

You are your biggest
problem,

And that's

FANTASTIC

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DEDICATION

To my ULP (Universal Learning Process), without which this book would not have been possible.

To everyone and every experience that forced me just to “be better.”

To every person who is tired of having their life’s hours spent for them in the rat race, who wants to take control and be the ones who determine how their lives are spent.

To my two boys, may your lives be filled with joy, and may these pages help you travel further in wisdom than I had at your age.

Love, Dad

CONTENTS

	Acknowledgments	i
1	Welcome, you huge problem you	1
2	Self-Awareness	Pg 9
3	Goal Setting	Pg 31
4	Time Management	Pg 54
5	Communication	Pg 74
6	Leadership	Pg 97
7	Employment vs Business	Pg 122
8	Creativity	Pg 138
9	Problem-Solving	Pg 161
10	Staying on the straight and narrow	Pg 184

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"The best years of your life are the ones in which you decide your problems are your own. You do not blame them on your mother, the ecology, or the president. You realize that you control your destiny."

- Albert Ellis

Chapter One – Welcome, you huge problem you

Here you are, ready (hopefully) to change your life one problem at a time.

As you realize your problems begin, continue, and end with you, inch by inch, step by step, you will start to feel the weight of the world fall off your shoulders.

Counterintuitive right? You would think that the more you take ownership, the heavier the burden will be! But this is one of the many wild contrarian facts of life—the dichotomy of taking on more to reduce your burden. The one golden rule of life's few absolute truths is that there must be a duality. An impossibility even.

How is this possible? As you realize what you do and don't have control over, you shed 95% of the worries you carry.

Why? Because of everything out there causing you stress or discomfort, the only thing you control is **yourself**. When you take ownership of this, you are instantly given the agency to make changes in your daily existence that will have a material impact on your mental, physical, and emotional states. You lose the feeling that nothing you do makes a difference, that your lot in life is set, and that the reasons for your unhappiness are immovable.

Too many people spend their lives buried in the news of faraway events, people, and places, burdened and depressed by things over which they have no control. Social media has only exacerbated this.

Suppose you were to measure your time and energy as a pool of 100, and you spent even 20% of your points on things you have no bearing on or control over. In that case, you would find yourself feeling frustrated at the very least and losing 20% of your available time and energy on meaningless activity at the very worst. Over the course of your life, this adds up to an almost criminal and irreplaceable loss.

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The confronting element of this truth in life is that you are indeed responsible for and in control of your happiness and success.

It's possible to realize that your marriage may fail because of what you have or have not done. Perhaps you haven't gotten that promotion because of what you have or have not done. Maybe your relationship with your friends and family has deteriorated because of what you have or have not done.

The duality is that just because we take ownership doesn't mean we automatically take blame.

When you can hand on heart say that you have done absolutely everything possible, within your level of control (your actions and behaviors), to improve your marriage, your chance of promotion, or your relationships with those around you, you can feel peace! We can't control others, not our partners, professors, bosses, relatives, or friends. The first step is understanding the balanced relationship between ourselves and others, what we can control or influence, and what we cannot.

This is where the second step comes in, "IFTTT," the ultimate tool to unburden and liberate you from the shackles of indecision.

If you have done everything within your power and capability to improve yourself and modify your actions and behaviors to optimize your chances of success and have not gotten the desired results, then IFTTT—**If This, Then That.**

If your partner is still unhappy after you've addressed verbalized and non-verbalized desires, then clearly, their happiness stems from something internal and not what they've expressed to you, so they need to seek out expert assistance individually. That future with this partner may not include you, but now you've done everything within your control you apply IFTTT to find and progress to the next step of action, whatever that might be. As a side effect, imagine this. By working on yourself to become the best partner you can be, even if it doesn't work out with that person, you are immeasurably better than when you started for the next partner you may find yourself with. You didn't change FOR the person you're about to leave behind; you changed BECAUSE of them. The change was always for you. For your improvement.

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In a work scenario, perhaps even after hitting all required metrics and performance gates, your boss passes you up on the promotion AGAIN. Well, IFTTT. It's time to look for a job elsewhere. IFTTT stops you from falling into the holding pattern (or prison, depending how you look at it!) of simply doing your best and then wishing upon a star that it will work.

Own it.

IFTTT.

"Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself." - George Bernard Shaw

I realized this after going through my journey, which I'll share with you now and throughout the chapters of this book.

I moved out of home when I was 19, not just around the corner. I moved to Northeast China for a working holiday, as I was studying Accounting then, and I felt I had no idea what I truly wanted to do with my life. From 35 degrees Celsius in the Australian summer to -25 degrees Celsius in the Chinese winter.

While there, I fell in love, married, and had a son—all by the ripe old age of 22.

A giant "WTF" hangs over that statement from most people I talk to, but the truth is, without knowing it, I just followed those two steps above. My life has been full of a series of events. I own it and then use IFTTT to move to the next step.

99% of how our lives progress is not what happens to us but how we respond to it.

Do we choose to level up? Or bail out?

We moved back to Australia to raise our son, and shortly after, we had another boy.

1x income, 1x home loan, 1x car loan, and 2x children. I joke that sometimes we need a good mental or emotional breakdown for a solid

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mental or emotional breakthrough. I've had plenty of those that's for sure!

There were innumerable times when I felt insufficient, not good enough, and without a clear path forward.

It was at those times, though, that there was always hope. How? Because you don't need much hope to take one more step. And that's all you must do. No matter how hard it gets or how aimless your life feels, just take one more step. Do your best and own it, then IFTTT the following action.

I decided to write this book after going through the COVID years locked up at home on and off for two years. In Australia, the Victorian State government's response was decidedly controversial and harsh. But I couldn't control their response to a global pandemic; I could only control how I responded to what was happening around me.

Lock me at home? Perfect, I don't need to travel to the gym because I'll work out at home. Can't go out? Excellent, it will force me to read the books I need to hone my mental and emotional strength.

I used a process that, by the end of this book will be explained in clear detail, called the Internal Converter.

I chose my response, and so can you.

After reading an eclectic collection of varied and assorted books on self-improvement, I realized that there was no one singular book that provided a fundamental or foundational understanding of what I was learning. It varied from easy and straightforward to understand (Eat That Frog - by Bryan Tracey) to extremely valuable but as fun as licking paint (7 Habits of Highly Effective People - Stephen Covey). Why wasn't there a book that I could give to my sons as they grew up to teach them the basics of what I had already learned through so much time, pain, and effort? And so, the inkling of what this book would become was born.

I did have an epiphany of sorts; ***our mental and emotional states can be considered in the same light as our physical ones.***

If I fill my body with rubbish, then the outcome is an unhealthy physical state. (IFTTT)

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If I fill my emotions and mental state with similar rubbish, the same will occur.

But if I exercise and eat right, I will begin to optimize my physical state.

To maintain your physical state, you don't push yourself. But if you want to grow, you do need to push yourself with exercises that will leave you sore. The terminology used in the gym is "Training to failure." When you train right up until your muscles are about to give out, you find that is where the growth lies. The key is not to fail and cause damage, but to run that line in the middle.

The same can be said for your mental and emotional strength. If you avoid complex and challenging circumstances, you will never have the right conditions for growth in your mental and emotional states.

Let's say you're not into the gym at all. Fine! How about mechanical devices?

They can be maintained and improved. Likewise, if you don't do either of those, they will fall into disrepair and cease to function as intended.

Look at your mental, emotional, and physical states as areas that can be maintained and improved upon.

I looked at my sons and thought, how can I possibly give them a head start, a primer, with the core truths it's taken me my whole adult life to learn? A book that will provide a manual on how to work on their psyche and emotional self. Part diagnostic tool, part instruction manual on how to improve and develop into better people as time goes on.

Furthermore, if I were an adult who had never considered my emotional and mental states like a machine that needs to be repaired, worked on, and continuously improved, how could I distill the necessary knowledge in an easy-to-read format to make it as easy to do as possible?

IFTTT, I'll make my own book!

At the start of each chapter, I've put some "red flags," things that you should reflect on and if any resonate with you, then know that this is probably an area you need to focus on. Each chapter's How To section will provide simple and practical steps you can take to improve that area of

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your life. The second core component of this book, and something that constantly nags at people, is "How do I know if this is legit?" In my experience, I have found that every core truth in life is made of a beautiful dichotomy.

Dichotomy - a division or contrast between two things that are or are represented as being opposed or entirely different.

The key to understanding if something really is a universal truth or not is to see if it can have a dichotomy inherent to its being. **Yin and Yang** is the ultimate presentation of this ideal.

At the end of each chapter is a **Universal Truth**, that will outline its own dichotomy.

In summary:

- 1) The only thing we can control is ourselves, and our responses to events around us
- 2) We need to own our responses, to reduce the burden on us
- 3) The two-step process of owning our problems and taking an IFTTT response moves us slowly and inexorably toward our future, better self.
- 4) Our mental, emotional, and physical states are inextricably linked. They all impact each other, but more importantly, they all need to be maintained and improved as we go through life.
- 5) Look out for your "Red Flags."
- 6) For something to be true – there must be an inherent or internal dichotomy. This is what makes it a ***universal truth***.

For the journey ahead, I've structured the chapters in order of importance and implementation.

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Within each chapter, the structure is also broken down into a format highlighting each element's importance, enticing you to read on to discover how that element might benefit you.

From each of the 3-5 major benefits, there are "How To" sections that provide meaningful and practical steps on what you might do to make the necessary improvements in your life.

After all, it's great in theory to know why having "self-awareness" is critical to your journey as a fully functioning member of society and a healthy human being. What is necessary though is knowing what the practical steps are you can take to improve that particular area of focus. I'd recommend giving all the How-To elements a try to find what works for you, and then out of the most effective, embed it into your daily routine and maintain the action as a habit for continual improvement.

I've also found some of the best quotes relevant to each section, from people that had significant input on each topic. I personally love a good pithy quote!

Please open your heart and minds to the possibility of a life that you own and have designed and shaped through your responses to what happens to and around you. To become the creator and shaper of the being you want to be. To be happy and proud of all you managed to do and change when they're wheeling you around the retirement village.

This is the highest calling any of us could strive for.

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"The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes."

- William James.

Chapter Two – Self Awareness (start with the person in the mirror)

RED FLAGS

Always blaming others or outside events for things that go wrong.

People are frustrated at you “just not knowing.”

Having an inflated or deflated view of your strengths and weaknesses.

Reacting poorly to constructive feedback.

I had a moment of clarity one day when I looked in the mirror and realized, for whatever reason, I was not in the physical shape I thought I was. I exercised regularly, ate what would be considered a healthy diet, and never really partied. How did I get to a point where the mental picture and image I held of myself varied so much from reality?

Likewise at the office, I felt like my team wasn't really coming to me for advice or help, when I felt that I was always available and ready if they ever needed me. I never pushed people away or told them I was too busy, so why isn't anyone coming to me for assistance when that's my responsibility?

This is where self-awareness kicks in, and the steps you can take to build or develop the most grounding skill you will ever have in your life. It's the foundation for everything to come. Like they say, the man who knows everything learns nothing.

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Time to realise then, how little you actually know.

Personal self-awareness is the ability to recognize your own strengths and weaknesses, like a bodybuilder looking in the mirror and analyzing the underdeveloped parts of themselves that they will build into their training regime. It's the act of being honest with yourself about what you're good at and what you need to work on without sugarcoating it or making excuses. Truth serum for the soul. In simpler terms, reflecting on your own strengths and shortcomings and then using that knowledge to become the best version of yourself.

This is the building block, the very first step.

Sometimes, you're an idiot. Sometimes, you're a legend. We are blends of the two in different measures at different times. But unless you learn how to look in the mirror and begin to shape how you think, there's no point to any of this.

Knowing you need to change, is half the battle.

If it's always someone or something else's fault, what's the point?

If you're perfect, what's the point?

Let's start here. It's your fault. You're not perfect, which means you're the problem.

But you recognize that, so there's hope. Let's begin.

Advantages of Self-awareness

- A. Improved relationships
- B. Increased emotional intelligence
- C. Greater self-confidence
- D. Enhanced decision making
- E. Improved stress management

A. Improved relationships - Build a tighter circle

"Friendship is the hardest thing in the world to explain. It's not something you learn in school. But if you haven't learned the meaning of friendship, you really haven't learned anything." - Muhammad Ali

When it comes to emotions and interactions with others, think of them like a hot cup of coffee. If you're too hot-headed and react impulsively, you're likely to burn someone, but if you're too cold and detached, you'll leave them feeling unimportant. The key is to find that perfect balance of warmth and understanding.

Optimal self-awareness is gauging your interactions with those around you and then aligning your interaction with them to their values. This doesn't mean not being true to yourself; it's about maximizing your effectiveness in every instance you have contact to uplift those around you and bring you all closer to your goals. Those goals might be deeper happiness and friendship; it could be to start a business relationship. Whatever the goal is when you are

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interacting with others, unless you become agile in reading another person's body language and communication preferences, you might be coming across as too aggressive or even too passive to be taken seriously. Adjusting yourself to the best communicative style for the person will result in the best outcomes for your relationships.

Using our self-awareness to match someone's verbal and nonverbal language can be like spice, adding flavor and depth to our interactions with others. It helps us connect on a deeper level, understand each other, and build trust.

At the same time, the other end of the spectrum is when you blatantly refuse to meet someone on their terms and leave them feeling like they are constantly struggling to get their message or intent across. They leave you feeling unheard, misunderstood, and totally not valued.

Once we become self-aware of our behaviors and actions in our engagements with others, our ability to adapt to the situation we are in with the people surrounding us creates deeper and more meaningful relationships every single time we connect, drawing others to our circle of influence.

Unless you learn to communicate effectively and find the right balance of empathizing with others while standing up for what you believe to be correct, you will never create substantial, meaningful relationships.

Below is a scenario demonstrating how someone might feel when confronted by a person lacking self-awareness, versus someone clearly demonstrating a good level of self-awareness.

"You're in the office, and you want to make friends with someone outside of your usual colleagues so you take the huge personal and reputational risk (office spaces can be pretty "high school" at times) to walk up and introduce yourself. After you introduce yourself, you're met with one of two outcomes:

Scenario A: Body language: slouched, not facing towards you, being looked at indirectly, semi-continuing a conversation with someone at another desk. Idly flicking through emails as you try to make conversation.

This person's lack of self-awareness may very well have flow-on consequences. In this instance, you may very well not want to have a crack at opening a conversation with someone new for a long time (how you felt because of this person's lack of self-awareness). Likewise, if you were in a position of influence later and were told to pick a person for a role, with an unknown candidate and this person, the truth is, almost anyone would be preferable to the person from Scenario A because of how they made you feel in that first interaction. Without knowing, this person's lack of self-awareness has come back to haunt their possibility of getting promoted. Often these types of people complain they get passed over when opportunities come up, not realising that it was because of their lack of self-awareness that created this hole they are in.

Scenario B: Spins in the chair to face and look directly at you, stands up to shake your hand. Smiles and has a relaxed body language that makes you feel like they are comfortable talking with you.

What a world of difference! In this scenario, you feel acknowledged and essential for the duration of the short interaction. Now there is a person who knows how to make friends and meet new people!

The only difference between Scenario A and B though, is probably the self-awareness of the person being talked to. They may have no ill intent, but because they aren't paying attention to how they are making you feel, more damage is being done than good.

One time, when I was living and working in China, the owner of the business came by to visit the newest school he had opened. I was the only "foreign" teacher there, and all of my colleagues were local Chinese teachers. They were being paid about \$500USD a month,

which for the time and country was a reasonable income—modest but reasonable.

As the owner walked in, his first words were (translated), “Check out these shoes I got from my trip to Europe; they cost about two months of your wages!”

Geees. Talk about a rude way to demonstrate a total lack of self-awareness. My colleagues felt belittled and underpaid! How was he going to expect to win their respect and loyalty when he was acting like that? Don't be that guy or the person from Scenario A.

Work on self-awareness in your relationships!

Here is a positive example: In our office I noticed that someone was looking a bit down. You could tell they were having a bit of an off day, likely something that had happened at home or after hours and was affecting them even now. I was not the only person who noticed. What unfolded brought tears to my eyes, seeing the whole office pick up on this fact and rally around this person to make their day a great one. One person brought their favorite coffee order; the other was on fire with jokes tailored to lift their mood. Within short order, we were looking at a person transformed. I was so proud of my team in that moment. These actions of self-awareness helped improve relationships across the board in the office that day.

Now this is using self-awareness to improve a relationship!

HOW TO - Improve Relationships through Self-awareness

1. *Journaling*: If you find things tend to go up and down in your relationships, like a roller coaster, keeping a journal is a great way to become more aware of your own thoughts and emotions. By

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regularly reflecting on your experiences and feelings, you can gain insight into your own behavior and how it affects your relationships.

2. *Mindfulness practice:* For when you walk away from an interaction feeling angry, confused or upset. Or when you've carried those emotions into a conversation and potentially done some damage! Mindfulness practices such as meditation can help you become more aware of your thoughts and emotions in the present moment. By learning to observe your thoughts and emotions without judgment, you can gain a better understanding of how they affect your interactions with others, and how to potentially modify them moving forward.

3. *Relationship review:* This is good for when you have known someone for a long time and haven't consciously sat down to rate the quality of your current relationship in a mindful state. Relationships take work and effort. Reflect on your current relationships and think about how you can improve them. Consider what you can do differently and what you would like to change about your interactions with the people in your life. This can be done alone or with the help of a therapist or counselor if this is a potentially difficult moment in your life.

B. Increased emotional intelligence - understand wtf is happening in people around you

"The most important quality in a leader is emotional intelligence. Without it, a person can have the best training in the world, an incisive, analytical mind, and an endless supply of smart ideas, but he still won't make a great leader." - Daniel Goleman

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Emotional intelligence gives you the adaptability to think on your feet instead of having a set of robotic pre-programmed responses.

It helps you navigate the ups and downs of life with more ease and less confusion by giving you the visibility to adapt yourself to the people around you, while you are with them and in the moment.

It's also recognizing and acknowledging the emotions that you and the people around you are feeling.

The ability to manage and regulate your own emotions in response to those around you is a powerful element of every successful person.

You can't tell people how to feel any more than you can control their minds.

What do I mean by that?

Let's go through another scenario, this time, you've gotten home early after a pretty good day at work, but your significant other is on the way home after a rotten day.

Scenario A: You decide to watch TV and enjoy your early arrival at home with some sports and a cold beverage from the fridge. Their problems are exactly that, theirs. You won't allow that party pooper to ruin your day.

While you may be unwinding in the method appropriate for you, it doesn't consider how your partner will feel when they get home. In fact, if you do all the above, your partner is likely to feel neglected, uncared for, and unimportant.

Scenario B: Understanding that a bad mood for them is most likely a bad mood for you, you make sure the house is clean and dinner is underway when they get back. Proactively ask them to come sit and tell you about their day while you finish cooking. Do not tell

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them what they should have done; just active listening and advice when asked for.

In the first scenario, you are likely to exacerbate the negative emotions of the person who's coming home late after a terrible day. In the second, both of you are going to enjoy a good evening as emotional intelligence was used to direct your actions and influence positivity in that person's life.

All it probably cost you was fifteen to twenty minutes of your evening, and you've made your loved ones' return home so much better.

Emotional intelligence (Or EQ) is knowing when to throw fuel or water on your emotions and recognizing the same in those around you.

Pump up their tires or just be there to listen when required.

It's the difference between knowing what is factually correct to say or do, versus what is the emotionally intelligent thing to say or do in that moment.

A healthy relationship should have this coming both ways. Tonight, you gave up what you wanted to do, to help your partner. The next time you have a bad day, your partner may just respond in the same way and make you feel loved, acknowledged, and appreciated.

The only way your EQ grows, though, is by being conscious of how your words and actions affect those around you and then remembering for next time. Growing your EQ takes time, effort, patience, and a willingness to keep working at it. Don't give up!

HOW TO - Increase your emotional intelligence

1. *Self-reflection through writing:* Write out examples of ways people around you have demonstrated and not demonstrated emotional intelligence. Then, follow up with examples of times you have and have not demonstrated emotional intelligence. Once you're done, find the relationship you want to excel in and write down 3 different ways you can display more emotional intelligence in the moment. Implement them next time you have the chance! Practice makes progress.

2. *Body-awareness exercises:* Engage in activities such as yoga, tai chi or dance to increase your awareness of your body and how it connects to your emotions. This can help you better understand the physical sensations that accompany your emotions and learn how to manage them. Sometimes, people are just getting stuff off their chest; they aren't attacking you. Learn to recognize when someone's behavior or words are triggering you into a negative response and program yourself to breathe and bring your body language back under control. This will help you emotionally deal with what's happening!

3. *Social service or volunteering:* Participate in activities that allow you to interact with and help others. This can help you gain a better understanding of different perspectives and learn how to communicate and empathize with people from diverse backgrounds. It can also boost your self-esteem and give you a sense of purpose. Not only does this help increase your EQ, it also helps develop self-awareness and empathy.

C. Greater self-confidence - give off charismatic vibes without looking like a tool

"Confidence is the most important single factor in this game, and no matter how great your natural talent, there is only one way to obtain and sustain it: work." - Jack Nicklaus

The more you understand and accept yourself, the more confident you'll become.

Think of confidence like a muscle, the more you work on it, the stronger it gets. And just like any muscle, it takes time, effort, and patience to build.

When you know your strengths, you can use them to your advantage to focus your initial drive and direction. When you acknowledge and accept your weaknesses, you can work on them and either minimize their impact or improve them to a point where they would no longer even be considered weaknesses. Like turning lemons into lemonade, but for your confidence.

Confidence is not rejection of your weaknesses and faults to the exclusion of only your strengths; rather, it is the acceptance of both and knowing that you aren't the best and you're working on the worst, and that's ok.

Someone who has zero self-awareness has a very fragile self-confidence. Other people's opinions and just how good of a day they have had will drastically impact this person's day to day confidence.

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But the person who is fully aware of what they are/aren't good at? Unstoppable, quiet confidence radiates from their sense of self-awareness.

You only have so many hours in the day. The less time you spend second-guessing yourself, the more time you have to actually work on improving yourself.

Growing up I was great with people, but it stemmed from a desire to please those around me. I craved external validation. Was I a good person? Was I funny? Did you like me? I was very self-aware of my shortcomings, but not at all aware of my strengths. Because of that I was extremely lacking in self-confidence. This manifested later in life as jealousy in relationships and feeling a lack of purpose. The moment I was aware of my strengths AND my weaknesses, and implemented measures to fix my weaknesses while developing and embracing my strengths, my life totally changed.

A quiet confidence developed that even though I wasn't perfect (far from it), I was definitely working on it and making progress, and that's okay.

How To - Increase your self-confidence

1. *Identifying and challenging negative self-talk:* Becoming aware of your own negative thoughts and beliefs about yourself is an important step in improving self-confidence. Try writing down your negative thoughts and then challenging them with evidence or reasoning. If there is a genuine need for improvement, put in place actions that will help and you should feel better just knowing the negative area is now only temporary as you work towards improving yourself.

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2. *Setting and achieving small goals*: By setting and achieving small goals, you can build momentum and confidence in your ability to accomplish things. This can be something as simple as making your bed in the morning or learning a new skill. A great journey is accomplished one day at a time. So, break up what needs to happen into daily targets that are easier to hit than big, ambiguous ones.

3. *Practicing gratitude and self-compassion*: Reflecting on what you are grateful for in your life and being kind and compassionate to yourself can help boost self-confidence and self-esteem. Try writing a daily gratitude journal or practicing self-compassion meditation.

D. Enhanced decision-making - Make fewer bad decisions, and more good ones

"The ability to make good decisions is vital to the success of any organization." - Peter Drucker

"A good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan executed next week." - George S. Patton

Self-awareness is knowing that you will never have all the information and that's ok. Making the decision and it being wrong is often better than making no decision at all, or one made too late.

It's knowing that sometimes you will make imperfect (or flat-out incorrect) decisions, but that doesn't mean your life is over. True self-awareness is having a personal devil's advocate, always questioning your assumptions, and providing a different perspective than the one that immediately comes to mind.

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If it were a superpower, it would be one of objectivity, helping you see things as they are, not as you want them to be.

How many times have you reacted to something only to see that your reaction was incorrect once you put some thought and perspective into it? On the opposite side of the table, how many times have you overthought a matter without getting an outside perspective and found your decision-making paralyzed?

Self-awareness is recognizing reactive decision-making for what it is: a big gamble. It makes you pause to give it more thought, enhancing your decision-making.

When you're aware of the biases and programmatic shortcuts your upbringing and life experience have embedded into your operating style, you can ensure they don't cloud your judgment and lead you to make bad decisions. Considering multiple perspectives can also ensure you're not missing out on important information or alternative solutions.

I realised that, on a Friday I would have a couple of whiskeys to relax at the end of the week. The drinking then made me peckish, and I would raid the cupboards for snacks and chips. Before I knew it, it was 11 pm and I was fairly hammered and hankering for a meal. Bam, Uber Eats and a big order of something you 100% should not be having that time of night was on its way.

Self-awareness was me realizing that the chance of showing self-control and discipline in my decision-making after deleting 10 standard drinks was close to zero. The answer? Don't drink so much on a Friday before my ability to make decisions that aligned with my long-term goals (have a body like Massimo) was totally derailed.

You will learn that small things like this make a huge difference in achieving your long-term goals.

"Don't confuse your excuses for reasons." Dirk Ludowyk

How To - Enhance your decision-making

1. *Role-playing different scenarios:* Practicing decision-making in a safe and controlled environment can help you become more confident in your ability to make decisions. Try role-playing different scenarios with friends or family, or even in your own mind. This was exactly how I came to the conclusion that drinking lots of alcohol = irresponsibly eating enough calories to solve global hunger on one dirty Friday night.

2. *Pro and con list:* When faced with a decision, make a list of the pros and cons to help you weigh the options. This can help you evaluate the decision objectively and make a more informed choice.

Again, remember to double-check that the pros and cons align with your long-term goals. On a Friday night, my only goal was to get hammered and smash my friends in Call of Duty, which didn't align with my goal of having a fit and healthy body to better achieve the life I wanted daily.

3. *Taking a step back:* When faced with a difficult decision, take a step back and take some time to reflect on the situation before making a choice. Think about flow on affects and consequences, good or bad. This can help you avoid impulsive decisions and allow you to consider all options more thoroughly. People tend to exaggerate the benefits of actions as well as the negative consequences of actions. Buying a lotto ticket versus public speaking. The chance of winning is so low in a lottery, but people still pay for the over-exaggerated chance of winning. Public speaking can paralyze people with fear, but the actual consequences are far from deadly. Work out the "best case," "likely case," and "Worst case."

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If the worst-case scenario of you making a decision is a low negative impact on your day-to-day life, but the best-case scenario could be amazing for you in terms of what your day-to-day life looks like, just have an attempt!

5. *Seeking out diverse perspectives*: Gaining different perspectives from people with different backgrounds and experiences can help you broaden your understanding of a situation and make better decisions. Try talking to people who have different life experiences and perspectives, or reading books and articles written by authors from diverse backgrounds. We don't know everything, but why learn things the hard way? If someone you know has gone through something similar, you can avoid the pain of learning the hard way, by leveraging their pain of learning the h

E. Improved stress management - enjoy life more, by properly handling whatever life throws at you

"Stress is the trash of modern life- we all generate it but if you don't dispose of it properly, it will pile up and overtake your life." - Danzae Pace

"Stress is not what happens to us. It's our response to what happens. And the response is something we can choose." - Maureen Killoran

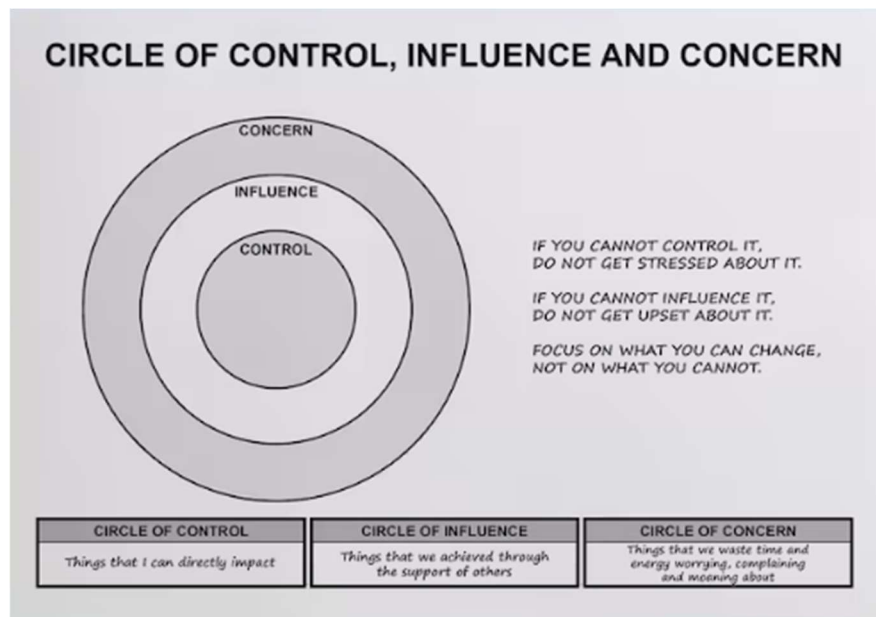
Stress management through your own personal self-awareness is like developing a self-induced-pain radar; it helps you recognize the

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triggers and warning signs of stress and develop effective coping strategies. It's like having a personal bodyguard for your mental well-being. When something comes up, that makes you feel really stressed, your self-awareness bodyguard asks the right questions.

Have you done everything you can to address the problem? Yes? Stop stressing then.

No? Then do what you can and refer to the previous point. Let go of the stress, don't let it control you.



The more you know about your stressors, the better equipped you'll be to defend yourself against them or avoid them altogether. Failing to plan, is planning to fail. So when you can recognize the triggers and warning signs of stress, you can nip it in the bud before it becomes a full-blown stress-monster. And when you develop effective coping strategies, you'll be able to handle stress like a pro -

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pushing through it with mental discipline and resilience instead of getting overwhelmed and acting like a paralyzed drama llama.

Stress is just our reaction to an event that is projecting unforeseen or uncontrolled consequences our way. Being stress-free is just acknowledging what we can or can't change and then acting accordingly.

My main line of work has been mortgage broking. Which has so many elements out of our control and is a veritable stress monster line of work if there ever was one.

What if the client has bad credit? What if they purchased a property and the loan was declined because we failed to read a certain obscure policy? What if they need to sell their place and buy at the same time, and the sale fails to happen on time, impacting the purchase and leaving them in the back of a moving van with their kids for the weekend?

Finances at home are the number one cause of divorce and household stress, and when you're responsible for that by giving people the largest loan they will ever have, it can be super stressful. Learning to create healthy mental habits and being self-aware of when I'm being too hard on myself or overthinking an issue has been key to my longevity and success in this industry.

How To - Improve Stress Management

1. *Identifying stress triggers:* Becoming aware of the things that trigger stress in your life is an important step in managing stress. Try keeping a journal of the things that happen throughout your day and how you react to them, and analyze them to identify patterns and triggers. Once you are aware of them, don't try to avoid them;

strategize ways to cope and minimize their impact. It is IMPOSSIBLE to totally remove stressful triggers, and it is fruitless (not to mention stressful!) to try.

2. *Time management*: By becoming more self-aware of how you use your time, you can identify activities that may be causing unnecessary stress, and then make adjustments to reduce it. Try to use time management techniques such as the Pomodoro technique, or make a schedule/to-do list to help you prioritize your tasks and manage your time more effectively. Make time for unscheduled things! Blank spots on your calendar that mean if something unexpected happens you need to work on (which almost always will happen!) you have time to address it, reducing your stress on the matter.

3. *Social support*: Building a support system can help you manage stress by providing emotional support, and a sense of belonging. Try reaching out to friends and family, or even joining a support group in your industry. By sharing your thoughts and feelings with others, you can gain new perspectives and develop a sense of community, which can help you manage stress more effectively. Feeling alone enhances the feelings of stress. When you really feel you're not the only one going through this and that others are not only going through it but have also come out the other side of it totally fine, then that reduces your own stress levels.

Conclusion

Self-awareness is like a personal all-in-one toolkit for life. It's like having a personal relationship coach, emotional intelligence trainer, confidence booster, decision-making advisor, and stress management expert all rolled into one.

Why was my mental image not aligning with what I saw in the mirror? Even though I exercised and ate well Monday through Friday, I was a fiend on the weekend for poor lifestyle choices involving food and alcohol. Once I realized and gained self-awareness, though, I made the decision to stop that from happening and get myself back on track.

Why wasn't my team coming to me for things? Because I was projecting an aura of being "super busy" and being the lovely people they are, they thought I was too busy for them and didn't want to interrupt. I needed to be more conscious of what I was projecting, as well as the tone and demeanor that I used when I was talking to them. Even though I felt like I wasn't rushing or distracted, that's not what was being portrayed. And often with many things in life, perception is reality. So, I implemented a process of minimizing all windows and tabs not related to our conversation, flipping my phone face down so I wouldn't see notifications, and then, in doing so, mentally putting myself into a bubble with nothing in it except the person opposite me.

With self-awareness, you'll be able to navigate the ups and downs of life with greater ease, understanding, and effectiveness. It's like having a personal adaptive GPS for your mind and emotions that constantly updates and improves the quality of the directional data over time.

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Self-awareness is not just a one-time thing, it's a lifelong journey, but trust me, it's worth the ride.

Arguably the single biggest upgrade you will ever install in your mental and emotional software.

Universal Truth: Being self-aware (looking internally) is the best way to improve things externally. Work on the inside to affect the outside.

So embrace self-awareness, and watch as your relationships, emotional intelligence, self-confidence, decision-making, and stress management all level up.

Knowing is half the battle, but once you know, what are you going to do about it?

Now that you are aware the buck stops with you, and you are the master of your destiny, how do you even get started? Set goals. Read on to find out how setting goals is both the point of the exercise and not. In the next chapter we discover what is necessary to set a goal and achieve it. Time to put this new self-awareness superpower to good use!

"A goal without a plan is just a wish."

- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

"Write down your goals, make a plan, and take action. There is no guarantee of success, but without a plan, you guarantee failure."

- Mark Victor Hansen

Chapter Three - Goal setting

(A ship with no direction finds no harbor)

RED FLAGS

Lack of direction in life.

Inconsistent levels of effort.

Avoidance of planning.

Frequent shifts in interests.

A person's goal is a matter of destination. It varies from person to person and could be financial, physical, emotional, or mental. It could be materialistic or spiritual.

While personal circumstances often provide the push (self-awareness that you need to achieve something), a rock-solid goal provides the pull—the wrenching pull towards something that entices you with future happiness or betterment.

If you jump on a boat with no heading or destination, you could end up circling the ocean for years before you ever hit land, and then when you do eventually hit the dirt, that land may not be one you ever wanted to arrive at!

So why do many people spend their lives doing this? Why do people look down on the need to set goals in life? Is it because of the fear of failure? The fear of what others might think if the goal is not achieved?

Going through the motions of life without any concrete goals seems crazy, if you ask me.

When we migrated back to Australia from China, I had a goal. My in-laws asked me, "Tony, you've not finished your degree, and you've been a teacher for four years. What are you going to do when you move back to Australia?"

"Easy. I'll work at a bank. That's where they keep all the money, so it must pay well."

This jarred horribly for them. It seemed too far out there. But it was my goal! When I returned, I engineered my actions and behaviors to get a job at a bank.

One of the best quotes I've heard recently is that if your goals don't make your friends tell you you're slightly crazy, then you're either with a great crowd of people, or your goals just aren't big enough.

Sure enough, after looking for work for one month, I landed an entry-level job closing credit cards over the phone at a major bank. For some people, it was boring work. I saw plenty of people from the induction group leave because they thought this role was beneath them.

Not me! This was a golden opportunity! Now that I had hit my goal of getting into a bank, it was time for a new goal: getting paid more!

The thing is, goals should be like failure—never final. They should always be refined, adjusted, and improved upon, a rotating and evolving conveyor belt of things you want to achieve—alive and changing along with you on your life journey.

And as you hit them, they get bigger and scarier, more outrageous! Why not? What's the worst that can happen? Shoot for the stars, land in the clouds. Who knows? One day, you might even hit the stars.

As long as you can set short--, medium-- and long-term goals, you will achieve more in this life than you ever thought possible.

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Aiming for the next short-term goal on a weekly basis, using medium-term goals to achieve interim objectives, and using the long-term goal as inspiration and a guiding point.

Once you have a destination in mind, you also know to look out for storms on the path and to take steps to avoid them. You know to check in every so often to see if you're still on course, and if you're not, to shift direction to get you back in the direction of where you want to go. Just as importantly, you will make progress, stoking the feelings of satisfaction, fulfillment, meaning, and accomplishment in your life as, step by step, you move toward your destination.

Shockingly, more and more people are losing the ability to set goals. Homeownership statistics are plummeting, unhappiness is polling at an all-time high, and despite having access to the combined knowledge of humanity via the internet, health is also taking a hit. People don't know what to aim for and find themselves stuck in the paralysis of indecision around setting their own objectives. What a horribly, crippling way to live!

Now, the question is, is it because they don't want a goal, or they just don't know where to start? I'm going to assume that people do want goals; they want to achieve things but just don't know where to get started.

Time to learn how to set some goals! So buckle up, the first destination – learning how to set goals for yourself and why it's important.

Advantages of Goal Setting

- A. Clarity and Direction
- B. Motivation and Inspiration
- C. Discipline and Resilience
- D. The Goal Itself

A. Clarity and Direction - Open your eyes and know which way you're going

"Clarity of purpose is the starting point of all achievement." –

W. Clement Stone

Clarity and direction are two little words with a big impact on our lives. As with any worthwhile undertaking, it's hard to reach where we want to go unless we open our eyes and face the way we're headed. Whether you're setting goals for your personal or professional life, having clarity and direction can bring a whole host of benefits: mental, physical, emotional, and financial.

A moment of clarity hit me square in the chest when I set aside the time to really meditate on what it was that made me love doing broking. Firstly though, meditation doesn't mean sending yourself up into the mountains on a retreat to drink tea and cross your legs! It could be sitting in the sauna, standing under the shower, or lying in bed at the end of the day. Contemplating without any overt direction. Secondly, for perspective, I've literally never stayed in one

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role, or even one employer or location, for more than four years! I think the longest I was ever in one spot would have had to have been high school!

I was dwelling on that very thought after six years in broking and that's when clarity hit.

I've always loved helping people, and because everyone is so unique, I never get bored.

Boredom would set in very quickly if things weren't constantly changing and challenging.

This might sound horrendous to some people, and that's fine! Your journey will be different from mine; the important part is finding your own clarity.

Mentally, clarity helps to reduce stress and anxiety. When you know what you want and how to get there, it's easier to stay focused and avoid getting sidetracked by life's distractions. It gives you the ability to constantly do a stock take of your decision making and the paths in front of you with the accuracy you need to make this meaningful. It also makes decision-making a whole lot easier. No more aimless wandering around the shopping center trying to figure out what to buy. With clarity, you will know exactly what you need, and you can make a beeline straight for it. Some people enjoy the "freedom" of going shopping without a list but often end up frustrated when they get home. This is because out of the items that were needed as part of this shopping trip, an unreasonably high number of objects never made it into the trolley. Now they find themselves trapped by the circumstances of their making. You can still have a list and enjoy a shopping trip!

Physically, having a clear sense of direction can help to keep you motivated. Remember, the body is a slave to the mind and not the other way around. Understanding this means when you have a goal in mind, even if it's a minor goal that contributes to the major goal, it gives you a reason to get out of bed in the morning and tackle the

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day with energy and enthusiasm. Studies have shown that even starting with a small item, like getting up on time and making your bed can increase your feelings of accomplishment, directly transferring into your energy levels for the day. Having clear goals assists in keeping the body subservient to the mind.

Emotionally, reminding yourself that every day you are incrementally taking action to move forward to your goal is a supportive embrace acknowledging that while you are not there yet, you eventually will be. Having clarity helps keep the bad mojo away, the depressing feeling that can emerge sometimes out of nowhere like a sad and heavily weighted fog, obscuring the view of what's around you and all that is wondrous and great about our lives. Emotions can be logically explained, and they can be logically dealt with. Use your newfound clarity to pivot your emotional focus on all you have achieved so far and are still achieving right now to help pull yourself out of those "self-pity gutters" we can sometimes overindulge ourselves in.

What about the financial benefits of having clarity and direction? When you know what you want, it's easier to prioritize your spending and invest your time and money in things that will help you reach your goals. Whether it's putting money into savings, investing in education or training, or simply making wise decisions about how you spend your time, having clarity can help you make the most of your resources and reach financial stability. Being clear on what you want to achieve and how, allows you to benchmark yourself and create a tangible reward in the form of improvement in your financial position, week by week, month by month, year by year!

Find your point of realism, unfounded optimism or pessimism is useless. You might just find that life is a whole lot sweeter when you are clear about what it is you really want, and who you really are!