

# SURVIVING TO THRIVING MENTAL TOUGHNESS

DR STEVE HARRIS

*Charles Darwin reputedly said that the strongest of the species will survive and the most adaptive will thrive. My research and experience confirm that improved mental toughness will provide you with a tailwind towards thriving. If you are already thriving, it will keep you moving ahead.*

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Surviving to Thriving - Mental Toughness

The 2013 hard cover edition titled *Mental Toughness – Mastering Your Mind* presented conclusions from my PhD combined with personal experiences. Since then I have released several revised, PDF editions adding new knowledge. This edition is titled: Surviving to Thriving - Mental Toughness

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# FOREWORD

*By Chester Williams*

I met Steve Harris more than 20 years ago when I was playing for the Springbok rugby team. He provided motivational, teamwork and mental toughness sessions. Thereafter, he represented the Springbok management on several tours in various roles. Since that first meeting, we have developed a close relationship. I value his role as a counsellor for many of my life and career development decisions and his commitment to social justice. I have a special regard for his teaching of mental and emotional skills – known as mental toughness.

I am greatly appreciative of Steve's role in helping me develop my mental toughness. I have had the good fortune of being a black South African rugby role model. However, I developed a concern that my involvement as a Springbok rugby player so early in the genesis of our democracy, and thereafter my marriage to someone who is outside what is generally accepted as my community, was ironically prejudicing me in some rugby circles and exacting a price on my ability to access national coaching jobs. This resulted in my accepting many, expedient, short-term appointments, overseas, with long periods away from my family. Through Steve's guidance, I have transcended blaming thoughts and focussed on personal responsibility. I currently have an absorbing and exciting coaching appointment at UWC.

With his assistance, I have retained my hope to coach South Africa, to this end I am growing my knowledge and skills to position myself favourably for that opportunity. If I am not successful, I will be consoled by the mind-altering experience my learning journey provided. Since our counselling sessions started, I have achieved a certificate and diploma in coaching science followed by a masters' degree in sport management. I am currently contemplating enrolling in a PhD.

This book highlights Steve's knowledge and skills in mental toughness. It gives practical examples of how to manage and maximise this important aspect that drives performance. I encourage anyone who is interested in self-improvement and sport performance to read his book. In addition, his mental toughness input has contributed to my successes and, possibly more importantly, helped me manage the inevitable disappointments I have had thus far.

In Steve's presentations and workshops, he draws on insight gained through experience, learning, reading and ongoing research. I like the way he builds the content around the concepts of surviving to thriving and the 'inches' that lead us to success and significance. In this way he helps people make their lives a bit better than they were.

Finally, at the risk of sounding like Steve's sales department, I highly recommend his novel *Impimpi – Black Anger, White Fear*. I found it a real page-turner. Once I started reading, I could not put it down. As a bonus, I learnt so much about South Africa's past from more perspectives.

**(RIP DEAR FRIEND)** <https://www.stev Harris.co.za/chester-williams-funeral/>

# INTRODUCTION

***“Mental toughness unlocks the potential for breaking through your mental ceiling.”***

This was the main conclusion from my PhD thesis. I used the Springbok rugby team as the target group to conduct research on mental toughness (*Harris S. Mental Toughness: A sociological and psychological study of Springbok Rugby Players 2007*).

***It was for the Springboks and now for my clients***

Benjamin Franklin wrote, “In this world nothing is certain, except death and taxes” (Franklin, 1789). I want to add a few to his list, like you can be certain that professional sport is tough and so is life in general. All of us experience tough situations ranging from relationship breakdowns, ill health, sport injuries to a loss of income. Some are exposed to a tsunami of misery. To cope and simultaneously enhance our performance we need mental and emotional skills. I am rediscovering how these are necessary for surviving setbacks, putting the effects of the drumbeats of doom into perspective and going from surviving to thriving.

***Your metaphoric tunnel to reach the richest veins of pay dirt***

Mental toughness is one of the most important skills needed in work, relationships and sport. As you become mentally tougher, it can become one of your competitive advantages by excavating a metaphoric mining tunnel to hit your richest veins of pay dirt.

***I teach mental toughness skills and my integrity is constantly challenged***

All of us have challenges and problems. I am no exception. In recent times, I have drawn extensively on the mental toughness skills I teach to manage mine. My involvement in sport had always been a feature of my life. However, an ageing body and excessive physical demands became a lethal combination that took its toll. Whilst mental toughness was a major contributor to my sport endeavours, I need it lately to accept and manage my physical entropy. I am redirecting intrinsic passion to new challenges, like writing, that do not keep returning me to an operating table.

My college ([www.etacollege.com](http://www.etacollege.com)) has been subjected to escalating costs, tough competitor activity, the Corona virus pandemic that stopped my students attending (fortunately, I had invested in online technology as part of my business strategy) and an increasingly onerous regulatory environment. Clem Sunter, prominent speaker and futurist, wrote in his book *Flag Watching* that an external investor once told him that foreign governments roll out the red carpet for business but in South Africa, they roll out the red tape (Sunter, 2015). I am drawing on mental toughness to manage and transcend these issues.

People close to me have experienced unforeseen, dire challenges. I feel deeply affected by their ordeals accompanied by enormous, near debilitating sadness when considering their plight. At times, I have expressed frustration, but regain composure accompanied with regret when I reflect and, once again, realize my reality is not theirs and I am not faced with their ordeal. In these instances, their choices are much tougher than mine. My best option is to try to build bridges between our different realities and walk my mental toughness talk by providing compassion and contextual support.

# 1. WHY SURVIVING TO THRIVING?

## ***Sharpen the saw***

In *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989), Stephen Covey uses the parable *Sharpen the saw* to illustrate his seventh habit.

He explains it with a story of a woodcutter straining to saw down a tree. A young man watching asked, “What are you doing?”

“Are you blind?” the woodcutter replied. “I’m cutting down this tree.”

The young man was unabashed. “You look exhausted! Take a break. Sharpen the saw.”

The woodcutter explained to the young man that he had been sawing for hours and did not have time to take a break.

The young man pushed back. “If you sharpen the saw, you will cut down trees much faster.”

The woodcutter said, “I don’t have time to sharpen the saw. I’m too busy sawing?”

Covey uses “sharpen the saw” as a metaphor for improvement. I agree the obvious choice for someone doing the work and wants to introduce progress, is to sharpen the saw.

However, there are always more possibilities. From a management perspective, you could choose to replace the saw with adapted equipment like a chain saw.

Furthermore, there are times, when you, as a leader, should critically reflect on whether sawing down trees is the right thing for thriving? Isn’t it a better idea to plant trees rather than saw them down?

## ***The strongest will survive; the most adaptive will thrive***

Charles Darwin reputedly said the strongest will survive and the most adaptive will thrive. His words still apply. Well, partly. To survive we must be strong, but to thrive we need to adapt sooner and faster.

Reflect on the Corona virus pandemic and the devastating uncertainty, anxiety and loss it caused. I suggest the components of mental toughness could help you adapt sooner and faster.

Ask yourself, “Am I caught up in outrage, conspiracies and trapped in a period of paralysis? How do I use this time to thrive? Can I become a better more compassionate person? In what ways can I rekindle my passion, try new ideas, build new competitive advantages, form synergistic partnerships, show more composure, increase intensity, rebuild confidence, take some calculated risks, increase my competence and show true grit?”

These questions highlight aspects of mental toughness that will move you towards thriving.

Our species, *Homo sapiens*, has demonstrated it is strong and we are surviving. I realise, however, that many individuals within our species struggle to survive.

Stephen Pinker in *Enlightenment Now* (2018) produces statistics indicating that in most developed countries individual survival is easier nowadays when compared with past times. However, adapting to a state of *thriving* is still as tough as it has always been – if not tougher. Many still do not adapt and like a bunch of grapes, they wither on the vine.

My observation is that most express the desire to thrive and do not want to settle for surviving. However, few dedicate themselves to identifying and implementing the adaptations needed to bring their aspiration into reality. Instead they either heap blame on others for their lack of thriving or behave like a hamster on a wheel by repeating the same surviving cycle, faster.

### ***Thriving is achieving success ‘or’ significance.***

The word ‘or’ signals a preference in which you are limited to one choice or another. I have concluded that, wherever possible, I want to live in an ‘and’ rather than an ‘or’ world. Expressions such as ‘you can’t have your cake and eat it’ have conditioned us to default to one choice or another, rather than embrace both. Therefore, instead of success *or* significance, I believe we should always opt to include significance in any pursuit of success. My default mantra has become *no success without significance*.

### ***Success is often associated with the words, winning, profit and fame***

Success can be plotted on a continuum from no noteworthy success through mild success and on to wild success.

Tom Brady, the former New England Patriots’ quarterback, has been successful. By 2019 he had appeared in nine Super Bowl finals, winning six. At forty-two years old he continued to be a high-profile example of wild success on a sport continuum. In this context he was successful because he experienced winning, fame and wealth.

If you want a younger example in this era, how about, Kyle ‘Bugha’ Giersdorf, the sixteen-year-old won the 2019 Fortnite World Cup. A handsome three million dollars.

### ***People who pursue significance usually care more about outcome than income***

Effective altruism, i.e. participation in the service of humane ideals involving audacious-sounding goals, from achieving equality, to saving the planet, to eradicating hunger and disease. These approaches aim to enrich the beneficiaries, so that they experience positive results, as opposed to enhancing a warm glow for yourself. This results in significance and satisfaction.

### ***Significance – become better people***

The words that come to the fore to describe significance, and in my mind with these you become a better person, are decency, service, compassion, volunteering, charitable giving and making a positive difference. i.e. let your humanity shine through.

### ***Seek new knowledge***

The first of three action items on my list to become better people is to seek knowledge and skills that make you relevant, then remarkable and finally rare. For more details on this, refer to chapter nine on competence.

### ***Help those less fortunate***

The second is to help those less fortunate. Think of the work tennis legend, Roger Federer, undertakes in poor communities. Yes, Federer gives money; however, more significantly, he is an effective altruist who in his philanthropic journey becomes personally engaged with the effort to create a virtuous cycle. For more on this topic you may want to read about Good Ventures in *The Business of Changing the World* (Kumar, 2019). Their mission is to help humanity thrive. The book exposes you to options where markets created by rich and middle-class people can be leveraged and expanded to provide services for the poor.

### ***Manage the mess***

This brings me to the third point, which is manage the mess. Our world is complex, particularly the people. To strive for significance requires of us to embrace complexity as opposed to throwing up our arms and spewing condemnation, frustration and blame about the mess we confront on a minute by minute basis. In this instance I will restrict the subject matter to environmental mess – obviously there are many other messes! You could start by becoming a low profile, yet significant, eco-guerrilla. These people are helpers not hooters. They commit to small, meaningful actions to create a better environment without blowing their hooter about what they are doing.

They respect their environment. They do not litter. Significantly, they clean up the litter left by others i.e. they manage the mess - not only their mess. For instance, when they spot plastic bags, bottles, cans, or scrap paper lying around in proximity, they don't pass it up they pick it up and dispense of it in a trashcan or even better recycle it appropriately. They go beyond their space and pick it up.

There are many embracing the concept of managing the mess. An example of someone going beyond picking up their personal mess is Boyan Slat <https://www.theoceancleanup.com>. If this is too much for you, you may want to consider supporting a climate activist movement.



### ***Japanese spectators***

The Japanese spectators at the 2018 FIFA World Cup showed eco-guerrilla levels of responsibility. After losing to Belgium, the Japanese team cleaned the changing room, and their spectators cleared the mess in the stadium.

Eco-guerrillas additionally act to reduce their carbon footprint. Everyone has some influence over the greenhouse gasses that are contributing to climate change and their effects, such as increased incidents of super storms, and wildfires (including in the Amazon basin), droughts, Greenland's ice melting, higher sea levels and floods. It sounds corny but we are going to discover; *what happens in the Arctic does not stay in the arctic*.

If you do not know how to help, I suggest you research reputable scientific papers on the subject. Emmanuel Macron, in his address to the US Congress on the 25<sup>th</sup> April 2018, put it this way: "*There is no Planet B.*"

### ***Climate apartheid***

I have become deeply troubled by the tragedy of displaced communities and the human migration of refugees. Initially, I had not made the obvious link to climate change as a driver of this distressing phenomenon. The logic is palpable; if poor people can't survive where they live because of environmental factors, they will "migrate" to a place where they have a greater chance to survive. Just as wild animals migrate when there is a drought or a veld fire to seek other areas to survive.

My concern is twofold. Firstly, we should limit human contribution to climate change. This means we need to let go of beliefs that it is justifiable to damage our environment in the pursuit of a "better" economy. Secondly, we must not create false equivalencies to defend inhuman treatment of migrants. I realise the problem is complex, but I can't accept the conflation of "we have a right to protect our home" with inhumane treatment of refugees. Were borders closed to migrants when they fled to survive a war-torn Europe after the Second World War? If you Google 'Climate apartheid' you will see the effects that climate change denial is having on the poor.

If the problem of climate change is worrying you - and it should - you may want to read about Katrin Jacobsdottir as an example of a concerned citizen: Before becoming the prime minister of Iceland, her road to significance included being an eco-activist. Another high-profile activist is, the sixteen-year-old, Time magazine person of the year 2019 - Greta Thunberg. Why don't you listen to her speech on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019 to the UN assembly? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMrtLsQbaok>

### ***Small, smart, and mostly proactive adaptations lead to success and significance***

My research and personal experiences have led me to believe that the evolution from surviving to thriving is achieved through incremental, smart, and mostly proactive adaptations that give us marginal yet significant gains.

My question to you is: Are you adapting so that you can progress from surviving to thriving? If you feel that you are already thriving, my query becomes: What are you doing to accelerate even further ahead?

I acknowledge that people struggling with challenges in harsh conditions, or persons with mental and emotional health concerns that draw them outside consensus reality, may struggle to adopt my ideas on thriving.

### ***To thrive you need differentiators that make you stand out in a positive way***

These differentiators act as competitive advantages that help you become successful or significant, they act as a distinct competitive advantage. They make you stand out from the crowd in a positive way. With this you get ahead of others pursuing similar outcomes.

An advantage, like this, is usually admired by others, unless they are suffering from achievement envy. For some, a stand-out competitive advantage may be highly stressful and therefore undesirable. This phenomenon is called FOSO – the fear of standing out. For them to benefit from standing out, they need to develop the skills to manage the stress and the possible resentment that could accompany this sometimes-lonely place. As is commonly said, “The tallest trees catch the most wind.”

### ***The human polar bear created a unique competitive advantage***

Lewis Pugh stood out for the right reasons when he created a unique competitive advantage. He achieved success through enduring extreme cold-water conditions and now achieves significance by combining this ability with a passion for environmental sustainability.

I met Lewis when, as a junior pupil, he joined the Clifton Surf Lifesaving Club in Cape Town. He was extremely driven and hungry for personal accomplishment. Lewis trained hard and showed extraordinary willingness to go the extra mile. However, no amount of training was going to be enough to make Lewis a serious contender for top honours in the swimming aspects of competitive surf lifesaving. Top competitors were usually of Olympic standard. This did not deter Lewis, who continued to train more than most, and helped to teach others.

An offshoot of his preparedness to train hard was his acceptance of the icy Atlantic sea temperatures off Clifton beach. His peer group lauded and respected him for this willingness. I suspect it was this acknowledgement and recognition that motivated him to adapt and develop a uniqueness for tolerating cold water. Eventually, this led him to international fame as an environmentalist, and earned him the nickname ‘human polar bear’.

### ***Don’t stand out for the wrong reasons***

Think back to Euro 2016 when many English football spectators stood out because they behaved shamefully. The team also performed dreadfully on the field. These are the wrong reasons to stand out. They went on to lose against Iceland! You might also be critical of the

way the English rugby team crumbled in the final of Rugby World Cup 2019 after being the most impressive team in the tournament.

### ***Stand out for the right reasons***

England produced a remarkably good performance at the 2018 FIFA World Cup by getting to the semi-finals. They performed superbly at, and won, the 2019 Cricket World Cup.

In recent Olympic Games many English athletes have produced outstanding performances. Did the English selectors suddenly unearth better performers? I don't think so. I am reliably informed that their sport scientists analysed every aspect of performance to identify where their performers could capture small gains. According to Jonathan Edwards, former Team Great Britain Olympic athlete, capturing those tiny improvements became the mantra of the team management (Kelso, 2016). In other words, they squeezed marginal gains out of athletes.

### ***Improve everything you do by 1%***

I will continue with England as our example. English cyclists had not won the Tour De France until 2013. It was then that, newly appointed, professional cycling manager, David Brailsford, challenged his cyclists to improve everything they did by 1%.

I have no evidence to prove that his challenge is directly attributable to their subsequent wins but there is certainly a correlation. They went on to produce winning performances. If you calculate the winning percentages of winners – Wiggins, Froome and Thomas – it is around 0.05%. The seventh winner in this sequence was Bernal, a Columbian not an Englishman this time, but also in David Brailsford's 2019 team.

Former Jamaican sprinter, Usain Bolt, always stood out. Whenever he competed, he was inevitably the favourite to win the 100-metre race. On closer examination, you will find that his winning times were often close to the rest of the field's.

Sport scientist, Professor Ross Tucker, claims that the winning margin between a gold medal sprint winner and the fourth-placed competitor is usually extremely small. Tucker writes that there is a 0, 5% difference between immortality and anonymity (*Tucker, Immortality and Anonymity*, 2013). The difference in success status is huge. The winner receives fame and fortune, and the medal less fourth-placed competitor usually remains anonymous. The question that begs is: Can you improve everything you do by 1%?

### ***The inches we need are everywhere***

Let us call these winning margins the inches that make the difference.

In the movie *Any Given Sunday* (1999), Al Pacino plays the role of an NFL coach. He gives an impassioned speech at half time in a crucial game about the inches that make the difference between winning and losing. He claims, "In life or football, the margin for error is

so small. I mean one-half step too late or too early and you do not quite make it. One half second too slow or too fast and you do not quite catch it. The inches we need are everywhere around us. They are in every break of the game, every minute, every second. On this team, we fight for that inch. On this team, we tear ourselves and everyone else around us to pieces for that inch. We claw with our fingernails for that inch, because we know when we add up all those inches that's going to make the difference between winning and losing."

Al Pacino may be right when he claimed the inches, we need are everywhere, but can we identify them?

We need to respect that the concept of inches cuts both ways. A small change (warming) in global temperature can transform rigid ice into flowing water with disastrous consequences to the world as we know it.

### ***Inches from technology - an option for smarter teams to beat richer teams***

Michael Lewis, author of *Moneyball* (2003), points out that we do not know many of the areas in which we can improve our game because we are blinded by day-to-day activities. He adds we unquestioningly accept conventional wisdom. The book opens with Lewis quoting athlete Mickey Mantle: "It is unbelievable how much you don't know about the game you have been playing all your life" (Lewis, 2003).

Billy Beane, former general manager of Oakland Athletics baseball team, introduced changes that led to their success. The Boston Red Sox went on to use similar variations of these changes and they too achieved success. Beane pioneered a fresh way of using statistics to study performance, claiming that the wisdom of insiders like players, managers, coaches and scouts, is often limited and flawed (Lewis, 2003).

He suggested that we need more "money ball" type managers that can use statistical reasoning to make better predictions on player recruitment and performance evaluation than the "experts". He added we can use this method to identify what is overvalued and what is undervalued in our organization. In so doing he introduced options for smarter teams to beat richer teams. You could say that he presented us with a nerd's way of analysing sport.

Lewis expanded on this performance theme in a follow-up book, *The Undoing Project* (2016). Passages from the book claim: "we should be sufficiently indifferent to the opinion of experts, the more we are paid the more costly our sloppy decisions become, and charm can mask a deep disinterest in hard work".

### ***Conference speaking***

The first time I presented on Mental Toughness, an audience member gave me feedback by saying my presentation was nice.

"Nice, I replied, nice is a cup of tea."

He seized on my metaphor and replied, “yes, and you need to understand that your talks won’t be everyone’s cup of tea.”

He added that I must expect unintended consequences: “Some social justice warriors on the liberal left and other zealots on the righteous right might not like your version of truth, in other words they may be offended by your harsh realities. That is the price for being a conference speaker.”

He was right. I have had occasion when audience members’ feedback indicated that parts of the content was offensive to them.

My response has been I accept we live in an era when social norms are changing, and some people may be offended by my candidness. My current way of managing this is to see their feedback as a reminder that I cannot dispense opinions without accountability. I must consider how “woke” I am and may need to re-evaluate my content. If I find evidence that their view is valid, I will adapt my presentation.

If I do not see enough value in their feedback, I ask myself can I balance my right to free speech against their right to be offended. Do I accept their criticism and own up to be *an equal opportunity offender*?

The audience member that made the comment “nice” added that I should tell background stories. “You should tell the juicy, behind-the-scenes, insider stories – both happy and sad. You were part of the management of the Springbok rugby team for years. You have been a world champion in surf lifesaving. You must have many stories, of initiation for example, that will entertain and enthrall an audience.”

I reflected on my competitive lifesaving days to identify some juicy tales. I thought about the thirty years I spent competing. I dug deeper into my surf lifesaving memories of local and international championships and, sure enough, I found material that would send *Heat* magazine into a feeding frenzy. The problem was that they were too salacious. I could imagine the front page of the magazine leading with, “Dr Steve Reveals Surf Lifesaving Scandals.”

I concluded that spicy surf lifesaving stories could not be revealed. What about rugby stories? Surely, I, who went on so many Springbok rugby tours, would have some great stories to tell.

When I reflected on activities involving Springbok players, I faced a similar situation as I did with surf lifesaving. Admittedly, the behaviour of Springbok rugby players was not as extreme as that of the lifesavers in my era, but the stories were still not of the type that I could relay to corporate audiences or in books.

What about stories relating to Springbok coaches? I received my first invitation and then exposure to Springbok rugby when Morné Du Plessis called and asked if I could present to the Springbok team. Of course, I agreed. The moment arrived and I entered the team room with a feeling of nervousness, layered with excitement.

After a sweeping gaze, catching the eyes of Francois Pienaar, Joel Stransky and the late Joost van der Westhuizen, I started in a somewhat customary way by asking, “Are there any

questions before I begin?” My request hung in the room. An awkward silence followed, interrupted by a voice with a typical Johannesburg accent. “Ya Boet, I have a question: Who the f\*\*\* died leaving you in charge?” I knew I was in for a rough ride. (RIP James).

The years went by and I worked with many Springbok coaches in a variety of roles, my last was an invitation from Peter de Villiers to facilitate his first strategic meeting. In every case, I accumulated many great stories, and in each instance, it would be a breach of professionalism to tell them. From a stories-perspective, it is back to the adage, “What goes on tour stays on tour.” I could never talk about my insider experiences and still expect my audiences to take me seriously when trying to leave take-away value from the talk. I am aware that the situation is different when ex-players or coaches write a book. Then the adage seems to be: “What goes on tour, goes in their book.”

### ***Reverting to research***

Having concluded that it would be unprofessional to share behind-the-scenes stories about my surf lifesaving and Springbok rugby experiences, I once again turned to my PhD research (Harris, *Mental Toughness*, 2007) to find stories that would liven up my talks and publications.

I had to overcome the lack of inherent entertainment in a research paper and how quickly the research outcomes become outdated. I decided to continuously update the research and express some of the sustainable research outcomes through storytelling. However, this decision exposed me to the possible accusation that I cherry-pick the research to suit the presentation and in so doing go down a slippery slope away from the original academic rigour. The assumption is that my presentations could be dominated by personal bias. I guess I am guilty as charged. My presentations and publications do contain my personal views as well as my research outcomes.

### ***Once you can read anything you can learn everything***

When presenting at conferences, I include video snippets and extracts from bestselling books as references. Many of these I did not use or were not yet published when I was busy with my research paper. I refer to books because I feel strongly that people who do not read have no advantage over those who cannot read. Many read magazines, and I have no doubt that articles in some magazines are valuable, but I suspect magazine articles are prone to providing entertainment as their first goal and don’t always qualify as learning material. Tragically, I would not be surprised if most people spend more money on glossy magazines and toilet paper than they do on books.

I also make liberal use of the surviving to thriving attributes of business leaders like Richard Branson to support my claims. Most of all, I use sport examples, current and down the ages, to spice up my motivational presentations.

### ***Become an admiration winner – turn up***

I often reference the 2010 FIFA World Cup Tournament in my presentations. You will recall that Spain won the tournament that year. I pose the question: “Was there another winner in a different context?” The answer is that South Africa was also a winner. Most of my audience members are aware that South Africa was a world admiration winner when it came to be hosting the event and for the spirit generated in the country at the time.

Naysayers claimed the tournament would never happen, and if it did, visitors would be robbed or even killed if they came to South Africa. Despite these claims, the tournament was a tremendous success.

South Africa’s world admiration status has not been maintained since then. Nonetheless, World Cup 2010 was a moment South Africans can call upon as a positive reference point for rallying future inspiration.

The question I pose to my audiences is around the opportunity of becoming a winner in a different context, like admiration winner. There is always another award on offer. Admiration winner is a title we could all strive for in any endeavour, whether it be sport, work, or relationships.

The often-used claim that 80% of success is ‘turning up’, originally attributed to Woody Allen, is applicable to the South African public in 2010. They turned up! The same cannot be said for the South African football team.

Many fancied teams also failed to turn up. Think about England, Argentina and Brazil in the 2010, 2014 and 2018 tournaments. They certainly did not turn up, though you may argue that England’s semi-final position in 2018 combined with Harry Kane’s Golden Boot award redeems them.

One of South Africa’s Super Rugby teams, the Stormers, has often qualified for play-offs or semi-finals in the Super Rugby tournament. I recall, after one of these matches, the words of their captain, Jean de Villiers, in a post-match speech. He was asked why the Stormers once again failed to win. “We didn’t turn up,” he replied. Of course, he did not mean turning up physically. All the players were on the field. I am sure he meant turning up with all their faculties, particularly their minds, to maximise their performance.

Turning up with surviving to thriving skills will give you the inches that will contribute to creating a competitive advantage in any endeavour.

### ***People don’t know what they don’t know***

Several years ago, I allocated time to networking with the sport and fitness faculty heads of universities and colleges. I felt it was my responsibility as CEO of **eta** College to build relationships with them, one of which was with the, now, late Professor Paul Avis of the University of the Western Cape.

South African rugby engaged me in various capacities, including that of mind coach. Paul was particularly interested in my mental toughness ideas. He had represented South Africa as a senior men's tennis player, with John McEnroe being one of his opponents.

In a short time, our conversation migrated from the relationship between **eta** College and the University of the Western Cape to my role in assisting sports people with developing mental toughness.

Paul asked me, "What qualifies you to help others with mental toughness?" I could only offer my personal experience as an answer. He replied, "Mental toughness is a language spoken by many but understood by few. Most people let opinion and conspiracy triumph over facts. However, people, most likely including you, don't know what they don't know."

Now that you know that you don't know, will you shift the boundary between what is known and unknown? Will you get qualified? I am suggesting that you formally study mental toughness, get qualified, and in this way find out some of what you, and in fact we all, don't know?"

He suggested that I enrol in a PhD programme with a thesis on Mental Toughness, which he offered to supervise. "Your job obliges you to access the immense knowledge that is unknown, bring valuable insights back and use it to facilitate the development of your community. In bygone days, the sage did that job. Note humans only see and hear a narrow spectrum of light and sound. In the same way, they only perceive a limited spectrum for mental capacity. Therefore, your research will leave you with some questions that can't be answered but more noteworthy – there are no answers that can't be questioned."

No answers that can't be questioned! That claim has been pivotal in the way I have viewed life ever since this seminal meeting with Avis.

He went on to say that, on one end of the spectrum some people make outrageous statements about the power of mental toughness and on the opposite end others assert there is no such thing. Once I successfully completed my academic programme, I could claim to be an expert on the subject and, with a smile, he alleged that I could justify my views by saying, "Trust me, I'm a doctor."

Avis explained: "When studying for a PhD, you will discover you have become bad at seeing what you do not like to see because it often contains an inconvenient truth. You will also realize that you love seeing what you agree with, but be aware, it could contain a reassuring lie."

I qualified in 2008, and now, several years later, I still do not feel like an expert. However, I can claim to have moved on from being a well-informed and experienced amateur to having an intellectual, deep, and continually emerging understanding of the subject.

Paul claimed that there were many requirements for improved mental toughness. He started with the need for developing a healthy BS detector to identify where the research methods had been manipulated by corporate greed or personal bias. This rendered the outcomes untrustworthy (Avis, 2004).



I have come across two illuminating books on this subject, both written by Dr Ben Goldacre. They are *Bad Science* (Goldacre, 2008) and *Bad Pharma* (Goldacre, 2012). Both books support his claims.

He went on to criticise some of the studies justifying the use of food supplements. My recollection of this part of the discussion was Avis' expansion on the use of nutraceuticals and an obsessive consumption of supplements and vitamins. He called this category 'powders, pills and potions' and suggested there was room for healthy scepticism about substances that claim to improve health, fitness, and particularly brain function.

He added that supplementation should be subject to closer scrutiny as most people can derive all the nutrients, they need from a healthy eating regime. His caveat was that force-feeding animals, fertilizers, food processing, preserving and anti-biotics may be destroying much of the nutritional value.

This caution softened his attitude and he revised his approach to supplements. His adjustment was that supplements could be used based on the outcome of a thorough needs analysis of individual nutritional needs weighed against eating choices and patterns.

This investigation should be conducted by a qualified person, like a dietician. "Tragically," he said ruefully, "even this process is underpinned with misinformation, as the official dietary guidelines these professionals use are riddled with bias" (Avis, 2004).

He cited increased obesity in countries with a western culture and linked this trend to the food pyramid dietary guideline used by nutrition professionals.

Avis concluded with a concern that supplementation could result in a licensing effect, where the consumer feels justified in indulging in poor nutritional consumption because they have a so-called healthy supplementation regime.

### ***The mind, not the muscles, regulates fatigue***

I mentioned becoming an expert in the light-hearted claim, "Trust me, I'm a doctor." Someone who was an expert in exercise science, before he became famous, or some say infamous, for his foray into nutrition, and he happens to be a medical doctor, is Professor Tim Noakes.

I was inspired by a talk given by Noakes claiming that the mind, not the muscles, governs fatigue. "The symptoms are utterly, completely illusory. They are generated by the brain and they have nothing to do with the state of the body at that time" (Noakes, 2016). He based the talk on research that indicated the brain as the governor of fatigue, even though muscles were the final arbitrator.

The Internet site, UCT Open Content, refers to Noakes' research as follows: "In the past Professor Tim Noakes was convinced that physiology could explain performance. After 38 years of studying the human body, he now believes that the mind and the role of self-belief are crucial factors in human athletic feats" (Noakes, *African Health*, 2011).

My understanding is that the signal one receives from the brain informing us that we are fatigued may be misleading because it is based on a mental estimation of reserves. I feel this signal can be likened to the one from a motor vehicle's fuel gauge. A warning light comes on indicating that the fuel level is on reserve, but it is not empty. In the same way, we receive a warning signal that we are tired and tend to interpret it as a sign that our energy is depleted. Consequently, we may give up too early. I fully appreciate that a vehicle cannot operate on nothing. However, I have seen a few people create a competitive advantage by operating on reserve and some even seem to perform on metaphoric fuel vapours.

Before hearing about Noakes' research on fatigue, I had reviewed a wealth of literature on misleading mental signals and their role in limiting aspects of performance. By extension, I believed that Noakes' research could apply to these signals as well. It occurred to me that many of us could experience better outcomes in our lives if we interpreted other communication with greater accuracy. For example, if in negotiations we maintained our bargaining position a little longer, or, if in relationships we maintained our composure a little longer, the outcomes might be more favourable than initially anticipated.

### ***The lingering habits of cave dwellers***

These signals have their origins in a wide range of embedded, unconscious intuitions. They manifest as sacred beliefs that express our identity and guide our inclinations. Astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson calls many of these signals 'neurological baggage from our evolutionary past.' Our minds have primordial 'flotsam and jetsam' against which we regularly collide.

Peter Breggin adds in *Guilt, Shame, and Anxiety: Understanding and Overcoming Negative Emotions*: *every humanlike and human child has been born with enormously conflicted capacities for close-knit social relationships and for incredible aggression.* (Breggin, 2014).

Through our genes, we inherit safety reserves that are hard-wired into our brains to keep us out of harm's way. However, these reserves go beyond the call of duty. They strongly regulate our ability to take risks and manage pressure. In terms of going from surviving to thriving, this will be a substantial restriction. Remember, our genes predispose, not predetermine, who we are.

Secondly, we seem to inherit limiting beliefs from the environment in which we were socialised. We acquire a strong and pervasive sense of limitations set by cultural conservatism, social norms, taboos, as well as the expectations and behaviour of family, peers, powerful role models, and mentors.

We reinforce these beliefs by our habitual behaviour and the examples provided by the people around us. This perpetuates a cycle in which these limitations are naturalised.

One of the ways to go from surviving to thriving is to learn to become aware of these signals and, when necessary, develop the willpower to override them. Top-level athletes can override pain and fatigue, and they can sustain a high workload tolerance. In this way, they become stronger.

## 2. SURVIVING TO THRIVING GUIDE

Feeling we have no control over a threat (real or perceived), is a huge stressor, possibly the biggest. This makes us react instinctively and, instead of reaching for mental toughness skills we stampede with the herd like wildebeest. Recall the reaction to the threat of COVID 19, people panicked and stocked up with toilet paper.

In Stephen Covey's book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989), he used a model depicting an outer circle, labelled the circle of concern. This circle represents all the things we are concerned about and that we feel affect us. I have called this circle, "what it takes" (WIT). Inside this circle he drew another circle and this one he labelled the circle of influence. Inside that one he drew a third circle and labelled it the circle of control. The circle of influence and the circle of control collectively I call "what I have got" (WIG).

The fraction WIG / WIT represents the extent to which we believe we can make it in life i.e. thrive. If you believe you have very little of what it takes than life can be very stressful.

Covey maintained we can influence some things that affect our lives, and there are fewer that we control. Of course, there are also many that we have little influence and no control over.

He asserts that as you plan and prepare, you will find that you worry less about the outcomes because you invested time in understanding them and have devised plans to achieve them. In this way, you worry less about matters that you can neither influence nor control (Covey, 1989).

Excessive worry about the things that could go wrong does not make life any more predictable. It only keeps you busy worrying, when, instead, this energy could be spent enjoying the good things that are also happening in the present. The threat presented by the Corona virus has undoubtedly taken away our certainty about our future. Acknowledging this loss of future certainty simultaneously opens us up to new possibilities.

Paradoxically, you can imagine how boring and meaningless life would become if you had complete certainty over your future. Take athletics for example. Athletes have influence and control over most aspects of their competition preparation, as in this phase they are mostly dealing with their own internal issues. They have less influence and control over the competitive result, little over the opposition, and none over the weather conditions. Isn't that why competing remains so stimulating and meaningful?

I am using Chan Kim's book, *Blue Ocean Strategy* (2005), as a guideline for creating a surviving to thriving guide. Kim's blue oceans metaphor describes an uncontested market space. In this space, the opposition becomes irrelevant and you thrive (Kim, 2005). I believe one can apply blue ocean strategies at an individual level. He explains that we mostly operate in highly contested Red Oceans, whereas Blue Oceans have less competitor activity.

Kim uses four categories to describe what to do, to go towards Blue Oceans.

The first is eliminate. What must you eliminate to get out of red oceans? I suggest you eliminate; outdated and unverified opinions, being trapped in binary perspectives and having unwarranted pessimism.

The second is reduce. What must you reduce to get out of red oceans? I suggest you reduce; irrational anxiety, knee jerk blaming and procrastination.

The third is raise. What must you raise to enter blue oceans? I suggest you raise your pursuit of significance, your knowledge and skills and your attitude to accountability.

The fourth one is to create. To enter blue oceans I suggest you; adopt a “can do” mindset; create a wellness plan to give you resilience; develop a vision and plan for new value through identifying new differentiators; invest in a diversified portfolio of wealth creation and wealth protection. Develop a plan B income source.

My summary of being in a Red Ocean is occupying a space where you are surviving. The following are some of the points that I use to describe being in a red ocean. In my talks I liken being in this state to winning a bronze medal. Being in a thriving state is winning a silver medal and to win a gold medal you must do better than silver.

1. Your strategy is reviewed annually, grows your existing income streams, emphasizes competitive differentiators and includes risk analysis.
2. You have a clean bill of medical health.
3. Your product and service keep pace with the opposition. Delivery and on-selling options are limited. Your elevator pitch is inconsistent across the organization.
4. Your qualifications and experience keep you in the race. You are useful and hard to match.
5. Your culture values managing change, being techno able, efficient, responsible, limiting mistakes and working hard.
6. Team members have grown from dependence to independence. They are the parts generating the value for the team.
7. You focus on developing the stress management skills that improve your resilience.

Being in Blue Oceans implies a space where you are thriving. With a surviving to thriving guide you inch towards daily bread and daily meaning. The following represents a check list for thriving and wins a silver medal:

1. Your strategy is reviewed continually, it grows existing income streams and introduces new differentiators, creating new income streams that are not in tandem. Your risk analysis caters for disaster scenario (think of COVID 19).
2. You have excellent holistic wellness.
3. Your product and service outshine others. You have multiple delivery options and your product is scalable. Your organization has a consistent elevator pitch.
4. Your qualifications, unlearning and relearning compounds your competence and puts you ahead of the race. You are rare and impossible to match.

5. Your culture values change agility, being techno smart, effective, accountable and outworking others.
6. You have developed interdependence. Your collaboration and new partnerships create synergy yielding new value beyond the sum of the parts.
7. You use the seven Mental Toughness components to manage the mess, live with uncertainty, and still give your best performance consistently.

I will expand on a few of the points.

The first point is about developing and continually updating a strategic plan that moves you towards increasing your existing value as well as discovering new value. It requires of you to create competitive differentiators that enable you to do things differently and better. At the same time, you develop additional income streams that are not in tandem with your main income source.

I want to point out the importance of establishing your life's priorities before fixating on efficient time management. This means, lead your life based on the important things that align with what you want from life, then decide how to manage your time. If what you are doing is not leading you to what you want from your life you need a very good reason for doing it. Many people are living like a hamster on a hamster wheel. They are very good at spinning the wheel, but they are not creating new value, other than becoming a fitter hamster. They still see the same view at every turn.

Lewis Carroll, in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), describes it this way when Alice first meets the Cheshire cat: *"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat. "I don't much care where—" said Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat* (Carroll, 1865).

It's clear to me that unless you know where you want to get to, you can't be helped on your journey. Through a thorough planning process, you can decide where you want to go and ensure that that direction resonates with your passion, is audacious and provides purpose.

Jimmy Johnson, former NFL player, coach and broadcaster, claims leaders can make their organisation extraordinary and remarkable. In his book, **Turning the Thing Around (1994)**. **He writes**, "The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is just that little extra" (Johnson, 1994).

In *Purple Cow* (2003), Seth Godin claims that you can transform your business by becoming remarkable. Using the metaphor of cows, Godin says, "You're either a purple cow or you're not. You are either remarkable or invisible. Make your choice" (Godin, 2003).

I am always impressed when I hear of or read about an organization or person setting out an audacious vision. This type of vision will need a lot of planning and hard work to implement. Hopefully, yours will be equally daring.

*"If you never lose sight of the shore, you are not on a voyage of discovery. You are on a day cruise."*  
James Earp

Your strategic plan includes a risk management log and caters for major disruptions. In his book, *The Black Swan* (2007), Nicholas Taleb writes about extremely unpredictable events that have massive impacts on human society. (Taleb, 2007). The Corona virus pandemic is an example of a Black Swan. My son in law's comment "This episode of Black Mirror sucks."

**The key elements of the strategic plans I facilitate for organizations are:**

1. Review of input data
2. Purpose / mission (Why does the organization exist?)
3. Vision (What does an ideal future look like?)
4. Values (what principles do we adhere to?)
5. Key Performance Areas (What are the priority areas we must focus on?)
6. The Business / organizational model (Who do we serve / what do we do for them / what is our value proposition and twenty second elevator pitch?)
7. Risk Log (What are the risks and disasters we face and how will we manage them?)
8. Goals (What are our SMART goals?)

**The key tools used to deliver the data for the strategic plan are:**

1. Key Performance Areas (What are the priority areas we must focus on?)
2. P.E.S.T.E.L Analysis (What do we understand about the impact of our environment?)
3. S.W.O.T Analysis (What is our understanding of ourselves?)
4. Blue Ocean Matrix Analysis (What must we eliminate, reduce, increase and create so that we have competitive differences that yield new value)
5. Reviewing stakeholder expectations (What people think about and expect from us?)
6. Competitor analysis (Who are our competitors and what is their impact on us?)
7. What is our business / organizational model including our value proposition and twenty second elevator pitch - What will make us better than the competition?)
8. Gap Analysis (Given our vision and goals how far are we from where we want to be?)
9. Risk assessment (What are the risks / disasters we face and how do we manage them?)
10. What SMART goals should we be setting?

**The methodology used to deliver the database is:**

Facilitated workshops with focus groups (that represent our stakeholders) provide the data that targets the key tools and processes to populate the database. They could use:

- a. Past strategic plans
- b. Surveys and external reports
- c. Organization statutes, policies, procedures
- d. Financial documents

**The key elements of strategic plans (life plans) for individuals are detailed in the chapter four on concentration.**

The third point is to develop excellent holistic wellness so that your faculties, e.g. physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual, are in a state where your energy is not dominated by surviving, instead it is driving you towards thriving. If you have serious challenges in any of these faculties, it will impact on your ability to strive for success and significance.

I recall a section in a poem that went something like: *They squander their health in search wealth, they sweat they toil and they slave. Then they squander their wealth in search of health, and only find the grave.*

***Differentiate between Signs and symptoms***

John W. Travis' *Illness–Wellness Continuum* (1972) introduced the notion of responding sooner to emerging situations in a wellness context. He differentiated between the signs and symptoms that indicate wellness and explained their relationship to proactivity and reactivity.

***Moving towards ill health or premature death***

By using a continuum, Travis illustrated the differences between a good health paradigm on the right side representing improving wellness leading to superb wellbeing. The left side representing increasing illness culminating in premature death. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) claims that 60% of premature deaths are attributable to lifestyle diseases. We can view premature death metaphorically as well, like the premature death of our intentions, a loss of relationship, failure in business, or even diminishing physical and mental abilities. This left side of the continuum is characterised by energy leaks, illness and suffering. In summary, failing.

As one moves to the left of the continuum there is progressive worsening, starting with signs, then manifesting in symptoms and finally the premature death.

If you consider the effects of trauma or chronic stress on our physical and mental health, you will notice a slippery slope of painful and destructive emotions driving increasing illness along the continuum from the signs to the symptoms of declining wellness.

***Physical symptoms of declining wellness (I won't expand, as you have often seen them)***

- Disturbed sleep patterns
- A poor or obsessive exercise regime
- Deficient food habits or neurotic control over your eating

***Mental symptoms of declining mental wellness (I will expand, as we tend not to talk about these)***

If you consult psychiatrists when you are experiencing distress and are in a psychological crisis, they will likely diagnose a mental disorder catalogued in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

These diagnostic labels invariably have the unintended consequence of compounding feelings of humiliation for the distressed person. For those who are significantly symptomatic, hospitalization is the first line of treatment, and, in most cases, psychiatric drugs are prescribed. Tragically, this regimen can make already fragile people feel more powerless and increasingly vulnerable.

I would like to suggest an alternative approach to the allopathic method and have come across many encouraging case studies but I fear that in extremely symptomatic cases the distressed persons may inflict self-harm, or are more likely to be involved in negative incidents, due to mood swings or a lack of awareness. This concern elevates the relevance of the medical model, despite the side effects of its prescribed medication, to first choice for suppressing symptoms and providing a safer space for healing.

Some of the signs and symptoms of declining mental wellness leading to a DSM diagnosis, follow.

- Hyper anxiousness which leads to an anxiety disorder diagnosis. Drivers for this are the negative legacy emotions of shame and guilt. These self-defeating emotions are triggered opportunistically when you are experiencing the consequences of trauma. Tragically, hyper anxiety is also associated with preservative cognition. This is a condition, where you are continuously thinking or ruminating about negative events in your past or in the future and this causes you to find new, imagined problems to be anxious about. In this state your intellectual and reasoning capacity is impeded, and you become governed by a melodramatic, as opposed to a fact-based or a consensus reality world view. Thus, instead of rationally recognizing and analysing your feelings of regret or remorse, caused by trauma, that could catalyse a change in your behaviour, your mind searches for reasons to justify your feelings of guilt and shame. Thus, you end up expressing anger and blame as you navigate a constant sense of crisis.

People suffering from hyper anxiousness conflate what is a frightening, perceived threat, with a dangerous, real threat. There is dissonance between the life they expected and the one they have. In most instances, this is accompanied by a notion that they have less choices. They usually notice bad over good, become prone to conspiracies, blame others and struggle to accept responsibility. Their flight or fight response is on high alert causing exhaustion.



- Extreme sadness is an indicator for a depressive disorder diagnosis. In this state you lack motivation, feel left behind, experience hopelessness and loneliness. You become a ‘baby doomer’ dominated by anhedonia, believing you have lost touch with happiness. *As an aside, in my opinion, the concept of lost happiness opens a can of worms. Firstly, we confuse excitement for happiness. Secondly, the suffering and sacrifice often endured in the quest for happiness highlights the opposite, i.e. magnifies what you are not achieving. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “the purpose of life is not chasing happiness. It is to be useful, honourable and compassionate”.*

Substance abuse leads to substance dependency. Your brain overvalues a pain managing or recreational substance seen as a medicating solution and not a problem. You continue use despite adverse effects. You consume more as the original effect lessens.

This is particularly hazardous when combined with a predilection for addiction. Users become irrational, have mood swings, renewed anxiety, fear, distrust, and extreme anger bouts. When challenged about irrationality, they revert to denial and counter accusations. Anti-social behaviours like lying and stealing manifest and personal hygiene deteriorates.

The cumulative effect of these states is likely to herald psychosis. In this condition your brain disables the ability to recognize disorder symptoms. You experience persecution paranoia, losing your handle on consensus reality accompanied by a loss of, once dearly held, values.

You demonise, blame and reject those who love you and could bring you happiness, dismissing them as co-creators, or worse they are the creators of your distress. You become hypersensitive to a range of contexts or words that trigger paranoia and you constantly scan for the next bad thing that is going to happen to you. These prompts you to self-stigmatize. You don’t need others to torture you because your mind is already doing it to you. You develop hypochondria and are often convinced you have contracted a dreaded disease.

### ***Worsening mental disorders are seldom apparent to the victim***

No matter how obvious worsening mental disorders are to others, they are somehow not apparent to the victim who mostly refuses assistance whether allopathic, therapy, community support or spiritual guidance. In extreme cases this leaves family with concerns that the sufferer, in many ways, is not the person they knew. Accepting these circumstances taxes unconditional love, and usually leaves loved ones gravitating towards the unenviable option of involuntary hospitalization with the heart-breaking prospect of a “revolving door” or Groundhog Day situation. This means the loved one recovers partially, gets discharged, relapses and has to be readmitted.

### ***Frog in hot water***

I have no doubt you have heard about the frog in hot water experiment Was it real? Surely not. Nevertheless, it is a great example of the importance of awareness. It is claimed that if a

frog is placed in a pot of boiling water it will jump out, but it will not jump out of a pot of cold water that is heated slowly. Apparently, the amphibian does not notice the incremental changes in its environment until it is too late. We need to be aware of the analogous changes in our situation before we find ourselves in boiling water. Of course, it also implies that it's insufficient to merely notice the metaphoric increase in temperature. You need to react to it.

I recall international limited-overs cricket competitions where a team adopted an overtly aggressive game plan. Despite the game plan patently not working, they seemed determined to stick to it rather than adapt it to respond to current conditions. It is not clear whether this team had not developed the awareness skills to recognise their plan's weaknesses at the time, or if they were just ill-prepared and had no alternative plan. They stuck to a sub-optimal plan and exited the competition because they did not have the awareness to adapt to their situation.

### ***Moving towards high levels of wellness***

Travis has high-level wellness on the right side of the continuum. On the extreme right have energy gains and pleasure. In summary, you are thriving and fulfilling your potential.

The signs and symptoms of high-level wellness on the right-hand side start with awareness. This allows you to recognize that you are developing or have developed bad habits or problems that you need to reject and replace. At this stage you use your curiosity to research alternative behaviours that replace the ones leading to disorder.

Finally, you summon courage to act on these. This will likely involve wellness interventions like consulting wellness professionals, healthy eating, balanced exercise routines, massage, visualization and mindfulness.

The wellness approach can be utilised at any point on the continuum. Wellness interventions do not replace the treatment paradigm; they work in harmony with it. Even though we often lack medical symptoms, we may still have psychological indicators such as boredom, depression, anxiety or simple discontent with life. Such emotional states often set the stage for disease.

Wellness is not a static state and its variability has a strong correlation with taking care of your physical self, using your mind constructively, expressing your emotions effectively, creatively involved with those around you and being concerned about your environment. In fact, it is not so much about where you are on the continuum as it is about the direction in which you are facing.

It takes a mentally tough mind to be aware of and respond to signs, rather than wait for the negative symptoms and react to them. Movement towards the left-hand side of the continuum, possibly ending in premature death, starts with missing the significance of the signs. These signs are usually our poorly conceived choices, whether they are instinctive or rational. Mentally tough people can read weak signs before they become full-blooded signs. The symptoms that follow are mostly the consequences of their choices. If they remain unaddressed, they lead to the dire outcome of a metaphorical or actual premature death.

Movement to the right-hand side of the mental toughness continuum starts with taking personal responsibility and realising that our decisions determine a substantial part of our success. The choice of not making a choice can be a negative choice, leading us to the left of the continuum. For example, if you choose not to develop a personal plan, you become a victim of your own lack of choosing. Self-help guru and author Wayne Dyer claimed: “You are doomed to make choices. This is life’s greatest paradox.”

### ***Awareness that helps you become aware of good habits and bad habits***

Awareness is the ability to perceive and be conscious of events, objects, thoughts, emotions, and signs of emerging changes. It helps to ‘get altitude’ or look at your issues from a distant perspective – to metaphorically watch the movie of your life. To improve awareness, I recommend you expand your ability to see and evaluate what is happening around and inside of you. Use critical self-reflection combined with evidence to examine any tendency to select information that confirms your biases and beliefs. This would be you watching yourself watching the movie, that is, you are looking at what you are watching. Improving awareness helps you to glean the early signs that enable you to be proactive. With this ability, you can usually read the sometimes-subliminal signs indicating shifting conditions, and therefore the alterations that you need to make to accommodate them.

With increased awareness, you could change your habits and change your destiny. Start by developing some good habits that lead to your intention. Simultaneously, you could also eliminate some ingrained routines that lead you away from your intention. For example, if your intention includes a healthy lifestyle, which I feel is a smart choice, you need to engage in habits that promote wellness and eliminate counter-productive behaviours that lead you away from your goal.

Developing good habits is a lot easier than getting rid of bad habits. Examples of good habits include exercising several times a week; eating a diet consisting of nutrient-giving, whole food; spending time with those closest to you; allowing yourself moments, per day, to read and relax; spending time outdoors and getting a good night’s sleep.

Marketing campaigns and social media serve as useful communication tools. However, we need to keep their doubled edged potential in our awareness. They can distract us into irrational behaviour providing the illusion of fulfilment when we buy their product, support their point of view or get mind captured by “fake” news.

Similarly, in most sporting contests, your opponents will try to consume your attention by setting up distractions. A typical tactic in ball sports, like rugby, involves capturing the attention of the opponent in front of you to deceive them into committing to a direction. This leaves their defensive channel unprotected. Mentally tough people do not allow marketing hype, competitors’ deception and zealous others, to distract or sully their intention.

### ***Mindfulness helps to block out unnecessary consumers of attention***

Mindfulness is a state of active attention on the present. When you are mindful, you calmly observe and acknowledge your thoughts and feelings without judging them as good or bad.

Through mindfulness, you engage in unfettered attention to the requirements essential for effective performance in a moment. This means you use self-regulation so that your attention stays on immediate experience. You can witness distractions and consumers of attention without indulging them.

A client gave me the following feedback: “I have come to accept that the ability to concentrate, that is, keeping the present and the future in mind at the same time, are crucial capabilities and that exercising discipline is an important practice to achieve this. If discipline, for future gain, is not a natural part of my makeup, or if my intention is not likely to be realised with my current levels of self-discipline, I must downscale either intention or upscale discipline. I need to improve my awareness of what keeps me on track towards my intention or what kicks me off track.”

The third point on product and service addresses the importance of having an outstanding product accompanied with jaw dropping service so that you outshine the opposition.

Once you have identified and implemented value differentiators, you capture these in a twenty second elevator pitch. An elevator pitch is a description of your differentiating value as a person or an organization. It explains in a way such that it can be understood in a short period of time. This description typically explains who the thing is for, what it does, the benefits, why it is needed, how it will get done. Finally, when explaining an individual person, the description generally explains one's skills and goals, and why they would be a productive and beneficial person to have on a team or within a company or project. When you are thriving because of significant differentiating value you invariably stimulate herd instinct and your customers queue for you or your product.

The fourth point is about compounding your knowledge, in the same way as your finances will benefit from compound interest, so will your knowledge. Chapter ten on competence will provide an expansion on this point.

The fifth point on culture, addresses values and the need for change agility. The appeal I am making is to identify and live the values that will make you thrive and work better as an individual and in a team. Find the values that will make you grow, prosper and endure. The main ones I have identified for me are passion, compassion, reason, justice, humility, ethics, decency, respect and inclusivity. I use these to build a culture around my life. My request to you is to reflect on your values and question; are they working for me and my community? I am not claiming your current values are wrong; I am questioning if they are making you thrive? There is more on values in Chapter four.

With reference to change agility. To me, this means proactively managing change. My experience is that life gets better by change rather than by chance. Think of your Nokia phone or perhaps your Blackberry. I am sure you remember them, but you have changed, haven't you? Possibly you are going to buy and sell your car at the local second-hand dealer or are you doing it online? Do you use google maps or Waze as your navigational aid? Do you use UBER or a taxi? Do you use Booking.com and trip adviser? The message is the world will keep on changing and we must update our knowledge throughout our lives. Disney's former

CEO Bob Eiger, the winner of Time magazine's businessperson of the year 2019, used the ice hockey anecdote "Don't skate to the puck, skate to where the puck is going."

The sixth point refers to eliminating any energy leaks emerging from poor teamwork. Rather, it is about gaining new value because you have developed partnerships and interdependence. The aim is to create a competitive advantage through synergy i.e. the sum of the parts is greater than the whole. This enables the team to go from red oceans to blue oceans or otherwise stated from surviving to thriving.

Interdependence requires each team member to commit to a shared strategy. If there is any doubt about your commitment the onus is on you to declare it so that it can be addressed. This declaration is not in the form of complaining or blaming in secret conversations in corridors, it takes the form of addressing the problem immediately with the team member you have a problem with or the team leader if it is a goal about which you disagree.

There are instances where an individual team member has a negative experience that lingers, is possibly unhappy with their remuneration and consequently teamwork suffers as this grudge motivates a lack of commitment. Or, the individual's culture and values do not resonate with that of the team. In these cases, this too needs to be declared to the team leader. It can be resolved through mutual conflict management. Under no circumstances can you, the team member, use your personal culture or values as a reason that undermines the team commitment.

The final point is on developing mental toughness. The remainder of the book is dedicated to this point.

### 3. A DEFINITION OF MENTAL TOUGHNESS

***“Strong minds suffer without complaining; weak minds complain without suffering.”***

LETTIE COWMAN

The trick or secret to increasing mental toughness is that there is neither trick nor secret. I have a healthy scepticism for anything claiming a secret. Quick fixes and oversimplified solutions to developing mental toughness, or achieving success and significance, insult our intelligence. I favour a planned approach to developing improved mental toughness through a systematic approach of practising and scaffolding the seven mental toughness components.

The mind is where our greatest potential lies. It is our ultimate asset. When we improve our mental toughness, we move away from irrational fears, illogical beliefs, destructive addictions, unfounded superstitions and other forms of self-destruction.

I help many organizations develop competitive differentiators like strategy, leadership, change management, teamwork, sales, service and wellness. Each of these differentiators are enhanced by having staff who are mentally tougher.

#### ***A definition of mental toughness***

The definition of mental toughness goes beyond the limiting description of a killer instinct or a high pain and panic threshold.

I define it as the ability to manage your mind so that it is not distracted and directs your energy to the right place, at the right time, for the right reason. With mental toughness, you can give your best performance consistently, regardless of what is going on within and around you. In this way, you become the best possible version of yourself.

#### ***Key points on mental toughness***

- You simultaneously have ‘fire in the belly and ice in the brain.’
- You develop a self-authoring mind that balances your socially conditioned mind.
- You adapt and improve each mental toughness component by 1%.
- Your concentration is fuelled by passion leading to conditional optimism.
- Your composure transcends volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.
- You apply controlled aggression through increasing energy, intensity, and willpower.
- You express confidence through supreme self-belief without arrogance.
- You take calculated risks using curiosity with the courage to innovate and improvise.
- You pursue competence towards the goal of wisdom through learning and unlearning.
- You display commitment through integrity and gritting, yet you know when to quit.

Your mental toughness mantra is: ***The strongest survive, the most adaptive thrive.***

### ***Natural abilities***

People are born with natural abilities. I recall being told *no matter how hard you practise and strive for excellence, you can never achieve the same levels of mental or physical prowess of prominent leaders, elite athletes, and high achievers*. My research shows that **this claim is false**.

I agree that some people have a greater inclination for sports or certain leadership positions. You are unlikely to become an international lock forward in rugby unless you are taller than two metres. However, everyone can acquire skills that enable them to improve their performance and excel within the realms of their boundaries. Essentially, you can learn to be the best version of you.

In today's world, mental as well as bodily attributes allow you to get ahead. Gone are the days of providing for oneself or one's family via physical resources alone. Although it is important to note that whilst there are laborious jobs out there, few of these involve cave dwellers duties such as hunting or gathering. Essentially, we need to be mentally tough and resilient to today's fast-paced and stress-inducing world.

The ideal approach to developing mental toughness is a holistic approach. By concentrating on one part, like controlled aggression, you are unlikely to gain a sustainable competitive advantage.

The key is to learn to tell yourself to do something, and then do it. How often have you heard of people on their deathbed saying, "I wish I'd done this or that while I could?" They had the idea and possibly the desire, but simply did not follow through. Somewhere along the way, they decided their intentions were untimely or too difficult to achieve. A mental ceiling acted as an effective obstacle. There is a difference between *saying* that you will do something and *doing* it. Ultimately, for accomplishment and the development of a competitive advantage, there must be alignment between saying and doing.

### ***Nature and nurture***

Some people are born with or develop substantial physical or technical abilities that help them become successful. These abilities are enhanced when supported with mental toughness. Mental toughness itself can be predisposed. The less a person is gifted with this predisposition, the greater their need will be to develop mental toughness.

The adage, "Talent alone will not prevail," applies. Talent combined with mental toughness is a powerful combination. Mental toughness is a resource that can, and indeed must, be developed. With increased mental toughness, those with little talent can become the best that they can be and will prevail over those with talent and no mental strength. Of course, developing mental toughness and developing your innate talent is the most powerful combination of all.

Mental toughness is not the elixir to all accomplishments. Therefore, how much of achievement can be attributed to mental toughness? Professor Ross Tucker talked about the relative contributions of the mental and the physical to success. He concluded that there is no

agreement on how much each grants you. He said, “Some said it was not ‘50% mental and 50% physical’ but rather ‘100% mental and 100% physical’, but it depends on the sport. Canoeing is different to athletics; long jump differs from high jump – both of which vary from the marathon. Downhill skiing no doubt requires substantial parts of each. Mental or physiological, it’s difficult to pin down” (Tucker, 2013).

Take performance in golf. Playing the outer game requires knowledge of the sport and its mechanical skills. To improve the outer game, you need to increase your game expertise and develop mechanical skills through learning and experience. Your inner game exists beyond the knowledge and logistics of the game. Understanding and developing this intrinsic resource has a huge influence on performance. The great golfers understand that the outer game can only take them so far; to get further they need to improve their inner game because it is ultimately this understanding that will enable them to improve performance over time.

### ***Mental toughness and other skills***

Mental toughness can provide you with a unique and sustainable competitive advantage. Neuropsychologists claim that we contend with challenges by being instinctively competitive. However, instinct alone does not give us a unique and sustainable benefit in this modern era.

If you adopt the strategies of the mental toughness model presented in this book and use them in your life, you will have the opportunity to progress from surviving to thriving. If you are already thriving, you could use these methods to fast track even further ahead.

On the other hand, if you do nothing about developing mental toughness, your chances of improvement in sport, work or relationships are slim, because you will rely mostly on your natural abilities, or luck.

It is important to note that the benefits of mental toughness are seldom accrued in isolation of other competencies. Part of the process of developing mental toughness involves assessing your overall competency needs and advancing holistically. Once you have these competencies, your confidence rises and the potential for mental toughness benefits is enhanced.

I recall a junior tug-of-war team from my son’s school days. The team was extremely motivated to do well at an inter-house tournament. However, the opposition teams were bigger and stronger. This made it difficult for the participants to conjure the level of mental toughness in the form of determination or spirit against the physical odds they faced. Of course, if you have tried tug-of-war, you will know that winning is not always about size and physical strength; it also requires an enormous amount of mental strength. However, in the absence of physical girth, you are unlikely to dominate on mental strength alone. You need the entire range of skills. Despite being highly motivated and initially determined, they lost because they lacked the basic tug-of-war physical requirements.

A useful analogy for developing mental toughness is that of a fitness regime. In a fitness regime, your aim is to develop physical muscle and become physically fitter. In a mental



toughness regime, your aim is to develop mental muscle and become mentally tougher. You may want to consider the process of developing mental toughness as a *fitness regime* for your mind. In fact, mental and physical fitness may be closer than a mere analogy – they may overlap. Tania Williams, a former South African national team gymnastics coach, insists, “*When you push yourself through the pain of getting fit, and developing and sustaining a tolerance for high workloads, you become mentally tougher. Becoming mentally tougher, you can push yourself physically to greater heights. We teach mental toughness this way. It doesn’t necessarily make you happier, though.*”

Developing physical strength can be a building block for enhanced mental strength. In other words, if you fix your outside, it can go a long way towards fixing your inside. Of course, the converse is also true: If you develop your mental strength it will, likely, encourage you to build physical strength as well. Thus, the two regimes can be complementary.

You may know from past fitness training regimes that you lost fitness when you stopped training. Well, I’m afraid the same is true of your mental conditioning programme: When you stop practising mental toughness, you lose mental muscle. Thinking about mental toughness in the same way as physical fitness provides a helpful framework for getting started.

I want to distance myself from the pop psychology approach of promoting mental toughness as willpower. My research indicates that willpower is a factor, but it is only part of mental toughness and not mental toughness in its entirety.

### ***The components of mental toughness***

The components that constitute the mental toughness model have a logical sequence, even though each one can stand alone as an independent factor. Each provides us with opportunities to improve the skills needed to become mentally tougher. Most benefits accrue when you use these components interdependently.

In order of priority, these components are:

1. Concentration
2. Composure
3. Controlled aggression
4. Confidence
5. Calculated risks
6. Competence, and
7. Commitment.

Start with the first component and work your way through to the last. Benefits then grow synergistically; they start to feed off each other and grow exponentially.

### ***Reassemble yourself to be better than before***

If you learn the skills and behaviours needed for each mental toughness component, you can reassemble yourself to be better than you were before. You develop a self-authoring mind to balance your socially conditioned mind.

If you do this, you can become the best person you can be and make it difficult for your competitors to contend with you. In addition, you could atone for any lapses of performance in the past. You cannot go back and make a new beginning, but you can start over and make a new present and ending. Moreover, while the journey towards becoming mentally tougher can become one of your goals, gaining mental toughness is an ongoing quest.

Mind and body form one interlinked system. Your body responds to your mind and vice versa. Think about how your mind reacts to feeling sick: Daily tasks become difficult to accomplish, and general motivation to execute these tasks decreases. When you feel anxious or sad, your body's ability to perform even the most automatic of tasks becomes difficult. Your breath is shorter, your heart beats faster. A feedback loop between your body and mind exists and influences your daily life in a balancing act of give and take.

Most people have an ingrained preference for physical tasks over mental tasks. However, we can strive for supremacy in both. The route to physical and mental excellence is based on choices. It hinges heavily on combining natural inclination with learnt skill and behaviour.

### ***The bell curve of performance***

The relationship between performance and time can be illustrated in a bell curve. The line of a bell curve starts at the mean. As we invest effort and allocate resources, the performance line forms an upward curve over time. Eventually, other forces exceed the influence of our effort and resources. As these forces prevail, the curve reaches its apex and starts a downward journey.

### ***Beating the curve***

Beating the curve requires that you adapt, renew, reinvent, innovate, or improvise before the apex. You do it while the line is ascending and there is upward and positive momentum. Initially, self-enforced changes will cause a loss in momentum and the performance line will plateau below the anticipated apex as you go through new learning and developmental processes.

### ***Nothing changes if nothing changes***

Beating the curve sets up a new bell curve resulting in higher performance over a longer time. The problem is that our instincts, beliefs, and mind-sets invariably tell us, "Don't fix it if it's not broken. Why change if we don't need to?" This is where mental toughness is required. It

is the ability to sense the need for change and to make these changes before you need to, that is, before you reach the apex.

If you introduce change at this stage, you build on current accomplishments and create longer-term improved performance by initiating a new, proactive bell curve. The new curve will cause an initial short-term loss in performance. Accepting this loss is another reason to be mentally tough.

Most people introduce change on the downward slope of the curve. This is driven by the pain of loss and the need to survive. However, reacting to the downward momentum requires a lot more effort, and far greater loss is inevitably incurred.

My question to you is: *Are you beating the curve?*

### ***Fire and ice***

Mental toughness can be represented by the fire and ice metaphor. It is crucial for an understanding of mental toughness to embrace a seemingly paradoxical relationship between fire and ice.

People who are mentally resilient have fire in the belly and ice in the brain. They combine fiery passion with cold reason – a gut-felt enthusiasm and a burning desire coupled with stony, clear-minded restraint.

The fire component is associated with qualities of heat, power, and assertiveness. The ice component, on the other hand, is associated with the qualities of cold, patience and persistence.

These two seemingly opposite claims are bound together into a new reality, creating a condition where intensity and tranquillity come together to enable success. However, while fire and ice can thus be mutually reinforcing, they can also short-circuit each other if they are not held in balance: Fire melts the ice, which in turn douses the flames.

Even gallantry must be tempered with cool calculation.

### ***Mental toughness is a success factor***

After the New Zealand All Blacks won the Rugby World Championship for a third time, former All Blacks coach, John Mitchell, claimed that mental toughness gave them marginal gains and was a significant element in their winning culture.

Mitchell's claim is impressive when one examines the global demographics of senior rugby players. There is a misperception that one of the All Blacks' success factors is their abundance of senior rugby players. In 2011, New Zealand was recorded as having 27,374 senior players. South Africa had 109,878. The ratio was 4:1 in favour of South Africa (Rugbydump.com, 2011).

Nevertheless, the All Blacks will always have to factor that some opposition teams have greater player numbers to draw on and will inevitably produce a side capable of beating theirs.

This was the case when the All Blacks were defeated by England in a Rugby World Cup semi-final (2019). In this game the England team's controlled aggression in the form of game intensity (ironically one of the All Blacks' traditional strengths) had the All Blacks on the back foot for most of the game. In my mind, it follows that mental toughness will continue to feature as a major component if the All Blacks are to regain their imperious form.

Mental toughness could give all of us marginal gains in sport, work, and relationships. It helps us to access the right attitude. As a result, you are better equipped to manage the tough times and turbo boost the good times. You recognise what makes you uniquely strong, and you own it. You do not run from things that scare you. You face them.

### ***Mental Toughness Sceptics***

Some sceptics refute the existence of mental toughness, they assume that supporters of the concept believe in a binary approach i.e. you are either mentally tough or weak. I guess this could be true for a few – although I have never come across examples to support their claim. My research and experience support the notion that all of us can improve anything on an incremental basis, including aspects of mental toughness.

Whilst I believe in embracing multiple perspectives, I would find it hard to ignore the overwhelming evidence supporting the need for mental toughness development for a claim that it does not exist. As I see it, this would be like supporting the claim that the MMR vaccine causes autism. Some well-meaning people back this view and with the help of conspiracy theories and fake social media posts perpetuate a very dangerous pseudo-science hoax.

*“Science is more than a body of knowledge; it is a way of thinking. It is a wiring of the brain that empowers you to probe whether something is real or not in this world. If you do not have the power to judge what is true and what is not true, then you might think that science is just one way of knowing things and here's this other way of knowing things and there's no difference between the two, and I choose to believe this and not that.”*

**Neil DeGrasse Tyson on Objective truth and Personal truth (2017)**

## 4. CONCENTRATION

*“Concentration is a fine antidote to anxiety.”*

JACK NICKLAUS

A leader focuses the attention of team members on the direction of the organisation, their role in the team, the important things they need to do, how they are doing, and how they can improve.

They do this by formulating and publishing a clear plan of where the organisation or team is going; they implement changes that will herald new value; they hold forums to discuss future changes; they have an enticing reward system; and they conduct performance appraisals.

I find evidence of the above in most organisations. Yet in these organisations I still come across the following concerns expressed by team members.

“We don’t know where the organisation is going – they don’t communicate with us”; “They keep changing the way we operate without consulting us”; “They don’t reward us enough”; “I don’t get feedback and I am not sure what my future is in this place.” Why are these assertions made when there is adequate evidence that processes exist to address them?

Is our concentration distracted by the ‘noise’ in our lives? Have we become deaf to corporate messaging designed to keep us aware of what is going on? Or do we default to an instinctive, blaming mind-set where the usual suspect is management or head office?

Statistics reveal that 80% of mountaineering deaths occur on the way down. Could climbers, loose concentration because they have achieved their goal of ascent, become complacent, and mistakes creep into their descent?

### *A definition of concentration*

You identify how your passion can serve the needs of a target community and then, using conditional optimism, prepare and implement plans that bring your passion into reality.

### *Key points on concentration*

- You identify what you are passionate about and concentrate on that.
- You let instincts balanced with rationality and planning guide you.
- You adopt an attitude of conditional optimism.
- You apply leadership to your life, and then you manage your time.
- You include your wellbeing in your planning
- You gain stakeholder support for your plan.
- You adapt your plans according to the influences of the organisational plan.
- You don’t sleepwalk through your life and miss the signs of the future.
- You participate fully in performance feedback.
- You use deliberate practice to put your plans into action.

Your concentration mantra is ***I must develop energy reserves and eliminate energy leaks.***

*"Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it."*

**Steve Jobs**

### ***The first step***

The first step in concentration is identifying what are you passionate about? This is the “why” in your life. It does not matter what your endeavour is, if you are not passionate about it, you will not thrive. At best, you will reluctantly comply and survive.

*“If you know the why, you can live any how.”* **Nietzsche**

### ***No why, no passion, no thriving - just surviving***

At the end of 1971, I finished my first stint at University and was conscripted into the South African Defence Force. I was reluctant to go, but participation was compulsory. The rationale for enlistment, given by the government, was that South Africa was fighting terrorism. The communists would take away our democracy and religion. As such, the authorities claimed we were fighting a holy war on behalf of God. They had biblical references to substantiate their claim. I particularly remember that the judgemental use of the “Cursed children of Ham.” At the time I could not understand the reference. Ham? Who was Ham?

Of course, you know what they meant. I have since become aware that a biblical reference can be found to justify almost anything. Even in those times, I did not buy into their logic. The deal-breaker was I would be jailed if I did not report for duty. I had no passion for the cause but wanted to avoid going to jail and allowed myself to become a foot soldier in a war I did not understand. I regret this decision and, in hindsight, should have had the courage to refuse and face up to the consequences like Mohammad Ali did, in 1966, when he was conscripted into the American military. I feel I missed an opportunity to display integrity rather than go with a more comfortable option.

Instead, my participation was through compliance and my feelings were dominated by apathy. After my initial stint, the conscription included annual camps for the following ten years.

In 1981, it finally dawned on me that the so-called ‘in group’ that I was a part of was the ‘out group’, and I was one of the ‘bad guys’.

During that time, the icon of the African National Congress (ANC) was Nelson Mandela. The ANC was the South African Government’s nemesis. Mandela was portrayed as a devil (sic) that was fortunately incarcerated on Robben Island. It had taken me ten years to realise that I shared this ‘devil’s’ passion for fairness and inclusiveness. I found a way of escaping any further military duty.

By 1991, Nelson Mandela had ‘miraculously transformed’. In 1994, he became South Africa’s saviour, uniting all citizens under a vision of a rainbow nation. I recall the song ‘Somewhere over the Rainbow’ and imagined the pot of gold that all would share under his leadership.

By the time 2009 came around, Mandela had left politics and South Africa’s rainbow was in tatters. It seemed the words of this song needed to be changed to ‘Somewhere the Rainbow is over.’ South Africa was burning in the flames of corruption. Mandela’s rainbow vision faded.

In 2017 the pot of gold at the end of South Africa’s rainbow was transformed into a bin of junk, the content was plundered with very little possibility that the treasures would be returned to South Africans.

Maybe, I have become a little cynical, or hopefully just sceptical, but my assertion is instead of trapping ourselves in the role of victim and waiting for another saviour, usually a politician, to give us scraps, we should take charge of our lives and use our passion to write our own story. In this way we can rediscover our individual and collective pots of gold, in whatever form we perceive them, without depending on a miracle.

In recent years, I have often facilitated groups where, as part of the learning process, participants identify their priority values. Invariably, passion features high on the list, so it is generally viewed as something of importance. Passion on its own is not going to transform you, action is.

### ***From yearn to yawn***

I wonder how many people are in a job that provides a means to an end, rather than one driven by passion, like a hobby. I suspect many. The road to mental toughness starts with having a passion for what you do, particularly for the work that results in an income. If you are in a job that is not underpinned by passion, I suggest you discover passion, or you may want to consider finding other work in line with your passion. Why not?

Most people have an abundance of passion as they start their life journey. Tragically, some experience setbacks and wounds during their lives that act as passion killers – they go from yearn to yawn. These people are consigned to leading lives devoid of the benefits of high levels of passion. They exist on a continuum that ranges from being unaware that they lack passion, to the other extreme where they are aware that they lack it, but they cannot tap into this precious resource. The situation is aggravated if their lack of passion is associated with mental and emotional health or substance abuse challenges. Symptoms include reactive blaming, increased bouts of anger, hyper-anxiety, or depression.

The underpinning logic of passion lies in our primordial neurological baggage. We are hardwired with passion. Although, when passion is fuelling an intimate relationship, the word ‘logic’ is not always applicable. I recall a Blaise Pascal quote, which I am paraphrasing: “*Love has its reasons about which reason knows naught.*” Alternatively, one could say that where the heart leads, the mind will follow.

Martin Luther King Jr provided an enduring example of someone with great reserves of passion. He channelled passion into purpose, which was contained in his famous dream speech. His dream was a big, bold, and audacious intention for eradicating racism (King, 1963).

King urged people to let their dreams shape their realities, rather than allowing their realities to dictate their dreams. He wanted us to progress beyond perceived limits imposed by past or present circumstances.

Michael Dell, IT innovator, reputedly asked his staff to peer around corners, past clouds, and find limbs worth going out on.

Walter Isaacson writes in *Steve Jobs* (2011) that Jobs warned not to fall into the trap of thinking you have something to lose. Your time is limited so do not waste it. Almost everything falls away in the face of death – all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure. There is no reason not to follow your dream (Isaacson, 2011).

It is reasonable to assume that you will vigorously pursue and, when needed, defend a dream originating from passion. On the other hand, if you do not have a dream steeped in passion, it is unlikely to be sustainable over time.

Passion provided the motivation that paved the way to King's purpose, expressed as a dream. But I suggest we should express purpose not simply in a dream, but in a personal plan. This plan should contain a vision of where we want to go, what we want to do, and with whom we want to share the journey. These combine as a major contributor to having a sense of meaning. My question to the reader at this stage is: "Are you playing your game of life like a 'wuss' or a warrior? Will your legacy be could've, should've, would've, didn't?" When you are in the metaphoric departure lounge will you look back lamenting the many things you could have done, but didn't?

### ***Apply the conditional optimism that enables you to aim high***

In most instances, if you start with passion, it will fuel optimism about the future. For those who are wrestling with being optimistic, consider Winston Churchill's words: "*I am an optimist. It does not seem too much use being anything else.*"

I believe many achieve too little because they are afraid to aim high in case they miss. Instead they aim low and hit. My advice is to start by identify the kind of life you want, then work out the way and the income to achieve it.

I have decided to be a conditional optimist. I don't assume things will get better. I create the conditions that give things a chance to get better. In these conditions I can aim high.

The notion that things will get better by themselves is no more rational than a belief that things will get worse. Seeing the glass as half-empty may be as valid in a context as seeing it as half full. Conditional optimism requires us to get busy and work towards improvement. Conversely, complacent optimism is sitting, thinking, hoping, and wishing for good things to happen.



Alain de Botton in a YouTube video on pessimism gives another perspective. He declares that we should consider including more constructive pessimism as opposed to feeling under pressure to adopt blind optimism. He explains that we need to expect that anything can fail, and that suffering will always endure. If we do this, it will set a lower bar on our expectations and in turn lead to less disappointment (de Botton, 2013).

I had not considered de Botton's view on pessimism as part of my approach. Clearly, there is value in the way he frames it. However, it does not persuade me to encourage my audiences to be pessimistic.

de Botton has published other works that I agree with like *Alain de Botton on Existential Maturity and what emotional intelligence really means*. The article opens with the quote "The emotionally intelligent person knows that they will only ever be mentally healthy in a few areas and at certain moments but is committed to fathoming their inadequacies and warning others of them in good time, with apology and charm."

I have concluded one should not have hope without reason not fear without reason. I also like the late Hans Rosling's approach to optimism. Pinker quoted him in *Enlightenment Now*: "I am not an optimist, I am a serious possibilist" (Pinker, 2018).

In *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World - And Why Things Are Better Than You Think* (Rosling, 2018). Rosling adds that his enthusiasm is fuelled by a mission to fight devastating ignorance with a fact-based worldview (Rosling, 2018).

### ***Turn conditional optimism into a plan***

It is better to have a plan and not need it, than need a plan and not have it. It would seem people struggle to thrive because they don't aim high enough in case they miss, then they aim low and hit.

A plan provides direction. I was inspired by the title of a pilot episode of *Star Trek* with the tagline, "Where no man has gone before." I find science fiction author Larry Niven's quote on space travel equally impressive: "The dinosaurs became extinct because they didn't have a space program. And if we become extinct because we don't have a space program, it'll serve us right!" I suspect it was words like this that inspired Elon Musk to plan for intergalactic travel.

Elon Musk's vision of creating a space in outer space for the human species resonates with bestselling author Yuval Harari, who writes in *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (2016) that our planning should create possibilities and not prophecies.

### ***Plan for major disruptions***

A word of caution: Whilst planning for successful outcomes, it is equally important to plan for disruptions and failure. In this instance, planning for disruptions and failure means anticipating and having action plans for the disorder and distress that will befall you if you

are confronted by surprise events that have disastrous consequences in your life. Think of the Corona virus and its devastating effects.

I want to clarify a possible misperception that I am simplistically claiming that if you have passion and conditional optimism, interpreted into a plan, you will be successful. There is no simple answer nor secret to success.

Things are never that simple. But what I can guarantee is that you are more likely to achieve what you are passionate about if you plan for it, prepare for it, and allocate resources such as energy towards achieving it.

You also need to be aware that your plan is in competition with many other people's plans, and it may clash with random unanticipated events or extenuating circumstances. However, if you want to achieve something close to your ideal future, you need to increase your influence over the events and circumstances in your future. This is where mental toughness comes into play.

Most of us mentally approximate what our future will be like based on our past and present experiences. We estimate the future in a similar way a business does when it projects its sales figures and finances. Business executives know they cannot be assured of future sales and, therefore, their financial position. We have the same lack of assurance about our future achievements. It is the concern that the future may fall short of our positive expectations that becomes fertile ground for increased anxiety. Few will mind achieving a future that exceeds their expectations.

You could leave the future to fate or any other perceived power outside of your influence, or you could introduce a process that will help you to co-create your future. The steps in this process generally used for a business also work at an individual level.

The first step is to get in touch with what you are passionate about and what you value most. Then, develop an optimistic vision of a future state linked to your passion. Past and present experiences are used as positive scaffolds to access the heights associated with this optimistic future. The next steps are to engage in planning and implementation over a given period. These enable you to build and maximise the resources that will create the conditions for bringing your vision into reality. The associated benefits from participating in this optimistic process are an increased desire for the future and reduced anxiety about an uncertain future.

### ***Be guided by instincts, but do not rely on them***

I often hear people say, "I trust my gut." I agree we can at times be guided by our instincts, but we need to be selective because we have many encoded instincts that misinform us, and we end up making bad decisions when we rely on these. When you include a rational planning process, you put yourself in a position where you can balance the rationality from planning and social conditioning with your instincts. You can do this because these clarify your high and low priorities. You get to know what is worth paying attention to in any given moment and, indeed, what is worth defending.

You also know what not to pay attention to, such as distractions that lead you away from your intention. The result is that you develop the ability to review the gut feeling that attempts to dominate your attention in any given moment. At this stage, you can still go where your instincts are leading you, but you are better informed.

When developing your plan, spending a disproportionate amount of time and energy on preparing for the future instead of attending to the present can be hazardous. It's as counterproductive as being a victim of the past. In addition, engage with and pay attention to the present moment whilst developing your plans. The present is your current reality and you can be sure that it is often out of alignment with your plans.

Think of how plans and attention are merged in an athletic event. If you plan to achieve a personal best time in a marathon event, you would presumably have planned for the specific demands of the race. This work may be undone in a moment when a worthy competitor starts the race a lot faster than you had anticipated. If you respond inadequately by keeping pace with this competitor and, in so doing, run too fast in the beginning, you will soon be exhausted with the goal nowhere in sight. You will have sacrificed your plan due to inappropriate attention.

The game of cricket provides another example of the need to merge planning and attention. Your plan will be to win. You need to make enough runs during your innings to outscore the opponents when they bat. However, they will do everything possible to distract your attention to limit you from scoring runs, or to terminate your innings.

Your attention needs to remain totally in the moment, playing each ball on its merits to build a competitive score, despite the distractions and pressure provided by bowlers and spectators.

When former Springbok rugby coach Peter de Villiers was appointed, he seemed determined to refine the intention of the Springbok team by adding creativity and a greater use of skills to the way they play the game. He asked me to facilitate his first planning session with the Springbok players to include this aspect.

After a comprehensive and participative session, de Villiers summed up as follows: "Our intention is to play complete and exciting rugby. We cannot rely on being in a cycle where we are fortunate enough to dominate other teams physically. Of course, we will still use physicality to win collisions, get the ball and retain the ball. In addition, there will be an emphasis on personal responsibility for creating value by paying attention to what is in front of us, making decisions, being creative, innovating and finishing."

After a short while in his tenure, de Villiers discovered that implementing a major change to culture that has existed for a long time is extremely difficult to achieve. The Springbok rugby stakeholder community with its competing discourses resulted in the maintenance of the status quo and de Villiers abandoned his new plan. On reflection, I feel that if he had wanted to implement a new plan, he should have paid more attention to gaining buy-in from the stakeholder community.

### ***Eliminate some choices***

Dan Ariely makes the claim in his book *Predictably Irrational* that we can become overwhelmed when faced with too many choices. This is aggravated by an instinctive need to keep our options open. He concludes that this draws heavily on our limited energy reserves (Ariely, 2008).

Choices could possibly overwhelm us and have a detrimental effect on our vitality and stamina. That is why, as part of our mental toughness development process, we should include a limited range of carefully considered scenarios in our personal plans. This will give us the benefit of enough, well thought-out alternatives when our number one plan fails. Ultimately, it will be our ability to adapt that will help us thrive.

If you have ever watched a dog that is chasing seagulls on a beach, you have probably noticed that despite an instinctive intent for catching a seagull, the dog ceaselessly changes its target from one to the next based on choices that appear closer or easier to achieve, but soon gives up, exhausted.

Many people hotly pursue opportunities that present themselves like metaphoric seagulls, but switch their focus when the going gets tough, or when a seemingly attractive or presumably easier opportunity presents itself. As a result, none of these opportunities are realised, leaving the pursuer exhausted and disillusioned.

Does that mean we must give up on our instinctive optimism? Certainly not! However, it is wise to avoid operating on instinct alone as a guide for our choices.

When combining instinct with a strategic approach, you will be better able to confront multiple choices and make wiser decisions about which opportunities to pursue. The ability to do this will also help you manage those anxious feelings that come with being overwhelmed or intimidated by multiple choices. In focusing on the right things, rather than on chasing life's metaphorical seagulls, you identify and concentrate on a future aligned to your passion.

### ***Prepare a plan at any age***

Is there a stage in your life where it is too late to reimagine and rediscover your future? Is it ever too late to construct a plan aimed at achieving a preferred future? I would argue that it is too late when you are at death's door.

You can express newly found passion, purpose, and create a plan at any stage in your life. One of the many benefits of growing older is that you become aware that time is a precious and limited resource; you realise that you would be wise not to squander it on doing things that do not excite or fulfil you.

### ***Lead your life, don't just manage your time***

It was a divorce, many years ago, that made me take a closer look at my priorities. I had several realisations, not least of which was that I was paying too much attention to managing my time at the expense of leading my life. I cannot say I was unhappy or that I was not experiencing some special moments, but when I critically reflected, I realised I was like a hamster on a wheel travelling a well-worn path.

I was caught up in a confined life of being employed by another. I concluded that I was deferring much of my excitement and happiness to weekends, annual holidays, and, ultimately, retirement.

I reflected on what I was passionate about and what I wanted from my future. I penned a personal plan that correlated with these reflections. It focused on living my life on my own terms, which meant creating a lifestyle without the traditional workplace expectations. I wanted a lifestyle where my daily time utilisation, my input versus output ratio, and holiday time allocation wasn't determined by an employer. Sure, I had to consider what resources I might need to plan for my twilight years, but retirement was not going to be my intention.

My passion was to lead a life involving fitness and learning. I wanted my income derived from a process that included continuous improvement of mind and body. My personal plan was therefore built around creating income streams around these preferences.

That was then, and largely I have achieved a lifestyle that approximates my plan. This is now. My current feeling is that I want to pay attention to seizing spontaneous opportunities for experiencing special moments. I need to recognise that many of them present themselves outside the boundaries of my plan, and I must have the adaptability and conditional optimism to grab them.

### ***Having a map brings confidence***

Having a map, or in our case a personal plan, to guide one does not guarantee success, but it does give direction and confidence. I recall the story of a young lieutenant leading a small Hungarian detachment in the Alps. He sent a reconnaissance unit out into the uncharted icy wasteland. It began to snow soon after their departure, and the snow continued to fall relentlessly for two days, with no sign of the unit in sight. The lieutenant was convinced he had consigned his people to a frozen death.

On the third day, however, they returned. The lieutenant was incredulous and asked where they had been and how they managed to find their way back. They reported that after finding themselves hopelessly lost, they resigned themselves to imminent death.

Until one of the men discovered a map in his pocket, they held no hope of survival. Now, however, the once-despairing men calmed down, gathered their resources, and pitched a tent to wait out the snowstorm. The next day they used the map to get their bearings and find their way back. The lieutenant asked to see the miraculous chart, only to discover that it was not a map of the Alps, but of the Pyrenees. The important fact was that their discovery of a map,

and the sense of direction and purpose it catalysed, was enough to calm them and provide them with motivation and determination to survive.

### ***How to create a plan***

A typical personal plan is similar to an organization's strategic plan and usually includes the following components: Passion, values, vision, current reality, key competitive factors, goals, and action plans.

### ***Passion and values***

What do you regard as valuable? What do you stand for and what will you fall for? We use values as a compass for direction and decision-making. This can be hazardous as some people are willing to commit the most horrendous deeds and crimes in defence of their values. Examples can be readily found in gangster cultures and religious sects.

However, let us focus on you. Is compassion one of your values? What about tolerance, personal responsibility, professionalism, winning, or sustainability? The list may be long. Try to hone it down to about five values for your personal planning exercise.

You may also want to reflect on where your current values come from. Did you take them on consciously or subliminally from your culture or socialisation? It is often claimed that values and morals originate from religious beliefs. However, this excludes many people who do not align with religion, yet lay claim to having values based on human norms. Think about the history of humankind. It was not that long ago when the majority in our society believed in many Gods and had values that regulated their behaviour without the prescription of current religions. Irrelevant of their origins, values are nuanced as well as individually orientated.

A critical reflection of values as part of creating your personal plan should include examining your understanding of some of the dilemmas that arise in society, sport, work, and relationships. You may currently value winning at all costs in sport, while others may value the honour residing in doing their best, regardless of who wins.

The outcome of this exercise is that you may want to affirm or adjust some of your values considering your reflection on prejudices or problems in the way you think and behave.

### ***Vision***

You have heard the claim, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Well I add, "Or we waste much time and energy instinctively reacting to other people and random events." Your vision is a portrayal of your preferred future against which you align your intention interpreted into planning.

To create your vision, you use what you are passionate about combined with your overarching values as architecture to describe your favoured destination and the direction you would like to take towards it. When you have this description, you can summarise it into a

paragraph or two. If you do not put enough rational thought into defining this, there is the risk of embarking on an aimless chase after subliminal and usually elusive results.

When you are constructing your vision, it is an opportune time to reflect on whether, thus far, you have mostly been running away from but not running to anything. Note, when you are running from something it signals you are trying to survive. When you are running towards something it's a sign you want to thrive.

Some people are not selective about the focus of their energies. They strive to be successful at everything they do and include being fiercely competitive in social or familial arenas. Do you need to win every game of social tennis or beat your ten-year-old son at snooker?

This indiscriminate approach to dominance tends to dilute the effect on things that matter. My recommendation to you is to identify those areas where it is important for you to be successful, and to concentrate on being fiercely competitive within that selective framework. By devoting your efforts to the identified areas, not only do you increase the likelihood of success for yourself, you also allow others around you, particularly family and friends, a higher chance of accomplishment.

I came across an article on dominance [https://www.pokerstrategy.com/news/world-of-poker/Why-you-have-to-let-weaker-players-win-occasionally\\_101770/](https://www.pokerstrategy.com/news/world-of-poker/Why-you-have-to-let-weaker-players-win-occasionally_101770/). Dr Jaak Panksepp's research was on dominance among rats. In summary, dominant rats let smaller rats win their playful wrestling contests occasionally to keep them interested in playing. He added that this was from a primitive part of the brain most likely shared by humans.

The way people make choices for their future is different from their immediate decision-making process. For example, when asked to plan snacks for the following week, most people, assuming they know the long-term benefits of a healthy diet, would opt for better choices such as fruit or nuts, but when presented with the same choice in the moment, would take a chocolate bar and a fizzy, sugar-filled drink. What you need to do is to bring your future intention and present attention into alignment, so that the decisions you make now actively inform your future destination rather than create a diversion.

### ***Current reality***

Your current reality is an evaluation of how your life is right now. In the same way that you compiled a vision, your current reality is a description of today. The gap between your vision and your current reality will give you a good idea of the size of the task you have in front of you.

### ***Key competitive factors***

These are the aspects of your life that you need to improve if you are to move from your current reality towards your vision. What could they be? The following may give you some clues for key competitive factors: Health, fitness, energy, work ethic, service ethic, resources,

relationships, family, networking, communication, learning, skills development and, of course, mental toughness.

### ***Goals***

Your goals are detailed, result-oriented statements using your vision and current reality as a guide. In your goals you systematically identify what you need to do about your key competitive factors. They should be recorded in the well-known SMART format. In other words, they need to be specific, measurable, agreed upon by your stakeholder community, realistically achievable, and time related. This period is usually one year.

### ***Action plans***

Action plans are tasks you need to do to extract yourself from inertia and develop momentum. These are tasks that line up with each goal. This could include, for example, phoning someone or making a relevant appointment that will progress one of your projects.

### ***Stakeholder support***

One of the key factors of an effective plan is expansive stakeholder support. This boils down to having most stakeholders supporting the plan. You will never get 100% buy-in, and if you compromise until you do, the plan will likely be diluted to the point where it loses its link to the original intent.

### ***Performance pathway***

In the late '90s and early years of the new millennium I assisted SA Rugby with the facilitation of their strategic plans. The rugby CEO was fully aware of deeply embedded cultural clashes between rugby stakeholders and went to great lengths to achieve strategic alignment from stakeholders for the new plans.

A large component of these plans was a comprehensive approach to a performance pathway based on the latest science as it pertained to rugby players. This pathway included a transformation element aimed at bringing national teams in line with the diversity reality of South Africa.

This resulted in the establishment of the annual Grant Khomo tournament for under sixteen rugby players. The science indicated that ability at this age was a reliable indicator of future performance. A large squad, known as the green squad, was selected after the tournament, and tested annually for strength, speed, and a range of rugby skills. These test results were recorded, monitored, and analysed nationally. Each player was given an appropriate exercise and nutritional plan. In many instances, players were supplied with the food as well.

The next stage was the selection of a more exclusive gold squad after the under eighteen Craven Week tournament. Testing and support continued for these players. They were



required to attend a series of rugby development camps that included psychological inputs to help build mental resilience. The CEO asked me to drive the implementation of the plan.

### ***The negative effect of a new leader***

The development and transformation plan had an encouraging start with execution gaining form and traction over the following three years. However, it did not consider the effect of a new leader nor was it locked into regulation.

Three years into the enactment of the plan, a new candidate for the position of rugby president entered the fray. I recall his populist, dystopian rhetoric. He claimed that SA Rugby was in disarray and shamed. He, alone, could make the changes that SA Rugby needed to stave off catastrophe and restore us to our rightful place as a respected and feared rugby nation.

If he knew then what he probably knows now, would he rather have said, “Make South Africa Rugby great again?”

He won the election and wielded his power tyrannically. He did not accept his predecessor’s strategic and transformation plans. Instead, he went on a relentless rampage to throw the plans, and many of the people associated with them, out. He wanted to ‘own’ his territory like a new male lion taking over an existing pride.

This type of behaviour is often the case when a new leader enters the fray and feels no restriction to their aggressive tendencies. You need look no further than the expunging of former American president Obama’s plans and achievements by his successor.

In 2006, the new rugby president was also unceremoniously evicted. He had trashed his predecessors’ systems and in so doing set transformation back a few years and apparently did other dubious things – verified in a subsequent court case in which the judgement barred him from serving in any capacity on the general council or committees of the South African Rugby Union.

Lingering social and cultural influences affected the pace of transformation, but the question remains: Could self-righteous and egotistical leadership have been the major reason why transformation in rugby took so long?

### ***If your work is getting in the way of your life, get rid of your work***

Let us leave the vagrancies of sport politics for the time being.

One of my clients gave the following feedback: “I feel as if my business plan is secondary to my personal plan. But, if I am clearer about how I want to lead my life, it’s easier to determine what I want from work.”

My feeling is that people often end up blaming their lack of success on their work, their boss, their employees, the market, or even their family members. They do this without recognising that, to become successful, their personal plan is more important than their business plan.

### ***Synergise your plans with the organisation's plans***

Once you have developed a personal plan, you need to synergise it with the plan of the organisation you work for, or if you are the business owner, then your business plan.

If you work for someone else, it is smart to help in the development of the organisation's strategic plan, or at least understand it. In so doing, you will become familiar with its underlying priorities, identifying how you can become a co-creator in the organisation's future and motivating your own future within it.

### ***Manage clashes between personal and organisational plans***

Tough times, changing circumstances, personal growth spurts, performance failure or cultural differences can drive conflict between you and your workplace. This will negatively affect your dreams and values, causing you to experience feelings of frustration, exclusion, or loss of motivation.

If you find yourself in this position, you need to initiate difficult conversations with your management before your loss of motivation affects your performance and the performance of those around you. These conversations, if had early enough, can be conducted without a loss of dignity or integrity for either party.

When you invest passion and effort into the organisation's plan – and in most instances, they will have one – you expect simultaneously to achieve the outcomes of your personal plan.

This assumes that you *have* a personal plan, and by this, I mean a carefully considered, *written* plan. If you do not, your discomfort will mainly be rooted in subconscious and socialised beliefs of how your life should be. Thus, read no further until you have constructed a personal plan.

I will continue with the assumption that you have a personal plan. If a large gap exists between your plan and the plan or culture of the organisation, you will experience a loss of motivation, which will ultimately result in resentment and a loss of performance. If you find yourself in this situation, you are at an important crossroad. As I see it, these are your options:

Option 1: You could accept the difference between your personal plan and the organisation's plan, and you could choose to live with the difference whilst maintaining a positive disposition.

Option 2: You might not accept this difference, yet you trundle along anyway because you are at a loss for an alternative. In this case, you are likely to experience growing resentment and demotivation, which will affect those around you. Ultimately, individual and group performance will suffer.

Option 3: You could engage with your workplace and identify where you can collaborate and cooperate so that your plan can start, inch by inch, to resonate with the plan and culture of the organisation. Initially you may have to share without agreeing and it is unlikely that they will change their plan to match yours. In most instances, this is a realistic option and may serve as

a short- to medium-term stopgap, giving you enough time to reassess what is possible in your life without resentment manifesting.

Option 4: You can leave the organisation. Find another organisation to work for that has plans that align with your own, or work for yourself.

This last option is the one I opted for a long time ago. At times, the consequences of this choice have been tough, but I have never regretted it. What has become clear to me is that it is crucial to develop coherence between your personal plan and your workplace. My coherence has manifested a state where I no longer perceive a difference between my personal life and work.

You do not live your life in separate compartments. The more you can align your work with your life, the more effective, efficient, and mentally tough you will become.

Although I say that we should not compartmentalise our lives, in times of extreme demand and stress, it is a useful tactic to mentally bracket a part of your life if it is causing you undue stress. This area is then somewhat contained whilst you deal with it, and you minimise the spill over into other areas of your life.

*“Of course, motivation is not permanent. But then, neither is bathing; but it is a habit you should do on a regular basis.”*

*Zig Ziglar*

### ***Turn plans into preparation***

If you want a preferred future, a plan on its own will not bring it into reality. You will not be remembered for the plans you made.

The realisation of a preferred future or something close to this intention is affected by a host of issues, including the quality and quantity of your preparation and the level of your competitors' commitment to their preparation.

Daley Thompson, winner of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics Decathlon event, believed in preparation. After winning the gold medal, the press hailed him as the world's greatest athlete.

In a subsequent interview, he was asked why he felt he was referred to as the world's greatest athlete. In his reply, he reputedly claimed that it might be because he always researched his competitors' training programmes. If the research revealed that they were training twice a day, he would train four times a day in response. If another trained three times per week, he would train six times per week; and if yet another trained in the rain, he would train in the snow. Whenever he went to a competition, he was always the best prepared.

Could Thompson's commitment to preparation have resulted in him being hailed the world's greatest athlete? The rather obvious conclusion is that preparation is a key ingredient to success, whatever your endeavour. How much you prepare is your choice. When committing to high levels of preparation, you choose to practise harder than the opposition.

In Daley Thompson's case, the outcome was winning a gold medal at the Olympic Games. Likely, he understood that practice and competition are both part of one seamless process.

Ashton Eaton had to dig deeper with his preparation. For Eaton to win the decathlon at the 2012 London and 2016 Rio Olympics, he had to out-prepare the opposition by committing to deep attentive practice. He had to learn to trigger his motivation, hire the finest coaches, and use the latest sport science.

### ***Prepare harder than you play***

World-famous karate exponent Bruce Lee said, “I fear not the man who has practised 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practised one kick 10,000 times” (Lee, 1975).

Michael Phelps put it simply: “Medals are earned in the hours when no one is watching.”

Most people can perform at the upper levels of their talent in any given moment, or during a once-off performance, but few are consistent over time. People who are consistent are the ones who have committed enough time to planning and the right preparation before facing their opposition. You may cheat your way to some measure of success, but not to significance.

Remember, you do not rise to the occasion under pressure; you rise to the level of your preparation. That preparation must be bone deep not skin deep.

### ***Apply deliberate practice***

There is a special category in practice called deliberate practice. This refers to the type of practice that is purposeful and systematic. While regular practice might include mindless repetitions, deliberate practice requires focused attention and it is conducted with the specific goal of improving performance.

Practice is essential for accessing your highest potential and then getting better. Malcolm Gladwell, in *Outliers: The Secret of Success*, refers to research claiming that, on average, one needs 10,000 hours of skills practice to produce excellent expertise in fields such as chess, dance and swimming (Gladwell, 2011).

### ***A positive spin to practising***

Gladwell’s claim about the amount of practice time needed for success is daunting. Fortunately, Anders Ericsson, the originator of the research, says his initial findings have been misrepresented.

Daniel Coyle, in *The Talent Code*, put an optimistic spin on the practice and learning times required to become excellent. Coyle claims there are ways to learn faster and easily remember. He advocates deep, attentive practice to be successful. In many instances, he writes, people have found ways of getting more bang for their buck. In other words, they benefit more from shorter, focused practice.

Coyle cites the example of futsal, the five-a-side football game played on a pitch the size of a basketball court. In this game, players have far more contact with the ball in a shorter

timeframe than normal. Consequently, futsal players have more opportunities to learn from their mistakes and successes (Coyle, 2009).

### ***Training releases genetic potential***

Sustainable success is a relationship with lifelong preparation, not once-off efforts. It requires you not just to practise until you get it right, but to practise until you cannot get it wrong. Ultimately, training releases genetic potential. This applies whether you are an athlete, a musician, or a chess player.

### ***Being in the moment***

Being in the moment implies paying attention and ensuring that the moment is special. You have often heard how important it is to be in the moment. You could argue there is no other place to be.

Attention enables you to be perceptive to present conditions, whilst still pursuing your intention. You seldom need to change your vision or even your goal, but you may need to change the tactics for achieving them. When confronted with obstacles beyond your control, you need pre-planned alternatives instead of being trapped in a desperate scramble.

Your goal may be to get fit and your action plan is to join a gym. If joining a gym becomes unworkable, you can pursue other options. This can include contracting a personal trainer; researching fitness options on the Internet; spending time working out with like-minded friends or exercising at home.

## 6. COMPOSURE

*“No matter how good you are and how much you’ve practised, or what you have been taught, if you can’t stay composed in a pressured situation, you’ll never perform at your maximum potential.”*

MICHAEL JORDAN

Concentration provides a hedge against pressure caused by the metaphoric storms in your life. The components of concentration position you favourably ahead of or in the eye of a storm. When you are in a calm emotional state i.e. composed, it is easier to process pressure.

What is happening around you does not cause your emotions to trip you up. It is what is happening in your mind that creates your pressure fractures.

Composure is the emotionally favourable place between panic and complacency. Over-eagerness, which is not as severe as panic, occupies a position close to panic.

Panic is driven by apocalyptic or frantic thinking. Conversely, complacency is associated with being self-satisfied or arrogant.

Accessing composure starts with being in touch with your emotions and recognising what you are feeling. In this way, extremes like rage, fear, and frustration on one end of the emotional scale, to grief and heartache or complacency on the other, do not hijack your mind.

### *A definition of composure*

I define it as being in the zone where you are mentally and emotionally disciplined. Circumstances don’t drive panic nor complacency. You transcend VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) and are less likely to be mind-captured or have your mind fogged.

### *Key points on composure*

- You are ready for action with a calm demeanour.
- You access the zone (flow state) where you match challenge with your competence.
- You read signs, do not for symptoms and catastrophize, blame or feel helpless.
- You distinguish facts (I just missed the train) from noise (What if I miss the train?).
- You do not feel victimised. You transcend fear, anger, resentment, and frustration.
- You transform panic or complacency into creative tension, making fewer mistakes.
- You are not duped by magic solutions, conspiracies, superstition, or irrational beliefs.
- You have an attitude of abundance; you are not caught up in zero-sum games.
- You work with uncomfortable circumstances without disrupting team dynamics.
- You are more accurate and win key moments in your ‘game’.

Your composure mantra is: *It’s not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters.*

(Epictetus)

### ***Wise words from Mike Tyson?***

Mike Tyson, ferocious former heavyweight boxing champion, reputedly said these wise words: “Everyone has a plan, until punched on the nose.”

I add: With composure you can take a punch, maintain concentration and keep fighting. You can manage your arousal levels and maintain concentration. You keep your awareness in the moment calmly acknowledging and accepting your situation, feelings thoughts and bodily sensations.

### ***Mistakes can be your refrain but not your anthem***

When composed, your performance is more accurate. You win the key moments of your ‘game’ because you make fewer poor decisions, hence fewer mistakes. You recall and can implement your emotional ‘sweet spot’. This sweet spot is the emotional intensity you experienced during your previous best performance.

You retain an ability to see the big picture. Intense emotions do not imprison you. Instead, you are absorbed in a state of thriving where you treat the many perceived disasters as difficulties to be resolved.

Composure enables you to operate in harmony with the instinctive brain and not exclude it. If you see a snake in your path your body reacts before realising that there is a snake because the instinctive brain short-circuits all other brain functions. In a similar way, many Olympic sprinters will react to the starter gun before they have the cognition that they have heard the gun.

With composure, you can remain focused and relaxed, or at least experience a tolerable level of anxiety. If your arousal increases to extreme levels, your brain starts to function irrationally and your body language, facial expressions, and behaviour changes. These are signs that you are losing control of your emotions and composure.

### ***Being in Flow / in the Zone***

According to psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, composure helps you get into flow and enter the zone. This is an emotional space where you are doing what you are good at and are ready for action with a calm demeanour. When you are there you are in tune with signs before symptoms therefore you don’t panic or catastrophize. You have learnt to hold two ideas at the same time. i.e. you know bad things are going to happen and simultaneously you know many things are getting better. You experience grace under pressure and make fewer mistakes because you feel the challenges presented to you are in harmony with your skillset.

Csikszentmihalyi refers to this as a highly productive state of relaxed concentration. You are so immersed in the activity at hand that time flies by; the outside world does not matter; talent flows freely; and you feel great absorption, alignment, and fulfilment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). In the flow state, concerns such as time, food and ego are ignored as you experience oneness with the world around you.

Top canoeists describe their paddle as an extension of their arms while they are in the flow state. These instances can be deeply gratifying and help us to produce some of our best work.

If you perceive the challenges presented to you as being unrealistic, particularly if you are not skilled enough to match the demands of the challenge, it can cause excessive anxiety, making it impossible to get into a flow state.

On the other end of the scale, if you are experiencing a low level of challenge and have a high level of skill, then it is also difficult to achieve a flow state. For example, if star footballer Lionel Messi played in a minor football league, it would probably result in boredom. To promote flow, it is important to find challenges that are going to stretch you further than before.

When you are in the zone, you are in a place where mind and body work exceptionally well together. You meet the demands placed upon you without the prescription imposed by your instinctive mind.

You can step back from an emotionally charged moment and consider the consequences of your actions. You check yourself by asking: “How will my actions disturb my life and the lives of others? How will my response affect the relationship with this person? Will I regret saying or doing this tomorrow? Next week? Next year?” Another well-known strategy is to slowly count to ten. Chances are you will react differently after the count.

### ***Ideal Performance State***

The Ideal Performance State (IPS) is another description for being in the zone. It is a state of optimal emotional arousal resulting in maximum performance. This relationship is illustrated in a golfing context on <http://www.Golsbygolf.com>. In the Ideal Performance State, we can identify the signs that we may be submitting to inappropriate instincts and emotions, thus indulging in too much thinking or obsessive behaviour. Yet we are still able to trust instincts, intuition or learnt automated responses requiring high levels of reactive skill.

One of the signs that you are in this state is shown by your demeanour. However, if it is only on the outside, it may mean that you simply look the part, but don't feel it. Many people have become good at steeling themselves and suppressing their emotions. They look good on the outside but inside there is turmoil.

Reliable signs of being in the zone are provided by physiological measures, such as heart rate variability. When you are in the zone, your heart rate operates within a narrow range. It is common knowledge that thoughts have direct and powerful connections to physiological functions. Think hard enough about the worst thing that can happen to you and your heart will start to beat faster.

Brainwave patterns can also indicate whether you are in the zone or not. At present, it is still complicated to measure them efficiently, but I have no doubt that there will be a watch-like instrument on the market soon that is able to read brainwave patterns.



From my experience, cricket provides an excellent example where players try to spend time in the zone. The challenge is to know when to access and when to exit the zone. The rest happens around that. When players access the zone, their subconscious mind knows exactly what to do. It is trained to react. When they are in their stride, their subconscious mind is working.

I paraphrase the words of Sachin Tendulkar, the former Indian cricket great: “I don’t have time to complicate my mind, so I try to keep it empty. Being in the zone is when you’re not thinking of anything, merely reacting. One would like to be in that zone often, but it’s not that easy. When you are there it’s like you are completely cut off from the crowd, from the noise they are making. Your subconscious has taken over and your mind is quiet. I feel it’s the conscious mind that messes things up. The conscious mind is constantly telling you this might happen or that might happen, even before it has happened.”

### ***Transcending VUCA***

Our lives are filled with departures, journeys, and arrivals. We identify our passion, make plans for future success around our passion, and put those plans into action. Within this context our circumstances are constantly changing. We are confronted by obstacles in the form of VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) daily. The straight line we planned for navigating to future success invariably starts tangling to look like a strand of spaghetti in a bowl.

With composure you transcend VUCA and stay on course. You sustain your interest in, and effort towards, your intention. You adapt by dealing with or flowing around, over or under obstacles. Composure grounds you when you lose sight of your destination whilst steering through life’s storms. It reminds you of the ‘why’ that you started with, upon which you plotted your route towards thriving. It binds you to the spirit of your journey and enables you to rise above the ever-changing details of your context. That was then and this is now.

In practical terms, When the rainfall patterns changed in Cape Town and there was water rationing, I installed a large water tank, when the electricity supplier cut the power, I install a solar system for my geyser and an uninterrupted power supply (UPS) to supply my computers and other necessary appliances. I intend to get a vehicle that can use sustainable energy sources as well. There is always a way of transcending VUCA.

### ***Thinking too fast***

A lot about composure relates to the appropriate application of fast and slow thinking as described in Daniel Kahneman’s book *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (Kahneman, 2011).

Kahneman, a winner of the Nobel Prize for economics, writes about the surprising mistakes associated with conscious and subconscious thinking.

In a review of the book, William Easterly writes, “Kahneman presents our thinking process as consisting of two systems. System 1 (Thinking Fast) is unconscious, intuitive, and effort-

free. System 2 (Thinking Slow) is conscious, uses deductive reasoning and is time-consuming work. System 2 likes to think it is in charge, but the irrepressible system 1 runs the show. There is simply too much going on in our lives for system 2 to analyse everything. System 2 must pick its moments with care; it is ‘lazy’ out of necessity.”

Composure gives you the awareness that ensures that you don’t rule out options because you’re over emphasising instinct and intuition as an option on the one end of the scale or overthinking on the other.

### ***Thinking too slow***

One of the consequences of being influenced by the pressure of a big occasion is that it increases your fear of failure and you may become immobilised and potentially freeze as you slip into a trying-harder mode as opposed to adopting a working-harder approach to control the situation that scares you.

When under pressure, our arousal increases and one of the ways we manage this is by overthinking and overanalysing. Our thoughts churn around and around. We become a hostage to our minds. We could lose precious time-related opportunities as we become cautious and increasingly deliberate. In this mode, reaction time slows down, we lose fluidity, and we make skill-related mistakes.

In sporting terms, this phenomenon is called *choking*. When someone possesses the ability to do well and it is expected that they will, yet they inexplicably slip up at a critical moment, the label ‘choker’ is used to describe this situation.

Choking occurs when the part of the brain that monitors behaviour starts to interfere with actions normally made without thinking. When one is in performance mode and overthinks too much about the skill needed in that moment, anxiety increases, and performance suffers. You may have heard that the dividing line between winning and disappointment isn’t about technique or talent – it’s about performing under pressure, and in this instance, pressure driven by a fear of failure.

It may sound over-simplistic, but when dealing with fear it is important to remember that all people experience varying degrees of it. You may have heard people say, “I need to get over my fear of it, and then I will do it.” What they should rather say is, “I need to do it, then I will get over my fear of it.”

South African cartoonist Zapiro published a cartoon in 2006 communicating that the South African national cricket team, the Proteas, need batting practice, bowling practice, fielding practice, and practice in the Heimlich manoeuvre in case they choke.

The South African team has often been ranked as the number one team in the world. Despite this rating, the press has habitually accused them of choking in important competitions, like the knockout stages of major tournaments. If you study the Proteas’ performance in knockout tournaments, you will appreciate how consistently this problem has haunted them.

This choker tag was initiated by a run-out incident at the semi-final of the ICC World Cricket Cup in 1999. From that moment on, their competitors have done a good job of exploiting this unfortunate claim. Former South African cricketer, AB de Villiers, in a newspaper headline claimed: “Proteas, Thinking Too Much.”

I agree, thinking too much in sport situations that need split second decisions will inevitably lead to choking. The other problem they face is the erroneous attribution of choking as the reason for them losing when there are a host of explanations for losing beyond thinking too much or too slow.

### ***Two famous chokes***

There are many examples of choking and the Proteas may take cold comfort from others who produced famous chokes.

Choke one: English cricket player, Ben Stokes, conceded a commanding position of nineteen runs in the final over of the 2016 T20 Cricket World Cup final. West Indian batsman, Carlos Brathwaite, struck four consecutive sixes off Stokes’ first four balls to win the game. I need to add that Stokes has made up for this blemish by consistently producing outstanding performances since then. Reflect on his batting performance in the 2019 Cricket World Cup and continued achievements in the Ashes series 2019 and in South Africa 2020.

Choke two: The Atlanta Falcons conceded a 25-point lead in the 2017 Super Bowl to hand the title to the New England Patriots.

### ***Mind capture***

It was probably the pressure of the occasion that caused footballer Asamoah Gyan of Ghana to pray before he took the final kick against Uruguay at the 2010 FIFA World Cup. His missed penalty kick heralded their exit from the tournament. What would have happened had he not prayed and simply did that which he is trained to do?

Instead, he allowed overthinking, in this instance through prayer, to capture his mind. He lost concentration and this sullied his kicking skill.

If Gyan included prayer before kicking as a calming ritual in his practice sessions, I would not have been able to link his missed kick to thinking too much. The mental toughness lesson is this: When, in sport, you are doing something that relies on instinct or has become a learned skill, do not think. Do what you practiced.

### ***Most people can be baited***

The need for composure is applicable to everyday incidents. Most of us can be baited into mind capture and lose composure – in this instance self-control. Consider how you behave in traffic when someone cuts in front of you. Our anger captures our mind and we end up wanting to fight. Accessing composure enables you to pause before reacting. Then, rather

than indulging in road rage or gesturing with your middle finger, you use the pause to generate other options like letting it go and not reacting.

Similarly, your competitors will try to bait you. They will try to outwit you and put you under pressure to make you lose composure and your mind will, likely, be captured.

However, be careful about trying to bait a seasoned veteran like Michael Phelps who has developed impulse control and is unlikely to be mind-captured by baiting. Chad le Clos tried to unsettle Phelps in the change room before one of their butterfly clashes in the 2016 Olympics. The result was that Phelps used le Clos' attempt to bait him to increase his own competitive intensity. Instead of losing composure, he was grateful for the extra motivation.

Could baiting, leading to neural hijacking be the reason why Zidane, a seasoned international sportsman and captain of the French soccer side, resorted to irrational thinking and head-butted Italian defender Marco Materazzi in front of billions of television viewers? It was the most important game of his life. His team was playing extra time in the 2006 Soccer World Cup final. Surely, he knew that his violent act would be tantamount to self-sabotage. The consequence of his reaction was a red card, largely contributing to France losing the Soccer World Cup final. Was his ability to make sensible choices hijacked? Is it possible that Zidane had little or no control over his emotions in that moment? Are we all capable of making seemingly inexplicable and uncharacteristic bad choices, particularly when under pressure?

Consider normally mild-mannered people who react with road rage and even kill another motorist. Wealthy people caught shoplifting. Politicians accepting bribes. Famous personalities expressing religious intolerance. Loving parents flying into a rage over their child's untidy room. National sport stars getting drunk and unruly. Others taking performance-enhancing drugs or becoming involved in match fixing. Normally efficient staff members treating customers poorly and civic-minded police officers stealing. Once you reflect, the potential examples are endless. How many of these acts of self-sabotage link to a loss of composure?

We all live with the possibility of losing composure and behaving in out-of-character ways. We all have the potential to have our brain hijacked. All of us can lose self-control and commit acts of self-sabotage.

Zidane could not control the behaviour of others or what they said. That level of control was outside of him. The choice to make a derogatory remark to bait Zidane was Materazzi's. However, Zidane could have exercised control over what was going on inside of him and how he reacted. To do this, he needed to be in touch with his internal hot buttons and the skills to manage competitor baiting, or correctly termed, competitor-induced neural hijacking.

It is patently obvious that competitors will try to get us to lose composure. If we do, we are likely to commit acts of self-sabotage. What a difference it could have made if Zidane had the composure to see Materazzi's comments about Zidane's sister as a ploy to bait him. To do this he would have needed the skills to rise above his slavish instincts and socialised reactions. These skills would have helped him recognise and manage the sudden surge in his arousal levels that intensified his emotions and lead to his self-sabotaging behaviour.

You may feel that the Zidane mind-capture example is extreme and that few of us will have our composure tested in front of billions of spectators. However, we do not need a sport competitor to induce this; it can happen in all walks of life. It is my contention that many of our decisions are exposed to potential hijacking, despite the circumstances being less dramatic than the Zidane example. The process is the same. The main constituents of neural hijacking involve primordial instincts, beliefs, unconscious social conditioning, mind-sets, and chronic anxiety. These aspects influence how we interpret activity around us without mentally questioning in what way we view situations and react to them.

I recently read Ben Elton's book *Identity Crisis* (2019) where he satirises social changes in identity. The content prompted me to humorously speculate on what may have happened if Zidane's head butt occurred on 2019 (the age of outrage) as opposed to what happened in 2006. Is it possible that Zidane would have floundered in the unfamiliar waters of social change? Would the "me too" movement label his behaviour as toxic masculinity that denied his aggrieved sister agency over herself.

### ***Mind-captured or mind-fogged – same result***

Mind capture through extreme emotions results in irrational behaviour. We conduct ourselves in a similar manner when our mind is sufficiently distracted (fogged) by chronic consumption of hallucinogens, inappropriate use of prescription medicines, believing in conspiracies or outdated medieval dogmas, succumbing to superstitions or through blind loyalty to our 'tribe'.

### ***Mind-altering substances***

If you are consuming chemicals or plants that are taking you out of a consensus reality and impinging your ability to interact effectively with the world around (pursue success and significance), you need to critically reflect on the benefits versus the non-benefits of taking them.

If you do not know how to reflect on the use of pharmaceuticals or recreational substances, seek help from a professional. If you already have professional medical help, seek additional opinions.

When it comes to recreational substances, some users will struggle to accept that they must seek professional help, as they are probably mind-captured by addiction or by drug delusion. In these instances, the substance they are using to satisfy their need or ameliorate pain is asserting control over them and their behaviour consequently they are not in control over the use of the substance.

### ***Not fooled by bad science or bad pharma***

I have, at times, been sceptical about some allopathic medicines. My concern was that research into the development and efficacy of pharmaceutical products can be biased. In

these instances, we are hijacked by a breach of science aptly named ‘bad science’. For more on this refer to *Bad Science* (Goldacre, 2008) and *Bad Pharma* (Goldacre, 2012).

This apprehension has a substantial following. The caveat to this scepticism is that the scientific method underpinning the development of medicine is the best system we have. Nevertheless, I note that Roger Martin writes in *The Opposable Mind* that dissatisfaction with the dehumanising consequences of conventional medicine has spurred the growth of the alternative medicine movement (Martin, 2009).

Could mind fogging be part of the explanation why some people prefer to use supplements and alternative remedies that have not been verifiably researched or do not stand up to the rigours of scientific research?

It is an opportune time to remember an Albert Einstein quote: “*One thing I have learned in a long life: that all our science, measured against reality, is primitive and childlike -- and yet it is the most precious thing we have.*”

### ***Can superstition be dangerous?***

People’s enduring belief in the conveniently invisible makes the work of science so much harder (Arnopp, *The last days of Jack Sparks*, 2016).

Think about what happened in Marikana in 2012. Police killed forty-four South African mine workers during a work dispute. I am informed that a faith healer told the workers that he had covered them with a potion that made them invisible to the police and therefore bullets would not harm them. Tragically, their superstition supported this claim leading to catastrophic consequences.

Consider how the belief in a Juju curse binds Nigerian women into sex slavery, or the hazards associated with believing that you have access to a high-level spirit or medium that provides you with information about superior methods of healing.

### ***Zero-sum game***

I did not know about the notion of a zero-sum game until the mid-nineties when I ran entrepreneurial workshops in Malawi. After the first session, one of the participants told me that I might be wasting my time using concepts like potential, abundance, growth, and creating value because most Malawians had a fixed-pie mentality. He explained that if one person in a community became successful, others would conclude they had less or even no chance as the opportunity and resources had been ‘used up’.

I have subsequently learnt that this is called a zero-sum game. If one person gains an advantage in ‘the game’, others involved suffer an equalising disadvantage because everyone competes for finite resources.

There are instances when a fixed-pie (zero-sum) mentality applies. Poker and gambling are popular examples of zero-sum games since the sum of the amounts won by some players equals the combined losses of the others.

Our mental toughness challenge, particularly within our teams, is to not default to this mentality. We should always try to create context and new resources where we have an expanding pie and participate in a positive-sum game.

### ***Abundance thinking***

Abundance thinking underpins a positive-sum game. Most of us have been socialised to believe that we are free to make choices. However, we do not realise that many choices are contained within the limitations prescribed by the beliefs we have accepted as part of our social context.

Even if we acknowledge a range of societal constraints, we still understand choices to mean that we must choose one way or another. I used the ‘you can’t have your cake and eat it’ example in an earlier chapter. My thinking is this: What is the point of having cake if you cannot have the enjoyment of eating it? Composure enables you to access abundance thinking. This way of thinking enables us to choose one way in addition to another. It is a manner of thinking where you choose to live in a world that allows you to have cake and eat it.

When you addressed concentration, you were challenged to develop future intent whilst paying attention to your present state. To assist with paying attention in a present state, you need to develop awareness and mindfulness. One can say that awareness and mindfulness open a portal where you live in an ‘and world’ and are not trapped in a conventional ‘or world’.

In his book, *Opposable Mind: Winning through Integrative Thinking*, Roger Martin wrote that conventional thinking can trap one in an either-or way of seeing life. Conventional thinking provides a self-reinforcing lesson that life is about accepting unattractive and unpleasant trade-offs. He adds that there are many more options than this one or that one. He argues why settle for an ‘or’ option when ‘and’ is possible. He adds that the drive for creative resolution is the single most striking feature of the successful managerial leaders he interviewed (Martin, 2009).

This ‘and world’ is applicable to your view of both the future and the present. There need not be a contest between the two because both are equally important; both can be realised and neither needs sacrificing. You do not need to sacrifice a present moment due to commitment to your intention. Nor do you need to forfeit your intention due to the pressure of a present moment.

You do not have to separate rational and intuitive thinking. Both are vital. However, intuition does not include magic.

### ***Magic or duped?***

Do you recall the hype around power bracelets? At one stage these ubiquitous bracelets were worn by people ranging from sport stars to school children. The marketers of power bracelets made various scientific-sounding claims. They said the bracelet used holographic technology for enhancing athletic performance. In addition, it aligned and balanced the body's natural energy field and in so doing, tapped into life's energy force at a quantum level.

I heard the impressive-sounding words. I did not understand what they meant. What they claimed seemed to fall within the realm of pseudo-science or magic.

Deepak Chopra used equally imposing and impressive terms to describe his views on healing and spiritual issues in a televised debate (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0E99BdOfxAE>). I was intrigued when his debating adversary, Michael Shermer, obviously from a different camp to Chopra and with dissimilar opinions, used the term 'woo woo' to describe the language Deepak Chopra used. He claimed that Chopra uses new-age language like 'quantum healing' to make unsubstantiated claims sound scientific and intelligible. Does he?

Let's revert to the bracelets. When I questioned owners of these power bracelets why they wore them, their responses were mostly, "It balances my energy"; "I feel more energy and it promotes my strength and fitness." When I pointed out that there were no independent scientific studies to verify the manufacturer's claims that they were echoing, the usual response was something like, "I have heard that, but it works for me – maybe it's the Placebo Effect – I don't mind."

When I hear this response a nagging voice in my mind calls out: "What? Are you saying that you will pay a substantial amount of money to wear something you know does not have any intrinsic value and probably relies on the Placebo Effect for results? What else are you willing to do? Will you use rhino horn to improve your sex life or treat cancer?"

I am aware that many well-meaning people reach for a range of remedies and substances despite overwhelming evidence that these rely mostly on blind faith or pseudo-science for results. Could these people be caught up in 'woo woo'? Are their brains unknowingly being hijacked by lazy thinking and defending this thinking by calling it intuition, instinct, sixth sense, ancient wisdom, or even magic?

You may recall a South African priest spraying their congregation with Doom insecticide to drive out evil spirits. I feel that this falls into the 'woo woo' category Shermer referred to. These people set themselves up to be gurus with magical insights. They will sell you treatment, supplements and detoxifiers to cure all causes only they are smart enough to see.

I would like to believe in magic, and I guess the world would be better off if solutions to some of our problems could be solved with magic remedies.

Richie McCaw, former All Blacks rugby captain, claimed in a TV ad, "I don't believe in magic. I believe in hard work. I believe in putting everything on the line."

With mental toughness, instead of having irrational and magic beliefs, you could change to having flexible preferences.



### ***If you must be irrational – do not be dangerously irrational***

Reflect on America's Environment Protection Agency (EPA). It was set up to work with industries and all levels of government in a wide variety of pollution prevention programs and energy conservation efforts.

Since 2017, their leaders have contradicted virtually all mainstream scientists who study climate change. They have switched from encouraging a green economy to denying the devastating role humans have on the environment and supporting the continued use of fossil fuels for energy sources.

In addition, they assisted in undoing much of the legislation aimed at minimising damage to the environment through greedy consumerism. They were in likelihood not impressed when French Prime Minister Emmanuel Macron made the teasing, yet provocative statement related to the US withdrawal from the Paris accord: "Make the planet great again" (Macron, 2017).

### ***Losing composure***

Losing composure often results in self-sabotage because of improper, emotionally charged reactions. Without composure, we lose the reasoning power of impulse control and therefore struggle with self-regulation.

Serena Williams lost composure in the finals of the 2018 US Open. Her angry outburst aimed at the umpire and then at her tennis racquet was a major contributor to her loss of the title and a significant tennis record.

Brett Kavanaugh lost composure in the hearing on sexual abuse held on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2018. This lack of maturity under pressure was not befitting a person applying for a lifetime appointment as a Supreme Court judge.

Loss of composure can manifest in a range of inappropriate reactions beyond smashing racquets, like overeating, substance abuse, reckless gambling, maxing out credit cards, catastrophizing, villainising others, or treating people with disrespect.

Pinker writes the following about catastrophizing: "They think that Islamist terrorism is a major risk to life and limb, whereas the danger is smaller than that from wasps and bees." (Pinker, 2018)

### ***Wilfulness, aggression and social contradiction***

Neuropsychologists inform us that many incidents of composure loss can be traced back to stress arising from a contradiction between the original purpose of some basic instincts and the circumstances we contend with nowadays.

The anatomy of our brain has evolved since the beginning of humanity. Brain evolution started with a simple brain limited to instinctive responses. A range of capabilities followed,

culminating in the most recent addition – the prefrontal cortex. This is associated with our reasoning capability.

Original instinctive responses are hardwired into our brains. These are called legacy instincts. They manifest in many ways, the most commonly known is our fight, flight, or freeze response that can be aroused by modern stimuli in the same way as it was in primordial times. These legacy instincts have provided us with the wilfulness, aggression and destructiveness that motivates us to stay alive and protect our tribe by fighting others and at times our families. In addition to these hardwired instincts, we have also assimilated a range of beliefs and mindsets from our nurturing and socialisation that could dictate a loss of self-regulation.

The personal mastery and calm demeanour referred to in the definition for composure means that you can control your aggressive tendencies and stay within an optimal emotional range for your thoughts and actions to be effective.

### ***Cognitive dissonance***

All of us have a lengthy list of expectations around relationships, career plans, finances, family members, sport, and health. Inevitably, gaps between what we would *like* to happen in our lives and our reality start to appear and widen. These gaps result in feelings of disappointment.

In this instance, the feelings of disappointment are a result of cognitive dissonance, which is an uncomfortable, distressing emotion caused by the inability to reconcile two opposing ideas experienced simultaneously. It occurs when there is a contradiction between what you think you know and what is revealed, or it occurs if there is a noteworthy gap between what you desired as an outcome and what you are experiencing.

A telling example of cognitive dissonance can be found in some romantic relationships. You would have cognitive dissonance if you pictured an intimate relationship and the other did not.

### ***Fear of failure***

Thomas Edison, American inventor and businessman, is reputed to have claimed, “I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.” Disputed or not, it makes good sense to appreciate that we will often fail.

When we think about performing a skill, it begins in the thinking part of our brain. The neurons get excited and they activate nerve cells connected to the limbic system. This area is associated with emotions such as fear, anxiety, elation, and satisfaction, and is tied to the motor cortex, which controls the muscles.

If thoughts concerning fear of failure, disappointing others, or being unworthy enter your mind, anxiety levels increase. The process involves the release of adrenalin that sets the heart racing, primes the muscles for action, and puts all the senses on high alert. In other words, the

fight or flight response comes into play. The fear of potential failure is now making you experience the symptoms of the failure you fear.

Positive thoughts can help you stay focused, but if thoughts or words stray into the realm of fearing failing, they become counterproductive. Mentally tough people become aware that it is the fear itself that has the power and is scary – not the thing you fear.

A big obstacle to people achieving their intention is the fear of failure. This can be defined as being terrified of making a mistake because of the negative consequences associated with failure, such as the loss of status or disappointing family and friends. Fear of failure is likely to be present in people who have experienced success early in their lives or careers.

Performing well in a small community isn't as difficult or challenging as it is to prosper as a senior executive in a large corporation, as a national athlete, or as a star performer.

### ***Fear of success***

You would expect that most people want to be successful at whatever they attempt to do. Curiously, many people sabotage their own success even when it may be close. They undermine their chances so that they can avoid dealing with the underlying fears that come with doing well.

Football player Wayne Rooney and golfer Tiger Woods had huge successes early in their careers. Yet, with this success they had to deal with many problems. Both were under the scrutiny of the public; they were recognised wherever they went and had to handle the high expectations of their performances and behaviour. If they were not winning, the community wondered what was wrong with them. If they behaved inappropriately, they were condemned.

Some people might have welcomed Woods' or Rooney's problems because of the celebrity status they achieved, but for others, the fear of success and the complications that come with it is as strong as that associated with failure. Many successful athletes, performers and businesspeople have sabotaged their careers because of their fear of success.

Why would the fear of success affect performance? Most people do not have to deal with the fear of public scrutiny if they win a club championship, or work in an assembly line. However, they might still self-sabotage by harbouring subtle fears of success, such as the fear of increased expectations or a deeply rooted belief about the evil of money and being rich.

You can expect a huge surge in anxiety if you have been acknowledged for a particular ability, feel the pressure of high expectations, and are publicly put to the challenge of performing to your expected ability. The confidence of others, or your own expectations for yourself to do well, can pressurise you to the point where it hangs over you like a dark cloud.

### ***Phobias***

Phobias originate from extreme aversion. The difference between a phobia and simply being afraid is a higher level of fear. In addition to feeling emotionally uneasy, people who suffer

from phobias show greater physical symptoms of fear, like increased heart rate, sweating, feeling faint, and even feeling that they are choking.

A typical example of phobia development is a fear of poisonous snakes that gets translated into a phobia for all snakes.

In most circumstances, people have well-developed mental skills and enough self-complexity to be aware of their instincts' ability to delude them. Consequently, with a bit of professional help and therapy, they can free themselves from the chains of this form of mental slavery.

However, if we constantly feel under pressure and experience chronic negative stress, our arousal levels are elevated, and even with well-developed mental skills and self-complexity, we start to fail as we feel more threatened.

### ***Anger***

When we experience extreme pressure, or have developed emotional 'hot buttons', our brain uses a short-circuit option that puts us in an implicit mode, or angry state, and we grab the first solution. We lose control over our ability to reason. We behave unacceptably. This is colloquially labelled as a 'rush of blood'.

The neural circuit for rage is faster than the speed of thought. The downside to this is that we can get into a state of panic where we think too little, forget the lessons we have been taught, and possibly do the wrong thing in a situation.

At the other extreme, our brain can be hijacked into an explicit mode where we think too much, take too much time, become robotically deliberate, and lose fluidity.

### ***Confusing panic with passion***

If you watch international rugby, you may have noticed the body language of a former Springbok rugby coach during games in the era 2011 to 2015. There are some YouTube clips available in case you have not seen what I am referring to. I recall seeing postings on Facebook claiming that the coach displayed so much passion. On the other hand, there are many behavioural analysts who interpreted the same behaviours as a loss of composure, and indeed signs of panic.

### ***Arousal and anxiety***

We must all perform under pressure. We need to endure pressure and consequently increased arousal from a range of demands and mishaps, including physical, mental, emotional, family, and financial.

Chronic anxiety is the likely end-product of excessive and sustained levels of arousal. The modern-day problem is that this arousal response does not distinguish between threats that are perceived or to one's ego, and threats that are damning or life-threatening. The physiological response is identical whether feeling threatened by losing a sporting

competition; losing a relationship; being in an intense sales meeting; getting stuck in traffic; or being involved in a near car collision. Naturally, some form of arousal is needed to motivate action.

An amount of psyched-up excitement when dealing with competitors and being anxious about doing well is fine. However, it is unnecessary to continually experience high levels of anxiety.

One of the physical symptoms of sustained high levels of anxiety is an elevated heart rate. When the heart rate increases above 145 beats per minute, a person's complex motor skills become less efficient, vision becomes restricted, and hearing is diminished. When your heart rate gets to 175 beats per minute, reasoning processes start to fail, and behaviour becomes irrationally aggressive. As blood is withdrawn from the outer muscle layer and concentrated in core muscle mass, you also become clumsier.

Anxiety driven by pressure may come from a variety of sources, ranging from the importance of an activity, competitor activity, time commitments, continuous change, and the uncertainty of an outcome. When you press the key to send an email, ask a difficult question, release an arrow, kick for a goal post, or face the bowler – the outcome is uncertain.

The challenge, therefore, is to regulate your arousal within an optimal zone so that you can generate creative tension without the debilitating anxiety. As explained previously, the arousal process is essential for motivating action. However, overstimulation is accompanied by mental and physical limitations and these detrimentally affect your performance. When you are over-aroused, particularly when this is coupled with chronic anxiety, you cannot make alternate and appropriate decisions. You literally do not see everything that is happening in the moment and you are prone to making mistakes. You are probably coming to the wrong conclusions.

### ***Excessive arousal lets Mr Hyde out***

In geological terms, extreme pressure can turn a lump of coal into a flawless diamond. In a human scenario, extreme pressure can turn ordinary people into complete basket cases. When heavily burdened, we can experience excessive arousal, which can cause neural hijacking. This enables primordial reactions to dominate.

In Robert Louis Stevenson's novel, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Dr Jekyll, representing the conscious mind, is a good citizen with many friends. However, he has a split personality. Mr Hyde represents his shadow side. This subconscious personality is capable of evil and murderous deeds when he is let out.

### ***We behave differently under hyper arousal***

It is widely believed that when we experience excessive arousal, we behave differently to the way we normally would. Under these conditions, we often make poor, out-of-character choices. We become strangers to ourselves. Increased anxiety heightens arousal and

magnifies emotions, particularly anger, fear, greed, lust, jealousy, and disappointment. Under these conditions, our ability to make rational decisions is short-circuited, as previously explained. These conditions are associated with poor decision-making.

In his book, *Predictably Irrational*, Dan Ariely wrote about the experiments he conducted on his students' attitudes towards sex under normal conditions compared to their attitudes when sexually aroused. The outcome was that students claimed to have one set of values and taboos when completing questionnaires under normal circumstances, but when sexually aroused, most participants gave different information to the same questions. The research indicated that they had fewer taboos and much riskier attitudes and values in the second test (Ariely, 2008).

You could say hyper arousal let 'Mr Hyde' out for each of them. In a similar way, being under pressure, stressed, and aroused at work or in competitive sport causes us to behave differently to our perceived normal conduct.

Everyone has hot buttons. If someone or some event pushes the hot button, we react in a predictable way. In sport, baiting and sledging are used as ploys to push players' hot buttons to increase pressure on them and drive up their arousal. The expectation is that, in this state, they will make more mistakes. It is particularly effective for people who struggle with impulse control and cannot restrain themselves when they are provoked. I am sure you can think of examples of people in your favourite sports team who fall into this category.

### ***Self-righteousness***

I have referred to losing composure due to mind-altering substances and extreme emotional states. A self-righteous belief acts in a similar way, as it moves us away from consensus reality. We assert smugly moralistic convictions in contrast with the actions and beliefs of others.

In his book, *Radical: My Journey out of Islamist Extremism*, Maajid Nawaz writes, "Cruel, selfish things are so much easier to do when in the delusion of self-righteousness" (Nawaz, 2013).

### ***Victim mind-set***

A mind-set is a point of view that has been accepted as truth, through which a person experiences their reality. Mindsets are often described as the lenses through which we view the world. In some circumstances, our mindsets operate as our subliminal and unconscious oppressors.

A victim mind-set limits seeing future possibilities. Victims struggle to be proactive and they take on a victim identity. They believe negative things happen to them. They blame anyone outside themselves and fail to take ownership.

This mind-set is a manifestation of a predisposing instinct that prompts us to believe resources are scarce and that many, if not most, people are out to dispossess or plot against

us. When this predisposition is reinforced, by personal experiences or influential people, we start to see the world in this way and we thus develop a victim mind-set of scarcity and conspiracy. It is difficult to convince a person with this problem to be composed and take on an abundance mind-set. Their underlying mantra is, “They are out to get me.”

People who have a victim mind-set struggle to see what is happening in the moment. They are limited to what they *believe* is happening – often leading to chronic anxiety and ultimately depression.

### ***The benefits of composure***

When you are composed, you not only know better, you do better. You enhance your chances of success and limit the possibility of self-sabotage through ill-considered, emotionally charged reactions. You are aware of what is going on inside you and around you without it disrupting you.

Under so-called ‘normal conditions’, most of us can achieve the above. The big composure challenge is to achieve it under extreme conditions like high-pressure environments; when faced with negative shocks; stressful physical, mental, emotional, family, or financial demands; setbacks; mishaps; and distractions.

Composure is also applicable to low-pressure environments where one is prone to underperform or coast along due to boredom derived from insufficient challenge.

Through accessing composure, we become aware of the differences between illusory fears and real danger; perceived weaknesses and actual weaknesses; things we can control and things we cannot; aspects we have influence over and those we do not.

With composure, we can embrace complexity; ambiguity; randomness; negative conflict; and nonlinear, unpredictable events. Even if we are composed, we may still feel disappointment, disillusionment, or anger. Despite these feelings, we do not participate in an ungainly and undignified race for centre stage. We do not blame externalities or project our problems onto others. Instead, we act – calmly, passionately, and resolutely in the direction of our intention.

When people are composed, they can critically self-reflect and are able to remove themselves from the emotion while still feeling it. With this ability, they can review and, in some cases, change their beliefs and mindsets. They can make decisions based on being open to the latest credible knowledge; create the mental conditions necessary to change hard-wired triggers that generate habitual surges of irritation or anger; and be mindful of letting things happen where immediate, instinctive responses aren’t critical. Note, the world will keep changing and we will have to update our knowledge and worldview throughout our lives. With composure you can consume the news and spot the drama without becoming stressed or hopeless.

When you are composed, you do not feel an overwhelming ‘in-group’ loyalty or ‘out-group’ prejudice. According to the social identity theory proposed by social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner, in-groups are social groups to which you feel loyalty and a sense of belonging. Out-groups are social groups for which you feel contempt and opposition or a

desire to compete against. People tend to hold positive attitudes towards members of their own group, a phenomenon known as in-group bias (Tajfel, 1979).

Composure can be applied in any endeavour where your learnt skills need to be expressed automatically and in an unhindered fashion. In sport or business, composure can be combined with technical skills, such as a primary game plan. With composure as part of your game plan, you make fewer mistakes.

### ***Embracing paradoxes***

When you tap into composure, it is easier to come to terms with the ambiguities and paradoxes that invariably confront you. Essentially, this is when you are required to deal with two or more seemingly opposite truths attributed to the same situation. For example, take the paradox of instinct where it is your biggest ally as well as your biggest enemy. Reacting instinctively with skills is crucial to success because your performance becomes automatic. Reacting instinctively with emotions like anger, fear, jealousy, lust, greed, disappointment, and even exuberance, can block performance.

Much of what is said about developing mental toughness will seem ambiguous and, at times, paradoxical, such as: Both calmness and intensity are required for mental toughness; gentleness is needed to promote strength and aggression needs to be expressed and controlled; we must learn, unlearn, and relearn; obstacles can be motivators; and instinct as well as reason is important.

The desire to win is instinctive. The paradox is that the best competitors in the world have learned that the more they think about winning while performing, the less likely it is to happen. The harder they try, the more difficult it is to perform well. The thoughts involved with winning and trying hard, seem to create the mental and physical conditions preventing them from expressing the skills that they possess. Paradoxically, the less experienced improve performance by thinking about their technique in the moment, yet the experienced campaigners lose performance capability due to overthinking.

### ***Not caught up in lazy thinking***

According to Daniel Kahneman, seemingly smart and intelligent people can think, say, and believe crazy things. For example, the evidence provided by over 90% of scientists around the world that humans are contributing to global warming is overwhelming and irrefutable. Yet a huge number of people continue to deny it. Why? Simply put, its lazy thinking or not thinking much at all. We all do this at least some of the time (Kahneman, 2011).

### ***Understanding that smoking kills***

Why would so many smokers be indifferent to the evidence that smoking will harm them?



Have you wondered why ‘smoking kills’, so prominently displayed on cigarette packets, is ignored by smokers? Does their lack of accepting help to stop smoking give testament to the claim: “The power of addiction outperforms the power of persuasion?” I assume this applies to many other addictions like sugar and drugs.

I find it understandable that people struggle to stop smoking because of addiction. However, why do they feel it’s okay to contribute to pollution or create fire hazards by stubbing out their cigarettes and abandoning the butts?

***Romantic love is excitingly irrational, but co-dependency is dangerously irrational***

*The heart has its reasons about which reason knows nothing* (Blaise Pascal)

Co-dependency is excessive reliance on the approval of another like a romantic partner and when we are rejected, we feel disappointment or anger and position ourselves as a victim, this victim status can be expressed in blaming or self-loathing.

When we develop strong attachments, it is considered healthy to develop interdependence. However, co-dependency is an unhealthy development.

When we are co-dependent and experience a shock / unexpected relationship breakdown, our reactions will usually include moral outrage and diminished self-worth. This is not surprising if you consider how many of the many of the messages in the lyrics of popular, sentimental love songs have conditioned us and spawned co-dependence e.g. “how can I live without you” or worse “I can’t live if living is without you”.

I am not suggesting we should not have emotional attachments or go to great lengths to help loved ones and family and experience a period of grief if we lose them. Rather, I am proposing we confront the harsh realities of life by proactively equipping ourselves with mental toughness to have a sustainable approach to these losses.

***Idealising and demonising***

It’s only natural for people to want to celebrate when the team they support wins, or that they feel disappointed when the team loses. However, why knee-jerk into extreme praise or blame reactions? Why behave like a bear with a sore head for the entire weekend or longer when the team you support loses? You can do nothing about the team’s result. You did not play.

I am not suggesting that we suppress our emotions to fall within a limited range akin to Dr Spock’s of *Star Trek* fame. The composure challenge is to move past a tendency to idealise or demonise others.

***Keeping your head when all about you are losing theirs***

Author and poet Rudyard Kipling provided a perspective of composure in his famous poem “If”. In his opening lines he wrote, “If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you”.

When you are composed, you treat triumph and disaster, otherwise known as success and disappointment, as simply experiences along the way to achieving intention. You learn from it and do not let it devastate you.

### ***Rolling plans***

You start your quest for composure by setting a plan like the one described in the chapter on concentration. I prefer to add the qualifier ‘rolling’ to the word plan, because no plan is perfectly accurate and should therefore be subject to ongoing conversations and revisions.

Of course, even with a rolling plan, you still run the risk of dissonance, as things do not always work out the way you planned. However, it is easier to manage things that do not work out according to a plan and revise the plan, than have things not work out according to a confusing subconscious expectation set by media advertising, glossy magazines, and pop idols.

When you plan for and act in the direction of your intention, you simultaneously increase the influence and, to some extent, the control you have over the variables that affect your life.

### ***How to access composure***

If you want to access composure, and given the benefits you probably do, I suggest you take the proactive steps that will help you with this. Using relaxation techniques, yoga, or martial arts practices will predispose you to feeling composed. You can also access composure by practising routines, rituals, imagery, thought stopping, centering, and breathing techniques. In these practice sessions you introduce triggers like rituals, words, or hand signals to help you enter a mental state that shuts out the noise from your environment or in your mind. This enables you to mentally access your best performance ability or focus before and during an event. You can then move on to develop the skills to help you regain lost composure when your calm demeanour escapes you.

### ***Relaxation techniques***

When practised regularly, relaxation techniques such as mindfulness meditation, progressive muscle relaxation and deep breathing can reduce the symptoms of anxiety and increase feelings of relaxation and well-being.

Relaxation techniques will teach you to remain calm during high-pressure situations. As with all skills, this needs practice. In addition, it is best to combine relaxation with imagery training as part of a holistic schedule. You first need to become aware of increased tension in the muscles and the mind. You then need to intercept with the appropriate quieting messages and techniques.

There are different relaxation exercises you can use. For example, you can sit in a comfortable position with your eyes closed. Relax all your muscles, beginning at the feet and

progressing to the face. Focus on your breathing. A mindfulness meditation example is available on <https://soundcloud.com/samharrisorg/mindfulness-meditation-26>.

### ***Martial arts***

Practitioners of the martial art Aikido claim that when you are relaxed, you can access greater strength. You might have heard the saying, “There’s nothing as strong as true gentleness and nothing as gentle as true strength.” In my mind, this claim resonates with some martial arts practices. I refer to it because I have developed an admiration for the dedication of many martial artists.

I am sceptical about the scientific validity underpinning their claims, but their practices certainly endure. A demonstration they use as evidence for their claim is the unbendable arm test. This test is freely available on the internet. Essentially someone of similar strength tries to bend your arm when it’s stiff, and they succeed. However, when your arm is in a relaxed state, combined with visualisation, it becomes nearly impossible to bend.

Their conclusion is that the unbendable arm exercise demonstrates the power of relaxation and positive attitude. I guess that many people will struggle with the ambiguity of being strong and relaxed simultaneously. They may even argue that the test primes the muscles and that is why the second attempt is stronger. Nevertheless, the ability to combine relaxation and focus is a feature of the martial arts.

### ***Routines and rituals***

Routines and rituals serve as methods of putting you in the zone. This may be a sequence or technique you use before a crucial event, bouncing the ball a certain number of times before a serve, or using the same stretching motions before exerting yourself. You will recall Novak Djokovic’s ritual of bouncing the tennis ball in the same way before he serves.

Routines help you focus by following a procedure, regardless of where and against whom you are competing. It gives a sense of familiarity and control, reducing anxiety. A player who attempts a crucial penalty goal would benefit from a learnt routine to feel at ease. Many sports people even do this when packing their kit bags or dressing and undressing before matches.

### ***Imagery***

Imagery is used to enhance and correct performance. It also taps into a person’s ability to imagine and mentally construct or reconstruct situations or scenarios. The use of imagery is therefore applicable to several of the mental toughness categories.

Golfing great Jack Nicklaus used imagery. In describing how he made use of mental images to improve his performance, he claimed: “I never hit a shot, even in practice, without having a sharp in-focus picture of it in my head. It is like a colour movie. First, I ‘see’ the ball where

I want it to finish, nice and white and sitting up high on the bright green grass. Then the scene quickly changes, and I ‘see’ the ball going there: its path, trajectory, and shape, even its behaviour on landing. Then there is a sort of fade-out, and the next scene shows me making the kind of swing that will turn the previous images into reality. Only at the end of this short, private Hollywood spectacular do I select a club and step up to the ball.”

Imagery can also be used in your critical reflections to recall events. Mentally replay your experiences. This time around, imagine alternative solutions for incidents where things did not go as planned. In addition, reflect on past performances where you feel you performed well, and identify exactly how you accomplished it. Then move on to consider the transferability that exists between those past circumstances and your current situation.

Figure skaters who walked through their routines or drew their routines on paper while imagining the moves with their chosen music playing, showed dramatic performance improvements. In comparison, control skaters who did not use the same technique were less successful. The fact is that without constant practise, the brain’s imagery centre reacts in much the same way as one’s muscles do without training – it atrophies. As with physical exercise, the more a person trains using mental skills, the faster the person adapts and the better the performance.

Imagery work can be used for incidents that will have an over-arousal response. These could be incidents or performance requirements crucial to winning or losing. They could also include sudden changes, problems and mishaps that may occur operationally. Mentally rehearse the levels of physical and mental activation appropriate for these incidents. Visualise how much composure is required of you and determine the desired arousal levels for these incidents. Mentally practise dealing with the fear and anxiety likely to occur using other mental skills, such as self-talk, breathing control or isolation techniques.

Imagery can be useful when becoming familiar with an actual location of a competition or event. Imagine performing a specific activity in a specific environment. The images should consist of accomplished and successful performances. In addition, they must use all your senses: See the activity, hear the sounds in that environment, smell the associated smells and develop a sense of touch. Mentally experience the satisfaction of a good performance. It is best to be in a relaxed state when attempting this, so include relaxation techniques when conjuring this imagery.

The process of using imagery to achieve a goal will forge the mental and, consequently, physical patterns for successful skills development. In a pressure situation, such as when speaking publicly or kicking a penalty, mentally call upon a predictable and well-rehearsed experience.

### ***Thought stopping***

Thought-stopping techniques are a useful tool against brooding or worrying. Say “stop”, and snap your fingers, or visualise a red light or stop sign. Revert to focusing your attention on

important performance issues. The main goal is to prevent distraction from irrelevant or defeatist thinking.

### ***Centering***

Centering is a mental technique that helps you focus on what needs to be done in the moment. It helps you regain composure when you have distractions and worries. It is applicable in instances where there is pressure, when you need to increase or decrease intensity, or when there is a need for motivation.

In the same way that we cannot perform intense exercise continuously, we also struggle to focus for long periods. You may have heard people claim that they lose focus, resulting in losing the game or the sale. Therefore, it is essential that you learn to focus in vital circumstances.

Focusing requires a mentality centred on the present situation. Successful people refrain from obsessing over yesterday's loss or tomorrow's performance. Their earlier mistakes and successes influence what they are doing now. In high-pressure situations, they take possession of their mind and execute their plans one step at a time. Focusing is a here-and-now skill. It relies upon being calm, absorbed in the present, and perceptive of the appropriate cues.

### ***Trigger words***

Trigger words practised during imagery are useful as a reminder of important performance cues, for example: "Watch the ball", "explode from the blocks," or "stay low". They help centre attention on the present, for example: "Focus", "let it go", "next point", "now".

You can write trigger words on a sweatband, shoes, hat, or hand. These written words serve as a reminder during any event or performance. Sports people use this technique to create a protective bubble around them, effectively removing crowd noise or other forms of invasion.

### ***Breathing techniques***

There are several breathing techniques to access composure. The two simplest are the 7-11 technique and box breathing. The 7-11 is when you inhale for a count of 7 and exhale as you count to 11. This will trigger your parasympathetic nervous system and it will help to calm you.

Box breathing has four parts to the practice. To begin the practice, expel all the air from your chest. Keep your lungs empty for a four-count hold. Then, perform inhalation through the nose for four counts. Hold the air in your lungs for four counts. Maintain an expansive, open feeling even though you are not inhaling. Release the hold and exhale smoothly through your nose for four counts. This is one circuit of the box-breathing practice.

### ***Bracketing, detachment and boundaries***

Bracketing is the mental ability to take a major disappointment, setback or trauma and isolate it in your mind so that you can get back to functioning in a consensus reality.

It is not an act of diminishing or demeaning the incident. It is containing trauma so that your life can continue without it dictating your emotions. Mental brackets enable you to contain or fire wall trauma without putting a metaphoric lid on it. This type of lid can create a pressure cooker. Brackets, on the other hand, allow the incident or setback to be confined whilst emotional seepage, rather than overwhelming torrents, occur.

Emotional detachment or letting go refers to avoiding engaging for personal or social reasons. You do not try to fix but remain supportive. You set and maintain boundaries that avoid the undesired impact related to engaging the negative effects of another. These limits do not mean avoiding compassion or loving and supporting the people you care about; rather, they create the space needed to rationally choose not to be overwhelmed or manipulated by such feelings.

Conventional wisdom informs us there are seven categories in our lives where we need healthy boundaries. These are: physical, emotional, spiritual, social, intellectual, financial and sexual.

To determine whether you have set enough healthy boundaries ask yourself:

Do I feel used?

Am I angry?

Do I feel violated?

Do I feel resentful?

Do I feel isolated?

Do I feel frightened?

Do I feel like a child in the relationship?

## 7. CONTROLLED AGGRESSION

*“The will to survive is not as important as the will to prevail.”*

JEFF COOPER

Most people have passion and some good ideas. Tragically, their ideas devolve into vague plans and, too often, that is where it bogs down. They mull around, immobilised, in a state of ruminating, postponing action or simply occupying a seat.

It takes controlled aggression in the form of energy and intensity to translate passion into plans, plans into action, and action into a noteworthy performance. You apply GOYA. In this instance, it is not the name of the famous painter; it is the acronym for Get off Your Arse, you miss many opportunities because they are disguised as hard work.

I subscribe to General George Patton’s famous maxim: *A good plan today is better than a perfect one tomorrow.*

Perfect takes too long to develop. We have limited time and money to bring our ideas to fruition. Customers will not pay for perfect and it is not profitable. In product terms, they want good-enough now, or in a sport analogy, supporters want you to win. Not by a lot, just a win.

Customers usually buy when they are in ‘pain’ and have the money to solve the pain. Their purchasing patterns tell us how much they are willing to pay to fix their need. You can imagine that the use of the word pain implies a range of needs from survival to ego.

### ***A definition of controlled aggression***

I define controlled aggression as increasing energy and intensity, in a moment, to change the odds in your favour. You choose to work harder and faster than the opposition, you are combative without losing discipline or impulse control.

### ***Key points on controlled aggression***

- You understand that you must take success – the opposition will not hand it to you.
- You raise your intensity and energy to become successful or significant.
- You put pressure on the opposition; you get under their skin and unsettle them.
- You increase pressure on them until they fall off the pace.
- You are believable and can intimidate the opposition.
- You operate within the boundaries of civility.
- You make the opposition believe you are dangerous.
- You distract the opposition from their intention.
- You know the boundary between naked aggression and controlled aggression.
- You have several game plan options.

Your controlled aggression mantra is: *No one can out-prepare or outwork me.*

### ***Hit the opposition hard, until they will lose their will to win***

It was my first rugby game. The coach gave his pre-match pep talk. I recall him saying about the opposition, “They are a bunch of sissies. Hit them hard, they will lose their will to win.”

As an impressionable young rugby player in my early teens, these words represent my first memory of anything vaguely approximating psychological strategy, and by implication, mental toughness. Of course, these motivational sentiments expressed by the coach were just as easily turned on our team when we lost the game; we became the bunch of sissies.

My coach was probably trying to stimulate our killer instinct so that we would intimidate the opposition and therefore have a competitive advantage.

I assume many people have had similar formative experiences, perpetuating the belief that aggression or killer instinct is a major component for achievement.

My experience has demonstrated that aggression, applied in areas outside of collision sports, is only effective if applied within a holistic and developmental context. My findings show that aggression and intimidation applied in isolation can backfire, inspiring the opposition to a winning performance.

Notwithstanding, aggression remains a crucial component in collision sports like rugby, where domination is a key success factor in forcing the opponents into a panicked mental state, whereby they lose composure and make more mistakes.

### ***You work hard***

It is unlikely that you are going to become successful or significant without hard work mostly in the form of intensity and investing energy. You will find many caveats on working hard, however, at this stage I want you to hold in your mind an image of a Duracell bunny as the example of hard work and contrast it with an image of a chicken without a head.

### ***Increase energy and intensity***

You may recall when the 2016 England rugby team were poised to achieve their nineteenth win in a row and beat the world record for consecutive international rugby game wins. In this nineteenth game, they faced a less-fancied Ireland team.

However, they underestimated Ireland’s ability to raise their energy and in so doing, increase the intensity of the game and change the odds in their favour. England fell off the pace.

Ireland won, and I guess the only word Eddie Jones, the English coach, could muster was, “Oops.” With the benefit of hindsight, this had a negative tipping point that started an England performance slump.

England went on to record losses to a resurgent Scotland, a struggling French team, and, of course, they lost their 2018 test series against a new-look Springbok rugby side. In all instances, energy and intensity were major factors in their fall from grace.



The English may have learnt a lesson from their losses. They controlled the final game on South African tour and countered the Springboks' physicality, causing the Springbok players to 'try harder', lose discipline, and then lose the match.

### ***Do not confuse trying harder with working harder***

When success is slipping away, and this is often the case when you do not pick up on changing circumstances in time, you tend to exhaust yourself trying harder. You react like a chicken without a head, grabbing quick-fix solutions to the immediate and demanding symptoms.

This method often spirals into a negative, destructive cycle of short-term, pressure-relieving tactics ending with self-justification and blame.

When you feel that you are limited to trying harder to regain or achieve success – and in my opinion, you should not be restricted to this option – you should rather consider working harder, like the Duracell bunny.

### ***Naked aggression***

*"Wilfulness and violence are in our DNA. Each of us is born with impulses to inflict devastating harm upon other creatures and other people, including our family members. Both physically and emotionally, we can and do tear each other apart."* (Breggin, 2014).

The opposite of controlled aggression is naked aggression. This is aggression without respect for rules, characterised by knee-jerk reactions, being careless, and throwing away caution.

If one reflects on the lifetime accomplishments of Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela or Wangari Maathai, they had the ability to call upon mental and emotional skills beyond naked aggression. They became global icons mainly because they could turn their mental ability into a competitive advantage.

When it came to aggression, they probably 'stepped themselves'. This is an interpretation of controlled aggression. It is an evolved way of processing intensity or anger, and is different to naked aggression, which is raw and unrefined.

If you have not invested time in developing composure, practising critical self-reflection, or creating a personal plan, you will struggle to differentiate between controlled aggression and naked aggression.

### ***Outwork the opposition***

Gandhi asserted that true strength is willpower. It may sound corny, but American actor Will Smith has willpower.

He explained that some actors might be more talented and sexier than he is, but he would outwork them. He added that if he were on a treadmill in a gym competing against another,

there would be only one of two results: either he would win or he would die, because he would never get off before the other person.

Could Will Smith's controlled aggression in the form of hard work have contributed to his success as an actor?

The rather obvious conclusion is that hard work is a key ingredient to success, whatever your endeavour, and I add that nobody can outwork you – nobody. Working harder is a choice we can all make. And if you work harder and faster than the opposition, you will have a tactical competitive advantage. At times willpower is expressed in the determination to stand your ground and outwait the other.

Some view hard work as punishment – and I guess if you are not passionate about your work it may be – however, consider these wise words from Confucius: *Choose a job you are passionate about and you never have to work a day in your life.*

In other words, you can overcome the view that hard work is punishment if you *love thy labour*.

### ***Make the opposition believe you are dangerous***

One of the ways to raise your game is to make the opposition feel that you present a threat, that you are dangerous. Even too dangerous to take on.

### ***Be combative***

To be perceived as dangerous you must be ready to be combative. You start by magnifying and playing to your strengths. This disturbs opposition thinking, frustrates them, creates doubt, gets 'under their skin', and erodes their confidence,

The late Muhammad Ali, widely acclaimed as the greatest heavyweight boxer of all time, had a clear grasp of how to use controlled aggression so that his opponents would lose composure. He used his ability to goad them.

Ali claimed, "You don't want to psych your opponent out. Rather you want to psych them up. You want to make them fight harder. Make them fight too hard, make them feel they must get you, make them angry, increase their arousal levels, make them anxious. Then they get too tired and the boxing ring is the wrong place to get too tired. Because now they are in serious trouble."

### ***Be believable***

To create the impression that you are a threat, you must be believable in the opposition's mind. Someone who was believable, and could therefore intimidate his opponents, was the former Australian spin bowler, Shane Warne.

Warne's skills, record and demeanour made him believable. He created the perception in his opponent's mind that he was too dangerous to take on. Therefore, when he was about to bowl, the opposition batsman not only faced him physically, but also faced all the mental fears they had from knowing what he'd already achieved. From my observation, Warne did not have to bowl particularly well all the time. He partially relied on his reputation.

The fear instilled in the opposition's mind by the thought of his bowling abilities was enough to increase the batsmen's arousal. That caused them to lose some of their fine motor skills, which meant that they would inevitably make more mistakes. When Warne retired, newspapers wrote, "Warne summoned up panic, and, like his faithful dog, panic came panting up."

### *Sledging is combative*

You may have personal experience of the effects of sledging. Alternatively, you may have observed the distracting effect that a few well-placed comments from people like Shane Warne, or the late Muhammad Ali, had on their opponents.

International cricket has provided excellent examples of sledging to undermine the opposition's confidence and composure.

Former Sri Lankan cricket captain, Kumar Sangakkara (a well-known wind-up merchant in his time), used sledging effectively in the 2007 ICC World Cup game against South Africa. His sledging played an important part in South Africa losing that match.

Shakespeare referred to distraction in Othello. In this play, a senator suggests that the Turkish retreat to Rhodes "is a pageant to keep us in false gaze". In our context, sledging can distract your competitors in false gaze.

This tactic worked for Warne and Ali because their performances matched or exceeded the expectations that they set up. If you cannot back your comments with the required level of skill and performance, chances are your sledging will come back to haunt you.

Sledging is most effective when it is subtle and selective. The tactic of 'throw enough mud and have faith that some will stick' is counterproductive. Well-trained participants easily block insults and crowd out noise.

The intent behind sledging is to enhance your position by 'getting up the nose' of the opposition. If done intelligently, the opposition reacts irrationally and makes more mistakes, ultimately boosting your confidence.

I believe that it is better to be honest without boasting or expressing false modesty when you are talking about your own ability. If you are going to comment on what the opposition is capable of, and I recommend you don't, keep it short and show respect. I do not believe that randomly sledging others helps your cause.

If they have done their mental skills homework it will not affect them, and you are probably increasing your arousal to a point where it will be to your disadvantage. If this happens, you will inadvertently create a competitive advantage for your opposition.

Mock charging, bullying and bluffing may initially give your opposition the impression that you are dangerous, but it can also backfire if they call you out on your threat and you cannot deliver against their challenge.

### ***Distract the opposition from their intention***

When you are combative, it puts the opposition under pressure; their instincts oblige them to pay narrow focus to what is unfolding in front of them, often to the exclusion of other important matters happening in the periphery. Soon, they lose composure and are likely to try too hard, increasing the chances of making crucial mistakes that erode their competitiveness. At this point, you get the opportunity to hasten ahead of them.

A word of warning: Being combative by applying unbridled aggression often results in you trying too hard. When you try too hard, your judgment is poorer, your skill levels diminish, and you will fall behind the opposition as a result.

The intensity with which you apply controlled aggression, and the periods over which you maintain it, will be proportionate to the desire you have for implementing your intention or your need to get ahead of your competitors.

### ***Intimidate the opposition***

Applying controlled aggression by being combative can create a competitive advantage by overwhelming or intimidating the opposition. You can achieve this without transgressing laws or behaving unethically.

The Springbok rugby team has experienced a high win percentage over time, and they have consistently used a combative approach to achieve a competitive advantage.

They deliberately intimidate their opposition with their abrasive physical play. They believe that if they assert their superior physicality, they will gain a psychological advantage over the opposition and ultimately win games. The adage applies: “if it thinks you are afraid, it will have you for dinner.”

### ***Handle what the opposition dishes up***

Les Kiss, a previous Springbok rugby defence coach with Coach Harry Viljoen, tried to teach players the value of communicating with body language to enhance their defence capabilities. Kiss explained defence as a total philosophy rather than something that you do in the moment on a rugby field. The part of his explanation that I related to in a controlled aggression context was his explanation of how players had to accept handling whatever the opposition dished up.

Their body language must communicate their determination to cover their channel and signify their willingness to confront other players. He explained that opponents reading this body language would feel pressured and, likely, pass the ball to another attacker. In this way,

the touchline would begin to act as an additional defender. In NFL games, where physical dominance is crucial in determining a winning result, this type of overt physical aggression, aimed at governing the opposition, is used to good effect.

### ***Controlled aggression can mask other skills you may be lacking***

A former Australian national rugby coach, Rod Macqueen, described the way the Springboks play rugby as ‘thugby’. He concluded that the name ‘Springbok’ was not apt for the team because the actual animals are known to be fleet-footed and skilful. He suggested that the South African rugby team should be named ‘Buffalos’. He thought this name was better suited because buffalos are strong and intimidating. He concluded “fortunately for opposing teams, they are slow thinkers”.

In the IRB World Cup tournament of 2007, it was clear that the main competitive advantage used by the Springboks was, once again, intimidation. The Springbok coach, Jake White, was even rumoured to say, “The Springboks are the only international rugby team in the world who can win a game without the ball.” He was right, as they won the tournament despite kicking a lot of possession onto the opposition.

The Springbok game plan, when they had the ball, was to kick it as close to the oppositions’ try line as possible. If this resulted in opposition possession, the Springboks could work their intimidation game plan effectively. White felt that it is easier to intimidate opposition rugby players when *they* have the ball than it is when *your* players have the ball.

One of the hazards when applying intimidation through aggression is that it invariably becomes uncontrolled. This can lead to punitive consequences for the aggressor, along with stifled creativity.

In 2011, the Springboks went in defence of their World Cup title with the press claiming that their strategy had not changed.

You could argue that the Springboks suffered the consequences of this. A composed and resolute Australian team in the quarterfinals of the tournament beat them. Ironically, the Springboks had something like 80% of the possession in this game. This implies that they could not execute their aggressive game plan because they had too much of the ball.

### ***Develop additional ways to achieve your intention***

Tim Harford writes that consistent success comes from developing more than one way to achieve your intention, if plan A is failing, adapt to plan B, then plan C, etc.” (Harford, *Adapt*, 2011). It would seem the Springbok rugby team, down the ages, have relied on controlled aggression as their only game plan to achieve their intention. I cannot fault the coaches as this approach has given the Springboks the second highest win rate in world rugby.

I recall Jason Leonard, the former England prop, being interviewed on television before the 2014 game at Twickenham. He was asked what the Springbok game plan was likely to be. He

said without hesitation that they would try to run over the opposition. The interviewer then asked what the alternate game plan would be. He answered: “They will try to run over the opposition.”

However, Tim Hartford’s Cautionary Tales podcasts (2019) sound a warning when he talks about plan commitment bias. He claims it’s hard to rethink our plans when we are under pressure. Our brain tricks us into ignoring warning signals.

### ***Springboks will move away from their comfort zone***

Heyneke Meyer, the coach of the Springboks at the Rugby World Cup 2015, made the claim that the Springboks would move away from their comfort zone at Rugby World Cup 2015 by using more of a complete approach. I did not see evidence of this move, and once again the Springboks seemed to rely on an intimidation game plan.

Meyer’s successor, Allister Coetzee, claimed he wanted to add panache and flair to the Springboks’ game. Coetzee did not achieve this. When the going got tough the Springbok team reverted to the usual plan A with aggression as its dominant differentiating factor. Despite this regression to the original game plan, the winning percentage during Coetzee’s leadership was 44%. Not enough to keep his job.

### ***It worked in 2019***

In the final of Rugby World Cup 2019 the Springboks achieved a magnificent win over England. South Africa’s game plan of controlled aggression in the form of physical intimidation particularly expressed in dominant scrumming, pressure kicks and resolute defence intimidated the English, creating conditions nearing the end of the game where South Africa could increase their lead, achieved by scrum penalties, by running the ball at a nervous, intimidated England team and scored multiple times. You may say: *If you act like a predator, they act like prey.*

### ***Practice the skills of controlled aggression***

The skills of controlled aggression are practised in imagery. They can be initiated by rehearsed trigger words or hand cues and implemented in real time. You apply controlled aggression when you see the signs that it’s required.

When opting for controlled aggression, you would be wise to use breathing control to manage the intensity of your efforts so that you don’t exhaust yourself working at near maximum intensity for too long. Mentally tough people do not need encouragement to apply or withdraw controlled aggression. They read the signs to decide whether it’s necessary or whether they should cut it back.

It should not be difficult to access aggression. The desire for your intent or the stimulation of competitiveness taps into an evolutionary-based process that enables instinctive aggression

originally intended for survival. Males have an additional atavistic urge to be aggressive. Their usual challenge is to channel and manage this. Understanding and using composure is the start to doing so.

### ***Access controlled aggression without getting into a frenzied state***

It was believed that motivation could be achieved or enhanced through getting psyched up. It probably still is in some quarters. People believed that the more aroused or psyched up you got, the better your performance would be. You may have experienced, or should I say endured, pep talks before a sports match or in a sales meeting, where leaders psych up the team by shouting, shaking their fist and widening their eyes.

People used to believe that you needed to enter the playing field or marketplace in a frenzied state. The cure-all to performance was to get excited and to try harder. Pep talks and glib statements to psych someone up can generate some short-term arousal that, tactically speaking, is often useful. However, according to our current knowledge, when we get over-aroused, we try too hard and we then lose the ability to harness our skills, which results in more mistakes being made. What we need most often is to maintain composure so that we can express our controlled aggression and do our best, without getting hyped up into a frenzied state.

### ***Use your body language***

Communication is 7% verbal and 93% percent body language. The exact percentage is irrelevant – we all know we communicate in ways other than verbally. It is in these ways that I urge you to communicate your strengths and magnify a competitive advantage.

In business, you can do this by looking and acting professionally. When you need to be accepted by others, you communicate by looking engaging. When you want to improve customer service, look helpful. When you need to be physically aggressive, look imposing. If you want to communicate, remember to tell your body and face about the message.

The Zulu king, Shaka, arguably one of the most astute generals in history, provided a great example of communicating aggression. Shaka dressed his warriors in ways that would intimidate the opposition. He even had them wear ostrich feathers to make them appear bigger, and in this way, they would communicate strength.

## 8. CONFIDENCE

*“If you believe you can, you’re halfway there.*

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

I expand on this: When you are confident, you are halfway to success. When you are not confident, you are halfway to failure. Confidence is the feeling that you can rely on yourself to deal with whatever life throws your way. You may neither need, nor be able, to develop the supreme confidence of extremely high achievers. Having a high level of confidence is a major contributor when it comes to achieving your intention at any given time.

Developing confidence is more difficult as we get older. The older we become, the more negative mental and emotional baggage we accumulate and drag along with us. This baggage affects the level of confidence we have in our ability to handle problems and challenges.

The development of confidence starts at a young age. Our confidence level is influenced by the beliefs, values, and attitudes we internalise from our environment, which includes nurturing, family dynamics, schooling, and random events. Once these have been internalised, we use them to evaluate and make judgements about our ability to cope with current experiences and future options.

In some instances, this enculturation will have a positive effect on developing confidence. In others, it will be negative. Therefore, if you intend to help a child develop confidence, and you should, it is important to know that in their formative years, each child is developing their unique way of viewing and interpreting experiences. You can modify your approach to nurturing based on their individuality and an appreciation of randomness.

### *A definition of confidence*

I define confidence as having supreme self-belief without tipping into arrogance, combined with an ability to manage the complexity created by embracing multiple perspectives.

### *Key points on confidence*

- You are aware of the risks of under- and over-confidence.
- You understand how anxiety or shame interacts with under-confidence.
- You develop an air of captivating authority that projects the best option.
- You use confidence to improve motivation and decision-making.
- You apply confidence to improve change management and teamwork.
- You are mindful of how easily supreme confidence tips into arrogance.
- You are aware of the hazardous relationship between confidence and confirmation bias.
- You have bounce-back ability in the event of a loss of confidence.
- You can set up small wins to boost your confidence.

Your confidence mantra is ***I choose self-belief over self-doubt.***



### *Life and soul of the party*

Don't confuse confidence with being socially adept or being the so-called life and soul of the party. I know many confident actors, teachers, speakers, and singers who could be labelled socially shy, but when they need to perform, they turn it on. These people have self-belief.

### *Self-belief*

Do you believe you are 'up for the scrap' when confronted by a challenge? You can't deceive yourself that you have self-belief – you must develop it.

Confident people have developed self-belief that manifests as a sense of authority. Their demeanour and body language captivate those who support them and rings warning bells to those who oppose them.

My judgement is that you have three choices. You could choose over-confidence, under-confidence, or supreme confidence. Reflect on former Olympic champion, Usain Bolt. He is someone who chose supreme confidence.

Another supremely confident athlete was the late, legendary heavyweight boxer Muhammad Ali. He articulated his confidence through self-belief and expressed it loudly. You may say he had testicular fortitude.

He was famous for saying, "I am young, I am strong, I am handsome, and I can't be beat." In a television interview with Michael Parkinson, he claimed, "I didn't just want to be champion of America, but also champion of Russia, England, and Europe. I wanted to be champion of the world, but not only world champion, I wanted to become the best champion ever, so I kept on working until I did."

Ali's sanguine statements and supreme confidence sound outrageous, and in some circles interpreted as arrogance. Surely if a person does what they claim they intend to do; they should not be labelled as arrogant? Ali's statements are a testament to: *Nobody can outwork you, nobody!*

In 2004, a youthful Hank McGregor came to Cape Town, or more precisely, to Paarl, to compete in the Berg River canoe marathon. Before the race, the local press interviewed him. It seems that they mainly took an interest in him because of his father's extraordinary water-sport achievements.

Lee McGregor, his father, had acquired national team selection in canoeing, swimming, yachting, and surf-ski paddling. I do not recall the exact way the journalist framed the question to Hank. It went something like, "Hank, your dad was an amazing sportsman and great canoeist, how do you think you are going to do in the Berg River Marathon?" Hank's reply was, "Well, I am feeling confident, I think I'll win." Hank won the four-day, 227-kilometre race, and, since doing so, went on to win it for a record eleven times.

### ***Under-confidence***

In published research of 1999, Messer's Dunning and Kruger of Cornell University concluded that many highly skilled people underrate their abilities. They can be under-confident and suffer from illusory inferiority. Actual competence can have the ability to weaken self-confidence, as competent individuals, at times, falsely assume that others have equivalent abilities to them.

In the 2015, 2016 and 2017 seasons, the Springbok rugby team performed well below their historic standard. I suggest their loss in performance had a lot to do with them being under-confident.

When one lacks confidence, it is a slippery slope to a loss of performance. The opposition senses your loss of confidence and they metaphorically have you for breakfast. In these seasons, the Springboks uncharacteristically provided hearty breakfasts for England, Wales, and Ireland. They also suffered losses to comparatively lowly teams like Argentina, Italy, and Japan.

In my opinion, they will recover from this period of poor performance and have another winning cycle. The player numbers in South Africa inevitably produce a team that can outmuscle any competitor. Until such time they will have to work harder than their opposition and embrace an adaptive game plan. This will give them the small wins to scaffold to supreme confidence.

### ***Over-confidence***

The main Dunning and Kruger finding is about over-confidence. It has been termed the Dunning-Kruger effect. Essentially, it is a cognitive bias that leads to many unskilled people over-estimating their abilities; consequently, they make poor decisions and reach erroneous conclusions.

However, their incompetence blinds them and denies them the ability to recognise their mistakes. In this instance, they suffer from illusory superiority, rating their ability above average and much higher than it is.

Over-confidence has to do with the over-estimation of one's own ability and, as a result, the accuracy of one's predictions. This manifests in poor planning and illusions related to one's abilities.

### ***Supreme confidence***

Muhammad Ali's claims and marketing hype were not always seen as supreme confidence. I suspect he was often seen as over-confident and arrogant. However, in my opinion, he was playfully expressing what he could do and then lived up to his own hype.

People may have interpreted Hank McGregor's seemingly over-confident claim about winning as over-confident or arrogant. I believe he too was only expressing what he knew he could do.

### ***Arrogance***

Is the fear of being labelled arrogant possibly the reason why many people struggle to express supreme confidence?

Supremely confident people do not link their self-belief to putting others down. Instead, they use their talents to succeed at the task.

Arrogant people look down on others. They are characterised by correcting other people's grammar or pointing out their flaws. They are inclined to declare victory or success prematurely.

An arrogant person may have more skill than a confident person. The supremely confident person will tend to draw on composure more readily than an arrogant one.

### ***Confirmation bias***

Confirmation bias is the tendency to interpret all evidence as validation of our perspectives and default convictions. We are all vulnerable to cognitive biases. Our perspectives and convictions are deeply rooted in hardwired social or tribal beliefs. As a result, we vehemently defend our views and fail to see, or accept, the views of others.

In the 2016 American presidential election, approximately 63 million Americans voted for Donald Trump. They cast him in the role of lifeguard who would rescue them from the scourge of socialism with his negotiating ability and assertiveness. He would take them back to the old ways and make America great again. They perceived him as a stable genius, albeit with flaws. Most republicans came around to the view: "He may be a SOB, but he's our SOB".

This group campaigned against Hilary Clinton, labelling her as 'crooked Hilary', chanting, "lock her up". In their view, she was part of a political swamp that needed draining. In addition, they were offended by the 'deplorables' label she attached to them.

They claim that her supporters don't acknowledge any of Trump's good deeds because they suffer from Trump Derangement Syndrome (TDS).

On the other side of the political spectrum, almost 65 million voted for Hilary Clinton. They saw her as a career politician who had the credentials to manage a leadership position America holds on the world stage and they were enthused by the thought of electing a first female president.

They rebelled against Donald Trump, labelling him as a liar who was irrational and dangerous. They saw him as a pompous businessman who was creating a toxic brew of

racism, sexism, and phobias. In addition, they felt slighted by the ‘losers’ label he attached to them.

Observing the evolution of this presidency reminds me that mental toughness requires accepting that people are complex and often have different versions of who we are, how we should live, and who should rule. Inevitably all do not see things the way we do and none of us has a complete account of the truth.

The mentally tougher mind dares you to see things differently and think differently. It helps you embrace the messiness of democracy and the need for teamwork in almost any situation. This expanded perspective embraces counterevidence and results in a wider, inclusive, and more humane understanding. It obliges us to suspend the prejudice and judgment arising from the position we hold and open our minds to a different account of what has happened or is happening.

It does not allow us to hold on to competing world views where some ideas are completely right and others completely wrong. Therefore, we do not fixate on binary positions where strongman tactics thrive because the answers are unclear. Can you with complete conviction claim that: Brexit was better than remain, allopathic medicine is better than alternative treatments, a person can be labelled a total jock or total nerd; someone is fully masculine or fully feminine? Reflect on the binary views involving immigration. Are you trapped by the label “closed border racist” on one extreme or “open border lunatic” on the other?

Or is the right answer, there usually is no completely right answer, there is no black or white, it is mostly grey.

Of course, when you are floundering in grey, you must consider a bigger problem, namely mendacity; defined as not telling the truth. If one of the views you are bringing into consideration is overwhelmed by lies, truth shading, conspiracy theories, extraordinary popular delusions, and the madness of crowds. You may have to settle for the notion that, indeed, some views are right and others wrong because lies can morph into truth if we let them.

### ***Confirming or disconfirming***

People tend to test hypotheses in a one-sided, non-scientific and confirming way. They search for evidence consistent with the hypothesis they already hold at a given time, rather than searching through all the relevant evidence. They phrase questions so that they get affirmative answers that support their hypothesis. They look for the consequences they would expect if their hypothesis were true, rather than disconfirming evidence to reveal it as false.

### ***Mind-set paralysis***

You may have painful memories of how elephants were kept in circus environments. To stop a baby elephant from running away, its keeper would chain one of its legs to a stake in the ground. Initially the elephant would struggle to break the chain in trying for freedom.

Eventually, however, it would conclude it is trapped and stop resisting. This learnt belief is carried into adulthood and when it is fully grown, capable of breaking free from a chain around its leg, it does not try. The keeper can even use a rope instead of a chain. The elephant has learnt that when there is something around its leg, it is stuck.

Mindsets act in the same way as the chain on the elephant. People are often trapped by a deep-rooted belief or learnt behaviour they are unaware of, and therefore do not attempt to break free from it. Mindsets can enable a person to see alternative futures with infinite possibilities, or they can restrict a person to seeing only one future with limited possibilities.

English philosopher John Mill wrote, “He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. If he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side, if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion.” (Mill, *On Liberty*, 1859)

Confirmation bias, confirming, disconfirming and mind-set paralysis contribute to over-confidence in beliefs and perspectives by maintaining or strengthening our position in the face of contrary evidence. As a result, we become convinced of the righteousness of our cause and the evil of our rivals.

### ***What can we do to embrace multiple perspectives?***

I have, at times, been astonished by the views held by others. My internal response has been, “How on earth can they think or believe that?”

The mental toughness position is to accept that there are many views about what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is false. With mental toughness you understand we are all prisoners of our own perspective and vulnerable to triggers. But we can choose how and when to act.

The first step is to keep an open mind when confronted with counter-evidence that supports perspectives other than your own. Then, try to understand the context from which other perspectives have emerged.

Examine the evidence as it grows and depending on how much damage you feel there will be to your reputation for holding on to your perspective, you may be open to seeing the other side’s view. It will also depend on how blatant the counterevidence is, and what it is doing to public opinion.

When you are open to perspectives that may be equally valid as yours or, at least, you think could be less wrong than yours you can develop new insights. If you are resistant or blind to others’ views it is likely that you will maintain your current perspective by warping information into fitting yours.

### ***Watch out for the escalating commitment hazard***

There are many hazards associated with confidence, including that it leads to escalating commitment. This causes decision-makers to refuse to withdraw from a losing situation, or to

continue to throw money, effort, time, and other resources into bad investments. That certainly is not mental toughness. Knowing when to stop is as important as knowing when to begin. Many years ago, I heard someone say that it may be hard to know when to start a business; it is even harder to know when to get out of the business.

### ***The benefits of confidence***

When you are confident, you trust that your chosen course of action is the best one for you. You trust yourself, your abilities, and your team. Confidence is not blind faith; rather, it is informed self-belief and determination. With confidence, you can critically reflect positively on yourself; you become less tentative; more willing to take calculated risks; able to see and do things different; you express your talent and skills without hesitation; and you show enthusiasm without fear of embarrassment or failure.

With sufficient confidence, you will not feel the need to make excuses; you will put your problems into perspective; you will make better decisions, modify your reactions and manage change better; you will manage conflict appropriately and be more valuable to your team; you will give better customer service, accept help readily and be inclined to help others with less concern that you are giving away your intellectual property. You become more resilient and bounce back more easily from mishaps and the effects of unexpected events.

When you are confident, you embrace trial and error and use either success or failure as a motivator. Confident people lurch beyond what is expected and move on to giving a memorable performance.

Whilst some people can draw on their confidence more easily than others, all of us can build self-assurance, and some can even develop the supreme confidence displayed by Muhammad Ali and Usain Bolt.

### ***Confidence improves decision-making***

Confident people have an ability to make fast and frugal decisions under pressure. People who lack confidence are relegated to slow and ponderous decisions, or they are indecisive and often miss out on opportunities.

Confidence is a feature of mentally tough people. Using this trait, they develop the ability to prioritise what to do quickly. They decide on a course of action that is in line with their desired outcome and commit to it. They use the ability to thin-slice a situation to make better-quality decisions under fast-moving, high-stress conditions than their under-confident counterparts.

Thin-slicing means that they do not need all the information in a situation to come to a decision – just a whiff or a sign to recognise the scenario and make the choice. The additional benefit of thin slicing is that they do not end up in a situation where arousal increases to dangerous levels because they are delaying decisions or making a poor decision. They have made the decision.

### ***Confidence usually improves teamwork***

Confident people have learnt that little is achieved in isolation. When people are confident, teamwork improves, and their teams usually experience better results. In high-speed team games that are filled with split-second decisions, like rugby, basketball or soccer, the quality of these decisions is determined by the confidence team members have in their own, as well as each other's, abilities.

### ***Confidence develops change resilience***

We live in an ever-changing environment in which we are required to manage external changes and a great deal of internal, personal change. You have probably read about change management or attended a change management workshop. However, despite reading and learning about change management, many people still react to change by allowing their emotions to hijack their minds.

I'm not suggesting that these emotions are wrong, or that you should not feel them, or that you can magically avoid feeling them. Experiencing and processing these emotions is essential; after all, emotions lubricate our behaviour. It is the extent to which they dominate or immobilise you, and consequently limit your performance that presents a problem.

The Elizabeth Kübler-Ross model in the new edition of her book, *On Death and Dying*, refers to the stages of grief and how knowledge of these stages can be usefully applied to understanding change (Kübler-Ross, 2014).

Improving your confidence will give you better change resilience and enhance your ability to manage the change process. When you are confident, you won't feel as threatened by changes in technology or politics, nor by changes in relationships, or even by the physical changes associated with aging.

### ***Don't be limited by your past***

Despite the possible negative effects of nurturing, family, schooling, and randomness, I believe that you can still make a major contribution to developing your confidence by systematically implementing the components of mental toughness. The process will usually start with concentration, that is, passion and a plan to translate passion into purpose; then implementing preparation in the form of deliberate practice. This is followed by calling upon composure; using controlled aggression; and committing to a process of lifelong learning. In this way, you start to reflect positively on yourself and your confidence grows. By following this process, you can be informed by your past, and not defined by it.

### ***Receiving and giving help develops confidence***

You can develop confidence by using a role model who knowingly or unknowingly acts as a helping hand to guide your decisions. You may take it further by having a formal relationship

with a mentor who you regard as experienced and wise. This relationship usually involves receiving advice and guidance, resulting in enhanced confidence.

Another way of developing confidence is to help others – guide them, support them, and affirm them when they have done well. The notion of working closely with someone else so that it boosts confidence is also used by the military in their battle buddy concept. Military psychologists claim that if you have a battle buddy at your side, it is easier to be confident, and you're unlikely to feel as fearful or defect.

### ***Be motivated by desire***

The Greek philosopher Aristotle claimed that desire is the starting point for all achievement. Simple, but profound. It is obvious that you are unlikely to achieve something if you don't think the process needed for a desirable result is worth the effort. Many people are driven by an outcome like winning a gold medal or creating wealth, but they lose confidence and drop their intention when the work and sacrifice required to achieve this becomes their reality.

Desire awakens us from inertia and sets us on the path to a tangible result. It instills in us a competitive edge and a will to win. A lack of ambition may be the foremost obstacle in achieving any objective, including developing mental toughness.

When the pressure is on and when the going gets tough, you will need reserves of desire to enable you to make sacrifices, be patient, and keep trying. Without the necessary desire to succeed, you simply will not manage the high workload associated with success or overcome the obstacles on the journey. It is not uncommon to come across people who, instead of conquering their hurdles, would rather have circular arguments about success and debate its meaning.

### ***Don't be manipulated by desire***

Be aware of the flip side of desire. There are many who interpret desire as a feeling that can be manipulated by the dark forces of conspirators and unethical marketers. To some extent they are right. However, if you allow the fire of ambition to be doused by the fears of manipulation, you are allowing a small part to dominate the whole. Concerns about exploitation are valid and should be held in awareness, but only as a cautionary mechanism.

To address concern about being manipulated, it is prudent to indulge in some critical reflection within a framework that respects the evidence. Consider how your desire may be influenced by your views regarding success or significance. If you struggle with the notion of pursuing personal accomplishment, it may be due to deeply rooted convictions about people who have gained undeserved prosperity.

Could your current belief system be dominated by memes about the so-called filthy rich? Could you have created associations of guilt or rejection around being successful? If these feelings are significant in you, you may be aborting your journey to achievement.



One of my clients wrote: “I believed that 85% of successful people were self-centred, selfish people who do not care about other people at all. I also believed that most of them do not have a private life. I think these beliefs have been limiting me in pursuing success or significance as I felt it would turn me into someone I do not want to be. I feel that this belief limited me so much that I failed to see the bigger picture and just accepted mediocrity.”

### ***Use your instinctive desires to develop motivation***

I could conjure up a substantial list of instinctive desires, but the following will do to make the point. When you are hungry you will intuitively desire food. When lonely, you develop a need for company. Sexual attraction also generates desire. It's not important to unpack the psychodynamics of these cravings, but it is vital for you to realise that they are instinctive and plentiful. The problem is not the yearning; we all have latent desires. It's a matter of getting in touch with them in order to transmute them into useful motivation.

Instincts are not your only source of desire. There are many instances where you have generated inspiration. You may recall experiencing and expressing passionate inclination after reading a book or magazine article, watching a movie, or attending an event.

Motivation drives confidence. Confidence, in turn, creates opportunities. If you are seeking confidence, you can develop it through developing incremental motivation. This can be achieved by understanding and applying some of the motivational theories, tapping into self-determination, and gaining short wins towards your intent.

Many people use the excuse of not feeling motivated as a reason for not acting or committing to tasks that will create opportunities. My experience has shown me that we will not always have the luxury of innate motivation to drive us to do what is necessary for our success.

In these times, we need to call on levels of determination (which arguably is a form of motivation in the first place) to act. We need to trust that we will feel substantial levels of motivation after we act. In other words, you act despite not feeling obvious motivation or the enthusiasm to do so. As a result of acting, you start to feel the traditional sense of motivation as opposed to the motivation itself, and then you act.

### ***Motivation theories***

Developing mental toughness is often associated with the concept of developing motivation. It follows that an understanding of motivation theory will therefore assist in your mental toughness development. There are many motivational theories, the most known one being Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This theory claims that people will display motivated behaviour to satisfy their needs and that these needs are hierarchical.

**Physiological needs:** Maslow claims that the most basic need is survival – what the body needs to stay alive, such as air, water, and food. If our survival is threatened, then we'll be motivated to survive. Note that when this is the case, any motivation for other needs will be sublimated by your survival instinct.

**Safety needs:** The next level in Maslow's hierarchy is safety. This is a need to have a safe and secure environment and an assured supply of food, shelter, and income.

**Social needs:** Thereafter Maslow claims a social need manifests, that is, the necessity to belong to a group.

**Self-esteem needs:** The next level introduces self-esteem, which is the need to feel important, to feel responsible, to achieve recognition, and to receive rewards and praise.

**Self-actualisation:** Finally, at the top of the hierarchy, Maslow places self-actualisation. This need is strongly intrinsic and involves expressing your full potential.

### ***Use intrinsic and extrinsic motivation***

The theory of self-determination addresses the concept of intrinsic motivation. This theory claims that motivation exists on a continuum ranging from intrinsic motivation on the one end, extrinsic in the middle, and amotivation on the other end.

Intrinsic motivation represents behaviour driven by internal, sense-of-self issues. People are likely to sustain activities when they are intrinsically motivated for their own reasons.

Extrinsic motivation is gained from influences outside of yourself. Participation is driven mostly by external goals and rewards.

Amotivation is an unwillingness or inability to participate in activities.

The degree to which individuals can fulfil their basic psychological needs determines their level of self-determination. The basic needs that self-determination has been associated with are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy is freedom of choice. It is defined as engaging in an activity because you choose to do so. Competence is defined as self-belief in one's ability to perform well in an activity. Using feedback appropriately is a great way to boost feelings of competence. Relatedness is defined as a sense of shared experience. If people feel there is an accepting atmosphere, they are likely to develop relatedness.

### ***Develop motivation through short wins***

Motivation can be developed by setting and achieving short wins. Essentially, short wins are mini goals that are in line with your personal plans. These mini goals are progressively demanding because as you progress, you confront situations that you have not yet experienced. In these cases, your ability to cope is continually tested. Successfully completing previous challenges provides you with the confidence to try to cope with difficult situations. However, this doesn't need to be a fortuitous experience as you can set up your own mini goals on the way towards your intention.

### ***Try using music to motivate***

Music is commonly used among athletes in training, and prior to competition, to trigger or regulate their motivation. Sydney Olympics rowing gold medallist, Tim Foster, now a coach, uses music to punctuate all the indoor training sessions that he leads. Specifically, during

circuit training or rowing (meter intervals) he puts on loud, fast music, whilst during recovery periods he plays soft, slow music. Therefore, work and recovery times are regulated by music. Research from Brunel University indicates that this approach increases work output, reduces perceived exertion, and improves the pleasure experienced during the activity.

### ***Positive self-talk can motivate and eliminate excuses***

I am not an advocate of mental preparation that uses loud self-talk as a preparation technique. In my opinion, it is self-indulgent when someone is shouting out things like, “Yes, yes, yes!” in preparation for an event. I believe this type of self-talk creates a risk of losing composure. However, I can fully understand people celebrating and expressing their delight and relief after achieving something significant.

I advocate positive self-talk as a preparation technique, or as a means of re-establishing concentration and enhancing motivation across a wide range of domains. The technique makes use of your powerful inner voice to reinforce important aspects of your performance. With appropriate repetition, self-talk can ultimately affect your belief system. Positive self-talk is the ability to hold inner conversations reflecting on your good performances that lead you to sustained success and improvement through positive self-reinforcement.

### ***Autosuggestion includes negative and positive reinforcement***

Positive self-reinforcement is a part of the broader concept of autosuggestion. However, autosuggestion includes the possibility that you are doing the opposite, like using negative self-talk and therefore generating negative self-reinforcement. Most of us habitually use negative self-talk without consciously considering the consequences of this habit on our performance. We receive our most important messages from the inner conversations we have with ourselves, not from others. When negative self-talk becomes pervasive, you can deal with it through thought stoppage, or using trigger words or gestures.

As people use positive self-talk to encourage themselves towards their intention, they will usually develop a confident attitude with the accompanying benefit of making fewer excuses.

### ***A serious loss of confidence***

A loss of confidence can happen to any person, in any pursuit, at any moment. Sometimes a loss of confidence is a momentary lapse and you bounce back, or, conversely, it has a long-term effect and morphs into a pervading lack of confidence.

I recall an incident when I lost confidence in the early part of the new millennium. At the time my main income source was conference speaking. I was booked to speak at an annual conference for a major bank. I prepared a multimedia presentation of slides, sound effects, case studies, and short video clips. The slides would be used as the structure of the talk, as well as prompts for my lines.

When I arrived at the venue the speaker before me was presenting and I was scheduled to speak next. There was a five-minute comfort break between speakers, and I had just enough time to link my laptop computer to the venue's audio-visual equipment. What followed was a disaster. The sound was inaudible, the visuals distorted, and the videos would not play.

This problem revealed itself in stages, from the moment the few hundred delegates took their seats all the way to the end of the presentation. Within five minutes of starting, I knew I had a major problem. I gestured to the local technician to indicate that I needed help and he replied by assuring me that their equipment was not at fault. I instinctively panicked and frantically tried adjusting the settings on my computer. I fiddled and squirmed my way through the presentation. Mercifully, the hour ended accompanied by gratuitous applause.

I left thinking I should never speak at a conference again. I felt embarrassed. I felt like a 'loser'. It took some time to regain composure and get around to reflecting on what my options had been in that awful scenario. At the time, the alternative was to abandon the technology I was relying on and give the presentation without it. To do this, I needed to draw on unplugged skills, but in that moment, I lacked the confidence to generate alternatives, possibly because I had invested so much preparation into a multimedia presentation. Instead, I panicked and neurotically tried to fix a technical problem that I had no ability to fix.

### ***Develop bounce-back ability and get back on the horse***

Fortunately, a while later, after critical reflection, I got back on the metaphoric horse. I still give conference presentations and, of course, I have encountered a few technical problems with presentations since then, but they've been easy to manage by simply accepting what was happening and switching to my own audio-visual equipment, which I always take along as a backup.

### ***A lack of confidence and a loss of confidence***

A lack of confidence can be an outcome of a loss of confidence, like the one I had with my presentation, or it can stem from developmental incidents as a child or even as an adult. When we lack confidence, it affects our ability to perform because we start to believe that we cannot perform.

Tragically, if we do not believe that we are capable, we mentally, then physically reduce our abilities to match the beliefs that we have of ourselves. It is easier to build on good past performances than it is to build on poor ones. As Floyd Patterson, a former world heavyweight boxing champion, said: "Winning is easy; it's losing that is difficult."

Difficult, maybe, but mentally tough people develop resilience and an ability to bounce back. They don't readily accept that a poor performance automatically leads to a downward spiral where success is unattainable. Believing in past success as the only precursor to confidence is an 'expectation trap' that has, in all probability, restricted many a gifted person and limited

them from exceeding what is expected of them. I believe that confidence can be established or ‘manufactured’ despite poor performances, failures, or perceived barriers.

### ***Perceived barriers***

In 1954, the late Roger Bannister became the first man to run the mile under four minutes. Until that time, it was believed to be impossible. This barrier was supported by many in the scientific community. The claim was that the human body could not achieve it. Some believed the body would break apart before such a speed could be reached. His feat demonstrates that one is capable of far more than expected. Well, not everyone believed it. Bannister started to believe that the four-minute mile barrier could be broken. In this instance, his belief made all the difference to his success. It led to the confidence that would help him break the barrier.

Within eighteen months of Roger Bannister’s breakthrough, sixteen other athletes did it. Were these barrier-breaking athletes more talented? The answer is a clear no. They did it because the barrier had been breached and they now believed it was possible.

Our beliefs impose limitations on our minds, and then our minds limit our physicality. If we are to overcome these limitations, we need confidence to update our beliefs in line with our latest knowledge.

## 9. CALCULATED RISKS

***“Taking calculated risks is the only way to become successful. This means living on the edge and doing what others might view as reckless.”***

RICHARD BRANSON

True entrepreneurs and extreme sport specialists take risks others will not. They are hell bent on getting ahead of the herd. Most people are not suited to this level of risk-taking.

While there are those who may take reckless risks to achieve their goals, the wiser option is to take calculated risks. People who take calculated risks accept that if they want something they have not had before, they must do things they have not done before. They sense that when they do not risk anything, they are paradoxically risking more.

He understands that it invariably requires taking risks to seize opportunities when they arise. He goes on to say if somebody offers you an amazing opportunity, but you are not sure you can do it, say yes, then learn how to do it later. If you wait until you are ready, you will wait for the rest of your life.

He also calculates his risks by capping the extreme downside. In 1984, he expanded from the music industry into airlines. Branson set one condition in his negotiations with Boeing. He wanted to be able to return the aeroplanes at the end of the first year if he did not attract enough business. He did not want his other businesses crashing down due to a single flop. He wanted to keep jobs intact for his employees at Virgin Records. He said if things do not work out, take that escape hatch. That way, when all is said and done, you will be able to gather your team, discuss what happened, and embark on your next venture together.

### ***A definition of calculated risks***

To take calculated risks you need to act on ideas based on an estimation of risk. Then, using innovation and improvisation, keep momentum behind the implementation.

### ***Key points on calculated risks***

- You take on a value-creation, growth mind-set.
- You realise you will regret the things you didn't do more than the things you did do.
- You challenge your assumptions.
- You cross self-imposed or conventional wisdom barriers.
- You do things you have not done before and embrace trial and error.
- You use courage reserves to go outside your comfort zone, reach beyond your grasp.
- You do not have an absence of fear – you act despite fear.
- You accept, up front, the downside of your risk.
- You have decided that if you fail, it will be because of ambition, not sloth.
- You flow like water around, over, and under obstacles. Eventually they are worn away.

Your calculated risk mantra is ***I layer courage over fear.***

### ***Growth mind-set and deep reserves of courage***

When you want to create new value, you need to take calculated risks. Taking these risks requires a growth mind-set with deep reserves of courage and a willingness to see and do things differently.

A value-creating, growth mind-set results in a positive balance between a willingness to take risks and avoid them. This is an equilibrium that embraces risk-taking without causing chronic anxiety.

Deep reserves of courage come from systematically developing these reserves. I believe courage can be developed in the same way as a muscle can. When you practice, one step at a time, moving inch by inch further away from your comfort zone, your courage threshold and reserve grows.

When you take risks, you will experience some fear and at least a little worry. If you are a leader, expect surprising levels of pushback from some stakeholders. Many in your community are unlikely to match your risk appetite.

The lesson is to limit your aversion and accommodate risk without doing so irresponsibly. Your current risk-taking ability may be anywhere from extremely averse to accommodating. Aversion includes reluctance to accept a proposition with an uncertain, yet possibly higher pay-off, because of fear.

For example, a risk-averse person might choose to put their money into a bank account with a low but certain interest rate rather than invest in a plan offering uncertain, higher returns.

Calculated risks are risks where you have estimated and accepted the chances of mistakes and failure. In the chapter on commitment, we address the notions of how to grit and how to quit. There is a time for gritting, a time for adapting, and a time for quitting. Many of us fail because we don't know how, nor for how long, to grit through the discomfort of change or the loss of immediate rewards. We struggle to distinguish between delays and denials. We conclude failure rather than opt to adapt, innovate, and improvise.

I am sure you have heard about risk versus return. The claim is that the greater the risk, the higher the return. Conversely, if the risk does not yield favourable results, the higher its negative consequence. In financial circles, they call this a cost-versus-benefit analysis.

You make choices involving risks every day. Over time, this may make you lean towards being daring or, alternatively, cautious. If you have become cautious, you drive towards maintaining the known, creating certainty, and minimising loss even when the potential benefit is large. However, taking some risk is the price of achieving favourable returns. Therefore, if you want to be successful or significant, you will need to embrace the uncertainty and complexity associated with risk.

### ***We do not like the uncertainty of the unknown***

People like to know what is coming, even if it is bad. They would rather endure the pain and discomfort of the known than embrace the uncertainty of the unknown.

### ***The benefits of calculated risks***

Most people involuntarily follow a herd instinct. They stay within the pack. They may try to improve their performance by using common practice or even benchmark best-practice. These are great ways to move to the front group in the herd. Yet this needs to be done with the understanding that you cannot become the best through imitation. At best, you become a runner-up.

Calculated risks provide an opportunity to get ahead of the pack and stand out. In the mental toughness context, it is useful to set a benchmark and then take calculated risks to progress beyond that mark to create new value. This requires a combination of discipline and daring. It challenges your habitual boundaries, creating new opportunities, but also new hazards. This is fine, because you have estimated the effect of these hazards.

### ***How to take calculated risks***

You balance calculated risks against the desire you have for your intent, relative to the threat you face. Calculated risks aim at positioning you optimally to accrue benefits. To do this, you need to let go of familiar security and accept the unknown.

A grizzly bear, when trying to catch salmon, takes a calculated risk by positioning itself on slippery stones in the middle of a treacherous river. It is a safer choice for the bear to position itself on the bank, where it will be dry and can avoid having to negotiate the river's hazards. However, the fish it wants are in the hazardous location. There are no fish on the riverbanks where it is safer for the bear.

You need to consider where the optimal risk position is in which you will place yourself. You have to accept discomfort, possibly for an extended period. This position will bring what is relevant and productive into your line of sight. This requires you to brave 'deep waters' with its associated risks.

### ***Embrace trial and error***

Tim Harford, author of *Adapt*, writes that we must embrace criticism and failure, and be grateful for the opportunity to learn and improve from our mistakes. He cautions us not to rely on one option in pursuit of our intention. Harford claims the route must be subject to adaptation, particularly when randomness plays such a large part in determining success (Harford, 2011).

In his TED talk on "Trial, Error and the God Complex" (March ,2014), Harford asks how Unilever would design a nozzle in a detergent-making machine. He explains that if you subscribe to the God complex, what you do is find yourself little gods in the form of a mathematician and a physicist – they understand numbers and the dynamics of fluid – and they will calculate the optimal design of the nozzle. Unilever did this and it did not work because the design produced was too complicated.



Unilever solved this problem by taking a nozzle and creating ten variations on it. They tried out all ten; they kept the one that worked best. They created ten variations on that one. They tried out all ten. They kept the one that worked best. They tried ten variations on that one, and so on. After 45 generations, they have this incredible nozzle. It looks a bit like a chess piece and functions brilliantly. Trial and error begin to work the moment one steps back from the God complex and tries out a bunch of options to determine what is working and what is not.

### ***Punch above your weight***

At the Rugby World Cup 2015 and again in 2019, the Japanese rugby team caused the greatest upsets in Rugby World Cup history, providing excellent examples of punching above your weight when they beat the Springboks in 2015 and the Irish in 2019.

Leicester City Football Club's achievement in 2016, when they won the Premier League, also ranks among one of the greatest upsets where a team punched above its weight. Of course, as Leicester discovered in subsequent seasons, it is even harder to stay at the top than to get there.

### ***Change your reference points***

Reference points play a part in governing how we behave. A reference point is the level of stress or anxiety to which we have adapted. As a result, we operate optimally or confidently up to that point or metaphoric barrier.

To take calculated risks, you need to change the mental reference point that represents what you believe about how tough your life is or how tough it has been. This impacts on what you believe you can do or say.

You change reference points through taking small, incremental steps across limiting barriers, thus establishing new barriers.

### ***Cross self-imposed, learnt barriers***

When you have self-imposed, learnt limitations, calculated risks help you cross the threshold of boundaries towards improvement.

I love snow skiing, but the South African currency has made going quite a stretch. I recall a seven-day ski holiday in the French Alps that qualified as a financial stretch. The first three days produced glorious weather, whilst the fourth day produced stormy, wet weather. My instinctive response was to stay indoors for the day and wait for the good weather to return.

My partner had a different point of view. She felt that we should not lose an opportunity to ski because of the rain, as we only had seven, expensive days in which to enjoy it. This was all it took to break an old mental restriction causing me to avoid skiing in the rain. Once I let go of this, we had a marvellous day doing just that, and I additionally felt a lot better about the return on my expense.

During my competitive sporting period, I was subject to a self-imposed limitation after having an operation on my shoulder. I had injured it several times playing rugby and developed a painful joint. The orthopaedic surgeon informed me that it could be remedied by having arthroscopic surgery.

I consented to having this procedure, yet three months later the shoulder was still experiencing severe pain and an inability to handle weight. I contacted the surgeon and explained that my shoulder was not repaired. His reply was brutally frank: “No, I’ve fixed your shoulder. The problem is you remember the pain and retain the memory of it. Exercise through the pain and you will recover your strength”. I did as he advised. In a mere three weeks, I was completely pain-free and exercising at previous levels.

Our limitations are often pain memories that we hold on to. Professor Tim Noakes seemed to draw the same conclusion when he claimed that the mind, not the muscles, is the first governor of performance.

### ***Springbok rugby has not had a good track record of crossing barriers***

In 2001, I was party to an experiment involving an attempt to change a reference point by taking a calculated risk. Springbok rugby coach Harry Viljoen decided to initiate a change in the way the Springbok rugby team habitually played. He felt that they needed to develop more creative game-plan options.

He discussed the idea with the team, and it was decided that, as a first step, they would experiment by playing with less reliance on kicking. It was common knowledge that the Springboks used kicking as a default attack and defence option (as did most rugby teams). This new approach was practised before being applied in real-time during the first rugby test match against Argentina.

You can imagine the consternation among the supporters and press when they observed the Springboks’ seemingly suicidal manoeuvres. These included moves such as running into spaces where, historically, they would have kicked to relieve pressure or set up an attacking platform. However, even though there were some tense moments, the Springboks managed to win the game. Most journalists and rugby fans criticised Harry for this ‘crazy idea’. Despite his explanations, I doubt if press or supporters recognised it as a tool aimed at increasing the reflexive options of the team.

Viljoen had taken a calculated risk to introduce a reference point change. He had intended for this to initiate a creative approach to the Springboks’ game. However, criticism and threats negatively influenced Viljoen’s commitment, and, soon afterwards, his adventurous spirit dwindled, and the Springboks were back to using rugby tactics that resembled the typical South African ‘subdue and win’ approach.

### ***Challenge your assumptions***

Assumptions often become a default truth. One such assumption was accepted as truth by colleagues in my first formal job. I was appointed production manager, and one of my responsibilities was to oversee a canned dog food factory. The assumption was that making canned dog food automatically results in an awful smell. The dog food manufacturing process involved preparing, mixing, and cooking the ingredients (meat by-products and grains), before pumping the mixture into a filling machine, which filled cans at high speed. These were seamed and then sterilised in large, high-temperature retorts (pressurised vessels used for thermal sterilisation) for seventy minutes.

Most of the staff, including me, found the smell in the factory loathsome; it permeated the clothing of everyone who worked there. In addition, when one opened a can of the finished product, the content was tacky and had the same distinctly unpleasant odour as in the factory.

The assumption in need of challenging was that dog food factories created unpleasant odours and dog food had to have a gooey content. I had become aware of these assumptions, but fortunately was too new to accept them. I wanted to eliminate the stench of my work surroundings sufficiently that I could entertain visitors at work, and I wanted the content to look like a meat loaf.

Despite the assumptions, my senior manager and I decided to experiment to eliminate the typical factory stink.

After some time, it became clear that boiling the mix generated the loathsome smell. My response was, why pre-boil the mix? My logic was that the cooking could take place in the sealed can during the sterilisation process. The 70-minute sterilisation period would then serve the dual purpose of cooking and sterilising the content.

Unfortunately, my experiment failed. All the cans distorted during the high-pressure sterilisation process and were unsuitable for labelling and selling. The contents, however, showed a remarkable improvement.

My research and development colleagues informed me that filling the cans with frozen meat ingredients then sealing them was not feasible as the cans would always distort. Hot-filling was an integral part of the canning process.

It took a few months of trial and error and many wasted cans to work through the issue. The answer lay in the use of enough headspace and an injection of steam immediately before closing and seaming. This created a vacuum in the headspace, eliminating the distortion problem.

Canned pet food was forever altered. If you were around, I wonder if you remember the awful smell and slop that confronted you when opening a can of pet food pre-1975.

### ***See things from a different perspective***

Which perspectives do you choose to see the world through? Try seeing things from different and varying perspectives. Look at things from the viewpoint of a competitor, a friend, your partner, a customer, and a child.

In the 1980s, Coca Cola tried a new perspective. At the time, the big players in the soft drink industry were battling it out for increases in market share. Talk was that Coke would not make it. Then Roberto Goizueta took over as leader and switched the company's perspective. He said that Coke was not fighting for a greater share of the cola market; they were fighting for a greater share of the stomach. Suddenly they were not only competing in the cola or carbonated market, they were also contending with water, milk, and coffee brands. As a result, Coke's opportunity grew enormously, and so did their creativity, their determination, and their financial success.

### ***Innovate and improvise***

Most individuals and teams have access to the same training, equipment, and intellectual property. A key differentiator is the ability to innovate and improvise.

To enable you and those you work with to take calculated risks, you need to create a culture where optimism, creative imagination, invention, innovation, re-invention, and improvisation are normal practices.

Creating this starts with committing to it in your business strategy. Opportunities to innovate and improvise will usually only manifest in the moment needed, the details of which are not anticipated in a strategy. However, they are not random or chaotic acts either. They are applied when taking advantage of a window of opportunity and acted upon when you take the offensive, or when ensuring business sustainability.

The intent of taking a calculated risk is to invent, reinvent, promote, and refine what you offer. Unless you are inventing, reinventing, innovating, and improvising, you could likely get run over by the opposition. However, you do not necessarily need to invent something completely new. Many successful innovations were not brought about by inventions, but rather through the reconfiguration and adaption of existing ideas. However, I want to remind you that you cannot be original or the best by relying on benchmarking and imitating. To become first-rate, you need to produce something better than the present selection.

To promote a culture where people take calculated risks, the strategy needs to emphasise maximising gains. I realise there are times when the focus needs to be on avoiding or minimising losses to ensure survival, but, if this is your main focus, you'll find it difficult to take calculated risks. Notwithstanding, when you adopt a culture that promotes invention, reinvention, innovation and improvisation, standards need to be constantly maintained.

In this dice-rolling culture, people need an attitude and an aptitude for these acts. Everyone needs to develop an unshakeable belief that sustainable solutions can be found. Risk-taking

will not survive in a bureaucratic environment. You need to protect inventors and innovators from bureaucracy.

### ***Flow around, over and under obstacles***

When you encounter obstacles, you need to persevere and flow towards alternate solutions. Picture a strong, flowing river confronting a rocky outcrop. Whilst water is fluid and yielding, it is still strong. Water is flexible. It can flow around, over and under an obstacle, or eventually wear away at the rock. Water does not need to fight the force of rock; it finds a way, as should you.

### ***Innovating***

Bill Gates, quoted on innovation in the *New Statesman*, claims that it seems wise to ask whether we can secure enough food to eat in the future. He adds that there are plenty of pessimists who have negative views about food security. He believes the smart money is in optimism. He says, “Pessimists extrapolate from the present to the future in a straight line. Optimists bend trend lines with the power of innovation and improvisation.” He adds, “Optimists look for key junctures where they can apply innovation to bend trend lines and avert crises. I am optimistic because I believe in the power of innovation. My whole career has been inspired by the conviction that breakthroughs can make the impossible possible.” (Gates, December 2011.)

South African born Elon Musk has become world famous for his innovative approach. He became famous for being a part of the start-up, PayPal, and selling his share to focus on space technology, electric car manufacture, and energy storage. He sold PayPal for US\$180 million, invested 100 million in SpaceX; 70 million in Tesla; 10 million in Solar City, and then he claimed he had to borrow money for rent. That was in 2002. By early 2018 he had repaid his rent and paid himself a whopping 55-million-dollar bonus.

### ***Improvising***

Korean singer Psy used improvisation and became an overnight hit. At the time, his ‘Gangnam Style’ music video posting went viral, accumulating the most hits ever on YouTube. Gangnam Style is simply a parody of old-style rodeo dancing.

### ***Use creativity and imagination***

To take calculated risks, you need to tap into your creativity and imagination. You need to do different things, and to do things differently. The least beneficial risk is the one that ponderously ties up resources. You need creative options. Everyone has a potential for being imaginative and can improve their abilities. I have listed below some ideas that you could consider implementing to improve your imagination.

We are informed that our subconscious mind gives us what we pay attention to. When you ignore creative aspects of your life, you are telling your subconscious that they are unimportant. However, if you pay attention to creativity, your subconscious mind should start feeding you creative ideas.

Think of people who you feel have creativity and imagination. You may consider people living or dead. These are people whom you benchmark for certain successes, enabling you to become daring. Just to stimulate your thinking, you could consider Bill Gates, Nelson Mandela, Elon Musk, Napoleon, or Helen Keller. Then, when you want creative imagination, ask yourself, “What would they have done in this situation?”

### ***Avoid risks that are poorly understood and not calculated***

I am not advocating taking risks that are miscalculated and poorly understood. There is nothing wrong with having a healthy fear of disastrous consequences or distractions.

The global financial crisis of 2008, resulting in the loss of millions of jobs and several bankruptcies, was the consequence of poorly understood and mismanaged risks regarding complex financial products. With centralised debt obligations, the people taking these risks were mainly the captains of the financial sector. The losers were their consumers. It is claimed that they won when they sold, and they won again when their consumers lost. If you are interested in unpacking this financial crisis, the movie *Inside Job* provides some insight.

### ***At times, you may need to take risks or die***

The British adventurer and ship’s captain, Sir Ernest Shackleton, knew that he had to take calculated risks, or he and his crew would die. Shackleton set sail for Antarctica during late 1914 in his ship, *Endurance*. His intention was to cross the Antarctic continent from one coast to the other via the South Pole.

Disaster struck his expedition when the ship became trapped in pack ice and was slowly crushed before the shore parties could be landed. There followed a sequence of exploits, and an ultimate escape with no lives lost, that would eventually assure Shackleton’s heroic status.

Shackleton’s story is captured in a range of excellent books, on film, and in a movie called *Shackleton*, with Kenneth Branagh in the lead role. If you watch the film, I recommend you read one of the books as well. Watching movies puts your brain in a passive mode because you are not actively involved. When reading, one uses creative imagination. You are creating pictures in your mind from words. You are learning new ways to express yourself and your ideas.

### ***Protect against the extreme downside – check your equipment***

The late Dan Osman took many risks. He was an extreme sportsman and was seemingly fearless. He broke world records in rope jumping, as well as rock climbing without safety

gear. It was said that he pushed the edges of life relative to extreme sports, particularly those that involved heights. Over time, Osman had changed his fear reference point for heights. His death was a result of a failure in his equipment, rather than the risks he took.

Miles Daisher was with Osman when he made his final jump. He said that the rope that snapped had been exposed to inclement weather, including rain and snow, for more than a month before the fatal jump. Based on Daisher's account, one can relate to the importance of Richard Branson's statement about protecting against the extreme downsides when taking calculated risks.

***You will regret the things you didn't do more than the things you did do***

My life's experiences relative to risk-taking have shown me that many things I feared never materialised. In addition, I have come to realise that I will regret the things I did not do much more than those I did do. In the main, I like to remember that life rewards action.

## 9. COMPETENCE

***“The first principle of science is that you must not fool yourself and you are the easiest person to fool.”***

RICHARD FEYNMAN

It's not unusual to have talent. What is uncommon is turning it into competence. Developing it is contained in three requirements: learn and reinvent your craft, then practise your skills and finally polish your act. Once you master these three requirements, it is likely, you will not have to chase money, it will chase you. When this happens, you will experience the most powerful advantage of money – the ability to think of things besides money.

Competence requires the acquisition of knowledge and skills to operate at the cutting edge between what is known and unknown. This enables you to function effectively and efficiently in the present and provides an ability to thrive in anticipated and unanticipated futures.

Reflect on the South African football team. Their competence problems, both on and off the field, have endured for as long as I can recall. When considering their situation, I am reminded of the axiom: *If the problem you are having now is the same as the problem you have had previously, you need to carefully investigate your contribution to it.*

We all have competence problems. This does not mean we are incompetent. It means we could do a lot better. If we are in denial about our lack of competence, it is unlikely that we will be motivated to seek improvement.

I recall the adage: *The learners will inherit the earth; the learned will find they are equipped for a world that no longer exists.* Put in another way, your rate of learning must exceed the rate of change in your domain. A lack of competence building relegates you to the past.

### ***A definition of competence***

Competence comes from going deeper than a surface approach to learning. You develop lifelong intellectual agility and get smarter using a research process to learn and unlearn supported by critical self-reflection and evidence.

### ***Key points on competence***

- You ‘get in the game’. Become relevant with a conventional wisdom qualification.
- You ‘get ahead **in** the game’. Become remarkable by thinking, reading and writing.
- You ‘get ahead **of** the game’. Become rare by cross pollinating and reinventing.
- You accept that if you claim truth, you have the burden of proof.
- You use black box thinking to analyse failure.
- You realise that you are blind to your blindness.
- You review beliefs that have unconsciously become oaths of allegiance.
- You engage with a wide range of perspectives.

Your competence mantra is ***I commit to lifelong learning, un-learning, and relearning. I understand that the more I learn the less, I fear.***



### ***Go deeper than a surface approach to learning***

Learning is a process that brings together cognitive, emotional, and environmental influences, leading to enhanced or acquired knowledge, skills, values, and world views. You could undertake a surface approach to learning, or a deep approach.

To operate at your highest ability requires you to take a deep approach. This leads you to a deeper understanding of the subject you are learning.

Surface learning is about taking a strategic approach to gaining skills and knowledge with the intention of completing the minimum learning requirements. It entails achieving a goal, like a qualification. With surface learning you are, likely, sacrificing the process. The learning is task-focused, information is memorised, but claims and facts are blurred.

A deep approach involves maintaining a curiosity of how things could work; refusing to be bound by limitations linked to old, outdated beliefs; seeking feedback and multiple perspectives; conducting scientific research; not inferring causation from a correlation; engaging in arguments; being open to more than one way to succeed in any given situation; constructing new realities; and recognising that we learn little from someone who sees a problem exactly as we do.

### ***Intellectual curiosity***

To achieve deep learning, you need intellectual curiosity. When confronted with a claim that may be dubious, you ask questions. You ask how, why, and why not? If it is important enough, you even ask for published scientific references.

You never fall for premature curiosity satisfaction. You do not accept an explanation if it is not substantiated by a credible source or enough evidence. “I saw it on Facebook,” is not a good explanation.

Goldacre’s *Bad Science* provides a credible source for the importance of research in attaining knowledge. His research aims at addressing problems and claims to clarify myths, separate the effective from the ineffective and the safe from the dangerous (Goldacre, 2009).

Evidence can be distorted and cherry-picked. Nevertheless, the scientific method is the best system we know for substantiating or falsifying claims. You propose a hypothesis and then through testing over time you see if it survives attempts to falsify it. It does not pander to beliefs or assumptions of truth.

Steven Pinker in *Enlightenment Now* puts it this way: “Science is not a game with an arbitrary rulebook; it’s the application of reason to explaining the universe and to ascertaining whether its explanations are true” (Pinker, 2018).

My conclusion is that truth is an extremely elusive concept. It changes as new evidence is revealed and is usually represented in each moment and context. If you claim to have truth you must accept the burden of proof. But, when you are wrong, don’t feel embarrassment, rather maintain a childlike sense of wonder

### ***Commit to intellectual agility and reduce fear of the unknown through scaffolding***

I feel we will benefit in both success and significance from taking a systematic, step-by-step approach to developing competence. Each step has the potential to build on the previous one to give incremental gains. It can be likened to using scaffolding against a building. You access superior heights as you build on the previous level. Benefits are derived from individual components, as well as additional gains from the accumulation of components.

### ***The Matthew effect***

The concept of scaffolding led me to use the ‘Matthew effect’ in my presentations. I used this parable as a metaphor to encourage audience members to grow their competence. The Matthew effect comes from the Christian Bible’s Book of Matthew 25:29: “For to everyone that has shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that has not, shall be taken away even that which he has.”

Professor Anders Ericsson of Florida State University used it and Malcolm Gladwell refers to it in his book, *Outliers: The Story of Success*. Gladwell correlates age-related success in contact sports like rugby and ice hockey with the Matthew effect. He claims that research reveals that many boys who have birthdates in the early part of the school calendar year initially benefit from a size advantage. This size advantage results in their initial selection into the A teams in their schools. This results in exposure to better coaches and the cumulative effect continues until they are well represented in age-related top teams (Gladwell, 2011).

### ***The rich get richer and the poor get poorer***

Steven Pinker in *Enlightenment Now* determines that in global terms the Matthew effect may be interpreted as *the rich get richer and the poor get poorer*. He feels we should bear in mind in most instances *the poor get richer as the rich get richer*. Pinker asserts global poverty is on the decrease and that the lives of the poor are improving at the same time as the lives of the rich - he claims the trend is positive (Pinker, 2018).

His claim is supported by Nobel Laureates 2019 Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo whose experimental approach to alleviating extreme global poverty comes to a similar conclusion.

Pinker’s caveat is that there is still unacceptable levels of extreme poverty and the vast difference in wealth between the extremely rich and the ultra-poor is deplorable. He illustrates this by referring to the Gini coefficient, which highlights the gross inequities between the salaries of CEOs and the wages of workers. Currently, America is the richest and most unequal country in the world.

The concern I have developed with referring to the Matthew effect, and why I have stopped using it, is the implication that the gains of one mean losses to another and, by implication, exploitation. Clearly, there are still many injustices that are making people poor and are

keeping them poor as demonstrated in the distribution of income associated with the DRC's cobalt mining.

However, the question that arises is this: Does this lead to a 'beggar thy neighbour' mind-set towards many who are creating new value and at the same time providing employment for the less fortunate? Does this trap several in a zero-sum game?

Pinker said that we must continue to eradicate extreme poverty and abuse. In addition, we must not lose sight of the mind-altering effects of scaffolding new knowledge and skills. In this process, anyone can accrue the ability to create new value.

If we do not allocate energy to the creation of value in our own lives, we could spend too much effort on expressing envy for the prosperous and encouraging ways of sabotaging them.

The lesson I am concluding is to guard against blind compliance to a quote or parable when it may have outlived its original purpose, because in present circumstances it is only partially accurate. Extreme poverty and inequality have always been in the human midst, and they are obviously unjust. At the same time, we need to acknowledge that a rising tide of wealth can lift all the boats. Rich and poor.

### ***Get in the game – become relevant***

Scaffolding knowledge and skills apply in most situations and works like compound interest does in finance. In a competence context, your aim is to *access greater heights* that will allow you to accumulate wisdom accompanied with the ability to create new value.

To start, you need to 'get in the game' enabling you to participate sustainably in areas for which you have passion. To do this, you construct a first scaffold, or use one that is already in place.

For the majority, this scaffold is the solid platform provided by a formal qualification giving you an accumulation of the answers provided by conventional wisdom.

However, instead of a qualification, it could also be a skill, a physical advantage, a wealthy family member, a friend, an alliance, or an experiential self-taught advantage. Whatever it takes to become useful, relevant and get in the game.

Some successful people are self-taught, or they have achieved learning through personal experience. My feelings are in line with a quote from General James Mattis posted in the blog Strife in 2013; *The problem with being too busy to read is that you learn by experience (or by your men's experience), i.e. the hard way. By reading, you learn through others' experiences, generally a better way to do business, especially in our line of work where the consequences of incompetence are so final for young men. (Mattis, 2003)*

On the other hand, getting a qualification, at least for your first scaffold, is like acquiring an 'access card'. From a perspective of success or significance, I believe it is essential that a portion of your learning is accrued through a formal education system. An additional benefit of a formal qualification is that it is generally accepted by society and you do not have to prove your relevance.

### ***Get ahead in the game – become remarkable***

Once the first scaffold is in place, you begin construction of the second. This means, you question the answers provided by conventional wisdom. You build your knowledge and skills to get into the front group of the game. You read, listen, think, write, and benchmark the best in your field. This step is aimed at moving you from relevant to valuable, noting that if you benchmark the best, the best you will probably become is second best.

At every point in your scaffolding journey, I suggest you hold the mantra of ‘act fast, fail fast’ in the back of your mind. You try things and experiment realising that, in a fast-moving world, you need to act fast. And if you fail, which at times you will, you need to fail fast and resume your value-creating journey. I recently heard Fareed Zakaria, TV Journalist from CNN, use the quote “run fast, but don’t run scared.” I reinterpret this quote as act fast, and don’t be scared to fail.

### ***Get ahead of the game – become rare – even risk your career***

For this scaffold, you question the questions. You narrow questions as if you were refining the question in a Ph.D. thesis. No sacred cows allowed. This means you accept that you need to live in an “and” world. Therefore, you access mind-enriching knowledge through customer research, and you cross-pollinate with other fields of endeavor. This approach enables you to enter new territory of creativity and innovation where you can reinvent or reconfigure your game.

This step is aimed at making your contribution rare. It’s not enough to rely on market research. You may recall a famous quote on consumer research by Steve Jobs: “*Our job is to figure out what they’re going to want before they do. I think Henry Ford once said, ‘If I’d asked customers what they wanted, they would have told me, “A faster horse!”’ People don’t know what they want until you show it to them.*” (Jobs, 2008)

To get ahead of the game, you identify what was previously unfamiliar even impossible. You reduce the fear of the unknown by reconfiguring your mind. Freddy Mercury, of Queen, did this several times. I particularly liked the way, in defiance of protestations from his management, he risked his career to become rare. He combined commercial rock music with opera as demonstrated in the movie, *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

Yuval Harari in *21 Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* writes: “The main struggle in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be about becoming irrelevant, not about being exploited” (Harari, 2018).

I read the editorial on “The 50 Most Genius Companies of 2018”, *Time Magazine* online, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2018. Among many others, the piece cites animal farming. They refer to the *Impossible Foods* organisation. This company is making a, plant-based, meat replacement that has all the characteristics, including taste and texture of beef. The innovation is driven by Pat Brown, he resolved to take on what he calls “the most destructive technology on earth” which from his perspective is animal grazing and their feed production. He claims these practices use about 80% of the world’s agricultural land, and livestock now makes up 60% of earth’s mammals.

Online Time Magazine 29<sup>th</sup> April 2019 reported: *Burger King's Meatless 'Impossible Whopper' Is Going Nationwide*. We are entering an era where we could consume fewer animals by having an equally good plant-based alternative.

If a plant alternative to meat does not excite you, could soon choose a factory grown steak using cells extracted from cows - Think about the way organs can be grown from DNA. One way or another the cow, pig or chicken and land that is allocated for livestock farming are facing competition. My sense is that we are heading for an “and” world. It’s not a binary choice of one or the other its either.

### ***Learn and adapt your way of thinking***

Another, insightful book about relevance is *Hacking Darwin, Genetic Engineering and the Future of Humanity*. Author Jamie Metzl exposes his readers to fascinating future possibilities of gene therapy, embryo selection and the relevance of sexual intercourse for creating babies. (Metzl, 2019). I can’t help thinking back on Darwin’s claim “the most adaptive will thrive.”

I urge you not to waste time when confronted with change, mishaps, or problems. Do not stop, do not blame, rather keep scaffolding, adapting and choosing to go beyond the road well-travelled, passing the road less travelled and consider the road never travelled.

I was prompted to reflect on the future of work, or should I say the relevance of some aspects of work in the future. I concluded that as industries and jobs evolve, many new ones will be created and the changes that may take our jobs may not be known at present. But if you are a conditional optimist and you are ahead of the game these are not threats, they are opportunities.

### ***Rebuild your life***

I need to acknowledge that people who are extremely disadvantaged economically or who are dealing with challenging physical or mental health conditions, face a greater struggle to muster the enthusiasm or the resources that are deemed as ‘solid ground’ on which to scaffold. In my opinion, developing improved mental toughness still applies – it’s just tougher for them and they will probably need to wait until they are in active recovery to access it.

J.K. Rowling, billionaire author of the *Harry Potter* series, when giving the 2008 Harvard University commencement speech, referred to a time, shortly after writing her first book, when she was in dire financial and emotional straits. She claimed that rock bottom became the solid foundation on which she rebuilt her life. She added that there is an expiration date to blaming.

### ***Competence priorities***

You can identify your competence priorities by analysing your personal plans. For example, if your main current focus is on parenting, you could reflect on your parenting skills and ask: Is my current skill level enough to be an excellent parent? Can I rely on my childhood experiences and the examples of my peers to fully realise my potential as a parent? Is there a chance that I may have learnt inappropriate mindsets and behaviours from these sources? Is my change-management skill enough for me to adapt to the transformations my children must undergo?

I opted to do a parenting course many years ago. Once complete, I was amazed at the knowledge and skills available for improving parental competency and, of course, how much I did not know. On reflection, despite attending this course, I fell short in aspects of parenting. I can only imagine how much worse I would have been without the learning from the parenting course.

Your strategic analysis, with reference to your income generation, will likely indicate that you will benefit from further education. This includes developing knowledge and skills equal to the best in your chosen field and better than those of your competitors. This may encompass intellectual, technical, management or leadership skills.

Education introduces new information and perspectives that challenge our accepted views. This enables you to accelerate your development and make a dramatic leap forward. Many people are working too hard because they lack the right education, often attempting to solve today's problems with yesterday's solutions because they are trapped by legacy paradigms. The work we do, whether as an entrepreneur, leader, manager, salesman, or sportsman, requires new knowledge and the continuous development of relevant skills.

### ***Reading or listening***

Reading is a key input to expanding our knowledge and competence. To use a computer analogy, reading is our way of updating brain software.

When we expand our knowledge, we simultaneously expand the boundaries of our ignorance. The more we know, the more we discover we do not know. This discovery is a source of motivation.

For those who read regularly, there will be times when you cannot muster the energy or concentration to read. We all have times when we are negatively stressed and have a heavy heart. At these times, you can either take a temporary break from reading, or you can listen to some of the many intellectually stimulating, knowledge-filled podcasts as an alternative.

### ***Emotional intelligence***

In my experience, relationship difficulties within or outside the organisation are possibly the biggest cause of business setbacks. I suspect if we spend time on developing our emotional intelligence (EQ), we will have positive returns in work, sport, and relationships.

We dedicate time to developing strategies and to skills training, but do we spend enough time helping people manage emotions?

If you decide to improve your knowledge and develop your intellect, it is important to develop your awareness that many people who interact with you may feel bullied by your newly acquired knowledge. Think of someone who develops his or her physical strength whilst constantly showing you up for being weaker. This is not emotionally smart. You have probably experienced the frustration of being with someone who consistently casts themselves as the smartest in the room.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand and manage your emotions. It's the ability to recognise your feelings and why you are feeling them, and to understand the effect they are having on your decision-making ability. Importantly, it is also the ability to perceive, understand and manage the emotions of those around you.

Having a well-developed EQ allows you to be perceptive and insightful. You start to notice the feelings of others, and how their feelings influence their decisions, cause problems, and create opportunities.

Emotional intelligence is also about controlling automatic reactions. You learn impulse control. When people try to bait you and throw you off your game, you have alternative responses because you do ongoing research and consider multiple perspectives.

### ***Did the awesome foursome lack competence?***

An example of staying abreast of the changing competence requirements in your environment can be recalled in the form of the South African swimming team's 'awesome foursome' at the 2008 Olympics. Ryk Neethling, Roland Schoeman, Lyndon Ferns, and Darian Townsend won the gold medal in the 4×100 freestyle relay at the 2004 Olympics and, to top it off, broke the world record. The same competitors swam in the 2008 Olympics and placed eighth by 4 seconds. Why? What went wrong? Did they lose competence?

In their defence, it's worth noting that the time they recorded in the 2008 Olympics would've won the World Championships the year before. This means that the team that took first place honours accelerated past the South Africans to the tune of four seconds. That's the measure of the changing competence in their environment. This incident also reminds me of another catchy phrase, "The knowledge and skills that have brought you to this point won't be enough for the future. You need to commit to never-ending improvement."

### ***Spare capacity***

I find people who have continued to develop their competencies invariably have spare capacity. They are likely to be the ones who, despite having a weighty workload, seem to get even more done. It is questionable that they'll give the response, "It's not in my job description," or "I'm too busy." They respond positively because they have developed an abundant mind-set and the knowledge and skills to be both effective and efficient.

Have you noticed that many successful people seem to have enough time to do an excessive number of tasks? They seem to be unhurried when performing under stress, they make fewer mistakes, and they do not allow a backlog to develop.

### ***Learn, unlearn, relearn and get smarter***

All of us experience some success with attending praise and some failures with accompanying criticism. These experiences can act as signs that we need to learn or unlearn.

In *Black Box Thinking*, Matthew Syed states that most people never learn from their mistakes, but some do. He feels that we can get smarter in our lives and business in the same way as aircraft manufacturers do. Air travel safety improves after every accident (Syed, 2015).

On balance, I find people open-minded about learning. However, many struggle with unlearning, particularly unlearning the mind capture of irrational beliefs. Unlearning is required when we have taken on potentially harmful practices and ideas that we have learnt over time. It is difficult to select what we need to unlearn, as we are usually unaware of it.

We must be educated enough to develop competence, and we need to be educated a bit more so that we question what we may have to unlearn. Kahneman says, “We are often blind to our blindness” (Kahneman, 2011).

### ***Critical reflection and metacognition***

Critical reflection is a route to identifying what we must unlearn. It requires metacognition. This is the process of thinking about and questioning your current experiences and beliefs. Then you can link them to earlier ones to stimulate a deeper, interrelated, and relevant understanding. The practice involves looking for commonalities and differences beyond their superficial elements.

Once we are open to practicing critical reflection combined with evidence, we can see the world as it really is. We can replace overdramatic and catastrophizing world views, calm irrational fears and regain mental peace.

In this state we can make better decisions, avoid being stressed by the wrong things and redirect our energy in line with our real priorities.

### ***If you can learn something, you can unlearn it – particularly Mega Misconceptions***

In *Enlightenment Now*, Pinker writes, “The power of dogma holds us hostage, people tend to treat their beliefs as oaths of allegiance or treasures to be guarded as opposed to a hypothesis that needs ongoing testing” (Pinker, 2018).

A critical reflection exercise could start with reflecting on the extent to which your mind has been captured (blinded) possibly a long time ago. Then consider: Why do I think what I think? Why do I believe what I believe? When confronted with evidence that does not fit my



beliefs, do I stay blind? Have my beliefs become my puppeteers trapping me in self-righteous delusion?

Mark Cuban, the American billionaire entrepreneur, claimed that the most sought-after skill employers will be looking for in future job candidates is excelling at critical thinking (Cuban, 2017).

Metacognition takes a step beyond critical reflection and refers to your awareness of your own cognitive processes. It is the ability to think about what thoughts you are having, and in so doing, check your thoughts for accuracy before they become concrete. You take a deeper approach – you think about your thinking. To do this requires you to access your mindsets, perspectives, and assumptions.

Once you have utilised critical thinking, a respect for evidence and metacognition attentively and repeatedly, you will likely conclude that you need to start unlearning some of the things that you currently know. These things fall into the category of “Maga Misconceptions”.

Take the example of applying brakes whilst driving. In the past, drivers were taught to pump the brakes slowly while attempting to stop on a slippery surface. With the advent of antilock brakes, they are taught to press firmly down on the brakes and hold. This demonstrates that a behaviour learnt to prevent accidents in the past can now cause them to happen.

You can learn a lot about yourself through the critical reflection of both good and painful experiences. Reflecting on what an experience has helped you learn can lead to growth. Times of stress are times of growth, and if we use adversity properly, we will grow.

Consider your opinions about intelligence. Do you believe your intelligence is fixed, or do you believe that your brain is malleable? This type of thinking can help you decide whether some of your current mindsets are imprisoning you or liberating you. Practising critical reflection and metacognition could create a new reality, taking you from understanding knowledge to creating it. This helps you to progress from being a well-informed amateur to becoming an expert.

### ***Competence delusion***

Many people are occupying jobs and assuming competence because they have the job title. Could they be suffering from competence delusion?

I have come across several sport coaches with the title ‘coach’. Some qualified because they completed a one-week course in coaching. Others rely on their experiential learning as a sport participant or the conventional wisdom garnered from role-modelling their coaches.

The job of a coach, like most other jobs, is too complex to rely only on the combination of a one-week course, experiential learning, and conventional wisdom.

The Idols competition has aspirant pop stars entering to parade their singing talent, hoping to win the title. If you watch this show, you will notice how many people enter despite not having singing talent, and, therefore, no chance of winning. Admittedly, some enter as a joke, but what is fascinating is realising that several poor performers are deluded about their lack

of talent. They genuinely think they are competent. This assumption of competence is akin to the Dunning-Kruger effect mentioned in the chapter on confidence.

I have spent a great deal of time in the sport industry and this assumption of competence certainly applies to some coaches who are deluded about their abilities. The late Stephen Hawking, world-famous physicist, has the following maxim attributed to him: *The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance; it is the illusion of knowledge* (Hawking, 2001).

# 11. COMMITMENT

*“One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time.”*

ANDRÉ GIDE

I recall lending a compassionate ear to an unhappy man aggrieved by his wife’s non-compliant approach to their relationship. He exclaimed, “But in our vows she said she would honour and obey, till death do us part. She must stick to the agreement.”

They are no longer together. Their circumstances changed and the detail of their marital agreement was no longer relevant. Did their relationship success depend on them gritting for a bit longer until they got stronger? Could they have adapted before they quit? Did they know how to?

## *A definition of commitment*

I define commitment as having integrity. You take responsibility for what you said you would do and accountability for results you said you would get, without making excuses. You can stay in the race through being resilient, patient, managing problems and adapting. After all, your problems measure what you are capable of.

## *Key points on commitment*

- You lead the life you have, not the one you wish you had.
- You lead the people you have, not the ones you wish you had.
- You identify your toughest challenge to commitment – you will find it in the mirror.
- You remind yourself of your ‘why’ and that you can bear almost any ‘how’.
- You don’t project old issues onto current relationships.
- You push for that extra bit and reach for another inch.
- You manage your problems and demons so that they do not upgrade to obstacles.
- You identify the underlying cause of your problems and address them professionally.
- You use stoicism to stay in the contest, work through pain and endure hardships.
- You know how to reimagine and reinvent your life within the context of your passion.
- You make amends for your wrongdoings, not roll in the muck.

Your commitment mantra is ***I know how to grit, how to adapt, and when to quit.***

*“Chronic remorse, as all the moralists are agreed, is a most undesirable sentiment. If you have behaved badly, repent, make what amends you can and address yourself to the task of behaving better next time. On no account brood over your wrongdoing. Rolling in the muck is not the best way of getting clean.”*

**Aldous Huxley**

### ***Problems cause pressure***

On our journey through life, we all encounter major problems that put us under pressure resulting in negative stress. The problems are usually associated with unexpected and unwanted events, disruptions, poor choices, mistakes, abuse, betrayals, bad behaviour (ours or others), setbacks and often – plain bad luck.

Consequently, we feel anger, anxiety, grief, pain, disappointment or remorse. These feelings can fester like wounds and the likely outcome is seeing ourselves as a victim. If we become mind captured by our casualty status it becomes very difficult to find a route out of these dire circumstances (we are blind to the sometimes-obvious route away from our problem because of our victim status). Our emotional wounds unwittingly become the default story we hang on to, as a result we don't accept help or act in the direction of alleviating our problems.

Commitment means we find a way. Starting with accepting professional help to help us persevere towards redemption despite our wounds.

In *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*, Taleb writes that some people gain from disorder. He claims that they can thrive when exposed to volatility, randomness and stressors (Taleb, 2012).

Mental toughness and antifragility are similar. Both are opposite to fragile and both challenge you to go beyond stress management interventions into a realm where you gain from disorder.

My prescription for gaining from disorder is:

Seek support for qualified people to help with ameliorating the defects of the disorder and adapting to new circumstances. If you are fortunate you will additionally experience the kindness of strangers.

Magnify your strengths and patch your weaknesses. Prepare for a new challenge. Reimagine and reinvent the way you lead your life. Reach for and implement your disorder plan i.e. the plan B you devised in the concentration chapter. Set up a few small wins to drive up your motivation. Remember to approach the change like 'eating an elephant' – one small bite at a time (awful imagery).

### ***Follow the mental toughness model***

Initially your problems may blinker or blind you. You pound away at old solutions trying to re-deliver what you always had. When this does not work, you throw in an unhealthy dose of complaining and blaming. At this stage, you may reach for a miracle cure in the form of substances or pharmaceuticals, and in so doing, you probably deny yourself the opportunity of growing your resilience.

Instead of the above, I suggest you follow the mental toughness model to forge creative paths to a new, healthy reality. Start with concentration, where you can re-examine the level of passion you have for your intention. If you still feel passionate about it, despite existing

problems, you can reinvent through new planning. In this way you do not continue to be blind to your blindness.

Then, get in touch with composure and give yourself mindfulness time. You may also consider increasing your efforts and intensity, growing your confidence through some small wins as well as taking some calculated risks, and finally scaffolding and compounding your competence.

If, despite following the mental toughness steps, you cannot rekindle passion for your original intention, it is time to engage in some self-experimentation. Try sampling a variety of life. This could include adventures, academia, arts, or volunteerism. Through exposure to something different, there is a good chance you will discover what you are passionate about. You can then construct a new intention and pathway around this source.

Try volunteering your services. If you don't know what to offer, let me suggest you attempt unselfish acts like the man in the mirror <https://mashable.com/2016/06/01/josh-coombes-dosomethingfornothing/#9v49rQHi8GqL>

Or you could provide refreshments at a local marathon, perhaps clean oil-polluted penguins. How about participating in outreach programmes for disadvantaged communities? Of all the people I know who have tried these things, only one gave negative feedback about their volunteer experience. However, this was associated with personal discrimination rather than the actual volunteer work. All the others were inspired and described their experiences as those that kindled passion.

Immersing yourself in any of the options mentioned will likely lead to something that resonates with you, something you can feel passion for and commit to building a new intention around.

Of course, your self-experimentation may open Pandora's Box and introduce new complexity into your life. However, in my opinion, this risk of complexity is preferable to leading a passionless existence where habitual behaviour and repeating cycles dominate.

Intention is not a detailed account of your future. It is a broad description of what you perceive as a preferable and inspiring outcome. For example, you may feel that a future with financial freedom is paramount and being caught in an economic prison is inadmissible. This intention will transform into a personal plan where you place greater emphasis on achieving enough income to free you from burdensome financial constraints and debilitating debt.

You may have heard about South African Peter Cilliers. He became a YouTube millionaire through making fitness videos at home. You might also like to take a leaf out of Robert Kiyosaki's book *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*, and organise your financial affairs around creating income streams for yourself rather than being trapped in decisions that result in personal debt (Kiyosaki, 2000).

You can consider an intention with additional exploits. There are umpteen examples of people dreaming of and embracing adventure in their lives in the context of leisure or work. A radical example of this is Ian Usher's attempts at discovering adventure. You can read about him online at [www.ianusher.com](http://www.ianusher.com).

If you still struggle, seek additional help from relevant professionals that have gained wisdom in the helping field to provide a process solution – you do not have their wisdom. If you can't fix the problem through this approach in the short term, accept responsibility for your trauma without complaining or blaming. Then draw on grit to limit its effect on other aspects of your life. If you grit long enough the chances are you will: bounce back from disappointment; find ways to influence those problems, you have no control over and “stay in the game”.

### ***Responsibility and accountability***

Accepting responsibility and accountability debunks the ‘not my job’ syndrome so often encountered in the workplace. Committed people do what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, whether it's in their job description or not, and whether they like it or not.

This may sound simplistic, but if you are a leader you must lead. Many people struggle to do what is required of them, despite being responsible for these actions.

I recall a time when my College had serious financial challenges. In my opinion, it was due to my poor awareness and follow-up regarding a lack of accountability in the regional campuses. I called a special meeting to address these issues. The meeting yielded a lively discussion. However, one of the managers did not seem to understand that whilst he may have been discharging his responsibility for implementing activities, he wasn't being accountable for the results.

I explained that activities are open to discussion and alternatives could be sought. However, accountability means the outcome must be achieved. I cited, as an example, that if I left my role it would not solve the problem of a lack of results. In my instance, I represent the organisation, and even if I ‘resigned’, I would still be accountable for existing students’ learning, creditors, staff and leases.

Essentially, when you are accountable, you accept that the agreed-upon results must be achieved. He resigned a short while later, leaving me convinced that he still had not understood what I meant.

### ***Do not blame the plan***

You have heard the cliché that some people fail due to a lack of planning. However, people are also performing below their potential because they lack commitment, despite planning.

You must ensure that you are planning the right things (being effective) and doing those things correctly (being efficient) in the moment. Committed people understand that, in most cases, plans get out of date and committing to plans needs to be likened to running a marathon, not a sprint. You need to change tactics as circumstances change.

Dan Ariely, in *Predictably Irrational*, says that when things are not going well in business, it is all too easy to think I need, a different plan, a different market, or more money. I should find a better business. He claims that we give up too easily, thinking the answer lies in making drastic changes rather than committing to adaptive choices (Ariely, 2008).

Ariely conducted experiments on choices and earning decent money using an electronic game. For his initial experiment, he used a group of smart MIT students. They were given a range of choices and they needed to identify, and commit to, those that made decent money. Once they had done this, the researchers upped the ante by offering a greater range of choices and making it trickier to locate the fiscally sound ones. The additional choices were designed to make little difference in consequences, so adding or closing options wouldn't have ruined their chances at success.

Ariely's research team discovered that the students were less able to commit to new choices. They could not bear to lose out on any opportunities. He claimed that, once they saw their options increasing, the MIT students – supposedly among the best and brightest of young people – could not stay focused. Pecking like barnyard hens at every door, they sought to make more money, but ended up making far less.

In these times, where we constantly hear of new sure-fire ways to get rich, it's easy to allow distractions to weaken our commitment to what we've already got. If you originally created your business from a feeling of sincere passion and interest, the odds are you made a good choice. That is true even if you don't feel as excited about it today.

Avoid flailing around trying to grab on to a magically perfect new plan or business. I'm not saying we should refrain from ever starting a different business – it's a lot easier to be successful with a second one if you've already had great results with the first (Ariely, 2008).

### ***Obey the rules***

During my visits to Australia, I was impressed by Australians' commitment to their country's laws. Generally, they cross the road where and when indicated and abide by speed limits when driving. I did not see their behaviour as seeking the approval of the herd. On the contrary, I think it's tougher to comply than to be like the many South Africans who frequently ignore and flaunt the rules.

There is a huge difference between Australians and South Africans in this regard. I believe that a lack of commitment to laws is one of the factors that limit many South African business people and athletes. It's almost as if there's an inherent resistance to abiding by agreed-upon rules and plans.

### ***Check the instructions***

For those of you who have learnt to water-ski, you may remember being taught how to sit and hold on. The final instruction is usually to let the power of the accelerating boat pull you up out of the water on to your feet.

Most people fall on their first attempt. This happens because they do not stick to the directions. In particular, the instruction to hold on to the bar. In most instances, holding on would have prevented a fall. Of course, they let go because of fear. On the first attempt, they

are unprepared for what seems to be millions of litres of water rushing at their crotch like an enema. At the time, it seems a logical option to let go.

### ***Do not be trapped by the tyranny of the urgent***

Steven Covey, in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, writes about the tyranny of the urgent. He explains that we often allow demanding issues to dominate our attention at the expense of important issues. His advice is to ensure that we have a clear understanding of the difference between what is important and what is urgent in our lives. This gives us a reference point, enabling us to determine where we should commit our efforts (Covey, 1989).

### ***Be careful of procrastinating***

Initially, we have good intentions, but then often end up delaying taking action. We frequently procrastinate when it comes to doing things like preparing a personal plan, starting a study programme, implementing an exercise regime, or committing to a healthy eating plan.

The delays are often justified by being a victim of mishaps, a family dynamic, or a range of injuries and illnesses. Procrastination is a delaying behaviour. It's a dilemma between "what I feel like doing now" and "what may be good for me in the longer term".

For example, right now I feel like watching television, so I postpone an important activity to the next day. When tomorrow comes, I again feel like watching television, so I delay once more. Please note that I am not suggesting you compromise or postpone special moments, but I am challenging habitual procrastination.

### ***Carrying old emotional burdens***

I recall a story about two Buddhist monks who were on a journey; one was a senior monk named I-hsiu, the other a student. During their travels, they encountered a young woman standing at a riverbank. She was concerned about how she would get to the other side of the river without drowning and asked the monks for help to cross.

The student walked straight past her and crossed the river without a second thought. The senior monk, however, picked the woman up and carried her across. Once he placed her down, they parted ways and continued.

Later, the young student felt uneasy. He thought, "We aren't allowed to touch women; how could my senior do this? Did Buddha not teach us to keep our distance from females?"

Over the next couple of months, the incident continued to bother him. Eventually, the student could stand it no longer and raised the issue with I-hsiu. Upon hearing this, I-hsiu smiled and said, "I put the woman down after I crossed the river. You must be tired after carrying her around for these past two months!"

The moral of the story is that the student was needlessly carrying the emotional baggage of what happened at the river crossing. We learn lessons from our experiences, both good and



bad. This story teaches us that we need to let go of burdens from the past that are still a load in the present.

It's happened. It's over. These incidents cannot be changed. We can only move forward and try to create a compelling future. You must not let old problems, however valid you feel they are, become excuses that keep you locked in inertia.

### ***Problems that become motivators***

Increased awareness through self-reflection, or through listening to feedback from those who care about you, should help you identify problems that will sabotage or end your journey to mind-blowing success.

It does not matter whether your problems were caused by random events or wilful acts. You can adopt the mantra, "I think I can" rather than "I can't". Blaming your problems on outside influences or using them as an excuse for inertia or underperforming is pointless. Try asking yourself, "How deep into the depths of despair do I need to go before I use my problems to motivate me rather than continue to frustrate, immobilise or debilitate me?"

Make the decision that, from now on, it is possible to coexist with and adapt to your problems and still live life with passion and commitment. The acute effect of the problem was *then*, and you are living in the *now*. In the *now* you can start working towards an exciting future and use your problems as motivators rather than allow them to continue to act as immobilisers. When you feel harmed, you want to grow stronger under harm.

Can you let go of negative judgements about your problems and those you feel harmed you?

### ***Problems, disappointments, addictions that become obstacles***

Problems can upgrade into obstacles and manifest as a crisis and threat. I define obstacles as problems that have either become normative or escalated to a point that they are debilitating.

When you are initially faced with a problem, one of the important questions to ask is whether the problem has the potential to grow into an obstacle. Will it put out the metaphoric flame inside you, or has it simply injured your body, broken your heart, or hurt your bank balance?

If you leave problems unattended, they invariably upgrade and become debilitating or immobilising obstacles.

If your problem was an overweight issue and you are now obese, and if obesity is conspiring with other factors that manifest in diabetes, you have encountered an obstacle.

If your problem can be traced to any form of abuse and you are now experiencing feelings of shame, depression, and anti-social behaviour, you have encountered an obstacle.

Obstacles are associated with chronic emotional pain. Most people long for a release from the pain, and their focus becomes finding a way to numb it.

### ***Some self-medicate***

At this stage, some try to self-medicate with substances like alcohol or recreational drugs to numb the pain, kick-start the dopamine cycle, and find motivation. It works to some extent, initially.

However, the motivation is short-lived, and it brings about a need for more of the substance. Your brain adapts and you need increased doses to continue to address the pain. You end up not moving on from the original problem. In addition, you have added new problems associated with living a substance-induced reality with its potential for brain damage.

### ***Some use prescription medication***

I have for some time had a concern that opioid-based painkillers and psychoactive medications, may end up doing as much harm as recreational substances.

I anecdotally concluded that with some prescription medicine, as with recreational substances, you can end up not ameliorating your original problem and possibly created a new, more dangerous one. This is magnified if you are predisposed to addiction.

My fears about opioids and addiction were largely substantiated in Beth Macy's investigative book *Dopesick*. She claims; once you are addicted there is no love strong enough, no hug big enough to change the power of the pill. (Macy, 2018).

Purdue Pharma, the manufacturers of Oxycontin, filed for bankruptcy after being sued for billions of dollars because their medicine has resulted in countless addictions and deaths. They plan to create another company that will produce medicine, Naloxone, to reverse addictions!

This inspired me to reflect on a report from *Time Magazine*, July 2017, that reported: "If you have become addicted to pills, there are pills to help you stop taking pills. If you take too many pills, there is a pill for that too."

### ***Loving and caring environment***

If an aspect of life is breaking you emotionally and causing distress or you encounter severe emotional obstacles that are impeding your executive functions, it is crucial to seek appropriate help and simultaneously set boundaries that contain negative effects.

For those who are not familiar with the concept of executive functions. They are broadly described as the skills every person uses in order to process and act on incoming information. The eight key functions are Impulse control, Emotional Control, Flexible Thinking, Working Memory, Self-Monitoring, Planning and Prioritizing, Task Initiation, and Organization

My preferred option for helping those suffering is immersion in an environment where love and care serve as therapy. It's worth noting that this is a difficult task as the person experiencing the distress caused by guilt, shame and anxiety will invariably reject the ones that love them and blame them for their anguish and painful emotions. Tragically, it seems,

this is an integral part of their condition and care givers must find ways to help and not defend.

If one spends enough time in this type of environment, you have a chance that compassion will revive passion. You will start to notice the barely perceptible embers of motivation glowing deep within you. With a little encouragement, these will become more detectable, and then with patience – and more time – they have the chance of growing to big motivational flames that help you get back on the road to a healthy intention.

We cannot always return to the old reality we had before our problems and setbacks arose. Instead, I suggest we reset, we create new realities where we seek fresh opportunities in which to operate mentally, physically, and emotionally even better than we did before. In many instances this can be called starting over.

### ***True grit***

When you are committed, you don't give up, you dig deep and stay in the game. You do not let problems or what another person does determine how you feel, in this way you free yourself to choose your response. You do not decide to "stop kicking" and sink. This does not mean you make the ultimate sacrifice in the face of insurmountable odds. On the other hand, it does require you to be patient, persistent and embrace pain. Patience implies that you are willing to wait, whilst persistence means you will keep trying. Embracing pain means you improve your willingness to suffer as well as your ability to block out pain.

Committed people show true grit. If their plans are not working out, they try again. If plans continue to fail, they use plan B, they adapt, learning from and moving past their mistakes. Their new approach will factor in what wasn't predicted last time, allowing for improvement. They self-reflect but do not resort to blame. Instead, they use their motivational resources to move forward. They refuse to give up. This requires discipline and endurance. At times, some tasks may seem impossible; this leads to an alternate route.

### ***The power of determination***

It may sound trite, but there is truth in the power of determination. If you think you can't, then you invariably cannot. If you think you can, there is a higher chance that you will. Of course, it is silly to try to convince yourself to accept that you can do something beyond the realms of possibility. For instance, persuading yourself that you can become a world champion boxer and then expect it to happen without talent and training is clearly unrealistic – and I doubt your aspirations are this incredible.

If, however, you want to change the way you perceive your intellect; address the concern that you may not be good enough; clarify how to further develop or apply your talent; identify an alternative way to earn a living; or improve the way you conduct relationships; sheer determination will probably do it!

As an example, take concerns about intellect. All people have intelligence. Some have done a better job at developing it and reaping the benefits of being what is generally termed ‘clever’. Yet, how clever do you want to be? Do you want to be as clever as the erudite physicist Professor Brian Cox? Possibly yes, probably no.

Therefore, what concerns do you have about your intelligence, and where does the concern that it may be an obstacle originate? Was it your school results? Did a teacher make you believe you weren’t smart? Was it perhaps something your parents or a loved one said that made you feel inadequate? Are you still the person who received and accepted those labels? Can you build a future not limited by these beliefs? Can you learn from the old obstacle, put it into a current context, and grow towards new thresholds? You can. That is mental toughness, and in this instance, it can start with determination.

### ***Grit or quit?***

If you register for one of my college’s fitness qualifications, you will learn about the three-stage general adaptation syndrome. Essentially it is how our muscles adapt and strengthen as a result of increasing stressful events like greater exercise intensity.

In the same way, your resilience in the form of mental toughness adapts as you are exposed to more intense problems and obstacles.

Tiger Woods faced many injury and medication problems. He decided to grit. Many would have seen his attempts at a comeback unseemly and advised that he should retire with his reputation intact. Many except Tiger himself. After five tough, lean years of gritting he clawed his way back to win another title in 2018 and the Golf Masters tournament in 2019.

Of course, there is a point at which we stop adapting positively and start to break down.

Since the beginning of 2014, I have experienced many physical wounds, mostly self-inflicted through overzealous physical activities. Ever since my teens, I have relied on physicality as my default ‘feel good’ formula. In January 2014 I damaged my shoulder because of overenthusiastic strength training, and it resulted in reconstruction surgery. Since then, my obsessiveness resulted in several hernia repairs and a hip replacement.

I felt poisoned by anaesthetics. I was frustrated by my fragility and annoyed by the limitations of poorly functioning anatomical repairs and pain. My conclusion was that physicality is impermanent and my competitive sport days were over.

I experienced that the tipping point between gritting and quitting comes when the pain of gritting exceeds the pain of quitting – when adaptation results in breakdown, not growth. This is when gritting becomes an act of self – harm.

I frantically tried to help my body adapt to the physical pursuits I had become so emotionally reliant on, but I found the experience frustrating. I was breaking down and realised it was time to let go. I needed to learn how to quit without feeling like a failure. I needed to find a way to “stop kicking without sinking”. I needed to find an alternative route as an outlet for passion beyond physical pursuits. Whilst I still love the physical aspects of life, I also have a

passion for learning, teaching, and doing something significant. I changed my focus to my college and to writing. The ‘why’ in my life has become learning and teaching.

In February 2013 I wrote the first edition of this book. In March 2014 I tried my hand at writing a novel. Oh, my word, that was daunting. I faced two major challenges. The first was a limited literary competence, and the second was a lack of confidence in this domain.

Most of my family members are enthusiastic readers. I was aware that they perceive me as an ordinary person who has done well riding on the back of physical abilities, and, yes, could write a book about mental toughness. I suspected, however, that their sub-text was *Steve, writing a novel is a bridge too far!* I concluded that I did not depend on their approval, even if they felt I was reaching beyond my grasp.

In December 2014, I sent a first draft of *Impimpi – Black Anger, White Fear* to some family and friends for feedback to help me with a final edit. By March 2015, the final book was completed and published on Smash words and Amazon. <https://www.amazon.com/Impimpi-Black-Anger-White-Fear-ebook/dp/B00R5ZCQJG>

### ***Is it ever too late to start again?***

If you feel life has lost meaning and is purposeless or you are too old to add new value to your life, consider the late 97-year-old Australian Keith Wright.

According to Sky News in 2014, “He is 95 years old and loves travelling round the world with his backpack, unlike the teenagers and twenty-somethings he meets on his adventures. This sprightly pensioner from Burleigh Heads in the state of Queensland is about to set off again, this time on a two-month trip around Europe.

Mr Wright, who believes he is the world’s oldest backpacker, has spurned genteel coach tours or cruises for independent travel. “If you are independent and a bit adventurous, it is the best way of doing it,” he told Sky News. “You see what other people don’t see because they have got a set route and go just where they are taken.” Mr Wright began backpacking at the tender age of 85 after his wife died. He travels light and stays in two-star hotels or hostels, sometimes in shared dorms.”

Is it ever too late to start again? He did not think so.

What about Mahathir Mohamad? He was elected Malaysian Prime Minister in 2018 at the age of 92. The electorate, nor he, thought he was too old to add new value. Mahathir resigned in March 2020, but not because of his age!

### *Closing*

The PhD research findings, my experimentation, personal experiences, and involvement with many clients indicate that mental toughness, as described in this book, can be improved, and can offer you a competitive advantage.

I am not going to close by wishing you luck. I rather wish that you develop your mental toughness so that you create your own luck and become the best person you can become. Tough times don't last, tough people do!

Please visit my website [www.stevieharris.co.za](http://www.stevieharris.co.za) for further information.

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Dr Steve Harris lives in Cape Town. He is a successful businessman, a conference speaker, and an academic.

His most noteworthy present and past activities are:

- PhD and MBA
- Author of *Impimpi - Black Anger and White Fear*
- Playwright – *Borderline* – performed at the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown
- CEO of eta College – specialising in sport and exercise science qualifications
- Former mind coach for the Springbok rugby team
- Former team manager for the Springbok rugby team
- Former winner of Anglo American’s national “Build a Business” contest for entrepreneurs
- Former world champion in surf lifesaving
- Former general manager of an international FMCG company

ALSO, FROM STEVE HARRIS

## **IMPIMPI: Black Anger, White Fear**

(Print and Kindle edition)

(*Impimpi: Traitor/collaborator*)

South Africa is trapped in a titanic clash between black anger and white fear. A self-righteous government hangs on to power in the name of God and on the pretext of containing communist expansion. Fervent freedom fighters try to destabilise the government and wrestle power from the white minority.

1950–1976, the golden era of apartheid, provides the context in which an Eastern Cape boy grapples with meaning in an environment of superstition, tradition, war, racism, broken relationships, and betrayal.

November 15, 1976, five months after the ANC-initiated Soweto uprising, and a week after the government-sponsored massacre in Maseru, a private investigator is the target of a bomb at his premises ...

This compelling tale echoes our contemporary world, where morality and justice continue to be corrupted by cultural zealots and religious extremists; love is still blind; and betrayal remains omnipresent.