

# Positioning in Life and Work

Most people read Clear Thinking to improve their own thinking. I've used the principles inside the book to build multiple businesses and help countless others.

One of the key ideas in the book is that the position you are in when you make a decision matters.

How can we architect our position to make life easier? Before we are faced with a decision?

## Positioning

“Each moment puts you in a better or worse position to handle the future. It's that positioning that eventually makes life easier or harder.”

“A good position allows you to think clearly rather than be forced by circumstances into a decision. One reason the best in the world make consistently good decisions is they rarely find themselves forced into a decision by circumstances.

You don't need to be smarter than others to outperform them if you can out-position them. Anyone looks like a genius when they're in a good position, and even the smartest person looks like an idiot when they're in a bad one.

The greatest aid to judgment is starting from a good position.”

That last line, “The greatest aid to judgment is starting from a good position,” was inspired by a book written in 1926.

So, how can we position ourselves for success at work?

In the book, we talk about safeguards (prevent, circumvent, create friction, and put in guardrails). Let's drop all the fancy terms and just put it into practice.



Here are some ideas (there are many more in the book) with how you can better position yourself individually and at work.

### Five ways to improve your position

**1. Start with sleep, exercise, and eating healthy.** All of these things affect your defaults. When you get the foundation right, it won't change the fact you get upset, but it will often change what happens when you're upset. Resisting the urges that get others in trouble is easier when you have the right foundation. You can use automatic rules to make these things happen.

- "I have a rule that I workout everyday."
- "I have a rule that I don't eat junk."
- "I have a rule that I go to bed at 9."

**2. Spend less than you make.** This is important because not only does having a little savings in the bank help you take advantage of opportunities and not have unexpected changes hurt you as much, but it also helps when it comes to doing something different than others and thinking independently. Don't use willpower - make a rule. Have money automatically taken from your account, live off one salary, and create forcing functions.

**3. Invest in your relationship with your partner/kids.** You can't be your best at work if your home life isn't good. More importantly - if you invest in your relationship before you have trouble - those little sparks that set people off will just dissipate naturally. As Peter Kaufman told me, imagine a patch of grass between you and your partner. Water it every day. If you do, you'll find sparks won't start a fire. But let that grass dry out and the smallest spark will start a fire.

**4. Design your environment to turn desired behavior into default behavior.** This can be as simple as leaving your phone off for the morning, removing all chocolate from your house, or more nuanced, like blocking off 90 minutes each morning with yourself to work on the biggest opportunities. Position yourself for your next role. There is always more you can do to make yourself invaluable at work. Look at the roles you might want in the future and start to acquire the skills now. When there is an inevitable opening, you'll already be qualified. There are many more practical ideas in the book on this.



5. **Automatic Rules** - Automatic rules allow you to turn desired behavior into default behavior. Some of my automatic rules are: work every day, no meetings until 12, stop drinking at 9 when out, invest in an index fund, weekly date nights, and more! They sound simple - and they are - but they're not simplistic.

6. (Bonus) **Make sure you don't fall into the Scrooge trap.** Ebenezer Scrooge got what he wanted only to discover that what he wanted wasn't worth wanting. This happens when you unconsciously follow the scoreboard others tell you to. Choose your own scoreboard.

### **Using Safeguards to position an organization for success:**

1. **Ownership.** Not all decisions need the same process around them. All decisions, however, need an owner. The owner is the one person who makes the final decision. The most important role of the owner is that they are responsible for defining the problem to be solved.

2. **Design your environment to align with the decision-making process.** One of the biggest time wasters in organizations is solving what looks like the right problem but the wrong one. Ownership is one way to improve the odds you solve the right problem. Still, another way is to separate the "problem-definition" and "problem-solution" phases between two or more meetings. This works for a variety of reasons outlined in the book.

3. **Make the invisible visible.** This is about writing, which offers incredible benefits when it comes to learning, coming up with new ideas, and seeing what's going on in your (and others' heads).

"Remember that writing out the problem makes the invisible visible. Write down what you think the problem is, and then look at it the next day. If you find yourself using jargon in your description, it's a sign that you don't fully understand the problem. And if you don't understand it, you shouldn't be making a decision about it."



4. **Win-win.** One counter-intuitive way to position yourself for success is to ensure your counterparties always win. That means - never taking the last dollar off the table, not nickel and diming employees, etc. Similar to your personal relationships above - you have a patch of grass between you and all your counterparties - one way to ensure you water it is to ensure they win.

5. **Ask yourself, “And then what?”** Not only does this apply personally but it applies for corporate decisions too. For example, I’ve seen organizations replace one piece of software with another only to end up with worse problems and a huge training expense. They didn’t ask themselves - “and then what?” In the book, we talk about the competition between today’s self and future self.

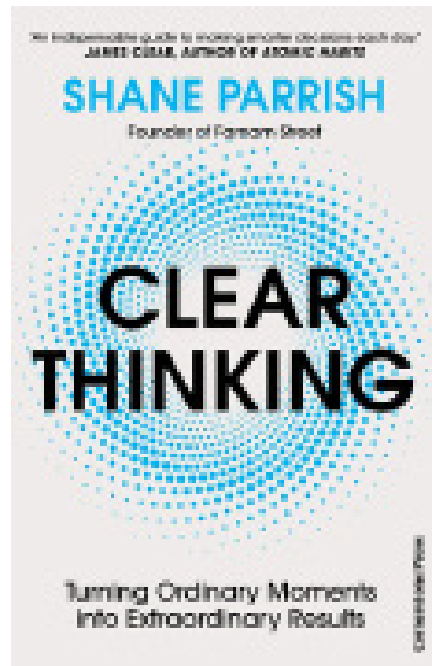
“When you solve a problem, you make a change in the world. That change can be either in line with your long-term objectives or not. For example, if you’re hungry and you eat a chocolate bar, you’ve solved the immediate hunger problem, but that solution has consequences: the inevitable sugar crash an hour or two later. If your longer-term goal is to be productive that afternoon, the chocolate bar is not the best solution to your immediate problem. It’s true that eating a chocolate bar once won’t ruin your diet or your day. But repeating that seemingly small error in judgment daily over the course of your lifetime will not put you in a position for success. Tiny choices compound. That’s why second-level thinking is needed.”

These are only a sampling of the ideas in Clear Thinking and how to implement them. It’s time for you to dive into the book!

One final thought:

“What may look like discipline often involves a carefully created environment to encourage certain behaviors. And what may look like poor choices is often just someone trying their best to use willpower and bumping up against their defaults. The people with the best defaults are typically the ones with the best environment.”

Email [shane@farnamstreetblog.com](mailto:shane@farnamstreetblog.com) and tell me how you position yourself for success at work and home.



These ideas are from *Clear Thinking: Turning Ordinary Moments into Extraordinary Results* by Shane Parrish.

Ever wondered why the world's most successful individuals seem to have an uncanny ability to be in the right place at the right time? It's not luck; it's positioning. They are rarely backed into a corner by circumstances, and you don't have to be either.

*Clear Thinking* is not just another self-help book—it's a transformative guide that hands you the tools to master your own fate, sharpen your decision-making, and set yourself up for unparalleled success.

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