of a role filled with promise and potential, without much of a plan.

But soon that bedroom housed my first business.

I let the memories wash over me: after outgrowing my bedroom, we moved into a warehouse, had a fuck-tonne of fun and made something beautiful that people wanted to buy. The business, Don't Panic, won every award from Cannes to a Bafta whilst creating some of the most successful campaigns for charities the world has ever seen.

In looking back, I saw how I took the lessons of starting a business in my twenties into my thirties, and combined my unformed passions for making a dent on the world.

We created a social enterprise called Livity to open doors for, and unlock the leadership potential of, many thousands of less advantaged young people; who turned their lives around, their dreams into reality, and unfair odds in their favour for a change. After a decade or so, our reach was global, our clients were the world's best-known brands, and we won every award from Entrepreneur of the Year to Business of the Year, with prime ministers and royals doling out the medals.

It was at its heady heights that I began to realise I needed to leave. To let old leaders run an organisation so dedicated to young leaders, seemed

wrong.

I got myself a book deal. I re-imagined myself as an author and got started writing. Then I got stuck.

Change isn't easy for anyone, but when my usually resilient ego turned insurgent and teamed up with my inner critic, I was outnumbered by self-doubt. I was so at odds with myself that I even considered getting a proper job.

And so, one optimistic morning, a few years ago in my early forties... there I was, having gone full circle. But this wasn't a victory lap of procrastination. This had been a self-education, a reminder that sometimes, once you've got the frame, it's easier to fill things in. And then I had an idea. I bought some cheap frames, and covered the blank walls of self-doubt with reasons to believe.

I framed the flyer for my first rave; the Don't Panic fanzine I wrote in collaboration with a then very young Banksy; the cover of the first by-young-people-for-young-people magazines I published; the first single I produced, the one with the Mark Ronson remix; the DVD cover of the late-night TV series I'd exec produced; the party snaps of the business turning ten; the photo of me and my young mentees outside Number 10; and the draft cover artwork for my imminent book.

And all of a sudden, I saw not just a set of events, but a sequence. Instead of forgettable individual achievements, it added up to an evolving adventure, one I still wanted to enjoy. With this realisation, I found and put up one more frame, this time empty. A frame for my daydreams. Enough space to stare at without getting lost; a reminder there's more to look forward to than there is to fear.

Thankfully, you do not have to trawl your subconscious, or become a ‘trauma tourist’ (as Mari puts it) to find your inner leader; because this book does a better job, and without requiring poorly honed DIY skills that will leave holes in either your walls or your mind.

The truth is that Leadership isn’t about external measures. Leadership is something that happens inside you. It’s partly your past, and being able to see how that’s shaped you. It’s partly about today, and the choices you make. And it’s partly about the future, and realising it’s all up to you.

It’s been intangible, timeless and annoyingly tricky to pin down. Until now. Until this book.

I still have that one empty frame up. It reminds me that leadership is always within, that it’s always possible to fill the next frame you’ll be proud to put on the wall, and that in everything we do, we’re already writing the next chapter.

Now: take hold of the next chapters of your adventure by getting a pen and paper, clearing some decent chunks of time and headspace; and get ready to begin with you.

Sam Conniff, author of *Be More Pirate*

www.samconniff.com

Introduction

What's your personal definition of success, for yourself? Whatever it is, you need to take responsibility for, and control of, the journey between where you are right now and where you want to be. If you want to take control of that journey, this is the book for you.

As I write this, we are experiencing one of the most critical times in living memory on our planet. There's unrest in almost every area; and not only for humans, but in the animal kingdom and for the planet itself. We're trying to deal with climate change, pollution, and now the coronavirus pandemic. Around the world, our political leaders are under fire – some deservedly so.

However, with lockdown having been almost globally imposed, people are being forced to stop, and they're reassessing their material and emotional needs and their mental health. They're spending more time with their families and working out what's really important in their lives, something most people haven't previously stopped to think about. I don't want to ignore the millions for whom coronavirus has been devastating – I acknowledge them and sympathise wholeheartedly – but this 'quiet space' is allowing positivity between families, communities and employees to build. We're seeing collaboration, inspiration, innovation and creativity go through the roof. Amidst upheaval and devastation, love, kindness and consideration are flourishing.

The differences in how the populations of different countries have coped *emotionally* with the pandemic's effects can, in my opinion, be directly correlated with the type of leadership they've had. Where leaders

have provided strong, self-assured, confident and *authentic* emotionally-contained messaging, people have responded far more positively, and have been more accepting of restrictions. Those leaders provided the safety and security of ‘a plan’ at a time when I’m sure *they personally* were also feeling concerned. *Good self-worth* enabled them to radiate strong, secure leadership when their followers were at their most vulnerable. Could you do the same?

How are *you* leading?

I believe that most leaders are not only excited about their own personal ambitions and growth, but also have a desire to create an impact on the world. Whether you are looking to *tweak* your performance across your whole life, ensure you stay *at the top of your game*, or, to be frank, you’re on the *edge* of burnout... **you will find solutions here.**

Many leaders, whether they’re politicians, pilots or parents, think they need a massive life-shift to live and enjoy the life they really want to lead. They see their happiness, fulfilment, and financial success as being things that have to start in their external world: and they’re wrong.

“If I work late tonight and through this weekend... if I get another qualification, if I find another role, buy the perfect house or – the ultimate dream – win the lottery, then I can slow down and life will be wonderful!”

Does that statement resonate with you?

Are you working later nights to tighter deadlines, commuting longer distances (although the pandemic may have righted that one) and waiting for that elusive tipping point?

Most leaders don't prioritise themselves. They may know that they have some issues, or just notice a pattern of behaviour in themselves that they don't like; but generally, they don't think they have time to do anything about it because there's already so much on their plate. So they just struggle on. The problem with this is that one day they might look up and realise they're on a hamster wheel.

Are you on a hamster wheel?

Whether you are looking forward to your next week at work, or dreading it, *depends entirely on you*.

If you are looking forward to it, that's great: but if not, and if you don't stop and do the inner work (and it could just be the tiniest tweak) then you could find yourself on a hamster wheel, as many of my clients have in their past. No matter how fast you go, the wheel will just speed up to match you... or it will break.

“

Most leaders don't
prioritise themselves,
then one day they look
up and they are stuck
on a hamster wheel.

”

Even if it doesn't break, it isn't a happy place to be. We can barely function, let alone be creative, make good decisions, and be fully present in life whilst in that situation. I've been there; it's exhausting, and there's always a knock-on effect.

Take staying late or working too many weekends, for example: if we aren't balancing our time, we develop stress and anxiety issues; our physical health suffers – coughs and colds become regular unwanted visitors; we stop eating well and exercising. We tend to drink more alcohol (especially if stress is affecting our sleep) and eat more sugary foods: consequently, we put on weight, and our self-confidence starts to shrink as our bellies begin to grow. We become snappier versions of ourselves. We feel guilty around our families, as we know we aren't mentally present or spending any quality time with them. We don't leave any time for ourselves, because it feels unfair to when we're too busy to leave time for anyone else. We spend less and less time doing the things we love with the people we love, whilst spending more and more time working even harder to be able to do the things we love with the people we love... *hang on!* There's a problem there, surely?

You may think you're holding it all together at work, but have you actually retreated into your own thoughts and worries, causing you to miss the unconscious cues that those around you aren't doing well either, because they're feeding on your stress and lack of direction? Have you ever come across the term 'contagious emotion'? It refers to when those around us unconsciously pick up and mirror our behaviours, and your team is likely to be affected by it. If you miss those cues, their productivity will drop, and, in return, that will affect how successful you are... uh-oh, it's that hamster wheel again!

As Imposter Syndrome, fear of failure, poor communication and the inevitable conflicts they cause raise their ugly heads, you won't be able to raise your own to find solutions, because you'll be too tired... and perhaps then you'll either worry that burnout is just around the corner, or see it standing there right in front of you... playing with matches.

You may, because you're a leader, maybe even ***the*** leader, see admitting to any or all of the above as being a sign of failure and weakness. You might not delegate, because you're too worried that those you delegate to will make mistakes, and you really want/need that promotion... because you're *so tired* that you desperately want that 'wonderful life' just so you can relax and be the loving partner and parent you used to be... so you stay late... Are you seeing the problem here? Can you hear the wheel squeaking?

Help is at hand

Okay, now let's pause for a moment.

Maybe you are feeling at the top of your game, but want to take action to equip yourself for future challenges; or maybe you see shadows of yourself in the above – or perhaps the shadows of someone else that you know. Either way, the knowledge and toolset this book will equip you with will help.

Know, like and trust yourself

There's a business saying: before you buy anything from anyone, you have to '*know, like and trust*' them. So, if you don't, at an unconscious level, know, like and trust *yourself*, how will you ever buy '*you*'? And if *you* can't buy '*you*', why should anyone else, professionally or personally?

When I see leaders who haven't sorted their internal issues, but instead, offer a façade that *looks like* they are okay, then I worry for them... and I really worry about the impact they will have on those around them.

If we aren't okay in ourselves, then we will *unconsciously* play out our own emotional baggage on those around us. We can't help it. This book aims to show you why that is; give you the understanding and tools to change it in yourself; and become a powerful *Alternative Leader*.

What you need to be a good leader

This book is premised on my belief that true leaders lead from within. I think it's *absolutely* fine for *anyone* to be ambitious, and no-one should feel guilty about wanting to further their career or their material wealth. However, a true leader *also* wants those around them to feel valued and respected, and wants to enable their followers to grow and develop with them. Many of them also have a strong desire to create a positive global impact on people or the environment. They're wider desires than the things they want for themselves, that spread from the inside of them outwards: it's not a way they *choose* to be, but something that comes naturally from **who** *they are*.

So, if being a true leader is about **who** someone is, then to *be* a true leader **you** must *be* authentic, honest, confident, full of integrity, and deeply empathetic. You must be able to deal with feedback and failure, show vulnerability, and communicate your vision so that others will *choose* to follow you. Crucially, to do all of those things well, you *must* like yourself – not to say that you must love *everything* about yourself (we're all perfectly imperfect) but you must be well-balanced and have good self-worth.

You need to be able to function to a high level across many different aspects of your life at once. You need to be able to *combine* the powers of your rational self and emotional self to achieve the highest possible levels in decision-making, communication and goal-setting; you need to be cognitively flexible, and able to switch modes fast and fluidly. You need to know your value, your strengths and your weaknesses. You need to be able to delegate, to trust, and to be vulnerable and emotional when it's appropriate. Many leaders try to quash their emotional side, and it's a huge mistake. The ability to use the duality of their rational and emotional sides as a strength is one of the differences between an average leader and a strong, Alternative Leader.

Many people never stop to give themselves a spring clean; but if you do, you can powerfully escalate your performance, bringing you to peak in all aspects of your life very quickly. This requires you to be in flow with yourself as much as possible, and to notice *when this is no longer the case*, so you can take *immediate on-the-spot* action to restore it. You need your unconscious to be clear, and working *for* you.

That's why I created my Five Principles of Alternative Leadership: to enable you to clear your inner issues, and gain understanding and clarity. It's a process that I hope will excite you so much that you will want to keep developing and honing yourself for the rest of your life!

My vision

I've written this book because I'm tired of turning on the news and seeing so many poor leaders making really *bad* decisions that will affect our whole world and my children's future.

What's most frustrating is that in their words and actions, I can hear and see that those leaders are making decisions from *unhealthy places*, from inner selves with unconscious emotional baggage... and their decisions have global impact! I find myself wanting to reach out to help them.

It's doubly frustrating because in my job I also see an amazing variety of *excellent* leaders – young aspiring leaders, and older, experienced leaders who are, like me, approaching that place of wisdom... middle-age. What I've begun to see is that these people, young and old, *do* have answers and solutions to some real-world issues. They are creative and innovative and *do* have the energy to change things, whether at a grass-roots family level, or at a globally-impacting level – but they often don't feel good enough, knowledgeable enough, or confident enough to. *They get in their own way.*

As a client said to me: 'The biggest problem in my business is me.'

I just couldn't sit back and watch it any longer... and I want this to be my legacy.

I want to help those excellent leaders to take action on their inspired ideas. Leaders have exponential and generational impact, and I chose to work with them to increase the impact I could have on the world. I want to work with those at the very top. If I work with leaders, I can not only help them to create impact, but also to improve their leadership, themselves, their parenting and their partnering.

My five principles cross *all aspects of life*, and using them will save you time and energy – the solutions you will find will create impact across the board for you, and save you from having to source and pay for help in each area.

If all of that wasn't reason enough for me to write a book, my clients have pleaded with me to write one so they could pass on the lessons they

had learnt to those around them: and, as one jokingly put it:

‘I’ll leave it on my boss’s desk.’

This book is for those who want to create change, for themselves and others. If you want to be a great leader who stands out from the pack, a well-remembered *Alternative Leader*: read on.

To illustrate the effectiveness of my five principles, here’s a testimonial from one of my clients about the results of our work.

‘I think in today’s world we’re all amazingly skilled at looking alright, even great, when really we’re not. Social media has only amplified this skill: and yet for me, this was not the case.

I met Mari when I finally grew tired from trying to hold that mask up.

I was in my early thirties, had achieved a senior management position in a multinational energy company, and yet I was struggling. I could see patterns in my work over the previous decade that would keep showing up. I knew it was to do with my head, but I was also fearful of admitting that I might need therapy. In fact, accepting that reality was what took the most time.

When I found Mari, I was really concerned that our work should not be about finding blame, or wallowing in childhood experiences, but helping me fix myself and get better. In my first consultation, she totally reassured me that this was not her job: In her words, that she was not “a memory tourist”. I loved this reassurance, and I loved the work we did. It was focused on understanding the routes of these patterns, finding the anchor and changing it for the better... but the ripples it had were amazing.

I felt again in control of my work life. I didn’t feel fearful of change or challenges, and when they came – and they did – the work we had done

helped me perform at an even stronger level. More than that, it allowed me to be more intentional in my relationships too. I was able to care for my team, and my colleagues' well-being, as much as care about the work; and outside of work I felt more true to myself, and a better friend and family member.

I'm so excited to see this book, because I know how hard it was to get this fixed; and, being a massive business book reader, I'd have loved to have known sooner that I could really shift these patterns, these behaviours, by using the tools and techniques Mari puts together.'

—ANDY, GLOBAL DIGITAL BUSINESS LEADER

CHAPTER 1

My story

My own journey to leadership and working with leaders started when I was very young...

When I was five, I had a book called *Who Are You?* (Boyer 1963), in which a small boy asked different parts of himself *who* they were.

The boy asked his toes and fingers, his ears and knees who they were and who they could be, before eventually realising that all these parts made him who he was: a whole person.

I used to take this book (which I still have!) to an old apple tree in the garden, my thinking spot, where I would climb up to a smooth branch, and, as the leaves rustled in the wind, sit and survey my world. I'd ponder, 'Who could I be?'

On reflection, I believe this book sparked a sense of self-determination and curiosity in my young mind; I was always a deep thinker. Could I be more? Different? Could my *life* be different? Could I be 'normal', whatever that was? I believe it awoke an understanding in me that who I was was not stationary, but flexible and changeable: it gave me a sense of the future...

So...

Who do *you* want to be?

My past

I had a difficult childhood – not as bad as some, but worse than some others.

My mother likely had an undiagnosed mental health condition, such as Bipolar or Borderline Personality Disorder. The psychiatrists sent by the GP tried to help, but her fear of us ‘being taken away’ and her high intelligence meant that she knew exactly what to say to them to slide under their radar. Her behaviour towards her children was erratic, veering from singing, playing guitar, and taking us out on drives, to shouting, being violent and feeling suicidal.

She was a hoarder, and I slept on a duvet on top of piles of junk, which was about two foot above floor-level, at its lowest point. Food was an irregular commodity, which I’m sure is partly responsible for my love of food now! I attended school intermittently, having been asked to leave a public school aged four because I ‘couldn’t sit still’ (what four-year-old can?!). I went to four different state schools over the next 12 years, but mainly I didn’t go to school properly until I was 12. The only friends I had were the neighbours’ kids: we would group together and maraud around playing hide-and-seek up and down the road (do you remember doing that?). I read books, watched TV and got lost in movies. You can learn a lot from film and TV: morals, values and philosophy – especially if you watch Captain Picard in *Star Trek*, old Open University lectures... and *The A-Team*.

My mother had so much emotional baggage that, despite seeing counsellors on and off all her life, she never shifted it enough to be truly happy or a good mother, despite trying desperately hard to do both. My mother loved us. It would often show in critical moments, when our survival was at stake, but it could also be heard on the old cassette

recordings she made. It's in the tone of her voice and in the songs and lullabies she composed.

Looking back, it makes me sad that by the time I had found a therapy that would have helped her, she was in the early stages of dementia...

My early career

I grew out of this childhood knowing that it *must* have damaged me; and there began a voyage through self-help books, counselling, CBT, psychotherapy, coaching... yes, you name it, I've probably tried it.

At 17 I became a mother and wife for the first time, and by 21, I had three children. At 37 I was a mother of five children, and leaving my second decade-long marriage. I'm driven by my desire to do right by my children just as much as I am by my desire to live up to my own potential; I've always wanted to be a better mother than mine was. I've succeeded in this, I hope, but there have definitely been times when my own issues have got in the way.

As I grew older, I got really tired of working so hard, fighting against my childhood baggage: the triggers and modelling that had created poor beliefs and behaviours that I rationally knew weren't productive... and yet I couldn't seem to stop my reactions. I tried hard not to lose my temper (anger was a real issue for me), to stop feeling that I had to prove myself over and over, and to stop constantly worrying about how others were judging me, but all to no avail. I had terrible Imposter Syndrome and fear of failure. I always felt like the 12-year-old in the room and that someone would call me out one day:

‘There's that stupid kid – what's she doing in here?’

I felt that I wasn't good enough, no matter what I achieved. I hadn't done brilliantly in school, scraping by with passes, which had embedded the 'stupid' belief into me (of course, my brain didn't take into account the truth of the fact that I hadn't attended school for 90% of my education, and yet had still managed to gain passes! I had low-level depression, and suffered from panic attacks which I hid fairly well. No matter what therapy I tried, it just didn't clear the issues that were holding me back, making me deeply unhappy on the inside.

I initially trained to be a teacher to pass on my love of reading. I wanted to empower children, especially those with the most difficult backgrounds, so I could show them that they could be whatever they wanted to be. However, when I realised that I wanted to know more about their personal stories than I wanted to teach them grammar, I transitioned into management. I knew I was good with people and I wanted to get a feel for having my own team. I wanted to understand how it felt to be in those leadership shoes.

What I came to understand was that managing a team could feel difficult; but managing two toddlers and three teenagers at the same time, with a mix of genders, personalities and learning superpowers, like Dyslexia and ADD, and with one of them being Bipolar too, as my daughter is, felt a lot harder. There's a reason I started to go grey young!

In my 30s I attended a course for parents of teens run by Judy and Sarah who were inspirational teachers. I experienced experiential learning; finally, some of those behaviours stuck within me started to shift! The changes so profoundly impacted me that I immediately trained and set up a business as a parent coach. Having experienced my mother's poor parenting, I was (and still am!) really passionate that we get it right for our kids.

Moving to leadership coaching

As my business grew from parent coaching to leadership coaching, I became interested in the link between the type of parenting we receive as children and its lasting impact on our lives and careers. I took a role as a Family Worker, where I worked one-to-one with parents and children (many of them from disadvantaged backgrounds) across 13 different schools. The aim of the role was to help catch and prevent the loss of potential at the earliest stage.

As part of this role, I ran a parenting course for parents of 9- to 16-year-olds. Immediately, the powerful impact of the course and the open and honest way I had of sharing my own problems with them meant I had a constant waiting-list and I ended up running it both as a day and evening course, for three years.

Quite soon, though, the parents I was coaching were telling me that they were using the *parenting* skills they'd learnt with me in their workplaces and with their *teams*. Over and over they were saying things to me like:

'I'm taking the techniques you are teaching me for my kids, and using them with my team and in the boardroom; please can you work privately with us?'

Many of them were corporate or community leaders, or entrepreneurs, and they began recommending me to their friends who were also in leadership positions – some of whom didn't have children, but *did* want the *internal change* they had seen in their friends. They wanted to sort out *who* they were so they could be their best selves in their roles.

That's when I realised that successful leadership, in any area, involves a lot of the same skills as good parenting. Leadership is about communicating effectively; purposeful negotiation; seeing other people's viewpoints;

understanding where you are as a person, even as you are balancing your own problems; managing conflicts; and making great decisions. These are all the same processes used by a parent managing a child.

A lot of the knowledge I gained from running that course is very much present in the essence of this book: like understanding the pressures and concerns you have as a leader, but also what you need to help you to balance your parent/partner/leader roles. I also work with our young leaders (those older kids of yours and mine) as they leave university or jobs and want to improve themselves to create a better future. For example, I mentor on the EnterpriseTECH STAR, a programme for researchers run by the Cambridge University Judge Entrepreneurship Centre. I use the principles in this book to enable the students to find their own inner leaders and leadership styles. The energy and innovation of these students, most of whom are finishing their PhDs, is inspiring; their start-ups tend to revolve around creating a better future for either the planet or its people. They are an expanding group who want intentional and strong leadership modelled to them by *seasoned* leaders, and guess who *they* are – you! The generational effect of this work is immeasurable.

I became really excited about working with leaders and their teams, realising that by targeting them I could have the same effect – helping children (and employees) to fulfil their potential, but from a different pivot point; and that by catching young leaders before they had children, or big teams to manage, I could set them up for future success. I could create a bigger world impact *and* help many *more* people to feel happy by my working within leadership. Over time, many of those parents on the course became private coaching clients.

Having seen the damage that bullying can do in the workplace in one of my partners, I then trained as a Conflict and Workplace Mediator too. I

wanted to try to help as many people work without tension as I could. I've mediated between separated parents, entrepreneurial founders, leaders and couples too. My ability to manage and help *others* to manage conflict (whether it's in the boardroom or the bedroom!) is yet another skill I'm going to pass on to you.

So, I had my own business, I was helping my coaching clients, many of whom were leaders; they were going away happy... but I would often have a nagging feeling that there was something even more, something deeper that I wanted to shift for them. Then I discovered the missing link.

I discovered cognitive hypnotherapy as my daughter was having night terrors. After watching my daughter's fast progress in just a few sessions, I decided (having pretty much given up on shifting my own deeper issues by then) to give it a go. I did not want to be 'put under' or told what to do, so I really liked that *cognitive* hypnotherapy doesn't involve anything like that. It uses language patterns and techniques from a wide variety of disciplines to access the unconscious and untangle our beliefs, and provides practical tools and solutions to empower further growth.

Amazingly, after just a few sessions, my life began to change dramatically as I released some of my 40-years-held beliefs, leaving me feeling really positive, lighter, excited and full of energy. *This*, I thought, was the missing ingredient for my clients; so I trained in it.

What I discovered was that coaching isn't therapy, and therapy isn't coaching; and that leaders' issues tend to stem from them *as people*, requiring a *much* deeper level of intervention than coaching alone can offer. Coaching can be deeply therapeutic, but it's not therapy.

Leaders have a lot of responsibility; they often feel isolated and anxious, and if they are at the top-level, they often feel that they can't admit

to having a problem. This, combined with the emotional baggage that holds them back, and the everyday stress of managing their teams and families, means that leaders have ***a lot*** on their plates. As one leader said to me this year:

‘It feels like I’m responsible for 32 of my children, as I care very much about my team’s welfare.’

“

Coaching isn't therapy,
and therapy isn't coaching.

”

I realised that leaders need therapy *and* coaching, blended together with conflict management, communication skills, and a few powerful tools at their fingertips. They can then clear their issues and embed the changes all at the same time. Leaders need joined-up thinking across all aspects of their lives if the work on themselves is not going to *cause* an imbalance. For example, if a leader sees a business strategy coach, their leadership might improve whilst their home life plummets... Leaders need to be enabled to enhance performance in *all* of their roles *at the same time*, and it's incredibly rare to find a coach or therapist whose skillsets and experience straddle a wide enough range for them to be able to help achieve that balance.

Finally, after having been dismissive of my own weird and wonderful childhood and subsequent life experiences, I began to see that the difficulties I had been through could be put to really good use: *I was in a unique position*.

Leaders themselves began to tell me that it was really helpful that I could relate to *whatever* they told me. They liked me because I hadn't come up via the traditional corporate route, so I didn't (and still don't) expect them to have to follow it either. Because of my own time spent making mistakes and poor decisions whilst trying to find the right path, leaders found me as non-judgmental as parents found me refreshing for sharing my own parenting mistakes. After feeling like I didn't fit in for so long, it seemed, in fact, that unwittingly, my mother had given me a start in life which, combined with my life experiences, provided me with all the tools I needed to empower leaders to lead with strength and intention.

I'm fresh and without corporate clutter, having worked in a variety of sectors - charity, private and public. My experience is so varied that I have

naturally developed an ability to adapt to my client. I don't think about whether change is possible, I assume it is.

Your future

Nowadays, I'm at a point in my life where I'm really genuinely happy and contented. Like you, I have tough times and tough emotions, but I'm okay with them. I just allow them to flow alongside me whilst I get on with my life. I want to help you to *feel and do the same!* My Five Principles of Alternative Leadership will enable you to access your untapped potential, lead with power and presence, and create the future you want.

To wrap up

I often use the following analogy to explain my work:

Think of yourself as being like a house: a house that might have one or two small and obvious issues, like a leaky tap and a door that sticks, but also perhaps a crack in one of the walls that you don't like to think about.

Now, a lot of coaches and therapists are like decorators or interior designers. They'll come into your house and help you choose furniture, paint colours and ornaments... and you know what? They'll probably make it look beautiful. But what about that crack in your wall? The one they papered over?

What if your house is subsiding, or even worse, sitting over a sinkhole you aren't even aware of? What if the problem isn't in your house, but in your *foundations*?

I became The Mind Architect, because a lovely client of mine said to me one day:

‘You don’t tell me what to do or believe. You help me rebuild my mind the way I want it; you’re like an architect of the mind... a mind architect!’

And then (because she’s a pitching expert) she told me to keep the title. It fits!

In fact, I built my own house extension: I dug my own foundations and mixed my own concrete. I did get a professional bricklayer in though, because you should always get the right professional for the job... especially with your foundations! I laid the damp-proof membrane that kept the damp from spreading up my walls. I know what it is to build foundations, figuratively, literally, practically and emotionally!

As a Coach-Therapist, my work is to dig under your house *with you* and guide *you* to build your own strong foundations – or to repair the ones you already have! We might get a bit muddy, and it might be tiring at times, but it’ll be worth it; you’ll sleep better at night knowing that your house isn’t going anywhere. You’ll *know* your foundations are strong. On top of that, you’ll be able to take pride in the fact that you have built them yourself! Okay: maybe you needed a helping hand from a professional, but ***you* designed and built them.**

As I say to my clients, I’m not an interior designer: but once your foundations are laid you’ll naturally know what furniture you want and what colours to paint; you won’t need someone else to make those decisions for you. You’ll feel happy and content, and when someone comes along to suggest you might build your walls from straw or paint them brown, you’ll *know* what is right for you, and have no problem with standing tall whilst you communicate it clearly. You will be in control of your life in a positive and healthy way.

So... who do you want to be?

CHAPTER 2

Before we start

It's impossible for any book to be as powerful as one-to-one work with a good Coach-Therapist, but my aim has always been for you, my reader, to be able to create *significant* change in yourself and in every aspect of your life by engaging with this one. To make sure you get the best from this book, here are a few things you should know before we start:

It begins with you

I want to be very clear that this book's *main* focus is on *you* as the whole wonderful, powerful, complex human being you are. It focuses on building *your* core foundations. As you'll see, many times through the book I refer to how building those foundations will also positively impact your leadership, your team or your family, but I want to make it very clear that this book isn't about you improving yourself for the benefit of everyone around you; it's about you improving yourself for *you*. This is about *you* becoming an Alternative Leader *of yourself* first, but here's the sweet spot: doing this work on yourself first will mean that you'll *naturally and easily* improve in other areas as a result – you'll automatically become a better leader, parent and partner!

Who is your team?

Whether you're the leader of a multi-national with 30,000 employees, the conductor of a 30-piece orchestra, the parent of a 13-year-old, or just

leading your own life... you're a leader. This book is for leaders... so this book is for you.

I've used the phrase 'your team' a lot in this book: but our 'team' is different for each of us. Perhaps your leadership role is as a parent and your team is your family, for example, ***so just pause and think of who your team (or teams) are, so that you can bring them to mind as we go.***

'I'm too busy right now...'

Your more-positive future is closer than you might think. I've travelled the therapeutic scenic routes and coaching cul-de-sacs, and eventually, I found the quickest route; now you can just engage with this book and learn from my experience!

A concern I hear from prospective clients, who are engaged and want to do the work, is that they are worried that they're already so busy that adding coaching or therapy to their lives would just be too much pressure on them, *even* when they *know* they have issues that need sorting out. Some of these clients have even had experiences of counselling, CBT or other therapies that left them feeling *worse* (and, in fact, recent theories do suggest that repeated discussion of negative events can *further embed* the bad feelings associated with them), but I'm here to reassure you. My Five Principles of Alternative Leadership are active and dynamic, leaving most clients feeling excited and happy at the changes they're creating and feeling *more* energised.

'It's scary to admit my flaws'

I want you to find a place of pure honesty.

Most of us are good at pretending that the bits of us we don't like aren't there at all; we hide them and hide *from* them, usually because we're scared of what we might find. If you are a parent, you may have noticed that the things you don't like in your kids are the behaviours you don't like in yourself! However, imagine if nothing about you scared you – if you didn't fear anything you thought, felt or did because you knew you could change it. **You can change**; and there is nothing scary about you; and as you change you'll become **more** yourself, not less – *the parts about yourself that you love will stay intact, or even be enhanced, and you'll have increased energy too!* It was a long road of trial-and-error for *me*, but I have done my inner work; and now when I come across beliefs or behaviours in myself that I don't like, I'm excited. I feel I'm exploring uncharted territory! So, I'm asking you to find that place of pure honesty in you as you go through this book, so that you can identify your issues and clear them.

'But I have so many problems!'

Imagine a balloon seller, holding tightly to 100 balloons. Each balloon represents one of your issues. If you were to sit down and list every one of your balloons, every tiny little thing you want to change about yourself, you might feel overwhelmed (you might even have five balloon sellers holding a hundred each!); but have you ever considered that many of your problems may stem from *the same root cause*? That's how my approach is different: we're not going to work on *every single individual balloon*... we're going to focus on the balloon *seller*, the root cause: because if we *remove the root cause*, the balloon seller, then he can release the balloons!

'I worry about having to deal with difficult emotions'

I want to assure you that this process isn't about me trying to artificially change you into a smiling leadership robot without negative thoughts or feelings. Some parts of this book may trigger feelings of sadness or regret in you; but that's okay. Go with them and explore them. Engage with the tools and techniques. They'll help, and I'm here too, if you need me. In any case, there's nothing *wrong* with you if you feel sad or low sometimes: negative emotions are *important messages* and feeling them means that we're understanding ourselves and others more empathically. Our brains' physiology isn't capable of coping with being buzzy and happy all of the time anyway, so if you're not happy at any given moment, maybe your brain really is just having a rest... if those feelings become troublesome, get in touch with me. I'll help you to work through them.



I've been through losses of all kinds: bereavements, miscarriages, divorces... I've got through them. If you feel sad or need to grieve, that's exactly what you should do: but I want you to be in your best internal state with tools and techniques at the ready, so that when you're hit by a challenge you'll be better equipped to deal with it.

So, now the objections are out of the way, there are just a couple more things...

Reality Checkpoints

In the centre of Cambridge, where I grew up, is a big square park called Parker's Piece.

Over the years, it's hosted (amongst other things) fairs and markets, cricket, military tents, celebrations to mark the downfall of Napoleon and, later on, the coronation of Queen Victoria.

There are two paths through Parker's Piece, running corner-to-corner; and in the middle of it, where they intersect, stands a tall, beautiful Victorian lamppost, like a centre-point to let you know where you are in your journey.

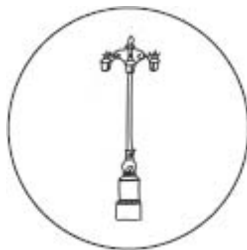
On occasion, when Cambridge is cloaked in fog, visibility on the piece drops to zero; and people needing to reach the other side of it must decide whether to try to find the path and stick to it, go all the way around the outside, or trust in their sense of direction (blind faith, you might say), setting out in hope across the grass.

Many years ago, on one such foggy night, someone scratched 'REALITY CHECKPOINT' on the base of the lamp. The name stuck, and when the lamppost was restored in 2017, it became official.

This book will take you on an emotional journey; a journey which may bring up some issues for you. It might sometimes feel as if you're crossing a park in deep fog; or as if you're on a path, but with poor visibility. Perhaps that will feel confusing... or perhaps you won't care where you are, because you'll be having fun exploring and feeling exhilarated at the thought of what you might find out next!

Whatever you feel on this journey, the most important thing is that you should *have faith in yourself and in the process*; your destination is there waiting for you – that fog will thin and lift... and you'll be able to clearly

see what to do and where to go. The feelings that you'll have and the steps that you'll take will be healthy and positive, part of the process of emotional and neurological change.



To help you to recognise where you are on your journey, and what you have learnt so far, there are 'Reality Checkpoints' scattered throughout the principles. Each one acts as a pause point, a place to reflect on your journey, to think about where you want to go next and to embed what you have learned before you move on. If you're like me, and sometimes skip the 'things to do' bits of books because you're finding the book so exciting that you just want to keep reading... well, it's your choice, and, as strengthening your autonomy is a key part of my five principles, I can't tell you otherwise. However, if you engage with them, they'll change your life. So, I urge you to stop and do the exercises. Underline things as you go, make notes in the margin, label and scribble, doodle... do what you need to capture your learning. I love books to look well-read and well-used, so I'll take it as a huge compliment if your copy is dog-eared. I'll love it if you contact me at www.mari-williams.com and tell me about your growth and epiphanies, too!

Online resources

To get the absolute best out of this process, download the accompanying 'It Begins with You' resource pack, which you can find on my website at: www.mari-williams.com/resources

It contains a handbook with all the Reality Checkpoint exercises in it, some recommended reading, an audio download and some other goodies!

CHAPTER 3

An introduction to my Five Principles of Alternative Leadership

My Five Principles of Alternative Leadership came into being through an equally powerful combination of *my own* coaching and therapy experiences over several decades, *and* the experiences and feedback of my clients. That's how my principles have become so highly effective: they've been tweaked and honed by my leader clients themselves as they worked through the programme.

You won't find fancy contrived acronyms in my five principles; I didn't "make them up": I just listened, watched, and learned, and themes appeared. Here's the good news: *you* don't have to spend decades finding the right solutions to the problems that you have, because I've done it for you. They're here in this book.

The human mind is like a big plate of spaghetti. It's hard to see exactly where all the beginnings, endings and connections are, and they're different in each of us, so each person will experience changes through this book slightly differently. The techniques will tailor themselves *to you*. *You* are unique, and although we all share commonalities, that's all they are: *commonalities*. However, the commonalities we share in the way that our minds are constructed means that my five principles *will* work for you, *whoever you are*.

How do I *know* that my five principles work? Through experience! I asked a client for his thoughts on how the programme had affected him, and he replied:

‘My life is 1000x better nowadays, personally and workwise.’

My five principles will help you to become the best *leader* you can be by becoming the best *you* that you can be: a true ***Alternative Leader***.

Principle 1: Understand how you think

First up, we’ll discuss how everyone’s own brain **creates** their beliefs, thoughts and behaviours, how *your* brain created *your* view of the world, and how all those thoughts entwine (like spaghetti!) to cause you issues. The understanding you gain from principle one will also help you to understand those around you – a vital leadership skill!

“

You don't have to
spend decades finding
the right solutions to
the problems that you
have, because I've
done it for you.

”

Principle 2: Clear your past

We **all** carry emotional baggage. If you don't believe that, reading this principle will change your mind. It'll help you to identify issues from your past, how you've picked up triggers, how both of those are impacting your life now, and how you can **change from the inside** by clearing issues and reframing memories to realise your full life and leadership potential.

Principle 3: Find your self-worth

Good self-worth creates **huge** positive impact on life and leadership, and low self-worth is incredibly damaging to both! In this principle, we'll look at how and why. Having low self-worth is a hard thing to admit... I know – it was hard for me! Our *rational* brains might know we have value, but we may be unable to match that emotionally. We'll look at why good self-worth, above all else, is so important; and how to strengthen and maintain self-worth to positively impact *your* life *and* the lives of those around you.

Principle 4: Understand the nuances of control

You might think that much of your life is out of your control, but the truth is that the majority of it is **very much** *within* your control, whether you know it or not! *Now is the time to take control consciously*. In this principle, we'll explore the neuroscience and nuances of control to see where our brains trip up our positive actions, and how **your** need for control impacts you as a leader and affects your team dynamics. I'll also give you some practical tools to enable you to shift to a more flexible and healthy control mindset.

Principle 5: Understand how to make and communicate great decisions

Are you making positive decisions **for you, and** for your team? Are you leading well? Can you be flexible and think fast under pressure? In this principle, we'll look at why being able to make strong decisions is key to our happiness and success ***in life and leadership***. I'll also give you some more practical tools: tools to help you to increase your clarity, whilst also giving you the ability to think on your feet.

PRINCIPLE 1

Understand how you think

Iwant you to have a clear understanding of how your mind works, so that you can identify your problem areas, and then use that amazing brain of yours to do the inner work to move you forward.

People become my clients either because they feel they aren't reaching their potential to be the best version of themselves, or they're stuck on that hamster wheel, going round and round. The latter tell me they feel guilty and frustrated; often *knowing* exactly what they're doing wrong, but seemingly unable to change it. They know that their life would be easier, more enjoyable, fulfilling *and* successful, if they could get a handle on their poor patterns of behaviour: working too late, becoming angry too quickly, showing poor self-care and generally not being mentally present with their friends or family. Most leaders don't mind the pace of their roles – in fact, being ambitious, many thrive on the pace – but they all want and *need* balance.

Many people feel like they're letting themselves and those around them down, because they know they can do (and be!) better... yet, despite working to pace themselves and set those goals and plans, ***nothing changes***. They can know that they're repeatedly triggered by the same events, but they're unable to get a handle on the processes and unconscious patterns that are tripping them up. They can be worn out, feeling low, and concerned that burnout is just a few weeks away (or in denial about it),

constantly trying, yet failing to be the inspiring person that they know inside they could be, if only things were just a little more in balance.

By helping them to fully understand their brain's processes, I enable people to see where these processes are tripping them up, and that understanding and awareness gives them lots of ideas about how and where they want and need to make changes, so that they can live more fulfilling lives, and truly become the person and leader they know they can be.

In this first principle, I'm going to offer you some models to help you understand the processes your brain uses to filter data, and how they, in turn, create your reality and your behaviours. These aren't 'true' models, they are theories, but they *will* provide some insight that'll help you to understand what your brain is up to, so that you can begin to understand your own problematic actions and behaviours, and thereby start to change them.

“

Most leaders don't mind the pace of their roles – in fact, being ambitious, many thrive on the pace – but they all want, and need balance.

”

By the end of this principle, you'll understand that, although you're an individual with your own life experiences, your brain's *processes* are pretty much the same as other people's. If, for example, you've been carrying a lot of guilt around, it's a *process* that's at fault, *not you*. *However, it's your responsibility to do something about it. Take action.*

I want you to build your life into something impressive... like a skyscraper standing tall amongst houses, for example. The foundations for every skyscraper are laid on bedrock. Sometimes that bedrock is 85 metres down, sometimes it's close to the surface. However, nothing but clean solid bedrock will do – it's the only surface strong enough to take the pressure. You can't build a skyscraper on loose surface soil, and you can't build an impressive life on false beliefs and poor behaviours; just like loose surface soil, your negatives must be dealt with first – whether they're close to the surface or 85 metres down. The understanding you will gain from this principle will provide a solid bedrock base on which we can start to build and strengthen your foundations. It's the key to understanding the *other* principles and how they all link together.

Why is understanding how you think important for you as a leader?

'I now have a far greater understanding of how my brain works.

I'm not scared of the unknown. I can shift between business tasks fast. That ability/power is extremely useful, it gives me energy.

This is now par for the course of knowing who I am and

understanding myself. I am quicker, faster, stronger in how I work and how I perform in all areas of my life.'

—ANDREW, SCOTTISH ENTREPRENEUR

Great leaders feel honoured by the positions they hold – they don't take leadership for granted. The best and most confident alternative leaders I have met all constantly worked to improve not only their leadership skills, but also themselves as people too... perhaps that's why you picked up this book? People don't automatically give trust and respect – those things have to be earned. Your followers won't automatically follow you just because they've been told you're their leader. I've many clients and friends who have no respect for their managers or CEOs because they feel they fail to lead well – so how can you prevent your followers from feeling that about you?

By leading *from within...* from a *solid bedrock base*.

You know those little inadequacies and quirks of poor behaviour that you're aware of in yourself, but think no-one else has noticed? Well, they've noticed. When you lost your temper, or mumbled your way through a presentation, or delegated poorly... they noticed.

If you aspire to be a great leader, this principle is going to be *extremely* important – not just for your own personal growth, but for the greater benefit of those who will follow you, too!

The huge benefit of this principle is that it will provide the foundational knowledge for you to identify the aspects of yourself that you need to work on to be at your best, but there's a whole other layer of value here. By understanding how *you* think, you will better understand how *all those*

around you think, and that will allow you to understand and adapt! This increased understanding will allow your leadership to truly flourish.

Imagine being able to respond not only with empathy and compassion when your team is struggling, but also being able to support and guide them towards a better understanding of themselves. You may even be able to spot when they need some therapy rather than coaching (needing therapy is far more likely, and recommending coaching when it's a therapeutic issue only wastes company time and budgets as the issue will likely reoccur).

You *won't* take it personally when someone offers you critical feedback, and you'll be able to understand and appreciate differences of opinion, and other people's trigger reactions, as well as your own, so your ability to prevent and manage conflict will increase. You'll be able to identify and understand the unconscious processes that might be at work when your followers or family underperform in certain areas, and you might come up with a solution to help them rather than panicking or feeling frustrated by it. Your leadership style will change as you change – you'll become a true *Alternative Leader*.

I love it when my clients come back and say '*I taught my team that thing you taught me, and it's led us to change the way we...*' It's the 'pay it forward' attitude that I want to see in the world. Because people take on the emotions of those around them – a process known as 'contagious emotion' – as you change for the better, those around you will also change. You simply can't afford to not get to grips with this information if you want to lead powerfully and with humanity; it's the key to your flexibility, your growth, and your career progression. People skills are a key to great leadership. Anyone can learn to read a speech prepared by others, but if someone doesn't treat others well, with humility and compassion, that is what they will be remembered for. When you move on, your team *may*

remember the processes you developed, but they'll *definitely* remember the way you treated them.

So, why is it worth knowing how your brain works, and how that affects your thinking?

'I think, therefore I am.'

—RENE DESCARTES

You *are* your thinking: your thinking *designs* and *dictates* who you are; how you behave, both physically and mentally; how you treat others, and the effect you have in the world. Your thinking creates the person that you are and the life that you lead. You can stumble through life blindly from moment to moment, or you can stop, look up and *choose* who you want to be and decide on the life you want to lead. There are exceptions, of course. I'd love to go to space, but as I can barely tolerate the dizziness I get from sitting on a swing, space travel is probably never going to be my thing. But that's okay, because I have plenty of other dreams... what are yours?

CASE STUDY

Bruce

Bruce came to me because, although he was really successful and great at his job, on the inside he was falling apart and he could see that soon it *would* affect his work. There were areas of his life in which, as he described it to me:

‘I seem to split into an adult and a kid! I clearly know what the right thing to say or do is, yet sometimes I entirely fail to do it. It’s like I become a child.’

Bruce had risen to a high level as a Chief Technical Officer; he had the car, the house, and the kids in private school. His stress levels did cause some tension between him and his wife, who didn’t like seeing her husband upset, unfocused and regularly unwell, but it was still a reasonably happy marriage. Bruce was ambitious and enjoyed his job and status, and even with his poor responses, his ability to organise, innovate and inspire had been recognised... but he realised that his relationships with both his wife and his kids were suffering. His health was deteriorating due to illnesses he was sure were due to stress, and he felt completely unable to switch off.

At work, both he and the HR team now had concerns about his performance and his ability to progress. His team were becoming destabilised by his erratic leadership: he’d gone from inspirational and empowering to unfocused, vague, disorganised, unprepared and emotionally unstable... the child Bruce was now in charge regularly!

He was incredibly frustrated, as he (and his HR) knew he had the potential to be an excellent leader, and could see where he was failing, but longer hours and ‘trying harder’ just wasn’t working. In fact, they were having quite the opposite effect (and we’ll look at why they don’t work later in this book). Poor Bruce... I really felt his frustration.

I coached Bruce by explaining the processes and filters our minds use, so that he could identify *exactly* where he was going wrong. Together we then did the therapeutic work necessary to clear his triggers and shift the ‘*child*’ Bruce, so that he remained a fully-functioning adult all of the time! Bruce, as he said, knew what to do in his *adult* mind, so with that child part out of the way he was able to really increase his productivity; he made better decisions and stabilised his team. His mind – now healthier, on track and cleared of clutter – allowed him to re-inspire his team. Together they went on to adapt and innovate some of the company’s products in a way that increased profits, which saw them pick up the company’s ‘Best Team’ award!

Steps for understanding how you think

Step 1: Understand your mind’s processes

I imagine that at some point you’ll have suffered the misfortune of injuring yourself somehow, pulling a muscle or even breaking a leg, but I’d like you to recall a time you experienced physical pain due to a less obvious cause. Can you remember wondering what was happening in your body to cause you that pain? Whether you were permanently broken? If you’d ever

get better? Who could help you? Those are all questions that we're used to asking about our physical selves when we feel pain; but how often do you stop to ask such questions about your thoughts or feelings? If you are like most people, it wouldn't be very often.

We often experience 'mental pain' in the form of negative thoughts, such as fear of failure, Imposter Syndrome, not feeling good enough, feeling insecure in relationships, or worrying what others think of us, to name just a few examples. Sadly, we don't often stop to wonder *why* we feel those things: we just try to avoid the thoughts, which can often make them 'louder'. We push on, trying to do our best, while life around us gets worse. This avoidance can lead us to develop physical symptoms, which can combine with our mental health issues (depression, anxiety, addictions) and lead to burnout, or in the worst cases, suicide. Most of us, however, just end up living half a life; we're generally discontented, feeling that we could be better versions of ourselves and achieving more... This disconnect between what we *believe* we could achieve and what is *actually happening* in our lives leads to us feeling poorly motivated, making poor decisions, poor career choices, poor relationship choices... the list goes on.

“

All of our thoughts and
emotions are created
to protect us.

”

So, understanding what is happening in your mind is the key to resolving your ‘pain’; it’s the key to understanding why you aren’t happy or fulfilling your potential. However, much of our minds’ processes are *unconscious* rather than conscious... So, unlike in the case of a broken leg or pulled muscle (in which we can physically feel or perhaps even see the problem, and so use our conscious minds to make clear decisions about which medical professional we see, and how we are treated), when our minds are in pain, it’s our *unconscious* that will often try to protect us in the way *it* thinks is best – unfortunately often bypassing our conscious thoughts in the process!

In trying to protect us, we know that the unconscious mind *creates physical behaviours*, like over eating or drinking: but if we widen the term ‘behaviours’ to include non-physical behaviours, like thoughts, beliefs and emotions, then we can see how *all of our thoughts and emotions are created to protect us too*: our minds are like one great big protection machine.

The results of our protection systems can manifest themselves mentally or physically, and can, quite literally, physically stop us from doing something. Have you ever watched those videos of people trying to walk out onto glass platforms hundreds of feet in the air? They develop ‘jelly legs’ as their protection systems step in! So, how can we get around our protection systems being triggered in all the wrong places at all the wrong times? How can you master your anxiety in your interview, or stop feeling judged in your team meeting? How can you prevent yourself getting tongue-tied in that conversation you need to have with your partner, or losing your temper when your child winds you up?

The first step is simply understanding that there *is* a protective process at work – realising that *your mind is trying to protect you*. Secondly, if you

can take a step back, pause for a moment, and *catch* your unconscious mind when it flicks that ‘protective behaviour’ switch, you can make yourself *consciously aware* of your brain’s automatic, unconscious processes; and with that awareness, it becomes much easier to halt the processes that aren’t working. Add to that an understanding of how your unique brain has created ‘you’, and you can begin to understand *yourself*. With that understanding, you can then move towards resolving the issues that are holding you back from where you really want to be, change your negative behaviours to create positive behaviours, and so reach the future you deserve, personally and professionally.

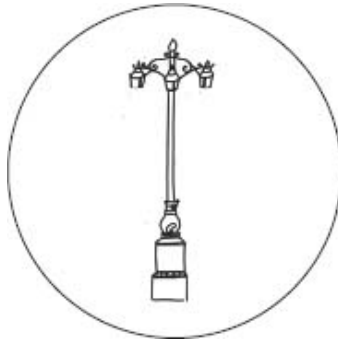
Step 2: Understand how *your* reality is created

‘Reality is your perception’

We tend to assume that everyone else sees, hears, thinks and feels the same things that we do, but I’m sure you’ll remember arguments that sound like: ‘How can you possibly think that? That’s clearly not what happened!’ ...and my personal favourite: ‘No, you’re... just... wrong!’ These have all been said at one time or another (often by you, if you’re honest). Reality, to us, is exactly that – reality to *us* as an individual and no-one else. There’s a current conspiracy theory that we are all just simulations in a computer game, like in the film *The Matrix*. For those that believe this, or want it to be true, that reality is fine (most of them seem to really like playing computer games anyway); but for those of us who like to believe we have autonomy and choice in our lives, it’s not. The great thing is that your reality can be just what you want it to be. I hear you saying that that *can’t* be true, some things in life *will just happen*, and you’re totally right – but through this principle, I’m going to show you how *both* can be true.

Because your reality is made up of thoughts, beliefs, behaviours, and meanings that are solely yours, *yours to change*; you *can* create the life you want. I'm not talking about buying yachts or becoming a famous pop star, I'm talking about something so much more important. I'm talking about the reality of *who* you want to be in your life. At the end of their lives, people don't tend to feel sad because they didn't buy a yacht; they feel sad because of things they haven't seen or done, relationships they let go, the potential they had that went unfulfilled, the parenting that could have been better... so *who* you want to be is a crucial component of your success and happiness in life. In the material world, it will lead you to make better choices and decisions (hey, maybe you can have a yacht anyway?); in your internal world, it will allow you to become someone *you* can be proud of, someone you can love, respect and have confidence in.

Before we look at the first Reality Checkpoint, make sure you have your 'It Begins with You' resource pack. It includes a workbook to write your answers in, as well as some further resources. If you don't have it already, you can grab it over at my website: www.mari-williams.com/resources



REALITY CHECKPOINT

What is your perception of yourself?

To be not just a *good* but an *exceptional* leader of others, you must be proud of and value *who you are* – this self-belief must be your reality. Without this, even with the best intentions, you will never reach your full potential. So, let's start changing your self-perception.

Question 1

If you were to close your eyes and travel forward to your old age, and then look back at your life, would you be happy with the *person* that you had been? If not, what would you wish you had changed about yourself?

Question 2

What perceptions do you have of yourself that might be holding you back from being the best leader you can be?

Step 3: Understand your fight, flight, freeze response

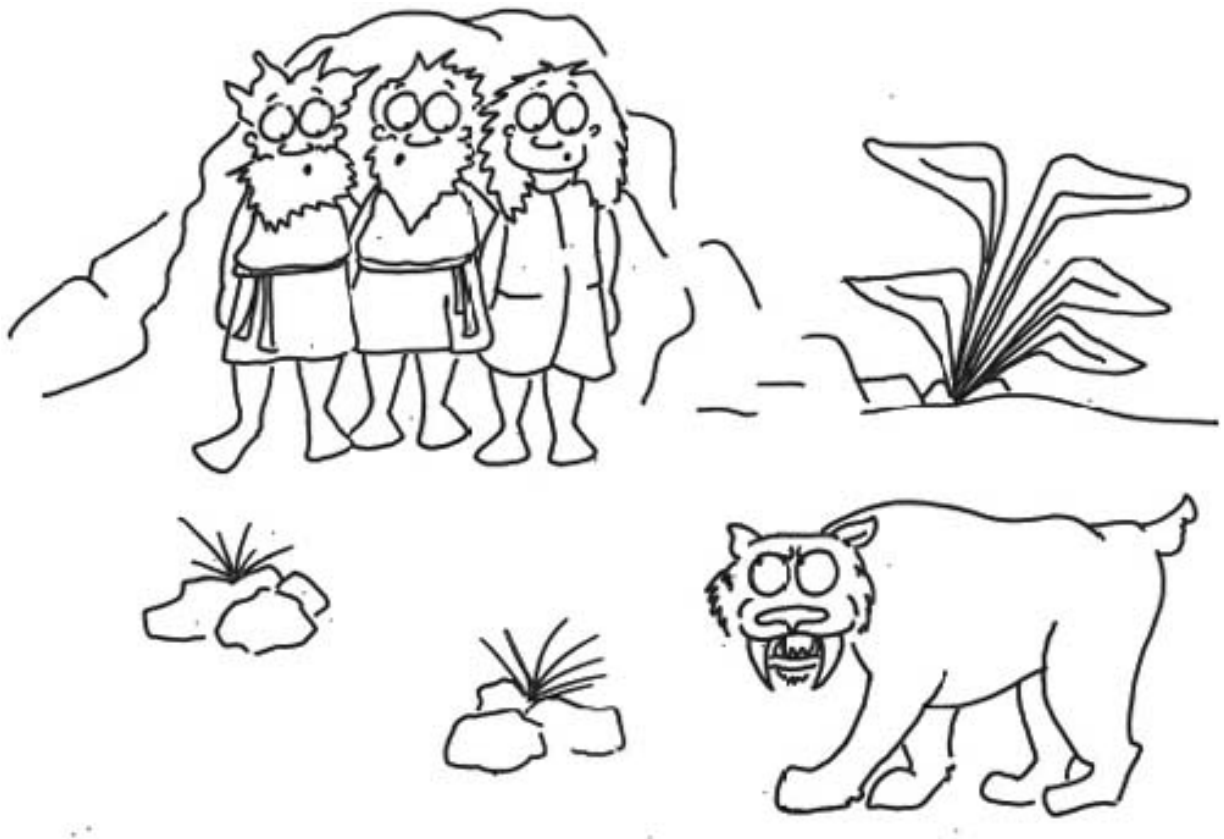
According to the renowned professor of physiology Dr Manfred Zimmerman (Calderon, 2014), our brains subconsciously receive 11 million pieces of data every single second – yet an oft-quoted piece of research by Harvard cognitive psychologist George Miller seems to show that the conscious mind can only cope with seven pieces of data (plus or minus two) at any one time (Miller, 1956). We absorb the ‘11 million’ pieces of data in an uneven spread via all of our senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch (we have several other senses, but you get the idea). Sight offers the most data and taste the least.

The human brain can in no way comprehend 11 million pieces of data all at once, so it runs lots of general algorithms to make quick decisions. Whether a spider on the floor is a friend or a foe, for example. Here’s how your brain tackles the problem.

Firstly, it checks in with your instinctive warning system, biologically known as your ‘sympathetic nervous system’ and colloquially as your ‘fight, flight, freeze response’. This protective system was genetically embedded in your not-even-remotely-human ancestors millions of years ago, and it’s still very much present in you today. It allows you to sense threats and *perceived* threats instantly... note the use of the word *perceived* – we’ll come back to that. Your brain’s primary mission is to protect you, to keep you alive and free from pain, and ‘fight, flight, freeze’ is one of its mechanisms to achieve just that. Once it knows you have physical safety, it also wants you to have emotional safety. When that’s in place you will be allowed to access your abstract thought and enlightenment protocols... but your safety and survival come first!

Picture this...

It's millions of years ago and Thig, Thag and Thog are sitting in their cave feeling chuffed with the new leaf shoes they have made today. As the sun begins to set and the cave is washed with evening light, discussion turns to which berry tree they'll shortly head out to for dessert, but on wandering to the cave entrance, they're confronted by the biggest sabre-toothed tiger they've ever seen.



Now, imagine that instead of reacting instinctively to the presence of this deadly feline predator, our three troglodyte friends were to clasp their hands, gasp in wonder and marvel at how beautiful and majestic it is... its fur shimmering in the sun... and its pure astounding size.

Can you imagine what would follow? I'm sure you can. Instead of returning their purely aesthetic compliments, the big tiger would think that

Thig, Thag and Thog were the tastiest starter, main and dessert it had ever seen.

Fortunately, though, Thig, Thag and Thog already had a clever, simple and fast method to counteract any such curiosity embedded in their genetic make-up. It was there to bypass their decision-making process if a danger was perceived or a threat was detected: the ‘fight, flight, freeze’ response. All humans have this protection system in their blueprints. Unfortunately, although brilliant, it is a flawed system.

Now, picture this:

Imagine *you* are faced with a sabre-toothed tiger.

Your brain (millions of years after Thig, Thag and Thog reacted instinctively to avoid becoming starter, main and dessert) sees the modern equivalent of a sabre-toothed tiger (let’s say a Bengal tiger), which triggers your unconscious instinctive reaction: your fight, flight, freeze response, built entirely for this purpose. You have the exact same blueprint reaction that Thig, Thag and Thog had millions of years ago (and their less human ancestors also had millions of years before them), which stimulates the *primitive* part of your brain to detect danger and react evasively – as it should! Years ago, I took my three-year-old to the zoo and watched as the tiger paced along the metal fence, staring at her, following her every move. All my primitive defences fired off. My conscious brain might’ve dismissed any threat, the tiger being caged, but my unconscious brain was still on full alert, knowing that we were still very much on the menu to a tiger! So how did this reaction develop?

Step 4: Understand the evolution of your fight, flight, freeze response

I'm going to pause here to give you a brief and very simplified model of how the brain is constructed. I'll be coming back to that spider on the floor as well, I promise! This is important, though.

Our knowledge of the brain is still evolving, but there are some stages we do understand. Our single cell organism ancestors simply reacted to their environment, and around 200 million years ago the first mammals came into existence. It's clear that 'we' had a very small neocortex then; there wasn't a lot of conscious thought, reasoning or communication going on. These pre-pre-human brains increased in size, existing alongside the dinosaurs; and after the upheaval in which they died out, the area of 'our' neocortex connected with vision expanded to cope with our need to seek out insects for dinner. It appears that other areas of our neocortex began to grow significantly to meet our needs for social awareness, living in groups, and, eventually, tribes. We needed a bigger brain to understand social niceties, among a myriad of other reasons that would also play a part in its growth.

Two million years ago 'humans' began to use 'tools', and 'tools' meant weapons we could use to better hunt and kill animals. Meat is a nutrient-rich food, and it's likely these nutrients made it possible for our brains to grow even further. Approximately 200,000 years ago the human brain 'began'. Much as they do now, diet, culture, technology, genes and social relationships all played their parts in its development (interestingly, over the last 10,000 years, our brains have reduced by 3-4% on average. Whether this is the brain streamlining its functions or because we no longer have to be as intelligent to stay alive is unclear...).

The human brain has three areas: the primitive reptilian brain, the limbic brain, and the neocortex. The reptilian brain area (which exists similarly in animals) controls instinctive and visceral processes: breathing,

temperature, and procreation, for example. It keeps you (and your species) alive. It's where your fight, flight, freeze reactions are triggered. The second stage of brain development was the limbic brain area – to deal with emotions, memories and arousal. Thirdly, the neocortex – the thinking brain – the area of conscious thought, language and reasoning. As a visual aid to explanation, let's think of the reptilian brain as being red, and the limbic and neocortex together as being blue.

Signals are received into the red primitive area of your brain, which is where the processing begins. This part of your brain is focused on survival. If it perceives a signal as an indicator of a threat to survival, it will prevent that signal from carrying on into the more evolved blue parts of your brain. This allows it to deal with reacting to this life-or-death situation alone, without the blue areas wasting valuable time on further assessment.

Imagine it like this...

There's a bridge between the red (primitive) and blue (limbic and neocortex) areas of your brain. In a scenario where you perceive a threat – our tiger, for example – the 'dangerous tiger' signal enters the red part of your brain. Not wanting to be faced with an unsavoury demise, it suspends signals from passing across the bridge to those more developed, more conscious blue parts of your brain and instead, initiates fight, flight, freeze. It's in your genes. If you *perceive* a threat, your bridge disappears so that the primitive brain can remain in sole control and decide what course of action should come next – should I fight, run away or freeze? The disappearing bridge protects you from your blue brain's thoughtful curiosity just as it protected Thig, Thag and Thog from theirs, but it means that, at that point, it is no longer the *conscious* you who is making the choices. Have you ever lost your temper to the point you couldn't seem to stop

yourself? You couldn't stop yourself because, by that point, 'you' – the part of you that does the conscious thinking – was no longer in charge; the bridge had collapsed, leaving your primitive red brain in sole control. Sometimes that's not at all useful or contextually appropriate!

When you enter the fight, flight, freeze 'stress' state, your body releases chemicals, such as epinephrine (adrenaline), norepinephrine (nor-adrenaline) and cortisol, which kick-start a host of temporary changes in your body, to enable you to take the required physical action. These chemicals cause the mental blockage described above – the collapsing, disappearing bridge. In times of need, you may seem to gain extraordinary physical abilities; the ability to run faster and lift greater weights, for example. Very useful! These things are possible because your brain organises blood from other parts of your body to be pushed into your arms and legs instead, so you are ready to run or fight; the raised pressure is what can give you that 'wobbly legs' feeling. Your brain may also attempt to empty your stomach and bowels so that if you suffer abdominal injury there will be less contents in your gut to carry potential sources of infection into your body. Your mouth may go dry as your brain shuts down your digestive system to conserve energy; you may feel sick and start to sweat. Do you recognise these as symptoms of stress?

Although, for ease of explanation, I've only mentioned three primitive-brain survival responses – fight, flight and freeze, their existence being undisputed – it's important to note that it's mooted that there may be more. But why do we need multiple responses at all? Why as many as even three? The answer is: *because our survival requires it*. Some things we can't fight, some things we can't run from, so evolution gave us a *range* of basic instinctive responses to help us to manage different scenarios we might face.

Although we have a range of responses, we do as individuals tend to have a *preferred* response, often modelled to us by our parents, or those closest to us as we grew up. We still have our (at least) three different modes available, but we tend to prefer that one. We also act contextually, according to life experience.

MY STORY

From Nought to Nuclear

My mother's instinctive response was 'fight' – shouting, which resulted in me taking on 'fight' as my own preferred response. I still tend to default to that on the occasions when I'm pushed hard enough for my limbic and neocortex to be shut down by my primitive brain. I used to have a huge problem with anger, which extensive amounts of CBT and psychotherapy couldn't seem to clear... In fact, I was once described by a friend as having a tendency to 'go from nought to nuclear'! Finally, I found Cognitive Hypnotherapy, and in one session, I cleared my childhood-baggage-related anger issues from my relationship with my mother. It was an experience that inspired me to train as a Cognitive Hypnotherapist myself. I rarely shout now, and when I do, the anger evaporates almost as quickly as it appeared.

Step 5: Understand the flaws in your fight, flight, freeze response

In our modern world, it's rarely a sabre-toothed tiger or any other predator that triggers these instinctive responses; and this is where *perceived* threat becomes the problem. Your brain has *not* updated the fight, flight, freeze response system in millions of years – long *before* Thig, Thag and Thog really *needed* it to avoid becoming starter, main and dessert on a regular basis. *Maybe* Thig, Thag and Thog didn't face emotional distress quite as much as they faced physical danger, but what's certain is that the

primitive brain does not differentiate between emotional hurt and physical hurt. Perhaps it never did. Pain is pain. The playground rhyme, ‘sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me’ is just not true, as so many children and adults would testify.

So, your brain won’t only protect you from, say, tigers... it might also protect you from aggressive bosses, argumentative partners, people who don’t share your opinion, misbehaving children, a room full of people to whom you are due to give a presentation, or your own feelings of general discontent with your life. In fact, many, many, *many* things might be deemed a threat to your survival by your primitive brain (maybe even a spider, like the one I promise we’ll get back to in a page or two)... and, as if that wasn’t confusing enough for us all, here are two *more* elements of confusion you can add to the mix: firstly, the things that trigger *your* brain to predict threats may be things that *other* brains aren’t triggered by at all; and secondly, even if your brain and someone else’s may share a trigger, they may not share the same *reaction* to that trigger. If your reaction to a situation is to fight whilst your partner’s reaction is to freeze, it may cause yet more conflict in your life. Your brain disappearing your bridge so that you can’t access your creative, problem-solving, language-orientated areas just as you really need them is a huge flaw in a brilliant system.

In the scenarios above, often neither fight, flight, nor freeze would be your best option. Imagine, for example, if Thig, Thag and Thog had been able to think protectively *and* rationally. *They* might have had the *sabre-toothed tiger* for dinner! To find resolution swiftly in times of stress and pressure, you need your bridge to stay in place to allow you to access your higher-level rational limbic and neocortex brains – but if your under-developed primitive brain perceives your survival is at stake (and remember, that could be triggered by something non-life-threatening, like

giving a presentation), it won't make any difference how much you try to step into your rational brain and argue with it. It will stand firm on its 'survival state' footing until it recognises that the *perceived* danger is gone. After the event, your bridge will reappear, giving you a high vantage point to survey the damage you have done in its absence, which can range from reacting aggressively to your children, team, or partner, to freezing in front of your audience, to literally running away. Remember the film *Runaway Bride*? A perfect example. Fear is powerful.

Now that I have mentioned films and fear, here's a personal story that illustrates this...

MY STORY

My Zombie Apocalypse

I don't like horror films, but a couple of years ago I watched a film that featured zombies. The zombies scared me to the extent that, when we got home from the cinema, I trailed my partner around the house all evening not wanting to be alone. I couldn't sleep and felt jumpy for days afterwards. Although my neocortex and limbic brains knew that what I'd seen was fantasy and not reality, my *primitive* brain couldn't tell the difference and believed it really had been under attack. The silver lining was that I was able to use the experience as an example in a funny blog I wrote (you can find this on my **website** www.mari-williams.com/blog), but at the time I was genuinely terrified.

The reason that *some* people find horror films and extreme sports thrilling is that fear, or perceived danger, pushes our primitive brains towards the fight, flight, freeze response; and the subsequent relief felt when that fear turns out to be unfounded (or, in the case of some extreme sports, simply the relief felt at still being alive) gives them an adrenaline rush. This triggers the reward system in their brain, flooding them with feel-good happy chemicals. Let's return to our three troglodyte friends and look at a really common fear in the modern world: presenting.

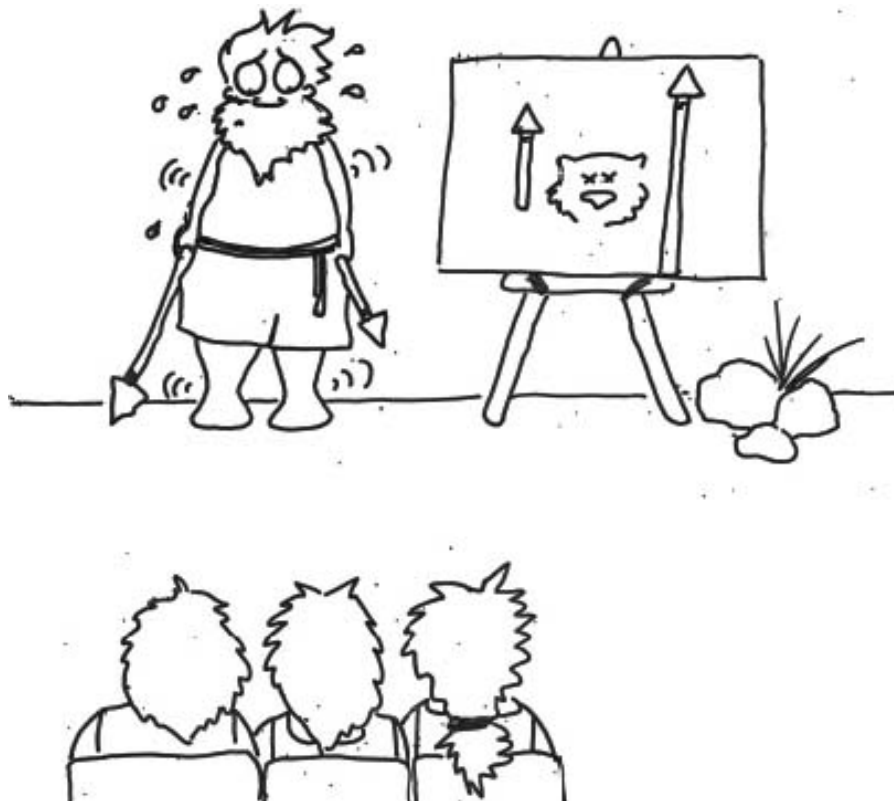
Picture this...

Thig, Thag and Thog each respond differently to the sabre-toothed tiger: whilst Thag is *frozen* to the spot, Thog's *fight* reaction is triggered. He grabs his long hunting spear from its nook in the cave entrance, but Thig's *flight* reaction is triggered, causing him to run straight into the shaft of the spear, snapping it clean in two! Thog momentarily stares in disbelief at the broken stick in his hands, but the cat, ignoring the frozen Thag, is nearly upon him. Thog's fight mode doesn't change, though: quickly gathering up the pointy end of his broken spear, he lunges at the snarling sabre-toothed tiger – now in mid-pounce – and kills it.



Surveying his kill afterwards, Thog realises that at close quarters a shorter spear is a useful tool. Thag agrees, having seen the whole fight, and soon enough Thog is asked to give a presentation to the rest of their small tribe about the benefits of shorter spears. Thog is flattered to begin with, but he soon re-evaluates the upcoming presentation; he starts to believe that if the elders don't like his idea of the 'Thogear' (he's still testing names for it), they might kick him out of the tribe entirely (think of this as like losing

your job and family at the same time). This triggers him to feel emotionally vulnerable and his brain registers the situation as a threat. Faced with a snarling sabre-toothed tiger, Thog's primitive brain opted to *fight*, but being faced with 'The Dinosaur's Den' of tribal elders stimulates his *freeze* response and poor Thog shakes and stumbles and he just can't get across how great the new weapon is.

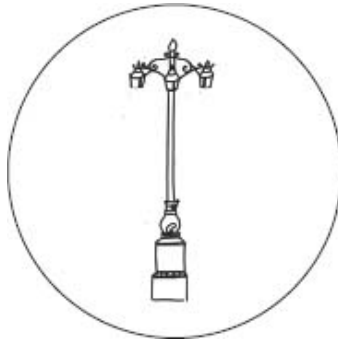


Thog's brain had decided that his audience was just as (or more) a threat to his survival as a sabre-toothed tiger, and that being in a calm or zoned-in state, in which he could present his words beautifully, wouldn't help him to survive anything so dangerous... but freezing or perhaps fleeing from the room just might.

MY STORY

I was a Frozen Teacher

When I was younger, I trained as a teacher, and had a similar experience to poor Thog. I stood before a group of 15-year-olds and completely froze. My mind went blank – all the physical symptoms of a ‘freeze’ were happening in my body. I stared at the faces staring back at me, and after a while, they began to laugh and snigger (they probably didn’t, but in the memory in my mind they did!). Luckily, my mentor quickly picked up on my distress and smoothly stepped in; but I never taught or spoke in public again, until I had some therapy to clear the fear from that moment, which had remained with me as a trigger whenever I was asked to talk.



REALITY CHECKPOINT

When does your fight-flight-freeze response take over?

By identifying situations in which your fight, flight, freeze response takes over, you can begin to identify thoughts that you need to change.

Question 1

Can you remember situations in which you felt out of control, or almost as if another you were in charge? What were those situations?

Question 2

What effects does your fight, flight, freeze response have on your leadership?

Step 6: Understand how your brain filters the world

And now, finally, as promised, it's time to catch up with that spider on the floor!

So, is that spider a friend or a foe? We know that the brain will be triggered instinctively; but who you are, based on your own life experiences, is also absolutely key here. To decide whether that spider is a friend or a foe, your brain also runs an instant crossmatch with *everything* you have ever thought, felt or experienced (not just about spiders) to try to collate data about what is happening there and then in the moment. Its ability to do this and do it *fast* is what enables you to function and stay alive.

For example, when a new client comes into my consulting room for the first time, they will recognise the familiar items in the room – walls, chairs and plants – because they have enough ‘back data’ amassed in their personal experience to cross-reference these ‘new’ things and correctly identify them. If, whilst we are talking, a fire breaks out, the client and I (given both of us probably have an innate *instinctive* fear of fire) will suddenly experience a conscious ‘interrupt’ in our conversation. Fire is a risk to human survival, and so fire as a piece of data will be fast-tracked through our brains’ sifting process to become one of our four pieces of conscious information to take action on – fast! Our unconscious minds are always working to keep us safe, and they will prioritise physical and mental safety over anything. Again, it’s a brilliant system, but it is also actually one of our biggest problems.

Let’s go back to those 11 million pieces of data I mentioned before to discuss what else affects that fast sifting process.

Whilst your instinctive responses are firing, and your personal experiences are being filtered, another factor creating your unique response to whatever’s going on around you is the construction of your particular brain. For example, if you’re an extrovert you might love parties and people, but if you’re an introvert those may be your personal idea of hell!

Although it's highly debated by some, I believe learning styles act as another filter. Most people learn through either visual, auditory or kinaesthetic systems. We use these systems contextually, depending on the situation; but most people have a preference. My personal preference is visual, followed by kinaesthetic and then auditory. Because I'm aware of this, I know that if you were to ask me my opinion of a letter you had written to a friend, for example, and you insisted on reading it *to* me rather than allowing me to read it myself, I would struggle to follow and hold the entire structure in my head clearly enough to be able to usefully comment. I've learnt that I need to read things myself to be able to connect to the words enough to retain the content. Because I understand this about myself, I know that when I attend conferences, I need to make copious notes; so that by reading them as the leader speaks, I can quickly convert the information I'm *hearing* into something *visual* to enable me to create meaningful memories. Knowing your learning preferences is useful. For example, if I'm completely absorbed by listening to something interesting, Superman himself could land in front of me and I wouldn't notice – my visual preference would be disengaged! Get to know where and when your senses and learning preferences work best for you and your team, and then use them to your best advantage.

“

Your unconscious
processes can affect you
at a deep and profound
level, steering your life.

”

So, in effect, this is how your brain's process goes...

Your senses receive 11 million pieces of data, which are then sieved by your unconscious brain through your personality filters, your learning styles, and your huge bank of life experiences to check for threats or *perceived* threats...

Next, your unconscious brain (like a supercomputer in a movie from the 1980s) whirrs and crunches through a variety of algorithms (which we'll come to in detail in a moment) to briefly and swiftly choose the four pieces of data it will pass on to your conscious mind... but it hasn't finished just yet.

Before it passes on those four pieces of data, it double-checks them by returning to your memory database to see what else it knows about those four pieces that it so swiftly chose. Then it drags up a lot more information to attach to them that's personal to you alone.

Now let's extend and expand upon our spider analogy to illustrate this.

Picture me sitting in my consulting room with a client – let's call him Ben. Ben and I are in the middle of our session, when suddenly a spider runs across the carpet. It registers in both of our respective conscious minds as one of our four pieces of data to be processed, but Ben and I *react* very differently. I simply note the spider as a spider; Ben runs from the room screaming.

My reaction ("Oh look, a spider...") was dictated by a formula my brain ran called a 'difference' algorithm. Here's an example of a difference algorithm in action. If you woke up one morning and found a huge boulder inconveniently placed right outside your front door, you'd notice it immediately, of course. To begin with, you'd be shocked and annoyed. However, after just a few weeks, the impact of the boulder on your thoughts

would have subsided; you'd only really remember it when you had to climb over it each day, and eventually, that wouldn't register so much either. It would have lost its 'difference' to the norm in your life. However, *getting used to negative influences on our lives is not often a good thing...*

Back to Ben's reaction: at thirteen years old Ben was trapped in his bedroom by a friend who thought it was really funny to *pretend* to throw a live spider at him. At the time, Ben's unconscious fired up his fight, flight, freeze response and kept a 'file' in his brain marked 'spiders!' so it could remember that they were 'dangerous'. Fast-forward to this moment: Ben's unconscious brain returns to that folder, assesses the spider as a perceived threat (important enough to become one of his four conscious thoughts), and sends the message 'get the hell out of the room so it can't be thrown at you, or you might die!' to his conscious brain... whereas my own conscious brain receives the message, 'oh look, a spider.'

We know the spider has already triggered his fight, flight, freeze response... but Ben's brain now continues its journey through all the experiences he's ever had, through all of the things people have ever said to him, the books he's read and the films he's watched. One of the storage cabinets in his brain is marked '*stories about me I made up*'. It's dusty because he rarely clears it out; in fact, he may not even consciously know it's there. Even if he is aware of this cabinet and the stories it holds (we call them narratives or beliefs and we will return to them in [principle 3](#)), he thinks they're just part of him now. Why would he bother to recheck them? In fact, the more 'painful' these narratives are, the more we tend to avoid them.

Let's delve into one of Ben's dusty files. We already know he had a 'friend' who pretended to throw a spider at him, but what else does Ben's brain link spiders to?

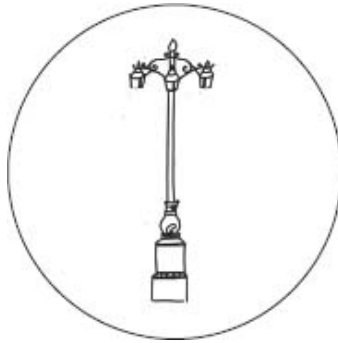
When Ben was young, his father would run screaming from the room at the sight of a spider, leaving his Mum to remove it. Ben saw his father's reaction and came up with the following 'formula': Dad is incapable of moving spiders, Dad is male, I am male, therefore *I too am incapable of moving spiders*. A false narrative. On top of that, Ben's dad also doesn't do DIY, doesn't make any decisions in the household, and lets others talk over him. In fact, Ben's Dad is often spoken to like a child in front of Ben. Young Ben, through a variety of algorithms and formulas, creates a false narrative (again) in which his father is incapable, and once again, as Ben too is male, applies it to himself.



When the spider runs across the floor, Ben doesn't just respond from his unconscious fight, flight, freeze response, he also experiences a wave of incapability-feeling wash over him. His unconscious is flooded with the thought that he is incapable as a person. This narrative pervades everything he does, from relationships to jobs and to the opportunities and experiences that he opens himself up to. As I'm sure you can see, Ben's narrative, linking his dislike of spiders to incapability, is incorrect – however, this narrative has come to alter the meaning of the raw data, 'spider'. His young

brain created a formula that incorrectly linked one part of his father's behaviour to another. A completely false conclusion, but one that's now embedded in his unconscious as a truth, likely without him being aware of it. Unless Ben realises it's there and edits the file, it will continue to cause havoc – and why wouldn't it? It believes that by dragging out the 'incapable' narrative, it will save his life, and so it will continue to do just that.

I hope you are starting to see how we humans can experience the same events and yet have entirely different personal realities. As you read on through this book, you'll see how unconscious processes can affect you at a deep and profound level, steering your life, whether you are aware of it or not.



REALITY CHECKPOINT

Discover your hidden issues.

By consciously highlighting your narratives, you can pinpoint the areas you need to revisit.

Question 1

What dusty files do you have in your mental filing cabinet that might have caused you to create false narratives?

Question 2

What negative boulders have you accepted as parts of your life instead of moving them?

The equations the brain uses

In addition to all the above filtering, your brain uses multiple equations during the sifting process. Three key ones are: $A=B$ (aka 'equivalence'); Cause and Effect; and $A \neq B$, (aka 'difference' – as mentioned earlier) (Silvester, 2006). There's also 'deletion', which we will come to later on (Lewis & Pucelik, 1990).

Your brain is aiming for speed and efficiency, so rifling randomly through the contents of your mind won't work – it needs systems. Your mind creates equations to save time, just as you separate the knives, forks and spoons in your kitchen cutlery drawer. It's called *inductive learning*.

'Brains don't just learn specific solutions to particular problems: they also generalise to solve problems they have never encountered. They do this by recognising similarities between new challenges and past ones, and then combining the building blocks of previous solutions to come up with novel ones.' (Douglas, 2020)

Let's use the situation with Ben and the spider to provide examples of these equations.

'A=B' can be explained as: 'an experience I had before is *the same as* this experience I'm having right now (or may have in the future, such as giving a presentation)'. So, for Ben, this spider situation is assessed as being *the same* as the spider situation he experienced at 13. The result is that Ben feels an urgent need to take evasive action! Not true, but it's a quick response equation – better safe than sorry, eh Ben?

'Cause and Effect' can be explained as: 'a spider near me will *cause* me to be scared, or in danger.' It's not really true in the case of Ben's childhood memory, because the *boy* holding the spider was the danger, not the spider itself (the spider also *wasn't* thrown; Ben was just *threatened* with it being thrown; the *perceived* threat was all that was needed to trigger his fear response). So, Ben's unconscious mind created the false equation 'Me + spider = danger' when Ben's actual (and true) thinking should've been: '*That* boy, in *that* moment, decided that threatening to throw a spider at me

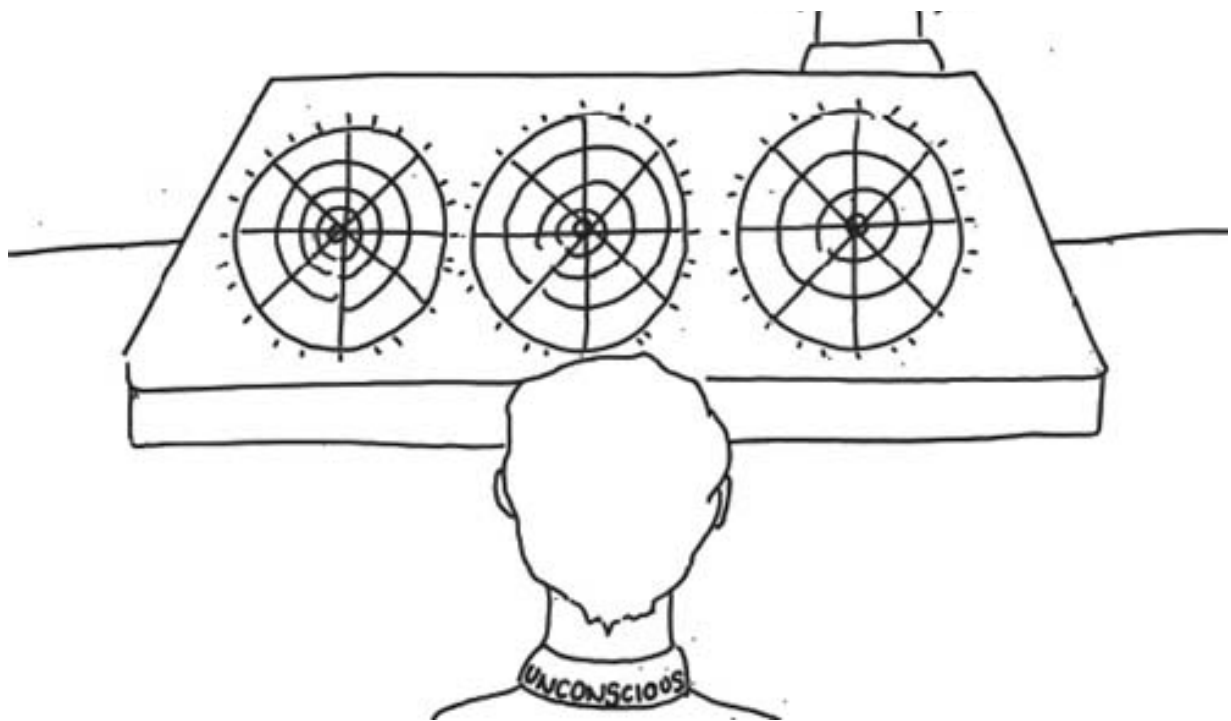
would be funny and I did not agree. The spider *wasn't* thrown, it *hasn't* happened since and *isn't* happening here, so I'm okay. I should have worried about the person, not the spider!'

' $A \neq B$ ' is very easily explained as: 'no spider is present, so I'm okay.'

You'll likely remember a movie scene in which an operator stares intently at a radar screen, a beam of light rotating from its centre... and then suddenly calls out upon seeing a flashing blip of light that represents a danger, or an enemy? For a moment, imagine your past life experiences as *three* radar screens in your mind – one for each of the aforementioned equations, with your unconscious mind as the operator. Each screen is programmed with a list of possible threats associated with its equation. For example, screen ' $A=B$ ' may be hypersensitive to the presence of bees, because you were once stung by a bee. In reality, you may never ever be threatened by a bee again, but your unconscious wants to protect you, so it creates a reaction – a phobia – to keep you aware... and anything that even resembles a bee will result in an alarm switch being thrown by your unconscious.

For example, your unconscious is going about its daily business – protecting you, checking its radar screens continuously – when suddenly something you experience (maybe a bee) lights up the radar. Your unconscious now rushes over, with less than a second to work out friend or foe. Can you see how it can easily make mistakes?





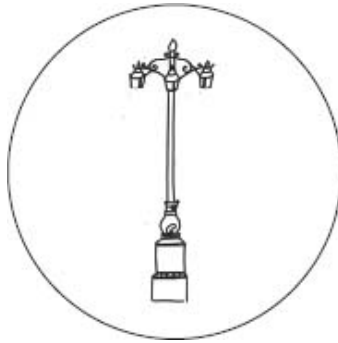
I'm keeping this simple, but there's another equation, which I mentioned very briefly earlier. It's called 'Deletion' (Lewis & Pucelik, 1990). Your unconscious brain runs systems that (as we have seen) are there to protect you. To do this, it feeds you *narratives* that enable it to twist your reality so that you do what it wants you to (remember, reality is just your perception). It will *delete* all information that it considers irrelevant to the current algorithm or equation that it's running, even if that information is the 'truth' of the situation. I personally believe 'Deletion' to be one of the most damaging and insidious little tricks of our unconscious; we have no conscious idea that we are doing it, as any evidence of 'Deletion' itself has been deleted. Ben's brain thinks that spider could equal his death, so it needs him to *not* see that it's just a tiny spider running across the floor. It

needs him to *not* remember all the times that spiders *haven't* hurt him. So, it *deletes* the evidence. Have you ever been in an argument with someone who appeared to have deleted all the evidence that would suggest you were in the right?

Poor Ben. One second, he is happily sitting in my consulting room, and the next second his unconscious's radar operator is slamming the emergency button, having spotted spider-shaped blips on the A=B *and* Cause and Effect screens. Deciding that the spider *must* be one of his four pieces of information, the big red flashing alarm bell goes off, and then Ben's 'Fight, Flight, Freeze' response kicks in too. Hey presto – Ben runs screaming from the room, feeling foolish, incapable and out of control. Crucially, he is still *unable to stop himself*. I hope you're beginning to see how *your* reality is not *the* reality. As one of my clients put it:

'I have learnt to look at my fears, and know they are just that.

Fears. Not Reality.'



REALITY CHECKPOINT

Detect and explore your negative behaviours

Your negative behaviours can have wide repercussions: spotting and removing those behaviours is *key* to your success.

Question 1

What negative behaviours do you have that you seem unable to change?

Question 2

How do those behaviours affect you personally?

Question 3

How are they affecting your leadership?

MY STORY

The Hooded Coach

Here's another personal story of mine; a superb example of how poorly the sifting process can work...

I'd been in London all day, attending my coach training course and boarded a train back to Cambridge, my hometown. It was the last train home and packed with commuters standing tightly compressed. I inched my way forward through the throng, desperately hoping to find somewhere to perch, and realised there was a man at a table for four sitting entirely alone. He had a big frame, like a rugby player, and was wearing a hoodie over his head; he looked a bit threatening. He was leaning forward and determinedly eating a burger. He didn't look overly friendly. However, I was tired, and I try to always approach people without preconceptions. I sat opposite him and opened my folder to look at my notes on the day's work. He asked if I was a coach, and I replied that I was in training. I was wondering where the hooded one was going with this, when he told me he was a coach himself. At this point my brain silently said, '*really?*', but aloud I said:

'Oh, who do you coach?'

He replied:

'I am a coach with the Metropolitan Police in London.'

It turned out that he was a senior ranking police officer with many years of experience in coaching, and we stayed in contact for years afterwards. My brain had sifted its 11 million pieces of data, the unconscious mind of every other passenger had sifted each of *their* 11 million pieces of data too, and for all of us the visual triggers ('hoodie', 'rugby player build', 'night train', and 'unsmiling') had resulted in our brains coming up with 'murderer!' I'm exaggerating (a little), but you see what I'm saying. My brain took the risk of sharing his table because *my* narratives didn't bring up 'murderer' as strongly for me, and tiredness was weighing far more heavily on my motivation scales! In fact, far from being in danger, I was probably in the safest place on the train, sat right next to a police officer!

To wrap up

If you want to excel as a leader you have to look at yourself internally first. Who you are *as a leader* is entirely based on who you are *as a person*. It's an inescapable fact. When we talk of leaders we respect, we don't just say that we admire their leadership skills, we say that we like and admire *them*; we refer to them as a person, not a skillset, even though the two are uniquely entwined. We employ and follow those we like and love. If you can understand and positively impact your leadership of yourself, the way you lead *intentionally* in *your own life* – the leadership of your family, your team, your fans or your country – will naturally follow. If you create a healthy inner self you will become a healthy leader; if you choose to ignore your flaws (we all have them) there is only so high you'll go before they will be spotted – and once trust and respect are gone, they are very hard to get back.

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You may feel you are already a strong Alternative Leader, but as I said, strong leaders still always work on themselves to improve: that's why they are different to the norm – and probably why you've picked up this book! If you can use an understanding of how *you* think to identify your 'problem' areas, or areas you want to improve, you can spot the processes that are undermining your best intentions. If your primitive mind can be trained to stop seeing everything as a threat, it won't respond with threat responses; it won't trigger your fight, flight, freeze response, and it won't hit the big red flashing alarm bell because of irrelevant things on your radar. These physical responses aren't really 'wrong', they are often just 'wrong in the moment'; they are inappropriate to the context you experience them in. If you saw a tiger, or someone threatened you, it would be *right* for your body to respond in that manner!

Therapy/coaching is successful when it *clears* the triggers at which your brain is firing off incorrectly, thus preventing those triggers from negatively affecting your ability to lead *intentionally*. The fact that your triggers and your baggage are so unique to you, as you can see, is the reason that you (just like everyone else!) should work one-to-one with a Coach-Therapist. The best, fastest, and most permanent way of clearing triggers and baggage is to *bespoke* the work to *you*. You need to shift your stuck points, old memories, and old narratives so that your protective brain only responds to *actual* threats, rather than misguided beliefs or predictions of threats.

Resolving those issues will enable you to make better decisions, which will help you in all aspects of your life: to delegate better, say 'no' more, manage conflict better, present better, handle emotional conversations with your partner better, and negotiate better boardroom business deals. At the very least, it should *reduce your reaction* to your triggers so you can continue with the life you want to lead. As my client Sarah said:

‘I used to be incredibly reactive, but this wasn’t always helpful! Now I can take a step back, put on which hat is needed (mummy, company director/wife/daughter/friend) and react more appropriately.’

Our ‘reality’ is our *individual* meaning, made from the processes that our brains use, and it is applied by our unconscious brains to past, present, and future events that happen around us. When we understand how these things work, we can become conscious about the way we view our world. It’s about staying conscious of when your reactions don’t feel ‘right’. If you have children, you will know the feeling when you suddenly realise they have gone very quiet – rarely a good sign! I think of my brain like this sometimes – I just sense it’s up to no good. If I catch it, I can distract it and retrain it into more positive activities!

So, the good news is that you now have a good strong foundation of bedrock for us to begin to build upon. Don’t worry if you have identified lots of things you want to work on, that’s brilliant; remember the balloon seller, and think of how much stronger and more empowered you’ll be once you’ve worked those things through. Well done for spotting them and being honest about them!

Now, let’s continue on to look at how to create a reality and a future that you’ll truly enjoy.

In this principle, you’ve learnt that...

- Your ‘reality’ is your ‘perception’, and you can change it for the better!
- You absorb 11 million pieces of data every second.
- Your fight, flight, freeze response is your body trying to keep you alive, but it may be overreacting!

- *Perceived* threats can be as damaging as *actual* threats.
- Your filters are unconscious and hugely affect your decisions, and your life.
- Your learning style affects your reality viewpoint.
- Old narratives may be holding you back, but you can work to change them!
- Your current thoughts and behaviours are created by the impact of your life experiences.
- Companies invest in those they *believe* in.
- Understanding how your brain thinks empowers your leadership skills.

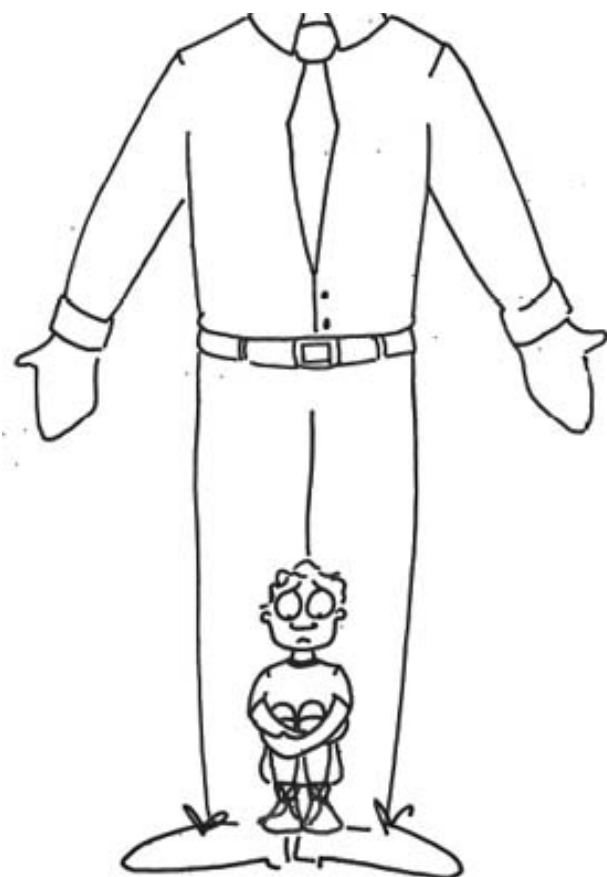
PRINCIPLE 2

Clear your past

In the last principle, we looked at *how* we process the data we receive; in this one, we're going to focus on how some of that data gets there in the first place. To begin with, however, I want to show you *why* it's so important that we *do* clear up our past.

Your past will always control you because your past *is* you. We could create a physical clone of you; but it would not have your experiences, your embedded belief systems, or your behaviours and reaction patterns. Somewhere in each of us are younger, 'ghost' versions of ourselves; caught in unhappiness, they're still acting in the way a young child would – a loop of film endlessly repeating. Remember the movie *Groundhog Day* with Bill Murray, where the character wakes up to repeatedly relive the same day, each time trying desperately to make changes to it so he can move on with his life? So many people feel like that. Your memories may feel like they are old and forgotten, lost in the dusty recesses of your childhood, but your brain is using those memories to relive your everyday present experience, from the food you eat to the TV you watch, to the way you communicate. Your past is *not* your past. You are, in effect, an adult child playing out the misunderstandings of your youth.





“

You are, in effect, an adult child playing out the misunderstandings of your youth.

”

As I've said previously, clients come to see me with issues that are causing them problems *in the present day* – a lack of confidence, problems in their relationships, stress and anxiety, fear of failure, Imposter Syndrome, and generally feeling unhappy with their lives. Often, they have already tried to make changes, but they come to me still struggling with the same old issues. I know the incredibly frustrating feeling of failing to change something about myself that I'm unhappy with, despite trying again and again. The problem is this: by working on *the issues we experience in the present day* we are trying to fix consequences and symptoms, rather than working out and addressing *what caused the issues to begin with*. Working at this present-day 'surface level' is like trying to get rid of dandelions by picking off the flowers: they reappear, fast. The roots have to be dug out!

Why is clearing your past important for you as a leader?

'I would never have imagined how powerful clearing my past blocks would be. It has been transformative. I now feel like the vision I have always had of myself, the child me, is no longer holding me back. I feel more confident and capable of inspiring and leading others to achieve our objectives. We often have all we need to be the leader we want to be. It's just a case of unlocking this realisation.'

—JAMES, FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR

I'm sure you can see how the issues above can impact your personal life, but how might they affect your performance at work? How might they affect your leadership and your team? I'm hoping that by now you already have some of the answers to those questions, but if you want to be the very best leader you can be, it's absolutely vital that you understand – so I'm going to be blunt.

Picture this...

You're someone who's always been confident in your work: yes, you know there are some areas you want to improve in, but honestly, you *know* you know your stuff, and you *know* you're pretty good! As time passes by, your organisation recognises it too, and puts you on the promotion ladder – or perhaps you become an entrepreneur? When the next promotion comes within your organisation, or as your own business grows, you get your very own team! You feel like Gru from *Despicable Me*.



You can picture the adoring faces of your minions as they hang on your every word... but seconds later, the image evaporates as reality kicks in: you will have to actually *lead* this team of people. You may even have been promoted from that team to lead it.

Suddenly, you're in the position of being the leader that you and everyone else complained about. Even with your great self-confidence, strong self-worth and top-level communication skills, it's going to be a big challenge. Realistically you'll need to be at the top of your game 95% of the

time, so you won't be able to afford being continually tripped up by the emotional baggage that you *know* has been holding you back. So, knowing that being a great leader begins with *you*, you ask for, or find, coaching-therapy to help you transition. It clears your baggage, improves your skillset, and gives you the tools to engage with those in your team, get to know them, and empower them. *You have become the perfect leader!* Well done you!

However, now picture this...

Like most of us, the thought of having others to manage brings out all the insecurities you have collected over the years. It all floats to the surface in a perfect storm – insecurities you may not have even known that you had! If you have a lack of confidence, fear of failure, or a tendency to perfectionism, this results in you being poor at delegating work because you're worried about your team making mistakes. Perhaps issues like those lead to you 'telling your team what to do' rather than coaching them; and as they lose autonomy, they begin to lose *their* confidence and need more reassurance as their own self-worth dips. Team morale takes a tumble with the realisation that *you don't trust them...* and all your leadership aspirations fall by the wayside.

You make decisions from fear or anxiety, which you may have been stuck in for years; you don't take risks; you struggle to build team relationships. You don't make changes because you worry too much about your authority being judged (even though you may be the boss!). You begin to panic as the very thing you'd feared, *that you'd be a poor leader*, starts to come true. You, in turn, find *yourself* needing reassurance from *your* manager as your confidence plummets. You dread going to work and can't relax at home. You're snappy with those around you and your sleep is

disturbed by worry... *congratulations! You have become the boss you all complained about...*

You probably read that second scenario thinking I was exaggerating for effect, but in fact, I could've written several pages about the possible negative impact of poor leadership. I see it all the time. The saddest thing is that most entrepreneurs are aware they are holding themselves back yet fail to get help, and HR's are often way ahead of leaders in spotting when they are struggling. HR's desperately want to *support* the failing leader by sending them to me, but they fear asking them as they know *they're in denial about their issues* and will take it as criticism. Instead, they end up sending me several of that leader's team, whose confidence and mental health have plummeted under the new lack of leadership. Or worse, they're already wanting to leave. The entrepreneurs often leave it until crisis point.

So often, it's late in the process when leaders arrive on my doorstep – quite possibly at a point where they are on a development plan, miserable or about to burnout. If *you* are one of those leaders, and any of this rings true, don't panic. Just ask for guidance, or seek it for yourself *now*. *Get in touch at www.mari-williams.com*. You probably only need a few tweaks... like parents, very few leaders are given good training! Setting an example by asking for therapy/coaching so that you can continue to grow is a great example of strong leadership and positive modelling for those around you. When it's viewed positively, there is *enormous* strength in vulnerability.

I've prevented and resolved a lot of conflict within teams purely by explaining the content of the last two principles to their leaders. That knowledge empowered them to return to their teams, *really* get to know them and *accept them for who they were*. You mustn't assume that everyone in your team thinks the way you do; and you should be *grateful* that they don't – thinking differently means they'll have *different ideas* about how to

create, innovate, and problem solve. *You* may need to adapt around *them* a little, but doing so will *enhance* your leadership abilities.

CASE STUDY

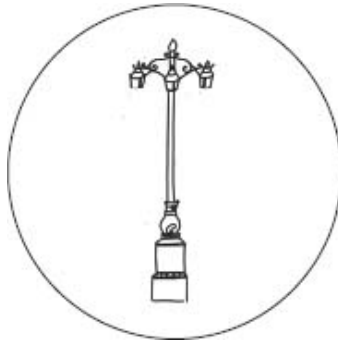
James

James came to me for help – he was already a good manager and wanted to improve, but he was also a perfectionist who struggled to delegate. He spent 15 minutes frustratedly discussing a woman in his team who always wanted to do things her own way: she struggled with others' opinions, was socially a little awkward, struggled with presentations and would get up and leave in the middle of meetings without explanation. James couldn't see why she was so awkward, and after several attempts at resolution, he struggled to trust her and felt no rapport.

From his description, I wondered if she may have had autistic tendencies, and asked him if he'd considered that. He said that HR had mentioned it, but there was no actual diagnosis. I firstly explained that, in my opinion, neurodiversity conditions like ADHD, autism, and dyslexia are *superpowers* and that any leader who has them, or who has a team-member who has them, should be gleefully rubbing their hands with delight at their luck! Then I explained briefly how the brains of *some* people on the autism spectrum work.

He realised her actions could likely fit that explanation. It wasn't that she was awkward, it was that *her* experience of the world was different to *his* and he needed to stop trying to squeeze her into his reality. James also recognised he needed some therapy of his own to clear his need for control and fear of failure. Two weeks later, he told

me he couldn't believe the difference in just a short time. His new understanding had allowed *him* to adapt *around her* and the issues had been resolved.



REALITY CHECKPOINT

Reality is perception in
the workplace too!

Understanding the differences between *your* reality as a leader and the reality of your team is a key leadership skill.

This will take some time, but it will be well worth the effort! I've spaced this question out in a helpful way in the workbook that is included in your 'It Begins with You' resource pack, which will make it easier for you. If you haven't already done so, go and grab your copy here: www.mari-williams.com/resources

Question 1

Take a moment to reflect on all you've learned so far about how our brains work, and what past baggage may be in your way. Then note down your answers to the following five questions.

Our brains use filters to create our realities.

What are *your* filters?

What are *your* triggers?

What are *your* unique strengths?

What is *your* perception of *your* workplace?

What is *your* perception of **yourself** as a leader?

Question 2

Look at Question 1 again. This time, apply a, b, c, d, and e to *each member* of your team – turn ‘*your*’ into ‘*their*’. Again, note down the answers. *If you’re really unsure of how to answer, that might just be a red flag in itself...*

Question 3

What have you learned about yourself and your team from Questions 1 and 2? How does your reality differ from that of each member of your team? How do your team members’ realities differ from each other?

Question 4

What *immediate* actions can you take to improve your leadership for you and your team?

Steps for clearing up your past

Step 1: Clear your past issues from your unconscious

Whenever I mention clearing up past issues buried within the unconscious, most people (after they have stopped looking at me like I’m a 70s hippy – which technically I am, given my age) will either say that the

past has already happened and *can't* be changed, or worry that I'm going to start blaming their parents. People jump to defend their parents; 'I had a great childhood!' they say, and they may well have had, but that doesn't mean that their emotional baggage and problematic behaviours don't trace back to it. As I'll explain, it's not someone's childhood itself in general that causes them problems, it's the *meaning* that the child took from *specific events within it*. When we understand that much of our perceived reality is, in fact, a bi-product of 'data' being unconsciously filtered through our memories of experiences from birth to today (as we covered in [principle one](#)), it's plain to see that we are all, in effect, *reliving our past in the present*.

Some of my clients don't want to spend hours revisiting their past; especially if their past was challenging. I agree, and it's not usually necessary!

With the techniques that I use, the only memories that need to be revisited are memories relevant to the blocks holding my client back. We are not 'memory tourists', as my trainer Trevor used to say. I'm not going to open up a client's entire childhood; it's not their entire childhood that got them stuck: just small moments within it. I don't look to find fault, I look to help my client to fix what needs fixing.

“

It's not someone's childhood itself in general that causes them problems, it's the meaning that the child took from specific events within it.

”

You may have had a great childhood, but it may still have left you with a few issues, as I said – whether you realise it or not!

Now, to the objection that the past has already happened and so can't be changed, my reply is:

‘No, we cannot physically time travel, so you are correct (and you only have to watch Marty McFly's attempts to keep history exactly as it was in *Back to the Future* to see the chaos that could cause anyway), but the events themselves *may* be *less* important than the *meanings* we've unconsciously chosen to apply to those events, and we *can* change those meanings by working with the unconscious!’

It's all about applied meanings.

Picture this...

Imagine you're visiting an abstract art gallery. You stare at a piece and think ‘my five-year-old could do that’, but the person next to you is looking at the same splodge of red paint and enthusing about light, texture, and the deep emotional connection they feel to it. You can see that their perception and understanding of the piece is completely different to your own, and now you know why: their *reality* is not the same as your own. Many artists say that the true measure of their art is in *the effect it has on the viewer*; the artwork itself is irrelevant. Memory is like that: a memory that troubles (or delights) you only has that effect on you because of the meaning that your unconscious has applied to it.

I can think of many examples (both from my own and my clients' experiences) of issues caused by the application of meaning to negligible, minor events – often things that never would have been identified as problem starters, even if they were being consciously looked for. So, clients

have often revealed problem starter events to me with the words, “This is trivial, but...” And that is why it’s so important that we work via the unconscious. We need to, in effect, move problematic memories from *unconscious* to *conscious* so we can change the meanings we gave them at the time. When I worked on my own anger, the memory I returned to was of the three-year-old me sitting alone on the stairs. It was not a traumatic memory, or even one that I consciously remembered, but the *meaning* the three-year-old me *gave* to the emotion I was feeling *made* that memory problematic.

Can you see that clearing the unconscious meanings behind troubling memories is incredibly important?

‘I learned that the issues I had in the present seemed hugely complex and yet rooted in the past, but you don’t need hours of treatment. My advice is to do the work on your unconscious. Do this and you will let go of the burden of your past – it will not define your present or future, it will simply inform you about where you’ve come from.’

CLARE, a mum who, after clearing her baggage and gaining her confidence, realised a 20-year ambition to train to be a Coach (she asked me to tell you that!).

I’m not saying that events that are *truly* traumatic (physical or emotional abuse, for instance) are *only* damaging because of the meaning they’ve been given by the victims. No, clearly the perpetrators are those

responsible! What I *am* saying is that if we look carefully at the incorrect meanings that we've given to (and taken from) these traumatic events (often that it's 'our fault' when it's not) and '*rewrite*' those meanings more accurately, we can '*clear*' the trauma.

Step 2: Clear up your childhood brain

So where does it all start? When we are born, our first connection is with our parents. Within an hour of its birth, a baby can mimic its parents, and within days it has fixed its cry to exactly the pitch that gets the quickest reaction from them (the most annoying pitch!). We are so in tune with our babies! The effects of separation at birth, and things like post-natal depression, extreme stress, and previous miscarriages can affect the bonding stage. Luckily though, the brain is plastic, so we can repair such issues. The parent-to-child attachment effect is unconquerable when all goes well. But what happens when things go badly?

A baby's learning capacity is phenomenal. As soon as it's born, its brain immediately begins to cope with those 11 million pieces of data per second. Its brain will grow 64% in its first three months. During these early days, its senses are blended; a loud noise can actually cause distressing ripples in a baby's vision. I have clients who say it wasn't an issue that their parent was in an abusive relationship when they were babies, because they were too young for it to affect them; but there's never a 'too young': it's now been proved that the emotions a mother experiences *whilst pregnant* can have an effect on her unborn child. During a session, a client told me he felt he was remembering being in the womb, and having a feeling that he wasn't wanted by his mother even then. Whether the client could truly remember that far back, or his mind was simply using the image as a metaphor matters less than the fact that when he checked with his mother, she had indeed

spent most of her pregnancy feeling that she didn't want him; and during delivery – a planned caesarean – she said she had felt this very deeply. That's unusual: most of us are born to parents who value us, so the majority of us are born full of confidence, self-worth, and love for ourselves. That's the state I'm aiming to get you back to!

Picture this...

You buy a new laptop. You unwrap it carefully, wanting to preserve its shiny newness. Eating or drinking near it are *forbidden*. You handle it gently, supporting the screen... a bit like a new baby, really. Six weeks later, you're dropping crumbs on it and chucking it on the sofa when the doorbell rings. It's still very loved and cherished, but it's not in quite such pristine condition now. It still works, but maybe not *quite* as well... and it keeps showing error messages which you ignore until it crashes!

This is pretty much what happens as we grow from children into adults. Life naturally gives us some superficial scrapes and some deeper scars; we might look fine, but inside feel that things just aren't quite right. Our brain and body might try to show us some error messages, which, if we ignore them for long enough (as we might ignore warnings on a laptop screen), will cause us to crash. Sometimes we need something like a factory reset. We don't often take the time to reset our minds in this way, but we should. Unlike a laptop, we don't need to get rid of everything and restart; we just need to clear out the 'error files' and 'junk folders' that are stopping us from maximising our potential to be happy and feel fulfilled.

The pre-teenage brain

Our processing in early life is very black and white. We're more prone to making false assumptions and applying undue inferences to

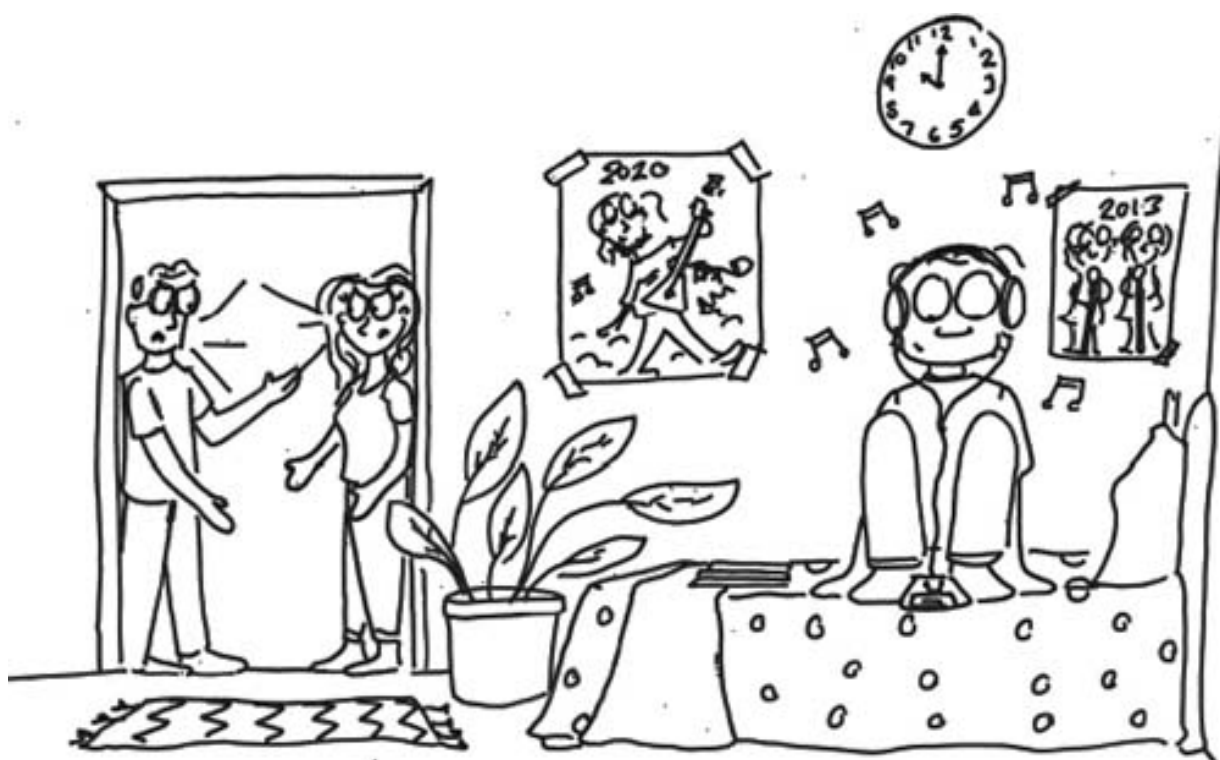
circumstances in our first 10-12 years of life than we are as adults, when our brains have matured and developed more nuanced levels of understanding.

Picture this...

A six-year-old boy hears his parents arguing. It's unpleasant for him, and shows as an alert on his 'shouting radar'. His unconscious, unable to discriminate between a physical and emotional threat, interprets it as a *direct threat to his survival* and comes up with a fast response to 'save' him. Perhaps he hides under his bed. However, because the situation has been interpreted as a survival threat, the unconscious brain creates a file (remember the spider file?) and comes up with a plan to stop him *ever feeling like that again*: to stay safe, he must never argue with anyone, ever, and must avoid *any* situation in which there's even a chance of an argument. Do you see the simplistic nature of this false assumption?

As he grows up, every time he is confronted with conflict or even *potential* conflict, his unconscious brain runs the 'A=B' and 'Cause and Effect' equations. As a result, he concludes that the situation is *just the same* as when he was six, when his brain thought he might die because of an argument that felt like a threat. His brain knows just what to do (it has a file about it)... avoidance saved him last time, so naturally, it will save him again! He has become conflict-avoidant, and it will follow him into adulthood. He won't assert himself; he'll try to fit in with everyone else's needs. When treated unfairly at work he'll say nothing; in an argument with a partner, he won't speak up for what is right for him. He won't put himself forward for promotion; if he's self-employed he won't put out social media content or create partnerships with others in case it creates conflict... he may become totally miserable with no sense of self.

Now, just like in the film *Sliding Doors*, let's rewind and look at an alternate reality: what if he'd been 13 when his parents had had that argument? By then, the boy's brain would have developed a greater emotional capacity, and although he still wouldn't have liked to hear his parents argue, his unconscious brain wouldn't have assumed it was a threat to his survival. Perhaps he would have thought: 'I don't like it when they fight, but they normally get on pretty well. Time to chill out in my room with headphones on.'



With no survival instinct triggered and no behaviours created, the event would have just disappeared into the ether. The boy would have grown up being able to assert himself when necessary, and his sense of self, his relationships, his parenting, his career and leadership would have all remained intact and he'd have thrived. The effects of our unconscious mind can be profound and generational.

Occasionally, a client finds the memory that's the root cause of a problem came from after the age of 12, or even in adulthood; perhaps some form of bullying at work or an accident. Adults still go through distressing events, of course: for example, if someone's partner is unfaithful to them, they might develop a fear of being cheated-on and carry it into other relationships. However, again, it's not solely *what happened* that will have caused their fear, but the *meaning they took* from what happened. Someone with good self-worth wouldn't 'take on' the meaning/belief that they were at fault: they'd leave the issue firmly with their partner, where it belonged. I'm not saying that we shouldn't reflect on such situations and see whether we can learn and grow from them; just that we shouldn't carry other peoples' emotional baggage.

As to the second objection – that someone's parents were perfect because their childhood was generally great, my reply is:

As children, we are all predisposed to love, like and accept our parents; so finding out that our parents are fallible human beings is hard, even as an 'adult child'. Even grown adults struggle to understand that their acceptance that something in their childhood was unhelpful to them *doesn't mean* there has to be blame attached. It's okay for us to say that sometimes (or all of the time) someone didn't parent us well enough: it doesn't mean they are a *bad person*.

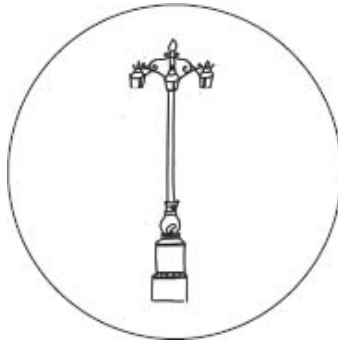
This is so important that I'm going to say it once again: we don't have to have suffered 'deep' traumas to end up with memories that will cause our radar screens to go to red alert and trigger unwanted behaviours. Something that seems perfectly innocuous, like a parent sensibly switching off their child's TV or computer, or putting unwanted tomatoes on their plate, can result in what we in therapy term a 'SEE': a 'Significant Emotional Event'.

MY STORY

The Restrictor

My son adores his computer games, but I limit his daily screen time: when he was younger, he sometimes called me ‘The Restrictor’. Sounds like an action film title, doesn’t it? Funny, and just a joke; but these are *exactly* the things I’m referring to: I know that him even *jokingly* calling me that *has* had an effect on the way he sees and treats me – but this doesn’t mean we shouldn’t set boundaries. They’re really important in *all* areas of our lives, and as a leader, you will occasionally have to make unpopular decisions. For instance, I returned to restricting his screen time throughout lockdown to prevent 12-hour *Friends* and *Big Bang Theory* TV marathons. *The Restrictor* – *Part 2*, starring Mari Williams...

So, for our first 18 years or so, we have one or two parents/carers to rely on (hopefully), helping us to develop into happy and healthy human beings and leaders! But we have to rely on *them being* happy healthy human beings to give us the correct modelling! As parents, we know we’ll mess up; but if we spend time working through our own baggage, not only will we be happier people, but we’ll spend less money on our kids’ therapy too. Win-win!



REALITY CHECKPOINT

Your relationship with your parents.

Your childhood feelings towards your parents live on in your inner child...

Question 1

Think about your childhood: how 'in tune' were you with your parents?

Question 2

Imagine walking towards your parents: what emotions do you feel?
Applying what you've learnt so far, why do you think you feel each of those emotions?

Step 3: Clear up your memories

How memories work

Most neuroscientists say that the human brain has an inability to recall memories from before about the age of 3½: it's known as 'Childhood

Amnesia' (Puiu, 2017). However, recent research shows that some children may remember memories as far back as when they were one month old! Whichever it is, by studying the way the brain's storage works, scientists have extrapolated that it's not *memories* that *make* us who we are, but rather that our memories are *representative of* life experiences *we had* that *helped* to create our identities (it's our old friend *meaning* again). Our *experiences* give us our morality, values, and instincts: our memories are just reminders of the *events* that we *took* those learnings from. We don't *need* to remember our early childhood, because the effects of those experiences are embedded within us, affecting everything from our self-belief to our behaviours. People who have lost their memories may not remember their lives, but often their family and friends say that they are still 'them', and this is because memory is just a conduit.

How memories can change

According to Psychotherapist Ernest Rossi, our unconscious is constantly refreshing our memories whenever we receive new data. This changes the meanings of the memories without us even realising it; memories are never kept in their original form. Imagine that years ago, you had a great holiday with friends – the memory is great, but years later, you find out your partner was unfaithful on that holiday. Your brain 'updates' the memory with the new information and it changes the *meaning* of the memory and the emotions connected to it to 'betrayal'. The event hasn't changed (we can't time travel), just the *meanings* attached to the event. As Jules Montague, a consultant neurologist, puts it:

'Our memories are not immutable; they evolve over time. Memories are embedded, consolidated, refreshed and mislaid. They are precise or

unreliable, enriched or fragmented, exposed or repressed, honest or deceptive.’ (Montague, 2015)

Think about how your feelings towards something can change because you are tired, hungry, or cold... emotions and meanings can be fickle things, and memories are *naturally* corruptible!

How the brain creates meaning in childhood

I’ve mentioned *meaning* many times; it’s a central theme to the whole book, and it’s the *meaning* we take from our memories that causes us issues. As adults, we have a much more nuanced view of events, but let’s take a more detailed look at how we create meaning in childhood. Imagine you’re very young, have limited development, and don’t know much about the world yet. Something ‘bad’ happens (and as we’ve seen, ‘bad’ doesn’t necessarily mean ‘*bad*’), and your unconscious brain, trying to find certainty in what is happening, makes three crucial errors (which it often blends together) while it’s doing its data sifting. The three errors are: ‘this is my fault’ (even when it’s clearly not), ‘this is about me as a person, my worth, my value’ (even when it’s not), and ‘there is no other way for me to consolidate or understand this experience’ (even when this isn’t so). Let’s look at them each in turn.

“

We don't need to
remember our early
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within us.

”

Childhood Error 1: ‘This is my fault (even when it’s clearly not)’.

As we know, to try to establish meaning, our unconscious monitors our emotional and physical responses and uses the information to update our learning, and therefore our beliefs and behaviours. However, because our unconscious is so ‘me’ focused, it often fails to consider what the other people involved in the situation might be doing or thinking – and what led them to behave or think in that way in the first place. This wider thinking is way above what a child can process.

Several of my clients have mentioned (as an afterthought) in our first session, or even several sessions later, that one of their parents died when they were young. A parent dying is a *huge* event at *any* age, let alone in childhood. The reason clients flippantly tag this on to their life story is that it’s actually still so painful for them that they ‘deny’ the pain, convincing themselves they are fine – that it hasn’t affected them. But when a parent whose existence is assumed to be eternal vanishes forever, the effect on a child who’s still developing is enormous.

As an aside, if there is a warning that a parent may die, or even if they do die unexpectedly, there are a lot of charities and therapists that can help negate this effect. So, don’t worry; if this is something in your child’s life, just make sure they get the right support. Do contact me at www.mari-williams.com if you need some guidance.

In such a situation, instead of the child’s mind seeing a parental death for what it is – a very sad, unfortunate, devastating occurrence – it will desperately search for *meaning* in the event. The child’s brain will rush around in its pain, trying to soothe itself. It has the belief that if it can work out *why* this happened, it can make sure it never has to experience it again.

The brain is unable to understand the complexity of death until around age 10; so, whilst crudely sifting the data it *does* have, it can land on entirely unrelated events and ascribe false meanings to them. Perhaps the parent was cross with the child three weeks before they died because they'd not tidied their room? The child's unconscious brain will wonder if that argument caused their parent to die. If that's so, then they must therefore be a terrible child... the 'this is my fault' assumption.

Once a 'my fault' conclusion has been cemented, a multitude of false beliefs and difficult behaviours can spring from it and ricochet around like pinballs: 'I am not worthy', 'it's disrespectful of me to enjoy life when my parent can't', 'I must never get cross with anyone again in case they die' (we've seen the effect of conflict avoidance), 'I must never get attached to anyone again in case I cause them to die or they leave me', and so on. You can see the multitude of permutations that the brain could create; and it will create a radar alert screen for each of them. The multiple repercussions of this simple false assumption can travel right through a child's life into adulthood, affecting their entire way of being.

CASE STUDY

Anne

Anne came to see me for help with managing her work stress, which was exacerbated by her manager bullying her. She stated her objectives for our programme as follows:

She wanted to be able to stand up for herself (she was conflict avoidant).

She wanted to feel generally less stressed...

Oh, and as an afterthought, she wanted to be able to talk about her Mum's death without crying.

Anne's mother had died when she was seven, but she didn't consider that it was something linked to her work issues. However, every time we tried to work on her stress, or tried to enable her to stand up for herself, her unconscious would ping us back to her mother's death and she would be in tears. I soon pointed out that her unconscious seemed to be guiding us to work with her mother's death first. Once we had resolved the false beliefs she had about that event and allowed her to be at peace with her mother's death, Anne's work issues were resolved too; she naturally stood up for herself and her stress dissipated.

Childhood Error 2: 'This is about me as a person, my worth, my value (even when it's not)'

Instead of understanding that they may have made a mistake, or something has gone wrong by accident, or that others are entirely at fault, the child takes on all the blame as an identity issue: through a child-mind application of cause and effect, they come to the conclusion that they are 'bad' or 'wrong' or 'a failure' or 'un-loveable.'

CASE STUDY

Howard

When Howard was three years old, he tripped up his mother by mistake. She was carrying a bottle of wine, and when she fell, the bottle smashed and cut her leg. Being as human as we all are, his parents were cross. Howard remembered seeing the blood and knowing he had physically hurt his mother. This memory popped up whilst we were working on his lack of self-worth. Surely it shouldn't be related to self-worth. It'd be clear to any *adult* that it was just an accident and he wasn't to blame; his parents got cross, yes, but they weren't really cross with *him*. However, he was young, so had only black and white thinking to work with. His brain used a basic *cause and effect* equation with the information 'I have hurt and injured my mother and she is bleeding; both my parents are upset at me.' This gave him the meaning 'this is my fault' (first error), which led to the second error, 'I am a bad kid', and this caused his lack of self-worth.

In later life, Howard's lack of self-worth led him into a relationship in which he was verbally and physically abused by his female partner, into jobs he didn't feel he was deserving of (even though he was good at them), and into a general sense of unworthiness. Howard actually spoke to his parents after we cleared this memory, and they confirmed that they hadn't been too troubled about the event, and they knew it was a mistake!

There's another unfortunate strand to this: sometimes a child is verbally told something is their fault, and sometimes they're also mentally or physically punished for something that was an accident, normal child behaviour or a misunderstanding. It sounds like something only an abusive parent would do, but well-meaning parents can do it too. At a young age, *children believe what grown-ups tell them*; they just don't have the adult awareness necessary to be able to discount such judgements, especially when they come from the authority 'care' givers.

Childhood Error 3: 'There is no other way for me to consolidate or understand this experience (even when this isn't so)'

Most of our experiences do not cause huge blips on the timelines of our past. If they did, we would never be able to function as adults. But some childhood events are deemed so traumatic by the unconscious that the brain cannot consolidate them. The same can happen to adults, but the effects are worse in children, who cannot comprehend so much. The child brain, experiencing a traumatic event, gets tripped into a fight, flight, freeze state. It sifts its 11 million bits of data and scrambles for meaning to soothe the pain of the experience. Remember, though, that the child brain has black and white thinking; sometimes it just can't consolidate or comprehend a traumatic situation at any level. Depending on the age of the child and the severity of the experience, the brain may jam and freeze like that laptop crashing and, rather than remaining whole, a trauma memory can be split into fragments of visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic senses and sensations.

For example, if a child is abused, either sexually, physically or emotionally, and *does* find meaning in the events, often it's that there's 'something wrong' with them. They must have deserved the abuse in some way, or they believe that they are worthless. Imagine a child being hit and

told they are worthless. The child, unable to reject information from authority figures (let's say it's their parents for simplicity), takes on this identity as a reality. The child also instinctively loves their parents, and so doesn't want to be upset with them ('who will look after me if I reject my parents?'), so the child's unconscious *considers it* easier and less painful to believe that they *deserve* abuse rather than face the devastating consequences of seeing that their caregivers are, in fact, abusive.

In traumatic cases in which a child's brain has either fragmented an experience, or perhaps boxed-up and hidden a memory because it's so painful, the memory/belief *cannot* then be updated unconsciously when new adult understanding is gained by the child – so the belief remains unchallenged or reframed. This can leave the child/adult with a core belief that they are 'worthless', and a lot of other issues too – false beliefs that can wreak havoc on the rest of their life, affecting all their decisions and relationships and causing them to miss opportunities.

Unfortunately, people who feel unlovable or unworthy tend to attract people who will treat them as if they *are* just that: partners who are abusive or dismissive of them, managers who bully them, 'friends' who walk all over them. They are unlikely to grasp opportunities to improve their lives; they can even fall into poor self-care because they don't feel they deserve to be looked after. Because of past traumatic experiences remembered by their unconscious, they may also experience strange reactions to stimuli, sometimes reactions that they themselves may not understand. The triggers seem trivial when taken out of context: certain sounds, visual experiences, or even the touch of something (many victims of rape are struggling to wear face masks because it's a trigger of their attack) or someone can trigger them to feel emotionally distressed. Obviously, we all stumble through

times when the above may apply to us, but people with a very traumatic past will be likely to have a systemic history of this.

Sometimes clients have repressed such memories, either consciously or unconsciously, and may try to convince themselves that they've had no lasting effects. However, more often, clients who've experienced these types of traumas will have life-limiting symptoms: depression, anxiety, feelings of being overwhelmed, sexual issues and very low self-esteem. They can present with PTSD symptoms too, all of which impact their quality of life. They can also carry these triggers from childhood into adulthood, where they lie in wait like landmines...

How can we change our meanings?

We now understand that our brains are naturally and regularly changing the meanings of our memories, and therefore our emotional responses too: our past is *not* just our past. Our future is *not* just our future. Our brains are constantly changing, undergoing structural, physiological, and emotional changes throughout our lives – a flexibility known as 'Neuroplasticity'. However, if the meanings of memories can change *unconsciously*, then they can be *consciously, actively, and deliberately* changed too – changed to our advantage to create positive, life-enhancing meanings.

Picture this...

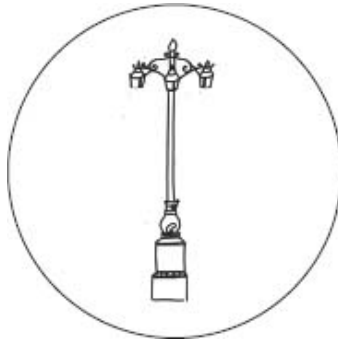
Imagine a child who *is* able to understand that the reason for the abuse they've suffered has *nothing to do with them* – that it is *the perpetrator's* own emotional baggage causing *them* to act out by abusing the child. We could, in fact, replace the child in the scenario with any other child, and the perpetrator's behaviour would remain the same: it's not about the child, it's about the perpetrator. Imagine how different life would be for that child,

being empowered by the ability to identify when people are acting out their ‘stuff’ on someone else? What if we reversed the three errors above? Would they then know that they weren’t in any way to blame for the things they were put through? They would know that those things that happened didn’t *mean* anything about *them*; they were in no way a true reflection of their worth. Imagine how different life would be for them when they reached adulthood? When I work with clients and we enable them to let go of their unhelpful beliefs, their lives change in every way. They choose better partners, better jobs; they start to hold themselves differently and take pride in themselves; they parent better; but above all, they find happiness and worth within themselves. It’s beautiful to see.

So, by triggering your mind to revisit old memories, you can *deliberately* return to your past, changing events you took as being unequivocal as a child. You can ‘clean up’ the unhelpful beliefs and behaviours of your unconscious mind, whilst leaving morals, values, and identity – yourself – intact. How can we change the past? By using the brain’s inability to tell the difference between reality and fantasy. According to research carried out at the University of Colorado, ‘If you have a memory that is no longer useful for you or is crippling you, you can use imagination to tap into it, change it and re-consolidate it, updating the way you think about and experience something’ (Reddan, 2018) and ‘you can use imagination constructively to shape what your brain learns from experience’ (Wagner, 2018).

Books, films, and computer games have emotional and physical effects on us because our unconscious thinks that what we are experiencing through them is happening to us *now*... remember my reaction to those zombies? We need to take meaning from life – it’s how we learn and

evolve, both as individuals and as a species, but let's make sure we do it as cleanly as possible. You can heal the child within you.



REALITY CHECKPOINT

Troublesome memories and the false beliefs they cause.

Understanding how your memories impact your relationships with yourself and others is crucial to identifying areas that might need some therapeutic work.

Your troublesome memories may be very difficult to identify without assistance from a therapist, as they may have embedded into your unconscious and created behavioural patterns that now feel 'normal'. If you'd like to work on them 1:2:1 with me then I'd be happy to help.

You can contact me at: www.mari-williams.com for more information.

Question 1:

What memories from your childhood (or adult life) have a negative impact on your present?

Question 2:

What happens in you when you revisit those memories *with adult understanding*?

Question 3

We tend to ‘attract’ people who treat us in the way we think we should be treated, based mostly on our *unconscious beliefs*. Look for common traits and beliefs in people from your past and present: which types of people do you think you attract?

Step 4: Clear your issues from your teacher’s expectations

How a teacher’s past comments can influence us today

Teachers have so much on their plate already that I debated with myself whether to put this section in! I chose to because I know that most teachers started their career because they want to enable children to be successful and to love learning... but they may not all be having the positive impact they’d like. I originally trained as an English teacher, but gave it up when I realised I was more interested in the kids’ lives than the grammar I was teaching! I’ve had five of my own children go through a total of 60 years in school. I know that teachers are one of our *most influential* leader groups, so I am hoping that teachers reading this book will continue to ‘teach’ by passing on the lessons and learnings in this book to their colleagues...

Teachers are often the second most influential sources of authority within our young lives. In our schools, they have ultimate power over us; their modelling can be inspirational and change the course of their pupils’ lives for the better, but, unfortunately, in my experience with clients, the *negative* effects of a *poor* teacher come a close second to the effects of poor

parenting. Words can *really* hurt, so teachers *must* be aware of how they phrase things to their students, and they *must* be aware that often the children who need *extra* care are the ones who *cause the most problems in class*. They must remember that children are acting out a set of behaviours (poor or otherwise) put in place long before the first day of school.

A teacher's comments and actions can weigh heavily, and it's not always as simple as them calling kids idiots, or stupid, or not good enough; that's obvious. As we've seen, small flippant comments can sometimes wreak havoc too.

I had a client who had developed a fear of giving presentations because a teacher once asked her to read aloud in class, and then humiliated her by saying someone else could do it for her as she was struggling. Another client had general anxiety because of a teacher who jokingly threatened to cut the ears off her class of five-year-olds! Of my clients with a fear of presentations, 99.9% will have been laughed at or humiliated when trying to give a presentation at school, so how you, as a teacher, manage this is crucial. This *can* be solely their perception – a memory warped by their brain because it was already feeling anxious about the presentation, rather than a real event – so if you're a teacher, please be overcareful and supportive at these stressful times. I believe that our current school curriculum doesn't take the individual personalities and preferences of children into account; forcing children to do things they are uncomfortable with doesn't help them and should not be necessary. My son hated being the centre of attention: his lovely teacher, knowing how much anxiety it caused him, let him do his presentation to her in private. So, teachers, this is a heads-up. When the child that you struggle to get on with (or just find plain odd) is causing you stress, or winding up other kids in your class, please, *please*, take a moment to breathe and then react with kindness and care –

and yes, firmness and boundaries – but please watch your *words* as well as your behaviour.

Step 5: Clear up your triggers

Have you ever been in a situation in which you found yourself out of control in your thoughts and behaviours, and knew you were reacting badly, poorly, inappropriately... and yet *couldn't* change your response, couldn't help yourself, no matter what you did?

Perhaps you've flown off the handle in a meeting when you were completely opposed to the outcome (despite a small voice in your head telling you that you were reacting badly, like the one I used to hear but be unable to heed when I'd lose my temper) and made the situation worse. Maybe you've found yourself unable to speak in an emotional conversation with a partner (even though you knew what you needed to say), resulting in conflict. Or perhaps you've *once again* been unable to stop yourself necking wine, and stuffing doughnuts down, as if in a contest, after *once again* starting your 'new' diet/detox/bedtime plan on Monday (and why do we always choose a Monday?).

How triggers work

The reason we sometimes feel, think, and act in ways that we consciously know to be wrong or unhelpful is that we've been *triggered*. Either an event in our past, or a belief system we've consciously or unconsciously created, has caused us to be hyper-sensitive to something: a word, or a feeling, or a situation, perhaps – just like a red rag to a bull. Our reactions to our triggers are not without nuance, though; we may react slightly differently to the same trigger on different occasions because of other factors.

I know I've said this before: our past is not just our past. Do you know any adults who seem to have triggers that cause them to act childishly? People whose behaviour changes so rapidly that they seem to suddenly flip into being an entirely different adult – or, in fact, from an adult to a different *child*? An incredible hulk, or incredible sulk? Tantrums, shouting, lashing out physically, and bullying – all very childlike behaviours, and yet we sometimes witness them in our adult friends and colleagues, and even in our political leaders. The reason for such childlike reactions is often that the root event that caused the triggers behind them happened when the person *was* a child, and that part of them got stuck at that age. However, a ten or five-year-old manages problems and emotions very differently to the way an adult should!



MY STORY

Anger Awareness

Remember me mentioning my anger issues ('going from nought to nuclear')? I'd have no *conscious awareness* I was about to be triggered, but my unconscious mind was running equations that would cause the explosive emotional wave: it would deem a current situation similar to a past one ($A=B$) in which an anger explosion had had a 'positive' result for me and use the behaviour again. I had no conscious control over my unconscious doing this, and even after many attempts using different therapies, which used my conscious mind to try to resolve it, I still retained my 'nought to nuclear' tendencies. It was incredibly frustrating that, no matter what I tried, I still had this awful reaction (and no, counting to ten didn't work either).

Finally, I was able to resolve the issue by using Cognitive Hypnotherapy. (I wasn't put 'under', as in traditional hypnotherapy, but by using certain language patterns, I was able to bypass my conscious mind and could trigger my unconscious mind to respond; this was something I hadn't been able to do with all the other therapies I'd tried.) The change was achieved by going back to the source of the anger, which, as it turned out, was caused by a feeling of confusion about my life at the age of three! I would never have reached this awareness without being able to tap into my unconscious processes, because I had no idea the memory even existed. Once I did

realise it was there, I was able to resolve that anger in one session. That was four years ago, and I haven't lost my temper like that since.

Most of us have lots of 'threat reaction behaviours' running concurrently, each vying for attention, pulling us emotionally in multiple directions – we're just not aware of them. Even as you read this, your unconscious mind is doing something that resembles monitoring thousands of spinning plates spread across an area the size of a football pitch, and rushing around trying to keep them all steady. These physical and/or thought behaviours, triggered by our minds in response to our original emotions, won't all be *practical physical* behaviours. Some of them will be patterns of thought and belief.

If you have children, you're likely to remember them having had meltdowns about the smallest things – writhing on the floor as if in agony, crying and wailing in anguish, all because they couldn't find the orange car they wanted. You're likely to have learnt that small things such as that could trigger a full-on tantrum if the darling child was in that sort of mood. Although, as an adult, you're unlikely to have a full-on tantrum over an orange car, you're not actually all that different. Your triggers may not show themselves so obviously, as they probably creep around under your conscious brain's radar, yet they can still run and ruin aspects of your life in subtle, devious-seeming ways. This is why it's so important to clear them. As my client, Mary, put it:

'I'm realising that negative experiences in my past have been affecting the way I view myself and react to situations, even if I think they're unconnected and just 'history' because I'm older

now and have moved on. Revisiting memories – sometimes ones that surprised me – has enabled me to see connections, understand why they formed and, importantly, leave those experiences in the past.'

—MARY, HEAD OF PRODUCT MARKETING

Why your brain creates problematic behaviours for you

All behaviour has a positive intention. I'm going to say that again, because this understanding underpins everything. *All* behaviour has a positive *intention*. Just let that sink in.

You might think that your brain *creates problems* for you, but whatever the effects on your life might be, your brain is doing whatever it's doing because it thinks it's found a *solution* to a problem. All behaviour serves a purpose. It has good motives. It can actually kick-off addictive behaviours this way too; your brain may decide that doing something that actually has a *long-term negative impact on your life* is a *good* idea because it *helps your brain to feel better in the short-term*.

“

All behaviour has a
positive intention.

”

Someone's brain might, for example, want them to regularly drink to excess even though this is likely to *cause* them problems like lost jobs, poor health and ruined relationships... but their brain sees drinking as a *solution* to their problems. It knows that they are stressed, sad or overworked, and it knows that when they drink, they don't feel sadness and pain – so why not drink some more? Just as in another case, someone feeling unloved might find their brain urging them to go on and eat that fifth ginger nut biscuit (my personal favourite), because they'll feel more loved when they eat (a common false belief usually modelled to children – like me – by their comfort-eating parents).

Someone might feel that they've chosen their life partners poorly, but, in fact, their unconscious may have *deliberately* chosen those partners as being perfect for them. Perhaps it was because something about them or their behaviour was reminiscent of a parent, for example, or because their unconscious thinks that this person fulfils their emotional needs – healthily or otherwise.

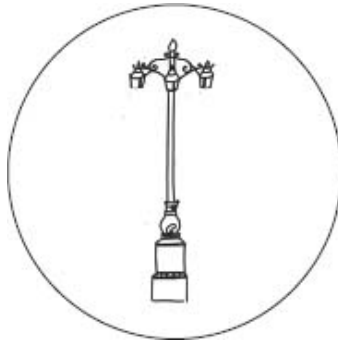
Often there's a part of their brain desperately sounding a 'caution' alarm bell on the third glass of wine, or the fifth ginger nut biscuit, or the second date, but the enthusiasm of the protective part of the unconscious mind is such that it drowns out this alarm. Basically, it sticks its fingers in its ears, saying 'nahnahnah!' (just like you did when you were five). The 'caution' alarm isn't loud enough to get through... and if someone's brain thinks that it's found behaviours to keep them alive, why would it quit those behaviours?





If you think there are times when a child part of you takes control, it's a really good idea to get in touch and get those root events and triggers cleared. The hurt child within you has positive *intentions* (*all* behaviours have positive *intentions*), but the results of it taking over your adult mind and body often aren't positive at all.

Can you see how incredibly important it is to identify your triggers? Once you do, it will bring them to your conscious mind, and once there, you'll be able to see patterns and themes you can work on. Don't panic if there are lots, or even hundreds – just remember the 'balloon seller' metaphor. They will all link to just a few key issues, I promise!



REALITY CHECKPOINT

The effects of your triggers.

Recognising your triggers and their effect on your life and leadership
is the first step to getting
rid of them!

Question 1

Having read this section, what triggers do you recognise in yourself?

Question 2

What effect are those triggers having on your life?

Question 3

What effect are those triggers having on
your leadership?

Question 4

Reflect on your answers to questions 2 and 3: what patterns and
themes can you identify that are common to both?

Step 6: Clear up the effects of modelling.

When someone's actions, behaviours or beliefs are consciously, or unconsciously, copied or imitated by someone else, it's known as 'modelling'. It happens without us realising it. Whether they are leaders, parents or teachers, those in authority positions 'model' all the time: they are quite literally 'leading by example', whether they intend to or not. In reality, we all model to each other in every interaction we share. I'm focusing on parents here, because I want you to understand how some of your own issues may have been modelled to you, and how you may then be modelling them forward: but *please* apply these learnings to your leadership!

Leaders often forget that they can be like parents to their team. In fact, a boss I consider to be gold standard definitely became a 'father figure' to me; he always had my back, and he enabled me to increase my self-confidence and self-worth, despite us being the same age. I didn't see the parental influence at the time but looking back he had such an incredibly positive influence on my life that I don't believe I would be where I am today without him. Thank you, Steve. Modelling is everywhere, though; artists, those in the media, musicians and politicians can have a huge positive or negative impact on their followers, which is why I'm passionate about working with them, so they model well.



TOP TIP

Many parents tell me they feel they can't say 'sorry' to their children, seeing it as a sign of weakness, but saying 'sorry' is a powerful gift we can give to our children. It models to them that it's ok to get things wrong occasionally, because they can apologise. It lets them know that we're not perfect, none of us is, but we *are* trying our best. If you have the ability to say sorry, it shows how *strong* you are; *it's not a weakness*. Do we really expect to become perfect because we've become a parent? *No*. Parents don't always get it right. I remember losing my temper with my daughter on the way to school one morning. I sheepishly apologised when she returned home and she said, 'I knew you were going to have to apologise.' Teaching your child to resolve difficult situations is a key life skill that will enable them to progress and lead with respect.

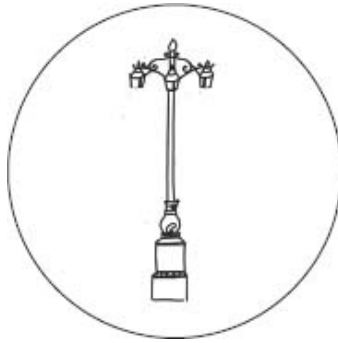
How modelling works

Good parents will look to *model* good behaviour to their children; but just as our parents modelled their issues to us, *we will* model some of our issues and emotional baggage to our children, even if we work really hard not to. In some cases, in fact, we are so busy trying to avoid replicating our parents' poor behaviours that we create different poor behaviours in place of them!

MY STORY

The Hoarder's Daughter

My own mother was a hoarder. The house I grew up in was many feet deep in 'stuff'. This made me so resolute that, as an adult, *my* house would be tidy and *my* kids wouldn't have the stress of a hoarder mother to deal with, that I swung the opposite way, developing low-level OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) in my 20s. Luckily, I noticed it developing and managed to stop it. Members of my family have been known to write 'keep this!' on important paperwork to prevent it falling into the 'it doesn't have a place so it will have to be thrown away' default I've developed! I have a healthy balance now, but definitely still lean towards cleanliness: tidy house, tidy mind. Modelling, with its powerful, generational effects, is yet another *extremely* good reason to do your inner work.



REALITY CHECKPOINT

The modelling you took and the modelling you give.

Don't pass on modelling you wish you'd never received!

Question 1

What beliefs and behaviours did your parents model to you? Which have been helpful to you? Which have been unhelpful?

Question 2

As a leader, what are *you* modelling to your children, your team or your followers?



TOP TIP

One of my clients told me that, during our work together, she had used a ‘WTFWMD?’ (‘*What The Fuck Would Mari Do?*’) question to help her make ‘healthy’ decisions until our work was done, and she felt confident enough to be her new true self. I found it hilarious and touching that she had so much faith in me and, *as it was a purely transitory step* whilst she was working towards being her ‘new self’ and feeling confident making her own decisions, I didn’t mind! If you need to, you could do this too, just pick someone you trust.

Step 7: Clear up your inherited trauma

Trauma can be *generational*: passed from generation to generation via modelling and genetics without a conscious link; and as we've seen, trauma isn't always what you might *consider* to be trauma. Researchers have found that the brain processes pain in the same way, whether someone has been hurt physically *or* emotionally (Biro, D. 2010). The implications of this are *huge*: the emotional pain caused by someone being told their hairstyle looks ridiculous is registered by their brain as being as life-threatening as a physical attack!

How inherited trauma works

Trauma can be *inherited* in belief systems, thought patterns and behaviours, which sometimes creep through our lives undetected. They do not feel 'traumatic' but nevertheless have a huge impact. Think about all the judgements you make that affect the opportunities you open yourself up to. Do you know where those judgements come from? Do you agree with them? Have they been modelled to you? I have adult clients who've experienced significant childhood traumas (sexual, violent and neglect-based ones), yet don't *see* the events as 'traumatic' until they understand the links their brain is making and the impact this is now having on their everyday life. I always encourage them to look back and accept that the behaviours of their parents (or whoever was responsible) were outside the 'norm', and would have been (and would still be) classified as abusive, whether intentional or otherwise. I ask them to look upon this acceptance as their first step towards a new life. However, as we know, it's the *meaning taken* from events that is important and this is where we can create change. Remember that the meaning we take from events as children is completely

individual – even a sibling put through the same events can ascribe a different meaning to them.

MY STORY

My Mother's Emotional Tsunamis

My mother was emotionally abusive, violent and neglectful, but she didn't mean to be. In fact, I didn't realise that she had been until, as an adult, I attended a child protection training course for a role I was in. The training covered all forms of neglect, and I realised that my childhood experiences ticked almost every box. That was an uncomfortable afternoon! I didn't go to school much as a child, and therefore had no friends, and so I had very little experience of 'normal' to compare my own life with. Don't get me wrong: I knew we were different, yes, but it wasn't clear to me just *how* different. My mother was mentally unwell: her reactive behaviour was always triggered by her finding herself overwhelmed by what I term 'an emotional tsunami'. I always knew I was loved by her, though, and therefore I didn't ascribe *quite* such destructive meanings to her triggered behaviours as I have seen in other cases. Whether we are loved or not is a core, if not *the* core, piece of meaning central to our wellbeing. That's why self-worth is a central theme in this book, and [principle three](#) is entirely about self-worth.

When someone believes their parent was truly malicious in their behaviour, though, there's a much deeper problem. It's certainly a resolvable one, but the effects on their life tend to be more profound. Remember, we are *all* doing the best with what we have, and maliciously abusive parents will have either had such behaviours modelled to them, or

unconsciously created those behaviours themselves whilst their brain was *trying to protect them*. There might not seem to be a difference between the way non-maliciously abusive and maliciously abusive parents behave towards a child, but the effects of the same-seeming behaviours can create very different meanings.

When a client of mine presents with a background of abusive parenting (malicious or otherwise), I always ask them to reflect on what they know of their grandparents (and great grandparents) to see if their parents had their parenting styles *modelled* to them. In most cases, there is a *very clear* and *direct repetition* of behavioural patterns. In some cases, there are defined mental health challenges. There's sometimes a recurring pattern of physical or sexual abuse but more often a recurring pattern of abuse by *neglect*. A parent's lack of ability to offer guidance, to show affection, warmth and unconditional love to a child can easily be passed on by that child to their own children, and so on until the pattern is broken by intervention. I hope that you will reflect on this if you have children; or intend to (I'm seeing a spate of young leaders who are all actively saying to me, 'I want to clear this before I have kids.' I love their intentional leadership!). Don't lead your children into negative modelling. Inherited trauma is exactly that: inherited. It's not *your* baggage, so don't continue to carry it. I'm going to use an example from my own life to show you how easily these things are passed down...

MY STORY

My Grandmother's Advice

My great-grandmother died just before my grandmother was due to get married; my grandmother wore black to her wedding and was left with no-one to give her parenting advice. My grandmother once told my mother to leave my sister alone at home in the middle of the bed whilst she went shopping; because, she said, as my sister couldn't roll over yet, she would be safe from harm. My sister was three months old.

When my mother was a child, my grandmother would lock her in her playroom above the garage whilst she cleaned the house; this was seen as perfectly acceptable in those days. From this though, my mother developed lifelong claustrophobia (even with severe dementia she showed signs of distress in lifts), *and* she passed this fear down to me. As a child, my mother would come home from boarding school to find her toys painted and given to her sister (again, it was wartime and acceptable). My mother always believed it was this that led to her developing the severe hoarding disorder (and when I say severe, I mean *severe*: her house was seven feet deep in 'stuff' when she moved out, and we had to climb in and out over it), which so profoundly affected my siblings and me, both practically and emotionally. What modelling did my mother take on to enable her to be a good parent, and to help her to move away from her own inherited traumas? Perhaps she didn't have much of a chance. I

definitely see some of those idiosyncrasies in my own children, so they're still visible four generations on...

I mentioned earlier that belief systems are another way of inheriting trauma: whilst inherited behaviours are often fairly easy to clear, belief systems can be a little harder as they embed into everything we do. My client, Anthony, carried an overwhelming sense of fear into every area of his life: he always looked for threats. It was similar to a mild PTSD response but with no traumatic cause. However, this response was obviously severely limiting his life, holding him back from many opportunities! When we dug deeply into this 'everyday' fear we realised that his uncle and aunt, who he had grown up with, had been survivors of The Holocaust, and *understandably* their survival response (stay fearful and be on the look-out for threat – absolutely appropriate for the time) had become their constant state. Sadly, for Anthony, this was passed down unconsciously through their parenting. Once Anthony understood this modelling, he was able to start to let go of this fear, as it wasn't his own, and as it left him, his whole life was suddenly changed for the better.

If you recognise your own experience in the section above, it's tough, I know. It can help to remember the neuroscience behind how we create behaviours, and that somewhere, some misguided part of your parent's unconscious thought it was doing the right thing for them. I don't believe you have to *forgive*, but understanding can help; and the beauty of understanding is that, once empowered by it, you can stop the downward trend.

Step 8: Clear your issues from your parents' expectations

Many of my clients want to look at changing or re-jigging their career as part of their personal development. When I ask what motivated them into their current career, the answer is often that it's what their parents wanted them to do. It's so incredibly easy to influence what your children study, even when you aren't meaning to. My daughter is about to go to college and has constantly asked my opinion. It was really hard not to 'tell' her what to do...

How the unconscious expectations of our parents affect us

As a parent and therapist, I've realised that we pass our conscious and unconscious expectations down to our children, without us even being *aware* of it – even without vocalising those expectations! Only 7% of our communication is verbal, so how much do we pass on through modelling without realising?

MY STORY

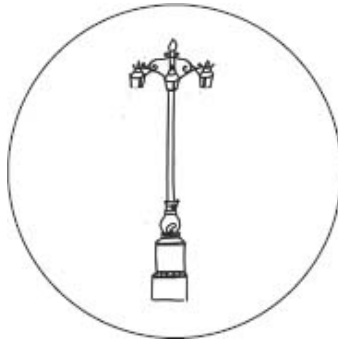
University Challenge

My son had some therapy when he was 23, which brought to light that he felt *I* was disappointed in his not going to university. I was really shocked, and immediately and passionately refuted it. I even rang my eldest daughter to get some backup, but she agreed with my son that I seemed to have had an expectation that they should all go to university! This was odd, because I had become a mother at 17, and had three children by the age of 21. I only went to university myself (at 23) because I wanted to become a teacher.

After I reflected on this, I realised I *did* have that expectation – it was a *hidden* belief. When I began to pick this expectation of mine apart, I realised that my unconscious saw a university education as a quick route to a ‘strong career’, and my kids having ‘strong careers’ should mean that they would have independence. They’d be ok financially if anything were to happen to me. So, the underlying motive of my unconsciously passing on my hidden belief was that, if I had died, my kids would be okay! The irony of that is that it was all a false assumption, not a belief I held consciously. My English literature degree has little to do with my work now, and I know many hugely successful people who never went to university or who dropped out of one to start a business. If you had asked me whether I thought university was important, I would have said then – and still would now – that I just want my children to be happy, and *mentally healthy* in whichever industry they enjoy. Actually, I consciously thought that

my son would probably open a beach hut café in New Zealand and live hand to mouth, but clearly my unconscious mind was more pragmatic...

Your ‘choices’ may have been influenced by ‘beliefs’ that aren’t, in fact, even held by the person you think passed them on to you. I’ve helped many clients to change the path of their career, be honest about their sexuality, and change their relationships by letting go of their fear of their parents’ judgement. I’ve had several clients whose parents have played a very direct, pressuring part in choosing their careers – even threatening to cut off their inheritance should they disobey! Some careers are seen as more desirable than others in some cultures, and again, I have clients who’ve spent years in careers they didn’t like because it was what their parents wanted. I hope you are now starting to see just how strongly our parents’ beliefs, or *perceived* beliefs, can impact us. You *must* clear any such baggage if you want to live the life *you* want to lead.



REALITY CHECKPOINT

Their choices; your changes.

If you're being held back in life by choices your parents made *for* you, it's time to take control!

Question 1

Look back on your life: what *life decisions* did your parents make *for* you that didn't make you happy – either then or now?

Question 2

What repercussions have their decisions had for you?

Question 3

What changes could you make that would help you to move towards the life *you* want to lead?

Question 4

Step into your place of pure honesty: what beliefs, hidden or otherwise, do you have that might be negatively impacting your

children or followers?

Step 9: Clear up your Imposter Syndrome

What is Imposter Syndrome?

Someone with Imposter Syndrome is likely to have the following thoughts and feelings:

- An internal need to feel that they must be ‘the best’
- That they must perform to superhero standards in everything
- A fear of failure
- An inability to accept praise, or see their achievements or their own abilities
- That success comes at a price – they struggle to see how they have got where they are and are racked with guilt
- Excessive negative thoughts, even when they’re doing well
- Overwhelming feelings of ineffectiveness
- Dwelling in the past, replaying old ‘failures’
- Anxiety, a lack of confidence and self-esteem
- A tendency to self-sabotage by not applying for, or refusing to take, promotions because they feel unworthy

- That it's all down to luck that they got where they are – rather than hard work or skill!

Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes were clinical psychologists. They discussed Clance noticing the above issues in herself, and named it 'Imposter Phenomenon' (Clance & Imes 1978), but it's now known as Imposter Syndrome. I've often found it relates back to a client's childhood experience, hence you find it in this principle; however, it's that plate of spaghetti again: it straddles self-worth and fear of failure and many more...

A study of 200 self-diagnosed Imposter Syndrome sufferers found that they were likely to be paid less than their contemporaries (Vergauwe, J. & Willie, B., 2015); they were less likely to be asked to apply for promotions (likely due to their lack of confidence); they were unhappy at work; and they felt Imposter Syndrome impacted their *whole* life, not just their professional life. Its impact can be vast, ranging from damaging sufferers' self-confidence, people and parenting skills, to holding them back from reaching out for life's opportunities – promotions, career changes, putting out social media content, giving presentations...

CASE STUDY

Martin

Martin came to me with self-diagnosed Imposter Syndrome. He had systematically left several different roles directly after being offered promotion, and finally realised he was self-sabotaging. He was racking up debt and hadn't told his partner he was out of a job.

I decided to use a technique to ask Martin's unconscious why it felt Imposter Syndrome was useful! Remember, he wasn't born this way, and *all behaviour has a positive intention*.

Martin remembered being in Scouts when he was eight years old. The group was playing a game in which people were knocked out of the game at the end of each round. It had come down to just himself and one other boy, and everyone was watching to see who would win. He remembered feeling shy and realising that he didn't want to win because he didn't want the attention and he decided to let the other boy win to avoid it. He deliberately 'threw' the game and lost, and the attention went to the other boy.

At this point, his unconscious brain evaluated the 'throwing' solution as: 'throwing' = no attention = no embarrassment. By simple cause and effect, his unconscious brain saw purposeful losing as a positive strategy and stored that behaviour in that dusty old file room in his brain as a workable solution, *should the need arise again*. He could have won, and the attention *might* have been *fun*, for example, but his

brain used the deletion algorithm to *delete* that idea to keep it's 'throwing' solution in place.

30 years later, Martin was offered a promotion at work. His brain made an A=B link between his new situation, in which he might receive more attention (Imposter Syndrome kicks in), and the events in the Scouts game when he was eight. It pulled out that dusty old file, and despite the two situations not being factually linked, his unconscious decided that the two were similar *enough* and repeated its trusty old 'throw the game' solution. It was a behaviour that led to Martin quitting his job rather than taking promotion... four... times! Each time his brain created and further embedded a false narrative: because the attention didn't appear, it made the assessment that the system was running perfectly! Unfortunately, the system's by-product of repeatedly leaving Martin out of work was deleted.

Martin convinced his unconscious to let go of its 'solution' by telling his eight-year-old self (in reality, the unconscious part of him that had got stuck at that age) that winning was quite exciting, and that the attention could be fun. As soon as he felt the boy understood, his unconscious mind realised that he didn't need this protective behaviour anymore and let it go. Martin said that he immediately felt lighter, which is quite common when someone has let go of a behaviour that's been holding them back; his Imposter Syndrome feelings disappeared. Shortly after our work together, Martin found a new role and he's now highly successful.

Martin's case is a perfect example of why looking superficially or consciously at things like fear of failure, Imposter Syndrome, and lack of

self-esteem just doesn't work. Why try to change a belief from the outside when you can better change it from the inside, and faster? Martin would never have thought that that memory was the reason for his behaviour 30 years later. If the Imposter Syndrome indicators resonate with you, then you may be suffering from it. It makes me so frustrated that there are so many articles on 'how to live with Imposter Syndrome'. Don't try to live with Imposter Syndrome – just get rid of it!

To wrap up

The journey from infancy to adulthood can be fraught with meaning: the black-and-white thinking of our childhood can hijack our adult brains, trip our triggers, and cause behaviours and beliefs that hold us back when we're striving to *do* and *be* our best, especially when leading others. This can leave us feeling disappointed with ourselves and frustrated that the potential we know we have always seems *just out of reach*.

Those we've crossed paths with, from parents and teachers to our partners and friends, have all stamped some modelling on us. Unfortunately, some put us through experiences that have left us with hair-triggers that can fire off inappropriate behaviours from us before we've even had time to blink – those unstoppable childhood ghost behaviours that loop over and over again.

So, our past never truly leaves us, but the damage it may have left us with *can* be resolved to our benefit *and* the benefit of others... *if* we are willing to do the work. We are who we are, and our experiences shape us, but we *can* round off and smooth some of the rough edges of our shapes to become the fulfilled versions of ourselves we were born to be. We are beautiful and complex, and the challenges and difficulties we go through in life can allow us to learn, grow and succeed... if we let them!

And if we don't do the work? Well, if we don't change the meanings our childhood selves have mistakenly picked up, or the models and baggage others have passed on to us, then we can get to a point where we are constantly tripped up by those childish beliefs and behaviours. Then our careers and lives will hit an unhappy 'glass ceiling', where we can see others rising above us, but not feel able to break through to join them. No matter what we do, our unconscious minds will drop old rocks in front of us

as we walk... If we want to smooth the path ahead and grow, we need to move those rocks, and keep the road ahead clear!

If you look back through history, you will see that alongside all the great Alternative Leaders were trusted advisors, people who provided experienced insight and learning on a variety of topics, in various capacities. In some cases, they had a secondary role: to challenge the intellectual and emotional growth of those leaders so they could confront the rocks in their path and continue to move forward... rather like the role a Coach-Therapist might take on. It's said that JFK would select strong and independent advisors to surround him as a safeguard against the possibility that he would make poor decisions (decision making is a vital leadership and parenting skill, which we'll come to in [principle 5](#)). For example, he used them to gather different viewpoints during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

It *amazes* me that leaders of today are not *automatically* offered, or do not *seek out*, a Coach-Therapist in the same way that they'd seek out other long-term advisors to help them to make the best decisions. How can the advice of someone who clears unconscious-buried issues that might (potentially) negatively affect *every decision a leader makes*, at work *and* at home, be less important than the advice of other consultants? The financial cost is far outweighed by the ROI in both emotional cost and future productivity.

Organisations are run from the top down in ethos, so positivity, *or negativity*, filters down *from* leaders. It's contagious emotion. If the top-level, C-suite 'leaders of leaders' are filtering positivity down, there's a much greater chance of it reaching the ground floor. This would mean that every employee would feel the benefits in happiness, creativity and innovation; and the company would reap the rewards on many levels; including productivity, profit and retention. This top-down ethos applies to

family and community leadership too! However, of course, if it's *negativity* that's filtering down...

I always try to work at 'board level' as it means there's a greater chance of *the impact of my work* improving *entire* companies. After all, the unconscious baggage of a CEO may affect the lives of every single one of their employees, just as much as that CEO's (apparently) conscious professional decisions...

In this principle, you've learnt that...

- The carer/parental relationship is the most powerful influence on our lives.
- We have black and white thinking until roughly the age of 12.
- Modelling is everywhere.
- Teachers can be inspirational or detrimental to our lives.
- You can reframe your memories and remove unhelpful meanings, which can change your life!
- Saying sorry shows strength, not weakness.
- Boys can cry and words do hurt us.
- Inherited trauma is not yours, leave it in the past where it belongs.
- Imposter Syndrome is a symptom of a cause, so find the cause and shift the symptom!
- If you truly want to be a great leader or influencer, you should do your inner work with a Coach-Therapist and keep them as a trusted advisor.

PRINCIPLE 3

Find your self-worth

Self-worth is fundamental. It's the basis for our choices, decisions, and motivation to do what is right for *us*. It's what makes us want to reach for opportunities and try new things. It helps us weigh-up and take appropriate risks and actions. However, it's not talked about often enough in relation to leadership, and yet it's the key component to what makes a good leader a great leader. So let's put that right.

'Self-worth' is the measure of how much someone likes, loves and values their 'core self', irrespective of their achievements, qualifications, and anyone else's opinion of them. Someone with *good* self-worth will *know* that others should value them, as they value others in return. They won't necessarily *like* everyone they meet, but they *will* view other people as having intrinsic value, whatever their personality. Whether it seems the sky's the limit for them or they're in the middle of a burnout crash, their self-value won't change, because they'll *know* they're a unique and wonderful person. In that way, your self-worth is not just important to how you value yourself, but also extremely important whether you are running a family or are the leader of a huge multinational organisation. When you have the stresses and responsibilities of running a business you cannot be making decisions and deals from a position of low self-worth.

“

Self-worth is the
measure of how much
we like, love and value,
our ‘core self’.

”



TOP TIP

As some of my clients work through my Five Principles of Alternative Leadership programme, they struggle to admit to their increasing confidence and self-worth, worried that they'll seem arrogant; but arrogance and self-worth are not the same. This is a really important point: I'm asking you to realise that you're equal to others, not to put yourself above them; to realise that all people have worth and value and that you're the equal of any of them. A lovely client of mine once told me that in her country they have a saying that expresses the difference between arrogance and confidence:

*“You don't have to cut others' heads off
to stand tall!”*

Now, you know you're not perfect – you make mistakes occasionally (everybody does!) – but *do you accept that you are doing your best with the internal resources that you have?* Deep down, do you *know* that you add value to humankind and our planet just by existing and being yourself? Do you believe that you deserve to have healthy, loving relationships with partners, and healthy professional relationships with people who treat you well? Are you worthy of the opportunities that come your way? If your answer to those questions is *yes... brilliant!* You have great self-worth!

Before you congratulate yourself, though, let's double-check that. I spent years believing that I had good self-worth when actually I didn't. Think back to our house analogy: the surface of our lives can look great, but what if we've missed signs of subsidence, or are in denial about them? *A lack of self-worth erodes or removes strong foundations.* Imagine if your foundations could talk and what they said was: 'Er... we're not actually sure how long we'll be able to hold you up...' Wouldn't that be worrying? You'd end up expending too much energy worrying about when they were going to crumble to be able to get on with your life – energy that could be used positively to create a better future, stronger relationships, and a more fulfilling career instead. If you want to be an Alternative Leader, someone who leads *strongly and faithfully from their core*, you *must* find your self-worth.

Why good self-worth is important for you as a leader

'I learned that my self-worth is the thing that underpins absolutely everything in my life. Unless your self-worth is consistently high then you will never realise your potential or live

a contented life. Developing high self-worth has huge, positive impact and has transformed the way I live. I'm better at practising self-care, relationships with others, decision making, stepping outside my comfort zone and succeeding. I've also learned that a genuine sense of self-worth does not depend on other's approval. My advice is if there is something or someone that you're not happy about in your life, look at your self-worth first.'

—JEM, BUSINESS OWNER

Firstly, I'm going to explain the vast reach and negative effects of *poor* self-worth. Don't panic! Positivity is just around the corner, as always. It's just *vital* that you understand how much damage poor self-worth can do.

Poor self-worth leads to a number of things; to believing that we aren't good enough to lead, either as a parent, a corporate leader, or an entrepreneur (Imposter Syndrome); to worrying about making mistakes (and this makes us procrastinate because we have no *good* self-worth foundations to fall back on); to not reaching out for opportunities and not trying new things (fear of failure). It makes us worry about how good we are and if we *know enough* to lead – sometimes it gets to the point where we develop *anxiety, stress and depression*, which exacerbate those self-worth issues, spiralling our view of ourselves even lower. It leads to us pulling back from life because we don't want to feel anxious, and stops us speaking to people we don't know when they might be our next partner, personally or professionally. It leads to us struggling to stand up for

ourselves, and feeling we've lost control of our own lives. It leads us to *not* pushing forward and *not* applying for a promotion, because we feel we won't get it (a huge issue, especially for women, who for centuries have *culturally* been told they aren't good enough).

If you have poor self-worth, you'll have a tendency to develop poor self-care. You might take up smoking, drink too much, or take drugs, maybe without even realising how bad things are getting in your life because you're too busy 'pushing up' to spot that your fragile foundations are struggling to take the pressure. Even though we know that a good night's sleep, taking exercise, eating healthily, and leaving the office on time will reap dividends in helping us to feel in control, be more productive and have more energy... if part of us has a belief that we aren't worth it, we'll find it hard to motivate ourselves to do those things. Does any of that resonate with *you*? It's overwhelming, isn't it? I know it is... because I've been there.

If you have poor self-worth, you'll likely start to feel the deep frustration that comes from knowing that, *despite* working really hard on yourself, maybe even having had lots of coaching or counselling, *nothing really changes for you*. No matter how hard you work on being better, on providing for your family, and on being the best leader you can, *nothing changes how you feel **inside*** (one of my least-happy clients was a **multi-billionaire!**). The same things will likely go wrong for you over and over, and you'll find yourself struggling harder with a lack of identity, your parenting, your relationships, your team, and all of it for nothing anyway. It won't matter how high you build, how many missing tiles you replace, or how many little cracks you paper over, because *the whole structure is sinking into the ground and may collapse sideways at any moment*. I've been there, too! ***We need bedrock to build high!***

To make all of that worse, there's another factor: If you don't believe you are worth it, no one else will either.

Stop and reread that statement. Whether you're consciously aware of it or not, if you have poor self-worth, your actions, body language, words, micro-expressions, and energy will all make it apparent. Often the most confident-seeming people have a *crushing* lack of self-worth. Currently, there are certain (so-called) 'world leaders' who ***clearly*** have a lack of self-worth, and are making *very* poor, world-impacting decisions because of it. Part of me sees a small child inside each of them, miserably playing out their childhood woes and wants to give them a reassuring hug – but another part of me just wants to push them off the side of the planet!

We've evolved to pick up on all these unconscious cues from our fellow humans, and, consciously or unconsciously, we do! It's how we pick our friends, partners, and employees; people either resonate with us or they don't. Unfortunately, though, when they do, it isn't always a *healthy* resonance. Sometimes our unhealthy emotional baggage resonates with the *needs* of another person's unhealthy baggage and draws us to them. A 'shouty' boss might attract an employee who has been constantly bullied in their jobs; a violent partner may attract a partner who, unconsciously, feels that they deserve no better.^{1*}

A lack of self-worth, even if someone presents as confident on the surface, will affect the deals they make, the networking they do, and how they sell both their self and their company. It will stop them from reaching out to learn from those who may be able to help them, and their followers will be affected by it too, because they'll model their behaviour to them.

Self-worth and confidence are what make someone shine as a leader. Have you noticed that some of the best leaders (like Barack Obama and

Jacinta Arden) have a really secure energy around them? They aren't loud, but they lead with an extremely strong presence that comes from knowing their worth. In fact, in Susan Cain's book, *Quiet* (Cain, 2012), she cites research by the well-known organisation psychologist Adam Grant, whose research shows that in many areas, introverts lead better than extroverts. He states that 'introverted leaders would do well to go on doing what they do naturally.' Quite obviously, extroverts bring another great skillset to the leadership table, and it's worth remembering that the leaders who do well exude self-worth, whether they're introverts or extroverts. It feels much safer to follow someone who knows where they're going, doesn't it?

Don't misunderstand me; I believe that vulnerability is one of the *most* important things and incredible strengths that leaders should show (sadly, most refuse to), but it should be vulnerability underpinned by *genuine high self-worth*, which is very different to vulnerability *because of low self-worth*. Imagine a leader presenting to his team, saying:

'So, things are tough right now. I'm feeling a little nervous, as you all probably are too, but I strongly believe that everything will work out alright: we have a plan, and steps to move forward.'

They are demonstrating vulnerability and empathy from a place of great self-worth: I'd feel reassured, wouldn't you? But what if they'd said:

'So, things aren't going well, and frankly I'm nervous. We have a plan with some steps to move forward, but...'

Finally, even worse than the wobbly leaders making their followers wobble are the ones whose unconscious minds have decided that they'll feel better if they bring others down. They go on to make their team members' lives miserable.

CASE STUDY

Ella

One of my clients was bullied by her boss. She was the most positive person I knew, and yet she would go home and cry with frustration at how she was treated. It affected her personality over the short term, and her relationship with her partner: she was so unhappy all the time that she became snappy and negative. Bullying bosses leave their employees frazzled. Their behaviour results in higher rates of illness and more staff needing time off. It certainly does not foster creativity or innovation, and it often reduces productivity levels and positive results. Teams need strong leaders who bring cohesion and create a safe, secure, stimulating, autonomous environment.

Again, it's a damning view I've presented, but once again, remember just how easy it is to *change* low self-worth. I've worked with many leaders and managers who came to me in exactly the above state, sometimes even feeling suicidal, but just a few sessions would see them on their way to a much better place... and leading better too. So, if you are serious about wanting to lead well, *sort your stuck points out*.

MY STORY

Holding Myself Back

My *hidden* lack of self-worth (my friends and I would have described me as confident) led me to date (and marry!) unsuitable partners, enter into poor friendships, and held me back from pushing my career forward. It even affected my parenting, making me feel I was failing even though I was actually a good mother. I *lived small* because of my poor self-worth. Two years into running a successful business as an entrepreneur, working entirely on referral, with everyone around me telling me how well I was doing, I *still* had Imposter Syndrome, a fear of failure, and a belief that I would never amount to much. I also believed I would never find a partner who would truly love me for who I was.

My self-esteem and confidence were wobbly, but strong enough to mask (even from me, especially as I wasn't looking) my lack of self-worth. If someone had asked me then if I had good self-worth, I would've responded from my conscious mind, and that part of me would have known *rationaly* that I was a good person, who deserved all the things above. So, in my 20s, *at a conscious level*, I was living the life of someone with good self-worth, but if I'd been honest with myself, *I never felt that I was as good as everyone else*.

I didn't fit in anywhere; I had no tribe and I always felt that I was doing the wrong thing at the wrong time. Having hardly attended school as a child, I had few friends. I was a young mum and then an

older mum (society seemed to judge me for both!). Then I was a stay-at-home mum, a working mum, a part-time mum, a divorced mum, but never at the right time in any of those roles, *in society's opinion*. I was so desperate to not repeat my mother's mistakes that every time I lost my temper or put myself first (and gosh we do need to do that sometimes as parents), or I wasn't 100% perfect, I felt swathes of guilt. In all of those roles, I was subjected to the judgments of others, which I did take to heart, but it was *my judgment of myself* that really held me back.

Now that my self-worth is really high, it doesn't matter if I look around and see all areas of my life struggling. I know I'm worthy and I genuinely like and love myself. I know that I'm doing my best and that everything will be okay. I lead from my core and, because I have done so much work on myself – and continue to do so – almost all the issues that cause a storm in my life are external to me now, just like the storm that's outside as I write this. Just like that storm, I tend to have a little bit of notice if something is going to go wrong, so I move anything that looks like it might be blown away and then I put up my shutters and sit cosy inside while it rages outside. Just like I am doing now.

So, to come back to the question I began with, pause now and double-check that deep down, under the stuff you're bright enough to know you *should* feel, and underneath the confident areas you have, and underneath your self-esteem: how strong is your self-worth?

Your self-worth is *fundamental* to how well and happily you live your life. It affects those around you and changes how you lead. By now you'll

be making links (especially if you've invested in the Reality Checkpoints) from the first two principles yourself; but here and now we're going to explore self-worth in depth: in you; in your career; in your team and in your family; because it can make *or break* all of those things...

Steps for finding your self-worth

Step 1: Identify your issues

Reading the above may have made you start to think about your self-worth; but let's pause for a moment to clear something up. We tend to use the terms 'self-confidence', 'self-esteem' and 'self-worth' interchangeably, but although they share similarities, and can all be affected by the same things (culture, upbringing, parenting, the media, genetics, experiences, individual brain processes and personality!), they are separate and different. Take a look at these questions. They should help you to identify *exactly* what your issues are...

- Do you struggle to realistically gauge your strengths and weaknesses?
- Do you find it hard to accept compliments?
- Do you give up early on your goals and dreams?
- Do you struggle to make decisions?
- Do you compare yourself to others a lot?
- Do you struggle to recognise how much you have achieved?
- Do you struggle to feel you deserve promotion?

- Do you believe that you are never enough, no matter what you do?
- Do you find it hard to spend money on yourself?
- Do you find it hard to give yourself downtime?
- Do you regularly put the needs of others before your own?
- Do you struggle to give yourself self-care, a healthy diet, exercise, good sleep, or look after your appearance?

So, the top set are about self-confidence, the second are about self-esteem, and the third are about self-worth. If you have answered ‘yes’ to *any* question, *that is where you may have a problem*. You may have good self-worth, but poor self-confidence in just *one* area and even that could be really holding you back. For example, a lot of people lack confidence in presenting, and it really affects their careers. You may have really good self-esteem, and recognise your accomplishments, but feel that they don’t make you happy because your self-worth is *low*. See how they all intertwine with each other? It’s that spaghetti tangle again. It often makes it very difficult to work out which problem is the root problem, and sometimes the problems can layer up, too. Someone can start with low self-worth, then lose self-confidence, and then stop reaching up to achieve, tumbling their self-esteem!

Let’s tease them apart so we know *exactly* what we are referring to when we discuss each of them.

- *Self-confidence* can be entirely contextual. *Most* people are confident in at least *some* areas of their life or themselves, but not necessarily in *all* areas. Someone might, for example, feel confident running their

business, but lack confidence leading a team; or feel confident in their parenting but feel that they are not a good partner at home. Our minds have different measures for ‘success’ in different parts of our lives; and when we think we fail to measure up, we might say we ‘lack confidence’ *in that area*. (Please don’t ever say that you’re ‘not a confident person’, though. There are likely areas in which it’s just not true. Don’t do yourself down or prime your brain by not being specific!) Did you know that the word ‘confidence’ derives from the Latin for ‘trust’? If you have *self-confidence*, it means that you *trust yourself*. It’s a measure of how you value yourself, yes, but *in specific areas*. If any of this is resonating with you, please make a note of which areas you think are being affected, so that you know where you need to develop your self-confidence!

- Someone with *poor self-esteem* is likely to think they’re ‘just not good enough’. Our self-esteem is based on our perception of what we’ve *achieved* in our life. The rough definition is ‘the value you give to your life and achievements.’ Achievements don’t have to be qualifications, awards or money earned; they could be bringing up a family or doing volunteer work. Someone with *good self-esteem* *sees* themselves as having achieved good and worthwhile things in their life, whilst someone with *poor self-esteem* may be devaluing their achievements. They may have created false beliefs that they are not as good as other people around them.
- Self-worth is (strange and mystical as it may sound) our ability to love and value ourselves *no matter who we are, no matter what our origins are, no matter what is happening in our life*. It’s how we measure our value – even when success in other areas may not be present. It’s our ability to love ourselves even in tough times when we have little to show.

It's our own *internal independent* standard of measurement. Someone's level of self-worth is what it is, whether they are 'Her Majesty' or homeless; whatever qualifications, or money in the bank they may or may not have; whatever their achievements; whatever other people are saying about them. If *you* were stranded on a desert island with nothing and no-one, would you still believe that you had value, just by existing? Your answer is a measure of your self-worth. I believe that self-worth sits firmly at the centre of the core of who we each are, and with almost every client, it's the first thing I tackle, because I believe that once their self-worth is re-established (remember, I believe that we were *all* born with *good* self-worth), life will naturally improve for them.

As you've seen, there are similarities between the three terms (the word 'value' is central to all three, for one thing), but they are different, and it's possible to have one without the others. However, in my opinion, if you can establish good self-worth, the other two will improve naturally (or at least take less work to correct), whereas I don't believe (from personal experience and from working with hundreds of clients) that working on the *others* will build up self-worth. Because of this, self-worth is the focus of this principle – but please do apply your learnings to *all three* areas. Think of them all as spectrums and changeable: if you go through difficult times when your self-esteem or levels of self-confidence dip due to external factors, that's okay and normal. When my mother died, my self-confidence in some areas plummeted, whilst my self-worth and self-esteem were fine. Acknowledging where you are is a key skill to then take into making decisions about how to proceed. I still have wobbles, but usually only briefly, and normally there's an external cause.

Step 2: Understand how our initial self-worth leaves us (and how we can regain it)

I believe we're all born with good self-worth, and feel the love and affection of our parents (or those who fulfil that role) in the way that they are in-tune with us: in their body language, in verbal praise and by their fulfilling our needs. As we grow, we unconsciously pick up from those around us whether *they* believe we are loveable or unlovable and we take their beliefs on as true.

It's those beliefs that your self-worth is based on, and that will create your future outcome – luckily, though, they are changeable beliefs! I'd like you to remember all you've learnt in the previous principles and apply it to your ability to *create* good self-worth. If your parents (or those around you) were *unable* to show you love and appreciation in a way that allowed you to embed a deep sense of worth, then all those algorithms and equations and the way your brain creates meaning may have worked *against* you, removing your worth and giving you a false belief that you aren't good enough. It's so important to remember that it doesn't take a hugely traumatic childhood to destroy good self-worth, and it can be destroyed by something entirely unrelated to a child's family: a comment from a teacher, a friend or a stranger – just one experience can cause a child's brain to accept a false meaning and flip.

This is how one client described the changes in her belief and, therefore, her thoughts, after our work together:

“

Just one experience
can cause a child's
brain to accept a false
meaning and flip.

”

‘It’s as if I’d had surgery on my brain. The strong neural path that automatically lit up almost every day, producing thoughts of inadequacy, guilt, embarrassment and fear weakened until these thoughts were almost imperceptible, and new thoughts of ok-ness, gratitude and confidence emerged. I started seeing myself as I really am, and seeing life ‘as is’, not as my ill, low self-worth thoughts had told me all along.’

—CRISTINA, PHD, SENIOR SCIENTIST

Imagine this...

I’d like you to imagine your life as being like a pond. The shallower outer edges are things like hobbies and travel and how you look after your appearance, and then things like diet and exercise are a bit further in. Those things certainly *are important*, but perhaps not as *immediately* important as the things around the centre: your self-worth, confidence and esteem; your personal and professional relationships, your parenting, your team, your career. Now, any stone dropped into the centre of a pond will, of course, send out ripples in concentric circles over the *whole* of the surface, and the biggest ripples will be closest to the point of impact: and just like that, any ‘stone’ dropped into the centre of your life *will affect your whole life*, whether you like it or not. No, you don’t get to cordon areas off, or compartmentalize things for protection; it’s going to affect *everything*.

Now, I’d like you to consider ‘lack of self-worth’ as a stone. Actually, it isn’t a stone: it’s a boulder. If you drop it into the centre of your life, it’s

going to make a *wave* that's, yes, going to affect *everything*. Full stop. A lot of people make the mistake of believing that if they stick their head in the sand, ignore their low self-worth and carry on pretending, then all will be well, but remember those ripples... every aspect of their lives will be affected. Even areas of *high* self-confidence will be undercut by a wave of low self-worth, which will wobble their foundations. Crucially, the thing it's likely to have the biggest effect on is their happiness.

'Being happy' can sound almost childishly simplistic, but it's the one goal that's shared by every human being on this planet. How often have *you* said, 'I just want to be happy'? Happiness comes from within, and without good self-worth you'll struggle to be happy. You might feel successful in your moments of achievement, or in the best moments of parenting, or when you can rationally recognise that you are a good person and your knowledge is good enough for what you need, but will you be *truly happy from your core*?

How can we put things right?

Now imagine this...

Why not drop some *positive* stones into your pond? They will naturally cause positive ripples, or big positive waves, right to the outer edges of your life. I'm still working through some outer-edge stuff in my own life, but it's much easier and faster than it might've been, because those areas have already been positively affected by big positive ripples! Tell me of *any* situation or issue in your life, no matter how insignificant it might seem, and I will tell you how it links back to your self-worth. My clients often preface stories they're about to tell me with the words 'this is only a *small* thing, but...' and my response is nearly always 'it's *not* a small thing, it's *huge*, and I can tell you exactly *why* it was so important to you, too.'

Talking of supposedly small changes, sometimes one of my clients will go through a bumpy patch and feel they are slipping. Interestingly, it's something I quite look forward to! I can always see what they often don't: that because of our work dropping *positive* stones into their pond, they are actually managing those bumps in a very different, more positive way. For instance, just today a client told me she'd had a rough week, so she hadn't gone out all weekend. Instead of going to see the relatives she normally feels she has to, she had just watched some TV and done nothing. She saw this as detrimental, yet I was so excited for her! This was a client who rarely put herself first. Her response to her rough week was due to her self-worth stone (which we had been working on for a few weeks) finally making enough waves to cause her to put herself first and say, ' I need downtime!' She and I were quite emotional at the change; it might seem a small thing, but it was a big step. Reflecting on our work together, she said:

'I have begun a journey that I know will ebb and flow, but the foundations feel solid. I know I can't keep giving from myself if I'm an empty pot. I feel that my decisions are more mindful now. I'm gradually finding it easier to say no sometimes, I don't need to justify things to myself or others. The changes may seem subtle, but inside I feel they are existential and empowering.'

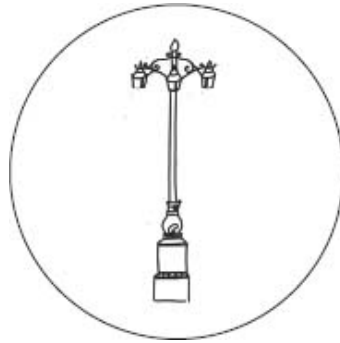
—ALEX, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Importantly, self-worth is the driver for your self-care: washing, cleaning your teeth, brushing your hair, eating well, sleeping well, exercising well, and *making time for yourself*. These are outer ripples on

your pond; but as you know, they are *crucial* to your happiness and success, because they are the external evidence of whether you *value yourself* enough to do those things. When you have strong self-worth, you'll want to look after yourself because you'll love and respect yourself. Even alone on a desert island, you'd still look to do those things for yourself because you'd know that you're worth it.

Why is self-care important for you as a leader?

A true Alternative Leader wants success not only for themselves, but also for those they lead. However, to put it simply: if you don't look after yourself first, you can't look after others. Put your *own* oxygen mask on first, as they say in those flight safety announcements! Success comes from within. Only by looking after your *whole* self can you radiate success outward, to the benefit of yourself and those around you; and in doing so, naturally and automatically passing-on that model for success, and its legacy.



REALITY CHECKPOINT

Stones and Ripples

Tracing negative ripples back to the stones that caused them will show you what positive stones you need to drop in...

Question 1:

Think about our pond analogy and the 'stones' that have dropped into your core. What are they, and where do you see them having an effect?

Question 2

What 'positive stones' do you need to drop into your 'pond'?

Question 3

If you dropped all of those positive stones into your pond today, what changes do you imagine you would see in yourself, in your life, and in the lives of those around you in three months' time?



TOOL

Clangers

How to spot hidden beliefs in the words and actions of yourself and others!

I often notice what I call ‘clangers’ in everyday conversation: when someone’s own words make their issues so obvious to me that it makes me wince. It’s as if they had dropped a cymbal and it had clanged onto the floor. For instance, I once attended a networking event where a bright, intelligent woman in her mid-20s was acting as a meet-and-greeter. When I asked her what she did, she casually and light-heartedly replied:

‘Oh! I don’t do anything! I’m not smart enough to run a business!’

(Clang! Lack of self-worth, self-esteem and self-confidence...)

‘Based on what evidence?’ I replied.

She looked really surprised and then after a pause, she said, ‘None, I suppose.’

I just smiled at her and walked away. Later that day she told me that our brief exchange had completely changed her outlook. Months on, I

saw her at the same event, but this time advertising her newly set up business. Look out for ‘clangers’ in your own conversations and those of the people around you: challenge the thinking simply and without blame.

I’ve presented a rather damning view of the impact of low self-worth, I know. But I meant to because it’s important that you take it seriously. However, I want to end this section with a note of hope and reassurance: *low self-worth is completely changeable!* Simply by reading this principle, you have already started to make internal shifts towards a more positive future; you’ll have identified areas where you are stuck. You’re already dropping positive stones into your pond, even if they’re just *thoughts* of where you need to change. I consider myself to score well in all three areas *now*; *nowadays* my self-worth is great. Don’t worry if yours isn’t, because you can *definitely* turn it around. I’ve watched so many clients turn their lives around through following my five principles and strengthening their foundations. I still receive messages from them, years on, saying that the work we did together is still impacting them positively (as it would – remember those ripples...). I *love* those messages; they make my day every time, so always feel free to get in touch if you feel inspired by reading this book.

Step 3: Understand your beliefs

In the *Star Wars* saga, the Jedi were keepers of peace and deliverers of justice; they believed in purity of thought and self-improvement through knowledge and wisdom... and that’s just how I think leaders should be. They should be like Jedi knights spreading peace through the world as they go. Where my views differ with those of the Jedi is on emotion. They

thought it best to shut out their emotions (an opinion shared by Mr Spock in *Star Trek*), and as we know, emotions are the messengers of the soul. Work *with* emotions and they double your power! So, do you want to be a Jedi? They're true Alternative Leaders! Okay, I'm joking (we *all* want to be Jedi, don't we?), but leading, whether it's your country, your team or your family, is a big responsibility, so it's your job to make sure you are functioning at your best.

Now, if you're a *Star Wars* fan, you'll no doubt remember a scene in *Return of the Jedi* in which Obi-Wan Kenobi (in spirit form) explains to a frustrated Luke Skywalker that our truths are dependent on our points of view, and that we pretty much believe what we want to believe. At the time, to me, it sounded like a grown-up making excuses for telling fibs, but he was absolutely right.

In [principles one](#) and [two](#), we discussed how *negatively-perceived* childhood experiences can leave us with beliefs that cause negative behaviours and thoughts. We also discussed how the reverse of this happens too: the same process, but with *positive* experiences, creates all the brilliant, positive elements of our lives. Do you remember me saying that beliefs and narratives are so important that we would return to them later? True to my word, we're about to. Our self-worth is created by belief, and our narratives are stories created *from* our beliefs. And these also create beliefs themselves. Yes, it's a bit of a chicken and egg situation, but beliefs and narratives go hand in hand. Narratives are 'experience creating' components, so think of narratives as being like stories that we tell ourselves about ourselves and others. We act as if these stories were 'true', and as if they are fixed, but the beauty of our minds is that *nothing* is true and *nothing* is fixed. I believe our narratives are a key factor in our living happily.

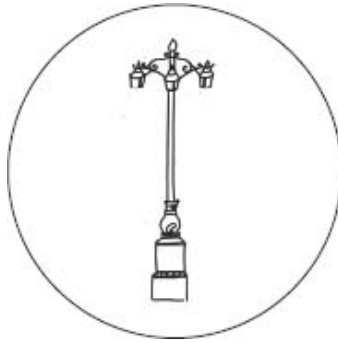
How your beliefs affect you

Our beliefs inform the way we lead, live, love and look after ourselves. Our beliefs about the world around us inform and create the reality we impose upon that world. This is excellent, though, because as we know: *beliefs can be changed...*

Think about beliefs you have about yourself: perhaps that you're confident, or that you aren't in control of your life, or that you are a great boss, or that you know you aren't! These beliefs are things that *you created* – you 'made them up' from assumptions, inferences and experiences, to which you have given meaning – and of the negative meanings you've given, a high percentage *will be false*. Beliefs are like filters, and depending on your mood and the circumstances you are in, your filters will change. It's like a kaleidoscope of beliefs being continually twisted, changing what you see, hear, think and feel. If you believe that you are rubbish when you speak in public, that 'filter' will only *allow* you to notice evidence that *backs that opinion up*; you may think that people look bored, or you may feel nervous. Your body will then *react* to that 'nervous' belief and match it with the physical symptoms it believes go with the nervousness, creating the very circumstance it feared. Other filters might cause you to hear *all* feedback as criticism – even compliments. A lot of my client's dread appraisals – especially as most managers have not been trained to give them, and *they* dread them too! It doesn't matter if your conscious brain knows that your belief reactions aren't healthy or aren't even working. If, for example, you smoke, drink, take drugs or drive yourself to burnout because of your brain's need to avoid pain, your unconscious will hold onto these actions as necessary, as beliefs, until you can persuade it that you have other solutions.

Here's a fictional example from one of my top-five favourite films, *Back to the Future*. When we first see George McFly, he is greasy-haired

and in a rubbish job working for Biff, his old high-school bully. He exudes a lack of self-worth and believes he can't possibly stand up to Biff; he accepts his victim role, held back by his lack of self-belief. However, as we watch young George's development under the tutelage of his son Marty, he gradually takes small steps towards valuing himself more. Marty's belief (or faked belief) in his father rubs off on George, who probably feels no-one has ever believed in him. Biff's attack on Lorraine is the final push that cements George's change of self-worth. His value system, in which Lorraine is not to be hurt, weighs more heavily than the belief that he can't stand up to Biff. Once he has done so, his entire demeanour changes to that of someone very confident. After a brief wobble on the dance floor when he's challenged by another student, he swiftly realises that his new-found worth is not only relevant to Biff, but to his entire life. When we get to the end of the film (remember the pond analogy?) that one stone – that change in George's belief – has caused huge waves of change that not only exponentially change the lives of Lorraine and George, but roll down to the fate of their children too. All of them have better careers, better self-worth, and better futures ahead of them. Remember, self-worth has generational impact!



REALITY CHECKPOINT

Identify and change your beliefs.

The ability to rewrite your ‘stories’ to create happy endings is a key tool to a successful future.

Question 1

Identify and write down any beliefs you have that you feel might be holding you back. How does each belief make you feel, both in your body, and emotionally? Write down these physical and emotional responses next to each belief you identify.

Question 2

Rewrite each belief so that it feels helpful to you: how does that make you feel, both physically and emotionally? Write down your feelings about each and note the differences.

Because we think thoughts are important, we believe them and act on them: but what if our thoughts aren’t really our own? If what we think is based on a corrupted belief system, or on other people’s belief systems, then we could take the view that what we’re thinking aren’t *our* thoughts at all.

Maybe they belong to our parents, our friends, our community, or our religion.

Sharing the same beliefs because you *stopped to think about them* and *decided* you wanted to believe them is a bit different from having beliefs embedded into your unconscious, though – it's much more positive. If you *don't* stop to check, you'll find yourself running your life based on someone else's experiences – the meanings they took from them, and the meaning *you* applied to the meaning *they* applied... well, it becomes very messy and complicated! Far better to base your life on what *you* believe, and want, and want to believe. If I told you that I enjoy green peppers and jelly for lunch, you wouldn't automatically believe that you'd enjoy it too, would you?



TOP TIP

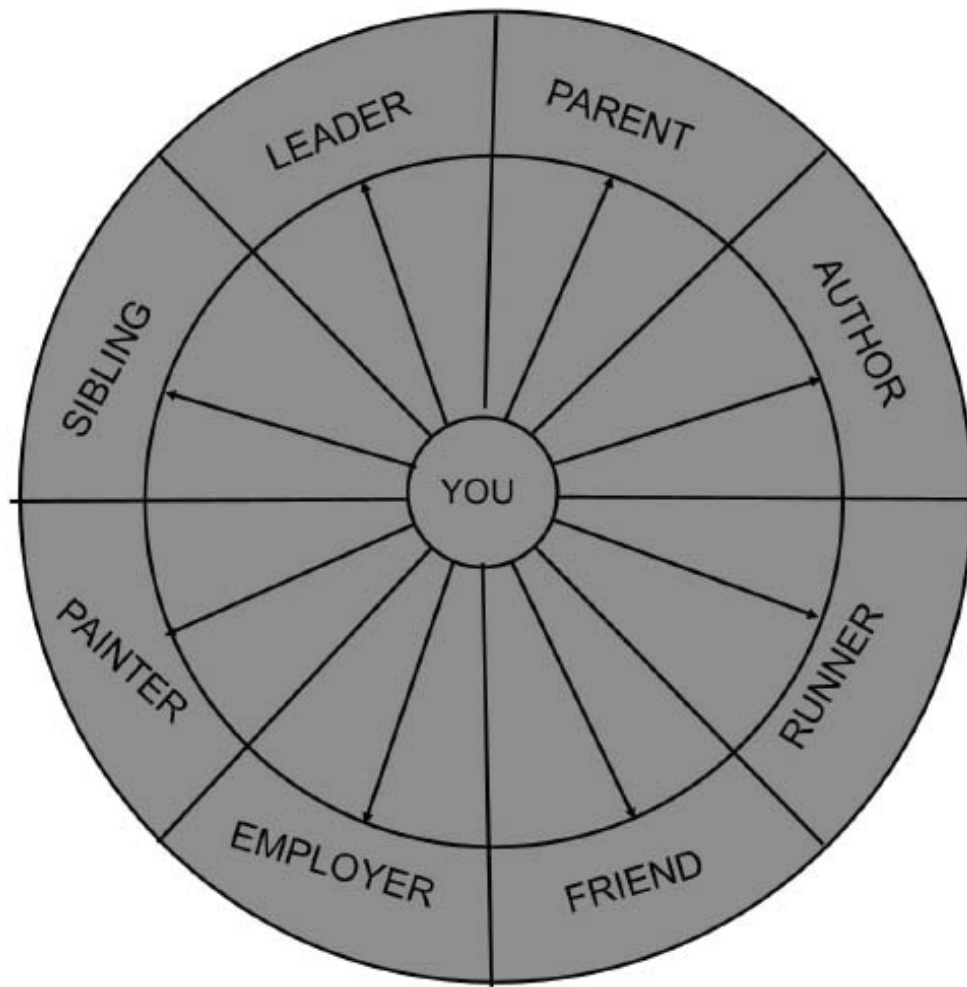
Learn from the diversity of your team

The best leaders don't expect their team (or their kids!) to completely absorb their ideals: they encourage them to have their own beliefs; they want them to have autonomy, to think creatively, to bring new ideas to the fore. *A good leader learns from their team.* It's well known that companies whose managers only recruit people with the same worldview as their own underperform. *Difference encourages evolution in life and business*, so actively seek out a diverse team; it's worth applying this to your friendship group too.

How your beliefs can make you transition poorly

Some of our beliefs run solely in the background of our unconscious minds, a bit like computer operating systems, and we're not even aware of them until they crash! Some run intermittently, others sit dormant until they're triggered years later; they each have their own 'tasks', and those may even be conflicting. We verbalise this confusion when we say things like, 'part of me thinks this, and part of me thinks that.' The issue with having so many different 'parts' of us is that we can end up jerkily transitioning from one belief to another, leaving people around us (and often ourselves) reeling in confusion about what has just happened! When we are inconsistent in our behaviour, it can lead to others lacking trust in us, not knowing what mood we're in from one moment to the next. They feel they can't trust in our reactions. I've met several lovely people whom I've really liked, but because their moods could change so quickly, I chose not to be friends with them; being around them would've felt like walking on eggshells. This sort of jerky transitioning can be seen at its worst with volatile managers and violent life-partners, where sudden and unexplainable flips in mood result in terrible consequences...

Have *you* ever noticed that kind of poor transitioning in yourself? I used to have areas that flipped me – my anger was one of them, and knowing that about myself really drove home the lesson that learning how to 'state-change', to switch out of a negative mood *fast*, was an empowering skill, one that I needed to teach my clients. So, what causes us to flip so poorly? Think of the roles you have in your life. Maybe you're an entrepreneur, a CEO, a parent, partner, sibling, best friend, runner, actor, celebrity. For each 'role' you probably have *different* beliefs about yourself and how you should act within it. I'll explain...



Imagine this circle represents your whole life. The small circle in the middle is the *core* of you. Each outlying segment represents you, but *in a different role*. As I tell my clients, as a rationale, I believe that inner circle should be *at least* 90% the same you, a *fixed* core you that doesn't change, and an *absolute maximum* of 10% of 'you' should be made up of whatever role you are currently inhabiting. You should be *at least* 90% the same person, with the same behaviours, the same state of being, no matter what role you're currently in. When you traverse through the different segments of your life you may show subtly different 'faces' and that's perfectly fine and correct. For example, I am *slightly* different around my clients to how I

am around my partner or my children. It's correct that we change sometimes, but that change should be a *maximum* of 10%.

If you aren't cohesive in holding to a 90% 'core you', then each time you step from role to role (even if that's eight times a day), 'you' will become someone entirely different with a whole different set of beliefs and behaviours. You'll *change character* when you switch between roles, like an actor playing several different characters in the same play by changing costumes. Just as each costume change will inform an actor's performance, each of *your* role changes might alter your vocabulary, posture, mannerisms, attitudes and values (you may even find you care more or less about some things in certain belief systems). Some people notice this most dramatically in themselves on the way to and from work, just like that policeman I met on the train.

That's why we sometimes only really get on with someone in a particular context. Within it, either we or they or both are significantly different because we're in different roles. These behavioural changes can be very abrupt as we quickly switch between roles, and that accounts for why they're often uncomfortably jerky transitions. You may love the you in some of your roles, because in those roles you have healthy belief systems (these will be the roles in which you are successful or happy), but not the you in others, and these are the roles and beliefs and versions of you that will hold you back in life. The problem is that it's not *you* who chooses those beliefs, it's your *unconscious*. I also believe that we can have what I call 'negative global beliefs'. These are beliefs that cast a pall over every area of the circle of us, colouring our whole lives. These tend to be insidious beliefs, like our old nemesis 'lack of self-worth', or 'I don't deserve to be treated well', or 'I can't lead: who would listen to me?' These are negative rocks that send ripples out from our cores into every area, often

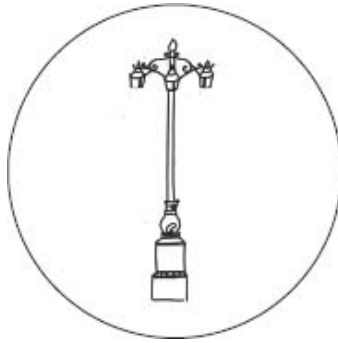
leaving you stuck on that Hamster Wheel. My clients and I work together to enable the 'central them' to stay the same when they transition, enabling them to smoothly transition through their positive segments, or roles; we work to clear or shift the negativity from segments of their lives so they can live happily and successfully. Often when clients finish our work together they notice positive changes in their roles, beliefs and behaviours in areas that we weren't even working on, sometimes it's in areas that they didn't even know existed until they improved, and it's all down to that lovely positive ripple effect from clearing negative global beliefs.

Perhaps you might remember the classic 70s children's TV show, *Mr Benn*? In every episode, Mr Benn (in his customary black suit and bowler) visits a mysterious fancy-dress shop, where the shopkeeper (who suddenly appears) invites him to try on a new outfit. Mr Benn then leaves the changing room by a magical door, to enter a fantasy world that matches his new costume. The difference between Mr Benn and our jerky transitions is that gentlemanly Mr Benn stays the same on the inside, with all his same values and beliefs; he is just wearing different clothes. This is what I want for you: to go and have many different adventures, but to make sure the costumes don't change you too much. Clear your baggage, so you remain a cohesive person with a strong sense of self, because jerky transitioning is much less like gentle Mr Benn becoming an acrobat and much more like Dr Jekyll becoming Mr Hyde...

MY STORY

Learning to love my emotional self

When I was younger, I hated the fact that I was so emotional. I cried at books, films, and TV; I found it *too* easy to empathise with everyone, and it was *exhausting*. I had very little emotional shielding. I once told my therapist that I hated being so overemotional, and wished I was tougher. She laughed and said that my empathic abilities were what made me so good at my job; they allowed me to *sense* my clients' issues. She asked me to change my language and change the label. She suggested I rephrase and reframe the empathy I considered to be a burden by saying, 'it's my strength', and instantly I felt a physical change, like a weight lifting from me. My emotional empathy is my superpower. It was, and absolutely is, a gift, but my own emotional tsunamis meant I labelled it as a negative.



REALITY CHECKPOINT

Identify your transitioning issues.

Smooth transitioning between roles is a sign of a strong 'core you'!

*These will take some time but will be well
worth the effort!*

Question 1

Draw a chart marking out your different roles: what beliefs do you have, and what behaviours and emotions do you feel when you are in each role?

Question 2

Note the issues you have in each role, and which are self-esteem, which are self-confidence, and which are self-worth issues (the 'spaghetti problem' may come up here – some of your roles may have issues connected to all three. Do your best!).

Question 3

How are the issues in each role showing themselves unhelpfully?

Question 4

How is your leadership role being affected by all of the above?

Question 5

If you changed all of the above negative beliefs for positive beliefs, what difference would that make in your life?

Question 6

(I told you this was a big one!) What one thing would you need to believe about yourself to enable you to change those negative beliefs?

Step 4: Stop worrying about what others think of you.

Being judged by others is a hot topic. Any talks or workshops I run about it are guaranteed a high attendance, no matter where I run them. When I'm coaching leaders or working with teams it's a core worry. Almost every client of mine lists it as a concern. So why *do* we care what others think?

Well, because we're tribal by nature, and being kicked out of our tribe would've likely meant death by wild beasts or starvation – or at the hands of another tribe. We are also social creatures and need contact with other humans, which is why lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic has had such an effect on mental health. Being able to get on with each other and live harmoniously is a key skill; a skill that, as we have seen, our brains evolved to have. I'm not going to say that you can be cured of wondering what others think of you – that would make you a psychopath! We do *need* to be compassionate and empathetic, taking the feelings others have about us into account, but (and it's a big but) only to a certain level.

It's all about beliefs (again!). Someone with poor self-worth might have the following thoughts based on their beliefs, for example...

'If I go home on time from the office, *everybody* will think I'm not working as hard as they are... and that *means* (no, it doesn't) that I will be seen as someone who doesn't pull their weight... and that *means* (no, it doesn't) I'll be fired.'

Or

'I'm just not good enough and everybody knows it', or: 'I can't try for promotion, everyone would think I was stupid to apply.'

Or

'I'm such a terrible parent.'

The sad fact is that we can end up having our decisions driven by the shadows people leave in our minds: shadows that can even cause physical behavioural changes. If someone stays late at work, they'll get home late; which might upset their relationship with their partner or their children, or just cause a lot of stress... so perhaps they'll drop out of going to the gym, as they try to squeeze everything in; perhaps they'll stop thinking straight as their sleep becomes poor; perhaps they'll become so filled up with worries because of it all they'll stop setting clear boundaries in their team or in their family life... and spiral ever downward... *Does any of that resonate with you?*

How about this: what if you *changed* your belief system? What if you believed that *no matter what happened to you or what anyone said, you'd be okay?* What would that be like?





I'll tell you. You'd let go of all the beliefs that were sapping your energy. Fear of failure: gone. Imposter Syndrome: gone. Constant worry about how others were judging you: gone. With those out of the way, you'd free up all of the energy you'd been wasting in trying to manage the negative emotions *caused* by your old beliefs (like trying to hold a bull back behind a broken gate) whilst trying to get on with your life. You'd be able to put that energy to positive use instead. Your new beliefs would empower you to become more efficient, make fewer mistakes, make better decisions, and take more risks with good judgement... all things that would have positive effects professionally *and* personally, so *your entire life would improve...* and you'd be home on time.

The 5% line

As we're emotional beings, I think it's only realistic to acknowledge that we'll all have worries that pop up from time to time – but it's important that we don't worry too much.

To define a healthy limit to such worries, I came up with the ‘5% line’ rationale. A maximum of only 5% of our thinking should be made up of other people’s opinions of us; our worries and woes; fear of failure and Imposter Syndrome: but no more than 5%, and those thoughts have to flit in and out and make room for other thoughts: they can’t take up permanent residence, and they can’t grow to something that will affect our decisions. Yes, we all want to belong; the fear of being kicked out of the tribe is still one our primitive brain has not lost, and we cannot override it; but we can learn to reduce it to a sensible level. I call this the 5% line.

“

If someone is rejecting you, it's rarely actually about you, it's about them.

”

However, I have clients who worry way above their 5% line, to the point that their worry becomes a global belief: clients who are so busy adapting around others, and doing what everyone else thinks they should, that they have forgotten what they even want or who they are at their core; clients who have ideals and values based on those of people they don't even know; clients who imagine what strangers would say about them in imaginary situations and then run their lives to meet those imaginary standards; clients who are always sure to be in clean underwear before they leave the house... in case they are in an accident and get taken to hospital. What a ridiculous idea that it would matter! Often, these clients are what I call 'over-carers': people who don't know how to say 'no' to others because they are so worried about being judged... so worried, in fact, that they rush around continuously helping others until they start to disappear under the weight of *other people's problems*.

Rejection isn't personal

Remember: if someone is rejecting you, it's often not about you; it's about *them*. There are 7.5 billion of us on this planet, and we all have different tastes, and different opinions about everything: wouldn't life be boring if we didn't? Those differences between us create variety in our lives, and mean that we can learn new thoughts and new things from others. Most people live their lives busy in their own brains, wrapped up in their own insecurities; they have little time to think about you – unless maybe they are worrying about what *you* think of *them*! Remember how we filter so much through our own experiences when we make decisions? When people decide to not like you, or not do business with you, or to reject something you said or did as invalid; it's often *their* stuff: don't sweat it.

They may be stuck in a false belief system, or they may just not gel with you. Don't worry, there are another 7,499,999,999 other people that might!

To conclude this little section, I want to encourage you to be curious – curious about life, the universe, and everything! – but to focus on growing your curiosity about who you are. Children are naturally curious; they ask questions because they need to learn, but adults need to keep learning too.



TOP TIP

Talk to those people you don't get on with, who seem to reject you: you might learn something useful... there are a lot of Alternative Leaders out there, people in places you wouldn't expect. Questions are important, and the question I want you to cement into your brain is: 'What happened in your life that made you who you are?' You can ask yourself that question, fine: but make sure you apply it to those around you, too. You'll understand them much more easily for doing so, especially if they're someone you find challenging.

Step 5: Learn to tell the difference between anxiety and stress, and their effects on you

Anxiety and stress have become so common these days that they're now buzz words, and you might feel you're in the minority if you haven't got one or the other. They are two of the most common issues clients come to me with: leaders at the top of their game; individuals who just want to feel happier and more in control of their lives; and young adults leaving university and about to enter into the big wide world... all needing help with stress or anxiety.

CASE STUDY

Emma

Emma came to work with me to shift her anxiety. In our first session, she sat down and said:

‘So, I have anxiety.’

I asked her how her anxiety appeared, and what evidence she had that she was anxious.

She spent a good few minutes in complete silence and then said:

‘Actually, I don’t think I am anxious! A friend once said she thought I was anxious, and I guess I just took on the label!’

So, we left her ‘anxiety’ alone and worked on other issues that Emma felt were really in her way. It just took a review of her *belief* that she had anxiety for her to let it go.

Have you mislabelled yourself?

Most of us will experience *at least* one period of extreme stress in our lives: the pressure of a high-level role; the effect of a pandemic on business; being an entrepreneur; moving home; having a baby; being made redundant or furloughed; going through a divorce; trying to work at home with your kids/pet demanding attention! Those are all common reasons. In those situations, though, we tend to say ‘I’m feeling a bit anxious’ when what we’re *actually* feeling is *not* anxiety, it’s *stress*. So, before we go on, let’s

look at the differences between the two terms. Whilst they can trigger each other, they're not the same thing.

- *Stress* is the body's reaction to a trigger, and it's generally a short-term experience. As we learned in [principle one](#), stress is part of our fight, flight, freeze response. It can have positive or negative results. Our bodies are designed to carry and use stress to a certain degree: we use it to get us through those all-night deadlines! However, we can end up *stuck* in a stressed state, which can lead us to...
- *Anxiety*, which is a *belief* issue that can be so serious that it can be diagnosed as a mental health disorder. Anxiety is a *reaction* to the 'stress trigger', and yet it can itself *cause* the stress trigger to be fired off. It's one of the most crippling negative global beliefs, affecting sufferers both physically (causing headaches, backache, excessive sweating, racing heart, lack of sleep) and mentally (causing excessive worry about anything from daily travel plans or small events to sickness or the safety of your children. Remember how your mind can't think rationally when you are in fight, flight, freeze?).

For some people, though, a state of anxiety becomes the norm, and their negative global beliefs take over their lives. They may cease working, be unable to attract suitable partners, stop looking after themselves, or go into a dip in their parenting. For a leader or an entrepreneur, anxiety can turn success into disastrous failure.

What can we do?

The first thing is to *realise* that they are, to a certain level, completely normal, natural reactions. In fact, I believe they have become somewhat

demonised. We are *meant* to receive both positive and negative emotions; they're like messengers, there to tell us something. Messengers don't always deliver good news, after all. It's often when we refuse to listen to a message that stress or anxiety symptoms and thoughts become more prevalent and heighten in intensity.

If someone is experiencing high levels of stress, it might just be their body or mind is trying to tell them to *slow down*. For example, we are whole people, and the idea that we can leave our stress in certain areas of our lives is unrealistic. That would be an important message! Stress is not all bad, and it tends to be our *beliefs* around stress and its impact that cause us problems, rather than stress itself. In her book *The Upside of Stress*, Kelly McGonigal (2015) cites a 1998 Harvard University study in which researchers combined data that asked 30,000 adults to rate their stress levels over their past year *and* what impact they thought their stress had, with data regarding their mortality. They found that the study participants who reported high levels of stress *and believed their stress had a bad impact on them* were 43% more likely to die over those eight years! However, let's not all panic. What was *even more* interesting was that those who reported having *high* levels of stress but did *not* worry about it (positive stress belief), were, in fact, the *least likely to die*; they seemed to have a lower mortality rate than the people who reported having *very low* levels of stress, but rated stress as something they believed was bad for them. So, it's not *stress itself* that causes the issue – it's what we *believe* stress will do to us. I have to say I breathed a sigh of relief: as a mum of five who runs her own business, stress is definitely something I experience from time to time!

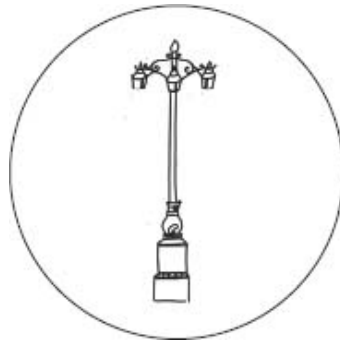
Remember, our thoughts are not 'true'; we *choose* them. Just because *others* say stress is bad does not mean it has to be bad for *you*. This is a precise example of why you must choose your own thoughts, and be careful

not to thoughtlessly absorb the worldviews of those around you: it could literally mean life or death!

“

We have 2500 thoughts
an hour, but we can
choose which ones we
pay attention to.

”



REALITY CHECKPOINT

Stressed or anxious?

Identifying which you are feeling is the first step on the path to changing your life and being clear of it.

Question 1

Imagine your thoughts as if they are just passing in front of your body, like clouds blowing by... (this is also a brilliant technique for relieving anxiety when your mind is feeling full, by the way!) Now that your mind is a little clearer... if I asked you to **evidence** to me how you know you are stressed or have anxiety, what would you say? Think about how your body feels and the thoughts that go through your mind in this state.

Question 2

What would need to change about your beliefs and self-worth for you to see yourself as someone without anxiety?

As I've already said, *stress* is temporary; *anxiety* is a *negative global belief*. Let's look at a case study so we can truly understand how a negative global belief like anxiety can take over someone's life.

CASE STUDY

Chloe

Chloe was referred to me by her friend, who saw how much her anxiety was ruling her life. She suffered excessive anxious thoughts, and physical reactions from being stuck in fight, flight, freeze mode almost all the time. She was jittery, always wriggling in her chair and talking in short breathless bursts. Chloe had rigid behaviour patterns around doing certain things like chores, the gym, or shopping, which had to be done on certain days and at certain times. Her routine was immovable. Chloe could drive, but she couldn't travel on trains or buses, and found flying almost impossible. Chloe was in her 60s when I met her; she and her husband had a lovely holiday home in Spain, which they wanted to use more often. She contacted me because she had got to a point where her increasing anxiety symptoms were going to stop her travelling completely. It was this point she was most keen to clear up. As well as her travel issues, she experienced physical anxiety symptoms caused by the stress on her body. She had bad IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome – proven to be worsened by stress), habitually bit her nails, suffered from bad eczema on her legs, had trouble sleeping and shallow breathing... along with a host of negative self-beliefs about her capabilities and her worth that were attached to the core of who she was.

When she described herself, she said:

'It's just the way I have always been.'

She had unwittingly accepted a global belief that was completely limiting her life! However, she was in my chair asking for help, so at least *part* of her *wasn't* buying into it.

After I'd explained belief systems to Chloe (much as I have to you) I went checking for evidence: had there ever been a time in her life when she *wasn't* anxious? On reflection, she remembered an event where she had been really ill *before* getting on a plane returning from a holiday. She had spent the whole journey feeling anxious about vomiting on the plane! Remember when we talked about perceived threat in [principle one](#)? This is a perfect example! Chloe *wasn't* ill travelling, but she *was* terrified she would be. That threat stimulated her fight, flight, freeze reaction; and her unconscious, in an effort to avoid that emotional pain and physical stress again, *created a belief* that would stop her from travelling again, and she would, therefore, not have to experience that stress again. Before that awful journey, which she took at the age of 29, she had been fine travelling, so for 30 years, her anxiety had been building until it had spread throughout the rest of her life. Chloe had travelled since, but said it was always so stressful that it almost ruined the holiday before she got there.

Let's pause the case study a moment. We know how self-fulfilling prophecy works – what we believe will happen tends to happen, *because we unconsciously create the situation*. For example, Henry believes his partner, Edward, will leave him. Edward says he's happy, but Henry can't accept his response, as his belief that Edward *isn't* happy is stronger (maybe because, purely hypothetically, lots of other partners have left Henry). Henry continually questions Edward about how much he loves him until Edward

loses so much confidence in his love that he actually *does* leave. We've already talked about deletion, the unconscious mind's tendency to *delete* information that might *stop someone believing that the behaviour or thought that it created to protect them is wrong*, so we know that our unconscious doesn't look for what is real, *it looks for evidence to back up its narrative*.

Back to the case study:

Chloe was *not* sick on the plane, but her conscious mind and body had not enjoyed that flight home, and did not want to repeat it, so a plan was created! Her unconscious ran through scenarios of what it *would* have been like to be sick on the plane, to keep her fearful, and that led to the belief: 'I can't travel.' However, that fear then started to bleed into other areas of her life... when our fight, flight, freeze instinct is repetitively triggered, the unconscious gets stuck on 'high alert', searching actively for threats. Instead of seeing threats where it's appropriate to, it begins to see threats everywhere, in everything! The more threats poor Chloe's unconscious registered, the more her anxiety rose, creating a vicious circle.

To try to protect Chloe from all these perceived threats, her unconscious started to create 'protective behaviours', fixing them as new beliefs: 'only do chores at a certain time of day', 'only go to the gym on a Friday', 'don't travel!' For a lot of people, home is their safe place, so often when people are experiencing anxiety and stress, they feel a need to stay at home (as lockdown during the Coronavirus pandemic is lifted, many people are still terrified to leave their homes, convinced they will die if they do, even if they are low risk). It's common that when under threat, our primitive brains want to keep us (what I call) 'living small', and will put in many different rules and regulations so that it becomes easier for us to avoid anxiety and just stay at home. 'Job done, nice and safe,' says our unconscious. 'Phew, you nearly went on holiday!'

But Chloe *wanted* to travel abroad and, on the motivation scales in her mind (I'll come to these in another principle), a part of her

weighed going on holiday as being heavier than staying at home, so she'd been able to override her protective beliefs. She'd won that hard-fought battle about twice a year, but not without it making her life a misery until she touched down in Spain, when she would immediately start to worry about the flight home. She was exhausted from it.

Chloe's unconscious mind, realising that its *cunning plan* was failing to stop her from travelling, decided it had to try harder, and gave her IBS as well (and remember Chloe had had a previous experience of illness on a plane, which it could use as 'evidence'). Her 'can't travel' belief, now mixed with *physical* symptoms, had slowly eaten away at the part of Chloe that *liked* holidays. Her eczema also made her legs sore to walk on – another good reason to stay at home. Poor Chloe was continually loaded with painful symptoms *caused* by her unconscious in its attempts to *protect* her from pain... where could we start to resolve this?

We know that the behaviours and beliefs the unconscious creates are protective in nature, so what if we could convince her unconscious that it *didn't need to protect her*? We began by looking at that first travel experience when she had felt ill, and over a few sessions, we removed the anxiety and stress from the memory, like removing the root from a dandelion. We did this with each issue, removing the anxiety and stress from the chores, the gym, etc. This is how to successfully play the unconscious at its own game; if a *negative* global belief can be reversed into a *positive*, then it will *equally ripple out* that *positive* belief. Instead of us having to unwind every... single... event... that troubles us, or every single symptom, we choose the big ones – the balloon *sellers*, rather than the balloons –

and by working with them, lots of those smaller balloons will just drift away.

In one of our last sessions, Chloe came in grinning; she wanted to show me that her nails had grown, and she'd had them painted a bright pink! We'd never worked on the biting habit – it was an outer ripple. She was also really excited to tell me she had visited her daughter in Glasgow, in Scotland. Not only because she had gone alone on the train to get there, but also because she had travelled on Glasgow underground without even thinking about it! She'd been so busy looking after her grandchildren, and (the fear having dropped so low now) she hadn't even noticed it until she was coming *out* of the station. She was so excited by these changes that this feeling (a nice reward of dopamine) encouraged her unconscious to create *more* rewards; and by feeling more relaxed, it was able to let go of (or at least reduce) her challenging issues even further. By inference, through changing her negative global beliefs to positives, her unconscious had continued to heal itself. Her IBS improved significantly, and her eczema *completely* cleared up!

If you've been reading this principle thinking, 'oh God, I'm doomed', you are not! Yes, I've spun you a tale of how terrible your life might be with poor self-worth at its core, but think of the reverse of that. What would it be like if we were to drop some *positive* self-worth stones into your pond, just as Chloe did? Imagine it as a movie scene where the film runs backwards, taking you back to that strong self-worth you were born with. Everything would improve until your entire life was changed for the better!

So, just like Luke Skywalker, Dorothy and Toto, and Frodo and Sam (and I!) had, you have a journey ahead of you... should you choose to take it. Yes, you will find some parts challenging, but you'll gain strength and determination, courage and compassion; you'll make big decisions, and develop a whole host of new skills and tools; and you'll find new friends along the way. You'll come out happier and more self-confident, with higher self-esteem. You will *lead well*, setting a good example to those around you, but most importantly, you'll attain a prize that's worth the journey of any quest: good self-worth.

To wrap up

Good self-worth is *absolutely crucial* to each of us, as people and as leaders of others, yet very few adults have perfect self-worth, despite believing that they may. I myself was a perfect example! Self-worth can take knocks in childhood, and poor self-worth, insidiously creeping under the radar into every area of our lives, can have ruinous consequences on us in adulthood. It can negatively affect our abilities to lead well, learn well, live well, and love well.

However, by understanding the ripple effect and how it can affect us negatively, it's plain to see that *we can use it pro-actively* to create *positive impact* on every aspect of our lives.

Understanding the difference between self-confidence, self-esteem and self-worth enables us to be more direct and active in our solution finding; it allows us to understand those around us more, leading to greater harmony and less conflict. Understanding that everyone's reality is based on their beliefs and self-worth enables us to manage our teams and personal relationships better, so that we react to people's behaviours rather than just their words, which are often just symptoms of a greater problem.

Stress and anxiety can hold us back in our leadership roles. Leaders must manage stress to prevent it from taking over their lives: being able to step in and out of the ‘stress zone’, to make crucial decisions and then relax, is pivotal to leaders keeping their presence of mind. Leaders must be able to access calmness, especially in high stress situations. Like Mr Benn, your transitioning between your roles (both at work and in your personal life) needs to become smooth, so you can *add* to the roles you play *without* being drained of energy just trying to hold your life together.

By understanding how your mind works, how your past impacts you and then by being conscious about how you want your life to run, the decisions you want to make, and the future you want to create, you can become aware of when things aren’t going as planned and ‘catch’ them. Most often, a negative belief can become a positive through reframing and re-understanding, so *you can re-write your life to make it how you want it to be*. With regular blended coaching-therapy sessions, and by using that place of pure honesty within you, you can clear up unhelpful behaviours as they appear, and before they have a chance to cast a shadow over your life.

You may have a journey to go on, and like any journey with a unique and worthwhile outcome (in this case, your future success!), it may be tough at times. You may have moments when you feel like you are walking in a fog, when you aren’t sure of what direction you need to go in, but that’s where I help my clients. I give them the tools and teach them the necessary understanding to *see through* the fog, or, sometimes, to help them to sit and rest comfortably until it clears.

By achieving good self-worth, creating positive beliefs, and managing your stress, you can have more fun, more adventures, more success, and, ultimately, create a future you truly love.

In this principle, you've learnt that...

- Self-worth, self-esteem and self-confidence are separate and distinct.
- Good self-worth is something we're all born with – we can easily lose it, but we can also regain it!
- It's crucially important to be aware of the stones being dropped into your pond.
- Someone's issues can be easily identified through what they say – you can catch clangers in your own words, and in the words of others!
- Your beliefs affect your outcome.
- Your self-worth affects your leadership.
- You have many roles, and it's important to transition between them smoothly.
- Your worries should occupy no more than 5% of your thinking.
- Rejection isn't personal.
- There's a difference between anxiety and stress.

¹ (*Just to be clear: victims of violence never choose it or deserve it, ever. They often have low self-worth and may have had violent behaviour modelled to them by a parent or someone else, which may have normalised it. If this is you, no matter what your gender is, please reach out for help: there is a list of resources in the 'It Begins with You' resource pack.)

PRINCIPLE 4

Understand the nuances of control

What are the nuances of control?

Whether you're a leader, a parent or a partner, living and leading life *with intention*, choosing to be an Alternative Leader, requires you to have a *clear idea* of what *you* want to achieve. Whether you're selecting a new home, a leadership book to read, or the direction of your entire organisation, you need clarity; and clarity comes from being *in control* of your life, and *knowing what you want... each... and... every... second*. Life is based on the decisions we make to create the success and the future that we want, and *those decisions are based on our understanding of how to flex our ability to control*.

Most of my clients come to me for reasons to do with *control*. Either they're doing well, but want to invest in their personal development and *take control* (a few tweaks to boost their success can reap huge rewards, after all), or because they're on the way to burnout... or, sadly, are already there. They're feeling overwhelmed and trapped on that hamster wheel – sometimes even to the point of describing their life as being a prison of their own making. That's the sort of emotive language they use to express their sense of urgency to me. It's the way they feel as they rush from one thing to the next, rarely stopping, and not being able to enjoy stopping if they do. They're often in their mid-life, with older children and in long-

term marriages (or getting divorced). It's as if suddenly they've raised their heads and thought: 'how did I end up here?'

They've *lost* control.

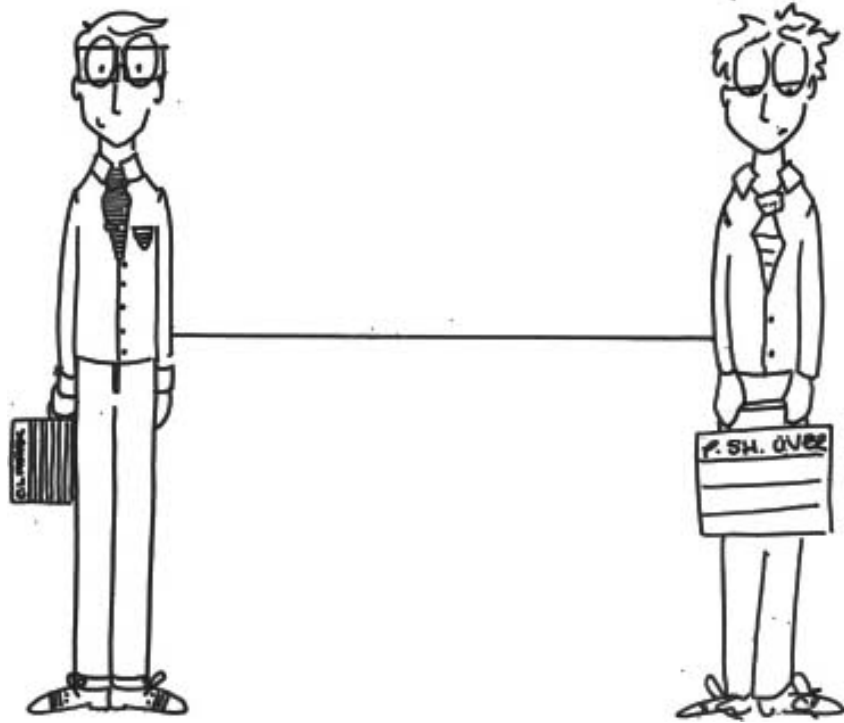
Sometimes they feel it's other people around them that control their lives. One client told me he felt he was just a passenger in the car of his life. If that's how *you* feel, you're working your way through the right book! In this principle, I'm going to show you how to get back into the driving seat, and enable you to re-route to your own choice of destination, *to re-create your own life as you wish it to be*, and *get you back to being in full control!*

“

A manager who's
unwilling to relinquish
control will starve their
staff of autonomy and
independence.

”

Just like a ‘rebellious’ teenager, control has ended up with an *unfairly* bad reputation. It causes no problems 90% of the time, but pushes boundaries the other 10% – our own boundaries, and those of the people around us too! We *need to assert control*, and in one way or another we always do. Controlling our environment is the basis for our survival at both a biological and psychological level, and someone who *chooses to relinquish control* has ***taken control by choosing not to act***. There is a continuum of control: at one end are the attitudes and actions of the dreaded ‘control freak’, who gains and keeps control with constant vigilance, or even dominance – and at the other end, those of the ‘pushover’, who takes control *through inaction*. Whichever position someone takes, *it’s their choice*, so they ***are in full control***. Control is not just an active process that can be seen through external actions, it’s also something we each exercise over our inner worlds – our thoughts and feelings. In this way, even in the most externally limiting situations, we can still be *in full control of ourselves*. In this principle, we’ll open your mind to the control continuum, so that you can find where you currently are, find where you’d actually like to be, and find out how you can get there!



Why is understanding the nuances of control important for a leader?

‘Until I realised that control was something that I could consciously influence, I assumed that I just was the way that I was: but now I know how to choose how to act, and react. I wish I’d known decades ago. I’m no longer concerned about what others might think of me. My increased self-worth means that I’m no longer hesitating over difficult decisions, and I delegate more, in ways I wouldn’t have been confident to before. I’m blown away by the positive effect that increasing my team’s autonomy has had. The impact on my team at work has been huge, yes, but

what has really surprised me most has been the impact on my family life. I knew something was changing for the better at home, but it took a while to realise that that something was me.'

—ELLIOT, STOCKBROKER AND DAD

Some leaders feel it's always necessary to keep a firm grip on 'control', and exactly as the dictionary defines it:

'Control'... 'order, limit or rule something, or someone's actions or behaviour.' (Control, 2020).

Many may well belong to the 'old school' of leadership, which instilled the idea 'whoever ranks highest knows best and *must not* be challenged.'

However, people have obviously realised that there are negatives to a domineering leadership style: poor staff-retention, high stress and sickness levels, quashed creativity, and a lack of innovation to name just a few! We live in a fast-changing world, and companies are most profitable, when management lets go of 'absolute power' control styles. We, the employees of today, demand autonomy; we're no longer willing to just do what we're told and be grateful. We want fulfilment, we want to know we're part of something that helps people and the planet, we want to create an impact. We no longer see spending 1/3 of the hours of our lives at work (about 90,000 hours for most of us) as something that a salary alone can compensate for.

There's a fine balance of power between a good leader and their team (a bit like the one between a parent and their children!). Get it right and everything goes well; get it wrong and everything tumbles downhill... fast.

We all have a need for control, we all need boundaries in our lives, and to lead well, leaders need to be able to squeeze and release those boundaries in considered and controlled ways (just like a parent!). Being *able to relinquish control* when appropriate is a crucial skill in the modern workplace. It means *delegating* without micro-managing, *empowering* others to innovate fearlessly (some companies have a ‘Fail Friday’, where all staff can try to innovate without fear of failing – in fact, Post-It Notes were created in a similar environment!), *trusting* employees to set their own hours (a trend hugely escalated by remote working), and using *coaching* rather than dictatorial leadership styles.

To lead *well*, you *must* clear your emotional baggage so you can work with your followers without your issues getting in the way. It’s not a moot point: *it’s non-negotiable*. You *must* be able to flow along the ‘control continuum’, responding to individuals or your whole team appropriately, easily able to identify and react appropriately when others are falling into *their* issues *because you’re free of **your own***. By developing the ability to ‘flex’ your control, you can remove a lot of the workload, pressure, and stress and strain of leadership *and* be able to make strong spur of the moment decisions, often with limited data, whilst simultaneously providing your followers with security, safety and a plan of action. Leading, whether it’s your family, your organisation, or just yourself, is an honour... and a responsibility not to be taken lightly.

CASE STUDY

Sam

Sam was offered coaching because her organisation wanted to promote her, but they could see that she needed a few tweaks to put her in the best position when promotions were agreed. Sam had issues with delegating and her HR department felt that her communication with her team could be better. There were some team members that she didn't have a good rapport with. Sam was excited to have been offered the opportunity (interestingly, people often assume that their company offering them coaching or therapy is a sign of deficiency, but the truth is the complete opposite: companies invest in employees that they see have potential for progression). After all, she knew that she struggled to delegate.

She said (laughingly) that it made her feel queasy when reports and presentations went out without her having overseen them, but in truth, she was very frustrated by those feelings. In addition, she worried what others thought of her too, and she was right; although Sam led well in other aspects, her team were losing faith in her ability to delegate, which in turn was preventing their careers from moving ahead, so they felt they were losing their autonomy. Sam was smart, knowledgeable and ambitious, and clearly worked hard to lead well. She also really wanted promotion, and to lead others.

I showed Sam how the brain works, and I explained to her some of the traps she had fallen into. Behind her inability to delegate was a

fear of failure. Her brain was ‘protecting her’ by gripping onto control and refusing to risk her failing (so refusing to allow her to delegate), so she didn’t get hurt. Once Sam saw how her brain was filtering her thoughts and triggering her, she and I did some therapeutic work to shift her fear of failure, and with her new understanding of how we all think, she was able to change her belief system and behaviours. Within two weeks, Sam had begun delegating successfully and her team relationships and productivity had increased. She’d even been praised by the two team members she’d been struggling with.

Steps for understanding the nuances of control

Step 1: Understand the aspects of control

Control is present in our lives in three different ways. Let’s clarify those presences here, so you can be more conscious of your behaviours towards yourself and others, and more easily identify where you might have issues.

1. Internal Control (control of ourselves):

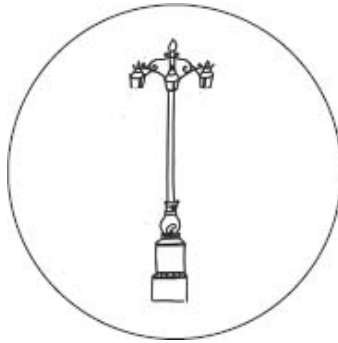
Self-control (or self-determination) is all about *our choices for ourselves*. It’s how we care for ourselves, present ourselves, show our mindsets and emotions, plan our careers and life goals. If you choose to brush your teeth after lunch and get a face tattoo tomorrow, you’re exercising self-control in your life. Control of the self can also, of course, have negative results when we choose to do things that are bad for us, or take on tasks better left (or delegated) to others.

2. External Control (control of other people):

Being in a position of control over other people should be thought of as an honour: it's a position of great responsibility, sometimes one in which lives are at stake, but like many positions of responsibility, it *can be subject to abuse*. External Control can come about in various ways, and for short or long-term periods, but in most cases, it *should be* as much a positive for those being controlled as for those exercising the control.

3. Relinquished Control (passing of control to someone else):

Under strong, healthy leadership, someone relieving us of responsibility or providing us with emotional and practical safety can be brilliant! We often exercise *self-control* to relinquish control *to others that we trust* so that we can use our energy to grow. For example, I trust my supervisor to lead me well, and my clients trust me to help them get their lives on the track they've chosen. We all trust our parents, teachers, and partners. We trust train drivers, doctors, plumbers (I *love* my plumber because he looks after me and always has my back when I have a problem). We *need* to be allowed to *relinquish control to others* in a variety of situations; we *rely* on community and teamwork to survive. The negative sides of relinquished control can be seen when we put our trust in, and thus relinquish control to, the wrong people – to abusive partners, lying politicians, and poor leaders, as we've discussed above...



REALITY CHECKPOINT

‘Control’ in your life.

By identifying how you control yourself and others, and are controlled, you can create a plan to move to a healthier model.

Question 1

How do you think your life is divided across the three aspects of control? In which aspects do you spend the most and least of your time?

Question 2

What control style do you have over others as a leader (be honest!)?

If there are negatives, use what you have learned in the previous principles to think about how you can change them.

Step 2: Understand your need for self-control

We have a biological *need* for self-control in our lives: self-control means *choice* and choice equals survival and happiness. It’s argued that choice is not only a *psychological* requirement but also a *biological*

mechanism to keep us alive, and research shows that ‘the presence or absence of control has a profound impact on the regulation of emotion, cognition and physiology’: basically, we don’t react well when self-control is *taken* from us (Iyengar et al., 2010). Many of us have an additional need for self-control as a response to the dysfunctions of childhood, too. It’s our *use* of control, in when and how we make decisions *for ourselves*, when and how we *control others*, and when and to whom we *give up control of ourselves* that determines our success in life.

The biology and psychology of self-control

Positive evidence for the theory that self-control is a *biological* need is that a need for self-determination is felt by animals, too. When animals are placed in harmless but stressful ‘no choice’ situations, such as being restrained, they show very similar reactions to humans. Have you ever tried to hold a cat or toddler that doesn’t want to be held? The need for self-control is deeply embedded in living creatures; it was imperative for Thig, Thag and Thog that they could use self-control to consciously decide what to do when they saw the neighbouring tribe stealing their berries, and it’s imperative for us to believe that we are the creators of our own destiny, giving us freedom, purpose, and hope that we can create the life we want to live. It enables us to empower others to share in our vision for our organisation or our world, but we need to realise when to let go of that control for our own good, and for the greater good, too. During the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK, there were protest marches against the government-enforced lockdown. Some people gathered together, refusing to wear face-masks, possibly putting themselves and others at greater risk of contracting a potentially lethal virus, in defence of their rights to self-control, in the forms of personal choice and freedom.

A *leader's* ability to adapt to changing situations by nuancing control is *crucial*. In our emotionally-charged society, with the pressure on them to succeed or resign, leaders *must* be able to see the difference between successful and failing ideas, and then react accordingly. Just think of the political fiascos that have arisen from poor, inflexible leadership!

The reason for inflexibility is often *fear*. Our brains seek out comfortable, *safe* situations for us, which become *familiar*, and so we are hardwired to feel more comfortable with what is familiar to us, because *familiar has been deemed by our brains to be 'safe'*. It's a trait of our brains, which can affect everything from our holiday destinations to our political stances. The ability to take risks and be open to new thoughts, people and places is unique to each individual, and in *each area*, it's based on a back catalogue of experiences and worldviews and beliefs; so someone might be happy to take big financial risks, but never want to try a different takeaway curry.

I believe we each choose to adapt our self-control to fit in with society as much or as little as feels right for us, making our choices for ourselves as individuals and only ever *fully* fitting in with society where we choose to do so. Some people refuse to limit their self-control at all, and they end up in places with the *least* available self-control of all: prisons!

Even in times when it feels that life's overwhelming, and that having someone else step in and make all our decisions for us might be a respite, the reality is that we would *hate* it as soon as they made a decision we didn't like. In any situation where a group of people are treated as being exactly the same, with their individuality and self-determination stifled, *someone* will *always* be unhappy. If a change is *forced* on people, as the COVID-19 lockdown was, and sensible reasoning isn't seen behind the

decisions made for us, we'll feel out of self-control, sending us into mild panic and rebellion!

Step 3: Understand where you are on the control continuum

Our centre of control

The psychologist Julian Rotter theorised that we each have a locus, or centre, of control – a place from which we make our choices. At one end is 'ELOC (*External* Locus Of Control)' and at the other end is 'ILOC (*Internal* Locus Of Control)'. Think of it as a continuum.

If someone's self-control is *ELOC*-based, they will *externally* validate their life and self, passing responsibility for their life to the external world. This might show as them making choices for (and judgements about) their life based on what others think or say, or maybe blaming external factors for affecting their life. Someone *ELOC*-focused might blame the difficulty of the exam questions for their poor exam result, rather than *their failure* to revise; or they might not tell anyone about the great new idea they have that'd help in their organisation for fear of their colleagues laughing at them.

However, someone with *ILOC*-based self-control *internally* validates their life and self. They have *good self-worth* and take full responsibility for their own decisions, successes, and failings. If they fail an exam, they'll accept responsibility if they didn't work hard enough, and they'll tell their colleagues about their new idea without worrying about their reactions.

“

A leader's ability to adapt to changing situations by nuancing control is *crucial*.

”

We should all aim to sit nicely in ILOC most of the time (we are human after all, so worrying what others think is normal to a degree), validating ourselves, and *not letting others determine our lives* – we should stay in control of our own lives and needs.

My client Marie explained her thoughts after we worked on ILOC:

‘I now know that how people react to me is never about me, and always about ‘their own stuff’. I don’t need to seek approval, I just seek to understand why they react this way.’



TOOL

The ILOC – ELOC bar

Here's a handy tool that's a 2 for 1! It'll help you to shift your emotional state to a healthy centre of control (ILOC) and bring to your conscious mind the decisions that you may want to make to *keep* you in ILOC. For example, if you were thinking of leaving your job, or a partner, but were too worried (ELOC) about what others might say, by moving to ILOC, you'd be able to step away from that concern and make the decision that was right for *you*.

Imagine a metal bar with a bead on it. At one end of the bar is ELOC and at the other is ILOC.

You are the bead.



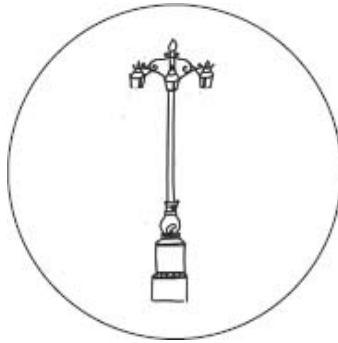
Whenever you're unsure of how you're validating in a situation, picture the bar in your mind and picture where you are as the bead. If you find you are near ELOC, then mentally slide the bead back up towards ILOC. You should find it helps you to change state, and that the decisions you need to take should become clearer, a bit like pressing the refresh button on your computer! If that doesn't help,

and you're still unsure of yourself, then imagine how someone else would react to the situation from an ILOC position. Do you remember me mentioning my client who would ask herself, 'What The Fuck Would Mari Do?' Borrow someone else's brain for a minute and think about the actions they'd take!



TOP TIP

Use the bar and bead image regularly to check (every day at least) where you are throughout your journey to your future. It can highlight where you're slipping out of ILOC and you may see repetitive themes that you can then work on clearing. This tool can be helpful in high pressure meetings, for example!



REALITY CHECKPOINT

How in control are you?

By identifying how you validate yourself, you can not only begin to see where you are making decisions for the wrong reasons, but also change them!

Question 1

Picture the ILOC-ELOC bar applied to different aspects of your life in turn (for example - to your family, to your relationship with your partner, to your career). Where would the bead sit in relation to each aspect?

Question 2

If the bead is past the centre point and towards ELOC, why is it there? Have you lost some level of control in those aspects? How did it happen?

Question 3

For each case, slide the bead back up to ILOC and imagine yourself there. What changes do you need to make to your thoughts,

behaviours and actions so you can *truly* be in ILOC for each case?

Step 4: Understand your brain's reactions to the feeling of losing control

As we know, our need for control developed to help us survive, so if the brain thinks it's losing control, it will very quickly try to regain it – often with disastrous results! It's a bit like a rug being pulled out from under someone's feet – they'll grab hold of anything, no matter how fragile or inappropriate, to try to keep their balance. There are three common modes of behaviour that the brain might use when it's lost control. You might recognise them in your toddlers or teenagers, or, sadly, in your manager, which is why this book should be helpful to both parents and leaders!

- Violent behaviour: acts of aggression, like physically lashing out, shouting, making poor snap decisions (such as firing people or giving them warnings), general aggression in tone and body language. This is the '*fight*' response in action.
- Distant behaviour: displaying an '*I don't care*' attitude, refusing to talk, saying '*I'm fine*', although clearly they are not. It's a dismissal of the issue, a removal of attention from it, a refusal to engage with it. It can be an active or passive response, like a '*freeze*' response because the brain is out of ideas.
- Victim mode behaviour: refusing to take responsibility, whining, demanding attention, wanting others to fix the problem. If someone stays in this mode, it can sometimes result in genuine physical illness.

Understand why being wrong... feels wrong!

The problem with life is that it's unpredictable, of course, and it's full of unknown things that are *out of our control*. Even after we've grown in confidence and self-worth, from working through difficult situations and gaining new skills and understanding from them, being 'in the unknown' will always be simply unpleasant!

In the land of 'the unknown', our unconscious will scramble around madly for safety, creating some weird and interesting responses in us as it does (do you remember Chloe's behaviour as her brain sought control?). One of the things that can push us into this frightening territory is finding out that we are in the wrong (a form of losing control) – remember those egotistical managers? If your self-worth is intact, you can likely override that uncomfortable feeling and manage it serenely, but if you are already questioning yourself at a central level, 'being wrong' can collapse your self-worth like a house of cards. 'Being wrong' can make us question *all* the choices we are making, and feeds into other poor beliefs, such as an excessive need to be liked by others. 'Being wrong' is, for some old-school managers, just too frightening. The boss that bullied that client of mine did so because 'being wrong' was too threatening to their own self-worth to admit. Rather than accepting that my client's skillset was different and seeing it as a positive, his unconscious created his bullying behaviour to save his ego. I'm sure it didn't make him feel better; bullies rarely feel good about themselves in the long term, and it certainly didn't help those he bullied, or the company's profits or staff retention.

MY STORY

‘Go on, prove it’

In my family, there’s a standing joke:

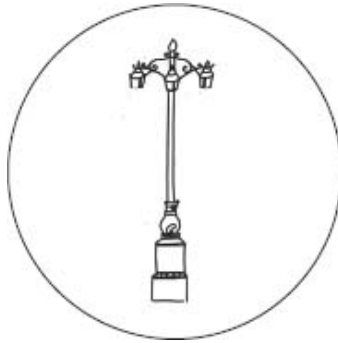
‘Mum (that’s me) can’t admit she’s wrong.’

I would argue (because I don’t like being wrong...) that I’m *happy* to admit it if I *was* in the wrong. I just like good evidence of it before I change my mind! However, to be honest, when I’m arguing a point I fully believe to be true and suddenly realise I *am* wrong, I do occasionally initially struggle to be gracious about admitting it. My family will absolutely love seeing this in print.

In these situations, I feel an actual physical tension in my body when I realise I’m wrong. It makes me feel squirmy inside. That feeling is my brain weighing up my values of honesty and integrity, and my love of growth and learning, against the fact that *I have to admit I’m wrong*. To my brain, that means admitting that a *belief system* it had running nicely is also wrong, meaning that all the *other* belief systems it had *linked* to that belief – my behaviours etc – will need to be re-evaluated too, and my brain, a bit like a two-year-old would, just stamps it’s feet and says ‘*no!*’

I have to admit that in my 20s I was pretty bad, having to be dragged kicking and screaming into admitting I was wrong, but now that my self-worth and self-esteem are high, I really *don’t* mind. It may still occasionally take me a split-second to move past that squirmy feeling,

but show me the evidence and I'll just see it as an opportunity for learning and growth.



REALITY CHECKPOINT

Your loss of control modes.

Understanding your reactions to *losing* control will help you to *stay* in control!

Question 1

What modes do *you* slip into when you feel you're losing control?
You may have different states with different situations: write them down and think about what you learned from [Principle 1](#).

Question 2

What are the triggers you respond to that push you into that mode?

Question 3

How can you resolve those triggers? Do you need some professional help?

Step 5: Understand when you should relinquish control

So we've covered our biological and psychological need for control, and how control benefits us, and our reactions to *losing* it. Now let's look at how we can best manage situations in which we aren't (or shouldn't be!) in control.

The reality of life is that it's challenging and difficult sometimes, which can cause us to feel very negative emotions. This section isn't about denying or disregarding those emotions, or pretending they don't hurt. It's to enable you to see where and when you should *release* control, and what to do if that decision is removed from your hands.

There are situations in which it's nonsensical for control to be shared between multiple people, as the very nature of those situations demand that one person (or just a few people) takes responsibility for a decision or an action. The way that military chains of command work is a good example of this. In an emergency, a coordinated plan of action will always be most effective; you can't have an entire team all individually deciding what they will do during an enemy attack! In the military, choice is removed through process, training, and hierarchical orders; but good military leaders replace *choice* with *trust, respect and loyalty* to the chain of command. I once interviewed an Army Lieutenant Colonel who had been in charge of elite teams, and when I asked him how he felt about giving and following orders he said:

'A good leader listens to their team. They respect their opinions and thoughts, even those of the most junior members, as they may have been in situations that the officer hasn't. They work together with their team, they have each other's backs, they describe themselves as family; they trust their lives to each other.'

Trust is imperative to the success of *any* team or family. If your followers know that they are valued, trusted and important, *and where they fit* in the process of the vision of the organisation, they're unlikely to question your leadership. Your trust in them and respect for them will result in their trusting and respecting you; your respect for, and trust in, their self-control in granting them autonomy will allow them to relinquish *overall* control to you.

There are other situations in which at least some, if not all, control *must* be handed over. Think of the professionals you encounter in your life that significantly impact you in the long term: accountants, doctors, pilots, and drivers, for example. Trust is a key issue in control, as we have seen. Sometimes we *must* trust others who know more than we do about something; knowing how and when to give that trust is vital.

Step 6: Living in 'the grey' – getting better at accepting situations out of your control

We can empathise entirely when others tell us they feel out of control; it's a common cause of stress and anxiety, familiar to us all. I see many clients who are transitioning in some way – taking on high-level roles, becoming entrepreneurs, having children, moving home, coping with deaths and divorces. Some of them are worried to a point of anxiety because they are having to 'sit' in situations they're unsure of the outcome of for long periods, often for many months. Will they be made redundant? Will the divorce settlement break them? Will their new role be awful? Will their business fail? They are a long way out of their comfort zones.

So, how can we learn to live in the reality of life, in 'the grey' between the certainty of black-and-white choices, ELOC and ILOC, and the yes's

and no's? How can we learn to be okay with knowing that lots of things are out of our control?

I'm going to show you a worst-case scenario to ground you, then we'll work backwards from that.

MY STORY

Taking Control as a Way of Life

I used to run workshops for people who had cancer. Most of those who attended had just had surgery or treatment, and their two main concerns were the physical changes in their bodies, and their lack of control. They didn't know what the future held, so they *had* to live in the grey; and although they had choices about treatment, *no* choice they made was going to give them a 100% guarantee that they would be okay.

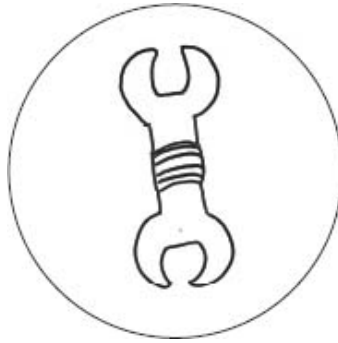
It was a thought that kept them up at night, and *unlike* a lot of the worrying (and sometimes false!) thoughts so many of us have, it had life-or-death consequences. However, worrying or letting their minds go into panic wasn't going to help them. So, I taught them how to live 'in the grey' by standing back and looking at the choices they *could* make. Together, we wrote lists and made colourful visual plans of all the areas of their lives they *could* still control – there was actually quite a lot of them!

The fears that woke them in the middle of the night were often based on running out of time to achieve the things they wanted to – that they would become too unwell or die too soon. Birth and death are the only absolutes in our lives. Often when people are unwell and facing an unsure prognosis, no one wants to talk about death, but it's a natural part of life.

We looked at the things they wanted to accomplish, and they took steps towards doing these things. They left letters for their children, gave up jobs they didn't want (or took steps to), left relationships that weren't working for them, planned trips to places they had always wanted to go. Lots of those people would go on to live long and happy lives, but they all faced their fears head-on, and by doing so, *took back control*. By taking control of all the things they *could* have control over, they were able to let go of their impossible-to-fulfil needs to control *everything* about their lives. They learned to live in the grey.

Most of us are fortunate that our problems are not so acute. I want you to realise that if those people could face their fears and take control, you can do it too.

To clear a fear, we have to look it in the face. For me, personifying a fear makes it much less scary, so when I'm worrying about death, I always picture Death as Terry Pratchett's Discworld character, who's kind and funny and always SPEAKS IN CAPITALS. Find whatever works for *you* to help you to face your fears.



TOOL

The plan, forget, and push forward tool

When you're in a situation in which you feel you can't affect the outcome, picture yourself stepping back from it and seeing it through someone else's eyes.

Imagine you're watching a movie in which the main character has your exact situation. You can see that there are *some* outcomes they can't control... but what decisions *can* they make, no matter how small (think from an ILOC)?

Which decisions are top priority, or most immediate, and have to be made *right now*?

Which decisions *can* or *have to be* left until further down the road in the situation?

Now, ***ignore the decisions in step 3***. You may know roughly what they are and that they may have to be made sometime in the future, but until they enter your life at step 2, put them in a box and forget about them for a while.

“

You are in control of
your life at all times,
even if only through
your internal thoughts
and reactions to external
events.

”

This tool is very useful in divorces, which are loooooonnnng processes... I know, because I've been through two of them! Already emotionally worn down from the decision to split up, people then have months (if not years) of feeling out of control – dividing houses, belongings and children. A career change or moving to a new house can be the same, but they are hopefully less lengthy processes. By using the above tool, whether personally or professionally, you'll feel the accomplishment of being up to date with the decisions you *can* make, and the time-out will help to de-stress your mind, which, when decision-time comes around again, will mean you'll have more clarity because you stayed in control... and more clarity when you come to make your *next* choice.

To wrap up

Even in the *worst* of times, *you can remain in control of your life by choosing how you feel inside*. By understanding that you *are* in control of your life at all times, even if only through your internal thoughts and reactions to external events, you can learn how to naturally find the balance of control needed at each moment. By becoming flexible, you can nuance your control and know how and when to delegate, and whom to relinquish control to, and you'll be comfortable doing it. As a leader, or parent, it's a bad idea to exercise complete control over all of your followers – they need autonomy as much as you need to trust them and have downtime. Show trust and delegate effectively. Micro-managing is exhausting and counter-productive!

To really gain those abilities, you *must* shift your unconscious blocks so that you aren't triggered by your past, or your ego, into a state of control; allowing you to remain clear-headed. Then, in times of pressure, your response as a leader will be from a position of clarity. Leaders show their

true worth during the *toughest* situations – for example, staying calm under pressure (as I had to when my daughter broke both her arms, and when my son electrocuted himself with a string of fairy lights!), and making clear and strong decisions in troubled times. Well done on introducing cycle lanes, politicians; but can you lead us through a war, civil unrest, or a pandemic...?

By building on *strong foundations*, and then by making the architectural changes to your mind that you want to, you will gain more control of your life, day by day, and be able to choose the future you really want.

Whilst I was writing this wrap-up, a client, Howard, was texting me about control issues. His ex-partner had been extremely difficult during their divorce. He wrote:

‘That time when you told me that I didn’t need to do what he said, that was a turning point for me.’

All I had said was that if his ex invited him in for coffee and he didn’t want to go, he could just say no: *he was in control of himself*. This small exchange had had a huge impact on him, helping him to realise that he *could exert control over his whole life*.

The ability to live comfortably in the ‘grey space’ between definite outcomes comes from *finding a solid stable space inside ourselves*. If we can create our own inner resources, be happy with ourselves and the life decisions that we make, and love and value ourselves no matter what, then *as long as our own moral compass tells us that we are ‘true’, then what happens around us doesn’t matter: we are in control of ourselves*. As my client Marie says:

‘I feel more grounded, at peace with myself. Life is not perfect, no-one ever is, but I learnt to control my inner demon, and to let my inner Buddha

shine. Storms may come, but I know what I need to do to weather them, and find my own strength and calm.'

By working on your issues with the methods we have discussed so far, you can raise a storm shield for when the weather gets bad, but please don't wait until the tornado strikes to take action. Treat yourself as you would your house. Surely *you* should treasure *yourself* more than a house anyway, and you wouldn't wait for your *house* to fall to pieces! Build-up your natural emotional defences, coping mechanisms and toolkit *so you'll be ready when a storm comes*, then you can be safe and snug inside. Whether it's some coaching to help your business, or deep therapy to remove stuck points in your past, don't wait for a hurricane.

In this principle, you've learnt that...

- Your leadership style is impacted by your self-control.
- We all have a psychological and biological need for control.
- There's a reason we all struggle to admit to being in the wrong.
- There's a continuum of control, and you can change where you are on it!
- It's important for you to realise when and to whom you should relinquish control.
- Staying in your ILOC is a key component of building the future you want.
- The ability to live comfortably in the grey is a vital tool for a happy life!

PRINCIPLE 5

Understand how to make and communicate great decisions

In both our careers and our personal lives, our decision-making is key to us creating the futures we want and deserve for ourselves. Help with decision-making is one of the top reasons why people come to see me: it's a literally life-changing skill we simply cannot do without if we want to succeed. In fact, its importance might be the very reason many of us find decision-making so hard. We often avoid making decisions out of fear; fear of being rejected or disappointing others, or being seen as ignorant or simply making mistakes. This means that decision-making is often directly linked to fear of failure and Imposter Syndrome, amongst other issues! Many people have been 'stung' by a decision, of course. In some cases so badly that just being faced with a similar decision can trip them into fight, flight, freeze; not a good state to try to make a decision from. We all need to clear our issues so we can be confident we're making decisions we can trust.

Anxiety, depression, and fatigue from the hectic pace of life can all have a negative effect on decision making too, which we're all aware of – but there's another set of factors that are often not considered: our pasts, our self-worth, and the natural algorithms of our minds. I hope that by now you've reached a good level of understanding about why and how those things can have a huge effect!

It's often cited that we make approximately 36,000 decisions every day. Whether this figure is exactly true or not is unclear, but it's clear that we make many thousands, most of them unconsciously. We decide where we'll walk, how we'll brush our teeth, whether or not we'll lose our tempers, for instance. However, many choices are made consciously, too. This might include whether or not to have another coffee; or whether to get up early and continue with writing a book or stay in bed (I had to face that one this morning); or whether to stay in a rut, or get our issues sorted and take control so we can be better leaders (!). But which of those 36,000 decisions should we be leaving to the unconscious, and which should we be making consciously?

“

I want people to stop
allowing themselves to
be led by the lives they
have fallen into.

”

In this final principle, I'm going to offer you several tools that I've designed to help my clients to bring some of those *unconscious* decisions to their *conscious* minds, so they can check their decision strategies and, most importantly, check that their past unrelated issues aren't affecting their decisions. If you use these tools regularly (and clear your inner issues), it will naturally hone your decision-making processes to work effectively and cleanly... *and*, as your unconscious mind learns the tools, it will embed them naturally, giving you an innate confidence about making decisions from your 'head' and 'gut' in combination.

As your Coach-Therapist, I'm now advising you to take action (if you haven't already started!) and make the decisions that will powerfully propel you forwards into the future you want. This final principle's aim is to enable you to make those decisions clearly and intentionally. I want you to become an Alternative Leader who's remembered wherever you go. There's even a section on how to communicate those decisions to others; a decision *not being implemented* because it's misunderstood or poorly planned is an all-too-common problem. In my experience, most people are actually only a few steps away from a *radically different future* – one they thought was a dream. So, let's help you take those steps!

Why is decision making important for you as a leader?

'The impact of being able to make decisions fast with clarity, even when I don't have all the information has been huge for me. I'm sharper, my team are sharper and we are so much more productive and, strange to say, happier. I learnt to trust myself

and my emotions. What's more, I feel like I have more energy, my mind is clearer. Clearing the parts of me that were holding me back and understanding how I got there in the first place has allowed me to feel really confident in the decisions I make, at home or at work. It's a superpower and what's more, if with hindsight it's the wrong decision, well, I make another decision!'

—WILLIAM, CEO, DAD AND HUSBAND!

Decision making is a crucial skill for leaders: if you're a leader for a big company, it's why you were employed! If you're the head of a big corporation you have the *ultimate* responsibility for *anything* that goes wrong, even if it wasn't directly your fault. You're paid big bucks because *the buck stops with you!* As an entrepreneur the pressure is on for you to get through the start-up stage and into profit, often whilst building a team at the same time.

Being a leader of leaders means that you are responsible for the decisions of *all* of those who follow you (a huge responsibility), even though you can't (and shouldn't try to) *directly* control them. You are often expected to be available 24/7 (sad but true), function at a fast pace and under huge pressure, make split-second decisions on widely-impacting issues, balance your power of control, create and sell a vision, offer security and praise, be humble... oh, and somehow devise a system to create a healthy work/life balance for yourself!

You can be full of inspirational passion for the changes you want to make, and the products and world influence you want to create, but if you

can't translate your passion into purpose by communicating your decisions clearly, and you can't control your performance and productivity, you'll never get off the ground. So many ideas and opportunities have gone to waste because the people that had them couldn't or didn't make good enough decisions, or didn't have the skillset (and didn't *decide* to find someone who did) to make their project a reality. In my late teens, I invented two different products, which I home-made for about 20 friends: within two years both of my ideas, *in their identical form*, were global household products. If I'd had the business knowledge then that I have now, I'd have decided to immediately file for patent and marketed both myself... and frankly, I'd be rich!

There are so many brilliant people with literally world-changing ideas out there. Yet so many *of* them are either sitting at home feeling frustrated *but taking no action* to get their ideas heard, or are in leadership positions, equally frustrated because their ideas aren't coming to fruition or their poorly-led, poorly-directed, and poorly-communicated-to team don't share their passion. I want people to stop *allowing themselves to be led* by the lives they have fallen into, to stop being merely passengers in their lives and take control of their futures, because by making the decisions they need to and want to, and by having equally strong strategies for communicating their ideas and resolving any conflicts that arise, they might just save the world!

In this principle, I aim to enable you to become *conscious* about your decision-making, communicate your decisions better, and equip you with *practical tools to create the life you want to lead*.

CASE STUDY

Peter

During our last session together, I asked Peter how he felt he had changed.

‘I’m not sure I’ve changed that much,’ he said.

I laughed.

When people first become my clients, I ask them to fill in a ‘reflection form’, in which they describe their whole life and how they feel. When he first came to me, Peter had very low self-worth, no time to have a partner or the kids he wanted, and was running himself into the ground trying to keep his business afloat – which over the years had grown exponentially from a small grassroots business into a large, multi-award-winning enterprise. Although he’d been extremely successful financially, he’d been so busy rushing around that he’d made fast, *poor* decisions and had no time to communicate them well anyway. These were issues that had resulted in the hire of a lot of unsuitable employees and zero-value consultants as he’d desperately searched for a cure for his stress. He’d been able to see that he’d been missing opportunities that would’ve been great for him and his business, because he’d been too fearful to make important decisions; he didn’t trust his gut and head to agree. He had a brilliant mind full of ideas that had carried the business forward despite his flaws, but he was also a workaholic who was so overwhelmed and exhausted that he’d had suicidal thoughts (this was

when a friend recommended that he see me, as I would cover both personal and professional aspects). I read his reflection form out to him.

He was horrified and said, 'I was completely pathetic!'

However, I reminded him that he'd just been in a very difficult place when we started. You might think I was sad that he didn't *see* changes in himself, but, in fact, I was thrilled! It meant that by clearing his multiple tangled issues, his brain had *released* all those negative emotions and behaviours to the point that *it no longer remembered them!* He was now so used to feeling great, communicating well, and making brilliant decisions that it had become his new 'normal.' In fact, his business had grown significantly in the time we worked together, and many of the structural and personnel issues had been resolved as Peter worked through the programme. He didn't feel he had changed because he'd become so used to feeling in control of his life that it had become normal for him; he couldn't even *remember* the suicidal state he'd been in back then. When he realised the changes in himself he was emotional.

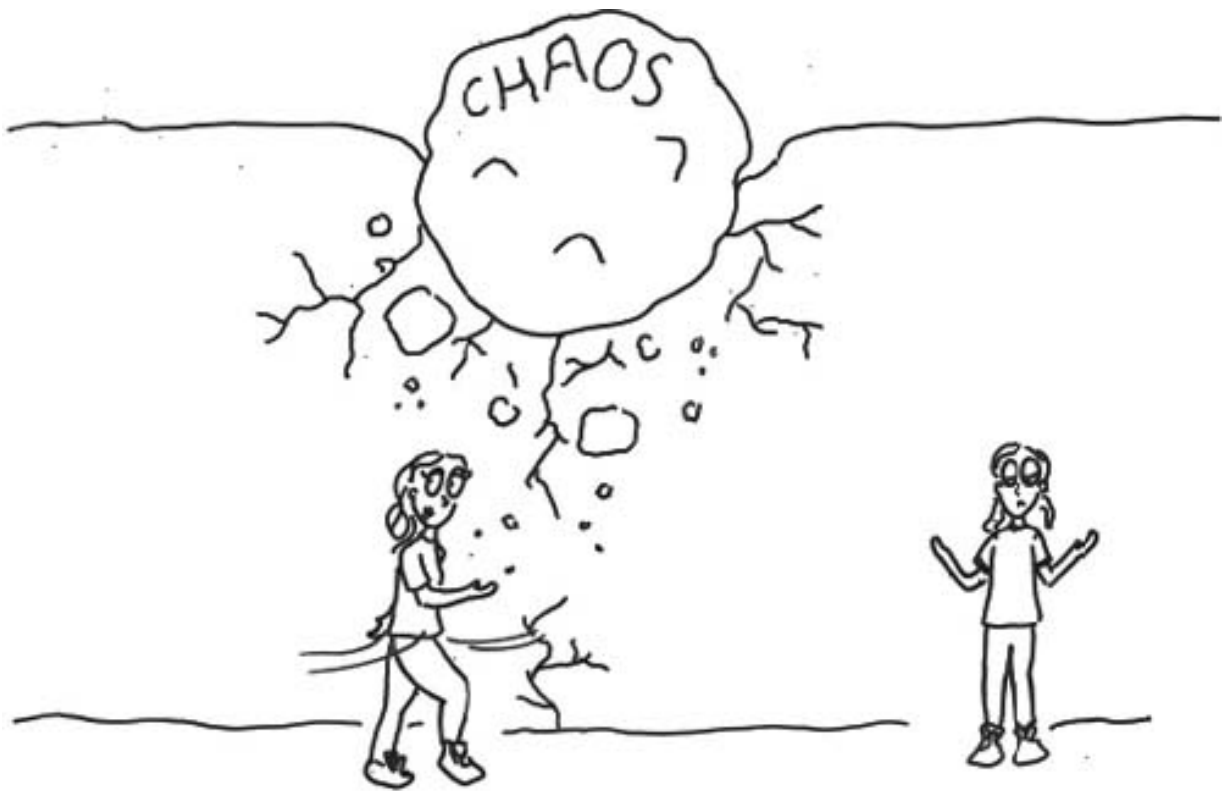
Steps for making great decisions

Step 1: Understand how your gut affects your decision-making

Why do we use the gut as a verbal reference point for something abstract like decision making? It seems that we believe in it – that we've given the gut mystical powers, as if it can see into the future, and we trust those mystical powers more than our own conscious rational selves.

When I ask people how they make decisions, their first answer, more often than not, is ‘gut instinct.’ Ten years ago I would have replied the same, but even then I knew deep down that my gut leaned towards listening only to the emotional baggage of my ‘heart’, rather than the adult intellect, experience and common sense of my ‘head’. Now I look back with hindsight and experience and wonder if ‘going with my gut’ was in some respects an abdication of responsibility for choices I *knew* I *wanted* to make, yet also knew *weren’t* the ‘*best*’ choices (this would be my unconscious trying to ‘protect’ me, so I’m glad I cleared it!). It often felt like my gut would skip merrily along towards imminent chaos with my rational self standing to one side, wearily shaking its head as it could see the future outcome, yet it couldn’t intervene. Remember how the cartoon character Wile E Coyote would always see his carefully-laid plans fall apart, his traps misfire, the boulder meant for the Roadrunner plummeting off the cliff towards him instead, *just in time for it to be too late?*

Does any of that resonate with you?



What if *your* gut instinct is *just wrong*?

I'm sorry to disillusion anyone, but what's actually happening when we have 'a gut feeling' is (sadly) not mystical or magical. It's just a perfect storm of all the influences we've covered in the previous principles doing their thing to produce emotional responses in us, and showing up as either conscious (head) feelings or unconscious (gut) feelings, which we then accept as the basis for our decisions!

Of course, when conscious feelings turn up in our 'heads' it follows that we can weigh up possible outcomes of decisions about those feelings rationally, but our 'guts' are untrained and all about the unconscious and emotions. We might think we *feel emotions* in our guts, but what we actually feel there is the impact of the chemicals that emotions release into our systems; emotions might trigger our fight, flight, freeze response or release all sorts of love-attraction chemicals. The two states actually share

some of the same chemicals – remember the adrenaline, cortisol and norepinephrine cocktail from principle one?

So, decisions made ‘from the gut’ are based on a ‘perfect storm’ of childhood and life-experience influences, and stress or happiness chemicals. Can you see how that might be a problem? Does that make you feel like Wile E Coyote, standing under a falling boulder?

So how can you dodge that boulder? Firstly, *do the inner work* so that when your gut does reference back through all those influences from your past, they are as healthy and positive as possible. Then use *both* your ‘gut’ *and* your more rational ‘head’ before you make decisions. I think of emotions as like telegrams: they’re short and to the point. If you listen to just one set, you’ll miss half the information. If you clear up your filters, your unconscious ‘gut’ will enrich your decision-making process with *accurate* messaging; it’ll become just as valuable as your head. It’s one of the key abilities I see in people who lead well; they listen to both their rational *and* emotional selves, their head *and* their gut, and double their decision-making prowess!

CASE STUDY

Gavin

Gavin was a very successful businessman in the property industry. As he describes it: ‘Everything I touched turned to gold!’

Deal after deal went well for Gavin; he had millions of pounds invested in multiple properties; he himself had several houses, including a beautiful penthouse in New York. But when the financial crash began, although Gavin could see the property and financial markets changing, he allowed his gut to overrule his head. One day, he received a call from his CFD trading account manager who told Gavin that the value of his CFD trades (then £800,000) was dropping and asked him if he wanted to sell.

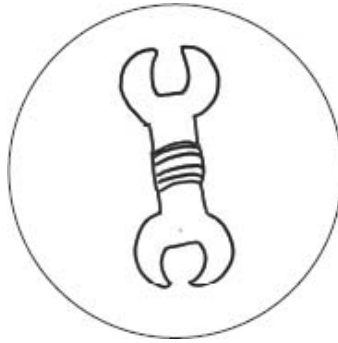
Gavin told me that, although he’d had little knowledge of the stock market, he’d trusted his *gut* that the share value would bounce back. Every few days his share manager would call with the bad news that the shares had lost more value, triggering a ‘margin call’ requiring Gavin to transfer large sums into his account. But still, Gavin ignored the warnings in his head and trusted his gut, which told him all would be okay. The pattern continued until the share value had dropped so much that he could no longer afford to support the margin calls, and finally, after paying £250,000 into his account, Gavin gave up, selling off his shares to cover his losses.

Because he allowed his *gut* to make decisions by filtering data *through his unresolved issues*, Gavin’s life plummeted radically

downhill and he lost almost everything – not just his investments, but his homes too, including that beautiful penthouse in New York, ending up almost completely broke. However, Gavin learnt his lessons, rebuilt his life, and is now back successfully investing in property once again.

(if you'd like to hear the full story, Gavin was a guest on my **podcast** (<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/the-alternative-leader-podcast/id1530166048>) and also hosts his **own** (<https://gavinjgallagher.com/podcast/>) : please find the links in the **resources pack here: www.mari-williams.com/resources**

Here's a tool to help...



TOOL

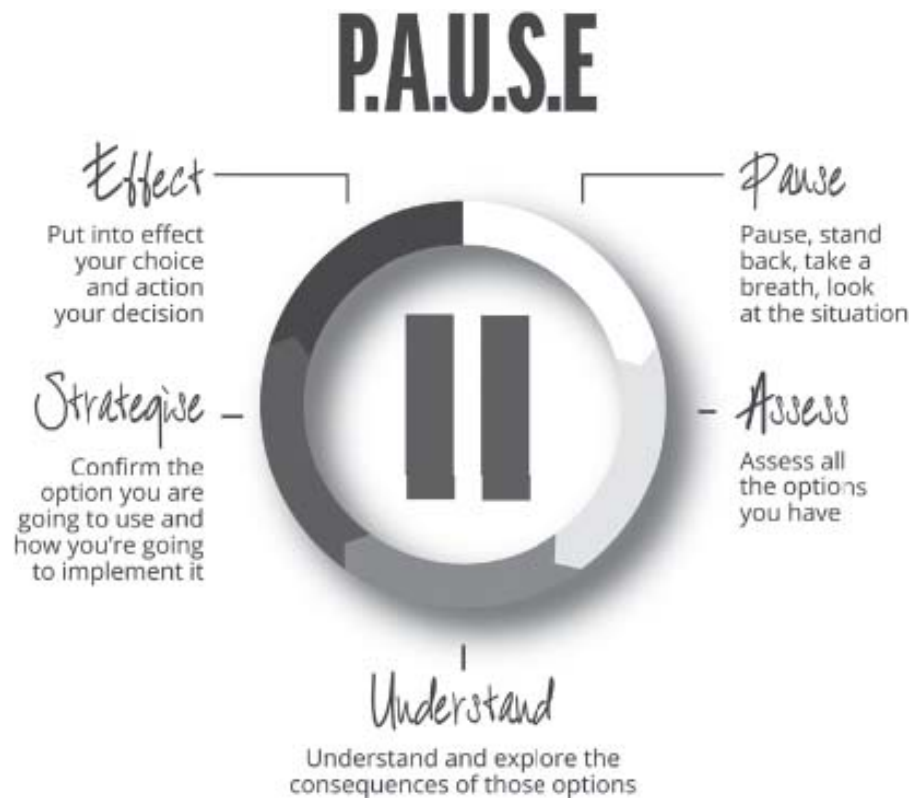
Mari's P.A.U.S.E. model

I give this tool to clients to help them to step back into *intentional* decision-making when they are feeling overwhelmed, under pressure, or simply want to *improve* their decision-making skills. Using it will help you to ensure that you're balancing your decision-making, using your head *and* your gut, and to check why you're making the decision you are, and what filters you are using.

The P.A.U.S.E. model is self-explanatory.

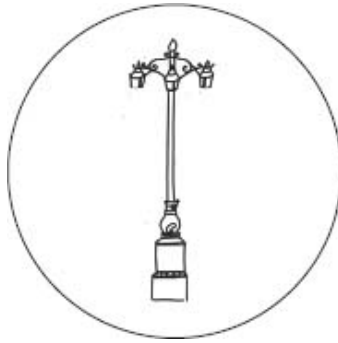
It's applicable in *any* situation, and it will also help if you feel yourself going into fight, flight, freeze mode. In fact, I once used it to decide what to do halfway up a -26c ski slope... I'd gone on a skiing holiday alone with my kids. It was snowing, neither I nor my daughter could remember how to ski (we'd only been once before), and so she wanted to stay on the nursery slopes and relearn; whilst my son, a natural skier, wanted to go off alone. My flight and freeze responses completely overwhelmed me but then I remembered my own model. I used this tool.

Simple but effective... and yes, I let him go off alone.



‘The P.A.U.S.E. model has helped me significantly since our work together on numerous occasions. This has taken effect particularly when liaising with upset clients and the occasional erratic colleague or manager! The ‘P’ makes me mindful of your training that their anger/behaviour/frustration, is their ‘stuff’ and that I don’t need to absorb it. This means that the A.U.S.E. flow easily from the encounter. I’m making much better decisions in potentially difficult or stressful situations.’

TIM, LONDON PUBLISHING ACCOUNT MANAGER



REALITY CHECKPOINT

Hone your gut.

Honing your head and gut enables you to make great decisions.

Question 1

Do you make decisions more often with your 'head' or your 'gut'?

Question 2

How successful has making decisions from this place been for you in the past?

Question 3

How has your leadership been affected by your decision making?



TOP TIP

For the next week, make sure you check-in with *both* your decision resources, head and gut, and use the P.A.U.S.E. model. At the end of the week, review how much more in control, how much more conscious and how much more successful you have been in your decision making. I'd love to hear your feedback so feel **free to get in touch** at www.mari-williams.com

Step 2: Understand how reclaiming your energy helps your decision making

Energy and decision-making are actually co-dependent. As hunter-gatherers, we expended a lot of energy chasing dinner – or *being* chased *for something else's* dinner, as Thig, Thag and Thog would testify! So, in preparation for these bursts of energy expenditure, our bodies are primed to do nothing as much of the time as possible – until there's a strong reason for us to expend energy. In a recent article in *New Scientist* (Pontzer & Raichlen, 2020), one of the last remaining hunter-gatherer communities was studied and their downtime (literally sitting or lying down) was equal to that of the sedentary Westerner! Simply put, when making decisions your brain takes into account how much energy it will have to expend to fulfil the outcome of that decision, and then works out whether the reward is worth the effort.

Engaging with and working through this book will put you in a better position to naturally make the decisions that will put you on the path to achieving your goals; and being clear in your thought processes, rather than submitting to old triggers, will make you naturally more motivated... probably without you even realising it!

How making better decisions increases everyday energy

Our energy is finite, and the amount we each have is an important factor in our productivity. Did you know that 20% of our energy is used by our brains? As Professor of Zoology Simon Laughlin says, the brain is '*very, very expensive in terms of energy use*' (Richardson, 2019). So, we probably

shouldn't waste any of that precious energy on worrying, stressing out or churning through our past mistakes, right?

I believe that when we clear our inner issues, the energy that we were wasting on negative processes can be put to positive use. Clients often feel physically lighter as they let things go; they often get *bursts* of *new* energy. When it first happens for them, they sometimes worry that the feeling won't last: but as *you* work to change, as *your* new thinking cements itself, you will become '*more you*'. You won't have a high buzz 100% of the time, but the clearer mind, more frequent happiness, and sense of contentment won't fade. It will just become *more of who you are, every day...* and the more baggage you clear, the stronger it will become, and the better decisions you will *naturally* make.

Why downtime improves your decision making

Lack of energy is a common issue amongst my leadership and parenting clients. The busy life of these clients leaves them checking their phones constantly and using coffee or sugar (or worse) to supplement their energy, so they are unable to switch off, even for a few minutes, if they *do* get a break. The problem, of course, is that to problem-solve, innovate, or create, we need a clear, *fresh* and well-rested mind. I find negotiation much harder when I'm stressed. Leaders *need* to replenish their energy stores to make good leadership decisions.

Our brains are actually far more creative when we're *not* concentrating. I took part in some research in which my brain waves were measured for activity, which proved exactly that (you can read my blog about it [here](http://www.mari-williams.com/blog) www.mari-williams.com/blog or in the '**It Begins with You**' resource pack: www.mari-williams.com/resources). I had a client called Tom, who ran a creative agency, and he once said to me frustratedly, as if it was a

waste of time:"This morning I had a major meeting with a new client... guess what I did first? I played piano and weeded the garden!"

"How did the meeting go?" I asked.

"Actually, brilliantly: we were really creative, came up with lots of big ideas and they definitely want to go ahead," he said. When I explained how playing the piano had opened up the creative part of his brain and the weeding had given him some downtime, he totally understood why the meeting went so well. In these days of back-to-back meetings, it's well worth remembering that if you want to *push* peak performance, *downtime* is key!

The frenetic pace of being a leader, whether you are leading a family or a big multinational corporation, can be exhausting and, to prevent burnout, you need to regularly check your energy levels. Life also has a way of throwing up events that we aren't expecting, and it's so important that you can be flexible in allowing those events to become part of your decision-making process, knowing when to forge on and when *not to*. By planning *around* life events you'll have a much quicker recovery, emotionally and physically, putting you in control.

“

If you want to push peak
performance, downtime
is key!

”

As you know, I help my clients to learn how their brains work, clear their past baggage, find their self-worth, move to a healthy scale of control, and make strong decisions. Sometimes the decision they need to make is to stop. I have clients that I have to *instruct* to take daily breaks, because they feel too guilty to. Resting, relaxing and just taking a break becomes their goal.

MY STORY

Mari's Retreat

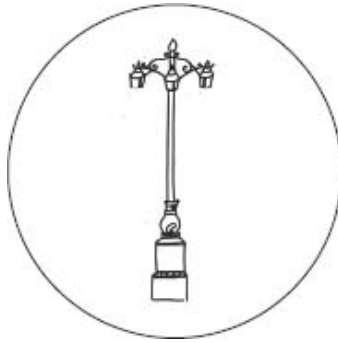
My life's been a bit stressful these last few years. My son caught glandular fever (or Mono, if you prefer); my daughter was ill for a year; I separated from my partner; and all the while I was trying to write this book, see my clients, start a podcast, run my household, and continue to build my business. I was doing fine juggling it all until my mother, who'd been suffering from dementia, quite suddenly died. It was at this point that I decided to give myself a break.

Because I'm normally such an optimistic, high-energy person, I was able to easily recognise that I *needed* a break when I started to feel low and quiet – quiet is not a normal state for me! I could sense that feelings of being overwhelmed or burnt out were just around the corner if I didn't take action. Being in a healthy mental state *normally* means that you can much faster recognise things becoming unhealthy, and so take decisions to change things earlier; however, for me, many of these events were out of my control. What *was* in my control was my ability to use the techniques I described in the last principle, and to make the decisions I *could* make... one of which was to *slow down*.

I saw fewer clients each day and didn't take on new ones; I took more rest breaks; I *paused* writing this book and *paused* my podcast plans (now released!). I focused just on my clients, my children and myself. I took control of the basic things that I knew would help my energy –

sleep, diet, and exercise. For me, being able to make the decision to take a break is *just as important to a leader* as pushing forward. It took two to three months, but now I'm completely back to my old self, with *even more* energy and drive than before. I also feel even stronger mentally!

Burnout only happens when you ignore all the warning signs. If you act early and quickly you can prevent it. Ignore them at your peril!



REALITY CHECKPOINT

Break time!

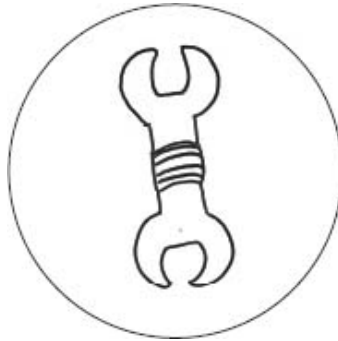
Downtime is important to prevent burnout.

Question 1

On a scale of 1-10, if 1 is a happy and relaxed state and 10 is total burnout, where are you now?

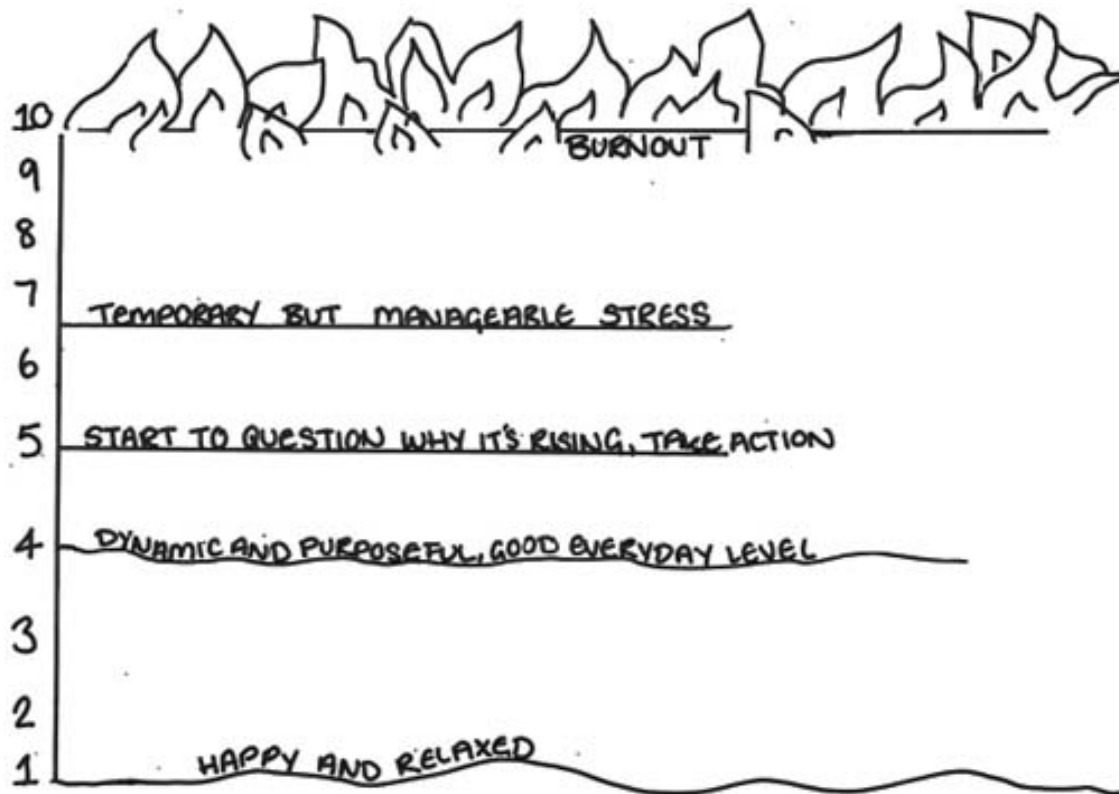
Question 2

When did you last take some downtime and do something just for you? If it wasn't in the last week, take some as soon as possible (even if it's only 15 minutes).



TOOL

The Burnout Scale



You may find the following tool useful to help you to gain greater conscious control of your life, and then to make the decisions that will allow you to *stay* in conscious control and be successful.

Imagine the scale described in Question 1 above. I believe that to function well, with a happy but dynamic state, we should hover around 3: relaxed and happy, but achieving goals. Now, remember a time when you were at 3: how did it feel physically and mentally?

Identify this feeling in detail, so you can hold it in your mind.

Several times a day, check in with yourself to see where you are on the scale. If you start to reach a 4 or 5, pause and try to identify why. Is it a temporary and manageable stress? Maybe you're moving to a new house, or you have a presentation to give at work? If so, planning and being aware of it can bring your stress levels back down. If the cause is something more long-term, like workload or family pressures, take the increase in stress you feel as a warning sign. It could keep climbing. Make decisions *now* to enable you to bring the level back down. Whatever the scenario, get to sleep earlier, plan more breaks, ask for help or delegate.

If you are using your decision-making skills from a place of pure honesty (which is a state I'm aiming to get you to), then you shouldn't really rise above 7-8, even at your most stressed. Even if you do hit 7-8, it should feel like 5-6 because you've already taken the situation in hand and planned how to bring it down again.

One client messaged me regarding this about a year after we had finished working together:

'Everything continues to be great. Stress levels average around a 2-3 and rarely get high (and it's been tested!).'

Step 3: Understand how your sleep, diet and exercise affect your decision making

So, when you've done your inner work, what else can you do to aid your personal development, and your development into the best leader you can be? We've seen how your energy affects your decision making, well, how about sorting out your sleep and diet, and getting some exercise?

You might think that those have nothing to do with decision making, but they certainly do... as you're about to learn. Questions about lifestyle are among the first I ask my new clients, and sadly the responses are often the same – they're too busy to exercise, eat healthily, have downtime or get more than six hours sleep a night. They're getting by on caffeine, alcohol and a burgeoning sugar addiction instead. We've all been there when stressed. If that's your life right now, I'm not blaming you... but there's a problem: your brain needs certain things to enable great decision making.

Poor diet and lack of exercise cause a lack of focus, creativity, and empathy; an inability to concentrate, form coherent sentences and use the right terminology; and difficulty understanding the consequences of decisions. Cognitive function is negatively affected by the symptoms of tiredness. *Does any of this resonate with you?* Do you worry excessively? Has your communication level plummeted, making you snappy, controlling and closed-minded? Has your parental guilt risen out of all proportion?

We all accept that *illness* will negatively affect our performance. Personally, I've recently suffered with 'brain fog' after having mild COVID-19, and trying to function to my peak was like trying to create a sculpture out of jelly... so why, if we accept that illness can temporarily affect us, do we create *symptoms* of illness in ourselves by exercising poor self-care?

When we've decided on the future or direction we want, we must then make many thousands of decisions, both big and small, to create that outcome. The success or failure of our decisions will dictate *our* success, contentment, and happiness. *They* are the *key external indicators* of the type of leader you are, and it's your decisions and your vision that will make others want to follow you. There's no question that being an excellent Alternative Leader requires you to have energy, *mentally* as well as physically.

The good news is that these are basic things that you are *entirely* in control of. If you can make even small positive changes to your self-care, then both your mental and physical energy will bounce up within a matter of weeks. Exercise will fill you with energy-boosting endorphins for free; a better diet will improve the way your body functions and this, in turn, will further boost your energy; and sleep (the central influencer in my opinion!) combines downtime, repair, creativity and innovation all in one lovely eight-hour package. If you want to be the best leader you can be, I recommend sorting these three out as your basic starting point. The time you '*lose*' while sleeping and exercising you will *regain* with your enhanced ability to make speedier and more accurate decisions; your stress levels will drop, and the inner work you do on yourself will be even more powerful...

CASE STUDY

Mo

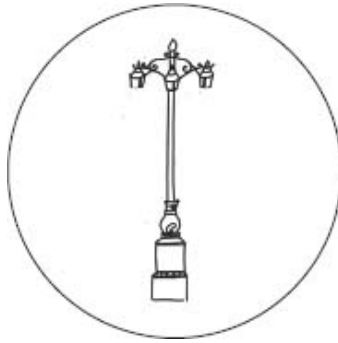
Mo's story is a great example of improved self-care. In our first session, Mo told me (amongst many other things) that he had stopped going to the gym because he'd been staying late at the office to catch up. I told him to get back to the gym and set an alarm on his phone to give him a fifteen-minute warning of needing to leave the office. Exercise and downtime were key in his case! Mo took instant action to improve his self-care, and after realising the positive effects of an improved lifestyle, he went back to going to the gym every day, started leaving work on time, and radically altered his diet. The next time I saw him, not only was he a picture of health and radiating energy, but he said:

“This morning a big problem flared up at work; normally it would’ve taken me hours to sort out, really stressed me and I would’ve had to cancel other meetings, including this one, and still, I’d have struggled to decide what to do. But this time I used the ‘P.A.U.S.E’ model to assess the situation, delegated to my team, stayed entirely clear-headed and calm, and within fifteen minutes, I’d sorted it and moved on to the next job. It’s like my mind is so clear, the logic just dropped in.”

What better evidence for the importance of self-care for leaders could there be? As a side note, just a few days ago Mo texted me to say:

“Just wanted to let you know that the life-changing work we did together still keeps going today.”

Our last session was two years ago.



REALITY CHECKPOINT

Basic self-care

By making sure you sleep well, eat well, and take exercise, you'll maximise your energy to live well and lead well!

Question 1

On a scale of 1-10 (10 being maximum energy and 1 being no energy), where does your usual working energy level sit?

Question 2

What do you do to give yourself some downtime?

Question 3

How much sleep are you getting? If it's under eight hours, please refer to the 'It Begins with You' resources pack at www.mari-williams.com/resources section on sleep: it's life-changing!

Question 4

How healthy is your diet, and how much exercise are you getting? If you aren't happy in either area, make a change (however small) that

will help to start you to feel more inspired.

Step 4: Understand how your biology affects your decision making

Our brains release the feel-good chemical dopamine as a reward for behaviours that it thinks are good for us. Sadly, though, it can become easily confused about what's good for us and what's not, and end up rewarding us for things like smoking or drinking...

When we don't get a dopamine reward that we had expected because we've changed a behaviour (even if the change is healthy, like *giving up* smoking or drinking!) our brains register *disappointment* because they like dopamine, and expected dopamine... and they aren't getting any. That's why it can be so hard for us to stick to new decisions. That lack of dopamine can make a decision to change something for the better (let's say a change of diet or career) feel like a mistake.

For example, if you suffered from a fear of failure or Imposter Syndrome, then your instinct to protect yourself (the *unhelpful* decision to *not* apply for promotion, for example) could trigger a dopamine release. This not only feels good but also makes you think that you've taken the *right* option, and keeps you locked in that unhelpful decision pattern. So how can that pattern be changed?

As we embed new behaviour that we've *consciously decided is good for us*, such as healthy eating or exercise, our brain registers (after a while) that this feels even better than the previous behaviour; and in time that dopamine is once again released to encourage us to keep it up. That's why the first few weeks of any abstinence or behavioural change can be tough on us (and why I offer daily support to my clients through the early stages

of change): we're going through those in-between states. The issue with using *just* coaching or *just* 'will-power' to create those changes is that it's trying to change the *symptoms*, *not the cause*. How many 'diets' have you crashed? I've found that the boulders that are most likely to create negative ripples are (as I've previously stated) the *unconscious* ones *rooted in our pasts*.

Step 5: Understand how decision making affects your goals

Whatever goal you set yourself, whether it's a *finite* goal (like losing a stone before Christmas, or reaching that next promotion) or an *infinite* goal (being the best leader, parent, or partner you can be), there's a *chain* of decisions that *you must make and communicate* to get you to your ultimate goal, to achieving the outcome that you want. Therefore, your ability to make clear intentional decisions *and* communicate them is vital to achieving goals, both for yourself and your organisation.

When someone has done the necessary internal work to enable them to become a great leader, it will have naturally enhanced their decision making, communication and goal setting tools. I know that having done the inner work myself, I now no longer need to consciously think about how to make decisions and set goals – as my client, Mo, has found, 'logic just drops in'.



TOP TIP

Here's a golden nugget my good friend Sharon shared with me when I was trying to decide whether or not to leave an unhappy marriage:

'You can only make the best decision for now with the information you have available. You can't predict what may come up in the future, so pick what feels like the most right decision and go with it.'

So, you might look back on a decision in ten minutes, ten days or ten years and wish you'd done things differently... but you did the best with what you had at the time. So, drop the decision-making guilt, okay?

Understand your goal-setting process

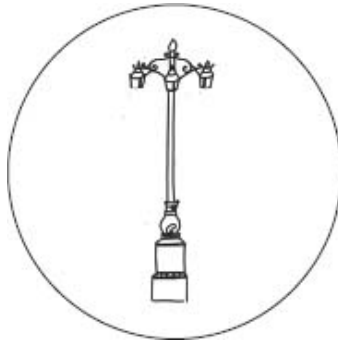
Understanding the process of goal-setting will enable you to see how decision-making skills sit at the centre of any successful (or unsuccessful!) outcome. In this section, we'll tease apart the goal-setting process so you can consciously apply all your new awareness and learnings to it, allowing you to identify where you normally go wrong, so you can stop yourself from repeating your mistakes.

It's often the case that someone's success or failure in reaching a goal is connected to their *reasons for setting* that goal. Someone who sets a difficult personal goal, or solo professional goal because they think they *should*, or are under pressure from their peers (or boss), rather than because they really believe in that goal and want and need it for themselves, is less likely to achieve it. Others may fail to reach a goal *despite* them consciously really wanting and believing in it, because they've yet to clear the root cause of *why they do the thing they are trying to change* (like giving up smoking, for example), so their unconscious mind doesn't want them to reach their goal, and will fight them at every turn.

In some cases the *end* goal is so important to the goal-setter that they'll do *anything* to achieve it, no matter the personal or financial cost, no matter how much they dislike the process. However, usually the chances of reaching a goal are improved if the process and work itself is enjoyable and filled with little rewards of dopamine. After all, someone who wants to lose a stone in time for Christmas is far more likely to succeed if they actually *enjoy* healthy food and exercise – the journey and work will be just as rewarding for them as sitting down for Christmas dinner in their favourite outfit again!

In some cases, someone attaching a goal they *do* value to a goal they *don't* value (like allowing themselves a special treat *only* if they complete that report their boss asked for on-time), or *reframing* a goal into a series of mini-goals (each one an emotional springboard to the next and on to the ultimate goal), can be great strategies that make the difference between success and failure.

So, from your place of total honesty, I'd like you to think about times you've succeeded in reaching your goals, and times you've failed. *Do any of the above situations resonate with you?* If you had the chance to set your goals again, *what would you do differently?*



REALITY CHECKPOINT

Your goal-setting.

Find the links between goals you've reached and between goals you've missed to help you to improve your goal-setting.

Question 1

Reflect on some old goals that you *achieved*: are there links between them in *how* and *why* they were each set? In how you felt as you worked towards them? In the key factors in your success?

Question 2

Reflect on some old goals that you *failed to reach*: are there links between them in *how* and *why* they were each set? In how you felt as you worked towards them? In the key factors in your failure?

Question 3

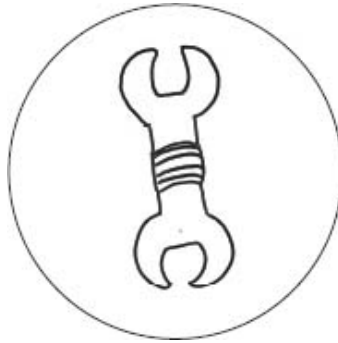
How does identifying those connections change your perspective on the way you set goals?

Question 4

How would you set those goals differently from now on?

Using your decisions to create, plan and achieve your goals

Having considered your previous successes and failures should naturally lead you to work out different plans depending on what you want to achieve. However, one of the main reasons people fail to achieve the end outcome they want is poor planning. So, let's pull apart that process and slow it down.



TOOL

Goals

What decisions do you need to make to properly plan to achieve your goals?

Does the goal need setting? There's a Harvard research paper which actually found that setting goals can make your life less happy! It states that goals can 'go wild: they can narrow focus, motivate risk-taking... inhibit learning and [worst of all]... decrease intrinsic motivation!' (Ordonez, et al., 2009) This research was carried out around organisational goal-setting and shows that it's important for leaders to not slip into setting goals just because doing it *looks good*... a good leader leads *intentionally*.

Are you motivated to complete the goal? This may be apt in work situations in which you are *told* what the goal is, or *know* the goal needs achieving, but it's not something that you really care about. If you aren't motivated, you may not be the best person for the job, so can you delegate, or change the goal? If not, can you mentally *reframe* the goal or attach another goal to it, so you'll have a secondary motivation?

Identify if it's a finite or infinite goal. Knowing this means you can make decisions about how the goal fits into your life. A quick two-week burst of activity, or an hour a week for a year? Does it need a whole team, or is it a one-person goal?

Create your recipe. We all love the excitement of a grand plan; but success lies in the details. Plan for your goal like a recipe for a meal: mark it out in steps, and look objectively at each one; what ingredients do you need (for example, if you are planning organisational goals, you might need a variety of personalities in your team for creative innovation, or you might want them all to have the same personality)? What methods will you use to 'cook' this 'meal'? Once you have taken all these decisions, you can start cooking... but be prepared to season as you go, and stay flexible – it may allow you to create another, even better meal! It'd be a shame to miss out...

Plan for your worst-case scenario. If you have planned for it, it's very likely it won't happen; and if it does – well, you'll have a plan! Also, your fight, flight, freeze response is less likely to be triggered by the *thought* of the worst happening, if you can demonstrate to your unconscious that you've a plan in place in case it does. Doing this will allow your unconscious to relax, and your conscious brain to retain control.

Thinking through all of the points outlined in this step will enable you to set better goals and make better plans to reach them, which is always a great feeling. It's a feeling best summed up by one of my childhood heroes, John 'Hannibal' Smith from The A-Team, when he said:

‘I love it when a plan comes together!’

Step 6: Understand how your communication affects the success of your decisions

Although most adults don’t want company 24/7, many do *need* a fairly high level of social interaction, and that involves communication, of course! They need to know that they can socialise when they feel the need and that others do care specifically about them. The COVID-19 global lockdowns have had a massive negative effect on social interaction. One of my clients told me he felt that, if we hadn’t done his ‘inner work’, which had helped him to manage his lockdown loneliness, he might’ve taken his own life.

When we make important decisions, whether they’re internal or external, we usually want to communicate them to our team, *our* managers, family and friends... we want them to understand our decision, and get on board with our new choice: we’re looking for affirmation! This is where our decisions can be scuppered. If we can’t communicate decisions clearly in a way that others can understand, we won’t get the support we want.

In my work as a Mediator, I’ve worked with a wide range of people – teams, entrepreneurial founders, couples – and it’s **always** a lack of communication that is at the root of the problems. As often as not, someone’s made a decision which the other party **does not agree with**. Now, I’m *not* here to teach you how to persuade others to feel how you feel, think how you think, and do exactly as you command, but I am going to offer you help to build awareness around how you communicate and goal-set. This will mean that, when you convey your ideas to others, *their* decisions are based on what you’re *actually* feeling or *actually* want to get across, rather than what they *think* you are feeling and saying. I’ve (subtly)

dropped in a section on conflict mediation later on, which should help you to resolve any conflict that does arise.

As my mediator trainer Michael said, ‘Anyone who learns these skills spends fewer nights on the sofa!’

Communicating your leadership decisions

So firstly, let’s look at non-verbal communication. When we communicate, we do it with the whole of our bodies. One of the reasons why online meetings are so exhausting is that we can only see heads and shoulders; because we’re losing the rest of the person’s body language, we’re having to work much harder to understand the message.

Have you heard of Albert Mehrabian? He came up with the theory that this ratio expresses how we communicate: ‘55/38/7’. That’s 55% body language, 38% tone of voice and 7% actual words. Now, as with many theories, there are caveats; he also states that if what someone says *doesn’t* match their body language, the people listening will pay even more attention to that person’s body language to try to work out the ‘true’ message. So, if you don’t believe in the decision you have made, or have *been given*, when you convey it to others, they’ll pick up on your lack of faith and then *lack faith in you*. My suggestion? If you have to convey a decision you are unhappy about to your followers, try to reframe the decision so you can accept it yourself. It’s only then that you can convey it honestly... or just be honest and say you don’t agree with it!

“

Fear of conflict is the
biggest secret concern
of most leaders.

”

Children, by the way, have an uncanny knack for knowing a lie or a bend in the truth (I barely scraped through the Father Christmas and Tooth Fairy stages; I'm terrible at lying!), so I always advise parents to tell the truth... but to give no more than the required information, and at a level appropriate to their child's age. Do not pass your emotional baggage on to your kids!

So perhaps 93% of our communication is non-verbal: but words can still cause *enormous damage and pain*. We give *huge* meaning to the things people say to us. My experience of working with children, adults, business professionals, groups (you name it, I've worked with them) has taught me that 99% of all past and present upsets come down to what was said, or what was taken as *inferred* (which works a bit like *perceived* threat). You may not remember what you ate the day you were upset, but you'll remember the words verbatim for years. Happily, I can help you to clear those feelings.

How to spot and resolve conflict... fast!

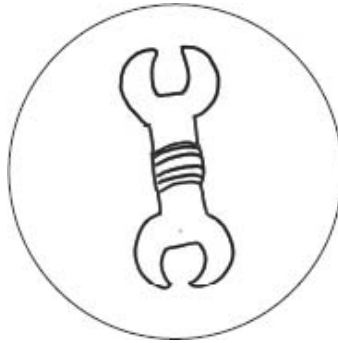
Fear of conflict is the biggest secret concern of most leaders, yet by clearing your inner hang-ups and communicating well you can avoid almost all conflict, swiftly resolving anything that does flare up along the way. You may even be able to predict where or when it's going to flare up! A good leader or parent knows their team, and can nuance to communicate with each team member in the most appropriate way, rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' (or 'one-size-doesn't-quite-fit-anyone') communication style. A good leader can manage a room of different personalities and enable all of *them* to *communicate with each other*. Great leaders are master communicators – so are good parents. Conflict is one area that really shows up in our families and teams, master it and life becomes soooo much easier!

How to manage conflict

As a leader, parent, or partner, conflict management skills are key to the way you create and build corporate and personal relationships, ask for investment, build partnerships, create social media, and keep your team on board. They are also vital in your personal life as you, your partner, children, and family all deserve to have as little conflict in life as possible... so **learn to develop those skills!**

I hate conflict, but many people would think the opposite, because if there's any sign of conflict I'll move **towards** it to resolve it, so I can then get back to feeling calm and happy. If you can't spot and resolve conflict, your life will be limited in so many ways, so here's a last bit of help for when conflict rears its head. Yes, I know it's a slight swerve from the topic of decision making, but clearly every time we communicate with someone we're making decisions and possibly causing conflict, so...

Here's my extra gift to you: hopefully there'll be no conflict with my editor over the wordcount...



TOOL

Mari's 6 steps of conflict management

In any conflict the first thing to do is remember what you have learnt about us each having *our own realities*, and how we filter uniquely through our own experiences. Just because someone's in the same situation as you *does not mean* it feels the same to you both. If those involved (yourself included!) can explain exactly the thought processes they went through to get to their current line of thinking (or the thinking behind the decisions they made) then the point where the two lines of thought diverged into two different 'stories' will become clear; and that point is usually the centre of the conflict.

Once you have identified the centre of conflict, you can (whilst holding in your mind that there is no right or wrong to experience, and nobody has the right to tell others how they should feel) gently, and with *empathy and compassion*, begin to separate the threads of the different 'stories'. Don't be afraid to pull the disagreement or misunderstanding apart right down to its fine details. It's often in the fine details that you'll find the knot of misunderstanding.

Ask both parties to use *clear, specific and emotional* language (emotions are at the core of conflict: it's very rare that we state the *real* reasons we're upset, so when you're managing conflict always try to encourage the use of *emotional* words to describe the problem.)

For example, 'I'm angry because you stole my stapler' is very different to 'I feel hurt that you invaded my privacy by going into my desk and taking my belongings.'

Focus on one point at a time and repeat what people say back to them as you go along. For example, you might say something like...

'I heard you say.... and the message I take from that is.... is that correct?'

Once each point has been clarified, you may find that the situation clears up naturally. If not, then look for compromises, or perhaps the parties can agree to disagree calmly and respectfully, now that they understand each other. You can also ask each person what they feel would enable the situation to be resolved. They might have a solution.

If you're in a conflict situation and find that the above doesn't help, or feel it's not something you can manage alone, you should bring in a qualified mediator as soon as possible. Too often conflict is left too late to resolve easily, and by the time a mediator *is* involved, it's become a more lengthy and costly process, if it can be resolved at all.



TOP TIP

Resolve conflict quickly, before it begins to fester! You don't have to do it 'before the sun sets' as the old saying goes; sometimes we need a break to get our own thoughts in order, but don't leave it too long!

CASE STUDY

Joan and Oyvind

A few years ago, I mediated a conflict between Joan and Oyvind, two friends who had co-founded a company. Their business was growing fast, they were looking for investment and needed to be making long-term plans, but they were repeatedly falling out. The mediation resulted in them realising that they were good friends, but they *weren't* good business partners. It saved them from making an incredibly costly mistake in setting up together and losing their friendship.

To wrap up

Whether you want a quiet family life, a life engaged with helping your local community or charity, or you want a busy, business-driven life, I want you to feel fulfilled and content. I don't want your future to be dependent on you having to constantly summon up energy or fight *against* your natural state... I want your natural state to *carry you forward* in the way that's right for you. That forward motion comes down to the decisions that you make, the way you communicate them, and, yes, the way you resolve conflict. Get those things right, and you'll be driving along the life route you want, back in control of the car.

Success and happiness in your career and your personal life are both dictated by the decisions that you make (or the decisions that you don't!).... and that's why this final principle is so important. By now you should be

aware of what changes you want to make to get the future you want on track. Now, I want you to start moving from a point of *awareness* to a point of *actually making decisions* in the external world in order to move you along your track towards your goals.

In this principle, you've learnt that....

- Your brain makes 36,000 decisions a day, many without your knowledge.
- Your emotions work like telegrams, you need to read *all* your messages!
- Using the P.A.U.S.E. model will help you to make better decisions under pressure.
- Your physical and mental energy affects your decision-making process.
- You need to take a break if you feel overwhelmed, and not to wait for burnout to force you to!
- Your sleep, diet, exercise and dopamine all affect your decision-making process.
- Effectively communicating your decisions will help you to achieve your goals.
- Your body language and tone have an incredibly important role in communicating your decisions.
- Managing conflict is essential to get others on-board with your decisions.
- You are in control of the decisions that *create your future*.

Congratulations!

Here we are at the end of the book, and at the beginning of your exciting journey to becoming an Alternative Leader!

My Five Principles to Alternative Leadership ***begin with you;*** but their impact is far-reaching... as is yours, of course! You may have a family and children, who you are modelling to; or a partner whom you love and want to support. You may be a leading light in your community, or you may be surrounded by a team whom you want to inspire (formally or informally) to develop and grow in their own way. It's said that we'll each come into contact with approximately 200,000 people in our lives: some of whom we'll know as long as we live. Most of those people we'll probably spend only a few moments with, but as communication's so important to us humans, the words, behaviours and actions of just a few seconds can change a life.

What impact do you want to create in the world?

For too long leaders have been treated as if they should be unfeeling robots who 'leave emotions at the door' and described only half-jokingly as psychopaths and narcissists who are just out for themselves. Well, we all know of leaders like that; but that's because you'll find those kinds of people in *all* walks of life, and leadership is a microcosm of society.

However, the leaders I meet tend to be those who want to be different; to be 'alternative'. They do indeed have high aspirations for their careers and performance, but they *also* want to inspire, motivate and empower those around them: whether that's their five-year-old, their partner, their

team, or the whole world! It's those leaders that I want to enable to excel. If you're one of those leaders, it would be no exaggeration to say that we and our planet need you now more than ever: we *need* you to clear up the damage left by the quotient who got into leadership not by earning respect, but by being in a place of organisational or political power. We need you to step up now.

So how can you create influence?

As I said at the beginning of the book: true leadership can't be faked. We humans are 'trained' to read each other. We see the unconscious baggage others have, both consciously and unconsciously; so if you want to excel, or 'up your game', or 'take yourself to the next level', or be a better version of you: take action. Use my Five Principles of Alternative Leadership; build the strong foundations that allow you to weather any storm.

Learn about your own brain and get it onside: it runs your life. Clear the baggage you have from the past – we all have baggage, so there's no shame and no blame: only strength in identifying and then clearing the issues that are holding you back. Don't worry too much about the journey – remember our balloon seller! Be honest about your self-worth, and if it's not great, fix it. Don't let the spider on the floor control how you run your life. Learn to not only know, like and trust yourself, but also *love* yourself. Love the person you are, flaws and all: you've seen the impact that dropping the self-worth stone into your pond can make; it's a quick route to changing multiple areas in your life for the better, all at once. Think about how you manage control... or how it manages you! Work hard to communicate as clearly, cleanly, and compassionately as possible: it'll not only reduce conflict, but also enable you to deal with it fast when it arises.

Your issues are like strands of spaghetti on a plate: they will intertwine; mask themselves as other issues; confuse and confound you. But if you keep pulling strands out, you'll find the plate will empty faster than you'd thought possible. If you need help, then do **get in touch**, I'm always excited to help someone excel themselves!

In whatever capacity you're leading, it's likely that you're really busy. I know the feeling of having to work through evenings and weekends to get stuff done too – I was supposed to be having a few days off, but instead I'm finishing writing this book. Lucky that I still have a few 'days off' left!

So, I'm not going to sell you a fake reality with no stress, strain or pressured periods, and I'm not going to pretend that after having read this book you'll never feel rubbish again. Sometimes you just will; I want you to be human, and feeling rubbish now and then is part of that. But, with the tools and understanding I've given you, those events will (happily!) occur *much* less frequently; and when you can't control their occurrence, you'll still be able to control your reactions to them, and that will make a huge difference. Things that years ago would've caused an emotional tsunami for me, now only cause me to wobble for a few minutes until I reground myself, and then decide on the next course of action. I cannot even begin to explain how much being able to do just *that* has irrevocably altered my life.

I'm not promising that by following My Five Principles of Alternative Leadership you'll find your personal Utopia: what I am saying is that life is really tough sometimes – but if you follow these guidelines, if you work through these principles, you'll be better equipped to handle those tough times and actually what used to register as a 10 out of 10 on your burnout scale will be a 3 or 4 at most. So you can enjoy life more.

So, as I was saying... you're a leader, so you're busy. But we can all change something for the better, even if it's just something small. Here's an analogy I often think of: it keeps me making changes, however small, and feeling good about myself, even in my most busy times....

Two ships

Two ships set sail from the same port at the same time. They have the same *final* destination, yet a few days later they are hundreds of miles apart. How did that happen?

It's a bit like life. We're all born, and we'll all die; but until then, we're all in control of setting our own courses (whether we know it or not!). Some courses will be very similar to others, following well-known routes; some will begin the same as others, but then be altered by unknown winds and tides; some will be wildly different as people strike out to discover new horizons, following the waves and currents to far-off reefs and undiscovered islands.

The decisions you make whilst travelling should be the ones that set you on-course for the life-journey of your dreams. I'm not going to try to convince you that the seas will be calm all the way (wouldn't that be boring?): you'll have to rise to challenges, look fear in the face, and accept loss along the way, of course... but if you let yourself adjust, and stop to see the sights... taste the food, drink the wine, take a break now and then... you'll make *lots* of friends, and have *many, many adventures along your way*.

So, what's next?

Are you ready to become an Alternative Leader? Are you ready to create change and keep developing yourself and your career?

Or...

If you're feeling as if you're stuck in port, unable to set your sails - perhaps starting with the Reality Checkpoint questions, or **getting in touch** at <https://www.mari-williams.com/contact-me> might just change the wind in your favour...?

As a thank you for buying my book, you can book a discovery session with me using this special link **DISCOVER** I'll help you build upon the book, identify your stuck points and help you plan your journey.

Reality Checkpoints

The Reality Checkpoint questions were designed to help you to dig deeply into each area, and if you spend time on them you will learn so much about yourself and those around you. They will also help you to identify areas you might want to work on more fully. Remember, there's a handbook with the exercises in it in the resources pack.

The 'It Begins with You' resource pack and online courses

Download the Resources Pack

www.mari-williams.com/resources: it's full of extras to help you! I also have a '10 days to boost your life and leadership' course which is a great next step.

Listen in...

Tune in to '**The Alternative Leader Podcast**', in which I interview leaders from all industries and backgrounds: from those who've beaten cancer, to millionaires who've lost everything and rebuilt their lives... all share their experiences so we can learn from them. It's full of insights to help you move forwards in your life (and if you are interested in being a guest, please do get in touch at www.mari-williams.com. The Alternative Leader Podcast is on all major platforms.

Ideas for working with me...

Become an Alternative Leader by working 1:2:1

If you truly want to excel then why not come and work 1:2:1 with me? I can (quite simply) make it a faster and easier process for you. I only take a few 1:2:1 clients so do contact me to check availability.

We've been working with your unconscious, and as you've read, the unconscious does like to hide things from us! Even as a Coach-Therapist myself, I still see my therapist regularly to stop my brain tripping me up. I'll guide you through my five principles, adapting around you uniquely, identifying your stuck points and creating a bespoke plan around your individual needs to get you from good to excellent as quickly as possible.

Working 1:2:1 also means I can enable you to find that holistic balance across your whole life, targeting areas in your relationships and parenting should you need it. I've gained a lot from books, and from group-work; but

nothing is as good as having someone working with just you: someone who gets to know exactly how you work, who ‘gets you’ and who’s been there before and knows the way.

Teams

If you’re interested in upscaling your team or company, then get in touch. I offer workshop days, deep dive training over several months, internal mentor training, coaching supervision for internal coaches (shockingly, many companies don’t provide this!), and also create bespoke team programmes to uniquely target your team’s needs. I’ve worked in the public, private and charity sectors.

Top-down ethos: Working with the C-suite/ Board

Change works most effectively when it comes from the very top. If you can get your board/C-suite to peak performance with healthy mindsets, great decision making and communication, then that impact can be modelled all the way down through your company! I offer an in-depth service which will identify the issues holding your board back from working fully cohesively. I can sit in on meetings, work 1:2:1, and bring you all together as a group. As we’ve seen, the cascade effect is incredibly powerful!

Contact Details

If you'd like to share your thoughts about how this book has impacted you, do please leave a review and feel free to get in touch! I'd **love** to hear from you.

If you'd like to book a discovery call please book here:

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Join the Facebook Community: 'The Alternative Leadership Community'

Twitter: [@williamsthinks](https://twitter.com/williamsthinks)

YouTube: <http://tiny.cc/MariW>

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To my Dad (who I grew up thinking was John Lennon) and Di (the best stepmum you could ask for), thank you for your love, support and kindness over the years. To all my family who have supported me so much; The Williams clan and the 'Original sibs'. I love you all.

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currently your biggest weakness.’ To Zein, thanks for taking me out and getting me tipsy when I needed it and for such genuine friendship, I’ll come and visit, I promise! Samantha, for tidying my bedroom when I was too stunned to care, thank you. To Bec, for being the first person I met when I joined Dent and who always makes me feel special. Love you Bec! Anne ‘with an e’, for taking me under your wing (and removing that huge spider!); thanks for your friendship and all the curbside conversations. Jeanette, thanks for making me strong, laughing with me and for not making me do burpees - you’re so much more than my PT, you’re my friend. To Andrew A here’s to terrible tribute songs. Darran B for never leaving!

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To all my clients, words truly fail me (and we know how chatty I am!) when it comes to describing how touched I am that you trust and have chosen me to share your pain, your hopes and your aspirations. Having travelled this journey myself, I feel privileged to be the one to accompany you, and the changes you make inspire *me* each and every day. Don’t ever forget how unique and amazing you are; there are 7.5 billion people in the world but there’s not one other like you. You have changed my life and me for the better, and in return, I thank you with deep fondness; you all have a place in my heart. Thank you so much to all of you who have allowed me to use your journeys as case studies so that others can be inspired by the changes you created, and to those who eagerly wanted to be included in the

testimonials as to what they had achieved: this book feels like a collaboration!

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For my Anna/Mother

You may not have been a good mother, or even a good enough mother; but you were my mother. Thank you for giving me the model that seeing therapists and trying your best to overcome your emotional baggage, even though you kept failing, was a worthwhile cause. The childhood I went through wasn't great, and frankly left a lot of damage and unresolved issues that took years to shift; but...

You also gave me a love of movies, like *Some Like It Hot*, *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*, *Star Trek* and *Singin' in the Rain*, and books – you taught me to read when I was four and I've never looked back. I discovered my beloved *Anne of Green Gables* that way, and Terry Pratchett became a shared favourite of ours when I was older. Your positive modelling of reading is a strong memory, as I barely remember you without a book in your hand.

Through your own struggles as a parent you also gave me a desire to be the best parent I could be, along with a wealth of experiences, positive and negative, that have enabled me to help and resolve others' pain and hurt, and led me to build the business and meet the people that I love.

So, in a roundabout way, thank you.

With love, Mari

ANNA

6th January 1941 – 29th December 2019

*‘Every apparent failure is but a
challenge to others.’*

AMY JOHNSON

1st July 1903 – 5th January 1941

About the Author

Mari Williams, The Mind Architect is an award-winning Leadership Coach, Therapist and Mediator. She works with leaders to enable them to be happy and successful, both personally and professionally. Her ultimate wish is world peace, so she's inspired to help others to develop to their best so they can create impact and leave legacy. She is a public speaker, a regular guest on BBC radio, and mentors on the EnterpriseTech STAR accelerator at the Cambridge University Judge Business School.

Mari's worked with hundreds of leaders, parents, and children over many years, and she believes that taking a holistic approach is the only way to feel good and be successful in life and leadership. On her podcast, 'The Alternative Leader', she interviews leaders from all industries about the personal and professional challenges they've been through so we can all learn from their lessons.

Mari is a mother of five children, aged from 30 to 14, who lives on the outskirts of Cambridge so she can have the joys of both the city and the countryside. In her spare time she loves gardening (though has no idea which ones are weeds); going to the cinema; and dancing ballroom, tango, and around the kitchen when no one's watching.

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