

My Mental Jungle



Michael O'Sullivan

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Follow the author of this insightful book as he explores his personal journey of evolution, and how he learnt to find love, happiness and intimacy, something we are all seeking.

Although this book tackles how our human psychology works, it uses simple layman language and easy-to-understand examples. If you decide to take the journey of self-discovery with the ideas in this book, you will never look back.

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Dedication

“I dedicate this book to people who struggle in silence to be themselves. I believe with the support of a good ally and the ideas in this book you can learn to untangle your mental confusion and live the life you have always imagined.”

Michael O’Sullivan

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PART 1

My Journey

Chapter 1

From an early age I felt different from other people and that feeling never completely went away, but today I am beginning to understand it a lot better.

It is like my creator used a different blueprint for me but did not tell me. I always struggled with what happened to me in my early childhood and why it left me feeling confused and worthless.

Most people who know me now would be surprised by what I have just said because in their view I am “normal”, well I believe most would say that. Of course, I do appear “normal”, like everyone else I seek to be accepted in a world that is highly judgmental.

Writing this book has helped me piece together a better understanding of my blueprint and how it might differ from others. I have included many theories and concepts from a diverse range of writers, some popular and some less well known. They all had an impact on me and to give

them relevance to being human, I have written about how they informed me and changed my life.

My hope is that the ideas in this book will assist you to gain a new perspective of how your mind works, and enhance your life as they have enhanced mine.

Amongst all the ideas that I will expand on later, there is one that stands out for an early mention. It offers the easiest and most productive approach towards regaining autonomy and authenticity. It is the work of Sydney M. Jourard, a psychologist of the 70's who researched the value of disclosure in maintaining a healthy personality.

Disclosure is the catalyst for all therapies, without which they are all doomed to failure. You will read more about this man and his research later in this book. For now it is enough to accept that the success of our quest to understand ourselves depends on our willingness to disclose our most inner thoughts and feelings to another human being, someone I want to call our 'ally'.

It all started for me when I was growing up in the 40's. My parent had just lived through World War II and survived the bombs with no casualties, but times were hard. There was rationing, meat and butter were scarce, we survived on the ingenuity of my mum's cooking, corn beef pie, treacle tart and bread and dripping was a luxury.

Of course, I had very little awareness of their challenges through those difficult time, they like all parents do, protected me from the bad things. My memories of the mid 40's were ration coupons, shopping with mum at the butchers, bakers, grocers looking for cheap cuts of meat, and going to the park and sitting in the sun, something I enjoy a lot today – good memories.

Nonetheless, there was another side to my early childhood, the confusion I experienced by my parents' contradictory behaviour. For example, one moment I was there pride and joy, the good boy that never misbehaved. Then something happened, I do not know what caused it, or where it came from, but it was louder than thunder, and more scary – my father. He had lost it and vented his anger at me for something I had, apparently, done wrong.

What happened did not make sense at the time, and I was not mentally mature enough to understand what it all meant. They made me feel like a very bad child, but I did not understand why – very confusing. On reflection, I needed an ally, someone who would listen to me as I cried out my hurt and confusion, someone who knew how to listen and not judge, and understood empathy – the art of listening to my sadness and not wanting to make me feel good.

As a result of many years exploring my evolution and writing this book, it has led me to believe that...

“Today, I am that ally I did not have when I was a child, and my work is to assist people to be an ally to their ‘child’ too.”

Without an ally to listen to me and support me, I was left to make the best decision I could at the time. I decided to try harder to be good even though I was not sure of what I did wrong. All I knew was that I had better not do it again, whatever it was.

It affected me immensely as I grew up. I strived to be a good person. Unbeknown to me at the time was this was the reason for my failure. The information given to me about me was flawed.

For many years, my profession in some form or other was supporting people in their personal and professional lives. Sometimes, I was executive counsellor and sometimes mentor, not forgetting parent and friend.

I spent many hours listening to clients talking about their challenges and as a result became their 'ally', the person they disclosed to and for many that was all that was needed.

Mostly, we worked on work issues, whether sales, management or personnel, it was helpful that I had at some time worked in all these areas.

For reasons of pride or safety, we may want to compartmentalise our professional and private lives, but my experience of working with people tells me that it is not always possible nor productive to do so.

The wires in our minds (neural synapses) are so intertwined that is impossible to separate them. It reminds me of the tangle of cables that lie hidden under my desk and home entertainment units. I started off with a few cables, and as I added more equipment, it soon evolved into a jungle of intertwined wires.

My mental jungle

This is one of the ways I find helpful to visualise my mind. An expanding mesh of intertwined wires (neural connections) that developed overtime and formed what I am now calling 'my mental jungle'.

What is important about these connections is they give us meaning and understanding. They define both the world we live in and who we are (our identity). As a system of connections, they provide us with our beliefs and belief systems. It is the formation of our belief systems that is my primary interest in writing this book.

Listening to clients retelling their story was where my work usually began. At some point, we would delve into the

meaning of the story, and that would be the beginning of understanding their neural connections (their beliefs) and their complex relationships (belief systems) that existed in their mental jungle.

With the belief 'outed' and the client more objectively observant they would easily see how their belief was either misguided or misinformed. And this simple re-examination of the belief alone would lead to a life-changing decision.

Let me illustrate the point with a simple example. People usually start by telling me their story as it affects them today. During their recalling, they would use words and phrases that start to identify the underlying belief, such as:

“Every time I stand up to speak in front of people, I freeze.”

Not an uncommon situation, I am sure you agree. You could say this is not a big problem, because they probably have not been trained to speak in public. And yes, you could be right and all that is needed is training and practice – something relatively easy to change.

But not all our beliefs, including the one above, are that easy to change. For example, if probed further by asking, *“Has that always been the case”*. It might prompt the response, *“No, I was very happy to stand up and speak at primary school, until... happened”*.

Now, whatever *‘happened’* caused them to believe something new and limiting about themselves, and usually it happened a long time back in their childhood. Over time, it has become a very well established limiting belief that needs something different to a training course, an approach that can release the original trauma that set up this belief in the first place.

It is not what *‘happened’* to cause the belief-forming event above that I am interested in right now. Rather it is the understanding that some beliefs are relatively easy to change, whilst others exist at a deeper level in our minds.

Whether a belief is easy to find or not, once we have verbalised it we are capable of changing it, if we want to, that is. Not everyone does.

For some people changing beliefs is just not on. Beliefs for them are hard wired and not changeable – it would seem. To view their beliefs as misguided or misinformed would be an anathema. Beliefs must be defended at all cost, but why is my question?

Obviously, if something threatens us or our beliefs then we may be compelled to defend ourselves. But for me, there is something wrong with blind loyalty to a belief system that requires me to die or kill to defend it. The same is true when the threat is within. For example, if personal change means we must challenge one of our beliefs then our blind loyalty will want to oppose it. So this type of loyalty can be a big barrier to personal change.

Looking at the bigger picture, society works hard to maintain the loyalty of its members, without which it will fail. We are educated to play our part in society into which we were born. For example, children growing up in the British culture are taught the protocol of polite communication, such as saying 'please' and 'thank you'. More importantly, we are taught to be loyal to the core

beliefs that uphold our national or cultural identity, such as 'dying for our country' or 'British is best'.

I know I have said a lot about beliefs in this chapter, but it is at the core of the matter. Let me assure you, after many years of working with people, changing a limiting belief has a far more beneficial impact on one's life and the people you love than does living with it.

Whatever beliefs we have internalised as our own, they give us a sense of identity, belonging and security. We see them as our protection against potential 'pain' or 'threat', for which we have a natural aversion. As a consequence, we believe loyalty to our beliefs is our best option.

I want to propose a new option. One, if well supported, may rid our world of the massacre of people and the devastation of their homes and their towns. A world where who we are and what we believe is not threatened by a different culture or belief system, nor do we feel the need to be supreme over another. For the world to change thus, I believe it starts with us as individuals. I believe we must look closer to home, to our culture, to our family, and to

ourselves, because it is us as individuals who will bring about change in our world.

A quote by Thomas Harris from his book entitled “I’m OK, You’re OK”:

“Problems of the world – and they are chronicled daily in headlines of violence and despair – essentially are the problems of individuals. If individuals can change, the course of the world can change. This is a hope worth sustaining.” (Harris, 2004)

I so embrace this idea that change starts with me, you and all individuals in the world. We sit back waiting for some ‘leader’ or other to bring about change and make our world better, when we have the power to make it happen. It starts with us! This is the reason I have written this book. I want to offer ways to enable change in the world starting with us.

So why me, why this book?

I consider myself to be the average Joe on the street, without private education or privileged parents. I was

brought up in a maisonette in London, which had one and a half bedrooms to house two parents and three children.

At the age of sixteen, when my two sisters got married and left home, I inherited the box bedroom all to myself!

Writing books was never on my radar, rather having a job, buying a house and having children was! But here I am today writing a book.

Throughout my life I have been saddened by the lives of people I know, whose happiness and aspirations have been limited by misguided beliefs; and to the best of my ability I have helped them to aspire to greater things. I am also deeply saddened by the hurt that is inflicted on people around the world every day.

Many of us have the desire and possibly duty to influence and persuade others, such as parents, teachers, politicians, advertisers and activists. For some it is a way of earning a living, for others it is a desire for a better world for us and our children. Writing this book is my chance to influence something. Through the media of the written word, I want to influence and assist individuals to change beliefs that

hold them back or cause mental stress or illness, or are a threat to themselves or others.

I want this book to stimulate your thinking on how to achieve this, and to gain new insights and perspectives of being human.

Along my journey of self-discovery, I have realised the many ways society has embedded its belief systems into my psyche. By changing them I have turned my mental jungle into a place of peace and opportunity.

On my journey, I was helped by hundreds of fellow travellers who too were searching for something better than what they had. I invite you to join us on this journey of self-discovery where turning 'your mental jungle' upside down or inside out enables you to live the life you have always imagined in peace and harmony.

Chapter 2

My Role Models

This title came to me whilst I was making a list of people I wanted to include in this book. I had a sense of who they might be, but did not reckon on how much they had influenced me and the writing of this book. Some are people I have known personally and some are people I have never met, but wish I had. You will see why as you read on.

Writing about them raised my self-awareness, in particular in the way my personality was formed. Also, it raised my self-acceptance (warts and all) in ways that had not been possible before. Not surprising then when I say I feel more in charge of my life, like at last I have accepted that I made choices about what I believed when I was young and today I can make new choices if I so wish – such a freeing up place to be.

I have not written about the people in any particular order. And yet, it does appear to follow the chronological path of my personal evolution. So there was some sense of order in my head as I wrote, starting with my parents, naturally.

Family members

The first and the most important influencers of my early years were without doubt my parents and close family members. I was born when my two sisters were aged 5 and 8 years. As I was the last born in my family, I had no younger siblings.

I am sure the difference in age to my older siblings was an important influence on my upbringing. I never had a younger sibling to look after like my sisters. I am convinced by being the youngest in the family I got lots of attention from my sisters as well as my parents. And in the 40's, there was definitely a gender bias towards boys, and I was a boy.

My father always made claim to his Irish origins. He was actually born in Devonport Devon England, and when

pushed on the matter he would claim he was conceived in Ireland. There was no doubt that his father, my grandfather, was Irish. He was born in County Cork and had a strong Southern Irish accent which I never understood. He did migrate to Devonport where my father was born, so there might be some truth in his claim. He obviously aspired to be Irish, as everyone who knew him, called him 'the mad Irishman'.

His parents moved to Woolwich when he was very young. Consequently, his formative years were spent in the East End of London. So, he became a hybrid, conceived in Ireland, born in Devonport and brought up in London. He was, in my opinion, typical of someone from the East End of London.

My mother, also an East Ender, was born into a large family of 8 brothers and sisters. As was usual in her time, she was out working at an early age as a waitress in the managers' canteen of a large dockside company. This is where she met my father. Apparently, he would turn up outside the canteen on a motorbike wearing a white polo neck jumper looking very dapper. He was very persistent

(so I was told), and it seemed she had no choice but to go out with him and in due course married him.

They lived with their two young daughters close to the docks of London. With the impending outbreak of war they moved to Northolt in Middlesex, away from potential danger, so they thought. They rented a maisonette (well you did in those days) which backed onto the wireless station for Northolt Airport where the American Air Force was based. Was that any safer than the docks? As it happened it was, no bombs landed where they lived, but some were close.

I was born towards the end of the war, which according to my mum was the biggest relief of her life because my father was not going to give up until he had a son.

I cannot recall much of my early life, but I do remember going to the park with my mum on sunny days. It was very quiet there as most people were at work and children were at school or nursery. For some reason, I did not go to nursery. As a result, my socialisation did not really start until I went to school at the age of five.

My first day at school quite honestly shocked me. I had not experienced children like that nor what they did to each other. Why was the girl sitting next to me always pinching me? I did not know why, but she did hurt me. And the boys were always having rough and tumbles as they rolled around on the floor pulling each other's clothes and shouting, I had no idea what it was all about! It was all a bit crazy and scared me – I was obviously easily scared by this time.

To everyone's surprise (not mine I might add), I walked out of school to look for my sister who was at the nearby junior school. I was 5 years old and I walked out of school because I did not like it! Can you believe that? I am not sure looking back, but I did walk out of school.

Already, I was a combination of my mother's passiveness and non-aggressiveness, and with little exposure to other children, lacked social skills and credibility. And yet, somehow I was able to decide for myself, which seemed very natural at the time. How did that happen, I wonder?

I believe the development of my personality all started with my mother. She was a very passive woman, she never asserted herself, and for sure not when my father was around. For certain she was a big role-model. I did spend most of my first five years entirely with her. I therefore had a lot of opportunity to copy her ways, which I believe is the primary means of learning in our early years.

Let me not forget my father who was a very noisy influence, highly reactive and aggressive, almost the complete opposite to my mother. On reflection, he was the 'dominant male' that used his temper, muscle power and loud voice to overwhelm any opposition. I was not only afraid of him; I was also highly confused by him. Needless to say he was also a massive influence over me. His explosions of violence stunned me; his large presence overshadowed me, and yet he was very proud of me. For example, if I did not understand what he told me to do, he would bash me all the way to my bed. And then, he would tell everyone how clever I was, no wonder I was confused, wouldn't you be!

Without understanding why, I decided not to copy him, well at least those parts that were hurtful to me. Now, I had a passive non-assertive mother whom in part I copied and an aggressive violent father whom in part I rejected. That just about sums me up!

But, this is not the whole story of my childhood experience or my parental role-models. I have many memories of things my father taught me that I did accept as my own. One formed a major part of my beliefs and philosophy then and today.

I remember being 11 years old and my father had just driven my grannie back home on a Sunday night. We were alone on this trip for about an hour. I do not remember how we got around to the subject of religion, but I do remember asking, "*what religion am I?*"

You can easily see my naivety at that age as I assumed we were, by some form of birth right, a religion. I did know Jewish people, I did know Catholic people and I did know Protestant people. It seemed natural for me then to ask which one I was.

His response not only stunned me into silence, but it gave me a core principle of life. He said, *“I cannot tell you what religion you are, you must make your own mind.”*

What he said that night in the car has remained with me all my life. It is a principle that I apply to myself and anyone I engage with. It is full of self-respect and respect for others, it is freedom to be oneself and make up your own mind. It is a gift I want to pass on to anyone who is prepared to accept it. Just like my father who gave it to me.

My understanding is that until we have the ability to reason and make decisions, we copy the people around us. And with no ability to assess what we are told or observe, we subsume their assets as well as their limitations, and regard them as ours for ever more. For sure, I have them both.

When I was eighteen, a surprising event took place in my home, I stood up to my father! In the past, when he was angry and shouting aggressively, my passive, non-assertive and non-aggressive behaviour meant I would wait until he finished, and then hoped it would all go away.

But this time something stirred inside me and I overcame my loyalty to my early programming and I took him on. The impact on him astounded us all. He stormed out of the room and for 3 weeks did not speak to anyone. I must have really shocked his world.

What happened? Did I rise above my programming? Did I extend my programming to assert myself? Did I ignore the potential painful outcome? Did I become someone else for a moment? I do not know; I was not even thinking about it at the time. It happened and nobody was more surprised than me.

Overlaying the foundation of my early development was the emotional traumas that I experienced as a result of doing something wrong. In my case, it was my father who dished out the punishment and the pain. I cannot recall the number of times I was sent to bed with a bashing over something I did not understand.

To this day, I still feel the remnants of his aggressive behaviour when I sense I have done something wrong. Although much reduced as result of counselling, I can still

notice those feelings today when re-stimulated. But, I know what it is about and how to respond.

What helped me was learning to counsel and be counselled, and that is how I overcame my early personality forming traumas. That is not to say, I have resolved all my traumas, rather, how many we have is not known and unlikely to be known. Resolving our traumas has to always be 'work in progress'.

My parents, I am certain, did not understand the impact they had on me when they lost their temper with me, especially when I was too young to understand. In case you are wondering why I have said parents, yes my mother did lose her temper too.

I have a saying that goes like this, '*Listen to your child's feelings, not your own*'. I believe as parents we must learn that venting our anger at our children not only traumatises them, but also teaches them a way of behaving which they will repeat later.

I remember overhearing many times people saying about me, “isn’t he like his father” or “just like his mother”. Of course I was, I copied them! The more I delve into my early programming, the more I reveal the resemblance to my parents – in both good and bad ways.

Of course, I did not end up as a perfect replica, there were others who too had an impact on my personality, as you will read later in this book. Nonetheless, copying our role-models’ behaviour and how they handle their emotions is our earliest form of learning, which lays down the foundation of our personality for ever more, unless of course we change it.

Sheila MacLeod

Fast forwarding to my work life, I joined IBM at the age of 22, personally a very growthful period of my life that lasted 28 years. It was whilst working in IBM that I met Sheila MacLeod. I was a computer engineer who had aspired to become a technical trainer, and Sheila was a personal development consultant in IBM’s own employee development centre called New Place.

We first met when I attended an internal personal development course run by Sheila. I had no idea at the time that this was the beginning of a new career for me. I was still enjoying teaching people in a subject I knew very well – how to fix computers.

I remembered an exercise introduced to me by Sheila called ‘Core Process’. In a nutshell, it helped me to identify moments in my life when things worked well for me. First I plotted a lifeline, then divided it up into significant parts of my life. With clever questioning I described what made me happy, proud and motivated in each part of my life.

By assembling my responses into a sort of personal mission statement, I was able to project into the future the continuation of my ‘core process’ (the good parts of my past life). By using the most powerful and successful resources of my past I was able to motivate my energies towards a desirable goal – great exercise.

My interest in this type of work grew when I realised how this could help me and others with life-challenging

problems, like: *who am I or what do I want to do with my life?*

It also offered me another channel for my problem fixing skills, albeit a more complex and more intangible subject matter when compared to computers – a bit scary and yet very exciting outlook.

How come fixing problems was such an attraction to me? I did work in my father's garage at the age of fifteen, repairing and fixing cars. But, by that time I had already developed the desire to fix things.

I remember being very young and feeling helpless around my father and his temper. As you know my strategy was to remain quiet and hope it would all blow over, and it mostly it did. But it was the in between times that made me anxious. When was it going to happen again? What will trigger his anger next time? What must I do to make sure it does not happen? How can I fix it so it does not happen again? It was anticipating his next emotional outburst that enabled me to fine-tune my fixing ability from a very early age.

My early programming not only included passive, non-assertive and non-aggressive behaviour it also had fixing things to avoid violence. I was seven! What is that great saying: *'give me the boy at 7 and I will show you the man'*. Well I think it has a lot of truth in it, and I am a good example of it.

It is true to say that today I still have my early programming and it can be re-stimulated by the right conditions. What is important is that I can recognise it when it happens, and know how to intervene in its patterned responses and choose a more rational response.

After many years of maturing, people would probably describe me as 'laid back', 'nothing rattles him', 'cool under pressure', a 'creative problem solver' – all are clearly cleverly disguised outward displays of my early programming.

Later in IBM, Sheila invited me to attend a course she had developed called "Fit for the Future". In the mid-eighties the technology was developing so rapidly that we were all having to throw away the old rule books and pioneer

unknown territory. There was no longer just one right answer. The objective of the course was *"To enable you to live with change and ambiguity in a creative and innovative way, so that you can respond positively and appropriately in whatever circumstances you find yourself"*.

It was new ground in corporate training and Sheila partnered with her colleague Tom Jennings pushed out the boundaries - lucky me to be invited to work with this pioneering duo.

It did not stop there, Sheila invited me to assist on a one-week residential training course for voluntary sectors managers called Creative Management Skills (CMS for short). Somehow my whole career aspirations had been turned upside down - from teaching computers to working with people. I am reminded of a quote by Goethe, which goes like this:

"If you treat an individual as he is, he will remain how he is. But if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will become what he ought to be and could be." (Goethe)

This is what Sheila did. She treated me as if I was capable of being a personal development trainer, and that is what I became – she was a big influence in my life.

After failing management assessment in IBM, I met Sheila again in the cafeteria of IBM's Education Centre. Sheila's prime influence in her work as a trainer came from Transpersonal Psychology to which she had added the experience of other personal development approaches. She told me about a counselling system called Re-evaluation Counselling (RC for short) that had been recently introduced to the IBM trainers. She spoke about its usefulness to recover one's self-esteem and autonomy. What an introduction!

And so I began to learn Re-evaluation Counselling and its excellent principles. You can read more later in this chapter under the heading 'Harvey Jackins', another person who influenced me.

So what part did Sheila play in influencing my life? First, she encouraged me to take risks, to try something completely new and outside my comfort zone. I never

really felt at risk working with computers, but now working with people in large groups of 24 was really scary. Second, her faith in my potential gently pushed the boundaries set by my early programming.

I was now working in a place where I would make many mistakes, feel absolutely bad about myself many times, and I did. But by taking on the risk of failure and exposing myself, I was made more aware of my early programming, and strangely its value to me and my new career.

It proved to be my saviour on some occasions and my downfall on others. But I did not appreciate until much later how useful my passivity and non-aggressiveness would be when working with people.

So far I have described my personality as a mixture of something I copied and something I rejected, and then added to through positive encouragement and harsh criticism. It seems to me that I am describing a simple understanding of how we develop our personality through the 'nurture' received from our role models.

Let me finish on a note of thanks to Sheila. She supported me and believed in me, and as a catalyst inspired my personal ambitions. She is the role-model to whom I am eternally grateful and strive to emulate.

Moving onto my next major influencer, mentioned earlier...

Harvey Jackins

I had no knowledge of Re-evaluation Counselling (RC). I only had Sheila's recommendation that it might be good for me. And she was right, it was. The founder Harvey Jackins, a therapist working in Canada in the fifties, had a life-changing experience with one of his clients, which he wrote about as follows:

"I tried to get a man to stop discharging [letting out emotions], but allowed him to because he was so intent on it. ...Early along the line [later] I decided it was good for him to cry." (Jackins)

Harvey Jackins used the word 'discharging' to describe someone freely expressing their emotions, in this case the man was crying. He goes on...

“When he started to shake I told him to quit and go back to crying.” (Jackins)

At this time, Harvey was not aware that shaking was another form of ‘discharge’. He continues...

“A few days later when he started to laugh I became very indignant, told him we had indications that crying and shaking helped him; to quit laughing and get back to shaking.” (Jackins)

From this experienced Harvey had found that people recover more quickly if they were given permission to ‘discharge’ their emotions, whatever form they took, for example: crying, shaking, shouting, laughing or yawning. In his book, ‘The human side of human being’ (Jackins, 1971), he clearly and extensively talks about ‘discharge’ as a natural healing mechanism.

He went on to found Re-evaluation Counselling, a counselling process that makes use of ‘discharge’ to re-evaluate past emotional hurts. It has proven very effective

and has been integrated into many different ways of counselling.

If I consider 'emotional discharge' as the goal of therapy, then my role of counsellor becomes simpler. Finding a solution is no longer my motivation but to assist the client to discharge their emotion is.

In his continued work on the healing power of discharge, Harvey noticed another phenomenon:

"While hurting, physically or emotionally, our flexible human intelligence stops functioning." (Jackins)

This was the key to understanding my childhood confusion. When someone vented their anger at me, their capacity to think clearly or take in all the information around them was taken over by their anger - a very sad state of affairs for both me and them. Harvey and his RC theory really did change things for me. Using 'discharge' I was able to recover many of my early childhood traumas. I have many examples to call upon where my father is concerned.

On so many occasions he inflicted his uncontrollable anger on me, which caused me to store away my intense feelings of shame and guilt with the memory of the incident. Never to be brought out into the open again, until I found Re-evaluation Counselling.

When I discharged my feelings of shame accompanied by much crying and shaking, I then released my anger towards him and the way he treated me. Only then did I become clear of the chronic pattern that limited me so badly all my life. It freed up my capacity to think and make new choices where there were none before.

I am reminded of the many times I worked with professionals on what appeared to be a business issue, initially. What became apparent was an underlying feeling of powerless or hopelessness, and once looked into it revealed an early childhood trauma. Once the original emotion attached to the trauma was discharged, the professional easily applied their rational intelligence to the business problem and moved on.

The theory is simple. With each stored away memory of a traumatic experience is the sensory information at the time such as what we saw or heard or touched, plus the accompanying emotion at the time, such as fear or anger, and lastly what we did to survive, our behaviour usually.

Together these three things form a distress pattern, which is repeated many time throughout our lives when the sensory input (whenever we see, hear or touch) comes close to matching the original memory.

The benefit of these patterns is they enables us to avoid the pain of the original experiences. And as a result, we are severely limited in our response by the distress pattern for evermore.

Until that is, we have the opportunity to discharge the original emotion, and that is where Harvey Jackins and his Re-evaluation Counselling comes in.

Once discharged, the distress pattern's power to influence us is drastically reduced to a mild sensation, and we are

now free to make new responses to similar situations for ever more.

You can see why I believe RC is the most effective counselling tool available. I have used it many times in my profession as mentor, counsellor and facilitator. Not only did Harvey Jackins' RC give me a way to heal myself, but it also shed light on my childhood confusion, which is now no longer!

Moving on to my favourite mentor deceased...

Sidney M Jourard

During my career in IBM, I visited IBM's Education Centre in La Hulpe on more than one occasion. One time whilst visiting the local library, I stumbled upon a very old hardback book on the shelf with a title that really took my interest. It was 'The Transparent Self' by Sidney M. Jourard (Jourard, 1971).

He was a clinical psychologist in the 60's and 70's who researched and worked in the field of self-disclosure. His book opened my mind to a very important concept:

'Openness (transparency) with at least one significant person is an essential requirement for a healthy personality.' (Jourard, 1971)

As this concept became central to all my work, many people benefited and became healthier personalities as a result. Whatever I engage in whether it is counselling, managing, or marriage, I have a healthier relationship when this concept is both observed and acted upon.

Simply put, our healthy state of mind is directly linked to how much we reveal about ourselves to another. The more we disclose, the healthier we become. It really is a magical formula for recovery from all sorts of mental distress including suicidal thoughts.

It is the experience of being permitted to be oneself with another human being who seeks to listen and not interpret or judge that enables us to reveal more, much to our surprise. Expressing undisclosed thoughts and feelings has the effect of reducing the associated tensions and increasing a sense of 'genuineness' to the outside world.

It must be said that most people will feel very vulnerable by 'telling all' to another person. It has to be with the right person and in the right circumstance. We need to feel safe with the chosen recipient of our disclosures, I know I do.

For me, the word 'transparent' in 'transparent self' now has a new definition. It means opening ourselves up to someone to know us. This type of disclosure brings about change all by itself. There is no need for a teacher, counsellor or mentor, only someone prepared to listen and not pass judgement.

Whenever I am successful as a teacher, mentor, counsellor, friend or partner, is when I am prepared to listen without judging. Anyone on the receiving on this type of listening, including myself, experiences the desperately needed freedom to speak out to another human being, and the subsequent release of tensions as we are becoming known to another.

As a result, we think more clearly, make more intelligent decisions, and move forward in life. It is a simple panacea for all troubles, which is drug-free, cost-free and effective.

Sydney M. Jourard identified the direct relationship between healthy well-being and self-disclosure, and promoted its use in therapeutic relationships.

In another observation, he presented a new and interesting perspective on mental health:

“Neurotic and psychotic behaviours might be seen as ‘smoke screens’ placed between them and the outside world, or put another way ‘devices to avoid becoming known’ (Jourard, 1971).

His use of words here is fascinating. He is now using the lack of transparency as a way to describe mental health. Used as a defence mechanism, it works to prevent some part being known to another. Truly a lot of work and stress is needed to maintain this defence. I am sure you have experienced this for yourself, like most of us have at some time in our life.

We probably learnt at a very early age how to colour our self-disclosure or at least distract from it to prevent being known or found out. This is what the listening profession

would see as ‘resistance’. If there is a skill to learn, it is dealing with the terrors that thwart self-disclosure by building a safe enough situation that ‘enables our previously un-told secrets to be told’.

This is what I think of as the skill of any listening professional, whether they be friend, mentor, therapist or counsellor. My personal growth has always flourished when listened to by someone with this skill.

One of my ambitions is to have people in my life who listen to me in this way, and in return, I listen to them in this way. Whatever your mental state, I highly recommend the process of being known by another, you can only enrich your current sense of well-being.

Eric Berne

Eric Berne wrote many books on human psychology. Probably the book he is most remembered for is ‘Games People Play’, which was a study of how people play games to benefit themselves in relationships.

His book outlines many of the games learnt as a child growing up in a family. We are not consciously aware of our game-playing but once alerted to it we can choose to stop playing.

His study focused on the exchanges between people, which he called 'transactions'. From this research came his personality theory known as 'Transaction Analysis', which is a well-regarded diagnostic tool in professions such as counselling and therapy.

It was whilst reading the concluding paragraph in Chapter 18 of Games People Play that I was stunned by the hopelessness it invoked in me.

Suddenly there was no hope for the human race apart from playing togetherness games. I felt the faith in my life's work wavering and my spirit beginning to extinguish.

I became depressed by the uselessness of my existence, not for the first time I might add. I remember feeling like this after running 'Liberating Beliefs' workshops, when I wondered why people who attended were not really

committed to the changes they had identified (once again, to my mind).

I was now in limbo-land - no purpose, no direction, no ambition and no-one to share my hopelessness – a very dark place. Obviously, somehow I rose out of that dark place and regained my sense of self-worth as this book is testament to. How did that happen?

I have this idea that if not interfered with people would go through their depression and come out the other end better for it in some way. What I mean by interfered with is someone or something trying to stop the person being sad or depressed by either jollyng them out of it (e.g. let's go out and have fun or get drunk), or taking medicine (e.g. prescribed uppers or anti-depressants). For me, they put on hold the natural process of healing that depression and sadness were evolved to do.

To underline this point, I have just read recently a post on Facebook by Cheryl Sandberg, in which she was sharing her grieving experience of her late husband who died 30 days before. In it she wrote...

“Real empathy is sometimes not insisting that it will be okay but acknowledging that it is not.” (Sandberg, 2015)

Expressing her grief and realisations publicly and to the world affirmed for me the healing power of disclosing and listening to understand, and not to ‘make well’ or ‘fix’, which seems to be an ingrained response to anyone’s sadness or grief in our society.

Not only has our body evolved mechanisms to recover earlier hurts through the discharge of emotion as exemplified by Re-evaluation Counselling, but I believe it has also evolved a mechanism to bring us out of sadness or depression called ‘boredom’.

We are very aware of our response to repetitive and unchanging activities, we become bored. It is the same for how we feel. If we are continually feeling sad or depressed for a long time, then we will become bored and start recovering our normal state of mind.

I know my depression really well, I withdraw from the outside world, I go inward, I redirect my anger inward onto myself, close down the shutters, so no-one can get in.

When in this state, I can be easily influenced by others telling me I am ill or maybe they say 'not well', or even 'snap out of it'. And, maybe I do go to the doctors just to please them!

A large part of my professional career was teaching, mentoring, and counselling. What motivated me was the belief I had in myself. But, when I thought I had got it all wrong, and I was not able to help people change, I felt depressed. My life's work and ambition was no longer. It was a dark period, I did nothing. I had nowhere to go! I was a failure!

What happened is I stayed in that place until I became bored with my depressed state of mind. Shortly, I felt the return of some self-respect, and then some self-acceptance and then that feeling of looking to the future. You know, wanting to plan, wanting to go somewhere, feelings of anticipation started to creep in.

It was then I remembered the book I found by accident in my local Doctor's surgery called 'Freedom to Believe'.

Although, I had been programmed to believe certain things as part of my upbringing, I also knew how to change what I believed and move on. And just as suddenly as my hope went, it came back. I realised I had taken on someone else's beliefs, not mine.

Today, I remind myself of the message by Thomas Harris...

"...If individuals can change, the course of the world can change. This is a hope worth sustaining." (Harris, 2004)

In Eric Berne's words, regaining our self-awareness, spontaneity and intimacy are the key to reclaiming our freedom to choose what we want our life to be. By helping individuals to change, the course of the world may change too, for me a hope worth sustaining.

Charles Kidney

On a visit to Ireland in 2005, I was greeted by a man sitting in his car on the entrance to Blarney Castle. His name was

Charles Kidney and I had no idea who he was. He started a conversation with me, which at first was a little strange.

Nonetheless, I soon learnt that this man was an author of several books, one of which he personally signed and I purchased. The book was called: *Articulating the Intangible* (Kidney C. , 1992). It was in this book of verse that I found one of the most profound observations of human behaviour. It goes like this...

“Sometimes a generation has to betray the generation before it to make progress.” (Kidney, 1992)

This gem was nestled amidst a series of muses written by Charles Kidney about the unhappy situation in Ireland. This particular muse epitomized the events in Northern Ireland in the 70’s when a group of mothers made a stand against the continuing violence that afflicted everyday life in Northern Ireland over many generations.

They started a movement called the Peace People, and at their first formal public address they made the following declaration...

“We have a simple message to the world from this movement for Peace. We want to live and love and build a just and peaceful society. We want for our children, as we want for ourselves, our lives at home, at work, and at play to be lives of joy and Peace. We recognise that to build such a society demands dedication, hard work, and courage. We recognise that there are many problems in our society which are a source of conflict and violence. We recognise that every bullet fired and every exploding bomb make that work more difficult. We reject the use of the bomb and the bullet and all the techniques of violence. We dedicate ourselves to working with our neighbours, near and far, day in and day out, to build that peaceful society in which the tragedies we have known are a bad memory and a continuing warning.” (Williams, 1976)

A very powerful and life-changing declaration for all the world to hear, from individuals who had decided that it was time to break away from the ways of the previous generations and make progress towards peace.

This muse by Charles Kidney made a big impact on me and my mental jungle. It gave me permission to think about

what my parents (previous generation) had passed down to me.

Although, I think the idea of ‘betraying our parents’ can be unthinkable to many, it is not about betrayal. It is about acknowledging all the options, including what has been passed down, and choosing the one that will make progress for us and our generation today.

Daniel Goleman

Daniel Goleman is the author of a book called ‘Emotional Intelligence’ 1995. He proposed ‘Emotional Intelligence’ as a far more valuable measure of someone’s ability to lead than the traditional IQ measurement.

I began to understand this theory when I realised it meant ‘being in control of my emotions’. An example of not using my emotional intelligence might be: ‘when someone angers me, I shout back at them and punish them’. If I were to use my Emotional Intelligence then I might: ‘at the first sign of anger, control my emotion until I understood

the situation better, and then make a more intelligent response’.

According to research, people who can do this make good managers and leaders. Try the following question for yourself:

“Who is more likely to be successful at managing you, someone who shouts and criticises you when under stress, or someone who is in control and calmly assesses your situation?”

I assume you would choose the latter, as they were obviously in more control of themselves and the situation – this is the sign of Emotional Intelligence.

As a child, I do remember suppressing my feelings when my father was raging over something. Today, I believe my early experience helps me manage my emotions, and stop them taking over my thinking and actions. In part, I think this is one of the elements that Daniel Goleman refers to in his book.

Regrettably, I can be described as lacking emotion by people who are obviously misjudging me. It does not mean I have no feelings or emotions. Of course I do, I just choose not to let them take charge of me, like so many people do!

Once again, another part of my mental jungle has seen the light. I now understand how my ability to put on hold my emotions whilst listening to people telling me their story, makes me a more effective mentor, friend, parent and counsellor.

Jeremy Clare

Meeting Jeremy was another twist in my never ending journey of self-discovery. We met one day when I was giving a lecture at an Institute of Personnel Development (IPD) conference on Executive Counselling. Jeremy boldly introduced himself at the end of my lecture and suggested we meet for a chat sometime. We did, and that was how our very long friendship began.

We were an odd partnership in many ways, because we appeared to have very little in common. Jeremy had a military service family background; I had an East End London working class upbringing. He attended officer training at Sandhurst and became a high-ranking officer in the British Army. I left school, did a butcher's delivery round for a while and ended up fixing computers. Jeremy was very committed to his Christian faith, and I was very diffident about the whole subject of religion.

At our first formal meeting in the grounds of Latimer House, it did not take us long to realise we had a common link. Our morning was spent just listening to each other, and afterwards it dawned on us how valuable that was, just to be listened to.

Remarkably, our different backgrounds did not matter. Stimulated by our belief that it would also be valuable to others, we decided to pioneer a new type of workshop, one that would give people 'a good listening to' and freedom to decide for themselves.

After eight years of working together and developing new concepts in facilitation, we assisted thousands of people to reclaim their autonomy and aspire to new heights. What we achieved in the eight years gave us a great satisfaction. By the way, Jeremy went on to write a book called “Whatever next...?” which encapsulated our work together.

We continue to meet regularly and are continually amazed by how productive our days together are. I highly recommend a day away with a good friend and listener with no agenda other than to give each other ‘a good listening to’.

Once again, I am reminded of the work of Sydney M Jourard and the importance of having someone who listens to whatever is going on in your head. Letting yourself be known to another is the key to a healthy personality. I really cannot emphasise this enough, and Jeremy is someone who influenced my life because I felt listened to and not judged.

Not Forgetting...

I am sure you will appreciate that there are many more people that played a part in my life, for example: school teachers, employers, siblings, school friends, partners and friends. But, I hope I have presented a selection of role-models that influenced me and my life.

If I have illustrated sufficient example of how people influence my personality to guide you, then I am happy. More importantly, I hope you are able to start your own research of who influenced you.

Chapter 3

Can I Change?

In the previous chapter, I wrote about my role models, the people who were fundamental in the formation of my mental jungle. The big question is can I change any of it?

I started to look at this question in the first chapter when I used the metaphor of a sapling growing into a tree, and the challenge of changing a belief whether it's relatively new or set a long time back in our development. I want to continue this discussion about changing beliefs.

In response to the question, 'Can we change?' you might respond with, "No, a lot of who you are is passed down through your genes, and therefore not changeable." Well, implied in this response is the 'nature – nurture' debate. 'Nature' being things I have inherited from my parents via my genes, and 'nurture' being things I learnt after I was born.

If I was talking about physical features or proneness to certain conditions, then I would agree that it is probably inherited from my parents - but I am not.

I am talking about the things that happened to me after I was born. I am referring to my nurture throughout this book, and not my nature, things I have learnt from people in my life. Based on this idea, I believe I have the potential to change whatever nurture has given me.

You may have similar experiences to me and relate to some of the ways I was influenced. But for sure you will have your own list of ways your nurture influenced your personality.

Of course, you are welcome to use my list as a template for mapping out your mental jungle, and it might even reveal enough for you to make changes.

Bottom line: *everything we learnt after we were born is changeable. Even so, it is not about betraying the generation we learnt from but giving ourselves the freedom*

to choose the options that make progress for us and our generation.

Born to copy

When we are born our mental jungle is more like a desert, dormant and waiting for the right conditions to start the cycle of growth. Apart from reflex reactions to hunger, pain, tiredness and cold, our 'born-with' learning mechanism is to copy people around us.

Whether a sound or a movement, we are amazed by our little ones making their first hand gestures of goodbye or hello, making their first sound of 'mama' or 'dada'. We want to believe they understand the protocol behind warmly greeting us, rather than just simply copying a hand movement.

It is the way we learn before we develop the facility to make sense of what we are learning, which comes later in our biological development. Until then, we copy the people around us, usually our parents and siblings. As we develop,

we also learn to copy the tones they use. It is the beginning of socialisation.

Bottom line: we initially form our personality by copying the role models around us. We do not have their understanding or meaning behind what they do or say, it is enough to have just copied them, usually to great approval. It is a simple form of early cloning that essentially propagates certain characteristics of our culture into the next generation.

Authority figures

As a young child, whenever I heard anything said about me, I would usually take it on board as the truth about me. Especially if spoken by an authority figure, such as my mother or father. I would also take note of the emotions displayed at the same time, such as their anger or delight.

Not only did I not challenge what they said, I did not know I had to, nor even how to. Without self-awareness and self-assurance, I was not ready to challenge them. I just

accepted what was said as the truth. As a result, what they said contributed enormously towards my identity.

Some common things people say when we are little are: 'you're a handsome boy' or 'you're a bloody nuisance', 'what a pretty girl' or 'you're a little bitch'. Whether it was good or bad, we will take it on as our own. I am sure you can recall things said about you when you were a child and you still believe them today, albeit subconsciously. It is not whether we are good or bad in a situation, but whether we believe we are good or bad.

These critical messages told to us as a child need to be re-examined. They were the view held by the person saying them, and probably tainted by how they were feeling at the time. What is critical to notice is what they said is not who you are, but their judgement of who you are (or were).

The challenge, as beautifully prosed by Charles Kidney, is:

"If we want to make progress we must betray what our previous generation told us." (Kidney, 1992)

But first we must bring back into our conscious mind the messages that we carefully stored away as a child.

Bottom line: Who we are today is in part the messages we were given by authority figures in our early childhood. These messages say more about the people who said them than they do us, and therefore it would be helpful to return them to their rightful owners.

Trauma and pain

It could be that I felt to blame for my mother leaving home. Or, I felt abandoned when my father left me in his lorry. Or, I felt pain when I was punished for doing something wrong. Of course none of these were true, my mother came back from spending time with her ill mother, my father had gone to buy me a present, and I had not been the bad boy.

Even so, all were traumatic to me. At the time, I was not able to understand. What I stored away in my mental jungle was what happened to me and the pain I felt, i.e. I felt abandoned and afraid on my own.

To make sure I would not feel like that again, I locked together the situation, the pain, and how I survived it. Then, if I ever got a sniff of a similar situation about to happen, I would be reminded of how painful it was before and carry out my survival plan as before. If this happened repeatedly and I survived it, then it was on my list of useful chronic survival patterns.

Relief from these chronics only came when I was able to discharge the original emotion in the safety of a counselling session. After which the chronic lost its intensity.

Although, I still have a little reminder of the pain, it no longer has the hold over me it once had, and I am free to choose instead of just repeatedly running my chronic pattern.

Bottom Line: Who we are today is highly affected by our early traumatic experiences, and the ensuing chronic patterns that work slavishly to save us from feeling that pain again.

Faith in my potential

What was most surprising is that I did not know the potential I had until someone told me. I had this fantasy about being a software programmer. It was the mid-sixties, so early days for computers, but it sounded fun and very creative. After 30 failed interviews, I came across an advert in the paper for computer engineers. It was not what I was looking for, but I thought I would write to the company declaring my interest in software programming and see what happens.

To my surprise, I was invited to the head office of International Business Machines, yes the one and only IBM – not really well known then by anyone, including me.

I was interviewed at IBM head office by the personnel manager. To my horror, one of the aptitude tests was electronics, something I knew nothing about. As expected, I got every question wrong on that paper, but I did fair well on the mechanical aptitude paper.

The personnel manager said, *“Have you ever thought of engineering?”* I said, *“No, not really, what would I do?”*

He then said, *“I would like you to meet the manager of the repair workshops, because I think you have the aptitude for engineering.”*

Within one hour of meeting the repair workshop manager, I was offered a job. And that was the beginning of my long 28-year career in IBM.

I started in engineering, fixing punches and verifiers, then computers, and progressed onto software, training, management, followed by sales and consultancy. It was a very rewarding and growthful time of my life, and all because the personnel manager had seen the potential that I had no idea about.

It taught me to believe in people that work for me or with me. It is amazing the effect on people when they know someone believes in their potential.

Bottom Line: Let me remind you of that famous quote by Goethe...

“If you treat an individual as he is, he will remain how he is. But if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will become what he ought to be and could be.” (Goethe)

Self-Disclosure

We can debate the rights and wrongs of suicide, but when it happens it is about how people who are left behind come to terms with it. It is a decision that has many consequences. I know because I have been close to it. I am sure many people have had that thought too, but somehow we found a way through our troubled times.

It happened to me when I kept my inner thoughts and feelings to myself, they would spiral out of control. A little like the feedback noise of microphones and speakers, once the shrill sound starts, it gets louder and louder until it is unbearable. I know this feeling; I believe many people know this feeling.

At this critical time, I knew I was not capable of thinking rationally. I can liken it to being in love with a rogue, a liar,

or a cheat. No matter what they are or do we still want to believe them and continue to love them. When we are in love with our feelings then we stop thinking rationally. We believe our feelings are the truth and nothing can shift our loyalty to them.

I return to my hero again, Sydney M. Jourard and his work on disclosure. He discovered the secret to a healthy personality, one that non-one else had ever told me. He said...

‘Openness in at least one significant relationship was a prerequisite for a healthy personality’.

That means to me, if I had someone to disclose my inner fears and anxieties to then my rational thinking will begin to outweigh my misguided feelings, leading to a healthier me.

Wow, did you know that already? Well, if you did then lucky you.

I have learnt that when I feel taken over by intense feelings, I need someone to listen to me. Not just anyone,

but someone who will listen without judging or offering solutions; someone who knows how to facilitate me, my feelings and my thoughts – a very valuable person to have in one's life.

It was in the disclosing of my feelings that I saw them for what they really were: misguided, unfounded, delusory and out of date. It was such a relief to feel sane again. I guess, without that opportunity, I might have considered suicide more seriously, maybe not to die totally but maybe part of me.

Bottom Line: Sydney M. Jourard author of 'Transparent Self' was a visionary that discovered through his work the benefit of having someone, at least one, who knows you all the way through. In the knowledge that you are known by at least one person in the world lies the secret of self-disclosure and the reward of self-acceptance.

Self-awareness

When starting a new relationship, I love the newness and the excitement of getting to know someone new. I am sure

everyone does. And yet, there comes a time when we stop asking about them, and rely on what little we have learnt about them from then on.

Using the little awareness we have of them, we are bound to misjudge them, and that is disastrous for any relationship. I am sure you have experienced being misjudged by your partner, I have. And you may be grieving the fact your partner still does not know who you really are. What may be worse is they have no interest in finding out more about you.

Now, if I consider the partnership that is probably our most important relationship, namely ourselves, we seem to do the same – don't we? Once we have gotten over the exhilaration of getting to know ourselves, we stop. We have this belief that what we learnt in our earlier years is enough to take us through the rest of our lives.

In my view this is a big mistake, one that leads us to misjudge ourselves and our situation, no different to any other relationship. When we stop growing in awareness of

ourselves, we behave like robots, we have lost our spontaneity.

Everything we do and feel just happens, in the same way a washing machine works by following the programme step by step. It is no wonder that our lives become repetitive and unchanging, and we get stuck in relationships that are not working.

Let me remind you of the words written by Eric Berne:

“For certain fortunate people there is something which transcends all classifications of behaviour, and that is awareness; something which rises above the programming of the past, and that is spontaneity; and something that is more rewarding than games, and that is intimacy.” (Berne, 1973)

He is writing about me when I am stuck in a rut or relationship because I have lost my self-awareness, I rely only on my programming, and deny myself intimacy by playing games instead.

It is an amazing piece of writing that is without doubt easier to say than do. But, if we truly want happiness, love and intimacy in our lives, then this is the way to go about it, starting with self-awareness.

I am reminded of another famous saying this time by Henry Ford...

“If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got.” (Ford)

The bottom line: the key to happiness, love and intimacy is self-awareness. Without which we cannot begin the journey of understanding our past programming, nor the games we play in relationships, nor the spontaneity and intimacy we have lost and so crave for ourselves.

Chapter 4

Heaven or hell – do I have a choice?

My reason for writing this book was to commit to paper what I had learnt during the many years I have survived this world.

Back in the 40's and 50's, as a child growing up, I was confused by many things that happened to me. Not much time was given to the psychology of growing up, and in the early years of my development I did not have the facility to understand it either.

Even with our better education and access to information, I am amazed by the lack of education for young parents to bring up children with healthy personalities.

In previous chapters, I described how my beliefs were formed, and critically how they became the biggest influence on my interpretation of the world.

As you can imagine, sometimes it was good and sometimes it was bad, sometimes I felt in heaven and other times in hell.

At the heart of this matter are my beliefs and how I use them to interpret my experiences. I am sure you know the answer to this question:

If several people happened to experience the same event, what would each recall about it? What would each say is important about it? And, how would each judge it?

I know we want to believe that we all saw the same event, but what is more likely is that we recollect the event differently, based on our individual belief systems.

How many brains do we have?

Thought I might give a layman's version of how our brains work. It is not meant to be scientific or full of jargon. Rather, a simple version that will enable further understanding of the chapters to follow.

Firstly, when we are born we have a primitive brain system, called the 'reflex system'. This system has direct neural connections between the senses and our muscles. An example is: when we touch something very hot, a signal to remove our hand is given, and we pull our hand away quickly. You may remember having your reflexes tested by a doctor with a small hammer.

Through evolution, humans developed an emotional brain, called the 'limbic system'. It uses emotions as a primitive mechanism to learn and make decisions. It uses the sensory information to search for matching past experiences. It is not as fast as the reflex system, but it does have the advantage of a limited choice of decisions. They are mostly variations of the 'flight' or 'fight' responses that I am sure you have heard of.

Our third brain, the cortex, came later in our evolution. In humans it is very large and can store huge amounts of data. But it takes a lot longer to search this larger database, compared to the limbic and reflex brains. Yet, it does provide the most flexible and accurate responses to our situations.

So you can see, we are endowed with three different brains, each has its unique selling points. Reflex for speed, limbic for flight or fight, and cortex for the more complex analysis and understanding of our situation.

What differentiates the three brains is not just speed, but also the amount of analysis and interpretation that can be applied.

Our interpretation relies on the network of beliefs accumulated in our brains. They are our judge and jury of any situation we experience today. So whether an event is perceived as good or bad, or heaven or hell depends on our interpretation, which depends on our beliefs, which in turn depends on our upbringing. If you accept my premise, then changing our beliefs could change our life.

Coming out of our shell

I think the quote by Cynthia Ocelli is worth exploring...

“For a seed to achieve its greatest expression, it must come completely undone. The shell cracks, its insides come out and everything changes. To someone who doesn’t

understand growth, it would be like complete destruction.”
(Occelli)

For me, personally, this quote not only sums up the message of this book beautifully, but also most of my life's experience.

As part of my continuing personal evolution, I was confronted by the breaking shell moment many times.

In the animal kingdom it takes place naturally as they are hard-wired to pass through all their stages. But for me, a human being with evolved emotional and intellectual brain, it is a more complex decision-making process.

We always compare the 'devil we know' with the 'devil we don't know', such as the unknown and possibly dangerous 'potential of growing ourselves'.

For many, stability and security is more important than growth; and breaking through their shell would therefore appear like 'complete destruction' as per the quote above.

It also talks about 'achieving our greatest expression', and it being the reason we would want to change. It might be attractive and motivational, but it is not the only reason for change. Sometimes, wanting to escape a terrible place is just as powerful, such as feeling depressed or seriously threatened.

Now we are stuck between the 'devil' and the 'deep blue sea'. Do we break out of our shell (possible destruction) or drown in the depths of depression (possible destruction)? It sounds like an impossible choice?

I have had many occasions where I have felt trapped by 'I am damned if I do, and I am damned if I don't'. It is not an uncommon experience.

And, when re-stimulated by an old trauma, I too might plump for the safety of my shell, even though it is not what I want. I know that I cannot think objectively, and the feelings of despair and disappointment within me are at their most damning and controlling.

Beliefs at best an estimate of the truth

The challenge with relying on our beliefs is that they are at best an estimate of the truth (and probably not our estimate) and at worse complete fabrications. It is no wonder that I misjudge and misinterpret things, but what am I to do? My beliefs are the only mechanism I have to assess an event, and to come up with a response.

Unless I know how to change them which is a challenge in itself, how do I re-evaluate my beliefs when all I have is my beliefs? Now this is the biggie!

Can you wash a blood stain from a garment with blood? No, the same is true for our beliefs because it is not possible to re-evaluate our beliefs using our beliefs?

To do this I need to find a way to be more objective, to get what I believe out of my head and in front of me, and then and only then, I might have a chance to see them more objectively.

This is where two of my three brains might help. I know when I talk out my beliefs and emotions (limbic brain), I am

able to make sense (cortex brain) of how mistaken or misguided my beliefs are. I know therefore with the help of a good listener, I can become objective about my beliefs, and then start the process of re-evaluating them.

But that begs the question, who can I trust to listen to me? Who will listen and not judge? Who will help me be objective and assist me to change?

Normally, they would be our best friend or family, but in my experience there are not many who can listen to me without wanting to save me as I disclose my suicidal thoughts, or make me feel a bad person when I disclose my shameful deeds or beliefs.

Who can give me a good listening to?

Even though I may feel too afraid to talk to someone, I do believe there is someone who can listen to me in the way I need.

It could be someone like a help-line, the Samaritan being probably the best known. Or, someone in the community who I can trust to be my confidant, like a religious or

community leader. Or, maybe someone who is very well known to me, like an old friend or partner who has a lot of history with me and a proven track record of trustworthiness. Not forgetting the listening professionals, such as counsellors, therapists, mentors and support group leaders.

My challenge is can I trust them? For instance, do I believe they will not judge me, or tell me what I ought to do? This always stops me talking, but surely that is my problem, not theirs? If I am to take the first step of disclosing, then best I decide who is right for me and how to overcome my distrust of them.

I believe the qualities we look for in a confidant are: non-judgmental, without an agenda, good listening and facilitating skills, trustworthy and confidential. These people exist, but they will need clear guidance as to what I want from them. It is not enough to expect them to know. So best I am up front about what I want from them as my listener and confidant.

For example, I could ask them to only listen, and to say nothing. This is an amazing first step. It is not only very useful; it can be all that is needed. I could go further and ask them to listen and assist me to explore my situation. Their job is to ask me very simple exploratory questions, like: “tell me more?”, “what was that like?”, “how did that make you feel?” and “what does that mean to you?”

The aim of the questions is not to inform their curiosity, but to assist me to inform myself on my situation. If trust grows, I could start to express my feelings and emotions. This alone could be therapeutic, especially if I am receiving their unconditional attention while discharging my emotions.

There are many levels to listening, each has its benefits. But, it is important to remember that we are in charge of what is taking place, not the listener. It is our responsibility to control what we say, whether disclosing secrets or discharging emotions.

This is the true art of listening and being listened to. For me, these are the critical issues to be addressed: who is

best to listen to me, and what guidance do I need to give them?

Fortunately, I have found people who listen to me in these ways, and consequently I have cleared much of my early years' confusion and misguided beliefs.

Society's view of depression

In addition to my view of depression, there is another view to contend with. Modern society sees depression as a negative state, one to be acted upon quickly. As a result, society has many ways to intervene with depression and anxiety, treating them as a disease needing a cure.

Contrary to what society thinks, I believe nature evolved many ways to keep us from harm and disease, and believe it or not, 'feeling depressed' is one of them. It raises the question, *'If nature evolved depression as a natural healing process, then why do so many people want to stop it?'*

Curiously, we believe depression is socially unacceptable and dangerous to the individual (I wonder how we learnt that belief). And yet, if we were to accept that 'feeling

depressed' is one way to resolve our troubled mind, then we might realise its healing potential.

“So are you saying Mike that I have to endure the feelings of depression for the rest of my life and not take any action to cure them?”

No, I am not saying that. I know our biggest worry is that depression will not go away and that it will only get worse. But, nature had already thought of that. It invented our natural ability to become bored with any continuing state of mind.

Let me give an example of what I mean: *try to maintain a state of happiness for as long as you can, and when it starts to wane, find something to raise it back up again. See how long you can last - an hour, a day, or a week?*

It really does not matter how long it lasts. What matters is after a certain time your mind and body will become bored with it and want to move on to something different.

The same is true of any state of mind, including depression. We can only maintain the state of depression

for a certain period of time before our boredom pushes us to open up communications with the outside world and realise what our inward journey was all about.

It raises the possibility that if we were to combine our natural ability to become bored with 'a good listening to', then we might have just found a way to choose between heaven or hell.

Surely, it can't be that easy?

Well, I am not saying it is easy, only that it works for me and for many people who I have listened to. So, why not give it a try before you engage in any of the alternatives, i.e. medication, therapy or the ultimate cure - suicide.

In summary, what I am saying is whether we experience heaven or hell is largely down to how our beliefs interpret our life events.

If we want to change our experience, then we must take a closer look at our beliefs. This we can achieve with the help of a good listener and the opportunity to raise our

awareness and change the beliefs that misguide us. If there is a simple mechanism for change then this is it.

Looking ahead to Part 2

I want to take you further on the journey of self-discovery and personal change. There will be more on changing beliefs, and managing emotions. Plus, I have presented a collection of principles that provide a framework to hang your personal journey on. It is a little like looking under the bonnet of your car to see how the engine works.

So waste no more time, find yourself a good listener and start breaking that shell!

PART 2

How change works

Chapter 5

Welcome to Part 2. It was not originally part of this book, but in response to friends and family who after reading my first draft said they would like more. So in a way I am continuing to write about my journey but with more emphasis on how change works.

I want to cover in more depth theories and concepts that underpinned my life's journey and work. You are of course welcome to make use of any of the ideas written here, some are borrowed and some invented by yours truly.

I have written Part 2 in response to a series of questions as follows...

- How does change work? (this chapter)
- Are we ready for change? (Chapter 6)
- What did we start out with? (Chapter 7)
- How do we work with our beliefs? (Chapter 8)
- How do we work with our emotions? (Chapter 9)
- Key principles of personal change? (Chapter 10)

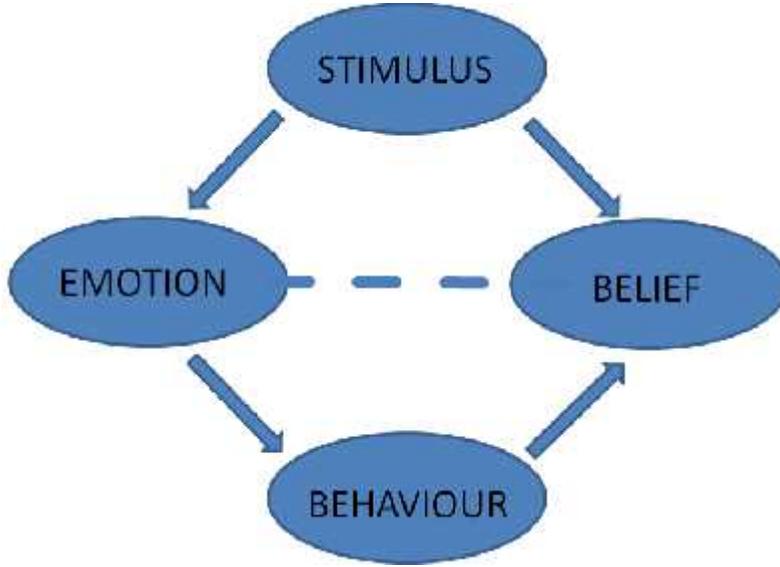
How does change work?

I begin with a model used in my 'Liberating Beliefs' workshops. That is because I believe models are useful as they give us language and structure to discuss and hang ideas on.

In Part 1, I wrote about the three types of brains – reptilian, limbic and cortex. The diagram overleaf shows how the limbic brain operates – you may remember it has a 'flight' or 'fight' function to perform.

Once the STIMULUS is received via our senses, it searches for a matching experience, in order to respond quickly – a simple but important process.

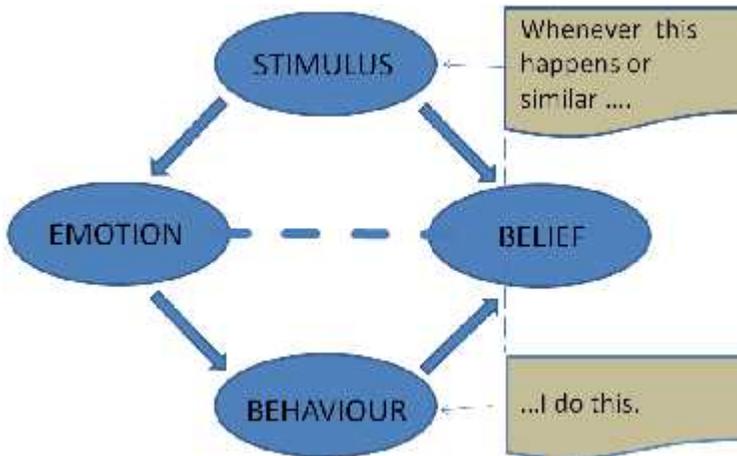
Once found it replays the EMOTION from the original experience and repeats the BEHAVIOUR that proved successful in the past.



To make sense of this interaction we form a rule. This is the BELIEF that links together the STIMULUS, EMOTION and BEHAVIOUR, and once formed enables us to respond to any STIMULUS in a timely and effective way (for the sake of our survival that is).

This has now become one of our SURVIVAL PATTERNS, one of many I might add. It is usually learnt at a very young age and subsumed into our subconscious mind.

From the diagram below, you can see how we can repeat behaviours from previous traumas on a regular basis because we believe we are about to experience the same situation.



Do you remember the example in Part 1?

The person who FROZE when they had to SPEAK IN PUBLIC.
This is an example of the STIMULUS and BEHAVIOURAL

response. I am sure you can recall similar situations for yourself.

Based on this model we can start to look at ways to change these survival patterns which no longer serve us well. For instance:

- Firstly, we can change our BEHAVIOUR. We can decide to do this by ourselves, it is only a decision. Or, we can seek help in many different forms: therapist, counsellor, mentor, friend, support group, internet etc.
- Next, we can change our BELIEFS. This is usually best accomplished with the aid of another person, someone who can listen without judging and help us to reveal our misinformed or misguided beliefs.
- Lastly, we can learn to manage our emotions through re-experiencing the original painful emotion. Success depends on the right person giving you the unconditional attention and support.

Starting with the most common method of effecting change – changing our behaviour.

Changing our behaviour

This is what we do when we decide to do something different. It is without doubt the simplest change process to start with. You know what you want to change, you change it and you experience the effects of the change. Sometimes it has little effect on you and other times a big effect.

As a result of changing your behaviour you will experience feelings which may be uncomfortable, but if you persist with the change and go through the feelings, you will change. Susan Jeffers has written a great book called 'Feel the fear, and do it anyway' (Jeffers), which is a very helpful starting place for change.

There is also a therapy called Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) that address this type of change. But, sometimes it is enough to talk it over with a friend or ally. Worth trying first.

Changing our beliefs

The second method is changing the beliefs that hold together the elements of our pattern. Here I am only setting the scene for what is covered in more detail later in Chapter 8.

Where do we start?

Imagine the early neural connections that you formed as a child growing up are like the first shoots of a sapling. As the sapling grows, the shoots become bigger and stronger and in time turn into branches. It takes on a recognisable form, a tree with an identity. Using this metaphor, you can imagine our neural shoots forming neural leaves, buds and flowers; and developing into what the world sees – our identity.

These neural connections are the link between sensory information, feelings, and what we say and do. It is our beliefs that give meaning and enable us to make judgements.

Beliefs such as ‘the brand of tea I like to drink’ or ‘my favourite colour’ might be as easy as pruning the outer branches of our tree. But, if the belief is buried deep within our identity, such as ‘who am I’ and ‘where do I come from’, then it might feel more like major tree surgery is needed.

Most would be fearful of this type of change. And yet, we know that cutting out energy sapping branches will produce a healthier tree and more fruit.

Sounds easy doesn’t it? But, it is not perceived as easy or even desirable. Why not? Well there is that thing called ‘loyalty’ again. Remember, I wrote about this and how it plays an important part in protecting our beliefs and identity.

Obviously, we are more loyal to some beliefs than others, such as our faith, our national identity or our family. It is this hierarchy that helps us make important decisions. For instance, I might give up my favourite television programme to spend time with my family, or I might spend more time at the golf course than doing the gardening. I

am not trying to judge our decisions; I want only to illustrate how making decisions is based on our loyalty to what we believe.

The truth and everything but the truth

When Galileo discovered the earth orbited the sun and not the other way around, he challenged the established belief at the time. It took a while for society to accept that what they had believed to be true was no longer true. You can appreciate that beliefs once formed are disinclined to change. And yet, we know they contribute to limiting us and controlling us.

When I was a child I remember looking behind me using a mirror. It not only looked different, but it also had a strange reality about it. Not only could I see more detail, it looked a friendlier place, which encouraged me to explore it. I never understood this phenomenon, until I learnt a technique for drawing portraits from photographs.

Take a photograph or picture of someone's face and draw a likeness on paper. Then turn the photograph or picture

upside down and draw another likeness of what you see. You will be amazed by the result.

I asked a well-known artist to do this, someone who is trained in drawing portraits. He could not believe that his drawing of the upside face was more accurate than his drawing of right way up face. The reason has something to do with our familiarity with what we are looking at.

Rather than just drawing what we see, we use our preconceptions (beliefs) of what a face should look like. When you turn something upside, you do not have the same preconceptions to rely upon. Have you tried this? If not, then give it a go – you will be surprised how good an artist you are! This is an amazing example of how our beliefs distort our version of the truth.

How did we learn what we believe?

In the beginning we believed the things we were told. Sometimes they were based on reality, other times somebody else's fantasy. At that time, we were not capable of differentiating – reality or fantasy?

Let me give an example of what I mean. Parents are delighted by their child writing to Santa Claus; and are horrified when someone tells them Santa Claus is not real. It is no wonder we grow up believing things that are not true, we were trained to! You might recoil at this idea, and not want to believe that is what we are doing when we teach our children about Santa Claus.

Perhaps we comfort ourselves by believing that as they grow older they will be able to tell the difference. I suspect not, some fantasies maybe, but not all! So many things we believe with conviction as the truth are probably fantasies passed down through the generations. For example, does the sun rise and set or does the world turn around?

It does not take much to see the impact on world peace when you realise how nations have passed down stories over generations. The stories were real for those that experienced them, but overtime they have become traditions that masquerade as the truth in today's situation.

As a consequence of this devotion to out-of-date beliefs, many lives are lost or ruined because of the loyalty that safeguards these stories (beliefs) handed down the generations. If we could reconcile this loyalty, then peace and harmony would be an easier solution to attain.

It was Milton Rokeach who got me thinking about how I took on early beliefs about myself and the world I live in when he wrote...

“No person is personally able to ascertain the truth of all such things for him/herself. So, he/she believes in this or that authority, parents, teachers, religious leaders, scientists. And, he/she is often willing to take some authority's word for many things.” (Rokeach)

This is my understanding of how my early beliefs were formed. Because I was not able to understand what was true or not, I took on an authority figure's version of the truth without challenge. And because I believed them, my life has been controlled by their misguided and misinformed beliefs.

Nevertheless, because I decided to take on what I was told, I am therefore able to change what I was told. Therein lies the root of change – the knowledge that I chose to believe and therefore I can change my beliefs.

Now, we only have to reveal the beliefs that limit or control us, then we can use our new found objectivity to change or re-invent them.

In chapter 8, I take a more in-depth look at how to reveal our beliefs, whether surface or deep-rooted.

Emotional Intelligence

In part one of this book I mentioned a book by Daniel Goleman called 'Emotional Intelligence'. It presents the research of many psychologists on the subject of how we manage our emotions.

Research shows that Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is a big factor in achieving happiness and success in life. It has more to contribute to building strong relationships, successful careers than Intellectual Intelligence (IQ), even though the latter has been used for many decades as a measure of suitability for a job.

What does it mean to have emotional intelligence?

It starts with recognising and controlling our impulsive feelings and behaviours. And, we need to pay attention to others' emotional states from the cues they give us. This understanding enables us to relate better, whether that be at work, at home or almost anywhere we come into contact with other human beings.

How do we learn to control our emotions?

In this third method of realising change I want to refer to the theories referred to earlier in this book called Re-evaluation Counselling.

The aim of this counselling approach is to release us from old traumas through the discharge of the emotion connected to a distress pattern. The outcome is both freeing and unpredictable, because once the emotion is released from the pattern our loyalty factor reduces dramatically and it no longer plays such an important role in our life.

Yes, loyalty to a belief is directly related to the intensity of the emotion attached to it. Reduce the intensity and you have lowered the importance of the belief and the pattern it holds together. It no longer takes over your ability to think and decide. As a result, your hierarchy of what is important has changed and you are free to make different decisions.

Once again, I am setting the scene for what is covered later in Chapter 9, which is dedicated to practical ways to manage our emotions.

Where do we start?

At an individual level, how would the following statement change anything for you or anyone else that you know...

'Our emotions are not who we are, they are the way we have been treated'.

What I mean by this is people are easily labelled by the emotions they display the most. For example: the angry man who is always telling people off, the sad child who always feels left out, the happy woman who treats everything as a joke. I do not believe our chronic displays of emotions are who we really are.

To me, they are the emotionally-driven patterned response to feeling threatened. It is our way of protecting ourselves from the pain we experienced way back in our childhood. I am convinced we all have emotional-related behaviours that chronically protect us from some demon or other, but

they might not be as easy to recognise as the examples given above.

One of our challenges is how we respond to another's emotional-related behaviour. Do we react with our own emotional-related behaviour, or maybe just walk away - what do you think?

What I suspect usually happens is we react from feeling threatened by them with our own emotional-related behaviour, and that is how wars start! There are many 'mini-wars' breaking out all over the world, in our offices, our homes, local bars and restaurants. I am not sure ignoring someone's emotional-related behaviour is any better. We may not engage physically, but we will secretly and psychologically be at war!

Another option might be to acknowledge and respond to the person and not their chronic distress pattern. But hang on, that sounds too easy to say, and not so easy to do.

Yes, I agree it is not easy. But that is why you are reading this book. You are on a quest looking for ways to change

your life and improve the way you relate. So, who said it was going to be easy?

Learning to control your emotions is the most effective change agent ever discovered, and yes it needs you to re-experience and confront your greatest fear – the pain of the original trauma that caused this blemish in your personality - the pain you have spent your whole life protecting yourself from.

Now that I have said that, are you still up for it? Before answering that, let me add a note of re-assurance to your decision making. I have not yet met anyone who has ever regretted discharging early traumatic experiences, and they survived it just as they did the first time, but with one big difference. This time they no longer have the duty to continually protect themselves from it. It no longer has the power over them it once had.

Re-experiencing the pain you have spent your life avoiding, has taken away not only your biggest fear but given you the opportunity to re-evaluate the experience with a clear and more informed mind. It all make sense now, how the

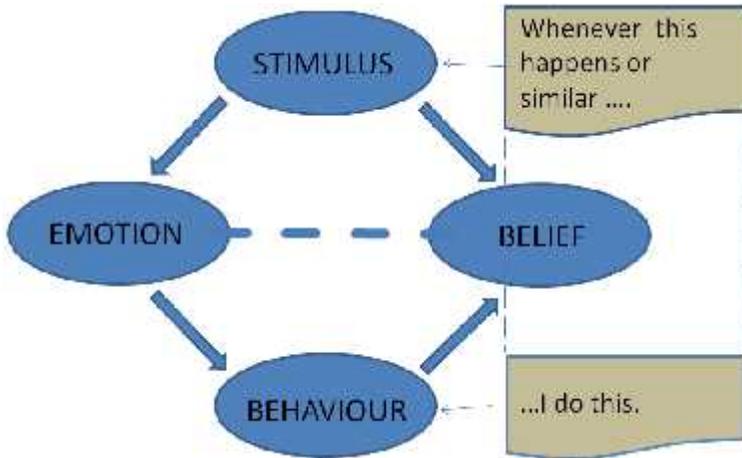
decision you made at the time about yourself was misguided or misinformed by the adults around.

Nevertheless, because I made the decision, I am therefore able to change it. Once again, therein lies the root of change – the knowledge that I can change my decisions. Now, we only have to reveal the traumatic experiences and the emotion that keeps it in place, and with our new found objectivity re-evaluate our experience and our decisions made at the time.

In chapter 9, I am looking at ways we work with the emotion that is the power source for our distress pattern. In effect, by disconnecting the power we disable its control over us.

Concluding how change works

To conclude this chapter on how change works, let me revisit the model used earlier. Remember, it has four elements.



Each can be changed and in so doing, change the way this pattern impacts on your life.

For example, you could remove yourself from the STIMULUS, or change your BELIEF, or take on new BEHAVIOUR, or lastly discharge the EMOTION.

The STIMULUS and BEHAVIOUR elements I leave to you because they are, in the main, DECISIONS to be made and carried through. Nonetheless they may get thwarted by your beliefs or emotions, so you might still need to work on your BELIEFS and EMOTIONS.

Before you start your journey of change, I thought you might benefit from working through ‘Are you ready for change?’ (Chapters 6) and ‘What did we start out with?’ (Chapter 7).

To my mind, Chapter 6 is a very important preparation for change. It prompts you to think about where you are in the journey of change, and what strategy would help you further your progress.

Chapter 7 takes a look at what we started out with. Who did we copy in our early years who gave us our first blueprint of our personality? It is an interesting exercise that only requires reflection and observation, and yet it gives you a foundation to start your journey of self-discovery.

Chapter 6

Are You Ready for Change?

Running workshops for many years, some management and some personal development, I could easily be satisfied by the 'happy smiling faces' at the end of the day, but I could also be disheartened by 'nobody seems to change'.

It is like I delivered an enjoyable and entertaining day for everyone after which they returned to their lives unchanged but a little happier. This of course was not true of everyone; a few went on to make major changes in their lives. They are my heroes of course and fuel my hope.

Can you see my quandary?

One day whilst browsing the internet I fell upon a piece of research by James O. Prochaska, a psychologist who identified the stages of change and the different strategies required to make progress. He not only changed me, he also restored my hope that change can happen, but only if

one takes into account where one is with regard to readiness for change.

He established that, in any aspect of personal change, people are usually at one of the following states of readiness:

- **Oblivion** - people at this level aren't ready at all. They deny any need to change and resist any attempts to change them. They just don't see the point.
- **Contemplation** - people at this level see the need to change, but are not quite ready to carry it out. They tell themselves 'someday they will do something about it'.
- **Preparation** - people at this level have begun to focus on how to improve. They are aware of the problem and eager to form a plan. They are ripe for change.
- **Action** - people at this level embrace change, in particular their emotional patterns, the way they think about themselves and their long-standing habits.

Now it made more sense. The attendees of my workshops varied enormously in their readiness for personal change. Some were tripping over themselves to change, and went

on to do so. Whilst others came not believing they needed to change but wanted to find out more about 'Liberating Beliefs', because it sounded interesting. Needless to say they left more knowledgeable but without any intention to change.

The lesson I learnt is to pay more attention to people's readiness. You can see that anyone at the first two stages are unlikely to commit to change, whether that is 'they do not see the point' or 'they keep telling themselves that someday they will do something about it'. The latter stages are more hopeful and therefore have a good chance of making change happen.

A word of warning: I do not see the four stages as labels to apply to yourself or anyone else as a whole. Rather they describe your confidence to make changes in a specific area of your life. By that I mean, you may not be ready to revisit an early childhood belief, but you may be ready to learn a new skill. In reality, we have all of the four stages depending on what aspect of our life we are considering.

The important message is:

“As you start out on this journey of self-discovery, it is helpful to consider where you are in terms of readiness for the change you want to happen.”

You can then choose a strategy that best suits your current state and helps you to progress to the next stage of readiness. This way you will not be engaging in activity which is doomed to failure.

Here are examples of what I mean:

- Oblivion – if you select this state of readiness, then you are probably not contemplating change. Rather, whatever anyone else might say, you do not see the need for change. It is possible that you view your situation as ‘hopeless’, ‘outside your control’ or ‘just not necessary’. If this is so, then you might consider ways to address your ‘your feelings of inadequacy’ or ‘your lack of motivation’ or maybe ‘challenge yourself to consider how your life could be better’.

- Contemplation – in this state, you recognise you have a problem to be resolved, but do not know quite what to do about it. You easily persuade yourself to put off any decision and can remain in a state of procrastination for a long time. Your strategy might be to consider a small step towards solving your problem, rather than trying to address the whole problem. Or you might try sharing your problem with like-minded people. You are looking for ways to build confidence to move you along the path of change.
- Preparation – You are aware of your problem and have ideas about how to approach it. You are taking actions such as researching personal development courses or looking for a new job. You are able to demonstrate commitment but still have some reservations. Your strategy might be to bolster your confidence by talking about your planned actions to friends and family or find ways to convince yourself that your plan is the best way forward. We all have different ‘convincing’ strategies. It helps to know what your’s is.

- Action – is the state where you might stop habits that are detrimental to your well-being or start something that raises your sense of self-worth. You may be quietly making new decisions or engaging in a change programme, such as a personal and professional development courses. Your strategies would include ways to maintain your decision and consolidate the benefits that change has brought you.

This is an important first step in understanding your readiness to making change happen, and not to be overlooked.

Chapter 7

What did we start out with?

Children begin life as immature and inexperienced human beings with no self-awareness. Our goal as parents is to assist them to grow into mature and independent useful members of society.

Given they start with no awareness of themselves or the world they were born into, they use their inherent capability to copy the role models around them as their initial way to learn who they are and how the world works.

In the initial stages, it falls upon the parents to show them how to behave and how to be respectful towards themselves and others. Without which they are unable to learn empathy and understanding. They need someone who is sensitive to their feelings for this to happen. And now you can see how important early role models are to the development of a child.

In my case, I was highly influenced by both my parents. I certainly imitated many of my mother's traits and rejected covertly much of my father's. Although, for most of my life I was not aware of that, well certainly not in any conscious way.

Now I can see how my life was both assisted and limited by their role modelling. In my opinion we are just as good at passing down our limitations as we are our assets, and without realising it. If we did realise it, I am certain, we would not do it.

Writing this book has helped me recognise the part role models played in the forming of my early personality. And, now with a more informed and mature understanding I can make better choices as to the usefulness of the traits I inherited.

There is a more comprehensive exploration on the subject of 'Adult Role Models' in Karen VanderVen's book entitled 'Promoting Positive Development in Early Childhood' (VanderVen).

The two questions to ask yourself are: *what did you copy from your role-models and what did you reject?*

Role models include parents, older siblings, aunts and uncles, teachers, maybe people you admire from afar like religious leaders. These are a few suggestions to start with, feel free to add your own.

Once again, you might benefit from a friend or ally. Someone who may have a more objective view of you, and can possibly give you pointers as to the traits they see in you and your family.

I am not asking you to change or discard any traits you copied, I am only asking you to become aware of what you copied or rejected as a child growing up with your role-models.

By answering the two questions above, you have begun the journey of self-discovery.

Chapter 8

Working with beliefs

My imagination was triggered when I fell upon a book in my doctor's local surgery called 'Freedom to Believe'. The title conjured up so many thoughts in me that I decided to read the book.

It tackled the tricky subject of what happens if a member of a religious faith wants to leave that faith, and the consequence of doing so. It really brought home to me how the human world attempts to maintain the loyalty of its followers to its belief systems, usually the one you were born into. It is a subject worthy of a lot more discussion, but for the purpose of this handbook, I want to consider this question:

'How free are we to change our beliefs?'

Beliefs are big part of our personality, they define us in so many different ways. The idea that we are free to change

our beliefs is an anathema to some cultures that hold dearly onto their belief systems with their lives, and unless we betray them so do we.

So what are we to do if what we believe is holding us back, or making our life difficult and stressful, or not giving us the freedom to choose how we want to live our life?

It seems a bit tricky this one, but what I want to cover in this chapter is how changing our beliefs can be beneficial to us, particularly the beliefs that hold us back. For the purposes of the following exercises, I want to make use of these definitions:

1. **Limiting Beliefs** – they are beliefs that hold us back, stop us achieving or becoming our dream. Their purpose is to stop us re-experiencing a painful experience, one which made us feel bad about ourselves at some time in our past.
And...
2. **Liberating Beliefs** - they motivate us and move us on to achieve or become our dream. Their purpose is to re-

live a good feeling connected to an original experience of achieving or feeling good about ourselves.

There are exercises for you to use on my website which are designed to pin point beliefs that hold you back or move you on. To get the best out of these exercises I recommend you work with a trusted ally, someone you feel comfortable with when talking about yourself, and them with you.

WARNING: you are not being asked to play the role of counsellor or psychotherapist. It is simply a sharing experience, you share your time, your beliefs and your good listening.

Each exercise asks you to talk for a few minutes whilst your ally listens, then you swap roles. When you have both had your time, then talk about how you felt as the talker and listener, what did it reveal and how can you make use of it?

Most of all, enjoy the experience of being listened to in the knowledge that you are free to express anything and

everything about your life, your past experiences, your hopes and your fears.

The exercises are designed to build listening and disclosing skills, I recommend you do them in the order presented, this way I believe you will gain maximum benefit.

Working with chronic beliefs

Chronic beliefs are a little more difficult to get in touch with. First they are chronic (no say!), which basically means they run all the time; and they are subsumed into our subconscious, which means we are oblivious to their existence and outward manifestation - although they might be obvious to people who know us.

I gave some examples earlier: the angry man who is always telling someone off, the sad child who always feels left out, and the unhappy woman who treats everything as a joke. For me, they are just chronically repeating old patterns of behaviour formed in early childhood.

In my workshops, it was easy to see how the progress of some people was thwarted by their chronic beliefs, some

of which were targeted at just surviving the day. Chronics not only operate all the time but also work in collusion with other chronics, and not just our own.

They are like players in a basketball team passing the ball skilfully between themselves until they score in the net. There is no doubt when working with people, I felt like a lone player up against a team of players until I realised I had to take on the role of referee and send some to the bench and call foul on others (the chronics that is). Importantly, I needed to take control of the game.

We are comforted and given a sense of security by our chronics. They have been part of us for a very long time and have proven to be reliable saviours.

What I learnt was raising awareness is not enough; one has to break out of the comfort zone, one has to take a risk if one is to rise above one's chronics – our challenge is the motivation to do that!

Here is a principle I would like you to consider...

‘Chronics can never be satisfied. If you want to be happy and successful, then you must dissolve them.’

What do you think? For me, it is obvious that ‘chronics’ do not want to be satisfied, they only want only to continue serving the purpose they were created for – to protect you from an old painful trauma ever repeating itself.

In this chapter, I want to demonstrate a way to reduce the power of a chronic by challenging the belief that gives the chronic purpose.

What follows is a transcript of a session between me and a client, and some notes to assist in the understanding of the process.

Key: M: for me and C: for client.

M: If you are able to change any part of yourself, what part would you change?

C: The way I speak to people is aggressive, I would like to change the way I speak.

M: Anything else you would like to change?

C: *Yes, give myself more space, more time for me and less for what others want.*

M: Anymore?

C: *Oh yes, lose weight, I can see myself eating when I don't want to. Not good for me.*

NOTES: What you have already is various things this client wants to change. They each have a simple narrative: *I want to speak differently, I want to have more time for myself, and I want to lose weight.* I am sure we can think of many suggestions for each of these narratives. But, if we do, then we are only touching the surface of what is going on here.

Hidden behind these three 'wants' is a very committed chronic, which will not only find a way to stop the change working, but will also form a bigger defence against any future attempts to change it in the future. How many times have you heard the following response to a suggestion?

"Yes, I have tried that already", replied the well-trained chronic.

It is so incapacitating. So we need to take a step back and try a different approach. One that will reveal the hidden chronic behind these three 'wants'.

There is a technique called 'chunking', which comes from Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) theories. It is a questioning process that reveals the common themes behind a series of ideas. You'll see what I mean when you read what happens next....

M: What are these three 'wants' examples of or what do they have in common?

C: They are things that make me feel bad.

C: I am not putting myself first.

C: I feel self-disrespectful.

C: I feel self-abusive, in denial.

C: I feel punitive & punishing.

M: Once again, what are *these* all examples of?

C: I don't want them to feel bad about themselves if I disagree to do what they ask.

C: I believe I must not make people feel bad.

C: I believe that I should do what I have arranged unless I can change it without upsetting people.

C: I must find out every detail so I can get it right, agreeing too quickly, don't want them to be hurt if I say 'no'.

M: So, can you summarise all of the above into one sentence beginning with 'I believe...'?

C: Yes, I believe that people who are close to me will feel bad if I say 'no'.

NOTES: Now you have the 'chronic belief' that underpins all the behaviours mentioned previously by the client. I am always fascinated by how simple the belief is when you get to it. And, why not, when you consider that it was formed in our early childhood and usually as a result of a 'parental directive'. Can you imagine what the 'parental directive'

might have been in this case? I am sure you can and relate to it as well. So let's see what happens next?

M: What do you need to change about this belief to get your life right for you?

C: Stop having to control things so much, I will probably hear much more from people.

C: I need to go more with thinking about myself, what do I want to do.

M: If the above is true, what needs to change in your original belief?

C: I believe the people close to me will respect me more if I do what I want, because if I do what I want I will have a whole different attitude.

NOTES: We now have the 'liberating belief' for the original 'chronic belief'. For some people that is all they need. They are already ready for change, and having found what they need to do, do it. For some, it is not enough, we need to explore a little further...

M: What is going to hinder or stop you?

C: *Myself*

C: *My desire to please people and see people happy and to enjoy that.*

C: *Habit*

C: *Feeling like I have to fulfil other people's requirements.*

C: *Not taking time for myself, not slowing down.*

C: *I do things quickly, which perpetuates what I always do.*

M: What action do you need to take?

C: *I must practice saying, "I don't know, I need to think about this first", so I can do what is right for me. I need to think about me and my life in a way I want to enjoy rather than respond in a way to what other people ask, and then I can make the most of it for myself".*

M: What indicators show you are achieving your desired change?

C: I am doing things because I want to.

C: Less pre-occupied with other people.

C: More independent.

Summary:

This case study illustrates the stages of 'readiness' explained earlier. The starting stage is 'oblivion', as you might recall this client was aware of her traits but unaware of the chronic belief underpinning them. As a result of the 'chunking' technique the client shifted from the 'oblivion' stage to the 'contemplation' stage.

After further exchanges you can see the client moving through 'Preparation' to 'Action'. Even though the client had identified actions, they may still need more support and resources to make the actions a permanent reality of life.

Nonetheless, very important steps have been achieved – awareness and desire to change - without which nothing changes.

Chapter 9

Working with emotions

Research shows that Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is a big factor in achieving happiness and success in life. It has more to contribute to building strong relationships, successful careers than Intellectual Intelligence (IQ), even though the latter has been used for many decades as a measure of suitability and aptitude for a job.

What does it mean to have emotional intelligence?

It starts with being able to recognize and control our impulsive feelings and behaviours. As well, we need to pay attention to others' emotional states from the cues they give us. This understanding enables us to relate better, whether that be at work, at home or almost anywhere we come into contact with other human beings.

So how do we increase our emotional intelligence?

Below, is a real case study that shows how disempowering the emotion, changes the impact of the chronic.

Case study background

It started with the following email communication.

“I am facing a complete dilemma in life and business..... I have kept it in but I am at a critical point now and very scared and need to make radical changes or something.”

This was followed by a face-to-face meeting as follows:

M: Tell me about what’s going on?

NOTE: My client brought me up to date on what was happening at home and in her business.

M. You said you are really scared, what are you really scared about?

C. I feel trapped and powerless. I feel misunderstood, not creditable and ignored.

M. Can you remember feeling like this before when you were younger?

C. Yes, when my grandfather used to come into my bedroom and touch me.

NOTE: You may remember how the opportunity to talk out an early childhood trauma, which has never been spoken about or listened to before, can be all that is needed.

Critical at this stage is keeping to the listening rules.

Questions like: 'tell me more', 'what happened next', 'what does that mean' can be used to assist the client to tell their story.

M. What happened next?

C. Nothing, I just froze with panic.

M. Did you tell anyone?

C. No-one, not to begin with. I was afraid because I was confused and believed it was something to do with me that was wrong.

M. What do you mean by, "Not to begin with"?

C. After a while I decided to tell me mum, but she did not believe me. And to make things worse, she made me apologise to my grandfather for telling lies about him.

NOTE: As a young child she had an experience that she did not understand and it scared her. More importantly, her significant adult would not listen to her story nor believe her. What do you think that did to the mind of this young child? What sense could she make of it?

Now we have an adult who has frozen in time the feelings of a very traumatic event that was repeated regularly, and is still being incapacitated by the chronic pattern of feelings, beliefs and behaviour formed at the time.

What we are looking for are ways to disempower the emotional element of the chronic pattern – the feeling bit.

It is critical to offer the time and space for the client to express the feelings felt at the time of the event. The feelings that were never listened to by anyone, and therefore became frozen in time. Our job is to find ways

for the client to express their original feelings freely in a safe and caring way.

Can contradictions help?

You may remember me writing in part one about Harvey Jackins the founder of Re-evaluation Counselling. As the listener the aim is to find a word or phrase that contradicts the belief held subconsciously by the client about the event, which links the emotion to the original event.

For example, the client in this case might subconsciously store away the belief that her grandfather mistreated her because he did not like her or thought she was a 'bad girl'.

The job of the contradiction is to re-stimulate the original feeling, whilst the client is being listened to with good attention. Amazingly, the latter alone (a good listening to) is an amazing contradiction of most people's experience.

In this case, after listening to the story of abuse, I offered the following contradiction...

M: I want you to imagine I'm your grandfather sitting here as I say the following to you..."I love you".

Her responses follows....

C: You bastard, you don't love me, you hurt me, you abused me, you did horrible things to me (more angry outbursts followed)

NOTE: The client's anger was re-stimulated immediately by that phrase. She continued to vent her anger at me as I kept repeating the same phrase slowly and calmly. I knew I had chosen a good contradiction because the discharge of anger was immediate.

After discharging a lot of anger, her mood started to change...

C: I wanted you to take care of me (accompanied by crying) I wanted you to love me and look after me.

What you are starting to see is the transitions through the emotions that usually start with anger (feeling threatened), followed by crying (feeling hurt or sad), and if you continue

to listen without interrupting, shaking and yawning (deep rooted fear and panic) will start to happen.

When the shaking started with my client, I knew we had touched the original feeling of 'feeling scared and panicky'.

After several minutes of tears and shaking, my client noticed how the 'weighed down' feelings of fear, panic and powerlessness had lifted and she was increasingly freed up and able to address her business challenges with a new found confidence and resolve.

In a recent conversation with this client, she told me how the session had changed her, and although her business challenge was still ongoing her self-confidence was now in the driving seat and not her panic.

Chapter 10

Principles of personal change?

In my final chapter I want to share the principles of personal change that have helped me and many others. Some will be a summary of concepts and ideas already written about in this book. Some are new and will add a new perspective on personal change.

Principles, by their very nature, sit higher up the pyramid of understanding than the content and subjective feelings of an experience. As we look down from this higher view point we can see more, be more objective and critical of our situation.

Let me remind you of an event that happened in 1995, when I first met Jeremy Clare. We had agreed to meet – our first formal meeting I might add – at a stunning place called Latimer House.

Neither of us knew what the outcome might be, but I guess we assumed it would be business as usual. By that I mean, a formal introduction to each other of our professional experiences, followed by flipchart of possibilities and maybe a decision to take something forward together or not.

Well, it did not happen like that. Rather than going with the usual conventional business meeting, we decided to do something completely different, something that was right for us at that time in the situation. We sat outside under a beautiful chestnut tree, gazing across the beautiful Buckinghamshire countryside with a lake in the foreground framed by hills and trees; and just talked.

This was the beginning of a new friendship. One that we would develop over 8 years together and benefited many people's journey of personal change along the way.

What we decided to act upon was that the lack of responsibility taken by participants for their time and activities. We noticed how participants arrived with an expectation that we, the facilitators, would set up the day

and organise theory and practice sessions. At the end of the day they would walk away with many gifts from us.

First, we needed to sort out our own ‘lack of responsibility’ patterns, and then we would be better placed to assist participants.

At the beginning of the day, we gave time to gently passing over the responsibility of time and activities to the participants. They chose how they would make use of this special time away from all other pressures, and they were totally surprised by what they achieved, which by the way far exceeded their original expectations.

By not being prescriptive, by not presenting a ready-made day of exercises and theories, they were free to choose their own processes and use the resources in the room as they wished. In a way our approach contradicted the usual expectations of what a personal development workshops are usually about.

As a consequence of these experiences we wrote some very helpful principles. Their purpose: to challenge and channel our thinking, to inspire and shape our ambition,

and lastly to recover and reinforce our autonomy to decide for ourselves.

Getting started

Principle 1

“In order to think about ourselves we must dedicate time to ourselves.”

This is where most of us fall down at the first step of our personal development journey. Sometimes it is because we are too busy, or just we feel it is too self-indulgent or maybe our conditioning has set us up to believe: ‘I can’t change, I am who I am’.

Whatever the reason it is a show stopper. This reminds me of ‘Oblivion’ - the first stage in the Readiness Scale. It is saying a bit more than *‘I do not know’*, it is almost saying *‘I don’t want to know’*.

Nonetheless, because you are reading this book, you have started. The next step is to dedicate time to your personal development without which you will make no progress. So the essence of this principle is:

“The more you dedicate time to yourself, the more you will reveal about yourself, the more unique your situation becomes, and therefore the more chance you have of changing your life for the better.”

Principle 2

“We begin the process of personal change by disclosing our inner thoughts and feelings to someone we trust.”

This is where I talk about my hero again. Yes, Sydney M. Jourard who established the importance of being known all the way through by at least one person. It would seem we can only get to grips with our inner demons by disclosing them to another human being.

In doing so, they not only lose their potency but you can see for yourself how misguided they are. It is by far the most effective process of all personal change.

It is a natural process that nourishes you to become a healthy person. In my experience, it is the ‘must have’ approach to all personal change. Without it, you will not

reveal your hidden beliefs and fears that covertly keep you down and hold you back.

You will benefit from the healing power of sharing and being known to another when you invite and entrust a friend and ally to listen to your inner thoughts and fears as part of your personal journey.

Taking ownership

Principle 3

“Where you are, is where you have chosen to be”

This is the principle that usually stuns people. And yet it is a principle that challenges the misguided belief that one’s current situation is not one’s fault or responsibility.

Whilst we believe our situation is not of our making but rather the responsibility of someone else, then we do not have the power to change it – they do!

As a result, we give up our autonomy, our freedom to choose and become victim to another’s chronic pattern.

Of course, many people on first hearing this, want to prove me wrong – but no-one has. Why not?

If you feel victimised, then it could not have happened without you having made the decision to be a victim – your choice. So, *where you are, is where you have chosen to be* – do you see that?

If you do and you agree that you made the decision to be a victim or whatever, then you can change it or not, because it was your decision, not theirs.

Either way you will be taking control of your life and responsibility for your own decisions *once again*.

Why *once again*? In my opinion, we are born with this facility to choose at whatever level we are able. It is our upbringing and education that interferes with this original facility. To the point, sometimes, where we feel we have no facility to manage ourselves, and remain dependent on others.

Take a look at this next principle which is closely related...

Principle 4

“You limit another’s growth to the extent to which you take responsibility for him or her”

This principle helps me see that my role as parent, teacher, mentor, friend and ally as well as facilitator has a really important purpose.

It tells me I must leave the responsibility for their situation with my child, my student, my mentee, my friend and my client. Otherwise, they will become dependent on me and not take responsibility for their own lives – one way to develop a victim, I guess.

As facilitators of workshops, this became one of Jeremy and my guiding principles. It started by giving participants the opportunity to disclose their story in a safe and attentive setting, and then encouraging them to take responsibility for how they made use of the day and resources to achieve their outcomes. We became merely additional resources to their day, and only if required – a really satisfying experience.

However, there was a consequence to us as facilitators. Our role had changed from managing the process of the day to providing a setting for the participants to work in. It was almost like we had swapped our role of facilitator to being caterers.

Passing over responsibility for their personal journey, meant I was confronted by a dilemma...

“What will happen to me, if participants no longer need me or my skills?”

As a professional facilitator, I wrapped my ego up in the blanket of people needing me and being dependent on my skills to make progress in their lives. And here I was letting them take responsibility for their own process and in a way making my professional skills redundant.

It is not difficult to imagine why professionals work to protect their investment, especially as their livelihood and ego depend on people needing their skills. This leads me onto my next principle, one that is directed to all professionals, including friends and allies...

Principle 5

“Whilst you work to be ‘liked’, you will not achieve your purpose, unless it is your purpose”

This is a simple principle, but in my experience one that needs a lot of self-awareness and discipline. Too often our decisions are guided by our ego and not the real purpose of our work.

By the way, you can change the word *‘liked’* to any other word that fits your personal situation, such as, *‘feel good’*, *‘praised’*, *‘rewarded’* or *‘loved’*. The principle still works.

It challenges whether you are carrying out your profession to look good, win approval, get strokes for your ego or gain reward.

On the other hand, if you know what the real purpose of your work is and regardless of what people think of you or the reward, you carry it out, then you are truly achieving your purpose.

What do these three principles have in common?

“Where you are, is where you have chosen to be”

“You limit another’s growth to the extent to which you take responsibility for him/her”

“Whilst you work to be liked, you will not achieve your purpose, unless it is your purpose”

They all have a focus on ‘responsibility’. The first is ‘you taking responsibility for yourself’. The second is ‘you not taking responsibility for another’, and the third is ‘aligning your responsibility to achieve your purpose’.

They are fundamental principles that assist me and, now you know them, you can use them when working on your own personal journey or when assisting another on their personal journey.

Letting go

Principle 6

“Solutions have a way of revealing themselves”

We have used this principle in workshops to great effect. After the participants have told their story to the group, rather than moving onto to problem solving, we ask them to consider their situation again but this time holding in their minds the principle above.

Almost without exception, the stress and burden of finding a solution is lifted. Now they would talk about their situation in a different way, as if it was no longer theirs but someone else's. Well, we all know how much more relaxed we feel when the problem is not ours to solve.

Although it may feel like you have given up on your problem, you have not, at least not subconsciously anyway. By working from this place, you are allowing yourself time and space to reveal the solution - and it will appear.

Principle 7

“Decisions are not forever”

Another interesting place to take. We are so often challenged in our decision making because we believe it must be final and everlasting.

We may not want to accept it, but all decisions are ‘draft and never final’. That means we can change our mind whenever we want and as many times as we want. I am not recommending that we act irresponsibly and without consideration of others.

No, I am only seeking to reduce the pressure on our decision making. It is more beneficial to decide based on the best information to hand at the time, knowing that if things change then so might our decision.

This is what I mean by **letting go**.

You are freer to think more creatively when you allow your mind to muse without the stress and confines of ‘having to find a solution’ or ‘making the right decision’. Amazingly, the solution will reveal itself.

Clean Language

Principle 8

“Our language is less contaminated when we use ‘verbs’ instead of ‘nouns’.”

As we grow up we learn to use many words to describe people and events. Mostly, we use labels, such as: *‘She is a martyr to her children’* or *‘he is a tyrant to his work colleagues.’* When we could just as easily have said: *‘She gives her children all her love’*, or *‘he keeps his workers on their toes.’*

Can you see the difference?

Using nouns is loaded with judgement, which leaves it open to varied and subjective interpretation as to what is meant by ‘martyr’ and ‘tyrant’. Whereas using verbs informs us exactly as to what they do.

How is this useful? It is natural to respond to any feedback that implies criticism. Usually, it will stop us talking or at least limit what we might say from then on.

For example:

'Sounds like you were a bitch to your friend, is that what you want to be?' or...

'Sounds like you treated your friend badly, is that what you want to do?'

Which one would you prefer to receive? The former is an attack on the person, and that never lands happily with anyone. The latter is an observation of their behaviour, which has so much more to offer the receiver. It gives the opportunity to change their behaviour without any impact on their identity.

The moral of this principle is people respond more positively and productively when feedback is observational (what you see or hear using verbs) and uncontaminated by subjectivity (nouns which imply judgement).

The Art of listening

Principle 9

“A good listening to’ is more useful than ‘a good talking to’?”

Most people would believe ‘a good talking to’ is what people need when they are causing trouble or are in trouble.

And yet, every time someone listened to me without judging my upset or anger, I magically recovered myself and understood what I needed to change. I am sure you remember times when someone gave you ‘a good talking to’. What was your reaction: complete compliance and understanding or unspoken resistance and resentment?

Principle 10

“Listening is being silent in a passive way”

A stethoscope is used for listening to sounds from within our body. It is a passive tool that conveys important information to the listener without interpretation.

In the same way 'a good listening to' listens to the sounds from another's mind and body. The idea that someone is listening to your psychological heartbeat is therapy in itself. To listen without interpretation or critical comment is an amazing way to help someone, and yet you will be surprised by the thanks for the advice that you did not give!

Principle 11 – The spotlight

"You cannot listen effectively whilst paying attention to something else"

The head-mounted spotlight shines on the task in hand, and the rest of the world fades into darkness. It helps you focus your attention onto the task at hand - listening to someone telling their story.

Distractions come in many forms: a phone ringing, the sounds of a television, or noise in the street. But the biggest distraction is likely to come from inside your own head, as you try to think of a question to ask, or have an

idea or a story that you must tell, or you might be feeling a little uncomfortable by what they have just said.

To remain focused on listening whatever the distractions is a sign of good listening. As a result, the client will reveal more, which is the point of a good listening.

Principle 11

“It takes two people to seek the truth. One to speak, one to listen and reflect back the truth of what they heard.”

This is based in a quote by Thoreau: *It takes two people to seek the truth. One to speak, one to listen* (Thoreau).

This reminds me of the saying, ‘*a camera never lies*’. As the goal of all modern camera designers, they strive to reflect faithfully the image in front of the lens, even though we are not always pleased with the result.

In a similar way, a good listener who listens and reflects back accurately what he or she has heard, might not get the approval or agreement they wish for, but they have reflected back truthfully what was said.

Believe me, success is more likely to happen if our decisions are based on the truth of our situation and not on our 'deluded' view of our situation. We need that trusted friend and ally to be bold enough to tell us the truth, and support us as we struggle with coming to terms with it.

How do I end this book?

For me, life is a 'never ending personal journey of self-discovery'. You can of course continue your journey in your own way or maybe follow up on the ideas in this book – I leave that for you to decide.

Personally, I will be continuing my journey by exploring more of my mental jungle and writing a new book, to be continued...

Addendum

During the final editing of this book, I felt the need to convince myself that what I had written about was useful and workable. I had of course used the ideas and concepts many times before with clients and friends. So why did I need convincing?

Well, it would appear I did not have enough confidence to just boldly and proudly publish my book to the world. Then I heard a voice in my head say,

“Hang on a minute, this sounds familiar.” It continued, *“This could be one of those chronics things you talk a lot about in your book.”*

Damn it, the voice was right. I was running a chronic. I realised this was as good a time as any to test my theories. So I did just that. Carry on reading and you will be joining me on a journey of ‘chronic dissolving’, so belts on, we are off...

Q: If I could change one part of me, what would it be?

- *The way I give up on myself*
- *Having no reason to do anything unless it is for someone else*
- *Needing people to work with me to motivate me*
- *Feeling I am just not good enough*
- *Feeling bored with my life*
- *Never finishing things*
- *Not doing things until I have to*
- *Wanting to be loved by everyone*

Q: What are these examples of?

- *A I'm not good enough on my own*
- *Life is pointless without someone else in it*
- *Lack of self-motivation*
- *What others want are more important always*

Q: What are these examples of?

- *Dependency on others for reason to be alive*

Q: What is the belief you hold about yourself?

- *I am not good enough alone*

- *What I want is not important*
- *Whenever I am with someone (especially a significant person) I am not important they are.*
- *I must never put myself before others*
- *I must always give up what I want to others*
- *I must find someone who thinks I am important and puts me first*
- *I want someone to put me first*
- ***By taking the place of lesser importance, I make my father happy and do not get hurt by his anger.***

Q: Is that really true?

- *Yes it seems to be true. It has worked well throughout my life.*

Q: If it is true, how did your life change because of this belief?

- *I never got into trouble with my father or anyone else*
- *I decided to give up on myself. It makes others happy.*

Q: How can you change this belief to give you what you want today?

- *Taking the place of lesser importance, does not avoid people's anger or make them happy*
- *By taking the place of lesser importance, I am happy not others.*
- *By taking the place of importance I am happy.*
- *Whether I am lesser important or not, does not matter. I am happy and people can be what they like.*
- *To be me, to be happy, I must change my childhood decision and not give up on myself.*

Q: What is your earliest memory of this decision?

In my childhood, I remember how my father dominated my mother's life and if he was angry because of me, she would be angry with me because he would be angry with her. For example, if I made a noise when he was asleep after doing night work, he would wake up and be angry at my mother, and she would make me feel the cause of his anger, and keeping him happy was more important than my feelings of 'not loved'.

Q: How do you contradict this belief you took on about yourself when you were a very small child?

- *My mother standing up for me and telling him to stop.*
- *My mother saying to him “think about your son for once, instead of yourself”*
- *I am the special one*
- *What I want is just as important as what you want*
- *I do not have to give up anything to anyone*
- *I want to be put first*
- *I want to be number 1 in someone’s life*

Q: Summarise your thoughts on what you have said so far?

- *I took on not being number 1 in my mum’s eyes. She put her fear of my father’s anger above me. I learnt to take a place of lesser importance. By doing so, my dad would not be angry and my mum would not be hurt by him.*
- *By being lesser important I avoid people’s anger.*

Q: It sound really clear how this chronic came into being: you gave up on yourself so your father would not be angry with your mother. So by giving up on yourself you are protecting others, yes?

I think so, I don’t know how that is true today apart from the ‘giving up on myself bit’. I seem to have a well-

entrenched habit of giving up on myself, the original reason has gone, and my mother and father are both dead. Yet I appear to have an allergic reaction when what I want stops others getting what they want. It's like I'm not allowed to stop them getting what they want.

Q: Can you tell me your chronic belief, starting with: I believe...

My chronic belief is: I believe I am not allowed to stop people having/getting what they want.

I believe there is something wonderfully freeing in that and yet a cost to me. It's the cost to me I have to attend to. Not stopping people have/get what they want is OK as long as it does not mean I give up on what I want.

Q: Now, you know the chronic belief that limits you, tell me what your Liberating belief might be?

My liberating belief is: I am allowed to help people have/get what they want but not if there is a cost to me! And that cost is not just money, it's time, self-respect, self-

importance, in fact anything that affects me in a negative way. I am no longer a martyr to other people's wants.

Everything I have written about in this book, I have tried and tested personally and it continues to convince me that we can change, that we can recover the original autonomy, spontaneity and intimacy we were undoubtedly born with.

I encourage you to 'break out of your shell' and enjoy the rewards that await you on your own journey of personal discovery.

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