

HOW TO USE YOUR ADDICTIVE NATURE TO YOUR FAVOUR

EVERYONE HAS SOME
DEGREE OF COMPULSIVENESS.
USE YOURS TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

KIERAN FITZSIMMONS

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO

♡ My children for their patience and understanding they have shown me. Also to my late brother-in-law, nieces and nephew who were the inspiration for this book

Also to those who have challenged and guided me along the way.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



*A*s a young man I was driven by the desire to succeed and was never satisfied with the status quo. I have always been a prolific studier, constantly asking questions and looking for answers. In my 20's and 30's I attended university and undertook studies in human sciences, including psychology, philosophy, mechanical, physics, journalism and astro-physics. Because I was always searching for my purpose in life I also studied theology at tertiary full time level and gained certification in other areas of diverse spirituality.

Before the age of 30 I had also been a millionaire twice, but lost all I had worked for. I repeated that scenario in the 2008 global financial crash! But I set goals, got back to work and succeeded again.

I succeeded in business but not in my personal life. I've been engaged twice, have had two unsuccessful marriages, and had become a solo-dad. However, I have lived through the pain, difficulties, brokenness and trauma of the journey and bounced

back. I have recovered from many forms of addiction and been through successive types of rehabilitation institutions. Today I am successful, fit, healthy, resilient and I live with hope and a love for life. In short, I am living my prime.

In my 40's I resumed my studies, graduating in the area of mental health and addictions. I am a qualified recovery coach, group facilitator and supervising facilitator. I have papers in acute trauma care, suicide and self-harm prevention, de-escalation, physical health, the science of nutrition, and alternative health therapies. I am also a qualified personal trainer.

I have always had a desire to help others. Through my personal journey and my extensive studies, I have a wealth of knowledge and experience about the path to recovery and how to renew hope. I have mastered the art of using my addictive nature to my favour.

This took me decades, even generations and I have to date six wonderful grandchildren, so my hope is that you do not have to go where I have been.

I am still surprised I survived it! My primary purpose in writing this book is to educate people through what I have learned, to enable others to recover and go on to live successful and complete lives, and to find their unique and individual purpose in life.

INTRODUCTION



*A*s the title states, this is a book on how to use your addictive nature to your favor. It will open up your understanding about your addictions and the incredible power of your gifted additive nature and how to redirect its influence in such a way that it will empower all aspects of your life. It will teach you how they function, how addictions affect our relationships, how they compound into problems and how to deal with the cravings.

It will support you to make the right decisions going forward. In short, this book may be what you needed to cross the line and not only beat your addiction but use that valuable source of energy to become the person you have always dreamed of becoming.

It is written in a conversational manner so it's easy to digest. It has real life stories so you can relate, see by evidence that the tools provided in this book actually work and have the goods to prove it. It gets to the point simply and powerfully so you can apply these principles to everyday life. It will encourage you to get back

up and run again. Only this time, with the benefit of wisdom and experience, you will be able to set goals for yourself and become the person you were always meant to be. It will support you to heal from wounds and help you recover from what many say is the root cause of their addiction, the underlying trauma, by putting things into a better perspective.

It is a secular book, not intended to be religious, but it does unpack spiritual concepts that apply to life. Through my hundreds of hours of counselling and decades of life experience, I have come to the conclusion that addiction recovery and understanding our healthy self-image and personal self-relationship dynamics are vitally important to healing and to the rebuilding of successful and purposeful lives.

Not many counsellors have been through life's darkest times, eaten the dirt of life's suffering repeatedly and fully recovered to thrive in life again, then shared their experience, strength and hope. If truth is not experienced in a person's life it is still a proverb to them. Drawing on my decades of training, relationships and life challenges, my total recovery and ongoing successes, I deliver to you the knowledge, wisdom and experience I have amassed.

I believe I have finally discovered life's true purpose and value. It is contained in a Maori proverb from the indigenous people of the land I call home:

'he aha te mea nui o te ao?

Māku e kī atu, hetangata, he tangata, he tangata'

'What is the most important thing in this world?

It is people, it is people, it is people.'

Add God to this statement and you have the full package.

I have been told to write this book so many times over the years I have lost count.

So here it is!

Kieran.

Foot note; for anonymity, people places and things have been fictionalized in this book.



01.

WHAT IS ADDICTION



*H*ow did we arrive at the place of addiction, a place where we did not want to be? It was never anyone's plan to find themselves in a position where we were damaging ourselves physically, emotionally and spiritually; a place of shame and reckless abandonment to everything we were meant to be.

THERE IS A QUOTATION THAT READS:

The best way to take control over a people and control them utterly is to take a little of their freedom at a time, to erode rights by a thousand tiny and almost imperceptible reductions. In this way, the people will not see those rights and freedoms being removed until past the point at which these changes cannot be reversed. Adolf Hitler — from *Mein Kampf*

When I researched this, I found that, according to Reuters (<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-hitler-freedom-idUSKBN22X1W5>), this quote was not attributable to Hitler's Nazism ideology. The author seems to be unknown. However, what I do subscribe to is the intention behind the quote. Imagine this quote was signed by 'Addiction' and then personalised to the individual.

LET'S READ IT AGAIN IN THAT CONTEXT:

The best way to take control over [a person] and control them utterly is to take a little of their freedom at a time, to erode [their] rights by a thousand tiny and almost imperceptible reductions. In this way, [that person] will not see those rights and freedoms being removed until past the point at which these changes cannot be reversed – Addiction.

From the vast majority of the recovery stories I have heard along the way, this very quote would be almost the exact story of their journey into addiction. It certainly was mine. Relate the power of this quote to the following and you will understand the 'gravity' of its meaning.

I have dedicated this book to my children, who have endured my periods of addiction throughout their lives and have still found a way to love their father, regardless of my behaviour at times. For this I am eternally grateful.

I am also grateful to my sister's children, as their uncle, because I was inspired with great urgency to write this book earlier this year as I stood and watched the 30 to 40 minute process it took to turn off the life support system that was sustaining the life of my brother in-law. My sister (his ex-wife) and his children stood around him as he breathed his last. He had suffered a stroke, which was associated with his heavy substance use in the days preceding his arrival to hospital.

When the doctors decided to remove his life support, some of his children literally collapsed on the floor, totally overcome with grief and distress. I instantly became vividly aware that the unbearable scene I was watching could very well have been me, with my children standing around me.

Words cannot describe the sheer horror and anguish that was present in the room at that moment. This gifted and talented man, with his God given sense of wit and humour and his musical talents, who could entertain those around him — even crowds as the singer and guitarist in several bands — passed away well before his allocated time.

I had been visiting him almost daily during the previous week as he drifted in and out of consciousness. I will never forget the day I walked in and upon seeing me he reached out his hand and clung on to mine with what strength he had left. The look of joy, mixed with desperation, rattled me to the core. However, knowing what I know, I found within myself the ability to hold

back my emotions to not undermine any hope for his recovery. I also laughed and joked with my nephew and nieces, speaking of hope and recovery, while I felt like I was being mauled by a starving lion on the inside. Over the week he had shown sparks of hope for recovery, only to regress back further into a critical state as his brain fought with everything it had for survival and the doctors continued to operate with all the skill and craft they possessed, until all that could be done was done and the inevitability of the situation took its ultimate course.

If even just one person fosters the glimmer of hope that they need, through the tried and tested tools provided in this book, to get them across the line, on to their journey of recovery, and on to live a purposeful life, then I will consider it a great success.

If you are reading this book, the last line of the quote at the beginning of this chapter — ‘until past the point at which these changes cannot be reversed’ — has not yet played itself out in your life. We all have an equal opportunity to live our life to its fullest.

The difference between the quote, as related to a nation, and as it relates to an individual losing their control to addiction, is that the addiction preys upon the very life of its host — the addict. Think of cigarettes and the grip of lung cancer as people gasp for their last breath. Think of the potential outcome of over eating, as a person’s organs shut down, overcome with the effects of a lifestyle of fatty foods and sugar and salt (I have pictures of

myself in my early 30's where my face was puffy and I barely had a neck. My children still tease me about that photo to this day).

Recovery brings with it rewards for the person who chooses it. Among other things, the rewards of recovery delivered to me a great relationship with my children, their spouses and my darling grandchildren. I have studied and gained extensive qualifications, I have gained financial independence, have won 1st place in a body building competition in the city I live in and continued on to compete nationally — where I took the national title — and I have also gained a much greater treasure; a peaceful and content mind.

All this was achieved simply by using the tools provided in this book, as I have learned to apply the power of my addictive nature to my favour. You and I are really no different, nor is the billionaire or the street sweeper. We all have the same 24 hours in the day.

Consider the founder of Kentucky Fried Chicken, Colonel Sanders, who was divorced and broke and the age of 66. But he had a dream and acted on it and reached the status of a billionaire at the age of 80. It is purported that he gave 99% of his earnings away. It's never too late. Never! Moreover, when you look back at your footsteps in life, it seems there is always a right time to decide to get clean and become your own success.

LET'S LOOK AT THE WORD ADDICTION, AND ITS MEANING :

Addiction is ‘a treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual's life experiences. People with addiction use substances or engage in mental or physical behaviours that become compulsive and often continue despite harmful consequences.’ [1]

A point to note before we go on is that at the very outset of that definition of addiction is the word ‘treatable’. So in the very problem is the solution... because the term ‘treatable’ can be defined as hope. An acronym the I often use for hope is ‘Hold On Pain Ends’.

I like words, so now let's take a closer look at the word addiction. The root word addict comes from the Latin word addictus, which means “to devote, sacrifice, sell out, betray or abandon.” In the Roman law, an addiction was a person who became enslaved through a court's (legal) ruling. [2]

Think of the word ‘law’ above. We give our addiction the legal right to exist within us by surrendering our stronger willpower over it. We give addiction the right to control our lives and make our decisions for us, so it becomes the master and we become its servant (we will look further at this when we consider the word ‘recovery’).

The Latin definition gets support from the ancient myth of Addictus. The myth tells the story of a slave who was set free from his master, but had become so used to his chains, that he wandered the land with his chains still attached, even though he could have removed them at any time because he also had the key.

This story of course can be seen as a metaphor for the definition of addiction as we know it today. Because an addict becomes tolerant and accepting of their own behaviour, or the drugs they use, they become a slave who doesn't recognise their own right and access to freedom. The image is of someone with cuffs on their hands and feet who has the key to those locks. All the person (challenged with compulsive behaviours of addiction) has to do is to turn the key and the shackles will fall off.

So, how do we free ourselves from addiction?

We enter recovery.

The best definition I have heard of recovery is this:

'Recovery is remembering who you are and using your strengths to become all you were meant to be.'

Definitions of ‘recovery’ are: a return to health after illness, injury, misfortune: the act or process of becoming healthy after an illness or injury: the act or process of recovering: the act or process of returning to a normal state after a period of difficulty: the return of something that has been lost or stolen. [3]

Let’s look at how the word ‘recovery’ evolved. ‘Gaining possession [of property] by legal action’ is from early 1500s. The "act of righting oneself after a blunder, mishap, etc." is from 1520s. The general (non-legal) sense of "act or power of regaining or retaking" (something lost or taken away) is from the 1530s. The "restoration from a bad to a good condition" is from 1580s. [4]

The point I am making here is that, as we remember who we are, we will realise what we have lost, or what has been taken, or stolen, from us through being wrongfully enslaved to our addictions. We then reclaim what legally and rightfully belongs to us. Such things may include our relationship to our family (especially our children and, in my case, grandchildren), our right to sobriety and a sound mind, with clear and peaceful thinking, that allows for good choices and healthy nutrition and sleeping habits.

It’s also finding and developing our purpose in life, which provides personal meaning and the ability to move on to achieving our goals. It’s the healthy and hygienic body we can have. It’s a place to call home and a relational community, where we find our fit and have a sense of belonging. It is also prosperity and resources, which every person has as a birthright. This list is

not exhaustive... you may add the likes of spiritual contentment, rediscovering your creativity, your journey towards knowledge and truth, finding confidence in yourself and your future, and so on.

The theme of this book is not so much about giving up our addiction, but harnessing the incredible power of our unique addictive nature, then expressing those learned tools and behaviours in such a manner that they will become the driving force in our life, to propel each of us to reach our highest potential.

The point is, we actually do not have to change who we are. We are who we are. We keep our personality... we simply redirect this powerful personality we possess and apply it towards our gifts and strengths, rather than our weaknesses. It sounds over simplified but it isn't. Inside us is all we need for our success, so we just rediscover it, make it our focus and that's where the magic happens.

We may think it is the compulsive behaviour or our choice of substance that is creating the addiction. However, it may not be that; it may just be our personality. Consider that during the Vietnam war, 70% of the soldiers were using heroine. At the end of the war 95% of them just stopped and only 5% became addicted to it. So was it the heroine or the personality that created the addiction? How about grandma having a hip replacement and being given morphine for an extended period of time... did she leave the hospital and return home as a grandma with a belt

around her bicep and a needle in her arm — a ‘junkie’? No! So it must be predominantly the personality, rather than the substance or compulsive behaviour, that is the cause and the addiction is the symptom.

Among other things, I am a qualified Recovery Coach, a Recovery Facilitator (an industry name for teacher in a classroom setting) and a Supervising Facilitator, (where I can train and supervise other facilitators). I have a very real empathy towards those suffering from the effects of addictions and mental health challenges, because I have been there myself (lived experience). When I have shared my experience, strength and hope, I have been told continually over the years that I need to ‘put all this stuff into a book’ on recovery. So here it is!

Addiction has been described as a global humanitarian crisis and it is one of the most stigmatised human conditions. Addiction can be described as ‘not having control over doing, taking or using something, to the point where it is harmful to you’.

The main difference between us and animals is that humans are proactive and animals are reactive. By this I mean an animal will react to its environment whereas, generally, a human will assess their environment and consider the best approach for survival and towards progress and, after rationalising the situation, will make the most effective choice. Then the individual arrives at a chosen outcome that will support their current belief about themselves. Often, for the compulsive, the best choice in the

moment is instant gratification, because the future seems to be obscure to them.

The key to freedom is responsibility — or ‘response-ability.’ It has been said that 5% of life is what happens to us and 95% is how we respond to it. Addictions slowly and continually reduce a person to their reactive position i.e. their animalistic or carnal nature. It is then not how we respond to our environment but how we react to it that enables our addiction. Our internal environment becomes the major driving force, where we need to service our addiction or behaviour, so we subconsciously create an external environment that will support the current impulsive need.

Our consciousness then becomes hijacked by our addictions and we resort to survival mechanisms to support our addictions, without regard for the long-term implications or the destructive effects we are having on ourselves and others. Think of people like Harvey Weinstein and the #MeToo movement.... Do you think he would have changed his predatory behaviour had he known it was eventually going to cost him his standing in the film industry, his respect, access to all his possessions and that he very well may live the rest of his days locked in a cell? I can only imagine so.

I know this from my own experience. My chemical addiction lasted for about a decade, from my late 30’s to my mid 40’s. However, I only saw later, on reflection, that there were other addictions like smoking, workaholism, sugar and food, TV,

gaming and device addictions that had come and gone along the way. You could almost say that I was addicted to addictions. Don't get me wrong, I liked all these things, but they came at a price. The price was the loss of time with my kids, lack of sleep, bad health, wasted money, loss of self-potential and relationships, accidents and worst of all, time.

As I gave up one addiction, I unknowingly adopted other addictions — addiction transference — so addictions were not the cause, they were a symptom of the underlying causes. We will unpack this topic in this book. In my experience, and in my observation, over time addictions work up the scale of intensity and severity. They continually require stronger 'fixes' to satisfy their appetite. We can become the host our addictions feed on. Addictions slowly feed on and consume our very life!

WE NEED 4 THINGS: FOOD, WATER, SHELTER & DOPAMINE

It is said we need four fundamental things in life for basic survival: food, water, shelter and dopamine. We know about food, water and shelter, but this dopamine molecule is a reward mechanism that our brain so desperately needs and it is the one that can catch us out. If you are reading this book, like myself, it more than likely has caught you out. The neurotransmitter, dopamine, is primarily for behaviour reinforcement, through the reward pathway known as the 'mesolimbic pathway'.

In fact, it is the fundamental driver underpinning the other three basic needs. The issue becomes, where do we derive or obtain the dopamine that we need for survival?

The feel-good reward of a dopamine burst, which creates a feeling of satisfaction, gets squirted into our brain for every action we take that either supports our survival — through the hunting or gathering of food (amassing resource for the future) or in danger avoidance. This is so we will repeat the behaviour the next time we are in a similar situation, as dopamine acts on the areas of the brain involved in memory and movement.

It helps us thrive in life, as we help another person, improve our daily life in any way, partake in an enjoyable recreational activity, receive compliments, words of affirmation, gifts or almost any positive human interaction experience. The entire human race relies on dopamine for procreation. Sex gives a big squirt of dopamine to the brain and the brain loves it, so it wants more. Chances are, each one of our lives is a direct result of this dopamine molecule.

The real issue with addiction is, where we derive those feel good feelings from. If we consume opioids, such as non-regulated pain killers, regulated substances, consume alcohol, gamble excessively, use pornographic material, self-harm or over indulge in other behaviours, certain neurons within our central nervous system get suppressed. A resulting feeling of relaxation, contentment or peace also comes about through a spike of

dopamine release. This paves the way for substance and non-substance addictions, including unhealthy food consumption. These behavioural reward systems flood the entire central nervous system, including the endocrine system, with up to ten times the levels of dopamine that we would normally receive from a natural reward. Depending on the self-administration of the behaviour we partake in, this can happen almost immediately. Combined with the sustained duration of dopamine delivered into the body over time this produces intensely euphoric sensations of pleasure.

The dopamine, acting on the movement and memory parts of the brain, literally drives the person to repeat, or habitualize, the behaviour. However, these levels of reward are foreign to the natural makeup of mind and body, causing the body to normalise the reward levels of dopamine that are being administered to the body by the brain. The brain then regulates the administration of the dopamine by creating a dopamine tolerance, reducing the number of dopamine receptors available for dopamine uptake and removing dopamine from the central nervous system.

This is called ‘the law of diminishing return’. It causes the person to increase the intensity and frequency of the addictive behaviour, resulting in destructive judgement impairment and severely limiting their ability to make positive functional life choices. All this produces a destructive and unsustainable lifestyle that the body cannot endure long term, so the health of the body and mind is compromised.

The ‘law of diminishing returns’ [5] is a theory in economics that predicts that after some optimal level of capacity is reached, adding an additional factor of production will actually result in smaller increases in output. The law of diminishing returns is related to the concept of diminishing marginal utility. This means that the more we have of something the less value we get from it. That is why, as addicts, we become tolerant to the level of use of something and need the next series of ‘hits’ to be slightly bigger and stronger than the last ones, just to get the same buzz, or dopamine hit. The end result will be self-destruction.

An overdose means that once we have reached some optimal level of capacity utilisation, the addition of any larger amounts of a factor of production will inevitably result in decreased per-unit incremental returns, to the point where what the brain wants the body cannot tolerate.

This scenario is a unique way of explaining addiction; one that I haven’t heard anywhere before. By reading about how this process of harmful addictive behaviours is being generated, through study and searching out knowledge and understanding (as I have), you too are becoming part of the worldwide pool of awakening recovering addicts.

If the way we get satisfaction originates from people, places and things that are harmful either to ourselves or another person, our internal navigation system is being hijacked. The end result is a breakdown of our lives through dysfunction, failure, depressed

feelings, unhappiness, a loss of hope and most importantly, unrealised potential. The richest place on earth is the graveyard — where all those unrealised inventions and dreams have been buried.

To overcome addictions we re-orientate our pleasure seeking habits from self-seeking behaviours to self-improvement behaviours. These may include, but are not limited to seeing our family supported and nurtured, obtaining qualifications through adult learning institutions (some of these are governments funded), quality relationship connections on their various levels and the physical and creative improvements we are making in our lives.

The real key to dopamine supply is the discovery of — and the living of — the full and successful life and purpose that is unique to you. This is what this book is about.

Here's an example from my routine: It's 4.32 am. I push myself out of bed to do some work as I feel I've been a little distracted lately, procrastinating in life and missing out (a bit of FOMO — fear of missing out). When I do push through my excuses I feel like I'm achieving something, so I get a reward squirt of dopamine.

I attend to my emails and get back to writing. When I start fading I get a coffee... another reward squirt of dopamine. I have gym in an hour and the workout will create endorphins, which in turn will create dopamine. I will feel good when I've finished. I shower, have another coffee with mates (all dopamine squirts)

and on through my day. The squirts of this feel-good molecule will go on as I talk to people or continually look for things to do to get a dopamine squirt and make me feel better.

All we have to do is replace the source of our dopamine. Once it would have been a cycle of needing to obtain 'stuff' — our next substance or alcohol use, or anything that was a 'quick fix' of whatever it was. Often it is just the thought of obtaining that thing that created the dopamine hit. I make no bones about this.

As I have said, I am a recovered addict. I have a strong addictive tendency in everything I do. It is in my nature and I have accepted this. I need a constant supply of dopamine, that is just who and what I am. All my life people have said to me things like, 'You think too much... your too intense... you need more sleep,' or whatever. I have come to realise that I am unique and so, instead of trying to fit into their mould, meet their expectations, to be 'normal' (whatever that is), I have decided to let them be them and tell them to allow me to be my true self.

What do you feel is your uniqueness and your differences that set you apart from the rest? To be normal is to be average; a grey person standing in a grey crowd living in a grey world where we all look alike. No thanks! Deep down you do not want that and neither do I. We are all individual human beings and we find our strength in our own personal humanity and our diversity.

As I have stated, it's almost like I am addicted to addictions. We all can be like this. Addiction transference is about moving from one addiction and distraction to another. However, now we have learned to reign in and channel the power of our additive personality into a life of contribution to others, positivity and personal development. Sure we can stumble and do dumb things here and there (we all do), but we realise we are human, so we give ourselves a break and try to do the same for others, knowing full well where we have come from and the errors of our past.

We may be used to seeking instant gratification from using substances, alcohol, sex, porn, TV, gambling or food. We may find gratification or escapism, in the form of workaholism, sport-aholism, recreation-aholism, retail-aholism, accumulation-aholism (hoarding or collecting stuff we do not need), or any other 'ism' you can think of.

Delayed gratification seems to be contextualised as some form of negative. However, if we can change our mindset, we can enjoy the good feelings of self-gratification in the form delayed gratification, by looking forward to the event. For example, I was an alcoholic. I would drink (that's obvious) regardless of my knowing that a hangover would await me in the morning. That would lead to depressed feelings throughout the day and the regret that I drank the night before. Over time I developed a mindset of looking forward to waking up without a hangover and being able to manage my feelings throughout the day. To this day I have never regretted waking up without a hangover, or

any drunken event from the previous night. This same scenario applies to not having the 'come down' from drug use, and being able to pat myself on the back because I ate properly yesterday.

One great thing is the feeling that, through recovery, we learn how to manage the need for escapism from the depressed or unbearable emotions that have been an internal haunt. A sense of unworthiness or shame is a common experience during our compulsive or active addiction days.

One thing that is very freeing is understanding that the fundamental difference between guilt and shame is that guilt is 'I did something bad' whereas shame is 'I am bad.' We learn to forgive ourselves, because humans make mistakes... we just do, we are human, that is how it is. Usually those mistakes affect others. Guilt is an occurrence (or maybe like my experience), many occurrences.

We forgive ourselves for these occurrences, let ourselves off the hook, release ourselves and tell ourselves that that's in our past now, so let's move forward. We get through our shame by saying that the mistake was an event not a person.... I am not a bad person, I have made mistakes. However, now I am evolving from those habits, no longer revolving in them. So, if anyone tries to shame us, we have an internal dialogue: "I am not that person any longer." If we trip up every now and then (which we will), it's an event not an identity. That is what evolution is, a journey, up, out and on. We quickly teach our brain to naturally create the

dopamine we desire, through habitual positive self-talk rather than the artificially manufactured dopamine we used to derive from our addictions.

Shame and guilt is a strong distraction that gets in the way of our recovery. We learn to exchange the power of those distractions and redirect them towards our attractions — our purpose, our goals and our personal success through positive self-talk. I deserve to live a full and complete life, it is my birthright. We turn our energies towards our personal innate God-given strengths and apply them through the tools provided in this book. We focus on what's strong, not what's wrong. Remember... 'recovery is remembering who you are and using your strengths to become all you were meant to be'

As I have stated above, to actually survive we only need four things — food, water, shelter and dopamine. Who would have thought dopamine was as important as food, water and shelter. In fact dopamine could be considered the number one thing we need to survive, because it is dopamine, the reward mechanism, that will get us up to get food and water and create shelter so that we actually can survive. Do you see the power of this molecule now?

RAT PARK.

I enjoy the study of rats and how they do what they want in the moment without regard for the future. When I look back at my addictions, at times I see how I lived with a rat-like behaviour being played out in my life. Addictions are mostly rat-like behaviours. Here is this process tested in a laboratory environment [6]. In the 1970s American psychologist, Dr Bruce Alexander placed rats in a cage, all alone and offered them two water bottles; one filled with water and the other with heroin or cocaine.

The rats would repetitively drink from the drug-laced bottles until they all overdosed and died. He then put rats into ‘rat parks’ where they were among others and free to roam and play on the play equipment, to socialise and have sex. They were given the same access to the same two bottles. When inhabiting a ‘rat park,’ remarkably, they preferred the plain water. Even when they did drink from the drug-filled bottle, they did intermittently, not obsessively, and never overdosed. The healthy social community beat the power of drugs. As this book is not so much about just abstaining from addictive behaviours, but rather the redirection and redistribution of the incredible willpower an addict possesses, toward realising their potential. Just saying, ‘No’ to addictions is basically a naïve, short sighted and ineffective option. This is why the dilemma of alcohol and substance use disorders has, along with gambling and other related addictions, become one of the most dominant societal dilemmas we face in the 21st Century.

The question becomes what do we need to put in our cage that draws our attention away from things that we know are not good for us, so it becomes not about resisting those negative behaviours but replacing them with positive behaviours. Find the behaviours that work for you and the magic will happen.

THE ANAESTHETISED PERSON CAN'T FEEL SUFFERING

Ethyl alcohol is one of the oldest known chemicals used for the relief of pain. Many more drugs and addictions cause the release of these powerful anaesthetising chemicals into the brain. Even behavioural addictions, like gambling, self-harm, or sexual addictions switch off the areas of the brain where we 'feel' physical pain and discomfort. Simultaneously, emotional pain (like guilt, regret, depression, empathy) is also anaesthetised in the emotional centres of the brain.

Most of the time the real challenge in overcoming addiction is the reinstatement of the emotions that we have purposely turned off through addiction. After getting 'clean' from these behaviours we come face to face with what we were escaping from, or our responsibilities. This is why so many of us do the 30 to 90 day cycle of relapse... where we set goals, do well, then begin glorifying thoughts of the compulsive behaviours and we slowly plan our next use (even though we don't admit it to ourselves let alone anyone else).

Relapse starts well before the action. We start thinking about it (we will read about ‘thoughts are things’ later in the book), then we might start looking for opportunities, make a few calls to old acquaintances, add a bit of creative genius to the mix and before we know it we are going around the same mountain. We can find rehab centres have the same effect... it’s nice to live in a comfortable bubble where temptation is at a minimum. However, when we get back into the real world our creative addict mind plays tricks on us. This is why being outside of a recovery environment places us at risk. Getting free of the ‘active addiction risk period’ is around the six month point from being in active addiction.

I personally got close a few times but lost to the addiction and succumbed again after around five months of being clean. I have found, through personal experience and observation, that if we can get past the six month period the brain realises it is not going to get fed the dopamine it craves from the addiction and it starts to make new neural-pathways to produce its own. A sense of relief begins to happen as the brain starts looking for new avenues to produce dopamine. It starts creating its own ‘rat park’.

I remember this clearly. As the frontal lobe kicks in and begins to make goals, to create a life where the feel-good feelings are derived from healthier choices, like study, employment, saving money, family time, relationship interaction and creativity. This is where the healing of trauma begins to take place and objective thinking and self-value begins to be rebuilt. The value of our

clean time increases. We begin to pat ourselves on the back and aim for a year clean. Our addictive nature starts planning for the future as the rewiring of the brain happens and recovery becomes our addiction.

From here on is the most powerful season in our life — to make success our addiction and to have a powerful resolve to better our life. I never knew what all the ‘old timers,’ who conquered their various addictions, were talking about when they said, ‘Stay until the magic happens’ until it happened for me.... They meant stay clean until you get a breakthrough. When I was about 12 months clean my brain simply ‘lit up.’ It was like for the first time in years, or in a decade, I could see clearly.

My brain had fixed itself and had now developed a structure to produce its own dopamine and the other necessary chemicals to function properly, without the need for compulsive behaviours and substances. The magic did happen, not only this but somehow my memory came back, with a healthy cognition of how to interpret both the good and the regretful thoughts, so they could be placed in order and I was able to respond to those thoughts in a healthy manner.

This occurrence is not uncommon and is available to everyone. We are well able to redirect our powerful addictive nature to our favour, to create the life beyond our imagination.

FOCUS VS FIXATION

Addiction is basically a fixation on a behaviour or substance which drives the need for more. Gaming is such a great illustration for addiction... the need to get to the next level, especially with virtual contestants. The digital interaction is a powerful attraction. I have an ex-partner whose daughter was is one of the top players in the country on a computer game. If the game or the computer was taken from her she literally had a meltdown.

The fixation on this game was tremendous and her brain needed it. If her extremely intelligent brain could not get the dopamine in lived on it simply went into short circuit. When I was younger I had an addiction to gaming. Back in those days it was 'Space Invaders'. Later the PS 1's, 2's and 3's came into being and I would play all night and still somehow work the next day. I was totally fixated.

The 'honeymoon' relationship experience addiction is a powerful combination. Everyone loves the honeymoon period of relationships. This is why we can have the same relationship over and over again with a different person each time. I unpack the process of the honeymoon experience and why it ends in another book called *Bouncing Back from Separation and Divorce*. A fixation on our new partner kicks in, brought about by the powerful love drugs of this new relationship. We also lose our 'social-judgement' — which the brain has anaesthetised. But

as the love drugs wear off we lose interest in that person and we start seeing the ‘red flags’ we missed at first.

This results in our awareness of who the person really is and how they aren’t the person we thought they were ... so we can ‘fall out of love’. This whole process is what the term ‘in love with the idea of being in love’ really means. Being ‘in love with love,’ means that person is just the object of our love for the time (emotional anthropomorphising is a deep topic to consider).

This honeymoon period is a design of nature to create babies and further the human race. If we are aware of this process we can bring ‘focus’ (as opposed to fixation) into the relationship from the outset and make good choices. A lot of people can feel hurt or disappointed in the other person because we feel they have changed, but they may not have. They may have just been on their best behaviour (which is normal in a new relationship) and it’s our perception of them that has changed, not them... so we may have just moved from fixation to focus.

Fixation clouds our correct judgement, whereas focus increases the ability to make more accurate judgements. If I had learned this earlier in life I definitely would have made better choices on a whole host of life issues, as fixation blinds us as addicts to pending loss, harm and disaster, which will be the outcome of our actions (such as the effects on the children from an extra marital experience, the loss of relationships, jobs, finances or driver’s license due to substance use, health issues, restriction of

movement, or loss of self-esteem due to eating disorders). One issue for me has been the mental challenges due to over thinking, anxiety and worry, resulting in loss of opportunity and personal development. We call this getting 'stuck' in life.

Often it is after the fact that focus kicks in and we can see the outcome of our incorrect decisions and choices. From now on we can consider the outcome of every choice we make through focus. We use past experience and knowledge to predict our future. We play the long game and get what we really want out of life, by making good choices in the present.

CONFIRMATION BIAS.

Lastly we will look at this interesting perspective, called 'confirmation bias'. This states that up to 94% of what we hear or take in we used to confirm an already present disposition or belief. For example, if I believe there is no God, I am an atheist. Therefore, when I hear something about God I will reject it, or accept it, to support my own belief.

Let's say creation verses evolution, I will disagree with creation because I believe there is no God. I cannot even entertain a thought of creation as it does not support my view of atheism. Then enter topics like quantum physics, spirituality or the origin of morality and the atheist starts working hard to maintain their position. Even the famous atheist Richard Dawkins, the author

of ‘The God Delusion,’ struggles with these concepts, so he ‘surmises an advanced alien civilisation might be responsible.’

Even granting Dawkins his alien civilisation (for which we have less evidence than we do for God's existence), that accounts for life on Earth only. It doesn't explain how life originated for the alien? [7] At some point it all gets a bit hard for us, so we just ‘switch off,’ to enable us to maintain the support of our own bias. I'm not here to persuade anyone either way. The point is, once we have a belief we will do almost anything to support that belief. If we believe we ‘can't’ do something, we will produce any excuse to support that belief. A good friend of mine, who is quite intelligent and has been a wealthy business owner in the past (but has fallen on hard times) came to stay with me for a few nights recently. He picked up a book that was on my bench called, ‘How to keep the love that you find.’

Then he said to me ‘I need to read this, but I haven't read a book in ages, like I used to, because my eyes aren't very good anymore.’ I instantly roared with laughter and said have you ever considered glasses, like one-third of the world's population wear. Immediately he realised what he had just said.... ‘Yeah, I feel like I've given up on everything’. He confirmed his own belief by making such a poor excuse. I do understand that's a difficult place to get out of. I have been there myself. The funny thing is that I had read that entire book, and a second time out loud to an ex-partner of mine. I probably should have put it into practice!

As with our addictive nature, we can be in one of four camps: active addiction, active recovery (this may include cycles of relapse, but that is still the process of recovery), active stagnation (where we are treading water in life) or active success (which may include finding your purpose). I attend a lot of meetings and talk to a lot of people being challenged with the symptoms of addiction and a vast majority get stuck in the recovery or stagnation phase.

As we have addictive natures, if we can use this powerful trait we have, apply it to our goals and purpose in life and make success our confirmation bias (we will read about this in the 'Goals' chapter). We will use 94% of the information we encounter, whether good or bad, to support our view that we are worthy and entitled to live a successful life. We will then by default make the choices and take the actions necessary to make our life reflect that belief. In other words we will become successful. There is a saying in the 'rooms'... 'Whatever it takes'... This is the view that we will do whatever it takes to prevent us from relapsing. If we spin the script, we can do whatever it takes to become our own success story (by moral and correct means).



02.

HOW DID I GET HERE AND HOW DO I CHANGE



Doing the things we don't want to do, to get the things we want

Here is an interesting question for you to think about... What do you really want in your life? If you can answer this you are already well ahead of the pack. If you can't, that's ok, because just the mere fact you are reading this book means you are looking to find what you want in life, which again puts you in front of the pack as an enquirer into your true life's path.

An article in the Washington Post states, 'According to just-released data by Gallup, only 13 percent of employees are 'engaged' in their jobs, or emotionally invested in their work and focused on helping their organisations improve.'^[1] This means that, worldwide, approximately just under one person in eight

actually enjoys their job — the thing we do the most — which is not a good sign for humanity in my view. To put it another way, seven out of eight people are not working in their true calling.

Therefore, we could say they do not actually have are not correctly engaged with their target in life, so they are operating outside of their life's purpose. If we drill down to a true-life purpose, the numbers will actually be a lot less. For example the UK Sun newspaper had an article stating that 'a staggering nine out of ten young Brits believe their life lacks purpose, according to a new study. [1a] You could probably take these statistics as international data across the western world.

Once we have defined our life purpose, we can set goals around that purpose, which we unpack in the 'Goals' chapter. Then all we have to do is manage and control our thoughts along the way. Why only our thoughts? Our thoughts work in a forward trajectory — they are the forward arrow in our life. Our thoughts dictate our actions, our actions will dictate our habits, our habits our destiny. But our thoughts can also work in reverse in our life, so if we can master our thoughts, we can adopt new beliefs and thus alter our personality and even our nature.

There is a saying that goes, 'Do the hard things and live an easy life, do the easy things and live a hard life'. If we put the work in now, it will pay off later. Because the battle is won or lost in our mind, we are going to build this chapter around the concept of 'thinking'.

“What is thinking? Where does it come from? Who does it come from? Who controls our thoughts? What do we do if we want to change our thinking patterns to get a better life?”

LET’S LOOK AT SOME QUESTIONS THAT AFFECT EVERY ASPECT OF OUR LIFE.

First off, what is thinking? We do this all our lives and never actually unpack what this fuzzy concept is. Think of thinking as ‘a continuum of questions and answers at constant’. I came up with this line as a way of explaining what ‘thinking’ is when I was doing a paper on ‘Ways of Knowing’ at a theological seminary in 2010. I have googled this analogy of thinking and have not seen it repeated anywhere.

However, I do think it accurately condenses this continuous action that goes on inside our heads into one simple statement. I would have to say, this study called ‘Ways of Knowing’ has had the greatest impact on my life of any papers or studies I have done to date.

It made me question everything I knew and develop a new basis of origin for interpreting what knowledge is, how we arrive at knowledge (what we know) and then a framework for applying that knowledge. In other words, how do we know what we know... and is what we believe correct?

Relate that statement — ‘a continuum of questions and answer at constant’ — to everyday life and this is how it works... The alarm goes off in the morning, we wake up and automatically switch it off or snooze it. Then we ask ourselves, ‘Shall I get up?’ We answer, ‘No, five more minutes...ok, five more minutes, but I need to make sure I’m not late’... then five minutes rolls round... ‘better get up or I’m going to be late! OK!’ We launch out of bed... ‘What shall I have for breakfast, cereal or muesli? Umm, what do I want?

Actually, I don’t have time for either, just coffee. OK coffee, hurry, it’s 7.15, I have to be gone at 7.25’. On and on it goes throughout the day, all the way until bedtime... ‘I need to get to bed to get a good night’s sleep... OK, I have 35 minutes till the end of this Netflix movie so I will watch it, but I will be tired in the morning, so I will record it and watch later.’ Or even ‘I can’t sleep, I can’t stop thinking about... role playing future events... I need to get this done... I forgot to do that... what if this happens?’ Or we re-hash past events... ‘I should have, could have or would have if I had my time again’... until we eventually fall off to sleep. We dream, thinking in our sleep, then we wake and start the process all over again.

Here is an interesting concept that most people have never considered... ‘over thinking’ is the most common addiction on earth. It leads to paralysis by analysis. We can’t move forward in life, or relationships, or leave a partner, or take a chance life hands us, because we are paralysed by over thinking. Over thinking can

create anxiety and stress, we take pills to put us to sleep or to deal with our depressed thoughts, creating the feelings associated with them. We have trouble taking chances in business because we over think. We sometimes cannot commit to a relationship that will be good for us because we are so busy role playing past negative experiences from past partners, who are nothing like the prospective partner that we desire a deep relationship with. We can even somehow make it their fault so we don't have to face our own short comings.

Sometimes our mind just seem to trap us, so trying to commit to this new relationship is like chasing a bus that we were late for. Remember 'ways of knowing ' above... how do we know what we know? I have sat with people who sit there straight faced and say they have no addictions at all, but who say they cannot sleep because of anxiety, due to the fact they say they cannot 'turn their brain off'.

They may be on medication for depression because their mind assaults them with internal negative thinking (this has been my experience). Will they admit they may have an addictive habit in their thinking? Oh No! They would not lower themselves to that level. They overthink too much, too often. It took me many years to come to terms with fact that I was actually an addict. Often the first step to restoration is realisation.

How we overcome these challenges is to first see the truth of the current situation for what it really is, in its uniqueness, and approach the situation with pro's and con's we learn about in the goals chapter. Then we can identify the best way forward with the least risk. The risks will have costs associated with them. If something unfortunate does happen, we have a plan in place to mitigate that risk with prevention strategies. We do this on paper so we can 'see' the picture because when it is done in our head it's just too difficult. We then get a clearer view. This will slow our thinking down, empowering our decision making. So, we do the hard mental work up front to make it easier on our minds later.

MOTIVATION STARTS AFTER YOU BEGIN

I talk about this later in the book as well, from another aspect, because this is such an important topic. 'Change'... We are never going to feel like it. It is not often I actually feel like going to the gym or going for a run, but once I'm doing it I feel good and when I'm finished I feel great! If we can consider how we will feel after the workout or activity and just start, our internal reward system will play the scenario forward, to the expectation of how good it feels during and after the activity has been completed.

I talk about how to get started in the 'two minute rule' later in this book also, and we apply that rule here. We muster up just enough energy to get started and then the motivation kicks in and we are away... the endorphins start flooding our endocrine

system, the body has woken up and we are away and laughing. Not many people feel like work on a Monday morning, however everyone loves payday.

Here comes ‘change’. There is a verse in the Bible that describes this well... which says, ‘Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of Yahweh is near, in the valley of decision’ (Joel 3:14). In ancient times, written language was represented by pictures — a bit like hieroglyphics — where words were a series of pictures to convey meaning.

This amazing verse is represented by two sticks, meaning two walking crutches. It’s like a crutch, where we lean in one direction and use our good leg for strength to push us in the direction we are going with. Then, the other leg we rely on hope and faith to carry us just far enough so we can get the next step in. Now, imagine trying to walk with two sticks, not the good quality crutches we have today. How difficult it would be to walk with two sticks — virtually impossible. We could not make any ground and be flailing around not getting anywhere in life. So we come to a place where we need to make the decision for a way forward.

The word ‘decide’ comes from the same family of words as suicide, pesticide, genocide, insecticide, homicide and the rest. It’s when we finally stop playing mind games with ourselves, as I had to. I am good at mind games, so when I play mind games with myself my head just ruminates like a spinning top, trying

to bullshit myself. Once a decision has been made there is some sort of relief. A new path opens up to us when we finally decide on recovery and then we have success. Why? The word decide: ‘de-cide’ is a powerful Latin compound word from, de = ‘off’ + caedere = ‘cut’. So we cut off or kill all other options. Its history is first Latin — dicider, then French — décider, which then became part of our language in late Middle English, meaning to ‘bring to a settlement’.

So we ‘cut off’ all other options and bring to settlement that recovery is our chosen road to travel. After we establish that, we can then adopt a successful life as our chosen road — not the road of the ‘normies’ or the average. Who wants to be one of the crowd? Not us! We are powerful addicts. It may be a good start but not a good finish. We are worth more than that. Our destiny is the road of success that is unique and individual to us, and how we get there is to use our intense, innate addictive nature to our favour. We decide what we want in life and then make the next best choice. Don’t over complicate it. KISS (Keep-It-Simple-Stupid).

PROS AND CONS

Self-awareness is the key to recovery. Self-awareness is about knowing where we are at any given moment. Knowing our feelings, our triggers, our drivers, our character defects, our strengths, our gifts, talents and so on. It’s about knowing ourselves. When we

know ourselves we have a clearer understanding of the options available to us, thus we can make better choices that will result in better outcomes. If you are reading this book or listening to the audio version you are seeking a better life. One thing you want to be is an expert at your own life.

The training involved to be an expert is experience and that we definitely have. History is a predictor of the future, so your experience is the empowerment for your success. We were successful at our addiction, we could always find a way to resource our addiction, so all we do is apply that very same personal quality that we already poses to a positive application.

I often hear addicts say, 'I could always find a way to support my three of four hundred dollar a day substance habit, but these days I have to be careful with my money. I live on the breadline, I don't know why'. I know why ... they stopped at recovery and didn't move on to success. They have only done half the job.

Carved into stone at the entrance to Apollo's Temple in Delphi, according to legend, were the words, 'Know thyself'. Consider that — a lifelong journey of self-discovery summed up in two words!

We hear that advice so often from people that it astounds us. We ask, "How do I do that?" and we get answers like, "Well... know who you are," or "Know your roots," which often just leaves us with the same question asked in a different way. So, let's have a look at this question and see if we can get to some 'how to's' on

knowing ourselves... like doing a six month university degree paper on ourselves.

On our journey towards success we need to be able to accurately see our experience in plain sight. Just thinking about it will leave us a bit fuzzy and our emotions at that moment can undermine our ability to make good choices. Good choices will cement our decision making. We have just learned that the word decision come from the word decide. So putting it together, when we decide to become clean — or at least get on the path of overcoming our addictions — we enter a new direction, where we separate off and kill all other options that will continually drag us back into our addictions, or stunt us from living the journey of success.

To support us with these decisions we need to get an accurate picture of our situation, by taking stock of our addiction outcomes. While this task may seem very basic, it is seldom done in life. It is done annually in retail outlets and in businesses (annual financials). Almost every business knows exactly where they're at. They can then make adjustments or preparations for their future. Why don't we do it in life and in the choices we make, which are probably the most important thing in our lives? Let's do the same thing for our addictions. We will do it in the form of a set of 'pros and cons'.

As neatly as you can, on one side of a page, list the benefits your addiction has brought you. Maybe you were a dealer or workaholic, so money would be one plus. Maybe it was using,

so temporary relief would be another benefit; it made you feel good for a short time, when you could forget the world, by concentrating on gambling or porn or self-harm. You loved a good night out, so alcohol or recreational drugs fuelled the fun and was a great social lubricant.

For those who are managing their anger, it might be the release and fulfilment you get for dealing out judgement on those who deserve it, because you are the 'offended' — the victim, the prosecutor, jury, judge and executioner. You are always right and they deserve everything they get! YEAH RIGHT!

Here is a good one... maybe you craved attention and connection, so had extra marital affairs, sex or even polyamory (multiple partners), which is rampant in society at the moment, because some people find it difficult to settle for one partner long term and eventually end up with none. You could call it relationship boredom syndrome, where we want to settle but find you need the 'fix' of something or someone new to keep you stimulated (which becomes a self-defeating cycle).

This is important to consider. An article in Psychology Today reports that the Pew Research Centre estimates that by the time today's young adults in the U.S. reach the age of 50, about 25 percent of them will have been single their whole lives. [2] This leaves 75% in relationships. However, approximately 50% of all marriages in the United States will end in divorce or separation. The average first marriage that ends in divorce lasts about 8 years

and over a forty year period, 67 percent of first marriages end. [2a] I don't want to fill this book up with relationship doom and gloom so I won't start adding statistics for de-facto relationship separations and solo parenting numbers, but you can see the situation here.

We need to make good choices for the right reasons in the relationship and we can only do that by defining what we want, then forming a relationship with a person who has also made that choice (to be able to achieve the outcome we desire). I am in no place to judge, having had two unsuccessful marriages and a further two engagements, or rather disengagements. Add to that having been a solo father. I am a statistic but I have not yet given up on meeting my true soul-mate. I'm an addict, I don't give up. I suppose you could call it 'relationship relapse,' but that's ok ... just like we learn from our other relapses, we can learn from relationship relapse too. Back to the pros and cons list...

On the other side of your page, list the aspects of your behaviours that brought you grief, loss of kids, partners, family, time and money. Include emotions like pain, difficulty, shame, regret, and hospitals or institutions. Don't enhance or exaggerate these negative aspects and try not to glorify the fun times or the addictions. Take some time for this. Be as honest and balanced as you can ... like an accountant would do with money.

Once you have completed this exercise, go down the list of the cons. Any minor cons can be crossed off... life happens to all

of us. People are not perfect, we are not perfect and there are always issues in life. Have a look at what's left on the cons list. Are there any cons that you can live with... ones that don't cause you problems in — financial, health, depression, relationship, also that are not illegal and are not offensive to others?

If so, cross them off, because you can deal with these little issues another time. Now let's make a comparison. What does the impact of your addiction look like on paper? Do the pro's well and truly outweigh the con's? If not, you need to ask yourself if you were truly happy in your addiction. Consider, on a scale from 1-10, how much pain your addiction has caused you (mine would be about 9).

The key points we are looking for are what I call 'non-negotiable' or 'deal breakers.' These include physical or emotional self-abuse, financial loss, relationship break-down, ill-health, mental issues, employment issues, and loss of self-respect, future self-development and life purpose. Circle these. Deal breakers are where you do not accept you own behaviour going forward. So, unless there is immediate change and you are willing to let go of the past, forgive yourself and move forward. It would seem that you are at the end of the road in your addiction and ready to move forward in strong decision.

In such a case you may want to move on to a 'planning and exit' strategy for your addiction (and ongoing relapses). This exercise actually was one of the key contributors to my relapse prevention.

If I am ever faced with temptation, I quickly recall this exercise because it is unique to me. I own it and I can role play the outcome of my choices before I make them. This exercise is tangible proof to myself that I cannot have even one drink, one cigarette, or buy or bring home sugary foods. It has literally saved me. Doing this exercise may save you too, or at least the SYSTEM will (Save Yourself Stress Time Energy & Money.)

DO A STOCKTAKE ON HOW ADDICTION IS AFFECTING YOU

We often look at how our addiction has affected us and those around us. However, what we don't see is the lost opportunities, the lost potential that we had available to us and the lost benefits. Our real loss then is the sum total of what we lost, plus the loss of the rewards that developing our potential and taking advantage of those lost opportunities would have brought. Now we are clean we can take hold of every piece of value and talent we have and put in into action, through perseverance and persistence.

We have learned our lessons. As for me, I know full well that alcohol is a gateway for me that will take me into other addictions, thus compounding the problem. One drink is too many. What's also weird is that, although I hate smoking, as soon as I have a drink, I feel like a cigarette, I have never figured that out.

To embed this realisation into our psyche we can get a clear understanding of what our addiction has cost us by doing a stocktake of our addiction. Retailers do this annually — a count of all the merchandise on their shelves and compare it to what that brought into the shop and what they sold, to discover the shrinkage. Let's say 1000 pairs of jeans were brought in to a retailer named Jeans'R'Us. 800 pairs sold and there were 165 pairs of jeans left on the shelf. So there is a shortfall of 35 pairs of jeans (the shrinkage). This means not as many were delivered or, what is most likely, there were 35 pairs stolen over the year.

So, let's look at us.... What is our shrinkage? List down what you have lost. Here are a few things that I relate to while in active addiction. I lost time with my children and I was not a good example of a father to them in many ways. I sold properties too cheap as I didn't have the mental capacity to hold on to them, due to the fact I was not trading properly and making money.

Then I sold them to get the equity out of them to live on, when the properties should have been long term investments. I quit good paying jobs, created chaos with my siblings, sent emails when I was drunk, called people drunk, lost quality friendships. I proposed to a girl drunk and ended up in a rebound marriage, marrying her to go with the flow instead of making clear and sound sober choices, so I ended up getting divorced.

I wasted money, broke the law and got my car impounded. Another time I drove of an 8.5 meter cliff, alone in my daughters car, in our own shared driveway (that put me in hospital). I spent many weekends away using. I tripped and fell of a balcony, two and a half stories high, on to a concrete drive — broke all my ribs and blew out my elbows and needed months of hand and wrist rehabilitation to get the function back into it. I've been hospitalised due to overdose, in rehabs. I had a stroke and have the infarct (the scar a stroke leaves in my brain). The list goes on. Honestly, it would be funny if it wasn't true. Most of these times were when I had been two three or even six months clean and then binged. I honestly do not know how I have survived, or at least how I have not ended up in a wheel chair.

Maybe you think you're not that bad. However, a completely wasted life far out weighs making mistakes and then coming back and fulfilling your life's purpose. What would it be like to lay on your death bed realising you never sang the song of 'your life' that was written in your heart. I borrow that concept from Serena J. Dyer, daughter of Dr. Wayne W. Dyer (author and teacher) 'Don't Die with Your Music Still in You'. Dr Wayne Dyer had his own challenges with alcohol. I have listened to and read most of his work. The question is, what is worse, to fail and then come back and succeed or to never finish the race?

It is difficult facing the truth, but we know that the truth will set you free. No one has to see this writing of yours and you can burn it after you have finished. List out all your losses and mistakes,

trying to be as honest as can. Hold nothing back, spend a few days on it and add to your list. It's amazing how we forget things on purpose, the brain is designed to do that. However, I have found great power in owning my shit. It stops me from repeating it. Keep this list in a safe place where no one else can get hold of it and possibly use it against you.

Once you feel you have taken stock of your addiction you can see the shrinkage that has occurred in your life. That was an eye opener for me. I did this exercise in my final rehab. I had never heard about doing a stocktake before but it has become a salvation tool for my life.

A QUICK LOOK AT BINARY THINKING

I would like to reframe a view that we have been taught throughout our lives, called 'binary thinking'. Binary thinking is thinking from a perspective of good and bad, up and down, right and wrong etc. Think of how computers work — is it a one or is it a zero? We call binary thinking 'binary taxonomy' — a bit like a multi choice question in an exam with a 'yes' or 'no' answer.

But the question is not a yes or no question. We can end up in an internal fight between white and black, but this is really not how our brain works in modern day life. We work with reason — a 'how to' or a 'why' sort of a questioning pattern, from which we end up with a decision... or we get stuck, freeze and have trouble

going forward in life, or in many cases just going with the flow because we cannot or will not decide.

Through setting clear goals and life purpose we will build a mental image of where we want to be in life; good relationships, healthy, content, a peaceful mind, etc. So with this thinking we can make choices in the 'here and now' that will have an outcome of taking us away from our ideals or toward our ideals. We can call this consequential thinking. We ask ourselves at the point of decision, 'What do I want and where might this end up? What am I doing here and where am I going with this activity? Will it serve me or take me away from my goals'.

Later on in this book we look further into the basketball player analogy and how the brain works? It's just like that, one hand is bouncing the ball as it has to and the other hand is balancing the body, negotiating the path between the other players to get to the hoop. That's our goal — to win in life in a moral and ethical manner and help others along the way. Now, let's look at triggers.

TRIGGERS

Before we look at moving from dealing with our addictions to using the power of our addictive nature to our favour, we will work through understanding and dealing with triggers. Triggers have the capacity to send us in a downward spiral, often times, back to our addiction or causing us problems. A trigger is an

instant reminder of an experience, where we get transported back in time to re-experience an event. In almost all of my training and therapy work, triggers are approached in a negative context. But I have come to realise that triggers are just triggers and they operate across all spectrums of our emotional range, both negative and positive.

However, because the title of this chapter is ‘Coming to the place where I want to change,’ we will concentrate on negative triggers in the emotional spectrum. Dealing correctly with these will allow us the freedom to make more beneficial decisions going forward.

Some triggers are a necessary part of our lives, designed specifically for survival. See a tiger... RUN! Stress triggers prioritise the body’s ‘fight or flight’ mechanism, shutting down whatever is not necessary in that situation, such as our digestion system and our immune system. However, this leaves us exposed to other elements of disease. When we are triggered, the brain does not differentiate. All of our primary senses, especially our sight, smell and hearing get amplified, along with our memory recall of previous similar ‘fight or flight’ experiences.

Triggers are things we need to watch out for, but often we are not even aware that they exist, they operate in our subconscious programming. Often we only recognise them retrospectively, after the event that has set them off and we have acted on them as a reflex. By then the damage is done. Think of a person with a

chronic anger issue. Almost everything sets them off; the car in front of them going 5 km too slow, noises in the house, a word taken the wrong way, and on it goes (most of us know this one). Imagine this in a gridlock traffic situation, as ‘road rage’.

The person is sitting there with every emotional trigger amplified, but they cannot fight or flee. The only outlet they have is their voice and expressions, so they use them! For those challenged with depressed feelings or anxiety, a person may say something and we are taken back to a event in the past to re-experience that event that causes us sadness, anxiety or self-consciousness.

While under stress, or in tempting situations, the fuel and the match are everpresent. One strike of the match and it’s all on, whether it be FOMO (fear of missing out), anger, sexual frustration or urges, cravings for alcohol or substances. Perhaps it causes us to disassociate or isolate, or there can be the smouldering embers of resentment and passive aggressive behaviour from feelings of victimisation. It’s so easy to get into a loop, where the same behavioural patterns are consistently our default mechanism.

When an issue is mentioned in a relationship we get responses like ‘Here we go again!’ or, ‘Are you still on about that?’ This is why arguments often go down the same old track, because memory recall is activated. Saying sorry just doesn’t cut it after a while and the frustration builds to boiling point. The triggers and the reaction are ever-present and become the culture of the relationship.

We can feel this happening within ourselves. In an argument with someone, in our own thoughts, or during a time of a relationship separation, memory is activated, sensory responses are amplified and everything gets bigger in our mind. At these times we must become extremely self-aware to be able to manage these difficult triggers and be able to use the tools of trigger management.

HOW TO MANAGE TRIGGERS

How we manage our triggers will either make us or break us. Self-awareness is the key to managing triggers. Identifying our triggers takes self-honesty, so our first job is to be honest with ourselves and look at the part we have played in the issues we face. If we do not fix this part of our lives, we will take our present self into the future and repeat the same cycle over and over. We can change this cycle by making every setback a setup for a comeback.

The destructiveness of triggers is that they cause a reaction within us. The reaction can manifest itself in many ways; anger outbursts, depression, self-harm, addiction relapse, sorrow, denial, emotional shutdown, rejecting possible beneficial opportunities and so on.

Once we have reflected on those responses within ourselves, we will know our triggers, then we will consider why we have the triggers and where they have come from. As I mentioned, triggers are usually an external warning sign that takes us back to

past traumas; a partner shouting at us, a call from the Ex. Triggers are often sight, sounds and smells that take us straight back into a traumatic situation and the associated emotional trauma or the strong desire for instant pleasure or relief.

We can often get into a repetitive cycle in addictions. We can remove ourselves from that environment, job, and relationship, but then we can find ourselves feeling the same way we did before, in an entirely different set of circumstances.

This scenario is called ‘transference’. It’s where the behavioural patterns mirror the behavioural patterns of our previous environment and cause us to experience an emotional recall based on the past, and to expect the same outcome. As has been stated, this often happens on a subconscious level. That’s why being self-aware is so important.

Investor, Warren Buffett, explained this as ‘confirmation bias’ when he said, “What the human being is best at doing is interpreting all new information so that their prior conclusions remain intact.” We try to rationalise it with logic but, as we know, emotions are more powerful than logic. Emotions become our personality, our personality becomes our reality, our personal reality gets expressed in the world and becomes our experience, and our experience is what we call our ‘life’. We have to develop a ‘catch ourselves’ habit and leverage it so that, just before we head down the wrong track, we apprehend ourselves. I have coined it, ‘minding the gap’.

‘MIND THE GAP’

When I was in England, I was on the Tube and heard a voice over the loudspeaker saying, “Mind the gap.” It is probably the most well-known statement in England. The voice belonged to a man named Oswald Laurence. Laurence was an actor who never made it into the public eye. There is a wonderful story behind it. Laurence’s wife, Margaret, was heartbroken after he died. She would sit at the train station during the day and listen to his voice, to remind herself of him and to help her deal with the pain of her loss. This went on for five years.

One day she went to the train station and there was a different voice. She was heartbroken. Margaret told her story to the staff and asked if she could have a recording of her husband’s voice. The staff felt emotional empathy for the situation and passed her story on to the team leaders and up the chain of command it went. Not only did Margaret get a recording of Laurence, but Laurence’s voice was also reinstated. So Laurence lives on through his voice.

I loved this story. Then it occurred to me that the most effective way to deal with triggers, which actually works, is that we must ‘mind the gap’. There is a gap between the trigger and the reaction. The trigger fires the gun, and we feel we must react quickly, to save ourselves from ‘the tiger’ — because we perceive it as real, even when it is not. So, the reaction is often almost beyond the limits of our control.

We may have a burst of anger at someone around us, blame someone, get mad at the kids, eat too much ice-cream, or whatever. Afterwards we reflect on the situation and wish we had taken another approach. Now I have an extra half an hour on the treadmill, or make up with my partner, apologise to a friend. I hate saying sorry, damn it!

I have become good at it though. There is a lot of power in the occasional well-placed, well-thoughtout, intentional apology, with flowers and all the trimmings. It can really validate your partner (and the ‘making up’ can be well worth it). I just need to make sure I don’t do it again. That’s the hard part!

REDUCING TRIGGERS TO STRESSORS

With self-awareness we can quickly catch ourselves when a trigger comes at us. We know ourselves because we have all had a repetitive cycle — a reaction to a harsh word said to us from an Ex for instance, or from a craving. When we feel it coming on we can quickly say to ourselves, “This is not real, I am not allowing you (my addiction) to take control of my emotions. You have no right in my life. I am not giving you my energy today!”

While we may be affected by a statement, peer pressure or an urge, we can see it for what it is — an attempt to trigger us or set us off; some-times for their own gratification sometimes for our own, or we want to believe our own nonsense. Like an energy

thief, addictions are stealing your energy and leaving you feeling drained. Don't give them the ammunition.

The circumstance or trigger is evident, however, your reaction is your right. The addiction does not have the right to control you! When you realise this, you can reduce the 'trigger' to a 'stressor' by minding the gap. A stressor moves slower than a trigger. The emotion takes longer so the gap gets bigger, then as you continue to mind the gap between their action and your reaction you can choose even better responses; ones that will take the power away from the addiction and disarm it entirely.

You could say, "I no longer have any feelings for it, I am moving in a different direction in my life now — away from it. I do not believe I need it any longer and it no longer has power over me." The better you get at this, those triggers, that once sounded like a car accident, become just the sound of a passing car on the freeway ... you barely notice them at all as they fade into the background.... all because you've learned to mind the gap.

Minding the gap has been the antidote for my addictions; from cigarettes, alcohol, overeating and more. But this tool has also saved me from many unprofitable, unnecessary arguments and continues to do so.

Caveat: If a trigger situation involves a threat of physical violence to you or a third person, these tools do not apply. Protect yourself and get onto the authorities immediately!

This application can be applied throughout the whole of life; at work, in other relationships or with a compulsion, like an addiction. For example, the triggers for craving alcohol, substances, gambling, eating disorders, can be reduced to stressors with the tool of ‘playing the outcome’ — considering the consequence of the first drink, that unnecessary snack, a small gamble, an idle look at bit of porn, a little flirt with the opposite sex for fun, how we respond to harsh words, or whatever it might be.... just consider where it will take you.

You have been there before and you know the negative outcomes. You do not have to do any more research to find out that you cannot have that first drink, that first chip. Whatever your challenge may be, wait for a while and watch the feelings of craving subside. Minding the gap works. It is not something out of a counselling manual. I know this from my own experience and the experience of others.

Delay the gratification and look forward to waking up without a hangover, resist that scoop of ice-cream you bought just for the kids, the temptation to gamble, then pat yourself on the back and buy yourself something nice rather than making the ‘house’ rich. You will thank yourself later every single time and build a strong resistance to your addiction.

HUMILITY OR HUMILIATION

We can boil a lot down to base factors in life... down to simple statements. One is 'humility or humiliation.' I have found that in a lot of cases, where I was headstrong and would not look at any other perspective than my 'blinkers' would allow, this was often my downfall. I have ended up in a place of humiliation. However, the real humiliation was of coming clean after the experience and my emotions being un-anaesthetised.

We can look back and see where we have been wrong and really feel it, or at least, where we could have done better but had not done so. For me, this was when I came to the realisation of how I could have been a much better parent. I have since apologised to each of my children. They were very forgiving and understanding, but I know they do not have a comparison between an 'OK' parent and a great one. But I do. I know what I should have done more of and I didn't do, and this is just something I have to live with.

We actually never have to face that day of realisation. We can continue to live a life behind our armour of excuse or self-justification, or we can be honest with ourselves, apologise and let it go. I have dealt with a lot of people who feel wronged by their parents.

They say that if only the parents could admit it they would feel so much better and would be able to have closure. I have found that addictions are a humiliating experience and people look down on others with addictions as sick people, which we have been. I

also considered them as one of ‘those’ people, until I had my own awakening in rehab and realised I was one of ‘those’ people. So we can either humble ourselves, accept that we cannot have even a little of our addiction because we don’t have power over it, or our addiction will humiliate us.

“The mind can process very fast, so if we don’t act on our ideas we will hand-brake and kill them”!

As this book is about using our great strength and willpower towards recovery and success, we are now going to ‘switch’.. to the other side of increasing your reaction time. In this book we have looked at not getting caught in the ‘valley of decision.’ Most people find that place and settle there; the nice comfortable and cozy place which then becomes our next enemy. So, using the trigger scenario, we will now adopt a ‘do the next best thing’ trigger in our lives. When we know what is best for us, we will act on it quickly. We will support change in ourselves by coaching ourselves. Whatever we serve, whether it is our addiction or our success, that will be our master. Choose you master. Living a successful life is a form of self-mastery.

It does not matter if you are in prison, in rehabilitation, being forced to change by being screamed at by your families or your partner threatening to leave you, the loss of a licence or a job, health issues, or suffering loss of any area of your life... these things will not usually move us. As addicts we are hard wired to suffer loss and we have a great ability to walk away from

things in order to serve our addiction. The feelings of pain are anaesthetised, which I will talk about later in the book. We as addicts are focused on an outcome and the ends justifies the means. For the true addict, whether you steal, beg or borrow to support your addiction, it does not matter. If you have to work and sell your irreplaceable hours, or sometimes steal from your loved ones to fund and feed your addiction, then so be it.

We have acted on our urges in the past, so why do we procrastinate when we want to act on that which will move us toward our dream life? If we don't act on our good triggers then our brain will reason our way out of them, handbrake the idea and kill it. When we get an urge to go back to university or do adult learning to improve ourselves, to start looking for better job, to change careers, improve our life in anyway, we must act on it. Google the subjects that interest you and start feeding the feeling of success, or it will disappear.

If we have the desire to save for a car or house, we need to write it out, make a plan, set a goal. We need to drop what we are doing (if it is not really important), pause Netflix, get off the phone or social media and let our brain run down the creative track of preparing for our future. This will lock the goal into our powerful subconscious where it can simmer away and our mind will come up with strategies for how we can achieve these goals.

THE LAW OF DIMINISHING RETURNS

In the Chapter 3, we are going to look at the law of ‘aggregation of marginal gains’. In this chapter we will look at a theory in economics that predicts that after some optimal level of capacity is reached, adding an additional factor of production will actually result in smaller increases in output [3]. This ‘law of diminishing returns’ is related to the concept of diminishing marginal utility. It sounds like a mouthful, but this law is simple and directly relatable to addictions.

I will explain it like this.... We don’t have a car, so we have to bus or ‘public’ it everywhere... shopping is a pain, carrying the groceries home on foot... when there is an urgency we have to get someone to pick us up... we constantly have to check the weather before we go anywhere. It takes longer to get to work. But, when we get a car, our city opens up, we can visit people when we want, we are on call for our kids... we feel liberated and empowered.

The thing is we then start thinking about having a second car (myself and other blokes especially). We do this with the expectation that it will bring the same amount of joy and utility in our lives. So we pay the big money for a sports car or a novelty car. We drive it home and park it, smiles everywhere. But it sits there, often for weeks at a time. We take it for a drive every now and then, but we can never get the same benefit or satisfaction for it as we did our first car. The return on our investment has

diminished. This applies for clothes too; we have our favourites that we wear a lot and a wardrobe full of stuff we can't get rid of but we don't use either. The \$40 we spent on our everyday wear has far more return than the \$140 dress or jacket we bought that we have worn a couple of times, and sits there losing fashion value (or we grow out of it). The more we have of something the less satisfaction we get from it, the return from the investment we made in it diminishes.

When we first started drinking or using, whatever it may have been, it was fun... nights out of enjoyment, the first beer after a good day's work, or glass of wine, our first big spend... the possibilities seemed endless. But the longer we consume something, or the more we consume something, the less enjoyment we get from it. The first bite of the pie, is always better than the last. This desire for more eventually crosses the line. Where it was an enjoyment and brought something to our life, at some point, it started taking things away from our life.

Remember the word SYSTEM?

It's such a great acronym for a path to success.
But here's a more sobering application of that acronym:

- **Save** — the opposite of save is cost. What has our addiction cost us; family, relationships, health?
- **Yourself** — addictions steal our identity away from us — our personal value, sometimes our freedom, health and even shortens our life.
- **Stress** — the addiction brings stress into every area of our life causing dysfunction on most levels.
- **Time** — wasted months and years, but also time we would spend with our children and our significant other building relationships. Sometimes we lose time, and even actually costs us time by shortening our life.
- **Energy** — the amount of energy it takes to get well is huge, then the relapses send us around again. The effort we put into servicing our addiction and the emotional energy is taxing.
- **Money** — not only the money we spend, but the money we didn't make and opportunities we didn't take. We often end up with debt and pay the interest on that too, so the problem is compounded.

To finish this chapter we can see from our own personal experience that, coming to the place of change is just a place of realisation — the understanding that serving our addictions is robbing us of our life. It is challenging to apprehend our behaviour (this I know well), but it is possible. Start reducing now; from this very time you are reading this look at the time and date, record it in your mind, make your success a decision and know ‘more of’ is not beneficial to us, quite the opposite... and it’s a road we just do not want to do down any longer. We now choose our dream life as our future and we are going to make a plan to create it!



03.

THE AGGREGATION OF MARGINAL GAINS



I If you are reading this you are obviously putting in the work to make changes to better your life and rise, as the title of this book states. There is an ability that you have within you that, if harnessed and nurtured, will propel you to live a life that you, your significant other, your family, friends and community will be proud of and that will be worthy of respect.

Everyone loves a winner, and there is no winner the crowd cheers on more than the underdog. Think of an Olympic running race where the runner, let's say runner Number 6, at the back of the field, starts to make a move. No-one even takes them seriously, but they pass the second to last, then the third to last... and when runner Number 6 is around the middle of the pack the commentator recognises them on the move and says, "Number 6

is having a go.” Think of running in the middle of the pack as being average or just normal; a place of comfort where most people sit in life and hide in the pack, unrecognised. Then Number 6 passes a few more and moves up the pack, the commentator raises his voice... “Hold on a minute folks, we could have an unexpected upset here with Number 6!” Number 6 is relentless in their pursuit and pushes on past the third place holder.

The crowd starts to stand to their feet and cheer. Number 6 passes the second place holder... the crowd is going wild... the finish line is within sight and the only thing that stand between Number 6 and the finishing line is the first runner. Number 6 digs deep and breaks neck and neck with the front runner.

The crowd noise is deafening... the commentator is screaming, **“LOOK AT NUMBER 6 GO! WE HAVE NEVER SEEN THIS BEFORE IN THE HISTORY OF THE OLYMPICS!”** Number 6 just manages to put a half a step in front of their competitor to win the race on a photo finish and takes the gold. The crowd is going mental... the commentator yells at the top of his voice, **“THEY DID IT, NUMBER 6 DID IT. NUMBER 6 TAKES THE GOLD!”** A lasting memory is made, this race makes headlines around the world and is played on the 6pm news globally. Number 6 is welcomed back to their country as a National Hero. They get their story told of how they were once a write-off and how they have become a huge success and their story lives on well past the race.

Now look at us, the underdogs, the ones written off and thought of as a blight on society, needing rehabilitation. That might be your current situation, or it once was, as it was mine. A pastor once told my wife, ‘Kieran will never change.’ My wife saw it as an authorisation to be released from the marriage, and that day she left me.

The funny thing is, that Pastor was the same person who prayed over us at our wedding. Fancy that! Not much surprises me now. The willpower that drove our addiction gave us the ability to walk away from the things we cared about. Some of us gave up our families, our jobs, our careers, our futures, even our health and freedom, to serve our addictions. But this same will power can drive us to succeed in life, attain our goals and go the next mile when others give up.

Every athlete needs willpower to get through a marathon, but surely no one has ever dug deeper than Switzerland's Gabriela Andersen-Schiess, in the first ever Woman's Marathon at the 1984 Olympics. Fourteen minutes into the marathon, Joan Benoit began to pull away from the rest of the pack. She went on to win in a time of 2 hours, 24 minutes, and 52 seconds. Twenty minutes after Benoit finished, 39-year-old Andersen-Schiess entered the Los Angeles Colosseum, suffering from exhaustion and dehydration. With temperatures hitting nearly 30 °C (86° F), the conditions were very warm for running the full marathon distance of 26.2 miles.

At the time, the rules stipulated that there could only be five water stations and the contestants could not be given water anywhere else. Unfortunately for Gabriela Andersen-Schiess, she missed the fifth and last station and became dehydrated as a result. Around the stadium, every step was simply torturous for Gabriela. The crowd gasped as she staggered onto the track, her torso twisted, her left arm limp, her right leg mostly seized, staggering side to side, hunched over, flopping like a warm lettuce leaf.

She waved away medical personnel who rushed to help her, knowing that if they touched her she would be disqualified. She took five minutes and forty seconds to weave and stumble around the 400 meter track. She finished 37th out of 44, in a time of 2 hours 48minutes, 42seconds. The crowd cheered her on with every step she took, right up to the finish line, where she collapsed and was taken away on a stretcher while the crowd roared her accolades. You can find this event on Youtube [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWtY7MaqwtS>]. [1]

Whether we have a winning photo finish or we stagger to the finish line to complete the race, we are that runner and our story goes out to the still suffering addict or the underdog. That story fuels the strength and hope that will encourage the next person to believe that they can recover too.

A quick example how just how powerful your story is to others, regardless of how you see yourself, is the four-minute mile story. Athletes had tried and failed to run a mile in less than four

minutes however ‘Years ago, experts claimed that running a sub 4 mile just wasn’t possible. Our body wasn’t designed or able to run at that speed.’ [2] Why? Perhaps this was because of the psychological mystique surrounding the four minute barrier. This was until the 25-year-old medical student, Roger Bannister won the mile race with a time of 3 minutes, 59.4 seconds. The “four-minute barrier” has since been broken by over 1,400 athletes and is now the standard of professional middle-distance runners. So, what was once an impossibility has now become a standard. Relate that to us; what we thought was once an impossibility — to recover from addictions — is now a standard, and further more to go on to become all that we were meant to be. To become a fully successful person is well achievable.

AGGREGATION OF MARGINAL GAINS IS BASED IN HOPE.

Hope is the basis of achievement. Recovery brings rewards, so if we do the work we will get the treats we are looking for. Let’s consider this phrase — the ‘aggregation of marginal gains.’ It holds the mantle to success. We all hear about the ones that got the ‘big break.’ Everyone wants the big break, but the big break does not really exist, because the big break is the accumulation of a series of little breaks that have been worked for, achieved and banked. All put together they add up to the big break that became Runner Number 6’s story of completing

the marathon... or Roger Bannister's 4 minute mile... or your story of recovery and success. The aggregation of marginal gains is just that. The Oxford Dictionary states that aggregation means 'the formation of a number of things into a cluster'. Marginal gains are the small incremental gains we make along the way that, all put together, become our personal success story.

There is a story that goes like this... back in Grecian days, a runner was on his way to Olympia to compete in the Olympic Games. He got lost and stopped to ask a man how to get to Olympia. The man said, "Son, to get to Olympia you only need to be doing two things; be facing in that direction and then taking the next step". Little did he know that the man he had just asked was the master philosopher, Socrates.

Our task then is just to overcome fear (FEAR > Face Everything and Recover) by doing the next right thing, which is taking the next step and the following steps will appear. Trust the process. It works.

DELAYED GRATIFICATION IS GRATIFICATION IN MANY WAYS

We often think of instant gratification in a negative context and delayed gratification in a boring laborious context, where we have to put off the day of excitement until the future, labouring towards it in a way that would appear we are under duress. It's

a bit like telling a child they can watch TV only after they have done their homework, or finished doing the dishes, they then unhappily do whatever is needed to get what they want. Because this viewpoint seems to be embedded into our psyche we can often have this approach in our adult life. As addicts we just want the good stuff now. When we come to the realisation that the path to success is success itself we get to celebrate the incremental steps along the way, which becomes gratifying within itself. We get all those dopamine hits we love along the way! There are a few different ways of looking at this.

If we can reverse the need to actually get something to feel gratification, we find that we can be thankful for not being in the negative or self-sabotaging situations we have experienced in the past. During our sobriety we have never regretted waking up without a hangover or not having to have gone through another ‘comedown.’ We still have the cash that we didn’t spend on something we didn’t need... or we didn’t gamble it away. We have not had to go and apologise for something we did to someone, while we were under the influence of active addiction, nor have we had to face the law for carrying contraband, using, stealing, or the many other ways we broke the law in order to support our habit. This sense of gratification also applies to gaining control over food compulsion. All of these successes are very gratifying and, in addition to not having to spend time dealing with the fallout of addictive behaviours, we get to apply ourselves with a clear mind to advancing in life.

Though we may have not taken active steps to advance in life, the mere thought and desire that we seek to advance in life is actually a great gain. This is called moving from a ‘pre-contemplation stage’ where we are not even contemplating doing anything with our life, into a contemplation stage, where we are considering making changes. An example of this is simply making it to recovery meetings, the likes of Narcotics Anonymous (NA), Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Gamblers Anonymous (GA), Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (SLAA), or the many other recovery groups you may find in your area.

Even reading this book, or joining recovery groups on Social Media, points to contemplation of a better quality of life that we are beginning to desire for ourselves. We are beginning to plan a better future. This is called the ‘planning stage’. I have found the support these groups offer is empowering enough to build a strength within the attendees, to propel them to make the necessary changes required, to take action and to break patterns of procrastination.

If we can get down to the underlying thing behind practically all character defects, what we will find sitting there, pushing the buttons, is ‘rebellion’. We all too often think of rebellion as rebelling against something external; like school when we were there, the law, society, social norms, family, government or other compliance structures that we feel are trying to control us. But this ‘rebellion’ against institutions can be caused by idealism. We then need get down to the heart of what it takes to crack the code,

in order to release the phenomenal willpower locked up inside the addict nature that burns white hot with intensity. The real rebellion I am speaking of here is the rebellion against ourselves — the war within each one of us. If we can master this rebellion we can master ourselves and basically become unstoppable.

Procrastination is one of my biggest character defects that I go to war with every single day. I literally have trouble making decisions. I over analyse everything, from intimate relationships to the choice of toothpaste. The other day while writing this book I got stuck for two hours on one word which was ‘serendipity’ and deciding whether it was it the best choice of word for that sentence. I actually had to get up and walk away from the computer to clear my head. Today I had to exhaust every excuse I could find to force myself back to the computer to continue. Why? My internal rebellion is what the symptom of procrastination is derived from. When I give my work to the person who is doing the editing for me, she is continually giving it back to me to make it more readable, so back to the drawing board I go. I hate it, I want to argue. It does my head in, but at the end of the day I know she is right.

We can trick ourselves out of doing what is most important in our life by doing what is most urgent. We can fill our days with urgency and feel like we have done a full days work, being busy, but busyness doesn’t equate to progress. Progress is what we are after, to get this we must have goals and vision, know where we are going. No target > no life objective > no finish line > no prize!

I have a couple of extreme underlying support mechanisms that enable my procrastination. You might identify with them. One is creative avoidance. Creative avoidance allows me to make excuses for my procrastination by inventing the next supposedly important thing. I need to go past the supermarket to pick something up and waste a half an hour instead of doing a once a week shop, or call someone that I really didn't need to, or get the latest news as I feel like I have to catch up with current events. When in truth today's headlines are tomorrows fish and chip paper, or what I use to fill my rubbish bin up with. Checking the internet for the news is the worst thing I can do, because there are always Facebook pops ups, ads, or an interesting Youtube clip and there goes another half an hour or so, then its time for a shower. The next thing is chronic dilution (another term for it is priority dilution), which is when our value systems are just not in order or we have simply too many priorities. Often we need to condense our priorities to a manageable portion, so that we can actually complete some of them... the most important ones. Let's take a quick look at the word priority first.

According to <https://www.etymonline.com>, in France, in the late Fourteenth Century, prioritie was first recorded as a "state of being earlier" (from the Medieval Latin, *prioritatem* — nominative *prioritas*) meaning 'fact or condition of being prior.' Simply put, it's something before something else, or from 1400AD, as 'precedence in right, place, or rank.' In 1897, the Century Dictionary stated, 'Priority is the state or fact of

coming first in order of time'. But in the Twentieth Century, the sense shifted toward 'Fact, or condition of coming first in importance, or requiring immediate attention; a thing regarded as more important than another or others'. This is where it gets interesting. The word priority was always singular, not pluralised, so "priorities" was practically non-existent before 1900, and not used in any volume until 1940. Since then it has grown in its use. According to the Google N-gram tool, the use of the word 'priorities' has increased, to the point where it is now used about 50% of the time, replacing the original singular word 'priority'. This is basic proof of the how much busier our lives have become. Looking at this we can see why the human race has increasingly become a race of starters but not finishers; not finishing the races we start. We are not able to focus and complete because we have too many priorities. A question that we must ask ourselves is, how many races can we run at the same time?

If we are going to make any real progress in life we can look at the clues successful people have left for us and follow the bread crumbs. We need to simplify our objectives so the races we choose to start we complete. Here is a great story to back this up.

We have all heard of Warren Buffett, one of the most famous investors of this age. He has a concept known as the 25/5 rule. Mike Flint was Warren Buffett's private pilot and was successful in his own right. Mike said to Warren one day something to the effect of, "When we upgrade I think we should get this particular type of plane." Warren said to Mike, "If you are working for me

in 10 years, when it is time to upgrade, I have probably failed you as a boss” (meaning he should have progressed out of this job and gone on to greater things). Warren said, “List 25 things you want to achieve.” (this could be in relation to your job, family, 25 things you want to do this month, or your life goals). Mike did so, then he came back to Warren. Warren asked Mike to circle the top five things on the list. Mike went away considered the top five and came back. Then Warren asked Mike for his strategy. Mike’s strategy was to work on the top five priorities first and then, on his weekends and evenings, when he got bored, or hit a snag, he would work on the rest of the list. Warren said, “Mike you have it all wrong. Your top five are your priorities. Work on your top five and never, under any circumstances, do the rest”.

The reason? Finish the races you have on before you start the next ones, because it is easy for us to rationalise spending time on things that are good uses of our time, as opposed to spending time on things that are the best uses of our time. These are the things that will change our life. The other 20 things take our time, our energy and emotion. They are on our list for a reason, but they just do not happen to be the best uses of our time at the present. If you have a deep faith, a long term relationship and / or kids, my view is that they should be in your top five.

When we see progress and the value it brings to our life, the attraction to our addictions fades into the background. These addictions may never go away, like alcohol, sex, TV, food, procrastination, over-working, cars, an unhealthy attraction to

money or whatever it may be — you will know what your Achilles heel is. These unhealthy voices screaming for your attention will get quieter and be kept more in balance as your value systems re-orientate towards your life purpose.

I have personally dealt with these challenges using this mental tool.... I have not ‘given up’ cigarettes, alcohol, substances, gaming or other things, but I have reduced them to a balanced healthy level... and for me that level is zero, and at zero it stays! I have also just reduced my energy drinks intake level to a balance of zero, because I could easily have three, four or even five of them a day (early days as yet but I will see how I go). I couldn’t ‘give up,’ because If I did determine to stop the use of these unhealthy behaviours, I couldn’t stay stopped and I would continually relapse. But I could reduce them... I was capable of that. So I eventually reduced them to zero! What a relief! I didn’t have to ‘stop,’ because that was just too difficult. It is the same outcome, just a different more manageable way of getting there. Remember ... whatever it takes!

You see, what's happening on the inside manifests itself on the outside and becomes our experience. For example, I am going through my 12 steps again with my sponsor — my forth sponsor that is! It has taken me until this time, to get to my forth sponsor, to realise it is not the sponsor I am struggling with, it is my internal disposition of self-rebellion I am wrestling with. Some of the steps have 40+ questions in them. My sponsor sends me away to redo the questions before I move on, not only because I

complicate the answers, I even argue with the way the question is being asked.

This may sound extreme, but what do you make excuses for in your own life that becomes a block wall, or a glass ceiling, preventing you from achieving? Is even not having the desire to achieve or to do better a block? If so, how about developing 'a desire to aspire' in your life? If there is no desire (a place I have been before), we need to go a further step back. We can wish we would have a desire to use all the talents and strengths we have in our life and to become the best representation of who we are. But what is really inhibiting us down at the core? Is it a lack of self-belief? If so, what do we do about this? We kill this lack of self-belief by a thousand paper cuts. How?

BREAKING CHALLENGES INTO SMALLER PIECES UNTIL YOU CAN MANAGE IT

Lack of self-belief is the master key that locks up one's life and legacy, and its deceitful twin is comfort. Look at it this way, when we were using, gambling, drinking, over-eating or whatever, and we were running out of whatever it was, what did we feel? ... a craving. The body needed that substance or activity we were caught up in so we could even function. When I was a smoker, if I didn't have a cigarette, I would simply go nuts. I just needed a cigarette and would do almost anything to get one.

Reviewing the recovery steps above we can see where we are in our recovery journey and — on the flip side — our journey to building the life we most desire. Here are the phases we go through.

1. Pre-contemplation
2. Contemplation
3. Planning
4. Action
5. Maintenance
6. Termination

WHAT ARE ‘MARGINAL RETURNS’ AND HOW MUCH EFFECT DO THEY HAVE?

One percent better every day, five days a week, for 46 working weeks of the year is the equivalent of 10 times better. But 1% worse will bring it almost down to zero.

To really show the impact of marginal returns I will reflect on an actual event where marginal returns were implemented, Team Sky, which is Great Britain’s professional cycling team, hired Dave Brailsford in the mid 2000s to do a review of the team. Team Sky had a very average record on the cycling world stage. They had won one gold medal in the last hundred years or so. They had never won a Tour De France. Dave Brailsford had a brief for the

team. It was to change their performance to reach a higher level. He implemented the aggregation of marginal gains method. To easily explain, this is the 1% improvement in nearly everything that you do. He reviewed their entire setup, improving their bike tyres, their bike seats and setting feedback sensors on the riders, to track their individual performance. They wore indoor racing suits because they were slightly lighter. They also looked at little things like massage gels to improve recovery. They taught the riders to wash their hands for hygiene, and even considered what pillow provided the best night sleep, keeping these on hand in the hotels they went to.

Brailsford supposed that implementing all these changes may be enough to win the Tour De France in five years, Team Sky ended up winning the Tour De France in three years, and went on to win the tour De France three times in four years. But that is not all, Great Briton's Cycling team won 70% of the gold metals in the 2016 Olympics in their divisions.

The accumulation of small improvements actually adds up to very significant changes in a reasonably short period of time. It's just plain maths. Improve the things around you, your systems and your routine and build better habits. By implementing these you don't have to reduce your goals, you just have to change how you implement what is necessary to achieve the goals.

RELATIONSHIP CONFLICT VS TASK CONFLICT

Often we fall out of relationship because of conflict in the relationship, not because we didn't want the relationship. This can be the case in all aspects of relationship, not just our significant other, but with our children and in our work environment. Think of the task of parenting children and the arguments that can happen with different parenting styles that don't get discussed and agreed on, or the desire to keep an active sex and intimacy lifestyle within a relationship. The different ways of doing tasks at our work place with our colleagues, or a leisure activity with friends can include unhappy disagreements. Sometimes doing a task that should be enjoyable, like making it to church, a family outing, going on a vacation, or planning a party, can turn into an argument.

When we reflect on where the conflict came from we will usually find it was around task driven operations within the relationship. Was it task conflict or relationship conflict? Did we bring the task conflict into the relationship where it didn't belong? If we are able to manage how we approach tasks with others, we will find that we will greatly reduce relationship conflict.

Why would I bring this up in an addiction book? Addictions and relationships have enormous cross-overs, unless you are an extreme loner or isolating because of your addictions, which I have done myself in the past. To service our addictions is a task in itself and that task almost always brings conflict into most

of our relationships, on every level, even sometimes with our suppliers. If we can figure out how to separate our task mode of operation, to be more conducive or more adaptable to other people's task mode of operation, we will find our relationships will get a whole lot better. We will most likely get more out of life, our relationships, be more productive and find we just have better days. Not every battle has to be fought. Sometimes we lose the battles to win the wars.

Now, what relevance is that to us personally? It's huge! We have a relationship with ourselves. Often, for whatever reason, we get stuck in life. This creates internal conflict, so whatever is on the inside will come out. Simply put, it's hard for us to put on a smile, be peaceable and compliant when we are having a bad day. I remember one day, when I had not had a drink for about seven weeks, my wife came home and she went 'off' at me. I asked her what I had done... I was dry, the house was clean, I was hitting my targets at work (which was always number one). She said, 'Because you're the only one here!'

At first I thought, 'bitch' but after a while I realised how similar to her I had been, with my selfish and self-centred attitude. How much more I would get out of life if I wasn't such of a pain the arse to be around sometimes. This took a bit of self-observation and self-honesty. I did discover my errors and more of my character defects, but just because I discovered them, it didn't save my marriage.

Changing them is a whole other story; ‘Transformation through suffering.’ That has taken years and I still have more work to do, even after all my training. I get solace knowing it’s about progress rather than perfection. We find, it works in reverse as well. The less conflict we have with those around us the less conflict we have with ourselves and the more our life improves. This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby all these marginal gains aggregate to our success story and our addictive nature works to our favour.

THE ABILITY TO FOCUS. ADDICTS HAVE THE GIFT OF FOCUS

For an addict, focus (which can give us the ability to push through that dark place to get to the other side), is a very powerful tool, when harnessed and used in a constructive manner. Think of all the past painful hangovers, come-downs, the pain of losing all the money for the gambler, the loss of marriages, health, jobs, finances and care of one’s children... the list goes on. Let’s be honest, we just get enough recovery and go back and do it all over again. The drunk sobers up enough to drink again, the gambler gets enough money to gamble again, the sex or porn addict has enough time between sessions to repeat the behaviour, the over-eater lets it go down so we can fill up again.

The amount of time I find myself opening the fridge just to stare inside it is ridiculous. I need a sign of the inside of the door saying, 'you gain!, piss off! How the marginal gains of all these behaviours aggregate (add up) is really something we do not want to have. It could be the person challenged with over-eating, or the person putting something in their body that will cause ill-health, like substances or alcohol. We have to carry that extra weight around every moment of the day, which is tiring. Or the body has to work hard to metabolise the poisons we are putting into it. We know the harm it's causing us and that we feel like crap, but we continue to do it. Why?

As an addict we possess a super personality side to us that is able to focus on a chosen objective. In the past we have been able to totally disregard the costs, or downside of the objective, to complete the task which was the next 'fix' — whatever fix that may have been. This is what this book is all about. I see the vast majority of recovering addicts totally fixated on holding off the addictive personality — like they have gone down to a surf beach, walked into the water and are trying to stop the waves. It's actually near impossible to do.

This is why some studies show that only about 3% of alcoholics actually recover. In my days going through rehab facilities, not as a support worker or facilitator of meetings, but as a patient, I met some of the smartest most talented people, who had totally lost everything. I mean seriously smart, I have been in rehab with PHD professors and addicts who were once were multi-millionaires

but have ended up homeless. I'm not joking — addiction has no favourites. NA (Narcotics Anonymous) considers the full effects of addiction to be jails, institutions and death.

If you ever want to feel like a total and absolute failure, try getting visited by your children and grandchildren while being locked up in a rehabilitation facility. I still cannot believe I actually got that low. It makes me emotional just sitting here writing about it. What was I thinking! Even my ex-wife came along to see me, with an undercurrent of, 'See, I told you so, loser!' It would be almost funny if it wasn't true. I know about this stuff first hand, not from books. Recovery must actually be a lived experience. I sit here as proof that what I am writing about works. Recovery is repeatable, and available for anyone who desires it (the four minute mile).

Fast forward a bit over two years... I sent my ex-wife a picture of a total of 27 acquired recognised qualifications, many from the Government Qualifications Association, hanging in my new practice room, along with a picture of me holding the gold trophy for the citywide Amateur Body Building Association, which I recently won.

I am now in training to represent my city in the Nationals event for the entire country. [Since writing this I have gone on to achieve 1st place at the Nationals and have become the National Title Holder] I have gone from literally the lowest time in my life to the prime of my life. So, yes, this application of 'using your

addictive nature to your favour' for recovery does work. I am not only telling you this works, I am also showing you (because there's a lot of talk out there, but actions and outcomes are the proof).

Just as in the previous analogy, of the person resisting their addictive nature by trying to stop the waves, the real application is to use the waves as a source of energy, to propel you into the direction of your dreams. The first thing to do is to identify what you actually want in life then you can harness the power of the waves — which is your unbelievably strong willpower. That willpower powers your internal endocrine system, much like the underwater electrical generators that work off the movement of the water made by currents, or the power generators in a dam that power entire counties with electricity. Body surf the power of those energy waves to reach your ideals, by redirecting all that powerful energy you contain into your desires.

**HERE IS A WORD FOR WORD EXAMPLE
OF THIS CONCEPT:**

It is currently 10.45pm on a Saturday night. I could be surfing Netflix or doing other dumb shit like drinking and other things, but I have chosen to put this concept into practice in my daily life and it works. I received a text from a mate. I like chatting by text. I get validation from it. This mate had been chatting to a friend in recovery.

I have copied and pasted the texts below:

Them: Something to think about... Maybe for your book?

One of the girls who is over a year clean has started smoking weed and has put it to the girls that she thinks she can drink one glass of wine and drink in moderation. I know for me - I cannot have anything mind altering. Ever! Do you think there is an addict that can use and their life stay manageable?

Me: Big question. For starters, your question is closed, requiring a binary answer. We call this binary taxonomy. So your question is unanswerable. Then there is the context of 'using' which is ambiguous as well. However, addictions are unique to the individual. Some people can be social drinkers but have an addiction to weed. ie: Weed 'use' addiction is related to tetrahydrocannabinol and cannabinoids. Whereas alcohol addiction is related to tetrahydroisoquinoline. So, you can have compulsive behaviours with one but not the other.

The second thing is 'use' often relates to 'clean'. Clean often is around the legal use of psychoactive substances. So, it's difficult to say you don't 'use' and be using illegal substances.

The real question is. What has been the past repetitive behaviour and what chances do you have of repeating that behaviour?

Me (again): Sorry if this seems complicated...Simplified...

It is more about your history / your story. Then it is about trajectory; the risks associated with chosen current behaviours. ie: Where might this go? (What story am I telling myself? Is it honest?

Then it is about what do I want? Then it is about, how do I get there? Then is about what my behaviours will need to look like to put myself in the best position to make it work to get what I want. Then it is about, 'do the next right thing'. What might that be for me? And try and just do that one thing. We call this 'the aggregation of marginal gains'.

Them: Do you mind if I send that to her?

Me: Go for it! Obviously!

Texting is very direct and self-interpretable. So I don't want her to feel judged in any way. Rather, validated.

If you feel to, text her this as well.

You thought it was very commendable that she reached out and was honest. That is a very courageous thing to do and worthy of honour.

Me (again): In your own words. As you have said, sometimes mine need a rewrite .Hahahaha

Them: You are good...oh soo good.

I will be honest, it was all worth it for that last statement from them. Also, success leaves clues. I only know that stuff because I studied so I can work in institutions, otherwise I would not have bothered. Why would I? Google knows everything and I have Google. Google has a PHD in PHD's. If you don't know this stuff, you actually don't need to. Google knows it for you. You don't need to remember it, Google will remember it for you. Google has everything you need to write a book or learn an activity. What Google doesn't know is what you want and what Google doesn't have is your time. So tell Google what you want...

I want to improve myself in this way or that way, write a book, get better at dating, have a family, grow muscles, get toned, make more money, or whatever. Give Google your time and you will get other most important things that Google won't get... all the rewards that belong to you. Sounds too simple? Try not to over complicate things as an excuse so you won't do them.

We can make this whole process happen by reverse engineering our brain from negative addictive habits to positive habits and applying the incremental process of achievement, by doing the next best thing in our life. This all added up becomes the aggregate (the total) of the marginal gains coming together, to form a whole, which is exactly what this chapter is about. Ok, this is all good theoretically, but how do we apply it in real life? One application of this what could be called the 'two minute rule'.

THE TWO MINUTE RULE

I personally am a highly motivated person and a high achiever, not because I am any better than anyone, but because I am an addict. If I wanted to drink, I was highly motivated and a high achiever. You are too. However I struggle with procrastination every day, as I am a bit of a magpie... just like magpies, whose personality is to get quickly distracted by shiny things. I can easily get distracted by a phone call and get caught up in a chat about interesting things, to be a sounding-board for someone. Or I can get distracted by something on the net — lose focus and run away down a rabbit hole about an interesting idea very quickly — even by my stomach, way too often.

It seemed easier when I worked for others, because they gave me a task or objective and would I do it. However, when it comes to self-motivation I struggle being my own boss. Voluntary compliance with 'self' (where 'self' is the one who reprimands) is difficult. The real punishment that 'self' hands out is the pain of regret. I don't like regret. Yet still, I can creatively invent excuses to myself when there are none. I have a PHD in creative excuses. Yes, I have even googled them. How do we keep ourselves in check then, and on target? Here is a simple but effective tool.

I continually exercise the two minute rule, which is about just starting, as motivation mostly happens after you start. Sometimes the whole package of getting to the gym to do a workout, get on to a project that's been dragging on, going for a walk or a run

just seems too daunting. You're tired, it's cold, you need to do other things... whatever the case may be. If we do not look at the whole task but instead do the first two minutes of the task, it becomes more achievable. That's all you have to do as your brain will kick in and take over. The brain switches into gear, and the behaviour automates the nervous system which activates. Then, the endocrine system starts to fuel the body with chemicals, endorphins and sugars and you somehow get dragged along in the process.

There is a saying... 80% of the workout is getting out of your car in the gym parking lot, or for runners and walkers, it's just the simple task of putting your shoes on. I have even fast tracked that. In the afternoon, when I have to train and don't want to, I drink a sugar-free energy drink. Now what? I'm committed, I can't sit at home buzzing my head off, so I'm forced to go to the gym. I said this to a friend who couldn't get motivated in the afternoon. He put up all sorts of resistance to the idea of having an energy drink. But me, being as convincing as I am, gave him a can to take home.

He called me up the next evening and told me 'it worked!' We both laughed. Another great hack is to get yourself a gym or walking buddy. You then feel an obligation to go walking, running or to the gym, just so you don't let them down. It works for them too. I am in the process of reducing my energy drinks to a manageable level, which for me is zero. However, I have noticed my coffee intake go up. I have to be careful of 'addiction exchange.'

This two minute rule works in nearly all areas of life; helping the kids with their homework, dialling the number to make a difficult phone call, working from home during Covid, as many round the world are required to do.

The reason this process works so well is that we are predisposed to what's called 'global thinking'. Global thinking is like saying, 'Just be happy... live your best life... get a degree in a certain subject... change your job... get a partner, leave a partner' ... or whatever other statement you want to make. The task is just too big for the brain. Let's look at a global thinking in a way we can easily break down... taking a shower for example.

There might be about 100 steps in the process that require every step to be performed. Get up off the couch, walk to the bathroom, turn the water on. Wait for the water to warm, adjust the temperature to suit. Undo your shirt, one button at a time, remove your belt by releasing the tension, pulling the belt off, undoing our jeans button, pulling down the zip... so many steps before even getting into the shower... and on and on it goes! If we try to approach our goals with global thinking for every step needed, our brains will explode, so we just have to create a goal, a plan and do the next right thing.

All we need then is to keep going in that direction, with consistency. To speed up the process we can apply self-efficiency. One of the best explanations for this phenomenon is the 'theory of self-efficacy', developed by the renowned psychologist, Albert

Bandura. According to Bandura (1997) self-efficacy is defined as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments.” So we come back again to self-belief.

You may not yet believe you can achieve your goal, I think that really doesn’t matter. All you have to do is have the goal, make the plan, be consistent and develop efficiency by just doing the next right thing. The quicker you can do that the more self-efficient you become. I hear people say, I may not be where I want to be, but I can’t believe how far I have come! I Love it!

PERSISTENCE EXPLAINS SUCCESS

One line we usually hear at the end of most AA or NA meetings is ‘Keep coming back.’ This is another way of saying don’t give up. The way we don’t give up is by not giving up. It sounds too simple to be effective but is isn’t. We frame it another way as ‘keep on going.’ The way we do this is again elementary in its statement but profound in its application.

As mentioned above it is ‘do the next best thing.’ The next best thing, played out in real life, is to look at our options and play the outcome. The option with the best outcome is then our preferred option. The outcome is what will make us feel the best once we have done the next thing. Imagine if we can apply this simple process in every day moments — how many arguments it would

save at work, around the family and in couple relationships. We all want love, attention and affection. If we were to continually do the next best thing with our partner there would be a whole lot more love to go around and many other benefits (if you know what I mean). We have heard that, 'practice makes perfect,' but the person or people who told us that were telling us lies and didn't know what they were talking about.

Practice makes permanent. If you continue to swing a golf club the wrong way you will develop a habit — a subconscious anatomical action — that will imbed itself into your psyche and you will automatically swing the golf club that way and wonder why you can never get on par, unless by fluke, which you cannot repeat let alone get a birdie. I am a qualified physical trainer. Studies show that it takes 300 repetitions to develop a habit and 3000 repetitions to change that habit, as you have to unlearn the formed habit and relearn the new habit. This is why we hear the phrase, 'Rome wasn't built in a day.'

However, it will take a lot longer to pull Rome back down and rebuild it. So, to lift weights or perform a function correctly in the gym, to protect the body from harm and to maximise performance, it is vitally important to learn to perform the physical function correctly from the beginning. I used to do gym early in life and didn't learn to squat and dead lift properly, so when I began training for competition it took me a whole year to correct my squat and dead lift techniques.

Pull this concept across to everyday life, like the way we converse with our partner. One of our goals might be to have a better marriage or relationship, maybe just get more sex. However, over time we have developed a subconscious anatomical action — a response to their behaviour at any given time or situation. Something happens and we kick in, say, or do what we automatically do and usually end up with the same result; both of us either staring at the wall or the ceiling, totally unaroused thinking it's the other person fault. Or even worse, turning to a friend or Tinder, when the person we really want is on the other side of the bed. This is actually quite common. I speak from experience here.

Once I had been seeing a girl for a short amount of time and I thought I was doing pretty well, until one day she had a problem with the software on her phone and asked me to fix it. When I was updating it I noticed she had a Tinder App. I opened it to find she had 33 matches. She had texts on the go and a string of matches she hadn't replied to yet, which meant she had swiped right on them. I can sit here and laugh about it now, but I didn't back then! I never said anything about it, I held my tongue, which was difficult, and thought about it.

We went for a walk a few days later. I asked her if I was the one for her and she said she needed about another six months. I said, "When you have decided let me know. Until then we're just friends". I walked her to her car with a smile on my face, kissed her goodbye and that was it. Never give your loyalty to someone

who counts you as an option, and to the best of your ability, 'hold your frame'. You might think this was a bad experience, but I think it was good.

There is a business model called 'fast fail'. The more mistakes you make the quicker you will find the business model that works the most profitably. As soon as you find they are not working, cut your losses and change your business model. The quicker you identify that you and your date, or prospective partner, are not the right match, the better. Move on. The quicker you fail the closer you are to finding the partner that you are correctly suited to.

In another context, the quicker you find things that are not helpful for you in your path of recovery the better. Remove them. If you find that a mode of recovery is not working for you and you relapse, change the mode of recovery you are using and find a mode of recovery that works for you... whatever it takes.

What has this got to do with marginal gains? We can persistently make marginal gains by self-checking everyday to play the outcome (which in this case was intimacy). If we continually practice this we will eventually aggregate the marginal gains that we incrementally make, to end up with the marriage we want. I have been happily married for about 4 years, although I was married 18 years in total. I only wish I had learned this stuff earlier. I will keep coming back.

LIFE IS A GAME OF INCHES.

To close this chapter off I want repeat the words of Al Pacino, in a monolog he delivered on the movie 'Any given Sunday':

You know, when you get old in life things get taken from you. I mean that's...part of life. But, you only learn that when you start losing stuff. You find out life's this game of inches. So is football. Because in either game, life or football, the margin for error is so small — I mean one-half a step too late, or too early, and you don't quite make it.

One-half second too slow, too fast, you don't quite catch it. The inches we need are everywhere around us. They're in every break of the game, every minute, every second.

On this team we fight for that inch. On this team we tear ourselves and everyone else around us to pieces for that inch. We claw with our fingernails for that inch, because we know when we add up all those inches that's gonna make the fuckin' difference between winning and losing! Between livin' and dyin'!

I'll tell you this: In any fight, it's the guy who's willing to die who's gonna win that inch. And I know if I'm gonna have any life anymore, it's because I'm still willin' to fight and die for that inch. Because that's what livin' is! The six inches in front of your face!

Now I can't make you do it. You got to look at the guy next to you. Look into his eyes! Now I think you're gonna see a guy who will go that inch with you. You're gonna see a guy who will sacrifice

himself for this team because he knows, when it comes down to it, you're gonna do the same for him!

That's a team, gentleman!

And, either we heal, now, as a team, or we will die as individuals.

That's football guys.

That's all it is.

Now, what are you gonna do?

Life is a game of football. Firstly, we are a team of one; ourselves. Then in a community which is our family, and then our greater community, which consists of all of our relationships. What are you and I going to do with that game and how are we going to play it? We decide and we will give ourselves the score at the end of the game. What do you want your score to be? Do the next best thing.

04.

ASSOCIATIONS



***Y*ou are the average of the five most significant people you associate with**

If you are surrounded by five guys who are overweight, sport watching, couch potatoes, I guarantee you that you will eventually be the sixth. I have found this to be the case at different times in my life. You could possibly apply this principle to any gender.

Motivational speaker, Jim Rohn, famously said that we are the average of the five people we spend the most time with. [1] This is called our 'sociogenic interplay,' which relates to the 'law of averages.' This is the theory that the result of any given situation will be the average of all outcomes. When it comes to relationships, we are greatly influenced, whether we like it or not, by those closest to us. It affects our way of thinking, our

self-esteem and our decisions. The outcome of all of this is our behaviour — the actions we choose to live our everyday life by. Of course, everyone is their own person, but research has shown that we're more affected by our environment than we think.

To put this simply, whoever we associate with 'today,' will affect us 'someday' in the future. We come to the realisation that we need to change our associations if we want to change our life. I have now made associations with some seriously smart people. I could never have the conversations I do and be spurred on to live my fullest life with some of my previous associations.

We do not 'unfriend' these past associations as they will always be our friends, but we do set new boundaries around our relationships, to prevent being drawn back into the limiting lifestyle we had with them and we don't allow them to speak into our lives anymore. No more 'she'll be right,' because sometimes 'she' won't be.

THE OPPOSITE OF ADDICTION AND DEPRESSION IS NOT ONLY SOBRIETY, BUT CONNECTION.

At first glance we can think that the opposite of depression is happiness. However, happiness is a fleeting emotion and really doesn't have any roots in itself that can anchor our lives. The opposite of depression is really relational connection, because we are fundamentally community-based creatures and we have

a deeply embedded need for connection. Connection produces dopamine (one example was Rat Park). As we saw in the first chapter, we need four things in life, food, water, shelter and dopamine... but dopamine is also the driver the other three as well and also addictions. However, if we put these two needs together (dopamine and addiction]) we have a real monster on our hands. Addiction driven by our lack of dopamine. How true is this! Now we know where the connection to our addiction comes from.

First we will look at the associations. It will be a little complex, but when we will apply it to our experience we will see how we can recreate a parallel environment that will propel us into the life of our desires.

The sociogenic hypothesis states that social conditions are the major cause of mental and behavioural disorders. [2] From this we can see that we are being mentally engineered by our social environment through 'social proof'. Social proof is based on the idea of norms and social influence. Social proof states that people will conform in order to be liked by or accepted by the influencer, which is our social community and our need to 'fit in' or belong. One of the fundamental reasons why we remain in unhelpful social environments is that we seek others approval, because we don't get it from ourselves.

When we look back at our active addiction days — or we are still in the ebb and flow of uncoupling from addictions, relapsing and then recommitting to clean living — we consider the disastrous effects of our addictions (as we saw in the ‘pros and cons’ table, in Chapter 3). We reflect on how the unthinkable became unremarkable, the abnormal became normal, how what we thought we would never do became something we did do. I am still wondering how on earth I could have lived the way I did, while I was in active addiction. That was just not me... it was like there was an imposter running my life, I resented that imposter.

Even when we stop using compulsive behaviours; get sober, clean, stop retail therapy or start managing our diet, the mental conditions do not immediately correct themselves. It takes time to move from sobriety to sober thinking. To put it very simply, sober thinking is about emotional management, consequential thinking (thinking about the outcome of our actions) and correct decision making, to produce actions that are in line with our values and our goals.

A few simple examples are holding off credit card use that enables our retail therapy, avoiding the next cigarette, which will eventually take us to a place we wish we hadn’t gone, or resisting the next emotional outburst of anger, which will damage connections in our relationships that we actually do want. Often we think of anger as an emotion, however the word anger is a verb (a doing word, or action) that is a response to an emotion; like frustration, loss, rejection or others. We can ask ourselves

what is making us angry? If we can resolve the underlying cause of the anger, the anger will, by default, resolve itself.

Sobriety in our life only occurred after the drama consumed us to the point of unsustainable resentment towards a situation. The level of resentment is different for everyone. If we do not reach this point and we no longer resent our own behaviour, we become capable of repeating it. However, the further we travel down the road of addiction we eventually come to a point where we literally have to break free from the environment of our addictions to save our own life, or the well-being of those we care about. Another way of putting it is, when the pain gets too great, it reaches the point where the pleasure isn't worth the pain that addiction brings with it.

I was talking to an amazing lady very recently who is three and a half years clean from addictions. She spoke of a time she was in rehab and her beautiful young son came to see her. When it was time for him to go he said something to the effect of, "Mummy, don't you care about me anymore?" She was heartbroken at that moment and the drama consumed her to the point of unsustainable resentment towards the situation. She made the decision to save the mental and emotional wellbeing of the one she cared about — her son.

She has been clean ever since. She is now a living testimony to sobriety and her successful life is the picture of recovery that others aspire to. She took full responsibility of the situation. I

have observed what an excellent mother she has become to her son. She now lives a life where she supports others; this has become her 'purpose' in life and she shows outstanding results and success. Added to that, she has found a partner who harmoniously compliments her journey.

Some people pat us on the back for overcoming addictions. I Have realised that I cannot blow smoke up my own arse for saving my own life. The real power of recovery then is in the saving, service and support of another person, facing their own addiction and recovery challenges, through the strengths we develop in our own life.... Our story!

The separation from our addiction requires the disassembling of the structures that are surrounding our addictive behaviour. As we now see, more often than not, it is our relationships or specific aspects of our community. The heart of addiction is the same, it is just the expression of addiction that differs.

When I got clean, which took a few years of painful relapses before I finally made it, I had to walk away from different 'circles' of relationships. This was almost as hard a giving up the addictions. I found that the common area of those relationships was the addiction itself. So I lost both my relationship connections and my connection to my addiction. At times it was a lonely path and I often had overwhelming desires to go back, as I had done before. But my experience told me it would be the same old path all over again. In the rooms they call this 'our research'. I didn't

need to do any more research to know what the end result would be! Interestingly, I still remain in connection with some of the people from those circles, so they were my friends. The other people were just acquaintances, who were in my life due to the commonality of addiction. So through that commonality I was supporting their behaviour also.

I recall the last time I used in a group environment. It was a few years ago now. My daughter called me to say she had crashed her car while she was under the influence. I had the awful realisation that she was heading down the road I was on and I was, to a large extent, to blame for being such a bad example of a father to her in that area of her life. I was totally overcome with grief, I mean totally! That moment of pain became the driver for my recovery from substances, although I had further to go in my journey to overcome alcohol. The point then is, pain is an emotion; emotion — energy-in-motion. We can redirect the energy of emotion; be it, anger, resentment, grief, happiness, joy, depressed feelings, trauma and any emotion we wish to name, not only towards recovery, but also on to success.

Today my daughter has two young children and is clean and sober. I have become a support to her and my grandchildren, which I count as pure success. The fuel I used to drive this area of success in my life is the ‘emotional re-call’ of the pain that I experienced. I do not want to repeat that cycle again. I have done enough research to know this. What emotion do you possess that holds the fuel to your success? How can you direct it? The

outcome will be ‘your picture of re-recovery and success’ that others will aspire to.

Back to social norms. Social norms affect individual behavioural patterns and whatever we think is a ‘normal’ way of living is easily adopted by us. Think of the Covid pandemic that has been engulfing society, worldwide. Every country has been impacted by it, even those countries with no Covid present, through tourism restrictions, limitations for international family and business meetings and the like.

What was unthinkable before; with the likes of ‘stay at home’ and ‘work from home’ restrictions, school closures and border restriction enforcements (under the public health guidelines), fast became the norm. What was once a conspiracy theorists rhetoric quickly became a social-norm and an accepted lifestyle. Conversely, what we called conspiracy theories became real, yet we never gave them credit for their prophecy (and sometimes judged them).

These conspiracy theorists then move on the next conspiracy and we forget that they could be right again in the future... they often are. Mobile phones, space travel, digital currency, along with information and person data collection, invasion of privacy — too many to name — were all predictions of the conspiracy theorists once. They do this usually by tracking social-norms, using social patterns and then they use these patterns to predict future events, based around expected human behaviours.

I have had conversations with people who have served lengthy incarceration sentences. When they are released back into society and begin recovery, they come to the realisation that what they were doing, that got them incarcerated, was living an incorrect lifestyle. Whether it be producing and selling substances, theft or other things, stand-over tactics financial crimes, or whatever, all these things could be called survival mechanisms.

Their thinking was so ingrained that it was just a chosen way of living and surviving. They did not know that what they were doing was wrong. On learning and accepting morality, through adopting a new social norm structure (by mixing in a different community), they become surprised at their past behaviour. They see that it was just a cycle of being in and out of prison and no longer want to live that lifestyle, so they set a new course for life.

Often they begin education and make something out of their life. Others who have lived in a gang environment have said that getting in to prison was like graduating from college and serving their time was like doing a university degree. Many people will have no comprehension of this type of thinking, but it is a social-norm for those who think this way.

Putting it simply, we have to be careful who new hang out with because the people we associate with will invariably affect our behaviour, and our behaviour will absolutely be a consequence of who we think we are. The best response then becomes to learn

to detach areas of our lives from unhelpful associations and reattach them to associations that will better our lives.

ASSOCIATIONS OF THOSE WHO WE SUPPORT

Sometimes, as supporters, we allow people walk all over us on purpose. Sometimes they need to do this and we can feel a sense of contribution by allowing this to happen. Why?

As they walk over us we become the stairs out of the hole they are in life. We become their foundation for a period of time; the rock they stand on and their path to recovery. If they push it too far and stamp their foot we can show a bit of tough love to them (and self-care to ourselves) allowing them to bruise their heel a bit, then gently and non-judgmentally bringing them back into line.

As parents we often do this very thing for our children. I do. I want them to come to me for support, because I know that I do not have an agenda to 'take' or 'get' something from them. I am only and totally interested in their success, I am a deep well and almost have an inexhaustible patience with my children. That is what love really is. In my view I can take nothing to my grave, accept the knowledge that I will live on through the DNA and genetic information that remains alive in my children, grandchildren and the lineage that follows. From an eternal perspective, we are the link in the chain that connects our heritage to our lineage.

I once heard of a person sharing their message of recovery. They were struggling in their recovery. They spoke of their support person as their 'light and sparkle'. It has been said (speaking of recovery), that if you want to keep what you've got, you have to give it away. I know this from the times I have been supported by others. I needed support and as time has passed and my recovery locked in, I in turn have learned to support others.

While supporting others I get a chance to recall the difficult person I was and the patience that was shown to me as I kicked back and rebelled. Then, like a horse getting broken in, I was broken to the point where I had to finally give up, as my strength and will power was exhausted and I accepted that I was under the total power of addiction. As they say, jails, institutions and death are the outcome of addictions and recovery is only the only way out to save our own lives. Even if we don't die, addiction continues to corrupt and kill every area of our life, bit by bit. It really doesn't matter how we over come addictions, just that we do. There is a saying, 'What ever it takes'.

WALK FAST, WALK ALONE. WALK FAR, WALK TOGETHER

We have all heard of the tortoise and the hare. The reason this story works in real life so well is that we can all start things, have a burst of energy and then run out of steam. At first we might start slowing down and if we're not making much progress we can

eventually lose our MOJO and give up. We have all experienced this too many times in life. Think of New Year resolutions. According to sundried.com, 43% of people expect to give up by February. The key word is expect. After three months only 10% of people think their resolution will last. This is an appalling result from us as humans, which begs the question, why? This website states that from polls taken, the number one reason is 'going solo' or, in other words, going it alone. [2a]

This is a fascinating reason. The question begging to be answered is, would all these people have given up if they had integrated themselves into a common interest group of like minded people? NO! What often happens is they revert back to their past social environment instead of finding a new social environment that will support their goals. Do you see how powerful associations are? Think about this. Ask yourself what your goals are and what social environment will be best for you to achieve those goals? Then start looking.

Let's dig a bit deeper. The big word bandied around about the ability to achieve a goal is 'consistency,' but how many people actually know what consistency really is? We think of the word consistency as from the word 'constant,' which in physics is a term known as 'at constant'.

Constancy is nearly impossible for a human. Life is full of curved balls being thrown at us while we are off guard. Many of these come with 'urgency' attached. Different occurrences happen to

us every day that are well beyond our control, like traffic, family, children's needs, teacher's meetings, sicknesses, Covid and a plethora of other factors unique to us.

According to etymonline.com, consistency was recognised originally in the 1590s as "firmness of matter" — from Medieval Latin, *consistentia*, literally 'a standing to-gether,' or 'with or together.' The original meaning of the word 'consistent' actually holds the key to us our reducing our risk of failing to meet our goals in life, as we desire them to be. When we associate ourselves with the right people (on the right path), we are encouraged to be true to our own path and pursue our purpose and success.

I remind you, success leaves clues. YouTube has a lot of encouragement and motivational videos regarding this very topic. Every successful person who writes, blogs, produces videos and publicly speaks of how they achieved success says they first believed in themselves. They might say the same thing in different ways, however they do all say that. All these people have this same association through their different forms of media. I encourage you to associate yourself with these inspiring people by listening to, or reading, the information they produce, via digital platforms which are designed for your success.

The second part of the rewards of positive associations is held in the power of what is termed as 'continuance.' This is a word not used often but it holds the key to us achieving our goals. It is well explained by the great orator and nation changer, Dr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. “If you can’t fly, then run. If you can’t run, then walk. If you can’t walk, then crawl, but by all means, keep moving.” This is a true statement that releases us from the self-sabotage of our guilt about slowing down and not being the ‘hare’ in the tortoise and hare story. The only reason the hare lost was because although he was faster... he ran and stopped as opposed to running and slowing to a relaxed, a casual pace of rest, so that he could either run again or just make some progress every day.

An affective principle is Warren Buffets principle to success of the ‘five priorities’... which is to do at least one thing every day that will progress you towards the achievement of success in your five chosen priorities.

We see this in sports, like group push bike riding, which I have done a lot of. We have our turn at the front, where we break the wind (which is hard work) and after a while, due to exhaustion, we come back into formation to sit in the pack to get rest while we get dragged along by the draft of the other riders in front.

On long rides, like some races, I have been on that go for five and six hours. If we lose our place in the formation and drop off the back of the pack we have to wait for the next ‘bunch’ to come along and pick us up. Think of how geese travel, they have a particular formation that is the shape of an arrow head. If they drop out of formation they cannot sustain the thousands of kilometres of migration travel on their own and will often die on the way. On reflection, we can see that the power of associations work this

way — they have the ability to empower us or limit our personal growth. What bunch are we riding our life in? Whatever bunch it is we will surely be going in their direction and end up at their destination. Choose your bunch wisely.

BONDING TO TRAUMA THROUGH A RELATIONSHIP WITH ADDICTIONS

We can actually have a relationship with our addictions. I know this first hand. I used to be a workaholic; I had a relationship with my work, I loved it, work was an escape, it gave me money which gave me choice... the more money I made the more choices I had. However, one day I looked at my children and realised I had missed out on some of their early years. Then, in the space of one year, three big property development companies went broke on me and all I had worked for vanished.

I also had a relationship with food. The big one was, in my later years, I slowly formed a relationship with alcohol. I loved alcohol and couldn't wait to finish work on a Friday and have some drinks — that was my reward system. As alcohol is a social lubricant, I enjoyed going out and drinking with friends, then I learned to drink on my own; a personal relationship with alcohol that turned into a cycle of self-inflicted traumatic experiences. Beware of addiction transference. The expression of the compulsive habit or addiction only increases in intensity over time, as the brain needs more do-pamine to sustain its equilibrium.

A trauma bond usually relates to a dysfunctional relationship between humans and consists of feelings of strong attachment, coupled with over-dependence. This can include a pattern of abuse and remorse. How close is this pattern of human relationships to the pattern we have with our addictions? It basically explains the cycle of addictions. An alcoholic will often try many times to revert to being a social drinker, but alas, this is not the case. The body has created a trauma bond with alcohol and the addictive cycle will repeat itself. This can be the same with gambling, and many other addictions, including anxiety, self-harm, substances and the like. Eating disorders are actually self-harm at their root. Specific medical support is often required to break the trauma pattern and uncouple from the addiction, until the brain has developed a new habitual pattern of thinking.

'**Stockholm Syndrome**' is a specific type of trauma bond. You can think of it as the next level of a trauma bond. While this term typically refers to someone who is a captive developing positive feelings for their captor, this dynamic can often occur in other situations and relationships. Once again, the addict often feels captive to the addiction; the desires for the addiction are just too great — the momentary joy, release and escapism the addiction brings overrules the pain on the other side. Our worst enemy arrives dressed up as our best friend. Think of the cost of extra-marital affairs, or sexual addiction and the dysfunction they bring into the home.

The children are often collateral damage, which scars them for life. Most people wish they could turn back time and had made better choices.... We all can from now on. We can consider the consequences of our actions before we make them, play the outcome of each action and do the next best thing. This is easily said, I know too well, but we can start today; even this very moment.

THROWN INTO REALITY AS A CONSEQUENCE OF BIRTH

Let's look at a few things we experience in life that affect us in every way, but that we have absolutely 0% power over, in any way, shape or form. These things are totally outside of our control.

We were cast out of the womb by a totally autonomic human reflex, that neither the mother nor the child could resist the power of (caesareans and induced births are exceptions to this process, but the end result is the same).

The journey of life begins, not as a matter of choice but of survival in the first instance. The other reasons why we are thrown into situations outside of our control are the community we were brought up in, accidents, the effect those around us have on our lives, governmental controls and the life changing outcomes of our actions that we hadn't planned for, like unexpected pregnancy or making someone pregnant. This act of procreation can start

the cycle for another life all over again. This demand of nature is specifically for the continuation of the human race.

We are affected by our DNA and our genetic information lineage, but the consequences of these are our choice. There is a story of twin boys who had an alcoholic father... one grew up and became an alcoholic because his father was an alcoholic. The other grew up, got educated, had a family and was successful in life. When asked, he said “I am a success today because my father was an alcoholic”. [3]

There is a statement of truth that I believe will liberate you and encourage you as much as it has done for me. It may seem negative, but it's not negative at all. The statement is, ‘You were born with your mistakes in you’. I have searched this phrase on Google and haven't found it used in this context, so I have coined it and adapted it. I came up with it in a class I was doing and realised how fundamentally it relates to every person on the planet. You were given a set of DNA encodings at birth, and a life and environment you didn't choose — including your parents, your siblings, the location and environment you were brought up in, your body, hair colour, height and so on.

Some of the mistakes you have made in the past can be attributed in part to errors in your DNA code, along with other aspects handed down from past generations. Attitudes, beliefs, views on money, intellect, religious views and some big ones; susceptibility toward addictions, anger issues, and a propensity to sabotage

yourself (including your choice of partners). It wasn't until very recently I found out a lot more about my heritage. My parents had said that addictions were an issue on both sides of my family tree.

Looking back now I can now see how that played out in my life and the battle with addiction that I would one day have to face. It took quite a long time to manifest. I was in my late 30's before I started drinking. It took me about ten years to put down the bottle once I had picked it up.

Most of the time our failures are built into us and we discover them along our journey through life. Often a circumstance will trigger them and set them off. When we find ourselves in a situation that is the result of a mistake, we can sit down and think about how we got there. We can ask ourselves, "What role did I play in this?" Sometimes we didn't; it was in us all along and just needed the trigger to set it off. This happens at a subconscious level that we are, more often than not, unaware of. It's unfortunate for us that we can be the victims (which we read about soon) of what some call past lives. This can be a valid reason why we got ourselves into an un-helpful or self-sabotaging lifestyle.

However, once we realise that our mistakes were already in us, from DNA coding errors and our early childhood experiences, we can give ourselves a break from blaming ourselves and the shame that comes with that and get back on track to self-improvement. This is achieved by cleaning up our internal environment with

good quality, uplifting self-talk and becoming all that we were meant to be. We can then recognise that we have a purpose and a destiny and we're not here by chance but by specific design.

A common saying (that is often taken too lightly) is that the two most important days in a person's life are the day they were born and the day they realise why they were born. This produces the age old question, why are we here? We can look at this from a human race point of view, then just as a person getting shown a photo of themselves in a group. They will always zoom in or go looking for themselves in the photo first. So we ask this question from an individual perspective. Why am I here? What is life? Once we can answer this question for ourselves we then have some common denominators or bottom line views with which we can approach life. Is life happening 'to' us or is life happening 'for' us?

This very question is the one that has caused me most of my depressed feelings. I found that the crisis of my depressed feelings was something called an 'existential crisis'. Existential comes from the word 'existence'... What was the purpose of my existence?

What is the purpose of your existence? For everyone, that purpose is as unique as the person themselves. Since we are a multifaceted human being; body, soul, spirit, life purpose, community, gifts talent, love and 'reason,' we can go looking for the answers to each of these parts of our lives and answer them

with pinpoint accuracy. Often when we don't have purpose we use coping mechanisms to distract us from our purposelessness. Then year after year goes by and we never seem to achieve the dreams we have deep down, while we observe others who seem to be achieving theirs. Distractions often include meaningless 'fun' that results in nothing; TV, too much social media, procrastination and depressed feelings, or simply boredom. This is one of the reasons why giving up was the easier part. I have done it hundreds of times, but staying 'given up' was the hard part! Add to that refraining from addiction transference. I share the outcome of these questions (that are personal to me), towards the end of this chapter, so you can consider yours.

The above questions bring us to the next point. If life is only happening 'to' us we can feel like our life is a bumper car experience at the carnival, with no clear perspective... bumping into as many cars as we can as they bump into us. We get through the crowd of cars to the other side with some form of satisfaction, then we say, "What for?" We do a u-turn and get back into the mosh pit again, waiting to finish our allotted time (our life) in the enclosed circle, having as much fun as possible, or at least surviving the experience we call our life.

All the while we are trying not to have too many injuries along the way (emotional and physical). This is a reasonable way of living life, if that is a person's chosen life, and to have a child sitting next to you to enjoy the fun adds to the experience. This life motto is, 'he who dies with the most toys and experiences wins.' If that is

the goal for a person and they achieve their objective and come out injury free, then they have succeeded, finished time in the circuit and can walk into eternity.

However, can they take their toys, or their self-serving experiences in to eternity? I do not think so. On their death bed most people lament, “What was it all for... I should have done more, lived my purpose and achieved something more... I only lived for the moment... my life was an end in itself.” That is a different and narrower view than in the moment. Some call this a ‘red pill’ moment — from the movie, *The Matrix*, where Neo is offered a blue pill or a red pill. He chooses the red pill, becomes enlightened and discovers his own power, path in life and purpose, which he fulfils, even against tremendous adversity. Don’t put off your red pill moment any longer than you need to.

There becomes an issue with living for the moment. That life can easily revolve around ourselves, where we can increasingly become self-centred, our needs and wants become our priority. The extension of this sort of living is where addiction finds its roots, because the needs of our family and others or our community are not in balance in our lives. This is an unsustainable lifestyle, where things will start breaking down. I have experienced this first hand, and on deep reflection I can see the entire process of my errors as if they happened in slow motion, with devastating results for both myself and others (not to mention the loss of my resources along the way).

Shame can be a big player in our lives. It can either drive us into isolation and further into addiction and depressed feelings, or it can bring change in our lives for the better. I felt shame in myself for my lifestyle, which was enabling my addiction. However, shame eventually drove me out of addiction towards my purpose and care for my family, because I no longer wanted to live that way. This sort of lifestyle is not the real 'us.' It is a journey coming back to restoration, but for you, me and all of us it's well worth that journey. A reminder, 'Recovery is, remembering who you are and using your strengths to become all that you were meant to be.'

We often meet people who live in the past... 'The older I get the better I was' sort of people. Stories of their past achievements seem to grow, get better and more grandiose as time goes on... or a large portion of their conversation is about their experiences, because they have had their day in the sun and seem to find it difficult to move on to greener pastures. They become stuck in the past.

If we are able to make the mental shift — to realise that life is happening for us, then we can come to the place where we realise that there must be a bigger picture here, so we start looking ahead. The reason you are reading this book is because, by default, you are looking for the bigger picture in your life and have probably suffered the injury of addiction while having your bumper car experiences. You have come to the realisation that you have had enough of the bumper car

journey and want out of the enclosure. Find your purpose, do something with your life and become your own success story.

A problematic way of living is to live in a bumper car lifestyle while putting on a facade of having purpose. Trying to live this impossible double life... attempting to live in both experiences at once, while not finding success or enjoyment in either life style, will result in disaster and shame most of the time, as eventually we all get found out. Some people call this being 'inauthentic,' or putting on a face.

An example of this would be those who are challenged with an addiction to masturbation and / or pornography, while in a relationship. The over use of masturbation creates a sense of loneliness and disconnection that, in correlation with pornography, numbs the senses and plays a role in the person's mind, reducing their perspective of another person by subconscious objectification, or seeing another person as an object, where ones focus is to seek immediate gratification (this happens for single people as well). In a relationship, openness and transparency becomes strained, intimacy is significantly reduced, emotions are dulled and the relationship becomes drained of love, joy and the togetherness that it once had.

Also comparison sets in, where the spouse or partner of the person with the addiction is not able to perform in the bedroom as desired, or their looks are not as welcoming as the porn actors. Where they were once attractive to the other person, arousal

becomes increasingly difficult to obtain, or, on the flip side, they use them for personal sexual gratification. So, you can see how difficult it is for a person suffering from porn use to have an open heart to their partner, therefore the spiritual connection between them is nullified. There is also a sense of shame involved here and hidden deception. This whole behavioural pattern happens bit by bit, until a habit is formed that is difficult to break. This requires a rewiring of the brain. We can become as much of a victim of this behaviour as we can with any addiction.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE A VICTIM

I have heard it said that you cannot play the victim. This is not the case. I think that you have every right to realise that you are the victim. For starters, you and I were given codes and errors in our genes that handed us predispositions to certain negative behaviours. We didn't get a chance to pick our parents, or the environment we were brought up in, that shaped who we are. Most of the time we thought this way of life was the norm. When I was 12 my brother succumbed to suicide. I do not think using the term 'committed' suicide is a very good term to use in these cases.

At the time I considered that it was a rational choice to make. This is also the case with challenges like depression, hypochondria, narc behaviour and other BPD and mental chemical imbalances. Our victim life is 'an addict,' yet at the same time our other life is

trying to fit into society with all of its roles; a husband, a mother, a worker or even a religious person... but our mental illness or addiction (which are often the same) plagues us constantly. We try to hold opposing systems of thought in dynamic tension — being upstanding and showing conscientiousness, while living a life of internal brokenness at the same time. At times this has been the story of my life and it is a totally unsustainable lifestyle long term, not to mention, hard on the brain!

Could we be the victims of our sexual urges? Let's look into this from a very deep perspective. Could it be that we were not meant to be the age we currently are and still living outside of life long relationships? This might not actually be an intended way of living. Consider the statistics outlined below.

Here are some time periods and the average life span, in years, of a person in these time era's and people groups: Classical Greece 25–28, Classical Rome 20–33, Wang clan of China, 1st c. (AD–1749) 35, Europe Early middle ages (late 5th early 6th century to the 10th century AD) 30–35, Medieval Islamic world less than 35, Pre-Columbian Southern United States 25–30. [4]

Some of us were barely leaving university when people in these countries had had their children, lived their life and died. They were usually married and pregnant in their early to mid-teens.

Most people didn't have a chance to get divorced and they certainly didn't have the social media, dating sites, the ability to travel to meet people and the challenges with the temptations we

have today. The current average childbearing age in Europe in 2020 was just over 30 years. [5] In America in 2018 it was 26.9, and in 2015 the percentage for women over 35 giving birth was 25.9. [6] What does this mean? It means that, as humans, we are biological chronologies. This means we have a time in our life where we are primed for things like child bearing and rearing, yet we are living in a society that doesn't match the timing of our biological body clocks. We are living out of sync. It is no wonder we are struggling with issues like masturbation and porn. Men in their teens and twenties are often in their prime simply because their hormone levels are at their peak. [7]

As men, we were never designed to be single or out of an intimate relationship through these years. We men have sexual urges... it's just the way we are made; to reproduce. Nature planned it this way. Try fighting nature; Madam Nature is a strong contender. Humanity relies on this for its greater survival. Generally speaking, in the ancient world, marriage was considered the norm once the couple hit puberty, unless they were upper class in which case they followed trends of the family in social, political or business interests and married a bit later.

It's no wonder we experience sexual frustration. This is holistically unjust. What do males do with a strong innate sexual appetite when they live in a society where the average age for marriage is often well past the male prime? Wikipedia states that, in Australia, the average age of marriage for males is 32.3 and for females it is 30.5, making the mean age 31.4.

In New Zealand the mean age is 30 and in the USA it is 28.9. On the flip side, the mean age in the Central African Republic is 20.4 and in places like Mozambique and Zambia it is 19.6 and 19.9 respectively. In Europe, places like Finland, Sweden and Ireland are getting up into the early to mid 30's. [8] This is why the personal sexual experience of masturbation is now the most common sexual practice on earth.

Connect this with the explosion of the availability of porn through digital mediums and the smartphone and don't you think that we have been dealt an unjust hand? Yes, we have! The result is that, in America, 35 percent of all internet downloads are related to pornography. Another interesting statistic is that one-third of porn viewers are women. The end result is that 47 percent of families in the United States report that pornography is a problem in their home. Pornography use increases the marital infidelity rate by more than 300 percent. Forty percent of people identified as "sex addicts" will lose their spouses. Fifty-eight percent suffer considerable financial losses, and about thirty-three percent lose their jobs. Sixty-eight percent of divorce cases involve one party meeting a new paramour over the internet while fifty-six per-cent involve one party having an 'obsessive interest' in pornographic websites. [9]

The question becomes, how do we mitigate the situation? Through understanding of the issue, and good quality education early on, we can make better choices through life. This habit is a road we really do not want to do down. I came to the point that I realised

I was the victim of my personal addiction, which grew from one mild compulsion to another and ended up as alcohol. For far too long people (mostly counsellors) told me to stop playing the victim, so I resisted the urge. Over time and through my own tertiary studies I realised I was in denial of being a victim. Once I owned the position that I was a victim, I came to the realisation I had a captor.

This was empowering for me. As I owned my victimhood I could do something about it. Previously, I could not do anything about it, I was powerless over it because I refuse to accept it — I was in denial. Once I accepted it, I took back my power I was able to deal with my captor. I became the victor over my victimhood. As in the first chapter — about Addictus, who wandered around in the land with chains on, not realising he actually had the key to unlock the chains — that realisation gave me ability to use that key and set myself free!

I understand this will be a totally foreign concept, that goes against practically all the counselling modules that most counsellors learn and regurgitate to their clients (which I was taught also). But I am speaking from lived experience that has enabled me to overcome cycles of addiction, extended bouts of depression, mental disorders, continuous failed relationships, patterns of self-sabotage and suicidal tendencies. It has brought me to the place where I am qualified in my field as an Addictions and Mental Health Coach. I teach and facilitate classes, support others in their challenges, write books, win fitness competitions

and am financially independent. I'm no-one special, just another addict in recovery. This realisation of becoming the victor over your victim mentality, enables you to take back your power, through ownership of your condition and win in life. This may be the key to unlocking your greatness too. It's worth considering. When I explain this clearly to others I support, lights go on for them and they see the value and empowerment in this concept.

Let's be real about it, only a tiny percentage of counsellors know what it is like to be an addict, therefore they actually have very little idea the challenges we addicts face. In addition to that, they all get similar qualifications from similar sources, sit similar exams, read similar books, with just a few variations. They do have their place, especially if they are government funded and do not cost you money.

It's nice to be heard by someone and to feel like you are helping yourself by seeing a counsellor. Find one that suits you. If you are seeing someone that you think is not that helpful, don't be afraid to move on to another person that you will find more helpful. When I studied counselling I had to write about what was expected of me, otherwise I would not have passed the course, whether I agreed with it or not.

The ultimate end of the consequences of our birth (that are out of our control) is that we are now forced into decision making... we have choices to make. Do we float along in the dodgem arena, playing the victim to our circumstances (which is how we

have lived for many years) or do we do the best with this life? If you believe there is a spiritual consequence behind the human experience, then the choices we make in this life will have an eternal end. One of many views is the concept of Heaven or Hell (eternal destiny or eternal loss).

Why is this included in an associations chapter? It is how we relate to ourselves. My personal belief is that we take into eternity the character we develop in this life. The next life is an ultimate binary extension of this one (an either / or future life). I do not say this without good reason.

The word ‘psyche’ comes from the Greek psykhe, which means “the soul, mind, spirit, or invisible animating entity which occupies the physical body.” [10] So our psyche is actually our soul, or some would say our spirit. As we overcome the ‘mistakes we were born with,’ the unhelpful areas of our lives; the environment we grew up in and the dysfunctional effects of society, we are actually cleaning up our psyche. We do this through self-acceptance and self-love. Often lack of self-love is just a self-esteem issue.

When we learn to relate to ourselves in a way where our psyche (soul) nurtures our spiritual and emotional being, our physical life improves our experience (actions and behaviours) while we are on this planet. This is the essence of self-care. We increase our self-acceptance by reducing the amount of time we compare ourselves with others and what other people expect of us. If they

don't accept us, so what! They probably don't accept themselves either (which is where judging others come from). We are who we are and that is how it is, so we need to believe in ourselves and all grow together. There is a final piece in this puzzle which we talk about in the last chapter (Spirituality), called 'atonement'.

THE ILLUSION OF PERMANENCE

The concept that we live two lives and our second one starts, when we realise we have only one, is often attributed to Confucius. Many of us get caught up in what's called the illusion of permanence. This simply means that we live in a false sense of reality — one where we are guaranteed there will always be a tomorrow, a next week and a next year. However, there is no guarantee that we will live to the fullest today, in the next month or the next ten years... this 'guarantee' is just an illusion.

We have all heard the saying YOLO — you only live once, however what is closer to the truth is YODO, you only die once. You get a new chance to live every single day. At any given moment you can choose to reinvent yourself, take the red pill, or at least renovate yourself by re-orientating what you give your primary thoughts and intention to. It could be said this way, 'If we do not make sacrifice for the life we desire, then the life we desire becomes the sacrifice'.

To conclude this chapter of Associations, here is an explanation of the illusion of permanence. There is a concept that comes from ancient Hebraism called ‘Teshuva.’ Teshuva means to, ‘turn away from,’ and ‘toward.’ This can be a challenge when it is amplified by the word ‘Selah,’ which means ‘to pause’ or to give ‘a large consideration to.’ Putting these concepts together — what is in our life that is sending us in a direction that we really do not want to go in? We need to give strong consideration to the outcome... then to turn away from destructive outcomes and toward a life we wish to live. This may include giving a large consideration to our associations and choosing the paths we take in life with great consideration. We can replace money, partners, associations, almost anything, (except children) but we cannot replace time. Our time = our life, let’s spend our time wisely!



05.

YES DARLING, I DO LOVE YOU BUT I LOVE MY ADDICTION MORE



*A*ddictions

In a lot of cases, addictions affect partner relationships, the home and work environment, and the life of the person. Addictions will eventually affect almost all of the relationships we have in life. Addictions are to a partner relationship what a slow cancer is to the body, which we will look at in this chapter. Addictions are parasitic to a relationship in the same way an ectoparasite is parasitic in a body.

Most ectoparasites are about the size of a sesame seed. They multiply and live on the blood of their host, defecating on their surroundings, creating infections and causing constant irritation.

Addictions are just like that; bit by bit, day by day, they draw the very life blood out of the relationship, leaving it anaemic and starved of nurture, love, emotion, respect and goodwill. This leaves pain, anxiety and carnage in its wake; putrefying and irritating the relationship and causing other infections, such as financial hardship, arrested development in the children, resentments, arguments and the like.

Addictions extinguish passion, erode the dreams of future contentment and the hope of bliss in relationships. With addictions in a relationship there comes a point where one person finally gives up and the 'vase is dropped'. I will explain later what that statement means.

If anybody ever finds themselves in a relationship with a person who has a destructive compulsive disorder or an addiction, it is advisable they seek some quality relationship guidance (in confidence). They should find a suitably qualified professional to decide what options are available to them. These destructive disorders run deep. The person with the disorder requires expert professional help to come to a full realisation and acceptance of their disorder.

A lot of people are either ignorant of the severity of their condition or they simply refuse to accept their condition (which was the case for me). The problems created by refusal to accept their condition and the end results are not good! They need to have a deep resolute willingness to go through whatever rehabilitation

is necessary, to manage the symptoms and complete the journey to full recovery and restoration to wellness. Sound serious?

It is! Addiction eventually paralyses, maims and kills whatever it comes into contact with. I don't know anyone who desires to be in a relationship with a person who has a destructive disorder or an addiction. In this chapter we sometimes refer to destructive addictions or compulsive behaviours as 'disorders,' because that is what they are. Most addictions prey on and live off their host, consuming whatever that host has in their life. The addiction's host is the person with the addiction and a relationship is one of the things the addictions consumes. How? Read on.

BROKEN WING SYNDROME

When we show compassion to a person with a disorder, and there is denial involved, it can take longer for healing to be possible for them. In advertisements for safety on an aeroplane the video shows the oxygen masks coming down and the instruction is given to put your own mask on first, then help those around you. Innately we are a compassionate species, especially to those we are in a relationship with; to those in our tribe (our community).

An individual's safety, survival and wellbeing is, in many respects, the responsibility of the community. Their wellbeing has an effect on the safety and survival of the greater community. Home life is a micro-community and is the base unit of society.

Because communities are made up of individuals, a certain amount of care and tolerance is built into us for those individuals. Back in the day, every person in the community or village was part of the wellbeing of the entire community, so they held their value to us in the form of our interdependence with them. One person did the hunting, another looked after the crops, another maintained the buildings in the village, another protected the village from dangers and so on.

Bring this aspect of human makeup into the micro setting of the family and we have a picture of what 'broken wing syndrome' looks like. One bird stays grounded to look after the bird that cannot fly because it has an injury, or is disabled or diseased (AA calls Alcoholism a 'disease' in the hope that the person recovers). This response is described as the 'rescuer syndrome'. In these types of relationships both the birds stay grounded; neither ends up flying, so even the healthy bird can forget it can fly (often a parent, friend or family member can be a 'rescuer').

This character trait more often relates to females, however males can have quite a strong nurture side to them too. I am told I am a rescuer. I probably developed this trait during the time I was a solo father, or I may be over-compensating for my childhood. Either way it is a character defect I have that I must be mindful of. My children have given me a reason to live, and I probably needed them a bit too much, creating a mild co-dependency.

It has paid off now though, because I feel I have one of the best relationships with my children I have ever had and they make me proud to be their father.

When someone gets into a relationship with a person who has behavioural issues they think they can help them change. Perhaps they're already in a relationship with a person who has issues that they think they can help them resolve. So an interdependent co-dependency begins.

One person (usually the female) may try to help by expressing their innate caring maternal nature, and also meeting their own need to feel valued and appreciated, while the other enjoys being nurtured and cared for. Some males can have a 'mummy syndrome' and are looking for another female to fill that void.

Some males who are in a relationship or family physically, sometimes lack full mental and emotional integration in that family environment. As a male I can speak with authority and non-judgmental experience here. We males can develop a refusal to fulfil our commitment responsibilities — almost having an immunity to responsibility; the 'boy syndrome'.

After we finish work, we love being with our mates, cars, hunting, fishing, sports or computer games and beer. We can do a whole lot of that stuff and leave the woman to look after the house and kids. It is in these cases that a woman's strong nurture traits usually kick in and they become the default leader of the household, for the benefit of the children. The male can then sit

back and easily divest themselves of their co-leadership role in the household and family environment and in bringing up the kids. Why? We like dopamine ... that's just how it is; the thrill of the kill, speed, a laugh with mates and getting to the next level on our computer games. It is how we are made up (generally speaking of course). The mundane everyday cores of life just do not provide the dopamine we enjoy so much.

This over-nurturing co-dependency happens at the beginning of the relationship. However, this pattern soon turns sour and the end result is a dysfunctional relationship, full of hurt and blame. The couple use each other to meet certain needs, unaware of the roles they both play in the dysfunction. The relationship eventually putrefies and begins to dissolve. Then more often than not, the two people go their separate ways and repeat the cycle with another person, or they no longer trust the other gender, believing that all future partners will have issues.

Many woman complain of being in these relationships and feeling used and neglected. They give their all, bankrupting themselves emotionally in the process and feel like they are looking after a boy, because the immature man will not change his ways.

But, in reality, the woman has enabled his addiction, or his unacceptable self-centred behaviour and has further ingrained the destructive habit into the partner's life. I speak from experience here, I am not happy about how I have behaved in

the past on some occasions. That was a long time ago ... lessons now learned. I only wish someone had taught me about this stuff earlier in life.

For a relationship to function harmoniously — where both parties are healthily validated by each other — the law of mutuality, equality and reciprocity must be alive and active. But in this situation, the naturally generous, caring person subconsciously attracts a partner with a dysfunctional personality trait; the bird with a broken wing. They believe in the partner and think that, if they can heal their broken wing, they will both soar the heavens together in a happily ever-after story. They both have a dream that they can turn their baggage into wings.

The three stages of unhealthy co-dependant giving and receiving begin here. The first stage is where the receiver shows appreciation and gratitude to the giver. This validates the giver, who feels significance and worth. It fills a void in their life and gives a sense of completeness. The web is spun for the fly and the trap is set. It is often a red flag that we are oblivious to and fail to see.

In the second stage, the receiver slowly becomes a taker, developing expectation and entitlement to the givers service and emotion. The giver now feels under obligation to the taker, so an unhealthy habit is formed and the fly is caught in the web. What was wonderful at the beginning of the relationship has now turning stale, so arguments and resentments begin.

Emotions have dried up and all that is left is the giver's 'hope' (hold on pain ends) that things will change back to the happy times they once had. So, they keep giving, with expectation and this misplaced hope. The third stage is where the taker despises the giver, seeking control over them and manipulating them with guilt and fear, because they are afraid of losing their entitlements and their crutch. The giver is now the victim.

The victim must comply, out of compulsion and under duress, or else! The fly is trapped, the fangs of the spider are now in the fly and the fly is being drained of its very life. This can go on for some time (perhaps for years) until the fly eventually escapes, or is rescued; wounded and disillusioned, or in some unfortunate cases, the taker succumbs to the addiction through overdose, accident or an illness. Restoration can happen. It is possible, but it takes work, commitment, self-honesty and professional help, and it's very rare.

TACIT CONSENT

Tacit consent is basically when one partner puts up with the other partner's unacceptable behaviour. This is especially important in the early days of a relationship. Often, an addictive behaviour continues until it reaches what is called 'critical mass'. Critical mass is when something becomes self-sustaining and no longer needs additional energy to remain in motion. The critical mass here is building a destructive behaviour pattern in

the relationship. Tacit consent is silent consent. The behaviour is noticed a little; even supported and justified.

If the issue is alcohol or substances, there may be parties every so often. Then they will become more frequent, and that becomes the new normal. Or a life outside of the house to enjoy their addiction becomes a habit, especially with things like gambling. It might be incorrect behaviour toward the opposite sex .

On a night out you see your man being a bit flirty, you don't like it and you 'catch feels', but you don't say anything ('catching feels' is to catch ourselves feeling something). The next time you go out he does it again. You're a bit concerned but you hold your tongue because you're a bit fearful of saying anything, or he brushes it off. Maybe you think it's all in your head. It happens again. This time you're really concerned and when you get home you have an argument.

However, he's been enjoying the attention and this has created a habit. Now he looks at you as a nag and you feel devalued. A dysfunction has entered the relationship. The gender here can be easily reversed. If we 'catch feels' about our partner's behaviour that we do not agree with, it is wise to address it as soon as possible. Prevention is easier than cure to stop these behaviours gaining pace.

As I described earlier, destructive behaviours in a relationship come in many forms; a fixation with sports, cars, hobbies, too much time out with friends, computer games and social media

addiction... with avoidance of responsibility in any form, while the partner is left to care for the children — or worse, they are never at home to help, which results in a lack of healthy communication.

Work can be a big issue, because most couples go out to work now and any strain on the relationship is amplified. Work is an easy retreat to avoid dealing with problems in a relationship that need discussion and resolution. Once a bad habit starts forming and is not challenged, it becomes increasingly difficult to apprehend and rebalance the relationship. It has a snowball effect.

The moral of the story ... take note of the red flags early. A person can only remedy their own character defects. Remember, beware of energy thieves and where behaviours are headed.

Addictions have so many variants that it can escape our consciousness that they even exist. This is a blind spot. It can also be denial, especially when we blame our own character defects on something or someone else and refuse to take responsibility for them. We addicts have to come to a place where we have to choose — our continual unacceptable behaviour or our relationship with our partner.

To be honest, I would never put up with the behaviour from another person that I showed to my wife, unless they were my children.... Even then we would probably need to have breaks from each other, but I could never leave them because they are

my very blood and future. Repetition strengthens confirmations. An addict is an addict whether there is acknowledgment of it or not. ‘Deny, deny you’ll get by’ is a fools game. I have been on both sides of a relationship that involved addiction. I know full well the excuses, promises, attempts at recovery and the failings of these attempts (relapses). The anxiety and pain I have caused, and the pain it has caused me, is soul destroying and has arrested personal development, resulting in years of wasted life.

Emotional outbursts and anger can become a habit. People who cannot control their emotions are usually blamers. Blamers often play the victim or crave attention. This type of immaturity is not sexy or attractive. There will always be a reason or an excuse for unreasonable behaviour. The ultimatums and the ‘one more chance’ pleadings become continuous. If you are in a relationship where you can see any of the above and the relationship is becoming unsustainable I suggest you seek professional advice.

This is a painful, lonely road that few recover from. If there is recovery the carnage and mistrust left in the wake is seldom repairable. Trust becomes a thing of the past, and bitterness and resentment are the outcome. It is very damaging for the people involved, especially for the giver. There is often an apprehension about building future relationships. Often the taker will just move on to another relationship — their new supply, their new victim. I will explain a human dynamic.

We judge others by their actions and ourselves by our intentions. We often justify our own behaviour to ourselves and others with excuses, but we condemn others by their actions. We make up instant excuses like, 'I just need to do this.... I was late because of the traffic (the third time this week).... I'm having a bad day.... I forgot because something came up.... I just need to check an urgent email / text.... I haven't taken much notice of you or how you are feeling because I'm busy providing,' etc.

'Nomo-phobia' is an addiction to a smart phone, sometimes referred to as 'smart phone use disorder'. 'Phubbing' is the name coined for someone snubbing or ignoring another person in favour of their smart phone. For years my second wife would continually tell me to put my phone down.

I honestly did not recognise what I was doing. I was totally unaware of it. It was a blind spot for me. I had all the apps on social media going, I was building my instagram following (I used to make up and post my own humorous pictures and quotes). I had all the excuses ... I have a business to run, 'I just have to do this, or was just doing that ... someone just commented on a post of mine ... someone disagreed with me in a comment ... someone was interested in a property ... I had an email that needed urgent attention' ... on and on it would go. I was oblivious to my behaviour at that time.

That was until sometime later, when I met a girl I adored and got into a relationship with her. We were both addicted to texting each other all day, every day. However, when we moved in together, her addiction reverted to others, with all of her group chats on WhatsApp, her family overseas, Facebook, building an Insta following, etc, that phone of hers was always in her hand. The funny thing was, she didn't recognise her constant use of her phone, but she definitely recognised my use of my phone. I would say it was about an 8-1 ratio. Excuses are so easy to make and forgotten so fast.

Addictions and disorders can be the worst blind spots. Excuses for these addictions include, 'I'm like this because something happened in my life,' or 'You make me do this' — that's always a good one! It will almost always be the fault of someone or something else; anything other than the person with the addiction taking personal responsibility for their unacceptable behaviour.

They may accept their addiction but admit they are powerless over it or they just love their addiction. I relate to all of these at different stages throughout my addiction. An addiction can also express itself in the work place, with employees repeatedly calling in sick for some reason or not being as productive as they should be. Whatever it is, it usually boils down to, 'I can't stop my addiction, or bad behaviour, because, because ...' On the other hand, if someone else does something to us that we disagree with we don't like it. If someone doesn't live up to our expectations, or their word, we find it hard to tolerate.

As with the above, most of the time they have a 'reason' for their behaviour. They offer that reason to excuse themselves, to vindicate themselves, to try and let themselves off the hook. But we judge them ... they are late, we have been waiting, we don't want to hear excuses, we just want them there on time. Forget the excuses because we are not interested in them!

It's in our nature to make judgements, it's how we humans are wired. It's actually a vital part of the human makeup to assess people and situations. Originally it was primarily for our very survival and protection; for following tracks when hunting for food or keeping watch for predators or enemies. Our life and the community's life depended on making quick judgements. In ancient times, if someone was a watchman on the city wall and they fell asleep they could be hanged, publicly whipped or imprisoned. An example of a community making judgements regarding their survival is the story of Jack Dunn; a New Zealander, who was a soldier in the First World War. His memorial and his story are recounted below:

'Jack was highly regarded by his comrades, Jack was one of the smartest men in the Maxim gun section and he did some splendid work, being game to the core and carrying out his duties with a despatch and intelligence which was the subject of very favourable comment from the officers ... he was all through the hardest of the fighting and never flinched in the face of the most deadly fire to do his duty' (Wairarapa Daily Times, 3 November, 1915).

While on their way to Europe the troops encountered fighting in Egypt. Jack had come down with pneumonia and had been hospitalised for two weeks. When he came back to join his regiment he was too sick to fight on the front line, so he was put on sentry duty, guarding a vital passage way. One night, sick and exhausted, he fell asleep. He was seen by an officer asleep, was court-martialled and sentenced to death. Sometime after the sentence there was an appeal and the sentence was reduced to 10 years hard labour. Jack was given a temporary release order to go and fight in a major battle, where he was killed.

The moral of the story: the safety of the regiment (the community) depended on Jack to play his role in the regiment, regardless of Jack's condition. Jack put his regiment at risk, so Jack was without excuse.

What does Jack's story have to do with this chapter on addictions? Everything! The world has changed so much since then. Globally, our generation lives in the safest, most comfortable time in recorded history. Generally speaking, for people in developed nations, very little that we face in common everyday life will be dangerous or life threatening, other than extreme sports. Having said that, Covid has been a game changer in recent times, unsettling the comfortable environment we have enjoyed for so long. We have suddenly had to wake up a bit and take precautions against this enemy that we cannot see.

Caveat: If we allow ourselves to be exposed to situations that are dangerous or life threatening (perhaps where drugs or guns are present, or we are exposed to violence at home) and we do not seek the safety that the legal system provides, we are putting ourselves in the way of harm. If that applies to you, try to remove yourself from those situations as soon as you are able to and seek help.

Generally speaking we have the government social welfare system, after-pay options and credit cards to fall back on in harder times. Paper money is rarely used now, so cash theft has reduced significantly. Online security is often the main issue we face in western society today. The social welfare system stops most people from starving and the medical system is advancing its abilities for treating illnesses. We eat better than the kings of ancient times (even the mightiest or richest could not get an apple out of season). Today we have fresh produce flown in from all over the world, so we can eat whatever we want any time of the year. What we take for granted in today's society was beyond imagination in ancient times.

What's my point? Our amazing brains are designed for acute sharpness and to notice the smallest threat to our lives, but without these threats to our survival, we have developed a fascination with trivia; especially on social media, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Viber, emails, texts and on it goes. Not only does this create a flow of excitement, but the sound of a text or a notification actually sets off the same reward chemicals

in the brain as most addictions do, just like the sound of a slot machine to a gambler. Oh, someone wants me! ... Reward! Oh, someone commented on a post... Reward!

We don't realise that addictions are all around us. We just have blind spots to them. Remember, others can see blind spots in us that we cannot see in ourselves, and visa versa. This sort of fascination with trivia is wasting valuable time that could be used to improve our lives, to increase the depth of our relationships, or to achieve our goals. If you have a partner, or family, get them to watch 'The Social Dilemma' (Netflix) and have certain hours each day that are phone free. Big companies are preying on our time and resource to fatten their bottom line and we are increasingly becoming the host that they feed off.

It is a good idea to take a bit of an audit of our time use and see if we can be more productive in some areas. I am continuously challenged with procrastination, and I have a PHD in creative excuses! But deep down I know all excuses are equal. Sometimes I have to literally peel myself off the couch, like Velcro, and enact the two minute rule we read about in this book, because I know, motivation happens after I start.

UNDERSTANDING ADDICTION AND MOVING ON.

I have been to many counsellors over the past 30 years. Some were helpful and some were just a waste of time and money; some made me worse. One of my lines of work is being a PSS (Peer Support Specialist). A PSS is a person who has recovered from certain life challenges and has gone on to create a successful life. They show in their own life the result of successful recovery; a bit like Alcoholics Anonymous (where alcoholics with a long history of sobriety help others achieve recovery and sobriety, because they have developed the mental and behavioural tools to beat addiction).

PSS is a relatively new discipline that is fast taking its place on the medical stage, due to its effectiveness and the success it is showing. The key factor with a PSS, which makes it such a powerful discipline, is that the PSS can show authentic empathy and patience with a person seeking recovery from any life traumas, personal violations, addictions of all types, mental health challenges, BPD's and other personal challenges.

Recovery from a relationship separation is such an intense event that it carries all the mental and emotional similarities and nuances of an addiction recovery. Our bodies, our minds, our emotions and even the spiritual aspects of ourselves have learned a way of living with this other person and now we need to unlearn ways of thinking and relearn new ways of feeling and acting, with a new set of behaviours.

However, generalising the medical pathway, the clinician will diagnose the patient through the identification of the group of symptoms they display, then retreat to their medical journal to label them. The diagnosis might be that they're an addict, they have depression, are bipolar, schizophrenic, have a mental disorder. Once they have done their job and arrive at a label for the patient, fitting them into a box, they then go on to an operations manual, recite a list of medications, give varying prescriptions and their job is done. This is all about symptom management. The stabilisation of symptoms is the goal.

Basically, it's a return to zero for the patient, if they remain on the medication and prescriptions given. This description is an over-simplification but what I am saying is that although there are times for professional services, they are not a silver bullet.

A Peer Support Specialist's role can be explained in this way. A person falls into a hole along their journey in life; it could be an addiction, depression, a mental health challenge or even a relationship separation. They yell out 'Help, I can't get out!' A priest walking by hears the person. He walks up to the hole, says a prayer for the person, then walks off. The person in the hole is not helped and loses hope in religion. They yell out for help again. A doctor hears, walks to the hole, and asks what the problem is. "Oh! You're in a hole," he explains. He writes a prescription, throws some pills into the hole and walks off.

Then a counsellor hears the word ‘Help!’ He walks up to the hole. “Oh, you are in a hole,” he says and draws a picture of a ladder on a piece of paper and writes on the paper, ‘Steps to getting out of a hole.’ He throws the paper in to the hole and walks off. The person is in a bad way by now, losing faith that they will ever be able to get out of the hole they’re in. But they yell ‘Help!’ again anyway. A Peer Support Specialist hears the person, walks up to the hole, sees the person in the hole and jumps into the hole with them. The person asks the PSS what they are doing in the hole. The PSS says, “I know all about these holes and I know how to get out of them.

Let me show you how and we will do it together.” They both climb out of the hole and walk off towards their hopes and dreams together. The person may stumble a bit and fall back in but the PSS knows all too well their own journey and the difficulties they had with relapse and so on. So, with patient empathy they continue to support the person along the journey of climbing out of the hole and becoming a complete person, who is in turn quite often able to support others in their ‘hole’ experience. I actually owe my sobriety to the PSS model. Nothing else came close.

Here is an example of a personal PSS approach to the addiction of eating, where we share the physical and mental tools we develop to overcome our addiction as an alternative option to medications and chemical based therapy. I have an addiction to eating and sugar. I enjoy eating and I enjoy sweet foods and deserts way too much for my own good. Ask anyone who knows

me, I can graze on food all day long, and if I'm not eating I'm drinking meal replacement drinks or cups of hot beverages.

I am currently training to compete at national level for body building so I have had to go into the boxing ring with my addiction to eating. I have to manage my food intake with the tool of food availability. What do I mean? I will eat only what I can, and what I can is what I make available to myself. What I make available to myself is what I put in my shopping trolley, which invariably ends up in my fridge and pantry.

However, this starts even before I leave home to go to the supermarket. I have noticed (and human behavioural science has also suggested) that if I go to the supermarket hungry, I subconsciously put sweet energy foods in my trolley and more food than I intended to, because I am hungry.

So I make sure I eat before I go shopping, which enables me to make better food choices and don't have to fight my cravings along the way. My pantry then has in it what I know is correct for me, so now, to get my favourite treat, which is ice cream, I would need to go out to the shop. I literally cannot be bothered driving up the road just for an ice cream. If I'm hungry during the day, I make sure I have a bottle of water with me at all times, or a low carb sweet protein drink. This curbs my hunger.

As this book is about using our addictive nature to our favour, this scenario helps me deal with the symptoms of my addiction. Using these tools described here may be a method you can glean

from to support you if you are also facing addictive tendencies with food.

The real gold is in the redirection of my addiction. By redirecting the power of this addiction I express it in exercise. If I do exercise why not connect that exercise to a goal? Ten or fifteen minutes on a computer googling sports competitions, I arrived at body building ... another ten minutes to pick a date far enough into the distance that is achievable and a class to compete in... filled in a quick form and the entry was made.

Go to YouTube exercise plans ... pick one ... google nutrition plans ... enter height and weight... choose a plan... start dreaming, thinking and asking questions along the way. Seem over simplified? It's not, it's just foreign to our current way of thinking. But within a couple of weeks it becomes the norm and a few weeks later it is a habit and a new lifestyle. This story is not made up, I actually did this very scenario. I'm no-one special and we all have the same internet connections. So you can too. I encourage you to decide what you want and go and get it, whatever the 'it' is. It belongs to you... 'It' is your birthright.

WE GET USED

I am going to explain alcohol and substance misuse (and possibly other addictions) from an entirely different perspective; one than you have probably never thought of before. I will go

pretty deep. I believe it is vitally important for us to understand these things so we can perceive why a person does things under the influence of alcohol or substances that lead to inappropriate behaviour, addictions, jail, institutions (rehab, hospitals) and even an early grave. You will have to go with me here and I will put it all together at the end.

The Greeks were the philosophers of the age. One of the original words for substance use (you could include alcohol) was the word pharmakeia (where we get the word pharmaceutical). The etymological word for alcohol comes from the Arabic al-kuhl which means 'body eating spirit,' and is the root origin for the English term 'ghoul' (unclean spirit). Further back in ancient times pharmakeia was derived from 'the cutting of plants,' meaning the extraction of psychoactive substances from their plant based origin.

From my own experiences and observations, addiction is like this. I see that it is not necessarily us misusing substances, but it can become the substances or an addiction misusing us, as its host. How do I come to that conclusion? Alcohol (along with other substances and addictions) is like a 'ghoul!' Have you ever been blackout drunk and had with no recollection of what you were doing, for hours? Or have you done something that was totally outside your character, or seen others do that? You wake up the next day and wonder what you've done, or why on earth you did what you did. You find texts on your phone, you have 'drunk and dialled' (spoken to people on the phone drunk), or there's

a stranger in your bed that you had relations with, unknown to you. Or perhaps you abused someone you love. Got into a fight ... What 'possessed' you to do such a thing?

You regretted your behaviour as it was totally outside of your norm. The gambler can talk of going into some sort of zone where, over a few hours, they exhaust all their finances in a slot machine, even impulsive spending. Only later they 'come to' and realise what they have done. Others talk of sex like this, and other addictions. I have definitely come to clearly recognise that addictions are operating at a subconscious, spiritual level. You will read more about this in the Spirituality chapter.

I have done some things like this that I am not proud of. We hear of people on methamphetamine having superhuman strength. The substance was expressing itself through our body. It was as though it was actually using our body to do things totally outside of our character — a 'ghoul!' I was talking to someone one day and when I explained this his eyes lit up. He said, "Now I get it!" He told me about a time that he'd woken up next to his partner after drinking. They had had sexual relations the night before, but he was in a state of blackout and could not remember anything. His partner said he was weird; like he was a 'different person' during the sex. He had never been able to figure out why until I explained this to him. He said, "You need to write a book about this stuff. People need to know it". Now he is extra careful when drinking. Do you see what I am getting at?

Alcohol is the name we give to the substance ethanol. Alcohol — al-kuhl — a body-eating spirit. That doesn't sound very good to me! They don't call high alcohol content drinks, like vodka, gin and whisky, 'spirits' for nothing. Heavy alcohol use will not only destructively eat away the body, but it will be destructive to everything that person cares about; loss of relationships, loss of driver's licence, loss of jobs, money, children, and more.

One of the biggest losses, that we just don't realise, is the loss of opportunity in our life. Alcohol and substance use takes our time and money. The price we pay for them is the most affordable part, but the amount we pay in the end, when we misuse them, is one we cannot afford. Imagine if we applied that same energy and resources to our family and to bettering our life! Where would we be?

Self-harm is also a disorder that can actually be considered an addiction; because it releases powerful chemicals into the brain; endorphins and endocannabinoids. Self-harming involves varying types of intentional self-inflicted injury, in order to experience these soothing, anaesthetic chemicals that ease mental suffering. Self-harm seems to be the reverse of rational thinking at first glance. However, most addictions are a slow form of suicide.

I have someone very close to me who was struggling with self-harm. I did a sound study of its origin, how it works, what is going on in the person and the brain at the time and the trauma

associated with it. It lead me to undertake two qualification papers relating to the subject and also de-escalation. They have been free of acting on the impulse for a couple of years now. If you are having difficulties here or know someone who does, seek professional advice. There is one method of dealing with the urges of self-harm in the form of cutting that has shown to be of help to some people. When feeling the urge and support is not available, have a red marker or felt-tip pen available. The act of drawing a red mark across the skin can achieve a form of momentary release to the person suffering with the symptoms of self-harm.

Caveat: This is not medical advice, it is a possible tool that may be of support until professional support is sought.

Think of smoking. Why would a normal person do such a thing? It doesn't seem rational. But media images and advertising campaigns from corporates and certain social environments normalise and even glamourise a behaviour that will eventually result in ill-health, death and make you ugly on the way — and people pay a handsome fee for that. Smoking and substance misuse could well be considered self-harming.

On reflection, decades of smoking cigarettes was self-harm to me. I noticed one day that light lines were appearing around my lips. I later found out this was called butt-hole-lips, from squeezing my lips together around the cigarette to inhale (this 'revelation' helped me give smoking away). There are many things like this

that we continue to do, even when we know they are not good for us, that can be considered to be self-harm.

Relationships can be like this. When we are procrastinating in a wrong relationship or entering one we know is not sustainable, it could be considered psychologically self-harming. We are losing valuable time that we cannot replace and missing out on opportunities that would be life improving. We could be in an absolutely right relationship, but because we are refusing to work through the issues we need to work through, due to judgment, unforgiveness and stubbornness, we could be turning a good relationship into a bad one. I know both sides of this first hand. If I had my time again I would have made different choices. However I cannot, so I have chosen to turn my mess into my message and my crap into fertiliser, for personal development and to support others to find their dream again, as I have managed to.

ALCOHOL IS AN ANAESTHESIA

Although I am talking about alcohol here, you can substitute alcohol with almost all addictions. Often addictions are a distraction from deeper issues. We don't have the space in this book to unpack them all. Alcohol is the most readily available drug on earth. Think of all the liquor outlets around you; the supermarkets, the bulk liquor retail outlets, the bottle shops, the bars; there are almost too many to count. Every one of these businesses have lease payments, power and utility costs, wages

and a profit to make; all on the margin of alcohol transactions. All they are selling is different flavoured drinks with a percentage of ethanol (alcohol) in them. If you took that single ingredient, the ethanol, out of the drinks these places would shut down overnight. I see non-alcoholic spirits available for sale for around \$60. Why people would spend that sort of money on cordial is beyond me. However, if that is what it takes to keep them off the real stuff and they have a happy home environment because of it, that is \$60 well spent. This sort of positive act by a person to mitigate their alcohol addiction is worthy of praise and would be proof to a spouse just how valuable they are to that person.

BROWNIE POINTS GALORE.

I never really drank at all in the 17 years before I met my second wife. Then, to be sociable we would have a few drinks together. Over the next year I drank more. By the third year I was drinking every day. This was when my wife decided to stop drinking, but I continued. It is said that alcohol ruins 10% of people's lives, whether it's the alcoholic or the effect the alcoholic has on those around them.

My wife was in a constant state of stress because of my drinking. On reflection, I realise that cortisol was reducing her decision-making ability and creating a state of anxiety. This, with a drop in serotonin, compounded a loss in connectivity in the brain. All she could do was think about when I would drink again.

She could not stop these thoughts and day after day she would constantly reinforce the idea in my mind that I would eventually drink again. I used to say, “I do not need to think of alcohol, because you do all the thinking for me and remind me about my drinking almost every day,” (even though weeks and months could go by when I had not had a drink). When I did eventually relapse I didn’t get hangovers. I would drink and she would get the hangover, due to all the stress in her body, and those hangovers ended up being permanent. Because she stayed with me, she was actually enabling my behaviour.

When she did finally leave me it was the best thing for both of us... and the best thing she ever did for me. I don’t know if I owe my addiction to her, but I certainly do my sobriety. When we addicts turn our lives around and use our addictive nature to our favour, the sky is the limit! We practically become unstoppable.

My wife threatened to leave me so many times it became a monthly event. At one time we belonged to an organisation where she spoke in public. On more than one occasion, while addressing the crowd, she would say that she kicked me out on a monthly basis (premenstrual tension didn’t help matters — she knew that and I certainly did too). For some unknown reason, this is when I would sometimes binge. She had a lot of patience, but all her saintly patience was no match for a monthly or bimonthly binge drinker. There is a whole area of science behind cyclic patterns, called Circadian Rhythms, which may also contribute to this. I used to blame it on the moon.

I just could not feel bad; I was anaesthetised. On the other hand, I could not feel great either. My emotions had been dumbed down by alcohol, although I was unaware of this at the time. The reason is, when we get drunk or we act out in addictions we don't feel pain as much as we do when we are sober, or not in the meditative state of the active addiction, because it has an anaesthetic effect. The real problem for a drinker is that alcohol anaesthetises all the emotions as well. So, when we should feel guilty for unacceptable behaviour we just can't.

Our brain is actually affected and this lasts well after our drinking ends; months or possibly even years in fact. Alcohol and substance misuse is worse than you would think, so if you have an alcohol-use disorder, or you are living with a person with one and you think you can put up with it or easily overcome it, think again. That stuff has poisoned, barbed hooks that go deep into our psyche; our human spirit. It clings to us and removing these hooks takes work and commitment.

I attended my first rehab at the end of the third year, but by then it had a hold on me. I went from being an everyday drinker to a binge drinker which, in many respects, was worse as I became like a loaded gun waiting to go off.

My wife would go mad at me and I just did not get it. It was not until the end that I really put all the pieces together. By the time I came around, the damage was well and truly done. She used to tell me it was "her or the beer" every time I drank, which was

about every one to three months. When I did drink, I was so wild, it would be like the space between the binges didn't exist, because emotions sit outside of time and space and trigger those old memories like they were yesterday, or even in the present.

In reality, when I think back the 'vase' had been dropped and we were just biding time on relational death row. 'Dropping the vase' is the term for the cross-over, when the relationship hits a critical point, and a downward spiral begins that almost become irreversible. Imagine a beautiful bunch of flowers on the bench, that is the picture of the relationship.

The vase holds the metaphoric flowers, which are dreams and hopes for the future, happy memories, kind gestures between each other, passion, care and all the good colourful things a loving relationship consists of. When you drop the vase it smashes into a million pieces and cannot be repaired. The flowers go everywhere; there is glass, water and mess everywhere.

What was a beautiful bouquet of flowers is a mess on the floor that is going into the rubbish. What brought smiles at the start is heartache and a mess in the end. At some point one person loses hope and gives up. It could be one-off event, like an infidelity, or it could be a slow-motion train wreck, like an addiction, laziness round the home, continuous arguments or the like.

The point I am making here is that the beautiful bouquet will never be the same after the vase has been dropped. If the relationship was not doomed at that point to eventual failure,

whatever caused the vase to drop will always exist at some level. There are exceptions to this, however they are rare.

She would say, “When I leave you will probably stop drinking”. The funny thing is that’s what did happen. She came back from a trip overseas. I had taken the opportunity to drink while she was away, and a week after she came back. I just couldn’t help it; it was like I was having an out-of-body experience.

I distinctly remember the moment, I got in my car ... like it was against my will, or in place of my will, and I drove to the liquor store and brought beer. I binged even though I knew what was coming. I loved her, but showed that I loved my addiction more. When we misuse alcohol and substances, or have other addictions (like gambling or porn), it floods the brain with dopamine, which the brain absolutely loves. The brain does not need to work to produce the feel-good feelings of dopamine because the alcohol or these other things are doing the brain’s job for it. However, when we stop drinking, or using, the brain gets starved of dopamine and craves it, because it has become used to not producing it.

So the brain literally screams for some dopamine, through alcohol or whatever else may be its method, to obtain that dopamine fix. It feels as though, against our own will, we are practically forced to get into the car and drive to the bottle shop to buy some alcohol, or do whatever it is we feel we need at the time to get the fix we need.

Honestly, when I look back at my actual experience. It was really more of a mental health issue than an addiction, which is what all addictions are in my view.

People think that love and pain are the strongest forces on earth. However, I believe that pleasure is the strongest force. You might disagree with me, but I am convinced that pleasure is the strongest driver we have. Let me explain.... An addict gambler will sometimes put their last dollar in the slot for the excitement, knowing that they don't have bus fare home or rent that week. An alcoholic will sometimes choose the pleasure of alcohol, knowing that it is going to cost them their wife, kids and house. A drinker will drink knowing that a bad hangover awaits them in the morning.

A person will choose the pleasure of an affair, knowing it will cost them their loving marriage. They love their family, but they love the momentary pleasure and excitement of an affair more. Often the pleasure of addictions will send people, knowingly, to an early grave. I have lost friends and even extended family members as a result of the pleasure they received from their addictions, like losing my brother in law (in chapter one) that prompted me to write this book. As I have said, the addiction preys on the very life of its host.

That binge was the last straw for my wife. We sat down to talk the next Sunday afternoon. We were in a new house I had just built — which meant nothing now, because all the trinkets, promises

and apologies in the world are not worth anything when you are the spouse of an alcoholic or addict. She said, “Can you promise me you will never drink again?” and for the first time in our relationship I was actually honest with her. I said, “No.” So she said, “We are over then,” and with that statement, she left. She made an application to rent an apartment and stayed in a motel that night. I helped her move her stuff to the apartment the next day and she never returned.... Another wife, another payout (payout number three) and everything else that goes with a divorce. On reflection and to be brutally honest with myself, as I said before, she did the best thing for us both and I honour her for doing it. Sometimes that is what it takes for us addicts to wake up, and if that is what it takes then, regardless of how it affects us, it is well worth the wakeup call.

I had just one more binge after she left me. After that I never touched alcohol again. From my studies and in my experience, I know it takes about six months for the brain to recognise that it will not be getting any more dopamine from alcohol or addictions. Then ‘neuroplasticity’ kicks into gear; the brain starts to build new neuro-connections and begins to heal itself. [1] After about a year, the brain really lights up and you actually become a new person. There is a saying, ‘Stay until the magic happens’, and it will happen. I have had this experience myself.

There is not much that others can do to change an alcoholic (or any addict) in my experience. The will to change has to come from inside of us. It’s called the gift of desperation.

We are just wired this way. If we change for another reason, when that reason goes or the relationship gets interrupted, so does the anchor for our sobriety and clean living. This can open the door for compromise. The real question then becomes, what do we find pleasure in? Or, better put, where are our values?

Whatever we value the most we will serve. Another way of putting it is, whatever we love the most we will do. If the wrong things are taking our life in the wrong direction (and we all have them), then we need to adjust our value systems so that we derive pleasure in the things that will improve our lives. Look at your goals and your purpose in the 'Goals' chapter and that will help you. Make your successes your self-improvements and your purpose your pleasure. Start with the little things you can change and work with them first.

So, wrapping this up, if you are a spouse, friend or family member of a person suffering from addiction, or showing compulsive disorders, or if you have challenges in this area yourself, I suggest you get some expert advice on how to make decisions around your relationships and your life. I look back and see how I should have made changes earlier. I am not a person to judge in any way, because I definitely know the difficult challenges people face, from both sides of the addiction coin.

06.

RE-PARENTING AND RE-EDUCATING YOURSELF



*S*erving yourself properly

When we were growing up and during our schooling years we were taught a lot of information that, when we reflect on it, was predominantly career driven and financially focused. Learning the ABCs (and the 123s) is not a bad thing, nor is a bit of science and history. Probably not many of us were straight 'A' students. Being a 'straight A' student would get your name in the Hall of Fame at school or college, but it would not guarantee you a place in the Hall of Fame of life. A complaint from many straight 'A' students, is that school taught them how to remember a 'bunch of random stuff' for a short period of time and to be able to regurgitate bits of that knowledge during an exam (most of

which will be soon forgotten) and voila, you're a winner! But life doesn't work like that and this process of learning is foreign to how human communities actually work in real life.

In the origin of our species we were quickly recognised by our strengths, whether it be horticulture, agriculture, being a leader, hunter/gatherer, a builder, meal preparer, tracker ... or perhaps we had a high sensitivity to incoming danger. But now we drag this philosophy of the superiority of the straight 'A' student into our adult lives and compare ourselves with each other on this abstract scale. This is as bizarre as comparing the ability of a monkey and a fish; the monkey is not adept at swimming and a fish can't swing between trees. We are all uniquely different. We have to give ourselves a break from the false expectations put on us by society and other people.

As long as we can read, write and work a smart phone we have all the equipment we need to succeed. Add an internet connection to this and we probably have no excuse not to succeed. The basics used to be reading, writing and arithmetic, but now we have a phone for that. We barely even need to write today if we can handle technology well. It's a good idea for us to look at what we have and what we are good at, then get to work on developing our strengths; focussing on those strengths, not our weaknesses. Focus on what's strong, not what's wrong! What is your passion? What do you most like doing?

In terms of recovery from an addiction, we have given so much of our identity away that we have lost ourselves somewhere along the way. It's time to reclaim ourselves, develop our strengths, our passions, our energy and claim our enthusiasm for life back from the addiction thief and fully believe in ourselves again.

What we didn't learn throughout our modern education was a lot of the life skills we would have been taught in a traditional village setting. Skills like conflict resolution, responsibilities, or fulfilling our role in the community, personal relationship skills between a male and female or other gender labels. Also, very importantly, we would have learned true respect for elders. When we respect our elders we learn to listen and receive the wisdom they have, to apply it to our lives, saving us repeating their mistakes and we can often discover how to negotiate life with more success. Rebellion would quickly lead to our downfall back then, because interdependence within the community was a safe place for us, but outside the camp was a dangerous place, filled with ferocious animals, lack of food and no access to help from our community network.

Today we get released from school starry eyed, with a certificate, or from university with a degree, thinking that our future is a guaranteed success... a fulfilled youth, a flash car and happy families, with a white picket fence in a leafy suburb is our birthright. But not so! Awaiting us, along with all the trappings of what society has to offer, are the hidden dangers, crouching at our door, ready to corner us, to suck us in, devour our time,

energy, emotion and hard-earned money ... even our potential and future.

The world offers us endless advertising, telling us we need this thing or that label to feel better, with endless retail and 'post pay' options, credit cards and student loans, vehicle finance, dating sites and eftpos cards that can empty our pay packet in a good night out on the town.

Then there's sugary foods and energy drinks for the dopamine hit, fast food galore, gaming consoles, social media and fast-moving Netflix series, to keep us entertained in the moment, so that we zone out and forget to plan for our future. We know that failing to plan is planning to fail.

With this level of temptation all around us it's no wonder so many of us lose our way and the divorce rate is so high, mental health issues are on the rise and loneliness in a busy society leads to living lives of quiet desperation. The cards are literally stacked against us and we wake up one day asking ourselves where the last few years (or even a decade) have gone? This has been my story and from what I hear, many others too.

At some point in our lives we have an epiphany — 'What am I going to do with my life?' Enter the concept of re-parenting ourselves. How do we do that?

FINDING OUR IDENTITY AGAIN IN SOCIETY

All day long we're getting hit with advertising, telling us what we need to look like, where we should live, what we should wear, the car we need to be seen in and the furniture we should have in our homes. Why do we need these? We want to fit in to society's norms and expectations. We are continually bombarded with other people's views of us, the boss's expectations, the image we should portray to our co-workers, our customers, our religious organisations, our friends, our neighbours and our social media profile.

Where do 'we' fit in to all this barrage of ideals? Why do we feel we need to comply with those ideals? Often we lose ourselves when we try to fit into the social norms and the expected social identity that we need to work to maintain. A big challenge is the role we are expected to play in our families; the way our society identifies us; as someone's 'wife' or 'husband' — or as a parent, where we're just known as 'Sally's mum' or 'Jonny's dad'. Perhaps we are identified by our job... a truck driver, tradie or a doctor. We identify ourselves in all the different communities we belong to in a certain way, as a certain person. All these people groups have their own perception of us. Our 'epiphany' will cause us to want to go looking for the correct perception of ourselves.

There is something called the 'hero instinct,' that every person craves for; it is a primal need. Some dating coach's talk about using this tool, by activating this primal need to attract a prospective

partner... to get them to fall in love with you and have feelings of need in their life for you. Some call it activating the ‘messiah’ in a person, or finding their ‘winner’ in them. All this stuff is basic manipulation to get what one person wants from the other person. If it is not authentic it more than likely will not last. The real key then is to discover within yourself your own personal hero, messiah, or winner ... whichever way you want to phrase it.

We all have our own personal talents, gifting’s and abilities. Identifying these, finding confidence in them and then putting them into effect is the crucial part of our true identity. That is what a good parent does for their children... they encourage and direct the children in their uniqueness. Just like back in the village days, when the parent would identify the unique qualities of their children and tell them, “You are a great hunter... can sense danger... have a green thumb” or whatever. But many of us never got this from our parents. Often parents are just trying to get through life themselves.

No one told me when I left home I would have to start parenting myself. Re-parenting ourselves is just that! It’s finding the ‘winner’ in ourselves, then encouraging and coaching ourselves along the way. So let’s find out some ways of doing this that our parents should have nurtured in us.

Here is a jewel I have discovered. During our upbringing we are often continuously taught to concentrate on areas that we are not very good at. We get critiqued, being told we are weak and failing at maths and science, even when we are getting A's in english, art and history. This can make us feel disempowered. This critiquing voice can edge its way into our psyche and become our inner critic, when really we need to be coached in our creative strengths. So, in essence, re-parenting ourselves is going back, rediscovering our strengths and dreams and being our own coach — to tell that inner critic to 'Shhh!' So let's develop our inner coach voice to encourage us along and to have more say in our lives.

WE TEACH OTHERS HOW TO TREAT US.

As we come into contact with other people we present an image to them of the person that we are. Our body language — the uprightness of our body and how we hold our posture, our walk, our clothing, our hygiene, the way we look at them, the amount of eye contact we hold, the way we speak, our nervousness or the confidence we display and so on — creates an image of who we are. The way we think about ourselves inwardly is what we present, in all these factors, to the outside world, so all this information is intuitively picked up by the other person. Then they automatically adjust themselves to meet us as who we present ourselves to be and reflect our view of ourselves back to us.

If we approach them as a confident person who is assured in ourselves — knowing who we are and knowing what we are about — that is the image we portray to them. That image will invariably direct the level of response we receive from them. This image doesn't necessarily have to be how we think of ourselves, it just has to be how we display ourselves. In fact, by practising this technique, we can reverse-engineer our mind and create this image of ourselves to ourselves and become that person, through practice. Sounds impossible or fake? No! Try this. Sit where you are right now, concentrate and smile a big smile and hold it for a while. Feel the feelings going on inside of you. Add a good thought... of your happy place. Hold your nice big smile and you will slowly create feelings of happiness inside of you. This is because the body's anatomical response cannot differentiate between cause and effect, so the effect of a smile initiates a response (happiness) to match the effect of the smile.

Over time, as we practice this, it will become a habit and we will develop that view of ourselves subconsciously. The clinical term for this is called 'meta-mooding' (meta = change or alter, mooding = our mood). In the Peer Support model of counselling we use this meta-mooding tool. We approach our guest (patient) with a smile and that sets the tone of the meeting. Even if we are having a bad day ourselves, we can alter our mood, or create our mood, by reverse engineering our feelings using these tools. They work every time.

In already formed relationships of any kind, the perception of how other people view us can go very deep. To change ingrained perceptions of what other people think of us, or how we have allowed them to treat us, will take time. You may be reading this book and you have come to the realisation that your relationships have to change for the better, or that you are accepting unsatisfactory behaviours from other people. That change will be a process. You may be feeling that things need to be different, but you can't put your finger on what or how just yet. However, you do know you are worth more than you are getting from your relationships, be they work, business, family, children or with your significant other.

I recently put up a post on social media of myself winning a national title for body-building. I was standing with a group of fellow competitors, having fun. I received a public comment from a guy who is a well-recognised counsellor and teacher. He speaks on the radio and has a Bachelor of Theology and a Post Graduate Degree and a Diploma for Graduates in Pastoral Therapy. He runs an organisation in the country where I live. In my binge drinking days I had been through a number of his full time study classes and received certification from his organisation. During this time my ex-wife would complain about me and dragged me off to see his counsellors.

One time she got a counsellor (from this persons' organisation) on the line on a Zoom meeting. I was so drunk I can only remember the start of the counselling session. Apparently I was

in tears. The next day she said, “You have problems.” I had made a complete fool of myself. I definitely know what shame is, first-hand! The ‘public’ post read “Little children, keep yourselves from anything that takes God’s place in your hearts — idols.” It is clear to me that his perception of me has not changed. These ‘so called’ counsellors have no idea what people are going through in their lives and need to learn to ask questions in private before they dish out comments in a public arena. Lived experience, like you and I have, is a qualification that cannot be obtained out of a book!

The point I am making here is that other peoples ingrained perceptions about us can become a habit in their lives that causes them to have a blind-spot. The interesting thing is that the people we relate too are unaware that we have trained them how to treat us. Sometimes they know the mode of persuasion they need to use to get us to overlook their unacceptable behaviour toward us. These behavioural patterns can very well be adopted by both partners in relationships and become issues that we just swept under the carpet. We know that if we continue to sweep issues under the carpet, eventually we will end up with a lump under the carpet the size of a dead body. That body will be ours (or our relationship), our personal perception of ourselves and our self-value. The main thing is to teach partners, in all forms of our relationships, how to treat us properly and not to repeat avoidable mistakes, like accepting anything less than what we deserve as equal human beings. The bigger question we then ask

ourselves is this: What is going on in our relationships, or our lives, that we have been unaware of, or where we can teach others how to treat us properly?

Here's good example of this... I have started seeing an amazing girl who often gives me compliments. I was shrugging them off with a joke, saying I could do better, or passing it away. She got annoyed with me one day and said, "Would you just take a compliment!" I thought about it and came to the realisation that, due to my issues, I have trouble receiving praise — which is actually a character defect. So I have altered my behaviour and now I accept the compliment and thank them for it. To go a bit deeper here, if I do not accept her compliment, what I am actually saying to her is that her view is not worth anything, therefore I am actually devaluing her. If I was to keep up that response, she would eventually stop complimenting me. Therefore, I would have taught her not to compliment me.

**EMOTIONS ARE A REACTION TO A THING FROM
THE PAST, BUT THEY CAN BE A PREDICTION
OF THE FUTURE.**

From our embryonic stages in life we learn emotions, then we attribute emotions to circumstances. One person may see a snake, shriek and run away, but another may look in wonder at its beauty and how gracefully it moves. Someone else may instantly get a stick, shovel or gun and kill it, yet another may bend down

and pick it up and allow it to weave across their body. In life we all face circumstances where we have been programmed, or we have programmed ourselves. This is an anatomical 'first emotional response.' We call this the 'law of first emotion,' which is usually adopted when we are young, in our formative years and is often learned from our parents or those around us. In others words, we get other people's views ingrained into us without us knowing. If our mother hated snakes, we will probably hate them too, but if we were brought up by a zoologist we would admire them.

This emotion then goes into the endocrine system and that process causes the body to anatomically emit a physical reaction on a subconscious level... and before we know it we are on a journey. Let's look at an easy example of this... A person may hear the words 'I love you' for the first time from someone who is endearing, But they may shrink away from the statement due to past experiences and then from the person delivering the message. Yet another person who hears those words gets butterflies inside and draws closer to the person who said, 'I love you.' These are two opposite reactions to the same words, said the same way, in the same circumstances.

Depending on our personal history, we all have these programs affecting our everyday life. We will be exposed to circumstances in life where we find it difficult to isolate those circumstances and to be able to approach these situations with objectivity, rather than subjectivity. If we are being subjective, we will superimpose past experiences into current experiences and act

according to our expectation of what is coming, because of what has happened in the past. For example, someone's response to 'I love you' might be, "The last person who said they loved me left me, so you probably will too." Or, "My mother or father used to say they loved me, but they have passed away and I miss them. Now you say you love me. I don't want to lose you.... You mean so much more to me now".

When we want a fresh start at life — a life of new beginnings and a life of recovery, with all the rewards and treasures it holds — we are faced with the arduous task of reinventing ourselves. Reinventing starts with a refurbishment of our thought processes. We need to do a 'thought audit,' to find out what we are thinking, where it came from and how we may need to change it, to get the outcome we desire.

SPEECH AUDIT

A person text me recently and asked me to condense what I know into a mantra. I thought about it for a while and came up with this and sent it back: 'You will get what you expect'. I will explain. Whether we are 'intentional' in our life (planning and working towards our purpose and goals in faith), or we are living in fear (the expectation of a negative outcome), or we are drifting aimlessly (going with the flow and becoming a chess piece in another person's game), we actually do get what we expect.... We become the outcome of our most dominant thoughts.

The origin of our thoughts is our feelings and our feelings resonate from the place within us that most of us describe as our ‘heart’. The ancient word for ‘heart’ comes from ancient Hebrew. The word that we generally translate ‘heart’ is כִּילְיֹוֹתָי (kil·yō·w·tāy) which directly translates as ‘my inmost being’. Our thoughts derive from this place and become the source of our words, therefore our words are the product of our thoughts. So, if we want to change our lives we can reverse engineer our lives by adopting a new language choice and change what we are saying. If we can change what we are saying, our life will change.

One thing that we do not realise is that our words actually stick to us. What do I mean by this? When we say something about another person our audience is not only adopting our perception of that person but the emotion we create in them is actually reflected back onto us. Therefore if we give a negative representation of another person, the emotion of that negativity is mirrored back to us by our audience, and our audience see us in a negative light. I have practiced this over the last few years, and it works amazingly well.

There is a term, ‘gush, don’t gossip.’ This is why it is important to avoid what most people term as gossip and adopt a ‘gush,’ or positive language that is authentic in its representation. The positive emotions created by this ‘gush’ language will reflect back to ourselves, making us look and feel good to others. So, if we reverse the order... people hear good words from us... that creates pleasant thoughts in them which in turn creates pleasant

feelings in them, because their feeling originated from our words. We become the object of those feelings and they have pleasant feelings about us.

I say this because nearly everything we want comes from other people. Other people hold our blessings and fulfilment in life. If you don't believe me try living in solitude, or marooned on a remote island and see if you can realise your dreams. We are and will always be communal beings, living in a localised society. Even if you want a family, you will need to find at least one partner who will accept you as a suitable mate. You could add alcohol as a relational lubricant, to help things along a bit, but that will lower the chance of the longevity of the relationship, reducing the chances of having a family.

Smiling is a simple example of this, as we have already read, our words direct our feelings, creating an emotion; a smile draws people in as it represents a welcome. I have practiced smiling when I talk to people. It's always amazing how much better I feel and how pleasant I am able to make them feel, just through the art of smiling. Smiling also represents trust.

SMV?

Here is a topic that I would like you to approach with an open mind. Some could find it a bit raw or edgy, so if you do not agree with it, discard this piece of writing. That's fine, we all have

different opinions. It's not meant to be fixed as truth but merely an opinion for your consideration.

We all have a value to society. One area of society is in the dating and mating (relationship) sector of society. One of the ways we market ourselves for 'dating and mating' is that we get ascribed an approximation value, called our SMV or our 'sexual marketplace value.' Generally speaking, this is more so for men than for woman, as woman are, in many respects, born with an intrinsic value, which is that they have the womb and men want to procreate. For example, in the animal kingdom the male puts on his wares and the female gets to choose her mate. This is in the basics of our human nature and makeup.

Men traditionally have to work for their value. We have to show ourselves to be good providers and that we have good 'seed'. Therefore, society can judge us according to our SMV value. This may be unfortunate but it is normal, we get judged and labelled by people and society. Among mammals, there is usually a dominant male who has the pick of the bunch; the James Bond, The Rock, the Jason Momoa, or whatever your choice may be.

One thing we can do, or something 'we do' hold power over, is increasing our SMV. How do we do this? In short, chase excellence in all areas of your life, rather than chasing a partner. Stay on your purpose. We are our own brand. We increase the value of our brand by what we project into the world; then a partner will come.

A general rule of thumb is, the better we become, the better chances we have of achieving a higher quality partner. If you have instantly turned off now and think you cannot increase your SMV, google a guy by the name of Nick Vujicic. Nick was born with no arms and no legs. But that hasn't held him back: his love for life, charisma, and personality helps us all see that we don't have to have any limits on our lives — he truly doesn't. Also watch the 'We're The Super-humans, Rio Paralympics 2016 Trailer,' The song, called 'Yes I can,' is truly inspirational. I especially love the swimmer with no arms and only one leg giving his all! [1]

Often we think that we have to have the Ferrari to get the chick, but really what we are doing with nice car is borrowing the credibility of the car and placing it on us. This does not make us credible; that credibility just reflects onto us for a short while. There is nothing wrong with a man making money, the issue is when we try to get money to make the man.

Increasing our SMV is really not that difficult, however it does take intention, practice and mindfulness. So let's get started. I will list some options, then you can come up with yours also.

- **Hygiene** — clean clothes, clean teeth, fresh breath, body deodorant and cologne.
- **Fashion** — clothes do not have to be expensive or labelled, just clean and well presented.

- **Car** — doesn't have to be the latest or best, just clean, legal and tidy.
- **Our look** — we don't have to have the whole James Bond jawline going on; a trimmed beard or cleanly shaven face, with a matching haircut to suit the shape of our face is acceptable.
- **The way we hold ourselves** — we command respect when we stand up to our full height, so don't slouch. Eye contact, a bright countenance (not a sour face), a genuine smile and clear communication.
- **Shoes** – I do not know what it is about shoes, but they seem to be a science in themselves — our shoes have something to do with our stride. Have clean, well-presented shoes that match the occasion.... There is an old saying, 'You can tell a man by their shoes,' that statement seems to hold some truth.
- **Bedroom** – if you are going this far... dishes done, a tidy bedroom, clean sheets, good pillow cases and a made bed does wonders! There is an amazing 6 minute clip on YouTube titled, 'Make Your Bed,' by Admiral McRaven. [2] It's well worth a watch.
- **Body presentation** — present ourselves like someone we would date. We don't have to be a body builder, just do our best to hold a masculine frame. Deal with the excess belly if it's an issue (I will put a couple body hacks about this at the end of the chapter). I started by joining a gym and

went to training groups — a good idea for every man. Using moisturiser doesn't hurt either.

- **Mental fitness** — we don't have to have a PHD, sound like we have just come from a library or be the smartest guy in the room. However, it's always good to have something to talk about. So know a little bit about a lot of things. What I do is google almost every question I think about to get different perspectives and check the questions others ask. This simple tool opens our vocabulary and knowledge exponentially. We may not be smart, but as long as we sound like we are, who cares? Job done! Side note: the more you know and the better you are with words the easier it is to be witty.

For the ladies, a bit of makeup can build your confidence. It's affordable, easy to learn to put on (lots of tutorials on youtube). Just smart, clean clothes, a good posture, tidy hair and some affordable perfume and you can pretty much have the pick of the bunch. Then imagine meeting a guy who has good posture, is clean, well presented, smells good, is interesting to talk to, witty and when you kiss him he tasted good... how much more would you want to see him again?

This is all pretty basic stuff. I wear clothes, it's not that much harder to make sure they are clean and smart. I stand and I walk, I may as well walk with good posture. It's about \$15 for a bottle of body spray and it only takes a few seconds to slap it on, a couple minutes at the drive through car wash and a couple

more to run the vacuum around my car at the gas station. All this stuff is easy, it makes me feel good, gives me confidence and increases my SMV. I'm actually pissed off no one taught me more about all this years ago and how powerful the results were when I started doing that. It would have saved me a whole lot of time and pain.

To be brutally honest about myself, my face is a bit messed up, because I have had operations on my face (numbering in the double digits), from a terrible pushbike accident when I was young. I have also had precancerous spots removed from my face. A lot of my teeth are false, I'm under average height, I'm in my 50's and I am a dry alcoholic with addictive tendencies. I could go on. It probably sounds depressing, but hey, that's what I have to work with so what can I do? I can't expect anything to come out of being a 49'er. Presenting myself as a 4/10 and expecting a partner that is a 9/10. So I have had to do some serious work on myself, mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually, to boost my SMV up a few notches. I will never be 6 foot tall, so I have put the work in, in other areas.

Generally speaking, woman date across and up, men date across and down, so for us men, the higher we can get our SMV up the better.

THE FIRST YEAR OF RECOVERY

I never understood why ‘long termers’ in AA and NA would say to hold off making big decisions or getting into relationships for the first year, but now I do! From my own experience, from neuroscience that I have researched and from my training as a recovery coach, I have learned that our brain and body goes through a full reset as it begins to bring itself back into balance (homeostasis) and resets its cognition. We undergo a barrage of feelings that seem foreign to us and we can even begin to ‘feel’ again in our early stages of recovery.

Then the second year of recovery reconfirms the new behavioural patterns we have instituted in the first year. Our mind can play tricks on us though. Our subconscious mind will try to circumvent our conscious mind’s decision to remodel itself with correct desires for the new future we have decided to live (to stay clean and not relapse).

Here are a few examples from my own experience — and a little science. Surviving the first year is about surviving temptations, peer pressure, cravings and living through times in the year that predominantly involve active addictions from the past. Christmas and holiday breaks (when we have a lot of time on our hands), birthdays, thanksgivings, family arguments, relationship challenges, employment problems, success and achievement celebrations and the rest.

I had been about three months clean from alcohol and substances. I was driving along the motor way and zoned out, as we can when driving. I subconsciously drifted off and came to as my car came to a stop. I looked up and I was parked at the local wholesale bottle shop. I was shocked at what had just happened. My subconscious had turned my conscious mind off, so it could drive me there to fuel its addiction. I didn't go in, but I did sit there in disbelief. I never understood the full gravity of what had happened. I thought this was unique to me, until I heard similar stories in the AA and NA rooms — and through my studies on the brain, especially the interaction between the roles the left and right brain play in our life.

Twice, on separate occasions (when I was 3 months and 5 months clean), I was out with people, having dinner at a restaurant when I actually physically watched my hand move across the table and grab another person's alcoholic drink. The second time I lifted their drink up nearly to my mouth. It was an anatomical subconscious reflex. I was so ashamed of my behaviour, but I managed to make a smart remark about how I thought they had had enough and called 'Taxi'. No one knew what had just happened until I told my friend about it after the dinner.

Another time I felt like I was physically put into my car and driven to the bottle shop and bought beer. That time I did drink. I know I could have over-ridden my subconscious mind at that time, however on that occasion I was going through my second divorce, so I allowed my conscious mind to succumb to

what my subconscious mind wanted. My subconscious wanted the temporary relief the addiction brought; the happy place, the dopamine hit and basically to feel good for a while, at any expense.

I hear about gamblers walking past a doorway, hearing the tune of the slot machines and saying they were literally transported in by the tune of the slots and emptied their wallets into them, until they 'came to' and realised what they had done. I have also observed a female who appeared to be struggling with sexual compulsiveness, while under the influence of alcohol, going up a taxi line of people in the early hours of the morning and asking for someone to go home with. The lists of stories I have heard leaves me with no doubt that we are fighting a spiritual battle. However, those who achieve victory over this battle become some of the strongest, most compassionate and understanding people I have ever met. Once again, they have qualifications in addiction recovery that money, books and university cannot provide.

THE PLACE OF YOUR GREATEST FAILURE IS THE PLACE YOU HAVE MOST TO GIVE.

Now, let's get on to the good stuff. Think of our lives from this perspective... the natural state of the garden is weeds, so if we want a garden worth eating out of we will have done our weeding. It's time to plant now and we will harvest what we plant and tend

to. We have read ‘you were born with your mistakes in you.’ On the flip side of that you were also born with your successes in you.

Our greatest strengths really can be misdirected and considered to be weaknesses. The title of this book reflects exactly that truth, because I have found that to be the case in my life. One of the greatest strengths of the addict is in the very nature that makes the addict an addict. The only issue is that this nature has not been nurtured properly, or put another way, not parented properly. If we are able to befriend this nature of ourselves and coach it into the direction of our dreams the limits come off, dreams turn into goals and the goals become our reality. All we need to do then is to learn to love ourselves along the way.

Often we hold keys in our life that other people can relate to. Those keys are part of our story — of how we overcame difficult situations. Maybe we haven’t yet overcome them and we are still dealing with anger, resentments or guilt. It is even these stories that other people relate to, because then they feel they are not on their own with their struggles.

Deep seated trauma can be almost impossible for us to confront head on — it is just too difficult. For me personally, I have had to deal with suicidal tendencies and have fought through depressed feeling for extended periods of time, months and years at a time. I was way too proud to let anyone know what I was dealing with internally, so I suffered in silence. I used distraction, money and

business to mask what was really going on inside. I lived a life of ‘what is it all for.’ Hearing other peoples struggles and stories weakened the power of these feelings, until I came to a point where I was able to confront what was really going on inside me and find a reason for life. My story is now my strength. I have survived this battle and now I savour every day above ground, regardless of what comes my way, because I know nothing on the outside can affect me as much as the devastation of what I can do and say to myself on the inside.

There is an art to gratitude. Evolutionary models show that gratitude produces gains further down the line. I have found being grateful for what I do have, instead of longing for what I don’t have, gives me great relief. Just not having pain in our bodies is something to be grateful for. The use of our limbs and having healthy internal organs are great blessings in themselves.

Having a partner, children or a pet is a blessing. We live in one of the best countries on earth. The food we ate today, a safe place to live... everything we have is a blessing. Even the breath in our lungs is worthy of thanks. Some people do not even have that and are suffering from emphysema or on respiratory machines. They would give anything to be able to breath properly again. In short, we need to value what we have, because we do not want to come to a place where we do not have it in order to realise just how valuable it is.

‘MMMMM’.

I want to end this chapter with an acronym that has really helped me. I was facilitating a class last year and listening to all the participants working through their recovery, the challenges they faced, and how they were overcoming them. I love listening to other people’s stories of success at overcoming mental health issues, addictions and relationship challenges.

I had been thinking about how, often, it’s our mind that can be our worst enemy. It puts us down (our inner critic). If our mind was a friend talking to us, we would call them arrogant and tell them to shut up. Sometimes our own mind does that and we can become our own, arrogant self-critic. I realised that we need to be our own best friend first. That’s not new, but the phrase ‘making my mind my mate’ — the acronym ‘MMMMM’ — is new and it sounded good to me, so I floated the idea in the group and everyone laughed.

It’s a great reminder. When we eat something nice, we go MMMMM! This sound is a good way of describing our approval of something. In everyday life we can describe our approval of ourselves by going MMMMM. Remember this tool whenever you have any negative self-talk ... ‘MMMMM, I approve of myself. I do deserve it. I can do it. I can achieve it. MMMMM ... I am good enough’. Yes, you can!

A good parent will sit by the bedside of their child when they're sick. Why can we not do this for ourselves when we need it? We can. Sometimes we can be the one to sit by our own bedside, hold our own hand, be there for ourselves. It sounds strange to do, but remember this and try it sometime and you will find just how good a friend, supporter and coach you can be to yourself and how valuable self-supporting can be.

In summary, our mind can be our friend or our foe — our critic or our coach. Make an active choice to be mindful of your inner dialogue and catch yourself when your critic self has too much to say. Ask yourself what your coach self would be saying at that moment. The coach would be encouraging and uplifting, cheering you on, with positivity and believing in you all the way.

BODY HACKS

As this chapter is about us re-parenting ourselves and we want to look good for ourselves, let's get a bit real. If you are challenged with your weight, as I have been in the past (I had to lose over 20 kg to get back into shape at one stage) you will appreciate this. I know the journey here. My kids have an old family picture of us all together that they still tease me about, because I was so overweight it looks like I barely had a neck. During times of addition, compulsion and lifestyle dysfunction and after we begin to get clean, we can revert to seeking comfort in other things... comfort food is one of the most common. The overhang of this is

weight gain can have a negative identity impact of our image, to ourselves and to how others see us.

I am convinced that weight issues are not really food issues as much as they are knowledge and discipline issues. We then ask ourselves, what will give us the drive we need to get our bodies into a shape that is both healthy and we are satisfied with. I have heard many times of people taking the initiative to address their body. Invariably they get a great amount of self-satisfaction from seeing the surprised response of people who once looked down on them, or even wrote them off as a lost cause. Like I have said in this book, the best form of revenge is success.

I will give you a hack to get yourself started. It's called water. Hold on, before you switch off! I am sure you will find this fascinating. I tell people about this and their eyes light up. Those who do it get real health benefits in many ways and they 'love' it.

I have qualifications in personal training, nutrition and the science of modern-day diets, which helps me a great deal in my training and body goals. Here is some science for you that will be a great motivator.

You hear lot about the importance of water. The following is a bit of a mouthful but I will simplify it. The three most common fatty acids stored in human adipose tissues are oleate ($C_{18}H_{34}O_2$), palmitate ($C_{16}H_{32}O_2$), and linoleate ($C_{18}H_{32}O_2$). These esterify to form $C_{55}H_{104}O_6$. [3] If you remove the numbers

you're left with the compound, CH_0 (hydrogen, carbon and oxygen). What two things does the body excrete that remind you of these three elements? You guessed it, water and breath. So to put it in simple terms, fat is CHO , water is H_2O (HO), expelling breath is to expel CO_2 (CO)? Sounds too simple right HCO to HO and CO . All we need to do to lose fat is to sweat, pee and breath it out.

Where does a camel store its water as it crosses a desert for weeks on end? In its hump on its back; its fat storage. Where do we carry our water? In our hump on our front (and if I'm not careful, my hump comes back quickly). So to get rid of some of that excess we just need to find a way to convert it into breath and water and excrete it. If you're feeling a bit fat, you're not, you're actually 'flooded'. So, let's get you started on our journey.

As an adult, the number of your fat cells doesn't change, so they act like balloons. You can easily hold 200 new balloons in a packet in your hand, but blow them all up and it's another story, they will almost fill the room you are sitting in. Fat is just stored fuel. We have a gas tank in our car that we fill up, this will drive us 600 to 800kms. Any more gas than that and it will be too heavy for the car to cart around, it will slow the car down and will wear the car out prematurely.

Think of the gas tank as if it was made of rubber and expandable like the balloon. If we keep going to the gas station when we don't need to, the gas tank will fill the boot and the back seat,

we may even need a trailer. One of the reasons we hold this extra fuel is because we are actually dehydrated. Think of it this way, the body thinks it's in a drought and stores the water. Try a 30-day challenge and drink three to four litres of water a day, (start by drinking two if you can). You will feel fuller and your body will begin to excrete the fat. I know of some very flooded people who have lost eight and nine kilos in a month just doing this.

On my Facebook page I put progress pictures of my scales. I was competing in a body-building competition in a division. I had not done that before and needed to be 10 kg lighter in a month. Apart from other things, like dropping my sodium to the minimum, I drank between 6 and 10 litres of chilled water per day and lost over 10 kg in less than four weeks, and I didn't eat less. This works!

The next reason is that when you are dehydrated, most of the time the body doesn't compute and you think you are hungry, so you eat, but you are not, you are thirsty. So drink water or herbal teas or something, just not coffee. Coffee and alcohol are called diuretics. Diuretics make you urinate more than you drink, so further dehydrating yourself and making the problem worse. Wine (and other alcoholic drinks) are filtered with sulphides to give them a longer shelf life. Sulphides further dehydrate the body. The dehydration is the most common thing that creates the headache in the morning and sulphides make it worse. Look at the back label and drink wine filtered

other ways (most commonly with fish and egg products). It will say, 'traces remain.' You might just be able to see a few, these are called wine diamonds.

Coffee stresses the body, creates cortisol and cortisol promotes belly fat, so limit your caffeine as much as you can. Salt is another major one. Salt retains water, water follows salt. Did you know that some athletes, especially body builders will take a couple teaspoons of salt before they train so that they don't sweat and lose their hydration. They want to keep the 'muscle pump,' which is the inflation of their muscle cells (being the water content in their muscles) so they look bigger.

The recommended daily intake for sodium ranges between 920 and 2300 mg [3.1] We average about 3500 [3.2] and some people up to 7200. So that can be many times the sodium (salt) we need. Most of our food has salt already added to it during processing, to extend shelf life, so adding more can be optional. I am not recommending a low sodium diet, however I do recommend we try to stay as close to the government recommended guide lines as possible. For example, one KFC Big Snack Burger has 2022 mg of sodium in it [3.3],¹ Tablespoon (15 ml serving) of traditionally fermented soy sauce has 902 mg of sodium in it [3.4] WOW! Salt retains water, can you see it now? So, be mindful of your sodium intake by reading the labels on the back of what you eat.

Some people complain that they eat very little and cannot lose weight. To put it bluntly, people often can't lose weight because their body will not let them lose the water, because it thinks there is a drought. It's the body's survival and protection system. There is much more I could say about this, such as the detoxification process, reduction of headaches and itchy skin, both of which are my story. I'm just scratching the surface here so feel free to do more research on the health benefits of drinking water.

There is a sentence I found when I was listening to a recording from a patriarchal book, called the Book of Enoch, written thousands or years ago (Chapter 96:6)... "Woe to you who drink water from every fountain, for suddenly shall ye be consumed and wither away" (some versions say, 'soon you shall wither away'). I always remembered it. Fat in those days was precious as it meant you could last longer in arid climates or in times of famine and drought. Water and food is mostly plentiful these days. Back then, not only was water difficult to obtain but you also had to carry it with you, so you were careful of how much you drank.

I was working with a girl some time ago on her weight goals. She wanted to lose 12 kg. My guidance was to address the hydration as a start. She argued with me but after much convincing and science she agreed to trust my direction. I could see she was dehydrated from the slight imperfections of her skin, and knew that she had a large proportion of meat in her diet. Meat takes two to four days to digest. It is hard on the system and has a

by product of ammonia in the kidneys, which requires a lot of the body's water to flush out, further dehydrating the body. She did the 3 litre 30 day challenge. I would check up on her. She had excuses, so I told her to keep a bottle of water on her desk at work, her bench at home, by her couch, by her bed, etc and keep sipping and refilling.

She lost 4 kg in five weeks, has more energy, her skin has cleared up well, she has found hope and excitement on her weight loss journey. On my direction she has significantly reduced the meat content of her diet, replaced it with great tasting plant-based nutrition and at the moment is half way to her goal weight in under two months... All this without dieting or crazy workout programs. She looks and feels better. It's the 80% nutrition 20% exercise rule. Next try and work on what types of food to eat at what times of the day... high carb low GI foods in the first half of the day, tapering off to low carb foods in the evening.

Lastly, every kilogram of weight we put on takes 5 miles of blood vessels. If our heart beats 100,000 times a day, that's 500,000 miles a day for each pound of 'flood'. [3.5] That is a lot of unnecessary work we are doing to keep all this flooding alive. So if you are feeling a bit lethargic or a bit flooded and want to feel better, start drinking now and take the 3 litres for 30 days challenge and see how you get on.

Footnote for food junkies: Be careful of chips like Doritos, CC's and the like. The taste is scientifically designed so that we cannot exactly identify the flavour, therefore we can sit there, eat one chip and then the whole bag. This is because our tastebuds don't get overdone with the one flavour and our brains can't figure the flavour out. So, we keep on eating. I used to do this exact thing and eat a 800-1000 calorie bag of chips and wonder how. So I researched it. I don't eat the first chip now and this saves me from eating the last one (addict).

Also important to know... an article in Time Magazine says that salt will increase our consumption of food by 11%.

As I have said, this is because our bodies cannot differentiate between being thirsty or hungry. If we eat salt, we create thirst, therefore we eat more. [4] Compound this with high fat content foods, particularly fast food, and the studies show that we will consume up 60% more calories. Now think of fatty salty foods, like potato chips, KFC, etc and BOOM! There goes our waistline! I just cannot have the first salty cashew, or peanut, or any nuts, or before I know it I'm at the bottom of the bag (250 grams of almonds is about 1500 calories), which is about a whole days calorie requirement for an average human. Wow!

07.

ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS



*G*etting Unstuck

Trauma can hold us back, even if we do not know about it. Sometimes not recognising our trauma is the thing that is holding us back. I know it was the case for me and I hear it often. The mind works in narratives; it tells us stories. Which of these stories are true and which ones are not? How much of those stories is true? A story has three main parts: the set up, the conflict / crisis, and the resolution. Think of the movies we watch, the bedtime stories we read our kids. Here's an easy one... The Set Up: Snow White has a vain stepmother, the Queen, who was the fairest in the land. Snow White becomes even more beautiful than the Queen, so the Queen gets a servant to take Snow White into the forest to kill her. However, he lets her go and brings back

a bear's organs to prove she is dead. The Queen's magic mirror tells her she is not the fairest in the land, so she realises Snow White must still be alive. The Queen decides to kill Snow white herself.

The Conflict / Crisis: The queen disguises herself and tries to kill Snow White, first with a corset, then a poison needle. Snow White is saved from these attempts by the Seven Dwarfs.

Then the queen (in disguise) gives Snow White a poison apple, which she succumbs to, falls into a coma and appears dead. A prince sees her, falls in love and takes her away to honour her.

The Twist: a soldier trips, wobbles the glass coffin Snow White is in, the apple is dislodged from her throat and she wakes up.

The Resolution: The Prince tells Snow White he loves her and they plan a wedding. The Queen comes to the wedding, Snow White recognises the Queen. The Queen gets put in red hot iron shoes and is chased off a cliff. She dies. It's happily ever-after for Snow White and the Prince.

Now relate that happily ever-after narrative to getting a qualification at university. We have the dream of achieving a degree... we make the application to university... then we go through the struggles of managing our finances, structuring our life... the times we want to give up. Then we get a pass mark, attend the graduation day and have the party.

We definitely have the ‘set up’ with addictions. We can sometimes trace them to our childhood, sometimes to an event. Then we are introduced to behaviours; bad eating habits, substance abuse, gambling, sexual addictions, etc. Sometimes it’s just too much of a good thing.

The ‘conflict / crisis’ might be the struggles, the arguments, relapse after relapse with cigarettes, jail, job losses, relationship separations, nights out with friends. It’s all part of the ebb and flow of our story. But what is our resolution? What does our life look like after the addiction? Just like a movie, what will be the twist in our story?

We write our story every single day. The question is, what do we want our story to look like? Do we become the victim or the victor ... the villain or the hero / heroine ... the winner or the loser? Or do we just fade off into the distance?

Let’s make our-selves the victor, the good luck story, the phoenix out of the ashes, the star of recovery and the picture of inspiration. How? By setting goals and going after them, achieving them, coming back and telling the story. That’s how! You can do that. So let’s start from the start — using real life, relatable examples along the way — and end at the finish line, receiving the prize that is due to us and enjoying the ride along the way.

How is that for a set up for a goals chapter? Did you get drawn in? Do you want to read on? OK, let's get into the conflict/crisis.

I am going to approach setting and achieving goals from the narrative point of view. I don't believe you can compartmentalise goal setting and achieving effectively without the full narrative process, Why? How many times do we have a desire that doesn't turn into a goal because we cannot believe in ourselves enough? Are there things holding us back, or do we have a things in our past or present that we are unaware of, that are causing us to roadblock ourselves? How many of our goals are unrealistic, unachievable... or we want them for the wrong reasons and when we get them they don't fulfil us the way we thought they would?

When that happens we can set goals and not get far past the starting gate, or throw the towel in part of the way through and do not complete. New Year's resolutions are a prime example of this. We've all set them, we've all given up on them and we will probably go and do it all over again next year.

REVENGE AND RETRIBUTION.

I like these words. They sound strong, full of emotion, vigorous, energetic, powerful... and satisfying. We all want satisfaction. Often we have been wronged in the past, and we can carry those traumas for years, fantasising about settling scores, ruminating

on the past, using up headspace that can be toxic to our mind, our body and even to our relationships, family and the real concern — our future.

One vivid memory of mine is when I was age 15. I was quite small for my age. My dad had done boxing in his life, had some sort of military training and he was a hard working blue collar man. It was a Saturday afternoon, I arrived at my parent's home,(where I was living at the time), with a few friends.

I walked around to the rear of the house and my dad saw me. He was in the garden. I continued to walk around the house in front of my friends. My dad left the garden and walked up to me and started beating the living shit out of me with a closed fist. My back was against the wall so I couldn't do anything. I was startled and in shock. He laid into me like a professional boxer, right in front of my friends. The back on my head bounced off the wooden weather boards of the house. I have no idea how long it went on, but punch after punch it did go on. After he had finished he walked off.

What role did I play in the event? To this day I still do not know what that beating was for. The shame I felt at that moment was worse than the pain could ever be. The only recollection I have after that event was a snap shot of one of my friends with a look on his face. I will never forget it. He was in more shock than I was, wondering 'What was that for?' or something along those lines. I would have thought my father had learned his lesson,

because three years prior, he had done the same thing to my older brother in front of onlookers... and about 44 hours later my brother succumbed to suicide.

The morning after my beating, at 7am my father was piously bowing his knee on entering his pew, in the same front seats of the church he always sat in, back stiff to attention as he paid reverence to the Catholic priests he knew by name. He did his holy reading of the gospels to the church in the most sanctified way. This type of behaviour was not uncommon in our household.

In hindsight, instead of protecting him and enabling him to continue this type of behaviour, someone should have called the police and exposed his behaviour, so he could have come the realisation that it was not normal and could have received help for his own personal challenges. Who is worse when these things are hidden away... those who violate others or those who enable them to continue their violation of others? I cannot answer that. However, the one who did the crime could have been stopped right there and then, but the one who didn't act to prevent it enabled the behaviour to continue and cause more harm.

Small, under developed 15 year old boys do not stay under developed and they don't stay either 15 either... trees grow, that is what trees do. I became a brick layer later that year and carrying around cement bags and bricks and blocks all day, day after day does something to the human body, specially working with robust, basic individuals. I do not recall any family member

standing up to my father in his out-bursts ever my life, until an incident that happened between us. He had another go at me and I wrestled him to the ground and subdued him, then walked away. Following that incident I do not recall him harming me or any other family member again.

I think I have only told my story once or twice in my life, but now I am writing it in a book. For a father to beat their son up in such a violent manner right in front of their friends is a bad idea. My father definitely had his good points and I do not want to detract from the goodness of the man, but no child should ever experience abuse from their parents.

About four months after my mother's death, at age 66 (which I believe was partly due to a broken heart), my father eloped and married someone who was the complete opposite to all the advice he had given to his sons about marrying someone of your own race (ra-ra, take my advice, I don't use it). This lady had twice the aggressiveness that he'd ever had and could go the full 12 rounds as a warm-up. It was unfortunate to watch his demise. In my view he died a broken man. Karma can be a bitch if you get on the wrong side of her.

How would it have been possible for a young teenage boy to reconcile these two conflicting paternal images? It was not. Stories about how a father, brother, sister, trusted friend, spouse or person we look up to, could cross, use or violate another person in such a manner are impossible to understand. It is not

acceptable human behaviour. It took many years and a lot on mental ballet for me to reconcile that internal conflict.

FORM AND FUNCTION

This concept has given me great relief. I have related this to quite a number of people struggling with letting go of difficult relationships. They have found comfort and a way forward to deal with their challenges and have thanked me for it. I have been told I need to put it in a book, so here it is.

I discovered this principle when working with an architect who helped me design the houses I built. We would work on the functionality of the houses and the form, so that what they looked like would follow that function. I then designed and built the houses and sold them for a profit.

One day, during an apologetics paper I was studying in a theological college, we were looking at relationships and how to honour your parents and what that means. I had a brainwave moment and I used the form and function idea, from the architectural design model, to compartmentalise my relationship with my father. The function of my father was that he was my father — my biological father, full stop. I didn't have to obey him, get on his good side, agree with him, take his advice or even talk to him. Hey, I could even honour him from a distance.

The form of him was another matter. I didn't agree with the things he did, his religious idealism or how he brought up his kids. I didn't even have to like the guy, but I could honour his place in my life as a sperm donor, a provider of food and shelter and I could thank him for that. The rest I could discard. He used to say that the man's role is to procreate and educate, so with ten kids I would say he was about 50% successful, on that definition.

This new idea was a relief to me. I could now resolve what the 15 year old boy could not. Whatever he did was his business and whatever I did was mine. I had a whole package of my own mistakes to make, which were waiting for me in my future. I have now learned to use this statement: 'Who am I to judge? I cannot.' I called him up a week or so later and said, in a reasonable manner, 'Dad you no longer have any right to speak into my life and thank you for all you have done for me'. In my mind the matter was settled, I could now move on.

I related this model to one of my brothers. He was a good guy in a lot of areas but difficult for me to relate to in others. I did want him in my life but he had issues. Using this compartmentalised model of form and function, I figured out how to relate to him in the areas I wanted to and never broach the areas of our relationship that caused arguments and dysfunction. Therefore I didn't build up resentments against him which would re-poison our relationship. We are now very close, one of the closest in my family.

When these things are done behind closed doors it is one thing, but in public, it is entirely another. It's interesting how a few bad areas of a person's life can so diminish all the good ones — especially for those who suffered the damaging effects from their destructive personality traits.

Think of people like Bill Cosby, Harvey Weinstein, Bill Clinton and so many more, who have achieved so much greatness but had unchecked character traits that got out of control that marred their whole life. Another great example of this was Lance Armstrong, the American cyclist, who was the only rider to win seven Tour de France titles, even though he was at one time diagnosed with testicular cancer, which also spread to his lungs and brain. He was later stripped of all his titles and sponsorship after an investigation revealed that he was the key figure in a wide-ranging doping conspiracy while he was compiling his Tour victories.

Who suffered the most damaging effects from Armstrong's deceptive behaviour? You guessed it, all those second place holders who had poured their hearts, souls, resources and lives into their riding. They all had their Gold Medal and first place holder recognition robbed from them, not to mention all the sponsorship, wealth and fame stolen from them by Armstrong. How upset must they all have been? Unbelievably! Imagine the second place holder's role playing all the fame and fortune they had missed out on. It would have been traumatic.

I think the medical system is largely emotionally trauma-phobic; meaning that the treatments prescribed, like anti-depressants, just mask the real cause of many conditions. Because they don't have the tools to deal with trauma they often steer clear of the trauma subject. Besides, there is no money in trauma resolution, so the real drug pushers are the big pharmaceutical companies, who profit from the proliferation of these drugs and have a vested interest of keeping us on them as they battle for market share.

According to <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db377.htm>, between 2015–2018, 13.2% of adults had used antidepressants in the past 30 days (that's almost 1 in 7). According to <https://www.drugs.com/article/antidepressants.html>, many of the anti-depressants on the market have side effects that may include fatigue and drowsiness.

I know this was the case when I tried them. I came to the conclusion that I didn't know what was worse for me, depressed feelings or the continual drowsiness and tiredness that made me lethargic and lazy. Antidepressants do have their place, but some people consider them to be almost a silver bullet. In my view anti-depressants are there for a specific purpose, to get us over a bump in life and to get us back on track, not as an easy 'go to' solution, or a lifestyle choice.

If we can uncover and deal with the cause of the condition, the symptoms of depressed feelings, or whatever they may be, they will eventually subside. They may never leave totally but they will quieten and become manageable.

So, what has my story about my relationship with my father got to do with setting and achieving goals? Everything! It is nearly impossible to reach for the future when your hands are clinging to the past. It wasn't until a couple decades later these memories surfaced in me. They had been buried somewhere down in the deep recesses of my mind, in the currents of my human psyche, whispering away words of failure and shame that echoed into my daily life. All the years of conflicting images during my youth had caused me a great disconnect in me. The echo was, I could win but I couldn't stay a winner, I could achieve but I couldn't hold onto that achievement, I could start but couldn't finish anything. And so it was with addictions... I could stop but I couldn't stay stopped.

It is extremely difficult to strategise our future when we are dealing with the past. Imagine a computer doing a virus scan over and over again, using up bandwidth and RAM (having many unused windows open at the same and processing masses of computation in the background) all slowing down the tasks in the window we are currently working in. In much the same way, when we are experiencing stress, indecision and lack of direction, or PTSD, our brain is racing away in the background searching for answers and a solution to the current unresolved

situation. This causes us physical, emotional or mental suffering and unease, due to us not being able to get what we actually want out of life. Then we just want distractions — like television and technology — to ‘act out,’ as a coping mechanism. The point is that trauma carries powerful energy that can be redirected. The idea then becomes to redirect the force of all this computation we have and apply it to our favour, so we get the benefit from it. How? — With correct knowledge.

Without correct knowledge we live in an ebb and flow pattern of stress; where it peaks and retreats, over and over, as the brain searches for answers to resolve the current environment. This is due to our inability to focus as we have all this other stuff going on, creating confusion as we do not have clear direction. Once we have direction we have focus. The brain is designed to focus on a task. The task for us is our personal and individual goals. This is one way we can resolve the past and let go of resentments we hold, so we can move forward toward our goals and live a successful life.

THE POWER OF REDIRECTED ENERGY

I now want to introduce you to another concept...

One where the very best kind of revenge is your own massive success!

People rarely gain anything by seeing another person fail. The only comparison we want to make is the comparison between where we are now, and where we become the best version of ourselves. The only emotional energy and resources we want to invest in is for ourselves, our loved ones and our children.

My hope is that, by the end of this chapter, you will take the time to identify what you want from life and set some short-term goals that will move you towards your long-term goals ... starting with goals for the next 12 months. This is a short enough time frame for you to keep track of your progress toward those goals. I set annual goals with a 'vision board,' which we will talk about later in this chapter.

A year goes past quite quickly, and it's amazing how you can drift through that year without realising. However, if you have goals and a target for the year, by the end of that year it will be rewarding to see what you have accomplished, and will encourage you to set your next annual goals. As you walk towards those goals you will be walking further away from past areas of your life that you are not proud of, or that have caused you trauma or difficulty, and nearer to achieving your highest potential. Your welfare and success are the only things I am interested in. However, in addition to these two factors, the better person you become through embodying recovery and the light you shine as an example of what recovery looks like to others, will be your story. I just love success stories!

What happens to any other person who has wronged us in the past really should not be our concern anymore, because sometimes we have all played a part in our own failure, even if we just refuse to admit it (other times we are genuinely the victim). Then our only other concern, apart from our own success, will be for our children. So, wish these people the best and watch them get smaller and smaller in your rear vision mirror. That is why your windscreen is so big and your rear vision mirror is so small, because it's about where you are going as opposed to where you have been. It's about you now, you family and your kids, if you have any. It is not helpful using up your precious time, energy and resources on people who are no longer a part of your life.

At one time you were limited by your addictions, they took your time, exhausted your finances, devoured your dreams, diminished your potential, caused you mental and relational chaos, drained your emotions and sometimes stole your freedom. Now your options are unlimited. Your addiction was the strong man standing in the way of your success and taking all your attention, but not now!

Our past is only a problem when it we haven't learned from it or how to resolve with it, when we allow it to echo and repeat. So throw away the rest of the ice-cream, tip out the beer, empty the tissue bin, finish your last rant and let's get on with it. It's time to focus on making yourself attractive, interesting, confident, successful, in shape, and a pleasure to be around.

I'm going to take time to unpack goals in this chapter, as goals have the potential to define us and make us the person we have always wanted to be. We are not going to change our personality, we are going to redirect the areas of it to get the full benefit out of our uniqueness, our individuality — who we really are.

I am an ardent goal setter. I have failed in many things and gone broke three times, but I got it all back again, and more; every time through goal setting. After my last financial bounce back and recovery I was able to buy each of my children their own houses. I have been able to get myself into a mental, emotional, and financial position where I am semi-retired at age 51. I can now 'give back' and help people, often without payment, just because I want to, not because it's a job to make a pay cheque. The way I view myself is that I'm worth more than they can pay me, and to work for payment dilutes my power.

I am not anyone special, I just know this stuff works. I put it into practice and get the successes that are due to me, through making good choices and having the correct belief system. So you can too. The sky is the limit. I passionately believe success is the birthright of every individual and my desire is for every person to have a successful life, especially those in recovery from addictions and mental health issues.

There's a saying, 'You will harvest what you sow'. Every good decision and every good choice you make will have a good outcome. It will take time, but it will happen. So let's not waste

our time and let's start today. Understanding this will make goal setting simple, achievable and, most importantly, it will help you have an expectation of a good outcome in your life. How? ... 'Do the next right thing.' It's simple... yet so effective!

YOU WILL NEVER HIT A TARGET YOU DON'T HAVE.

There is a concept called 'failure to strive, failure to thrive.' Failure to strive is a failure to attempt anything. We just can't get going, we just can't believe. It hasn't worked out for us in the past so how can it in the future? We feel a bit depressed. We don't know where to start or how to start. We've had setback after setback, maybe lost a bit (or a lot) of hope and we don't seem to be able to recover.

Failure to thrive is when we are trying, but not seeing breakthroughs. We work every day and at the end of the year we are no better off. It's Groundhog Day; we live day to day, week to week, month to month. We sometimes get ahead and make wrong choices and fall back again. We can't seem to make progress; it's like we are playing a game of 'Snakes and Ladders' in life and there are just too many snakes in the game. Life has been like this for ages and we feel stuck.

If you identify with either of these concepts, let's have a look at how we can move you up an on.

In my experience, sometimes we can ascribe how we are feeling to a mental condition, or at least symptoms of a mental condition. However, often we are just in a difficult season in life that results in mental or emotional turmoil. Depression can be a big hindrance to achievement. In most cases depression is just an absence of hope (HOPE > Hold On Pain Ends).

I have yet to meet a person who has not had an absence of hope at some stage in their life. I have had times of feeling depressed in my life. I think we should be careful not to label ourselves with a condition when we are just going through a season in our life. Everyone has bad days. I have had bad years, but taking on the label of depression is a sticking point, because it can become an identity, rather than just an experience, or time of change, or season of life. Active addiction can be that season.

If you do need help to get over a major challenge in life, sometimes seeing a doctor is wise, or at least getting some counselling to help you through it. You don't need to do this alone. There are free programmes available for support. I encourage you to start reaching out for help today if you feel you need some support at this time. If we can fix the difficulty in our life then we can relieve a lot of the symptoms that are causing our mental or emotional unease. AA and NA and other anonymous like-minded groups are out there. People tell great stories of recovery and the pitfalls to watch out for. I find these group very encouraging. You may want to google groups in your area and go along... you might be pleasantly surprised.

Goal setting is a proven method of overcoming emotional challenges and being able to move forward. I am going to approach it from a different angle to the usual hype. I want to bring goal setting back down to earth and explain it from a practical point of view.

Here is a true account as a personal example. I came out of a relationship that was as good as it was bad. On some levels we hit stratospheric highs but on other levels we just couldn't get it together... our thinking was just too far apart. We had completely different world views. She was definitely my Mrs Right, until I realised her first name was Always. Unfortunately I am hard to persuade as well, and with both of us having big personalities, let the games begin! We studied together, went to the gym together, enjoyed each other's company and loved a good dopamine hit. But by the same token, we both well knew how to stand our ground... immovable! We'd each had two marriages and 4 engagements... need I say more?

The relationship ended. What had been heaven on earth was hell and high water on the other side. During this time I was writing another book called Bouncing Back from Separation and Divorce. I needed to call on every piece of my own advice to get me through this incredibly tough time.

I was losing weight by the day, I came to the point where I knew I had to do something about it or it was going to kill me. I desperately didn't want to relapse, so I did what a good addict

does in recovery. I remembered my favourite line, ‘Recovery is remembering who you are and using your strengths to become all that you were meant to be’. I revisited my dreams, I had wanted to compete in a body-building competition since I was 15, reading about Arnold Schwarzenegger. Now, at 50 I think I was old enough.

I set myself a goal and enrolled myself into a city wide body-building competition being held by an internationally recognised body building association in the city that I live in, that was happening in seven months. Then I went and told everyone, which was probably the worst thing I could have done. Fast forward, I trained like my life depended on it and ate like it was my first day out of a concentration camp. Three weeks before the competition I realised I had no idea what I was doing.

By chance, I found a very experienced trainer who had been competing in shows for over 20 years. He was my saving grace. He said, “Very simply, you are too fat”. What! I had a six pack and I was too fat! Well, that was like red rag to a bull! I starved myself, trained three times a day, drank water like I was drowning and took every piece of his advice. I practiced posing. I had no idea what I was doing and saw my trainer every day to pose in front of him. I joined another gym as well — one that was open 24 hours and I would go in at 11 o’clock at night, lock the doors and practice in my undies in front of the mirror, get back up at 5 am and do it all over again.

We manifest (materialise) things, situations or events in life at a subconscious level. However, the ability to manifest the life we desire takes active and intentional consciousness and is an art that we develop; a bit like building muscle. The way we can put the work in is by belief and expectation. We deal with any thoughts that are in conflict with what we are believing for.

Manifestation is taking an abstract, ambiguous concept that is hidden and making it mentally visible, tangible and immediate. When we really believe something it drives us to take action. That action produces results. Every result becomes a confirmation, which builds a bit more faith in us to believe stronger, with more focus and take further action. This faith also helps us to overcome difficulties, obstacles and negativity from both our internal dialogue and from others.

After a week or so my trainer said he was seeing changes in my body every day and realised how serious I was about this, and serious I was. I knew this road... I treated it like I needed another drink and always found a way to get one. However, this time it was for a good cause.

A week out from the competition my trainer said, “You know what, you might just have a chance here — maybe a get place”. Four days before the competition I went on a water fast and dehydrated myself. I lost 3.5kgs in the last three days and I have the photos of the scales with a time stamp to prove it. He said on the last day that it wasn’t enough. So I had to body-hack. Like a

true addict I found a way. I ate bowls full of dry oats which sucked all the water out of my system into my stomach and dragged my skin into the muscle.

Because I know that our bodies fill out during the day, on competition day I was eating dry glucose tablets to get my vascularity up and having caffeine and guarana shots so I could function. I did all this while other contestants were enjoying their food — chicken, rice, peanut butter, etc. We had enrolled at 9am for briefing and warm ups, judging started at 12 noon and the public event was on at 5pm. The event went until 8pm that night. Long story short, I came 1st and qualified to represent my city in the Nationals.

I took the cup, posted the pics on Facebook... my forearm looked like it belonged to a reptile! I was sick the next day and suffered exhaustion for the week following. All I can say about that whole journey is, thank God I'm an addict. I know that isn't normal behaviour, but I'm not a normal person, I just do not know when to stop or how to give up.

To answer anyone who says I have mental health issues (which I probably do in some respects on some level), I will borrow these words from Socrates: “No man has the right to be an amateur in the matter of physical training. It is a shame for a man to grow old without seeing the beauty and strength of which his body is capable.” [1]

As I write this I am six weeks out from the Nationals. I have a better idea of what I am getting myself into this time. We are in 'level four Covid lockdown' in our city, No gyms are open. I can't heavy squat, bench or dead lift. The competition is in another city, which is open. I have heard that there are a lot of contestants dropping out. I can make a choice... do I join them and blame Covid, or do I look at the situation like this... less contestants, more chance for me?

My mate has a few weights, so, like a good addict, I get what I can from where I can. I go over there for two hours or more every morning and smash those little weights to failure. Then, in the afternoon, I go down to the cliff and run the stairs for an hour or so every evening. In the past, I wouldn't let go of getting beer if I really wanted one, so I just redirect my personality to a productive application, by using the tools in this book that work.

Sometimes we have it in our head that we have to do all this changing stuff. The amount of counselling I have been to, dragged along by my wife to a counsellor, to hear about how much of an arse I am and my personality is addictive. You may have felt the same, whether you are male, female, non-gender specific, LGBTQ or whichever identity you ascribe to. However, we are who we are and that's how it is. So it's not so much about changing our personality, it's about channeling that unique personality toward who we want to become. If that fits with others around us, that's fine and if it doesn't, that's fine too. No hard feelings, move on.

The question here is, what things are on your bucket list that you want to achieve? Let's find out what they are and how to get them. Read on.

LIFE HAS SEASONS.

One of the challenges we have today is that we're often not as aware of the effects that changing seasons have on us as people were in the past. The seasons now only really affect us in weather and temperature changes. We get almost every season's food and entertainment all year round, regardless of the current season.

In the past, and still with agriculture today, there is a window of opportunity to plant and reap... Miss these time periods and the outcome is not pretty. Sometimes if we miss seasons in our life, as they come around, we can miss times of growth and harvest. It's good for us to understand our own personal seasons in life and make the most of opportunities as they become available.

I did not know this when I was young. But now, as I see my grandkids coming through and starting school, I am seeing life repeat itself and I have obtained the wisdom of comparison. Think of the life cycle of an apple tree... in the autumn the fruit falls from the tree, the leaves drop, and the tree becomes bare. Any unharvested fruit rots and the seeds become exposed, or that fruit gets eaten by an animal, carried off somewhere and

pooped out. The manure from the animal becomes compost, full of nutrients for the seed. When the tree goes through winter it puts on a strong layer of dense growth (the dark growth ring you see when you cut a tree). The tree needs this strong layer of growth. If it had only summer growth the tree would be less dense, weak, and not be able to withstand the storms of winter and, most importantly, not able to bear the weight of the fruit it is about to produce in the coming seasons, so it could break. Winter eventually changes to spring, the tree has grown stronger and bigger, its roots have gone down deeper, in order to access more nutrients and water. It bears more fruit than last season and its seeds have produced more trees.

While this is simple it is also profound. Our life is a series of seasons. We need these seasons to grow. If we had all summers, we would live life chasing one good feeling after the next and not really maturing. If we only had winter seasons, we would eventually die or give up from too many long, challenging times.

If you feel you are in a winter season now, great! You have something to overcome, to prepare you for when spring comes. In this season you are building great strength in your life. We call this transition through suffering. At this time we get to reevaluate life and get rid of things that do not serve us. It is a vital part of nature's cycle. We are part of nature so why would we escape these cycles. Snakes shed their skin, lobsters their shell, crabs outgrow theirs, a lot of trees lose their leaves during winter, bears hibernate... on it goes. I have had periods of long winters and

when I look back I realise they were deep learning periods that prepared me for the future. I could never do what I do now, as a mental health and addictions coach, as patiently and effectively as I do, unless I had experienced what I have.... Nor would I have the empathy to write this book.

I got married quite young, I didn't really know what I was doing. Both my wife and I brought baggage into the relationship, lots of it, which eventually poisoned it (winter). We broke up and I ended up as a solo father to our three children. I developed a very strong relationship with each of them. I also went to university through that time and I worked on the side (spring). The strong bond I developed with my children was immensely powerful and is still there today, even though we have had our issues.

My children eventually grew up and moved on. I was doing okay in my life but there was an emptiness. I had always been a father. I had taken that on as my identity and, suddenly, that rule was over. They wanted to spread their wings and move on. They all now had partners and I was no longer needed.

I understand what mothers go through now when they speak about this experience. If parents don't have their own goals, when the kids become more independent, they can lose their identity. I didn't have any goals for myself as a person, so I experienced a lack of hope, and a season of depressed feelings (winter).

An interesting point here is what often happens in the dynamics of marriage when a couple reaches their 40's. Largely I put it down to a lack of relationship goals. At one time the family unit consumed the relationship, but as time passes the couple drifts apart because they haven't focused on their relationship with each other. If we had dreams and goals for the relationship, the experience of the good times was the hardcopy of those dreams. The success of the family unit was the relationship's therapy. But there always needs to be a balance between the children's needs and the relationship the parents have with each other.

On reflection, I realised this was a season of major change in my life. I had been connected to my family but now felt disconnected to a large degree. I realised I had been living my life through my children. Who was I now? I remembered a saying: if you know what you are looking for you will find it, but if you don't know where you're going in life you will probably end up in a place that you did not want to be, because you can't find something that you don't even know you're looking for. That was my experience. So I had to reinvent myself; I had to redefine who I was and to set new goals for my life and start moving into the next season of my life (spring).

I had always wanted to be a real estate agent, so this shift in relationship gave me the chance. I set this as a goal. I had re-married by now and started a life with my new wife. That was a summer experience. I talked my wife into becoming an agent too. We went and studied, got our certificates to practice and

got a job together working for an agency. It was new and fun. These goals gave me hope. I was now looking forward.

Many of us have career changes in life, as I did. They are a renewed hope for a new beginning. If we look back we can see the seasons in our life for what they were and we can be sure that, for any season we are in at the moment, things will change. That is just how growth happens, it is a law of nature.

I wanted to have my own office, so I drained my bosses of their knowledge and boom, I was on fire! I then approached other agencies to open a franchise and opened an agency across the road from the office I had been working at. By doing this I developed an enemy and stiff competition, but I did not care, I loved it. I quickly became number one in the area and our office also become number one.

I worked night and day, seven days a week and to relax and switch my brain off, I started drinking with the new friends I was making (autumn). Put all these combinations together and you guessed it, my marriage hit the wall (winter). Our relationship fell apart. My wife took over the business, and I was on my own again. I had achieved my business goals, but my life was out of balance. I didn't have good relationship goals, so I ended up in a place I did not want to be (back to a winter sea-son). That was a tough time in my life, but I only had myself to blame.

The issue here is, wherever we go, there we are. Just because I changed my career and my country, I was still the same person, and I was going to do the same thing because I hadn't changed. What I have learned the hard way is that, for things to change, I have to change. We may not have to change that much around us (although we might have to disassociate with the odd toxic relationship every now and then), but we don't necessarily have to do anything too dramatic. We probably have everything we need to get ahead within arm's length... we just need a goal, a strong desire and a plan of action.

So, it was time for another reinvention of myself (Spring). Whenever I have run into problems, I have gone back to the building industry and started at the basics. I am good with my hands and I know how to work hard. I spent a few months doing odd jobs. I called myself an 'odd-jobologist,' so I had a title. I had a few dollars left after lawyer's fees, separation agreements, negotiations and dividing of assets. Times had changed in the building industry. I could not operate without a certificate, and to get one I would have to go back to school and re-educate myself.

I remembered an audio tape I had listened to about 10 years prior, called, 'Doing all you Can with Everything that you Have' (I can't remember the tape at all, just the cover. I later found the cover, but the tape was missing). However, the title was all I needed. I had a body, a brain and I had my health, I knew how to work. What could I do with this?

The three fundamental questions you can ask yourself are: What do I have? What do I want? What can I do? Those three questions contain the seeds for your success. It's that simple. From this you can build a platform of increase. What you have now is the 'seed' to grow your tree; your inventory, skills and abilities, relationships, and contacts who may be able to help you. Even your mode of transportation is an asset.

I planned and set some goals. Goals can be daunting at the start. You don't know how but you know what you want. You take the steps you can take and then the next step is revealed. You take that one step and on it goes. You just 'follow the bread-crumbs', stay consistent, do the work, and your powerful subconscious goes to work and you find a way to make it happen. 'Success leaves clues.'

I don't know how it works but it just does. It always has for me, no matter how much of a mess I make of things. It's like God says, 'Okay, have you learned your lessons yet?' and I reply, 'Yes, I have'.... 'We will keep going then.'

I hear so many stories like this from all walks of life. It excites me, as does every story I hear of recovery from even the hardest journeys. And your story will excite me too. Feel free to anonymously email your stories if you feel you would like to share them.

There are studies that show that having a plan and setting goals really works. One is from Harvard University (as per Zig Zigler). [1] In the study, 84% of the class had set no goals at all, 13% had set written goals but had no concrete plans and just 3% had both written goals and concrete plans. Ten years later, the 13% of the class that had set written goals but had not created plans, were making twice as much money as the 84% of the class that had set no goals at all.

However, the 3% of the class that had both written goals and a plan, were making ten times as much as the rest of the class. The veracity of this study and these statistics has been questioned, but these stats are consistent with wealth distribution. Whether or not the Harvard MBA Business School study on goal setting is accurate or not, it does help to highlight something very important: to achieve your goals, they need to be written out and planned for. As simple as it sounds, it works. Set your goals, do the work, enjoy the rewards.

At the end of every day, a good question to ask ourselves is, “What have we done to progress toward our goals?” As we get into a habit of asking ourselves this question, it will repeat itself in our minds throughout the day and, in time, we will find ourselves planning our days towards our goals.

The ‘big break’ that we see others get is just the accumulation of all the little breaks put together. I have found that the harder I work at my goals the ‘luckier’ I get! It sounds good but how

much do we want to get ahead, and why? Reminder, 'Don't die with unplayed music in your heart, let it out while you can' (Dr. Wayne Dyer).

I got the last of my money together, begged for loans wherever I could get them and built a house, then another, to get me going again. During that time I sat down and thought about what I wanted for the rest of my existence on this spinning rock we call our world.

I went back to tertiary education yet again, to re-educate myself and do what I used to do. I used to find my 'juice' in helping people, as a consultant in churches for their buildings and direction. I also used to be a pastor, but when people came to me with their issues, I did not have the experience to be able to empathise with them. I didn't understand what they were going through, therefore the answers I had for them were just what I had learned from a book.

If a counsellor doesn't have life experience, they can hand out information like 'Three steps to Happiness,' 'Four steps to getting better,' or 'Five steps to a successful life,' ... too many steps and you will likely fall over again. It takes experiential knowledge to really understand the struggles people are facing. While my intentions were good, I was not ready back then, as I did not have the experience. I had worked with people who were suffering from relationship separations.

They were distraught. I would listen and thought I understood, but I had no real understanding; until I experienced the real thing! It's only now I can really understand them.

RELATIONSHIP ADDICTIONS.

It was around that time I got into a relationship that really did hit stratospheric highs. It was literally heaven on earth. She told me to make her my addiction, and I did. We were both 100% committed to each other. It was a happily ever-after story! After three weeks she said she loved me. The trajectory went perpendicular from there. We got engaged in six weeks. It was like some sort of twin flame experience on steroids (or what is known as a karmic twin flame). We did everything together, including the COVID-19 lockdown. We brought the best out of each other... and the worst! Through that time, I defined myself, I saw myself reflected in her; my addiction. As it started it finished. It really fell over in a matter of around eight to nine days. I came to the realisation that the energy between us was just too powerful to control. We were just not ready for it. When I left, it took everything in my very soul not to return, but I know how to give things up and handle the cravings and pain that follows.

Some things maybe just not meant to be. It may be no one's fault, these things just may be as simple as an organic season in life. I believe a good perspective is to just try to let go, wish the other person the best and continue to work on ourselves. I had to leave

to continue my purpose. My navigation system was screaming. If I did not leave, I believed I would never reach my potential. If I did not know about intensity and self-determination before, I learned it in the four weeks or so after leaving. I visited places in the depths of my being that I had never visited before. I needed the pain, and I probably deserved it. It was a good clean out. Some say pain is the wound healing. If that is the case, sit with the pain and allow it to run its course, or use the pain for a good purpose and let it be excreted out of the body and mind. It's difficult I know, but better than burying it so it can be dug up later.

I believe I now understand about the extreme difficulties of leaving a what could be a toxic relationship and the addiction to all those wonderful love drugs it carries with it. I now have experiential knowledge about how distraught someone can be after a breakup and I can truly empathise with them. If you are in an unsustainable, difficult, toxic or abusive relationship, it is going to take all you have inside of you to leave it. After a while you will be able to reflect on the relationship with a clearer mindset and you may wonder why you stayed so long.

Also, if children are involved they have a right to a safe environment and we, as parents, have an obligation to provide that for them. I suggest seeking professional counsel to help negotiate the best way forward.

DON'T LET A GOOD CRISIS GO TO WASTE.

This is a familiar term in politics. If there is a crisis politicians will use it as a smoke screen to implement policies that would usually cause an outcry. While everyone is concerned about the front page of the newspaper, the politicians use it to their advantage, initiating policies on page three that might otherwise cause a lot of opposition and end up on page one. Learn how to use the crisis you find yourself in to your advantage to further yourself in life.

A relationship that is unsustainable, unhealthy, or even toxic is hard work on the mind. The breakup is even more so. This scenario is much like an addiction, often we can develop a relationship with an addiction. It's a crisis and in the body's chemistry laboratory, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, are arguing and throwing petri dishes and beakers at each other, pumping out protein peptides that increase the heart rate, hormones that increase stress and create cortisol.

Both sides of the mind are having flare-ups at each other, processing imaginations, bringing up the same old information and 'What if's,' and 'How could they's,' or 'I should have' and so on. The heart weighs into the argument with its irrational arguments that make no sense at all. The mind is going around in circles about the same thing. Meanwhile the mouth is talking away about this and that, to whoever it can.

You have all this energy, this horsepower going into this situation you find yourself in, and holding off the cravings of addiction or creating stress is burning up emotion like a race car sitting there in the pit stop, revving its head off, but going nowhere. If you could use that energy and intensity in a running race or a boxing fight, you would surely win, or in an exam recalling information the score would be 100%.

Imagine, just imagine, what would happen if you applied this horsepower in the race of life. Well, you can, you absolutely can. When all this is going on, the worst thing you can be doing is sitting around just enduring the emotional pain without a purpose. The purpose might be the healing and learning a lesson in life we needed to learn.

I was with someone recently who was going through a detox. He was three to four months clean, exactly like this scenario. I was watching it happen. As his mouth was going, every now and then I would say, “I can see you are in a high energy moment,” which is a term I use for mania, or experiencing a manic emotional moment. He would say, “Yes” and calm down for a while, then I would watch it build up again. He was sipping away on Coca Cola at the time. I asked him if he thought fuelling his body with a high sugar and caffeine beverage was a good idea, during this high energy time. He said, “No” and now that he thought about it, and realised the effect it was having on him, he went and tipped it out.

The question is, what can you do right now that will bring some relief and redirect this energy? Really think about this question, and your mind will answer you. Then apply the answer you arrive at.

'Make necessity your master!' Decide on a goal or goals. Believe... intend (have a plan)... attempt... do your best... do not give up! Relinquish the outcome; the universe will rearrange itself accordingly. The next step will be revealed when the time is right. This is a spiritual law that I rely on and you can rely on it too.

MANURE MAKES GREAT COMPOST.

In my life I have proven to be good at making money and getting stuff done. But I have been broke three times after making millions and losing it again. I have also been through the revolving door of relationships, including the two marriages and four engagements I spoke of. So, I have a fair bit of compost to use. Not that I feel too good about how I created it all. We all build up a bit of manure in our lives and getting back up on the horse after an addiction is extremely difficult to do. Humans have an internal code that draws them to seek dopamine. We can lose hope after an addiction, or after a relapse, when we realise our loss and mistakes. However we can reinvent ourselves. I had done enough research by now to realise I just could not relapse again. Research here means experience.

One of the most important things I have learned in addiction recovery counselling is about mental relapse. Relapse starts in the thinking before it ever becomes a reality. When people come out of rehabilitation, they have big hopes and dreams. This sounds great to the unskilled listener. They are feeling confident and it looks like they are back on their path and going to make something of their life.

But to the skilled listener this is mental relapse. They are setting themselves up for a fall because they don't have a plan. I have been in this position, only to return to the same unhelpful behaviours. What I needed was a smart set of goals. We will look at SMART GOALS soon (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timeframe).

Our goals and purpose become a navigation system in our life. If we have set some specific financial goals, we can check our progress each week and recognise when we're heading off track: 'Hang on, I just spent \$80 on that night out and it really wasn't that great,' or, 'I'm never going to get my new car at this rate. I've just missed a week's scheduled savings'. Or, we might look at our target weight goal and say: 'Hang on, I just ate two cream buns at the work function. That's it, no more deserts for me for until the end of the month'. If we have set goals, guidelines and expectations we can challenge ourselves to keep to those goals. This is where having a 'vision board' is so important, because we can 'see' our goals and they get imprinted on our psyche.

VISION BOARDS

Having a vision of what you want is one of the most powerful tools known to man. I speak to a lot of people who know about them, but I very rarely meet a person who has one, and even fewer who have one by their bed, to look at and meditate on.

John Assaraf is a lecturer, entrepreneur, author and behaviour expert, who focuses on brain research and brain retraining. He has a good introduction to vision boards on YouTube, called 'Do Vision Boards Work,' which talks about the power of the vision board. [2]

The reason that vision boards are so effective is because we think in images. Let's say we read something interesting. As we read, the words are transformed into images in our mind. When we explain what we read to someone the next day, we translate the image we have formed in our mind, encoding the images back into words. The person listens to the words and decodes them to form an image in their minds.

Eventually they will say, "Oh, I see what you are saying." We do not see words or listen to understand, we interpret them into an image to help us comprehend. So, seeing images on our vision board goes directly into our understanding and our subconscious goes to work to convince our conscious and together they team up to make it happen.

This is basic stuff, but payday is in the follow-up. Once you have identified your goals, follow these steps:

1. List goals you would like to achieve (I set my goals annually).
2. Download pictures from the internet that match your goals, (not exact but near enough) and get them printed.
3. Use picture frames to make a collage out of your pictures.
4. Write a caption for each picture. For example, on a car picture, write, 'Within 12 months I will be driving this car.' For your work, you might write, 'Within 6 months I will have a promotion and a 15% pay rise' (or whatever your goal may be). Then put it by your bed and look at it every day, with intention.

It is said that knowledge is power. That is incorrect. Applied knowledge is power. Too many people take their knowledge to the grave. What I am saying here is to apply this knowledge in your life. Create a vision board and you will experience the power of it working for you.

Look around you. Everything you see, that is not part of the natural world, has been made by somebody, somewhere at some time. Even the landscaping at your house was inside someone's head as a design. Everything that you see first started in someone's mind, then through planning and execution it was transformed into a physical form and was placed somewhere within your reach; in a shop, on the internet. You used your

resources, selling your hours (or to be exact, a portion of your life) to purchase that thing. Consider and apply this process to the chair, couch, bed, or floor you are sitting on. Someone thought it, it became their vision, they designed it, it was made, and you bought it; now you are sitting on what began as a thought. You may think this is over simplified, but it's not. This was just the natural course of events that happened to get this thing to you.

Now, think of your life... you thought of a topic to study, did the training at university, an apprenticeship, or whatever. You graduated, looked for a job, maybe changed your job and now this is your reality. Even if you are on welfare currently, you still had to make an application to receive it. Many great stories come from people who were on welfare and decided to change their lives. What am I saying? Nothing is impossible. Make a goal, then start making choices in that direction and you will enjoy the self-validation from doing the work to achieve it.

Believe in yourself, there is a story about man named John Key who was the Prime Minister of New Zealand, he grew up in social housing. He told his mother from a very young age that one day he would lead this country, and that is what happened. He grew into the vision he had planted in himself, adopted that belief and became it. How? According to an excerpt the NZ Herald, 'There is a pattern throughout Key's life of setting aims and racing toward them. As a child he spouted two outlandish goals: to make a million dollars and to be Prime Minister. He

knocked the first target over easily, now he looms tantalisingly close to the second' [3] which he eventually knocked over as well. In 2008 John Key became the 38th Prime Minister of New Zealand.

Apply this concept to your community and environment. The culture of the group became part of your vision for your future. Either you chose to be a part of the group, or you were born into the community. You were in a relational setting with them. They became your relational infrastructure and formed part of your identity. They helped steer you in a particular direction and you went along, either by your actions, or by your inactions. Perhaps you prolonged a bad relationship environment when you possibly knew it wasn't right. You have 'created' your current experience.

WHAT WE BELIEVE WE WILL LIVE

Remember, we harvest what we sow. Make a promise to yourself that you will make every attempt not to talk negatively about yourself or anyone else, and never complain.

Without overcomplicating it, our intention goes out into the environment and what we put out we get back. In other words, be careful about the words you speak, because they have an impact on your reality. On YouTube you can find documentaries about Dr Masaru Emoto, and his experiments that show the effect of emotions on water. [4] In the experiments, words

spoken with intention, positively or negatively, affected the shape and quality of the water crystals. Our bodies are mostly water. Your intentions have an affect on matter. It is so important to realise that our thoughts have a real impact on our feelings, our emotions and our reality. So, self awareness and focussed attention (even 5 minutes during your busy day) is all it takes to re-ground yourself with your goals and intentions. Your current situation is not as important as your future.

Here's one of my old journal entries: What have I got to be excited about? It is 10.21 am on Christmas Day. I woke up this morning at 5 am to an empty house, washed my face and kept on writing after going to bed at 12.50 am. I was at the gym training with a couple of mates at 7 am. My lounge and dining rooms are a construction site because the carpet guys did not come back after ripping up the wooden flooring. My kitchen is demolished, and I have one pot and a couple of plates. I am alone again.

I have been living off frozen vegetables, packet soup, frozen berries and protein drinks. I have a mortgage payment that I must pay by tomorrow, which will use the remaining space on my credit card. I will then have just a couple of hundred dollars left for food and gas. I do not know where to go from there... However, no money, no problem, but no belief ... big problem! I have a goal, my goal is to be financially in-dependent and to work in a voluntary situation. My current challenges will not deter me from that goal. My intention towards that goal will shape my future.

Since this entry was made I have done exactly what I promised myself, simply through good planning, goal setting and follow through.

'Necessity is the mother of invention' and sometimes out of necessity we have to reinvent ourselves. Like the saying goes, 'If we do what we have always done, we will get what we have always got'. When I was writing that entry I had three partially written books that I had given up on. I considered my options. Foreseeing what was ahead for me I asked myself this question: "What do I have? I have my health, I have a computer, I have a roof over my head, I have food and I have time. I have decades of study and not very well used qualifications and I have ample life experience".

I was under considerable pressure. I could go out partying and distract myself, I could feel sorry for how unfortunate my life is at the present, or I could do something about it. So, I got out my book and have been sitting at my computer for the last few months, going between finishing my current university papers, writing this book and doing my practicals for university. I was now back on track with my vision.

If you struggle to keep yourself accountable, find a friend who will be as committed to you as they are to their own future success. Every year I create a vision board with a friend. We sign each other's vision boards to say we will support each other's visions and we almost always reach our goals. He has built a twenty-

million dollar business from nothing in the past 3-4 years. He has put on over 10 kg of muscle, and he is driving his dream car. I absolutely love watching how things materialise for him, according to his vision board.

Sometimes values change along the way and we realise the vision we started with was not what we really wanted, or we were not specific enough. My purpose was turning back towards people again, not things. I had put on my vision board several spiritual elements which were in conflict with the accumulation of more 'stuff'.

My heart had recognised this, but my head had not. I was in a dilemma. I had to go with my heart, so soon after, I closed my business and went back to tertiary education to continue my training as a counsellor. I placed this new goal on my next year's vision board and a few unexplainable occurrences happened that led me to the right place to study. I now get a great deal of satisfaction helping people... far more than doing the next real estate deal.

Think about how you want your life to look in 12 months from now. What do you want your future to look like? What does your future partner look and act like (if you are single)? If you are in a relationship, think about the options you have. Where do you want to go to spiritually? What is your goal weight or achievable shape? What school do you want your children to go to? Do you want to retrain into a new career, change your job, get a job, give

up a bad habit or toxic friendships or a difficult relationship? Maybe you're in a relationship that is not bad, but it is not really the best for you and you can do better, do more and go further in life. Good is the enemy of great. The list is as long and broad as your imagination, and if you use the following SMART Goal System (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timeframe) in your goal setting, you will achieve those goals.

SMART GOAL SYSTEM

Specific: Be specific. Goal creation works like a person at Amazon packing shoes. You can get whatever style of shoe you want, but if you just ask for a pair of shoes, without being specific, when they arrive they won't be the style or size you wanted. You need to make sure you specify the size, colour, and style you want. If you need a new car, be specific about what car you want, even down to the colour. It is as easy to envisage a blue one as it is a red one.

On my vision board I pictured a partner. She would have a certain eye contact with me, and a certain look. Then I met someone and I was amazed that she was just as I'd imagined. However, I had omitted being specific about personality type, beliefs and values.

Her belief system and personality did not match mine. I was annoyed that I had not been specific in those areas, because I had invested my time and energy (and she had also) into a

relationship that could not work, as our beliefs and values were incompatible. It was an impasse.

Measurable: Be able to measure your goals. Saying I want more money is too ambiguous. A \$100 note for your birthday is more money, so your intention was met but not to your expectations. Describe the amount of the pay rise you desire, the job you want. Make it so you can measure it; the turnover of your company in dollars, credit cards cleared. Think abundance, not debt. You can pay debt with abundance, but you cannot pay debt with more debt.

Achievable: This is where we set our parameters with a time frame. Your goals must be more than you can do on your own, but not so much that it's something totally unrealistic in anyone's thinking. Something that is well balanced and a bit out of your reach is perfect, so that when you do receive it, you know that your creative vision has enabled you to reach your goal.

Realistic: What can you achieve within a year? Think of a holiday. Do not get too comfortable. Don't limit your goal to spending the night at the local hostel, but don't aim to visit the moon for the weekend either! Make your goals realistic.

Time frame: A one-month vision board will not be long enough to achieve much. A five-year vision board is a bit overwhelming and a bit of a marathon. I think 12 months works well, so I do my vision boards annually, and I can add onto it the following year. I made a goal to take my children around the world

within 12 months. I put it on my vision board. They all picked a destination. We made it a goal. That December they all got what they envisioned, right down to my daughter wanting to go to Paris. She loved the movie *Moulin Rouge* and saw Paris as the city of love. When we got there it was anything but. She looked a bit down one day while we were walking back from Notre Dame. I asked her, “What’s wrong honey.” She said, “This is not like the movie, I thought it was the city of love”. As we were crossing the bridge at that very moment there was a couple on the bridge kissing on a bench seat, looking out over the water. It was a picture-perfect scene. I said, “There you go, you got what you came for.” Her face lit up and she was happy again. I will never forget that moment.

The year I left the business I was building to continue counselling. I changed my vision board to focus on that area. That was just for the career part of my vision board. Vision boards are living things, so you can add a little to them or take away that which does not serve you. But keep the fundamental aspects the same.

BORN WITH YOUR SUCCESSES IN YOU.

To wrap this chapter up I want to present you with the flip side to ‘born with your mistakes in you’. I hope it will encourage you as much as it did me, once I was able to get my head around it. You were given a set of DNA coding and in that coding is the personal strength to enable you to overcome the darkest,

most challenging times (like struggling with an addiction) and to achieve your life's purpose and desires. Whatever else you need you can get along the way. You just need to want to do it.

Having the technology at our fingertips that we currently have is something every generation in the past has only dreamed of. Now we have the 'smartphone'. This amazing device holds all the information we need; information about literally millions of things, throughout history, and put together by people who have laboured tirelessly to deliver to us the truth (or their perspective) in a matter of seconds. Every time someone asks me a question I reply, "Have you googled it?"

As simple as it sounds I believe that we are designed to overcome obstacles and succeed, according to our intention. Once we have identified our goals we do not have to go out and learn from scratch... we can copy the success of others. Humans have the intellect and ability to copy others and replicate their successes. So, find someone who has gone before you in your chosen field and copy their steps with the knowledge you have available, with intention and with the discipline to carry it through. Then you cannot help but achieve your goals. This is the package of ingredients others have used who have gone before you. A reminder: 'success leaves clues'. Here is a story about the power of exchanging addictions for goals. Bob Hawke was elected Australia's Prime Minister in 1983. Here is an excerpt from an article from News.com.au titled, 'Bob Hawke's complicated relationship with drinking'.

Before taking office, Mr Hawke was “drinking all the time” in a way that would “kill any modern day politician’s career,” Mr Richardson said. But, at the time, Mr Richardson said Mr Hawke’s reputation as a “larrikin” helped working class Aussie voters relate to a politician in a way they had never done before.

“He gave up drinking in 1980 when he went into parliament, and when he was prime minister he was drinking non-alcoholic wines and all that sort of thing, but as soon as he left office, we went back on the grog,” his political contemporary Graham Richardson told news.com.au. “He could have never become Prime Minister if he carried on drinking the way he was.” Mr Hawke explained why it was so important he gave up the beers. “I said to myself, ‘If you are going to become prime minister of this country, you cannot be in a position where you can make a fool of yourself in front of the country’ ” he said. “I never had a drop for the whole period I was Prime Minister.”

Just remember, even when you get tired, or feel a bit depressed, think about achieving your goals, and how proud of yourself you will be. Goals will stop you from giving up, even when it seems impossible. I personally hate regret, so I will try to avoid it at all costs.

The only way I can avoid it is by doing the next right thing. There will always be people who tell you that you can’t, just like our addictive nature. We rebelled at all costs to serve our addiction. Use the naysayers and the haters as fuel to propel you forward...

prove them wrong about you. Take every bit of the energy of negativity and redirect it positively towards your goals. It is possible and it does work.

Remember the narrative approach at the start of this chapter? Let's move into resolution (or conclusion).

The point here is, we are just too powerful to be naïve. The power of mankind built the 'weapons of mass destruction' as a deterrent for invasion and protection of countries' sovereignty. An atomic bomb was used on Hiroshima and a plutonium bomb was used on Nagasaki, killing hundreds of thousands of people. So mankind's creative genius was used for man's destruction. Relating this to us as individuals, we can use our great addictive strengths for advancement towards our goals, or only use a fraction of them; just enough to get by and waste the rest.

The great misuse of our power is to become our own predators and use our strengths towards our self-destruction. The way to use the great power of our addictive nature to our favour is by sacrificing ourselves to ourselves... just like Bob Hawke. He sacrificed his addiction to his Prime Minister-ship.

As addicts we are rule breakers. That's in our nature, so we can break our own rules — the ones that are holding us back. We then sacrifice wants for wants; do the self-inventory and decide what you really want. Create your vision board as soon as you can and want success more than you want Netflix, sweets, retail therapy, beer, or porn.

Instead write a book, or go for a walk, give time to your partner or kids, watch a motivational self-development video on Youtube.... Just do it! Motivation happens after you start. Whatever it is, sacrifice it for yourself by giving back to the amazing person that you are. You will feel better and want to do it again and again. It will become a habit before you know it and very soon you will wonder how you achieved so much in life.

As I have said before, we have been trained to work harder on our weaknesses than on our strengths, but our successes come from working with our strengths. So, we will turn our focus to fully discover our strengths. Our focus will be on what's strong, not what's wrong; on our passions and what is good for us. We will disprove those who thought we would fail and make our future selves, our children and those around us, proud.

08.

HOW TO GET IT ALL- EASILY!



We all have an addictive or a compulsiveness aspect to our nature. This is part of our personality; our point of difference. A lot of times we have wanted to be ‘normal’ or we have been told to be normal. But what is normal? The word normal actually means to conform, or ‘to be like everyone else.’ [1] So, that makes us just another cookie cut out of the cookie cutting machine, required to sacrifice our individuality to the god of the current social norms. Is that what we want at the end of the day? No thanks! We want to discover our own individuality, our uniqueness, then live it.

It is my belief that we don’t change who we are, we simply adjust the script of how we give expression to our personality and apply it to our lives. We do this bit by bit, by rewriting our script line by

line and thought by thought. We rewrite the narrative of our lives so that it tells a different story than it has done up to this date; the story we actually want our lives to tell. We have this incredibly strong willpower in our individual personalities, to enable us to achieve our dreams regardless of our past, our current challenges, our internal voices, or anything that might present itself to us in the path of life.

This chapter is a bit of mind bender. I will try and keep it simple. You will be reading phrases that are new to you, but I'm sure that you will learn a lot. You may have to reread paragraphs, however it will be well worth the read and your mind will open to the width, the depth and the complexity of who we are and the world we live in. We will also look at how we used the Quantum Field to enable our addiction and how we flip the script to use it to get the life we want.

NON-CAUSATIONAL COHERENCE. THIS HAPPENS WHEN WE FOCUS

Non-causational means there is no seemingly reasonable evidence for the 'cause' of a particular experience or event. Think of meeting a person that you have just been thinking of, or a telephone call from someone you had just been talking about. Was this just by chance or is there a deeper meaning or force that brought this event into being?

According to vocabulary.com, coherence means ‘all parts fit together.’ It comes from the Latin, meaning ‘to stick together.’ So, non-causational coherence means that there is no evidential proof that things seem to happen for a given reason. However, they do.

We have a word for this that has a bit of a spiritual inclusion. That word is ‘serendipity,’ meaning a series of events that lead to a fortunate outcome. There is an understanding, related to serendipity that I like... ‘freak occurrences ordered by God.’ Some people exchange the word God for The Universe, Higher Power, The Spirit or Creation. Either way it points to a greater power than ourselves.

What is the difference between serendipity and synchronicity? Serendipity is an unsought, unintended, and / or unexpected, but fortunate, discovery and / or learning experience that happens by accident, while synchronicity is the state of being synchronous or simultaneous. Synchronicity is a term that is frequently used to represent the process of experiences coming together and forming some sort of meaning.

All this being said, at what point do we stand back and say, all these coincidences can’t just be coincidences. Am I manufacturing them? What role am I playing in creating my own experience, that I call ‘life’? Am I manifesting my own experience? Yes!

The view of Divine Serendipity is of God bringing people, places, things, and events into your life that will at some time combine with other (often seemingly unrelated) people, places, things, and events that will benefit you or someone else.

The word serendipity was coined by Horace Walpole (writer, politician, and the 4th Earl of Orford), in a letter he wrote to his friend Horace Mann on January 28, 1754. It came from an ancient Persian fairy tale called ‘The Three Princes of Serendip.’ On their travels the princes were always accidentally discovering something that, when combined with something else — also accidentally discovered — turned out to their benefit, although that benefit may not have been seen or received for some time. [2]

I find it interesting that a great explanation of serendipity comes from the book of truth, the Bible: ‘And we have known that to those loving God all things do work together for good, to those who are called according to purpose’ (**Romans 8:28**)

Let’s split this sentence in half. Firstly, ‘All things work together for good to those who love God’ (their higher power or their higher calling). Do good and good will come back around to you. Some call this good ‘karma’. Second, to those who are called according to purpose... what has our past purpose been, what do we intend our future purpose to be? Either way, it will play out, it is always our choice. I love the saying, ‘Go forward confidentially in the way of your dreams,’ and make a plan to achieve them.

Think back to our using or compulsive days (or if we are in the throes of needing to service our addictions and compulsions, somehow from somewhere). How did we find the time, energy and money and even the creative ways and means to attain that which we needed at that time? How did we do this? With focused intention, even the smallest amount of intention, when accurately focused, will bring about an outcome. The question then becomes, what outcome do I want in life, is the life I have now the outcome I want (or wanted)? Parts of our life might be going well, but other parts of our life, that are not in order, can toxify the good parts of our life easily.

So if we are able to (seemingly quite easily and quickly) service our needs, we un-knowingly operate the non-causational coherence rule. If that's so, why can't we service our success in the same way? We can... just by flipping the script of the needs of our compulsive behaviours to wants and desires for our successes, allowing non-causational coherence to operate in our success story.

Look at it this way, if we were to get a small magnifying glass (just a few centimetres in diameter) and, using the sun's rays, concentrate it on a piece of paper or small piece of timber, we could create a flame and start a fire that could turn into a major forest fire. In fact, while I was having an 'escape from society' isolating time in my life, I went and lived on a remote island off the East Coast of Queensland, Australia for about 18 months. The Island mainly consisted of dirt roads, had just one convenience

store and could only be accessed by boat. There were a number of forest fires that burned a lot of the island and threatened the inhabitants. I learned that if I ever saw a bottle on the ground I needed to pick it up, as the curvature at the bottom of the bottle could act as a magnifying glass.

When the sun hits it at the right spot as the seasons change, the position of the sun throughout the year can create a focused laser ray which can start a raging forest fire. Likewise, when we initiate our will and intention we activate a power that is beyond ourselves, going in the background, which we are so often unaware of and we can bend it to meet our needs.

The point is, our Higher Power is like the sun. We are in partnership with our Higher Power and we are the bottle. What direction are we directing this energy? What will be the result of us directing our energy? A great forest fire of self-destruction or the great forest fire of our success?

A spiritual perception of this would be that we are a 'localised package of non-local consciousness'. This means, while we are localised within this body that our soul wears. There is another aspect of ourselves going on 'out there' that is co-creating our life non-causationally. The movie, *The Secret*, explains how this unseen cause and effect is happening to us in everyday life. All these 'everyday life' events add up to our 'one day'. Our 'one day' in the future when our life will look like the summation of all of our 'todays.'

Quantum physics tells us how much the observer (our non-tangible self) is affecting our environment. It is described as the 'measurement problem' in the movie, 'What the Bleep do We Know'. These two movies are 'must watches' (along with Game Changers and The Social Dilemma). There is too much to say here, so I will paraphrase and condense it.

Professor Wolf describes the basis of our integration with the world and our environment as 'Popping the QWF' (the 'quantum wave function'). When we are looking at our environment, we experience it as a particle (matter); what we see and experience. But, when we are not looking at it, it's a wave. The wave is influenced by our intention and the particle (ie: our experience) adapts itself to the degree of our intention. Therefore our intention, or our expectation, influences our experience. Another way of explaining it is to say that what we believe will happen will actually happen to us (to the degree we believe it). Jesus said, "Just as you have believed let it be done to you" (Matthew 9:29).

This measurement problem, which the scientists describe, works like this. When the experiment is being conducted the outcomes differ according to the view point or the intention of the person doing the experiment. The energy of their intention affects the environment of the test in the laboratory. If you can, google or Youtube the 'double slit experiment'. This is called the Quantum Wave Function. It is said that this experiment is the single most impressive experiment that has ever existed. The first person to conduct this experiment was Thomas Young, in 1801. He

performed it with light and was able to demonstrate the theory at the time — that light was a wave. Therefore, the theory that light was a wave was proved to be correct. We all know this now, we learn it at school, but back in those days, this was a massive discovery in science.

I will go a little deeper, ‘The Universe will re-arrange itself accordingly’ through the non-causational coherence rule (my favourite saying). This means that our own creative powers are managed by our expectations. What we expect becomes our reality; our experience. Therefore, the best way to predict our life path is to create it. In **Genesis 1:26**, God said, “Let us make humans in our image, in our likeness.” God is a creator and we, being in his likeness, are also creators. As I have said, we know how we got to be the way we are today because we thought it yesterday. We know where we will be tomorrow because we are thinking it today. So thoughts are actually things; as thoughts create things.

I have a classic car with the number plate QWF and in small writing: ‘pop the QWF, quantum wave function’. The plate on my every day car has I CR38; ‘I create,’ and in small writing, ‘yes we create our experience.’ I have fascinating conversations with people who ask about the number plates.

Because this is an addiction book, I will add in this morsel. We have all heard it said, ‘Birds of a feather flock together.’ Why? In a previous chapter we discussed associations. Today we can apply

this to our associations. Psychology will tell us that the more time we spend with people (or a group of people) the more our brains sync together, making a group dynamic, so we will continuously develop a group mindset or culture. Therefore in a group or community dynamic we will develop organised ways of thinking and doing things, whether they are good or bad. We then develop a co-creating unity; co-creating our future, influencing our experience, direction and life. So, picking the right person or people you relate to, to co-create your life, is a good idea. Otherwise you may be living a life you are not happy with, or you won't agree with the direction your life is going and have internal conflict or conflict within your group. This group environment affects us very quickly as we humans have a desire to 'fit in'.

Have you ever wondered why you might be having conflict in a group environment? The group may be out of sync with who you actually are; like being a square peg in a round hole. We call this your 'shape'. Everyone has a shape and one of our objectives in life is to relate to others with the same or a similar shape. This 'fitting in' human need is a driving force in our lives. We then ask ourselves where is our right fit and go looking for it. It may also be that we outgrow that group dynamic and move on to our higher calling as we grow. We may find that a smaller group, within the group, also outgrows the group, and we may be one of them. This seems to happen for no specific reason, it just happens. It's a non-causational coherence experience.

On a side note, I have discovered we have some sort of obligation to fit in with our siblings: brothers, sisters, parents and cousins, etc. We have a word in New Zealand — our ‘Whanau,’ or greater family. We try to vibrate for their approval. Is this the correct thing for us? It may be and it may not be. We may relate to some of our family and not to others, yet for some unknown reason we feel a duty to seek the approval of our family. I have come to the realisation that I do not have to.

I did not choose my brothers and sisters or anyone else in my family. They are some random people my mother gave birth to. I did not even choose my parents. Therefore I do not need to continuously choose them as my associations, I can honour them, but that may not include having to relate to them.

I choose the ones I want to relate to and the others are just associations, by chance, due to my blood line. I get to choose my family in life regardless of blood or not, so I have true brothers and sisters who are in my blood line and some who are not in my blood line. This becomes my Whanau. It may take a bit to get your head around, because of our learned social expectations.

This may be a very liberating concept for you to adopt. I share this with people who are struggling with their family, due to judgement and undue expectations, as a point of view to consider. Sometimes I almost see a tangible weight being lifted off their shoulders. This is because the non-causal coherence rule affected them in the detrimental manner. They really didn't think

they had a choice with family. Who taught them that? Their society did. Is society always correct? No! Follow your own path.

CORRELATION WITHOUT CAUSATION, ENTANGLEMENT

Further to the above, there is a term called ‘Correlation without causation.’ The Oxford dictionary states that correlation simply means ‘a mutual relationship or connection between two or more things’. The second part of this term ‘without causation’ is what it says — seemingly without a cause. We operate in the physical world. However, we know that there are things going on out there that we cannot explain, yet we are affected by them.

‘Entanglement’ is a quantum physics term that means inescapably bound together. So, our physical thoughts and actions affect our non-physical world (‘out there’). Our non-physical world in turn affects our physical world. This is an inescapable law. Some call it ‘sowing and reaping,’ ‘what goes around-comes around,’ or ‘karma’. Whatever we do or think actually does come back to us. We are entangled with our thoughts and choices. Therefore, it’s a good idea to be mindful of our thoughts and choices, because they become our life. Remember the meaning of insanity... ‘doing the same thing and expecting a different outcome’. So, to try to fight against this inescapable law is not sane.

After a while in life we come to the realisation that, in some manner, we do actually create the experiences in our life. Sure, things happen to us, but it is said that our experience in life is 5% what happens to us and 95% is how we deal with what happens to us. I would go even further and say that we create about 95% of what happens to us, through our beliefs, thoughts and choices in life. This life we create for ourselves is a manifestation of what we expect.

As we have read above, what we expect is just another way of saying, what we have faith for. Thus our greatest expectation goes out into the environment and delivers us back our fears or our faiths (fear in this context is simply faith in the negative). This amazing course of events is called the 'manifestation phenomena'. In saying this, we can reduce the power of this entire process to a statement. We humans have the desire to put these massive concepts into a box, or come up with a formula, so that we can package them up, label them, put them on a shelf in our mind and say that we understand them. So we reduce these incredible concepts down to our level of our understanding, limiting their power to our comprehension. This is totally misconceived.

Our real job is to develop a set of quality desires that are personal to our individuality and that express the best version of ourselves. We then turn those beliefs into goals, apply our faith, overcome our fears and limitations and walk confidentially in the path of our dreams. Simply put, our job is to direct the faith and powerful, compulsive determination that already resides within

us, put the work in as the opportunities unfold, follow the bread crumbs that success leaves for us and trust the process. We do not have to ‘work it out’ we just need to ‘work on it.’ This works every single time. The problem is that we tend to give up before we see the outcome. Stay until the magic happens.

Did we ever give up on finding a way to support our habits that were unhealthy? No, we found a way to service our habits and we created a life that would support our habits, until we hit the impenetrable wall of an unbearable lifestyle which lead us to losses, sickness, institutions, a shortening of life... or until our survival mechanism kicked in and screamed so loudly and put so many problems in our way that we could no longer ignore the issues our addictions and compulsions were creating in our lives.

We hear this so often from smokers who are told by their doctors if they don’t give up smoking it will kill them, or over eaters, that their bodies cannot withstand the food consumption and they must change their eating habits or their organs will begin to shut down. We tried to bend reality by serving our compulsions or addictions, like twisting a large elastic wire until it snapped back in our face and we suffered the consequences. However, we simply cannot escape the law of sowing and reaping, or karma. It is a governing law of the universe. In scientific terms it is the ‘first law of thermodynamics’, and is referred to as the ‘conservation of energy principle.’

Energy cannot be created nor destroyed. Putting it simply, if we participate in negative energy we will receive the consequences of that negativity, if we participate in positive energy we will receive the benefits of that positive energy.

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE OUT-WORKING OF MOVING FROM NEGATIVE OR POSITIVE ENERGY.

When I was 13 to 14 years old I used to go to my girlfriends place and we would watch the WWE on TV and see all the muscle men doing their wrestling. Then full of excitement after the program I would bounce round and show my tiny muscles off. During that time I joined a gym called Top Shape and would go down and do bench presses and bicep curls. This was well before all the health and safety regulations were introduced. I would buy muscle magazines and read all about Arnold Schwarzenegger, see him competing and have a goal that one day I would win a body building trophy.

But, as we all know, life happens and if you are reading this book, you and I will probably have something in common — a predisposition to addictions. This predisposition is just sitting in our DNA waiting patiently to be triggered. I had a few compulsive behaviours on and off throughout life, but the real one was alcohol, that was triggered at age 37-38. This came after me with vengeance (although I could never really escape smoking cigarettes on and off until it became so socially unacceptable I

felt stigmatised by smoking so I was able to give it away). For me, alcohol was the lead up to substances; it was the flow on from tobacco, workaholism, relationship co-dependency, food, gambling, exercise, procrastination. You name it... I think that I am addicted to addictions.

We then carry these addictions throughout life as a weak point and we have to be careful, because we can easily slip into the same ruts and relapses. We come to the realisation that we have addictive personalities. We often cannot escape our DNA makeup, so our intention now needs to be the redirection of this will power within us to a positive application, while doing the work to uncover and to iron out the character flaws that we have.

As I have said in this book, the willpower of an addict is almost second to none. It is my view that redirecting your great willpower, to become the best version of yourself, may be the secret to unlocking your own Holy Grail and discovering the immense treasures that lie within yourself. This is because the personalities of compulsiveness and greatness are almost the same, just with different expressions. They live next door to each other and borrow each other's clothes.

Through the journey of life I would sporadically attend a gym and fall off again. However, for some reason that body building dream never left me, 30 or so years after watching the TV programs and reading the Arnie magazines, my reality was very different...

I woke up one day in my mid to late 40's in a small room about 3am one morning not recognising the ceiling I was staring at. It was small, there were two doors and a bedside set of three draws. I was in a small bed, above me was a small window, I could see that it was very dark outside, where on earth was I? Was I in a police holding cell, did I have a drinking black out event and ended up at someone's place in their kids bedroom? I was in shock. I must have laid there about 20 minutes trying to figure out where I was and how I got here? It dawned on me that I was in a detox centre for addicts. I had been admitted the day before and through the trauma of it all I had actually blanked it from my mind.

The very experience has given me great insight into what trauma actually is and how it works. Through trauma I had cancelled out memories, even the most recent, of entering into the detox centre. The trauma of entering into the detox centre was too much for my mind to accept, so my subconscious removed the access of the memory from my conscious mind. WOW! How many trauma memories are sitting up there that I, or we, do not have access to?

I then had an epiphany. The question became, "How did I get here?" For the next few hours I reviewed my life. I had left school wanting to take on the world. I had worked really hard all my life, had studied, had kids and grandkids, and here I was literally locked in a detox treatment centre. If I had thought that life could not have gotten any worse, it just had. I couldn't really do much and wasn't allowed my phone.

I found a Bible in the top draw on the side table and read through the entire Bible. I settled in and ended up having a lot of fun in the facility. I got others outside in the morning doing exercises. I studied and did a paper on alcohol abuse and how it affects the brain, and I shared it. I ended up being the joker in the treatment facility.

My kids, my Ex (“I told you so!”) and some friends came to visit me during visiting hours. It felt like they were visiting me in a low-security prison or something. It was ten years to the month from when I had started drinking light beers to fit in to my social surroundings, which had put me on the path of other addictions.... End result, hospitals and institutions.

Through that time in rehab I had a chance to revisit my life and see where were I went wrong and the paths that I had taken that led me away from my goals for my life. One goal was to get into body building, so after I left the centre I joined a gym and got my focus back, from when I was young.

A competition was the furthest from my mind; just getting healthy would have been a good start. I put it out there and got to work. I had a long way to go. Being a bricklayer and in the building industry for a few decades had taken its toll on my body but it also had taught me how to work. I had been over 90kgs before but through the addiction journey I had ended up at weighing in at 69kg.

When I came out of rehab, I thought I had it all together. However, just two weeks later I was on a date by the beach. It was an afternoon, the sun was out; a perfect summer's afternoon. We were sitting outside. I was having a coffee, we were laughing and carrying on. She was having a beer. I got another coffee, she got another beer. The sun's rays hit the Heineken label on the glass just right, lighting up the golden colour of the beer, the condensation causing a drip to run down the glass. It was a picture perfect advertisement. I could not resist... just 'one' glass of beer would be ok, I could handle myself. 'I got this,' I thought.

Well, what was a blind date turned into a blind drunk date and the rest of the evening is a blur. The next morning and day would have to have been one of the five worst days in my life. Not only was I hung over but I had let everyone down. I had told everyone I was clean this time, I was on top of my addiction. When someone challenge me about what I would do if I was tempted to drink I would say I would happily tip it out. I had shamed myself and the feelings of that were unbearable. I was face to face with a crossroads... do I get more alcohol to relieve these unbearable feelings or do I change? I googled the next NA or AA meeting and literally crawled into it. That was my last beer.

I got back on the road to my success and allowed the 'correlation without causation' rule to operate in my life. I now try to allow it to operate in all areas of my life and it does.

At times we need to spend time on our own. I needed to get away to be able to focus and to unpack myself for a few months, to write this book and to compete in the body building competitions I had entered. I moved to a small provincial town, found an abandoned church (of all things) and obtained the use of it. I put my bed and desk into it, joined the local gym and got to work. Doing this sort of thing has not been easy — quitting everything. But if I didn't do it now, when would I? I might eventually take my dreams to the grave.

In the area of body building, I had made a plan, committed to it and allowed the 'entanglement' phenomenon to take its course. I followed the bread crumbs that success leaves and 1 year and 362 days from the date of that last beer I had worked through all the qualifying rounds of comps in my city, entered the nationals and I took the Gold, and the title of Mr New Zealand Masters, in the National Body Building Competition.

What am I saying? This stuff works, and it will work for you and for anyone who allows it to operate in their life. It is just an undeniable a law of nature.

SPONTANEITY VS IMPULSIVENESS

One of the challenges we have with addictions is often that we have an underlying creativity in a certain area, even if we haven't discovered our creativity as yet. We have used our creativity to

manage ‘angling’ our addictions... creative ways and angles to fund and supply our addictions. We were impulsive when we thought of who to contact, what things to say and do to achieve what we wanted and jumped at the chance of supply. Sometimes we'd fool ourselves that this was not us. However, think of a person meeting a possible partner, or maybe a hook up... think of the mind games and angles they use when they want to date that person or sleep with them, especially when it involves extramarital affairs. All this is using that creativity in a negative way.

I have a friend who would call every now and then to chat. I met them in a rehab, eventually and almost on cue the conversation would come around to seeing if had any diazepam. If I didn't, did I know of anyone who did? They were desperate and I understood them and what they were going through with real empathy, knowing how creative they were and how their inviting general small talk would get around to what they really wanted. I would think to myself, imagine if they could use this powerful creativity and relentless pursuit to achieve a life of their dreams.

When I was in that same place at one time, I couldn't see the power of the compulsive nature I possessed either. Think back to the lengths you would go to, the things you would sacrifice to meet your needs and you will see the incredible ability you have to achieve almost anything you desire in life. Make that desire your success.

Spontaneity is a playful, enjoyable human trait, but when it crosses the line it becomes impulsive and turns into compulsiveness. Spontaneity is, in its essence, creative. It's a walk in the park with the kids and an ice cream, that painting you have been wanting to do for a while, writing a business plan, planning that trip away, writing that book that is inside you, buying that house, or whatever excites you.

When we can turn our attention away from our impulsive needs our brain fires up our spontaneous creative mind to our wants, so we can rewrite our script from needs to wants and learn the art of enjoyment. At one time I could not imagine doing things like going to the beach, out for dinner, having friends over, unless in included beer or wine on any other form of intoxicant. When we realise just how good life can be when we can browse a shop without having to buy something, enjoy the company of someone without having to imagine them sexually, or eat something without the need to feel full or regret about what we ate, or whatever else our compulsive mind has craved, we find the laugh inside we have been seeking for so long.

WHAT I MIND

We all know that we have one brain with two sides. Why did we get made with a brain with two sides? We often say that we think with one side or the other, depending on whether we are left-handed or right-handed. This is called 'hemispheric lateralisation'

and is not necessarily correct. It's more like a spectrum way of thinking, rather and a binary way of thinking... or we think with 'both and' rather than 'either or'.

This means we all have a different approach in our ways of thinking. We may think more with the left than the right, we might even have an even way of thinking, but very few people think with only one side of their brain. The left hemisphere controls the right-hand side of the body and receives information from the right visual field, controlling speech, language and recognition of words, letters and numbers. The right hemisphere controls the left-hand side of the body and receives information from the left visual field controlling creativity, context and recognition of faces, places and objects.

According to the left-brain, right-brain dominance theory, the left-side of the brain is considered to be adept at tasks which are considered logical, rational, calculating. By contrast, the right side of the brain is best at artistic, creative, and spontaneous tasks (Corballis, 2014; Joseph, 1988). [3]

The brain works like a basketball player... the left-hand side of the brain is bouncing the ball (which has to be done otherwise they will be penalised), doing the numbers, the immediate, the urgent and servicing the needs. While this is happening, the right-hand side is negotiating a way forward, looking at all the players, studying in real time the gaps and watching for any oncoming attack. At the same time it's focusing on the goal, the

net, getting ready (at just the right moment) to join the alternate brain functions together, by holding the ball with both hands and launching the body into the air to shoot for the goal. Both sides of the brain are fully employed at that moment, with total focus. Sometimes we meet the dreamers who are always working on their next big thing, yet never seem to achieve much, and other times we meet the busy people, always busy, busy, but never seeming to get ahead either. Why? We need to employ both sides; to have the dream (RHS brain), make the plan (both sides of the brain) and do the work (LHS brain). This is why vision boards are so important.

Here's a personal experience that demonstrates what happens when we're not employing both sides of our brain well. My computer bag 'went missing' from my car yesterday, while I was in another city visiting one of my children. In the bag was my computer, both my backups, my phone and all my notes. Years of work all gone. To say I am gutted is a massive understatement. I am literally in shock, stunned beyond belief... I feel like vomiting.

Years of study notes on all my subjects, all my building works and projects I have on, two books I have outlined and have been writing, years of photos, bodybuilding info and the rest, all gone! I had been in the process of moving and I would normally separate my backups (not one but two), but they all went in the same bag.

I am not often lost for words, but I was this time! I felt almost lost! What role did I play in this? I was so busy bouncing the ball with my left brain I did not prepare for any oncoming attack. Thieves thieve... that's what they do. You can't judge a snake for biting; snakes bite! I didn't get out of the way. Also, what negative energy did I put out there to attract this, something from my past? Probably!

I lay down to reflect and I remembered a sounding device that was left at my daughter's wedding. I had been lazy and not called around to find out whose it was. I wanted that negativity out of my life. I got on the phone and found it belonged to the photographer. He was so happy because he said it was worth about \$500-600, about the same value that my computer was worth, secondhand. I went and posted it straight away by courier, along with some chocolates. I took a picture of the tracking number and text him it, I received a text back from him saying, "Thank you, I'm lost for words".

Our mind is where everything happens. It has been said that there is nothing going on 'out there'... everything is going on 'in here'. My feelings were screwing me so I had to get out of my head.... It's the water inside the ship that will sink it, not the water on the outside!

What to do? It was all about what I 'mind'. I needed to reorientate my value systems. I thought, 'Put it into perspective... I have my health, my children are ok... everything else can be replace

except for these. I have food and a roof over my head, I have the physical essentials. I am grateful for those.' Gratitude is an art form. Our happiness is up to us.

I now needed to create dopamine, so I went and got a new affordable computer, salvaged what I could get off my emails and kept on going. At 8.26pm I called my editor for a Zoom edit, because I couldn't fly to her due to covid restrictions, which have been going on for months. Just keep going!

Fast forward a day... I feel so much better, I am making progress again. I know progress releases dopamine and feeling sorry for myself takes it away. The choice was mine. To stay positive in a negative situation is where we win.

I realised I did two things that allowed this to happen to me... I had put negativity out there from my past behaviours, so eventually that energy would come back. Also I was so busy on the immediate left brain thinking that I didn't employ the right brain to keep my eye on the other players and it cost me dearly.

When someone says something or does something to us, we can take it in however we wish. We can choose to be happy, angry, fume, or laugh it off. We can also use that energy to mature ourselves, to consider where our values really lie, to propel ourselves forward and to grow. If we want something 'new' we have to stop doing the 'old'. Nothing really goes on 'out there' in life; the life we live is 'in here'. We are our own universe. We have all heard the saying, 'I think therefore I am,' but how about

'I feel therefore I am.' We have all been given free will. That really means we actually are the masters of our own destiny. When we really understand that we're the masters of our own destiny, the better our choices will be and the easier life gets. Also, as we take control of our thoughts and emotions the easier life gets. This is how to 'get it all easily.' So I encourage you to master the destiny you desire. And, By the way, I had my computer returned to me a couple weeks later, was it by chance? ... Serendipity ...

09.

SPIRITUALITY



Spirituality loses its relevance if it is not presented in a manner where it can be applied in everyday life. Spirituality is often presented as a philosophical discussion, or religious doctrines that have no significance for us. Jesus, who was probably the most direct preacher of all time, preached in simple terms, then followed it up by giving spiritual relevance to practical life applications, that produce present and eternal outcomes.

This chapter is in no way an exhaustive compilation of the multidimensional spiritual beliefs existent. It's just a snapshot of the role spirituality plays in our lives; in the spiritual nature of addictions, interpersonal relationships, prospective partner choices and the spirituality of self-relationship.

The problem I had with general philosophy at university, or particularly the philosophy of spirituality with all its unproven theorems, was that it was void of absolutes. It lacked relevance in my life and didn't have any form of standards, applications, lineage, or morality. It was an endless continuum of self-countering arguments, full of conjecture, without substantive reasoning. It was about non-representational concepts using analogies to prove suppositions. It was enough to give the best philosophical apologist anxiety, haemorrhoids and shingles. That's general philosophy for you... confusion!

However, any attempt to describe even one seemingly insignificant aspect of the infinite is to attempt to describe the infinite itself. It would be like using a drop of water to explain the water of the ocean. The drop is contained in the ocean and the ocean in the drop. We, being finite, cannot define the infinite in its infiniteness. We cannot describe the indescribable, search the unsearchable or explain the unexplainable, so I will leave the vortex of that statement there and get on with the application of it.

Let's have a look at exploring the application of spirituality in a way that takes us up the rabbit hole (rather than down); from complexity to simplicity; from the unexplainable to something that can be explained, understood and applied; to find how to express in everyday life what flows from its origin; the inexhaustible entity we most commonly refer to as 'God' and how this God is able to relate to us in our present. You might refer to this entity as the Universe; the Grand Architect;

Ultimate Intelligence; the Collective Consciousness, or however you choose to describe this Higher Power. We are not going to talk too much about God, because the world does not contain enough trees to produce enough paper to begin to write an introduction to a book about God. However, I believe that if you can't explain something simply you don't know what you're talking about. This is because a concept is irrelevant if it does not have an application. So I will meet my own expectations here.

Most people cannot find God because they are looking too high. What do I mean? They can't find God because they are not looking low enough. So, how do we do that? If you want to see God, look at the next person you meet.

The Indians have a word — Namaste — meaning the divine in me honours the divine in you. It's a 'nice' concept and we hear it everywhere now, especially on social media. So what does it mean and how do we apply it? Otherwise, that concept is also useless. Its application is in connection.

Presume that the person you meet has something to tell you that you do not already know. Imagine their inner being is trying to pass something meaningful on to your inner being; infinite to infinite in the finite moment... to increase your knowledge and understanding of yourself, to give you direction, overcome trauma, to answer a question you have been thinking about, and so to continue your path of recovery and personal completion. Success leaves clues for us to find and apply, so follow the

breadcrumbs the Spirit leaves. Reality will unpack itself to you and offer you all the benefits it holds. I use this and it works every time.

I really enjoy talking to others and more so when I get into deep and meaningful conversations. I consistently find AA and NA meetings highly valuable, because there is so much truth in them as people feel free to become vulnerable in the safe non-judgmental environment that these meetings offer.

Imagine if religion could operate like these meetings, maybe more people would attend. I learn something new every time, I have been to hundreds of these meetings, and if I was to include recovery classes where the participants open up about their story and their recovery it may be in the four digits.

Sometimes I find myself unenthusiastic about attending these meetings or a bit bored. However, I know that if allow myself to listen, close my judgments and open my understanding, this process opens up to me, whereby I hear what I call ‘worth it statements.’ There may be only one statement that clings to me in the meeting, but that statement becomes a life impacter. I walk away enthused and with another piece to put in life’s reality puzzle, which makes the meetings well worth attending. I also become an audience for them to release their challenges or celebrate their successes. I’m sure most other people in the meetings feel this way also.

We can have a bit of fun and challenge ourselves in everyday life, where we can have one basic objective when we meet someone — to give the other person a good time (regardless of the outcome) with the perspective that they feel valued. They have enjoyed themselves meeting us and we can leave them with a positive view of us. We can easily measure this by their smile.

In everyday life we converse subjectively; subconsciously trying to steer the conversation around to something we know about or are interested in. Otherwise we just zone out, or listen to answer, rather than listening to understand. So, when you meet someone, see if you can talk objectively and focus. Allow the person to run away with their thoughts, really listen and watch the pearls drop. I love it. It takes a bit of practice, but it's worth it. If they say something, I may ask for clarification, or if I have a thought about what they're saying I may comment, but I let the conversation flow. I leave every conversation with something new. I have condensed it down to this generalisation: If I talk, I get what I know, but if they talk, I might get what I don't know.

One thing that is important to do for this to work well is to keep our phone in our pocket. Researchers suggest that the mere presence of one's smartphone reduces available cognitive capacity and impairs cognitive functioning, even though people may feel they're giving their full attention and focus to the task at hand. [1] Conversations get more exciting, people want to be around you more, you improve your life and theirs.

This spiritual practice leads me to a better understanding of the divine life in me; God within me, and in others. Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17.21). Simple, yet so profound, and what’s more, so discoverable.

Applying this practice somehow eases the journey of coming out of an addiction and becoming complete again. This is a powerful tool. Think of it this way, the divine spark in you has the goal of leading you to completeness. An example of this happened recently to me. I had been training to compete in the regional Masters Physique Bodybuilding Competition for the city I live in. During my training programme, I had to fly across to the other side of the country for a leadership development course for a while, at a Hilton Resort. Following that I flew to another city to work with my editor, who was working with me on another book I have written.

During this time I didn’t have a hire car and only taxied to the gym on the odd occasion. My nutrition plan went out the window also. I like sugar and there was lots of it in all forms — morning, noon and night. On every break... cakes, deserts, you name it, I ate it. All excuses are equal — my fault. By the time I returned I had lost over 3.5 kg and fattened up a bit. I felt like a pig. My first morning back at the gym, during squats, I felt like I had the weight of the world on my shoulders and could only do a portion of what I could do before I left.

I felt I had lost my 'mojo' and was going to withdraw from the competition, feeling like a bit of a loser. I was having a coffee with the boys after training and someone said to me, "Are you still going to compete?" I wouldn't answer directly. They laughed and arguing amongst themselves (jokingly) about who would win the bet. I enquired as to what the bet was about. To my surprise it was whether I would carry through and compete, or not. I found that my mate, who I do the vision boards with each year, bet in my favour, that I would carry through and compete. I was quite taken back, I hid a little emotion.

I instantly remembered a quote from Abraham Lincoln: "I'm a success today because I had a friend who believed in me and I didn't have the heart to let him down." I immediately said, with renewed enthusiasm, "Yep, definitely, competition is my middle name." At that time I also remembered a line out of the movie *Any given Sunday*, where Al Pacino says in his speech, "You have to fight your way back into the light". Out of that conversation came my answer and the motivation I needed to get back on track with a vengeance. The competition was 6 weeks away at that time.

Getting into shape at my age is no easy task, especially getting into 'stage' shape. However I am an addict, and as every good addict does, we will do whatever needs to be done to get what we need to get done. I gave the next few weeks all I had but as it was my first body building competition I was very ignorant and my qualifications as a personal trainer and nutrition lacked

the depth of knowledge at completion level. I had a trainer who was good and could push me to vomit point, but didn't have the depth of experience and expertise to develop the choreography needed for a posing routine.

Three weeks out I knew I was totally unprepared and I was despondent. However, at that time I consciously called on the addict in me to come through with the goods. If I could come through drinking myself to overdose and ending up in hospital, unconscious, with my children at my side.... and if I could come through after consuming so much alcohol and substances (over a period of time), that I ended up being carried off an island (my sanctuary from the world) by water ambulance, after giving myself a stroke due to the chronic harm and stress, I could find a way to get through this competition. I meditated, asked God, my Higher Power for help and guidance. I got on the internet and found a number. Of the million numbers that were on the internet the number I called was a personal trainer who just happened to be the regional organiser of the Body Building Federation for the competition I had entered.

Remember, from the 'Goals' chapter, when you put your intention out there, there is an unseen force that will support you whatever your intention is. Put out into the universe only what you want back — never what you don't.

Was this meeting by chance or divine guidance? How could it not be? What I can say is, everything seems to happen for a reason. We can look at life from a perspective of, 'things happen to us' or from the perspective of 'things happen for us'. If we take on the perspective of 'to' then we can easily become the victim of circumstances (as I have said before). However, if we take on the perspective of 'for' then we can see the divine purpose in life and see that there is another side to our existence, where we have the capability to move from being a victim to a victor.

As I said earlier, just keep following the bread crumbs. You will know you are on the right path when you turn around and look at your footprints and see how the divine has had its hand and involvement in your journey, regardless of the dark times you experienced along the way. It could be that we made self-sabotaging decisions and eventually were led through them and out the other side.

You may be still in the process of that... life is a journey. There will be trauma issues and hangovers from the past mistakes to deal with, however, that is all part of the healing process that is available to us as we continue. All we have to do is try and do the next right thing. It sounds over simplified, but for some reason, no matter how many mistakes we make, when we come to the realisation we are heading down the wrong path and desire to make changes, things just come back into alignment and support reveals itself again.

I remember waking up in hospital one morning from a drinking overdose the night before. I was actually suffering from alcohol poisoning. I was leaving that afternoon and a male doctor came and saw me to release me. He looked me straight in the eye and with the most intense voice said, “You know what to do, now go and do it.” I will remember that moment as long as I live. I had no idea at the time what that thing was that I had to do. It wasn’t until a couple years later (after some more relapses) that I figured it out.

The thing that I now know to do is ‘the next right thing’. I wish I could go back and thank that doctor. I cannot, but what I can do to thank him is do the next right thing and patiently support the next person who is still suffering as I was at that time. Maybe this statement might help you too, as it helped me.

My story is only unique in its specifics, but common in general. I hear this type of narrative consistently in recovery stories from people, and the more it happens to them the more confidence they get to trust the process, the more they understand and the more enthused in their recovery they become. The more secure they become in their recovery the more they become an inspiration to others and the flow happens. Like I say, when the tide comes in, all the boats rise.

An interesting point here is that the word ‘enthused’ means ‘God in you,’ and the word inspiration means ‘in-spirit’. Are these words by chance? I don’t think so. As we allow God to work in

our life, follow our given path, the spirit gains power in us and we impart the power of that recovery spirit to others through our experience, strength and hope... and so the spirit flows.

I have a poster that I have kept for decades. It says, 'The universe will re-arrange itself accordingly.' I like it as it's reassurance that after the continuous relapses I've had along the way, the accidents and mistakes I've made, as we all do, there is always HOPE, (Hold On Pain Ends). We move on to another HOPE, (How Original People Evolve), and we use HOPE, (Holding Only Positive Emotion, or energy). We don't beat ourselves up, physically or emotionally. There are enough people in the world who will do that for us, so we need to show ourselves self-care and balance.

Here is an example we can all relate to as a reminder. We all know the lady's voice on Google maps — her name is Karen Jacobson. I remember this because my mother's maiden name was Jacobson. Karen directs us when we put a desired destination into Google Maps... she says, 'Turn left in 400 meters, take next right, travel for three kilometres along this road,' or whatever. When we take the wrong turn she doesn't raise her voice or say, 'You idiot, can't you listen to the simplest of instructions!' No, Karen says, 'Do a U-turn,' or 'Take the next right'. I have driven in the wrong direction for ages going elsewhere sometimes just to see what would happen, but no, Karen continues to try to re-route me, to get me back to the original destination, on the shortest or fastest route without fuss. Imagine if we can treat

ourselves how Karen would treat us, gently and patiently trying to get us back on the right course and towards our full recovery; to live a successful and purposeful life.

The point here is, when you get the answer, follow the direction with enthusiasm. The second point is find someone who truly believes in you and keep them close. It may be a friend, family member, one of your children (or even a pet). Remember what got Lincoln motivated and don't have the heart to let them down. It is not about where you have been that's important, it is about where your feet are pointing at this very moment, and take the next step, which is to do the next right thing. This is actually spiritual living being applied in everyday life. It's that simple.

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

We have all heard phrases like, 'Don't worry, there is light at the end of the tunnel' ... 'There's always hope' ... 'Things will work out,' etc.... Ra Ra! What most of the people who quote these statements are unable to tell you is what that light looks like; its description, what it is, who it is and, more importantly, how you get there?

I am here to tell you, it's you. You are the light in your own tunnel. There is no end; there is a continuum of self-discovery; of the light that already exists in you. It's you in all your splendour and glory, in your completeness. It's Christ in you. You contain

that radiant light: “The Kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21).

What I call the ‘Truth Book’ (Bible is just the Latin word for the English word ‘book’) actually describes a perception of this light, in 1 John 3:2: “We know that when Christ appears, we will be like him for we will see him as he is.” I would say here that it is each person’s responsibility to be on the right side of Christ when this does happen. Try not to be thrown off by this word Christ, as it carries religious overtones that cause a lot of people’s walls to go up. So let’s look at this word for what it actually is.

The word Christ comes from the Greek word χριστός (chrīstós), meaning “anointed one”. Some people have a view known as ‘Christ Conscious’. According to Wikipedia, the word is derived from the Greek verb χρίω (chrīō), meaning “to anoint.” In the Greek Septuagint, ‘christos’, was used to translate the Hebrew, מָשִׁיחַ (Mašiah); Messiah, meaning ‘[one who is] anointed’. All pretty simple really and nothing much religious there after all.

According to <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anointing>, the act of anointing was a common practice an ancient times by many nationalities. It is simply the ritual act of pouring aromatic oil over a person’s head or entire body. The meaning behind it was for the appointment of a person into a role they would undertake, like a government official, a priest or religious position, even to be a leader. Today we could call that being appointed as a boss or an executive. Anointing was also for the empowerment of a

person to undertake certain tasks in life, like for the healing of a sick person. What does all this mean to us?

As an addict in recovery, or a person being challenged with the symptoms of addiction or even mental health, one thing we definitely need is empowerment and the healing from the destructive effects of our addiction and mental health challenges. This doesn't mean our addictive nature leaves us, it just means we gain the power over it and only then can we use this powerful addictive character trait we possess to our benefit. That is what this book is all about.

By adopting 'Christ Consciousness' into our life we adopt the empowerment of anointing the sits behind it. We actually allow the spiritual appointment of recovery, in all its forms, to be present in our life. With it comes healing, restored relationships and the successes that recovery offers.

Many would describe Jesus (who is Christ) as the object of completeness and the ideal of 'good'. When we get a true vision of what it means to be 'complete' we will have a certified image; a standard to adapt ourselves to. Our goal here and now is to take the time to perceive goodness, or completeness, for what it really is, then become it. You are already the light in the tunnel; you light your tunnel, you just may have not yet discovered your complete self yet. It's a journey.

I realised this when, after decades of searching for this light, that was supposedly at the end of the tunnel, straining to reach it, putting the (apparently) 'required' practices into place to obtain it, I was left exhausted and drained. The promises I was offered did not eventuate. I felt I was sold a phantom truth. I ended up in a continuous, downward spiral of monotonous daily routine. Happiness and laughter existed on the outside. People, places and things did hold some attraction but, inwardly, I knew there was an emptiness.

Once I had fulfilled my current goals at that time; obtaining the latest fad, buying the next car, wearing the right clothes, (which we all want to do) eating at the 'go to' restaurants or fast food outlets, getting savings stashed away, coming back from the planned holiday... the emptiness was there again. The light seemed to have moved further away with every attempt to move towards it.

Eventually I realised time was moving along and I was getting older. A sense of desperation pushed me to go deeper inside myself; into the darkness, until one day I saw a glimmer of hope. There was a little light shining in the darkness. This hope wasn't on the outside, it was within. This discovery led me away from materialism, momentary self-seeking pleasures, organised religious practices, current events, political arguments, the news and destructive addictive habits into the real value of the eternal soul that every human really is. This was a process, because I had a PHD in relapse! I could stop but I couldn't stay stopped.

My addiction and recovery journey has been a shocker, as most people's have.

I learned to grow this light by giving it away. The more I cared for others the brighter this light got until now. I intend to live my purpose, walk in the light by daily attempting to be the best representation of who I am; no longer what I am or what I have, but an eternal spiritual being with a finite temporal human form that will age and pass away (in line with the predestined cycle of life), while I enjoy the journey along the way. I think this is a reasonable goal for every person — especially the recovering addict, or the person with addictive or compulsive tendencies — to use this innate power for a purposeful and successful life, whatever that may look like for you.

We often hear of people who are suffering from the pain and trauma of loss, personal violation, addiction and other things (the Big Book in AA calls alcohol addiction the lashings of alcohol. Those lashings I have definitely endured). When they hear of another person talk about their struggles they realise they are not alone and find comfort in another person's story. A foot note to this is that the more I tried to understand others the more I understood myself and the more I showed acceptance to others the more I was able to accept myself.

When I used to go to bed and when my head hit the pillow, or when I awoke in the early hours, my pillow would talk to me: 'You're a loser... you have totally ruined your life... everyone

thinks you're an arsehole... you did this or that wrong... your kids are your fault... you will never amount to anything'. On and on and round and round the voices in my head would go.

I do not think anyone ever gets rid of these challenging voices but they do calm down, they do quieten and you can get to a stage where you argue back with them and win the argument. We have all heard of 'pillow talk,' usually between newly formed lovers during times of intimacy in their honeymoon phase; 'You're so right for me... where have you been all my life... I love everything about you... I'm so lucky to have you in my life... I can see our future'. You know how it goes. Well, how about giving ourselves some positive pillow talk, instead of allowing the pillow to talk to us (reminding us of our bodily imperfections, failures, character defects, broken past and shattered dreams).

We can give ourselves a bit of honeymoon experience like, 'Where have you, my self-lover, been all my life?... I am good enough... I will never leave you... I promise to support you in good times and in bad... I will be your best friend and protect you from any negative others will say about you'. Show me a perfect person or a person who has not made mistakes... there aren't any. I'm a 'work in progress'. I may not be where I want to be but I'm definitely glad I'm not where I was and I will have moved further every day, until after 'a life fully lived do we part.'

How does all this fit into spirituality? In every way! These statements are coming from a place deep within us. As we have learned, our heart centre is really our 'inner most being'. What is that place? It's the place of the spirit. I never realised that a rehabilitation facility was actually a mental institution until I began my studies in mental health and addiction. To come to the realisation that I — being a highly intelligent, high functioning person with intentional morals and a desire to do good — was the frequenter of mental institutions absolutely floored me. Like WTF! How on earth could this be? How have I done this to myself? What was I thinking! Until I realised that it was not the physical aspect of life that crippled me, but the effects of a spiritual crisis in my life. Some would term this as a 'broken spirit'.

Think about how the effects of a broken heart can cripple our life; a broken inner most being, the self-centre. I have studied theology full time at three Bible Colleges and they are good.

However, I realised there was more to this than meets the eye... I needed to look over the fence. I got qualified in Chakra Healing, energy healing, crystals and over a year of qualified training, through all the levels I became a Reiki Master. I attended over 2 years of Ayahuasca ceremonies and retreats and saw many unexplainable events.

The more I get to know, the more I realise I don't know and the more I understand how much the 'other side' is influencing 'this side' of life. In short, it is almost impossible to use physical tools to overcome a spiritual condition. Addiction is, more often than not, a spiritual condition that expresses itself in our physical experience. So we have to use a spiritual application to mitigate the spiritual condition of destructive compulsive behaviours. To overcome darkness you have to turn on the light.

We all have a dragon to contend with in life... it is different for every person. Think of all the movies we watch... to get the gold the warrior has to defeat the dragon. The dragon is an analogy of our character defects or traumatic circumstances that have happened to us. The gold is our personal success and to find internal completeness and contentment with ourselves. The scales on the dragon are every self-defeating word we say to ourselves — I'm not good enough, I don't deserve it, I can't, etc. The sword we defeat the dragon with is our person self-talk: 'I am good enough... I can do it... I do deserve it... I believe in myself'. My success is my right and I'm going to get that gold because it belongs to me. The best representation of myself is my birthright. We stab that dragon between the scales of lying doubt with our sword of truth and take back what was stolen from us; which has been ours all along.

It is a journey, beating this destructive addict voice and slaying our own dragon, by using our positive powerful addictive compulsive personality (our heart centre) to rise again. So,

instead of getting the next drink, substance, the next gamble, sexual experience, over-work, or dessert, we can picture the next statement we say to ourselves; statements of love and acceptance. I only wish I had learned this stuff years ago. I felt a flood of regret and emotion as I wrote that.

So, the answer to myself is that I am just glad I did eventually get it, and maybe it was all for a reason, because it happened for me, not to me. Maybe I went through it so I could support others through their difficulties. Who wants to be a ‘normie’ anyway. I feel better now.

The point is, we transcend ourselves through the process of breaking and mending. There is nothing in the caterpillar that tells it that it’s going to be a butterfly. There is no indication when we look at a caterpillar in its current state that it has a butterfly within it; it just becomes one. The only real difference between us and that caterpillar is that we have choice; we can either stay a caterpillar or we can choose to become a butterfly — by using the baggage of our destructive addictive tendencies to grow the wings of recovery.

WE LIVE TWO LIVES

The concept that we live two lives, and our second one starts when we realise we only have one, brought me to the conclusion that I will take into eternity the character I develop during my

time on this earth. So, we have a window of opportunity to adopt and live by a set of principles that are congruent with the eternal being we wish to become. It is definitely a path that takes time to walk, so it's just as well we have our whole lifetime to walk in it. Purity is impossible to obtain. However, it is a relief to know that it's not about perfection but progress; each day, each correct decision, every positive attitude change, every gift of ourselves to another, every piece of tolerance we grant to others, is progress.

That journey is progress toward perfection, until the move from this earthly plain into full spirit completes our journey ... the tunnel of light. This is exactly why we have 'time.' Time is a gift that we take; we take time, and then we spend it. Time allows us to incrementally improve ourselves — on a daily basis.

We are not yet ready for eternity, because if we lived in eternity we would have to do everything at once. What an overwhelming experience that would be. That is why I believe we take into eternity the character we develop on earth. I could write another book on that very statement. I have a book I have started called *How to Love God*, I suppose I could sum it up on one page with one statement, 'Do the next right thing.' However, it will take a book to unpack that one statement.

There comes a time in everyone's life when they go looking for that light. Some people don't look for it until they're on their death bed. Many people who have had a near death experience describe this tunnel when they come back. It is interesting that

they describe a tunnel of light, not a dark tunnel with a light at the end of it. Yet it's available to us now, if we go looking for it. This search usually happens in the winters of life; the dark times, times where hope is fading, times when we're facing loss, divorce or separation, relapse, self-disgust, shame or illness in all its varying forms. That's the best time to look for that light, because light becomes better exposed in the darkness; a lightbulb is much brighter at night than during the day. It's all about comparison and context. These times can be the most valuable wakeup call we can have; a chance to reinvent ourselves.

If we were to look through the passage of time in our lives, when it's not dark, it would look like a kaleidoscope of events; most meaningless. So much of our life is taken up with unproductive activities (for example, the average person spends almost two and a half work weeks a year sitting in traffic). All this meaningless activity is a distraction from the light.

Most of us know the Parable of The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). He took his inheritance from his father early, went away to another land, blew the money, ended up feeding pigs and wanting to eat what they were eating. The story tells us that he was sitting with the pigs and "he came to himself." He had an 'epiphany'; a momentous self-realisation, and realised who he was. His inner being finally got loud enough within himself that he could actually hear it. Better put, he had forgotten who he was, but now realised who he really was. He wasn't able to hear his inner voice before, amongst all the noise of the world and his

destructive behaviour, so he'd never comprehended who he was. But now he did. He became complete; the person he had been all along.

Do you recall the meaning of recovery? 'Remembering who you are and using your strengths to become all that you were meant to be'. The prodigal was a great man's child! When he remembered that, he quit what he'd been doing, walked away from the situation that was wasting away his life and purpose and went home. His father welcomed him, dressed him in fine clothing, set a feast before him and he became the envy of those around him. This is a spiritual story that many of us have lived in real life.

Almost every person who has done anything great tells others that their greatness began from a position of difficulty. If you are going through a struggle, or even if you are not, this is your time to 'come to yourself,' to remember who you are and make the changes that will lead you to your own greatness. Using the tools and implementing the concepts of this book will guide you on your way. The meaning of the parable is that the great man in the story is God, our Higher Power and the person remembering who they are is you. God restores each of us to our completeness so we can become the likeness of this God we have within.

A good point to this story is that the son didn't actually change his personality, just his behaviour. He blew all his inheritance on riotous living. That means for us today we spend our resource —

our time, money, emotion and personal gifts and talents — on destructive or wasteful living. I was addicted to gaming and TV. What a waste of time that was. I can only imagine what I could have used that time for if I wasn't glued to the TV screen night after night, getting to the next level of a game or watching useless rubbish on the goggle box. Add to that alcohol and other things, not to mention my procrastination addiction. Looking back, it seems to me that addiction is actually insanity.

However, insanity and greatness are close neighbours; they borrow each other's shirts. They just choose to apply their incredible power with different applications. We each have that choice every day with every decision, so we can start at any moment. Start now if you are facing compulsive challenges or, if you are in recovery. Keep on going with what you are doing with all the power of intention that you possess.

IMAGO DEI

Imago Dei is a theological term, applied uniquely to humans, which denotes the relationship between God and humanity; or describing the consciousness of being made in the image of God; discovering and instituting completeness within oneself. Imago = imagine, or creation and Dei = Deity, or the complete spirit within.

I will go a little deeper. I have said before that, ‘The Universe will re-arrange itself accordingly’. This means that our own creative powers manage our expectations. What we expect becomes our reality; our experience. Therefore, the best way to predict our life path is to create it. In **Genesis 1:26**, God said, “Let us make humans in our image, in our likeness.” (Whether this was an occurrence that actually happened or it’s a narrative / analogy I’m not going to debate.)

The point is that God, our Higher Power, is the Creator and we, being in God’s likeness, are then also creators. As I have said, we know where we are today because we thought it yesterday. We know where we will be tomorrow because we are thinking it today. Thoughts are things; thoughts create things.

Because this is, in some form, a relationship book, be it a relationship with another person or the relationship we had with our addiction, or even the relationship we have with ourselves and our additive nature. I will add in this morsel to get your head around. At many marriage ceremonies we hear the celebrant quote a verse out of the Bible, from **Genesis 2:24**: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two will become one flesh.” Today we can apply this to a marriage, a common union, or a form of relationship as above. Science will tell us that the more we have sex or the more we relate with a person the more our brains sync together. Make two people into one person and we have a co-creator at our side.

Another way I can put it is to say that I was in common union (I had married) with my addiction. Therefore, my addiction was co creating my future, influencing my experience, direction and life. So, picking the right person or behaviour to help you cocreate your life is a good idea, otherwise you may be living a life you are not happy with, or you won't agree with the direction your life is going and have conflict and confusion in your life.

As Imago Dei can be described as becoming complete within oneself; our physical nature and spiritual nature combined into the one person we are today and our life objective is self-discovery. When we attempt to do this it is often called 'finding one-self'. This is one of those life tasks that almost everyone wants to do. It's a journey of self-understanding; finding out who we are, what we are about, what we actually want, what our purpose is and the meaning of life. When we discover this, we can walk through the world with confidence, stand on our own two feet, even under pressure and in the difficulties life throws at us. We can manage the loss of dear ones, whether by death or choice and always be developing personally. Through being complete in ourselves, no other person can really rock our world to its foundations, because our foundations are not 'out there,' they are 'in here'.... "The Kingdom of God is within you." When Imago Dei is not present in our lives there is a feeling of incompleteness; a lack of confidence, fear of the future.

Life is a struggle and we believe that we need other people, or things, to feel complete. Often there is a subconscious element to this belief pattern, which emerges into our conscious thoughts, where we are looking for another significant individual, or material things, to complete us or to create an image that we put forward to the world; the house, the cars, the social media profile, etc. How many of these people talk of an emptiness, even though they possess what we would term as ‘everything’ — the fame, the fortune, the lifestyle and all the trappings that go with it.

We may have a concern about being alone, so we invariably look for that missing piece of ourselves in the form of a partner or an identity that others perceive us through. This person or image that we portray is the entity that we use to fill that void. We are ingrained with the idea of the ‘happily ever-after story’.

This void has a set of rules, ideals and patterns that we think can make us whole again. We believe that once we have found this one true person, or all the ‘stuff,’ we will be whole again. This puts a massive expectation on that person or that image we portray and the ‘stuff’ we want, as we have fabricated a story of ‘Once I get there I will be happy.’ Now there is the task of living up to our expectations that those things are the missing pieces in our lives.

When this whole idea falls short of our expectation, we are disappointed, and too often disappointed in ourselves and those around us and we lose our zest, zeal and hope in life. We may

suffer from depression; I know I did. I went through years battling depressed feelings, filling my life with the next shiny attractive thing I could get my hands on, like the ‘magpie’ — attracted to the next shiny thing to fill our nest up with. I had the Ferrari, the big boat, the big house, the marriage, the big mouth... and I still felt like crap under the surface. I said marriage, only because we both married the wrong person (and I didn’t mention the children because they were the only real value in it all).

What I was experiencing was what I later came to realise was an existential crisis. The depressed feelings were due to the purposelessness of my existence. Apart from my children, my life was void and trying to fill that void was futile as it had no bottom; nothing could fill it apart from finding true purpose.

This void is a place in our heart that has been referred to as a ‘God shaped hole.’ Purpose is a spiritual concept, so it takes a spiritual concept to reconcile a spiritual circumstance that needs resolution. I have now resolved this void by finding my purpose. This begs the question, what is your purpose?

It could be children, business, or anything. However, discovering our purpose, to me is the mathematical answer to Stephen Hawkins’s equation — ‘the theory of everything’ — for each one of us. All we are given in life is an = equals sign and it is our choice what we put in front of it and behind it. We are fully equipped as humans to complete the equation that is unique to ourselves.

The word 'disappoint' is interesting, because it means to remove the appointment of a person or thing. We realise that person, or that stuff is not the thing we held such high hopes for to make us feel complete, so we remove them in our mind as a place holder of the idealism we had set for them. They are not 'the one' and we end our relationship. Or we go on living in that relationship with the knowledge we have sold ourselves short, settling for someone we just know is not right, all the while wishing we could go out and find our matching puzzle piece and start all over again. We realise that materialism and what others think of us will not give us that deep sense of happiness that we long for. We then have a hole in our heart once again and, to an extent, feel a sense of emptiness.

Only this time we are empty in a relationship rather than on our own. Ending a relationship is traumatic at the best of times. Or we feel unfulfilled with all the 'stuff' but we get on the cycle of more, more, more. Ending a relationship with an addiction is like defeating our dragon.

I do not really want to write this but I will. My second wife was a rebound relationship. Both of us had come straight out of an unhappy first marriage. We were good friends but incompatible lovers and we crossed the line that we should never have, and tried to put there what never was and never could be. Sporty Spice (Melanie C) sings a song, 'Never be the same again.' One line goes: 'I call you up when things go wrong, you're always there, you are my shoulder to cry on. To take the forbidden

step, is there something that I might regret.’ Well, in this case there was and it did go horribly wrong. We should have stayed friends. Friends are there for each other, but nothing more.

I started drinking with her and when she finally left I stopped drinking (fully my error and I own it all the way). She once said, “I thought you were my knight in shining armour, but you’re just an arsehole” and an arsehole I was. It took me a few years to develop a drinking habit, starting with light beers just to be sociable. I did not want the carbs at the time because I was into fitness and I didn’t even like the taste, but I thought I needed the image to fit in.

I ended up a full blown weed smoking, binge drinking, rehab and hospital visiting alcoholic train wreck, with all the trimmings — the financial disaster, pain and shame that goes with it — and what a disappointment to her I was. The best thing she ever did for me was kick me out for the last time. I fully deserved it and I absolutely needed it. A couple of months later I woke up in a detox centre, after one more damn good relapse binge. I have never touched the stuff again. It was my personal dragon.

To put a further spin on the dragon analogy, I don’t think we actually fully kill it; we tame it — like breaking a horse in and we make it our pet that we have control over. It does what we say, instead of the other way around. Alcohol and other things will always be there for me to relapse into. However, I just do not feed the dragon. I keep it starved. What do I mean? I could not

give up alcohol, cigarettes, substance and other things ... I could stop but I could not stay stopped, so I reduced my intake of them to a level that I am comfortable with and is sustainable for me. That level is zero. Zero can be yours too, so we have to reduce our addictions to zero and at zero we intend them to stay. This perspective can be a great relief for us and helps us whenever the dragon raises its voice at us with temptation. We tell it to be quiet, and it does. Back to the cage it goes, because it is starved it has no power to fight with us.

Back to my Ex... when she met me I was a sober, clean living property developer, and I ended up being an 'imposter' in her life, and my own. How it all happened is beyond me but it did. Remember the Hitler analogy from the 'How did I get here' chapter? ... That's how!

We have all had this type of relationship, where we once thought a person or stuff was our Imago Dei and they were not. Often we have had several relationships where we experienced variants of the above, especially where addictions are involved. Add children to the equation and the situation becomes amplified. What has all this got to do with spirituality? Everything!

The core of spirituality is love, acceptance and (despite many peoples' views), pure logic at its best. The balance to spirituality's 'love' is truth. Love and truth go hand in hand, because you can't have love without truth, and you can't have truth without love. If I am true to you I show you respect, honour, equality, empathy,

forgiveness, understanding and support. I care for your wellbeing, I defend you against other people's negativity, against harm and against loss. What I have I willingly make available to you. I am honest with you, even when there is nothing in it for me — and I sure as hell don't talk badly about you behind your back! All these things are expressions of love; in fact they are love.

Relate this statement to self-love and re-read it... 'If I am true to myself, I will show myself respect, honour and so on...' We will find that our Imago Dei resides within and we will find all the completeness and security that we are looking for on the outside is what we already possess.

We can actually have a relationship with stuff as well. Some guys have a relationship with their cars or motorbikes. Sounds strange? Let me explain. It's called 'personification'. Personification is ascribing an identity, value and emotion to things by giving them living human attributes (the technical term is anthropomorphising). We hear advertising on TV like, 'This car has spirit' or 'This new brand of boat has soul'. Once we have taken on this idea and we have ascribed personality to the thing; 'This is a darling of car' ... 'She is a beauty of a ship' ... 'I love my house' we are duped. The inanimate object now has human attributes, we can then give it a personality, then the door is open to for us to express emotion towards the identity we have given the thing. We often term this emotion 'love'.

Thus we can show love to that thing, when really the car or boat is still a thing and if it was pulled to bits it would look like a junk yard, a mechanics workshop or a lumber yard. We can apply this principle to any structure on earth, be it a computer, jewellery, a house or even a mountain (I say mountain because some can find belonging in a place). The philosophy of ‘place’ is an interesting topic, but I am not at liberty to say anything about it here.

However, if you get a chance, google it, have a read and come up with your own conclusions. Wrongly placed love for money or material things can steal away the time, emotion and love that is reserved for the family or the significant other, thus devaluing what real love should be reserved for; people and our Higher Power. Therefore it could be said, ‘love objects (verb) to loving objects’. Why do I mention this?

Where this runs deeper into the spiritual area for us is that (as I have previously stated) we can develop a relationship with addiction. My addiction was my worst enemy dressed up as my best friend. In truth I loved my addictions to the point I gave them free rein in my life. Addictions tend to feed off our spirit, soul, body, relationships, resources and self-value, until we become empty, sick, tired, broke, alone, shamed and, in my case, lost my freedom. This is a common story — a spiritual journey through the dark side, until we come to realisation and, just as Al Pacino said in his ‘Every given Sunday’ speech, ‘we fight our way back to the light’ (I use repetitions like this often, because they help to embed important concepts into our minds).

There is a great verse in John 10.10 (NLT Bible): “The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.” Isn’t this the truth? The enemy — our addictions and other energy thieves — come to steal our future, kill our dreams and destroy our relationships, finances, jobs, health, resources and things that are of value in our life. However, through Christ, as explained earlier in this chapter, and recovery, full restoration is available to us at any time. It has been said that addiction is giving up everything to gain one thing and recovery is giving up one thing to gain everything. It did take time for us to get into addiction and for addiction to slowly consume the amount of our lives that we allowed it to, so recovery will take time — to restore our lives and support us to become the best version of ourselves. Journey in, journey out, journey up.

Back to love and truth. Truth without love is brutality and bullying; stating a negative fact about you without seeking ways to overcome the problem. This is not truth at all, it is a counterfeit. Love without truth is not love either ... how can it be? It’s a lie. It never was love at all; it’s just a lie waiting to be exposed for what it is. Love without truth is inauthentic; it has an agenda to get what it wants and move on, to stay until the supply gets exhausted and there is nothing left to get.

Then it will look for other forms of supply; another host to feed off. It’s a salesperson showing an interest in you, showing care and empathy in the hope of a sale. Once the deal is done, they

are gone, onto the next person to get the next sale. I know this strategy well.

I was the top real estate agent for my city. We were trained expertly in how to manipulate people and their emotions to close the deal, and be paid the commission. Of course, the company didn't frame it like that, they called it 'sales training'. The ploy of the sales agent, in any business; be it insurance, houses, widgets, etc, is to get your trust.

Once they have your trust, they can then empty your pockets. Call it what you like, a spade is still a spade. Even if it is amongst a pile of shovels with the label saying, 'shovel' on it, it's still a spade. A person may say all the right things and do all the right things to gain your approval, to edge their way into your life for their own agendas. There is no truth about this so called love. This performance-based love is called 'cold love' because it was not actually love in the first place.

Protect your heart until the one you want to partner with proves to be trustworthy. I have partnered with many things in life; a church's vision of being bigger (just to see it close down), a business startup that I put my heart into (just to see it fail), addictions, relationships that failed and so on. In **Proverbs 3:23** we read, "Guard your heart with all vigilance, for from it flows the source of life." This could also be considered spiritual protection.

By shielding our heart (our innermost being) from loss, manipulation, false beliefs of others or addictions (believing they are better, or different, than they are), we protect our heart from sorrow and regret and safeguard our very life-force by not giving our power away to be misused by others, or addictions, or ideals that end up nowhere.

Protect your hunger for life and your purpose from energy thieves. You can't blame a snake for biting, that's what snakes do! Addiction (whether it's to a thing or a person) is just doing what addiction does. You just have to get out of the way so it doesn't bite you. So leave it alone and stay true to your purpose. I'm not saying any person is a snake; it's just a good analogy to embed the moral of the story.

As difficult as it is, it's our responsibility to find ourselves in this life. I love the verse in the Bible about Jesus (**Hebrews 5:8**) that says, "He learned obedience by the things he suffered." Often it's through our difficulties that we are forced to discover ourselves.

A friend of mine, John, was a self-confessed workaholic. He had little time for family, other relationships or personal development. A large piece of metal fell on his ankle and he was hospitalised for a few weeks. Afterwards his movement was restricted. He often reflects on this time as a pivotal period in his life, when he had a self-realisation that his lifestyle was dysfunctional. This accident changed his life. He is a much nicer person to be around now. He re-evaluated his life, reduced

the amount of time he spent at work and gave that time to his family. It was a spiritual awakening for him. His faith has grown deeper, he is happier and more complete, and he now has a great family life because of it. As with John's story, relational, physical and emotional difficulties in our lives can either shut our spirits down or we can take the opportunity to re-align our values, re-invent ourselves and make changes, to become the person we always dreamed of becoming.

SURRENDER TO YOUR PURPOSE.

Surrendering to your purpose sounds like an oxymoron, but it is quite the opposite. Our heart; our inner being or 'our true self,' knows exactly who we are and how to get there. People talk about listening to their inner voice; their intuition, or gut. However, too often we follow our head and end up in a place we wish we had not gone to. Our inner self knows.

Think of all the red flags that our gut knew about in life or in relationships, or the green flags of go that we didn't follow in our lives or in relationships, due to the fear of past negative experiences repeating themselves. We then missed out on opportunities that someone else took and they got all the rewards that would have been ours if we had just taken the risk, based on the merits of that particular opportunity. The 'would have, could have, should have,' opportunities we would take if we had our time again in life; be it in relationships, investments,

career choices, opportunities to travel or directions in life... the list goes on.

We went forward into a relationship that was unsustainable and we tried in vain to 'put there' what was missing. Think of the times we were so stubborn that we couldn't say sorry or forgive and held on to resentments. We squashed our inner conscience self-talk and a life opportunity or relationship that was good for us ended.

Hanging onto our pride is a relationship killer and extinguishes opportunities. Think about this slowly. Purpose creates meaning and meaning creates being. Being is spiritual. Being is what it means to be human, so finding one's purpose gives the human their 'being,' thus purpose completes the human being. Simply put, our purpose in life is to live a life of purpose. We could exchange the word purpose for the word mission. Mission has Christian and corporate connotations, but 'purpose' crosses all spectrums.

At any time in the process of recovery we can dramatically speed up our recovery from the difficult effects of our addictions by concentrating on our own success and on learning to thrive in life again. While this is easy to describe, it is challenging to implement. However, the rewards are well worth the effort, and once you begin you will wish you started sooner. To thrive again and find any real long-term joy, we must find our purpose. Do the work and get the treats.

Purpose is undergirded by two forces in our life; truth and responsibility. We are our own responsibility; we give account of our lives to our future self. So with the effort we put in today we will reap rewards in the future and our future self will either be pleased with us for picking up our responsibilities and hitting our goals, or not. This is a continuous event, so we take our responsibilities daily. If we miss a day, we make sure we don't miss two days. We try not to finish our day in worse shape than we began it, or we learn from that and don't repeat the same mistake twice.

Our heart is calling us. All we need to do is to follow it. It sounds simple but it is difficult. I am in my 50's and I knew my purpose at the age of 25. I got started on it but I got distracted. I thought that was due to having a family, but when my son was born I then realised I had a responsibility towards my children, as their father. From then on my children were included as a large part of my purpose. In retrospect, I have come to realise that my children are my foremost primary purposes in life, second only to myself, and if I'm not an appropriate father and grandfather to them I may lose them from my life. In other words, we are our own responsibility first. I didn't want to be a drunk purple faced grandfather in the corner of a room, nursing a bottle.

I think a lot of men don't realise how much their children are their purpose and they miss a window of opportunity that will never be repeated. Once the children have grown up there are no second chances. I thought I had children but, in reality,

my children had me. They actually made me mature, and grandchildren really made me get my shit together.

I re-entered the other aspects of my purpose at the age of 31, for a few years, but then I went through my first divorce. I started back on my purpose, to support others, a couple of times after that. But life, alcohol, addictions and other difficulties prevented me from surrendering to my purpose. So, I only surrendered to my purpose again a few years ago, and this time it is worth more to me than almost anything.

You may have been living in your life's purpose and lost your way, but the main thing is to realise that now is your time to get back to that purpose, whatever your age or the situation you are in. Put the intention out there and start thinking. The universe will re-arrange itself according to your intention (remember, 'Pop the QWF').

I was discussing this topic with a person I have been recovery coaching with (finding one's purpose is one of the most common themes in recovery). They were talking about their options for the coming year and throwing up ideas. Because we had already had a couple discussions, I could see that a spark came into their voice and their body become more upright when they mentioned teaching.

This time they ebbed and flowed in and out of ideas, then they arrived at philosophy. I questioned, 'Why that?' I already knew the answer, but coaching is not about me, it is about their

own discovery, so I must keep my mouth shut and open my understanding — otherwise I will steal their thunder and their self-realisation, then they will not have an epiphany and will lose their self-empowerment. I enquired, “What else?” They said they had considered other options, and it was down to teaching and philosophy. I asked, “What gives you the most juice, the most excitement, the most meaning?” They replied, “Teaching.” So I said, “It sounds like you have answered you own question.” Then they said, “You know what, I think I have”. They used to teach Arts at University but they had lost their way a couple of years before, due to a life challenge and a relationship loss.

I received a text thanking me so much, because they had ‘found themselves’ and decided to reenter University employment and take further education in teaching. I didn’t do anything. I just reflectively listened, supportively questioned and let them ‘come back to themselves’. When this happens, a life is changed, and it’s worth more to me than ten property deals. This self-realisation happens in the moment, whatever happens after is up to the person.

If you are in recovery, or are battling with the challenges of addiction and relapse, this is an opportunity to autonomously apply your purpose to your life, without the complication of what active addiction brings.

Recognition is the first step to the realisation of your purpose. Your purpose is to succeed in your life. Fulfilment is the definition of success. So, put together, living your purpose is living a fulfilled life. Then you can define yourself as a success.

Caveat: the journey is the success, not the destination. Simply put, success is a progressive realisation of a worthy purpose.

Often we find our spirituality in our weakness; in our difficult times, in times of separation. It may be that we have to go to the low places, the dark places to really appreciate the value in ourselves; who we are ... and to embed this in our own value in life and the value of our purpose. The power of this realisation is in 'comparison'. In the good times we compare good with great, so the comparison loses its definition; like a light turned on in the daytime. But in dark times, when we compare bad with great, the comparison shines bright; like the light turned on in the darkness ... and we value it so much more. Then we never want to let our purpose go again. It took me the pain of another separation and nearly losing everything to really discover my purpose. Experience costs blood.

What gives you your 'juice' in life. What have you done that you felt enthusiastic about? Remember the root word for enthusiasm means 'Full of God'? [2] What inspires you? Once you know this, make it your primary goal and build your other goals around it.

Without purpose, even if you reach your goals, you will find yourself unsatisfied. Finding purpose is finding what is really valuable to you. It is said, if you can find your ‘why’ you can find your ‘how’ (how you are going to achieve it). To put it another way, the bigger your ‘why’ the smaller your ‘how’. Often when I am talking with people I am supporting, they describe how they have a sense of fear, or feelings of being paralysed by their ‘how’ (how do they achieve what they want) and their paralysed ‘how’ becomes their ‘don’t’ so they don’t achieve their wants. Did you know that the brain cannot picture a ‘don’t’? If I say to you, “Don’t imagine an ELEPHANT,” what is your reaction? You get the picture of an ELEPHANT in your mind (like you never even heard the word “don’t” in the sentence). So just do what needs to be done right now. Concentrate on your ‘why’ and your ‘how’ will reveal itself.

I find the word ‘don’t’ a fascinating concept, I have never heard this before from anywhere. Where does rebellion come from ... mainly from the word ‘don’t’. If we cannot picture the word ‘don’t’ then rebellion is an anatomical mental reaction; a deeper psychological level where we feel we have to resist something. If someone says, ‘Don’t touch this’, we can automatically feel like touching it and we have to resist that urge not to touch it. A lot of studies with children have proven this. This is why it is so important to have positive self-talk rather than using commanding self-talk.

When we use commanding words like, ‘can’t, don’t, have to, must not’ we put ourselves under duress and have to use our energy to fight rebellion. So we can either say, ‘I can’t,’ or ‘I must not’... or we can say, ‘Today I choose to let go, and I feel free’. Which of those two statements feels better when you say it? The point I am making is that you can build on a positive but you cannot build on a negative. For addictions we can say, ‘Today I choose sobriety,’ and we can put positive words behind it like ‘and I feel good about it’. Thus recovery becomes easier to achieve.

Our task then is just to have faith as opposed to resisting fear. Take the next step and the following steps will appear. If you are walking towards your purpose, then by default you are walking away from your trauma and addictions without even trying. Trust the process, it works.

A QUICK LOOK AT RELIGION

A spiritual chapter isn’t complete without a bit of religion in it, so let’s have a quick look at what religion really is. Let’s get it straight out of the Bible so you can quote it in the future. This way I am not having any persuasion here. As I said at the start of this chapter, if you can’t explain something simply, you do not know what you are talking about. Let’s see if I am true to my word.

Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and not let this world make you evil. (**James 1:14**)

In the old days the widows were almost helpless, as it was basically a patriarchal society. Men had all the say and control, and the widows and orphans were not cared for by society. Today, in most Western societies, we have a social welfare system. We pay our taxes, right? Yes! Even if you are on welfare, welfare is an entitlement and most often it is taxed. So our taxes go the government.

The government allocates basic provision to the widows and orphans, so, boom, you are half way there (it's not your fault if the government misappropriates the tax revenue). If you pay your taxes willingly you will feel like you are contributing to healthcare, education, infrastructure, etc. By practicing the giving intention you are a blessing to society and attract blessing back into your life. If you pay your taxes grudgingly you will feel like you are having something taken from you; a negative perception or at least an annoyance and you may be challenged with a sense of lack in your life. If you don't care, you may be missing out on blessings available to you. Life is all about perception.

Next, just try not to live an evil lifestyle. Sure we all do things wrong every now and then, but just make sure you don't go out there with intention to do evil. This is religion 101. Do this and you have most of your religious service done.

Next, the love stuff — straight from the mouth of Jesus: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. This is a first and greatest command; the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (Matt 27 V 37-40)

Now the question becomes, 'How do we love God?' There is a picture of love in **Romans 12:10** ... "Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honouring each other." So, breaking it down, we all have a view of God that is developing as we take time to learn more about God throughout life. When we love God with genuine affection this uses our heart and we delight in honouring him.

To honour is to put first with intention, this uses our mind and soul. It could be said this way; live life from an eternal perspective. We do this by doing the next right thing, to our best ability. No one can do better than their best. We make mistakes; that makes us human.

Part two is straight forward; treat others as you want to be treated. These are simple but difficult to consistently practice. However, as I said, we are human, so intention is the key to it all. The last statement from Jesus is a big one: "All the law and prophets hang in these two directives." This means what it says — the whole of scripture is contained in these verses, so take these to heart, close the book and sleep easy.

As most of us have jobs, children and bills (or at least two out of the three) we can't really get a one way ticket to India and do the Mother Theresa thing. If we want to feel like we are making a contribution to the world, we can find the answer directly from Jesus. The people asked Him, "What must we do to accomplish the deeds God requires?" Jesus replied, "This is the deed God requires, to believe in the one whom he sent" (**John 6: 28-29**). Jesus was talking about himself here.

In conclusion, with religion, Christianity, or whatever term you use, you can see it's quite simple. Pay your taxes (willingly if you can), refrain from doing evil things (intentionally), have God honouring thinking, treat others well (make your best attempt to) and, to complete it, believe in Jesus; the ideal of good. I personally believe in what is called 'Atonement'. I can't make amends for all my wrongdoings, so Jesus paid the price for me by his work on the cross (he atoned for my errors on my behalf).

Thus he restored my relationship to God. In short, 'Atonement' is about reliance on Jesus rather than effort from me. Sounds simple? It is. If the above belief system works for you, you are free to adopt it. Keep it simple and don't let anyone try to confuse you with complexity. I don't.

PUTTING THINGS IN CONTEXT

To wrap this chapter up I want to present you with another idea: ‘There is no such thing as a maverick atom’. I think this concept, while natural, is also very spiritual. I was down by the beach with my son and one of my daughters not long ago, having a coffee. We were just chatting generally. We got onto the subject of putting life into perspective (people often say to me ‘*When do you ever stop thinking!*’). I floated the idea that there is no such thing as a maverick atom. We know that the basic elements in the universe are atoms (without getting into Quantum Physics). I reminded them that they learnt about atoms at high school, in the Atomic Table. After I unpacked this concept my daughter said, ‘Dad, you need to put that in your book.’

It’s a bit of a mind bender, but here it goes. Atoms make up molecules and molecules make up cells. There are about 100 trillion atoms in a cell and there are about 100 trillion cells in the human body, so you can see the numbers of atoms in our body is definable; written as 10^{28} . That is 10 with 28 zeros behind it.

On earth there are about 1.33^{48} atoms in total, according to the US Department of Energy’s Jeffer son Lab. John Carl Villanueva states that the known universe contains between 10^{78} and 10^{82} atoms in it. [3] How amazing is it that humans can work these things out? Having studied astrophysics at university and looking at the models used to arrive at this conclusion, I can see the rationale behind Villanueva’s theory.

The word ‘maverick’ means independent or non-conformist. Because there is no such thing as an ‘out of control’ atom, God, or the Grand Architect, the Universe (or whatever you may call the higher power), knows the placement of every atom in the universe. Nothing escapes God’s notice.

Scientists tell us that the universe started the size of a small dot and went BANG! Universe! Uni=1 verse=statement, so the universe is 1 statement, ‘Let there be’...and there was (**Genesis 1**). Jesus said, ‘If you have faith like a grain of a mustard seed... nothing will be impossible for you.’ (**Matt 17:20**.) Was he saying it all started with a compressed piece of matter (the mustard seed) and ‘BANG’ creation exploded — just like the scientists say? He very well may have been. He was one smart guy! So let go and let creation take its course in your life. Surrender to your purpose.

There is another saying, which most people know: “God knows the number of hairs on you head” (**Luke 12.7**). When Jesus said this, he was describing how valuable you are to God, and how much God knows about you. Why the hairs on our head?

There is a concept that we live with a headless perspective in the world. We can see the entire world, our bodies, and every other person, but we cannot view our own head. Mirrors are a recent invention and even then, it’s hard to see the back of our head. How hard would it be to count the number of hairs we have? We can put into context almost everything ‘out there’ but often

we cannot put into context the things going on ‘in here’ — in our own head. God was saying he knows everything about us, especially things we don’t know about ourselves.

Pushing it a bit further, God knows every thought we have: The Book of Psalms tells us: “How precious also are Your thoughts to me, Oh God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand” (Psalm 139: 17-18). What a loving God!

Bringing it all together, if we look up and ‘out there,’ we see just how big everything is and how much everything is in control; the universe spinning in order. When we get hold of this grand order, bring it into our lives and see how small the issues are that we make so big in our heads (especially the emotional ones), we can let go of our control a bit, trust a little bit more, take a big breath, allow our mind to put everything back into context and allow the Creator to play a bigger role in our lives. Just know that everything will work out and let the Spirit do its work in our lives.

Then we will see how momentary our problems really are and how important it is to allow ourselves become ‘unstuck’ and release these problematic issues in our life.

If we can fix our life issues we can fix the other issues that are causing us difficulties. In my work I have discovered that putting all aspects of our lives in context is one of the most important things we can do. A lot of the things we refer to as mental health

issues are just life issues. Getting over an addiction and moving on is, to a large degree, a spiritual matter.

An addiction gets into our mind and sometimes, for years, we role play scenarios, feel used, build resentments, hurt and play the blame game, I did. Often the things we think about get out of context. We make mountains out of molehills; little things can rule our minds and steal our focus. We get stuck in life and procrastination hinders our ability to thrive and succeed in life.

By making your purpose the most important thing in your life you walk away from the things that are holding you back without even trying. Letting go is about loving yourself more and moving on in your purpose. Recovering is remembering who you are and using your strengths to become the person you were always meant to be.



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