

NBA-1a Preface.1

Today is Tuesday, Aug 4, 2020 ~ It's a cool, August morning here in Fort Wayne, IN, 62 degrees and cloudy at 9:00 AM, as I sit down to write this narrative, a stark contrast to the 90 degree days that were pelting our region just a week ago. It almost feels like a touch of Fall is in the air. My 'teacher friends' are getting ready to go back to school this week, all seems normal, except for one thing ~ It is so NOT ANYTHING CLOSE TO normal ~ we are right in the middle of a 'pandemic'. Covid 19 has wreaked havoc on our world. Nothing is normal! Teachers are freaked out, parents are anxious, kids are ... well kids, they just want to get on with life. I am sitting on my back deck, writing this narrative, because like many people the world over, I am now working from home. The word that comes to mind is surreal ~ I have used that word a lot over the last 5 months.

I am writing this manuscript, this morning, because for the first time in 20 years I have the time. By transitioning from the office to my home I now have about 90 minutes of extra time every day. When you subtract the commute, and the time it takes to open up and get ready for business and reverse that process at the end of each day, I get a full hour and a half of extra time. I made the decision to use this time to finally do something I have wanted to do for years ~ finish this book. So at 136 days into the pandemic I have pulled all of my notes together, written the rough draft of the manuscript and am now sitting down to create this preface, the piece I decided to do last.

The Back Story

So here is the back story: I am not a writer by trade I am a therapist. I have had no formal training in writing, and really didn't have an interest in writing when I was younger ~ in fact in high-school and college I hated it, term-papers were a total drag, I paid others to do them for me. When I got into my master's program, however, I realized I was pretty good at it, or at least my professors thought so. I got A's on all of my papers and some really good feedback, but I still didn't have a passion to actually sit down and write a book. Although, like many folks, the thought had crossed my mind.

I did love to read, however, and ever since I became interested in the field of psychology and therapy, I have read everything I can get my hands on that pertains to motivation, inspiration and the psychology of change. And I am not gonna lie, many times when I read this inspiring work, I have thought to myself, 'I wish I could write like this someday ... maybe someday?'

I read dozens of books prior to my graduate experience, and probably a hundred more just in graduate school ~ and I still have every one of them on my bookshelf. And since graduating, I have read hundreds more. I always have at least one book in progress on my iPad. Even if a book wasn't all that great, I always take at least something useful away from the endeavor. I have learned so much from reading books, it is just hard to imagine my life without them.

As I got into my profession and began sharing information with my clients, one of the questions my clients asked most often, and still do to this day, is: 'Where can I read more about this? Do you have any books you can recommend?' I have come to realize that many of my clients are just like me ~ they love to read too. But, unfortunately, I always balk at this question. The answer is technically no, there is not a book that you can read there are actually hundreds.

The information that I give people is a conglomeration of literally hundreds of books that I've read or listened to over the years, and not just books, but article after article (probably thousands - the Internet is the most wonderful thing that ever happened in terms of finding information that is helpful to learn, grow and develop professionally) and video tapes I have watched tons of them, YouTube, TED talks, etc.

So no, there is *no one book* that you can read that explains what I am telling my clients. I give them a list of my favorites, the books that have been most influential in my own journey. Those will be helpful, and interesting, but won't really support the essence of what I'm telling people. Then, the comment I most often get from them next is - "Well, you should write one.'

And I've thought about that many times. I've actually done a bit more than just thinking about it, I have been writing, here and there wherever I get a chance, since graduate school. And I have really grown to love writing. In fact, in 2010 I *started* writing a handbook. I was a couple years in to my private practice, still building, and a growing so I had a bit more time on my hands back then, my case load wasn't yet full. My plan was to provide my clients with this handbook so they could review what I was telling them in session, and to be able to answer that question about 'a book they could read' with this answer: "Yes, as a matter of fact I have written a manual." My plan was to add a new chapter to cover each of the main issues that I saw coming through my door week after week. If you wander out to my website, TakeChargeCounseling.org, you can find this first attempt under the 'About Us' Header. I made it to chapter 7 in the written format, which was about the time that I gave my infamous Ted talk, which you can view from a link on my home-page, and my course changed. (More about that later on in this book.)

Suddenly I became infatuated with iMovie, and the additional chapters in my *book* that I had planned to write, became *video* chapters, which just seemed so much more exciting than the written manuscript I was working on. So if you are curious as to why the chapters suddenly change to videos, now you know. The time that I had been spending trying to write my handbook was now being dedicated to creating video content. I saw much more value, at the time, in getting my content out on YouTube, then having a static 'handbook' sitting on my website. My TED talk inspired my fascination with video, which led me to learning iMovie and creating video-content, learning to upload to YouTube ~ it was a whole 'thing', you know. So that's what happened to the Handbook.

All the while my practice kept growing, exploding, actually. My plan was always to 'get back to my book - someday'. I kept on writing, but if you know anything about writing,

trying to sit down when you get a few minutes here or there, just doesn't work very well. It is hard to shift gears and get anything meaningful done when your next client is going to arrive in 15 minutes.

After years of trying, I really had nothing but an eclectic set of ideas, filed away in my computer, waiting for the day when I would *have more time*. It was becoming evident, after all these years of trying, that this book was just going to have to wait until retirement. I will be 59 in about a month, still a good 6 years away - or so I thought.

The Pandemic

On March 18, 2020 that all changed in a big way. I walked out of my office, on what was supposed to be the first day of a 10 day Spring vacation to California, a Christmas present from my wife - she had outdone herself on this one. (She's great at surprises, and this one topped all of them. I had no clue.) But two days prior, on March 16, San Francisco, our final destination, had shutdown ~ due to Covid. Little did I know then, but I was walking out of my office for the last time. Five months later, I have done close to 500 virtual sessions from my home-office, and I don't see an end in sight. Experts are still predicting that we are not even close to being half-way through this thing. There is simply no way that I can safely distance in a closed office with a client - period. So until there is a vaccine, or Covid just goes away, this will be the arrangement for me. And quite frankly I love it. I have honestly had some of the best sessions of my career in the past 5 months. My clients are so much more relaxed in their own homes, it is convenient, efficient and effective. Most of my clients love it as well. I have a feeling this is going to be my new normal.

I tell you this partly because someday I hope my grandkids will pick up this book and read about it. Right now they're all too young to understand. But the main reason is to tell you how this all happened. When I left my office on March 18, 2020, I was booked out six weeks, had a waiting list, and a cancellation list. It had been that way for a good number of years. And now what? Like most people in the world I was a bit nervous ... what was going to happen to my practice? And, like most, I was glued to the news at first. It felt a bit like the after-math of 911, drama unfolding right before my eyes every day in the media. Restaurants and places of business suddenly shuttered, staff sent home until further notice, unemployment lines. I remember watching a news clip on March 17, St. Patrick's day, a huge business day for many of our local restaurants and taverns. It was an interview with a local tavern owner who was all geared up for St. Patty's day, ready to sell mountains of corned-beef and other Irish delights and here he was ~ closed for business. But rather than crying in his green beer, he was sending out an open invitation for anyone to drive on over and pick up free food. He was paying his staff to keep working, continuing to prepare, package up and give away his entire inventory of St. Patrick's day offerings. I was inspired. I initially had entertained the idea of calling everyone on my cancellation list and trying to fill my 10-day vacation with appointments, but this news clip changed my mind. I decided instead to follow suit and donate my vacation to the cause. If I was feeling nervous, I reasoned, certainly many of my clients and former clients were feeling it too. They could probably use 'a little help'.

So I donated the next 10 days, 100 hours, to the cause. I set up a special page on my website (<http://takechargecounseling.org/corona>), video-taped a special edition of my educational tapes geared toward the unfolding crisis, and then went to work contacting everyone of my contacts (3000+ individuals) whom I had seen over the past 12 years. I had no idea what kind of response I would get, but I have to say it was nothing short of amazing. In 10 days I had conversations with close to 300 people. As I suspected, this situation was freaking people out a bit. Some of my folks simply responded with encouragement and gratitude, others were almost in a state of panic. Those 10 days flew by, and in the weirdest of ways I have to say that it turned out to be quite possibly the 'best vacation' I have ever had. It was unexpected, and certainly unconventional, but if vacations are 'a break from the norm' and 'a way to energize and refresh', this was one of the best.

NBA-1b-Preface.2

The New Reality

And then ... it was back to reality ~ a new reality that nobody could have foreseen. By the time the 10 days past we were all on lock-down and going back to my office wasn't an option. Like millions of people the world over, I set up shop in my home, and began the arduous task of pivoting my entire booming practice into the virtual space. It was anything but 'business as usual'. Fortunately, most of my clients were flexible and gracious. Like me, they too were thrust into this virtual space. We were all taking a 'crash course' in virtual communication. FaceTime and Zoom became my new office. It was all so surreal.

My core nucleus of clients simply pivoted with me into the virtual world, but I knew that wasn't going to be enough to sustain my practice. Prior to Covid I averaged about 3-5 new inquires a day. That immediately dropped to zero ~ the phones literally quit ringing. It was spooky and scary. The average number of times I see a client is about 5 times, depending on the severity of their issues. After 5 or so sessions, most are 'good to go'. This means that without 'new blood' I was going to be in big trouble. I had visions of having to go stand in the unemployment line with the thousands of Americans they were showing on TV every day. I don't know what was more scary for me, getting Covid or the thought of working for someone else again.

My Come To Jesus Moment

For years I have coached my clients through anxiety and panic, and every last one of those skills was being put to the ultimate test for me. It was a 'come to Jesus' moment for me, for sure. And so I did what I always do, and teach every single one of my clients to do, I grabbed my journal and wrote. I could hardly keep up with all of the thoughts that were going through my head, it was like a torrential downpour.

And, once again, my journaling paid off. As I processed through my own anxieties, quieting them down one-by-one, with the techniques you will learn in this book, I began to realize something, something big. For the first time in years I had some extra time on my hands. There was nothing I could do but sit and wait to see what would happen next ~ and of course ... write, and write, and write. And it soon dawned on me that for all the havoc Covid 19 was wreaking on the world, it had just handed me an opportunity to finish something I had started years ago ~ this book.

So I kept, writing ... every chance I got. And even as my practice started to pick back up, which it finally did after weeks of sweating it out a bit, I kept on writing. I realized that even as I was slowly getting back to full capacity (as I write this, I am now back to a 6 week wait time and a waiting list) I still had an extra 90 minutes every day that the universe had 'gifted me'. My office is a 23 minute commute each way, and by the time I got everything ready for clients in the morning (making coffee, tidying up, checking the bathrooms, etc.) and doing the reverse at night before I left, an hour and a half of time had elapsed, which I now had all to myself.

And ... 5 months, 150 days, 225 hours later I am writing this preface. The end is in sight.

Perception Is Everything

I tell you all of this for several reasons. First I hope it is an interesting story that brings some context and marks a historic year, 2020 ~ the craziest by far of the (almost 59) I have experienced in my life, the year of the pandemic and the year I finally wrote my book. And secondly as a way to introduce a deep truth that I hope becomes very evident to you as you read further ~ *perception is everything*. 2020 could go down as the worst year of my life or the best. For a minute I thought I was going to lose everything I had worked so hard for, and in a very real sense I lost a big chunk. My office, which I am still paying for, is sitting vacant. The vibrant, bustling lobby feels like a ghost town when go over to check on things and get my mail, but my virtual practice has grown on me. Like nearly everyone else I had to get used to doing everything by FaceTime or Zoom, but at 500 sessions in ~ I absolutely love it, and so do most of my clients! Things are not always what they seem or what we predict they might be.

On the grandest level, Covid has been a test of my integrity ~ can I really practice what I preach? Find the silver lining? Look at the bright side? I am proud to say that even though I had my moments, like everyone else, you are holding my 'silver lining' in your hand ~ the gift of time, deposited in my account by the universe, which I have converted into one of my dreams ~ writing this book.

Self-Help Junkie

I love to read, but not just any read, I am a self-proclaimed 'self-help' junkie. I read every self-help, motivational, inspirational, 'reach your full potential', secret to success, book I can get my hands on. I have 142 books from this genre just in my iBooks

account (and, yes, I just counted) alone, and that only dates back to 2012 when I discovered I could read books on my iPhone and iPad. I have a book-shelf in my office loaded with at least 150 more. And those are only the books I own. That doesn't count the dozens of books that I checked out of the library back when I couldn't afford to buy them. And that is just the books. I have read thousands of articles on the internet and watched hundreds of videos on YouTube and the TED website. If someone even mentions a book, or video, I make a note and hunt it down. I download the sample, and if that passes the litmus test, keeps my attention, I purchase. It is my passion.

And, truth be spoken, I have learned more from books, articles and videos, by far, than I have learned anywhere else. My master's program was probably the best program in the State of Indiana (at the time) and perhaps the entire country, but is still only provided a fraction of what I have learned in my profession. And, truthfully, most of what I had to know to pass my state boards is now obsolete information. The time I spent in therapy myself provided just a tiny percentage of the knowledge that I now possess ~ most of it has come from reading. And so I am beyond thrilled to contribute to that body of knowledge with this book.

Join Me In The Effort

But here is the big twist ~ this book is more than just a static collection of information about theories, techniques and strategies, it is an invitation ~ an invitation to join me, and an elite group of individuals that is already forming, who are on a mission to optimize their lives.

My goal with this effort is to bridge the gap between general information that you can get from reading a book, listening to audio, or watching a video and the personal coaching that can only come from personal interaction with someone who is experienced, knows what they are doing, and can show you how to do it yourself.

I will be the first to admit that I have learned far more from books, audio tapes and video tapes than I have learned from a personal connection, be that a therapist, a coach, a professor or anyone showing me exactly how to do something. Yet, even though personal 1:1 conversations have provided just a very small portion of the whole, they have been *absolutely essential*. I would not be here today without it ~ I can promise you that, and I believe I can empirically 'prove' it. Allow me to illustrate ...

Before I go any further, I might as well get this out of the way upfront, here, in the preface ~ I love analogies and metaphors. I think they are a great way to get a point across and help develop a new perspective. This is especially true when it comes to mental skills, which, of course, we cannot see directly. Physical skills, like playing a sport for example, are much more readily observed and understood. The parallel works well because at the neurobiological level, all skill acquisition is exactly the same. In other words, whether I am trying to learn to hit a baseball or trying to learn to 'not get so nervous about something', I have to train my brain with the same strategies and

techniques. Both involve the systematic re-wiring of networks in the brain through consistent practice and repetition to acquire that skill. They are no different.

So when it comes to learning, for example, 'the *kind* of thinking that supports a consistent exercise program or a healthy diet', the 'training and coaching' process is the same. And to illustrate this, I need to give you the back story ~ My Back Story.

NBA2 ~ My Story

I was born in Tucson, AZ and lived there for the first 10 years of my life. From there we moved to Garden Grove, CA, in the heart of Orange County, a 5 minute drive from Disneyland. I was introduced to baseball when I was 5 years old in Little League, T-ball. Growing up in a southern-western climate, sports like baseball were popular ~ especially in California, which produces more professional baseball players than any other state in the US and even beats the Dominican republic, in 2019 there were 216 Californians and 152 Dominicans in the Major League Baseball, Florida came in third with 117 (just in case you were wondering). Needless to say, baseball is a big deal in Southern, CA. My dream was to play professional baseball and I pursued it with a passion. I was pretty darn good in Little League, I never sat the bench and pretty much played every inning of every game. Back in the 70's there was no such thing as 'letting every kid have equal playing time'. I think every kid had to play at least one inning, usually in right field, the least likely place to get a ball hit your way. I played short-stop and I never sat out.

Of course high school was a different story ~ kind of the great equalizer ~ when you realize that 'Little-League-good' is not necessarily 'High School or College-good'. My claim to fame is that I played Little League with Lenny Dykstra, who went on to play for the New York Mets (1985-89) and the Phillies (1989-96). Lenny was 'Little League good' *and* 'Pro-good'. I don't ever remember him making an out in Little League, although I am sure he did. He was like the 'automatic' base-runner, he could lay down a drag bunt and make it to first every single time if he wanted to, or he could hit one over the fence and trot around the bases ~ he was just that much better than everyone else. Me, on the other hand ... not so much. I spent more time on the bench in high-school than I would have liked, which is when I made up my mind to find a small college in the midwest with a decent baseball program. My reasoning was that if I went to the midwest, where you cannot play baseball for 5 months out of the year, I would have a much better chance of making a college team. It worked out beautifully. I found a private college in Southern Minnesota (in case you are wondering, there were 6 professional baseball players from Minnesota in 2019) that had a good baseball program. I made the team and got to play, which is all I really all I wanted to do at that point ~ have the experience of playing college baseball and not sitting the bench. I gave it up after a knee injury at the end of my sophomore season.

One of the things that made me good at the game of baseball is that I somehow learned how to hit the ball to right field batting right handed (remember, that place where they

send the worst kid to play his obligatory inning?) I just happened to learn how to hit that way. And I was so good at it, so I never changed it. I never learned how to 'pull the ball' to left field, which was just fine with me and my coaches. 'Hitting the opposite way', as is it called, was a prized skill ~ something coaches love, so I went with it.

I still played some competitive softball after college for a number of years until I completely blew out my bad knee and had to hang that up for good. It was then that I took up the game of golf. (I really am going somewhere with this story ~ I promise.) The game of golf involves striking a round ball with an object that you swing, just like baseball. From there, however, the similarity to baseball departs significantly. If you know anything about the physics of a swing (and even if you don't, use your imagination) hitting the ball 'the opposite way' in golf is just not a good thing. In baseball it means hitting the ball to right field, in golf it means hitting the ball into a corn field. I had what they call a terrible slice. I could hit the ball just fine, but my 'default' swing sent it off to the right, way off to the right. Now it might seem that it would be simple to correct. I just needed to hit the ball more to the left ~ right? Yeah, right?? Every time I tried that I would just drill the ball into the ground 5 feet from the tee. It wasn't that I didn't know what was wrong, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that the club-face at impact was not perpendicular to my target, but getting it to happen correctly was elusive. I read books, watched videos, took mental notes while watching other good golfers that I played with, and tried to emulate their swing, but to no avail. It was either in the cornfield or in the dirt. I compensated by aiming way to the left and then hoping that my ball would slice back into the fairway. Doing such 'got me by', but I knew it wasn't the optimal way to play the game. I was never going to be more than just an average hacker by playing that way. In the same way many folks compensate with things like their weight ~ they buy bigger clothes, give up on any water activities ~ or won't wear a swim suit, or do any kind of activity like skiing or playing volleyball because they are just too big, or people who take drugs to control blood sugar or cholesterol instead of losing the weight. All of these are compensations.

Professional Help

So finally, after years of trying to figure it out on my own, I spent the money and hired a professional. After 5 lessons my golf game was on a completely different trajectory. I wasn't yet golfing good after 5 lessons, oh heck no, but I was at least 'practicing the correct swing'.

And here is the real heart of this analogy, *I never would have learned the correct swing without the help of a professional.* I can assure you that. The correct swing felt so unnatural when I tried it that I can guarantee I would have never stuck with it unless I trusted the professional, which I did because he could easily demonstrate what he was telling me and hit shot after shot right down the fairway. I trusted him because he proved right before my eyes that he could do it himself.

This is such a key point here ~ as much as I tried to learn it myself from books and videos, I was never going to get all the way there without a professional. He watched

me swing, analyzed quickly what I was doing wrong, and showed me exactly what I needed to change to get my club face square at impact. It was a completely different feel from the swing that I had been using since I was 5 years old, which yielded great success in baseball. But, and this is huge too, had I not learned so much about the golf swing already by trying myself, reading everything I could get my hands on and watching videos, I don't think those 5 lessons would have done much of anything *either*.

I needed all of the knowledge I had gleaned from experience, books and videos, plus the assistance of a professional who not only understood the game, but knew how to explain, teach and coach others, to finally pull it all together.

But the opposite is also true, had I just gone to the professional first, I never would have gotten that kind of result. I believe we need to do both.

Perfect Practice

But that still didn't get me to where I wanted to be. I had the knowledge, and the mechanics, but I still had the practice and repetition ahead of me. When I was concentrating very hard I could make the correct shot happen, but it took every ounce of concentration and it felt very weird. The only thing that kept me going was the fact that when I did it the right way, as weird as it felt, I got the result I wanted. The minute I lost concentration, my old, comfortable, slice would reappear and the ball would spray off to the right. I was almost in a worse position at first. At least with my old swing I could trust what the ball would do, it was predictable, and I could aim way left to compensate. With this new swing, I had to aim straight, and really concentrate, feeling awkward and unnatural. I would hit a few good shots and then spray the rest. It was so frustrating. I was tempted to go back to my old swing and just settle for being a hacker.

And then one day I took a different route to work and drove past a golf course that I had passed many times before, but never noticed that there was a driving range off to the side. It wasn't your typical driving range, it was just a small area where I saw a guy hitting range balls. I stopped to see what he was doing. He had his own shag bag, and was hitting and collecting his own balls. I didn't know the range even existed. There was really only room for one or two people, and it wasn't very long either. You couldn't practice your drives, but you could comfortably hit a 4 or 5 iron. The guy who was hitting balls was the golf pro. His father had built the course, and added this little private range for himself, a place to tune-up his own swing before playing a round ~ not really meant for public use, which is why I had never noticed it before. This got me excited. It was about 5 minutes away from my work and I had to take a mandatory lunch break. I could get here and back from work in 10 minutes leaving 15-20 minutes to hit a shag-bag of balls and pick them up. So I simply asked if that would even be a possibility? His answer was: "Sure, no one hardly ever uses it. That's what it's here for. Help yourself."

I bought a shag-bag and some range ball on the way home that evening. I had just enough time on my lunch hour, to drive to the course, hit the 50 balls in my bag, pick

them back up and get back to work. So I started going there every-single-day and focusing hard on just hitting one club each day. That way I could really focus on swinging just that one club, and theoretically the balls would be in a tighter group out on the range for quicker pick up. By the time I drove there and took a few warm-up swings, I had about 15 minutes to practice and 5 minutes to retrieve the balls. That gave me about 20 seconds per shot. Little did I know at the time, but this is the 'high intensity focused practice', conducted in relatively short intervals, like 15", that produces tremendous results when done consistently ~ as in every single day.

By the end of that summer May-September, at 15 minutes a day, 2250 minutes, 37.5 hours (just over a day and a half = 36 hours) I had hit about 7000 balls. But it wasn't just any old practice, it was the *perfect practice*, focusing intently on what the professional had showed me. That's what it took in the end. I never would have figured that out no matter how many books I would've read, or how hard I would've tried. I needed someone who new what they were doing to observe what I was doing, correctly analyze my non-productive swing, reconstruct my swing, and then I had to practice the productive swing, over and over, 15 minutes per day for 5 months in a row, using 'high intensity interval training' techniques. In the gym these are know as HIIT workouts.

I learned a valuable lesson that summer:

- There is no substitute for a coach that knows what he's doing to analyze your swing for you.
- Practice doesn't help, only the perfect practice will help.
- Practicing the perfect practice, consistently, daily, for months on end, is the ticket.
- 15 minutes a day is plenty of time to learn a new skill as long as you do it long enough.

A Little Help

Do you think it would've worked as well to practice for five hours a day, for seven days (35 hours)? Absolutely not. Or how about two hours a day for 18 days? Nope. 15 minutes, of concentrated practice, every day for five months - that is what did the trick. I didn't need some kind of an intense 'golf therapy program', I just needed a little help.

Now this might sound strange coming from a therapist, who is currently running a private practice that is bursting at the seams, but ... you probably don't need therapy either. Most of my clients don't. They don't need to make an appointment, drive somewhere, sit in a waiting room, get ushered into an office, answer questions for an hour, sign consents, be diagnosed and then proceed to get 'therapized' by a well meaning 'therapist', who may well think it is her job to just listen and reflect. They don't need that at all. They just need a little help. Like my golf instructor, an experienced professional who can quickly analyze errant thinking, that is almost impossible for a

client to determine himself, make the adjustments and show them exactly what to practice.

In fact, most people don't even need to schedule a time to meet with me at all. 'A little help' can be delivered in a myriad of ways. There is always the virtual meeting, phone, FaceTime or Zoom, but those require scheduled appointments. The most efficient and effective way to 'give a little help' is by exchanging voice-messages or video-messages, which are nothing more than the verbal version of a text message or email. By eliminating the schedule, yet retaining all of the valuable nuances of verbal communication, 'a little help' can be delivered in a highly effective and highly efficient manner and can be accomplished right from your smart phone, anywhere, anytime. All of this for a fraction of the cost of conventional therapy.

Integrating The Principles ~ A Revolutionary Concept

Think of it this way: When you read a book or listen to it on tape, no matter how good the information might be, you are still left with the task of integrating the concepts, principles and strategies into your own life, right? And even with the plethora of examples one could give, it is highly unlikely that you will find one that fits your life situation exactly. And even if it did, the likelihood that you can implement such in your own thinking is low. It is simply that difficult to examine our own thinking without the help of an experienced, objective observer.

But lets just suppose that when you set about to implement the principles and strategies you have just read about, you also have the option to contact the author of the book, give him a brief rundown on your own situation and he, in turn, creates a customized 'chapter' tailored to your issues, complete with unlimited personal virtual coaching until you get the hang of it, whether it takes 5 lessons or 50 lessons. How does that grab you? It's a game-changer. And that pretty much describes my PVC platform, which is the integrative part of this book.

This is the revolutionary concept of this book: part bibliotherapy and part virtual therapy, a proprietary blend of written, audio, and video-taped communications that allow for direct interaction with the author. No more getting excited about a concept, or set of principles that 'sound good on paper', but then just don't materialize in your life. No more reading a book and then having it gather dust on the night stand. This changes all of that.

My objective is to take the best of both worlds ~ biblio therapy and talk therapy and blend them into a unique platform that catapults you over that last hurdle. My guess is that like most of my clients you have read plenty of inspiring and motivating books, and gathered many good ideas along the way ~ you are almost there, but you just need 'a little help' to finally pull it all together. And this book, plus the invitation to become a member of PVC, my propriety Premium Virtual Counseling/Coaching entity, is just that ~ great information and 'a little help'.

NBA3 ~ A Momentum Book

Bibliotherapy is a term applied to the approach of employing books and other forms of literature, along side traditional forms of talk therapy, to support a client's journey and goals. Though bibliotherapy can encompass any genre or theme, I prefer to encourage books that are motivational and inspiring.

1. Unbeatable Mind ~ Mark Divine
2. Ultra Mindset ~ Travis Macy
3. You Are A Bad Ass ~ Jen Sincero
4. Tools Of Titans ~ Timothy Ferriss
5. The Four Hour Work Week ~ Timothy Ferriss
6. Take The Stairs ~ Rory Vaden
7. The Subtle Art Of Not Giving A Fuck ~ Mark Manson
8. Quitter ~ John Acuff
9. Outliers ~ Malcolm Gladwell
10. Learned Optimism ~ Martin Seligman
11. The Happiness Advantage ~ Sean Achor
12. Can't Hurt Me ~ David Goggins
13. Barking Up The Wrong Tree ~ Eric Barker
14. Awaken The Giant Within ~ Tony Robbins
15. 10% Happier ~ Dan Harris
16. Girl Wash Your Face ~ Rachel Hollis
17. The Talent Code ~ Daniel Coyle
18. With Winning In Mind ~ Lanny Bassham

Here are just 18 of the hundreds I have in my library. As I perused my library, these are the ones that jumped out at me. These books are a rather eclectic set of reads that have all inspired me in some way. The authors range from hard-core Navy SEALs to funny and insightful business women and olympic medalists, and everything in between. I can't compete with any of these authors, many of whom write for a living (or can afford to hire 'ghost writers' to assist in bringing their story to life and making it interesting). But that is not my objective anyway, that is be funny and clever, but I will do my level best to be interesting. I want you to read all of these books and more ~ read as much as you can. I rely on these authors to keep me motivated and I want them to keep you motivated as well.

Motivation is the fuel that makes change possible, but it takes a bit more than motivation to pull it all together, keep it together and ultimately transform your life. This is where this book fits into the picture. It is not designed to be ***motivational (designed to promote the desire and willingness to do something)***, but rather to be ***'momentumal'***. (So, yes, in case you are wondering, I have created my own genre of books: ***'Momentumal (designed to promote the ability keep doing something)'***~ I checked *Google* and *Webster*, and this adjective does not exist. As far as I can tell it is an original.) Motivation gets one moving, momentum keeps one moving.

Self-Help Junkie

If you are a 'self-help' junkie, like me, then you probably already know the drill: Someone tells you about a book that 'you just need to read'. You pick it up and start to get all excited as you read. The author deftly draws you into the 'story' and pretty soon you 'can't put the book down'. It seems like the book was written just for you. As you read the narratives about grit, determination, self-discipline, rising from the ashes, the come-back stories of the most unlikely to succeed rising to the top, you begin to insert yourself in the narrative, imagining that this could be you too and anxiously anticipating the part of the book that reveals the secret to such success. It is generally the same narrative that so many authors follow, but 'this time' there seems to be a new twist. This time you really feel inspired to become the best version of yourself, to beat the odds. That is what reading books, watching movies, and most other forms of literature do to the human soul. Humans have that capacity to be moved, and motivated, inspired by imagination to vicariously insert ourselves in someone else's story and for a brief time we really feel like we have found the secret, the missing link, the mother-lode, the holy grail of success and change ... and then what happens? ... You know the rest of the story. Your 'white-hot' motivation slowly starts to cool off. The Badass you felt like in the beginning eventually wanes to, well, just plain old Lazy-ass. And once again, you are disappointed in your self.

Take one my latest reads for instance: *Can't Hurt Me* ~ by David Goggins. I will try not to spoil the book for you, it's a pretty decent read. David is a 45-year-old retired Navy SEAL and is the only member of the U.S. Armed Forces to complete SEAL training, the U.S. Army Ranger School and Air Force Tactical Air Controller training. He has a 'more than impressive' resume of athletic achievements, including the Badwater Ultramarathon, the worlds toughest foot race. It is a 135-mile course starting at 279 feet below sea level in the Badwater Basin, in California's Death Valley, and ending at an elevation of 8360 feet at Whitney Portal, the trailhead to Mount Whitney that is over a mile and a half above sea level. Denver is at a mile above (5280 feet) and people get altitude sickness in Denver!! Badwater is Badass for sure. I would consider David's book to be mostly autobiography. He basically tells his story ~ and it is a good one. I love Navy SEAL stories anyway. Anyone who can survive that training has earned the right to say something about mental toughness and forging ahead against all odds. Just to be a SEAL is impressive and inspiring and when they share what kind of 'thinking' it takes to make it, I am all ears. I tell my clients all the time ~ the strategies I am going to teach you have been used in the SEALs program since its inception ~ albeit minus the physical torture. If you want to win in the game of life, you must learn to think like a SEAL.

Excerpt from David Goggin's ~ Cant' Hurt Me

I will tell you this one little part of the book. I just have to in order to make my point here.

At a pivotal point in his life, David, who has cheated and lied, tried to skate his way through life, acting as a self-proclaimed gang banger, has come to the realization that he can't even pass the Air Force entry exam, because he can't cheat on it. He's looking in the mirror and he just starts talking out loud to himself in the mirror and says this: (If you are going to read the books and hate spoilers, just skip the next section in italics.)

That night, after taking a shower, I wiped the steam away from our corroded bathroom mirror and took a good look. I didn't like who I saw staring back. I was a low-budget thug with no purpose and no future. I felt so disgusted I wanted to punch that motherfucker in the face and shatter glass. Instead, I lectured him. It was time to get real.

"Look at you," I said. "Why do you think the Air Force wants your punk ass? You stand for nothing. You are an embarrassment."

I reached for the shaving cream, smoothed a thin coat over my face, unwrapped a fresh razor and kept talking as I shaved.

"You are one dumb motherfucker. You read like a third grader. You're a fucking joke! You've never tried hard at anything in your life besides basketball, and you have goals? That's fucking hilarious."

After shaving peach fuzz from my cheeks and chin, I lathered up my scalp. I was desperate for a change. I wanted to become someone new.

"You don't see people in the military sagging their pants. You need to stop talking like a wanna-be-gangster. None of this shit is gonna cut it! No more taking the easy way out! It's time to grow the fuck up!"

Steam billowed all around me. It rippled off my skin and poured from my soul. What started as a spontaneous venting session had become a solo intervention.

"It's on you," I said. "Yeah, I know shit is fucked up. I know what you've been through. I was there, bitch! Merry fucking Christmas. Nobody is coming to save your ass! Not your mommy, not Wilmoth. Nobody! It's up to you!"

By the time I was done talking, I was shaved clean. Water pearled on my scalp, streamed from my forehead, and dripped down the bridge of my nose. I looked different, and for the first time, I'd held myself accountable. A new ritual was born, one that stayed with me for years. It would help me get my grades up, whip my sorry ass into shape, and see me through graduation and into the Air Force.

The ritual was simple. I'd shave my face and scalp every night, get loud, and get real. I set goals, wrote them on Post-It notes, and tagged them to what I now call

the Accountability Mirror, because each day I'd hold myself accountable to the goals I'd set. At first my goals involved shaping up my appearance and accomplishing all my chores without having to be asked.

The Accountability Mirror kept me on point from then on, and though I was still young when this strategy came through me, since then I've found it useful for people at any stage in life. You could be on the cusp of retirement, looking to reinvent yourself. Maybe you're going through a bad break-up or have gained weight. Perhaps you're permanently disabled, overcoming some other "

"injury, or are just coming to grips with how much of your life you've wasted, living without purpose. In each case, that negativity you're feeling is your internal desire for change, but change doesn't come easy, and the reason this ritual worked so well for me was because of my tone.

I wasn't fluffy. I was raw because that was the only way to get myself right.

Excerpt From: David Goggins. "Can't Hurt Me." Apple Books. <https://books.apple.com/us/book/cant-hurt-me/id1446028392>

A Cognitive Selfie - Your Course To Greatness

It occurred to me as I was reading this excerpt that essentially David was touting the very thing that I am promoting.

A cognitive selfie, which you will learn about in this book, is simply a high tech version of David staring in the mirror and talking to himself. Obviously you can't carry your bathroom mirror around with you, and it would get a little weird to be standing in the men's room at work giving your self some kind of a lecture or pep-talk design to get you motivated.

Ah, but you can have such a thing on video tape, on your phone, that you could watch and listen to, if you have a pair of earbuds handy, literally anywhere.

David gives examples of the kinds of things he told himself in the mirror. One should be able to just copy these down and say the exact same things to himself, right? Of course not. Those pieces of narrative resonated with David because of 'where he was in his life, what his experiences were, where he wanted to go and how David talked to David'.

How did David figure out just what David needed to hear from David in order to change the course of his life? This is an integral part of this book. Teaching you how to figure out exactly what you need to hear from yourself to begin charting your course to greatness, just as David did. He is living proof that the human mind can do amazing things, once we learn exactly what we need to 'hear from ourselves'.

Now, I wouldn't recommend necessarily calling yourself a punk ass, saying you stand for nothing, that you are an embarrassment, one dumb motherfucker, and a fucking joke ... those admonishments don't work for me, but I am not David ~ and that is the whole point! David needed to figure out how to talk to David, Miles needed to figure out how to talk to Miles and the same goes for you!

Loosely translated, here was David's message to self - 'You are far from where you want to be in life. Thinking, feeling and behaving the way you are right now is going to keep you right where you are.' That is the admonishment to self.

He continues on by making comparisons between his own current thinking and behavior and that of people he aspires to be. He acknowledges that it's going to be hard, and that taking the easy way out has gotten him nowhere. And he acknowledges that it is completely up to him.

Exactly what one might say to himself, in the Accountability Mirror, or into the video camera of one's own cell phone, must be carefully constructed to fit the individual exactly. Most people don't know how to get their new narrative started, and you simply cannot borrow someone else's.

Doing it Davids way, talking to the man in the mirror every morning, is certainly powerful, but I believe having it on video has some major advantages. First of all, as I pointed out, once you have taped your own 'man in the mirror' narrative you can literally view it just about anywhere. And for most people starting out, you would want them to view it at least three times a day. Morning noon and night ~ the first thing you hear after you wake up the last thing you hear before you go to bed and at least one more time in between. And if you make one video with intensity you don't have to try and summon that intensity over and over again every morning. Watching the video brings that intensity back into your neurological networks by just watching and thinking along. You will have the same internal physiological reaction as if you were intently lecturing your self for real.

Secondly, you are not going to be leaving things out. Trying to remember what you want to say, or come up with something new to say every day, is not nearly as good as practicing the perfect practice, the same way, every day. Using video, you can work on this 'man in the mirror narrative' until you get it exactly right, and then you can tape it until you get the one 'take' that has the proper intensity and conviction ~ the best take. And that's the one you want to listen to, multiple times every day. This way you bring the intensity by simply hitting play and following along. This is taking advantage of brain science. The intensity you brought to create the video will be neuro-biologically and neuro-chemically re-created by just viewing it a cool little brain hack, one of many you will learn in this book.

I love books like this ~ (Can't Hurt Me). They truly bring the motivation. The story is captivating and compelling. My specialty is to take this motivation and turn it into momentum by focusing on the technique. The idea of talking 'to the man in the mirror' really works, but only if you are saying the right things to yourself. I guess you could

say that my entire book fits neatly inside this one intervention that David describes. My objective is to thoroughly dissect the 'Accountability Mirror' and explain the history, philosophy, theory, strategy, neurobiology, brain function and integration of this seemingly simple little habit. There is more to it than meets the eye, that is for sure.

David demonstrates that there is really no ceiling to human potential, and I agree wholeheartedly. If we can think it and dream it, we can live it and breathe it. The thought of that excites me every single time. Some things just never get old.

NBA 4a ~ Just Do It

On the evening of July 19, 1976, Gary Gilmore walked into a gas station in Orem, Utah, robbed Max Jensen, the only employee on duty, and then shot him with a 22 caliber pistol - even though Max had willingly complied with Gary's demands. 24 hours later he did the same thing to a motel manager in Provo. Gary accidentally shot himself in the hand during the second murder, which left a blood trail, drew some attention, and ultimately allowed police to track him down. These murders marked the end of an extensive life of crime for Gary that began with stealing cars as a teenager.

Although murder is obviously a most heinous offense, these crimes would have been largely forgotten save for one small twist, Gary was found guilty and the jury recommended the death penalty. Well, that wasn't actually the whole twist - Gary wasn't the first person to be sentenced to death, but he would become the first person in almost 10 years to actually be executed in the United States. And the kicker ~ Gary didn't even want to get out of it, in fact he gained international attention for demanding that the death sentence be carried out.

Against his expressed wishes, Gilmore received several stays of execution through the efforts of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). At a Board of Pardons hearing in November 1976, Gilmore said of the efforts by the ACLU (and others) to prevent his execution: "They always want to get in on the act. I don't think they have ever really done anything effective in their lives. I would like them all — including that group of reverends and rabbis from Salt Lake City — to butt out. This is my life and this is my death. It's been sanctioned by the courts that I die and I accept that."

Gilmore was executed on January 17, 1977, at 8:07 a.m. by firing squad at Utah State Prison in Draper, Utah. Gilmore was transported to an abandoned cannery behind the prison, which served as its death house. He was strapped to a chair, with a wall of sandbags placed behind him to trap the bullets. Five gunmen, local police officers, stood concealed behind a curtain with five small holes, through which they aimed their rifles. When asked for any last words, Gilmore simply replied, "Let's do it." It is rumored that he didn't even flinch when the bullets ripped into his chest.

Perhaps it was the fact that it was the first execution in 10 years, or that Gary had such a stoic resolve to accept his own fate, **or both**, but his execution captured the attention of the nation. 2 years later, in 1979, Norman Mailer published **The Executioners Song**, a novel based on Gary's life that won a Pulitzer prize and was later made into a movie.

Just over a decade later, in 1988, Dan Wieden, an advertising executive who co-founded the Wieden-Kennedy agency in Portland, Ore., made something of a morbid pitch to Nike sports-wear company. Long before Nike became a dominant sports and fashion brand, Nike was struggling, failing to keep pace with the more fitness-focused approach of Reebok. Like Gary Gilmore, Wieden was a Portland native. He remembered the crimes and the bizarre ending, and this gave him an idea.

Wieden said in the 2009 documentary “Art & Copy” that he looked at the phrase “lets do it” and used it as the inspiration for his pitch to Nike, the catch phrase ~ “Just Do It”. Certainly, it wasn't a question of Dan being inspired by Gary Gilmore's actions, but rather, it was about the ultimate statement of intention - Dan knew a good pitch had to be personal, it had to be powerful and to the point. Dan had a hunch this was it.

Dan approached Nike co-founder Phil Knight with the idea. Phil at first replied with: ‘We don't need that shit.’ However, Dan was persistent and finally convinced Phil to: ‘Just trust him on this one.’ So Phil gave him a shot, and the rest, as they say, is history.

One of the first ads in 1988 for “Just Do It” featured Walt Stack, an 80-year-old marathon runner in San Francisco. Walt is jogging across the Golden Gate bridge and as the camera pans in, Walt quips: People ask me how I keep my teeth from chattering in this weather ~ I leave them in my locker.” As the camera pans out ‘Just Do It’ appears on the screen. Pretty dang engaging!

From there, “Just Do It” would become the company's signature slogan, helping to turn a niche brand into a global multibillion-dollar giant and etching the phrase so indelibly into the global memory that it's almost interchangeable with the brand itself.

In 2018, 30 years later, the slogan took another surprising turn. It was announced that Colin Kaepernick, the NFL free agent quarterback, whose kneeling during the national anthem in protest of police shootings of unarmed black men ignited a national controversy, would be the face for the 30th-anniversary campaign celebrating Nike's “Just Do It” slogan. The news came as Kaepernick, who was possibly heading to court for his collusion grievance against the NFL, signed a new multiyear deal to keep him with Nike. “Believe in something,” the ad stated. “Even if it means sacrificing everything.

So why do I care about the slogan? It just so happens that those 3 words ‘Just Do It’ also happen to be the back-half of a question, a 6-word question, that has been uttered to me, more than any other question ~ by a wide margin ~ in the hallowed confines of my private practice: Why can't I Just Do It? As in ~ I know I need to exercise and/or eat better. I know **exactly** what to do ~ why can't I just do it??

Usually through tears, most times in frustration, often with huge helpings of Self-condescension and self-deprecation and always in a state of perplexion, as in, What the hell is wrong with me??

Turns out - nothing. The reason you can't just do it, is because nobody can just do it. And there isn't 'a' reason that nobody can, there are dozens of reasons that nobody can just do it. And that is what this book is all about ~ the myriad of reasons why a human being can't simply 'just do it' when it comes to change ~ changes in thought, emotion and behavior are so much more involved than 'just doing it' that it is almost laughable that one might think one can.

But of course that isn't the whole story. What the heck good would be book be that just explains all the reasons you can't just do it? Right?? I also go to great lengths to explain how it can ultimately 'be done'. There is a big difference between 'just doing it' and 'actually getting it done' and that difference lies in knowledge, strategy, technique, brain science, and a lot of practice ~ not just any old practice, but the perfect practice. If there is one thing I have learned about the human brain over the past 2 decades it is this: the brain is diametrically opposed to change. The brain has been engineered, incredibly well-engineered by the way, to not change ~ but rather to stay the same, to hold a steady state, to maintain homeostasis ~ at all costs.

I have a little 'saying' that I like to lay on my clients: "People say change is hard, but they are wrong about that. Change isn't hard ~ it is almost impossible." Sure it is tongue in cheek, but it is also spot on.

When it comes to change no human being on the planet is capable of just doing it ~ not a single one. Change is slow, deliberate, meticulous & hard and it takes ~ well, literally forever. And if you don't have a powerful, set of proven, scientific, systemic strategies at your disposal, then change is probably out of the question. The only thing that you are likely to 'just do' is 'just stay the same'.

The idea of 'just doing it' is very sexy and appealing ~ and has sold millions of sneakers ~ I totally get it! It is tempting to try, but it fails every time. And I don't know about you, but I hate failure ~ there is nothing I hate more than failure. So that last thing I am going to tell you is 'just do it', or any other derivative of the idea that something can be accomplished by just simply deciding to do it. Deciding only gets you in the starting block ~ it is only step one of dozens, specific, defined, detailed, intentional, guided and practiced steps that must be repeated until your neurons bleed. Change is actually complicated, if you want the truth. (And if you don't want the truth, then just gently put this book back on the shelf and step away.)

NBA-4b ~ My Truth

This book is about the truth ~ my truth. I have spent 2 decades discovering the 'truth' about change and I am ready to share it at all costs. This book challenges existing paradigms, blasts away at conventional wisdom and exposes some of the most widely held beliefs for the myths they really are. It is a compilation of years of experience, research and empirical studies. I have seen more pain and anguish experienced by my clientele in the name of half-baked axioms that keep people hopelessly stuck in the quagmire of fallacious idioms like 'just do it'.

But I am really not here to rail against the establishment, because there is one thing I hate almost as much as failure and that is wasting somebody's time. I don't have time to hunt down every useless idea or expression, rather I am going to spend my time, and yours if you are reading this book, leading you, teaching you, coaching you and imploring you to spend your time learning, creating and practicing a systematic strategy that not only demonstrates very lucidly why you can't 'just do it', but also clearly demonstrates the tedious and exacting tactics to make the almost-impossible ... well ... possible.

Dan Weiden hit the lotto with his award-winning campaign 'just do it'. 'Just do it' drives an emotion that is pretty much universally human. It captures the imagination and taps into the core of human desire. It feels powerful to entertain the idea that we are just a mere decision away from 'doing it'. Such notions are, unfortunately, just that ... notions. Most attempts at 'just doing it' are failures just waiting to happen.

But there is an answer ... a logical, scientific answer ... to the question: 'Why can't I just do it?' And the answer is security. That's right ~ the very reason one 'can't just do it' is for our own protection. The human brain has an elaborate security system designed to make sure that nothing gets changed without proper authorization, and the route to obtaining such authorization might surprise you. It is actually elegantly simple for such a highly sophisticated system ~ repetition. That's it! Simple, but far from easy. Changes to the system must be properly vetted in a procedure that is most commonly known as Neuro-Linguistic Programming, NLP for short. Until someone invents a biological chip (and they are in the works), or a way to electronically or magnetically manipulate the firing of synaptic networks in the human brain, language remains the only programming tool available to make changes in the human operating system.

This book is about learning the most basic programming language of the human brain and applying powerful psychological strategies to get the job done. No magic, no mystique, no gimmicks, just pure, proven strategies to upgrade your experience of life. 'It's about believing in something, without sacrificing anything.' To quote Gary Gilmore: "This is your life, and you have to accept that" ... how do you want your life to be?

And if that all sounds 'too good to be true, I would like to make you a deal. I am the kind of guy that will say to anyone who is trying to explain something to me: "Prove it." Don't just tell me something is true, back it up. Give me the evidence. Make it make sense to me. I am this way to a fault, and thus I naturally expect that my clients will be this way also. So here is the deal: Let me try and prove it and back it up. Let me show you the evidence, explain the process and make it make sense. And if I can't, then just drop me a line and I will gladly reimburse you ~ not only for the book itself, but the time you wasted reading as far as you did. And I really do mean that. The only thing that I will require from you for reimbursement is a short paragraph or two explaining, briefly, what didn't make sense and why. That's it. I think that's a fair deal.

But before I close the introduction, let me say one last thing. This book is so much more than a book, it is really an invitation to an exclusive membership. The purchase of this book grants you the opportunity to become a member of an elite club of folks who are all on a mission to do one thing ~ optimize this thing we call life. No matter how great this book may be (or any book for that matter), what you read (or hear if it is an audible or video) is only going to take you so far. To get the rest of the way there, you need me (or someone like me) to personally coach you the rest of the way.

If you have any familiarity with self-help or inspirational/motivational books, then you probably already know that the information contained therein is meant for the broader audience. The book is not written expressly for you and your life. You, as the reader, are left to operationalize the principles expounded in the book and integrate them into your own life. This is where therapy or coaching comes in. A good therapist does just that. But a good therapist, or life coach, is hard to come by sometimes, and usually quite expensive ~ right. And where do you find the right one?

Up until now, those answers were hard to find, but no more ~ I am right here, ready to coach you, personally. But not as your therapist, or life coach, but rather as your personal author. That's right, I am offering to write and re-write the principles of each chapter to make them fit your life ~ exactly. No more wondering, guessing and ultimately failing. With this book, and a nominal monthly agreement, the author (me) becomes the coach as well. You send me your story and I help you to re-write each situation to fit your life. Think of it as your own personalized book with you as the main character.

With my proprietary platform, as a member you will get your own personalized version of 'supplemental' chapters and sub-chapters written to meet your specific needs. It's as if the book has come to life and you are interacting with it, you are in the book. And I will do this by sending you audible chapters, custom designed to address your specific difficulties and desires.

Further in, I will explain the platform in detail, but for now just think of the offering as having your own personal author 'on retainer' to 'write' as many subsequent 'chapters' of your 'personal self help book' as you desire or require. How many (you might ask)? However many you need. And for how long? Until you get to where you want to be ~ Period.

One final comment: In this game we call life there is one thing you must know about me ~ I play for keeps. I will stop at nothing to obtain, maintain and sustain the optimal way of living for myself and anyone who wishes to come along for the ride. I have done the math and I figure that at any one time I can take about 250 people along for the ride. This means that my membership is capped at 250. Once in, you can stay in for life if you like. Once out, you must stay out until a slot opens up ~ if one ever does.

Playing for keeps means commitment and being serious for the long haul. I want 250 dead serious players who want to win at this game and are willing to pay a good coach to win. I am not asking you for a life-time commitment, that is completely up to you. You can drop out any time you like, but I am quite sure the waiting list to get back in will be long.

At this juncture I am about 1/3 of the way there, and I just barely got started. So if you are so inclined, don't delay ~ inquire today!

NBA-5 ~ I Don't Need This Shit

"I don't need this shit." This is exactly what ran through my head as I was looking at the syllabus for one of my theories courses at the beginning of my second semester in grad school. I had just spent several hundred dollars at the bookstore, prior to heading for class, and as I looked at the syllabus, I saw what was now appearing to be a trend ~ several assignments of this nature ~ 'to read a book that I had purchased and write a reflection paper', which amounted to a 3-5 page paper 'reflecting' on what I had read.

I had already figured out how that worked during the first semester. I diligently and dutifully read the books that had been earmarked for such, and painstakingly pounded out a 3-5 page paper on the subject matter. When I got each paper back, it was exciting to see the A or A+ on the title page, with some comments about how good the paper was, but then as I scanned the rest of the paper for comments or corrections there were none. The professor had simply read the paper, put an A on the front page and made a few comments. Really? I got to wondering if he even read it??

It just rubbed me the wrong way. I am paying a lot of money for this education and this is how you educate at this level? Have someone read a book, write a reflection paper, and slap a grade on it? This just seemed like some lazy educating to me. Hell, I could do that myself, right? And so I was feeling a bit steamed about noticing that 3 of the dozen books I had just paid an arm and a leg for, were simply going to be used for 'reading and reflection'.

One of those books was *The Feeling Good Handbook*, by Dr. David Burns. It was clearly a 'self-help' book ~ not something I would expect in a graduate program. And the kicker was that the reflection paper assignment for this particular book had some special instructions: Choose one of the interventions described in the book, apply it to a problem in your own life, and then write about it. Really? The book appeared cheesy, the assignment sounded lame, and I automatically thought: "I just don't need this shit." I am a 38-year-old man, recently married to my second wife, blending a family of 6 kids, ages 4-13 at the time, 3 boys, 3 girls. My wife works full time, and I am working full time AND completing my masters, on campus, sitting in 4-hour lectures every evening, after working all day and trying to keep up with a busy brood that was involved in everything from dance and gymnastics to Little League. Weekends were filled to the max. Getting my homework done and studying for exams kept me plenty busy. I didn't have time for this 'bullshit' kind of assignment that really amounted to

reading something on my own and writing a paper to prove that I read it. Hell, I could do that without spending \$40 grand.

So it was with that attitude that I dove into *The Feeling Good Handbook* one Friday evening to begin working on the assignment. My plan was to read far enough to get the gist of what this guy was saying, then skip ahead to one of these interventions, figure out how it was done and then make up some bullshit story about how I applied it to my life. Yep, that was the plan alright.

But as I began reading the book, my plan started to dissolve. It was actually rather interesting. Unlike the many other books I was forced to purchase and read, this one was different ~ it was easy to read. Books chosen for a graduate program are generally rather academic. They feature big ideas, written by big egos, with big vocabularies. I am a fairly intelligent guy and I shouldn't have to have a thesaurus handy just to figure out what this intellectual is trying to say, but that was the case with most of the manuscripts. Not so with Dr. Burns ~ and rightly so. His book wasn't written for academia, but rather for common folk, ordinary people with ordinary vocabularies who just want to be able to understand what they are reading and don't really give a crap about an impressive lexicon.

A Refreshing Read

It was actually quite refreshing to read something that was so understandable and really made a lot of sense. So I aborted my original plan and just kept right on reading until I got to the 'intervention' part of the book. I still was toying with the idea of making something up just to get it done, but I was also considering actually giving it a legitimate go. Monday morning rolled around and I still hadn't decided what I wanted to write about, but I had read most of the book and was intrigued by various interventions David had proposed for rationalizing ones own thinking. I still had another week before the paper was due, but I was thinking about it. Now all I needed to do was decide on an upsetting event to serve as the subject on my experiment.

As I backed out of the driveway, I glanced at my lawn. I hadn't gotten a chance to mow it over the weekend and it looked like hell. It was over-grown, full of weeds and really an eye-sore, especially against the back-drop of my neighbor's perfectly manicured lawns, both to my left and right and across the street. In that moment I really felt inferior. Why the hell hadn't I taken the time to at least mow it and level out the weeds, even if I didn't have time to trim. What would it have taken me? 20 minutes? Tops??

Now of course I realized that I was 'upset with myself' for not having just taken the time to do it, and ordinarily I would have just blown it off and driven to work in a foul mood and blamed it on being a Monday. But having just read a good portion of the Burns book, and having some of his techniques fresh in my mind, I decided to take a closer look at what I was thinking. What were the thoughts, if any, lurking beneath the surface of the main thought: I am just pissed at myself. I thought about it for a minute, and at

first concluded ~ I got nothing! ~ I am just pissed at myself, case closed. But then I heard Dr. Burns 'voice' in my head saying: And why is that so upsetting to you? And what does that mean? And all of a sudden it hit my like a lightening bolt. It was upsetting because of what the neighbors are probably thinking. And what are they probably thinking (I thought to myself)? Well ... that I am a lazy low-life? That if that is all the better I am going to keep my lawn I should be in a trailer park? That they have worked so hard to keep their lawns immaculate and here is mine, making the neighborhood look bad. And that opened the flood gates in my head.

My Cognitive Distortions

In my mind's eye I could see my neighbors, gathered in the street, looking at my lawn and shaking their heads, discussing how they 'wished I had never moved in' with my loud brood of kids and my lazy-ass attitude about home-ownership. I imagined them petitioning to have us removed from the neighborhood if we couldn't do a better job of keeping up the property. I heard all the should've(s), could've(s) and would've(s). Should have just taken 20 minutes. Could've avoided the embarrassment of my neighbors looking down on me. Would've kept my name and reputation in good standing. And the emotional reasoning ~ I feel lazy, therefore I must be. And especially the discounting of the positive ~ Here I was working more hours than any of them, completing a master's program, full time on campus, studying and writing papers, carting my kids in 6 different directions, trying to give my marriage enough attention to keep it intact, and because I didn't mow the lawn, I was the laziest person on the block, deserving of shame and scorn for having tall grass and weeds. I could go further, but you get the drift. And right there, on my driveway, I had this amazing epiphany ~ I wasn't just pissed at myself, I was afraid not only of being perceived as lazy and incompetent, but even more afraid of the notion that I was staring at proof that is was actually true. My mind was blown. Dr. Burns was spot on.

I had never stopped long enough to hear the thoughts I was actually thinking, or notice the detail with which I played out those scenarios in my head ~ right on down the the brand of beer my neighbors were drinking as the rendezvoused on my front sidewalk to discuss what should be done about the sloth who lived between them.

In my head I checked off the cognitive distortions and almost burst out laughing at myself (yes the same self I was just pissed at). In reality, or should I say rationality, I was working harder than all three of my neighbors combined, one was retired and the other had been 'grandfathered' into the family business and pretty much made his own hours, and my neighbor across the street played golf every day. In fact, thinking back, it was surprising that I hadn't run into him that morning, throwing his golf clubs into his trunk as he often did on Monday mornings. His kids were grown and his wife was perfectly content to hang out with her own friends.

And suddenly my mood shifted again, from laughing at myself to being actually quite proud of myself. And as I drove past my unkempt lawn on the way out of the addition, it suddenly had a whole new meaning ~ it represented that fact that my life was about

as full, and fulfilling as it could possibly get. I was actually, dare I say it, proud of my lawn and what it stood for. I was also pretty tickled that I had just 'written my paper' in my head, right there on my driveway. But I was mostly in awe of the powerful transformation that had just occurred to my entire mood.

All the way to work I felt this surge of optimism and pride ~ that was a Monday morning I will never forget. I wrote the paper in less than an hour that night and killed it, and I still have the paper, with a big red A+ on the front to prove it.

Unfortunately, my mood did not last long. The next day I fully expected to get up and feel that same sense of satisfaction. I even walked over to the window, with my morning cup of coffee, and gazed out at my lawn, fully expecting the rush of pride, and I have to say I was a bit disappointed. I could still conjure up a bit of the mood from the previous day, but my predominant thought as I surveyed my lawn was ~ "Who are you trying to fool? You are a lazy shit." It was as if my brain forgot all about the exercise I had gone through the morning before, and I had to start all over again, right from the top. I was a bit disappointed. I thought that the clear conclusion I had arrived at the previous day was truly a change in my thinking, and I was a bit dismayed to find out that it seemed to have changed back over-night. I had been so excited the day before to think that my Aha moment had created a permanent change, and now I was almost back to pissed at myself all over again. Had I done something wrong? Was it just an illusion? Was I trying to fool myself? I didn't know.

So I tried to think through the steps again, and this time they didn't bring forth a clear winner. There was definitely a battle going on in my head between feeling pride and shame. Had Burns predicted this would happen? I went back to the book and really couldn't find a definitive answer. I was disappointed in my self. Yep, that same self I had been pissed at, proud of and laughing at I was now disappointed in. Why couldn't my self just simply hold on to the great ideas I had conjured up yesterday? They were so logical and convincing yesterday, but today there was doubt and uncertainty ~ kind of unsettling. I managed to convince myself that at least I had a little belief that just maybe I wasn't a lazy ass, but today I just wasn't so sure. As the days wore on, I have to admit, I sort of forgot about the lawn. I had other things to think about, and soon enough the next weekend arrived and I took the time Saturday morning, first thing, to mow the dang lawn.

Had I missed Something?

I knew something powerful had happened but I was still a bit confused as to exactly what the meaning of it was. I had almost instantaneously gone from pissed at myself and ashamed of my self to 'proud' of myself, and it had stayed pretty much that way for a day, but then it seemed to almost vanish as quickly as it had come. And trying to get that feeling back again was proving to be a bit elusive. I went back to the Burns text numerous times to see if I had missed something, but I couldn't surmise what it might have been. Perhaps there was a clue in the name of one of the interventions ~ The Daily Mood Log. I must admit that it certainly hadn't become a 'daily' thing. I did it

a few days and then got busy with other things. Maybe this was something I needed to do every single day? But that wasn't real clear, at least not to me.

Besides, the Burns text was littered with examples of 'actual patients' Burns had seen in his office. His stories painted the picture of clients who had these sorts of epiphanies and their anxieties vanished. He spoke of administering a depression test, pre and post intervention, and literally eliminating the depression in one swift intervention. Man, I wanted that so bad.

And I have to tell you right now that the one saving grace for me is that I was in a master's program with the intent to learn how to teach this to others. I am pretty sure that had I been the casual reader, I would have simply concluded I had done something wrong and given up on the effort and likely just relegated myself to the 'can't be helped' category. But I was too committed to the process. I knew deep down in my heart that Dr. Burns was right about this whole thing and I had experienced this massive, polar shift in mood in the span of about 5 minutes, completely due to changing my own perspective, but I didn't know how to make it really stick. The only answer I had in my head was to try harder.

I thank God every day for my personality. I am the kind of person that says 'there has got to be a way' and 'I will figure this out or die trying'. I knew that there had to be an answer to my dilemma but it wasn't forthcoming. Now don't get me wrong, I wouldn't have even been in the master's program in the first place if I didn't believe that therapy worked. I had seen it work in my own life. I had come from the depths of despair, to a pretty happy life, due in a big way to a therapist who had gotten through to me. She had deftly navigated through my defenses and convinced me that my thinking needed to change.

I knew my thinking had 'changed' to a degree, but I really didn't know how or why? And I didn't know how to make it stay permanently changed? When I was really focused on better ways of thinking, I would definitely feel better. But the minute I lost my concentration, my brain would default back to negative thinking. Why couldn't I just get it to stay positive? Was that even possible? Or was that a pipe dream? Maybe this was the best it was going to get? I was a bit perplexed, to be sure, but I was bound and determined to answer those questions.

NBA-6 ~ Coming Off The Rails

But before I finish this story, allow me to digress for a moment and fill you in on just what the hell possessed me to get into a master's program in the first place??

The back-story begins in 1995. My first marriage was coming off the rails. I knew we were in trouble. We didn't know how to communicate without fighting. We both thought we were right. We had no idea how to compromise or negotiate. We would argue, I would get mad, she would shutdown, I would drink until I forgot about it. We would

ignore each other, and then eventually pretend like nothing happened, only to start the cycle over and over.

I suggested marriage counseling and she pretty much said you're the one with the problem, you go. And so I did, and I absolutely hated it. The counselor I went to see was pompous, arrogant, and condescending. I went exactly twice - and walked out of there convinced I would never go again. I went back to my word when things really got bad. She finally agreed to try couples counseling, and so we tried it.

It was no better than my first experience. It was like sitting in a room, arguing, just like we did at home only a little nicer to each other, and having a referee - not a coach. When that didn't work, I talked her into meeting with our pastor. That encounter was beyond awful. It did more harm than good.

Three strikes and I was totally done. Done with everything. We divorced and I spiraled into the abyss. It was bad. I was angry, anxious, depressed ~ just plain pissed at the world. My friends tried to get me to see a therapist - but the answer was same, 'been there done that' ~ not trying that again. I was about as anti-therapy as one could get.

So how, you ask, did I ever wind my way back to being a therapist myself? Well my ex-wife started seeing a therapist, Melissa was her name, and she suggested I give Melissa a try. I'm pretty sure that my ex was worried she was going to read about me in the paper. And at first I said - oh hell no - but then on second thought I thought - maybe I just need to go and find out what kind of shit this woman was filling my exe's head with? Because I was convinced that this was all that was happening.

So I set the appointment, and went in loaded for bear. She was going to get both barrels. But it didn't go that way at all. She was confident, kind, really smart, and unflappable. She handled me superbly. Now don't get me wrong, I didn't walk out of Melissa's office thinking; wow I want some more this! It was more like - 'that was not what I expected'. Not only did Melissa completely disarm me, but she listened, and gave me some advice that actually made sense. This was my fourth time in counseling and someone finally made some sense.

So I thought about it for a while, and decided to set another appointment. Melissa made even more sense. She just had this way of showing me the perfect amount of kindness, firmness and genuine love. And her confidence in what she was doing and saying was infectious and intoxicating.

By session number three, I was completely hooked. Melissa never offered me a name for what she was doing, she just did it ~ and did it well. And what she did, in a nutshell, was convince me that what needed to change in my life was my own thinking, and you can probably imagine what a tough sell that was! I thought my thinking was just fine. After all that's what I'd been defending for the last 30 years. I hadn't even considered the notion that my thinking needed to change or even that it could. But Melissa had that way of selling her ideas that just sucked you in hard. She got through - and was able to

navigate around my defenses. I've got a hand it to her - what she did was astonishing, given the frame of mind I was in back then.

Long story short - I fell in love with the process. Not only did I get my thinking under control, but my drinking, my eating, my exercise ~ all of that changed, I quit drinking, lost 50 pounds, and got into the best shape I'd been in since I played baseball in college. You see, I found out I didn't have an eating or drinking problem, I had a *thinking* problem.

I would probably still be seeing Melissa today, but the money ran out - divorces have a way of doing that to you. So I bade her a tearful goodbye after about 6 months, and she wished me well - but not before she had turned on the light for me, and lit that little flame down in my soul. She loved to suggest good books, and she left me with a list. And that was just one more powerful thing she did for me - she ignited my thirst for reading 'self-help' books. I have read hundreds, perhaps thousands of this point. Some of them I have read multiple times. I read everything I can get my hands on that pertains to self-improvement, motivation, inspiration - improving life period.

At that point I had no intention of getting married again, or becoming a therapist. I was just happy - period - probably the first time in my life that I really felt good. When they say - you will find love when you least expect it - they are right, (whoever *they* are). I met my current wife in the zaniest of ways.

I was dropping off her daughter, now my stepdaughter, after a playdate with my daughter. They were best friends from school, and I had never met this girl's mother. That's just kind of the weirdness of divorce I guess. So since I was giving her daughter a ride home, I thought the least I could do, was be a gentleman and introduced myself to her mom. She met me at the door, in jeans and a T-shirt and no shoes, she had been mopping the floor, and was obviously sweaty, no make up, hair in a ponytail, and embarrassed as hell. The girls quickly scattered, maybe my stepdaughter really had something to show my daughter in her room, or maybe it was a ruse, I will never know. But they left me standing there in this very awkward encounter - for what seemed like a long time. And as we chatted, it was hard not to notice her natural beauty. We ended up talking for quite a while. And when I finally left, I just knew there was something about that girl I had to find out more about. 21 years later, she is my wife and my best friend - my best supporter, my business partner and truly my soulmate.

So how did I wind up in a therapy chair? When you make massive, sweeping, changes to everything in your life - mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually - it is quite noticeable. My life had done a complete 180. And that's when it all happened.

People began to come out of the woodwork and ask me; what the hell are you doing Not just once, but multiple times - dozens of times. And I realized pretty quickly - that people want to know - 'What's the secret?' It feels pretty good to be in that position where people want to know what you were doing right. And I tried to tell them - because I really thought I knew. And I *did* know what I had *done*, but what I didn't know was how

to teach someone else how to do it. That became glaringly apparent - quickly. And although I was striking out, I was having one hell of a good time swinging the bat. And I came to finally understand why Melissa loved what she was doing. You see the commodity that you are trading in the therapeutic relationship cannot be bought. You cannot put a price on happiness, self-esteem or confidence. It can only be obtained with knowledge and practice. So what I would be 'selling' would be 'priceless'.

I realized quickly how good altruism really feels - and I've got to say today, that it never gets old. I had to find out how to do this right. My wife was supportive of the idea, and has backed me all the way. I began researching Masters programs and there happened to be a very good one right in Fort Wayne. I applied, auditioned, and made it in my first try.

And the rest, is history

NBA-7 ~ What The Hell?

So here I was, in the second semester of my graduate program, choking on a lot of busywork, but yet excited about this thing that had happened, courtesy of what I thought was going to be just another lame, time-wasting assignment ~ and then I woke up!

Literally, I woke up the very next day after completing the assignment and writing the paper, grabbed a cup of coffee and wandered over to the window to look out at my weed-filled lawn, fully expecting to bask in the triumph over my negative thinking that I had 'so enjoyed' the previous day. But to my chagrin my positive mood had vanished and been replaced with an even greater sense of self-loathing. Lazy had come back with a vengeance and was now joined by Stupid ~ as in how could I have been so stupid as to think that my neighbors viewed me as anything other than 'the lazy guy who brought down their property values'. How could I have been so ridiculous as to think that my new replacement thoughts actually had some validity? When I thought about them now, they seemed like complete BS. I was convinced I had just been fooling myself. I have never forgotten that feeling, it sticks with me ~ and I want it to, actually. It helps me to remember exactly how so many of my clients feel when they get all excited in my office about this 'new thinking'. They seem to practically float out of my office on a cloud, all pumped up about how they imagine their lives 'can be' - when they see things from a different perspective - and then 'bamm' they wake up the next day feeling even worse than before, and stupid for believing that maybe it could work. Or even worse, convinced that they are just 'too broken' to be fixed.

I was perplexed. Clearly I had changed my perception about what a weed-filled, overgrown lawn meant, the day before. And the change in perception had most definitely radically changed my mood. Where had that good feeling gone?

I tried to get back to it, by mentally retracing my steps, and reviewing the wonderful thoughts I had crafted the day before. But my brain would have none of that. It was

insistent that the thoughts I tried to formulate the day before were so much BS - I was just trying to fool myself.

This isn't what Dr. Burns had predicted? He made it sound like those thoughts *did* vanish. There was nothing in his book about the experience I was having, or at least I didn't think so. I reread the exercise again, and the chapters preceding, just to see if I had missed something. There had to be something that I wasn't doing right. I looked at the paper, on which I done the exercise the day before, and really tried to focus on the new thinking that I had created, and had enjoyed so much for a day. But it truly looked ridiculous in that moment.

So I was caught in this conundrum. There was no doubt that yesterday changing my thoughts had changed my emotions and my mood. That was 100% true. But today, those same *new* thoughts were doing almost nothing to change my mood, in fact they were making things worse. This wasn't supposed to happen. So had my thinking changed my emotions? Absolutely, for a day. Had it changed my *beliefs* in any way? No it really hadn't. The *belief* that I was lazy seemed stronger than ever, and my *belief* about being stupid enough to think that I wasn't lazy compounded the problem.

Something Was Amiss

Something was amiss, but I didn't at first know quite what. Looking back on it years later, I now know that part of the problem was that Dr. Burns, as much as I love what he was trying to do, gave the impression (at least to me) that his interventions with clients would produce amazing transformations quickly, that would stick. He gave numerous accounts of 'transforming' clients from 'suicidal-hot-messes' into positive and optimistic individuals, practically over-night. And he would use the 'administration of his own depression scale', before and after, to 'prove' that depression had vanished. I re-read his work again, just recently, for about the 5th time in 20 years, and I've gotta say, I don't know how anyone would come away from reading it with a realistic view of just how long, arduous and painstakingly repetitive it really is to change a belief.

But to his defense and credit, I don't think he really fully understood that. I don't think he could really relate to the depths of negativity himself. And I think he fell into his own trap of thinking that changing a thought was the same thing as changing a belief or an assumption. And I don't think he had enough clinical experience to really know this. It took him until 1976 to finally finish his trek to become a board certified psychiatrist, and in 1980, 4 short years later, he published his first book, *Feeling Good, The New Mood Therapy*. Now, I know from my own journey just how much effort goes into writing a book, and I know how hard that is when you are also doing something else ~ like running a practice or trying to become 'board certified' in a discipline.

Burns also divulges that he had applied for a grant to do a research project on psychotropic medications (watch his TEDx talk) and that he actually wound up returning the money after he got turned on to Cognitive Therapy by Aaron Beck, who was giving a series of seminars on this new-found strategy. I know how much time goes into setting

up a research design that is worthy of a grant, and I know that they don't generally just hand over large sums of money to a 'brand new graduate'. So suffice it to say, Burns had a lot going on in his life when he sat down to write his first book and there is no way he could have been doing any of this while seeing 40+ clients a week ~ which is what I pretty much did for 2 decades. Less of course in the beginning, but as many as 50 a week in my busiest season of 'practice building'. I am now back down to about 35, but I am still seeing 35 clients per week while authoring this book.

So I am going to go with the conviction that Burns was doing the best with what he had and wasn't trying intentionally to misrepresent or embellish anything. His forte is in explaining the principles and giving great examples of cognitive reframes. His book is more like an encyclopedia of ways in which you can 'reframe' a cognition. My book, on the other hand, is the instruction manual for getting those reframed cognitions properly loaded in the human brain, so they can actually become part of one's new belief system.

Insight Isn't Going To Cut It

Unfortunately there are still a good number of therapists, psychologists, motivational writers, coaches, etc. that place a great deal of emphasis on 'insight' and practically ignore the arduous, painstaking task of turning insight into action ~ or more accurately, fully replacing a less-functional thought pattern with a more-functional one by literally 'over-writing' that program in the human operating system, AKA the brain.

I have often wondered if this is because many therapists really haven't done the work themselves? Or, I suppose, it is entirely possible that for a certain sector of the population a bit of insight *is* all that is necessary to re-route one's thinking in a new direction. I have heard tales of 'aha' moments or epiphanies, during which everything seems to have changed in an instant. And I suppose it can happen pretty quickly under some circumstances ~ I went from believing in Santa Claus to 'not believing' in a pretty big hurry. But for most things that really get one 'messed up', like the thinking that creates the feeling of 'not being good enough', just creating insight isn't going to cut it.

And I suppose there is the possibility that there are some people who just have a 'knack' for replacing cognitions ~ as in 'it just comes naturally', like someone who picks up the game of golf pretty quickly, just a 'natural'. But I am not one of those people and in 2 decades of practice I have *never* met one of them. One would think that if they exist, one of them would have wandered into my office at some point over the past 2 decades. So I am pretty sure that if they exist there are not a lot of them out there.

Or maybe it could just be that many authors really do know the kind of tenacity involved in the arduous endeavor of changing a belief, but would rather just 'dumb that down a bit' so as not to scare off too many readers and thus shut down the referral pipe-line that really sells books.

I am guessing that the the real answer is probably some combination of these reasons, of which I cannot be 100% positive. But what I can be 100% positive of is my own reasons for bringing the information I bring to the table. I needed answers. Deep down in my soul I knew from the beginning that there had to be a way and I was going to find or develop it myself.

So as I stood there, staring at my pathetic lawn, so many thoughts were running through my head: Had I changed or hadn't I? My thinking had changed temporarily, but the belief that 'if I wasn't doing what everyone else was doing I was lazy' ~ regardless of all the things I was doing they they weren't ~ that had not changed.

Was this really just a bunch of BS? Had I completely missed something?

I didn't know what to think, but I knew I was going to find out one way or there other ~ this I knew for sure. I knew that change was real, because it had already happened to some degree in my life. But I also knew, that I was nowhere near done changing myself. This little experiment, using the work of Dr. Burns, had made that glaringly apparent. So this revelation had elements of being exhilarating, and perplexing at the same time.

What Melissa, my former therapist, and Dr. Burns had in common, was that they both knew that the ticket to happiness was to be able to change one's own thinking. They had very different styles, but they were both getting at the same concept. The difference was that Dr. Burns was explaining the theory, and the concepts. I was learning what I needed to know to teach someone else how to do it, and that really excited me, but I still felt like there was something missing. My experience told me that there was something more that I needed to know in order to make the picture complete.

NBA-8 ~ What Is Change, Really??

In my masters program we quickly got into the practical nature of counseling. The second year, we were already seeing clients in a free clinic on campus, and using the theories, the practical components, assessments, treatment plans and diagnostic tools. It was a great program, as far as learning how to be a good therapist, but there was still something missing.

My life had changed tremendously, no doubt about that, but I still had a lot of anxiety and dread, and plenty of self-doubt. And no matter how many times I went back and tried the Dr. Burns activities, they never really seemed to completely solve the problem. When I was *actually doing* the activity, I would feel better, in that moment, but my better mood seemed to quickly fade.

Of course I tried to reproduce what I had done, on paper, in my head, but that really didn't seem to mitigate the negative emotion. And it wasn't practical, to sit down every time I felt anxiety or dread and do a written assignment out of Dr. Burns book.

And that kind of mystified me for a long time. Why couldn't I just *think* these new thoughts, since I knew they worked? I knew they were more logical, and just made more sense. Why couldn't these new thoughts just become my new default?

And that led me to some deeper questions. What is change, really? Sure I could change my thinking in the moment, when I was doing a written exercise, but the minute I quit thinking about it - my brain went right back to the old default, irrational, illogical thinking. So had I really changed my mind? Or was it just changing my thinking in that moment, which made me feel better for little while, but not really shifting the entire *belief* in my head?

There was no doubt that I was happier in my life than I could ever remember, but yet my self confidence was no where close to what I wanted it to be. When I had to give presentations, which was a lot of times in grad school, I would get quite nervous. And when I analyzed my thinking regarding such, it was pretty obvious what I was telling myself - *They will think it is stupid. If you get stuck, or lost, or mis-speak, everyone will judge you. They will think so much less of you.* I tried everything Burns suggested to calm my self down and rationalize my irrational thoughts. I could logically wrap my head around ideas like - *They are all just as nervous. No one will even care if you mess up. And if they do it just doesn't matter.* The only danger here is a bit of embarrassment, certainly not the intense physiological reaction I was having - which was way over the top in relation to the potential danger, which was pretty much zero. I knew the logical thoughts, why couldn't I just think them?

And that remained a mystery pretty much throughout my entire Masters program. No doubt my thinking had gotten better, my life is gotten better, my over-all mood has gotten better, but I feared that I had not really changed my deep down beliefs about myself. One critical comment would remind me in a big fat hurry that those illogical beliefs we're still there, ready to spring into action, overtake my entire thinking and my entire mood. And that bothered me?

Was Change More Like Sunscreen Or Like Reprogramming A Computer?

Was change more like sunscreen? That you had to apply every few hours to make it effective?

Or could change be more like reprogramming a computer? Where the old program could be completely overwritten, and literally not exist anymore? Or at least be mitigated to the point where it couldn't pop up, overtake my whole brain, and put me in a state of panic - for no good reason?

I pondered this question, over and over, in my own mind. I tried to find answers from my professors, from books, and of course the Internet which was just becoming available, and I had access to scholarly articles at the university library. I found nothing.

Part of the problem was that I really didn't even have the right questions. You see even then, although I didn't know it, the answer was being '*locked out of my thinking*' by my silent assumption that '*knowing better*' was somehow going to do the trick. Turns out that was a faulty assumption.

In my masters program, there was a precious little emphasis placed on the neurobiology involved in change. In fact, the only class that I remember addressing the neurobiology at all had to do with one or two lectures about antidepressants. I remember seeing a slideshow in which the 'going theory' of serotonin re-uptake was explained. I'm pretty sure that in 2002 most of the antidepressants were SSRI's. Prozac was pretty much the dominant drug of the day.

There was no class, or even part of one, that was dedicated to the physical changes that would have to occur in the brain in order for change to happen. The emphasis was pretty much 100% on mental, emotional and behavioral change. I am going to guess that there was either so very little known at the time, or it just never occurred to anybody in the echelons of my program, or maybe counseling as a whole.

So it never really occurred to me either. That is until one day when I was reading a readers digest article. Ever since I was a kid I loved Reader's Digest. There was always a copy of it in the bathroom at home, and I would read the short articles on so many varied topics. Readers Digest did a great job of putting together a menu of very short articles that were entertaining, funny, serious, and thought-provoking. It was always a very eclectic mix of the genres - something for everyone.

The year was 2002, April, and I was reading that month's issue of Reader's Digest, and yes I still have that particular magazine in my possession. I was reading an article on stress, ***Stay Calm: Stress, Anxiety and Worry Help Keep Us Alive. (by Timothy Gower)*** and something in my head clicked. The article cited an author, Joseph LeDoux, and the book he wrote was called ***Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are***. Again, we hadn't learned much about the neurological components of the brain in our program, but since we had recently had a few lectures on the theory behind SSRI's, I at least knew what a synapse was. I thought the article was well written, but it wasn't so much the article itself that got me going, or even the reference to Joseph LeDoux's new book, it was actually the ***title*** of the book that had me intrigued. I had always thought of the 'self' as some mystical construct that referred to our concept of what we think, feel and do. I had never considered that the 'self' might be a physical construct in the brain made up of these synapses I had just learned about. And if Joseph was promising to explain how our brains become who we are, might there be clues as to how we can change from 'who we are' to 'who we want to be'? The idea that Joseph might have the answer in a book on neuro-biology written by a scientist really got me fired up. I had never thought about looking to neurobiology for the answer to what seemed like an existential question.

Maybe there would be some insight into what made up the 'self'. If I am mad at my self, or upset with my self, just who or what am I mad at? Who or what is the self? And most importantly, how can I change my self.

Just Who or What Is My Self?

Somewhere, in the midst of all of this, it dawned on me that I had no idea who or what my self really was. As humans we have all kinds of references to our 'self'. We can be mad at our self, proud of our self, beside our self. We can have self-esteem and self-doubt. We strive for self-awareness, self-discipline and self-control. We can be selfless or selfish. We can hurt our self or help our self. And there have been thousands of 'self-help' books designed to help us change our self. But just who or what is this self? Is it just a figure of speech? Or is there really a self that exists in some form that we as humans can have the capacity to be pissed at? It all seemed like some philosophical or existential conundrum. How can there be two entities in one person that can be 'the thing to be mad at' and 'the thing being mad'?

And if they are one and the same then how can the self change itself?

Obviously I am not the only one asking such questions. This idea has been hotly debated for years, but I had not found a satisfactory answer - just a lot of theoretical mumbo-jumbo ~ circular arguments waged by philosophers who love to debate such conundrums.

I think I had written it off as a figure of speech that just referred to phenomenon that really couldn't be explained. Changing my self or helping myself was just a reference to the idea that no one else or no outside event caused the experience - just me.

So my reasoning was - If this book explains what makes up the 'self', which it seemed to be promising to do, maybe there would be some clues as to how to change my 'self'. Not just my thoughts, emotions and behaviors - but my 'self'. That idea had me so excited that I went online, and purchased a copy of this book off of Amazon, sight unseen. I had to have it, and it was not yet in bookstores. It was a brand-new book. That represented the first time ever I had used Amazon for anything.

And when I got the book, and cracked it open, at first I was disappointed. It wasn't exactly what I had expected. It was technical, clinical, and a bit sterile, but as I read on I got more excited. What began leaping off the pages was the answer I was looking for. I had to read it a couple of times, just to get the gist of it all, but the basic premise was becoming clearer and clearer. The Self is made up of vast synaptic networks in the brain. And so changing the self, means changing the configuration of these synaptic networks in some way. The way these networks are built, and the way that our brain uses them to navigate life, avoid danger, seek pleasure and stay alive, is collectively The Self.

In an instant I knew I was on to something. Joseph did not write this book for therapists, so there was certainly no clear path as to how we might change our self, if we did not like our self, or felt that our self was creating a lot of problems for us. But most certainly, by way of inference, explaining how we become our self, in terms of hardware configurations, neural programs, and synaptic networks was providing the answer.

I was stoked!

NBA-9 ~ The Human Super-Computer

The human brain actually functions amazingly like a computer. A synapse is essentially a tiny biological Micro switch that is either open or closed. It is pretty much a binary switch, although it has degrees of modulation. Information is stored and retrieved, on the basis of how these switches are left open, or closed.

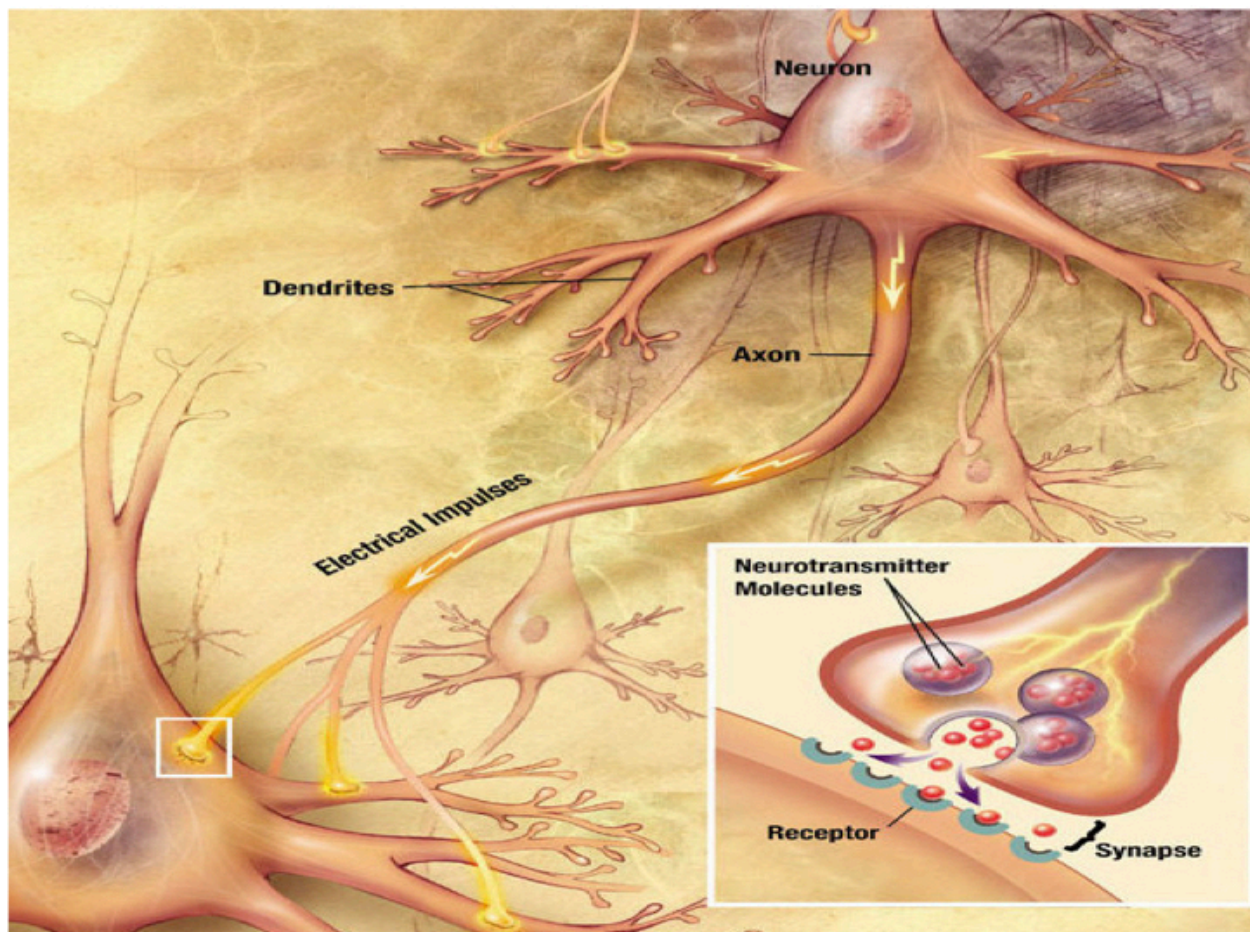
Actually the human brain is more like a *super* computer, which is a network of multiple powerful computers hooked together to function as one. Individual synaptic networks in the brain are more like individual computers that are hooked together in a vast network, stretching from ear to ear (literally), and creating a super-computer that cannot be touched in terms of function, by even the most elaborate networks of man-made super computers ~ not even close.

The adult human brain contains roughly 200 billion neurons which are interconnected by synaptic switches. In a man-made computer, these switches are etched in silicon and plugged into a mother-board. There is almost no limit to the amount of individual switches that can be connected in a man-made super-computer. There is a limit, however, to the number of synaptic switches that can be connected in the human brain ~ the estimate is 300 trillion. How big is that compared to man-made computers? (you ask?). Well, I am typing away on my MacBook, which has a pretty good sized 1 terabyte solid-state drive. A 1-terabyte drive contains 8-trillion bits, or individual binary switches. Bit is short for 'binary digit', the smallest unit of data in a computer, and a synapse is also a 'binary digit', producing a bit of information in the brain. So to put it in perspective, one human brain has the same capacity as 37.5 of the computers I have sitting in my lap right now. The computer on my lap holds every bit of data I have produced or downloaded in the past 12 years of private practice ~ every document, file, audio and video (and trust me there is a great plenty) and I still have 1/3 of my 1 Terabyte hard drive empty. If I collect information at the same rate for the rest of my life, it is doubtful I will need more than 2 or 3 more Terabytes of man-made storage. Most experts agree that with 300 trillion bits, or synapses of storage, the average human being will barely use half, even if he lives to the ripe old age of 100.

Although the human brain and a computer share some similarities (and there will be more to come as I go), there are also some stark differences. In a computer, the amount of 'switches' that are used to 'run a program' are essentially a fixed number. In the human brain, this is a bit different. 'Programs' in the brain are 'built-as-you-go'. Human experience is processed through the 5 senses and is recorded in the brain as a

'synaptic' configuration or network. The neurons involved in recording the experience, network together by closing synapses, the tiny physical space between 2 adjacent neurons. Each neuron has spindly protrusions called dendrites that are like the tentacles on an octopus, reaching in every different direction to hook up to adjacent neurons.

The drawing below shows adjacent neurons hooked together in a synaptic network. It shows the cell body of the neuron, the axon protrusions and the dendrites which branch out and 'hook-up' to neighboring cells by proliferating with each subsequent firing of the neuron. Notice the yellow arrows that are drawn on the axons to indicate electrical current. Literally, each time a neuron is fired, NGH (Neural Growth Hormone, a form of Human Growth Hormone specialized in the brain) is released into the brain causing the dendrites to sprout and grow to within 20-40 nanometers of the adjacent neurons. How it knows to stop at this distance is one of the great mysteries of life. This tiny space, 25 millionths of an inch wide, is a synapse. It is estimated that with each firing of a neuron, approximately 10,000 new dendrites are produced, a pretty significant number. This is how a thought grows in size and strength. Not only do thoughts matter, they ARE matter, literally. They have mass and take up space and they get progressively bigger and stronger each time we think them.



In addition to neural growth hormone, another substance is released in the brain when a neural network is fired called myelin. Myelin is a fatty substance that acts as insulation and literally wraps the fibers in the network with more and more insulation. Insulation in an electrical circuit, which is exactly what a neural network is - an electro-chemical circuit, makes the signal travel faster and faster with each subsequent firing.

So each time we think a thought, or have a cognition, the human brain literally reinforces that thought. And when you stop and think about it, this is a brilliant design. What the design does is help to ensure our survival as individuals and as a species. This is the learning process. It is how we learn to walk, talk, avoid danger, drive a car and do calculus. Repeated exposure to an idea, set of ideas, or sequence of cognitions continues to strengthen and hone such, while dis-used ideas are deleted from the system via atrophy or more precisely, neural pruning. This whole process is known as neuro-plasticity, a term I had never heard until I read *Synaptic Self*.

This is how change really happens in the brain, by manipulating the growth and/or atrophy of desired and undesired circuits, a meta-process dubbed 'directed neuro-plasticity'. Not only are the circuits constantly in a state of proliferation or atrophy, the neurons themselves can be generated or deleted from the system in a process called neurogenesis or neural pruning. New neurons are consistently generated throughout all of the life-span, and unused or defective neurons are removed, or more accurately, metabolized in the system.

It is not my intent to get too far off into the weeds with neurobiological functions and facts, but I think we need to know something about the biology of the brain if we are going to effectively understand just what we are trying to do when we talk about making changes to thoughts or beliefs.

The inset picture on the diagram isolates a synapse. It shows the dominant theory of how a synaptic switch is closed. As the electrical impulse makes its way to the tip of the dendrites, it stimulates a 'storage reservoir' of neurotransmitter molecules. You have likely heard of serotonin and dopamine, these are two of the more widely talked about neurotransmitter molecules, of the 40 or so that have been identified. The electrical stimulation causes the reservoir to release the transmitters into the fluid-filled space, where they float across to a 'docking site' on the adjacent neuron body or axon. The going theory is that there needs to be a certain number of molecules that have to make it to the docking site to close the switch and complete the circuit, and when enough synapses close, the next neuron in the circuit fires. For simplicities sake, this drawing shows 5 receptors on the docking site, 2 of which have 'docked' transmitter molecules, 2 more are almost docked, and the 5th is just leaving the reservoir. If the remaining 3 docking sites get filled, this synapse pictured will close, and if enough additional synapses close, the next neuron will fire. Simple enough, right?

But here is the catch. What the picture can't show you is that the reservoir opens and closes about 200 times per second during a firing of a neuron, and that each time it closes, it sucks all the molecules out of the space and back into the reservoir. This

action is known as 're-uptake', aptly named. So it is more like a rapidly oscillating pump, that reverses direction hundreds of times per second. So this switch can be opened and closed very rapidly, and depending on how many switches are doing the same thing (100's of thousands in unison), electrical impulses are conducted and impeded in a mind-blowing myriad of ways.

Now let me stop right here for a little break and remind you that this is *still all theory*. And let me divert for just a minute to comment on medications themselves.

NBA-10 ~ The Vetting Process

Anti-Depressant Theory

So back to the re-uptake function. It is thought that what happens in, say, a depressed person, is that the electrical impulses that carry the message 'all is well' are somehow being muted and not getting through. It is thought to be a problem with the neurotransmitter called serotonin. Either there is a shortage of the transmitter, or one is just not producing enough. And since there is no way to just 'add more serotonin to the system', we can only work with how the system uses what it has.

So if the circuit is not getting sufficiently fired, because not enough synapses are getting sufficiently closed, then the message 'all is well' is just not getting through. Thus, theoretically, we have to get more switches closed. So the idea is to 'slow down' or 'inhibit' the re-uptake function (which remember is happening very rapidly), which would theoretically leave transmitter molecules in the synaptic space a bit longer, which would increase the odds of filling up more docking sites, closing more switches, reaching the threshold to fire the neuron and getting the message through that ~ 'all is well after all'!

And since no one can be really sure what kind of transmitters are in any given reservoir, we have to try and be 'selective'. So if we are selectively targeting serotonin, and we are trying to inhibit the re-uptake pump from pumping it back out of the synapse too quickly, in order to leave it in the synaptic space long enough to close the switch, then we have a 'Selective Serotonin Re-Uptake Inhibitor' or an SSRI, or Prozac. Man, that was a helluva a trip down theoretical lane to get to Prozac, wasn't it?

Also, keep in mind this is only one of dozens of theories as to how to close that switch. Other drugs are theorized to mimic the transmitter and artificially close the switch. And the list goes on and on.

Medications Serve As BandAids

So there you have it. That is all I am going to say about drugs except that I don't use them (not just psychotropics, but none ~ zero, zip, nada ~ only vitamins, and a couple of Budweisers on the weekend, that is it). I don't prescribe them, and I don't really recommend them. I believe they function as a 'bandaid' or 'crutch'. I don't condemn them, I like having bandaids around the house and I have been on crutches numerous

times. (I am an athlete and very active, and have broken and torn lots of things in my life. My wife thinks I am accident prone, but I don't think that is the case. I think sometimes my mind is writing checks my body just can't cash.) But of course the bandaid is not what heals the wound, it is the integumentary system and immune system that heals the wound. I am not here to hand out bandaids, but to strengthen the systems in the brain that really fix the problem.

Since anti-depressants hit the market back in the 1950's we have learned eons about brain function, but we still don't know everything. For example, we still cannot definitively answer the question: Is depression caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain, or is the theorized chemical imbalance the result of depression? And if the latter is true, then what causes the depression? Is it sad and depressing situations and events in life that cause the depression? Or is it how we think about or perceive these situations that causes the depression?

These questions have been debated for the better part of a century, and we still don't have clear answers. In other words, we don't know for sure, and we may never know for sure until technology advances enough to image individual molecules in the human system, or some clever scientist comes up with a different way to make the determination.

I have my opinion, which will probably become clear as I go here, but it will remain that ~ opinion. I really don't want to debate things we don't yet know, but the good news is we don't have to. All we have to focus on is what we do know ~ for sure.

What We Do Know For Sure

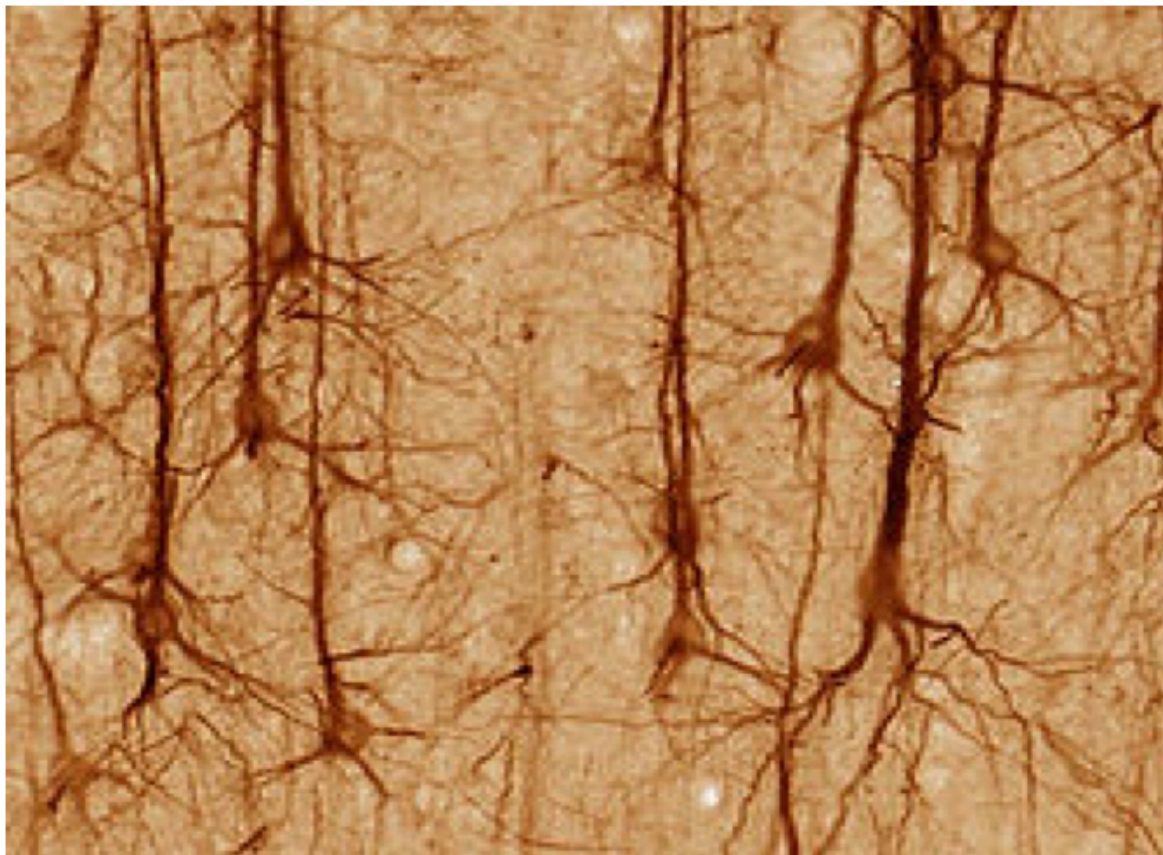
We do know for sure that thoughts and emotions, or mood states, are correlated in a directly proportional fashion ~ as thinking changes, mood changes with it. This has been proven countless times in scientific studies and by empirical research. In the 20 years that I have been practicing I have witnessed this correlation to be true 100% of the time. I have never had a client who had a positive and optimistic outlook complain of feeling depressed, nor have I had the opposite, a negative and pessimistic thinker who was not depressed. Oh sure, I have had clients who thought they were positive thinkers, but once their thinking was properly captured and analyzed, turns out it was much more negative than it appeared on the surface.

I can also tell you with 100% certainty that I have never had a depressed client who began employing cognitive strategies to create more positive thought patterns who remained just as depressed despite the exercises. In fact, I have a 'standing challenge' with all of my clients to 'prove me wrong'. When clients actively practice the strategies I put forth in this book, and do so for at least 100 days, they always feel significantly more positive. Especially when folks are skeptical, I challenge them to 'prove me wrong', and no one has ever done it. I have been proven right too many times to count.

So you see to me it doesn't matter where depression (or any other negative mood state for that matter) comes from, all that matters to me is that when we change thinking, we change mood state ~ 100% of the time. That is all I need to know and I know that for sure.

Synaptic Networks Grow And Change

Another thing we do know for sure is that synaptic networks grow and change in the brain as they are repeatedly fired.



Above is an actual picture of some neurons. It is quite possible these days to image neural networks and literally watch them grow. With the advent of fMRI imaging, we can even witness synapses connecting and disconnecting in the brain. This fascinating imagery allows for us to say for sure that change involves the growth of neural networks along with the subsequent pruning of competing networks.

Our brains work by following paths of least resistance, this is in accordance with physics. More electrical current flows through the path of least resistance. So the bigger the synaptic circuit and the better insulated it is, the more current will flow. When you stop and think about it, this is an ingenious way to ensure that the 'most chosen'

pathway *remains* the most chosen pathway ~ we refer to this experientially as habit. So if I am trying to develop, say, a new habit (which is essentially what change is, right?), then I have to create a new pathway that I can divert my thinking to when a particular situation arises. But due to the laws of physics, this new pathway will have a higher impedance, meaning it can't handle as much current as the established pathway, until it is fired enough, to grow big enough to compete with the established circuit (or old habit).

So to put it simply, change will not occur until the new circuit (or new habit) is fired enough times that it grows to a size that it can compete with the old circuit (the old habit). This can take many, many repetitions of firing that new circuit.

Unfortunately, this is where many people, hopeful for change, lose momentum and peter out. They get excited about forming these new habits, and even see huge results in their lives at first, but then they 'take their foot off the gas' long before the new circuit has been fully established and the old one has begun to atrophy.

So why does this happen? Several reasons actually. When we begin executing a new thought process and seeing the results of such, we get pretty excited. Unfortunately, we also get fooled into thinking we have 'made the change'. It feels good, it looks good and we are tempted to think we are done making the change. Such ideas are also, unfortunately, fueled by notions that it takes 30 days to establish a new habit. The 30-day idea really came from Maxwell Maltz, a plastic surgeon in the 1950s who noticed that after he performed an operation, like say a nose job, it would take the patient about 21 days to get used to seeing their new face. He wrote about these experiences, as well as his own experiences, and eventually published a book called *Psycho-Cybernetics*, that became a block-buster hit, selling over 30 million copies.

It is easy to see how such a myth can become mainstream. It is a time-frame short enough to be inspiring, but yet long enough to seem believable. Maltz's work influenced nearly every major 'motivational' or 'self-help' professional from Zig Ziglar to Tony Robbins. If enough people say something enough times, everyone starts to believe it.

If I were to tell you it could take 21-weeks, or 21-months, most people would probably give up before even starting, but the truth is it can take many months to establish a 'new habit' depending on the complexity of the 'old habit' one is trying to break. In the human brain, the pecking order of habits is established by sheer size and conductance ~ it really boils down to a numbers game. Whichever thought has been thought the most remains on top, until de-throned by the contending thought or thought pattern. Size is what matters. So if a thought pattern (or habit) has been hanging around for a long time, the circuit housing such has likely been fired hundreds of thousands of times, making it a behemoth in the brain. The task of building a contender can seem quite daunting.

This also explains, by the way, why we can 'know better' and do it anyway ~ as in "I knew better than to eat that donut, but I did it anyway". Logically it makes no sense that

one would continue to 'give into' an old habit, over and over, knowing full well that he is completely disregarding his best of intentions. This is super frustrating to anyone who has tried to break a habit. People saw things to me like: "I just don't get it." I know I feel so much better when I exercise, but then I set my alarm to get up and exercise and I always talk myself right out of it. And from a logical stand-point, it doesn't make much sense. But when it comes to habit, the brain abandons logic in favor of 'tried and true'.

The Brain's Elegantly Simple Security System

What many people fail to fully grasp at first is that the human brain has an elegantly simple security system when it comes to introducing new code, or in the case a new habit. A new piece of code will not be permitted to 'over-write' older established code until it has reached a critical mass, or amplitude within the system. It is a simple vetting process that does not allow for 'new code' to be pre-maturely accepted. And when you think about it, this is an extremely valuable feature. We may 'hate' it and 'curse' it when trying to establish a new habit, like exercise, but in the grand scheme of things we need to embrace it. This painstaking 'vetting' process is what keeps us alive. Without out, we would invariably adopt some errant code that would ultimately be our demise. It is one of those 'be careful what you wish for' quandaries. It would seem to be so desirable to just flip a few switches and install a program that supports exercise or eating healthy, wouldn't it? But if we really could do that, we would invariably change something that would be deadly. The very thing that frustrates us so much is the thing that keeps the system stable and helps one survive into old age.

So if the human brain is so resistant to change, and it takes such a large number of repetitions to get there, how on earth would it even be possible to change thought patterns that have existed for most of a life-time? "If I have been over-weight my whole life, and I am 30 years old, is it going to take the next 30 years to literally 'think' the new patterns enough times to make the change?" Fortunately, no, and the solution is what this book is all about. Change is hard, but certainly not impossible, but it must be done a certain way. Hence the theme of this book: You can't just 'do it', as in put your mind to it and make it happen. It is not about willpower or desire, it is about strategy and leverage ~ leveraging the power of the human brain to 'beat it at its own game' so to speak. And that is what the neurobiology of change is all about.

NBA-11 ~ My Marketing Strategy

Going on 12 years ago, when I opened my private practice (October 2008), I was transitioning out of a clinical director position at another counseling agency, in charge of managing a clinical staff of about 18 therapists. Although I always maintained a very small case-load, just to keep my skills up, I literally had zero clients to 'take with me'. I started from scratch. I believe I had 2 clients my first month in business. I had to come up with a marketing strategy to put my practice on the map. Thanks to a great tip from a mentor in my graduate program, I hit on a strategy to offer to give presentations, at no charge, to any organization that would have me. All I asked, is that I would be able to promote my practice, and hand out business cards. So what kind of a presentation

would I give? Well, I had been talking about the '*neurobiology of change*' for quite some time, and I had always kicked around the notion of putting together a presentation that graphically represented the concepts I was attempting to convey to my clients.

So I went to work on developing a Power-Point presentation on ***The Neurobiology Of Change***. I knew just enough about Power-Point to be dangerous at that time. I had used it in graduate school, but just to create mostly slides with words on them. I knew very little about using the 'graphics' tools that come with the program. It was a self-taught, crash-course in creating a visual representation of the process of change at the cellular level in the human brain. I pulled pictures from the internet and drew in lines and captions to create a graphic representation of the concepts involved. I certainly couldn't afford to have it professionally done back then, so I did the best I could on my own.

It was pretty crude, by graphical design standards, but I was proud of it all the same. I then started calling anyone who might want someone to come and speak for free on anything related to stress, anxiety, depression, etc. I designed the presentation so it could be easily modified to just about any 'issue' or 'problem' one might want to address. That way I could easily customize a presentation for any general problem an organization might want to hear about. It was a huge success. Word got around and pretty soon the phone was ringing off the hook. It was a fantastic marketing plan. People were impressed with the information, and would pass my name along to friends and family. Pretty soon my case-load was growing quickly.

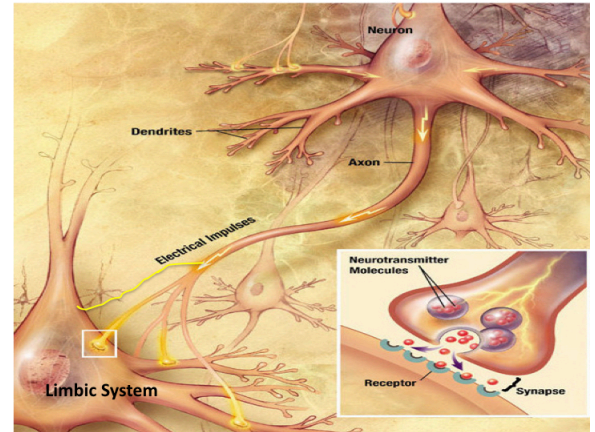
I tell you this not to just brag about my ingenious marketing plan, but as the set-up for this statement ~ *people loved having the visual*. It allowed them to 'see' what was happening in the brain. As crude as it was, it hit the mark. In fact maybe it hit the mark because it was crude and simple. To this day I have clients tell me things like: I can still see those 'yellow and green' lines in my head forming as I go through the steps of this process. I still have that same presentation on my website and I do encourage you to take a look, it is the bottom selection under the video tab titled ~ ***The Neurobiology Of Change*** ~ of course! That presentation remains pretty much in the same format it was created 12 years ago, and I make no apologies for that. I have considered handing it over to a graphics design professional for a complete over-haul, but every time I get close, I just can't do it. It has so much sentimental value to me and it is really a vintage presentation. Someday I might pull that trigger, but for now you get the vintage version.

My philosophy has always been this: If we want to make something happen we need to know as much about it as we possibly can. But that has to be balanced with the qualifier: Not too much. I would rather err to the side of a bit too much than not enough, but I really want to stay as close to that line as I can. There is most definitely a point of diminishing returns when it comes to explaining a concept or process, beyond which there is a steep drop in both additional learning and interest. So that is my quest.

I'll Do It Tomorrow

When I decided to write this book, I knew this presentation would be an integral part of the effort. What follows next is an expository narrative of this presentation, complete with some of the actual slides for reference and an explanation of where the information originated.

The slide to the right shows a solitary yellow line I have drawn in running from the axon of one neuron to the cell body of an adjacent neuron. This line is meant to represent a negative thought. For the purpose of this presentation, *yellow* lines refer to negative thoughts and *green* lines will refer to positive thoughts. In reality, a 'thought' would produce 10's of thousands of new connections, but I am trying to keep it simple here.



I want to mention here that a negative thought is defined as any thought that produces an unwanted emotional state or keeps one stuck in such a state. I like to think of the negative vs positive dichotomy as a similar distinction to how negative and positive are used in the medical world. If you think about a test, say a pregnancy test, if it comes back negative it means that nothing has changed, the system remains at status quo. But if the result is positive, then something has changed ~ big time. In the case of a pregnancy test a negative result is not necessarily 'good or bad'. If one wanted a baby, then it is good, if not, bad ~ right? I make this distinction because often times negative thoughts seem like 'perfectly good' thoughts when you take them at face value, but they turn out to be quite negative if they keep a person stuck in an unwanted state of being.

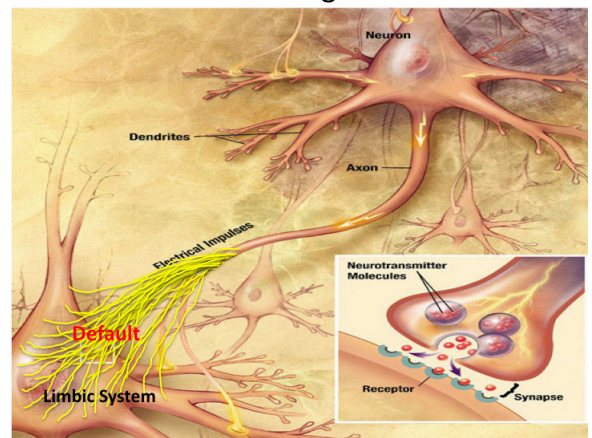
Take for example the thought *'I'll do it tomorrow'*. This is a perfectly legitimate thought, nothing inherently bad about it, but if you apply it to the idea that 'I don't have time to workout today ~ I'll do it tomorrow', now it becomes an insidious negative thought that has the power to keep one hopelessly stuck in the state of being out-of-shape.

So just for the purpose of giving this presentation some meaning, let's designate the first single yellow line as this very thought: "I'll do it tomorrow". This thought can begin innocently enough, right? We are busy people with demanding schedules, and it is pretty easy to come to the conclusion that I *really* don't have time to exercise, 'I'll do it tomorrow'. I am hoping the most of you reading this right now can completely relate to this idea, and am betting that most of you have thought it yourself.

This one solitary idea has the capacity to proliferate into dozens, perhaps hundreds of derivatives: I am too tired, I will do it tomorrow. I am not feeling well, I will do it tomorrow. I am too stressed, I will do it tomorrow. etc. And it can jump the tracks and start infiltrating other ideas as well: I will start my diet tomorrow. I blew it today, I will start again on Monday. If you are smiling now, then you know the drill.

Over time this thought pattern, we will just call it 'putting things off', becomes a rather large network of negative thoughts all connected into a giant synaptic network.

The second slide, to the right, is simply meant to show how this idea has grown into a large network that has become the default thought pattern when it comes to 'getting in shape', and perhaps a whole host of additional things we keep putting off.



Notice on this slide that I have labeled the 'receiving neuron', (which in reality isn't one neuron, but rather a host of neurons, but again, for simplicities sake, use your imagination), the Limbic System. The significance here is that most issues in life that create some kind of distress or aggravation are somehow linked to the limbic system.

The Limbic System

The limbic system is the part of our brain that essentially has one purpose ~ to keep us alive, and it generally does so by seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. In some ways it seems like the limbic system 'has a mind of its own'. It is the system that is responsible for the drives to eat, drink, sleep and have sex and it is also the system that quickly and forcefully kicks on the adrenaline and cortisol when danger is perceived, as in the familiar 'fight or flight' response. I would say that nearly every problem that walks through my door is connected in some way to the limbic system.

Let's look again at the 'putting it off' nature of 'I'll do it tomorrow' when it comes to exercise. Quite literally the limbic system wants nothing to do with exercise that occurs without the direct purpose of catching food, having sex, running away from danger or fighting the enemy. Burning calories for the purpose of losing a bit of weight or having tighter abs just isn't in the cards for the limbic system. So this part of the brain will devise any conceivable way to make exercise 'not happen' - from convincing us that we hate to do it, to convincing us that we just don't have time, and everything in between. The limbic system is also the main driver when it comes to anxiety and depression. It is the major player in the generation of negative thought patterns, again, one's that keep us hopelessly stuck in an unwanted mental, emotional and/or physical state.

The limbic system is faster and stronger than any other system in the brain, and this is by design. If it didn't work this way, we wouldn't likely survive. When any event or experience occurs, even if it is an imagined one, that in some way involves avoiding pain or seeking pleasure, in this case avoiding the discomfort of exercising as well as the the over-arching threat of burning valuable stored calories for 'no good reason', the limbic system kicks on quicker and harder than the rest of the cerebral cortex, making it difficult for the logical part of our brain to over-ride with a reciprocal idea that the discomfort is actually good for you, and those precious calories, stored as body fat, could really use some purging. Why? Well if you play this out a little further, let's put it in

a different context. Let's suppose that the threat involved is not the relatively minor threat of depleting calorie reserves, which could ultimately impede survival ~ eventually burning all the reserves would result in death ~ but rather the immediate danger of a hungry tiger stepping into the clearing, down at the watering hole, intent on making you his next meal? This is no time to stop and 'think this through', right? The limbic system bursts into action, and you will flee as fast as you can. If you make it out alive, then you can stop to think about what just happened. If it is an over-reaction, or perhaps a misinterpretation of the threat (AKA ~ the tiger had just eaten a Zebra and really had no interest in you, he was just getting a drink before lying down for a good long nap), then you can sort that out. I refer to the limbic response as a 'shoot first ask questions later' response. Better to have misinterpreted the threat and be alive than vice versa. The limbic system does not have a separate set of rules for 'less threatening' experiences, and that just makes sense, doesn't it? Therefore, the idea of exercising often gets thwarted by the quicker and stronger limbic response, especially when that response has been used so many previous times.

I hope this is starting to make sense to you and starting to answer the question that I get from so many perplexed clients: "I know exercise is good for me, I know I feel better when I do it, I want to do it ~ *Why can't I just do it?*"

The answer lies in effectively muting these insidious negative thoughts ~ namely: "I will just do it later, or tomorrow, or starting Monday." I call these negative thoughts Intention-Killing-Thoughts, IKT's for short, because that is exactly what they do ~ kill our best of intentions. So just how do we go about that?

NBA-12 ~ Intention Killing Thoughts

Just how do we go about muting our Intention Killing Thoughts? Well, this is where things get fun and science comes into play. I pondered this question for quite awhile until that answer became clear courtesy of another neuro-scientist, David Eagleman. I own two of his books, ***The Brain & Incognito***, both are phenomenal reads, I would highly recommend adding them to your library. In *Incognito* David was explaining how the brain makes decisions and all of a sudden it hit me. In order to efficiently process information, the brain operates on a system of ***mutual exclusivity*** (his concept, my label), meaning that it searches for either/or conditions and then chooses based on previous outcomes. Yeah, I know, I had to read it multiple times to fully get the gist. Let me explain it using our example. If we are talking about the idea 'I can do it later', that option will get the nod unless a stronger, mutually exclusive contender, just happens to be present and found in the search. And the general idea that is mutually exclusive to 'I can do it later' is simply 'I can't do it later'. Later is not an option. So plainly stated, either I can do it later or I can't, as in it must be done now. It can't be both.

Now the light was fully on in my head. This explained everything. For years I too was perplexed by the conundrum that one can 'want to exercise, know it is good for them and even know how good it feels afterward' and yet still not seem to get it to happen. One could recite lists of reasons why exercise was good, and yet nothing. And here

was the problem. The idea that *exercise is good* and the idea that *I can do it later* are *mutually inclusive*. I can believe *it is good* and that *it can be done later* simultaneously.

Mutual Exclusivity, as it turns out, is one of the more important concepts to be aware of if one is going to truly make change happen. I find so many people, working so hard at trying to substitute better ways of thinking, and they keep coming up empty because the substitutions, or replacement thoughts, do not meet the condition of being mutually exclusive to the thinking they are attempting to replace. And in my book there is nothing more frustrating and disheartening as working so hard at something and failing, not because you are not putting in enough effort, but because you are using an ineffective tool and you don't know it.

In logic and probability theory, two events (or propositions) are mutually exclusive if they cannot occur at the same time. A clear example is the set of outcomes of a single coin toss, which can result in either heads or tails but not both.

This is an elegantly simple yet brilliant way to increase the probability of making choices that increase that chances of survival. To put it as simply as I can, I am alive today because the choices I have made this far in life have not gotten me killed. In order to keep staying alive, I am wired to continue to make new choices that are similar in logic and probability to choices I have made in the past. The strength of these tendencies is directly related to the sheer number of times I have made these choices or decisions. If I want to most effectively and efficiently change this decision-making hierarchy, then I will want to present a way of thinking that is mutually exclusive to that which already exists. If I don't, the brain can effectively keep *both* ideas, and simply defer to the one that has been most frequently used in the past. (This is most commonly referred to as: 'I know better, but I keep doing it anyway'.) However, if I make the new idea or proposition mutually exclusive to the old and bolster and strengthen the new proposition through repetitions and practice, mental rehearsal, then I can get to the point that the new idea will actually surpass the old way of thinking making it the stronger of the two. So the most efficient way to weaken an unwanted thought pattern is to strengthen a mutually exclusive replacement pattern.

Now if you are still confused about exactly what I am saying here, you are perfectly normal. These concepts are a bit heady in the beginning. And this is exactly why one is most likely to need a good coach to integrate the concepts into daily life in a practical way. Each person's way of thinking is unique, as unique as finger prints. There might be some stark similarities, but at the end of the day, no two ways of thinking are identical, hence for maximum efficiency, each individual thought pattern needs it's own unique replacement, derived directly from the original or default way of thinking.

To think that this could be fully explained in a book would be akin to thinking that someone could pick up a book on how to play the game of golf and somehow become a scratch golfer. Even if you carefully explained each aspect of the swing in great detail, it would be exponentially more efficient to have an instructor show you how to swing a club. And even with that, it is likely to take multiple lessons and hours on the driving

range to master the golf swing. The point that I want to really drive home here is that reading something out of a book is a great way to assimilate information and convey concepts and principles, but getting from there to putting these principles and ideas into practice in real life is a whole different story. Having someone to coach you through it in person or by audio or video is the element that can really make all of the difference.

The Power Of Video

I am reminded of an experience I had back at the end of 2013 that really landed this for me. In the fall of 2013 I put together a seminar titled “***Why Can't We Put The Fork Down?***”, a 4-week, in-person seminar on ‘food addiction’ that I held in the conference room at my office. The seminar itself was inspired by 3 clients who came in just weeks apart exclaiming that they had a ‘food addiction’. I found that to be rather odd, since it really hadn’t happened before, that I can remember, and then all of a sudden ~ 3 in a row. I wondered if some entity in the media had inspired this notion? I never did pin that down, but I figured it most have become a ‘hot topic’ somehow (kind of like how the concept of ‘codependency’ suddenly became popularized in the mid 1980’s when Melody Beattie wrote a book about it, *Codependency No More*, which sold 8 million copies, and all of a sudden everyone seemed to be ‘codependent’) and so I went with it.

After giving the live seminar 3 times, and selling out very quickly each time, I decided that I was going to make it into a video series. I was dabbling in video production with my new MacBook and the very powerful little on-board video production program that comes with the system ~ *iMovie*. Now at the time I didn’t know a thing about video production or editing. So I went to the internet and downloaded the manual, a PDF that described in detail how to use the program. After spending an entire day using the written manual to try and figure out how to edit and produce a video I had gotten literally no-where. So I typed ‘How to use iMovie’ into my browser and up popped several videos on the subject. I clicked on the first one and it was an 18-minute video of a screen recording, done by some young man who sounded like he was no more that 20-something. In 18 minutes I was 500% farther than I had gotten from an entire day of trying to decipher written instructions. I was literally off and running. In no time I was filming, editing and producing videos of the series, and it still ‘lives’ in my website under my video tab. That experience was powerful for me. In an instant I had realized something huge. The difference between writing something in a manual, and showing someone how to do it with video was exponential. I was instantly hooked on the idea that video would become and remain a vital ‘tool’ in my toolbox for coaching my clients through the process of change.

Actually I Hate Exercise

So back to the idea of *weakening* unwanted ideas or thought patterns by building and *strengthening* reciprocal and mutually exclusive desirable ideas. Let’s take another look at exercise. I have encountered so many folks along the way who have made this lament: ‘But you don’t understand ... I really hate exercising.’ It always tickles me a bit when I hear this comment. Ironically, nobody understands that better than someone

who actually exercises consistently. I have exercised on nearly every single day for the past 25 years, only missing on rare occasions. Everyone that knows me knows this about me and I share this freely with my clients. It is almost an automatic assumption on the part of others that I 'must love to exercise'. Truth is, I don't. I hate it just as much as anyone else. There is nothing remotely pleasant about dragging my ass out of bed on a cold winter's morning, hobbling to the bathroom on stiff and creaking knees (both have been surgically repaired, as well as two surgeries on my left ankle), yawning, trying to wake up as I make my way down to the basement to climb onto my exercise bike. My joints scream at me as I slowly begin pedaling and getting everything loose. As my heart-rate starts to climb and my breathing becomes more labored I can feel the sensation of a my sweat-pores opening up, which isn't all that pleasant, kind of an itchy feeling at first. Did I mention how much I dislike this whole process? So if I hate it so much, then why do I do it every single day? Because I like the result 10 times greater than I dislike the process of *getting* that result.

So let's take a closer look at the thought processes involved here: Either I avoid the discomfort of exercise and lose out on the benefit, or I endure the discomfort and reap the benefit. Those are two very much mutually exclusive thought processes. It can be one or the other, but not both. I cannot both avoid the discomfort and reap the benefit, I have to choose. And I am not going to consistently choose reaping the benefit, until I have sufficiently '*practiced*' this idea and concept in my mind. Yes, I have written it, read it, said it out loud, heard myself say it literally thousands of times. In fact, I still hear myself say this every single day. I have it on tape and I listen to it, ironically, while I am on my bike working out.

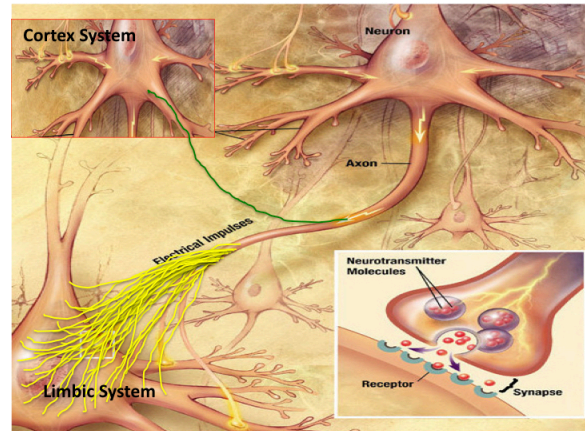
Not Just Any Old Positive Thoughts Will Do

The bottom line here is this: 'Not just any old positive thoughts will do'. Take for instance the idea of a 'gratitude journal'. This is one of the more popular forms of journaling. It simply consists of taking the time every day to write down all of the things we are grateful for. Gratitude is a very positive thing to think about, but it will do virtually nothing to dis-lodge the negative thought 'I can exercise later'. I hope that by now this makes sense to you and that I have driven this point deeply into the conversation. If we are going to expediently get to the point of exercising consistently, we have to carefully engineer a precise thought pattern that will effectively mute the intention-killers and then practice the heck out of it. Likely you have heard the phrase 'practice makes perfect', and you may or may not know that this isn't exactly true. Practice makes permanent and thus, more precisely, only perfect practice makes perfect. Now of course, having said that, I should qualify that nothing is perfect, it is more a figure of speech, but you get the drift?

NBA-13 ~ The Perfect Practice

The figure on the right features a green line stretching from the axon of the cell body of a neuron to an adjacent neuron, in an inset box labelled the Cortex System. This green line represents the reciprocal, mutually exclusive idea that we have reconstructed to

counter the default yellow, or negative thought pattern. Again, these lines represent hundreds of thousands of synaptic connections each. Just to keep it simple, we will designate the yellow cluster as 'I will do it tomorrow' and the green counter thought as 'there is no tomorrow', or another way of saying it, the yellow cluster allows for the option of putting things off and the green represents the idea that putting it off is simply not optional.



*I need to add a disclaimer here ~ this picture is merely a crude representation of a highly complex process and is only meant to provide a visual representation of what is happening in the brain, not an anatomically correct diagram of the nervous system.

So this slide represents the result of going through the process of *metacognition*, analysis and reconstruction. We have carefully and precisely formulated a new way of thinking that actually stands a chance of neutralizing the problematic, 'putting it off' way of thinking. But as you can see, this lone green line is no match for the robust synaptic network that houses the 'put it off' or 'do it tomorrow' way of thinking.

The Path Of Least Resistance

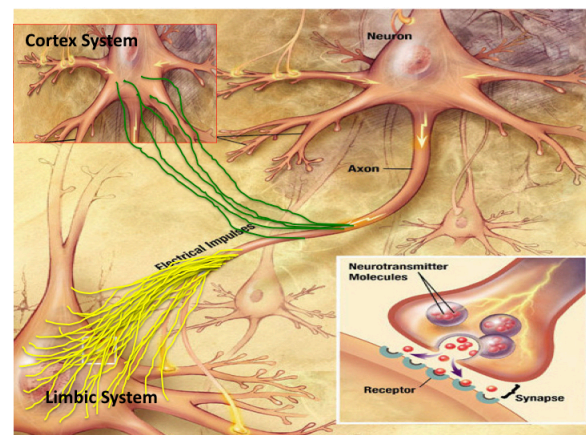
In keeping with neurobiological function, any impulse running down this neural pathway is going to take the path of least resistance, the yellow path, despite that fact the the green path actually, logically, makes more sense. This is the purpose of adding the Cortex System inset to the slide. The Cortex, as in Cerebral Cortex, is a very different system in the brain than the Limbic System. They are actually opposing systems that balance each other out. The cerebral cortex is the home of logic. It is most significant to note here that logic is not at the top of the decision-making hierarchy, like many people assume it should be, it is subservient to signal-strength, or literally the size of the networks involved. So even though it makes more sense, logically, to choose exercising *'today, right now, every day'*, over putting it off, a human brain in this configuration is hopelessly doomed to putting it off. Any signal traveling this pathway will ultimately trip the 'putting it off' circuit. That is just plain physics. Now it *is* true that with great effort we can occasionally 'over-ride' the default pathway temporarily, like when we get all fired up about getting in shape, sign up for a gym membership, and go a couple of times, or maybe even a couple of weeks. But we all know how that usually ends, right? This is how Planet Fitness stays in business ~ thousands of unused memberships. Over-riding the default pathway takes a lot of extra energy and usually, as the excitement of starting a new healthy life wears off, it gives way to the usual 'putting if off' scenario and ~ well, you know the rest of that story, right?

I can't emphasize enough that this is where many good intentions die in the water. Many people, and unfortunately even many therapists and coaches, think that at this point you should be 'good to go'. We have fashioned a solid, logical, perspective about 'how we should think about exercise' ~ one that *should* eliminate the habit of putting it off ~ right? Now I not only know what I need to *do*, but I know what I need to *think* as well. Why don't I just think that way?

The answer is physics. Take one more look at the diagram. One lone strand of positive 'green' connections, versus a robust network of negative 'yellow' connections. The new way of thinking doesn't stand a chance, unless of course, we can build that green network. So how do we go about doing that?

The short answer is to 'think' the new thought. That is the *only* way to build the new green network, by thinking the new thought 'there is no tomorrow'.

The diagram to the right represents doing just that ~ *thinking* this new thought. Remember that 'thinking' the thought is what fires the network, releases neural growth factor into the system, sprouts new dendrites, and increases signal strength by increasing the size of the network. If you are actually counting, this rendition shows 5 thoughts. Don't even bother to try and count the yellow lines, but rather just imagine how many times in your life you have likely 'put something off'. That's probably a pretty big number, right? And for how long have you been 'putting things like exercise off'? Are you beginning to see a little problem here? We have some serious 'catching up' to do with this positive green network, *if* it is ever going to be a contender, to 'get the green light' (no pun intended), when the intention to exercise is executed.



Just so we are clear on the physics of what this all means, let me state it this way. The yellow 'putting things off' circuit will be the dominant course of action until the green 'do it now' circuit reaches approximately the same size and signal strength. Until that threshold is reached, the green circuit is largely ignored or left unused ~ *even though it logically makes so much more sense and lines up correctly with our desires.*

Will-Power Is A Unicorn

Let that soak in for a minute. Is it starting to make sense why we can have the best intentions in the world and still consistently 'not carry them out'? It isn't laziness, or lack of desire, it is the physics of neurobiology ~ period. I have coined the phrase 'will-power is a unicorn' (or at least to my knowledge I am the only one who has ever used it). I say it to my clients all the time. There is absolutely no power in the 'will' or 'desire' to think

or do something. The 'power' comes from the size of the networks involved, and all networks are built the same way ~ one thought at a time.

And if all this is sinking in for you, then you just might be getting a 'sinking' feeling of ~ 'oh, my, god', how am I ever going to catch up if I can only build my new network one thought at a time? It is going to take me hours and hours, days, months, years. Will I ever make it there in my life-time? It seems like a daunting task that is formidable, or perhaps even nearly impossible. And you would be exactly right about that. It is all of those things, and you have to understand and embrace that fact.

When they say change is hard, that is actually putting it mildly. I say change is 'damn near impossible' ~ and I really mean that. What I specialize in is making the 'damn near impossible' ... well ... possible.

This has to be said. To say anything different is to lead you down as path that will only increase your chances of failure. You have to know what you are up against, a formidable foe. (This is why I toyed with the idea of calling this book the worst self help book ever. What author, in his right mind, tells you that what you are about to try is 'damn near impossible'?)

And while I am on the subject, I might as well address this right here. I have read hundreds of self-help books, some of them several times, if they are good ones. And I can tell you the general formula.

1. First a catchy title
2. Followed by an interesting preface
3. And then comes the formula
 - you are the way you are right now because of how you're thinking
 - you need a new perspective, and here it is
 - if you perceive your life this new way, you will be everything you want it to be, you will become the best version of yourself
 - it's just that simple, follow my lead

And I totally get this. It is actually partly true, which makes it so seductive. And I'm guessing that a message like - It is really freaking difficult change your perspective, actually damn near impossible, the odds are stacked against you, it's going to take a lot of work and a long time, much longer than you probably imagined. You're going to have to be willing to try things that may feel very weird at first. In fact you might hate them at first, but you have to be willing to push through, until you get used to them ~ probably is not the approach that is going to make books fly off the shelf.

I'm pretty sure any good editor would nix all of that, especially one who has some familiarity with the motivational genre.

But I don't have an editor, and I'm really not that interested in my book flying off the shelves. It is probably not going to appeal to the masses. Most people don't want to hear how hard it is and how much work it takes. But some people do ~ those people who have tried and tried to get it right, they're willing to practice, but they've never really been shown the perfect practice. Remember the axiom, practice makes permanent, only perfect practice makes perfect.

That's my audience right there, those who have been practicing, and are willing to practice their ass off, but have never been shown the perfect practice. That is what I am out to show you the perfect practice. As for the motivation, I will leave that up to motivational authors. There are hundreds of them. And they're super good at motivating, which is getting people pumped up for action.

A Momentumal Author

I am not a motivational author, I am a 'momentumal' author, a phrase that I coined myself (yep, I googled it and found no reference so I am going to claim it as my own invention ~ the adjective form of momentum). Motivation gets you moving, momentum keeps you moving. I'm not here to get you all pumped up, I will leave that to people who do that far better than I do, and I will be happy to recommend dozens of books to you for that purpose if you would like. And once you're pumped up, then come and hear what I have to say. My audience is those people who are already motivated, and probably have been for some time, they just keep getting pushed in the wrong direction because what they're practicing is not the perfect practice, at best it's a mediocre practice, and in many cases it's just poor practice - no matter how hard you work at it, poor practice produces poor results. And I certainly don't think authors are doing this on purpose. I have to believe that they don't know any better. They are just giving you the best they've got. And I get that, most of them have not spent 20,000+ hours over the course of 2 decades interviewing clients, researching and experimenting, going back to the drawing board, over and over again, in pursuit of *The Perfect Practice*. Enough said ~ I rest my case. (Although, knowing myself, I will likely bring it up again.)

So back to my green, positive thoughts. Many people, including professional therapists, tend to stop after they have successfully gotten their client to embrace a new concept or perspective. In the biz, we know this as the 'aha' moment, the point at which the client looks at you quizzically and says: "I never thought about it that way before." It is tempting to think that now that I have this 'brand-spanking-new-way' to think about something I am good to go. The next time I am tempted to put something off until tomorrow I am simply going to 'remind my self' that tomorrow doesn't exist. And that would be fantastic, I suppose, if it actually worked ~ but it doesn't.

Now let me freeze frame right here and interject another idea. I just stated that this would be fantastic, but I am going to retract that statement. If we could actually make a change this quickly or easily, it wouldn't be so fantastic after all. The fact that we can't

make it quickly is really a part of what I refer to as the brain's security system. Just like any high profile operating system in use today, the brain has a very tight security system. There are some stout 'fire-walls' protecting the system ~ and for good reason. I will posit that 'if we could make a change this quickly', the system would become very unstable, very quickly, and we might not live to see tomorrow. Think about it for a minute. The human brain has millions of functions that are embedded into the fabric of the operating system that are literally in accessible. You cannot change your default blood pressure or heart rate by simply thinking about it. Sure you can over-ride your respiratory rate momentarily by slowing your breathing, or you can bring down your heart rate by meditating, but your system will restore the default automatically. I say damn good thing, right. I would hate to have to remember to breathe. All systemic functions are pretty much under this same security system. So when the default is 'do it tomorrow' you cannot just swap that out for 'there is no tomorrow' without knowing how to get around the fire-wall. Sure, you can do it momentarily, just like you can hold your breath, but ultimately the brain takes over and the default is restored. It is a survival thing.

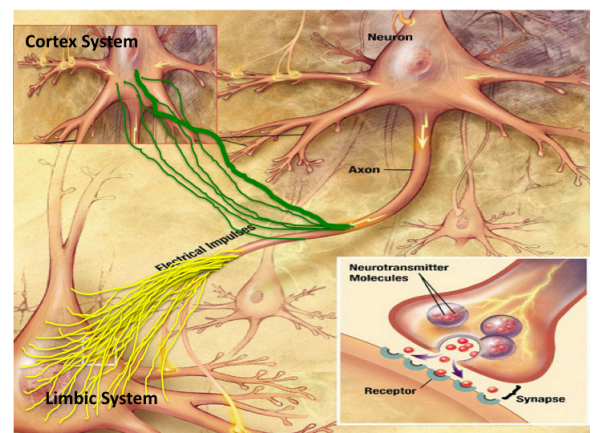
Breaching The Security System

So is there a way to get around the security system? Absolutely. If there weren't, the entire discipline we call 'therapy' would be worthless. The way around it is actually quite simple, but takes a lot of effort and time. In a word, we breach the security system with repetition. Refer back to the diagram, and what I have already told you. When that green network gets as big as the yellow one, then the fire-wall has been breached, the security system disabled, and a change made. It is elegantly simple. A new idea that would displace the 'tried and true' default must be properly vetted before it can become the new default ~ literally 'thought enough times', over and over, to gain access by becoming the new 'path of least resistance' (for those who are scientifically challenged - the bigger pathway).

Let that all sink in for a minute ~ the very thing that often frustrates the hell out of us is the very thing that increases the probability that we will live to see another day. How mind-blowing is that?

NBA-14 ~ Dirty Little Secret

On this diagram to the right you will notice that in addition to the 5 green lines there is a 6th line that is considerably 'thicker' than the others. As I stated earlier, fortunately there is a way to accelerate this process. I call this accelerant cognitive audio-visual programming or CΔVP for short. CΔVP is derived from the first word of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and the last word of Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) with the words audio and visual sandwiched in the



middle.

CBT is by far the most renowned therapeutic strategy ever devised. It was invented in the late 1950's and early 1960's by Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck on the east coast. Ellis paved the way with rational emotive behavioral therapy (REBT) which posited that emotional issues were the result of irrational thinking and thus the aim of his therapy was to 'rationalize' thinking. Beck followed up with Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, which essentially said the same thing in a bit different way, using the term cognition to apply to all thought processes, and focusing on distorted belief systems that needed to be reconstructed to restore mental health and positive behaviors.

In the 1970's, Richard Bandler and John Grinder developed NLP on the West Coast. Grinder earned a doctorate from the University of California in linguistics, Bandler was majoring in psychology. They were not interested in psychological theories, they wanted more practical ways of effecting change ~ they wanted to know how, not why. And this was the 1970's, when computer programming was coming on strong and many people were making parallels between the human mind and a computer. So in short, NLP posits that change requires a reprogramming of the human computer and the programming tool is language.

Of the two, CBT & NLP, I draw most heavily on CBT, but I share with Bandler and Grinder the strong emphasis on practical as opposed to theoretical, and I believe that there are unmistakable parallels between the human mind and a computer.

Now to the audio-visual that is between the two. To fully explain, I have to back all the way up to graduate school. One of the standard protocols when it came to therapeutic intervention was to have your client journal. There were, generally, little instructions when it came to journaling ~ you bought a journal and started writing in it every day. What you wrote in that journal was completely up to you. The general consensus seemed to be that you wrote about your feelings, the things that were bothering you. Without even fully realizing it, I had picked up the idea that the process of journaling was a cathartic one, a way of releasing and thereby providing relief from strong or repressed emotions. Clearly there are some Freudian roots in the idea that writing about something has a way of releasing it from the mind. It seemed logical, kind of like lancing a boil, or squeezing a pimple ~ get the bad stuff out and let it begin to heal. Funny, isn't it how we just accept a notion about something and then go with it. The one problem with this notion, however, is that it just didn't seem to be working ~ for me, or my clients.

Catharsis Is A Complete Myth

And then my serendipitous discovery of neuroplasticity suddenly provided the answer ~ writing about things that bothered a person would only serve to strengthen that thought or emotion, not weaken it. Catharsis was a complete myth. Talk about an 'aha' moment. All of a sudden I had this epiphany that the very thing I had been encouraging my clients to do was probably making matters worse. You see writing actually requires

a hefty amount of neurological activity and coordinated effort from a vast network of synaptic circuits that control language production, linguistics, and the coordination of motor functions that create words and sentences on a page. Writing about bothersome things was actually a form of inadvertently 'practicing' bad ideas ~ literally strengthening the very thoughts and ideas that were causing the disturbance.

And from that very moment my paradigm completely flipped. I began teaching my clients to journal in a more productive way. Rather than simply writing about what was bothering them, I began teaching them how to analyze those bothersome thoughts and ideas and then spend their time writing about how they *should* be thinking about things. So rather than simply being a repository of bothersome thoughts, the journal became a tool to *capture, analyze, restructure* and ultimately *practice* the corrected thinking or perspective. And the results were nothing short of amazing. By giving a lot more attention to the perfected versions of thinking, they were essentially performing 'the perfect practice'. What a difference.

Negative Thinking Can Be Elusive

Yet there was still a bit of a problem with journaling ~ people simply tended to not do it. Most people did not carry their journals with them and when they got home at the end of the day they would often forget to journal or they couldn't remember the bothersome thoughts that had caused the disturbance during the day. So the journal tended to gather dust on the night stand. Negative thinking can often times be elusive. Those hidden assumptions and beliefs often lurk in the shadows, just below the threshold of conscious thought in the semi-conscious range. In fact, many times my clients will tell me that they were feeling anxious or depressed for no apparent reason. Upon further introspection, however, we can usually piece together the semi-conscious thinking that is being driven by these hidden beliefs. These thoughts are closest to the surface when they are actually producing the disturbing emotion. So it is imperative that one stops in that moment and attempts to capture 'what exactly is running through his head' when the emotion is occurring. 'What, precisely, am I telling myself right now?' And, of course, in these moments one's journal is nowhere to be found. Thus the opportunity is lost. How can we analyze, restructure and practice what we can't capture? It is nearly impossible, and a good guess just won't do. So how was I going to get my clients in the habit of capturing these disturbing thoughts if I couldn't get them to carry a journal with them?

Jexting?

Ah ... enter the cell phone. This was the early 2000's, several years before the smart phone would take the world by storm, but there was texting. I knew that many of my clients owned cell phones and they weren't leaving *those* on the night stand. Could I get my clients to 'journal', at least the 'capturing of thoughts' piece of journaling, with their cell phone? I discovered you *could* send a text to yourself or to your email address, so I started to experiment and introduce the idea. And it went over swimmingly. You see, pulling out a journal would 'just be weird' and sure to draw

attention, but pulling out your phone to send a text to yourself? Now that was a different story. Nobody was going to ask you what you were doing. It was efficient, effective and incognito. And when you got home at night, your captured thoughts would be neatly lined up in your inbox to analyze, restructure and begin practicing. My clients loved the idea. I dubbed it 'jexting', the contraction of 'journaling & texting'. It was a big hit. It was amazing what a difference it made to suggest journaling on a device that people were already fascinated with. Journaling had just crossed over into the information age.

Now I should probably stop right here and address the question that some of you might be thinking: 'Isn't it so much better to 'hand-write' in a journal, on paper?' The answer: 'It really doesn't make much difference.' The important thing is that you actually do it. What ever small gain might come from 'hand-writing' (if it even exists) is quickly negated by 'not doing it at all' ~ you get what I am saying here?

I found that clients were 500% more likely to have their phones with them, than their journals, when they came to sessions, and they could easily access the text messages they had sent to themselves. It made my job of helping them to analyze and restructure their distorted thinking *infinitely* easier and much more accurate. It was an amazing improvement. This was a herculean leap past the traditional way of journaling. I knew I was on to something big.

But there was one last, major, hurdle ~ and that was the practice piece. All of these improvements, though very cool and exciting, would be for naught if people did not practice the thinking they derived from the process. The best replacement thoughts in the world were relatively useless until they could be neurologically amplified enough to become a viable substitute when the circuit was actually fired.

Leveraging The Cell Phone For Practice

So I began to think about how I could leverage the cell phone to improve the practice piece as well. In conventional cognitive therapy, clients were encouraged to 'try and think' in new ways about a situation or event. My knowledge of neurobiology had taught me how futile that was, but yet I really hadn't yet evolved my own thinking to look beyond the writing and reading piece. I encouraged my clients to text themselves the restructured version of their cognitions so they at least had them on their phones, but that method was cumbersome at best. There had to be a better way.

And then in 2009, Apple introduced the iPhone OS 3, the third major release of the IOS mobile operating system, and on it was the capability to record audio and video. I didn't know this in 2009, it would be several years later that I would purchase my first iPhone, but that was the 'break-through' technology that would ultimately inspire the audio-visual components of CAVP.

So here is the back story: As I was thinking about better ways to infuse new ways of thinking into the human operating system, my thoughts drifted back to graduate school. When I decided to go back and get my master's degree I was working at a local

hospital, Lutheran Hospital in Fort Wayne, IN. I had lost my business in my divorce and had been fortunate enough to have a connection with Lutheran Hospital and was able to secure a position as a Behavioral Health Technician, working nights and weekends on the psychiatric unit. The pay and hours were not great, but the benefit package was awesome. And since I was court-ordered to maintain medical benefits for my kids it turned out to be a blessing. I learned to live on less money and I was around a great group of people. In fact, most of my co-workers were huge supporters of my idea to go back and get my master's in counseling. Unfortunately, the administration was not so supportive. You see my master's program was an 'on-campus' evening program at Indiana-Purdue University in Fort Wayne. All of my classes and lectures started at 4p and ran until 8p, smack dab in the middle of my 3p-11p shift. When I pitched the idea to my supervisor, much to my dismay the answer was a flat 'no'. I was disappointed, but not deterred. My wife, who was, is, and always has been my biggest supporter simply said ~ 'just quit then', we don't need the money, and I have great insurance. I was elated, but I wasn't about to let her carry the entire financial load, so I had a chat with my neighbor, who owned his own dry-wall and painting business. I knew he was always looking for good help, and he jumped all over the idea. I didn't know much about painting or drywall, but I figured it couldn't be that hard, and it would give me the flexibility to work around my school schedule. And best of all, he was willing to match my 'hospital pay'. That was sweet!

I really am going somewhere with this story, so bear with me ... the nature of the business of painting and drywalling was often a pretty solitary job. My neighbor quickly realized I was responsible and trustworthy, so if it was a 'one-man-job', he would often send me alone - which I was totally cool with. I was alone with my thoughts for long stretches of the day, sometimes listening to music, but mostly just thinking ~ and I had a lot of thinking to do. I was in a master's program, trying to absorb heavy concepts. I would work right up until the time I had to jump in the truck, head home for a quick shower, and then off to school. Coming home at 830p left me precious little time to study and I felt like I was falling behind. It dawned on me one day that I could use my 'time at work' to study if I just put my notes on tape and reviewed them during the day, listening with headphones while I was painting away. So I bought a micro-cassette recorder, some headphones and a sleeve of cassette tapes. It worked like a charm. Every night I would come home and spend about 20-30 minutes recording my notes, and then the next day I would listen to them on tape while I was painting. This turned out to be my 'ace in the hole'. It was not just a good way to make use of other-wise wasted time, it turned out to be an extraordinary way to infuse and retain information in the brain, better than anything I had tried before. I wasn't about to tell any of my classmates about it. At the graduate level it is all about how you perform in relation to the cohort as a whole, and with this method, I was killing it. I went from falling behind to top of the class. I was acing tests and screwing up the curve for everyone else. I never stopped to think about why it was so vastly superior to trying to study by 'reading my notes', I just knew it was and that was going to remain my 'dirty little secret'.

NBA 14 Ends here. 091720 Fig.7-018

NBA-15 ~ My TED Talk

So back to my main story. As I was contemplating ways to improve the *practice* piece with my clients, 'my little secret' popped back into my brain. It was another 'aha moment'. I began encouraging my clients to give it a try. Micro-cassette recorders back then were in the \$30-\$50 range, and the tapes themselves were about \$20 for a sleeve of 6 tapes, not all that expensive, but certainly more so than a journal, not to mention the batteries needed to be replaced quite often. And if I could talk a client into giving it a try, they usually gave up on it quickly. Carrying around a compact recorder was just a pain in the butt and not very incognito, it was sure to draw attention and they didn't fit neatly into one's pocket. So it just became an extra device that got left on the night stand or desk and eventually became a paper weight.

Even the best of interventions are worthless, unless people are inclined to actually follow through. So as good as I thought my ideas about using audio-tape were, they were just simply too much of a hassle to be viable. I never gave up on the idea, but it lay dormant for awhile ~ just waiting for technology to catch up.

All of that changed in 2012. 2 major things happened that year ~ I gave a TED talk and I got my first iPhone.

First the TED talk. In early spring I had a client who was involved in curating speakers for the inaugural TEDx event in Fort Wayne, IN. He thought I should audition for the event. In 2012, my practice was booming. The last thing I needed to be doing was spending extra time getting ready for a TED talk. And so I tried to politely decline, but he was persistent. Finally, I decided to 'save face' by auditioning for the event. I figured there was 'no way in hell' they would pick me ~ out of all the important, and polished, speakers to choose from. I guessed wrong. Somehow they liked my idea and invited me to speak. I thought: Oh my God, what have I done? Not only did I not have the time to prepare, I really didn't have the desire either. But how do you audition, get accepted and then turn it down? So now I was locked in.

At first I panicked a bit, but then I settled down and started to think about just what I wanted to say. I had given plenty of public presentations in my career, so this really shouldn't be that big of a deal, but 'ah' I was so wrong about that. A TED-talk is a presentation like 'none-other'. First there is a specific time limit, I was issued 10 minutes to 'give the best talk of my life'. Unless you have ever tried something like that, then you won't know, as I didn't know, just how hard it is to prepare a quality talk that you only have 10 minutes to give. You have to get everything nearly perfect. There is no room for error. I would venture the estimate that it is 10X harder than giving a 60" talk. You wouldn't think so, but trust me, it is. Add to that the fact that folks are paying good money to come and hear you give your best. They are expecting something extraordinary. And then there is the whole nature of the platform ~ you are out there on stage, no podium to hide behind, no notes, no outline ~ the only thing permitted is a slide-show for visual aids if you desire. Not a power-point presentation ~ you would be booted off the stage. It's just you and the audience. You only get one shot and the 'take'

becomes the property of TED Inc and is forever on their website. It was by far the most intense performance I ever gave in my entire life, an adrenaline rush like none other.

Over the course of my career in public speaking I have learned a thing or two about public performance and performance anxiety. One thing I learned early on, is that you cannot be 'too' prepared. The better you know your material, the easier it goes. I would spend ample time preparing by actually giving the presentation, either all by myself in my conference room, pretending there was a live audience, or actually getting a few volunteers to sit and listen.

And of course I planned to do the same thing with my TED talk and here is where things got a bit dicey for me. When I tried to do the talk, with no notes, in an empty conference room, I kept messing it up. It is one thing to give a talk from behind a podium, on which you have all the notes and outline in front of you to glance at and stay on track, but it is entirely different to do it from memory. Ten minutes doesn't sound like a long time, but when you are 'on stage', speaking from a script that is in your head, 10 minutes can feel like an eternity. It amounts to roughly 1500 words, 3 pages of typed, single-spaced, 12-font text ~ and I pretty much had to know it word for word. There was no room for error. If I forgot one point, or got it out of place, I was screwed.

This really hit me hard when I started practicing live. I would go over the 10 minute mark (and yes, BTW, they had told me there would be a large clock on the back wall, counting down the time for me ~ and there most certainly was.) Or I would fall way short and wonder what I had left out? This really started to screw with my head as I was trying to practice. And, of course, each time I would make a revision, it only made matters worse. I would catch myself using a phrase from an older version and that would throw me off.

And of course this started to conjure up images in my head of getting lost in the middle of my presentation, drawing a complete blank and looking like a complete fool up on stage. Did I mention that I was in the busiest season of my practice? Did I mention too that I was also in probably the busiest season of my life? I had a daughter and a step-daughter down at Indiana University, Bloomington, and 4 other kids heavily involved in baseball, gymnastics and cheerleading. I was feeling the pinch pretty hard, and as June 20, 2012 approached, my anxiety was creeping up on me. I just didn't have the time to practice like I wanted to and when I did, I seemed to be getting worse. It was like I was psyching myself out.

The Mind And The Brain

And then one day I had an idea. I remembered a passage from a book I had read by Jeffrey Schwartz ~ The Mind And The Brain. In the book he had referenced a research experiment in which a group of volunteers were taught some simple introductory piano lessons and then divided into 3 groups. Group #1, the control group, was instructed to do nothing, group #2 was instructed to practice the lessons every day on a piano, and group #3 was instructed to practice the lessons only in their imagination ~ they were not

allowed to use a keyboard. The result of the experiment, as measured by a functional MRI, showed that the control group, as suspected, had not built a neural network that supported the practice. But the amazing thing is that groups 2 and 3, had both built a comparable network, and they both showed similar levels of skill, clearly showing that practicing in one's imagination was comparable to practicing for real. This is nothing new, of course, good athletes use mental imagery copiously to 'mentally practice' prior to a game or event. But in this experiment it was proven to be just as effective as actual practice, as measured by networks that can be imaged in the human brain. Amazing.

And this gave me an idea ~ if imagining a practice session could be that powerful, I wondered what 'watching' one would do? When I was practicing my TED talk, I didn't screw up every time, I just couldn't consistently produce the result I wanted. So here was my plan, I was going to start video-taping every practice performance, until I produced the one I wanted, the keeper, essentially 'The Perfect Practice' and then I would watch that particular tape as a way of 'practicing' my performance. I had just gotten a 'brand-spanking-new' iPhone which had video-taping capability and I was anxious to give that a try too.

It turned out to be super easy to do, prop up the phone in the camera app, push record and 'go for it'. I could literally 'practice' anywhere I had 10" alone. It didn't take long before I racked up a pretty good selection of 'keepers', practice talks that nailed the speech in under 10". I chose the best of the keepers, and began using that as my 'practice' speech. My little plan worked out perfectly. I always made sure to have a pair of ear-buds in my pocket, and whenever I had a few extra minutes, I could plug them in and whip out a practice session. It is amazing how many 'white spaces' you have in the margins of even the busiest of days. And I didn't even have to complete the whole practice session. I could listen to the first 5 minutes while waiting for a client, pause the tape and pick it up the next break I had. It was truly amazing. I would simply watch the tape and literally 'think along' as I went. This was exponentially better than just simply trying to imagine myself giving the talk. I knew that every practice session I was practicing 'The Perfect Practice'.

Now of course I still practiced giving the speech live, and I noticed right away that there was a huge uptick in my performance, it almost seemed magical. And my confidence shot up right along with my performance, and most amazingly my anxiety started to level off. I was getting better and better, faster and faster than ever before, and in the most efficient way I possibly could ~ making use of the white spaces in the margins of my busy life. As June 20 approached, of course I was nervous, but it was a different kind of nervous, an excitement that I had never really felt before.

And when I took the stage, my adrenaline was over the top ~ hands down the biggest adrenaline rush I have ever experienced ~ and yet I nailed it. If you want to see it for yourself, go to <https://youtu.be/TsHtjEGD5m0> or just type in Miles Nitz Ted Talk and you should find it readily. I said it exactly the way I wanted to say it, adrenaline and all. It was an amazing experience on so many levels. Looking back, I am so glad they extended the invite.

As I was coming down from the 'high' of the whole TED experience, one thought that kept ringing in my brain was ~ 'If this method worked so well for pulling this off, what else would it be good for?' My brain was humming with possibilities. So I went to work immediately, experimenting with how I could use this method in my practice. I reasoned that if watching myself on tape, performing The Perfect Practice of my TED talk, had produced such a phenomenal result, then watching myself on tape performing 'The Perfect Practice' of the 'kind of thinking' I wanted to learn ought to work as well. So I sat down and put together a new 10 minute presentation, only this time it consisted of the 10 ways of thinking, or perhaps you could say the 10 most important perspectives, that I could have in my brain. I went through the exact same process as I did for my TED talk, I taped myself a number of times until I got the 'performance' I liked and then I began watching it every day. It was nothing fancy, just me, talking into the camera, literally 'telling myself' just how I wanted to think about some really important things.

It worked like a charm, so well in fact that I still watch that very same tape, every single morning, 8 years later. By my estimates I have watched it about 3000 times. And over the years I have revised the script, and even added pictures, when I learned to use iMovie, after purchasing a MacBook in the fall of 2013. There is a whole story about that which will someday tell, but for now, suffice it to say I was hooked. I knew this was something big, huge, epic ... and I immediately began to incorporate the idea into my practice. My goal became to equip every single one of my clients with a video-taped version of themselves, reciting the very best cognitive reconstructions we could come up with in therapy, that they could watch every day, as a powerful, effective and efficient way to practice their new thinking and essentially re-program their perspectives.

Cognitive Selfies

This was no easy task back in 2012. For one thing, not everyone had a smart phone. This was not insurmountable, videos could be made with a digital camera and transferred to a computer and with a bit of savvy, and could be saved in DropBox or Google Drive, and if one was really techie, a private YouTube channel was a good place to store and view video tapes. I dubbed these tapes 'Cognitive Selfies'.

The next hurdle was getting people over the 'hump' of *really feeling weird* about seeing themselves on video-tape. For me this was no big deal, as I had been watching myself on tape since graduate school, when we had to video-tape every session we did with a client in our practicum clinic, and then watch it, often-times with the professor and the class watching as well. After doing that every single week for a year, the brain gets a bit desensitized to the idea of taping yourself and watching it. But since most people have not had that kind of experience, it was *just plain weird* to create a tape of yourself, talking to yourself and watch it every day.

It wasn't hard to sell the idea, most people intrinsically understood the fact that they literally 'talked to themselves' every day in their own heads, and that this 'self-talk' was generally not helpful, and many times down-right nasty and self-loathing. The idea of

infusing a corrected version of 'self-talk', on tape, where it could be 'perfected', made sense ~ it was just too weird for some people at first. But I knew that once I could get people to try it, they would be hooked too.

NBA-16 ~ The Reticular Activating System

I completely understood the hesitation to video-tape oneself, from a gut level. I knew how uncomfortable I had felt for the first few months of practicum in my master's program, watching myself on video-tape, but I also knew it got easier and that after awhile that weird feeling completely went away. But I have a scientific mind, I don't generally just accept something for what it is, I have this insatiable need to know 'why'? We see ourselves in the mirror every morning, and we hear ourselves talk out loud every day, and we don't have that 'self-loathing aversion' to either of those, but put yourself on tape and watch the play-back and almost everyone 'hates' it - at least at first.

So I set out to find out why we cringe when we first see video-tape of ourselves. Turns out it was pretty easy to find. When we look in the mirror every morning, we may not like what we see, but we don't cringe like we do when we see images of ourselves in pictures or on video, and the reason is quite simple. In the mirror we see a 'mirror' image of ourselves. Think about it. If you are right-handed, the image you 'see' in the mirror is 'you picking up your toothbrush with your left hand', everything is exactly the reciprocal, or opposite, of what you would see in a picture or on video. And since human beings are not perfectly symmetrical, the brain notices these subtle differences, and translates them into 'that doesn't look like me', and in the brain, different is usually classified as strange or weird. Same goes for your voice. You hear it every day, but you hear a slightly different version than you hear from a recording. Your voice has to bounce off of nearby objects to get back to your ears and it is matched up with the vibration you can feel in your vocal-chords. Coming directly from a device it sounds strange or weird. And again, most individuals automatically classify the difference as something they don't like. I don't believe I have ever had anyone say to me ~ 'my voice sounds different on tape and I kind of like it' ~ nope. It is almost always something like: I sound like an idiot, or a child. Which of course is silly, because they actually sound completely normal and have very pleasant voices.

But here is something else you might not know, even though we generally dislike seeing images of ourselves, we are still drawn to them. Think about it. Someone shows you a picture of a group of people, and you are in it, where does your focus go immediately ~ to your own image. Eye-tracking software proves that in these situations everyone tracks to their own image first and most often. And it is not for the reason most people think (because of our ego), it is because of something neurobiological called the ***reticular activating system***. It is not a conscious thing, it is subconscious, most don't even realize they are doing it. This system in the human brain has a massive job of filtering information. Every second of every day the human brain is bombarded with billions of bits of information, streaming in almost constantly from the 5 senses. Retaining all of this information would be impossible. Even with the 500-trillion-synapse

storage capacity of the human brain, storing all of the information streamed into the brain would fill up the hard drive in no time, less than a day, and the system would crash. So the human brain comes equipped with an ingenious filtration system that literally 'decides' rapidly, what information should be kept, dumping the rest. There are many criteria that determine which information should be kept and one of the main criteria is 'familiarity'. From a biological standpoint this just makes sense. Paying attention to the images and sounds we have heard the most increases the odds of survival. Turns out our own image and our own voice tops that list. Put another way, we pay close attention to what we have to say to ourselves, and when we are also adding the visual component, via the magic of having video recorders and players right in our pocket, anything we might have to 'say to ourselves' gets amplified exponentially ~ and I do mean literally 'exponentially'. The difference in amplitude between trying to 'think' about something in your head, and watching yourself 'say that same something on video-tape', while thinking along in your head is at least 10 times greater.

Think back to the concept of Hebbian plasticity ~ neurons that 'fire together' ~ 'wire together'. The sheer number of neurons, and resulting synaptic connections, that are involved in watching a video of your-self expounding about a certain thought or idea you want to strengthen is astronomical. Think about it ~ the eyes and the ears gather by far the most sensory data of all the senses. Some estimates are that when the auditory and visual cortex are processing in the brain they are hogging a whopping 70% of the brain's processing power. And it is not just sights and sounds that are being processed, it is language also ~ making meaning out of sounds, syllables and inflection and combining all of that with facial expression and body language. (And by the way, I have often said to my clients ~ if I could find a good way to touch, smell and taste thoughts, I would do it). The vast amount of neurons involved in 'watching a thought portrayed by self' on video dwarfs the act of *thinking* it and even *writing it down and reading it*, although I still recommend writing them and reading them, which you will most likely do anyway before you video-tape them. I am probably getting a little bit ahead of myself here by telling you this, but when I coach people along in making these tapes, I always have them write out the script first rather than just winging it, impromptu, on tape. And the reason for this is simple ~ when you have '*what*' you want to be thinking written down, and are taping it from a script (think tele-prompter) then your brain is free to focus on '*how*' you want to say what you want to be thinking. I encourage my clients to practice saying it with conviction ~ like you really mean it. And then watch it. If it looks like you don't mean it, tape it again until you get a version that feels convicted of and committed to a thought, or set of thoughts.

It Feels Like Such Bullshit

Interesting side note here ~ many of my clients report to me that the first time they try to tape and then watch it, it feels like such bullshit. I just smile ~ of course it does! Why would it feel like anything else? You are not going to become convinced of something that at first is the reciprocal, or opposite, of what you believe right out of the gate. It takes numerous repetitions before you begin to believe it. But eventually you will believe what you hear and see, if you hear and see it enough. Any doubt about that?

Then I simply have to defer to the advertising industry. How many times have you seen the Geico gekko? Did you believe that Geico was an impressive insurance company the first time you saw the silly gekko in some clever, humorous situation? Of course not. It is only after many repetitions that your brain begins to form that belief. Are you skeptical? If so, talk to the folks at Budweiser. This year (2020) they spent well over \$5 Million for a 30-second spot during the super bowl. Why? They make that money back 10-fold in beer sales just from that spot. They wouldn't if they didn't. Do you think they care if you are convinced you aren't influenced by their silly or sappy commercials? Nope, not one bit. Commercials work by sheer repetition. The more times they are processed in the brain, the more familiar the information becomes. It literally starts rising to the top in terms of importance. And if it didn't work that way, then you would have to somehow have the *belief* the Budweiser is the best beer, or that Geico is the best insurance, *'before'* you saw the commercial, right? It is obviously the other way around.

Which leads directly to my next point. When people watch a video of themselves saying something that does not resonate with their belief system, the first reaction is 'that is bullshit', and this makes it even harder to watch, because they already hate how they look and sound. Their brain tells them it is pointless to listen to such bullshit. But here is the beauty of it, we are actually 'pulling a fast one' on our own brain. If it were someone else trying to feed us this 'bullshit', we would simply reject it as such. But it isn't someone else, *it is you*. And thanks to your reticular activating system, even though your conscious brain is rejecting the information as 'so much bullshit' your subconscious is still receiving the message loud and clear, courtesy of the fact that it is *your* voice and your image. The reticular activating system over-rides your conscious objection and safely deposits the information into your subconscious in a file that is marked 'important and true'. How nifty is that? In essence, here, we are bypassing the fire-wall and breaching the brain's own security system in a covert way. The conscious brain is quite content to believe it has 'rejected' this 'false' information, while all the while, the new file is being built deep in the subconscious. And then one day the file size reaches a capacity that is big enough to challenge the existing belief and, wha-la, change has occurred. So many of my clients describe it this way: 'I caught myself thinking the old way, and all of a sudden it was as if someone 'pushed play' in my head and the new thought began to play". I know that feeling, I have experienced it hundreds of times myself ~ it is almost surreal, but oh so very cool!

Consolidation ~ I Think I'll Just Sleep On It

At this point you might be asking: "Okay, so you claim that just watching this video every day is going to change my thinking? And I am going to hate it at first, and it is going to sound like such bullshit? But if I keep doing it, even though I hate it and don't believe it, it will still work? And that eventually I might even like it?" And just how long is that going to take? Good question: And the answer is: About 100 views on average over the course of 100 days, roughly 1 view per day for 100 days, not 10 views per day for 10 days, which would be 100, and not one view per week for 100 weeks, (which would probably work but we take 2 years). We would all, I suppose, like to knock this

thing out as quickly as possible, but there is this other little feature in the brain called 'consolidation' (for lack of a better term). Essentially, the brain consolidates information every night as we sleep, kind of like de-fragmenting the hard drive on ones computer. Not to get too far out in the weeds here, but this is where dreams are thought to come from, this process of cleaning up and consolidating the day's information.

I would suppose that most people have had the experience of 'sleeping-on' something, and then the next day having a much better perspective. As a matter of fact, I do this purposely when I am using the ***PVC platform*** I have developed, Premium Virtual Counseling. PVC is a 'non-real-time' conversation that takes place over the internet or cell-phone network using voice recordings instead of 'live' conversations. When I receive a voice-recording, I process the tape, taking some notes and then purposely 'sleep on it', meaning that I don't create my reply, most generally, until the next business day. It started out this way because of the logistical nature of trying to fit PVC in the margins, or white-spaces, of my booming conventional private practice. I couldn't guarantee same-day responses, so I guaranteed 48 hour responses. Invariably I would find 10 minutes to listen to a tape and then have to put it away because I had a conventional client waiting in my lobby. More times than not, I wouldn't get back to my response until the next day or even the day after, and I started to notice something really interesting ~ my response quality took a dramatic upward turn. At first I thought maybe it was a fluke, but then I noticed it again and again. When I picked up the mic to tape my response, the thoughts that flowed into my head were so much better than when I tried to tape my response immediately after listening, or even later on that same day. There was something wonderful and almost magical happening when I 'slept on it' or more technically 'allowed my brain to do it's consolidation thing'. I have most certainly found the same to be true with using the CΔVP method every day for 100 days. You need those 99 nights of consolidation to reach the threshold.

Now how, you ask, can I say this with such confidence? After all, isn't this just your own observation, your own empirical evidence? Yes, that is true, but here is the kicker ~ I have challenged every client who has used this method over the past decade, and there have been thousands, to prove me wrong (and BTW I will issue the same challenge to you, right here, right now). In other words, make the tape, watch it every day for 100 days and then tell me what you think? I have had many take the challenge, and not a one has ever proved me wrong, as a matter of fact, 100% they have proven me right ~ and I can say that with 100% certainty. I have never had a client watch a tape 100 days in a row and tell me ~ nothing is different. The response is always more like ~ Holy Crap, this is amazing ~ why haven't I heard about this before? I just shrug my shoulders and smile. I have tried my best for 10 years to spread the word. Now, of course, I am not saying that everyone who starts using CΔVP experiences this amazing transformation after 100 days, because not everyone makes it 100 days ~ as you can well imagine. You can have the best method the world has ever seen, the most effective and efficient, and still not follow through. I have yet to figure out how to work that miracle.

NBA-17 ~ Killing 3 Birds With One Stone

Supraliminal Messages

Another side note here is that I have been experimenting over the past 3 years with listening to tapes 'without' trying to pay attention to them. Ever the experimenter that I am, I just couldn't resist the temptation to find out what my subconscious might do with an audio feed that was playing in my ears, but not the object of my focus. So I made a few tapes and started the experiment. I was most interested in finding out what the subconscious is capable of without much assistance from the consciousness, as in not trying to focus on what is playing on tape in my ears. I had heard of subliminal messages, the ones that movie theaters supposedly used in their trailers to get people to buy candy or popcorn. Rumor had it that editors could cleverly sneak a few frames featuring pictures of snacks in a running tape, spaced out below the threshold of conscious detection, but yet still picked up by the visual cortex, that would create the urge for people to hit the concession stand. I believe that such conspiracy theories have yet to be proven, but it makes one wonder.

Of course, these messages would not be subliminal, because I could most certainly detect them and consciously knew they were playing, I was just trying to not pay attention to them. And as I did some re-researching, as I always do, I ran across the term supraliminal, which literally means 'existing above the threshold of consciousness', but is more accurately interpreted as: 'being aware of an environmental cue, but not aware of the influence of such on self'. Perfect, I thought, to describe what I was trying to do. Of course I am aware of the fact that my voice is playing in my ears, but I also wanted to see what kind of influence this had on me if I was intentionally trying 'not' to give it my conscious thought.

And I am very happy, and excited to tell you that my experiment has been a smashing success ~ even when I am not focusing on my voice, playing in the back-ground, it still has a tremendous amount of influence on the acquisition of new thought processes. And since I am hoping right now that this has your attention, let me tell you just a bit more about the experiment. I exercise every single morning for 90 minutes. That alone is something I could write a whole separate book about. The results of doing such are nothing short of miraculous. Why anyone on earth wouldn't want to do this, once they know how much it improves quality of life, is almost beyond mystifying, except that I know the answer and that is what this book is really all about. But ... back to the story ...

My Exercise/Meditation/Journaling Routine

On 6 days of the week this exercise consists of riding a stationary, recumbent, bike in my basement. (on the 7th day, if you are wondering, I lift weights, I am now at the point in my life, with joint and tendon issues, that I need a full week to recover from a session of weight lifting), it went from 3, to 2 and now finally 1x per week. The biking is really out of necessity in that I have had surgeries on both of my knees and my left ankle. Sports my whole life really beat my body up pretty good, but I wouldn't go back and change a thing. Jogging is out of the question. In fact any aerobic activity other than a

bike is out of the question, except for maybe swimming, but I can't do that year round. And more importantly I cannot do anything else while I am swimming. Biking on a recumbent bike, now that is a different story. I can do lots of other things while I am biking on a recumbent bike. I provided this picture to the right so you didn't have to try and imagine what I am talking about. Here I am, in my 'cockpit', where you will find me every single morning. Even on my weightlifting day, I still ride 30" to warm up. As you can see, I have my laptop conveniently positioned right in front of me, so I can type on my computer. And I don't even type all that much. If you are observant, you will see my computer is a MacBook and if you are a Mac user, you will know that you can dictate instead of keyboarding in any program or app, so most times I am simply positioning the cursor and speaking what I want to be typed out. I love this set-up for so many reasons, chief of which is that I can multi-task. I get so much done in those 90 minutes it would blow your mind, and the time passes so fast that I hardly notice I am getting a fantastic workout in at the same time. It takes a minute to train your brain to keep your legs pumping without thinking about it, but once you get the hang of it, it is the bomb. I have been working out this way since graduate school (another story I will save for later).



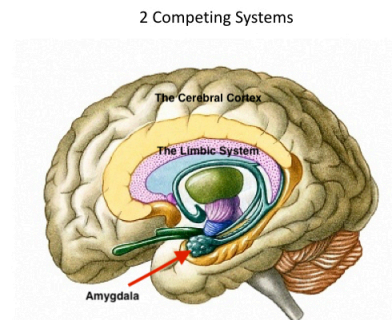
I really am going somewhere with this ... I promise ... So the first 30 minutes is warm-up, easing my stiff joints into it. And during this first 30 minutes is also a good time for me to get some really boring tasks done. Every day I have about 30 minutes worth of 'mind-numbing' administrative tasks, data entry into my client database, insurance billing tasks, invoice management, schedule updates, etc. So I decided I would do my 'supra-liminal' experiment during this 30 minute time frame. It would be the equivalent of killing 3 birds with one stone: warming up my body, grinding out mind numbing work, and playing 30" worth of CΔVP tapes in my ears, which I have now dubbed supraliminal meditation. I started that project 3 years ago, and when I set it up, I included some special tapes that would serve as my 'control' tapes to empirically prove, one way or the other, if I was picking up the information supra-liminally, and I am so excited to say I have empirical proof that it really works.

So back to my claim about 100 days ~ I believe it will make a huge difference even if you find yourself not paying that close of attention. Now I wouldn't suggest trying the supra-liminal thing while trying to watch TV or listen to a podcast, but while driving to work, mowing the lawn or going for a jog ~ heck yeah. And anyone who has physically done it, had the video (or at least the audio portion if you are multi-tasking) hit their retina or eardrums every day, for 100 days has had the same response ~ "I am amazed at how well this works", usually followed by the sheepish admittance ~ "I really didn't

think it would". No surprise there, I think skepticism is built into our DNA. So there you have it ~ The Secret Weapon!

The Limbic System

In order to more fully explain what we are trying to do here, I am going to zoom-out a bit, from the cellular level to the structural level in the brain. In the picture on the right we have an artist's drawing of the human brain. In the center of the brain, in color, is ***The Limbic System***, and surrounding this system, in beige, is the 'rest of the brain', ***The Cerebral Cortex***. These are actually 2 competing systems in the brain that act together as a 'check and balance' for the entire system. It is really quite a beautiful thing that they do, although it tends to frustrate the heck out of a person if you don't understand it.



So first let's take a look at the Limbic system, a relatively small part of the brain, but yet extremely powerful and quick to action. It is often referred to as the Lizard Brain or Reptilian Brain, referring to what scientists believe is the older, more primeval form of the brain, before human's developed the cerebral cortex to actually 'think beyond' primeval instincts, you know, eat, drink, have sex, kill or be killed ... that sort of thing. And just to be clear, often times they are referring to just the Amygdala, which is the almond-shaped (amygdala is the greek word for almond), darkest green, structure on the bottom, that looks a bit like a clump of grapes in this picture. Now if you are a creationist, you just accept the idea that this was all part of the plan from the beginning and that this system, and the way it works in concert with the rest of the entire brain, is just an elegantly simple, but amazingly brilliant and ingenious design. Either way works just fine for me ... it doesn't affect the function whatsoever. I think of Limbic System as a unit, because it involves some other structures beyond just the Amygdala, which we will get to in a moment.

The primary job of the limbic system is ... well ... to keep one alive. You can also refer to it as the 'pleasure-seeking / pain-avoiding' system in the brain, since that is generally how it keeps one alive. It houses the infamous 'fight or flight' response, which excites us to action when we are in trouble and need to get out of danger, and curiously enough the excitement system, which invokes some of the same responses (increased heart rate and rapid/heavy breathing) when we are engaging in something extremely exciting (think having sex). Have you ever stopped to think about how similar those feel physiologically? Keep that thought in mind.

I will remind you hear that in the previous slides, I have the 'yellow lines' representing 'negative thought patterns' connecting to the limbic system, and here is why: Nearly every issue I work with in my practice, stress, anxiety, depression, fear ~ fear of failure, fear of what others might think, fear of being insignificant, or leading a life of mediocrity, lack of confidence, low-self esteem, inability to lose weight, addictions of any kind, procrastination and ... you guessed it ... the difficulty in maintaining an exercise program ~ which has been the chosen theme here ~ all involve the limbic system in some way. In fact, I can think of very few problems that I help people deal with that are not in some way related to how the limbic system and cerebral cortex fail to balance out the system. Schizophrenia, personality disorders and other biological problems like Aspergers or Autism come to mind, and I can't even say for sure that those aren't related in some way to this balance in the system, they just don't appear to ... at least not to me.

I am not going to take the time here to explain how each of these problems (and many more I didn't mention) relate to the balance between the 2 systems, but since exercise has been our theme, I will touch on it here.

Built For Survival

Expending physical energy for any other purpose than catching food, getting away from a predator or having sex just doesn't make sense to the Lizard Brain. The system is built for survival, and anything that threatens survival, or even 'seems' to, is a 'no go' in the system. So the limbic system 'pumps the brakes' on the idea of exercising for no good reason. But as I have stated before, the limbic system has evolved to be very clever about just how this happens. It doesn't come right out and say 'no way ~ exercise is not going to happen' (okay, well ... in reality it does do that for some people, who are hell-bent on being couch potatoes and don't really have the slightest desire to get in shape ... but if you are one of those people you probably aren't reading this book) instead the limbic system launches more covert, subversive thoughts like: 'Yeah, sounds like a great idea, really something I ought to do ... I'll get on that tomorrow'.

Same goes for most 'diets' ~ How many times have you had the idea to 'eat well starting today', and then you spy that box of donuts in the break-room and your limbic system goes to work, on a mission to get one of those donuts in your mouth. The argument begins subtly, doesn't it, 'I have been eating good all week, I suppose one isn't going to hurt!', and then it progresses from there: 'I can just skip lunch today ~ I'll make up for it that way'. Or 'I will get on the treadmill the moment I get home from work' (after of course I move all of the clothes that have been hanging on it for months) ~ think of the ridiculous notion that you are going to pay for that donut by doing something else that you haven't been able to accomplish? Kind of crazy, isn't it, how the limbic system conjures up 'subversive thinking' on cue to instantly torpedo any intentions you had for 'eating clean' today. Sure, every now and again, the limbic system loses for a moment, and you walk away from the box of donuts without at least one of them making it into your mouth, but for the most part the limbic system wins ~ it is supposed to win! That's

what it does ~ on-boards as many available calories as possible and quashes exercise by using cleverly designed irrational thinking the kills our best of intentions.

Okay, so I said I wasn't going to take the time to explain how all of these problems relate to the balance between the two systems, but here is one more: Anxiety and Depression (and by the way, in my book they are one and the same thing, just different levels of the same problem - fear, the Amygdala's 'middle name'). I have yet to meet a client who suffers from excessive anxiety or depression whose core thinking did not have fear as the root. All of anxiety is obviously rooted in fear: Fear of failure, fear of embarrassment, fear of what other people might think, fear of not being good enough, fear of ostracism ... fear of bad things happening period. Depression takes fear to the next level ~ hopelessness and helplessness, usually accompanied by a deep sense of complete failure 'I have failed at everything and failed everyone, and there is no way of redemption' ... failure to see the meaning of life, failure to see the reason to even keep on living. And perhaps the worst fear ~ that our lives are completely worthless and mean absolutely nothing, to anyone, and it would be better for me and everyone else if I just wasn't here anymore.

It may seem to you that this is a bit counter-intuitive. If the limbic system's main function is to keep us alive, how does something like suicide even happen? This is one of the true conundrums of life, but I believe it is best explained this way: We are geared to survive individually as human beings, this is the primary focus of the limbic system, and this system goes to great lengths to make this happen, but when it is continuously and chronically bombarded with the thinking ~ 'I am worthless, just a drain on humanity, and there is no hope of that changing' ~ I believe at some point the system defers to the greater good of the whole, survival of the species so to speak, and the idea sets in that for the greater good of humanity it is best that we 'be culled from the herd' so to speak. Now of course I cannot prove that this is the case, it is my theory, but from all of the empirical evidence I have gathered in 2 decades of doing this, this makes the most sense to me.

The Balancing Act

So if the limbic system is so strong, fast, persuasive and decisive ~ how do we stand a chance? Well ... glad you asked. Here comes the balancing act. The limbic system is indeed strong and fast, but in sheer size it is relatively small. The cerebral system is weaker and slower by design. Why? (you might ask). It all hearkens back to the main job of the limbic system ~ survival, getting out of danger. When something threatens the system in any way - physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually - the limbic system springs into action, flooding the system with adrenaline, 'rocket fuel' which makes one 2-3x stronger and faster, and cortisol, the body's naturally occurring steroid which makes the system 2-3x more capable of not dying from severe injury or trauma (think about what steroids are used for, 'reducing inflammation and suppressing the immune system' - functions that just may keep you alive). These functions happen automatically at the first hint of danger detected by the limbic system. Better to have these hormones on board and not actually need them, than to be slow the punch, and then activate them

once it is determined they are really necessary. In other words, by the time the cerebral cortex determines that there is a problem, it could well be too late. I refer to the system as a 'shoot first, ask questions later' system.

NBA-18 ~ Leveraging The Cerebral Cortex

Have you ever heard of a frontal lobotomy? Do you know what it involved? Severing the nerves between the Pre-frontal cortex and the, you guessed it, limbic system. Did it work? Yes and no. Yes it basically eliminated anxiety and depression, but along with it happiness and excitement and a whole host of incredibly debilitating side effects. It rendered a dangerous individual (danger to self or others) less dangerous, but at a high price and was simply a diabolical procedure, rarely if ever used anymore. So simply disconnecting the limbic system is not a very good idea ~ in case you were wondering.

Size Matters

So, yes, the cerebral cortex lags behind, but ... and here is the big but ... what the cerebral cortex lacks in speed and strength, it more than makes up for in sheer size. That is how the cerebral cortex balances the equation. Remember that in the human brain, size truly matters.

So just to keep this all in perspective, let's apply it to our central 'problem' here ~ which is the limbic system's relentless insistence that 'exercise for no good reason is a waste of precious resources' and thus it can be dismissed from the agenda by simply launching the 'I'll do it tomorrow' idea, which virtually guarantees it isn't going to happen. Are you with me? The cerebral cortex, armed with all of the logic that exercise, though it burns precious calories, does in fact benefit the system by creating more stamina and boosting over-all functioning in many other sub-systems, like the immune system, for instance, won't be able to win the argument until this logic can 'out-weigh' the limbic response. And to make this happen requires the neural-networking of as many sub-systems in the cerebral cortex as humanly possible. Size ultimately trumps speed in the brain.

So what does this feel like when it is happening? As a long-term, daily exerciser, I can tell you exactly what this feels like ~ I feel it every single morning! The alarm goes off and I try to shake the sleep out of my head. I feel so warm and cozy under the covers. It is 6 am and my feet need to hit the floor within 2 snoozes of my alarm. My limbic system goes to work immediately, launching the argument for me to stay put: I didn't sleep all that well. I have a long day ahead of me. My back hurts. My head hurts. I feel a bit nauseated. I don't have time this morning. Can't a put this off until tomorrow? Man, that argument is strong. It freezes me for a moment, and then my cerebral cortex kicks in. Are you kidding me? An hour of exercise trumps an extra hour of sleep exponentially. Any pain you feel right now will be 10 times less when you are done with exercise. Exercise will gain me time in productivity. I cannot afford to not do it. And, by the way, there is no tomorrow. These are thoughts I have rehearsed thousands of times, in fact I rehearse them on tape every morning, and will be rehearsing them again in just a few

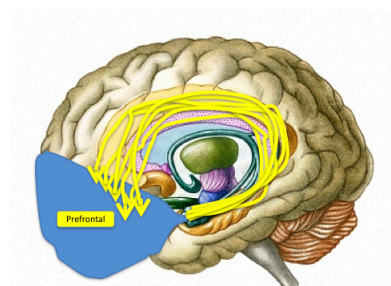
minutes when I get on my exercise bike, put earbuds in and push 'play' to start my 'play list' of self-guided imagery meditation tapes. By rehearsing these 'cerebral' thoughts, that directly dispute my 'limbic' thoughts, enough times and with enough sensory stimulation in my brain, I have recruited a vast army of synaptic networks that I can summon at a moments notice, at 6:15am, to essentially 'win the argument' that is happening in my head. Although the cerebral system is a bit late to the pity party, it arrives with a commanding argument and sweeps my feet off the mattress and onto the floor, eases my body into an upright, standing position and guides me across the bedroom floor to dutifully don my workout clothes and start my ritual. The good news is that my cerebral cortex wins this argument every single day, but the bad news is that the argument still happens 'every-single-day'. And I only keep my winning streak alive by practicing every single day. Yes, I am at the top of my game, but I still practice every single day. Does that surprise you?

Batting Practice For The Brain

If so, then consider this. I am a huge baseball fan ~ huge. Loved to play it, still love to watch it. (And here in 2020 I am going through withdrawal, waiting for the season to start midst the Covid pandemic. As I write this narrative, opening night is one week away, July 23, 2020 - I can hardly wait.) This will be the first year in as long as I can remember that I won't be attending a Cubs game at Wrigley, and that bums me out, but that isn't really the point of the story. Here is the point: When I go to see the Cubs at Wrigley, I am in line when the gates open, 2 hours before the actual game starts, not to drink beer and eat popcorn (although I will be doing that), I am there to watch them warm up and take batting practice. Call me boring, but I get a huge kick out of watching that whole process. And here is the relevancy ~ these guys are the best in the business, at the top of their game, and they wouldn't even consider 'NOT' taking batting practice. Just like them, I wouldn't consider 'NOT' listening to my tapes, and for the same reason ~ if I want to be 'the best in the game' of producing the thinking that elicits a consistent, daily exercise routine, I have to practice that thinking, just as a baseball player takes batting practice. Of course executing a successful baseball swing and executing the thinking needed to get out of bed and exercise are decidedly different in function, but mentally they are controlled by neurons from the same set of neurons that control everything a living organism thinks, feels or does. Contrary to popular belief, there is no such thing as 'muscle memory', with out the neural commands, muscles are useless (think stroke victims). The bottom line is that I succeed at exercising every day because I go to the bother of practicing the thoughts and ideas the make such happen. Without that daily practice, my ass is likely to stay put, in bed, along with north of 80% of Americans, wondering: Why can't I just do it??

So just how do we get there? Glad you asked. This is really my most favorite part of the story. On this slide you will see those familiar 'yellow' lines again, only this time they are running from the limbic system to

2 Competing Systems



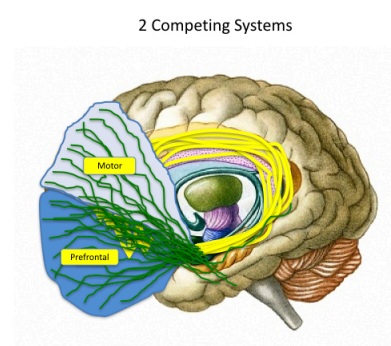
the pre-frontal cortex of the cerebrum. This represents how the limbic system works to 'inform' this very important part of the cerebral cortex. The pre-frontal cortex is involved in planning complex behavior, decision making, moderating social behavior, concentration, abstraction, problem solving, orchestration of thoughts in accordance with internal goals ~ in general, it is in charge of executive function in the brain. Is it any wonder that this part of the brain needs a direct line to the limbic system? When even the hint of danger ~ any kind of danger, real or perceived ~ is detected, the pre-frontal cortex is the 'first to know'. It gets a swift and strong command to act, and act now.

Maintaining Homeostasis

So when the alarm goes off at 6am, and you are contemplating burning energy for no good reason, the limbic system springs into action, launching thought after thought to thwart any attempt at actually carrying out this potentially lethal act of wasting precious energy reserves that would necessarily be used in moving, bending, flexing, pumping blood, removing waste and growing and repairing muscle tissue. These yellow lines represent all of those 'early warning' signs that come in the form of: "I really don't want to do this. I didn't sleep all that well. I am so tired. My head hurts. I feel nauseous. I better just skip this and catch an extra hour of sleep. Today was not a good day to get this going. If I feel better later I can try it, or maybe tomorrow, when I feel more like it." Do I need to go any further, because I could. In the seminar groups I used to run, we had some fun collecting all of the 'excuses' we use to keep our asses in bed in the morning. I have a collection of over 50 of them. I find it fascinating how clever the human brain is at maintaining homeostasis. And the most interesting part is that they are all very believable in that moment. They do a very effective job of making sure we don't mess with status quo.

So in one's pre-frontal cortex one can have the best plan, orchestrated deftly with my internal goals of getting in shape and being more healthy, and one will get absolutely no-where, because when the alarm goes off at 6am, my best of intentions are obliterated by a volley of limbic responses that virtually guarantee your ass is staying in bed. Sounds depressing doesn't it? No wonder I can't 'just do it'.

But don't despair ~ the fun is about to begin. Remember what these green lines represent in this figure? They are the reciprocal, mutually exclusive, counter-thoughts that we have crafted to replace all of the yellow thoughts. And we are about to begin the counter attack ~ launching these thoughts to counter-balance the system in favor of ... well ... getting my ass out of bed. I have already mentioned several times how to craft these thoughts and what that actually looks like (remember the 'Free Drinks Tomorrow' story?), so I will trust you don't need that



again here. I want to focus on the functionality here.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming

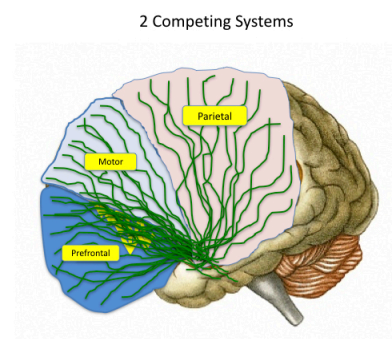
We use our prefrontal cortex to identify our negative (yellow) thoughts, analyze them and restructure them into positive (green) thoughts that will neutralize the negative thoughts, and then we use our motor cortex to write them down (or type or text if you prefer), analyze them, and re-write them in their corrected format. In doing so, we are already revving the cerebral engine and creating synaptic networks to join in the fight to over-throw the limbic system. This represents the beginning of neurolinguistic programming (NLP), programming the brain with language. To formulate thoughts, we need quite a bit of cognitive horse-power. Imagination and creativity are higher-level cognitive functions that rely on the use of memory and learning. There is a lot happening here when we make the effort to 'think differently', and think positively in a highly specific, mutually exclusive way. A lot of neurons are 'turning and burning' here, creating a highly favorable and logical way to think about how to think about getting my ass out of bed in the morning to exercise. A lot, yes, but not nearly enough. And I cannot stress this enough ~ *Not even close to nearly enough!*

This is where so many people - counselors, therapists and coaches included - veer off course. As an evolved human species, we have placed so much emphasis on getting the logic right, that we have elevated logic to a place of power that it just doesn't have in the brain. This is probably 'ground zero' for the theme of this book: Why don't I just do it?. At this point we have done a considerable amount of cognitive work to formulate the best kind of thinking, but if we stop here, thinking we are done, we are screwed ... and tattooed. We need to go the rest of the way and take this thing 'to the house'. If you stop here, this effort will die in the water, just as every other effort has, and you will be standing there wondering: "I know exactly what I need to be thinking ~ Why couldn't I just do it?"

Take a look again at the picture above. Look how much cognitive 'real estate' is left idle? And at the risk of being redundant, I am going to 'say it again' ~ size matters when it comes to synaptic networks. We need to recruit the rest of the cerebral cortex to join in the effort.

The System Integrator

Next to the motor cortex is the parietal lobe, see the diagram on the right, which is also known as the sensory cortex. This area of the brain is involved in perception, body awareness and attention. I think of it as the 'system integrator'. It also has one more very important function ~ it controls the reticular activating system (RAS), the brain's filter or gate-keeper. The brain processes



about 400 billion bits of information per second, but as humans we are only aware of about 2,000 of those. The brain can only go so fast. The average 'clock speed' of neurons in the brain is a mere 200 firings per second. This means that the vast majority of information streaming into the brain every second is filtered out. If left to 'do its thing', the RAS will likely 'filter out' new thoughts and ideas that are contradictory to the old defaults that already exist. This is where many people get caught up in the process. It seems impossible to 'believe' something that we 'just don't believe'. This is also why so many people at first reject new ideas ~ as so much bullshit!

Perhaps an example right here might be helpful. So many of my clients are caught, hard, in the firm belief that they 'are not good enough' (maybe you think that sometimes as well). So if we follow the steps already outlined previously, we will ultimately arrive at a binary, mutually exclusive, reciprocal thought: I am good enough. Pretty simple, right? So I should be able to just 'tell myself' I am good enough, right? One sure way to get a client who is convinced she isn't good enough to think you are full of shit is to tell them to tell themselves that they 'are good enough'. If you want a good laugh, check out this video on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ldAQ6Rh5ZI> Many of you have likely seen it. It is a bit on SNL featuring Stuart Smalley (Al Franken), which aired in 1991, a satire on Daily Affirmations ~ a complete slam on the idea of 'looking yourself in the mirror and telling yourself you are fun, capable, and attractive'. It is pretty hilarious. And on more than one occasion I have had a client reference the skit when I am trying to explain this part of the process. It is particularly funny to me because it highlights the general feeling one gets when trying to correct an errant thought like I am not good enough, by simply looking in the mirror and saying out-loud: I am good enough. Blame this on the reticular activating system, busy filtering out the bullshit.

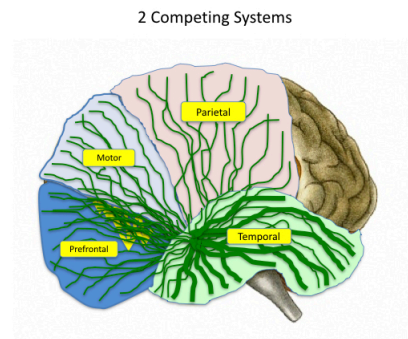
But what makes it particularly amusing and interesting to me, is that the funniest things always seem to contain a grain of truth ~ and the same goes for this process. As I have mentioned previously, our brains have an affinity for hearing the sound of our own voice and seeing our own image. We may think we hate the sound of our voice and/or our image on video or in a picture, but the reticular activating system sees those things differently. Not only do we pay very close attention to our voice and our image, but subconsciously we regard our own verbalizations as authoritative and true. So as much as we might consciously hate the sound of our voice, or cringe at seeing our image, whatever we are saying gets a clean pass right through the filter and is deposited in our gray matter as something that is important and true.

And when you stop to think about it, this is nothing new 'under the sun'. Since ancient times people have said things out loud, repeatedly in the effort to learn, memorize and ultimately believe what is being said. Mantras, chants, incantations, creeds, liturgies, common prayers (like the Lord's Prayer), The Rosary, and hymns are all verbalized out-loud, spoken, chanted or sung, usually in groups for the purpose of ... creating a belief or set of beliefs. Tony Robbins, one of the iconic motivational speakers of our age, gives a glimpse into his personal regimen in the Netflix documentary "I Am Not Your Guru". He most definitely uses a litany of personal, spoken narratives ~ I believe he refers to

them as his incantations ~ that keep the cognitive momentum going in his mind. It just plain works.

NBA-19 ~ Change In Your Pocket

Moving further along in the cerebrum we find the temporal lobe, the audio-processing power-house in the human brain, the area in light green in this diagram. Audiologists would argue that this sensory receptor is the most important one in the brain because it is the 'system that never sleeps'. It is always on, monitoring the environment for sounds. It will stir you out of a 'dead' sleep when you hear a strange 'thud' in the middle of the night. I am guessing a flash of light would do the same thing, and there are clearly more neurons dedicated to the visual cortex, but hey, to me it doesn't matter which is more important ~ the answer is that they both are.



The Temporal Lobe

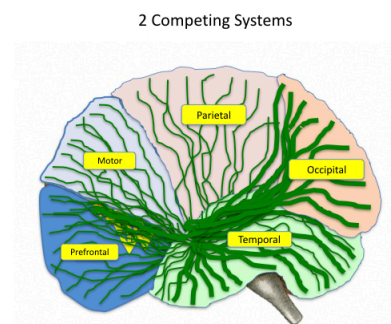
The temporal lobe has two major functions, processing sound and more specifically processing language ~ which is essentially assigning meaning to sound, right? It has been estimated the the temporal lobe alone hogs over 1/3, 35%, of the brain's processing power when functioning. That is astounding, but not surprising. Think of what it takes to decipher every sound coming into the cerebrum and evaluate such for meaning? As you might suspect, the temporal lobe works in concert with the reticular activating system, as well as the visual system which we we explore next. In fact, the very word reticular means 'characterized by a fine network', and literally describes the fact that it branches through out the whole brain, helping to monitor, filter information and integrate the systems.

Processing sound is a huge task in an of itself and deciphering meaning from spoken sounds, strung together in words, sentences and paragraphs is ... well ... kind of mind blowing, really? It takes the first full year of life (on average) just to learn how to speak, and then about 5-6 more years on average to learn to read and write. I marvel at the amount of neural machinery that is churning in my brain right now as I 'pluck' the words I am typing right now from my vocabulary, and arrange them into this very sentence. And I marvel even more at the fact that somewhere in the future, you are going to be reading these very words and will (hopefully) derive the same thoughts and meanings I am using to create them. This happens so effortlessly for adults, and so seamlessly, that we can't even imagine the gargantuan amount of synaptic activity that is happening inside your head right now ~ wether you are reading this sentence or listening to it on audible. Simply amazing.

Once you consider the expansive volume of networked neurons it takes to create and the subsequently listen to a spoken thought, why would you even consider not bringing this entity on-board in the effort to build the kind of thinking that will change your life? My mother used to say: "Many hands make light work!" and the same principle applies here. If you leave out the speaking and listening piece of this practice, you are leaving a lot on the table ~ A LOT. And we can't afford to leave anything on the table in this fight. The opponent, our crafty, robust and wily limbic system, is just too strong and fast. We need all the help we can get.

The Occipital Lobe

Last but not least is the occipital cortex (figure 14-028), our visual processing power house. In the human brain, neurons devoted to visual processing number in the hundreds of millions and take up about 1/3 of the cortex. (By way of contrast, this is about 10 times the number of neurons devoted to processing sound.) Keep in mind, though that this is because it just takes about 10 times as much space to store video as opposed to audio. Even on a computer, you will find that a video file is about 30 times larger than an audio file of the same length. And it is probably worth mentioning here that a video pretty much always contains the audio as well ~ right? Especially when we are talking about making these cognitive selfies. Capturing your thoughts on video and then playing them back for you to watch and hear is just simply colossal in terms of neural-network-involvement. It is the bomb.



Just how much of a bomb, you ask? Glad you asked ... because of love this answer: They say a picture is worth a 1000 words, but is it really? Turns out that isn't correct. In 1983 Nicholson Baker, in his investigation into the 'size of thoughts' came up with an ingenious way to test this. In his experiment he had participants 'describe' in words the same information expressed in a single diagram or picture. The result was that on average it took 84.1 words to describe the picture. So let's take that one step further, since we are not talking about a snap-shot, but rather a video, which is a series of 'snap-shots' being viewed at typically 30 frames per second. So ... 84 words, times 30 frames, times 60 seconds is a whopping 151,800 'words' per minute of video. Just in case you are wondering, a typical novel contains approximately 40,000 words. So roughly 4 novels per minute. Now do you see why so many neurons are dedicated to visual processing? Again, I am not trying to say here that the visual is 10 times more powerful, I just like to play around with numbers. What I am saying is ~ it is powerful, and brings an enormous network of 'data-crunching' synapses into the fray. And as you have heard me say numerous times already, we need all the help we can get!

And one final side note before I move on ~ when you video-tape your revised thinking, *do it with conviction*. It is interesting, and perhaps a bit amusing to me, how many of my clients trip a bit on this piece. They tape their thoughts and then upon watching the replay are perplexed by the fact that they don't look like they believe one darn bit of it. They 'thought' they were portraying a convicted self, but in retrospect, it just didn't come out that way. Yep, that's your brain for ya ... even when you think you are staging a convicted self, your brain can twist it right into 'so much bullshit'. It often takes a time or two to create a convicted take. Man ... the self is tough nut to crack. Details really do matter.

If I haven't made a good case by now for creating a cognitive-video-selfie from the neurological advantage stand-point, then I don't know what I could possibly say to drive it any further. Neurological recruitment, which falls directly in line with Hebbian Plasticity, puts one in the very best position to re-program the brain.

The Nuclear Version Of Thinking About It

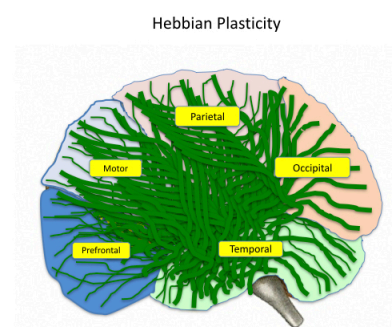
As you can see from my drawing here, using this strategy is literally bombing the brain with desirable thinking creating a fire-storm of synaptic activity. Theoretically, one episode of watching the video fires off every neuron and synapse involved in it's creation as well. This is the *nuclear* version of 'Just trying to think about it differently.'

Perhaps the best part about this process (and it's hard to pick a best part, because I like the whole process) is how easy and efficient it is. And this is so, so important.

Once you have the cognitive-selfie-video on your phone, you have reduced the effort to 'one-click' ~ hit play. If you have your headphones with you, you can literally do it anytime and anywhere. You don't need to be standing in front of a mirror. You don't have to try and remember what you are supposed to be thinking, or have to read it from a script. You don't have to have any privacy, with a pair of head phones or ear buds you can watch and/or listen just about anywhere. You can be doing something else, like driving, exercising or mowing the lawn, and you can just listen to the audio portion if you want to. It is super easy to create. Just about every mobile phone these days has video capability, even the dumb phones generally have this technology. Aim ~ click ~ record: What could be easier?

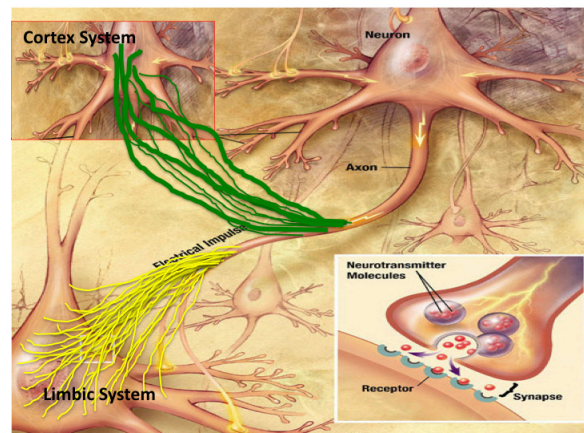
The Most Amount Of Traction From The Least Amount Of Effort

If I have learned anything over the past 2 decades I have learned this: It doesn't matter how good your strategy is and how well it works ***if you can't get people to execute the strategy and stick with it.*** We are humans and humans follow a path of least resistance as well. The greater the hassle, the lesser the likelihood of completion. It is



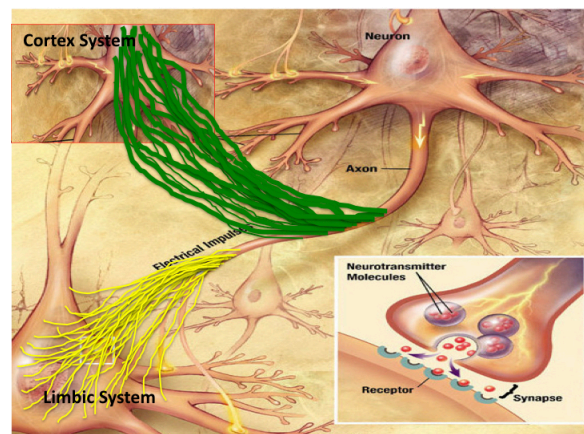
just that simple. Everything about this process is geared to extract the most amount of traction from the least amount of effort, and to make it happen on a device that is most likely to already be in your pocket ~ your cell phone. A number of years ago I nick-named this process **'Change In Your Pocket'**, a play on words, of course, derived from the almost defunct circumstance of actually having some small bills or coins in your pocket - like most these days my currency is plastic in my wallet or cyber-currency in the 'electronic wallet' on my phone. This method, literally, is a way to have a 'change agent' right in your pocket. I would tell you this is what I envisioned 20 years ago when my young, female client completely lost her train of thought during a session, upon getting a text message, and I thought to myself ~ I am going to find a way to get inside that phone ~ but that would be a bold-faced lie. I had no idea it would look like this, I couldn't have imagined it, but I am most pleased with the result.

So let's zoom back in again and take another look at what is happening at the cellular level. This slide shows some additional 'thicker' green lines, over-laying the original thin ones. Just to keep us on the same page, the thin green lines were depicting the thoughts themselves before we recruited all the help from the 'rest of the cortex'. The thicker green lines depict an episode of 'watching these thoughts on your video-taped, cognitive selfie'. Armed with all of the extra cognitive horse-power, we can create these pathways at a much faster clip.



One can literally 'catch up' to the limbic system at a much quicker pace. In my live presentations I am able to flip through these slides in succession and then back up and go through them again using my pointer to illustrate what is being simulated here, but with these still pictures I don't have that option so I will just walk you through it.

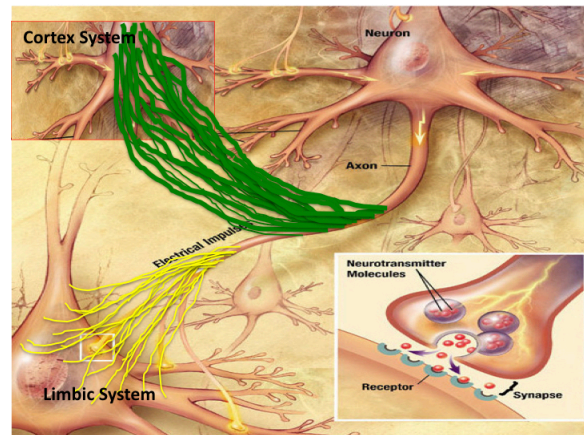
On the the slide to the right you see the green network growing rapidly, as we apply the more powerful CΔVP method. If I counted right, I applied the thicker green line about 10 times here in order to get the visual thickness I desired. That is certainly not meant to indicate that it will only take 10 times of watching this 'cognitive selfie' to catch up to the limbic system, it is the number of strokes it took to create a visual simulation. So how many strokes might it take, you ask? ... A fair question ... and here is my answer ... it all depends ... on the size of the yellow (limbic) network involved in the contest. But that's a pretty weak answer,



and sounds a bit like I am weaseling my way out of pinning it down to a number. That would work well for me, wouldn't it? If a client was having trouble getting the new network to 'take', then I could just hide behind the idea that his yellow network must be so darn big that it is just going to take a lot more tries. I don't like the smell of that anymore than you do, so I actually have a better answer ~ typically about 3 listens a day over the course of about 100 days, give or take. That seems to be the range for most people. A 3-times-daily frequency is about the optimal daily limit and it takes about 100 days of consolidation (AKA ~ sleeping on it) to get to the point that most people really feel like something is different, as I have mentioned earlier.

Use It Or Lose It

On this slide to the right, take a moment to focus on the yellow network and then compare it to the previous slide. You will notice that I have 'thinned out' the yellow network just a bit. This 'thinning' represents what is known in the neuro-science world as 'pruning' ~ neural-pruning, or atrophy. It is literally a process of taking apart synaptic connections and repurposing them for a new cause. In this case, the brain is literally repurposing the neuro-peptides that were being used to hold the yellow circuit together in order to build the new green network. The



nervous system, just like the muscular and skeletal system, employs a 'use-it-or-lose-it' strategy. Neurons and their hardware are often recruited or re-purposed in an elegantly efficient 'recycling' program. This phenomenon was first noticed many years ago when scientists were studying the nervous system in animals. It was not uncommon to surgically sever parts of the nervous system, just to see what would happen. This practice has been largely mitigated by animal-rights activists, who abhor the practice of experimenting on animals in ways that disable or disfigure a perfectly fine, cuddly animal, but back in the day it happened routinely. Neuro-scientists would sever, for instance, an optic nerve, rendering an animal completely blind, forcing the animal to rely on its other senses. After a period of time, they would then re-examine the animal to see what had happened in the brain. What they found is that the groups of neurons typically used in sight had been recruited by the other senses, particularly sound and touch. Upon further inspection the same was found to be true in humans, although of course, they had to wait for a blindness injury to occur naturally from some kind of a mishap.

Neural Recruitment

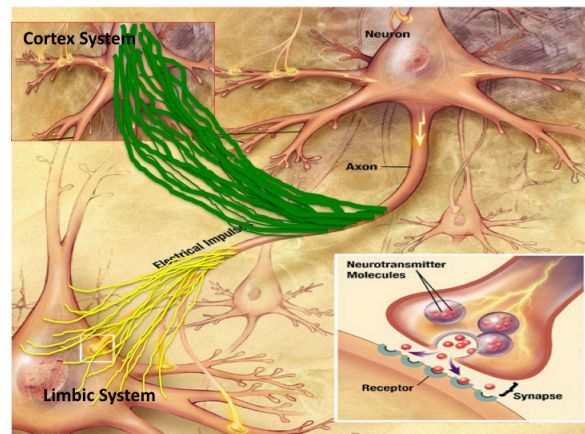
The same went for stroke victims. In the event of a cerebral stroke, certain parts the neural architecture of the brain are damaged beyond repair. How then is it that people can recover partial and sometimes fully? Well, modern technology has given us that

answer ~ neural recruitment. The brain is very quick to begin recruiting adjacent neurological hardware to take over the job as best it can. (For some very interesting reading about this subject, I would recommend Norman Doidge ~ *The Brain That Changes Itself*). These days, stroke victims or victims of other injury involving the neurological system, such as spinal-chord injuries that cause paralysis, are in physical therapy, or speech therapy, immediately. The sooner after the injury the better. There seems to be a window of opportunity to recruit neurons to do the job, which eventually closes, at least to some degree. My argument has always been that this kind of recruitment is really readily available all the time, we just don't realize it. This the kind of recruitment we are intentionally doing when we build a new neural pathway to take over the job of an existing one. Of course the job becomes even more daunting when the 'old' neural network is still alive and well, vying for the opportunity to fire first and launch the default algorithm before the new circuit even wakes up and realizes what his happening.

NBA-20 ~ Deep Practice

A New Sheriff In Town

What I have attempted to indicate here, with this diagram, is the relative equality in size of the green and yellow circuits. The green circuit is, of course, made up of thicker green lines than the yellow circuit, but the yellow circuit has more total lines. This is by design. It is important to note that the yellow pathway will not begin to atrophy until the green pathway reaches the threshold of being equal or greater in strength to the yellow. As you recall, this is how the brain works. It is a functional default to the path of least resistance. It is a ***security measure***.



The green pathway will not fire first until it exceeds this threshold. But once the green pathway reaches and exceeds the signal strength of the yellow, all bets are off. We now have a contender, a *new sheriff in town*, and the default is about to change.

Interestingly, the green pathway can be just below the threshold and yet feel non-existent. It is not like we can feel the green pathway getting stronger and stronger. It doesn't work that way. The yellow pathway is the default until one day that it is not anymore. This explains why so many people 'fall off the wagon'. They work tirelessly at building that green pathway, and yet they still continue to consistently follow the instructions issued by the yellow pathway. For so many this leads to the conclusion ~ 'this just isn't working for me', and they abort the mission, thinking they have gotten nowhere closer to where they want to be, when in fact they may be just a practice stroke or two from reaching the threshold and kicking the default over to the green pathway.

Now, you might be asking, how do I know this? I have experienced it myself, many many times and have watched it happen even more times. Let me give you an example. Awhile back I had a client who wanted to lose weight. She had failed at every other attempt and had come to me as her 'last resort' ~ (I actually get that a lot). She was intrigued by the fact that this was the first time she had ever seen a cognitive approach to this problem. She was a 'quick study' and soon got the hang of the process. We created some very good tapes that constituted her green pathway. (By the way, if you are interested in seeing some of her 'green' thinking, take a peek at the **Weight Loss** videos series on my website: http://takechargecounseling.org/videos/weight_loss She dutifully watched her tapes, day after day, which included thoughts like: Yes, one more will matter. I do care, that's who cares. And there is no tomorrow. Meanwhile she kept messing up. This woman was a 'high-powered' business executive who spent a lot of time on the road, always being wined and dined, and eating catered lunches just about every day of the week. Like most, she would 'try and tell herself' she was going to eat well, and sensibly, but when she was actually in the situation her limbic system would take over and she would find herself 'drawn' back up to the buffet, succumbing to thoughts like: 'One more cookie won't matter. Who cares anyway, I am just destined to be this way. And the proverbial: What the hell ... I can start this over tomorrow'. This would, of course, break down any resolve she had to 'eat better' and she would find herself grabbing another plate and filling it with the delectable deserts that were always being served. Then, of course, she would regret it, just as soon as she had chowed it down and feel like a weak, embarrassed, hopeless pig all afternoon. Nonetheless, the cycle would repeat the next day and the next. I had to keep encouraging her to press on with the tapes, even though she was getting more frustrated with herself and was definitely doubting the process. "This isn't working" kept creeping into her cognitive space. I was hoping she could hang on long enough to reach the threshold, and then it happened. She bounced into my office, beaming from ear to ear, and couldn't wait to tell me what happened.

It Was As If Someone 'Pushed Play' In My Head

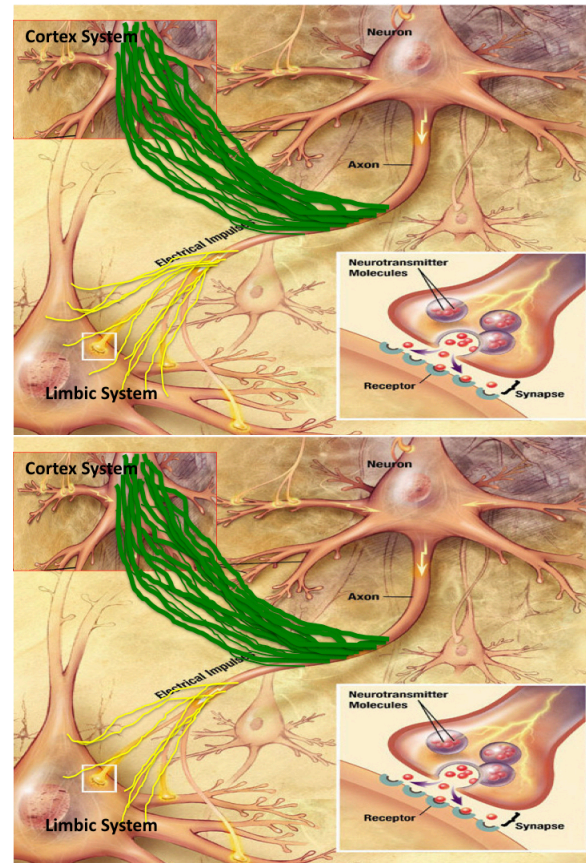
She was at a conference, doing her usual thing and on her way back up to 'get some desert' she stopped dead in her tracks. She described it this way: "It was as if someone pushed play in my head and the tape began to play". Loud and clear she could hear herself 'mentally reciting' her green thinking: One more will hurt. I do care, that's who cares. And, no, there is no tomorrow. As she described it, she almost turned around to see who was talking in her ear. I have heard so many varied descriptions of this happening and felt it so many times myself, and it is so cool ... it never gets old. But I cannot stress enough, that you really can't feel yourself getting closer to the threshold, it just happens 'all of a sudden' and bam, you are there. That is the nature of the change.

No before I go any further, I have to say, reaching the threshold is no place to stop. I have had the experience, on occasion, of clients getting to the threshold, getting super excited about the experience, and then letting their 'foot off the gas'. Usually they wander back into my office, sheepishly, a year or so down the road, having to admit that they gradually quit listening to the tapes and it all just sort of faded to black.

Fortunately, it is kind of rare ~ most people are so stoked at this point that they would never dream of letting their foot off the gas ~ but it does happen. For most, Having this kind of experience is such a momentum builder. You won't want to stop!

Like Learning A New Language

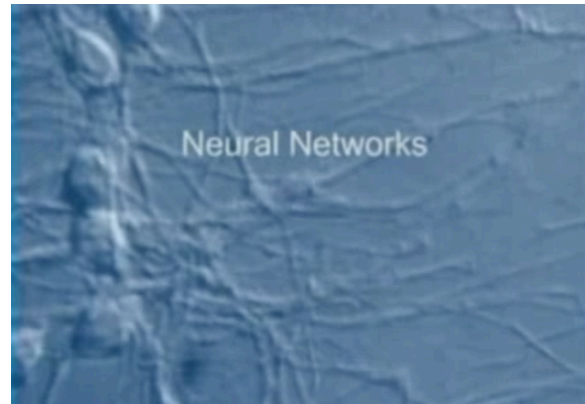
These next 2 slides to the right show the progression ~ as the green circuit gets stroked, the yellow circuit continues to atrophy. A good comparison here, I believe, is to think about the process of learning a new language. I must confess I can only speak one language. I tried, about 15 year's ago, to learn Spanish, but that was before I embarked on my own private practice. The effort to learn Spanish was very time consuming ~ talk about repetition! First there was the rote memorization of the Spanish form of the word, followed by all of the declensions, singular, plural, feminine, masculine, present, past ~ you probably know the drill. Then there were hours and hours of listening to words, sentences, paragraphs and practicing out-loud, over and over again. I didn't get anywhere even close to speaking it fluently, let alone setting Spanish as my new default, which I probably would eventually get to if I for some reason decided to take up residence in Mexico. But even at that, I have been around plenty of people over the years who have a good command of the English language, but still occasionally slip back into their mother tongue when they are feeling pressured or stressed. I don't think anyone ever completely forgets his mother tongue, just as no one ever completely forgets how to talk themselves right out of their best of intentions. I am a good 25 years down-stream from crossing the threshold between my own thinking that used to keep my butt in bed and my new default that gets me out of bed every morning to work out, and yet I can still hear the old default, making some noise, in the back of my brain as I lay there on a cold winters morning, under the covers, all snuggly and warm ~ that little voice encouraging me to stay put: One day won't hurt, right? You can get right back on this tomorrow. But that voice never wins the argument anymore, it is just too weak to stand a chance. Like the final picture in this sequence, the bottom one to the right, there are a few yellow strands left, enough to launch the suggestion that I just skip my workout, but that emaciated network never wins anymore ~ it is just annoying at this point.



I would imagine that some readers are wondering right about now ~ Can he prove any of this? Actually I can't prove all of it, we still aren't there yet, when it comes to technology, but where we are with technology is simply amazing. Take a moment to click on this link:

http://takechargecounseling.org/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/media1.26791444.mp4

The video clip is some phenomenal footage of actually neurons engaging in neuroplasticity and neuropruning. This picture to the right is actually a still picture, a screen-shot, from the above video clip that I have embedded in my **Neurobiology of Change** video presentation on my website. This clip is in the last minute or so of a presentation I have on my website titled, **The Neurobiology of Change**. I would love for you to watch the whole presentation. I think it would be very helpful to consolidate this information in your mind. I have included a link to the entire presentation as well:



http://takechargecounseling.org/videos/neurobiology_of_change

Deep Practice

So there you have it, CΔVP A to Z, but I want to leave you with a final thought. Even the best strategies mean absolutely nothing if one is not willing to practice. Essentially, CΔVP is the process of devising the best practice stroke, the perfect practice, to learn a new perspective. Daniel Coyle, in his book ***The Talent Code***, calls this kind of practice 'Deep Practice'. If you have not read the book, I would highly suggest it, it is an interesting read. Daniel was intrigued by fact that there were 'hot-beds' of talent, small, un-assuming, geographical regions that produced high levels of talent that were simply off the charts ~ a small village in Brazil producing more world class soccer players than anywhere else in the world ~ exponentially more. The same went for a small tennis camp in Russia, a music venue on the East Coast and a baseball training facility in the Dominican. In each case, the number of world-class performers produced was statistically astronomical compared to anywhere else in the world. So Daniel visited each of these 'hot-beds' of talent to figure out why. And his discovery was this (and I will try my best not to spoil the read for you) ~ it was how they practiced. They each had a strategy of 'practice' that was unlike all the others ~ deliberate, intentional, well-defined, measured practice, that was profound and intense ~ not what anyone might have suspected. Daniel called this practice 'deep practice'. *It is practice that is built in such a way that it makes one operate at the edge of one's ability ... forced to slow down, make errors, and correct them - as you would if you were walking up an ice-covered hill, slipping and sliding as you go - these experiences make you swift and graceful without your realizing it.*

I love the concept of *deep practice*, which runs parallel to the idea of *'perfect practice'*. I have borrowed Daniel's findings and applied them to my craft, which is not learning how to hit a baseball or play a piece of music, but rather learning *how to think from a new perspective*. From my perspective the *learning* is not fundamentally different. All learning involves the building of synaptic networks and the strengthening of such through repetition of the 'preferred' or 'perfect' way of performing. There are no 'instructions' to hit a baseball that are programmed into the muscles involved. Take out the part of the brain that involves motor skills and you won't be able to walk or talk, let alone hit a baseball. So talent, skill and ability all come from practice, and the deeper, or more perfect, the practice piece is, the better the outcome. CΔVP is simply the deepest, most perfect practice ever devised. And just like Daniel made reference to in his book, the experience of CΔVP makes you *swift and graceful in your thinking* without your even realizing it.

So there is only one thing left to do, and that is ... practice ~ the only piece I really can't help you with. I can help you build the perfect practice regimen, the deep practice necessary to learn the perspectives that will produce the life of your dreams, and show you exactly how to use it ... the rest is up to you!

NBA-21 ~ The Backwards Bicycle

By now I hope the message has become loud and clear ~ change is hard, really fricken hard, and even 'damn-near-impossible' in some cases, depending on what we are trying to change and for how long we have been doing (or not doing) what we would like to change.

Now I can say that, and you can hear that, but that doesn't necessarily mean that we both have the same idea of 'just how hard' I am talking about. And that is where metaphors come into the picture. I love metaphors. They are, in my opinion, the best way to convey a difficult or nebulous concept. I use them all the time to try and explain what something is like.

Just Like Riding A Bike

And for years I have used the metaphor of riding a bike as a way to conceptualize something that is rather complex in the beginning. I still remember my own skinned knees from the many crashes out in the parking lot beside our house in Tucson, AZ as I was trying to get the hang of balancing, thrusting down on the pedals, turning the handlebars back and forth, first to just to learn how to stay up-right and then to turn ~ there is a lot of physics for your brain to learn in the process of riding a bike. But you stick with it, and eventually it's a piece of cake ~ right. You literally 'don't have to think' about the many complex equations and algorithms your brain is running in the background to keep you upright. You can ride side-by-side with someone and carry on a complete conversation without ever once giving a conscious thought to just how you are keeping your-self from face-planting into the pavement. And even if you haven't

ridden a bike in years, you 'never forget', as the saying goes ~ "it's just like riding a bike".

My point of sharing this with my clients is to drive home the point that our brains don't just do this with things like riding a bike, they do it with everything that we have learned and done over and over. Let's take, for instance, the algorithms that govern food intake. We have literally learned our habits just as we have learned to ride a bike. We have learned what we like to eat, how often we eat and how much we eat each time we do it. It is completely governed by the subconscious. We don't have to think about it. Same goes for how we respond to something that upsets us (think anger) or frightens us (think anxiety), and the list goes on and on. These are all algorithms, or programs, in our brains that weren't there when we were born, we learned them, and now they have become subconscious programs, that we don't have to think about anymore. Some scientists estimate the up to 95% of the cognitive activity in the human brain is subconscious.

One day, about 8 years ago, after having had this conversation with a client, he texted me a link to a YouTube video saying ~ you gotta check this out. It was a link to a ***Destin Sandlin*** video ~ ***The Backwards Brain Bicycle***. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFzDaBzBIL0> Of course I checked out the video the next chance I got and I was stunned. For many, I suppose, the video would be interesting or amusing, but for me a giant door just opened up to a whole new perspective on 'just like riding a bike'. In an instant I knew I had been turned onto something big. Please watch the video right now, even if you have already seen it, watch it again ~ right now, please!! (I am asking nicely.)

The Perfect Metaphor For Change

Destin stumbled onto something big, bigger than big. This experiment, in my opinion, is the perfect metaphor for change. The back-wards bicycle represents the 'perfect' example of a mutually exclusive replacement in the simplest of ways. A gear, welded onto the handlebar, makes turning the handlebar to the right, cause the wheel to turn to the left ~ the exact opposite of the default way everyone has learned to ride a bike.

Destin, like so many of my clients, grossly under-estimated how hard it was going to be to simply turn the handlebars the opposite way ~ he thought it would be easy. He knew exactly what he needed to do, why couldn't he just do it? Destin admits on the video that he was laughing outwardly, but inwardly he was feeling frustrated (sound familiar). And then he shares his deep revelation: As he puts it: "He had the *knowledge* of how to ride the bike, but he did not have the *understanding*". And this really resonated with me, because I have often said there is a big difference between '*knowing*' a skill and '*owning*' a skill ~ knowing what to do, and even how to do it, but still lacking the rest of what it takes to actually do it, be that '*understanding*' as Destin called it, or '*ownership*' as I call it.

You can tell Destin isn't 'just faking that he can't do it' and you get the impression right from the beginning that the video is going to conclude with him being successful at learning ~ right? I mean how interesting would it be if he just gave up and concluded it couldn't be done. Further he gives some clues upfront about 'damaging' his brain. You have a pretty good idea this is not going to end with him concluding it just can't be done. Right?

Destin also sheds some light on the fact that there are 'algorithms' in the brain that run some fairly complex tasks.

You Cannot Ride This Bike

And then he bombs you with his definitive statement: "I am telling you right now ~ YOU cannot ride this bicycle. You might think you can't. I know this." Translated: "I know that you can't just do it! And then he proceeds to prove his statement by showing clips from his speaking engagements. He lets people try the bike. He states: People think they are going to try some trick (think diet) or power through it (think mind over matter), it just doesn't work. Your brain cannot handle this! (Translated: You cannot just do it!)"

And then Destin shows a clip of a guy he offered \$200 just to ride the bike 10 feet across the stage. He makes the statement 'everybody thought he could do it', and of course he couldn't. Wow! What a powerful metaphor for the futility of trying to build incentives into the effort: Some people think ~ If I tell everyone I am going to do it, or get in a 'pool' where the winner takes the pot, or the loser pays ~ that is going to help keep me on track with my diet! I hope you are getting the picture here, and seeing the uncanny analogy. All the money in the world isn't going to help you ride the bike 10 feet or stick to your new diet. They are equally as futile. It is some entertaining video, but it is also illustrating a deep, deep truth about change. Incentive means nothing. Will power is useless. All the desire and incentive in the world is not going to do the trick, Destin knows it, and he is willing to put \$200 (and really his reputation) on the line to prove it. If someone does make it 10 feet, the gig is up ~ right? But Destin is absolutely sure that isn't going to happen.

And then in his voice-over he says: "Once you have a rigid way of thinking in your head, sometimes you cannot change that, even if you want to." Translated: *You can't just do it!!*

But here is what he did on his driveway, he practiced, 5 minutes per day for 8 months. If you do the math, that is 1200 minutes, or 20 hours of practice. Now think about that for a minute, 240 days in a row. I went back and looked at the video, counting the seconds it took from the time each contestant began his try until he was 'reset' and ready to try again. It averages about 10 seconds per try. That means about 6 per minute, or 30 per 5 minutes. So I am going to estimate that it took Destin about 7200 tries. That's right, he had to practice over 7000 times to get it right. That is some deep practice, don't you think? That's 7000 failures, and plenty of crashes and face-plants along the way.

In describing the experience, Destin says 'one day I *couldn't* ride the bike and then the next day I *could*, it was like I could feel some pathway in my brain that was now unlocked'. This is where Destin reached the threshold, the point at which the green pathway (learning the backwards bike) finally caught up to the yellow pathway (the normal bike). He describes it well. It isn't so much a gradual thing as a 'yesterday it wasn't happening and today it is'. I have heard that described by so many of my clients and felt it myself hundreds of times. And until you hit that threshold it is so easy to think 'I am never going to get this right' and then, bam, the pathway is 'unlocked' as Destin says, or in reality, it has finally grown big enough to be a contender.

And Destin then goes on to say: There's this new (think green) trail in my brain, but if I wasn't paying close enough attention, my brain would easily lose that (new) neurological pathway and jump back on the 'old (yellow) road'. Any small distraction, like a cell-phone ringing in my pocket, would instantly throw my brain back to the old control algorithm (yellow circuit). I could not have asked for a more potent description of what it feels like when you are sitting on the threshold. That is spot on.

Neuroplasticity On Display

Then Destin pulls his kid into the experiment. How cool is that? What a great demonstration of neuro-plasticity, 2 weeks vs 8 months. Now, Destin concludes that children have much more plastic brains than adults, but in reality, it is just the fact that his kid's 'yellow' pathway was much, much smaller than his own 'yellow' pathway. It is just pure physics really. Age doesn't affect the ability of the brain to be plastic. It is simply this equation: The longer one has done something one way, the longer it is going to take to learn how to do it another way ~ they are directly proportional. Of course Destin doesn't know this, he wasn't even sure if he was saying the word 'neuro-plasticity' correctly, he is an engineer ~ but a damn smart one, that's for sure.

Now he jumps to Amsterdam, where he has tweeted a 'meet-up' to see if he can ride a normal bike. He 'gives it a go' and fails on the first try, and in the 'voice-over' comments that this is one of the 'most frustrating moments of his life' he has ridden a normal bike since age 6, but in this moment he couldn't do it anymore. He goes on to say that he had set out to see if he could 'free his brain from a cognitive bias' ~ whoa, Destin, where did that come from? That's not engineer-speak, that is some precise terminology ~ cognitive bias ~ somebody has been doing his homework! But rather than 'free himself' from it, he is pretty sure he can only 're-designate that bias'. Again, spot on. The yellow pathway is not gone (or as Destin states it 'freedom-from' from it), it has been re-designated ~ yep, his has built a new one, a green one, and has grown it to the point that it has been 'designated', as Destin says, to be the new default.

Destin claims it took him 20 minutes, and if you time his 'tries' on the video, again we are probably talking about 120 tries, and finally his brain 'clicked back into the old algorithm' and it happened in a 'very specific moment', and, of course, the yellow pathway sprang to life and took back over. How many times have you heard or seen

that happen? Suzy loses 80 lbs, and it feels like she is 'home free', destined to live the rest of her life as a skinny person. So she lets go of her diet, starts eating what she wants, not paying much attention and what happens? The old way of thinking is not gone, it has just been re-designated and when put back in the old situations (think Destin jumping back on a regular bike) it doesn't take long before the old algorithms are back, right? 1200 minutes to build the green pathway and re-designate the default, and 20 minutes to switch it back. Amazing!

And then Destin caps is all off with a profound statement: "You are looking at the world with a bias, whether you think you are or not." That is some deep truth.

NBA-22-a ~ Back Betty

Needless to say I was hooked, hooked on the video, hooked on the ideas, hooked on the analogies and the metaphors, and I have been using them ever since, with high levels of productivity, helping people to turn *truth* into *understanding*, to truly *own* what they already *know*.

I showed this video to one of my colleagues, Chris Blake ~ who I refer to as The Human Engineer ~ thehumanengineer.org. Chris and I first met while he was working on a project, commissioned by the mayor of Fort Wayne, and the city of Fort Wayne ~ **Fighting For A Fitter Fort** ~ F4. I became a stakeholder in the project, and Chris and I spoke at an event designed to help folks negotiate their own food intake as the holidays approached. Chris and I have continued our relationship beyond this project and continue to collaborate on ways to bring the best information, in the most premium delivery systems to optimize human functioning and human potential.

Chris got it instantly. In fact, he got so excited he went out and had one built, and then proceeded to learn to ride it himself. Chris really want after it hard, and learned to ride the backwards bike in a lot less time then it took Destin. No surprise there, the more effort and time we put into practice, the quicker we are going to get there ~ but it still takes lots of repetition and failure to get to success.

Chris has been using the bike, which he named *Back Betty* to engage his audiences in conversations about the difficulty of change. He offered me the opportunity to give it a try. At the time I was so busy that I really didn't have the time, but I swore I would take him up on that opportunity at some point. In the back of my mind, I kept playing the scenes from Destin's video where he was on stage, talking to an audience, and then inviting volunteers to come up and ride the backwards bike. I could see myself having a grand old time, doing the same thing Destin did on stage, having some fun, taunting a volunteer with a \$100 bill and then using the demonstration to drive home my points about the difficulty of change. I gave my share of public presentations in my day, so I vowed that I would give it a try the next time I accepted an invitation to speak to an audience. That opportunity came in December of 2017 when I accepted an opportunity to give a keynote speech to a large company in the vicinity of Fort Wayne for their yearly management retreat. I would be speaking to about 250 professionals about change.

The event was scheduled for March 3, 2018. So I had about 2 months and some change to see if I could learn to ride the bike and pull this thing off.

Chris dropped off the bike in the middle of December, 2017. He brought it to my office at one of our meetings. I couldn't wait to give the darn thing a try. So the next chance I got I tried to ride it down the hallway at my office (and I still have the tire marks on the walls to prove it). I think I will leave them there forever, as a nice little reminder of what it feels like to begin the process of change. I couldn't ride that thing more than a foot or two without crashing into the wall. It is incredibly hard, I would say impossible at first, to just make your brain do the opposite of what you are used to. What a visceral experience.

The more I tried, the more frustrated I got. And then those thoughts began: Am ever going to get this? What if I just can't do it? What if 2 months won't be enough? Maybe this is just a waste of time?

No matter how much I concentrated, nothing seemed to work. I tried holding the handlebars every which way I can think of, and I even bought a set of training wheels. That was a complete bust. Training wheels can hold a 40 pound kid upright, but not a 195 lb man on an adult size bike. Come to find out, after doing a little research, training wheels are actually the worst way learn to learn to ride a bike anyway. The best way, is to find a grassy knoll, and coast downhill. Well I didn't have a grassy knoll, I just had my conference room and my parking lot. So I did it the old-fashioned way, try, after try. After try.

A Second Revelation

This is where a second revelation occurred. I hadn't anticipated how much physical effort this was going to take. I'm in pretty darn good shape, I ride 40 miles a day, everyday, so I was kind of surprised when a 15 minute session of trying to ride this blasted contraption, got me breathing hard and sweating. It was not only mentally challenging, it was physically challenging, way more than I could have imagined.

Now I had been thinking about this experiment for a while, and I had some ideas of just how I was going to do this when I finally got the chance, so right out of the gate I made sure I documented everything ~ right on down to how many times 'both feet left the floor and were on the pedals, and at least one of my feet touched back down to keep me from doing a face plant'. (And by the way, just for the record, I did make it to the ground on more than one occasion, completely sprawled out, jamming a wrist and an elbow, and my bad knee took a pretty good beating. This ain't for wussy's, I tell you.) I referred to these 'touch downs of a foot' as touches or touchdowns, each 'touch down' was the completion of a practice stroke. No I didn't count every single touch down, that would've been insane, but I did figure out the average number of touches per minute of a practice session and then extrapolated to calculate the estimated touches. It was approximately 10 touches per minute at first. So I recorded the time and multiplied by 10.

Like Destin, I also documented my mental journey. It started out as complete frustration, and then slowly, my brain would 'get it' for just a second, and I would go a few feet before touching down. I also noted the mixed feelings of the *excitement*, when I would go a few feet, and *embarrassment* when I would realize I was excited about going a few feet. I prayed to God that no one would walk into the conference room and see what I was doing.

Eventually I had the experience of *locking* in the backwards algorithm for a fraction of a second and getting that glimpse of hope. I would hurry back to my starting spot to try and recapture it, only to fail miserably the next try. That was a frustrating phase to push through. I felt all the negative emotion of failure, mixed with tiny glimpses of success. Not at all unlike beginning the process of trying to eat healthy amounts ~ lots of frustration and only glimpses of success. Had I not seen with my own 2 eyes the Destin and Chris could do it, I wonder if I might have given up?

And slowly, but surely, the distance between touchdown's got bigger, inches at a time. My touchdowns dropped from 10 per minute down to 4 per minute toward the end of the experiment. In the end it took me right at 10 hours, over the course of seven days, practicing three or four times a day, for 15 minutes each.

Feeling Like A Kid Again

On the seventh day, I knew I was getting close. As luck would have it, that evening my last appointment cancelled. It was a mild December evening, no snow on the ground, so I went outside on the empty parking lot at my office under the lights. I was glad it was dark, because I'm sure I looked like a complete fool to any passersby. That was the night it finally clicked. I can only describe the feeling as being a kid again, 50 years ago, Learning to ride the regular bike for the first time. 15 minutes became 30, became 45, and then an hour. I was dripping with sweat, my heart was pounding, my legs and arms were aching, but I couldn't seem to stop. Mastering this thing was intoxicating. I knew I had it, for sure. I was beaming from ear to ear, pretty darn proud of myself.

I actually had to shower at the office before heading for home. I felt like I had just raced a good 25-miler. It was quite a workout.

I couldn't wait to jump in my car, grab my phone, hit my voice memo button, and debrief my experience ~ which is how I do so much of my journaling, in my car, speaking into my phone, actually my Bluetooth ~ I keep both hands on the wheel.

And right in the middle of my drive home, my excitement was rudely interrupted by a very strange sensation.

At the time I drove a 2017 Highlander and it featured a 'lane departure warning system'. It beeps and even gives a little tug on the wheel when it detects that you are drifting out of your lane. I found it annoying at first, but then, as I got used to it, I rather started to like the system. A few times it has saved my butt, actually.

As I was driving home, the night of my glorious triumph over the backwards bike, all smug in my mind about conquering the beast, chatting into my blue -tooth, my 'audio-debriefing' of the evening, I got a bit distracted and drifted out of my lane. The car beeped, the steering wheel tugged and I corrected ~ THE WRONG WAY. Thank God I had not altered the part of my brain that housed the instructions to just 'gently correct' or I would have been in the ditch. That was a surreal experience let me tell you ~ kinda freaked me out for a minute. All the rest of the way home I noticed the sensation to turn the wheel the opposite way of normal. That got the wheels turning in my brain. I didn't sleep much that night, I was lying there thinking about what all of this meant and what I was going to do next.

And on the way back to the office the next morning, I still felt the strange sensation to turn the wrong way. As I reflected on what I was experiencing, fear started to creep into the viewfinder. You see, I am an avid cyclist. I ride every day, indoors when it is cold, out doors when it is nice. The previous summer I had a pretty bad wipe-out on the open road. I was traveling about 20mph and I hit a rut on the pavement, over corrected, and just like that I was flying through the air, looking for a soft place to land. Fortunately, there was a grassy burme and I landed safely ~ albeit not very gracefully. The only thing damaged was my bike and my ego. As I contemplated the gravity of the situation in my Highlander, I realized I had no choice ~ this experiment had to be over. I couldn't afford to screw with my brain anymore than I already had. I felt like Destin, wondering if I had done a really foolish thing here.

NBA-22-b ~ My Keynote Speech

So that very afternoon, I went back out on the parking lot, set up my tripod and camera, 60 feet from the starting point, and filmed myself riding toward the camera. The following link is to a short video clip of me riding *Back Betty*, proof that I can indeed ride the backwards beast.

<https://youtu.be/1sVSLSpZItA>

Once I got 3 good runs that was it. I was done, or so I thought. I had worked so hard to get to a place where I could pull this off in my keynote speech, I was really torn here. What should I do, keep going with this thing and risk really messing myself up, or stop right here and abort the idea to do this for my keynote speech. I decided I just couldn't miss this opportunity. I didn't need to be an expert at the backwards bike. I just needed to go 15 feet without a face-plant. So I compromised. I limited myself to just enough practice to maintain the ability to go 15 feet with confidence, no more, no less.

And it worked out beautifully. On the day of the keynote speech, I pulled it off perfectly. It was such a rush and I hit on every single point regarding change that this metaphor has to offer. I even had a volunteer come up on stage and I taunted him with a \$20 Starbucks gift card, to ride 10 feet. Of course he couldn't, but I gave him the gift card

anyway, just for being a good sport. Now I knew was done, I had to be done. I couldn't afford to not be done. I returned the bike to Chris and haven't ridden it since.

I was actually a bit nervous to ride my regular bike again. And when I finally did, I experienced a mini-version of what Destin experienced in Amsterdam. It took me just a few tries to lock my normal version of bike riding back in place ~ phew ~ I was thankful for that. But I concur with Destin. It felt odd to be two layers deep into this experiment. It was a strange sensation to, just for moment, have to re-acquaint my brain with a skill I have had for 50 years.

So in case you are wondering, total elapsed time for me to learn the 'shaky-just-barely-keeping-upright' skill you saw in the video ~ 5.3 hours, approximately 21 X 15" practice sessions, give or take, and about 2500 touchdowns, or put another way 2500 failures, because each time I had to 'put my foot down' was technically a failure ~ right? I never even got close to riding the backwards bike 'as far as I felt like it ~ until I wanted to stop', like I can with my regular bike. Success, in this case, was to simply stay upright for 15 feet consistently before inevitably having to put a foot down. I am guessing I may have gotten only 10% of the way to making the backwards bike my new default, but interestingly enough, most experts agree that even a 10% change is big ~ just one more way this experiment validated the things I already knew about change.

"You Cannot Ride This Bike"

I cannot put into words how powerful and compelling this experience was for me. It brought such clarity and depth to the difficulty of change. When Destin says: "I'm telling you ~ you cannot ride this bike!" he is emphatic about that. Of course, the part he left off is ~ 'unless you are willing to spend time out on your driveway practicing for the next 8 months'. I am just as emphatic about my definitive statement that 'you cannot just decide to eat better or exercise more ~ unless you are willing to spend the time, every day, practicing on the driveway in your mind, practicing the cognitive strokes that it takes to learn the new ways of thinking.'

It was absolutely impossible to force my brain to simply 'turn the handlebars the other way' ~ that is all I had to do differently! Everything else about keeping a bike upright was exactly the same. It is absolutely just as impossible to force your brain to simply eat less or exercise more. They are equally as futile and I will stand on that statement all day. The only way to success in either case is to take your practice strokes. And you are going to fail, over and over, until one day it clicks in ~ *just a little bit*. You will feel it for just an instant, and then it will be gone. You will successfully eat sensibly or manage a workout, for just a minute ~ and then you are back to a string of failures. When that was happening to me, during my backwards bike experiment, the frustration was off the charts ~ thinking 'I've got this' for just a second and then realizing, nope, I don't yet. Man, talking about feeling defeated, or wanting to give up, or getting that horrible sinking feeling that 'I just may never get this.' But ... if you keep going, focusing, concentrating,

trying, practicing ... eventually the 'successful' attempts become more frequent. It is subtle at first, and then it finally clicks ~ and now you know you've got this. I remember that feeling out on the parking lot at my office, under the lights, sweating like a pig. I even danced a little jig. I was pumped. It was the moment that I knew, without a doubt, that I had turned the corner. It was far, far from mastery, of course, but success was in the cross-hairs. There is nothing that feels quite like that.

How far you do think I would have gotten just trying once every day, and then hoping I would do better tomorrow? Or next week? Do you get what I am saying here? How many people wake up every day thinking: 'This is the day I am going to start eating right? This is the day I am going to start exercising?' I am pretty darn sure that if I had approached learning to ride that backwards bike like most over-weight and out-of-shape Americans approach getting in shape, I would still be waking up every day hoping ~ 'maybe this is the day that I will learn to ride the backwards bike.' (I hope you are following what I am saying here ~ this is huge!) And then, after giving it a go and crashing, the physiological equivalent of hitting the snooze 6 times and then declaring - 'it's too late to work out now', or the dietary equivalent of taking a salad for lunch and then eating 2 donuts in the break room, you declare ~ I'll try again tomorrow, and throw the rest of the day away.

Are you willing to spend 5-10 minutes every day for 8 months practicing the necessary cognitions to build the pathways that support the life you want? That's what it takes. There are no tricks, shortcuts, incentives or will-power that will get you there - only practice, the perfect practice.

In the case of the backwards bike it's pretty easy to see what the potential rider is trying to do and what one would have to practice doing to succeed. When it comes to eating right or exercising consistently, however, that's a little more complicated, because what we're practicing, is actually a way of thinking, not necessarily a way of performing. That seems a bit weird to some people, at first ~ *practicing a way of thinking?* But it is nothing new, really. The term 'mental rehearsal' has been around for thousands of years. It is widely used in just about every major discipline, but probably most notably in sports or other performance-based endeavors.

Just like the backwards bike - there is no way around it. We literally have to *practice thinking* the kind of thoughts necessary to support our desired behavior. And the paradox of course, is that if we already knew what these thoughts were and how to think them, we would already be fit and trim ~ right? This is where a good coach becomes imperative, one who knows the nuances of cognitive behavioral strategies.

I so wish that anyone who wanted to make a change could have the experience of learning to ride the backwards bike, but that's just not practical. Experiencing the frustration, the failure, the doubt, the disappointment and just the sheer

power of my brain to adhere to my cognitive biases took the experience of change to a whole new level.

But getting the chance to try and ride this bike is not something most people will ever experience. And even if you **could** get your hands on one, there would be still plenty of people who wouldn't have the physical strength, coordination or stamina to even try the experiment. I am fortunate that "I" could, and did, but I just couldn't stop thinking: There has to be a way to make the experience more accessible to anyone who wants to try.

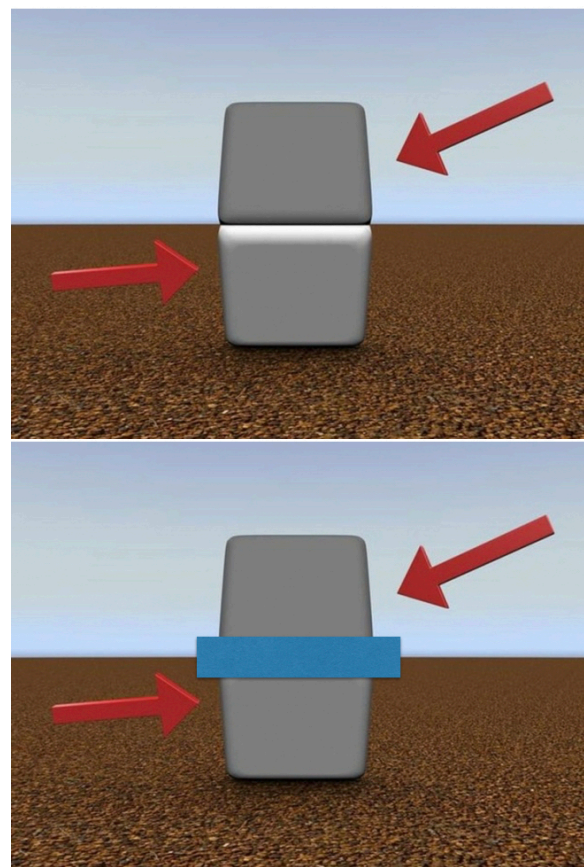
NBA-23 ~ Gray Panels Experiment

So I began searching for a similar experiment that anyone could try at home. And I finally found it, in the most unlikely of places ~ on the internet, when I was searching for optical illusions. Serendipity strikes again I was searching for an illustration or picture to support the idea that 'things are not always what they seem' for another presentation when I ran across this picture:

This picture is a drawing of two gray panels that are hinged together. It's a very simple drawing that seemingly means nothing. But if you do one simple thing, place your finger or a pencil in such a way as to cover up the hinge, you discover something interesting ~ they are both the same color. Initially, when you look at the picture, nothing seems amiss. But when you cover the hinge, and then uncover it again you notice that the bottom panel appears to be a much lighter gray than the top one ***until*** you cover up the hinged area. So what's going on here?

Well the artist has cleverly altered this picture to create the illusion. If this were an actual picture, the bottom panel would be a lighter color, because of the way that the light would be hitting the surface. The color our retinas would pick up would be lighter on the bottom and darker on the top. So why do we see it the way we do even though they are in fact the same color?

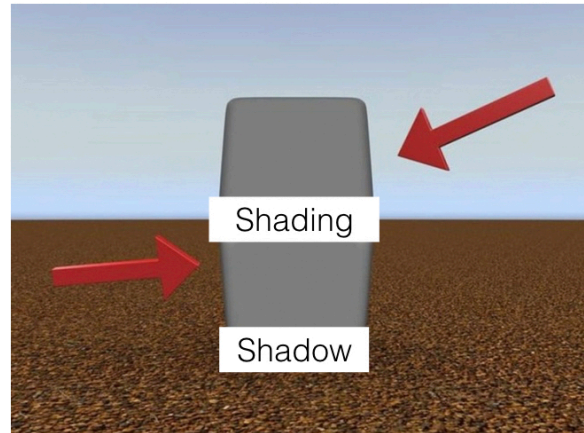
It's really quite simple ~ we have a cognitive bias in the brain. Our brains are biased towards paying attention to ***proximity*** information over ***color***. So we automatically default to proximity and our brains change the color in our minds to match. And this just makes sense when you



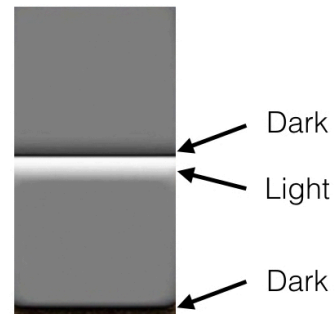
think about it. Is it more important to know how far away a tiger is, or what color it actually is? You get the point!!

So when I tripped across this picture and realized what was happening in the brain I knew I had hit the jackpot. Since I know that those two panels are in fact the same color, then with practice, mental practice, I ought to be able to train my brain to see them as the same color even when the *proximity* information says they shouldn't be.

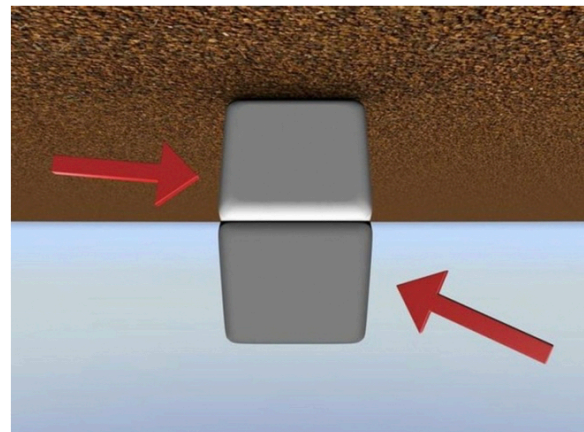
So the first thing I did was to alter the pictures myself. In this picture, I blocked out the shading portion and sure enough they were the same color.



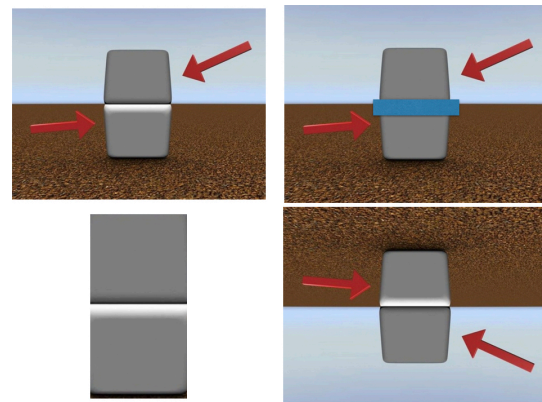
In this next picture I left the shading in, but cropped out everything else. Again they appear the same color.



In this figure I just flipped the image upside down, changing nothing else, and once again they appear the same color.



So I devised the experiment this way: I placed all 4 Versions in a composite picture figure shown here. Then I spent 10 minutes a day staring at all four pictures and concentrating on the fact that all panels were the same color. I would simply move from picture to picture, in a clockwise rotation, and then land on the original picture (upper-left), trying to hold the correct color in my conscious awareness as my brain attempted to change it to the default lighter gray. At first nothing happened. I would land on the original picture and my brain would switch the bottom panel right back to light gray. But the more I focused, concentrated, and 'told myself out loud' that what I was really seeing was 'two panels the exact same color' things began to change. I would land on the original picture, and I could hold the correct color in my conscious awareness for a few seconds. But then I would lose concentration and the bottom panel would go right back to light gray.



The more I did the exercise, however, the longer I could hold the correct color in my brain when I stared at the original picture. At the end of 10 days I was amazed and pleased to find that I could hold the correct 'color information' in my brain, for as long as I wanted to, while staring at that original picture. I had altered the bias enough in my brain to consciously choose color over proximity. Eureka ~ I had found it. I'm pretty pleased about that, and as long as I don't encounter a gray tiger I should be okay.

I invite you to invest a couple hours of your time and try this yourself. I think it goes along way to illustrate in a very visceral way how strong a cognitive bias really is, and the magnitude of attention, focus, and concentration it takes to even begin to change a very simple bias in the brain. I guarantee that if you take the time to correct this bias in your brain, you will never again ask the question: I know better, 'why can't I just do it?'

I hope by now that I have nailed down the imperative that practice, *the perfect practice*, is really the key to making change actually happen. But before I am done, I want to share one last concept and resulting 'experiment' with you. Throughout the years I have had many clients who have come into my office with the expectation that I am going to be able to give them some insight, create some kind of epiphany, share a secret that will be like a key fitting into a lock, unlocking the potential to change and to enjoy the life they have yearned for. And when I present cognitive strategies, which are actually elegantly simple to understand, and explain the process of *integration* and *practice*, which is quite

difficult, meticulous and repetitive, they seem clearly disappointed. When I send them out the door with a narrative that I want them to tape and listen to every day, for the next 100 days, they seem a bit 'put out'. It just sounds like a monotonous, boring task that really doesn't seem to have the capability of producing the change they desire.

I, being the metaphor and analogy lover that I am, came up with a way to explain *why* what I am asking them to do really makes sense. And it goes this way: Suppose that instead of wanting me to show you how to lose weight or start exercising when you came in here today, your objective was to learn how to play the guitar. And so I showed you how to hold the guitar and position your fingers on the frets to play a couple of basic chords and then suggested that you go home and practice those every day, would you say to me: "But Miles, you don't understand, I was expecting that you would show me how to play a song and that I would walk out of here being able to play a song on the guitar. I don't see how practicing a few chords is going to help??"

Of course you wouldn't, nobody would. We expect that a guitar lesson is going to go pretty much that way, right? But when it comes to 'lessons' on how to think differently about what I put in my mouth or how to get my butt out of bed to work out, we balk. I then proceed to explain that the two learning experiences are really no different. You have to learn how to play the chords to eventually play a song, and in the same way, you have to learn the individual thoughts that produce a desired dining experience, before you can successfully negotiate the buffet or dinner party. Both require practice, and probably the same amount.

And, you probably already guessed it, one of my clients, who heard me use that analogy sent me a YouTube link to a TED talk by Josh Kaufman ~ The first 20 hours ~ How to learn anything. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MgBikgcWnY&feature=youtu.be> It is a very interesting talk ~ please watch it. In the talk, Josh basically demonstrates the skill of learning to play the Ukulele in 20 hours, along with a very interesting talk on some theories about how long it takes to learn something. I watched that video back in December 2017, and it stuck with me. I have often told people that if they were willing to practice, 10-15 minutes per day, for 100 days, that is when they would begin to really notice that a new way of thinking had emerged in the brain. Doing the math, quickly, I found that I was talking about somewhere between 16 and 25 hours of practice. How interesting? 20 falls almost right in the middle.

Now here is a bit of the back story. I have always wanted to learn to play the guitar. My fantasy of playing the guitar stems back to high school when I dated a girl named Amy who played the guitar and sang. She was new to the school my junior year, and she was cute and confident. I had a bit of moxie back then and so I 'went for it' and to my delight she accepted my advances. Soon we were an item. We would go for walks and she would have her guitar strung over her shoulder. We would find a quiet place in the shade and she would sing and play

for me, my own private serenade. I thought it was the sexiest thing ever. I felt like the luckiest dude alive. In my memory she was every bit as good, and confident, as the singers I hear today on 'The Voice' ~ now granted, I probably have a bit of a skewed memory, but I'm keeping it. As quickly as Amy came into my life she left. Her dad was in the military I believe, and they moved constantly. She promised to call and write (yeah that was way before social media) but that never happened. All I have left is the magical memories in my brain, and the fantasy of being able to sing and play the guitar like she did.

Learning to play the guitar was one of those things that I just never got around to trying. When I saw people do it, I would always get those good feelings back and say to myself ~ someday I am going to learn. When I turned 50 I made a vow that I was going to learn to play the guitar before I turned 60. (As I am writing this, I just turned 59.)

After watching the Kaufman video, and really pondering on what he demonstrated, the fantasy started to become more real in my head. And a year later, December 2018, when my wife asked me what I wanted for Christmas I proclaimed ~ a guitar. She at first thought I was kidding, but I wasn't. Christmas Day 2018 was the first time I touched a guitar ... for real.

I was on a mission to do 2 things ~ cross learning the guitar off my bucket list, and in the process test Kaufman's, and my own, theories about just how long it takes to really learn something.

Now, let's get one thing straight, just about anybody with two functioning arms and hands can play the guitar. You can hold it in your hands, press down on the strings with one hand and strum the strings with the other - right? But, you can't really 'play the guitar' ~ as in playing a recognizable song. Like the backwards bike, you have the *knowledge*, but not the *understanding*. You *know* how to press and strum the strings, but you don't *own* the skill of playing the guitar. You don't know how to think like an experienced guitar player. You don't know how to make your brain do the things necessary to make your hands and voice work together to play and sing a meaningful song. And all the desire or will-power in the world won't help. You can't just do it because you want to. It takes practice. It is the exact same thing with learning the thought sequences that are required to get your butt out of bed to exercise every day ~ the proverbial 'exercisers mindset'. It takes practice.

And I have plenty of empirical evidence to prove that it takes about 15 minutes of mental practice, every day, for about 90-100 days to 'learn the thinking' necessary to 'become and exerciser'. So now I had the opportunity to demonstrate this, do the experiment on myself. I was going to see if I could learn to play the guitar in 24 hours - which would be 96 days, at 15" per day, 1440 minutes, 24 hours, one day.

So I began Christmas Day, December 25, 2018 and ended 96 days later on March 31, 2019. I plugged in the CD that came with the guitar and took my 'first lesson'. It was a painful 15 minutes, my hands were cramping and I actually got blisters on my finger tips, for real. They eventually peeled and callouses formed. I was horrible. It wasn't pretty and it wasn't even very fun at first. I decided that my goal would be to learn one song, just like Josh Kaufman had done. Now which song should I pick? Actually, one of my clients picked it for me. I was showing her one of my own cognitive selfies, my Today tape, which I will get to in the next chapter, and the background I had chosen was the instrumental music from Simple Man, by Lynard Skynard. I really like that song, and had chosen that track as background music for that video (which I will explain in detail in the next section and provide a link to). When I shared my plan with her in late December, she remembered the video and suggested I use that song. And wouldn't you know it, turns out that particular song is one of the easier ones to learn. I think it was just meant to be.

Just like my Backwards Bike experience, there were so many times when I just wanted to give up. It felt and sounded like crap. My fingers just wouldn't cooperate. I wondered if I would ever get it, and then one day ~ it happened. The algorithms locked in for just a moment and it actually sounded like something recognizable. And then it would be gone, again. As 96 days approached I was getting a little nervous ~ what if it didn't happen? I felt so far away from any sort of skill.

And then ... it happened just like it did with the backwards bike. March 31, 2019 arrived and I was nervous and excited to make the tape. I sat down in my 'make-shift' studio with my micro-phone, took a deep breath and went for it. It took me a couple of 'tries' to get a keeper, but I finally got one and the experiment was over. Can I now play the guitar? You be the judge. Here is a link to the video I made about this experiment:

<https://youtu.be/6HIn1UluBuo>

I am certainly not an accomplished guitar player by any stretch of the imagination, but I think I proved one thing: If you are willing to practice, even 15" a day, you can make some pretty cool things happen. In just 24 hours, one day's worth of time, you can learn something that will serve you for the rest of your life. I believe this really puts things into perspective. I love owning the skill of being able to play the guitar. I can still play that song, quite well now, and I am learning new ones, and it very relaxing to sit down for 5 minutes, play the guitar, sing along, and imagine ... just let myself dream a bit. It was so worth the effort.

NBA-24 ~ My 'Today' Tape

Back in 2013, not too long after my infamous TEDx Talk, I started to get an idea. I was experimenting with all of the different ways that I could use audio and video to enhance the learning experience and I thought ~ wouldn't it be cool to collect my very best

thoughts and put them all into one tape and then do something special with them. I was learning how to use iMovie, drop in video tape, over-lay instrumental music in the background, drop in pictures, etc.

So I set out to collect my 10 best thoughts, the 10 thoughts that would most influence my day and my life if I *practiced* them every single day, using the CΔVP method. I would narrate those thoughts on video-tape and then I would pair each idea to a meaningful picture and finally in the background I would have a meaningful instrumental playing. The idea was this: ***Flood the senses with stimuli, my own voice, visuals and music.*** I wanted to see what would happen if I stimulated my entire cerebral cortex and involved as many sensory inputs as I possibly could.

My 10 Best Thoughts

So I went to work on capturing and distilling my '10 best thoughts'. That proved to be more difficult than I had imagined. It wasn't coming up with 10 that was the problem, it was narrowing it down to 10. Over the course of a couple of weeks I thought and wrote, and wrote and thought, until I finally came up with the collection. And just in case you are counting when you watch the tape, I settled on 12, not 10 ~ I just couldn't part with any of the last grouping, so I went with a dozen.

The first thing I had to do was come up with a 'theme', something that brought continuity to the effort. Again, I thought and wrote, wrote and thought and finally this idea popped into my head: *Today is a brand new day.* Yesterday is in the history books and tomorrow is 24 hours away. I can't change yesterday, ever and I can't change tomorrow until I get there – so that leaves today ... and then I proceeded to list my 12 most important thoughts in the form of '*I will*' statements and '*I am*' statements. The present and the infinitive form of *doing something.* For example, the first one is: Today I will exercise my body, my mind, my heart and my soul ~ a reference to working out, journaling, meditating and praying.

Next I arranged the ideas from least to greatest in terms of importance in my life so as to build in a climactic way as I went along. Again, this was no small feat, as all of them are so very important, it was mostly like 'splitting hairs' ~ really.

Here is the script I came up with:

Today is a brand new day. Yesterday is in the history books and tomorrow is 24 hours away. I can't change yesterday, ever and I can't change tomorrow until I get there – so that leaves today.

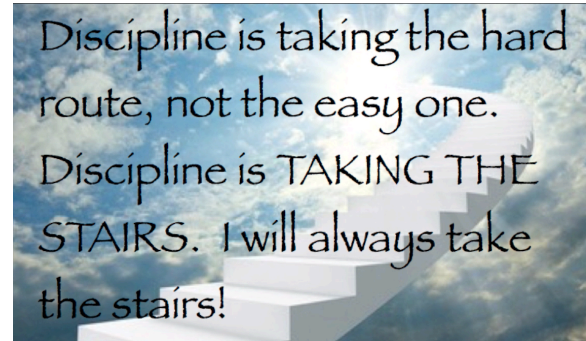
- Today I will exercise my body, my mind, my heart and my soul.
- Today I will practice self-discipline - I will take the stairs.

- Today I **will** do what others **won't** do so that tomorrow I **can** do what others **cannot**.
- Today I will practice integrity, doing what I say I will do and doing what is right.
- Today I am putting everything I've got into everything I do no matter how painful, boring, difficult, or scary.
- Today I am burning every drop of fuel I have in the tank, I will drive home on empty – I love that feeling.
- Today I will only allow myself to think positive thoughts, negative thoughts will be denied.
- Today I will stay in the moment, no regrets about the past, no worries about the future.
- Today I will make a meaningful contribution to my life and a meaningful contribution to the lives of others.
- Today I will do something to strengthen a relationship with someone I love.
- Today I will pause long enough to thank God, and appreciate everything that I have.
- Today I will live my life to the fullest, squeeze every bit of life out of my day and savor it like fine wine. And if I get a tomorrow, I'll do it again.

Then I went on the hunt for meaningful pictures. What might best represent, visually, the concept I was getting across to myself, or at least complement the idea? Ideas like exercising were easy. I just took a selfie of me on my stationary bike, with my computer in front of me ~ in my basement, where you will find me every morning ~ exercising my body, mind, heart and soul. Yes, I pump the heart with my cycling, meditate using the very tape I made, and some additional tapes, (and yes, in case you are wondering right now, the cognitive selfie is simply a form of meditation, 'guided imagery', ~ guiding yourself with selected ideas to focus on, to the exclusion of the rest of the chatter in your brain), I am journaling by dictating into my computer and I pray ~ all during my workout. It is the best hour of my day and a great way to start every day, that is for sure.



For concepts like self-discipline, I referenced an idea that has stuck with me for a lot of years: Take The Stairs, a reference from a book by the same name, written by Rory Vaden, a very good read. In the book, Rory makes the analogy of Taking The Stairs, as opposed to the escalator or elevator. It is a reference to avoiding the easy way or trying to find a shortcut. The analogy stuck with me, and so I simply found a picture of a stairway and plugged it in. Now think about this for a minute, when I hear myself talk about self-discipline, and reference taking the stairs, while visually processing a picture of a grand stair-case I am flooding my brain with ideas and images. I am not sure just how many passages out of Rory Vaden's book fire up in my brain during the few seconds that this picture is on the screen, but it feels like a lot. It is a powerful experience that I not only wish everyone could have every morning, but one that I will go to great lengths to help anyone, that wishes, to experience. In other words I would be more than happy to show you how to do it. I have helped many of my clients, who actually turn out to be more tech savvy than they think, and many times more creative than me. I can recall multiple instances where I showed a client how to make one of these, they ran with it, and then showed me their finished product. They blew me away ~ made my tape look pretty amateur.



For an idea like 'making a meaningful contribution' I found a 'word-collage' that contained words relating to the idea, as you will see when you watch the tape. When I dropped the picture in, I just wanted to reference an idea, but as I started watching the tape, I would find myself trying to read every word on the screen during the 8 seconds it is on the screen. It became kind of a game each time to try and 'grab, comprehend, and think about how I apply' the 45 concepts contained in the word-collage ~ all in the span of 8 seconds. I got pretty good at it after awhile. That is an 8-second blast of high intensity focus. Pretty exhilarating for sure.



Now I am a baseball guy, it runs through my veins, if you don't know that by this stage in the book, you haven't been paying attention. The concept in this picture is huge for me. When I played baseball, I thought nothing of 'laying out' for a 'fly ball'. You were destined to get a face-full of grass and dirt, but that was the only way you were going to make



the great plays. Somewhere along the line I realized that I wasn't exactly playing the *game of life* like I played the game of baseball. Rather I was 'playing' in a more reserved and tentative fashion, holding back, not really putting myself out there. And it dawned on me that if I wanted to be the champion I desired to be in life, I had to play the game of life exactly how I played the game of baseball ~ all out, all the time, regardless of how much dirt I might eat in the process. This picture reminds me of this concept.

This next picture fig 31 of a fuel gauge reminds me of another important, and kind of related idea. Somewhere along the line I realized I was trying to conserve energy, unwittingly. For some reason when I was 'exhausted' at the end of a long day I thought I was doing something wrong. Then the idea hit me that if I ended my day with 'fuel left in tank' THAT was actually something I didn't want. In other words, I wanted to burn it all up, every day. To be completely exhausted, in a good way of course, not burning it all up on crap that doesn't matter but rather spending it on what does, at the end of the day was exactly what I want to do. I wanted to fall into bed with not an ounce of energy left in my body. Going to bed with energy left meant leaving something on the table ~ and I want to leave *nothing* on the table. So this picture reminds me of that concept when I am nearing the end of the day, and I know I am running on fumes, I see this image in my head, and I stop and smile, thinking ~ perfect, what a perfect way to end the day, completely exhausted.



This picture has some special meaning for me, it reminds me of a ski trip, with my wife, to Winter Park, Colorado. The significance of this for me, is that I used to ski quite a bit when I was younger. At college in Minnesota, I was actually in a ski-club, had my own skis, the whole bit. But after major reconstructive knee surgery in 1989, I was told that this would be out of the question.

When the idea of taking this ski trip came up in 2009, at first I was nervous and tentative, could my knee handle it. I hadn't tried anything like this for 20 years. I figured I would just take it very easy and see how it went. How it went was nothing short of awesome! We had the best time, skiing for 5 days. We had the best weather, the best snow ~ and my knee held up just fine. And to think that I almost passed on the idea, because I was afraid I might get hurt. I most certainly 'savor that memories of that vacation ~ like fine wine'. It reminds me just how much 'fear' can rob you of the best things in life ~ if you let it.



The rest of the pictures are pretty self explanatory I would think. I could go on and on about all of the images I am trying to conjure up in my head in just under 2 minutes (1:55 to be exact), but I think you probably get the point.

Here is a link to the video on YouTube:

<https://youtu.be/00-Os8VQHfI>

I should probably add here that when I made this tape, about 7 years ago now, I had no intention of showing it to anybody, except for maybe my wife. (And yes of, course, that is my wife on the tape, in Seista Key, our favorite Spring Break destination ~ also a fabulous memory). But as time went on, and I realized how powerful this little 2-minute gem was for me, I just couldn't *not* show it to people. It is just too hard to do it justice without actually showing it. I still remember the first time I pulled the trigger on showing it to a client. I took a deep breath, muttered something like 'what the hell ~ here we go' and went for it. The look on her face after watching the tape was priceless. I knew I had hit it out of the park (there I go with another baseball metaphor). Not just over the fence, but into the bay. It was a 'monster shot', and I knew it. From that point forward it became standard fare and now I am showing it to the world in this book. My struggle with showing it in the first place was not so much that it exposed my inner-most personal thinking, but more so that I didn't want to come off as arrogant or conceited, 'showing off my life' in a display of vanity, but in the end I decided that was the risk I had to run, and I am still running it.

And as I mentioned earlier, my objective is not to have you sit in awe of my cognitive selfie, but rather to motivate and entice you to make your own and to help you in any way I can. I don't claim to be a master of cinematography, but I know my way around iMovie enough to help anybody with Apple products (iPhone, iPad, or Mac) easily create their own videos. Android and PC, sorry, you are on your own ~ but I have clients who have easily figured it out, so I am pretty sure that a bit of research would 'get you in the paint' (yeah, I changed it up with a basketball metaphor, just in case you don't catch that.)

NBA-25 ~ The Birth Of PVC

No-Shows

About 8 years ago, when I was 4 years into my private practice, I began to get a bit frustrated with no-shows and late cancellations ~ people not showing up at all or telling me, many times the morning of the appointment, that they were not going to be able to make it. I have tried everything in my power to curb the tide of no-shows, which typically runs at about 20%. I sent reminders out the day before, which helped a little bit with people simply forgetting, but even clients who confirmed the day before would not show up or cancel the morning of the appointment. I keep a cancellation list, but most people simply cannot pivot that fast to fill an appointment the day of. I have never charged a 'no-show fee' or even threatened to. To me that is petty and just pisses people off. It's not like 'they didn't have a good reason', and who am I to judge what a

'good reason' is, or to think that my time is more important than theirs. A 'no-show' was, of course, a complete bust, by the time you wait 10" to make sure they aren't coming, it is too late to get anyone else to come in. Late cancellations weren't much better. My schedule is tight, it has to be to stay in business, so I most generally didn't have much time to work my cancellation list nor could I pay someone else to do it. Doctors and dentists get around this by 'over-booking' patients at approximately 20%. They can run a bit of interference by leaving patients in the waiting room for about 10 minutes and then 'rooming' them, where they might wait another 10 minutes before a nurse or assistant comes in. This all 'buys time' for the doctor to work in 'over-bookings' in, and people just accept it, because that is the way it is, right? There is no way that I can or would do that as a solo-private practitioner.

Long story short ~ I was sitting there 8-10 hours a week with almost no return on that investment. That is really when I first got the idea to start writing this book. So ironically, this book comes to you courtesy of, at least in part by, people not showing up for their appointments.

Now I am not trying to grind my axe here, trust me, I am just giving you the context for this platform. Most of us have very busy lives and tight schedules. When the boss says 'I need this on my desk by lunch', you don't go telling him that you have a therapy appointment scheduled. I completely get that. And if you are not feeling well, I really do appreciate the fact that you didn't bring it in to share. It simply is what it is! Frustration won't help, that just makes *me* part of the problem.

At first it was kind of nice to just 'take a break' when a client didn't show. I would sit down and write my book or I would go in my 'studio' and tape or edit something. But eventually, as my practice kept growing, I realized that I was spending 1-2 hours extra every day just to be able to see enough clients to pay my bills and keep the practice afloat. Eventually that starts to get old. I knew that early in my practice I was going to have to practically 'sell my soul to the devil' or I wasn't going to make it, but by the time I hit the 8-year mark in 2016 it was time to pull back on the throttle a bit.

And no-shows weren't the only problem I was facing, just the scheduling itself was quite a time consuming process. Even though I had the 'scheduling' process stream-lined, it was still taking up a large chunk of my time. I was handling 3-5 inquiries a day. By the time I returned every message, corresponded, found slots on the schedule, made adjustments as people needed to re-schedule, etc. I realized I was spending at least 2 hours a day just scheduling. Between scheduling and 'no-shows' I was spending 12 hours to see 8 clients ~ that is simply not very efficient.

The Schedule Is My Nemesis

I realized that the *schedule* was really my nemesis. If it weren't for the schedule and everything related to it, I could reduce my work-day from 12 hours to 8. That was a pretty harsh realization. But just how the heck do you eliminate the schedule? Is that even possible in this business?

I knew that I could eliminate the commute. I already had a sizable chunk of my clients who I was seeing remotely. We didn't have to be in the same place at the same time, but we still had to be '*somewhere* at the same time', which meant the schedule was still in play, even if I were able to convert my practice to remote phone and video-conferencing sessions. I also had to find a way to eliminate the condition of 'Real Time' or a synchronous conversation.

My objective was simple: To develop the most efficient and effective platform for dialoguing with my clients. Face to face, in-person sessions were effective, but quite inefficient and very expensive. At \$150/hr most people, unless they have really good insurance, simply cannot afford it. \$150/ may sound like a steep ask, but here is the dirty secret ~ you are paying for everyone else's no-shows, late cancellations, the sizable cut the insurance company takes, and people who simply don't pay their bills. If everybody showed up, kept their appointments, paid their bills and insurance companies didn't dip so heavily into the profits, the cost per hour would be slashed in half, at least. And the only way to make that happen would be to eliminate the schedule and eliminate insurance claims.

Eliminating the schedule was the most daunting proposition. I had always conducted sessions in real time (synchronous conversations), either face to face, or via phone, Skype, FaceTime or Zoom. Non-real-time (NRT) conversations were going to be the challenge. Emailing and texting have their purpose, and will always be a part of the platform, but I realized from the start that I could not rely in these modalities. There is simply too much meaning that gets lost in translation without having verbal cues. No matter how many exclamation marks, emojis or LOL's you use in the text, it still doesn't do justice to the narrative. I found that out very quickly into to game of texting. No matter how careful I was with emails or texts, misinterpretation still happened, way too often to trust it with a therapeutic conversation. I had to find a way to have an authentic, productive verbal conversation without having to do it in real time (synchronously).

Snapping??

As I was pondering this conundrum I had a serendipitous experience with a 17-year-old female client in 2016. She was re-telling a 'conversation' she had with a friend, and as I often do with millennials and post-millennials, I inquired about the 'kind of conversation' she was having. Many of them refer to 'talking' to a friend when they are actually 'texting'. To my surprise, she was doing neither, she was '*snapping*' with her friend. Snapping?? What the heck was that? I had never heard the term before. She proceeded to show me just exactly what she meant. She opened her *SnapChat* app and video-taped herself pretending to dialogue with her friend and showed me how she could just point the camera at herself or whatever she wanted so show her friend and then send the video, just like you would send a text. That had never occurred to me before. I knew, of course, that people exchanged silly pictures on these apps, but using it for a 'non-real-time-video-conversation' (asynchronous), that was a new one. I asked

her why she did it that way, and she looked at me incredulously, like I had just asked the dumbest question (and she was right, it was a pretty dumb question, I just wanted to hear her answer) and she obliged me with: "It is just quick, easy and accurate. It would take way to long to try and text what I want to say or describe what I can show someone with a 60-second video." And she was dead-on. That was my 'eureka' moment. I knew she was on to something.

So I started experimenting with video files. I knew that SnapChat, Instagram or FaceBook was not going to be the answer. These conversations needed to be longer than a few minutes and those platforms were not nearly secure enough for a sensitive conversation, but SMS and Email, those were different. Phone conversations, and Skype, FaceTime or Zoom had long since been deemed safe enough for transmitting sensitive information. How did SMS and Email stack up? Pretty well actually. The chances of a video sent by SMS or Email have a very low probability of being intercepted. Someone would have to be very tech savvy, have expensive equipment and software, and be in exactly the right place at the right time to intercept a video tape. And as far as a video file accidentally falling into the wrong hands due to 'user error'? That was pretty well covered too. You would have to be pretty ignorant, in this day and age, to open an attachment from someone you didn't know, right? The chances turned out to be far less than winning the Power Ball. That was good news to me.

The big problem with video was file size. I did all sorts of experimenting with video conversations and found that I was going to need about 10-15 minutes, on average, to tape a quality conversation. The file size for such a video was 300-450 MB. Most servers limit file transfer sizes to 25MB. There was no way that was going to work, but what about audio only? An audio tape is 30X smaller, between 5-8MB for a 10-15 minute tape. So I began experimenting with audio only, and it turned out to be the ticket. The big question was, how much does the video portion contribute to the clarity of the message? Turns out, not that much. In fact unless you have something to show someone, other than your face, the video turns out to just be a distraction. Audio gives all the inflection and tonality to very accurately interpret a message. While it is true that body language says a lot, when it comes to conversations, body language is almost always congruent with verbal language, and just reinforces what you already are getting from the verbal. In other words, body language is really just redundant information that rarely changes the verbal report. It may reinforce what is being said, but it simply doesn't do much to help clarify ~ verbal messages are pretty darn clear all on their own. And I can tell you now, with 5 years of experimentation under my belt, that the incidence of mis-interpreting a 'verbal only' message is no greater than the incidence of mis-interpreting a 'face-to-face' conversation.

The 'Body-Language' Myth

The notion that body language plays a bigger role came from a study done back in the 1960's at UCLA by the professor Albert Mehrabian. Subjects were asked to listen to a recording of a woman's voice saying the word "maybe" three different ways to convey liking, neutrality, and disliking. They were also shown photos of the woman's face

conveying the same three emotions. They were then asked to guess the emotions heard in the recorded voice, seen in the photos, and both together. The result? The subjects correctly identified the emotions 50 percent more often from the photos than from the voice.

In the second study, subjects were asked to listen to nine recorded words, three meant to convey liking (honey, dear, thanks), three to convey neutrality (maybe, really, oh), and three to convey disliking (don't, brute, terrible). Each word was pronounced three different ways. When asked to guess the emotions being conveyed, it turned out that the subjects were more influenced by the tone of voice than by the words themselves.

Professor Mehrabian combined the statistical results of the two studies and came up with the now famous, and famously misused, rule that communication is only 7 percent verbal and 93 percent non-verbal. The non-verbal component was made up of body language (55 percent) and tone of voice (38 percent).

When you read how the study was conducted, you realize quickly that the findings were taken out of context. All Mehrabian was demonstrating is that when you say a word like 'okay' it can be said numerous different ways to give very different meaning. And that the same word, when couched in various different body language formats, again can take on very different meanings.

The same goes for face-to-face conversations versus videoconferencing, a phone call or a text. It is absolutely true that a text can be completely misread, that's the reason for the judicious use of punctuation and emoji 's. Think about it for a minute, the smiley face or the LOL it's just a way of saying this is a positive comment, please take it that way. When you hear the word being said, it clears up the meaning. And if we could set it up so that one could see the 'look on one's face' when they were texting a message, again, it would probably clear up the meaning. But it isn't even close to accurate to insinuate that having both 'doubles' the 'clarification factor'. That is just poor science and taking statistical liberties out of context. The point here is that the verbal report clarifies the message almost entirely without the body language, and I have hours and hours of empirical evidence to prove that one.

A Matter Of Preference

I think the real issue is that most folks that are older than millennials (gen Y) or post millennials (gen Z), that would be mostly gen-X and boomers like myself (born 1961), simply prefer 'face-to-face' encounters. That is what we grew up with. The telephone, which of course has been in common use since the 1920's, was not something you used for important conversations. When I was in my master's program, 1999-2002, right at the turn of the millennium, telephone conversations were 'highly discouraged' for therapeutic conversations. A lot has changed in 20 years, but beliefs die hard. Many boomers and X-ers stand tall on the idea that face-to-face conversations are superior in every way, and that anything virtual is automatically of lesser quality. There is a strong

sense that the intimate information exchanged in a therapeutic conversation should only be done face-to-face. I 'get' that sentiment, I really do, but that is only one perspective.

Consider this perspective: A therapeutic conversation should not be an intimate conversation in the first place. Personal details are shared, of course, and I have often had a client tell me that 'they have never told anyone else this before', but it should never become an intimate conversation. Ah ... but it often does. I cannot tell you how many times in 20 years I started to get that feeling that the person across from me was 'developing feelings' for me. Face-to-face conversations behind closed doors, between someone who is distraught, and especially someone who is dismayed with their own relationship, suddenly in the presence of someone who is kind, listening, encouraging, confident and knows what to say ~ well, I probably don't need to finish that thought, you can fill in the blank. And every time that happens, which is frequently, I get that uneasy feeling. I know where this is going. Now I am in 'damage control mode', trying to walk that line between being empathetic and 'interested'. That is a tough position to be in and maintain a therapeutic vibe. These are the things most therapists don't like to talk about. I have seen that end poorly more times than I can count. And quite honestly, spending 12 years in solo private practice, in-office, often finding myself in a room alone with a female, I am lucky that nothing ever happened. I have had women embrace me in a 'frontal hug' and bury their face in my neck, which always catches me off guard, but no client has ever gone beyond that, although the insinuation has often been left 'hanging in the air'. Covid 19 eliminated that one several fronts ~ hugs are not acceptable any more, and virtual conversations have 100% eliminated that 'uncomfortable' feeling. Plainly stated, in over 500 virtual sessions I have not had to worry about someone touching me inappropriately and no one has made a pass at me ~ and for that I am thankful.

NBA-26 ~ The PVC Advantage

What I'm saying here is that a therapeutic conversation is, and should be, a business transaction. And for those kind of conversations, not being face-to-face is actually better. Feelings of intimacy and attraction should never be a part of that conversation. And I have even felt it from men who were attracted to me, and I am not making that up, they have admitted to it. That can be awkward. For me the situations are very uncomfortable, and so far that has never happened with a virtual communication.

An Ugly Situation

And then there is physical safety. Things can get ugly in a hurry if someone who is somewhat less than stable hears something they don't want to hear. Back in 1998, the year before I got into graduate school, I was working the night shift at Lutheran Hospital in Fort Wayne, IN. We had just admitted a man who was hallucinating. He was a paranoid schizophrenic and was convinced he was being chased by the mob and that everyone in the hospital was 'in on it'. My job, at the time, was to handle just such folks if they got out of control. I was in charge of keeping an eye on him on the 'locked down' unit. He seemed to calm down and come back to his senses, so much so, that it was

deemed safe for him to come off of the locked unit. Turns out it was just a ruse on his part, once out he made a mad dash for a window, which he of course couldn't get open. So he grabbed a lamp from a nearby table, which should have been screwed down, and began trying to smash out a window, which should have been plexiglass. Much to my horror, it wasn't plexiglass and he smashed out the window. When he realized he couldn't actually get out of the window, he grabbed a large shard of glass in each hand and headed for the nursing station. I was standing there, trying to reason with him, and was even holding the door wide open to his freedom, but he was inching closer to the nurses he had cornered. I kept trying to get a bit closer to him, but he was having none of it. Finally, when he looked away for a split second, I made my move, lunging at him with all I had and pile-driving him into the floor. I played line-backer in high school and knew how to get someone to the ground in a hurry. As soon as I had him down, the rest of the staff piled on to get the weapons out of his hands. Fortunately nobody got seriously hurt. He wound up with a couple of severed tendons in his hands, and I needed about 25 stitches in my nose, upper lip and neck to close a few superficial, but very bloody wounds to my face and neck. I am not sure if I had more of my own blood on me or his, but I looked like a stuck pig. One of the nurses actually fainted. They all thought I was in serious trouble, but thankfully not. You never forget an incident like that, and when someone starts acting a little agitated, the hair on the back of your neck stands up. This has happened numerous times in my private practice. People can get very angry, very quickly, and I have had to escort more than one agitated client out of the building. Thankfully no one has ever tried to attack me physically, but it has gotten a bit scary a few times.

The Glock

One evening I was all alone in my office with a 'good-sized' gentleman who was no stranger to violence. He had been in the military, special operations, and told me he had personally killed another human being, and wasn't afraid to do it again. He was currently serving as a US Marshall and had some pretty intense stories to tell about that. I was also working with his girlfriend at the time, in fact, she had come to me first, because the relationship had become abusive. Those kind of situations can be very tricky because people hear what they want to hear. I never have, nor will I ever, tell someone to end a relationship. That is simply not my place, but sometimes it gets heard that way. And this happened to be the case here. This gentleman had somehow gotten the message that I was encouraging his girlfriend to leave the relationship. And as I was casually explaining to him that this is not what I told her, he casually leaned back in his chair and pulled his Glock out of its concealed holster and laid it on the end-table next to his chair. With a sinister grin on his face, he told me the gun was 'pushing into his side and was just uncomfortable'. Can you imagine how I felt, conducting the rest of that session with that Glock lying on the table? He had the legal permit to carry a concealed weapon, and there is certainly nothing unlawful about unholstering your weapon if it is pinching your back while seated in a chair. You find out in a big hurry just how vulnerable you are. I wonder how many times in my career things could have gone seriously wrong, quickly, and I might not even be here writing this story.

Having the virtual space that remote communication affords all but eliminates this kind of situation. I highly doubt someone is going to drive to my home and try to get in my face, or intimidate me in some way. It is just plain safer, all the way around.

Another unexpected finding was that phone conversations are actually more productive for me than face-to-face video conversations. I never would've expected that, but here is the reason. I don't have to make eye contact, and therefore I can jot notes the entire time. That just doesn't work in a face-to-face conversation or a video conversation. This was yet another serendipitous discovery. Making eye contact is a necessary thing that we do in conversations that are either face-to-face or video.

Re-Thinking Real-Time Conversations

That may not sound like a big deal from the client-side of a conversation, but let's look at it from the therapist side: In a face to face or video conversation I'm busy in my mind trying to remember what is being said, and distill it down to what I can jot on paper quickly, so as not to make the conversation feel like some kind of an interview. With a phone conversation, however, I can be writing the whole time which frees up my mind from trying to remember and it frees my mind from all of the visual stimuli coming in through my eyes. In fact, sometimes I just close my eyes and listen. It's amazing how much easier it is to listen, process information, and formulate a high-quality reply. I actually prefer a phone conversation over a video conversation because I can be much more productive - I never thought I would say that, but it's true. I would say that on average I am 150%-200% more productive on a phone conversation than a video conversation. By the way, even on a video conversation, the file is in my lap the whole time and I can take a lot more notes while 'making eye contact, something that would be awkward in a face-to-face conversation'. As most people have probably noticed in this world of zoom and FaceTime, eye contact isn't really 'eye contact' anyway. I can keep my face centered in the screen and honestly not pay that much attention to facial expressions much at all. That's just the reality of the modality.

Another thing to remember is that when Mehrabian did his experiment he simply combined the statistical results and came up with his 93% nonverbal claim. That completely ignores the answer to this question: If I'm getting the audio alone, how much more does the video of that person's face and body movements inform me about the meaning of the message? I would say there's a huge overlap, so much so that the video would just be a confirmation of what you already get from the audio for the most part. And I believe that I have been able to empirically prove that over the last five months by processing over 500 sessions that are both phone only and video conversations. I have a great frame of reference. I give people a choice, whatever they're most comfortable with. The last thing I want is an uncomfortable client. So if they choose phone that's what we do. And what I have found is that video conversations do not significantly add useful information that I'm not already getting from the audio. I can assure you of that. My finding is that Mehrabian made a fundamental mistake and that he never took the experiment far enough to design a way to see how much additional information might be gained from a video over just the audio, and vice versa. Think about it for a minute.

Suppose you had just the video with the audio removed, how well would that go? Do you get what I am saying here?

And for these reasons, from a therapeutic standpoint, a phone conversation, as it turns out, is the superior 'Real Time' conversation. Prior to the pandemic, which forced me to go exclusively to phone and video-conferencing (5 months now and counting), I would not have discovered this, but one thing that you can't argue with is results. I did not set out with this hypothesis in mind. Trust me, I went in believing, like everyone else, that you just couldn't beat a face-to-face, in-office, conversation. I saw a zoom conversation or a FaceTime conversation as a very distant second, but still better than just a phone call. I was wrong on both counts.

Full disclosure here ... I was doing zoom sessions long before Covid, and Skype sessions long before Zoom. And I must admit, I hated them - absolutely hated them. I realize now that my hatred was being governed by my cognitive bias, my anxiety, and simply the fact that it was so different. Just like anything else that we want to learn to do, it takes practice. I should also add here that we've come a long way with video conversations like Zoom or FaceTime. Back in the day they were very sketchy which also probably added to why I really disliked them. But we have come such a long way with technology that these conversations are actually very good and for the most part uninterrupted.

And even though I have been talking on my phone for most of my life, my cognitive bias was governing those conversations as well. From the time I was in graduate school it was drilled into my head that a phone conversation with a client was a dangerous endeavor. The reasoning was this: It was simply assumed, likely based on Mehrabian's Study, that without facial cues you were likely to misinterpret a conversation and somebody was going to be seriously compromised by missing the visual cues that would help you put it all together. And the specific fear was that you would not pick up on a suicidal ideation, the client would off himself and you would be in big trouble. Interesting that 20 years later I've never heard of that happening, never heard of anybody being questioned or prosecuted for such and I can't find a record of anything like this happening anywhere on the Internet. So I'm pretty sure it never happened.

And consider this ~ when people back in the day were making their determinations about which kind of conversations were the best, nobody had video conferencing at their disposal to make the comparison. In fact I believe in the last five months, using my own empirical data, a true study with over 500 sessions gives me some massive empirical clout. It has been so consistent and so significant that I can say with 100% certainty that a phone call trumps a video conference and a video conference beats a face-to-face conversation in terms of productivity. Hear me clear ~ I am not talking about what people prefer, or what they are comfortable with, I am talking about productivity ~ two very different things.

The Hidden Benefits

And I'm talking here specifically about the *productivity of the therapist*. To the client it doesn't matter so much. The onus is not on them to perform or be productive. They just come in and sit down. It is the therapist who asks the questions, listens to the answers, processes the information, and formulates a useful response, all while trying to maintain eye contact, and take a conservative amount of notes so, as not to create an uncomfortable feeling that one is being interviewed. It is up to the therapist to manage the comfort level, the productivity, and give the client some thing useful to walk out the door with. That's a lot of moving parts. And when I experienced how much better a phone conversation went simply by removing the 'eye-contact' component and taking the governor off of how many notes I could take, it became blatantly obvious. When you take good notes you free your mind up to process information without having to try and remember it, and when you remove eye-contact, it's amazing how much more attention gets devoted to auditory processing. The brain does that automatically. It is an amazing boost in productivity from the therapeutic side. And I can totally understand why clients like the face-to-face. They aren't doing all of that, they're just sitting, answering questions, and letting you do all the work. Of course they are, that's what they pay you for. So here's my question to any client: Would you rather have the comfort of a conventional conversation, face-to-face, in-the-office, at half the productivity? Or a non-conventional conversation that doubles the productivity of your therapist?

Here is another dirty little secret: Most therapists have memorized a 'canned set of responses'. There is no way that a therapist, no matter how smart they are or how experienced, can have in their brain a repertoire of responses that cover every situation, not even close. What you get when you sit down with a therapist is a response that has been rehearsed many times that can be modified to fit pretty much every situation. They have 'memorized modifiers' as well to fit different situations, because, you know, you wouldn't say the same thing to a client that just lost his wife to cancer as you would to a client whose wife is having an affair, right??

And as if that isn't bad enough, many therapists think it is their job to simply 'actively listen' and 'reflect' back to the client. That goes something like this: "So you just found out that your wife is having an affair with your best friend? So ~ how does that make you feel? (Okay, so I am being a bit facetious here, but you get the point!) Just typing out the question 'So how does that make you feel?', right now in this momen, is making my skin crawl. I have had so many clients come into my office and at the end of the first session, when I have explained 'how I roll', say to me something like: "Man, that is a breath of fresh air!" And then they will proceed to tell me about how their last 'therapist' would "pat them on the back until they felt better and send them out the door". (Yes, that is an actual quote!)

Once you walk out the door, your therapist scratches down a few quick notes and puts the file away, and you are not likely to be 'thought about' until the next session when your therapist will essentially repeat the same process. That is so not how I roll. But here is the big problem, it is so hard to actually do more than that in conventional therapy. When you add up the costs of doing business, and subtract the costs of insurance discounts, unpaid claims and delinquent accounts, you have to 'see clients'

back-to-back-to-back. And unless you want to spend evenings and weekends researching and dreaming up unique interventions for your clients, very little happens outside of the 50 minutes you are seated with your therapist. So, to be fair, the nature of conventional therapy itself is the major problem, not necessarily 'lazy' therapists. They are just trying to keep their sanity. But no matter how you slice it, that is simply not good enough for me. PVC solves all of those problems by providing the time necessary to process the information that has been exchanged, give it some quality attention, and provide a high quality response ~ not one that is canned or impromptu, but one that is well-thought-out, incubated and cultivated through the process of 'cognitive consolidation', and prepared in a unique, exclusive and proprietary way. That is the PVC difference, and it makes all the difference in the world!

NBA-27 ~ Stepping Into The Future

So now let's go one step further. If you take out the real time, or synchronous, component of a phone conversation, you're left with an exchange of voice messages. It feels strange to get used to it first, but it is really just a matter of *batching* all of your comments into one continuous narrative and sending it off. It is really just the verbal analogue of a text message conversation.

Asynchronous Verbal Conversations

Now here is where productivity and efficiency really 'climb the ladder'. You eliminate the schedule completely. You talk when you have time, I talk when I have time. That is taking all of the awesome components of text messaging and eliminating the only real drawback - which would be misinterpreting the texted message. The verbal analogue virtually eliminates misinterpretations. And let me add right here, now that I'm thinking about it, let's not forget how many misinterpretations happen when you are in an 'in-person' conversation. I can say something in session and a week later it is completely twisted around, and vice versa. So we would have to factor in the amount of communication that gets misinterpreted anyway, in a face-to-face conversation, and subtract that from the equation as well. And for the record, this happens quite frequently. People often hear what they want to hear. I used to get floored by some of the things that my clients think they heard me say, but it happens so often, now I just expect it. Cognitive biases can significantly twist the meaning of the spoken word.

With NRT, or asynchronous, conversations I can hear all the information, take all of the notes I want, and then take as much time as needed to 'Think about' a response. To sleep on it if necessary. Again, I did not set out to prove this hypothesis, it just became very apparent to me from the empirical school of experience. I was experimenting with these conversations and fitting them in between my 'conventional' conversations, in the no-show spaces (which this kind of communication, by the way, virtually eliminates) and I discovered it. I would often listen to a recording while taking notes and then have to put it away, because my next client walked in the door, and maybe not get back to the taping my response until the next day. When I referenced my notes and picked up my

phone to tape my response, the result was consistently better than if I had taped an immediate response ~ often times up to 200% better.

Willing To Do Something Different?

So once again I have to ask the question: Are you willing to try doing something a different way to gain a 200% improvement in the productivity of the response you're getting from your therapist?

I want to make it clear that I am not intending to eliminate Real-Time, synchronous, conversation from the menu. I will always maintain a schedule, but those conversations are going to be more costly and they will need to be pre-paid, non-refundable appointments. This is the only way that I can provide my services at a reasonable cost. Pre-paid, non-refundable sessions eliminates that problem of no-shows. PVC is a 'Full Service' platform. NRT, asynchronous, conversations are a flat monthly fee for unlimited conversations and RT, synchronous, conversations, phone, FaceTime or Zoom, are 'pay-per-session'.

The idea of exchanging voice-messages, as opposed to text messages, is really nothing new. Phone applications like 'Voxer' have been around for awhile, since 2007. Voxer is an application that 'turns your phone into a walkie-talkie', but with the added feature that what ever you say gets recorded and is sitting there waiting for you to pick it up and listen (a true 'walkie talkie' requires that you be listening when the message is being spoken). I have only had two clients that I recall in the past 10 years that use this application. It clearly is not a mainstream app, but it is still in existence and has been in the Apple App Store since 2011. That says something about it's staying power. My guess is that it hasn't become more popular because people 'get nervous' about 'leaving a voice message'.

Judging from my business correspondence, many people are still 'gun shy' about leaving a voice-mail. I rarely answer my phone 'live'. During business hours, I am simply too busy to answer the phone. I would say less than half of my callers leave a voice-mail. Once they listen to my greeting, which gives them an option to leave a text message, most of them hang up and do just that ~ shoot me a text message.

Logistically that makes ***no*** sense, right? The beep sounds and all you have to do is 'tell me who you are and what you want' ~ it is 'right there', teed up for you! But most would rather hang up, open another app, and shoot me a text. No secret there, many people 'freeze up' a bit when required to 'speak an impromptu message'. They actually get a bit of stage-fright. They think: 'What if I forget my number? Or say something stupid? I can't take it back'. (Although with most message systems, yes, you do get an opportunity to record again if you would like). It is so much less anxiety provoking to hang up and take your time texting a message, making sure it is right, and what you want to say, and then hitting 'send'.

On my iPhone, when 'texting another iPhone' I have the option to simply press down on the 'squiggly-wave-form' icon embedded right in the 'message box', hold it down and audio-record what I want to say. Or I can dictate my message by pressing the microphone icon at the bottom of the keypad. I can count on one hand the number of times I have gotten a 'voiced' message as opposed to a 'dictated' or texted one, and for the same reason ~ you can proof-read a dictated message before sending it.

I can also use the Voice Memo app to tape and then choose the 'share' option to send to another iPhone or a newer droid phone. I just sent one the other day to a droid and it worked perfectly. Just a short while ago, Android phones could not open the audio, but technology is advancing. New universal audio file formats are emerging that are making it easier and easier to communicate efficiently and effectively using audio messages. That is music to my ears.

And one of the coolest newer features on my iPhone is the 'transcription' feature in the voicemail app that is still in the 'beta' phase. I love that feature. When someone actually does leave a voicemail, I get a transcribed version of the message that I can read while listening, which means I don't have to go back and listen to it again to get names, phone numbers, etc. That kind of technology will be so useful for my virtual practice. I will be able to send a tape and a transcription of the same message. This software is already available, but does not come native on the iPhone ~ just yet. I can get the software for a subscription price, but the transcription doesn't happen right on my phone, it gets sent to the cloud and is returned as a transcribed message. I can see this kind of software eventually becoming native to the iPhone.

On the voicemail 'beta' transcription feature, there is a message from Apple at the bottom asking if you find it useful or not. I always click on the useful button. I would hope that many people are hitting the 'useful' inquiry button at the bottom of the transcribed message and submitting that back to Apple as well. I love this feature and hope it spreads to other applications, like 'messages' for example. It would be so nice to have the option speak a message and have it sent as both audio and transcription ~ just like the 'beta' version in Voicemail. That is my vision for the future ~ to be able to pick up my phone, press a button and speak to my client and then send the message as an audio tape and a transcribed message.

Making The Case For PVC

In conclusion, I hope I have made a case for, and sparked some interest in, trying the PVC platform. When I started this project in January of 2017, I quickly realized that I was about 5-10 years ahead of my time. Covid -19 has changed all of that in a heartbeat. 5 months ago, most Americans over the age of 40 had never tried video-conferencing, and now most have become comfortable with it and the majority of my clients actually prefer it over face-to-face encounters. Like it or not, technology keeps marching on, and taking with it the communication preferences of the entire world. We can either 'roll with it' or get 'left in the dust'. I prefer to be the first one to the party. I foresee a world coming in which 'face-to-face' conversations are reserved for only the

most intimate of encounters. Heck, even in the dating world, virtual encounters are already to most prominent way of 'meeting' someone. The majority of relationships I deal with started 'on-line' and stayed there for awhile before the two agreed to meet for a 'face-to-face' encounter. And it is not uncommon these days for people to have strong relationships with people they have never met and probably will never meet. In the same way I have an increasing number of clients whom I have never met face-to-face and probably never will. I have clients from just about every continent in the world, 6 of 7, still have yet to counsel someone in Antarctica.

I no longer think that I am 5-10 years ahead. It has been estimated that the Pandemic has accelerated information technology by a factor of 10X. What has happened in 5 months would have taken 5 years organically. So that means the time is now!

I hope you have enjoyed this book and I hope that someday soon you will shoot me a text and join the movement. I always want to be way ahead of the curve and it would be so cool to have you there with me.

On The Cover

So what is the significance of the picture on the cover?

In March 2020 my wife and I had a vacation scheduled to San Francisco, California. That vacation was canceled due to Covid 19, and rescheduled for October 2020. At that time, in March, it seemed for sure that the pandemic would be over by October.

I have referenced this vacation in my book. This marked the beginning of my opportunity to actually slow down and write this book. In October, 2020, as I was nearing completion of my rough draft, we had a decision to make. Should we go on the October vacation, or forfeit the money? We weighed our options, and decided to go for it.

We stayed a couple blocks away from Fisherman's Wharf, near the infamous pier 39. One morning we were walking the boardwalk, just in front of pier 39, and I saw this guy holding a trophy, with a photographer taking pictures. I recognized the trophy, but was a bit confused as to why he had it. It was the USGA Open Trophy. His name is Matt Cardis and he explained he was doing a documentary. Matt is a photojournalist, and an avid golf ambassador, and he had gotten permission from the USGA to take the actual trophy on tour. Matt asked me if I was interested in holding a piece of golf history. Heck yeah!! And so I had to sign a waiver, glove up, with nitrile gloves and cotton gloves over those. And his crew photographed me holding the trophy for Matt's documentary. Here is a link to his website if you are interested. The documentary is not on the site yet, as of November 2020. The US Open was in September (17-20), 2020, so Bryson DeChambeau, this year's winner, had hoisted this very trophy at Winged Foot in New York, less than a month previous to my getting to hold it. Matt is just beginning this project. He has to have the trophy back to officials before the US Open June 2021, (obviously), so look for the documentary to be out late summer 2021.

<https://www.golfinyourstate.com/>

Now I love golf, and I refer to the game of golf in my book quite often. Learning how to really play the game, which is very hard to play well, takes a lot of practice. Golf provides the perfect metaphor - in my opinion - for illustrating the complexities of change. So when I thought about what picture of myself I wanted on the cover, this picture came to mind. It was pretty cool to be holding the very same trophy held by Bobby Jones, Ben Hogan, Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Tom Watson, Fuzzy Zoeller, Payne Stewart, and Tiger Woods held in their actual hands, and saw their signatures engraved on the base of the trophy ~ this was not a replica, this was the real deal! It was a pretty cool experience, standing at Fisherman's Wharf, San Francisco bay in the background. I'm not one that is so big on reading 'too much into coincidence', it's just that sometimes, when you're in the right place at the right time, cool stuff happens to you. So that's really the significance, this book represents all the cool stuff that can happen in life once we figure out how to get out of our own way. I am hoping that if you are reading or listening to this book, now is the right place and time for some cool stuff to happen in your life.

Standing there holding that trophy, imagining all the golfers who have held that trophy, was a neat experience for sure. But there's really a much bigger trophy that I get to hold everyday, and that trophy is the "life I get to live". I'm not interested in being the best of the game of golf, although I sure have fun playing it, I'm interested in being the best at the game of life. As gratifying as I can imagine it might be, to be standing on the 18th green, at the US golf open, hoisting this trophy, and taking home millions of dollars, that is nothing compared to hoisting the trophy, and taking home the purse, in the game of life - happiness, passion, satisfaction and purpose. Now that really gets me excited!!

So there you go. Enjoy the book - and start making way for cool stuff to happen in your life!