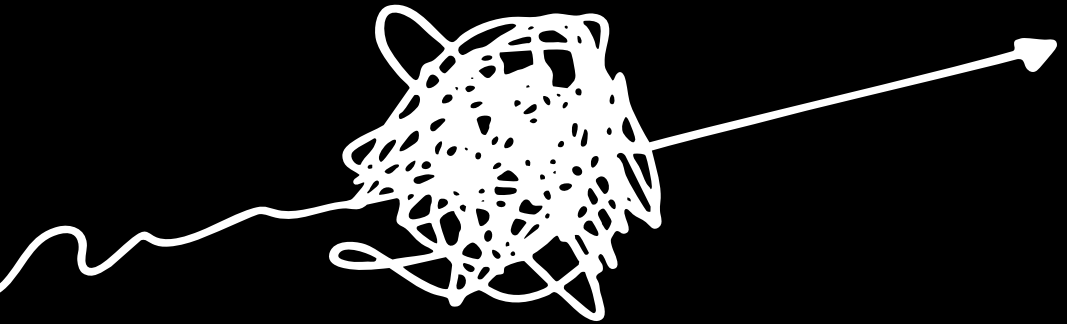


A little book on

recovery



& reconnection.

Dr Pete Stebbins PhD



5 Days of Focus

A Road Map For Recovery & Reconnection



5 Module Online Program

Dr Pete Stebbins, PhD



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I. Why We Struggle With Life

Stress, Burnout & Unbelonging



CHAPTER 1.

Focus:

- (i) To recognise you are so much more capable than you may feel right now.
- (ii) To identify the 'background apps' that may be draining your battery and any 'data intense events' that you are currently facing.

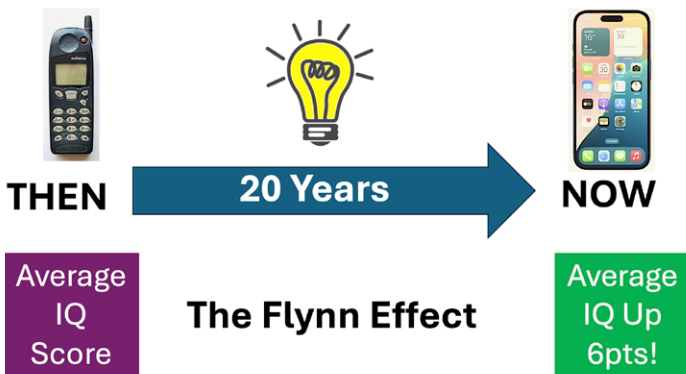


CHAPTER 1.

Stress, Burnout & Mobile Phones: Operating in low power mode!



So the other day I was shopping for a kid friendly mobile phone and it was almost impossible to find one! All I wanted was a mobile phone like I had 20 years ago – which could only make phone call/ send texts - nothing more. Back in the day these big Nokia ‘bricks’ (as we called them) was ‘state of the art’ technology but now you can’t even buy them as everything is packed with so many extra features and apps!

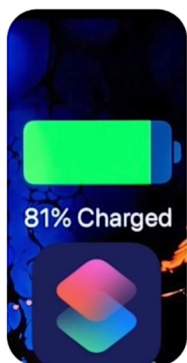


Anyway, as I was trying to find this much simpler low tech phone I had one of those ‘lightbulb moments’ about how, when we think about the rapidly rising rates of mental health issues and burnout today, the mobile phone analogy is perfect on so many levels. Firstly, just like current mobile phones are way ‘smarter’ than mobile phones from 20 years ago. . People in our society today are overall much smarter than their predecessors. This is because of the Flynn Effect which shows IQ goes up 3pts every decade – so our average IQ is now 6 pts higher than it was 20 years ago!

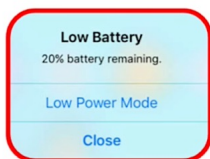
Now this is really interesting for me as a psychologist because a lot of the media and commentary about the mental health crisis is about people not coping with the world because they don't know how to – somehow lacking the 'capability' (knowledge and skills), to begin to self help their way out of problems (or at the very least do a google search and read some relevant blogs or watch some useful YouTube videos). – but hold on a second... we know as a society we are 'smarter' than previous generations (because of the Flynn Effect), so it we are not able to 'self help' our way through the mental health issues we face it's probably not due to us lacking 'capability' but rather a lack of 'capacity'.

And this is where our smart phones again are a really helpful illustration of the capability and capacity issues You see our 'capability' is the equivalent of the amazing tech in our smart phones – which as we've already said is much 'smarter' than previous generations – however our 'capacity' is the equivalent of battery in the smart phone – and you guessed it if the battery is flat the phone just won't work at all – no matter how much amazing tech it has. Or if the battery gets too low it switches to 'low power mode' slows down with performance problems and glitches.

Hmmm I wonder if our inability to 'self-help' our way out of the struggled we face sometimes is actually caused by a being in 'low power mode' or because our batteries are flat – having a lack of capacity rather than a lack of underlying capability?



CAPACITY
(Battery)



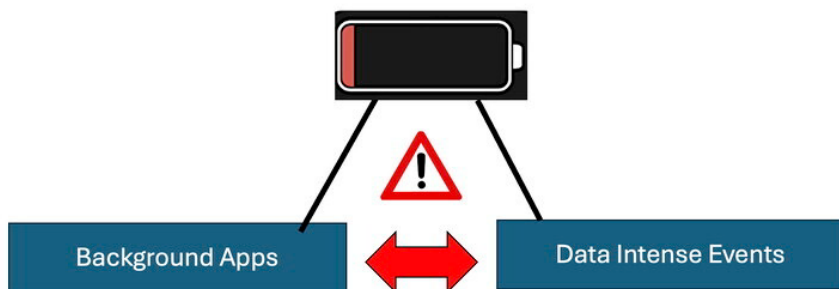
LOW
CAPACITY



DE-ACTIVATES
CAPABILITIES

I reckon we might be onto something here because as a society we have been normalising and de-stigmatising burnout and mental health issues and championing 'capability' development through sharing best practice tools and tips for a long time. Yet despite this things seem to be getting worse. Perhaps we've got the diagnosis and the prescription wrong? Perhaps the problem we have is less about our underlying capability and more about our available capacity? Perhaps if we had enough capacity – if our battery was sufficiently charged we'd be able to access our underlying capabilities to address the challenges we are facing?

What causes our battery to drain too fast?

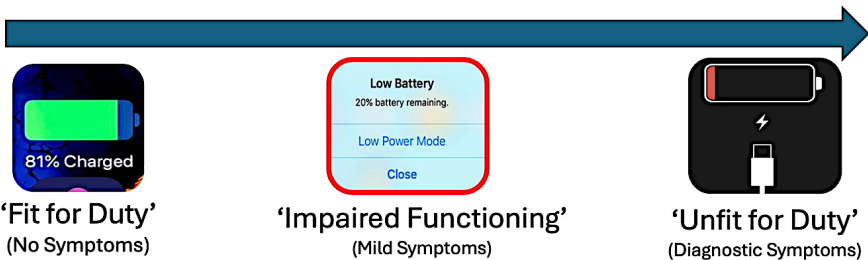


I suspect the way we are currently living is draining our capacity – running down our batteries too fast. Many of us have too many different things going on in our heads kind of like too many apps running in the background – draining our batteries too fast.

Maybe we are also running some data intensive apps as well - managing some major life issues right now – issues that require huge amounts of data and extra energy in the present moment? Maybe we have both the background apps running and the data intensive apps running at the same time – no wonder our batteries quickly fall into 'low power mode' – deactivating normal capabilities or we go completely flat and shut down! The analogy of mobile phone battery life and background apps and data intense events is a good one to use when we starting thinking about burnout.

WHAT IS BURNOUT?

Burnout is a generic term which describes *'a state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion with accompanying lowered productivity, lowered energy and feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, frustration and worry.'* In occupational health, the term 'burnout' is often applied indiscriminately to both mild states of impairment as well as more severe diagnosable depressive, anxiety and stress disorders which make a person 'unfit for duty' until their condition has resolved.



You can see (in the following table) a list of things from a personal and work perspective that maybe creating background vulnerability or may be stressful events in the present moment which are also sapping our energy and draining our batteries.

At a personal level we need to consider the issues that may create underlying vulnerability toward burnout such as emotional suppression, unhealthy thinking and behaviour patterns and previous adaptive response to 't' and 'T' traumas which have long since outgrown their use and are now maladaptive and dysfunctional. (*We'll talk about 't' and 'T' trauma more in the next chapter.*)

With our battery already draining trying to cope with these background vulnerabilities we quickly reach a critical 'tipping point' when stressful events happen spiralling us into a state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion - and burning out!

What causes our battery to drain too fast?



Background Apps

Location tracking apps

- ☐ Facebook,
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Maps, etc

Mobile Phones



Data Intense Events

Online character games

- ☐ Roblox
- ☐ Fortnite
- ☐ Call of Duty

Background Apps

Personal Vulnerabilities

- ☐ Emotional Suppression
- ☐ Unhealthy Thinking & Behaviour Patterns
- ☐ Adaptations from 't' & 'T' traumas

Personal



Data Intense Events

Stressful Events - Personal

- ☐ Major Stressful Life Events
- ☐ Health Conditions
- ☐ Extreme Fatigue

Background Apps

Workplace Vulnerabilities

- ☐ Unclear reporting lines
- ☐ Multiple communication channels
- ☐ Lack of clearly defined teams

Work/School



Data Intense Events

Stressful Events - Work

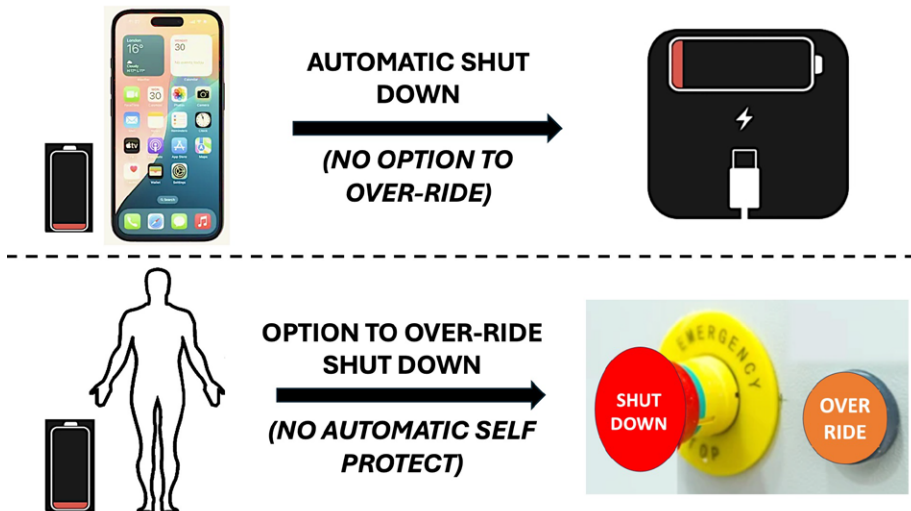
- ☐ Student Behaviour Incidents
- ☐ Parent Conflicts
- ☐ Task Overload

As you can see in the table, a similar narrative plays out in workplaces/schools where dysfunctions in communication, supervisory relationships and teamwork create significant background vulnerability for burnout. When there is already a high level of workplace vulnerability, the occurrence of additional work related stressful events creates a 'high likelihood' clinically significant levels of burnout in affected staff.

No Auto Shut-Down: Pressing The Over-Ride Button

The hard part for many of us is that a lot of the time we are unaware that our batteries are draining too fast, or if we are aware, we simply ignore the warning signs our bodies are sending us. At least our mobile phones know when they are in 'low power mode' and tell us – along with the handy feature of 'automatic shut-down' as a final self-protection step to prevent damage to the device.

Unfortunately, as humans we tend not to 'auto shut down' to protect ourselves. Instead, we press our 'over-ride' button – expecting ourselves to be able to continue to operate at maximum capability even when we have been in 'low power mode' for a long time. This results in considerable damage to our mental and physical health.



If we want to be the best version of ourselves and access our full set of amazing capabilities (and further develop these capabilities) we must ensure our batteries are always sufficiently charged. This begins by reconnecting with ourselves to (1) check the charge level of our battery to begin with; (2) turn off any background apps we don't need anymore; and (3) check that we have enough data processing power to manage the current issues we are facing!

Remember as humans we are all already 'capable' of amazing things provided we have enough 'capacity' in the present moment to learn, heal and grow!

CHAPTER 1.

Reflect:

- (i) To recognise you are so much more capable than you may feel right now.
- (ii) To identify the 'background apps' that may be draining your battery and any 'data intense events' that you are currently facing.



CHAPTER 2.

Focus:

- (i) Consider how unbelonging and emotional suppression may have created some major vulnerabilities for burnout in your life.
- (i) Develop an understanding of the practical tools and strategies you can use personally and at work to reduce the risk of emotional suppression.



Unbelonging: Why we work too hard and get sick.



‘Life is difficult.’ These are the first definitive words of Scott Peck’s masterpiece ‘The Road Less Travelled’. And whilst I would agree with this to some extent, I also feel the statement is incomplete. Something is missing because: ‘Life is Difficult AND Life is Beautiful’.

Thankfully the terms ‘difficult’ and ‘beautiful’ are not opposites, nor mutually exclusive categories - yet for many of us the beautiful moments are merely a glimmer in an otherwise constant grind of difficulties that seem to dominate our lives. Speaking for myself, I know I’d much rather it the other way around - almost everyone does.

So, why do we find it so hard to change our perspective on life so the ‘beautiful’ becomes the more dominant focus than the ‘difficult’?

The 5 Regrets of The Dying...

Becoming consumed by the difficulties of life and missing out on enjoying the beauty of life is not merely some ‘first world’ problem, or a vanity quest of executives seeking ‘self-fulfilment’. This same problem also sits in the hearts of many people suffering chronic illnesses and fatal diseases.

Bronnie Ware, in her bestselling book of the same name lists 'The 5 regrets of the dying' as:

- 1.) I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me."
- 2) "I wish I hadn't worked so hard."
- 3) "I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings."
- 4) "I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends."
- 5) "I wish I had let myself be happier"

Looking more deeply into this list with my psychologist hats on, there are two larger themes: Firstly, the theme of 'suppressing emotions' (points 3 and 5). Secondly, the theme of not focusing enough attention and time on personal growth and relationships (points 1, 2 and 4).

'Suppressing emotions' and 'neglecting personal growth and relationships' are not just the regrets of the dying, but also core issues among the burned out, over stressed and disillusioned leaders we work with. And when these issues remain unresolved overtime the risk for more serious adverse personal and health consequence escalates.

Suppressing Emotions: What does this mean?

Suppressing emotions is when we 'push down', 'block' or 'deny' feelings such as anger or sadness in the moments we feel them. This is an unhealthy response pattern but entirely normal and indeed sensible if we think the opposite of suppression is 'expression' - because as adults, in our society it is totally unacceptable to 'lose our sh#t', 'burst into tears' or 'fly off the handle into an uncontrollable rage'. However when it comes to emotional processing, the opposite of 'suppression' is not 'expression' but rather 'observation' - recognising what we're feeling and accepting these feelings without the need to express them outwardly. We can then 'observe' these feelings and notice how in a matter of a minute or two they begin to reduce in intensity as we begin to return to a normative state. In this short space of time we are 'observing' our emotions and processing them as opposed to 'suppressing' them or expressing them 'outwardly' in unhelpful ways.

Burnout: Leaders Working Too Hard & Getting Sick

As an executive coach and psychologist my work is often focused on supporting school leaders – with a dual focus on both (i) personal wellbeing and (ii) executive performance and leadership. School leaders have it tough. Much tougher than many of us would realise. Recent research findings (Black Dog Institute & UNSW, 2023) show they are way more distressed than the wider population across a range of factors such as: Depression (52% vs 12% of general population), Anxiety (46% vs 9% of general population), and Stress (60% vs 11% of general population).

Stress, Depression, & Anxiety: Symptom Profiles

There are a number of overlaps in the symptoms of stress, depression and anxiety. Stress symptoms include: poor concentration, attention and memory; physical tension, irritability, low mood, muscle aches and pains, changes in diet and appetite, sleep problems, shortness of breath and rapid heartbeat, social withdrawal and nervous habits such as nail biting and fidgeting. Symptoms of depression include low mood, loss of interest in normal activities, weight loss or gain, sleep disturbance, agitation, restlessness, low energy and problems with attention and concentration. Anxiety symptoms include agitation, restlessness, fatigue, low energy, problems with attention and concentration, irritability, muscle tension, sleep disturbance and excessive worry.

As you can see from the symptoms listed above all three conditions have the following symptoms in common: low energy, fatigue, irritability, poor attention and concentration and sleep disturbance. And, as you can guess it is quite possible to experience depression, anxiety and stress all at the same time!

If we look at research into the causative factors behind the high rates of stress in school leaders (ie., Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey in 2023) the issues of: (i) excessive workload and (ii) supporting distressed staff and students are identified as some of the top contributing factors. Most school leaders operate in a stressful environment with excessive workload being an understandable barrier to personal growth, and supporting distressed staff and students limiting their ability to focus on their own emotions and self-expression. In this regard, their experiences have a lot in common with the regrets of the dying. Namely, 1) The risk of suppressing their own emotions, and 2) The risk of over-focusing on work and neglecting their personal growth and relationships.

Do as I say not as I do....

Yet these leaders are all super smart people - many with psychology degrees and training in mental health first aid. They're also people who struggle in not being able to 'do' what is needed to prevent burnout despite 'knowing' what to do.

This murky problem can be summarised by the following question:

What drives us to endure sustained high levels of personal distress at the expense of our own health?

Many of the school leaders I've worked with will acknowledge that they are very caring and compassionate people who always go the extra mile for others. Such care, compassion and dedication is evident in many of us across all walks of life. These virtuous characteristics (among many others) are noble, but such virtues do not necessitate 'enduring high levels of personal distress at the expense of our own health'.

When our care and compassion for others leads to a decline in our own health there is something 'not quite right' with what is going on... Whenever we make choices for the sake of others that are not one-off solutions but rather overtime undermine our own needs and/or mental and physical health we are, according to two of my favourite authors in this space: Natalia Rachel (Why Am I Like This?) and Gabor Maté (The Myth of Normal) – putting our needs for attachment and belonging ahead of our needs for authenticity and individuation. In more plain speak – we are in a cycle of suppressing our own emotions and needs in order to please others (and usually unaware of it at the time).

And whilst this struggle between these two forces of 'belonging' and 'individuation' are a constant juggle for all human beings – those who end up burning out or become unwell may have got caught in a long-term pattern of over-prioritising their need to belong and in turn suppressed their need to individuate. Here is a great quote to consider:

“To belong and to individuate are two biological imperatives. We need each other to survive and thrive. But we also have an inbuilt impulse to diversify, individuate and be unique. Sadly, many systems in the modern world ask us to forgo our individuation in order to belong – creating an existential ultimatum for us to:

- A) Choose to belong and forgo individuation – with the consequence of feeling stifled, misconnected (aloneness while in relationship to others) and a loss of self.*
- B) Choose to individuate and forgo belonging – with the consequence of rejection, misconnection and self-righteousness.”*

(p 125-126, Why Am I Like This, Natalia Rachel)

The root cause of this problem, according to both authors, is exposure to traumatic stressors – events that create tangles or knots in the fabric of lives. The term ‘traumatic stressor’ refers to both big ‘T’ Traumas – severe stressful life events (big messy knots) and little ‘t’ traumas – events which are not so dramatic but none-the-less conflict with our values and sense of self (smaller knots). Traumatic stressors of either type impact our ability to belong and individuate. Another great quote:

“A recurring theme... is the inescapable tension, and for most of us an eventual clash, between two essential needs: attachment and authenticity.

This clash is ground zero for the most widespread form of trauma in our society: namely, the “small-t” trauma expressed in a disconnection from the self...”

(p 105, The Myth of Normal, Gabor Mate)

Both authors suggest that the presence of either ‘T’ trauma or ‘t’ trauma through early childhood such as the big ‘T’ Trauma of abuse, neglect (or both) and the little ‘t’ traumas caused by a range of relatively normal but none-the-less unhealthy parenting practices lead to ‘conditional’ instead of ‘unconditional’ self-acceptance.



**‘t’ traumas
(Smaller knots)**

**‘T’ traumas
(Big knots)**

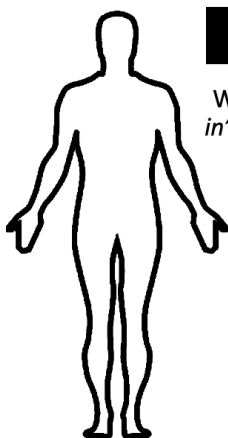
They suggest that parenting traps such as: excessive praising for achievement over effort; promoting the idea a child is more ‘special’ than others; withdrawing emotional support when they become upset and disruptive (let’s not confuse this last issue with the principle of ‘appropriate consequences’) create ‘t’ traumas – where children learn over time to suppress emotions that do not meet their parents ‘conditions’ for love. Accordingly, this shapes their sense of self-identity - feeling as though they don’t always belong in the world as they are, leading to a ‘driven-ness’ to people please or engage in hyper-responsible or over-achieving behaviour.

However as both authors highlight, even in the absence of childhood ‘T’ or ‘t’ traumas, there are enough contemporary ‘t’ traumas in the schools and workplaces we operate in, and in wider society to create the conditions for school leaders to find themselves enduring sustained high levels of personal distress at the expense of their own health. To that end, we would contend that some of the more contemporary challenges for staff in schools such as dysfunctional ways of working, poor relational dynamics, unrealistic workloads create all sorts of ongoing ‘t’ traumas. The table below summarises how unhealthy ways of working impact emotional suppression and the HPT solution for each one. You can learn more about this in our book *“5 Quickstarts for High Performance Teams”*.

Emotional Suppression: Unhealthy Ways of Working			
	Workplace Issues	Types of Suppressed Emotions	HPT Solutions
☐	Personality Clashes	Anger, Stress & Anxiety	Team Profile and Above & Below the Line Chart
☐	Inconsistent Meeting Protocols	Anger, Stress & Anxiety	HPT Meeting Agendas and Roles
☐	Task Overload	Confusion, Stress & Anxiety	Action Registers and Role Description (GSTs)
☐	Lack of Strategic Direction	Despondent, Anxiety & Exhaustion	Vision, Goals and 12-Month Action Plans (Term x Term)
☐	Unrealistic Wellbeing Expectations	Frustration, Despondent & Exhaustion	HPT Team Pulse, Norms and Boosters

Under the burden of unhealthy ways of working t-traumas abound. Navigating this environment can become a never-ending (often unconscious) stress fuelled dilemma: do I choose to prioritise belonging (doing what other's expect of me right now) over individuation (doing what I need for myself right now)? This dilemma is also tainted by the only too real consequences of jeopardising our job security and strained working relationships if we do not meet the expectations of others - further elevating our distress at the expense of our own health. And when I speak of health it's not just our mental health I am referring to.

'Belonging is a felt somatic experience' writes Natalia Rachel. When we feel as though we 'don't belong' we don't just feel it as emotions we also feel it physically in our bodies. We may become physically tense, brace and change our posture as a physical response to 'contain' ourselves. Or we may try to 'numb' ourselves using alcohol, drugs, junk food or even excessive exercise. Referencing the work of Gabor Mate: 'Self suppression has deep physiological consequences on the immune system, on the heart and so on. Self-suppression is a form of physical self-annihilation...' which he further states has been linked in research to a range of auto-immune, inflammatory and chronic health conditions that often have connections to 't' trauma.'



Emotional Suppression: Personal Stocktake

When you last had to '*bite your tongue*', '*grin and bear it*', '*hold it in*' or '*keep yourself in check*' where in your body did you NOTICE it most?

- **Cognitive** (self criticism/ self pity),
- **Emotional** (numbing/ detachment/ disassociation)
- **Physical** (holding breath and/ or bracing internal tension).

The 'grey zone' between exemplary leadership behaviours that are primarily healthy (in their service to others) or unhealthy (in their drive to address internal unmet needs) can be a very murky space. Indeed, in some leaders, many outwardly positive leadership traits sit, like the top of an iceberg, above an unconscious pattern of emotional suppression and unfulfilled needs for belonging. For example, the virtue of 'compassion', when taken too far may be driven by a compulsive concern for the needs of others whilst ignoring self. The virtue of 'kindness' if leading to personal distress may be driven by feeling over responsible for others and repression of healthy self-protection and anger. The virtues of 'diligence' and 'generosity' in their unhealthy forms driven by externally focused hyper responsibility and work ethic to justify one's existence by doing and giving. I wonder if you, like me, you can relate to some or all of the unhealthy drivers behind these well-intentioned leadership behaviours at various times in your leadership journey?

If we are caught in the trap of suppressing our emotions and a pattern of prioritising belonging over individuation, the good news is that regardless of its origins the path to greater wellbeing is a matter of awareness, intention and behaviour change – all things that are entirely within our control. But it's not about being 'less caring' or 'less compassionate' per se. Instead, it is about becoming curious within yourself about why you wish to be caring or compassionate – ensuring your intention is not driven by any unmet need to feel a deeper sense of belonging in the world.

By establishing an intention to be caring or compassionate that is free from any unmet need for belonging, the subsequent behaviours you engage in will always be within your available energy; the other person's response (whether grateful or otherwise) will only be of mild concern to you and any adjustment to relational boundaries becomes merely a logical consequence - with your self-esteem, sense of belonging and identity remaining intact.

When it comes to taking personal action to reduce your risk to inadvertently engage in emotional suppression, there are a number of strategies you can use. The table on the following page highlights a number of cognitive, physical and emotional recovery strategies.

Emotional Suppression: Taking Personal Action

First Aid – Self-Talk

- ☐ Wholesome vs suppressive responding

Recovery – Cognitive

- ☐ Changing unhealthy belief patterns – ABCDE Technique

Recovery – Physical

- ☐ Yoga, breathing, progressive muscle relaxation

Recovery – Emotional

- ☐ Mindfulness, meditation, visualisations, social support

At the cognitive level, getting in touch with our self-talk is a powerful way to understand whether we have a tendency towards wholesome or suppressive responding. Wholesome self-talk which promotes self-compassion is always a better strategy than self-berating/ suppressive self talk (eg., *'well done for trying so hard under such difficult circumstances - great effort'* vs *'what's wrong with you - you could have tried harder/ prepared better/ - double down and work harder next time'*). Suppressive self talk such as self berating leaves you feeling empty/ unloved/ reinforcing the need to work harder regardless of your availability energy damaging your mental and physical health. Wholesome self-talk leaves you feeling loved and validated in touch with your available energy and desire to improve (or let go) increasing your mental and physical health. If we struggle with suppressive self talk than identifying and changing the unhealthy belief patterns that are driving this is an important part of the recovery process (see Appendix C bonus chapter).

There are also a number of powerful physical and emotional techniques that will assist with your recovery journey. You can access some downloadable audio exercises on progressive muscle relaxations and mindfulness (calming thoughts and images) via the 'Wellbeing Playlist' on my YouTube channel 'HPTLevelUp!' or via this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjQ7cHS3Umk&list=PL0izL4F-K2VH2t3pdHZD4C3QOnWHW2o9>

Bringing It All Together

As we bring this chapter on burnout and unbelonging together we'd like to offer Viktor Frankl's quote: "Life can be pulled by goals just as surely as it can be pushed by drives." We would suggest that anyone suffering from burnout is being 'pushed' by the drivers of their challenges and unmet needs for belonging far more than being 'pulled' by their own goals for wellbeing and personal growth.

For leaders who are caught in the burnout cycle, enduring high levels of personal distress at the expense of their own health for the sake of some noble or worthy cause, now is the time to take a different approach. To make some changes in three important areas of your life – so you can continue to do work that is worthwhile and fulfilling without being driven by any unmet needs that may have led you to work too hard and suffer burnout. Remember, Trying to please all, please none, and makes you sick.

Unbelonging, Burnout and You

Take a couple of minutes now to silently reflect on your personal boundaries, life history and workplace interactions so you can develop a forward plan to prevent the risk of burnout!

1. Sense of Belonging: Do I feel like I belong as I am, or do I feel like I have to prove my worth to belong?
2. Self-Awareness: What are my signs of stress when I suppress my emotions?
3. Emotional Suppression at Work: What are my workplace risks?

CHAPTER 2.

Reflect:

- (i) Consider how unbelonging and emotional suppression may have created some major vulnerabilities for burnout in your life.

- (i) Develop an understanding of the practical tools and strategies you can use personally and at work to reduce the risk of emotional suppression.



Notes



II. Recovery & Reconnection

Three signposts to guide the journey.



CHAPTER 3.

Focus:

- (i) To what extent do you believe that the universe is abundant and caring towards you?
- (ii) Identify any issues you may need to address using the upward arrow to shift your perspective about the universe.



Benevolence: Trusting in the universe and the upward arrow.



Do you feel, in your gut (as opposed to head) that the universe is abundant and caring or scarce and uncaring?

Mindset matters - and so does reality! But what happens when, despite cultivating the best, most growth orientated, most super-charged, most eco-friendly, carbon neutral, compassionate, loving and accepting mindset on earth you still wind up burning out? Getting sick, physically spent, depleted, and bewildered about the fire hose of misfortune that keeps forcefully spraying in your face!

As I'm in my 50th year now I'm noticing an increase the frequency of my 'reflection on life ponderings'. These naval gazing moments (whilst sitting in an awkward variation of the lotus pose and watching 'slow life in Bali' on You Tube) are a mashup of both personal reflections on the many shite-storms I have faced over the years and professional reflections on my training and work in clinical psychology and executive coaching.

A lot of what rambles through my head during these times is heavily influenced by the short daily readings I do whilst drinking my morning coffee before commencing my novice 'yoga' routine. Anyway the point of this backstory is to enable a fast track to the 'aha' moment I want to share with you. The scene: just finished reading Haemin Sunim's reflection 'How do you feel about the universe?' (page 54-59) from his deeply insightful book 'When things don't go your way' and I am sitting down cross legged thinking about how I feel about the universe.

Do I feel, in my gut (as opposed to head) that the universe is abundant and caring or scarce and uncaring? As the kaleidoscope of my mind cranks up I'm able to get past the 'correct' answer that my clinical brain quickly arrives at and go deeper, much deeper into how I have truly felt when coping with many stressful life events across my lifespan. And the truth is complicated. Because I'd be lying to myself if I did not acknowledge that I have developed a very resilient and growth oriented mindset that has enabled me to bounce back optimistically and look for the silver lining in every cloud - and perhaps do this better than most - given the extra professional training and personal practice.

But I definitely, hand on heart (prior to the insight I'm about to share) did not believe in my gut that the universe was abundant and caring towards me. The opposite was closer to the truth - at best the universe was neutral and at worst it was a harsh and at times cruel obstacle course to test my faith and perseverance (hence the 'overdosing' on growth mindset and personal responsibility). Any good fortune was not 'a gift from the universe' but due to hard work and personal faith and any misfortune was due to my lack of those two things or simply because 'life is hard'. I knew I had arrived at my deepest truth about the answer to how I truly felt about the universe because I felt completely calm and still both in my mind and body. And I was sad.

Sad that I did not know how to truly embrace the idea that the universe was benevolent, abundant and caring towards me. And so for a few days I sat with this sadness and quietly thought about how I'd learned the universe was scarce and uncaring AND how I might 'unlearn' this lesson and instead 'learn' to believe that the universe was abundant and caring....

So how did I learn that the universe was scarce and uncaring?

Easy to answer! I grew up in a deeply religious family and the religious texts were full of *'life is hard, the world is sinful, the devil is out to get you, the road to hell is wide and the path to heaven is narrow'* etc etc. Thus I learned the universe (aka the world) is uncaring but in our religion God was caring and would help me if I had faith, worked hard and took responsibility for my actions. And thus, all the way back then, I inter-twined these two separate ideas (about 'myself' and about the 'world') into one integrated life philosophy which was reinforced by many stressful life events (confirming the harshness of the world) and subsequent resilient responses (confirming the need for hard work and faith).

This pattern then repeated itself again and again, across a multitude of different issues, over many decades - forming a deeply unconscious system of beliefs. As I began to understand this I could now finally see the problem - the cognitive error that formed many years ago. I had fused my beliefs about 'myself' with my beliefs about the 'world' when, in actual fact, they are two different things. This mix up is of my own making and for me to resolve but the phenomena of fusing beliefs about the 'self' with the 'world' is pretty widespread and reflected in the famous quote by Anias Nin: 'We don't see things as they are; we see them as we are.'

As my attention refocused on the question Haemin Sunmin posed (how do you feel about the universe?) I realised I had unconsciously re-interpreted the question to fit my beliefs (how do I try to respond to the universe to be a good human?). EUREKA! I could finally see the what the problem was and EVEN BETTER I could set aside my beliefs about 'myself' (acknowledging my good set of self helping skills) and actually create the space and focus needed to reflect on my views about the 'world' - focusing on unlearning my old unhelpful beliefs about the universe and learning some new and more helpful beliefs!

The Upward Arrow

One of the tools we use in CBT (cognitive behaviour therapy) for helping people to challenge and change unhelpful beliefs is called the 'Downward Arrow' technique. It's a pretty straightforward series of prompt questions which enables people to dig down and identify their deeper beliefs about themselves in context to stressful events. Once such deeper beliefs are identified they can be challenged and changed to become more adaptive and helpful.

I knew from personal and professional experience the enormous benefits of the Downward Arrow technique in helping people recover from psychological disorders and become more resilient and I wondered if this approach may offer some value - not to change my beliefs about 'myself' but rather to change my beliefs about the 'world'. And after a few revisions and reiterations I developed a variation on the Downward Arrow I call the 'Upward Arrow'.

Activating Event:

*Being told I didn't get the job
(after making the final interview)*

Thoughts & Beliefs (I):

*I gave it my all and failed – I'll never
succeed at getting a job!*

Prompt Question (I):

'and if that is so, then what does that mean?'

Thoughts & Beliefs (II):

*I'll be unemployed and my friends will think I'm
a loser.*

Prompt Question (II):

'and if that is so, then what does that mean?'

Thoughts & Beliefs (III):

*I'll be rejected and alone.
(Unbelonging)*

Downward Arrow

Therapeutic Consequence:

*Explore 'right-fit' learnings, interview skills, consider
other options – no loss of self-confidence*

Thoughts & Beliefs (III):

*That I need to be open to what's next and grateful
I didn't end up in a job that wasn't meant for me.*

Prompt Question (II):

*'and if the universe is abundant and cares for you,
then what does that mean?'*

Thoughts & Beliefs (II):

*I guess it means that there must be something
better coming – that this wasn't meant for me*

Prompt Question (I):

*'and if the universe is abundant and cares for you,
then what does that mean?'*

Thoughts & Beliefs (I):

*I gave it my all and failed – I'll never
succeed at getting a job!*

Therapeutic Consequence:

*Able to address unbelonging issues and promote
self-compassion and problem solving*

Activating Event:

*Being told I didn't get the job
(after making the final interview)*

Upward Arrow

The 'upward arrow' is a process which specifically focuses on shifting my beliefs about the 'world' - that the universe is abundant and caring even in the face of adversity. How it works is very similar to the Downward Arrow only that (1.) the actual prompt questions differ (Downward Arrow prompt: 'and if that is so then what does that mean' vs Upward Arrow prompt: 'and if the universe is abundant and cares for you then what does that mean') and (2) the direction of the steps goes upwards not downwards.

As you can see in the example diagram, the Downward Arrow allows me to get to the 'root' of my own unhealthy beliefs and maladaptive coping – ultimately enabling me to become more resilient within myself (but not necessarily changing my beliefs about the world as abundant and caring instead of scarce and uncaring). The Upward Arrow, on the other hand, neatly bypasses my tendency to solely focus on my own coping skills and directly prompts me to address my beliefs about the world – making a shift towards a benevolent viewpoint of abundance and care much easier to embrace.

So if you're like me, and sometimes get stuck in cycle of seeing the universe as scarce and uncaring instead of abundant and caring, give the Upward Arrow technique a go! Take whatever negative event happened to you and, using one or both of my favourite Upward Arrow prompt questions: (i) *"...and if this turns out to actually be good luck it means..."* OR (ii) *"...and if the universe already loves you and intends to bless you even more it means..."* focus your thinking upwards and see where it takes you!

CAVEAT: Still Not Feeling The Love? Committed vs. Connected

"You can go years being COMMITTED while never feeling CONNECTED. When you're not aligned, effort feels wasteful and exhausting. When you are aligned, effort feels purposeful and energising." Cory Muscara

I still remember facing a particularly big stumbling block in fully embracing a benevolent worldview. After many years of success, I once got stuck in a seemingly never ending cycle of rejections and blockages. There were many months of writing proposals, sending out quotes, talking with people eager to work with me – yet none of this work materialised. After each rejection I would use the 'upward arrow' to help me re-group - only to keep have the same negative results. If the universe really was benevolent then the only explanation left was that I was on a career path that was no longer meant for me. A lesson I had to learn the hard way because I was so 'over-committed' to what I was doing and so 'under-connected' to my inner-self.

CHAPTER 3.

Reflect:

- (i) To what extent do you believe that the universe is abundant and caring towards you?
- (ii) Identify any issues you may need to address using the upward arrow to shift your perspective about the universe.



Notes



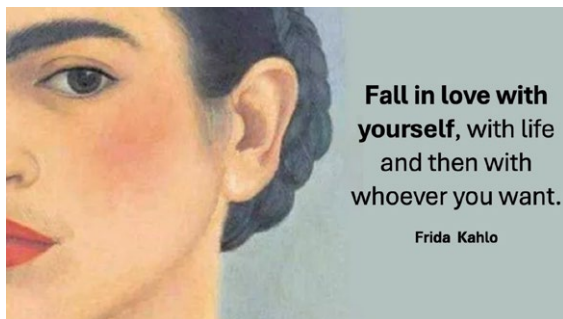
CHAPTER 4.

Focus:

- (i) Review your life history and identify any patterns of 'conditional' self acceptance/ self love.
- (ii) Identify how these 'adaptations' helped you in the past but may now be 'maladaptive' and unhelpful.
- (iii) Release these old patterns as you move towards loving yourself unconditionally.



Unconditional Self Love: Why we should & the many reasons we don't.



'Fall in love with yourself, with life and then with whoever you want.'
Frida Kahlo

Most leaders believe in the importance of self acceptance – but there is a vast chasm between self acceptance and unconditional self love. Between treating yourself with dignity and respect contrasted with being truly, madly, deeply in love with yourself.

This chasm between self acceptance and unconditional self love is vast – so vast that many otherwise high functioning leaders cannot cross it – much to their own detriment. There are thousands of reasons why we don't unconditionally love ourselves yet only one indisputable reason why we should: 'I am'.

I exist, I breathe, I am here on this planet in this moment - I belong here just the same as everyone who lives and breathes. I am neither more special nor less special than anyone else and while I am here I need to look after my mind and body and make the most of my time on this earth.

For those of us with a religious perspective, the Latin term 'Imago Dei' highlights our divine right to belong in the world. For those of us with a secular perspective, the UN Human Rights Charter states we are all born 'equal and free'. In this chapter I want to go deeper into the issue of belonging and focus specifically on embracing unconditional self love.

Frida Kahlo famously said *'Fall in love with yourself, with life and then with whoever you want'*, but I think most of us do this journey in reverse - especially in the western world. From birth we develop early attachments with our carers which then expands into friendships and then later still romantic connections - different forms and ways we love others. We also begin falling in love with the world so to speak, very early on in our lives as we become attached to our favourite toys which then evolves into different types of material possessions across our lifespan. But when in this trajectory do we fall in love with ourselves?

Some would say we are born 'in love with ourselves' putting our own needs and comforts above all else and this makes sense to me. You can see a baby photo of me I refer to as 'little Pete' - which I reflect on when I am wanting to reconnect with a deeper state of unconditional self love.

Yet aside from this very early state (for which most of us have no memory), few people, if any, seem to keep that sense of total self love once in the midst of childhood. And even fewer still hold onto such a state of total self love into adulthood. So perhaps a better question to consider 'why is it so hard for many of us, as adults to truly, madly and deeply (aka unconditionally) love ourselves' in the manner Frida Kahlo's quote suggests? And, how might we unlearn the conditional self love and/or lack of self love most of us have acquired and learn/ relearn the unconditional self love that we may have experienced in the time before our language and memory were fully formed?



Conditional Self Love: The Norm in Modern Society

There are myriad of reasons why, from a very early age most of us lose a sense of unconditional self love. As Gabor Mate puts it: 'The way modern society functions is inimical to healthy human development'. We are subjected to all sorts of behavioural parenting regimes which over represent consequences and under represent nurturing; our familial structures and work routines limit the amount of high quality time we spend with our parents with our development most heavily influenced by peers; our school and sports systems promote and reward high grades or achievements – accolades to the winners whilst everyone else is told to try harder (and by default sent the message they are not good enough as they are); our employment system places higher monetary reward to a select group of roles (many which are not particularly helpful for wider society) whilst devaluing other roles which may have enormous social, community and environmental value. And perhaps the cornerstone in this toxic soup is our addiction to social comparison and materialism linked to increasing amount of time spent on social media – taking us away from both our own self-reflection and personal growth, and building meaningful relationships with people in our local communities.

As an aside, when I was a kid growing up in 1980s one of the most frequent taunts and insults in the playground was criticising kids who 'love themselves'; 'are totally into themselves' etc. This label, somewhat paradoxically was given to kids who really struggled with self-love and were ostracised for trying to be proud of their own achievements (as it was often the only marker for self acceptance they had left after being unable to find any form of social acceptance from peers). Ironically, these ostracised kids were the least likely to develop narcissistic traits as adults but rather ended up with co-dependency and social avoidance issues as a consequence of being teased about 'loving themselves' too much.

So when we consider the current state of society and the conditional nature of acceptance and validation that features in almost every aspect of our lives, it is very hard/ almost impossible to be able to grow and develop with a deep sense of complete and unconditional love for ourselves. Self acceptance – sure - after all there's no point giving yourself a hard time if you've done your best – made the most of what you've got – treated others the way you wanted to be treated... But unconditional self love – truly, madly deeply?

Hmmm I'm not so sure about being truly, madly deeply in a state of self love... perhaps I place a few conditions on myself first – perhaps I have high self expectations, perhaps the messages of love and care from my parents and early carers always seemed to be linked to some desirable behaviour rather than for me as a complete person, both the good bits and the bad bits.

Reconnecting with your Inner Child

There's a wonderful inner child self reflection activity that Buddhist Monk, Haemin Sunim recommends. The activity begins with you looking at a childhood or baby photo of yourself and then expressing feelings of love, appreciation and complete unconditional acceptance of your much younger self. As you sit quietly reflecting, notice any sense of reconnection with yourself and release of unhealthy self judgements & expectations which you may be carrying in the present.

Aside from early childhood experiences, perhaps the other main reason we do not unconditionally love ourselves is due to the 'Arrival Fallacy' whereby we withhold love, happiness or other rewards from ourselves until we achieve certain goals. The Arrival Fallacy is something that I must admit has also been a shadow in my own life and something I regularly encounter in the high achieving executives I work with. And this is where it gets a little complicated – because having unconditional self love AND having high amounts of self discipline are not mutually incompatible characteristics per se – but unpacking how these two things are different and can co-exist can be an important key to deeper self love.

Can unconditional self love co-exist with goal orientated self discipline?

"If you can control your ambition, you won't overextend yourself. If you do not overextend, you will not harm your health. If your health is good, your mind becomes balanced easily."

Haemin Sunim

When we love ourselves unconditionally we place self care as our top priority and indeed as a precursor to caring for others – making sure we don't 'pour from an empty cup'. Or, if we are trying to achieve big goals – making sure we are working from within our available energy reserves as we strive for success.

This means we must be sensitive to the available energy in our mind and body and do things which replenish our energy when it gets too low. To operate this way we can borrow from Zen philosophy in needing to be 'present' in the moment - not 'grasping' at desires for things we don't have nor 'resisting' feelings and emotions which we don't wish to feel. We must also be cognisant of our whole body – scanning for where there is calmness and tension. The easiest way to do this (and thereby unconditionally loving ourselves) is by meditating regularly - putting ourselves in a state of heightened self awareness – and then lovingly respond to ourselves based on what see, hear and feel to optimise our energy and focus.

Attaining such a state of self-awareness and self-love becomes a practical barometer or guide to how much energy we can use in a self disciplined way toward a person/ task/ or goal – not over extending ourselves in the moment but equally able to persevere in bursts of available energy over a very long timeframe if needed. We can also add in the other key elements of Zen, namely 'impermanence' and 'connectedness' as reference points for when we need to shift our focus with various people/ tasks/ goals – adjusting our expectations, setting new boundaries or engaging in new pathways as the journey of life unfolds.

Unconditional Self Love - Promoting Metabolic Health

The other benefit of living in a state of unconditional self love is biological – when we are present, calm and aware we are not caught up in any chronic 'stress response' or fight/flight cycles and thus we do not have any additional cortisol and adrenaline spikes, nor the related metabolic impacts, sugar cravings and cellular damage that may become early markers of later non-communicable diseases.

Bringing It All Together

So where are you at with unconditional self love? Are you in the shallow end of the pool – all for self-acceptance and self respect subject to meeting your own reasonable standards and self expectations? Or are you at the deep end of the pool – going 'all in' for truly, madly deeply self love? Remember unconditional self love is not narcissism but rather the only sustainable way to truly love and serve others, to achieve extraordinary things without sacrificing your health and to live in a state of peace and joy amidst the turmoil of the wider world we live in!

CHAPTER 4.

Reflect:

- (i) Review your life history and identify any patterns of 'conditional' self acceptance/ self love.
- (ii) Identify how these 'adaptations' helped you in the past but may now be 'maladaptive' and unhelpful.
- (iii) Release these old patterns as you move towards loving yourself unconditionally.



Notes



CHAPTER 5.

Focus:

- (i) Develop a realistic understanding of what recovery and transformation actually means in your context.
- (ii) Develop new daily routines to reinforce your recovery and new level of personal growth and freedom.



Surrender: The daily practice of self-love and faith in the universe.



Crossing The Chasm: My Journey

It was quite a journey for me to realise that the root cause of my own personal burnout experiences mainly related to largely unconscious patterns of conditional self-love (as well as a lack of trust in the abundance of the universe). Being able to trace back the origins of this issue, and how it had evolved across my lifespan was a tremendously helpful part of my transformation journey.

I was able to see the origins of my inability to embrace unconditional self-love in my early childhood experiences such as transference of parental stress, unmet emotional needs and conditional rewards. This resulted in me 'being unable to find rest in a state of unconditional love' in my early years. I felt as though I didn't belong as I was (especially when I was unhappy, angry or sad) – and I felt as though I was defective or faulty in some way which I had to somehow fix so I could become lovable.

Thus, my childhood was marked by a sub conscious pattern of emotional suppression, physical bracing, tension and disassociation/ self-reproach from any undesirable/ unacceptable feelings. All of these issues manifested in a hard wired default 'stressed/ hyper vigilant' state akin to an ADHD profile. The chronically elevated cortisol/ stress hormones became my new normal with consequential negative health impacts (unusually high frequency of colds, flus and infections and severe joint pain of unknown origins).

It also meant my baseline level of dopamine/ happy chemicals was much lower than my peers making me seek it with greater urgency than others - leading me to develop more addictive/ intensive patterns in both hobbies/ extreme sports (individual pursuits which I can control) and in friendships/ relationships (if these were even available to me at all).

And so, by the time I was in my teenage years and early adulthood my life became an overachieving freight train of things I could succeed at to give me a reason (aka 'a condition') for self-love and allow me to repress my heightened emotional sensitivity and feeling of unbelonging. I cultivated a small circle of friends with similar extreme sports interests (and maybe similar needs?). But all of this activity and achievement doesn't actually fulfil my needs in any lasting way but rather it simply patches over things until my next achievement arrives - always 'on the search'. My unmet need can only truly met by unconditional self-love which I can connect with via religious experiences for brief periods at various times in my life until more recently where I have learned to immerse myself in this state in a more sustainable way. However, by now there are decades of unhealthy belief systems, neurochemistry, social and economic pressures and musculoskeletal wear and tear to complicate the post transformation journey.

Post Transformation: The After Party...

So, in this post transformation/ 'enlightened' state, having embraced the universe as benevolent and caring towards me (whilst acknowledging the existence of both kind and unkind actions from others) AND fallen in love with myself unconditionally - with no expectations to be more than I already am - (embracing all my gifts and imperfections with equal joy and acceptance) what happens next?

Do I win a prize? Do I enter Nirvana? Does a halo shine brightly above my head? Do I get to retire and relax for the rest of my days? At one level I know these questions are silly, but honestly, at another level I have been conditioned all my life to believe that after working really hard to achieve something there needs to be some sort of reward – an 'A' grade, a certificate of achievement, a medal, a ribbon, a prize – an after party and champagne room where I'm given my platinum membership and get to hang out with the A listers...

So, what is the prize? Where is my ticket to the after party? There is a Zen saying, 'Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water', and therein is the answer. The 'after party' of transformation is not about escaping the world or engaging in extraordinary activities, but about fully engaging with and finding the profound within the ordinary – about complete acceptance and surrender to what is - in the moment – in the present.

Sounds good in theory but how does this actually work in practice? I mean if I am still surrounded by my old environment where so many of my unhealthy patterns built up surely, I'm at risk of relapsing into my previous burned-out state. After all, we know that 'our environment influences our behaviour'. This saying is a truism BUT what is also true is the fact that we have the ultimate power to be able to choose our behaviours despite our environment. As Viktor Frankl said: "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." And this is where the daily Zen practice of 'surrender' becomes a very practical tool to reinforce the wonderful growth and freedom that I/ we can experience in our post transformation journey.

The Daily Practice of Surrender: My Routine

For novices like me, I am less focused on 'surrender' as a divine flow state I can continuously 'be' in (although it sounds amazing) and more focused on something concrete and practical I can 'do' each day – while still being in my normal environment and facing my normal life, family and work commitments. At a practical level this means I have a daily morning routine of stretching, meditation/ reflection & journaling which I get up early to complete before getting on with the family and work routines of each day.

My daily practice of 'surrender' enables me to keep embracing the universe as benevolent and caring towards me (whilst acknowledging the existence of both kind and unkind actions from others) AND stay in love with myself unconditionally - with no expectations to be more than I already am - (embracing all my gifts and imperfections with equal joy and acceptance). This time of mediation, stretching and journaling usually begins by sitting quietly and considering three inquiry questions:

- 1. Do I feel like I can rest in a state of unconditional self-love right now?*
- 2. Do I feel the love of the abundant universe towards me more than I feel the pressure from any obstacles or criticisms I am facing?*
- 3. Is my work focus energising me to feel excited for the future or feel drained/ obligated/ resentful about the present?*

Then I simply sit in silence reflecting - mentally via noticing the thoughts that follow and physically via body scanning. Where I notice tension, I then ask myself if I am 'resisting' any negative feelings or 'grasping' at any goals/ desires that are beyond reach.

When I consider the first question, if I can feel any bodily aches and pains (common for my life stage!) I also ask the following inquiry questions: *'Do I believe my body is always doing everything it can to heal itself (and how I am showing appreciation to it)?'; 'Are my choices in diet, exercise and social support nurturing my health right now?'* Another inquiry question I used for a while was *'Do I accept and love myself both past and present – acknowledging all my mistakes and imperfections without any further judgement or self blame; and am I focused now on the present and how I can best nurture myself and show appreciation toward others today?'* These additional questions maybe helpful for you too.

When I consider the second question, I consider the idea of 'impermanence' when I am worried about any current obstacles - knowing that these too shall pass, and 'connectedness' - recognising the majority of criticisms from others are a response to their own issues and unmet needs (and my role is to set personal boundaries rather than judging them as 'bad' and elevating myself as 'good'). Some additional inquiry question I use are: *'Am I accepting that life events are a mix of random circumstances as well as consequences from my own choices?'; 'Am I accepting any rejections as a sign the universe has better plans for me as I grow towards areas I am energised and inspired by?'; 'Am I grateful for opportunities I have without the need to 'over-reach' or grasp to make them into more than what they are?'*

Finally, I reflect on the third question about my work/ activity focus for the day ahead. I think about the extent to which my work is energising me to feel excited for the future or feel drained/ obligated/ resentful about the present. An additional inquiry question here is: *Am I 'committed' to things more than I actually feel 'connected' to them right now?* If I am feeling any obligation, resentment or disconnect about the tasks I have to do today I take some time to reflect further on how my work provides for my family whom I love very much and/or consider which aspects of my work I still find energising – expanding my focus on this as a source of inspiration for the day ahead! I also give myself permission to consider changes I may need to make in my work over the longer term to better align towards my personal energy and growth.

Once this time of reflection is done (usually around 5 - 10 minutes) I then do other additional exercises (i.e. stretching or affirmations) and journal any ideas on my notes in my phone and get on with the day – and thus my daily practice of surrender is done! (Unless I need to rinse and repeat a shorter version of the same routine as a response to unforeseen setbacks during the day.)

Bringing It All Together

For me the daily practice of surrender is a beautiful and essential part of the next stage my journey to fully embrace both unconditional self-love and the benevolence of the universe. It's a work in progress with the all too real tendency to relapse in old patterns of cognitive emotional and physical behaviours that have been deeply rooted survival mechanisms for much of my life - albeit with many undesirable consequences.

Whilst we all have different journeys and life experiences I wonder if you may find some value in the daily practice of surrender and taking a moment to 'thank the benevolent universe for blessings that are on the way to you and will be arriving soon' AND also taking a moment to say to yourself 'I love you as you are in this moment - you don't have to prove anything nor become any more than you already are!'

Wishing you every blessing!

CHAPTER 5.

Reflect:

- (i) Develop a realistic understanding of what recovery and transformation actually means in your context.

- (ii) Develop new daily routines to reinforce your recovery and new level of personal growth and freedom.



III. Appendix

- A. Recovery Planning: 5 Days of Focus/ 5 Weeks of Healing
- B. My 3 x Daily Reflection Questions
- C. Mindsets: Change the backstory of your life!
(chapter from previous book: 'Resilience')



APPENDIX A.

Recovery Planning: 5 Days of Focus/ 5 Weeks of Healing.

How long will it take me to recover from burnout?

What a great question, and a fair question to ask me as someone who has a PhD clinical psychology! The answer, firstly according to Google is: *'The time it takes to recover from burnout varies significantly, ranging from a few weeks to several months...'* And this is true because it depends on the severity of the underlying depression/ anxiety/ stress symptoms and the extent to which you can access professional help and follow through correctly with appropriate recovery strategies and, if needed, medical intervention to manage more severe biological symptoms. Another similar question most people want to know is *'how quickly can I recover from burnout – can I fast-track the process?'*

Research on the effectiveness of psychological therapies shows 5-6 sessions over 10-12 weeks yields significant gains. Research on injury recovery from strains and sprains (such as ankles) also shows 10-12 weeks is a realistic timeframe. Finally research on achieving significant weight loss and/or muscle gain/ fitness also highlights the 10-12 week timeframe as realistic. So 12 weeks is a realistic time to recover from 'mild-moderate' burnout and also a timeframe to see major improvement if the condition is 'severe'. 12 weeks seems like a long time and some people can recover much faster than this however you should NOT expect to be fully back to normal in under 6 weeks – you'd just be setting yourself up for failure and probably make things worse.

So, if I am aiming for 6 weeks what should I be doing?

Well the good news is there is a 6 week process we call '5 Days of Focus/ 5 Weeks of Healing' which can give you some structure to move forwards and, the best part, if after 6 weeks you are still struggling (which is normal – remember 12 weeks is the expected timeframe in most cases) than you simply repeat the same cycle albeit with new ideas, insights and focus in this second cycle of personal growth.

However, if after 12 weeks consistently using appropriate recovery strategies there is no significant improvement than a full medical assessment and review will be very important as there may be other medical conditions not detected by your medical doctor from your initial assessment that could be impacting your recovery.

5 Days of Focus/ 5 Weeks of Healing

Assuming you have sufficient available energy to read, reflect and journal, the first 6 weeks of your recovery journey has two phases:

Phase 1: 5 Days of Focus*

This is the first week of your journey once you have got this book and completed your first session. In this first week you'll read a chapter each day (allowing for two spare days) and journal your reflections based on the specific chapter focus questions. In this week your overall recovery goal is to accept where you're at – give yourself space to calm down without trying to 'fix' it or 'force' change.

Allow yourself to rest when you needed to and communicate with those around you so they can understand where you're at and accommodate for you. During this week you'll start to map out the underlying issues that may have led to your burnout and by the end of the week you'll have a journal/ notepad full of notes and ideas to share at your next session which will form become the catalyst for setting some recovery goals for the following 5 weeks.

*If you are in the second 6 week cycle you'll complete the same chapter focus question reflections with the benefit of expanding on your thoughts and ideas from the first cycle.

Phase 2: 5 Weeks of Healing

Once you complete your second session you'll have some goals developed in the areas of Thinking, Emotions, Physical Responses and broader Healthy Lifestyle. You may also have some deeper reflection areas to consider on Benevolence, Self Love & Surrender. Each recovery goal you set will be broken down into daily/ weekly actions that are realistic for your available energy. There is no blame or self judgement if these goals are not achieved but rather regular check-ins at each subsequent session to adjust things further as your recovery progresses.

A Little Book on Recovery & Reconnection

Chapter Reflections Worksheet



My Reflections...	
Reflection Prompts	
CHAPTER 1 (i) To recognise you are so much more capable than you may feel right now. (ii) To identify the 'background apps' that may be draining your battery and any 'data intense events' that you are currently facing.	
CHAPTER 2 (i) Consider how unbelonging and emotional suppression may have created some major vulnerabilities for burnout in your life. (ii) Develop an understanding of the practical tools and strategies you can use personally and at work to reduce the risk of emotional suppression.	

	CHAPTER 3 (i) To what extent do you believe that the universe is abundant and caring towards you? (ii) Identify any issues you may need to address using the upward arrow to shift your perspective about the universe.
	CHAPTER 4 (i) Review your life history and identify any patterns of 'conditional' self-acceptance/ self-love. (ii) Identify how these 'adaptations' helped you in the past but may now be 'maladaptive' and unhelpful. (iii) Release these old patterns as you move towards loving yourself unconditionally.
	CHAPTER 5 (i) Develop a realistic understanding of what recovery and transformation actually means in your context. (ii) Develop new daily routines to reinforce your recovery and new level of personal growth and freedom.

APPENDIX B.

My 3 x Daily Reflection Questions

1. Do I feel like I can rest in a state of unconditional self love right now?

2. Do I feel the love of the abundant universe towards me more than I feel the pressure from any obstacles or criticisms I am facing?

3. Is my work focus energising me to feel excited for the future or feel drained/ obligated/ resentful about the present?

Rating for each one:



1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

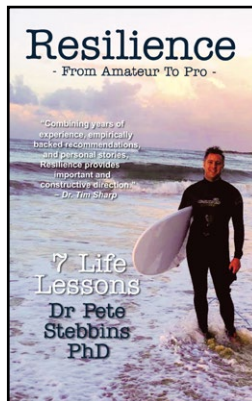
Very Low

Very High

Appendix C

Mindsets: Change the backstory of your life!

(chapter from previous book: 'Resilience')



4 . Mindsets :

Change The Backstory of Your Life

**“The Devil is in the details, but so is Salvation.”
Hyman G. Rickover**

**“To change your mindset it’s not ‘what’ you are
thinking that is important it’s ‘why.’” Dr Pete**

Pro Question:

Can you live free from the need to worry, demand and blame?

Turning Pro: Mindsets & Me

I have always believed that how you feel is directly related to how you think and the scientific evidence to confirm the link is overwhelming. However, despite knowing this, I have really struggled with the process of changing my own negative thinking patterns at times when I felt intense sadness or frustration. Despite looking into the mirror and telling myself all sorts of reassuring and positive statements and affirmations, my sense of hopelessness and despair did not seem to improve and sometimes I felt worse.

I had learnt in my clinical psychology training how to identify the negative thinking patterns that caused me so much distress and it was pretty easy for me to recognise these negative thoughts. However recognising my negative thinking was simple compared with the much harder task of uncovering the unhealthy mindsets that caused these thoughts. I also had to learn the difference between the surface thoughts that form the story of our lives and the more powerful deeper thoughts and mindsets that formed the backstory of my life.

Once I could uncover the mindsets and backstory that drove the surface thinking and story of my life, I then had to learn how to effectively challenge and change these deeper mindsets so they became healthy. I initially learnt how to do this when I felt calm and refreshed. However uncovering, challenging and changing unhealthy mindsets was much harder to do when I needed it most – often in the middle of episodes of sadness or anger when I had very little motivation to try and change my thinking.

In this chapter I will share the life lessons of (1) Why affirmations fail; (2) The difference between healthy and unhealthy mindsets; and (3) How to uncover and change your mindsets to write a better backstory for your future...

Why Affirmations Fail

“It’s not working!” cried my depressed and anorexic patient Katie. “Every day for the last few weeks I have been doing exactly what you told me to do – looking into the mirror each morning and telling myself ‘I’m not fat and ugly – I am beautiful and healthy’. Yet I feel even more depressed, fat and ugly than ever before!”

Affirmations are a poison chalice. Whilst it is a simple fact that your thinking patterns will lead you to happiness or despair, changing your thinking patterns is not so simple. When I did my postgraduate training to be a clinical psychologist I was taught to encourage people to use ‘affirmations’ and think ‘positive thoughts’ about themselves – and say these thoughts out loud to change their negative thinking patterns into positive ones. The idea was that if they repeated these positive thoughts often enough, the positive thoughts will eventually replace the negative ones. Whilst this idea may sound logical, the

notion that you can ‘fake it till you make it’ does not change your underlying thinking patterns, and used as a stand-alone self-help strategy is downright dangerous, often making things worse.

Just look at what happened to a patient of mine ‘Katie’ (not her real name) who was suffering from anorexia and depression (made worse by conflict with her family and boyfriend). Despite her engaging in therapy and doing her daily affirmations, staring in the mirror and saying to herself – *I am beautiful* – she kept feeling worse about herself and ultimately ended up back in hospital. What went wrong? Why didn’t these daily affirmations change her negative thinking into positive thinking?

Thinking Patterns: You and The Mirror

Try a quick experiment with me now. Go to the bathroom and look into the mirror and say to yourself out loud “*I am beautiful and healthy*”. Then stop and take note of the thoughts in your mind as soon as you have finished speaking... what happened? Chances are many of us would have had after thoughts such as “*This is silly*”, “*No, you’re not that beautiful*”, “*You wish...*”, “*Who are you trying to fool?*”. A few of us may have thought, “*Yes – you really are very beautiful and healthy*” and the rest of us may have not thought anything at all.

Those of us who had some negative thoughts in our minds immediately after we stared in the mirror and told ourselves we were beautiful need to recognise why our affirmation failed to prevent our negative thinking from getting worse. Even more important, we need to learn the secrets of how to truly change our negative thinking into positive healthy thinking to live a happy life.

The Story & Backstory: Surface Thoughts & Mindsets

“The real story is in the backstory.”

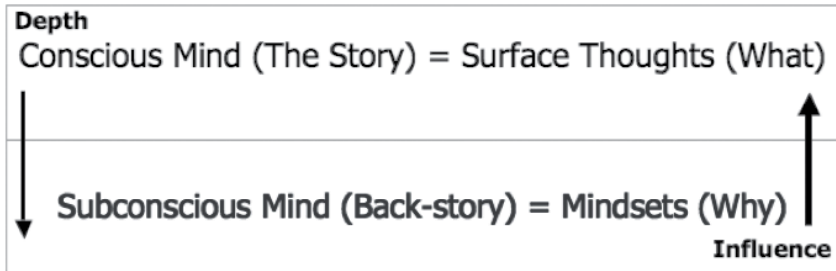
Dr Pete

To understand what went wrong for Katie and for many of us, we need to understand two important concepts in books and movies namely the ‘story’ and the ‘backstory’.

The ‘story’ of a book or movie is what you are experiencing in the present moment – what can be seen and heard – just like seeing yourself in the mirror and hearing your voice say aloud “I am beautiful”. In psychology, the ‘story’ is known as our ‘surface thoughts’. Our surface thoughts (be they said out loud or in our minds) simply describe what we are thinking and can be either positive or negative, like the thoughts we had after we told ourselves we were beautiful. For many people, these subsequent thoughts were negative.

When it comes to psychology and mindsets, the ‘backstory’ of a book or movie is more important than the ‘story’. The ‘backstory’ is the narrative providing a history or background of why the characters are behaving the way they do in the main ‘story’. This ‘backstory’ is akin to our underlying mindsets, which develop over a lengthy time and influence our surface thoughts to be either positive or negative in response to the situations we face. For those of us who had negative after thoughts about how

beautiful we are – our underlying mindsets are the ‘backstory’ that needs to be both understood and changed if we are to truly believe we are beautiful...



In research psychology we have known for a long time that it is the mindsets and deeper layers of thinking (the ‘backstory’) that are more influential in causing depression, anxiety and stress than surface thinking (the ‘story’). Yet, when it comes to therapy to change negative thinking, we often make the mistake of only treating ‘surface thinking’, which does not change the underlying mindsets nor help people recover from depression.

Why Katie’s Affirmations Failed

Let’s apply this theory to Katie, my patient with anorexia and depression. As you can see from the case study, when she was asked to change her surface thoughts from negative (“*I am fat and ugly*”) to positive (“*I am healthy and beautiful*”) she co-operated and began changing her surface thoughts by saying aloud the positive thoughts every day. Unfortunately, despite using these affirmations to help her change the ‘story’ of her surface thoughts from negative to positive, we did not help her

uncover and change her deeper negative mindset and ‘backstory’. As such, her ‘backstory’ continued to negatively influence her thinking and ultimately made things worse for her, leaving her feeling more frustrated and sceptical about her therapy and prospects of recovery.

If Our Affirmations Fail – What Next?

So how do we (1) help Katie and ourselves uncover and identify the unhealthy mindsets we have within us that lead us into negative thinking patterns and sabotage our attempts at positive affirmations to lift our moods and (2) learn the skills, techniques and strategies we can apply through a self-help approach to rewrite the backstory of our lives and change unhealthy mindsets towards more positive ones for lasting wellbeing and happiness?

In the next section we will explore the unhealthy mindsets that lead us into negative thinking patterns, and in particular define the difference between these unhealthy and healthier mindsets.

Unhealthy Mindsets

Did you know there are only five types of Unhealthy Mindsets and only three of them are linked to Psychological Disorders? When I was younger I was an avid reader of self-help books and found the work of Dr Albert Ellis really helpful in understanding and improving myself. Dr Ellis (27 September 1913 – 24 July 2007) was an American psychologist who in 1955 developed Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). He was a very direct and somewhat con-

roversial therapist and zealous promoter of what he called Rational Thinking.

Dr Ellis developed a list of Irrational Beliefs aka Unhealthy Mindsets, which he theorised were the root cause of most psychological disturbance. As researchers tried to prove his theory, they began to develop questionnaires to measure these Irrational Beliefs. When they analysed how similar or different each of these beliefs were, they found several overlapped and their results suggested there were only five clearly distinguishable types of Unhealthy Mindsets:

1. **Worrying** – Irrational and excessive worrying over possible misfortune and possible future accidents.
2. **Need (Demand) For Approval** – Excessive need for approval from others reflecting a fear of not being accepted and/or rejected.
3. **Emotional Irresponsibility (Blame)** – Ascribing emotions to external causes instead of oneself.
4. **Rigidity** – Irrational rigid thoughts and norms people hold for themselves and others leading to guilt, attribution of guilt and punishment for mistakes.
5. **Problem Avoidance** – Irrational avoidance and dependent cognitions concerning decision making and taking risks.

Psychological Disorders

Fast forward 15 years and I am completing my PhD research. In my research, I examined the link between types of Unhealthy

Mindsets and psychological distress in people who were carers for a family member with an injury or illness. I did what is called a ‘longitudinal study’ where I measured people’s mindsets and also their level of distress at two time points six months apart (to accommodate for the varying effects of life events on psychological status).

The results of the study at the earlier time highlighted a range of different stressors and coping problems people had which were difficult to disentangle given their complex adjustment issues. However, at the second point in time – where participants had a subsequent six-month period of settling and adjustment – the results were much clearer regarding the specific impact of different mindsets on various types of psychological problems.

Correlations Between the Predictor and Outcome Variables

Dependent Variables	T2 Global Severity Index	Somatisation	Obsessive/Compulsive	Interpersonal Sensitivity	Depression	Anxiety	Hostility	Phobic Anxiety	Paranoid Ideation	Psychoticism
<i>Irrational Belief Inventory Subscales</i>										
Worrying	0.42**	0.15	0.43**	0.38**	0.42**	0.32**	0.42**	0.32**	0.30**	0.34**
Rigidity	0.04	-0.03	0.22	-0.11	-0.16	0.05	0.19	0.11	0.17	0.11
Problem Avoidance	0.16	0.01	0.06	0.23	0.17	0.09	0.01	0.22	0.05	0.22
Need for Approval	0.21	-0.04	0.32**	0.23	0.17	0.08	0.27*	0.17	0.31**	0.22
Emotional Irresponsibility	0.20	0.07	0.14	0.23	0.41**	0.09	0.05	0.07	0.07	0.13

Note: **significant at $p<0.01$ level (2 tailed)
* significant at $p<0.05$ level (2 tailed)

My research showed that the Mindset of Worrying is linked to almost all forms of psychological distress. The Mindset of Demand (Need for Approval) is linked to Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Hostility and Suspiciousness (Paranoid Ideation), and the Mindset of Blame (Emotional Irresponsibility) is significantly correlated with Depression.

The key point here is that whilst all five Unhealthy Mindsets are likely to be unhelpful in living a successful life, only

three (Worrying, Demand and Blame) in my follow-up research were linked to actual psychological disorders.

From Unhealthy to Healthy Mindsets

Having discovered the three most important Unhealthy Mindsets related to serious stress related disorders (Worry, Demand & Blame) it was also important to identify and clearly describe the corresponding healthy mindsets for each of these (Accept, Encourage & Responsible) and be able to clearly communicate what this shift in thinking patterns would look like.

From Demanding to Encouraging – There is much freedom from anger and depression when you change your mindset from Demanding that others ‘should’ do what you want them to by controlling their actions and instead move to a mindset of Encouraging. Example thought patterns that relate to a mindset of Demand include:

“They should do what I want them to do or else...”

“I must achieve what I set out to with no flexibility.”

“I do not accept failures or excuses and people must do what they commit to, regardless.”

The opposite mindset, Encouraging, respects people’s right to make their own choices and encourages and influences them where possible. Example thought patterns that relate to Encouraging include:

“How can I shape and influence them to do what I need them to?”

“I hope they will do what I want but I need to have a backup plan.”

“How can I encourage them and show them the benefits of what I want them to do?”

From Worry to Acceptance – The mindset of Worry involves fearing the future and change, over-controlling relationships, and blocking growth and development for self and others. Example thought patterns that relate to Worry include:

“They might be hurt or unsafe but I do not know because I am not there.”

“What if this or that bad thing happens soon?”

“I can’t let them take that risk as I do not want them to get hurt.”

When you move from a state of Worry to one of Acceptance, you make the most of each day and each relationship in the “here and now” without trying to predict the future. Example thought patterns related to Acceptance include:

“That has not happened yet. I need to make the most of today.”

“One day at a time – I will not worry about the future.”

“I hope they are safe but no point worrying about what I can’t control.”

From Blame to Responsibility – Blame is where you rigidly believe other people and/or events are to blame for your own reactions, outbursts and negative moods. Examples of thought patterns related to Blame include:

“How dare they talk to me like that!”

“It’s all their fault my life is ruined.”

"If they didn't treat me like that, then I would have been able to succeed."

When you make the journey to the Responsible mindset, you take responsibility for your own reactions, outbursts and moods. You have an awareness of your own body and mind and decide your own actions, letting go of harmful emotions. Example thought patterns related to Responsibility include:

"I will not waste my energy or time on them any longer."

"I will make the most of what I have."

"My anger is my problem and the sooner I move on from this the better."

Mindsets and You

When it comes to Mindsets, where are you at with Worry, Demand and Blame? Take some time out now to answer the questions below and identify where you could improve your thinking patterns and adopt healthier mindsets when facing the challenging Waves of Life!

Worry - Do you Worry more than live in a state of Acceptance? How do you know you are Worrying – can you remember a recent example of this? Could you replace this worry with a mindset of Acceptance and what would this look like for you?

Demand - Do you Demand more than you Encourage? How do you know you are Demanding – can you remember a recent example of this? Could you replace this worry with a mindset of Encouragement and what would this look like for you?

Blame - Do you Blame more than take Responsibility? How do you know you are Blaming – can you remember a recent example of this? Could you replace this worry with a mindset of Responsibility and what would this look like for you?

Changing Mindsets: A New Backstory For Your Life

So let us return to the beginning of the chapter: Why do affirmations fail? Why didn't Katie feel beautiful despite the fact she looked into the mirror and told herself "I am beautiful" every day? We have already discovered that the reason affirmations often fail us is that they don't engage our thinking patterns at the deeper levels where our unhealthy mindsets are hidden. Whilst our surface thinking may be changed through our affirmations and mantras, the deeper unhealthy mindsets remain unaffected and so our negative views remain intact despite the positive things we say to ourselves in the mirror. We refer to these important layers of thinking as the 'Story', which represents our surface thinking and the 'Backstory' which represented our deeper level mindsets.

In order to become more resilient and happy in life we need to be able to (1) quickly and easily uncover the mindsets that have created a negative backstory to our lives, and (2) genuinely challenge and change these negative Mindsets to rewrite this into a more positive and helpful backstory for the future of our lives.

So, in this next section we will learn the skills, techniques and strategies we can apply through a self-help approach to rewrite the backstory of our lives and change unhealthy mindsets towards more positive ones for lasting wellbeing and happiness.

Quick Refresh: Thinking Patterns and the ABCs

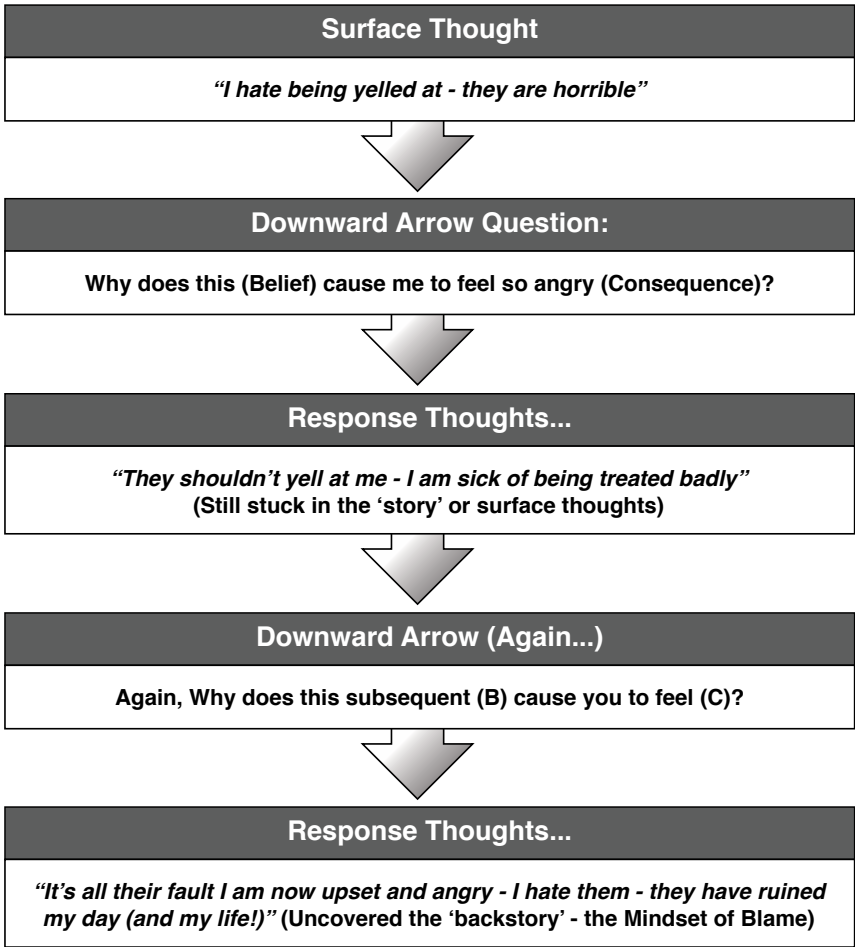
So everyone knows the ABCs of thinking, namely we can predict the emotional consequences we feel (C) based on our thoughts and beliefs (B) about the events or actions (A) we experience. This simplistic view of the different emotional consequences (C) of various thinking patterns and beliefs (B) to the same action or event (A) is illustrated below:

A	B	C
Action or Event	Beliefs & Thoughts	Consequence
Someone I care about yells at me...	"I am a failure – I give up!"	Depressed
	"I hate this – they are horrible!"	Angry
	"I don't care – not my problem..."	Calm

We also know that B contains both surface thoughts – aka the story (*"I'm a failure – I give up!"* or *"I hate this – they are horrible"* or *"I don't care – not my problem"*) as well as deeper Mindsets – aka the backstory (the reason why I have my surface thoughts).

1. Uncovering The BackStory: Mindsets & The Downward Arrow:

To uncover the backstory and mindsets driving our surface thinking and story we tell ourselves about our lives, we need to use a strategy called the Downward Arrow. The Downward Arrow is a self-questioning technique where we ask ourselves a “why” question to reveal the mindsets that cause our surface thinking and subsequent emotional distress. Let’s go back to the example of *“Someone I care about yells at me...”* and becoming angry and upset with surface thoughts of *“I hate this – they are horrible”*:



2. Rewriting the BackStory for a Better Future: Changing Your Mindset

To do this we add two more letters to our ABC model of thinking. You guessed it, D and E. In the ABCDE model the ABC is the same – with the Downward Arrow applied to the B to uncover the backstory (unhealthy mindset) behind the story (surface thoughts). The D stands for Disputing or Challenging our unhealthy mindsets and the E stands for new and Empowering Healthy Mindsets.

Let's look at the example from Katie's life where "*Someone I care about yells at me...*" using the ABCDE strategy to uncover and change the negative mindsets causing the unhealthy emotional consequences.

To rewrite the backstory of Katie's (and our) lives for a positive future, we must Dispute or Challenge these blame-based mindsets that drive our unhealthy surface thinking and anger. We need to ask ourselves some important questions about how logical, realistic, practical (helpful) and empirical (evidence-based) the beliefs are. If these beliefs fail any one of these important challenge questions then we will need to rewrite this belief to match what is more practical, realistic, helpful and so on.

Let's do this together now using the example above as a guide. As we ask ourselves these challenge questions, we quickly realise how unhelpful and unrealistic our Mindsets are and have to write down beliefs that are more helpful and realistic. *NOTE: we are not writing down positive affirmations or unrealistic predictions of the future – just blunt, honest and believable statements about the*

situation. As you can see, the result of this dispute/challenge process is a healthier Mindset in the E Column, which provides an Empowering new believable backstory for the next stage of our lives.

HAZARD WARNING:

Letting Go of The Old Backstory is Hard!

Changing Mindsets is hard – giving up and letting go of the old backstory of your life to embrace a new backstory for your future is not as easy as it may seem. Let me explain.

Compare the following old backstory (B) and new backstory (E):

Unhealthy Mindset (Blame)

“It’s all their fault I am upset. I hate them – they have ruined my day (or ruined my life!)”

Vs

Healthy Mindset (Responsible)

“Whilst I may be angry and do not like being yelled at, I can choose my own response and stay calm instead of wasting my energy on anger.”

Which would you rather be? The answer seems quite obvious and most of us would choose to have a more Responsible mindset

CHANGING MINDSETS - ABCDE				
A	B	C	D	E
Action or Event	Unhealthy Beliefs	Consequences	Dispute Un-healthy Beliefs	Empowerment
Someone I care about yells at me...	"I hate being yelled at!" "They shouldn't yell at me - I am sick of being treated badly" <u>"It's all their fault I am upset"</u> (BLAME)	Upset Angry	Logic Q: <i>Is it logical that my anger is ALL their fault?</i> A: NO – I am responsible for my anger Evidence Q: <i>Is there evidence to prove my belief?</i> A: NO – They do not have 100% control over how I feel – I do! Practical Q: <i>Does this belief help me cope?</i> A: NO – It only makes me more angry - I don't like being angry Realistic Q: <i>Is this belief realistic?</i> A: NO – I can control my own response	"Whilst I may be angry and do not like being yelled at, <u>I can choose my own response</u> and stay calm instead of wasting my energy on anger" (RESPONSIBLE)

and have greater control over our own happiness and quality of life. However, whilst this is all very well in theory, in practice many people, including Katie, struggle to shift from unhealthy to healthy mindsets despite having all of the insights and strategies we have covered. Why?

Why is 'Blame' so Easy and 'Responsible' so Hard?

Let's be honest, for some people there is some short-term pleasure in blaming others for their emotional distress and burnout. We create this evil logic that if we didn't cause the problems that led to our own anger and depression then why should we have to fix it??? It seems unfair and unjust to expect ourselves to have to work hard at our own recovery when we believe our stress was caused by someone else.

Just like when you walk past the broken food jar someone else spilled on the supermarket floor without feeling the need to clean it up, you become a bystander avoiding the obvious need to take action to restore your own wellbeing and instead wait for someone else to fix your life for you! But drinking from the cup of blame is a poison chalice and creates a very dark back-story of your future life. By refusing to help yourself recover you will either be waiting a very long time (for some sort of justice, retribution or compensation) in a state of depression – wasting the wonderful life you could have had OR be rescued by some knight in shining armour without learning to help yourself. This only reinforces your cycle of dependency and blame when the next life crisis occurs. Clearly the catastrophic long-term consequences of the Blame mindset outweighs any

short-term relief and self-justification (aka self-righteousness) you may feel.

On the other hand you could change the backstory of your life to being Responsible for your emotional state regardless of the unfair circumstances and unkind people who may have contributed. In the short-term this may feel overwhelming, unjust and unfair as you try to rebuild your life by collecting the fragments that were left after the destructive actions of others. You need to pace yourself and allow yourself plenty of room to grieve and process the negative emotions of sadness, anger and fear. As you persevere with rebuilding your life, each day gets a little easier to manage but setbacks may still occur. When you face setbacks, imagine a boat stuck high and dry on a sandbar unable to set sail. Gradually (it may seem like an eternity), as the tide turns and the water level rises the boat floats and can set sail again. In a similar way through patience and perseverance, your hope and optimism for the future returns and you can overcome any setbacks and confidently move forward with life again.

Moreover, as you set sail again on the adventure of life, your Responsible mindset creates a positive backstory to your future life. With the scars born of wisdom from the self-recovery process you have undertaken, you now have powerful reminders of your courage and self-confidence to successfully face the next challenges of life. Thus the short-term burden and angst of being responsible for your recovery even when the damage was done by others is clearly only a minor inconvenience when compared to the lasting courage and self-confidence gained through the struggle of self-recovery!

Changing Your Mindset: Don't Be A Passenger – Be The Driver!

Changing Mindsets is hard because effort is required often when you feel most upset and distressed and simply want to avoid taking responsibility for lowering your distress – but you are the driver of your own life and if you let go of the steering wheel and become a passenger, a crash is inevitable.

However if you understand and can easily apply the ABCDE strategy to your life then driving through the hard times is possible and you need not give up and become a passenger!

Resilience Pop Quiz: Mindsets

Why do affirmations fail? When it comes to understanding our thinking patterns, what is the difference between the 'story' and the 'backstory'?

What are the five unhealthy mindsets? Which ones cause stress and burnout? What do the others cause?

What is the ABCDE strategy for and how does the 'downward arrow' help to uncover unhealthy mindsets? Why is it hard to change the backstory of your life and let go of unhealthy mindsets?

About Me



Dr Pete Stebbins, PhD

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Dr Pete Stebbins, PhD is a Clinical Psychologist & Executive Coach with a Masters Degree in Clinical Psychology and a PhD focused on Resilience, Burnout and Families.

Pete is a very experienced psychologist and coach who has spent many years providing private practice services, as well as executive coaching programs in the areas of people leadership, strategy execution, wellbeing and life transitions.

Pete's clinical specialties include depression, anxiety, stress, trauma, pain and complex medical conditions. Pete's therapy modalities include CBT, existential, humanistic and positive psychology approaches.

Pete's therapy style is warm, empathic, collaborative, and respectful drawing on a variety of evidence based strategies that best suit each person according to their unique circumstances and needs.

Pete is a keen surfer and devoted dad who lives on the Gold Coast in Queensland, Australia.

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