

Mastering the Power of Assertive Dialogue

A Guide to Unshakeable Self-Esteem & Influential Interaction

Karen Davies



Part II


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Mastering the Power of Assertive Dialogue: A Guide to Unshakeable Self-Esteem
and Influential Interactions

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Preface and Biography

It is widely recognised that Assertive behaviour has a role in our leadership success and personal development. Without honing this essential skill, we become ineffective, lose respect and risk the physical and mental effects of stress. Yet Assertive Development too often focuses on the simplicity of just applying new behaviours, rather than exploring the source of our lack of assertion.

In her first, thought-provoking book of this Assertive Trilogy, Karen explored the profound drivers that influence how we think, feel and act, gaining an insight into the impact these factors have on our performance and our behaviour.

This second book builds on that essential foundation by tackling yet another crucial assertive challenge – our poor-quality communication. This is not just simply about interacting with our colleagues and customers more effectively. It uncovers the deep-rooted influence that our internal dialogue and self-esteem have on those interactions. More intriguingly, it shows how to expel these mental demons in a practical and powerful way, leaving us in no doubt about our capability and our route to success and fulfilment.

This *internal dialogue* neatly collaborates with *external interactions* to reveal some highly relevant and tangible strategies that promote a more authentic assertion – in an instant. At the heart of this second book is how we see ourselves, our self-worth and how self-belief ruins or rewards our efforts.

Bringing us this fascinating topic is Karen Davies, who is passionate about her work in developing the art of authentic assertion and unshakeable self-confidence.

Whilst Karen has been in the personal development and coaching fields for twenty-five years, it has been in the last fifteen that her work has had the greatest impact, thanks to her own self-discovery journey. After suffering from stress-related depression in 1997, Karen had a unique opportunity to explore herself profoundly and uncover the fundamental triggers that created her health situation. After some cathartic self-development, she worked through her challenges, many of them triggered by self-destructive thought patterns and her learning has become the source of her own healing, her inspirational teachings and powerful coaching.

Through her Consultancy, Karen inspired changes in hundreds of executives, leaders and aspiring employees across the globe, achieving success for over thirteen years. Today Karen is role modelling her ‘optimise your potential’ teachings by shifting her focus from business to personal transformation, inspiring the fulfilment of individuals, through her new vocation – My Well-being.

Karen's refreshing approach to development is far beyond the concept of the traditional training course. She uses her coaching philosophy to guide us on our own path of self-discovery, building on the notion that teaching is a passive activity; learning is active. You will not just read this eBook, you will take a journey and, engaged by her coaching exercises, have the opportunity to alter the way you think, how you feel and behave in all walks of your life. Your transformation is just around the corner.



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**"We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts.
With our thoughts we make our world."**

Buddha

1 Introduction – Assertive Trilogy Part 2

My philosophy on developing self-confidence and assertiveness is to take an *inside-out* approach, inspired by Stephen Covey's book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. When we explore, at a profound level, why we do what we do or think what we think, we are so much closer to becoming the leader, employee, executive we are destined to be.

Assertiveness is such a big topic that it needs breaking down to enable the gathering of a set of authentic strategies that create a long-lasting change – hence the Trilogy approach that I have taken.

The first book in this three-part series, **Your Assertive Development Journey**, lays down some critical principles for raising our self-awareness, through which we gain a tremendous understanding of our current behaviours and what could be holding us back from that illusive assertive Utopia.

This second book looks at mastering the art of assertive interactions by exploring how our **dialogue** influences our self-esteem and how others experience us. We discover the role our thoughts have on our self-worth and behaviour patterns and explore some of the latest research that reveals the mind/body association that has exciting potential for the way we utilise our brainpower in a business context. In addition, we uncover how to interact more influentially, addressing more than the traditional communication topics we are familiar with, enabling us to earn greater respect and more collaborative results.

The third and final book focuses specifically on real-life assertive challenges to which we can apply practical strategies that improve our outcomes and leadership impact.

Individually, each book combines the pieces of our *personal and leadership effectiveness* jigsaw. Together they take us on a self-discovery journey that broadens our mind to the magic of self-awareness, high self-esteem and sustainable, long-term change, generating a route-map for success.

1.1 Setting the Context – The Two Faces of Dialogue

Before we go on, let me be clear what I mean by the word **dialogue** and set the context for this second book. Dialogue has two faces to it:



- **Firstly, internal dialogue.** This consists of the language, beliefs and thoughts that come from our mind and can best be described as *self-talk*. If this is the first time you have come across this term, it may seem an odd label and for many, creates a suggestion of madness. Our internal dialogue has a subtle, yet powerful influence over how we see ourselves. The apparent simplicity of the phrase, “I’m no good at that,” has a huge significance over how we perform, how we feel about ourselves and the general quality of our interactions.

Our habitual, internal dialogue forms programmes that, based on the quality of the language we use, unconsciously shapes our self-perceptions. More directly, those ‘thought programmes’ impact on the way we then behave and interact. Interestingly, science is increasingly affirming the links between mind and body, encouraging us to consider the result our thoughts have on our personal and leadership effectiveness, on our health and well-being.



- **The second face is our interactive dialogue.** This is the combination of our words, intonation, body language and the intent we use when engaging with others to achieve an outcome. We typically refer to this as *communication*, although I feel this is too unsophisticated a term for today’s business culture and needs a fresh perspective, which I aim to provide.

The quality of our interactive dialogue affects our reputation, influences the condition of our relationships and shapes the response we receive from others.

To increase our effectiveness, I believe we need to explore *communication* from a new angle; acknowledging the impact that a more inclusive interaction has on our success, our personal and professional relationships and the overall quality of our lives.

As you can see, **dialogue** differs in its characteristics and role, yet each one has a powerful part to play in our assertion, which we explore in this book.

1.2 Why the Interaction/Assertiveness Partnership?

We predominantly see assertiveness as a *behaviour style* that through the implementation of key strategies can achieve win-win outcomes, allowing all parties to feel fairly treated and honoured. Whilst accurate, this notion represents a superficial assertive ideal; be prepared to look deeper within and we find far more answers to our assertive challenges than this classical model offers.

When we are prepared to seek out this deeper connection, we realise that assertiveness is as much about how we treat ourselves as it is about the way we treat others. If we treat ourselves unfairly, then it will be hard to sustain an assertive style with others. In line with my *inside-out* philosophy, assertion must first come from within – once we acknowledge this, then what we project on the outside will be authentic.

The quality of our internal dialogue is a great guide to understanding how we truly regard ourselves. If we portray our worthiness using poor quality internal language, then our behaviours will follow suit. Everything we show to others is a direct reflection of what we think and feel on the inside.

Internal language such as, “I can’t do this”, or “I’m bound to fail”, over time can form a self-belief foundation on which our behaviours sit. If we hold beliefs like these, we display withdrawn body language, our conversations match our self-deprecating language and our tone of voice sounds hesitant, meek and fearful. These features then combine to form an unassertive representation, which is likely to receive an unassertive response from those around us.

We can therefore, begin to see the impact our internal dialogue has on our external interactions. Get the *inside* strong, worthy and the *outside* acts like a mirror, which people respond to positively – this is the strength of their partnership.

1.3 Personal Expectations

I base my writing style on being a personal coach, encouraging us to interact with the aid of these pages as a workbook. This makes the learning experience so much more engaging, which encourages more profound insights and inspired change.

What you invest in the exercises equates to the results you get out of it. I urge you to devote time, patience, reflection and commitment so you can accelerate your assertive development. It is not so much about effort or determination; it is more about being open, honest and willing.

Before we start, I would like you to take a few moments to think about why you want to read this book and set some goals for what you would like to learn and experience. If you have already read my first book, **Your Assertive Development Journey – Part 1**, then you may be looking to build on what you have learned and enhance your assertion further.

If this is your first book in the Trilogy, then I encourage you to reflect on the questions below and somewhere in a journal or on a note pad, write down the desired outcomes you would like to achieve by the end of this book.

1. What would you most like to know, understand or appreciate more because of reading this eBook?
2. What do you imagine yourself being able to do differently, after your reading?
3. Given the two faces of Dialogue that I have mentioned, what interaction challenges do you experience most often that you would like to resolve?

"You are what you are and where you are because of what has gone into your mind. You can change what you are and where you are by changing what goes into your mind."

Zig Ziglar

“Every thought we think is creating our future.”

Louise L. Hay

2 Internal Dialogue

If we build our assertive strength from the inside, then our ability to lead, influence, interact and build meaningful relationships increases. If we fix our assertive challenges with just a few random strategies, then we end up applying a sticking plaster to the issue, which soon returns to haunt us. I believe that personal development is an inside job and in this second chapter, we focus on the fundamental role our internal dialogue plays in the condition of our self-esteem and the relationship we have with ourselves. When we master our thoughts then we master our success rather than relying on or blaming external factors.

2.1 Evolving Science of the Brain and the Mind

There is an increasing interest in leadership quarters about how to enhance performance through mind optimisation. Four decades ago, Neuro-linguistic-Programming (NLP) introduced us to a physiological phenomenon that helped us master our self-awareness and our relationships with others – and science continues to intrigue us with new developments in the mind-body connection.

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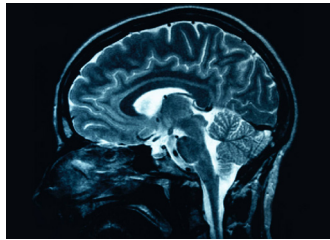
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This chapter aims to consolidate some of the material that is out there about the brain and our mind, relating this closely to the role they play in our development. Although, let me lay out my boundaries very clearly before we continue, as there is a huge amount of scientific data and detail available to us. I wish to present just a flavour of the theories, concepts and philosophies, focusing on what I have found most interesting and relevant in my Leadership and Personal Development career.

2.1.1 The Small Matter of the Brain



Scientifically, we are much clearer about how the brain and our central nervous system physiologically and chemically run our bodies and their influence on our behaviours. Neuroscience has even revealed evidence that there is a partnership between our emotions and our limbic brain, showing how we subjectively experience and objectively express emotions such as anger, fear, pleasure and joy. Yet, we have only scratched the surface of our brain's capabilities. Even Albert Einstein recognised:

“We do not know one thousandth of one per cent of what nature has revealed to us.”

There is a real temptation for me to talk about the brain's biology and chemistry; the interdependent two hemispheres, the four lobes, the central nervous system, neurons, plasticity and brainwaves, all of which could have a deserved place in this chapter.

Although for the purposes of this eBook, I will focus more on the abstract nature of the mind and the modern physics paradigm that present different ways of understanding the mind-body connection.

2.1.2 Quantum Theory and a Basis for the Mind

The theories of two great Physicists offer an interesting dimension into our Internal Dialogue that are worth touching on, in very crude form; Isaac Newton's theory of the Universe being a machine and Albert Einstein's Quantum Theory based on energy and the electromagnetic spectrum.

Einstein and his colleagues shone an amazing spotlight on a new physics model that has opened up the path for all sorts of advancements in the last century. The basic premise of Quantum Theory, which launched onto the scene in the early 20th Century, has an expansive, interdependent and holistic view of the world and opens up the potential for mind-blowing mind/body connections.

Quantum Theory suggests that everything is energy. All matter is energy and has a frequency, a vibration that can alter the physical and chemical nature of a particle. It is this principle of energy that lays out the premise for how our mind interacts with our body. When the mind has a thought, (which is energy vibrating at a certain frequency), this influences the brain's neurotransmitters and the body's biological functions, which release certain hormones that shape how we express ourselves.

Yet Einstein's theory of electromagnetic energy forming the substance of our existence, presents a real intellectual challenge to our Newtonian mechanistic conditioning. It stretches our 'black and white' belief, because energy is both invisible and intangible, which has given rise to great cynicism. Paradoxically, we experience the result of Einstein's discoveries at a very practical level every day, in the form of microwave ovens, CAT scans, mobile phones and television.

Dr David Hamilton in his book, *How your Mind can Heal the Body* says,

**“Thoughts, emotions and beliefs are not just subjective ideas in the mind,
but cause real chemical and physical changes in the brain and throughout the body.”**

Although what does this have to do with mastering our mind and assertiveness? We are about to move into the fascinating realm of mind psychology, an abstract concept that for many is difficult to grasp. The problem is that the immaterial nature of the mind does not fit our mechanistic view of the world. Yet in presenting an alternative view of our invisible intellect and its innate power, it allows us to consider the possibilities of mastering our mind/body interaction and consequently the external expression of our thoughts and emotions.

As Bruce Lipton says in his book, *The Biology of Belief*,

**“Thoughts, the mind's energy, directly influence how the
physical brain controls the body's physiology.”**

In his book, *The Concept of the Mind*, Gilbert Ryle defined the mind as a 'Ghost in the Machine.' As we explore this ghost, the invisible energy that we call the mind, we enter into a new field of psychological science that reveals a chocolate box of possibilities.

2.1.3 Science of the Mind

This branch of psychology involves the study of the mind and its processes, incorporating research on intelligence, thought, memory, emotion and behaviour. It enables us to make sense of thinking activities such as perception, problem solving, decision-making and planning. It is within this science faction that the illumination around our internal dialogue opens up an interesting set of personal effectiveness possibilities.

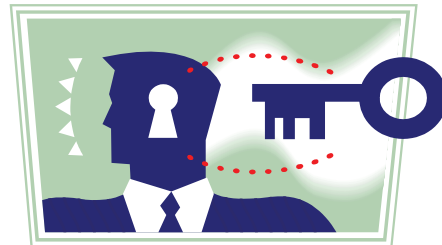
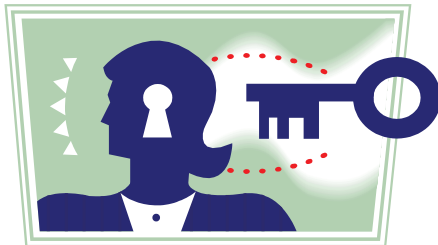
The mind is a common and broad term used to capture a diverse range of thinking activity. The Oxford Dictionary defines the mind as:

"The element of a person that enables them to be aware of the world and their experiences, to think, and to feel; the faculty of consciousness and thought."

2.1.3 Understanding the Dual Nature of the Mind

Bringing this back to a practical, day to day level, how familiar is this phrase?

"I'm in two minds about it."



An advertisement for Mälardalen University. The background is a photograph of a snowy landscape with trees. The text 'TAKE THE RIGHT TRACK' is prominently displayed in the center. Below it, a message encourages applying by 15 January and mentions collaboration with major companies like ABB, Volvo, and Ericsson. Four circular callouts provide additional information: 'Apply by 15 January', 'World class research', 'www.mdh.se', and the Mälardalen University logo. A red speech bubble in the top right corner says 'Click here to learn more'.

We say this so often and yet rarely consider its meaning. It appears to suggest that in a conflict or a moment of indecision we have one mind telling us to take one action and another saying we must do something else. Which mind do we follow? Which one is right? This can sometimes be interpreted as the *heart mind* or gut instinct, versus the *logical head* mind.

In reality, we have only one mind, yet it has two distinct characteristics as Joseph Murphy states in his book, *The Power of the Subconscious Mind*, where he describes that we have two spheres of activity within that one mind.

Their distinct characteristics are commonly described as:

- The objective and subjective mind, or
- The conscious and subconscious mind, or
- The surface-self and the deep-self
- The head and heart mind.

For the purposes of this eBook, I will be using *Conscious* and *Subconscious* terminology.

For the sake of clarity and simplicity, I would like to explore what this dual nature of our mind looks like and expand upon a gardening analogy that Joseph Murphy uses.



Conscious mind – The seed/plant

Our thoughts, ideas, attitudes and beliefs constitute seeds or seedlings that we plant. The conscious mind is the thinker, planner, problem-solver, decision-maker and rationaliser. It has an active level of awareness attached to it and it sits in the pre-frontal cortex. Features of our conscious mind include:

- Our creativity
- Judgement and reviewing skills
- Reasoning and validation
- Problem solving
- Awareness
- Where choices happen
- Free will
- Manual control
- Holds our aspirations and dreams.

Subconscious mind – The soil

Our subconscious soil supports and nurtures the seedling, irrespective of its type, giving life to it and creating its form. Whatever we sow, the soil receives and responds, and so our garden takes on the form of the seeds that we consistently plant. Features of our malleable subconscious mind include:

- Runs on automatic pilot
- Looks a bit like a jukebox that stores programmes from past events and people
- Houses learned experiences and taught perceptions, creating habits and patterns
- Is like a hard-drive that has programmes down-loaded onto it from observations and experiences we have been exposed to, predominantly during our first seven years
- Uses external stimuli to create behavioural and emotional reactions
- Instinctive, reflexive reactions are stimulated here
- Is significantly more powerful than our conscious mind
- Our conditioning and limiting beliefs are programmed here
- Creates a subtle yet powerful blueprint by which we live our lives
- Houses our fears and doesn't always reveal our truth
- Automatically runs our body's key processes.

Our behaviour patterns – The garden's landscape

The subconscious mind runs the show 95% of the time. In addition, this hard-working mind also controls the subtle functioning of the body's processes. Our heart, breath, digestion, senses, blood flow all operate reflexively through the subconscious mind.

What we consistently feed and plant in it, become our garden's eventual landscape – our predominant behaviour patterns. Feed it with toxic and inaccurate thoughts and we create a garden full of weeds that spread in wild contagion. Feed it with nourishing, self-affirming thoughts and our garden will have an array of colour and variety.

If we think consistently, “I can’t discipline anyone”, “I’m too scared”, “I’m a useless leader, as I always make the wrong decisions”, these become entrenched in our soil and sets the foundation for our behaviours – the external expression we exhibit to others. Our external behaviours are a reflection of our subconscious garden and so cultivating the right landscape is a key to becoming more effective.

Ghandi once said:

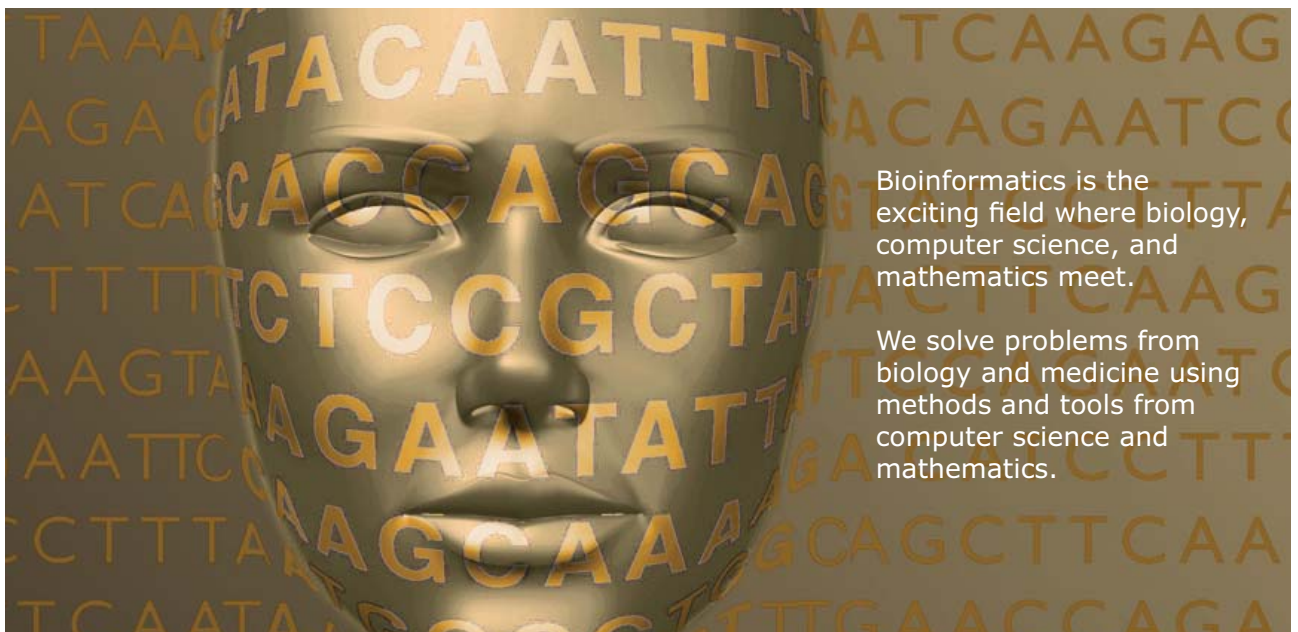
**“Your thoughts become your words,
Your words become your actions,
Your actions become your habits,
Your habits become your values,
Your values become your destiny.”**

I would add to the front of his quote that:

*Your thoughts become your beliefs,
Your beliefs become your words...*



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Ghandi describes perfectly the relationship between our conscious and subconscious mind. Sow self-deprecating thoughts often enough and they become our truth, which influence how we see the world and how we ultimately interact within it.

The more worrying element is not only do our own thoughts impregnate our subconscious mind, what we see and learn from others filters through to embed its roots. So powerful is our brain that we take on other people's realities and make them our own. This is truly worrying because what if that person's truths are not accurate. Our subconscious mind does not monitor or evaluate what we download, it just soaks up what we choose to believe, whether it is true or not and becomes our self-fulfilling prophecy. When we examine them, so many beliefs we hold about ourselves are false, we have just learned to believe in them.

Example

At school, teachers told me that I was unlikely to pass my Geography exam and they suggested I gave it up for the benefit of my other subjects. This was a tough call for me as I loved Geography and so my teachers agreed to me dropping History, which I enjoyed less.

They said that if I worked hard then I might scrape a pass, although not to hold out much hope. I took two truths from this experience; firstly, I came to believe that I was not academic or capable and that I struggled with my studies; the second was that I needed to work hard to achieve anything.

The hard work ethic I am comfortable with, as it is a value that my parents instilled in me and I believe that being conscientious is honourable, although perhaps I have paid the price for this belief. I suspect that I have missed the notion of effortless effort, until recently.

The 'not academic' perception has remained throughout my life. I have avoided professional studies and procrastinated around what I consider to be, 'clever stuff'. I even hear myself saying, "Well I'm not very academic", almost as if apologising for my lack of capability. Yet if I examine the facts, I do have qualifications (thanks to my conscientiousness); I have secured a profitable career and had fifteen years running my highly successful consultancy. Therefore, my non-academic belief has no foundation, and so I wonder how many opportunities passed me by holding that belief?

How easy it is for our subconscious mind to take on other's perceptions and formulate them as our own? Our mind is certainly a complex system of processes that, when combined form an essential part of what makes us uniquely human.

The most important point to summarise here is that although we have created our mind to be this way, we can re-cultivate it to produce better and healthier results.

2.2 Self-esteem versus Confidence

Worthy of comment before we move on is to be clear on the distinction between self-esteem and confidence. It is easy to use one, when we really mean the other and so clarity I believe is vital.

Self-esteem versus Confidence - Exercise

Think about your view on these two important words before we continue. When you think about, self-esteem and confidence, what words/phrases would you use to define them?

For me, it is very clear. **Self-esteem** is on the inside and **confidence** is the behaviour we display on the outside. More specifically, **self-esteem** is a phrase used to describe the worthiness with which we accord ourselves. It is the attitudes, beliefs and judgements that we hold about ourselves, which are deeply rooted in our subconscious.

Confidence on the other hand is an external expression, that sometimes mirrors what we feel on the inside, although can be a mask we wear.

You may have come across the notion that if we develop a great confidence, then we have it made. Leadership will be a breeze if we 'act as if' we are confident. Yet there is a real danger with this idea; it is just a superficial, external confidence that when attacked by a side-swipe, challenges the very core of our self-worth, and has us crumbling to pieces within seconds.

I like to use an analogy of an iced cake.



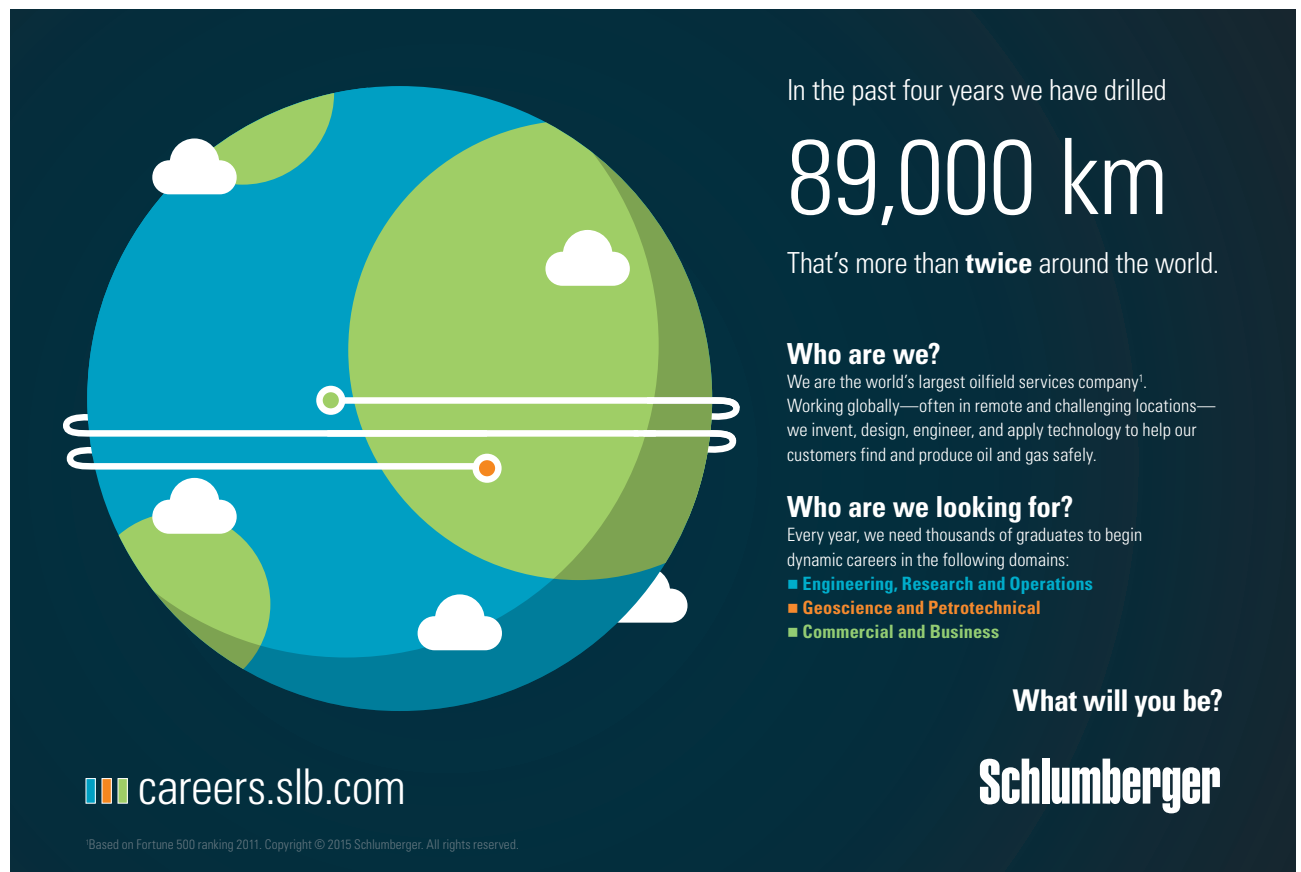
The outside presents a beautiful, highly decorated cake. It shows confidence, presence and is incredibly appealing. Yet, if on the inside, behind the icing's façade, there is a soggy sponge cake that in a week is likely to sink, sag or go mouldy, what affect will this have on the cake's image? It starts to crack, fall apart and suddenly lose its appeal.

To me, the essence is about building a robust self-esteem – if you like, a rich fruit-cake. If on the inside, we can ensure that our beliefs, thoughts and attitudes toward ourselves are rock solid, we have a great opportunity to influence our conditioning. We can then create strong self-worth and project an authentically confident outside that remains intact, robust and resilient, even in the face of adversity.

2.3 Impact of Inner Belief and Dialogue

Imagine you had a new member of staff in your team. What impact would it have on them if you criticised them, put them down and consistently insulted their common sense? What would you notice about their body language, behaviours and confidence? Depending on the strength of their self-worth, you might see them gradually withdrawing, shying away from responsibility and being uncertain about their interactions with you.

What do you think is the result of you using the same approach towards yourself? You would get exactly the same result; withdrawal, uncertainty, depressed body language and interactions.



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Yet, this is what many of us do to ourselves all too often – generally without realising it. Perhaps during our childhood we heard parents, teachers or authority figures saying, “You’re no good”, “You’re stupid”, “That is a ridiculous thing to say”. Those statements, when heard repeatedly, become stories that we play out from our subconscious mind, which then turn into beliefs. Through a conditioned learning process, neural pathways hardwire to respond in a specific way and through repetition become our behavioural patterns.

Like playing a CD, we hear a song repeatedly and come to know the tune, the message and the words off by heart. We merrily hum the tune all day and it lodges in our mind and becomes grooved in our head. The impact of our inner belief system and our internal dialogue on our self-esteem is the same. We are constantly creating our personal internal playlist, which is great, if the tunes are all upbeat and bouncy. If they are morose, downcast and negative, then they have a detrimental impact on our interactions, other’s reactions and ultimately our self-esteem.

If you think about it, a baby is born with immense potential, so what happens to create low self-esteem? Our early experiences teach us how to value ourselves; people around us influence our conditioning and help shape our stories. From those stories we construct judgements about how the world works, filtering out anything that contradicts those stories. We form generalisations, scripts and programmes that embed themselves in our subconscious mind and impact upon every decision we make and every action we take.

Beliefs though, are just beliefs – they do not have objective reality – they form subjectively in our minds, shaping the stories that we live out. The challenge is that having created our inner programmes, which form the foundation of our reality; we then generate or attract situations where we can live out those beliefs, such that they reinforce our truth.

All this shapes our inner critic. Intrinsically this can either positively foster or limit our world-view and therefore shape our success, happiness and achievements. If we do not respect ourselves, how can we fully respect others and how can they truly respect us? If we criticise ourselves, we are more likely to criticise others and in turn, we attract criticism from others.

Noticing the seeds we are planting is critical to our self-esteem, our behaviours and the future we create. If we plant seeds that turn into weeds, this affects the soil and the garden’s landscape. As Michael Kewley writes it in his book, *Life Changing Magic*:

“As human beings we are nothing more than the accumulation of the conditioning we have received, the overwhelming majority of which is negative.”

Observing the Mind - Exercise

Each day, we have over 50,000 thoughts. Some of which are practical about how to carry out the day's tasks, others regrets about yesterday, some are hopes for tomorrow. The rest have some impact on our subconscious mind and the soil we are preparing. Getting to know what type of negative thoughts we allow to dirty our mind is important to the elimination exercise we will do later.

I therefore encourage you to be an observer of your mind and catch those self-deprecating thoughts, the self-beliefs and stories that you are running. They are easiest to notice, when you are in a difficult situation. Start to take notice of the *before* and *after* moments and write down the thoughts that emerge for you.

2.4 Self-esteem and Assertion

By now, you will be getting some clarity about how having a low opinion of ourselves can affect our behaviour, happiness and the quality of our relationships. As you may have read in my previous eBook, **Your Assertive Development Journey**, doing an inside job with our assertion is a key to our success; otherwise, we put a sticking plaster on the matter and never really move forward.

We continue the inside-out approach with this deep-rooted issue and my belief is that if we can build our self-esteem, from the inside, then our assertive challenges diminish. Here is how this plays out in reality.

Example

I worked with a client who had difficulties with his boss. He was condescending, over-powering and impatient. His demands made my client feel uncomfortable, compromised and small. Whenever his boss instructed him to do something, he felt a fear of failure and pressure to get the job done. This was particularly tough for him as a perfectionist, and consequently he put so much energy into pleasing his boss that he often let his colleagues down, who also needed his input.

My client soon realised that his inefficiency was rooted in how he felt around his boss. When he observed his thoughts, he learned that after a request, he would think, "I can't do it the way he needs me to", "What if I fail, like last time", "He'll shout at me for being incompetent", "He'll think I'm useless".

At this stage, it would be easy for us to point the finger at his boss, suggesting he needs to change. Whilst that may well be true at one level, we have no right to change others, we can only work on ourselves.

We surfaced that at an early age, my client developed a low self-esteem due to a relationship with his aggressive father. Therefore, our focus was to re-landscape his garden by building a stronger view of his qualities, strengths and capabilities, gathering evidence that reinforced these views. Through diligent practice, he found that his reshaped self-beliefs influenced a completely different behaviour.

By changing his internal focus, there was a direct, external impact. Through his increased self-esteem, he was more confident in standing up for himself, he asked clarifying questions, negotiated for more time, asked for help and demonstrated a stronger presence. In response, his boss respected him more, treated him like an adult and became less demanding. Their relationship improved drastically, and all because of my client's change in his internal belief system.

This story shows how, when we change what we think, we can begin to alter our conditioned behaviour. We can challenge what we thought to be true, that actually show up as fallacies and delusions, often shaped around other's stories or dramas. We learn to create our own truths and based on those we are able to demonstrate more assertion.

If we want to develop assertive behaviours then we need to examine the quality of our internal self-worth. If we do not think we are worthy, then our external behaviours match this view of ourselves with timid body language, soft tone, low volume and avoidance behaviour.



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When we believe in ourselves, our ability to speak out and confront issues alters drastically. Now we can begin to see the ingredients laid out before us like a recipe that makes a robust fruit cake. These then provide the basis for an authentic layer of icing that holds up firmly amidst life's challenges.

2.5 Fear's Role in our Non-assertion

A little something on fear I think would be worthwhile and its role in our behaviour patterns. What is fear? Fear can be both an emotion and a thought that induces instinctively when threatened by danger. When we believe something will harm us or threaten our happiness or security, fearful thoughts and feelings arise that paralyse our ability to act assertively. Our primal fight or flight instincts kick in and produce protective behaviours that are not considered or rational.

Fears are primal, deeply rooted in our conditioning and many people think that they cannot be 'cured' because of that depth. For some this may be true, if this is their mind-set. Although, there are many different tools for eliminating or, at the very least reducing the impact that fears have on our lives.

What Fears Hold you Back?

The bottom line is that fears weaken us. In our personal lives, we may be able to hide them to some degree, yet professionally, fears have a particularly impacting effect on our success.

Think about your fears. This may range from a fear of spiders, making presentations or not being liked. List what behaviours they provoke in you. Understand their role in your non-assertive thinking and actions (or inactions).

Again, we will explore these later, although for now, awareness of your fears and their impact is a good start.

FEAR – False Evidence Appearing Real

2.6 SID – Self-imposed Doubts

Before we leave this introductory chapter, there is just one more piece of information I would like to present – the concept of SID. I have found that creating an identity, which encapsulates our negative thought patterns, has been incredibly helpful in their eventual elimination.

By characterising our negativity, it lessens what can feel like a huge ocean of pessimism and softens its effect on us. This makes it so much easier to work on than the overwhelming 'to do' list.

There are several different characterisations used to brand our negativity; demons, thought gremlins; internal voice. I like the idea of SID – Self-imposed Doubts, as it defines this negative internal dialogue perfectly.

At this point, using your imagination, create an image of SID that suits your purpose. Give him unappealing features that increases your loathing of the character. The more we associate pain, discomfort or disdain to SID, the easier it is for us to eliminate him. Having completed this, you can begin to identify the negative internal dialogue that plagues your conscious mind, taking you a long way to re-building your self-esteem and weeding your subconscious garden.



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Identifying your SIDs – Exercise

In the middle of a piece of paper, illustrate your SID character. Then allowing your mind to work freely, start to list the doubts, fears, anxieties and negative views you have of yourself. They are likely to start with phrases like, 'I can't', 'I should/shouldn't', 'What if', 'I'm not', 'I haven't', 'I never/always', 'I'm unable to', 'It's impossible for me to', 'You can't', 'You are...lazy/stupid/irritating/frustrating/impossible/aggressive', 'If only'.

Take as much time as you need for this exercise and think about all the phrases that you hear. They will be criticisms, personal attacks, disapprovals and judgements. It may feel like a hard exercise, although surfacing your SIDs will empower you to change these debilitating beliefs and free yourself from them.

Notice what comes up for you in terms of emotions. You may experience anything from sorrow, grief, sadness, anger or relief. Sometimes just being able to commit them to paper can be quite cathartic. Acknowledge all that you feel, deny nothing. We will be taking another step with this list shortly, so worry not, we shall return to these SIDs.

Now with some science and useful information behind us, we can move swiftly onto the magic that is reprogramming our subconscious mind.

"The subconscious mind shapes 95% or more of our life experiences."

Bruce Lipton

3 Reprogramming our Mind

The 1990's was the decade of the *power of positive thinking* revolution. The basic premise was that if we thought positively then we would achieve positive results. This was a sound theory although essentially flawed because neuroscience had not sufficiently verified the link between the conscious and subconscious mind. As we now recognise, our subconscious is critical to the experiences we attract, to the quality of our relationships and our self-image. So merely having a positive thought in our conscious mind is not enough to change our deeply engrained programmes, which continue to run the show. We need a more robust strategy to ensure that we re-landscape our garden and project a more sustained and assertive presentation.

This next exciting chapter focuses on how we can move beyond the simplicity of positive thinking, into a new realm of re-tuning strategies that offer us the opportunity to rewrite out-dated programmes that no longer serve us.

3.1 Power of Mind over Matter

Armed with some powerful knowledge about our brain and mind, we can begin to consider the interesting possibility that we can change our old beliefs. By actively making new choices about what we think and embedding those thoughts into new beliefs, we can begin to create a more fulfilled future. Let's just recap on the key points:

- Our subconscious mind runs the show and holds all our hard-wired programmes, conditions and beliefs. It does not judge, rationalise or ponder – it reflexively responds based on the programmes implanted into it.
- Repeated events, other people's stories, messages and language we hear, create our subconscious landscape through which we experience the world.
- When the mind is engaged in consistently negative thoughts, it has a chemical, physical and behavioural impact on us.
- Every belief and conditioned programme has been learned through repeated assimilation and so we therefore have the capacity to learn new beliefs and conditions.
- Our conscious mind is a creative source that plans, rationalises and holds all our thoughts.
- Our conscious mind sits in the pre-frontal cortex, which is responsible for observing, self-reflecting, evaluating and planning.

- Thoughts, beliefs and ideas we hold about ourselves or that we have been taught are the basis for our self-worth and are planted into our subconscious.
- The interdependent relationship between our subconscious and conscious mind is hugely powerful and must be acknowledged and channelled if we are to truly succeed.
- Positive thinking alone will not work, long-term. We need to recognise the power of our subconscious mind, its malleability and its openness to autosuggestion.

As we discussed in the last chapter, neuroscience is presenting revelations all the time and the latest research on the *placebo effect* is shining a new light on how the brain works. Bruce Lipton states;

“...some people get better when they believe (falsely) they are getting medicine. When patients get better by ingesting a sugar pill, medicine defines it as the placebo effect.”

The bottom line to this is that whatever we believe or perceive, whether true or false, has a chemical and physical impact on our behaviour patterns.

In her article, *Mind over Matter*, Dr Lissa Rankin describes a patient who was receiving Radiotherapy to shrink a tumour. After an X-ray to assess the results, they found the tumour had indeed shrunk, although doctors discovered the equipment had been faulty and had not administered the treatment. The effectiveness of the patient's mind to believe in the treatment was powerful enough to create a physical change in their condition.

On its own, you could say that was just co-incidence or chance, although more and more clinical studies are showing the placebo effect. If we believe that something works, then our mind's mechanics is chemically driven by those thoughts and transmit messages through our neural network, physically altering the 'state' of the condition without direct intervention.

This is, I acknowledge, a somewhat contentious issue, shaped by traditional medicine belief systems. Although given the emerging scientific data, I believe that for our assertive development purposes, this has some amazingly interesting possibilities.

Learning how to harness the power of our mind to achieve health, wealth, success and fulfilment is not just a fluffy concept conceived by life coaching gurus. It is a science, backed by hard data, which presents us with infinite possibilities, if we keep an open mind.

3.1.1 Exercising our Mental Muscle

It is said, “Use it or lose it”, and how relevant this is to our brain’s function. After all, it is a muscle, which we need to keep exercising. Except we need to train it in the right way. Improper exercise gets us the wrong results and can cause harm and injury – just like our body’s muscles. So, this is all about making sure we have the right type of workout to build our muscle in the right way. Here are some examples to experiment with.

The Balloon

Let’s conduct an experiment. Find a balloon from somewhere. If getting one is difficult then use that magnificent imagination of yours instead. HEALTH WARNING – loud bang coming.

Blow up the balloon for real or in your mind and with a marker pen, write on one side a negative belief or SID you have about yourself. On the other side of the balloon, draw your characterisation of SID. As you look at your balloon, this inflated view is what is taking up room in your conscious mind and is affecting your subconscious patterns.

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Now with a sharp object carefully pop the balloon. Collect all the pieces that have flown across the room and look at the writing left behind on the balloon. What do you notice? Amazingly the writing is still readable and intact, although notice how minute it is. The inflated SID is now small and insignificant. What does this tell us?

What it tells me is that we blow up these negative thoughts about ourselves, increasing their size, ferocity and density and yet, in reality, they are paltry. Each time we have a negative thought, we blow up yet another balloon and expand its meaning, when in practical terms it is just a thought, which we can change.

A thought is a thought – nothing other than an atom of micro-electric energy. The minute we realise this it alters our mind-set and creates the space for a new way of thinking. Old habits can die after all.

Stilling the Chattering Mind



From the earlier exercise, ***Observing the Mind***, you may recognise just how many thoughts you have and start to understand their impact on you. If we can train the mind to become still, then imagine how much more effective we could be.

Meditation is increasingly hitting our screens these days. No longer exclusively associated with New Age hippies, meditation is a scientific-based practice that gets great results and is now becoming an accepted part of corporate life.

Investing just ten minutes a day to be still, concentrating the mind on our breath, allowing thoughts to arise and fall away can bring us a great sense of calm. Whilst we return to the active thinking that is required for our daily activities, we carry them out from a more peaceful place. Of course, we can return to that serene place anytime we need, especially if we have a difficult situation to handle such as a disciplinary, giving feedback or dealing with a tricky customer. Taking a few moments to be still puts us in a much more constructive and less fearful place, allowing us to operate more productively.

A friend and colleague recently told me about a way he creates stillness and clarity, which I thought was a great technique. He regularly checks in with himself by asking, ***“How am I feeling right now?”*** He acknowledges that feeling, be it sadness, anger, frustration or fear and then asks, ***“What action do I need to take?”*** He will be very clear through his stillness what to do or not do next – sometimes just purely acknowledging how we feel in this present moment is enough, action is not always required.

Using constructive questioning techniques and meditation can really help still our busy mind and enable us to deconstruct and remove the chatter, allowing us to handle what is most important.

Positive Daily Journal

If we have a propensity to negative thinking, then we need to shift our focus to a more positive mindset. Building up a positive muscle is important in creating a more assertive outlook on life and here is a technique to help.

Before you go to sleep, write down in a journal, all the good, positive or uplifting things that you have appreciated in your day. This may be as simple as hearing the Dawn Chorus, someone smiling at you, getting some nice feedback or watching the setting sun. Committing these events to paper is a great way to shift your mind from negative to positive. Practise this for at least thirty days, as it helps you to see the good in things more naturally and, over time, retrain your mind.

3.2 Re-calibrating our Negative Thoughts

We have a number of different strategies to use that enable us to re-programme our subconscious patterns, resulting in a more efficient hard-drive. Now we know how malleable our subconscious mind is, we can use the philosophy of autosuggestion to develop our self-esteem.

In this section, I would like to share with you a couple of processes I use for my own development and in a professional capacity that achieve great results. It combines the well-documented science of affirmations, mind/body principles and mental muscle techniques. Thanks to inspirational authors that I have had the privilege to read, I have developed my own process that has proved to diminish SID and increase self-esteem.

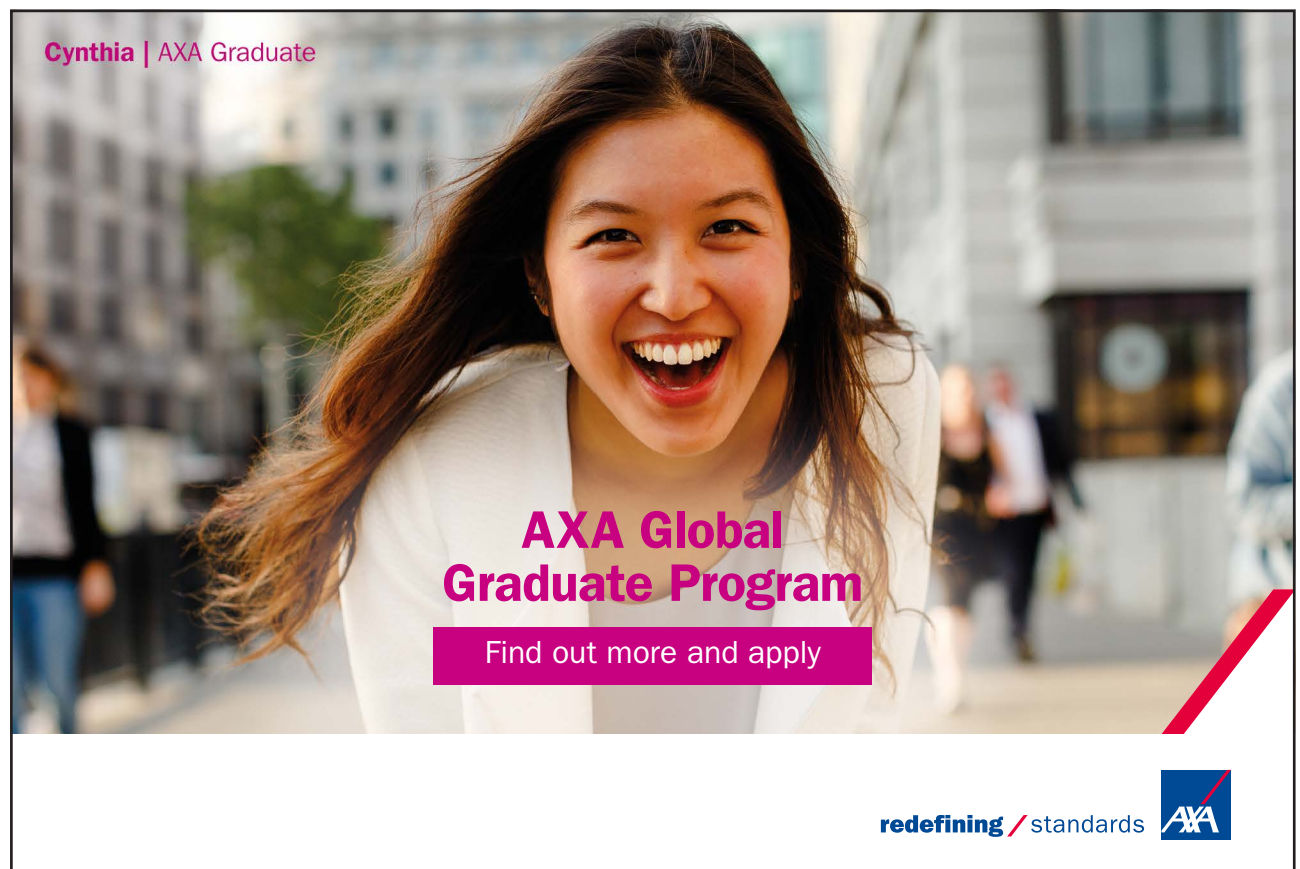
3.2.1 Building self-respect – I Am Exercise



At the heart of changing our limiting beliefs is our ability to develop a sense of self-value. If we learn how to endorse ourselves, then our approval seeking behaviour changes and we no longer look for external validation.

When you no longer rely on other's opinion of you to give you internal validation, then you begin to strengthen your self-esteem.

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As Lynda Field suggests in her book, *Creating Self-Esteem*, self-validation is the key to change. The more we can learn to value ourselves the less SID can interfere with our success. The more we affirm our own value, the greater our achievements because we are driven by completely different motives.

Here is an exercise you can use to build up that all-important self-respect. Using a flower analogy, build up petals around the, **I AM core** by acknowledging your strengths and capabilities. Petals might consist of:

I am: a strong leader, kind, sensitive to others, a good listener, supportive, a great coach

The idea behind this is that it shows our current magnificence and focuses our mind on all we already have and do rather than concentrating on what we can't do. This is such a powerful exercise and reminds our subconscious mind about our capabilities rather than our failings, thereby increasing our self-respect.

Refer to this daily and keep repeating and acknowledging your capabilities and strengths, and you will soon see the impact that this exercise can have on you and your performance.

3.2.2 The Art of Forgiveness

To build a strong self-esteem, we may need to look backwards at events, people or situations that contributed to our lack of worthiness. When exploring the causes or sources, it is vital to remember that we are not looking for blame, either in ourselves or in others. It is about identifying, forgiving and accepting what has been. To blame, be angry or judge is the wrong mind-set to operate from and instead we must work at this with compassion and understanding.

Allowing ourselves the capacity to forgive someone is a highly empowering action that can change our stance from *victim of circumstance* to a *victor of our future*. By releasing the power that some past event or person may have over us is to give ourselves permission to live out a different, more fulfilling life.

3.2.3 Seven Steps to Higher Self-esteem – Banishing SID

Having characterised earlier the negative internal dialogue that lurks within our subconscious garden, (disguised as weeds), we are ready to use our conscious capability to take control. With the help of Bruce Lipton, Tony Robbins et al, I have developed a process that dismantles our negative thought patterns and creates the space for a more positive internal dialogue.

Banishing SID

To help you in this process, I suggest you give yourself plenty of time to work through these stages systematically. There will be a tendency to speed through to the final step, although it is only when we follow the stages outlined here that we get the best result.

1. Identify your Fears, SIDs and Negative Thought Patterns

Reconnect with the exercises in chapter 2, where I asked you to notice your thoughts, fears and SIDs. For this process, I would like you to select just **three** that are most debilitating to you right now. You may have more than this, although once you are used to the process you can apply the same strategy to your other weeds.

Examples you may have on your list could be:

Nobody likes me.

I always let people down.

I'm scared of failing.

I'll never amount to anything.

2. Creating Table Tops

In his book, *Awaken the Giant Within*, Tony Robbins uses a TABLE concept to represent our beliefs. The legs, which provide the table's stability, characterise the reference points that give our beliefs their certainty. Without legs, the table cannot stand and it has no definition.

So with this in mind, write down your three negative thought patterns and draw a box around them. Now begin thinking about evidence, experiences and reference points that will form your table's legs, which make your beliefs feel certain for you.

For example, my SID table top, **I always let people down**, may have the following evidence that holds up my belief.

I remember a time where I missed a meeting and the team were waiting for me, because I hadn't checked my diary.

I was too ill to run a course I had to deliver, so I had to postpone the workshop.

Having considered your reference points, (your table's legs), you need to assess how strong they are. Looking at my first leg – my missed meeting was in fact over twenty years ago and the meeting still went ahead without me. With this challenge, I can begin to question how valid this leg is in holding up my belief. When I rationally scrutinise the evidence, it is just a fragile, pine leg based on two factors:

- Notice how far back I had to go to find a reference point.
- How little I actually let them down, in reality.

My second reference point was an illness. I'm sure having to cancel the course was disappointing to the group and my client, although the illness was out of my control and the course was rescheduled a month later. So once again, this evidence really has very little substance to it and forms yet another weak leg.

Interestingly, I could only find those two examples. So, when I look at my table's composition it is pretty unstable with only two, weak legs holding it up. In fact, through this exercise, I have been able to collapse the belief because there are insufficient legs to support it and those that do exist are simply not up to the job.

Collapsing the belief is what we are aiming for. The more we weaken our perceived certainty, the easier it is to collapse it and strip away its power over us.



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Some pointers to remember about finding table legs:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legs that are distant recollections are often less powerful than recent examples. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Even three legs make a table unstable if they are not positioned correctly.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If evidence is based on 'Someone told me', focus on the fact that only one person told you, not ten. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Words such as <i>always</i> and <i>never</i>, need an equivalent number of examples to justify them, so if you struggle to find enough, the belief weakens immediately.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Even if one of your legs feels true, you still need three more for the table to stand strong. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legs may have some truth for you, although if even one of them has a weakness then the table wobbles.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking too much time to think about legs indicates a weakness of the belief, as you are finding it hard to justify it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If legs are bowed, made of pine or have splinters of doubt, then they are weak. Strong legs are made of oak.

3. Collapsing the Table

Having made positive in-roads in collapsing, or at the very least destabilising the table, we now have the scope to see the unfounded truth upon which we have based our belief. So, with that possibility in our mind we can begin to disempower it even further, using our conscious mind and autosuggestion.

Return to your three table tops, which I hope have now started to wobble. For each box, with resolve, I would like you to put a cross through each one and write the word DELETED. This signals to the brain that this programme no longer has a role to play in your subconscious mind. At the top of the page, also add, I AM CHOSING TO DELETE THESE SIDs.

4. Reframing our Beliefs

Having collapsed and deleted the three negative beliefs, we have some space. That space needs to be filled with positive tables that, when consistently implanted begin to cultivate a greater self-worth.

Using those three deleted beliefs, we now need to reframe them so that they adopt a positive angle. Taking my example, we could change these from:

I always let people down.	To	I am committed, conscientious and do the best I can.
Nobody likes me.	To	I am loved and lovable.
I am scared of failing.	To	I learn from my mistakes.
I'll never amount to anything.	To	I focus on being the best I can be.

Language, as we have already seen, plays such a delicate role in how we feel about ourselves and how we behave. It is, therefore, vital to choose the right language that empowers not weakens. Here are the phrases I recommend to replace old, out-dated and untrue beliefs:

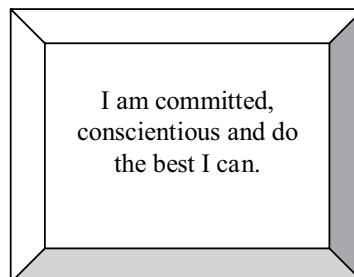
I can I am I have (already) I focus on I commit to
I am learning to I acknowledge I am becoming I am able to I am capable of

When we use these phrases, we are sending out a strong message for our subconscious mind to receive and, through repetition, it quickly adopts new programmes and conditions. So rewrite your three SIDs into positive phrases that feel good to you.

5. New Table Tops and Legs

Having acquired some better sounding phrases, now we need to construct them into solid tables. In the same way, negative beliefs become certain for us through reference points, so our new, reframed beliefs also need that same certainty. It is this formula, which sets apart the *positive thinking* revolution to the *power of the mind* philosophy.

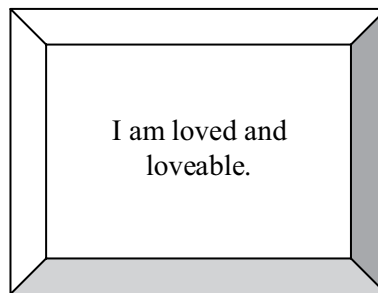
Armed with your three reframed phrases, draw a box around them to represent table tops and now develop four sturdy legs, characterised by evidence that stabilises their truth for you. Here are my table tops:



My four legs are:

- I enjoy meeting people's needs and making them happy
- I am receptive to people's needs through my listening skills and intuition
- I have history of a hard work ethic and feedback to support this from clients
- I am an assertive communicator, which enables me to say what I am able to achieve.

Notice here that the four reference points focus on my abilities and skills to support this belief. Here's another example:



- My family show and tell me how much they love me.
- A new group that I have recently joined show warmth towards me and have given me positive feedback about how I come across.
- I have a huge capacity to love others and this comes back to me in return.
- I have life-long friends who tell me how much they value me.

Notice how these legs are specific pieces of evidence that contribute towards validating and strengthening my belief – I have not made them up. They are real experiences that stabilise my new thought and I know to be true. They ensure that no SID interference can threaten my new belief from taking hold.

6. The Written Word is More Powerful

Having played around with our new thoughts and attached evidence to them, we now need to remind ourselves of them every day. So, write them down and keep them visible, perhaps on the fridge, in your car somewhere or in your wallet or a drawer at work. When we commit something to writing it has a stronger emotional and mental resonance with us, so be prepared to put your new thoughts out there.

7. Repetition

“Repetition is the Mother of Skill.”

The more we repeatedly do something or say something, the more likely we are to master it. We know this to be true at so many levels. Think about learning to drive a car, playing golf or some other sport. We only became competent through making mistakes, learning and repeating the techniques until it became second nature.

Inspired by NASA's research into the effect weightlessness had on astronauts, data demonstrates that new habits are created in around 30 days. So, this final stage of the process follows the same principle. When we repeat *new ways* consistently for 30 days, our brain develops new neural pathways and our habits change. Learn to practise our new statements last thing at night just as we settle down to sleep and again as soon as we wake up. These are highly receptive times for our subconscious mind. The more we repeat them, the more our brain embeds the neural pathways and the more substantial our new hardwiring becomes.

I encourage you to follow this process for your three SIDs and then over the next **thirty days**, consistently repeat your new beliefs. Notice what interference comes up from SID and write this down. This may be either another negative belief that needs tabling or simply highlighting some of the wording that is not working for you. Adjust it and keep repeating.

Example

I had a client recently who committed to this process and one of her goals was to write down experiences that were 'great'. She really struggled with this and gave up after a couple of weeks. At our next session, she shared this with me, realising that it was just not a word in her vocabulary and each time she wrote down something 'great', she received a whole heap of interference that inhibited her practice.

An advertisement for SKF. It features a woman with long dark hair smiling in the foreground, with a wind turbine in the background. The text 'Brain power' is written in large white letters. To the right, there is a block of text about SKF's role in wind energy. At the bottom left, there is a call to action to visit the SKF website. The SKF logo is in the bottom right corner.

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We explored the words that were more comfortable to her and she settled on ‘positive’ and ‘good’. This enabled her to move forward with the mental workout exercises that she knew she needed to do.

And finally...

Of course having done this exercise and achieved a successful shift, you will be ready to tackle other negative thought patterns that you have identified. Revisit the rest of the list and follow exactly the same process for each one and you will be well on your way to greater self-esteem. I know, because I have committed to exactly the same process and it has and still is working for me.

3.3 Science of Affirmations

In conjunction with the positive thinking revolution, came the introduction of affirmations. Big names like Louise L. Hay and Tony Robbins, talk about the role affirmations play in helping our self-esteem grow. Despite some scepticism, their continued existence owes itself to, what some people might call the New Age movement. Yet they are so much more than that thanks to the efforts of physicists, chemists and biologists who continue to present the science behind our mind, thoughts and affirmations.

When we apply science to the techniques I have recommended, then our sceptical ego is removed from the equation and we are left focusing on improving our self-esteem and respect. Here’s a list that captures the essence of affirmations:

- A thought is just a thought and it can be changed and challenged.
- What you put your attention to, grows.
- A positive thought can turn into a positive belief through repetition in the same way that negative conditions were created by something you learned and observed in childhood.
- Our ability to learn and adapt is innate and, irrespective of our age, we can learn new ways of thinking and behaving. With the right programming and practise, we can change our self-criticism into self-appreciation.
- Thoughts only have power when we add meaning to them.
- Our conscious mind has the ability to choose and so we can choose to have a positive mind-set and self-belief.
- The more evidence we have of something being true, the more meaning we attach to it and the greater is our belief in it.
- When we experience something joyful or happy, we release different chemicals in the body that produces a feel-good factor. If this is true of experience then it can be true of positive and appreciative thoughts and mind-sets.
- Studies highlighting the effects of twenty minutes meditation each day shows how stress can reduce by up to 50%. If a calm mind can create this change in physiology then imagine the impact affirmations can have.

- *Placebo effect* studies have shown that it works when patients **desire** to be well, **expect** to be well and **believe** that they will be well. When we apply the same three ingredients to changing our thoughts with affirmations, then we can have the same remarkable effects on our self-esteem.
- When you combine a visual image with an affirmation, you affect specific neurons in the brain that, when it magnifies, creates new, neural pathways.
- We know that certain music creates our mood, either uplifting us or inducing feelings of sadness. A musical tone or a song's words affect us chemically and so if we practise applying positive, uplifting and appreciative thoughts towards our self and others, we can influence a chemical change to our mood.
- The meaning behind words activates thoughts, feelings and mental images. Therefore, if we use positive words, it triggers a cycle of healthier thoughts, feelings and ultimately behaviours.
- Words affect us at two levels; through our interpretation of their meaning and through their tonality. Words and phrases take on a completely new significance when they are positive.
- Through repetition, neural pathways develop in our brain. Affirmations can, therefore form new tracks for us to play that, through consistent application, become new habits.
- Affirmations are a form of constructive auto-suggestive reconditioning.
- Whatever the conscious mind assumes to be true authorises our subconscious mind to draw specific conclusions towards a problem or situation that we are facing.

Trust and responsibility

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Inés Aréizaga Esteva (Spain), 25 years old
Education: Chemical Engineer

– You have to be proactive and open-minded as a newcomer and make it clear to your colleagues what you are able to cope. The pharmaceutical field is new to me. But busy as they are, most of my colleagues find the time to teach me, and they also trust me. Even though it was a bit hard at first, I can feel over time that I am beginning to be taken seriously and that my contribution is appreciated.



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With these pointers summarised, I hope it embeds the logic and science that is behind both positive thinking, affirmations and reprogramming our subconscious mind. With confidence in the process and the knowledge, we are now able to add a degree of faith to the matter and with it, a real solution to low self-esteem. Here's how we create affirmations.

3.3.1 Five P's of Affirmations

Here are the five essential ingredients to writing good, solid affirmations:

Positive

Keep your affirmations in the positive at all times, so:

This	Not This
I am committed to....	I am no longer going to...
I am getting slimmer.	I am losing weight.

Present Tense

Avoid conditional tenses such as ought, should and could as they leave a margin for error. Avoid future tense, as again it leaves room for excuses and procrastination. It must be in the NOW.

This	Not This
I am successful.	I will be successful.
	I could be successful.

Personal

They must be about you, so phrased in the first person. Avoid the third or objective person.

This	Not This
I am, I can, I have	We are going to...
	It is going to be...

Powerful

The affirmation must have strength behind it to recondition an old pattern. So ensure you select a statement that gives you confidence, belief and meaning.

This	Not This
I am committed to thinking, feeling and behaving more positively.	I can be a positive thinker.

Proved

Anchor affirmations by either adding **concrete actions** or **robust evidence** to secure the thought as a belief. It keeps any interference and doubt at bay.

This	Not This
<p>I am committed to thinking, feeling and behaving more positively.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I repeat my affirmations three times a day • I challenge negative thoughts and replace them with positive statements • I have received comments from my colleagues that I seem more positive. 	<p>I am committed to thinking, feeling and behaving positively.</p>

One final thought. It may seem as though this section has been about ridding ourselves of the bad and replacing with the good. Well to some degree, this is true. Although a point to remember – we are a blend of shadow and light, good and not so good. We must acknowledge the less healthy aspects of ourselves and embrace them, as by fighting, we only end up with further resistance. When we honour the bad feelings, the negative thoughts, fears and judgements we make of others, then with compassion, we give ourselves the permission to refocus our efforts on the positives.

We are and will always be *both* not *either/or*. When we realise this, we can choose where to place our power and utilise our strength in the best way. When we feel down, we must acknowledge it, explore it and resolve it, if we can. The key is not staying with that emotion or thought. When we do, it starts to take root and could become an unhealthy pattern that changes the way we behave.

Chapter 3 has focused on how to re-write our subconscious programmes so we can alter our behaviour patterns and develop authentic assertion. With a stronger self-respect, we have a more robust self-esteem, which changes the intentions behind our behaviours and allows us to act with integrity.

The next chapter shifts our attention from the inside conversations we have with ourselves, to the way we interact with others. Communication is everything, as we are already beginning to realise.

"Thoughts are the starting point of all change and so the source of all change is within you."

Dr David. R. Hamilton PhD

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"Communication is the response you get regardless of your intention. If you don't get the right response, then change your communication."

Communication Definition

4 Interactive Dialogue

Every relationship needs it, businesses rely on it and customer service demands it. What is this IT? Communication of course!

We started this book acknowledging that there are two distinct types of communication; the one in our heads – our internal dialogue and the external one we use to interact with others. To me, communication is at the root of everything. It is so critical for us to get it right, and now we have some tools to master our mental chatter.

The principles behind our *interactive dialogue* are similar, although there are some more detailed considerations that I would like to offer in this chapter. Hundreds of books have been published that focus on *the art of communication*, yet many of them present a one-dimensional perspective. I believe we must deliver more than a transactional communication – for me it is all about how we *interact* that counts and the two are very different.

We will be looking at how to create interactive, meaningful and influential dialogues that position us assertively, enabling us to generate positive outcomes, relationships and resolutions.

4.1 Self-esteem and Interactive Dialogue

We have already seen that if our internal dialogue constantly invalidates us, this affects the messages we send from our brain to our body, influencing us at a physiological level. Our body language subtly mirrors our self-perception, which then reflects through our behaviours, dialogue and interactions.

Our unconscious display to others releases a subtle energy that people around us pick up. This shapes their response to us – which can then invalidate us further, eroding our confidence and reinforcing our low self-esteem.

When we feel more positive about ourselves we project this unknowingly, and it influences our language and presence, to which others respond.

You may be familiar with the idea that if someone in your household starts the day in a bad mood, how quickly it spreads to others. Equally, how contagious is someone in the team who bounces in of a morning? How we present ourselves influences other's energy at a subtle and unconscious level and so stresses the importance of working from the inside out. Get our inside healthy and what we project becomes more assertive, natural and authentic.

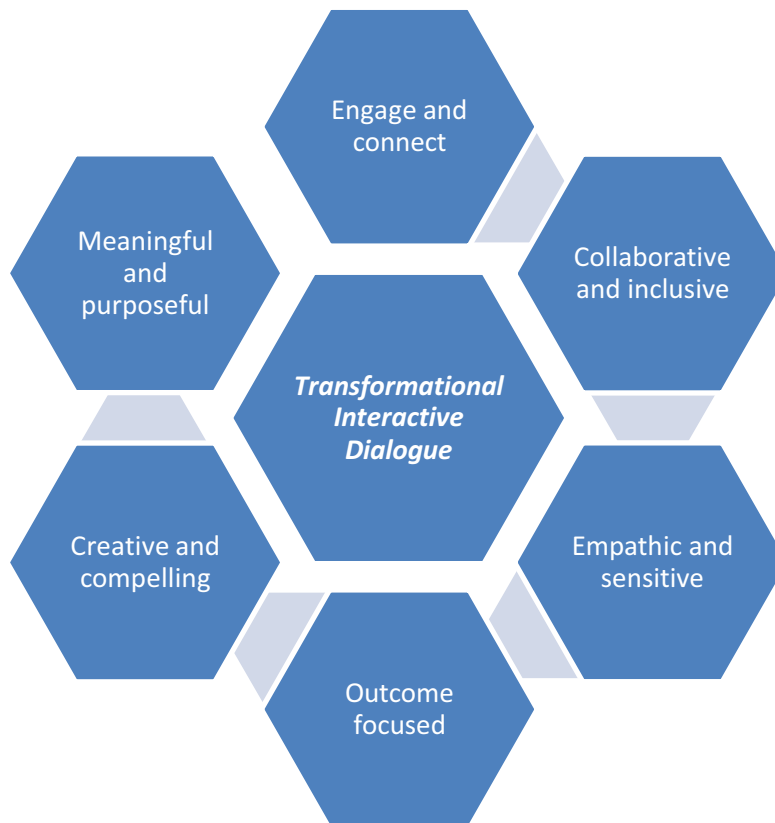
4.2 A New Model of Communication



If we delve into the old communication paradigm, it talks about having a two-way conversation, listening actively and planning what you say to achieve a positive outcome.

Superficially, there is nothing wrong with this model, although the latest opinion about the art of great leadership focuses more on *how* we engage with people. It is a much more profound *model of interaction* that creates greater meaning and heart-felt communication. When we team this up with Emotional Intelligence, Neuro-linguistic Programming and conscious communication, then we have the ingredients for assertive interactions.

Add to this the amount of conversations conducted remotely via Skype, emails, telephones or WebEx; it is no wonder that this topic keeps raising its head in any personal development or leadership manual. The pressure on us to manage global relationships, international customer bases and the metric model of management means we have to find a more sophisticated way of doing business. This **Transformational Interactive Dialogue** model below, summaries that sophistication:



This transformational approach to leadership, communication, teamwork and business is now at the heart of the corporate world, moving us away from the traditional management model of *Command and Control*. Our interactions must align with this new business paradigm to ensure our success.

4.3 Transformational Interactions – The Way Forward

The minute we take responsibility for our part in interactions and relationships, is the moment things begin to change. All the time we blame others or events for the *state* of our association, the more we get stuck in a blame, resentment, frustration cycle that exacerbates our negative experience.

When we realise that what we do and say impacts on others, we immediately take control of the reigns and start driving our interaction forward. Notice how a simple smile can change the dynamic between two people. This is the influence we have when we become aware and take responsibility.

That responsibility invites us to focus on the Transformational Interactive Dialogue model and, having changed our internal chatter, gives us the opportunity to invest thought into how we project ourselves to others.

4.3.1 Engaging, Empathic and Meaningful Interactions – Through their Eyes

The distinction between communication and interaction is that it encourages a different level of inclusion, awareness and sensitivity. When we begin to interact with others by experiencing the world through their eyes, we are a step closer to building a more fulfilling rapport with them.

Example

Whilst coaching one of my clients, she described having difficulties with her aggressive partner who generated a defensive reaction in her. I encouraged her to step inside his shoes and experience what his world might look and sound like. Now whilst we could only surmise what had influenced his behaviour, the opportunity to learn and understand was enough to shift my client's defensiveness. She came to appreciate that past events were likely to have influenced his patterns and that he may be concealing a low self-esteem. She acknowledged that her responsibility was to shift the dynamic of their relationship by adopting a more empathic approach.

Three months later, my participant reported that their relationship had changed significantly, because she was choosing to behave more constructively and express herself assertively through being more appreciative. Reducing her defence mechanism enabled the energy of the situation to shift, allowing them to operate at a more constructive level.



"I studied English for 16 years but...
...I finally learned to speak it in just six lessons"

Jane, Chinese architect

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We can classify effective interactions by our ability to see through another's eyes and communicate in such a way that it appeals to and engages them. If we drive our communication only by our intention and agenda, then we miss the opportunity to create accord. Taking time to see things from another's perspective is hugely powerful and enables us to adjust what we say and how we say it, to achieve the best outcome for us both – an assertive resolution.

What does that mean we need to do? Here are three recommendations:

Engaging	Empathic	Meaningful
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with the person by getting to know them. • Speak their language. • Value their contribution by involving them. • Actively listen to them. • Ask open questions. • Talk with them, not <i>to them</i>. • Look at them, don't stare. • Smile. • Acknowledge their contributions. • Adapt your style to suit their needs/preferences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See the world through their eyes, not your own. • Take time to understand their perspective. • Use phrases like, 'I agree', 'I understand', and 'I appreciate'. • Be sensitive to their needs. • Show consideration in your interactions. • Be compassionate. • Honour their views and opinions. • Show you value them by actively listening. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk in a way that they will understand. • Match your energy to theirs. • Speak their language. • Work out how they like to hear things. • Learn what motivates them and what they value. • Be clear about action that is required. • Become more people-centred than task-focused.

4.3.2 Be Outcome Focused

As author, Stephen Covey once said, *“Start with the end in mind”*. In most cases, for an interaction to be productive, it needs to have an outcome, an end-point to which we must head. If we are unclear about what action or result is intended from our communication, then ambiguity, lack of focus and misunderstandings occur.

Before we enter into any communication, we must consider what our desired outcome is from the conversation. Now of course, there are many types of interaction, for example:

- **A meeting** – what do we need to present, inform or gather from the agenda to justify our attendance?
- **A disciplinary discussion** – what message do we need to deliver regarding performance, and what specific behaviour needs to alter?

- **A presentation** – in what way do we want to change the condition of our audience; what do we want them to know, do differently or learn, having attended our talk?
- **Delegation of a task** – what specific task do we need to delegate and what outcome do we need from its completion?
- **Team huddle** – what information do we need to gather from the team and how do we want them to feel at the end of the meeting?
- **A negotiation** – what result do we desire from our discussion, and where are we prepared to compromise?
- **Disseminating information** – what is the purpose of the dissemination and what do we need our recipients to do with the information? What key messages do we need to present?
- **Complaint handling** – what policies and procedures do we need to honour and how do we wish our customer to feel on leaving the interaction?

Each interaction is unique, because the recipient has their own personal view of the world, shaped by their experiences. We can never plan for every eventuality, although it is more about the intention we put into the interaction.

Where there is an interaction that has specific significance, value or importance (as opposed to just a chat over coffee or a catch up), then invest time in thinking about this, as a smoother transition is ensured and, most likely, a constructive and positive outcome experienced.



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4.3.3 The **Who** and **What** are Sorted – Now for the **How**

Frank Carson, an English comedian once said, “*It’s the way I tell ’em*”. A joke delivered with the wrong emphasis, tone, confidence or body language can turn it into a damp squib. If we deliver our message inappropriately, it leaves no end of damage and confusion.



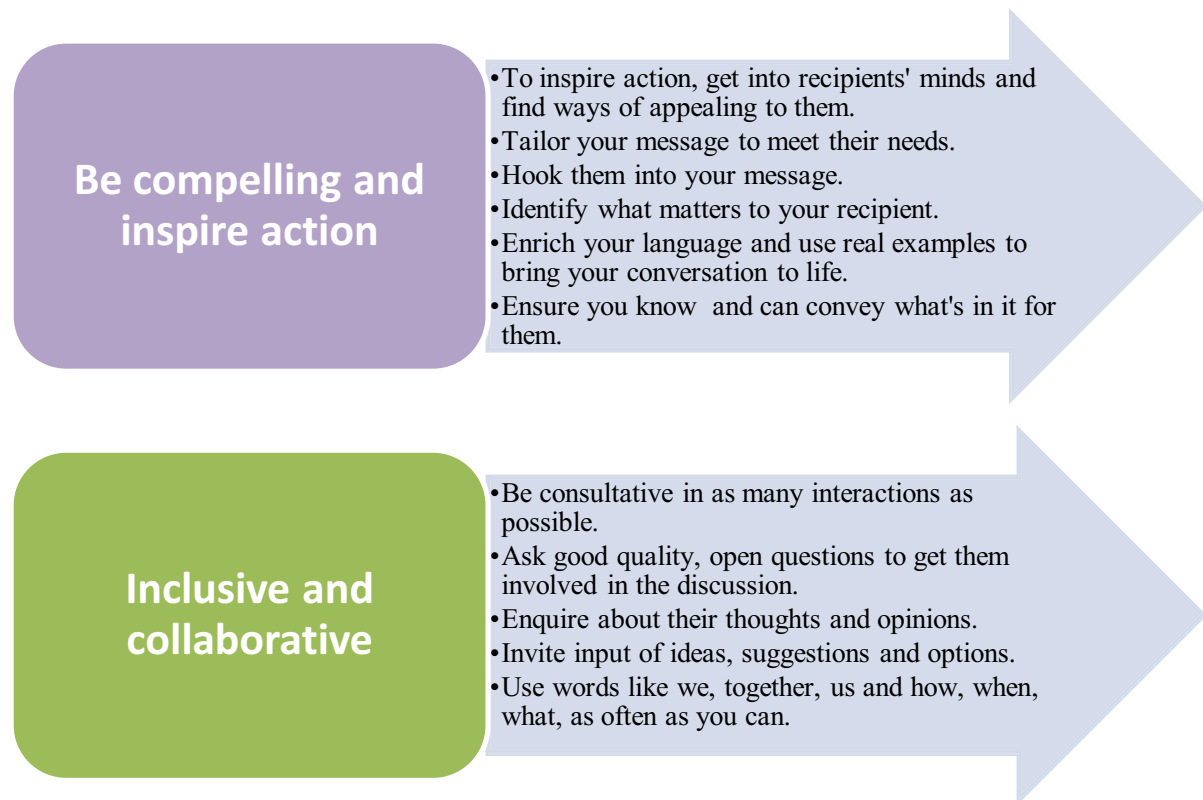
An airline pilot often takes a different approach on landing at an airport because of the changing conditions. The same is true for us when we interact. The environment surrounding our interactions is always shifting and whilst our style remains consistent, our tactics must be adaptive to the culture, the recipient, our message and the desired outcome. No two interactions will ever be the same.

This opens up a minefield of possibilities with today’s technology and, paradoxically, our options can be our limitations. If we need to have a remote conversation, then our choices become slightly narrower than if there is someone in the next office that we need to converse with.

The important factor here is to return to our audience and the message we need to deliver. Email may just be too impersonal or face to face simply impractical. Within the boundaries of geography, we must focus more on what method most likely to suit our audience’s need and our purpose.

A word of caution! Watch out for SID’s interplay with the selection. There may be a difficult interaction to have and we decide that to email or phone rather than face the person is easiest. Easiest is not necessarily the best and our *fear of confrontation* or our *need to be liked* must be addressed if we are going to interact appropriately and assertively.

Having selected our option, we now need to turn our interaction into something inspiring, compelling, inclusive and collaborative. These are, I believe, what turns our communication into something more transformational and interactive. Here are some ideas on how to do that.



4.4 Interaction Nuances

Corporate bosses are looking for aspiring high flyers and leaders who stand out from the crowd to ensure they have the very best people to take their business forward during these challenging times. Distinguishing ourselves from others is vital in the fight for promotions and job security, as we search for ways to be different and to shine.

The way we inspire others through our interactions is one highly noticeable way to excel. With the blend of empathy, assertion, creativity and enthusiasm, we can demonstrate so many transformational capabilities that organisations are crying out for.

Here are some interaction nuances that can set us apart from others:

4.4.1 Neuro-linguistic Programming

NLP has been around for over four decades heralding a powerful discipline, which can be accessed by anyone, enabling them to build influential relationships and develop inner confidence. NLP promotes itself as the premier psychological model of positive communication, designed for personal and leadership success.

Its loose translation is about how:

- To understand how the brain works, (the neuro)
- The language we use affects us and our interaction with others, (the linguistics)
- We decode this partnership into meaningful behaviours and actions that guide us towards successful outcomes, (the programming).

When we become aware of the interplay between this trio, we arm ourselves with a series of strategies that provide us with opportunities to live and work more effectively with others.

Yet again, NLP deserves an eBook all of its own, although in this section I aim to summarise the most relevant features that assist our interactive dialogue.

The premise to NLP is a *fascination with people*, how their thoughts and their behaviours work. When we make the transition from being task-centred to people-focused, we make a crucial shift in mind-set.

By inspiring others (whether we are directly responsible for their performance or not), we create a momentum that encourages tasks to be completed effortlessly, customers to be delighted consistently and teams to operate optimally, because they are appreciated, involved and understood.

The advertisement features a background image of a person running on a path, with a bright sun or light source in the distance creating a lens flare effect. The Gaiteye logo is in the top left, with the tagline 'Challenge the way we run'. The main text 'EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF FULL ENGAGEMENT...' is in large, bold, white letters. Below it, a dotted line separates the headline from the sub-headline 'RUN FASTER. RUN LONGER.. RUN EASIER...'. In the bottom right, there is a yellow button with the text 'READ MORE & PRE-ORDER TODAY' and 'WWW.GAITEYE.COM'. A hand cursor icon is pointing at the button.

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Entwined with this philosophy is understanding how values, beliefs, thoughts and language interact, both for the individual and amongst a group. When we notice how our own view of the world interplays with others, we begin to see how relationships evolve and how we can have a positive bearing on them.

Some key NLP features that are worth noting, within the context of our interactive dialogue discussions are:

- **Observing, attending and listening**

When we invest in watching what people do, how they do it and why they do it, we immediately access valuable information that helps get the best from our relationship.

- **Making conscious choices about our interactions**

Having observed and considered, we can then make choices about how best to interact, so that all parties achieve a win-win outcome. Subtleties such as tone, body language, words, pace, can all be ingredients to a successful interaction outcome.

- **Building rapport and empathy**

Every moment of our interaction must drive towards the desire to build rapport, empathy and, ultimately trust. With these in place, our relationships will go from strength to strength.

- **Be respectful**

Respect is at the heart of any relationship and we can only build rapport when respect is our partner. Learning to appreciate other's views and perspectives is vital – this does not mean we have to agree, we just need to be respectful of another's right to their opinions.

- **Match and mirror**

In the 1960s, William Condon coined the phrase *Cultural Micro-rhythms*, which discussed the unconscious dance and rhythm we engage in when in rapport with someone. When we match someone's posture, tone, pace and even language, at a subtle level, they feel valued. Mirroring has the same premise; we just reflect back their cues, again creating a sense of affiliation. This is not intended as a manipulative or orchestrated technique. Just finding subtle ways to adjust our posture, match our language and generate the same energy as our recipient, signals a subconscious acceptance between us and helps build a stronger connection.

- **We communicate with our whole body**

Whilst *thinking* happens in our conscious minds, the effects of those thoughts transmit through every fibre of our being. Thoughts translate into emotions, emotions colour our language and tone of voice and these vibrate through our body posture and gestures.

Learning to hear what someone is saying without having to speak is an art, although once we are attuned to what someone is saying with their bodies, not just their words, then we have an amazing tool, enabling us to adjust to their experiences of the world and build trust, rapport and quality interactions.

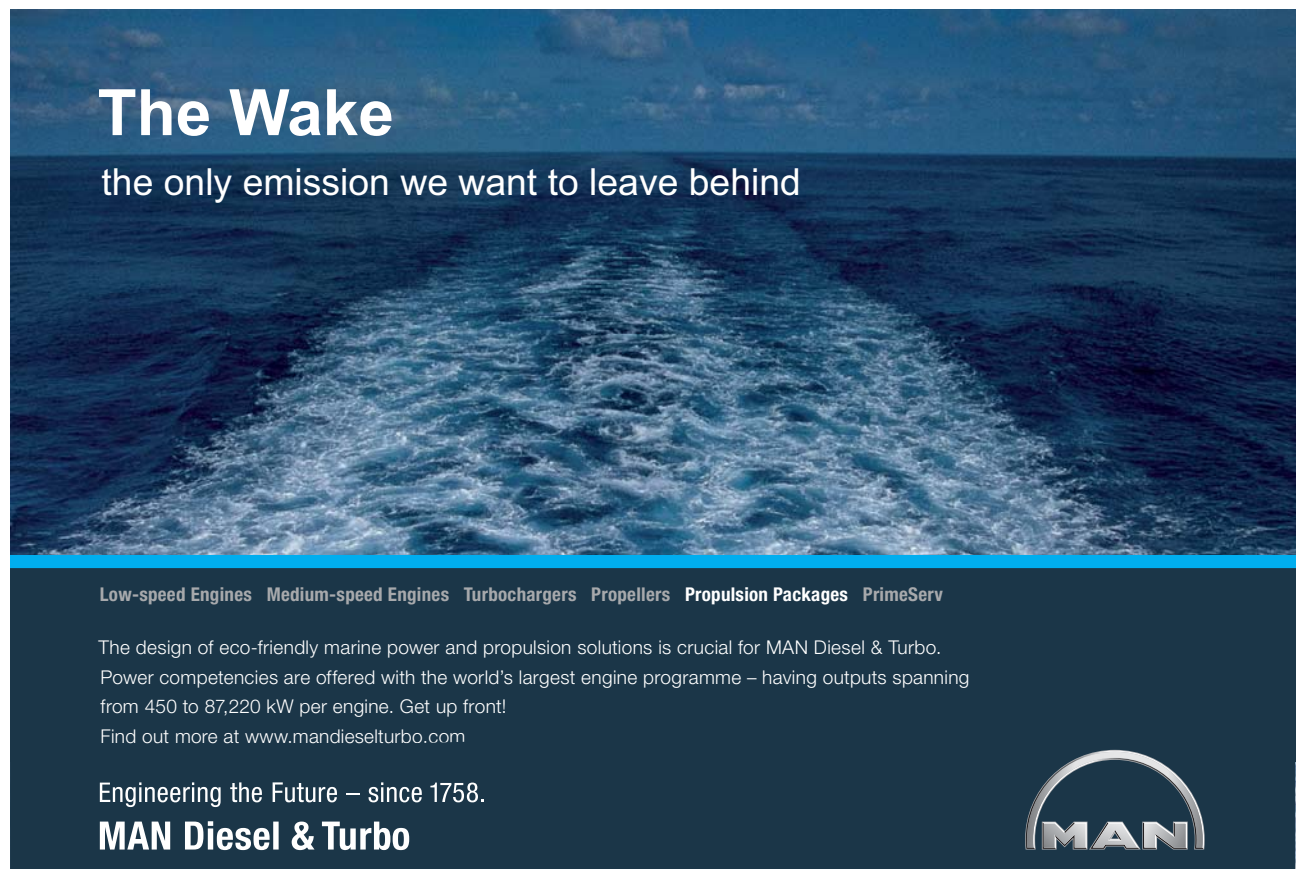
When we hone these techniques, then the results we can achieve from our conversations improve and so too do the depth of our relationships.

4.4.2 Questions are the Answer

As a coach and facilitator, I have learned the power of questioning. One question, the right question can turn someone's confusion to clarity and change their whole way of thinking. I love this quote from Joseph O'Connor and Andrea Lages in their book *Coaching with NLP*,

“Questions are like spotlights that shine into dark places”.

This really gets to the heart of the role questions have in our interactions. We can be trapped too often into thinking that talking gets us the results we need, especially when pressurised. Alas that's really only half the story and 50% of the potential. When we ask a question, we open up the gap between two people, inviting interaction, debate and the sharing of information. Without questions we simply resort to telling, instructing and dictating, which is not transformative in nature.




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Questions are engaging, involving, inviting, explorative, provocative and reflective. When asked with the right intent, it can change the whole dynamic of an interaction. Sometimes just the simplicity of asking: “*What do you think?*” can send a wave of inclusivity that alters our joint experience of that interaction.

Tips for great, powerful questions:

- Keep it Simple Speaker (KISS)
- Keep them open – who, what, when, why, where and how, with **what** and **how** being the most powerful.
- Keep them sensory; What you think, feel, know? How do you feel? How do you see this working out? How does this sound to you?
- Time your questions appropriately.
- Once asked keep quiet and listen. A question asked that is not heard is no question at all.
- Keep them succinct – multi-layered questions are unhelpful and confusing.
- Ask questions that put the recipient in a positive state, such as, ‘What is the best thing that could happen here?’ ‘What skills do you have that could help?’ ‘What is the best-case scenario?’

4.4.3 Vocabulary of Success – Sensory-based words/phrases

Words have so much power that when we get them wrong, just notice the awkwardness around you. One word placed wrongly can spell disaster. Conversely, the right words can create magic, energy and win-win results.

From an NLP perspective, choosing the right words when we interact is critical to a positive outcome. Sensory-based words enable us to reflect back to our recipient language that matches with their subconscious preferences. These fall into three categories:

	Visual	Auditory	Kinaesthetic
Words	See, look, notice, observe, illustrate, imagine, outlook, perspective, reflect, show, visualise, watch, focus.	Ask, sound, hear, resonate, tell, tune, comment, question, remark, discuss.	Balance, contact, feel, seem, handle, stress, touch, sense.
Phrases	I see. Imagine how this might work. We see eye to eye on this. Show me how. Beyond a shadow of a doubt. See this in your mind’s eye. Shed some light on this for me.	How does that sound to you? That really resonates with me. In a manner of speaking.. We’re on the same wavelength. That’s music to my ears. I hear what you’re saying.	I can’t put my finger on it. How does that feel? On balance, which is best? I feel it in my bones. Hang on a minute.

The art of successful sensory-based vocabulary is to first listen to what people are telling us, pick up the words they are using and then match our response to them. We then start building a powerful rapport with them and they feel valued.

4.4.4 Vocabulary of Success – Influential language

As Confucius said,

“Without knowing the force of words, it is impossible to know men.”

It has to be worth investing just a little time in looking at other words and phrases that either enhance or weaken our interactions. The more conscious we are of our language, the greater the chance of positive results. Here is a list of words and phrases to consider:

	Powerless	Influential
Words	You, us, them, possibly, may be, try, perhaps, should, shouldn't, ought, nice, fine, failure, difficulty, problem, fearful, but, might, always, never, everything, only, just, spend, fault, blame, hopefully, sort of, hope, wish, however, but.	I, we, together, commit, will, great, amazing, learning, challenge, and, intrigued, curious, exploratory, potential, can, have, inspired, driven, motivated, feel, believe, sometimes, often, invest, responsibility, accountability, ownership, desire.
Phrases	I can't. I should/ought. What if? I hate. To be honest/truthful. I am just. It's only me. I tend to think. I'm afraid. I'm sorry. I could be mistaken, but... If it's not too much trouble.	I need/must. I could. How might it work out? I prefer. I am/I do/I can/I have. I apologise. I accept/I choose. I agree/I appreciate/I understand I feel..... when. I'm unable to do this now, although I could do it later. How can we achieve this?

We must choose our vocabulary wisely, as whatever we use affects our internal state, our external demeanour and the energy of the people around us.

Example

I ran an Assertiveness seminar for a group of thirty Shipping Administrators and we had a very engaging and buoyant time together. Towards the end of the day, I carried out a vocabulary experiment to show them the impact our language can have on our physical being.

I split the room into two groups, giving each a set of cards with specific words and phrases for them to study and discuss. After a couple of minutes I asked the groups to face each other and describe how the seminar had been for them and how they felt about the information I had shared.

The first group were highly animated about their learning, were visibly upbeat and most inspiring in their body language.

The second group talked in low-tones, came across in a lethargic way, using insipid language and offering very little inspiration about the day.

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When I asked them to reveal the words on their cards, they were:



Sunflowers	Happy	Dark	Winter
Sunshine	Joyful	Empty	Depressed
Laughter	Peaceful	Cold	Alone
Beach	Spring	Sad	Isolated
New life	Smiles	Homeless	Bare
Friends	Warmth	Angry	Resentful
Together	Sharing	War	Misery
Birdsong	Singing	Tears	Stormy
Grass cuttings	Bluebells	Rain	Hurt
Butterflies	Winning	Argument	Hate

The collection of words were so powerful that despite their motivated state going into the exercise, after being with the cards for no more than a couple of minutes, the second group's condition altered completely. Imagine what impact language can have on others if this is what vocabulary can do to our behaviours.

The words we consistently choose affect our behaviours, our relationships and the results we achieve. How amazing to think that something so small and seemingly insignificant can have so much power. Words can empower or depress, choose carefully.

4.5 Presence and Projection

The final word on Interactive Dialogue is around the subtleties of how we present ourselves. I don't mean the orchestrated way in which we might prepare for an interview to make a good first impression. I mean in the day to day authenticity that shows up when we have a restored self-esteem, have emotional acuity and have *people* at the heart of what we do and say.

On the Leadership programme I ran, participants would question what the word *presence* meant so that they knew what they had to 'do'. Perversely, there is little that we can do. Presence is a charisma, a poise, an air of confidence that exudes from us when we operate with authenticity.

When we master an internal strength based on self-belief and self-respect, speak from the heart, interact through the eyes of others and act with integrity, we naturally project an appearance, which reflects that which is inside. Presence is the art existing authentically.

These then are gifts that we receive when we have mastered the ideas from this eBook. We walk tall, we talk confidently, we look natural. This is not forced, this is an instinctive bi-product of solid self-worthiness, calmness and indisputable substance. People around us respond to the aura of confidence that we display and want to follow us, be with us and be happy to engage with us. If there was ever a goal for business leaders, this surely has to be it?

"Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind."

Rudyard Kipling



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PEOPLE FIRST



"In everything, the ends well defined, are the secret of durable success."

Victor Cousins, Philosopher

5 Action Planning

If you have read my first eBook in this Assertive Development trilogy, you will be familiar with my closing approach that focuses on goal setting. Many books we read uplift us, perhaps even motivate us, although if they don't inspire action and change, then your reading investment may be thwarted.

Change comes about when we are inspired to take action to doing, thinking or feeling something different. Although we must be proactive, courageous and initiate change otherwise our status quo remains the same.

I believe when there is enough desire to change, then this creates a momentum that needs no pressure, forcing or pushing. Desire creates an innate propulsion that carries us forward. Armed with a clear focus on what you want to be different, commitment to see it through and diligent application, you can turn your goals into reality.

Having read this eBook, what do you feel determined to change, inspired to do differently? Thinking these two questions through is so important if you really want to revel in the positive results awaiting you.

This chapter, albeit short and sweet, gives us a chance to think about how we convert our learning into something tangible that can make a difference to us, to our relationships and to our business outputs.

5.1 Six Steps to Making Change Happen

For consistency, I have repeated the *Six Steps to Making Change Happen* from my first book, because altering the process would dilute its results. So you may be familiar with this.

5.1.1 Step 1 – Review your Learning

Reflecting back on the exercises, think about what stood out, resonated or meant something. There has been plenty to contemplate, so collecting your thoughts and gathering up what have been the most useful discoveries is an important step before you begin translating those into goals.

Learning Review

Return to each chapter, noting down the elements that have struck a chord with you.

Then go back to chapter 1, where I asked you to consider what you wanted to achieve by reading this eBook and based on that information, record what have you learned and discovered.

5.1.2 Step 2 – Review your Goals

As you review your original goals, you may feel that they no longer work for you or that they are too woolly, especially given your discoveries. This is natural. Visions and goals need to be flexible and adaptive, so use them as a reference point. If you believe your goals need to change, carry on to the Goal Review exercise below, otherwise move on to Step 3.

Goal Review

If your original goals need to change, rewrite what you want to achieve based on your learning. Consider what you want to look, sound and feel like one year from now.

With your goals revised, you can now return to your learning review notes and identify which discoveries most help you achieve your goals over the coming year.

5.1.3 Step 3 – Your Inspirations

When we are really inspired to do something, nothing stops us. Think back to a time when you have had a real passion, an energy to do, say a marathon, prepare for an interview or work for a charity that is close to your heart. Even though you are busy, you make time for inspirational activities.

Your Inspirations

Albert Einstein said, ‘Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration’. This may be true, although if we don’t have inspiration in the first place, then our perspiration is wasted sweat.

List what you feel most inspired to do differently that will help you towards your newly revised goals in chapter 1. Only list three things so that you keep focused.

5.1.4 Step 4 – Questions are the Answers

In chapter 4, we discussed the importance of questions being the answers, and now it is time to employ that skill in setting your action plan.

Taking the three most relevant inspirations that have had the greatest impact on you, formulate each one into a measurable and tangible action using the following six questions:

What: will you specifically do differently and what will it give you?

Why: is this action important to you?

How: will you approach achieving this action, how often, how well?

When: will you do this, over what period?

Who: will need to support you and who is involved?

Where: will this goal take place? At home, work or socially? Be specific by stating whether it is at meetings, talking to your boss, when handling a difficult customer.

This now gives your actions structure and helps them become meaningful statements of intent.



The advertisement for Linköping University features a light grey background. In the top left corner is the Swedish flag with the text 'Sweden Sverige' next to it. The main text reads 'Linköping University – innovative, highly ranked, European'. Below this, it says 'Interested in Computer Science? Kick-start your career with an English-taught master's degree.' A dark blue button with a white arrow and the text 'Click here!' is positioned below the text. In the bottom left is the 'li.u' logo followed by 'LINKÖPING UNIVERSITY'. On the right side, two young women with long brown hair are smiling and leaning against a red door frame.



Click on the ad to read more

5.1.5 Step 5 – Do and Review

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit.” Aristotle

It is now time to take action and repeated action at that. Inspired by your commitments, you need to go forth and apply yourself. To help you, here is some guidance about making it a long-lasting change and not just a ‘five minute wonder’.

- **Focus only on three commitments.** If you adopt any more it will become like a shopping list, often overwhelming and soon forgotten. When you have changed those commitments into new habits, then you can identify your next set of actions.
- **Repeat your actions regularly.** The more you repeat, the more you hone and gain in confidence. After all, *‘Repetition is the Mother of skill.’*
- **Involve people in your changes.** Talk to people close to you about your changes, especially family and friends. With their inclusion you secure their support rather than create fear, suspicion or threat. When I implemented a big change to my language, I asked for my team’s help in spotting when I used negative words and they became a factor of my success.
- **Carry out regular reviews and document your successes.** The more you assess your progress and celebrate what is going well, the more momentum you will experience. You will also be more in tune with what is working less well and be able to make adjustments. During a twelve-month leadership programme, I encouraged participants to produce an Evidence Portfolio that recorded specific examples of their progress. They collected samples of emails, wrote situational summaries, asked colleagues for feedback and copied letters of thanks they received. This review mechanism helped them produce long-lasting behavioural changes.
- **Celebrate your successes.** It is important to acknowledge what is going well. Share those successes with colleagues, friends who will be interested, your partner or boss. The act of sharing itself reinforces the positivity of the action and inspires you to continue.

5.1.6 Step 6 – Commit to Paper

If you like formality and structure, then I encourage you to adopt a form similar to this to help you.

Action Planning Form

Learning event: Mastering the Power of Dialogue

Date: / /20

Inspired action	What it will give me	Support required	Progress and evidence
1.			
2.			
3.			

With a stronger self-esteem, a newly landscaped garden and a new appreciation for the power of the mind, you are ready to move further forwards towards your authentic assertion.

Once again, I encourage you to use the next **four to six weeks** to experiment, talk, journalise and reflect on what is going well and what still needs adjusting before you head towards the third instalment in this Assertive Trilogy.

If this series is capturing you, then the final book will be the real icing on the cake. We focus on pulling together all the inside out learning I have encouraged in the first two books and give you an opportunity to combine it all in the application of handling situations with authentic assertion. Inspired by participants and clients' real life circumstances and those I have experienced myself over the last twenty-five years I show you how to overcome assertive challenges. Using the foundation of self-awareness inspired by these first two books, you will be in a strong position to apply the techniques and tools in the final edition to master your assertion.

See you next time!

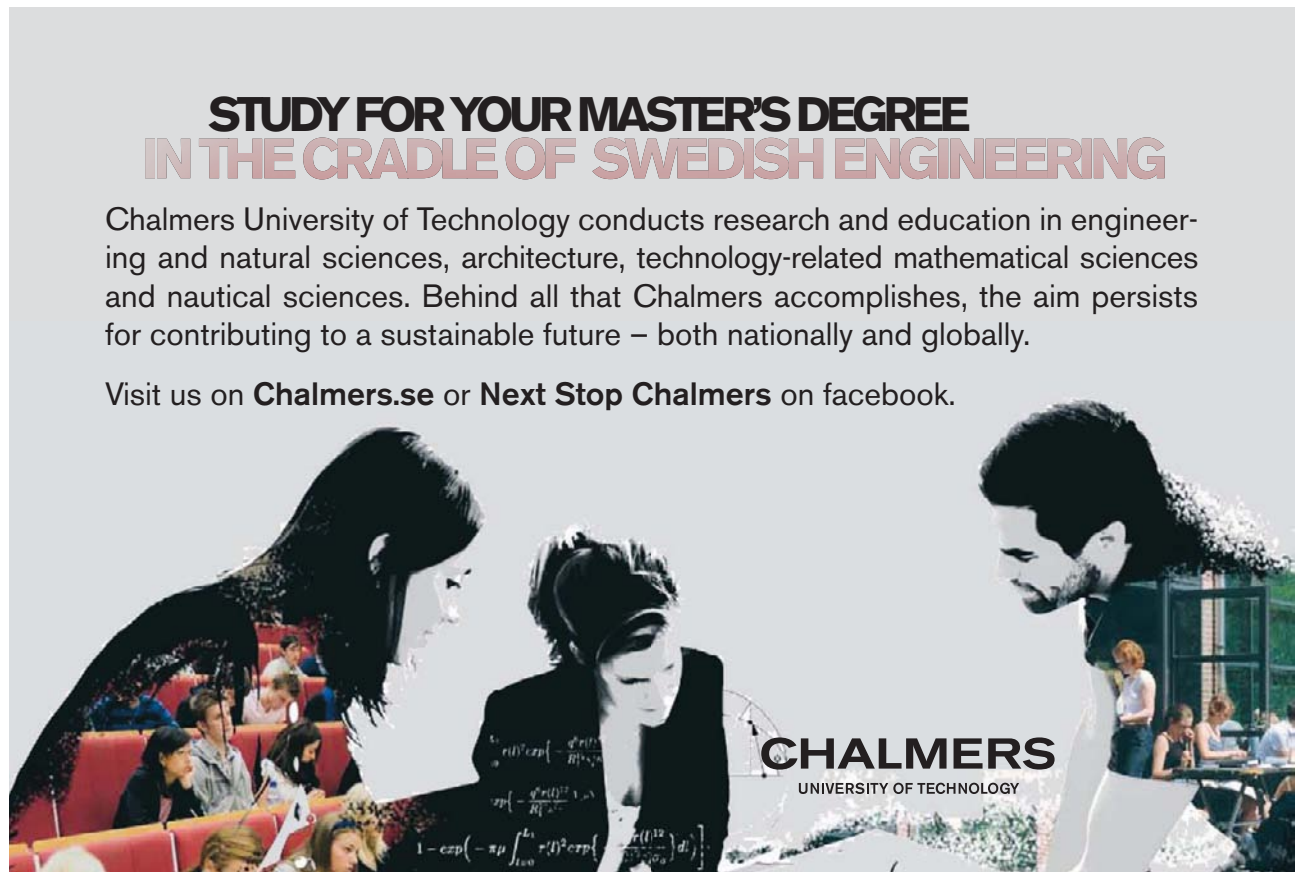
"All we are and all we have are nothing if we don't believe in them."

Karen Davies, Coach

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