

Discipline Your Mind



CONTROL YOUR THOUGHTS, BOOST
WILLPOWER, DEVELOP MENTAL TOUGHNESS

Zoe McKey

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Control Your Thoughts,
Boost Willpower,
Develop Mental Toughness

By Zoe McKey

Communication Coach and
Social Development Trainer

zoemckey@gmail.com

www.zoemckey.com



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Chapter 1: Take Control

“Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

– Serenity Prayer, Reinhold Niebuhr

Once upon a time, my life took a switch. I moved away from home, Romania, to pursue better opportunities and escape family dramas in Hungary where I earned a scholarship. My parents weren't exactly made of money. Unable to afford renting an apartment I was placed in the high school's free dorm. The free dorm offered exactly what one would think: a place where I could keep my stuff, sleep and clean myself. Nothing more. Before you start brainstorming what else do I need, I give a hint: food. Weirdly, food was not included in the service. “At least I can wash before I die of hunger”, I thought dramatically with my fourteen-year-old brain.

It was not the school's responsibility that I couldn't afford the cheap canteen meals in the dorm's kitchen, which was designed to feed poor yuppies like me. I was an even poorer yuppie than the rest, though. At the same time, I had a strong sense of “yuppieness” and kept my yuppie head high as only a fourteen-year-old could, defiantly refusing to ask for help. I'm a big girl, I'll deal with it.

I “dealt with the problem” by sulking in the kitchen at lunchtime watching the others eat, hoping that someone would give me his or her lunch. That never happened. The best chance I had was that someone would leave his or her unfinished meal on the table so I could feast upon the rest. Still, my foolish pride kept me fasting instead of feasting while someone else could see me. You know how self-conscious fourteen-year-olds can be about their image. So, I just sat, sulked and prayed the canteen lady didn't clean up the leftovers before I did.

I spent three days hoping that if I stayed around there long enough, I would get some food eventually. But I didn't. The only thing I heard besides my growling stomach was the canteen lady's sharp, loud voice. She always complained about how many dishes she had to collect and wash.

Gotcha—a light bulb moment!

The next day after lunchtime was over, I went down to the kitchen and started to collect the dishes and bringing them to the dish collector cart. The canteen lady was very surprised and grateful for my help. My stomach, like a well-trained dog, started growling loudly at the right moment, sending a clear message to the mother of three. The canteen lady told me there were lots of leftovers, so if I was hungry, she could give me a plate or two. Or, as many as I wanted, really, because otherwise, she would just throw the food away. From that moment on I had a job and a salary in a barter sense.

Going back to the quote at the beginning of the chapter, I realized I couldn't change the schooling system in Hungary. I couldn't make the Ministry of Education include free meals next to free tuition and housing. Even if I succeeded, it would have been a post-mortem achievement. The solution to my problem was right in front of me, and luckily I took the courage to change what I could. The difference in my case was obvious.

In other words, the things you can't change are those things you can't control. As a consequence, things you can change are those that fall under your control. Today's society is a control freak. We like to feel in control, and when we're not, we become desperate. In this state of desperation, we overlook some solutions that could also solve our problems, and we'd even have control over it. In my case, I wanted to change the system, the minds of my classmates, everything before I thought about what I had in my own power to make the change myself. So many people get stuck in a position because they want a solution that is out of their control when every solution they can hope for lies within them.

I rephrased Niebuhr's saying: Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot control, courage to change the things I can control, and wisdom to know the difference.

One thing that you can control is your time. Not time in general. You can't make twenty-six hour days but you can control what do you do in your twenty-four you have. Many of your control-related frustrations root in bad time management. Let's take as an example a situation when you stay in a long line in the supermarket.

Situation A: You were on time. You woke up on time, knew you needed to

drop by and pick up some breakfast before work so you calculated how much time would that take as a worst-case scenario and left your house just in time. While you waited in the line you read the news, checked your social media, read a book, or double-checked your presentation so you didn't have dead time while you waited. When you finally got to the checkout, you paid and headed to work.

Situation B: You had a delay. You knew you should have woken up earlier, but the bed was so inviting to sleep five minutes more. And five more minutes, again and again... You jumped out of bed in a hurry, did a perfunctory job with your hair and dress, rushed to your car to get to the supermarket to grab some food. You hit a long line even though you collected what you wanted in thirty seconds. You looked at your watch five times per minute, impatiently tapping your leg. All you could hear in your mind was, "I'm going to be late. I'm going to be so late. My boss will scold me, I'll get angry and won't be able to finish my job. Life is so unfair! Why does this line have to be so long? Inconceivable! Why am I always attracting misfortune? I must have done something very bad in a previous life. Come on, hurry up!"

The same situation, different outcomes. What was the difference between the two examples? The power of control. In the first example, the person prepared herself for unforeseeable hindrances, things she couldn't control, added them to her time-management plans and prepared her morning plans accordingly. She made uncontrollable events controllable by managing her time well. With self-control and good time management, she could handle even the uncontrollable things. Stuff might happen but wouldn't affect her plans.

In situation B, the person didn't have any kind of control. She had zero self-control when it came to getting up. She didn't make any time management plans to adapt to the uncontrollable. She didn't have the flexibility to change her plans knowing she was delayed, like ordering a delivery breakfast. Stubbornly, without any sense of responsibility, our hero followed her plans. She hoped no one would be in the line at the supermarket. On the way to the supermarket, she made up different explanations why people would not be queuing in front of her. Empty rationalization. When things turned out differently, she started panicking and rationalizing why everything and

everybody but her was at fault for the fact that she would have a bad day. She already decided that her boss would be angry and she'd have a bad day. Who behaves like the person in situation B? A child. Zero self-control, zero sense of responsibility, blaming others, lacking priorities.

People are not machines. We get in situation Bs all the time, sometimes even when we take major events into consideration and keep our time under control. Regardless of the reasons, let's see how can we handle situation B.

The most important step is to take total responsibility for your situation and actions. Regardless of being at fault (like oversleeping) or not being at fault for your problems (an accident ahead of you on the highway), the responsibility is still yours to take. Do not mistake the word culpable and responsible, they are not synonyms. People often don't take responsibility because they think it makes them culpable, even if they were not. You still have to take action if something goes wrong in your life, and those actions are your responsibility regardless if you're at fault or not.

For example, if you pour coffee on someone, it's your fault and you have to take responsibility for it even if it was an accident. You didn't pour the coffee on the person voluntarily, but the coffee is still on his shirt. Saying sorry, you didn't mean to, and walking away won't make his shirt coffee-less. This is how our society works – you mess something up, you have to take account for it.

However, things occur in life where you're not culpable for what happened. For example, it turns out your baby will likely be born with a severe mental or physical illness. It's not your fault, but it is still your responsibility to make a decision and you'll be responsible for that decision. Whatever you choose, whether to keep it or have an abortion, will have life-long consequences and you'll have to live with it.

The more responsible you become, the more control you'll have over your life. Why? As soon as you accept responsibility for something you jump from past tense to present tense. Issues get solved in the present. As long as you stay in the past, you'll complain, try to find culprits, and victimize yourself. These “quasi-solutions” might give you a peace of mind in the short term, but they won't solve your problem.

You can't control the queue at the supermarket. It's not your fault that

everybody else decided to shop that morning, but it is your responsibility how you act: do you get angry and frustrated, stay on the line against your better judgment, order food later, call your boss telling you'll be a bit late, etc.?

Or you can stay in line, be late – and take responsibility for the consequences. It was not fate, a past life or the odds of shopping that conspired against you. It was just you, your bad time-management and lack of willpower to get up in time. This is a solution too. It won't help you with your boss, but it will give you a sense of being in control. Yes, you messed up, but you know you did and you're ready to suffer the consequences.

Know your priorities. Which is more important: doing the shopping or arriving on time for your work?

What are the steps you should think through to maximize your control and minimize hindrances in a situation?

1. Know what you want to do.
2. Identify any potential uncontrollable event that could prolong or circumvent your plans.
3. Prepare prevention strategies to minimize uncontrollable event's effect as much as possible.
4. If the uncontrollable event happens and it is worst than you expected, prioritize what is more important for you to accomplish.
5. Make a decision, and take responsibility for it.

These guidelines can be applied to minor things like the shopping misery mentioned above as well as bigger problems. Stay in control requires training. Analyze your reactions given to stressful situations and note, which has kicked you out of balance the most. Which are the life areas where you struggle taking responsibility? What freaks you out the most? Apply the five-point analysis mentioned above to get through the event with a clearer mind, more control, and less stress.

Chapter 2: The Something for Something Principle

I read a blog post by Mark Manson based on a Facebook post he saw on his newsfeed, which was shared by CTV News, Canada. The main character of the story was a man named Mohammed El-Erian, the CEO of a two trillion-dollar worth bond fund called PIMCO. Financially speaking, he was quite well-off with a decent \$100 million per year salary and an upward-running career.

Even though the career path of this gentleman was enviable and extraordinary, he decided to resign in his position. Why would he do that, one might ask? For no other reason than to spend more time with his ten-year-old daughter. Of course, news like this doesn't go unnoticed in our society. It circulated like wildfire because the reasons and results are somewhat contradictory to today's western society values, namely get rich, richer, the richest.

What on earth led El-Erian to this decision? The deal breaker day, when he came to his decision, began like any other day. He had an argument with his daughter about a trivial issue. He asked her to brush her teeth. When the little one refused, the dad fueled by parental superiority and shortage of time supported his demand with the following argument: "I'm your father and you will do what I say." The little girl hearing this asked for her father's patience, entered her room and a few minutes later came out with a paper where she wrote down twenty-two moments of her life that year where her father was not present because of his work.

Apparently, these childish scratched sentences changed something in Mohammed El-Erian because the next day he left his job and his salary ridiculously rich in zeros. He chose to be a father for his child instead.

Highly educated economists might call this phenomena "opportunity cost",

but I just call it the “something for something principle”. In other words, anything you choose to do will cost you in not doing something else. You can’t have it all. Every time you make a decision a cartload of parallel universe choices fly into the mist of unrealized opportunities.

If you want to have a smooth journey on this earth, you have to accept one thing: you can’t have it all. Every choice you make is also a sacrifice. In the case of El-Erian, the something was his job, which he gave up for another something, his daughter.

Every choice has a price. The more mind-blowing and bolder the choice you make is, the bigger “opportunity cost” you have to pay for it. Some people are admired in our society for their money and success. Yet, there is an equally huge opportunity cost behind them, and many things they gave up for their big something. Bill Gates was famous for sleeping in his office, Angelina Jolie can’t make a step without being photographed, or harassed by the media, and so on. Don’t feel sorry for them. Their fate was their choice and they are responsible for it. The point is that every great achievement comes with great costs.

Everything you choose to do fosters you from another opportunity you could do instead. Therefore, when someone chooses to spend his or her time creating a benefit for you, they expect a reward for that. If you go to work for a company, you expect a salary. You trade your time for money. If someone helps you with your work, they expect something else in return: your goodwill to recommend him to a promotion, your help in return, or your peanut butter muffins. I ended up concluding that altruism doesn’t exist. One way or another, people never do anything unless there is a gain in it for them.

I learned this lesson when I helped out the canteen lady. When I just sat passively in the kitchen, I went to bed hungry. The canteen lady just washed her dishes and went home exhausted. Both of us were losers at the end of the day. The supply and demand sat face to face but for some reason they ignored each other. I didn’t ask for food, and she didn’t ask for help. When my hunger finally showed me the way, we left the kitchen with a win-win feeling. We both added something in the value basket and took something out

of it.

The world, however, is much more complex than ancient barter. We have so many opportunities that alluringly invite us to choose them. The abundance of choice created by modern society makes the opportunity costs seem much higher than ever before. To choose something, we perceive that we say no to ten things and it increases our remorse. We constantly feel insecure about our choices. “What if I wasted time by doing this? I could have done that instead, it would have been so much more productive, etc.”

The world isn’t going easy on you, is it? You might live in a terror of missing out on something. In the age when the aforementioned ancient barter was trending, everybody had their role in society. The role was determined by birth much of the time. Who was born a farmer didn’t have other choices than being a farmer. The son of the blacksmith inherited the workshop and the profession from his father. The sick and weak son of the blacksmith became the next priest of the village. These people didn’t aim for anything else than becoming a farmer or a blacksmith – partially because they weren’t aware of something else being there for them, and partially because they felt no pressure in “leveling-up their lives”. They had it all in an old sense of the meaning. The farmer brought fresh products to the blacksmith who sharpened the gardening tools of the farmer in return. The rudimentary art of a deal.

Not today. Today there are so many opportunities, and what’s more important, we are reminded of these opportunities so often that regardless of our choices, we’ll end up crumbling under everything we didn’t accomplish.

If you choose to be a successful business owner you’ll inevitably have to decrease time spent on love life, family, friends, and hobbies proportionately to favor your business. Books, movies, and advertisements will still find you bombing the importance of family, love and healthy hobbies in your face, triggering a sense of loss and regret in you.

It works the other way around, too. If you stay home to be a parent, then career promoting, Lean In type of books might surround you, reminding you how unfulfilled that area of your life is. If you choose to be a boring but useful piece of the society lego, you’ll look resentfully on the rich and beautiful. If you’re living an out of ordinary glamorous life, you might wish to have a quiet little lodge somewhere near the Canadian border away from

all the fame and fuss.

What is the solution to break out of the “ten somethings for one something” rut?

Clearly, our time is limited. We have twenty-four hours from which we have to sleep at least seven to enjoy life longer. Having more money? “Like that’s so easy,” you might say. You’re right. It is not that easy, and it is not something that is purely under your control. You can’t say “I want a million dollars,” and next the guy from DLS knocks your door with a special delivery. Not time, not money.

I’ve been brainstorming a lot on how to answer this question to myself. As the previous chapter concluded, only those things you can change in your life for sure are completely under your control. What is under your control in this case?

Your needs and wants.

You can’t control your income for sure. You certainly can’t generate more time. Even over the twenty-four hours you have, you can’t have total control. An unexpected accident on the highway, a broken oven, a power outage, and all your plans can go down the toilet without having any control over it. Own what you can control instead – your own craving heart.

“What if the solution is simply accepting our bounded potential, our unfortunate tendency as humans to inhabit only one place in space and time. What if we recognize our life’s inevitable limitations and then prioritize what we care about based on those limitations?” – Mark Manson

People who complain about a tiring job, lack of time, being stuck in a rut, feeling that their lives are not heading anywhere, having no personal life, don’t know what to do to turn their lives around, usually have one single problem. They don’t know what to say no to. For example, if they stay at their job, they don’t have time for friends and hobbies; if they resign their job, they’ll lose the comfortable lifestyle they are used to, if they choose to hang out with friends more, their work’s quality will decrease making them a constant target to the boss.

Stop it. You’re digging your own rabbit hole of problems. You can’t have

everything. However, you can have something all the time. Look at El-Erian. First, he focused on his career, sacrificing everything for the career's sake. He persisted and made it. Then he gave up his career for everything else. Now he has the money and a presence in his daughter's life. He has made a lot, just not at the same time.

Give before you ask.

Now, being aware of the "something for something principle", let's see how can you use it in everyday life. In business, people will only help you if we can compensate them somehow for their time, effort, and knowledge. Nobody works for free. Just like you, they are also reaching for a goal.

How would you feel if someone was stealing one hour of your life asking for your help just so he can disappear with your ideas? Not so bad? Okay, then let's change the word idea for money. I bet you'd be furious. Time is money one way or another, I'd say time is even more precious than money. So next time before you ask someone for business advice, consider the following: what can I do for this person to get what I want?

What can I give to get?

Who would you rather help? Someone who comes to you asking for your peanuts or someone who offers candies first for your peanuts?

Human nature is coded to equalize the balance between how much they give and get. In most cases, people focus on the get side of the equation because they don't want to give more than they get.

However, people also hate to feel indebted. Did a colleague ever treat you to coffee and you felt uncomfortable around them until you reciprocated? What's more, because your colleague offered his treat so selflessly the other day, you wanted to show an extra appreciation, more than just equalizing the balance, so you added a cookie to the coffee treat. Now your colleague feels indebted, so the next time he'll bring an extra muffin his wife just baked to give to you... And so on.

This is what I call channeling the odds of overcompensation. If we give first, we will start to get more.

One day I found a purse full of money. The evil advisor inside me quickly sat

on my left shoulder whispering, “Take the money and run! You won’t have to wash dishes for weeks!”

“Yeah, you’re right, evil little voice in my head. I hate dishwashing anyway. I will save so much time and eat much better food than leftovers.”

However, another voice spoke up on my right shoulder – glory and white puff as it should be. “Take a look at this old purse. Someone worked hard for that money. How could you foster someone from livelihood? You have other options to eat, too. This person might not have.” Cursing my good side I decided to take a look at the ID card in the purse, hoping to see a twenty-year-old yahoo who just lost his lunch money. Instead, I recognized a middle-aged man who holds some classes quite often at the dorm’s gym.

I went to the gym. He was still there. I called out for him and returned his purse. He was very surprised to see me return his money. He had just finished his class, so we started talking. It turned out he was a 3rd Dan Aikido master. While telling me stories about the Aikido philosophy he noticed a glow of interest in my eyes. Unexpectedly he asked me to join his team.

For a moment I thought I misheard him. The very thought to belong somewhere sounded more than inviting to me in my isolated situation. I would have paid all the opportunity costs to do Aikido but I knew I couldn’t pay the real costs. So I politely refused his offer. After a moment of consideration, he told me the money he had in his purse would cover my membership fee for a year. If money’s the reason why I decline his offer, I shouldn’t worry because I just paid it.

I learned a great life lesson that day. What you give is what you get back. If you give good, you’ll get good. Maybe your kindness won’t be rewarded instantly. Maybe not the same person will repay it.

Don’t forget. There’s always an opportunity cost in your decisions. You always give something for something. If you can help it, make sure to give first and give good.

Chapter 3: The Paradox of Responsibility

We live in the age of freedom of speech, freedom of expression and free Wi-Fi. I was born into it. You might have been born into it, too. Ultimately, we're the absolute beneficiaries of a lot of values that have been earned through the sacrifice and blood of our ancestors no longer than two generations ago.

Today we can access everything so easily, with so little sacrifice that we don't even consider them as values, rather things taken for granted. We feel entitled to certain things even though we did nothing to earn them. Easy pleasures bring with them two main existential issues:

A: People take everything for granted faster and easier. For example, there is a trial for free Wi-Fi on an airplane. Let's say someone messes something up and cuts internet access for everybody after fifteen minutes. Following the mistake, a mini-riot breaks out on the plane, demanding internet connection. Wi-Fi on airplanes is uncommon, and hardly ever happens for free, or at all. Still, the passengers after only fifteen minutes' usage got so used to the comfort of it that they thought of it as the new "normal". They felt entitled to their demand even if they never had internet connection on a plane before.

B: People think they should get things without sacrifice. In the past fifty or sixty years, living standards radically improved in the Western world. Everything became more accessible, easier, and faster. Weirdly enough the happiness level didn't raise with them. Psychologists were never so busy as today. The number of patients with mental illness, depression and anxiety problems is over the roof.

As self-importance grows and grows, the importance the world gives to the individual shrinks and shrinks.

Why? On one hand, people's self-importance turns into narcissism and prevents them from caring about others' self-importance turned-narcissism. On the other hand, the many distractions in the world make it impossible to catch the tail of time and do everything one wants. Caring about your issues probably won't be someone else's top three priorities. And it shouldn't. Even

if you build your hopes upon the self-deception that someone else will solve your problems, they won't.

The world is not responsible for you. You're responsible for yourself in the world.

I experienced this paradox of responsibility early in my life, although it took me decades to act upon it. I still struggle occasionally with choosing to take responsibility instead of whining and blaming my problems on my unfortunate past and expecting the world to compensate me for it.

The first time I experienced the paradox of responsibility was right after I moved away from home. I was very young, lacking the knowledge needed to manage myself in a foreign country. I knew nothing about money, or state institutions and regulations. And yes, I was fourteen, so nobody took me seriously.

One day I received a notification from my school that I needed a document to confirm my permanent residence in the country. When I went to the immigration office, I was told they couldn't issue a permanent residency paper unless the school will confirm that I legally study there – and live in their dorm as a consequence of my studies. My school, however, wouldn't confirm my studies until I got the residency document. The catch of 22. No one in the government office knew anything. They just sent me to another department, hoping to get rid of me. My school didn't know anything either except how to threaten me to freeze my studies and my place in the dorm.

I was fourteen. I felt the situation I got stuck in is completely unfair. My parents were far away, and I had no one to care about my problems. Nobody seemed to care if I ended up on the streets if I was denied from my hard-earned position at a good school. Why? Because some bureaucratic loop the government was too lazy to develop properly. What could I do? I had to take responsibility to my life. Nobody else would have done it. Any why would they? My problem was not their problem. Was I young? Sure I was, so what? Screaming it into the face of a clerk wouldn't have solved my problem. "Bring your parents then," they might have said. But my parents wouldn't come. They couldn't. They had no money. I couldn't count on my dad coming in a shiny armor to save me from the evil. All I had was myself, and my wish to stay where I was.

I clearly lacked the knowledge I needed to argue with meaning. What do you do when you lack knowledge? You research it, study it and learn it. So I went to the school's computer room and spent long hours every day after classes to search for the solution of my problem. It wasn't an easy ride – legal documents, immigration law, exceptions... Come on! I've been playing with Barbie dolls a year ago! Why do I have to deal with this? Why? As much as I hoped, no answer came to this question. The sky didn't part, no magical fairy dust-levitated scroll descended with the solution to the problem. I was just my desperate mind and me. This is a tough and painful realization at any age but the quicker you accept it, the easier your life will be.

After a few days of research, I found an article that imposes different treatments on foreign students and merges the terms of permanent residence and temporary residence into residence. I printed the wicked article and marched back to the immigration office, empowered with knowledge, and a stern, confident poker face. I didn't ask anything, just claimed that I wanted a document that proved my residency at my school's address as a foreign individual based on the purpose of studies. As if I was speaking a different language, the official promptly provided the necessary documents that I submitted to my school so I could be officially accepted.

The solution may sound incredibly simple, and something immigration officials should definitely know. Maybe they knew it, or it would take them five minutes to look it up. However, people don't have five minutes for your problems when they don't have time for their own. They might help, but you can't build your existence on others' good will. You'll be out of control and constantly stressed about the outcome. You'll be bound to someone else's mood, knowledge or willingness to help.

"Freedom isn't free," states the common saying in the United States. Even though this saying was merely used to support the purpose of a war fought for the values of the country, it can be related to everyday life freedom, as well. Your everyday freedom of choice and security has to be earned with sacrifice. This sacrifice can be taking the time to search for solutions by yourself, as I did, saying no to the alternatives to the thing you want, and taking responsibility all the time.

How can you handle a challenge quickly, taking responsibility, and excluding the reliance on the world on saving you? I collected eight questions you can

ask yourself to properly address your problems without relying on others:

1. What is the challenge?
2. Why is it a challenge?
3. Where do I stand on this matter? Am I the initiator or the one being dragged into this story?
4. What do I know about the problem?
5. What are the fields I need to learn about the problem?
6. What could be the hidden traps?
7. How can I correct the deficiencies?
8. How could its possible outcome affect me?

Let's see how can you apply the questions above to take responsibility for a job interview. You applied for a job that matches your profile, and it would meet your expectations. You care about the outcome and don't want to leave it to chance.

1. What is the challenge? – To get the job.
2. Why is it a challenge? - There is no guarantee you will get it.
3. Where do you stand on this matter? – You are the initiator, you applied for the job.
4. What do you know about the job? –You know information about the company. You understand the job description of the position, and you have all the required skills.
5. What are the fields you need to learn about the job? – Research on about tricky questions in job interviews, in general, and in your specific field. Prepare for them.

If you know there are gray areas in your knowledge regarding the position, don't be lazy, look them up.

6. What could be the hidden traps? – Hidden traps usually are those things that you don't know about or don't realize you should know. Like an unexpected request to complete a task related to the job or some skills that weren't mentioned in the job description but they are highly appreciated if you have them.

These are the moments when you have to rely on your confidence, your security about being sure you are fit for the chosen position and all your knowledge of the job. These ordeals serve the sole purpose of testing your endurance, stress-handling ability, and capability to control an uncomfortable situation. If you count on them to appear during your interview you can prepare mentally beforehand. You can't be ready for the exercise or question itself, but you can be ready to execute anything without dealing with the terror of surprise.

7. How can I correct the deficiencies? – By preparing mentally to the obstacles that could fall in your way. Using your persistence, willpower, and convincing ability you can sell yourself even if you don't have the necessary theoretical knowledge required. Your self-confidence, unshakable interest towards the job, and a strong work ethic are the real assets of the company. Make your interviewers focus on that.

8. How could its possible outcome affect me? – The best-case scenario means you get the job. The worst-case scenario means you don't get the job. If the latter happens, feel free to ask what the reasons were you didn't succeed. Was it something you did wrong? Did they look for some other qualities? Try to get to the bottom of the problem. Pain and disappointment might blindside you if the outcome is negative but try to stay collected and get as much information as possible about what you need to improve for your next attempt.

Take responsibility for yourself because nobody else will.

Chapter 4: The Most Unreliable Organ

A few centuries ago astrologists believed that the Earth was in the center of the Universe and everything else revolved around it. Even before that, the myth circulated about the Earth being cube-shaped and having a clear end line somewhere in the misty oceans. People also thought that they could heal different diseases by cutting someone's arm and let it bleed. Some other people believed that a short, black haired man who liked to scream in German had good values upon which they could build a superior world-nation.

When I was a child, I believed my grandparents when they told me carrots would help me whistle better, and with my improved whistles, I'd attract pigeons. (Apparently, when I was a kid I really loved pigeons.) I also believed spinach made you stronger, but I resisted eating it to avoid getting disproportionately large forearms as Popeye did.

When I moved away from home, I told everybody that I was okay when in reality I was really lonely and full of fear. I believed that winning someone's attention and love was purchasable, so I bought clothes that made me blend into my new environment. As a fifteen-year-old, I thought it was lame to be nice to others and disinterest was the way to win others' respect.

When I had my first boyfriend, I thought we'd always be together. We would have in a little cottage in the woods, with lots of cats and we'd be happy. When he first cheated on me I thought that I would never forgive him (this part actually turned out to be true). When we broke up, I was certain I'd never love anybody as much as I loved him – and nobody would love me as he did. Then I had another boyfriend who loved me much more than I did. I thought I was responsible for his feelings and I was guilty of not loving him more. I felt like a horrible person for not loving him more. I was wrong all the way through the carrots to love.

I'm sure that if I look back five years from now to my thoughts on today, I might feel that I was wrong. I hope I will. It means that I'll know more and be better in five years. We're never completely right, though. To quote Mark

Manson, star blogger and best-selling author's words, "we don't go from 'wrong' to 'right'. Rather we go from wrong to slightly less wrong... We are always in the process of approaching truth and perfection without actually ever reaching truth or perfection."

I don't even believe there is absolute right or wrong. There are things you experience to be right or wrong for you based on your values. Neutrally approaching it, your freedom of practicing your rightness expands to the point where you violate someone else's freedom in doing so. Not considering extreme negative values that people consider right (like the loud, short, black-haired German's) we can agree that "right" or "wrong" is subjective. Based on different experiences and values, people have different answers to the same questions, and none of these answers will be better or worse than the other.

Our own answers might be different today than what we thought ten years ago. Ten years ago I was convinced that I should be mean to gain respect. Today I believe I was wrong back then.

People have a history of being wrong about things they believed to be right. You have a history of being wrong about things you believed to be right. According to these analogies, how can you be sure what you think someone else thinks to be right?

We people have a superpower. This superpower is the ability to think. Our brain works all the time. It thinks about something 24/7. When it becomes puzzled about something, like what you should think about a situation you have with another person, it starts to think about what that other person must be thinking. Did you ever catch yourself assuming what someone would think, react or say, and then you realized you were totally wrong about it? I had done it more than I could count.

The brain is the deal-breaker part of our body that differentiates us from other species. It is, however, a very fickle organ. It makes us believe we heard things, it convinces us that we saw stuff that wasn't really there. It can even re-write our memory. For example, research has been done where people were shown holiday pictures in Disneyland where Bugs Bunny shakes hands with the kids. After the slideshow was over, some subjects clearly remembered shaking Bugs Bunny's hand, as well, when they were in

Disneyland, even though Bugs Bunny is a Warner Brothers character.

My point with this extremely long introduction is to give you enough reasons to believe me when I say it is not advisable to try to guess what someone else thinks. It is not advisable to even believe what your own thoughts are. I really don't want to pull the rug out from under your feet. The faster you accept that your mind should be questioned from time to time, the better you'll become at making decisions. The better decisions you'll make, the better your life quality will be. Don't forget, I might be wrong with what I just said.

There is, however, a discipline that can help you with figuring others out better than your own wondering mind. This discipline is the field of nonverbal communication, body language and the paralinguistic.

Based on Albert Mehrabian's research, nonverbal communications, body language and paralinguistic account for up to 93 percent of the meaning that people receive from any human communication. Only 7 percent was the verbal expression itself.

Understanding body language thus enables better awareness about your fellow humans than your own assumptions. It can also help you understand yourself better. Your body language reveals your feelings that your conscious brain might want to explain otherwise. For example, you can lie by saying you're not afraid of heights, trying to convince yourself and impress the lady beside you. If your legs start to tremble, you involuntarily grip something and push your neck into your body or close your eyes often, your body language will clearly contradict your words.

If you send confusing signals to your partner, you lose credibility, regardless if that person consciously or subconsciously perceives it. When you meet somebody you haven't seen for a long time who welcomes you with a big smile but with crossed arms and body turned towards the exit you'll also get the message that he's not as happy to see you as he claims.

Body language manifests your subconscious thinking, while words and thoughts indicate your conscious thinking. This doesn't mean your subconscious mind is "right". It is a pure emotion-driven auto responder system that relies on your previous experiences, mostly from childhood. The subconscious mind is the nest of your instincts, and regardless if it is right or wrong, at least it is honest. If you want to know the truth about how

somebody (or even you) thinks, pay more attention to body language. That doesn't lie.

People do not always say what they think or feel. If you want to get to the bottom of someone's true feelings, you have to discover what's behind the words. This book was not meant to be a body language manual, therefore I mention just the easiest red lights to detect. If you want to broaden your knowledge about body language I can recommend you to read Allan and Barbara Pease's book like *The Definitive Book of Body Language*, or *Signals*. Or Joe Navarro's *What Every Body Is Saying*.

Emotional hints can be detected most easily. If somebody is crying, presumably that person is sad. But tears can also be ones of joy, or appear along with laughter. Some tears are used to gain sympathy; so in this sense, they are deceiving. Always examine the context for an accurate assessment.

Emotions like anger, impatience or anxiety can be expressed through facial expressions and body language. Facial expressions are the easiest to read, followed by body language and body positions such as personal spacing. If a person holds his arms crossed in front of him while rhythmically tapping his foot, he probably is impatient. However, if he crosses his arms, looks downward, and awkwardly shuffles his feet, he is probably anxious or embarrassed.

How to determine a fake smile? The first sign of a true, heartfelt smile is not visible from the person's lips but the eyes. If someone is truly happy, not only will the lips curve upward but small wrinkles around the eyes also appear. When we say "cheese" for the photographer, we seem to be smiling because the zygomatic muscles are pulled backward. Still, it will be a fake smile. Showing your teeth doesn't equate with happiness in the animal world either. A monkey can be scared, happy or assailant if we take only its mouth's position. Its eyes help us make the difference between the three feelings. Same with humans. If the eyes don't laugh, the smile's isn't honest.

Oh, those telltale eyes. There are a lot of verbal expressions referring to certain nonverbal eye communication. "He looks down on me," "icy stare," "bewitching glance," "tell me in the eye," and so forth. The eyes are the mirror of the soul, some say. If you pay close attention, you can read many things from a person's eyes before they even say anything.

The eyes also can be used as a manipulative device. Women often use the up-looking technique to convince men about something. (If you wonder how does the up-looking technique look like, google Princess Diana's signature girl like glance photos. You know, where she shyly looks upwards keeping her chin down.)

It is a common misbelief that liars hesitate to maintain eye contact. Precisely because of this common notion they usually have an unbreakable gaze. What can expose them is the twitching of their mouth or scratching their ears and other out of context spasms of their limbs.

Always consider cultural differences. Some signals are universally true everywhere, but some can be badly misunderstood. So if you plan to travel, do a quick Google search for the typical praising or insulting nonverbal signs in your destination. For example, Facebook's famous signature "Like" sign (the thumbs-up image) in the Western world means, "okay," "cool," "one" or a hitchhiking signal. In Greece, however, it means, "go to hell," especially if it is moved up and down. In Japan, it means "five" or "man."

How to practice your body-language reading skills?

Choose a good, old black-and-white, mute movie in a retro theater and try to predict what will the characters do next based on the emotions they seem to have according to their mimics and gestures. Mute movies are excellent starters to observe body language because the lack of sounds forces the actors to be very expressive with their kinesthetic work. Thus their following actions are easily predictable.

When you can guess eight out of ten actions that follow in a silent movie, take it to the next level. Watch a normal movie with the sound off. This way it will be much harder to guess what the character might do next because words and special effects normally help with predictability. When you can score eight of ten correct prognostications in muted "regular" movies, you can start reading the body language of the people around you.

Read the full body picture together. Don't jump to conclusions based on one or two signals, and most importantly, don't take your guessing for granted. Reading body language is just an additional craft that can help you discover other's feelings better than only relying on your thoughts or spoken words.

Check your own body language occasionally and compare it to your conscious thoughts. Do they match? Don't forget, body language expresses the unfiltered feelings of your subconscious brain. You can learn a lot about yourself if you choose to pay attention to these subconscious signals.

Chapter 5: Stress Mess

The bus is leaving, the line in the supermarket, the salary is delayed, the traffic jam, the school, the workplace, the kids... Oh, I could go on with this list. What's common in them? They all can be stress factors.

Stress is inevitable in life and it quickly takes control over us unless we do something about it. But what can we do? We cannot eradicate stress from our lives, but we can make some changes to minimize its negative impact. Stress can be a significant obstacle since if we spend too many days influenced by stress, we will miss focusing on things that truly matter.

What is stress? Stress is your body's way of responding to any demand or threat.

When you feel threatened, your nervous system reacts by releasing stress hormones (including adrenaline and cortisol), which prepare your body for emergency action. Your blood pressure rises, your heart beats faster, your muscles tighten, and your senses become sharper. These changes increase your strength, enhance your focus, and speed up your reaction time.

What are the major causes of stress?

There are some external stressors like major life changes, school and workplace problems, financial difficulties, relationship struggles, and being overloaded in general.

Some stressors are internal, like negative self-image, worrying, perfectionism, lack of flexibility and extreme thinking.

There are different types of stress levels.

Sub-stress – This is when you try to pretend that you don't care about things, and try to convince others (and yourself) that you are not even stressed. Yet stress does affect you. You just don't realize it. Sub-stress is a very typical reaction of the "cool kids" in school: "I don't give a crap if my test grade is an F. I never did, I never will. Simply doesn't affect me...."

Optimal stress – This type of stress is helpful. It's the state when your body and mind are prepared to handle challenges. Your senses are sharp, you have optimal blood pressure to bring out the best of your potential. You are swimming in adrenaline.

If you manage to embrace this reaction of your body, you'll be able to multiply your abilities. Your body usually shifts into this phase before a race, an interview, or a presentation. You dance on thin ice, though. If not properly controlled and used, you can easily fall into the next, the supra-stress phase.

Supra-stress – This is the stress we hate. The one that paralyzes our brain, numbs our limbs and makes us feel miserable. When we face supra-stress life becomes a struggle. If we experience supra-stress often, we develop a constant fear of when another stressor might appear that we can't control.

Supra-stress can be divided into three groups: manageable, partly manageable and unavoidable.

Some sources of stress are unavoidable. You can't prevent or change stressors such as a serious illness, the death of somebody close to you, or a national crisis. In these cases, the only thing you can do is to accept them. It is not easy. But it is useless to brainstorm about things that can't be changed.

As we saw in the chapter about control, there are things that fall out of our control.

Forgiveness and acceptance can ease the pain supra-stress causes. If you forgive yourself or others for something that caused you stress, you will feel released of the stressful situation.

Partly manageable stressors are the issues that may be partly caused by us. Therefore we have a certain amount of control over it, and we can change our part in it.

For example, instead of continuously complaining about the office being a mood-killing environment, we can change it by decorating with vivid colors, flowers, and some pictures. If we don't like a colleague, we can decide whether to approach her differently from now on or to find a way how to make her disinterested in us. Worst case, we can try to change departments or jobs. The most important thing is to eradicate the stressor from our lives,

which causes the damage.

Stressors that can be eradicated should be eradicated. Why? Because even if you control your anger the stressor generates, its poison stay inside you. You might not consume your bitterness on the person who made you angry, but you will release the tension somewhere. Most likely on someone who doesn't deserve it and has nothing to do with your anger.

Manageable stressors are all the first world problems like being late or not finding milk in the supermarket. This group is the most populated, thousands and thousands of little annoyances live waiting when can they stress you out.

Stress—real or self-made—must be taken seriously because it can become the cause for physical and/or mental problems. Stress can inflict cognitive problems like memory problems, poor judgment, constant worrying, negative perspective, and concentration issues. It can also leave a mark in everyday behavioral causing eating and sleeping disorders, alcohol, drug, or cigarette usage, and other nervous habits like nail biting. The emotional symptoms of high stress are moodiness, short temper, feeling overwhelmed, inability to relax, or depression. Stress can manifest in physical symptoms such as aches and pains, diarrhea, nausea, frequent colds, and rapid heartbeat.

How to handle stress better?

First, identify your stressors. Do your own research about what pisses you off the most. What type of stress do you face most of the time? Sub-stress, optimal-stress or supra-stress? When it comes to you supra-stress issues, which are real problems which are the first world problems among them? What are those things you can't change but you still stress about it?

Social engagements can help you in reducing stress. If you share your deepest thoughts and fears your friends will feel that you trust them. It will strengthen the bond between both of you. However, don't complain too much, and don't use people just to discard yourself from stress.

Have a stress journal. I tried this method and it worked! In the process of writing the issue down, you release some tension and when you read your complaints over again a few days later, you will realize how trivial they were and how little effect they actually had in your life.

R.E.S.T.: Relax, Eat, Sleep, Train. *Mens sana in corpore sano*, a Latin phrase, is translated as “a healthy mind in a healthy body.” It is much easier to face everyday challenges and stressors if you have a personalized healthy daily routine. Experience with some sample routines and see what works for you the best. Balance R.E.S.T. in your daily routine. If you want to train only twenty minutes and relax for three hours, it’s up to you. As long as it fits into your schedule and you can meet your deadlines without stress.

Pay attention to your feelings. There is always a moment where the stress level is “optimal” then it turns into a hurry, confusion or mental blocking. Try to grasp that moment when the pressure is still optimal. It should be the time when you still think about what and how should you do to perform at your best. The minute you start whining and telling yourself that you won’t succeed, you’ll mess it up, the optimal stress zone is gone.

When you face your next challenge, focus and acknowledge the optimal stress zone. Do not hesitate. Take action immediately. Don’t let yourself fall into the jaws of supra-stress. If you can’t start what you are stressed about immediately, because, let’s say it is still not your turn to perform, keep yourself busy with something else. Go and talk to somebody, I rarely say this but check your social media accounts.

Now let’s approach stress-free life from the other side: how to learn to be patient. Impatience is a quality that often drags stressors in your life, most of the time avoidable ones.

For example, at the post office, there are two lines, so you pick the shorter one. By Murphy’s Law, the other line will move faster. So you decide to change lines. But the odds chose to laugh at you today, so from that moment, the line you previously stood in becomes faster. Then you decide to change again, and once again. Yet if you stayed in the line you originally chose, you’d already be done, walking in the sunshine, eating an ice cream. But you are not because your impatience exposed you to a higher degree of stress. It is less stressful to stay in a line than to predict after every change of places that the other line is faster.

Impatient people are often labeled being insensitive, impulsive, and even arrogant. They are frequently considered as poor decision makers because they make quick judgments or interrupt people. Some even avoid impatient

people because of their bad tempers and poor social skills.

Impatience causes stress, which can affect your mental and physical health on a long term. Impatience and anger are like drinking poison and expecting someone else to die.

You are waiting in line and the salesperson is moving with the speed of the sloths in Zootopia. You are in a rush. After some minutes of utmost torturous waiting, your nerves are tearing you up, stress hormones are ripping through your body, and your heart is beating like a delayed-action bomb. You start to imagine scenarios of the consequences of being late, praying for the line to move. But your agitation is useless. The line won't move any quicker. Whatever your wild mind could invoke, you still will be stuck behind the customer with a cartload of questions, or on the bus next to the screaming child, or at a café with your friend who continues to elaborate the same ongoing problem and you almost expire of fatal boredom.

Patience is a skill, not an innate ability but it is perfectly learnable. If you take the time to acquire this skill, your life will be much easier. You will be able to focus on the important things that are leading you towards your goals. Or you will simply breathe more freely, knowing that the odds of traffic jams, lines, and office issues don't have any power over you anymore.

How to become more patient?

First, find the triggers that flip your casual mood into an impatient rage. Would these triggers be people, certain words or affirmations? The five o'clock rush hour? If you already identified your stressors, it will be easier to select from those which stressor makes you impatient.

Determine what makes you impatient and why? It is ideal to write them down. Collect as many anxieties, frustration or tension circumstances as possible. Becoming aware of your impatience, in general, is a great start. Bringing something from the subconscious to the conscious mind helps you to take control over it.

When you feel the regular symptoms of impatience—heavy breathing, pounding heart, cloudy brain, clenching fists, agitation—take a step back. Pay attention to what exactly are you feeling. Focus on those sensations as intensively as you can and try to regulate them.

Calm your breathing. Focus on something you are looking forward to or a pleasure from your past. Tension will slowly ease. Stay in this state. Do not let impatience take control over you again. Just relax and call whomever you should inform that you'll be late.

The main idea of becoming more patient is to identify the root cause of your impatience. There is a technique called the five whys. This technique helps you to dig deeper into your problem and identify what triggered the situation with more certainty.

For example, you are at work, and you suddenly feel uncomfortable and don't even understand the reason. Maybe you won't be able to identify the reason, but your colleague next to you might point out your empty water bottle. Maybe you got so deeply focused on your work that you didn't even realize you were dehydrated, which could have caused the stress. Sometimes you don't have to dig deeply into all five questions because the answer could be as simple as being dehydrated or hungry.

Another example could relate to feeling anxious around dogs. Ask yourself the first of the five whys. Why am I anxious around dogs? Because they make me feel afraid. In fact, they make me uncomfortable enough to run away. Why? You can recall a dog attacking you when you were a kid. Why? Because you disturbed him. Why? You wanted to play with him. Why? You found him cute.

So as a kid, you liked dogs, therefore, you approached one recklessly because you didn't know that not all dogs are friendly. But today, as an adult, you can identify the reason behind all those bad memories from the past. You can consciously determine that it was just one dog out of many, and there is no reason anymore to be afraid.

The next time you see a dog, remember the conclusion you drew the previous time, and tell yourself, "I am not afraid of you. I like you." Then you will get rid of a stress factor in your life, and even make some sweet four-legged friends.

Patience training exercise: raise a flower or a small tree. Start with the state of seed or a little rooted branch. Water it as recommended, fertilize it, and take care of it. It is a good exercise to improve both your patience and your caretaking skills.

Chapter 6: A Modern Sickness

Not only overload can be stressful, but also, "underload" is a potential stressor. When you feel that torturing feeling that your day just went by ineffectively, it is a red sign that you are not challenged enough and it causes you stress.

People are genuinely lazy. Think about all the inventions we've made—the washing machine, the oven, the car, and so on. All these inventions were brilliant, and they became successful because they simplified our everyday lives, helping us out to have more time for other things. However, even if our lives are easier than our ancestors', we seem to find harder to appreciate it.

According to studies, people today are much less happy. Anxiety disorders, mental illness, and depression is much more common today than it was when everything was actually more depressing. We are obsessed with perfectionism: have the perfect body, be perfectly healthy, be perfectly happy, rich, funny, smart, witty, better – better – better. Be more productive, bring better results, post that perfect picture on social media about your perfectly nutritious breakfast, hop in your perfect car, whistling happy melodies to get in perfect time to your perfect workplace.

Who has time to comply with all these perfection ideals? Nobody. Not even those who make this as a living, promoting their perfect life on different sites. I feel that the idealized perfection we all chase in one way or another does not exist. It is fairy dust, distraction fireworks for zombies, a big fat lie.

People invest so much time and energy to achieve this utopist happiness vision where the sun always shines and bunnies jump around. Ironically, the more they invest pursuing this vision of perfection they more disappointed they get. Why? Because chasing perfection reminds them of their imperfections, inadequacy, not being good enough. For example, all the time you strive to have nicer hair you subconsciously know you do it because you think your hair is not nice enough. It doesn't hit that invisible, superficial, crappy standard that's supposed to be met.

Perfectionism is a weakness. Consumer society is built upon exploiting this

weakness. They sell you the idea that the road to happiness leads through a bigger car, better job, better-looking partner, more expensive clothing, food. The keyword is more. Certain companies, clothing, tools become status symbols and people, like sheep, start to baa echoing the message of the commercials: *“my hair will look be-e-e-tter, I will be ha-a-a-ppier.”* The problem is that you won’t. Even if you reach the hair standards, there will be thousands of other standards that you currently don’t meet.

When you fail to accomplish something, you feel sad. Or bad. Or angry. That’s okay. It is normal. The biggest problem is that you think it is not normal. You start thinking that something’s wrong with you. There must be. That girl on Instagram could make the perfect hair picture, you couldn’t. And she’s happily sipping a rainbow unicorn cocktail in some club called The Billionaire while you sit at home cleaning the cage of your parrot. Not only are you not “perfect” enough, you’re also sad and boring, while everyone else out there is awesome. You can’t help but think that life is even worse than you thought it to be – and that’s it: the cocktail for depression, anxiety and unhappiness is ready to be served.

You don’t realize that whatever you see on social media is not real, at least not as real as you think. Social media is like a camera set on a great height of, say, a hundred meters, and only takes a photo when you reach that height. Everything that is below a hundred meters gets unnoticed. If someone scrolls through your pictures, they will only see those moments when you were at the hundred-meter height. He will know only your high points but will compare them with everything between his zero-to-hundred-meter heights. He knows everything about his memories but only your best ones. To him, his one hundred percent memory package will consist of everything, but your one hundred percent memory package to him will be all one-hundred-meter heights. It is almost impossible to him not to think that something’s wrong with him.

He’ll feel bad about his inferiority. When he realizes he feels bad, he’ll feel bad about feeling bad – in commercial Lala Land, nobody feels bad, after all. What is the way out from this spiral of insanity?

The solution is very simple and very difficult at the same time. Embrace the pain and care only about what truly matters. The truth is, there is no happiness without pain. There is no excitement without boredom. There is no

success without failure.

Have you ever been very anxious to do something right? Let's say, to write an essay right. However, the more you struggled to do a good job, the more stuck you felt and the harder it was to live up to your own expectations? Whereas when you didn't care too much, words somehow came out of the tip of your pen, and you did a great job without wanting to do a great job. It happened to me several times. The more I cared, the harder it was.

Is this the answer? Caring less? After an exhaustive period of self-examination, I concluded: yes. This is the answer. Every time I was desperate about something, I just fell farther and farther from getting it. When I didn't care, it just fell into my lap. Perhaps it really didn't, but I wasn't stressed about it because I didn't care.

I fell very deep in the pond of minimalism. I started reading and implementing minimalist rules in my life to help myself caring less. For example, I gave away most of my stuff – mostly those things that served only the purpose of a fake status. I started budgeting to not spend the money I didn't have on things I didn't need to impress people I didn't respect. Long story short, I started changing my values.

I started to value the less instead of more. I started saying no instead of yes. I stopped reaching for confirmation on social media and so on.

Did it hurt? Hell yeah. I felt horrible when I threw out some stuff I worked a month for to purchase. I felt really bad after refusing someone's request to have an extra hour in my life I could take under my control. I felt really neglected and uncool when the social media saliva waterfall stopped falling on me.

Changes hurt. Changing old habits hurt. It is perfectly normal. You're acting against your old values. The subconscious brain perceives this as an attack against the cherished old, well-accustomed habits and tries to annihilate the danger. How? By sending that pain back to you. Loss, fear, anxiety, guilt – your subconscious brain has an entire arsenal of negative emotions to protect your shitty values. Don't forget that these painful emotions and feelings are responsible for humankind's survival. All the pain we felt during our evolution helped us to become more aware, careful, stay healthy or ultimately alive. Only in the past few decades has it become so popular to repress

negative emotions.

Being positive is a good thing, but being extremely positive is harmful. Extreme positivity and the avoidance of the natural negative make your life miserable. Extreme positivity is the commercial Lala Land.

There is a great power in embracing pain. The biggest character-shaping moments in your life are the negative ones. Trying to avoid them equals trying to avoid improvement. I can't emphasize enough how normal some negative emotions are. Don't get stuck in them, but don't try to avoid them either. Avoiding pain is painful. Avoiding struggle is a struggle.

Let's get real here for a moment. Your life will end. My life will end, too. There are limited things we can care about, or go for, or value during our lifetime. And while all this might seem obvious, in the impulse of the moment it is not that easy to prioritize and focus your thoughts on those things that are really worth your time. It might take a lifetime to learn to find the gems around you and ignore all the rest.

1. Don't wait for the "right moment" or the "perfect conditions" to start what you want. Do it now.
2. Keep a journal of your real values. Pin them above your head to read them every morning.
3. Organize your living area to mirror your core values.
4. Exclude time and energy vampires from your life like TV and inappropriate people.
5. Focus on those activities that you are passionate about. Don't fall to "current trend" stupidities.
6. You call it multitasking, I call it a distraction. Focus on one thing at a time.
7. Allow yourself to be "lost." Turn off your cell phone, turn off the Wi-Fi, and dedicate all your attention to what or who matters the most to you.
8. Drink water. Do you? Drink more.

9. Be grateful for what you have instead of complaining about what you don't.

Caring about too many valueless things, trying to repress pain and live in the constant fear of inadequacy is a modern sickness. You can't change the way the world works, that's something out of your control. You can, however, control its effect on you.

You can choose your values better. You can start caring less and throwing out everything that doesn't add value to your life. Spoiler alert: pain is not one of them.

Chapter 7: Self-Knowledge

Self-Awareness

“Who am I? What’s my purpose? How can I become a better...?”

These questions circulate in our minds like a wild bird in a cage. Weirdly enough, one day we feel we know the answers, the next day we question them, and on the third day we’re totally lost again. But in fact there is nothing weird about it. Our brain is evolutionarily developed to question everything, including itself. The constant questioning, however, leads to some distress in life.

I don’t think there is a clear and long-term answer for the questions above because we change so often. If you asked me who I was and what my purpose on this Earth was fifteen years ago, I would have answered, “I’m the girlfriend of my (now) ex-boyfriend, and my purpose is to get married to him and grow chickens and farm together.” Today this answer sounds hilarious to me – the chicken part much less than the others.

Psychologists proved that the stories we tell ourselves about who we are seriously affect our behaviors therefore our success. Be it in a positive or negative sense. If you believe that you are smarter, you actually get better results in mental challenges, tests and in arguments. Once I gave my grandpa two minty pills for his headache. After he confirmed me that he feels much better I told him I gave him Tic Tacs.

Our beliefs have power over us. Precisely this is the reason why we should be aware of them and learn to question them over time.

Zen Buddhism differentiates two types of mind: the thinking mind and the observing mind. The first type is the voice in your head that relentlessly chatters and blabs. Even if you decide to meditate and quiet your thoughts, it still will project some pictures and thoughts. The thinking mind never sleeps: it chatters to you when you stand in line, when you’re about to sleep, sometimes even in your sleep. Did you ever notice this? Yes? Then you did it with your observing mind.

The observing mind is the one you should use to keep track of your thoughts and actions. Unfortunately, people don't use their observing minds. Until I read about Zen Buddhism, I didn't even know it existed. I didn't call it my observing mind, mostly just better judgment or my right mind. Usually I wasn't in my right mind. When someone cries out to you, saying, "What were you thinking? You're not in your right mind!" that person actually means, "Hey, doofus! Please check on your thinking mind with your observing mind because it's running wild!"

When the thinking mind gets out of control, the observing mind can't do much about it. Have you ever asked someone for help on how to channel your anger? "What can I do to stop feeling angry?"

The answer is, you can't stop it. Once the thinking mind is unchained, that horse is gone. What you can do is to not relate with your emotions. Zen teaches that instead of telling yourself "I am angry," say, "I feel anger." You are not the human form of anger, you were just poisoned by this emotion. Making this tiny thought switch, you can separate yourself from the emotion.

Your emotions pop up from your subconscious mind, you can't control them. But you can control how you manifest them. As soon as you become aware of the mess your thinking mind is about to cause, you can catch yourself in the moment, accept that you are angry, or afraid or anxious, and consciously act against them. If your thinking mind tells you, "don't do it, don't do it," then just do it. (Unless you're standing at the edge of a cliff and you're about to jump. Then don't do it.) Choosing to acknowledge your fears and worries and act anyway will help you grow guts and strengthen character. You'll also become in control again.

Separate your emotions from your identity. You are not your emotions. The more you choose to focus your emotions, the more powerful they become. Even if you focus getting rid of negative emotions, the harder you try the more presence they'll have in your life.

What can you do then? Nothing besides accepting that negative thoughts and emotions are part of life. You can't get rid of them, but you can let them go. The quickest way to let them go is to stop identifying with them. Change negative statements like "I hate my job" to "I'm feeling hatred towards my job." Or, "My co-worker is a donkey," to "My co-worker is not a donkey but

I often have the feeling that he is.” This way you gain a verbal and mental distance from the problems. You will realize that your rephrased negative statements are suggesting a temporary state instead of an unchangeable fact.

Self-awareness arises when you realize that you have two minds, a thinking one and an observing one, but you can have control only over the latter.

Self-Discipline

If the upgraded version of Toyota is Lexus, the advanced version of patience is self-discipline. Well-founded self-discipline can grant you long-term success in all aspects of life.

It doesn't matter if you wish to be slimmer, a better football player, or an acknowledged performer, self-discipline is the number one quality you need to achieve them. It is the main trait you need to accomplish goals, have a full life, and be happy in the long-run.

Studies show that people with greater self-control are happier because they can handle difficult situations better. Crisis periods are shorter in their lives, and they are able to make positive decisions more easily and rationally. Also, they are not driven by emotions.

Again, self-discipline is a learned quality, just like patience and so many others. It doesn't come naturally, but with perseverance and concentration, it can be developed. Offering great long-term benefits, self-discipline makes your life happier, and you'll make wiser, healthier choices. You'll learn to control your emotions, so when you make a decision, it will be less influenced by them.

What's the difference between patience and self-discipline?

Mark's friends called him to say they were running late and wouldn't make it to his place sooner than 6:00 p.m. Mark was a patient guy, so he said okay, no problem. He sat down and looked around the table. There were lots of sweets and sandwiches prepared for the friendly afternoon. He thought he might eat one. It was delicious, so he ate another one and another. Even though he knew he had a weight problem, he couldn't stop eating to make time pass and boredom to go away.

What's the lesson in this simple story? Mark had developed the quality of patience, so he didn't argue with the friends being delayed. But he couldn't stop eating even though he wasn't that hungry. He lacked self-control, which is the base of self-discipline.

Practice self-control. The easiest way to start is to apply the rule "out of sight, out of mind." Self-control is all about acknowledging your temptations and refusing to let them control you. Temptation can be a bad eating habit, as in Mark's case, or the inability to switch off the phone when you're in the middle of a major project.

If you exercise self-control, your conscious mind will be powerful enough to keep you from these temptations, even if they are in front of you. However, I'd suggest you exclude them from your environment in the beginning.

Mia had weight issues, so one day she decided to start a very strict diet. She could eat a low-carb meal only once a day, and drank some protein shakes during the day. She admired how self-disciplined she had become to reach this higher level of self-control. But at the same time, she became moody, she often lost focus, and her ability to concentrate decreased noticeably. Basically, she lost control of everything but the diet.

Self-discipline shakes when your Maslow pyramid crumbles. Balance your eating and drinking habits for better self-control. The right kind of nutrition is essential to be self-disciplined. If the base of your Maslow pyramid is shaking, you won't be able to fill the expectations at the higher levels of the pyramid. In other words, if your basic human needs are not satisfied, you won't be able to patiently follow your self-realization and other type of higher purposes. For example, the sensation of hunger or thirst makes you moody, pessimistic, and you'll have a weakened sense of self-control in all areas of life.

Choose healthy snacks like seeds, fruit, or a protein bar. All you need is to provide the necessary nutrition to keep your brain on track. If your blood sugar is regulated, you'll have better focus, and you'll go on through your day in a balanced, more productive way.

Remember, being comfortable is not primary. If you decide to change old, ingrained habits, a sensation of discomfort will inevitably hit you. Trying to preserve the status quo is a natural reaction from your brain. It doesn't like

changes, the comfort zone is the normal state and everything that threatens it, the brain tries to eliminate. If it sends you the feeling of discomfort or pain, your brain is betting on you stopping to change and get back to normal.

However, if you are persistent enough, and consciously use the new methods, your brain will begin to accept these habits and create a new comfort zone. If you don't give up at the first bump, you'll eventually develop better habits, in this case controlled, disciplined actions.

Habits don't stick quickly and easily therefore if you lose control and act without being disciplined forgive yourself for that. When you decide to do something differently, change won't come instantly. You will have some low-points and make some stumbles. You will have some outbursts even in your disciplined life, you're not a machine after all. Self-discipline's purpose is not to turn you into Buddha himself, but to help you to think clearer, control your life and choose your battles better.

Learning to say no to others is where self-awareness starts. Learning to say no to yourself is where self-discipline starts.

Sometimes I contemplate about the very visible similarities of the antiquity and today's culture. The Ancient Romans lived in hedonism, just like we are encouraged to live. In this age of liberty and libertinism, we often hear things like "do it only if gives you pleasure" or "don't do it if it is uncomfortable." Through this brainwashing, we get the idea that things should come easily in life, and if something doesn't, then it's not for us.

We reach for easy highs instead of the life-long pleasure of something lengthy and difficult. The temporary feeling of enjoyment by watching a movie in the cinema will fade away the next day. Meanwhile, holding your college degree in your hands and looking at your parent's proud face is a memory you'll remember and cherish for decades to come.

It is up to you if you want to live your life through temporary pleasures, or working disciplined to reach some major milestones. What comes easy, goes easy. Taking life's hard way doesn't exclude the momentary fun factors. But if you live for present pleasures only, it is absolute reality that you'll never accomplish anything big.

Want to achieve something? Dump the excuses, step onto the right path *today*

and unwaveringly commit yourself to staying on it!

“Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishment.”

- Jim Rohn

Chapter 8: Don't Attract, Act

Did it ever happen that you wanted something badly, and somehow you got it but you really didn't understand how? The only explanation you could find was that you "attracted" it with the power of your thought.

A friend shared an experience with me. In 2015, Ana was working for a small subsidiary of a big recruiting company. When she was on a business trip in Spain, Ana met the boss of the bosses at their company. They engaged in a good conversation exchanging opinions about how could the company work better, how could they have more clients. Seeing Ana's enthusiasm and devotion to the company, the big boss offered Ana a bet. The boss told Ana if she enrolled a certain number of clients for the recruiting company, she would gift her a computer as a reward. The woman saw how Ana's ancient computer was giving her headaches and slowed down her progress.

Ana took the bet seriously and was highly motivated to work hard. The target number of clients Ana was given had never been reached before by anyone in their small subsidiary company. But Ana was unstoppable, "I will be the first then", she thought. It was not about the computer anymore, she wanted to achieve the number for the company's sake.

In the following weeks, she bumped into people who either were interested in her offer or knew somebody who would be. Long story short, Ana reached her goal and recruited more clients than she was asked to. However her direct boss, maybe out of envy, fired her. Ana was so devastated and overwhelmed about having to find a new job that she totally forgot about the bet.

Almost a year later, her old computer was very close to its death, and she was googling to get a new one. Being short on money, she was giving up all hopes to get a new computer, she was browsing for used ones. "If only a miracle would happen," she cried. The next moment Ana received a message. It was the big boss of her previous workplace with whom she made the bet. The boss told her she was in the city and asked about meeting up to buy Ana the promised computer.

Ana was speechless, she never ever, in her wildest dreams would have

thought that the big boss even remembers her. In fact, she even had her doubts that the boss was ever serious when they made the bet. Nevertheless, in the afternoon, she got richer not only with a computer but also a job offer as a senior recruiter for headquarters of the recruiting company. Therefore, as the irony of destiny, she became the boss of her previous direct boss who fired her out of envy. Ana didn't take revenge. She focuses on doing her job well at the company — she is successful, loves her job, and respects her boss.

This is a true story. I even saw Ana's computer otherwise I wouldn't have believed her myself.

The human mind is truly tremendous. It has the power to create the greatest companies in the world but also can be used to destroy. Whatever you think about creates your reality. That's why I always warn myself, "Be careful of what you think, because one day it will come true."

Those effects you experience in your outside world have their origin in your inner world. In other words, all the circumstances of your life are the consequence of your beliefs, and this is true for every aspect of your life. Your thoughts affect the state of your health, relationships, and finances. Look around you. Whatever you see—good or bad—is the result of your mental creation.

If you don't like what you see or experience, change your thoughts. It is this simple. People think that if they change their hairstyle, their life will also change. Nope. True change happens inside the head, not on the outside.

How can you become more conscious about your thoughts?

Most of us go through the day with very little notice of our thoughts. We usually don't examine how our mind works. We are not aware of what causes fear in us, what is the small talk we say to ourselves during the day. We eat, work, shop, plan, talk, play, flirt but hardly ever examine our thoughts about these actions.

Do this exercise every day: for a few minutes examine your thoughts about certain actions you are taking. You know, like, "Now I'm going to the kitchen to pick a soda," or, "I'm so angry about the payment delay at my company, I attract this kind of misfortune." Pay attention to your thoughts related to everyday actions just as much as on the significant things.

What you focus your mind on, that's what you'll attract. I'm sometimes skeptical of the whole law-of-attraction idea, although I can't deny, some things come to us in inexplicable ways.

I think what we call the law of attraction has to do more with self-awareness. When we're in a bad mood we really don't look around ourselves. We are so gloomy and consumed with our own problems that we miss certain stuff along the road. We don't look outwards, only inwards. That's why we don't "attract" anything good with a negative mindset – because the mind is closed and clouded.

When we are carefree, living in the present, full of hopes, we find that dime in the street, we'll notice that call for a job, we'll participate in that competition. And guess what? Just by opening up, participating and being kind and likable, we'll attract the things in our lives. It's not some giant conspiracy of the Universe, it's all you just acting differently.

Ana didn't get her computer and dream job because she "attracted" them. She got them because she was open at the right time with the right person. She could have participated in the business trip in doom and gloom, being consumed with her financial problems, do the necessary minimal work and go home without networking with anyone. If she did that, I bet she could have prayed for the computer gifting odds day and night without getting anything.

The power of thought in Zoeland is nothing more and nothing less than what you physically bring out of it.

I have a friend who is obsessed with the law of attraction. He read all the books by Rhonda Byrnes, he practiced the laws diligently, but he got the total wrong end of it. Recently his favorite pastime is to attract buses. I kid you not. Thanks to him I got familiar with the law of attraction in the first place. One time, years ago, we were going somewhere. Suddenly he stopped, lifted his pointing finger as if a eureka idea hit him, clenched his eyes and struggled so profoundly to concentrate that his forehead got more wrinkles than a shar-pei. "Did you just fart or something?" I asked.

"No, he replied, I just channeled the Universe to send us the bus right now."

I was not interested in self-help back then. In fact, I was more earth-bound than the wildest stockbroker on Wall Street. You can imagine my disbelief and bewilderment, especially after I made sure he actually meant what he said. I took a few safe-distance steps and patiently waited for the bus that showed up a few minutes later. (“My negative thoughts chased it away. That’s why we had to wait for so long.”)

My friend achieved one thing. Even if he didn’t teleport a bus for us in the next thirty seconds using his mental Jedi powers, he made me curious about what on Earth could turn him into the Obi-Wan of busses. So, I bought *The Secret*, my very first self-help book. Actually, now that I think it through, he is responsible for me writing this book right now. Without him and his bus, I might have never opened my mind to write in this genre. However, I always wanted to become a writer. Was this a huge conspiracy of the Universe and I was still blindfolded in front of its power?

Or was it rather me, catching an interest in the topic, and while digesting it with a pinch of salt, I work – and read – my ass off to be able to put my own self-help thoughts together in a book and deliver it to you? I leave this question open for you to answer.

“Weak is he who permits his thoughts to control his actions; strong is he who forces his actions to control his thoughts.” Og Mandino

Your brain can focus on one thing at once. Make that focus point a constructive, positive one. To change the external conditions, you first have to change the internal ones. Train your conscious mind to stay open, be success oriented, rather than seeking what’s not good. Keep your mind busy with good expectations, act upon them and you’ll see that you’ll attract good things. Not due to some cosmic conspiracy but yourself.

If you learn to act in your best interest, you won’t need to murmur spells to attract good results. One thing you should believe in is the fact that you deserve whatever you’re acting upon to get. I don’t mean feel entitled, I mean what I say – feel worthy of getting what you wish for. Why? If you feel unworthy of something, you won’t be able to act in your best interest to get it. You’ll think that your object (or subject) of desire is too good, too difficult for you to have – and badabumm, the “Universe” will never give it to you, simply because you gave up on acting resiliently to get it.

If you want to get a job in design and feel worthy of that position, you'll polish your resume, you'll promote yourself fearlessly, you'll send out your curriculum from the smallest to the biggest companies, you'll constantly work and improve your design skills. One lazy Friday morning you'll wake up and get an interview appointment from a company –possibly from your dream company. Was it the Universe? Sure, because you spilled your chances around in the Universe. You acted in your best interest and the Universe replied.

Now let's see the other version. You want to work for a great company, but you don't feel worthy of it. (Feeling worthy doesn't equal feeling good enough. Someone can feel worthy of a position even if he knows he isn't good enough yet because he knows he has all the motivation, diligence and creativity to improve and hit any standard.) Eighty percent of people outtalk themselves from taking action at the very beginning. "I'm not worthy to be a designer, I'll just go to this... McDonald's on the corner."

Twenty percent of the defeatist group won't admit to themselves that they are unworthy. They will aim so high instead to consider their goal unreachable. "I would be a good designer, but there is only one place I'd like to go to work, and getting there is impossible." Fifteen percent of them will end up at the corner McDonald's without taking further action, too.

Five percent of the defeatist group will send a sheepish resume to the big-deal design company. But their resume will be so average that no one will notice it. Since deep down they don't feel worthy, they won't highlight any mind-blowing skill and won't show real dedication. They send the resume to have a well-founded reason to complain and prove themselves that indeed they were right. "I tried everything I could... I knew it was impossible to get a job." Then they sorrowfully walk down to the corner McDonald's, just to realize that the jobs are filled even there with the other ninety-five percent of defeatists. They conclude that life is unfair and they are not good enough even for McDonald's. (I have nothing against people working in McDonald's. I worked there for a very short while when I was seventeen. I got fired for eating more food than the allowed quota for workers. I couldn't help it, I felt like a hungry mouse that fell into a cheese factory depot.)

If you believe in the law of attraction, please ignore my skepticism. Go on with attracting whatever you want: buses, money, your better half with all

your might. Please add to your attraction some constructive actions, too. You know, it is like the lottery – the more tickets you buy, the bigger your chances become. We have this saying in Hungary, “Help yourself and God will help you, too.” I think this saying can be applied to the law of attraction too, just change God to the Universe.

Chapter 9: Fail For The Better

He who ran away from his family early, lied about his age to become an ambulance car driver, who was fired from a newspaper for “lacking imagination and having no good ideas”, who started and failed a cartoon series in Kansas City, who started several other businesses and failed, who drew an excellent mouse character and got it rejected because it scared off women, who lost his mother in a carbon dioxide accident in a house built to offer her a better life, whose workmen left to fight the Second World War, that transformed his studio into a tank repair artillery, who had a four-million-dollar debt, who struggled to open his first funfair for family entertainment was Walt Disney. A person we regard as the symbol of ultimate success.

Stuff happens. Despite our best attempts, failure and pain invades our lives from time to time. It doesn't matter how self-disciplined, focused, or positive we are, failure is an inevitable component of life.

In fact, it would be a bad system if it kept you from failure. It would prevent you from meeting your greatest teacher. True greatness is the multitude of tiny or big failures. If you know someone who is very good at what she does, she went through a lot of failures to get there. If you feel that you are inferior in something to someone, it means you probably didn't get so many face-palms from failure as the other person did.

When you learned to talk, you mispronounced a cartload of words, you babbled and sometimes confused words and meanings. Still, you didn't give up until you learned to talk. As a child, you never thought that talking maybe wasn't for you and never said a word again.

Giving up and looking at failures with a bad eye is a non-childlike approach. Sooner or later your life comes a point where you simply would do anything to avoid failure – especially in public.

Ironically, most of your failures come from bad standards you set yourself. For example, if you say “I want to be the smartest on my team”, that sets you into a fragile position where you lose control over the situation. You can't

control how much Jim knows or studies, or how talented Jack is at presentations. You'll be anxious, constantly in a fight with the world, depending on others. You chose a bad standard to measure up to. If you choose "I want to improve my presentation skills from good enough to very good," you'll be able to reach your standard without failing, regardless of the performance of others. You'll be in control.

Set your standards within your "control zone" to stop exposing yourself to avoidable failures.

Failure is a feeling that we interpret more or less the same way. It is that devastating feeling of loss, anxiety, and sadness. The difference is how much time each of us needs to get over a failure.

Some of us appear to magically deal with it and will even smile the next day. Many toss and turn for weeks, contemplating about why it happened. Others feel the need to talk about it all the time; yet in contrast, some don't say a word with an apathetic stare. Sometimes people become angry if you try to help them after a failure.

Generally speaking, there are four failure-handling archetypes:

The silent ones: Those who never share anything with others but process all the bitterness inside. If somebody else has an issue, they are good listeners, as long as they don't have to say anything. In a relationship it is very difficult to help a silent one because they rarely open up.

The martyrs: "Why me again? I am so unfortunate. Poor me, please have pity on me." In some regard, they are the opposite of the silent ones because they talk a lot. The more people they tell how ill-fated they are, the better they feel—temporarily. In a relationship, it would seem to be easy to help them since they tell everything about their issue. The problem appears when the partner realizes that the martyr doesn't want to get over the problem but rather to discuss it repeatedly. Being and staying a victim is almost a must for them.

The interrogators: This type is quite rare and is a mish-mash of the first two categories. When they have a problem, they try to get over it by asking a lot of questions from the people around them. Interrogators ask their questions in a way to find out if their partner had experienced something similar in their life. If so, they try to come up with solutions for their partner, but in fact, they

are seeking answers for themselves.

The aggressors: They live by the rule “the best defense is a good offense.” If they face failure, they become irritated, and Heavens have mercy on those who try to help them. They channel their disappointment by being rude and refusing any help. It is not a good solution to give them space either because then they’ll feel ignored and neglected which also fuels their aggression. It is just how they deal with frustration.

These four types are loss-handling mechanisms of different personality types. None of them is better or worse than the other. None of them deals faster or slower with failure. The subconscious use of these patterns extends the length of failure management. If we know about these patterns, we can identify which group we belong to and reduce the toss-and-turn time of overcoming a failure. When we can recognize what our pattern is, we can shorten the time of suffering because of failure and channel our attention towards more productive goals – like to learn from the failure.

If you are a silent one, and you know that keeping it all in just makes the suffering more intense as it poisons your day, find someone you can talk to in confidence. Or read an inspirational book or go running. The main thing is to break the habit; you will have to experiment to find what works for you. There is an app called Talk Space where for as little amount of money as one hundred something dollars you can get monthly access to talk with a licensed psychologist as many times as you want. You can exchange messages every day if necessary. The app is absolutely safe to use, your data is confidential. If you need to talk to someone who doesn’t know you personally, it can be a good option.

Martyrs should channel their urge to talk in a different direction. Talk about your problems once – but for the sake of seeking a solution, not for the sake of complaining. As soon as you start the self-pity part, consciously change topics. Ask your friends to help you in this endeavor by drawing your attention to whenever you complain. You can “organize” complain-free days for yourself. Commit to consciously stop yourself from complaining to have twenty-four, forty-eight or seventy-two or more hours. Whenever you complain, put five bucks into a jar. Commit to giving the amount in the jar to some charitable purpose you don’t like. If you hate dogs, give the money for a foundation for dogs. If you hate Republicans, give the money to the

Republican Party – or vice versa, if you hate Democrats, give the money to them. The point is to commit giving your money to someone or something you hate. You'll be highly motivated not to collect many fives in that jar. How can you achieve that? By not complaining.

The interrogators are on a good path to solving their problems. They ask questions and seek an answer to them. Their problem mostly is that they can't stay in the center of the conversation. They feel the need to drag the attention from their failure to others' failures. They feel ashamed. Pay attention to the advice and experiences you gather. Remember the useful advice you learned and contemplate your new attitude about your failure. You're not alone in your failure. Everybody fails.

For the aggressors, the best way to handle failure is to channel their anger into doing something that doesn't directly involve people, such as an individual sports activity. Usually, when aggressors spit hellfire on somebody to get through disappointment, they will still have to deal with the feeling of remorse. The best course of action is not to replace a problem with another - as switching failure to remorse but to seek alternative anger-reducing methods.

Generally speaking, you shouldn't take failures personally. Just because this time you didn't succeed, it doesn't make you a failure. In fact, this kind of event helps you to become more persistent, self-disciplined, and wise. This is why it is crucial to approach it analytically.

Ask yourself these questions. Why did you fail? What actions might have brought a better outcome? Was the failure completely beyond your control? After gathering the facts, take a step back and ask: what did I learn from this?

Sometimes we are not so affected by failure but rather by what others might say about our misfortune. Let it go. Those who will identify you by your failures are insignificant people.

Don't try to hide your failure. A brave step of acceptance can bring you more respect than trying to sweep it under the carpet.

People never learn as much from their successes as they learn from their failures. An all-time favorite example of mine is about Thomas Edison and his more than 10,000 attempts to invent the light bulb. He said: "I have not

failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work. I am not discouraged because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward."

Success doesn't come for free. But it tastes so much better when we reach it. So embrace failure, make peace with it, and learn and grow.

Make peace with your previous failures if they still haunt you. Go to a place where you experienced a significant failure a few years ago.

It can be your old school, a sports center, a workplace... I personally went back to a Burger King restaurant to a specific table where I had my very first breakup. When this event happened, I thought it was the end of the world, and I'll never be okay again.

For a few years, I was avoiding that place like plague. But one day I decided to go back. I bought a burger and sat at the table. I was expecting to feel some sort of cathartic moment of liberation, but I felt nothing. I was long over it. I just nonsensically clung to the pain and deception. Going back, having this realization was the moment when I could let go of my personal failure for good, keeping the lessons and move on.

Facing again a place where you had a negative shock in the past can be sobering. As you see that nothing is left there that remembers your pain, shame, or disappointment you can heal. To leave the past and pain behind for good, write on a paper every bad, sad, infuriating, unjust, painful, damaging feeling and thought you had at the place where you are. Tear the paper apart, burn it if you can do it safely, bury it, throw rocks at it, anything that will release you from any tension you still have.

When you're done, leave.

Failure is something you shouldn't depress about for too long. However, there are other events, not necessarily failures but rather changes that you also need to accept, and let go to move on with your life.

Jess and Jane were best friends since childhood. They shared their toys as kids and even went to the same high school. During their college years, they grew apart, got to know different people, and simply didn't have the same interests anymore. They forced to keep up the friendship for old time's sake, but they felt awkward around each other. They only shared the same

nostalgic stories each time they met for a coffee. When one of them started to share information about her new life, the other was non-supportive and judgmental. They were not the same people anymore.

As time passes, we change and grow. Sometimes we try to cling to the past, but it is often just a waste of energy and a fear of moving on. Especially if we leave behind something or someone who made us feel good in the past. We fear whether the future could hold something at least as good for us.

If you create tunnel vision for yourself because you're afraid of the unknowable future, it will only hold you back. Try to recall a situation when you finally said, "I don't care anymore!" How did you feel after letting that go? Was it liberating?

These are examples of the typical factors that hold you back from letting go of a relationship.

Growing apart from somebody – Just as in the previous story, sometimes we evolve away from each other's core values.

People who affect you negatively – Some people have a bad influence on you. Sometimes you cannot detect it directly, but if after meeting with them you continuously feel depressed and weakened for days, it is not a good sign.

Not letting go of an old grudge – Somebody has hurt you, cheated on you, or mistreated you. It was quite unfair, but holding on to it will harm only one person—you. It will keep you away from present opportunities and happiness.

Your needs and goals changed – You change just like the seasons, the moon, and nature changes. It is natural. So stop feeling guilty if something you wanted four years ago doesn't apply anymore. Acknowledging the need to start over requires real power.

What are you holding on to that's holding you back? What's the first step you need to take to let it go?

Do you feel frustrated about something? Cry it out—loudly and openly. If you keep it in, it can manifest in physical illness. Engage in a new activity. Learn a new skill or just introduce a physical habit into your life. Turning your focus to something new and pleasurable can build the bridge between a

bitter past and the promising future.

Are you angry? Don't try to avoid this feeling; rather, feel it fully. If you try to hide it or keep it in, it will burst out inevitably and may hurt innocent people. Then remind yourself that nothing lasts forever and neither will anger. Try to understand what triggered this anger and where your responsibility lies.

If you feel it would give you a peace of mind, express your thoughts about your anger to the person who triggered it. But only after the red fog disappeared, otherwise nothing constructive will come out of it.

Are past relationships holding you back? Try to unromanticize the bond and face the facts. Make an unbiased list of good and bad things you experienced in this relationship. It will help you to see that more things weigh on the negative side, and that's why the relationship ended in the first place.

There are always bigger fish... and a better love. Don't make the mistake of convincing yourself that nobody will love you as much as the other person did. Do your best to love yourself as much as possible. When you learn to love yourself, you won't need the emotional validation from others so badly.

Know that when the rain is over the sun will always come out. If you know that something good will follow you'll let go much easier.

My dad told me a story when I was lovesick. In ancient India, a girl asked her father to give her a gift for her birthday that would raise her spirit in times of sorrow, and bring her back to Earth where she is head over heels. The father acknowledged her request. For her birthday, she received a medal on which four words were engraved: *"it won't last forever."*

Final Thoughts

In the bubble of life we create boosted by the media, things come easy, people are nice and teeth are white. In real life, however, you have to work and suffer and endure disappointment to be free and happy. Something you suffered more for gives you more pleasure than something you got without effort. If you get something easily, you don't appreciate it. If you can't feel appreciation for it, you won't feel happy having it. You'll take it for granted, and therefore you might lose it.

The things we feel the most secure in our lives about are the ones that we can lose the easiest. We won't pay attention to them – we only pay attention to the things we feel insecure about. If you lose something, you usually won't take responsibility for losing it because of your own negligence. You'll find a scapegoat. For a short while you'll feel okay explaining your loss as someone else's fault. But this attitude won't solve your problem. No one else will solve your problem. You'll feel ignored and unimportant, filling your life with easy solutions (buying food, clothes, a yacht) but those are easy gains. They won't make you happy and you'll take them for granted. Then, you'll feel bad again, dissatisfied, and if your easy gain goes away, you'll find a culprit.

I call this vicious circle the happiness paradox – things that are supposed to make you happy make you even more miserable. This boomerang effect of the happiness paradox stays in your life until you are unaware of it. You don't take responsibility for your own actions and don't embrace the pain in your life.

Pain is the highway of improvement. If you want to become more resilient, more experienced, wiser, smarter, more persistent, have more confidence and so on, all these qualities lie on the other side of Painland. You have to cross these hostile lands first. Feeling pain just for the sake of pain won't help you either. Feeling pain by itself won't give you the insight you think it would, you will not become more knowledgeable about the mysteries of the depth of the human soul, and eventually, fall into the well of eternal happiness. There is no such rule that if you suffered enough, you consumed all your suffering

credits and only good things will follow, partially because you earned it, partially because there is no more pain for you to experience.

There is always more pain. Rich people suffer because they are rich. Poor suffer because they are poor. Singles suffer because they are alone. People in relationships suffer because of their partner's weirdness. People who don't have a job suffer from idleness, those having a job suffer because of their job. There is always more pain out there, but there is also improvement in pain. For example, I have money problems. Bill Gates also has money problems – only he has better money problems than I do. We have to accept that we can't avoid pain in our lives. The only thing we can wish for is to have different problems as we go through the learning curve of Painland. Accept that we can't really avoid pain, what's more, experience and motivation gained through pain leads us to better problems.

For example, when my first relationship ended, I was devastated. My ex-boyfriend, as it turned out, cheated on me several times. Somewhere in my agony and denial, I promised myself that I'd never go through the same pain again. As months and years passed, I identified new mistakes that I made in that relationship and worked relentlessly on my character to correct them, to fulfill the promise I made myself. I have been living happily in a relationship for more than two years, preparing to make the next step. We are able to talk about our differences. Our biggest problem usually is who pays for the coffee and whether we cut the potatoes into circles or diced.

In my first relationship, I was convinced being with someone simply wasn't for me. I was independent, proud and a real jerk of a go-getter. I constantly fought with my ex, trying to outmatch him, being better, earning more... playing pool better. I was competitive as hell – and I was better. Technically I castrated him. Of course, he went to find a girl for himself instead of a wild horse. Did I need the pain I went through to realize all of this? Sure I did. Did I become a better person after? Yes. Was it worth going through that pain in the end? More than anything. I felt bad back then, but today I'm very grateful for all that suffering because it showed me a better way of living. As soon as I took responsibility for my own mistakes, and embraced pain to improve myself, all my rage disappeared.

When you take responsibility, everything around you will change as magic. You'll suddenly stop feeling that you're a victim exposed to your

circumstances. You won't feel anymore that things just happen and you're totally out of control having no power over them. Suddenly you'll realize that the key to creating the life you want to live was in your hand the whole time. You just missed noticing it because you were too busy finding other keys around yourself. The key to improvement lies within you. And it is never too late to use it.

I believe in the law of change. Everything changes around you—the seasons, the environment. And you are a part of nature, so you also change. Since change is inevitable, why not change for the better? It's in your hands. It's your choice.

Be honest with yourself, take responsibility for your life, take control, embrace failure and pain and live your days as if they would be your last!

I really believe in you!

Yours truly,

Zoe

P.s.: If you have some questions please don't hesitate to contact me on zoemckey@gmail.com. I welcome any kind of constructive opinion as well. I'd like to know how can I help better so please share your ideas with me. If you'd like to get helpful tips from me on a weekly basis, visit me at www.zoemckey.com and subscribe. Thank you!

Reference

Books:

Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence*. London: Bloomsbury. 2010

Manson, Mark. *The subtle art of not giving a f*ck*. Strawberry Hills, NSW: ReadHowYouWant, 2017.

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Communication and Confidence Coaching

By working with me you can expect to gain a better understanding of yourself, and the hope you need to change your life for the better. I will help you understand everybody around you better starting with yourself. My three main goals are to help you:

- Embrace discomfort to break down your negative beliefs,
- Find your strengths and focus on them,
- Bring out the side of you that is totally comfortable with yourself and your environment.

I have a unique approach to coaching. The entire lesson is composed of two parts:

Interpersonal Skills Development

Do your palms sweat and your heart pound when you enter in a room full of strangers? Do you feel awkward when somebody starts a conversation with you? Do you fear you'll run out of things to say and wish you could just talk casually with everybody?

Then this course was made for you!

In this section, I'll help you learn how to communicate with others, how to be presentable, and how to always make a great impression. Humans are social beings and since you live among them you can never underestimate the importance of social skills. If you have them you can be 100-percent present and aware in any situation. I have been studying and developing communication and real-life social interaction skills for more than 10 years.

I've written 10 books – all of them [Amazon best-sellers](#) – on the topic. I can help you, please let me!

Here you will learn:

- How to start conversations and keep them going with anybody,
- How to “win friends and influence people,”
- Airy, pleasant ways to be more charming and likable,
- How to be the life of the party, and
- Tips on how to handle difficult conversations and people.

I'll teach you how to be the person everyone notices when you enter the room, the person who instantly sparks people's interest and can talk easily to anyone.

Intrapersonal Skills Development

Is the mirror your worst enemy? Or the scale? Or both? Do you feel uncomfortable with who you are? Do you sometimes feel your days are passing by without any purpose? Is sleeping your favorite activity? Do you wish you were somewhere else, maybe someone else?

If any of these statements apply to you then you have work to do. Living with self-contempt, regrets, and frustration is not sustainable. In this part of the coaching I will help you to accept and recover from any inner struggles you have. With honesty and commitment, I will guide you to let go of old wounds, and help you find your strengths and develop them in order to bring out the best in yourself.

I'll help you:

- to discover the root cause of your problems,

- recover from childhood traumas,
- communicate with yourself objectively and silence the malicious voices in your head,
- build confidence and self-respect, and learn to be persistent and get what you want.

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