

geoff thompson

shape shifter

transform your life in 1 day

powerful advice on
personal development

SHAPE SHIFTER

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To Holly Barnes, my number one fan
and to my beautiful wife Sharon

Also by the Author

The Fence
Real Head, Knees and Elbows
Real Punching
Real Kicking
Real Grappling
The Art of Fighting Without Fighting
Animal Day
The Elephant and the Twig
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Arm Bars and Joint Locks
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Three Second Fighter

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Prologue

What if you could become anything you wanted? Do anything you wanted? Live your dreams? What if there was a method, a secret, that allowed ordinary men and women with average ability to transform themselves into beings of extraordinary talent?

Could, then, a toilet cleaner become a self-taught, world-renowned sculptor? Steve Goddard did.

Would, then, a once violent criminal be able to metamorphose into a writer of prize-winning poetry? Benjamin Zephaniah would likely agree that even the implausible is entirely possible.

And what about a humble Manchester rent collector: could he transform himself into one of the finest painters of a generation? A lot of people said categorically no. But Lowry proved them all wrong.

Then there was Gandhi; an unknown who became a history-making leader with twenty million followers.

Sir Richard Branson was a penniless aspirant who cultivated a billion pound industry from the

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entrepreneurial seeding ground of a public telephone box (his office).

One of the most respected singer-songwriters of our day, Sir Paul McCartney wrote some of his greatest hits on a serviette in a Liverpool café. He couldn't even read or write sheet music.

If it wasn't for the fact that many of these examples are immediately recognisable, you might be forgiven for thinking this is the stuff of fiction. But these are real people and, whilst their backgrounds may be diverse, they have one thing in common with each other. They are all shape shifters. You also have one thing in common with them. You are a shape shifter.



Introduction

Us and Them

Change your life in one day! A bold claim and perhaps it's one that seems impossible to back up. But this book can change your life in one day; actually it can change your life in one hour; it could even change your life in one minute.

Alexander the Great believed that if you could control your fear you could control the whole world because fear is all that stands between us and our dreams. Fear is little more than a lack of the right information or too much of the wrong information. The right words, the right information, the right knowledge can dispel fear in a miraculous instant.

Change your life in one day?

For those who are ready for change even one line of text can open a portal to a brave new world and let you see what your fear has been hiding from you.

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When I was a boy I innately knew that anything was possible. I felt it in my very bones. There were no limitations to my reverie; I could be anything, do anything, go anywhere. I could be a professional footballer (I was a fanatical player), a screenwriter (I wrote and made my first film at the tender age of twelve), a spaceman (I've been accused of being a 'spaceman' many times since). Anything that my virginal mind could conceive I could achieve. I knew that if I could see something – anything – clearly in my mind, I could make it real. I believed it. All I had to do was board my dream ship and set sail into the great blue beyond.

If life is a great ocean faring adventure then, at an early age, my ideals were shipwrecked and left broken on the rocks.

As I started to mature, the social ethos of personal limitation became palpable. As the time for me to earn a living beckoned, I felt a definite shift in my level of thinking. It was almost as if my friends, family and peers had just been waiting for me to outgrow my school shorts before passing on the bad news, my true legacy; *how it really is*.

This new paradigm rocked my world. I was sixteen years old and about to leave full-time education to seek rags-to-riches employment – something in keeping with my daydreamy idyll – when I got a smack in the mouth from my new best friend Reality; a not-to-be-messed-with, hostile sentry that stood ominously between me and my dreams.

I say reality – I mean perceived reality. One that – as far as I could ascertain – the majority blindly adhered

to and only the very brave challenged with any degree of success.

In my case, reality came in the guise of a six-foot-two school careers adviser (the PE teacher in a shirt and tie), who literally laughed me out of the room when I suggested writing as a possible career choice. He instead proffered a list of factories looking for lathe turners and bog cleaners. If I really applied myself, he seemed to be suggesting, I might one day make factory foreman. He was the first of many over the next fifteen years to try and school me in the ways of society; invisible ceilings, codes of conduct, unwritten rules. The intimation was that if I ignored any or all of the above, I risked being thought pretentious for trying to seek more; suffering ridicule and humiliation if I tried and failed; and social ousting if I dared to succeed. Why? Because people like *us* should know our place. People like *us* do not write books.

That's for people like *them*.

Popular belief – certainly in my neck of the woods, the Midlands – was that the world consisted of two types of people; there were *them* and then there were *us*. And unless blessed with membership to the former, you were destined for a life of mediocrity. If that were not injury enough, the world, I quickly realised, was also a wholly disproportionate place; there was an inordinate number of *us* and only a very small quantity of *them*. We saw *them* so rarely – usually only on the telly, at the pictures or in the newspapers – that they were almost viewed as

a different species. This nominal contact greatly perpetuated the feeling that those at the top were different and their grandiose lifestyle unavailable to the masses. They were the gifted few; silver-spooned emissaries born with a genetic start-up bursary, a baton passed down from one generation to the next. This belief, this lie, killed and continues to kill the potential of ordinary people like an injection of cyanide. It certainly slaughtered my great ambitions.

For a while.

I spent the next umpteen years doing exactly what was expected of me. I worked as a floor sweeper, chemical operator, pizza maker, road digger, hod-carrier, bricklayer, delivery driver and nightclub bouncer before – in my mid to late twenties – something fantastic, even miraculous, happened. Something that enabled me to exhume the buried treasure of my youth: the knowledge that you really can be and do anything. I sold my first book. I became a published author. Me, the working class kid from the local comprehensive, the one who left school with no qualifications and no hope. The lad destined for a life of shop-floor drudgery. The popular media believed that the chances of ever becoming a published writer were next to none. Apparently the probability was so low that it did not even attract official odds. And yet I had achieved it. I wrote my first book, *Watch My Back*, on the toilet in a factory that employed me to sweep floors, and a small, burgeoning publisher bought the rights and published it. That is when I realised the truth (and here comes the good news): there is no *us*, there is no *them*. It's all a lie, perpetrated and perpetuated by the ignorant and the fearful. We are all

US AND THEM

potential creators and to believe differently is to sell ourselves short and imprison our potential in a self-imposed gaol.

We have all been a party to the lie. We are all guilty of using the *us-and-them* rationalisation as an excuse to fail or, even worse, as a reason not to try at all. We have lied to ourselves and to each other. And we have employed these fibs because sometimes it is easier to hide than it is to face our fears and take our place at the top table.

Three things I know to be true:

1. There is no us and them.
2. We are all ordinary.
3. (A paradox) We are all extraordinary.

Each of us is an incredibly complex organism that has the ability, if used properly, to build worlds for ourselves and for others. That is what makes us ordinary. We all have the same equipment. Not just a few, not the minority, but everyone on the planet. And what makes us extraordinary is the fact that the brain, that five pounds of grey matter swimming in your skull, contains billions of cells, each one of them capable of growing to demand. There is not a computer on the planet that can even nearly match it.

We are therefore very valuable. In monetary terms, priceless. To recreate just your left eye would cost an estimated fifty million dollars (and science is not yet able to do this). How much it would cost to recreate the human brain is beyond imagining. We are so valuable it does not bear thinking about. Not *us*, or *them*; everyone! We are all born with this gift and each of us

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has the ability to not only utilise this gargantuan computer, but also to grow it. It has no limitations. You have no limitations.

Given this fact let me ask you a question, you billion dollar man or woman: what are you using your brain for? Are you growing it by feeding it with first rate information, or are you sitting at home watching the soaps, bemoaning your existence and pretending that you are destined for no more? What is out there for one is out there for all. If the people you look up to, your idols, your heroes, are living their dreams, then why not you? Because they are different? Because they have the gift?

Let me share with you something very interesting. When I was at the 2004 BAFTA awards, I was surrounded by A-list celebrities. If you closed your eyes and threw a dart in any direction you would have hit a globally recognised celebrity. People who, only the week before, I had paid money to see at the cinema were now sitting next to me at the Odeon, Leicester Square, waiting nervously to see if their latest film or their recent role had won them the prestigious British Academy of Film and Television Arts award. What was glaringly obvious to me was the fact that, like the rest of us, they were all very ordinary. Some were aesthetically beautiful and most were undoubtedly talented, but all of them without exception were ordinary people, the same as you and me. They were doing, had done and were about to do nothing that could not be done by you or me, providing we are prepared to dedicate our lives to it. I was hugely encouraged by their achievements, but more than anything else I was inspired by their ordinariness.

There is a feeling in society that to become highly successful is somehow a birthright and not an attainable goal for mere mortals, as though winners are whisked to superstardom straight from another planet.

I had the pleasure of spending some time with Anthony Minghella after the award ceremony. His latest film, *Cold Mountain*, an epic American Civil War movie starring such luminaries as Nicole Kidman, Jude Law, Renée Zellweger and Ray Winstone and costing tens of millions to make, had picked up a glut of awards. What I didn't know was that Anthony started out his career working on a small but popular British TV show for children called *Grange Hill*. Somehow you imagine that Anthony had been magically transported straight to Hollywood, spirited there by the talent angels. What inspired me was the fact that he, like the rest of us, was once an unknown and aspiring writer-director looking for his first big break. He told me that after *Grange Hill* he went on to work on another popular British TV drama called *Inspector Morse*. The TV bosses were so pleased with his work on the show that they offered him the chance to do anything (within reason) that he wanted to do. A beautiful and very successful TV film called *Truly Madly Deeply* followed. Suddenly he had the Hollywood big-wigs chasing after him and some of the

biggest stars in the world begging for the chance to work on one of his films.

He started somewhere small, he placed his talent under the supervision of more experienced players, he went through exactly the same periods of massive self-doubt that we all encounter, before ending up on the world stage. I was in the company of what I would once have called *one of them*, but realised very quickly that he was *one of us*. As we were talking, a man that I did not recognise walked past and kissed Anthony on the cheek. 'My brother,' Anthony said. Then his mum and dad walked past and smiled. His whole family was there. It was obvious that, to them, he was just their brother and son and whilst they were clearly proud of him they never, I am sure, thought him an untouchable superstar born to the role. He was where he was because he had shape shifted to his position as a Hollywood director.

Everyone I saw that night – from Jodie Kidd to Patrick Stewart to Harvey Weinstein – all were ordinary. I knew it and they knew it. You should know it too, because what they have, who they are and where they are is wholly available to anyone who has the wherewithal and courage to wake up and take action.

There is no us and them. We are all the same. You know this anyway, you just needed reminding. How many

US AND THEM

times have you looked at those seemingly above you in high positions, whether it be at work, in a magazine or on the telly, and secretly thought *I could do that, and better?* It is in these moments, when the portal to your dreams opens fleetingly, that you see your real potential. The only difference between us and them is that they have firmly seized the opportunity whereas the majority haven't – not yet. But you can and, God willing, you will.

Success is a choice, not a lottery.

But you must not make the mistake that I made early in my life, which was to believe that you can get professional results on recreational time. What you put in is what you get out; it is no use indulging your dream for a few hours a week and then expecting the moguls to beat down your door with offers of a six-figure advance and a first-class lifestyle. You'd have more success playing the bingo.

Amateurs work part-time, professionals make it a vocation, they do not see it as a job at all – it is the very air that they breathe.



Chapter One

What is Shape Shifting?

Shape shifting is a tried and tested method of personal transformation. It encourages and nurtures excellence in any chosen field through consistent practice. It employs under-the-bonnet visualisation (which we will look at in a later chapter) as its core, and peer exposure as its sustenance. It has worked for me and I trust without question that it can work for you and for anyone else.

Most people fail because they simply choose not to succeed. Often that choice is unconscious and the decision fraught with undefined fear.

We all have the ability to change who we are for who we would dearly love to become. This is no idle boast;

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I have used and perfected this methodology over a number of years. It is what has enabled me to enjoy a charmed life. I spend my mornings writing in my pyjamas and slippers with fresh cups of honey-sweetened tea ever on supply. My afternoons are dedicated to café-trekking with my wife.

I love my life.

It wasn't always that way. Like many people, I once hated the hard graft of my days, working in a job I despised, living a life that brought me little pleasure. It was only the concept of shape shifting, and my ability to adopt it, that enabled me to escape the slavish bonds of societal expectation and live a life more befitting of my wants. A life that I chose to live as opposed to a hand-me-down nine-to-five existence that I neither wanted nor took particular delight in. The process of shape shifting belongs to us all. Since man first walked the Earth, he has transformed himself in the forge that necessity and desire cast. This transformation, however, has usually been unconscious. What I intend to do within the pages of this book is draw the unconscious process into consciousness, bring it into the light so that its practice and perfection can be better understood and more readily employed.

Anyone with a sure desire for change and a strong work ethic will have the opportunity to realise the very best of their imaginings.

I ask not that you take my word for it, only that you read the book, assess the data, put it to the test and make up your own mind.

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In other words; be the proof.

Let me, within the pages of this book and via living, breathing examples, help to quieten your doubts. I am, after all, not the only one who has practised, or knows of, this transformational alchemy. Though I suspect you will not need to look outside your own life or intuition for conclusive proof that shape shifting is an attainable reality.

You may view these examples of success as *natural* or *gifted*. It would be tempting to believe that the triumphant are somehow predestined for victory. Yet all of these people were *no one* before they became *someone*. All had their abilities and aspirations trounced and doubted by the fickle and the false before they were finally vindicated. Everyone was once aspiring, insecure, and unknown.

What I have discovered is that anyone with average ability and a strong desire can become a top amateur in any chosen field if they invest 3,000 hours into its study and practice. That amounts to one hour a day, six days a week for ten years. If the same 'average' person wanted to become a world beater they would need to invest 10,000 hours, which is the same weekly commitment extended over thirty years. Of course, if you were to increase your investment your return would be greater and the time to fruition proportionately shorter. An artist who decides to turn professional and dedicate his every waking hour to the easel will create a *quickenning* (more on that later) and can arrive on the world stage in a fraction of the time.

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My experience tells me:

- 1. We all have the ability to shape shift – it is our birthright as a creative species;**
- 2. Most of us have already shape shifted, to varying degrees, even if inadvertently.**

This book will map out in pyramidal steps how it can be done. I must have given a thousand talks over the years on how to live a happy and successful life. The fact that I have made the transition from factory worker to professional scribe seems qualification enough in many people's eyes. I've talked in bookshops, at seminars, in cafés, on the phone, over the Internet and even in the middle of the street (I'll talk to anyone, me) about how I became a martial artist, West End fight-choreographer, author, playwright, novelist and screenwriter. The most frequently asked question by far is, 'What is the secret to success?' In response, I have talked about many things that have made me successful (and I define my success not by any material gain, rather by the fact that I live the life that I choose). I have talked about the power of thought projection; the mastery of body and mind via labour and palate. I have drawn out detailed spreadsheets on the importance of dedication, visualisation, manifestation, work ethic, goal setting, tenacity, belief, serendipity, courage – the list goes on. But there is one axiom that encompasses all of my theories on personal transformation, a primary model that I refer to first and foremost when explaining my rise from factory sweeper-upper to BAFTA-winning writer.

Shape Shifting

I gratefully borrow the term from Odo, a character from the cult American TV show, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. Odo is a member of a species called ‘shapeshifters’ who demonstrate the natural ability to change (or ‘shapeshift’) literally into any object – a table, a lamp, a person. Whilst I appreciate the fact that *Deep Space Nine* is a futuristic work of fiction (and I don’t really want to turn myself into a table or a lamp), I am extremely excited about the possibility of changing one’s shape – either physically, mentally or spiritually. It can be done and it has been done. It is being done now, as you read this book; in fact it is going on all around us all the time. What I would like to demonstrate in this book is that our ability to change shape is as innate as Odo’s. We too can become anything that we set our hearts and minds on. Even if – and perhaps especially when – others tell us that we cannot.

Millions of people around the world have already achieved a shape shift. You have, even though you might not be aware of it. If you have gained weight or lost weight deliberately or by accident you have shape shifted. If you have changed jobs from cleaner to foreman you have made a shift in shape, or if you have found love you have shifted shape into someone’s beau or belle. If you have married you have shifted from a single to a married person. Had children? You have shifted – and not in name alone – to a father or a mother. I used to be a floor sweeper. I shape shifted into a bricklayer. I learned the skills and made the quantum leap from labourer to tradesman. As a bricklayer I looked

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and felt entirely different. I was treated differently too. I went up in other people's estimation because I was now seen as a skilled man, and perhaps because I held myself differently. What's more, after being a bullied kid at school, I later shape shifted into a world-renowned martial artist and no longer attracted or tolerated bullying in any name, shape or form. Against the odds, I became a writer. I made the shape shift. It took a lot of work, it demanded much dedication and time and practice, but I proved the naysayers wrong and made a living out of my dream. What is important here is not what this says about me and my achievements, rather what it says about *you* and what *you* can achieve. No doubt your goals will differ from mine but the premise is the same; anyone can achieve anything if they want it enough. If I can do it, you can do it too.

Power and Corruption

Be warned from the beginning, however, that shape shifting is a two-sided coin. What can be worked for good can also be used for bad. I have personal experience of men and women who have shape shifted to the darker side of life, such as the respected friend, a nightclub owner, who shape shifted into a multimillionaire drug dealer with a future of gaol and heartache. Globally and historically there are many examples of man's potential to misuse this latent gift. Hitler, by all accounts, was once loved by his fellow countrymen. He transformed the German economy and held thousands spellbound with his charismatic speeches, before his metamorphosis into one of the most hated and murderous criminals in the history of our species.

Similarly Stalin, the Russian dictator (and humble son of a cobbler) initially pursued the laudable goal of building 'socialism in one country' before allowing power to corrupt him. This man of ideals became a man of evil, a maniacal murderer of millions of his own countrymen.

The good and the bad continue to use shape shifting to transport them from the ground floor of everyday existence to the heady heights of global notoriety, and whilst none of us (one would hope and pray) would aspire to the depravities of Hitler or Stalin, we can all be awed by the power of the process. We can also be warned by it. What can heal can also harm. Whilst the Gandhis and the Luther Kings of this world used their platform for the good of mankind, others left murder and mayhem in their bloody wake.

The Shape Shifting Process

Becoming a writer was not the end of my story, though I thought it would be. Naively I imagined that when I published my first book I would be home and dry. Not so. Not long after the celebrations and the congratulations, I realised that there was still a way to go. There is always a way to go. And if you do not anticipate this it can be very disillusioning.

This is one of the pitfalls, the countless traps that the uninitiated often fall into; and once in you may never get back out again.

I call it the Black Belt Syndrome.

Let me explain.

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It is not common knowledge, but more people give up karate and other martial arts after they reach black belt standard than at any other time. Why? Because what they think of as their Everest is only the first stage.

When I was heavily involved in the martial arts, achieving the coveted first dan (black belt) was the big goal. It is what everyone aimed for. In a karate class it was correct etiquette to line up for training in grade order, with the lower grades (white, yellow and green belts) to the left and the senior grades (purple, brown and black belts) always to the right. The dream of all aspiring martial artists was never to have to look right – in other words, to be up there with the black belts. I used to stand in a line of sweaty karateka with a steaming gi (karate suit) and a thumping heart with my low-grade yellow belt tied around my waist and think, looking to my far right, ‘Wouldn’t it be great to be a black belt?’ It took me several years to work my way up that line and I shed my fair quota of blood, sweat and tears along the way, but standing at the top end of the class with the other black belts made it all worthwhile. I can still remember the day I passed my grading and the huge, tear-inducing sense of achievement it brought. I was on a high for days, but when my feet finally found terra firma I soon realised that, whilst winning my black belt had been a great achievement, it was not the end of my journey. Far from it.

There is a belief in the higher echelons of karate that black belt is where the journey proper really begins. But, in all honesty, you don’t understand the full import of this until you are there yourself.

The top of the class as you perceived it is actually the bottom of the *real* class.

I might have made black belt first dan – and that did entitle me to stand at the senior end of the line ahead of the coloured belts – but I was still looking to my right at the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth dans. And whilst getting from white belt to black – six different-coloured belts in total – can be achieved in as little as three years, traversing the six giant steps from first to sixth dan takes a minimum of another twenty years, and only then if you pass each grade at the first attempt. I could not see beyond my goal of black belt and though I had a slight inkling that there was a whole other galaxy just past my limited horizon, at the time it was beyond my comprehension.

Thirty years later I hold a sixth dan in karate and whilst my naive younger self might have been thrilled at even the thought, the wiser me knows that there is still, even now, a heck of a lot to do. You might think this a depressing realisation; thirty-plus years of study and still not a master of the art. But actually I am utterly inspired by the fact that each time I close the door on one goal another door opens up to reveal a plethora of new and exciting opportunities that I didn't even know existed. It is a cliché, but whilst the goal is important – and is incredibly gratifying to achieve – it is the journey and the grand unveiling of new possibilities at the journey's end that excites me more than anything else.

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Similarly, when my first book, *Watch My Back*, was published I thought I'd made it. The full shape shift from bouncer to book writer. And I had made it, to a degree. I was a published author, after all. But once I arrived – and after the celebratory dust had settled – I took in the full scope of my new landscape. I quickly realised that what I'd envisioned as the end of a long and tiring journey was actually the beginning of an entirely new quest. I was published and selling a few hundred books – but there were authors just ahead of me who were selling thousands, and authors ahead of them selling tens of thousands, and authors ahead of them selling hundreds of thousands, even millions. Authors having their books translated into different languages. Having their books made into films. Getting prizes and accolades. There were all sorts of new pressures that my shape shift had brought. Pressures that I did not even know existed when I wrote that first book with only a very distant hope of finding a publisher and a slot on the shelf at W.H. Smith's or Waterstone's or Ottakar's. There was also the unspoken, often self-imposed, chip-on-the-shoulder presumption that because I hadn't learnt my art in a classroom I was not a *real* writer, but a chancer.

The top of one mountain invariably takes you to the bottom of another. No shape shift is ever the final shape shift.

To give you another example, I had a friend who always wanted to get into 23 SAS, the territorial branch. A

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mammoth task in anyone's eyes and not least because the initiation, the selection process for the territorials, is the same as that for the regular patrol. The success rate is notoriously low. It had been a lifelong dream for my friend, and despite all the regular things that hold people back – a job, the obligations of a relationship – he went ahead and enrolled. It took him two years to successfully complete the course but he did it. He shape shifted into a fully capped SAS trooper.

But once he was there and mixing with the regular soldiers he realised that what he'd thought of as his own personal Everest – the revered SAS beret – was in fact just a small hill en route. He was suddenly mixing with guys who had twenty years' service under their belt and several legendary, much written about campaign medals hanging from their lapels. And whilst they admired him for successfully completing selection he was still viewed as a rookie, a comparative greenhorn with as yet no active service in the regiment.

The point I am making is this; you can become whatever it is that you want to become. But there is no discernible end to the journey. There will always be somewhere else to grow, and that is what makes shape shifting such an exciting concept. Can't you feel the excitement of infinite possibility?

There is no limitation to your potential; you can become as big as you like.

**There is always more to do and whether you
scrape by or skyscape is a deliberate choice
you make, not a sweepstake.**

WHAT IS SHAPE SHIFTING?

‘Yes, maybe you are right,’ many people have said to me, ‘but it’s hard!’ To which I always reply, it *is* hard. Of course. But then so is moving concrete blocks around a building site all day, so is sitting at a computer for eight hours punching out words that bring you no joy; spending forty hours a week at any job that does not inspire is painfully hard. Selling out one third of your waking life just to make the rent is excruciating. At least when you are investing your time into something vocational it is *hard* in the right direction. It is anabolic (as in life enhancing) as opposed to catabolic (as in life destroying).

The road to potential is hard. You may experience periods of respite, but resistance is far more constant. But you learn to become comfortable with discomfort because it is a hardship of your own choosing, and the rewards return directly to you without having to pass through a dozen middlemen.

Leonardo da Vinci

Leonardo da Vinci was a prolific polymath, and many scholars acknowledge him as possibly the most accomplished man in history. It would be easy to believe that Leonardo had it easy, that he was a complete natural and that everything he touched turned instantly and obediently to gold. No failures, no discomfort, no pain, no uncertainty, no ambiguity and no doubt.

Not so.

Leonardo da Vinci knew all about discomfort. He experienced inordinate amounts of resistance in his quest for new discovery, but it didn’t stop him from forging ahead. The secret of his success, according to

the current crop of historians, was his ability to tolerate long periods of uncertainty. Discomfort and uncertainty, the deadly duo that beat back the weak of will like a forest fire, were his constant companions.

Many of his very ambitious projects never left the drawing board because he could not muster the courage to complete them. He was notorious for leaving projects half finished and left many a benefactor infuriated. Leonardo gave up on many occasions, and he struggled for most of his life to get his ideas funded. He was also a man without even a rudimentary schooling, a fact not commonly known, and whilst some might view this as a handicap it is often considered that his lack of education was actually the pivotal factor in his later success. With no didactic structures to limit him his imagination was able to run wild. Subsequently many of his inventions were hundreds of years ahead of their time – the parachute, the helicopter and the tank to name but three. He saw the infinite possibilities of mankind and spent his life not only exploring those potentials, but also having to convince his fellow man that what they believed impossible was merely the possible awaiting discovery.

If the great Leonardo could develop a tolerance for discomfort then so can we, and so we should because to those seeking greatness resistance is a constant, and it wears many masks.

WHAT IS SHAPE SHIFTING?

If it sounds like I am comparing myself, and you, with the great Leonardo da Vinci, it's because I am. And why not? He was human; he only had one brain. I compare myself to not only Leonardo but every man or woman that ever graced this spinning planet. If they achieved greatness then why can't I? Why can't you? It is not only your right to be great, it is your legacy. What the greats of yesteryear left us was the knowledge that anything is achievable to those with the intention to achieve. We do ourselves an injustice if we make them into gods, because by giving them a deity status we disqualify ourselves from ever achieving or surpassing their standards. The great men and women of antiquity would not thank us for placing them on a lofty platform. It is my belief that they were not in the business of building pedestals for the rest of us to cower under, rather they were in the business of constructing ladders that those who followed could climb. Not just up to their level, but up and beyond.

Take a scan at the latest discoveries in quantum physics. What current research tells us is this: every one of us carries at least one million cells in our bodies that would once have belonged to Leonardo da Vinci; one million cells belonging to Jesus of Nazareth, to Mozart and to Einstein. In fact, we are constructed from the cells of all our predecessors.

If they can do it we can do it.

We just have to reshape our limited thinking, broaden it a little to take in bigger concepts, break out of the restricted, collective thinking that holds in the majority like a prison door.

Resistance? Discomfort?

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They reside at the periphery of every comfort zone to herd in the frightened and the ignorant. Once you break out of the comfort zone, you will expand and grow rapidly until, again, you find another wall of resistance that needs to be broken down.

Discomfort is the norm when you venture out into new oceans. It does not end, though you do grow accustomed to it. And once you reach the higher echelons of success, that resistance is still present, and you, like Leonardo, may encounter bigotry, petty jealousy and elitism. Especially if your work is new, or groundbreaking.

Some people in the art establishment would never accept Lowry's paintings. They felt his work was amateurish, childish and uncouth. Even when the Queen Mother bought one of his paintings and propelled him into the stratosphere, some of the stalwarts of British art still hated both the man and his work. Quentin Tarantino is at the same time viewed as a genius and a pretender. A man with a background as a video store clerk is not supposed to turn the film world on its head with some of the most radical and exciting work in the history of cinema. And even now, with his Oscars and his Palme d'Or, there are many in the industry who cannot accept his work. Similarly Tracey Emin – despite massive commercial and critical success; even the Tate has bought a considerable amount of her work – is at once loved and loathed (I love her) in the world of modern art and beyond. Mostly because some of her work – for instance, *My Bed* – is viewed as unartistic. The common complaint about *My Bed* in particular has been that 'anyone could have done it'.

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Tracey further enraged people when she replied to her critics, 'Yeah, but anyone didn't. I did.'

The bigger the game the greater the struggle (there is a point beyond struggle that I will talk about later).

And you should expect no less; in fact, you should be grateful, because it is only by overcoming great resistance that you develop great strength. Resistance is also a sure indicator that you are on the right path, the one less travelled. If you spot a trail that is heavily peopled, avoid it. The easy path is always busy and leads only to fools' gold.

Learn to expect discomfort in its many disguises. Learn to embrace, court, love and – as Gandhi said – be the change.

Do you know what the one major difference is between good athletes and great athletes? The good athletes talk about how they tolerate pain; the great ones talk about how they love pain.



Chapter Two

Nature, Nurture and Change

Those who believe success to be for the privileged few often claim that the gifted minority have ascended to the higher echelons because of little more than a genetic gift. In other words, they were born with their talent. That is why – and only why – they are successful and others are not. To back this defence they often cite the great geniuses of past and present who could play piano from childhood, who wrote great symphonies before the age of ten and who could do maths without any previous instruction. Some people are born, I would agree, with gifts in certain areas. Whether this gift is a genetic bursary or they were somehow able to pluck their gift from out of the ether is an argument that may never be settled.

Einstein, for instance, laid no claim to his genius or his discoveries; he said that his successes were less about genius and more about his ability to access ideas that

were available to anyone. He was quoted as saying that *the ideas* – far from being his discoveries – were simply in the air. He just happened to be the one who grabbed them and did something with them. Many, many great discoveries came from the dreaming minds of men and women, in visions and in flashes of intuition. Many more came about by accident, though all were followed up by a massive work effort.

Take eBay. It went from a small hobby website to one of the most prolific companies in the world with 95 million users at the time of writing this book. Last year it traded goods worth more than fifteen billion pounds. And what is it? One of the simplest ideas you could imagine; an online car-boot sale. And it was not discovered by a genius or an A-grade student or a polymath; rather it was the ‘idea’, ten years ago, of Pierre Omidyar, then a salaried computer systems developer. eBay came about when Pierre’s girlfriend (now wife) wanted to find collectors like herself of spring-loaded PEZ sweet dispensers. Omidyar advertised on the Internet – and got a huge response. This gave him the ammunition to tweak the idea and Auction Web, swiftly renamed eBay, was born. Pierre and his wife are both now, of course, multimillionaires.

The idea was in the air for anyone to pick out. It just happened to be Pierre who did the picking and then placed his courage, his energy and his time behind it. So for every ‘natural born’ out there with a supposed talent bursary there are millions more who were expected to amount to nothing. There are also many who are born talented but do nothing to nurture or grow their gift.

So the first school of thought says that if you were not born with it then you are destined only for a life of mediocrity. We know, of course, that this is folly, because there are more people out there with home-grown talent and genius than you can shake a stick at.

William Goldman was one such man. He always wanted to be a writer but was told from a very early age that he did not have what it took; the natural gift for the written word. Even when he signed up for a creative writing course in the hope that he might be able to develop a talent, he was told that he would never make it. But, never a man to take no for an answer, he went away and practised. He intended to become a writer if it killed him. When he eventually got his first book published the critics were harsh. It seemed that they were in agreement with his early detractors and were almost insulted that his book had made it to print. Still he never gave up. He took his critical beatings, licked his literary wounds and went back to the typewriter to practise some more. Eventually Goldman went on to global fame as an Oscar-winning screenwriter penning such legendary classics as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *Marathon Man*, *All the President's Men* and *The Princess Bride*. He also wrote many internationally bestselling books. He was not born with talent. He developed talent. He intended to be a top writer and did everything in his power to make that intent a reality. If he had prescribed to the rule of 'nature' he probably would never have even tried.

The second school of thought says that, actually, it is not about genetics at all, it's not nature – rather it is about our environment, what the psychologists call

nurture. Place a child in a good school with the right influences and add a bit of money into the mix, and wallop, he or she could make it just the same as everyone else. Irrespective of their parents, and despite the fact that they might have little or no obvious lineage of success or talent.

Anyone from any background given the right environment and influences can achieve anything, even the Nobel Prize.

Goldman falls into this category, as does Lowry, the Manchester rent collector who, despite the critical vilification, now has an arts centre (The Lowry Centre) named in his honour.

There has been a spate of articles in the papers about this very subject. One in particular told the story of Peter (a pseudonym), ‘a difficult child’ who was kicked out of his local comprehensive school for unruly behaviour. The teachers felt that he was ‘an impossible case’. At the same time, as coincidence would have it, a television company was planning to make a documentary examining whether environment and influences had any effect on the development of pupils. They were conducting a social experiment to see what would happen if they took an average or below average child from a state-run school and placed him/her into a public school. More specifically, would a below average kid thrive or flounder when placed inside the great walls of academia? They got in touch with Peter and asked him

if he would like to take part in the experiment; he said, 'Yes, please,' and bang, before you know it, this unteachable youngster was enrolled in one of the best public schools, with the best teachers, in the land.

The makers of the programme were amazed at the results.

Within a year Peter was top of his class, excelling in Latin (he'd never studied Latin before) and mathematics. He also became a top rugby player (again, he had never played the game before this experiment) and one of the most popular lads in the school. To think that environment and influence do not matter is to miss out on a massive reservoir of learning and potential.

Ronnie O'Sullivan, a world champion snooker player, could rightly be called a genius. Even the greats of snooker acknowledge his poetry behind a cue and it would be easy to say he's just a natural. Until you read his autobiography and see that even at the age of ten he was at the table practising eight hours a day. Legend has it that as a youth he practised for so long in one session that his hands and his feet were bleeding. To call him a natural would be an insult to the hours that he put into his practice.

So which one is it; nature or nurture?

The good news is that science has finally, it seems, come up with a conclusive answer. It is neither one nor the other. It is a combination of the two.

The latest research confirms that when a person is exposed to the right environment and the right influences (nurture) it creates a catalyst that triggers the

hidden knowledge locked in their genes (nature). So the two work together. This is great news because it confirms something that I believe we all know anyway; that given the right encouragement we can all succeed, and we can all shape shift if we are prepared to dedicate ourselves to the task. We were perhaps just too scared to admit it.

And that is what this book is all about. Using nature plus nurture to shape shift into whatever it is that you always wanted to become. Exposing yourself to all the right influences triggers your body and mind to 'shift' in the direction of your intention.

The difficult thing is undoing all the previous conditioning. If you have been trained for the last twenty years to believe that you cannot change or succeed or grow, then fostering a new ethos, a new belief system is going to take a bit of work. It is going to mean, possibly and probably, going against everything and everyone that you know. Because they are still going to be locked into the old paradigm of 'it doesn't happen to people like us'. They will not only disagree with you, they may attack everything that contravenes their belief. When crabs are caught in a fisherman's basket we witness the same phenomenon; when one tries to escape the others pull it back, even attack it.

The Other Crabs

Aiming high does not come without its complications. Leonardo da Vinci once made a very apt and beautiful statement. He said that if a bird lands on a branch the whole world changes. What he meant, of course, was that everything affects everything. If you change

yourself, you not only change your immediate environment (friends, family, workmates etc.) you actually change your whole world. This is one of the reasons why so many people are afraid of change. Something as simple as changing your eating and drinking habits can change your whole social structure. Hence the reason why so many alcoholics struggle to dump the booze; because everything they know is attached to alcohol. For them to let go of the drink they have to let go of all the things that they associate with drink. They have to become different people.

I read an interesting story recently about John Lennon. Apparently he lived for many years with his aunt Mimi. She was the person who bought the great man his first guitar, which he played – by all accounts – to distraction. But she warned him, ‘The guitar is all well and good John but you’ll never make a living from it.’ Just as well, methinks, that John did not take her advice. Later when he was mega successful John had his aunt’s words engraved on a plaque that he hung from the wall of his New York mansion.

People feel it is their duty to warn you and pull you back when you get *above your station*. I am still not sure what my station is, but as a youth I was warned many times that I should not try and get above it.

When I first published my book, *Watch My Back*, me, a working class Coventry kid with no educational qualifications, one of my friends (acquaintance might be a more appropriate word) cornered me in the pub. I was still working at the time as a bouncer by night and a floor sweeper by day. ‘Geoff,’ he said coolly, like he was going to offer me the kind of life-changing advice

that you pay gurus an arm and a leg for, ‘Geoff, I don’t know if anyone has told you this but your book will never do any good. Might sell a few copies locally, but you’ll never get anything more than that. I thought I ought to tell you,’ he continued, ‘because no one else will, not to your face anyway.’

Thanks for the encouragement.

I’ll never forget this guy – I still see him occasionally, still on the doors of Coventry, slinging out drunks and offering success advice but never quite listening himself – and how much his words inspired me to make it, just to show that actually it can be done. For ages after the book was out and doing well my other friends – the real ones – would wind this guy up. ‘Geoff’s doing really well,’ they’d say, ‘in the bestsellers now.’ My associate would suck his teeth. ‘It’s early days,’ he’d say, just waiting and hoping for me to fall flat on my face.

I am glad that I did not listen to his sad advice.

Who are you listening to?

My nephew Gary came to see me last year. He was obesely overweight at twenty stone (he would not mind me saying so) but desperately wanted to get into the Royal Marines. The Marines had told him, ‘No problem, lose six stone and we’ll take a look at you.’ Gary wanted to know if I could help. I knew that the work would be all down to him, and that to lose six stone would take a hell of a lot of discipline, a whole lifestyle change, a complete shape shift. But he felt he could do it so I agreed to help. I gave him nothing but

information (the information in this book) and left him to it.

He was a big drinker at the time so that was the first thing that had to go. He spoke with his best mate and drinking buddy about his decision to abstain from the beer in order to shed weight and, ultimately, get in the Marines. He was looking for a bit of support. And this is the interesting bit.

His friend was incensed that Gary thought he could lose six stone and very angry that he felt himself worthy of the Royal Marines. So incensed and so angry, in fact, that – after telling Gary that he had more chance of flying to the moon on a helium party balloon than he did of making the Marines – they fell into a big argument that actually ended in a fist fight.

Why? Because his friend was heavily invested in Gary failing. If he succeeded, it would point out his own weakness, almost as if Gary was tilting a lance at him (Gary can lose weight/give up beer/get in the Marines and I can't). There would also have been an abandonment issue for Gary's mate: 'If Gary succeeds and goes into the Marines I may lose my best friend.' Gary had to choose between where he was and where he wanted to be. It meant not only cutting out his drink, but also losing his drinking partners, one of whom, he thought, was his best mate.

This is not always the case, but it often is. When you drop a pebble in the water the ripples will affect everything in the immediate environment. We share comfort zones with everyone in our social circles, so when we decide to move to greener pastures it will affect them. As you open a portal to leave, you allow everyone

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else in your world to see what is out there for the taking. For you and for them. When you go you also leave a void, and people are extremely uncomfortable with empty space; even nature abhors a void. True friends will always help you to achieve your dreams. But unfortunately friends of this calibre are few and far between.

As it turned out, Gary lost his six stone and is at present about to embark on a new career in the Royal Marines. There is a positive end to the story as far as his mate was concerned too. Gary never gave up on him. In fact, he never gave up on the pub either, he just drank water and diet drinks when he was out. And the two of them have remained friends. What Gary had to do was listen to his own counsel, court bigger and better influences (we introduced him to some great people at a local gym) and make sure that, when his old mates tried to pull him down, he stood up for himself. Which he did, and it worked.

But it is not just in the formative stages that friends can react badly to our change. It is often after the change has occurred that they react worst of all.

I had a friend who used to run a team that sold framed pictures from factory to factory all around Coventry. He was a very charismatic man. His lads loved him and although most of them were pretty rough guys he won their respect. But my friend had bigger aspirations. The picture selling business was in its death throes. Many people had made either their living or their fortune from

the business but now there were so many different teams around the country in the same game it was starting to get a little crowded. Sales were diminishing and fresh places to visit were growing thinner on the ground. So my friend used the bit of wedge that he had saved and took the experience he had gained into the nightclub business. He had a great ear for contemporary music and a gift with people so he bought a rundown picture house in the city, gave it everything he had and opened his first nightclub. When he was selling pictures his life allowed him the luxury of closing the doors at five or six o'clock every evening and heading for the local with the other picture sellers for a few halves and a game of pool. Obviously the nightclub business runs by a different clock; where before he could end his day at six, now his day was just beginning. He would work through the night, go to bed for a few hours and then be up in time to organise the cleaners and the delivery of beer and spirits. And with it being a fledgling business he was in the speculation stage and had to bang in as many hours as he could. Which, in his eyes, was no problem because he loved every minute of it, and it wasn't long before the lad was driving around in a Merc with personalised number plates.

But what about his old pals?

With the nature of the nightclub business he inevitably lost contact with them. Not that he didn't like them – quite the contrary, and if any of them came to him looking for work he did his best to look after them. But he didn't meet them for a few halves at the pub any more and he didn't have his fifty pence pieces stacked on the table waiting for his turn to shoot a little

pool. He would have loved to, but his new job did not allow for it. But rather than look at the situation logically his old mates started accusing him of ‘changing’. Certainly he had changed. He had changed jobs, he had changed cars, he had changed mentalities, in fact he had changed just about everything in his life to become a successful nightclub owner. He didn’t want to lose his mates from the past, far from it. But it was not him who could not handle the change. He had embraced it after all. Rather it was they who struggled with the new him, it was they who struggled with his new hours, his new job and his new regime.

Social Scripts

We are all socially conditioned to act out the script that has been written for us by our environment and by our influences. We are acting out the script that was handed down from the generation before us, and if we are not careful we will be handing down the same legacy to the next generation.

I recently received a letter from a young chap who’d been going through a bad patch. His girlfriend had finished with him, he was in a job that he didn’t like, he was still living at home with his parents and he was feeling pretty fed up about his life. He was in a bookshop with a friend who, aware of his growing depression, picked my book *The Elephant and the Twig* off the shelf and said, ‘Have a look at this. It might get your chin off the floor.’ He said something like, ‘No thanks, I’m not into that positive thinking crap.’ But he had a scan of the book anyway. He wrote to me that he got hooked after reading a few pages and decided to buy the book

and take it home. He ended up reading the book four times. The book inspired him to want to change and he even made a list of the things in his life that he wasn't happy about so that he could start to make that change.

But he still found it very hard. Every time he read the book the information in it made him feel as though he could change the world. But after placing the book down and going out into what he called the *real* world he was overwhelmed once again with can't-do-it emotions. Very quickly after starting a new venture, his attitude would become very negative. He told me, 'Most of the lads I knock around with I have known for fifteen years plus. I've known them a long time, but I've finally cottoned on to the fact that my negative attitude and way of thinking is influenced in a major way by these friends and by my family.'

So every time he fed himself positive thoughts he was swamped by the negative words, thoughts and actions of his immediate influences. This meant that he either had to remove those influences or change them. The latter is improbable because you cannot change people who do not want to be changed. Normally, you have to remove these influences.

It usually means moving on.

I had to change almost all of my influences, and definitely had to change my environment. I needed a new environment that could nurture the part of me that wanted to excel, and that included finding people who would support me. It wasn't easy. Many times I stepped away from my environment and its inhabitants only to

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be pulled back again. Because I was scared. I was frightened of change.

This is what Carlos Castaneda called the first enemy of man: fear. And if there is one thing that we fear most as a species, it is change.

Why does the very thought of change send shivers down our spine?

Most people fear change. It is often easier to stay in the dark than it is to create light. But you have to move to richer soil and seek out better influences if you want to grow. A gardener thinks nothing of transferring a plant from a small pot to a large pot when it starts to outgrow its habitat. If he doesn't, its roots will crash against the side of the pot. It will run out of sustenance and begin to atrophy, and eventually the roots will turn in on themselves.

A good gardener will monitor the growth of his plants, offering vitamin-enriched compost, exposure to sunlight and water in the right amounts. The avid gardener will even talk to his plants to nourish and encourage them to grow. By paying positive and consistent attention to the plant he helps it to reach its full potential. And the more the plant responds, the more the gardener will encourage it, and when it begins to outgrow *that* pot he will, again, move it to a bigger one.

We are creatures of nature. We actually grow, like the plants and the trees, on this planet. We need to be planted in rich soil, we need sustenance, and encouragement.

When I was at primary school and they moved me to the seniors at the age of eleven, I went from being the

top kid at my own school to being pretty much unknown at the ‘big school’. This was extremely uncomfortable for me. Scary, even. But absolutely necessary for my development. Going to the big school was a venture into the unknown. But I have found – interestingly enough – that things are only dark when you stay still. They get light when you create a resistance between yourself and your fears, or between yourself and adversity. A bit like a dynamo on a pushbike. When you are stationary the light is not there. When you pedal the bike forward and the wheels turn, the dynamo lights up to show you the way. If you don’t pedal you don’t get any light. You need the adversity and you need to step into it, to face it.

Old Paradigms

It happens to everyone. It happened to me. Somewhere between the innocent summers of my childhood and the winters of adulthood my belief in limitless potential was mugged by the realists and left bleeding in the gutter, only to be replaced by a more *realistic* and limiting ethos.

How this happened I am not entirely sure.

When you’re young and excited and you tell your peers, parents, friends, loved ones, anyone that will listen, that you want to be a pilot or a writer or the Prime Minister, no one takes an awful lot of notice. You might get the odd condescending chuckle from your mum (‘Oh, isn’t he a dreamer’) or a patronising ruffle of the hair from your dad (‘Crazy kid, believes he can be anything’). They might even, semi-encouragingly, buy you the child’s version of the equipment: soccer shirt with number eleven and Best

(as in George) emblazoned across the back; the Hurricane Higgins snooker cue; or perhaps in your Christmas stocking there's a scaled-down Matchbox model of the Ferrari that you intend to buy when you've *made it*. It's only when we get a bit older, nearing the age of responsibility, that our guides feel the need to inject a bit of realism into our minds (for our own good) to prepare us for the real world of work and worry. That's when it all gets a bit dark.

Our view of the world is limited – or opened up – by the perceptions of those around us.

Lee Evans – brilliant comedic talent; Hollywood star; millionaire – made it. When he was at school his teacher actually stood him up in front of the class for larking around and said to the other pupils, 'Look closely: this is what failure looks like.' With comments like that it is a wonder that the lad did anything at all with his life.

Delia Smith left school with no 'O' Levels (which meant, as far as her peers were concerned, she would end up at the back with the also-rans) and started her cooking career as a washer-up. She went on to become possibly the best known TV chef in the world. Her platform is so powerful that if she recommends a certain cooking ingredient in her show, within days the shops will sell out completely and there will often be a national shortage of the said item. What encouragement was this culinary beauty given at school? She was told by her head teacher that if she worked *very hard* she could possibly become a secretary.

Wow! Inspiring stuff. I am surprised that this particular head wasn't sought out by the captains of industry and booked on a national motivational tour.

People like Delia and Lee broke out of this peer-constructed cocoon, irrespective and perhaps even because of discouragement, and went on to realise their dreams and more. But how many other people are out there now who didn't (but still could) break free and are still living and breathing the 'truth' they were fed as impressionable youngsters?

The thing is, we tend to get what we see. And what *we* see is often little more than what our teachers/friends/parents saw and passed on to us. Probably not maliciously, possibly not even intentionally, but passed on all the same. People teach what they know, but what they know – their truth – limits us to the same mistakes, the same limitations, that they lived with. Psychologists call this the Looking Glass Self; we tend to become what those closest to us think we are worth. If our parents fill our metaphoric hard drive with limitation and a small view of the world, that is exactly what we will see through our conditioned eyes.

If others think that our potential is limited to a factory job or menial hire, then as likely as not that is all we will achieve. Unless, that is, we can become individuals and break free from our limitations, and grow a bigger vision of the world and our potential within it.

What we knew as innocent babes, that the world really is our oyster, is what we have to re-learn as adults.

This is easy to do.

It is also very difficult.

One paradox of many that you will read in this text. Easy in concept, hard to make a reality because it means change and we are, as I have said, terrible at adapting to change. Certainly we are not good at initiating change. We need to learn.

Change: The Only Constant

One thing we have to realise and realise fast is that change is inevitable: it is the only constant. It should be welcomed with arms wide open because change means growth. One of the reasons we allow ourselves a limited viewpoint of life is because where we are seems safe, even if it's not a happy place. For our world to grow, for our ailments to heal, for our businesses to prosper and for our relationships to mend we have to see a positive change, but to see a positive change we have to lose our fear of change. And we do this by facing it down. Stepping into the adversity.

Facing Adversity

Have a look at the world around you. Have a hard, honest look and tell me what you see.

Let me tell you what I see.

Millions of people racing as far away from adversity as they can get. Looking for comfort, warmth and gratification of the instant variety. I have observed that as much as 85 per cent of society avoid adversity like the plague.

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Now let me tell you what else I have observed; about the 15 per cent this time. The individuals. The ones who make it to Land Happy. They don't run from adversity, they run into it. They do this because they know, like I know and like you know, that the gold, the nirvana, the Promised Land, is in the adversity. That is where the growth is. So the majority live in the dark, broke, unhappy and lost. Stuck in a kind of purgatorial limbo constantly wondering 'What is this all about?' I have been there many times. Afraid to go forward, afraid to go back, afraid to stay where I am, sometimes even afraid of life itself. To get ourselves out of this self-imposed prison we have to *see* ourselves out of it.

How?

As before, you empty the hard drive of limiting thoughts and beliefs and start to replace them with thoughts of abundance, potential, growth and happiness. Instead of seeing the walls of fear, you see beyond them to the Promised Land. And be sure of one thing; the Promised Land is just beyond the fear, which is why you must race forward rather than run back.

Just as you were taught to see limitation you can be taught – or you can teach yourself – to see abundance. I did this by surrounding myself with positive information; books, tapes, conversations and people. I changed everything that I ingested, from information to oxygen to food, from negative to positive. I did it slowly, bit by bit, until all of the old was out and all of the new was in.

Did you know that catfish – pound for pound – is the very best form of protein you can find? What you may not be aware of is the fact that the catfish gets its

flavour from its environment. It literally absorbs all of its environmental influences – from the water it swims in to the food it eats – until it is its environment. The cleaner the water and the better the environment and the food, the more flavour the fish has.

**What are your environmental influences?
And what kind of flavour are they giving you?**

I find it amazing that people don't see how pivotal environment is to their growth. It is difficult to think and live clean when you are surrounded by the murky waters of a polluted society. I think that it is something we innately know. If not, then why do we advise our kids to be choosy about their friends? Because we know how malleable young minds are, how easily influenced they can be.

As if *we* are immune from such vulnerabilities.

In a way we are all still like small children, massively influenced by those around us. If you want your quality to be the best then it goes without saying that everything you ingest should be of the finest quality. It doesn't take a genius to know that what you put in is what you will get out.

When my brother worked as a fishmonger, surrounded all day by fish, he could not lose that fishy pong. It was on his clothes, in his hair, even in his pores. If he sat on a bus he would elicit stares that made him feel like a social pariah.

He tried washing it out of him. It didn't work. For every ten minutes he spent in a clean, hot shower he was spending ten hours surrounded by fish. So no

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sooner was the smell off him than it was back on him again. In the end the only way he could get rid of the smell permanently was to change his environment by changing his job. You can't expect to work all day as a fishmonger and not smell of fish. Similarly you cannot expect to spend hour upon long hour surrounded by negativity and procrastination and come out of it feeling uplifted and positive.

So you may – probably will – have to change your influences. It doesn't mean that you have to suddenly drop all your friends. That really is up to them, not you. Many people cannot handle the success of their friends and will, sometimes over time, sometimes immediately, pull away from you. Others will enjoy, celebrate and even be inspired by your success and take the journey with you. Charles Dickens once said that he had to feign modesty in front of his friends because they could not deal with his success.

Part of the problem is that your new direction places you in a different environment, so you make new friends. Make sure that you try as hard as you can to help friends and family to understand your new direction and encourage them to grow with you. But if you do find yourself moving in different circles, do not allow yourself to view it as a bad thing. You are not abandoning people, no more than you abandon your primary school teachers when you take the leap into senior school or college or university.

As much as you can you have to change all of your influences until they are all pointing in the same direction.



Chapter Three

Food for Thought

You are what you eat.

How many times have you heard this statement and forgotten it again because it is such an old cliché?

Just because it is old does not for one moment mean that it is no longer true. The older I get the more I realise that the old truisms are the ones that make the most sense.

You literally are what you eat. Your palate is your power base. Don't just take my word for it; listen to the greats. If not, just sit quietly and listen to your body – it will tell you every truth if you care to listen.

The Palate

Mahatma Gandhi believed that the secret to building unlimited holistic success was in developing the correct palate. If you control your palate, he taught, then all the other senses will fall into line. When you control

the senses you control yourself and once you can control yourself, you can control the whole world.

If you cannot control something as basic as the food you eat, how are you ever going to get your head around the big issues such as health and wealth and happiness? People err when they think that they can bypass the fundamentals and get straight onto advanced play. A decorator can quite easily ignore the preparation work when he is painting a sill. Who, after all, is there to stop him from rushing in with brush and gloss and covering the old with the new without consideration for sandpaper or undercoat? No one. But the finish will be pretty dire and the results of the job short-lived. And if the fellow is trying to make a living from his trade he is unlikely to get many repeat orders or recommendations if he leaves a job half done. The best painter spends seventy-five per cent of his time preparing the job before he goes anywhere near the gloss. The better the prep, the more time he takes, the more thorough he is, the easier the glossing will be and the better the finish. Watch a real pro in action and see how his paintwork shimmers. It is all down to the prep work.

Why would it be any different with our bodies and our minds?

From my experience the right preparation and even foundation for positive thinking is palate.

This is not just a whimsical theory that I have thrown into the mix. It is a tried and tested methodology that has, quite simply, changed the quality of my whole life for the better. Let me explain my thinking behind this.

Extremes

Before I go on to explain the mechanics of palate control and the effects of wrong eating, please note that I am talking about ‘control’ as opposed to complete abstinence. In my bid for self development I have been to many extremes; from complete abstinence from anything that I felt to be negative to complete mortification of the bodily desires. I learned one thing from this. Extremes did not work for me. They made me unhappy and stressed. But the experience taught me many excellent lessons.

I learned a lot from extreme abstinence. As the poet William Blake said, ‘The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.’ I have found what the Buddhists call ‘the middle way’ which, in layman’s terms, is an abstinence from excess.

My top priority is health – because it is very difficult to be happy when you are unhealthy. No amounts of money or material possessions will make up for poor health. And it is very difficult to be healthy when you are not controlled with your palate. Good health comes from a combination of healthy eating and moderate exercise. What you eat profoundly affects your well-being. Just switch on the telly, open any newspaper, listen to the radio, and the message will be as loud as it

is urgent; wrong eating leads to bad health, even death. The government is so worried about the state of our nation's eating habits that they are promoting national campaigns to get people eating more healthily and partaking in physical activity. If you are not doing either it will have a detrimental effect on your physical and mental health.

Have you ever met an ill person who was completely happy, who would not pass over a king's ransom to get their health back?

No, me neither.

And it is not just what you eat; it is how much you eat and when you eat it. Let me explain the biology of it so that bit makes more sense.

The Adrenals

What you eat, when you eat and how much you eat fundamentally affects who you are and what you think. The wrong foods – or even the right foods eaten in heavy portions – can trigger the adrenals, forcing the body out of homeostasis (the body's natural state of balance) and into a 'fight or flight' state. In this aroused state the whole organism is affected; digestive tracts are closed down, the immune system is suppressed, cortisol (a blood pressure regulator that acts as a caustic on brain cells and smooth muscle like the heart, lungs, intestines etc.) is secreted, and major parts of the body – including large sections of the brain – are temporarily closed down. This not only makes it difficult to think positively, it makes it almost impossible to function normally.

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Again, this is not about never having a beer again, or never having a pudding or a pizza. It is about moderation. It is about not eating food that you have not earned or that your body does not need. Certainly it is about taking the pressure off an overworked digestive system and allowing that energy to be used in other, more constructive areas.

What does it mean to not eat food that you have not earned?

It means that if you are sitting at a computer all day - a very sedentary job - you don't need to eat like a hod-carrier. Your body does not need that kind of fuel for a job that is not physically demanding.

Let me tell you how my wife Sharon and I operate. It works very well for us. Maybe it will work for you too.

We both like our food. We love eating out, we love cafés, but the bottom line is this; food is a fuel. We enjoy it but we do not have a relationship with it outside of its primary function. We both train every day so we make room for the food that we eat. If we miss training we eat proportionately less.

No different from how you would treat your car.

If the oil/brake/water light comes on in the car do you carry on driving and ignore it? If you are sensible you do not because you know that it will ruin the car. If you forget to top up the oil or replace the water the engine will let you know by overheating. If you keep ignoring it, it will seize up. Similarly, if you place diesel in a petrol engine (or vice versa) you will not even get to the end of the road before the car splutters and coughs and stalls, never to move again until a mechanic comes

and completely washes the engine through. A very expensive and time-consuming job.

This makes sense doesn't it?

I am not asking you to buy a philosophy; I certainly do not want to lecture. I just want to ask you to use a bit of common sense. A car is a clumpy mechanical behemoth compared to your finely-tuned and touch-sensitive body and mind. So if a car reacts to the wrong fuel we should not expect our bodies to be any different.

Football clubs, athletes and sports coaches are now honing in on the importance of diet for their training. Clubs are investing tens of thousands of pounds employing top nutritionists to teach their players and staff the benefits of eating well. And the ones who are ignoring this imperative? They are coming in a sorry second place.

If you want to be the best eat the best. What you put in is what you will get out. Top athletes will tell you that 75 per cent of their training is in correct diet.

What is 'correct diet'?

Mostly it is obvious. Stuff that you will have heard a million times before.

So many times in fact that you've probably stopped hearing it.

Fruit and veg for your vitamins and minerals; dry nuts for oils; proteins (white meat, if you eat it, and fish is the best); and water all make up the power-base of palate. Many people are walking about in a state of dehydration all the time. Try to have a bottle or a glass of water with you at all times. Things to avoid are just as obvious; white flour products like cakes, pastries and biscuits; sugary items like sweets and puddings; fizzy

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drinks and alcohol; food high in fat like fried food; and – as a general rule of thumb – heavy meals. When you eat heavy you feel heavy. You feel tired because all your energy is being directed to the digestion. And mostly to digest food that you don't need, fuel that you haven't earned or made room for.

How do you know if you haven't earned it?

If you are overweight then you automatically know that you are eating more than you have earned. Your body stores the calories and the fat because it has no immediate use for it. So if you are overweight eat less or move more – or preferably both.

I have found that any meal that makes me feel uncomfortable, tired or stuffed is a meal that is too big. I have found that eating small meals, often, is best. I feel light because I eat light. I feel good because I eat well. And the moment I lapse my body lets me know with feelings of discomfort and tiredness.

If you want to know what food is right for you listen closely to your body, listen to the signs that it gives you. If you feel bad after a night of drinking and/or eating, that is your body's way of letting you know that something is amiss. It is up to you to heed the signs or suffer the consequences. Warning lights ignored are often followed by physical or mental breakdowns.

I used to think that I could have it all – health, wealth and happiness – without any work. Eat what I wanted, drink what I wanted and still get great results from my body and from my business and my life. And I tried that way for a long time. I kidded myself that I could fill my engine with cheap fuel and still get quality results.

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I got out what I put in.

It is important that you try this for yourself and see how you feel. You need to find out what light, healthy eating means to you and make the decision to commit to be the very best you can be. For years and years I messed around with this diet and that, always looking for a fast track, an easy path, a short cut. There was none. Once I was convinced of this and made the commitment to be the best, no one had to tell me about diet, about what I could and could not eat. I already knew. I knew it in my very bones.

Once committed, I started to see myself how I wanted to be, how I wanted to look and feel. Then I cut my meal sizes down, taking out all of the heavy elements (for me, that meant meat and pies and beer etc.) so that I was not full after eating. I drank lots of water. I trained moderately every day. I cut the ‘treats’ (sugars and the like) to a bare minimum, but not completely. And I made sure that I did not eat anything that my body had not worked for. I treated it like an employee. I paid only what it earned. So if I had a physically demanding day I would eat more; if the day was physically easy I would eat less. More than anything else I changed my relationship with food. It was fuel, pure and simple. Not something to have as a treat if I was feeling a bit fed up.

The secret with this is not a diet sheet for you to copy and remember. It is to be completely honest with yourself about your own expectations. Don’t expect to take your body on an epic trek through life if you are not prepared to fuel it correctly. I find it interesting that people will be meticulous about how they treat the car

in their drive, a vehicle that they will probably change every three years, and yet they will treat their bodies as though completely different rules apply.

The rules are universal. What you put in you also get out.

I would highly recommend that you read *You Are What You Eat* by Gillian McKeith. It is the best book on the market about nutrition.

Feeding the Brain

So we have talked about fuelling the body. But what about the brain? What about fuelling inspiration and motivation? What about fuelling the journey to succeed? How can we keep the mind interested when yet another rejection letter drops through the door? When you have cranked it up one more time and feel as though there is nothing left inside you?

When the going gets tough it is not usually the body that gives up, it is the mind. We run out of mental energy and often just surrender. This is because, like a car on a race track, we have to stop and refuel intermittently. It is not enough to read a motivational book or watch an inspiring film and head out onto the road. We all know that this kind of thing offers enough fuel to get us to the gym for a short while. But what happens when the inspiration fades, what do you do to keep yourself going?

My daughter Lisa is a terrific, gutsy girl with ambitions to travel the world. She is currently on a year-long trek around the world. She knows she can do it. She believes she can do it. She even has proof; she worked in the United States for three months a couple

of years ago. But every now and then, during the planning stage and when the reality hit home of what she wanted to do (give up her job and her home, sell her car, leave her family etc. – and all at the tender age of 23) she would come to me for a chat. For reassurance. Her fears laid out on the table for Dad to take a hammer to.

After I had spoken with her for an hour, reminding her really of what she already knew, she would go away on a high. I reminded her that what she was planning was absolutely achievable. Others had done it, she could do it too. I reminded her of the time before she lived in America and how – way back then when she was only 19 – she had the same could-she-couldn't-she fears. I pointed out how she overcame those fears and made living and working in America a reality. I also reminded her of the times she called me from the US – homesick – and how I told her that before she knew it she would be back, and that home was exactly where she had left it. She could return whenever she wanted. She always went away from the chats realising that she knew all this stuff, but hearing it out loud not only reassured her, it also recharged her. On this particular occasion, she asked, 'Why do I keep forgetting, Dad?'

I answered her question by asking one of my own. 'If you didn't eat for three days, how do you think you would feel?'

'Tired,' she said. 'Weak, out of balance, no energy.'

'Well,' I said, 'that is exactly how your brain feels when you haven't given it any inspirational fuel for a few days.'

I went on to explain to her that travelling the world,

leaving everything that you know, leaving your friends and family behind is a big thing in anyone's book. It is not an everyday event like going to the office or the factory. It is a scary thing to do. Exciting, too. But these emotions place the mind under a lot of pressure, a lot of extra weight is taken on, which means that you need to feed the mind with extra inspiration, and on a daily basis. If you don't it will tire. In fact without information the brain would actually die; information is the staple diet of the brain, that's why millions and millions of books and newspapers sell every single day of the year. The brain needs to eat and its food of choice is information. Inspirational information is the most nutritious. Most people fail to do exciting things with their lives because they just do not feed their minds with the kind of inspirational material that needed to take the trip. And if we do not keep the fire in the mind stoked up it is only a matter of time before the flames die, and not only do we run out of heat, we actually forget why we are aiming so high in the first place. In Kabbalah they call it *the forgetting*.

If we do not constantly inspire ourselves, fuel our brains, we will find ourselves lagging behind, even stopping.

My wife Sharon runs marathons. She is about to embark on her fourth marathon in Edinburgh. She is a bit of a veteran runner – she has run thousands of miles and what she has learned about running long distances is this: if you keep fuelling yourself at regular intervals and take the steady-steady approach you can pretty much run forever. She is right. Watch the London Marathon next time it is on. They have fuel stations

where the runners can get water and power drinks every mile of the 26.2 mile course. They do this because they know what Sharon knows; when running long distances, fuel is essential.

Going for any goal in life is exactly the same, whether you are aiming for the BAFTAs or applying for the job of foreman at work. You may think that aiming for the job of MD in a multinational company is proportionately more frightening than aiming to be a factory foreman overseeing ten staff, but to the person experiencing the fear there is no difference at all.

One day I was sitting down with a coffee in McDonald's mulling over the fact that I was stretching myself in many new areas of my writing (film, novels, stage, motivation, journalism) and was feeling quite fearful. Could I make it to the next level, and in so many areas simultaneously, would my work ever be good enough, would I ever get there (wherever there was)? I had been giving the work my very best shot and, it seemed, falling just short of the mark. It felt at the time that it would be easier for me to go back to what I was doing before and be happy with the level that I had already reached.

I was in the middle of this contemplation when the young lady cleaning the floor broke my reverie with a less than her usually cheery 'Hello'. I asked her if she was all right. She confided in me that she was feeling very afraid. She had been promoted and from the following Monday morning she would be working as a counter assistant-come-cook. She was terrified that she might not make the grade, scared that people might be impatient with her – shout, even. What if they gave her

an order that she did not understand? Worse still, what if the café suddenly filled with hungry people looking for their Big Breakfast and she simply could not cope with the rush? She was so stressed about it that she was seriously contemplating staying exactly where she was. Whilst cleaning tables and floors did not meet with her aspirations it was safe. She could manage as a cleaner; it was what she knew, even if it was what she hated. I told her that her worries were groundless and that the other staff would look after her, no one was likely to shout or be mean, and if they did, she would cope a lot better than she thought she would. I explained that I still felt the same fears as her.

‘You?’ She said it as though the very thought of me being scared was so alien to her that it was beyond belief. I explained that my position was no different to hers. I felt the same fears, the same apprehension, even courted the same doubts, and on many, many occasions I had felt like throwing in the towel because where I was seemed more reassuring than where I was aiming to be.

As a result, she went from feeling quite desperate to knowing that what she was about to take on was within her capabilities and that, actually, she could do anything.

All I did was give her a little fuel, what I call an *inspirational snack*. Information that her brain converted into energy. In this case she got the energy from a two minute conversation with someone who had walked the same path as her and could tell her with some confidence that it was all going to be fine. She could also get that same information from a book, a card, a T-shirt, a motivational logo on a tea mug, an inspirational

audiotape, a video, a film, a newspaper story about a self-made man or woman. There were many places she could feed her brain.

More times than I care to remember I have sat moping and thought, 'Why does it have to be so hard?' What I have learned to do over the years is to step forward regardless of my fears, do it despite the fact that my knees have gone to jelly. Feel the fear (as Susan Jeffers rightly says in her book of the same name) and do it anyway.

My small offering reassured my cleaner friend. She had gone from feeling alone ('I am the only person in the world who feels this scared') to being part of a growing number of people in the world who are thinking 'I can do more'. And subsequently go on to do just that. We have this strange notion that no one in the world feels like we do, that the stars and the celebrities and the 'made-its' never went through any of this.

I have a friend called Steve Goddard who is an internationally acclaimed sculptor. He has his work for sale at Harrods in London; he has even worked for royalty at Buckingham Palace. He is mixing with the wealthy and the famous. When I first met Steve – a wonderful and generous spirit – he was sketching dogs, printing them onto T-shirts and selling them at dog shows. He ran a small printing shop doing similar work for other people. At his terraced house in Coventry he built an attic room, locked himself in it and taught himself to sculpt. He had the desire. The desire became an intention, he paid attention to it and he did it.

I have witnessed his ascent (and I continue to watch as he is still growing) and I well remember how hard

each stage of the journey was for him. From the outside looking in it might seem like a journey without obstacle, just jumping from log to log on his way upstream. Not so. When he made the jump from an employed toilet cleaner – which was his first job – to self-employed printer the decision was fraught with worry. What if it didn't work, what if things went wrong, what if he failed to cope with the change?

He was plagued by 'what if's.

To get the fuel-injected inspiration he needed to challenge his 'what if's, Steve found real-life examples of people who had successfully taken the step he was about to take. He talked with friends who were self employed, he read articles about successful businessmen, he surrounded himself with people who were already living his dream. This proved to him that it could be done, that it had been done and that the potential difficulties were not as scary or insurmountable as he thought they were.

Such journeys are possible but you need inspiring all the way.

You need mental fuel, inspiration, belief that it can be done, belief that actually you are the one with the can-do. And this fuel needs to be injected on a regular basis. Unlike the more tangible body fuel, inspirational fuel is very subjective. What might fire my imagination and start me on a life-long trek of discovery might leave you colder than a politician's smile. Only you can know what inspires you.

The brain feeds off what you read, watch on telly or at the pictures, what you hear in conversation and, of course, what you say to yourself.

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As with the body you have a choice; you can fill yourself with junk food, the stuff that gives you instant highs but no sustained energy, or you can feed yourself with Class A protein, healthy vegetables and wholesome carbohydrates. The body will grow whichever choice you make, it'll digest whatever you put in yourself. The trouble is, if you give the body junk food it will grow sluggish, it will grow obese, it will grow unhealthy, and eventually it will clog up and break. We all know this much. But what you perhaps did not know is that the brain is no different. It will digest and assimilate whatever information you fill it with. Fill it full of TV soaps, tabloid newspapers and gossipy conversation, fill it full of negative thoughts and conspiratorial messages, and it will grow but, like the body, to levels of obesity.

Fill it full of motivational and spiritual information and it will flourish. In fundamental Christianity they call it 'warming the soul'. I prefer to call it feeding the soul, because reading and re-reading material that will inspire you to continue your quest actually does feed your soul. You only have to go a few days without inspirational sustenance and you will find yourself feeling tired and without motivation or reason to carry on. You know the feeling that you get when you listen to a good motivational speaker, or read a good motivational book, or watch an inspiring film or video, or even when you listen to uplifting music? It fills you with energy, you feel like you could take on the whole world. This is the fuel I am talking about. This is why body-builders read all the muscle mags, to feed their enthusiasm. Marathon runners get all the running mags because on the cold and wet Mondays when they feel

like staying in bed it is only the inspirational articles that keep them going. Writers' mags are the same. I get *Writers' Forum* every month because the stories about writers struggling to make it, writers who get their first article or book published and articles about writers getting the £100,000 advance for their first tome are actually food for the soul. I love it when my *Writers' Forum* drops through the letterbox. I bang the kettle on, put my feet up and fill myself full of inspiration. It keeps me going when the film script that I sent out the week before has been turned down (again) or the article I wrote has failed to sell, or a critic trashes my work. This is inspiring, or feeding the soul.

Once you feed the mind well, the unhealthy outlook, the narrow perspectives and the limitations will disappear like a bad fog and be replaced by a clear and expansive view.

The Four Foods of the Brain

There are four foods of the brain, of which information is only one; the other three consist of physical food, oxygen and love.

Let's have a brief look at them.

Physical Food

The brain is affected by everything we ingest and is hypersensitive to, and easily damaged by, the obvious things like alcohol and drugs. These fall into the realms of addiction. I will talk more about this in the next chapter. For now I will look more at the foods that best feed the brain. What we have learned thus far is that the brain is obviously part of the body, and just like the

cells of all other bodily organs, brain cells are continually being renewed.

Today's cells are made up from what we ate yesterday, and tomorrow's cells will be made up from what we eat today.

There is much about the brain that we still do not know but one key neurological fact that we do know for certain is that two thirds of the brain is composed of fatty acids. These fats are the basic component of nerve cell membranes, the medium through which all communications with other cells take place, both within the brain and with the rest of the body. Therefore the food that we eat is directly integrated into these membranes and makes up their substance. So if we were to consume, let's say, large quantities of the saturated fat that you would find in butter or animal fat which are solid at room temperature the rigidity of the fat is reflected in the rigidity of the brain cells. If, on the other hand, we take in mostly polyunsaturated fats – those which are liquid at room temperature – the nerve cells' sheaths are more fluid and flexible and communication between them is similarly more stable. This is especially so when those polyunsaturated fats are omega-3 fatty acids.

Placing the wrong fat into the brain is a little like placing sugar into a petrol tank. The effects of these nutrients on behaviour are striking. When omega-3 fatty acids are eliminated from the diet of laboratory rats, the animals' behaviour radically changes in as little as a few weeks. They become anxious, they stop learning

new tasks and panic in stressful situations. A diet that is low in omega-3 fatty acids also reduces the capacity for pleasure. In short without them your brain will not function correctly. The best sources of omega-3 fatty acids are algae and plankton. We get these through fish and shellfish, which feed on algae and plankton. The omega fats accumulate in the fat tissue of fish. Cold water fish are richer in fat and therefore better sources of omega-3. Mackerel is probably the best source followed by herring, tuna, whole anchovies, wild salmon and sardines. For vegetarians, omega-3 can be found in such foods and oils as flax-seed, rape-seed, walnuts, spinach, dried seaweed, spirulina and watercress. There have been many studies strongly linking diets poor in omega-3 with depression and lethargy. It stands to reason that if you want to grow your brain, then feeding it with the right nutrients is the prerequisite.

Oxygen

The third food of the brain is oxygen. Obvious enough, you might think, we breathe in and we breathe out. This oxygenates the brain, it feeds it. But simply breathing in and out is not enough if you want to really grow the brain. The best way to get extra oxygen to a growing and active brain is through physical exercise. You don't have to go mad, no need to place your entry for the next London Marathon; just take up a little moderate exercise. Preferably something that you enjoy. Running has always been seen as the king of all exercises. It is believed to be better for combating depression than the

strongest drugs on the market. Not only is exercise good for feeding the brain, it is also an excellent way to rid the body of any residue stress hormones. It clears the system and leaves you feeling wonderful. Like any meal that you feed the body, the intake needs to come in daily doses. Consistency is an imperative if you want sustainable results. It doesn't have to be running, it can be anything that gets your heart pumping: swimming, dancing, yoga, t'ai chi, qui gung, rowing, walking – whatever does it for you. If the exercise is not enjoyable then it can become a stressor and this would defeat the object of doing it in the first place. Exercise is also a great mental discipline, it keeps the mind muscular and alert, and it helps the skeletal muscle defy the gravity that is attacking it every minute of every day.

Exercise keeps you young.

Love

The fourth food of the brain is one that might surprise you. It is love. Or, if it makes you more comfortable, call it kindness.

Dead simple stuff, really. The brain feeds on love. When we have love in our lives we feel as though we can conquer the world, and when we have none it feels as though we are not living at all. We have all felt, I am sure, the power of love on our brains. Even a small injection of love can give you the energy to climb mountains – metaphoric or otherwise. The best way to get love is to give love. This does not necessarily mean romantic love, it can be parental love or the love of a friend or even the love of a complete stranger. Giving

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love can vary from as little as a kind smile to dedicating your life to a soulmate. It can be a favour for a friend when you are really too busy to be doing favours or taking your mum shopping or taking two minutes to talk with a homeless person.

The brain cannot survive without love.

If your life is lacking love it is most likely for one of two reasons; you are not giving love or you have stopped accepting love. Many people feel as though they give love but often people just barter: 'I'll do this for you if you'll do that for me.' It may be unconscious but the agreement is there. You might not think this is so but there is a simple test you can do that will tell you whether or not you are giving or bartering. If you are bartering you always expect some kind of return, even if it is just a thank you. When you give unconditionally you expect nothing. So if you give to another person and are offended or angry or disappointed (just another word for angry) that your offering was not acknowledged, then you were bartering. The same goes if you open the door for someone and you are offended when they do not acknowledge your courtesy. Or if you are affectionate to a mate and they do not reciprocate in the way you expected.

Any expectation is a sign that you are bartering.

Are you easily offended?

Many people are walking through life just waiting and expecting to be offended by someone or something. And you know what? They are rarely disappointed. If you want love – and let's be honest here, without it we are all lost – start giving it, in abundance and with no

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expectation of return. But remember this, everything that you give out will return in its likeness. Give unconditional love and that is what you will get by return post. Barter and others will barter back, not always fairly. Next time you give to someone, check out your reaction if/when it does not come back. The fact that you even notice that it has not come back is an indication that you were expecting it back, that you were bartering. Give in abundance and expect nothing in return, but know that it *will* come back to you; not necessarily from the object of your offering – it might perhaps come from a completely unexpected source – but it will return.

Make sure also that you are open for love. Many people are not. They have perhaps been hurt in the past and are too frightened to trust again so they close the doors and keep love out. Examine this in yourself. Recognise that you have to be brave, that you have to have the courage to trust again, for your own sake. You cannot survive without love. Love to the human brain is like light to the leaf, it converts it directly into energy. But you have to give it to get it.

You want more love, you want a ton of love, you want an abundance? Then give more, give a ton, give abundance. It is easy, easy, easy and believe me when I tell you that there is more out there than you will ever want or be able to use. If there is want in your incomings it is because there is scarcity in your outgoings. You only need to go as far as the library to learn that every great philosopher that ever lived knew and taught this truth. Listen to your heart and you will know that it is truth. Take it out for a ride, test drive it, be the proof.

The four foods of the brain are information, physical food (specifically omega-3 fatty acids), oxygen and love.

Easy!

So if it is so simple, why aren't more people changing their bad habits and replacing the negative brain food with positive?

Because it is so hard!

It takes effort; it means discomfort, pain, change. And what are we all uncomfortable with?

Change.

That word again.

But change is where it's at. You know that it's right when the majority race away from it in their droves. Change is the road less travelled. But I have to tell you – and this is the exciting bit – when you embrace change, when you step into the dark, when you front the adversity and face down the fear, guess what? You become one of the lionised minority. People flock to you for guidance and for information and for energy because you are doing the one thing that they have been unable to do.

You are the writer who takes his rejection letters on the chin and still sits down despite the pain to write another draft. You are the footballer who gets knocked back at yet another trial but still gets up for training the next day and still goes to the next trials. You are the singer who fails the audition but still sings; the sculptor whose work has yet to sell but still places his heart into

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his craft. You are the man or woman who makes the changes that his body and mind needs, despite the fact that it is uncomfortable. The person who has learned the meaning of true power: the ability to control *you*.

Look at Gandhi. He realised the worth of his body and learned to master it, he got it to work for him so that he could move mountains and part seas. He wasn't a physically imposing man; he probably didn't weigh above ninety pounds. He was not a general, leading an army of bloodthirsty soldiers – in fact he abhorred warfare. He didn't fill people with fear or trick people with rhetoric; the man was as gentle as the species allows. And yet this small, humble, honest spirit turned himself from a weak-minded man with some debilitating addictions to a spiritual leader with over twenty million followers. Twenty million: that is almost beyond comprehension. When I first read this many years ago the question that jumped into my head was, 'How did this man become so powerful? What did he do?'

He did just one thing. One thing allowed this man to fill cities with his aura, it allowed him to change the course of history, and it allowed him to defeat armies without the use of physical violence. He mastered his own body and mind. That is all he did. Doing this allowed him to connect to a higher power; the power of God.

How do you master your own body and mind?

The first step, to conclude this chapter, is to master palate, because you really are what you eat.



Chapter Four

Mastering the Body and Mind

What I am about to tell you here is very possibly not what you want to hear. But it will speak to you at some level because it is true. You will know this as soon as you read it. Before we look at the process of mastering your body and mind we need to look at why it is necessary.

Think of your body as a conduit for energy – which is basically what it is – like a hose is a conduit for water. If you had a garden hose and the water was only dribbling out of the end, what's the first thing you would do? Probably you'd follow the hose from one end to the other looking for kinks; you would straighten the hose. This would give you back the full flow of water. The body is no different. If you have kinks in your body, blockages caused by unhealthy eating or drinking or thinking, it goes without saying that the full flow of natural energy will not work through you.

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The signals from your brain to your body will be weak. By straightening the kinks from your system you get the full flow of energy; you become a clean, strong conduit. And the cleaner and stronger you are the more power will flow through you.

In fundamental Christianity cleansing is achieved by ridding the body of its cravings or its addictions. In Kabbalah it is believed that we are weak as a species because all our power is locked into our addictions. To regain our power these addictions need to be killed.

The majority of society is possessed by addictions.

Society's cravings have become independent entities. They live in the people and feed off the people. They lead them through life on a leash.

If you think not, try and kill an addiction and see how many excuses fly to the fore in order to stop you. See how weak you feel in the face of your addiction.

To gain control of your life you need to shine a light on your addictions by acknowledging them, and then they will dissipate.

As I mentioned before, abstinence falls into two very distinct camps; total abstinence and abstinence from excess. The former is employed to kill unhealthy addictions and the latter (known in Buddhism as 'the middle way') is used to temper mild cravings. Only you can know the difference between what is a craving and what is an addiction. If you are unsure, test yourself by

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abstaining for a period of time to measure your own reactions.

Killing these damaging addictions can be very uncomfortable because it involves change, and change means adversity, and adversity is what most people run away from. You might be thinking, 'I've got a mate who's successful and he hasn't given up junk food/drink/smoke/taking drugs.' I also know many people who have material success but who are very unhealthy in their bodies, their minds and their spirits. They have material success but not holistic success. I suppose it is best to define what your idea of success is before you embark on your journey. I don't see much point in having the money and the big house and the fast car if you are uncomfortable, even ill, in your own body. I refuse to live under the dominion of petty addictions. I don't want a million in the bank but a gut-bucket-belly hanging over my jeans. I don't want to be uncomfortable in my clothes because they are all too tight. I don't want to be short of breath when I climb the stairs and I certainly don't want to be under doctor's orders because of high blood pressure, stress or illness.

I do not want to be possessed.

All the material success in the world will not compensate for an unhealthy body and mind.

If it is just the material success that you want you can get it without this chapter; move forward if it suits you, no offence taken. If you want more then read on, and even if it seems a lot to take on board right now, don't

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worry. As long as the seed is planted the rest will happen all by itself when you are ready.

The core to finding and maintaining success, with the ultimate aim of being able to shape shift into your chosen ideal, is to master the bodily cravings. Kill the addictions. In doing this you will not only empower yourself but you will also get yourself in great shape.

I don't really need to tell you what your cravings are – you know these already, even if you have not yet admitted them to yourself. If you really are not sure then let me give you a clue. They are the ones that scream the loudest.

Abstaining from your addictions is a cerebral workout second to none. It's hard but it has to be. If there is no adversity there is no advance. At the moment you may – like the old me – be looking at this and thinking 'Why should I give up my beer/crisps/sweets? Why should I?' You didn't buy this book looking for half-truths and compromises, you bought it looking for answers.

I will focus on what I consider to be the main addictions society struggles with. These are all addictions I have fought and given up.

Food

This is the one that most people struggle with and it is what the last chapter was dedicated to, so I will be brief here and just go over the fundamentals.

What you put into your mouth ultimately determines how your body functions. Fill it full of rubbish and the performance of your body will be rubbish. Controlling your food intake is probably the ultimate challenge.

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Forget the marathon (as laudable as it is) or the judo black belt or the strong man competitions, in fact forget all of the exterior stuff; they pale into insignificance when compared with the internal jihad, the internal war with your cravings.

Most people forget what food is for, they forget that it is a form of sustenance, the body's fuel. They have a relationship with it that is not healthy. At a guess I would say that your food addictions are things like sugar, sweets, chocolate, white flour products (cakes etc.), fried food (including Chinese and Indian take-aways) crisps, fizzy drinks, pizza, beer, wine, spirits, drugs. These are all foods that give you immediate gratification, instant highs, but they are not healthy food choices for the body. If you feel that you have not got an addiction to any of these foods give yourself a test; don't have them for a while. Don't have a beer this weekend, don't have a curry this month, stop having sweets and sugar for a week.

How does it make you feel?

Hard, isn't it?

Or do you use the excuse of denial?; 'I could if I wanted, I just don't see the point.' The point is that you have to train your body to do your bidding and make your body earn its food. Don't give it food just because it craves it. Train your body to eat less and to eat healthy. In training the body and abstaining from the negative food you will build not only a fantastically healthy physique but also a sinewy mentality.

I basically just became a light eater. I cut out the heavy eating, gave up meat, cut the majority of sugar and white

flour out of my diet and got rid of the fizzy drinks. In place of these things (if you create a void in your life by taking something away, it is important to fill that void with something else, preferably something healthy that you like even more) I started to eat healthy option meals, light on fat, light on carbs with plenty of vitamins and protein. I made a study of food and experimented with what worked for me, I listened to what my body was saying (and ignored it if it said ‘Mars Bar, please’) and took heed. Within a relatively short time I was two stone lighter and sylph-like. But more than that I was healthy and I was in charge of me. I was the one behind the wheel, not my addictions. I was no longer possessed.

Alcohol

My friend loves a beer. Actually beer loves my friend. He is one of the many addicts I know who is in massive and complete denial. It is ruining his health, killing his body, slowly ending his life. Secretly he knows it. His family knows it too. They have to sit and watch him drink his kidneys away, watch him pass his health over the club bar. But his addiction has grown so strong – far stronger than him now – that he cannot even face the thought of life without beer. Even when his doctor told him not to drink because it was killing him, he still continued, saying that the doctor didn’t know what he was talking about. ‘I’ve worked all my life,’ he told me aggressively, ‘I’ve earned a drink. I will have a drink and no one will stop me.’

I’m not judging him. Not at all. I am a man that has had many addictions, one of them alcohol, and I

completely understand where he is coming from and how hard it is to give up.

‘I’m not an alcoholic,’ my friend says. ‘Don’t get me wrong, I like a drink – don’t we all? – but I’ve got control of it. I could lose it any time I want.’ He had control, or so he thought. It reminds me a little of the pitcher plant that feeds off unsuspecting insects. It lures them in with the sweet smell of honey. They land on the plant (shaped like a pitcher glass) and start to eat, slowly crawling down the inside of the plant for more. And even as they eat they look to the bottom of the shaft at all the other insects, dead and partly digested by the plant, and they think, ‘Not me, I’m in control. I’ll have a little bit and then I’ll be off.’ But the honey is addictive and before long the insect has eaten so much and has crawled so far down the plant that it can no longer fly away. It has become so heavy, so laden by its addiction to the honey that its wings will not carry its weight. Slowly they slip to the bottom of the plant to join all the other insects who thought they were in control.

‘What about when you go on holiday?’ I asked. ‘What then?’

‘Oh well,’ he said animatedly, ‘I’ll have a proper drink. When I’m away I’ll get wrecked, but everyone has a blow out on holiday.’

Not everyone, but perhaps the majority. What I had to ask myself when I tried freeing myself from addictions was, ‘Do I really want to be one of the majority, one of the 85 per cent? Or do I want to be one of the 15 per cent?’

I have been brought up to believe that drink is OK. Well, not just OK but *good*. I suppose we all have, really.

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It is an accepted, even encouraged norm in society. In most working-class families, turning eighteen was a big thing because it meant that you could become a member of the local working men's club. Before that the alcohol was surreptitiously passed to you when the gaffer of the club wasn't looking. Either that or you were fed the watered down version, shandy, until your liver adapted. Even babies got their initiation to alcohol with the dummy being dipped into the Pernod and black to help them sleep. Weaned on the stuff. Doctors drink, politicians seem to be mad for the stuff and celebrities openly brag on TV shows to the amusement of the audience about getting 'pissed/legless/blotto' or claim, 'I know it was a good night because I can't remember a thing about it.' You can go into just about any shop now and buy alcohol. Yet it kills hundreds of thousands of people. Alcohol is a poison. We know it is, we know it kills, we know that our bodies reject it, and yet we still drink it by the barrellful. And why not? We work, we've earned that abuse. It is a huge societal scam that I managed to release myself from.

It was a difficult thing to do because alcohol links people together. It is a huge part of our social fabric. We share drink with our friends, get drunk together, have a chat over a beer. When you give up the drink it rocks the social boat, you are no longer a part of the club, and your friends/family/peers often think that, in abstaining from alcohol, you are tilting a lance at them. So giving up the beer is not just difficult because of its addictive nature, rather it is difficult because of all the contributing social factors. So ultimately (I suppose) the fear attached to this particular addiction is a social

one. One of my friends had thought about giving up beer but didn't dare because he thought that it might wreck his marriage. It was – he felt – all that he and his wife had left in common. Another friend felt he could cope without drink at home but the thought of going on his annual holiday to France without being able to have his wine was anathema.

When I gave up the beer, I made the mistake of announcing it and lots of my friends got upset; they couldn't handle the change. One of them all but attacked me verbally when I mentioned my abstinence. So I learned to keep quiet, just to save people from themselves. I have to add here that it was not really an act of will. There is a level of 'will' involved in all difficult endeavours, but will can be beaten on a bad day. It is better to open a portal and climb through.

I am a voracious reader. Books are fabulous for increasing your knowledge base, but they are also excellent for opening portals to allow you a new perspective on something. I read one such book about Kabbalah and it said something that really resonated with me. I had been thinking about taking my training to a new level for a while, thinking about practising abstinence as a means of improving my mental capacity, challenging the old grey matter, but was never completely sure how to do it. Kabbalah offered me the opening I had been waiting for. It said that all growth, or all 'light', came from resistance. If you resisted negativity you created light, or power. It defined negativity as being anything you were addicted

to, like junk food or drugs or pornography. But it said – and this was the bit that opened the portal for me – that the light, or the power, only lasted as long as you resisted the negativity.

You cannot bargain with your addictions, even if you think that you can. You either kill them completely or they are still alive, waiting in the wings to tempt you and coerce you in any future moment of weakness.

At the time I was playing with abstinence. I would partially abstain from certain items, perhaps not have a beer in the week, just a couple on a Sunday as a treat. I thought I was doing well with this, I thought I was pretty strong. And for a while it worked. It was the high days, low days and holidays that mucked me up. If I had a high day, perhaps I got a good deal through or finished a book or someone had a wedding or celebration of any kind, I would have a drink. And why not – it was a celebration. Then I might have a low day, something had gone wrong, I didn't manage to close a deal, I didn't finish the book that I was writing and was fed up, I'd have a little drink (and maybe a cake or a biscuit or a curry) just to cheer me up. Nothing wrong with that. Then there are the holidays. You only get away once a year, so you have to let go then don't you? Everyone lets go on holiday.

All of a sudden the addiction that you thought was under control, in a cage, mastered, is back out as large and as ugly as life and you are back where you started. I realised that I couldn't have half an addiction. I was

either addicted or I wasn't. My addiction was either dead or it was alive. Addictions are very patient. They will lurk in the dark crevices of your mind waiting for your high days and holidays, they will wait for as long as it takes to reinsert themselves into your consciousness. I realised that I had to get rid of drink once and for all. That meant, for me, never having a drink again. Either I was a drinker or I wasn't. No half measures (if you'll forgive the pun). In that moment the portal opened and I acted. People say to me now, 'Aren't you ever tempted?' I never have been. There is nothing to tempt me because I am a non-drinker. It doesn't even enter my mind. What was hard was making the decision, because I knew that once made it would be for life; I also knew that the subsequent ripples would touch all other areas of my life. Some of my friends didn't know me (and didn't really want to know me) as a non-drinker. So the Geoff who met them at the pub for a rattle but only drank water was not the Geoff they knew. It took some of them quite a time to adjust. Some didn't make the journey.

Before I decided to abstain I weighed up the odds. I looked at the facts. Alcohol is poison. Did I want poison in my body? Alcohol was working me like a puppet, I was not in control of my own body. Did I want that? Did I want to be possessed? I decided that I didn't, so it had to go. For the first time in thirty years I took back control of my body. I didn't want to be 'like other people'. I didn't want to be a drinker, just like everyone else. I wanted more from my life, I wanted to live an exceptional life. And to me that meant doing what most of the others had failed to do: abstain from anything that was not good for me.

Sex

Next I had a look at sex, or more specifically pornography. I make no secret of the fact that I have always found pornography hugely arousing, to the point where – if I watched it – I felt consumed. And once I had watched one film it wasn't long before I wanted to watch another, and another. I felt controlled by it. And looking at the fact that sex is a billion pound industry I was obviously not on my own. This was also, I felt, an addiction that had to go. So I stopped watching porn. I stopped eyeing up shapely women when I was driving the car and I stopped thumbing the newspapers for pictures of Kylie's bum. I am not throwing a moral judgement on pornography, the sex industry or people who like to eye up shapely girls in the street. I am simply passing on what I have learned. I am in the business of becoming the best I can be, and to be the best you have to face your strongest opponents.

Gandhi, you may be interested to know, was a sex addict; he even used to visit prostitutes. Later, in his bid for spiritual perfection he actually gave up sex and even had naked women in his bed to develop his powers of resistance. This is, of course, extreme. And I am sure that if your wife caught you in bed with a naked beauty or two the excuse 'I was just practising my powers of resistance' probably would not cut the mustard.

I have to admit that even now, especially if I am tired or stressed, thoughts of a pornographic nature do try and infiltrate my mind, especially when I switch on my computer and some lemon has sent me a spam e-mail with sexually explicit images emblazoned across the screen. What I have learned to do is change my

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perspective on these images. I draw my gaze away from the actual sex and look closely at the eyes of the woman in the photographs; there often seems to me to be a sadness about them. With this in mind I try to re-humanise the images. It is not hard if you try. It doesn't take long to make these pornographic images completely sexless.

Also when I watch porn I feel as though I am betraying my wife. I am being unfaithful in my mind, and whilst I might not be actualising it, it is, as they say, on the hard drive. In the bible it says that if you think it, you have done it. As the psychologists have discovered, the unconscious mind cannot tell the difference between what is strongly imagined and what is real.

Procreational and loving sex does loads of good stuff for the well-being of you and your partner, not least because love is one of the brain's major foods. It is only unhealthy, in my view – like most things – when it is allowed to bloat and distort. There is an old saying: one hundred mouthfuls of food equals one drop of blood; one hundred drops of blood equals one drop of sperm. What this means is that the sexual act, as well as the production and ejaculation of sexual fluid, uses up masses of energy. If the sex is attached to love and procreation, it is a worthy and profitable investment. Love in all its dimensions is a primary fuel for the brain and has many benefits. Its powers are boundless – as mentioned, the brain converts love to energy, meaning it gives you the inspiration you need to achieve your goal. But the casual deployment of sexual fluid can leave you weakened, impaired and vulnerable, if it is spent

with no other profit than satisfying lust. The debilitating effects of sexual activity on the mind are underlined by Chin-Ning Chu in her book *Thick Face, Black Heart*. She attributes the theory to ancient eastern philosophy, which views sexual fluid as an important, life-giving force.

Finally I decided I didn't want to be sitting in front of the telly with the doors closed, secretly watching the ten minute preview on the fantasy channel, or an x-rated film, like a pervert in a raincoat. From there on in I became very vigilant about the kind of material I allowed into my mind. If I deemed it to be excessive it was refused entry.

Knowing about the debilitating effects of addictions, and utilising that knowledge, has been pivotal in taking me to higher levels of personal, professional and spiritual success. But if you have the information and do not employ it, it is useless.

Look at the lads in the gym, the bodybuilders, for instance. I have been in and out of gyms all my life. I love them, love the people, love the ambience. But how many of the people that purport to be body-builders or weight trainers actually have half-decent physiques? Not many, I have to tell you. Most of the lads and the ladies come in, week in week out, year in year out in many cases, and they never look any different. The gym that I go into on a regular basis in Coventry is a good example. The guy who runs it is a champion body-builder, built like an Adonis, muscles on muscles. He is in fantastic shape. So if this guy runs the gym (and he does run it excellently) and knows the secrets to

building a great body, why is it that the greater majority in the gym, his gym, do not – and probably never will – look like him? Genetics perhaps, a natural God-given talent for it?

No, I think not. The difference between the guy with the great body and the guy with the failing physique is that one uses the information he is offered and the other does not.

The artist Escher said: ‘For the most part things like talent are mere poppycock. Any schoolboy with a bit of aptitude might draw better than I; but what is usually lacking is the unwavering desire for expression, obstinacy gnashing its teeth and saying “Even though I cannot do it, I want to do it.”’

It is easier to sit in the comfort of denial and not do a thing and then blame everyone and everything for your failure than it is to have faith in the information given and make the changes. I was a good example. Many years ago I approached my friend who runs the gym, and asked him to give me the secrets to a good physique. He gave me the secrets, probably already aware that I would not employ them – most people don’t. I looked at the instructions. As far as the training was concerned I was pretty much on the ball. I trained hard, always had and I trained regularly. It was in my diet that I was way, way off. He told me this, but at the time it was not

what I wanted to hear. I wanted success without sacrifice. I wanted a body without the work, the ribbon without running the race. I altered the instructions he gave me so that it could include some of the things that I would rather not give up; wine, the odd curry, a sweet now and then (most days). I thought I could make up my own rules, believed that I could short-cut the system and make myself into Adonis without the hard work of correct diet. It was like trying to make a cake without one or two of the vital ingredients, or trying to crack a six-number combination lock with only five numbers and kidding myself that it might still open.

If you don't have all the numbers in place that lock will not budge.

Killing your addictions is difficult because you think that life without your little crutches will be awful. People often think that because I don't have a drink or smoke or eat rubbish that my life must be pretty boring. I thought it would be too. That's why it took me so long to get there. But actually now, on the other side of those addictions, I feel great. I have a fantastic life, feel wonderful, and all the other areas of my life have improved in accordance. My body feels light and clear, I feel better than I ever felt. And I look back and wonder, 'Why didn't I do this sooner?' When I started I felt that I was needlessly torturing myself. And my friends would say to me, 'You're mad, why are you doing that? Get out, enjoy yourself, have a beer, eat what you want when you want.' It is only now that I look back and can see that it was all worth it. I am where I want to be in my life. The friends who told me I was mad are still stuck in the same place, like

Groundhog Day, perennially re-living the same sorry existence. And as I go forward with my life and face new challenges and feel that ever-so-familiar tingle of fearful apprehension I can tell myself not to worry, because I know now that as you step into the darkness it lights up. You just have to have faith in the process.

The angrier your response to this type of information the more likely it is that you are in denial. If you want the booty you have to earn it, work for it, sweat for it. If it was easy, everyone would be fabulously successful. You have to step into the adversity. It has to be difficult.

So if the very idea of abstaining from the addictions in your life, or even admitting to the addictions in your life, is causing you untold discomfort then this is a strong indication that you are on the right path.

Thoughts

Science tells us that everything in the material world starts its life with a concentrated thought or intention. Thought is at the beginning of all creation. In fact, thought is creation. We tend to become what we think about constantly. We tend to create what we think about constantly. So what starts with a thought can quite quickly become a reality.

This is not just science; it is also the belief of every great spiritual leader since time began. And when great men speak we should listen, even if and especially when the listening is uncomfortable.

What I have learned is this: wrong thinking creates wrong doing. Resisting wrong thinking will bring power.

You get from life what you think about. So I practise

only thinking the things that I want to create. One of the hardest things to control – even though it is well within our capability – is thought. People often advise ‘Just don’t think about it. Think about something positive instead.’ Easy as that. They very rarely offer any pragmatic get-your-hands-dirty exercises for controlling the anxious thoughts.

That’s why, when I decided to write this book, I had to make sure that I didn’t end up doing the same thing, offering advice and information but no practical method to bring this into reality. Thought is at the very core of our reality.

When I started to write about the methods of controlling our destiny via our thoughts and via abstinence, an anxiety fell over me. I remember thinking, ‘I can’t write this stuff, people don’t want to hear this.’ People don’t want to be confronted with discomfoting information. I feared that if I was too honest I might alienate my readers, and a book without a reader is just a doorstep. Then I asked myself a few questions: ‘Is this stuff true? Is it how you live your life? Does it work for you? Are *you* ready for it?’ I answered an unreserved ‘yes’ to all of these questions. Then I asked myself another, ‘So if it’s good enough for you and you are ready for it, what makes you think that it might not be good enough for others and that they might somehow not be ready for it?’

Mastering your body by killing the addictions, making it work for you and serve you, whipping it into shape with consistent resistance to all negativity is the prime way of initially controlling thought. Untrained, undisciplined, weak, flaccid, overweight, spoiled,

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clogged, indulgent thoughts are what allow and even court addictions and cravings. They keep you trapped in a cycle of fear; the job you hate, the relationship that is abusive, the life that is unfulfilling. Once you get the cravings and the addictions in line you will have trained your thoughts to a high level. I used to think that I could just sit and concentrate on my thoughts and make them stronger. It helps but on its own it is not enough. It would be like a bodybuilder trying to build muscles without lifting weights. You have to build your mental muscle like you build your physical muscle; with resistance training. You have to put your thoughts to work by using the positive ones to resist all the things that are negative. This is going to take a lot of honesty. Most people will not admit they have addictions. So this is the first step. It is impossible to fight your addictions if they are hidden under a pile of defence mechanisms (a defence mechanism being an excuse that you use to hide from the conscious mind something it cannot face, like saying ‘I could give up smoking, I just don’t want to’).

Write down a list of your addictions and systematically get rid of them.

This is what former US president Dwight D. Eisenhower did. He wrote down all the things that he felt he could or should improve on. Once he had them written down he worked on them every day until all of his weaknesses had been ironed out. His ability to do this made him the most powerful man in the free world

at the time. He knew that whilst he had weak links he was always going to be incomplete.

The *thought practice* comes in when the cravings start and you feel the urge to indulge in whatever it is you have decided to abstain from. It takes tremendous self-control to stop yourself from succumbing, especially if the addiction in question is a strong one like drugs or alcohol or cigarettes. Remember at this point that all the gold is in the pain, all of the advance is in the adversity, when you resist negativity you will plug yourself into the power mains. And the more pain you feel, the more discomfort you suffer, the more you have to fight and resist, the more power you will receive in return. All of the growth occurs when you practise resistance.

You need to remember this because, when you are in the thick of it and the cravings and the temptations are strong, it is only this knowledge that will get you through. You need to know why you are there. If you have ever worked out with weights you will know that it is only the last few repetitions in a set, the ones that really burn, that actually break the muscle tissue down, and it is only in breaking the muscle tissue down that we are able to grow the muscle bigger and stronger. Hence the reason why, after a workout, you will hear bodybuilders and weight trainers talking about the ‘fantastic burn’ they got from that last rep. These lads and ladies are talking about extreme pain with reverence because they know why the pain is important.

Mastering the body and mind won’t come overnight. It is a lifetime quest, something that needs to be maintained.

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Initially mastering the addictions is very hard, but once you have control it is a lot easier, it's just a matter of monitoring them so that you don't slip back into bad habits. As far as I am concerned self-mastery is THE shape shift. Once you have that in place (and this can happen as quickly as you like – if you are really determined you can start now, this moment, which after all is the only moment you really possess) you are equipped to take on anything with the expectation that you will succeed.

**There is nothing you cannot build if you
have a strong foundation.**

Imagine this scenario: you call the builder up and say, 'I want to build a ten-bedroom house on the base where my three-bed semi is standing now. Can you help me?' The builder turns up, looks at your property and tells you yes, he can build you a ten-bed detached but first he has to get rid of the existing structure and build a new, deeper, wider base. 'Can't we just use the existing base?' you ask, wanting to make the transition with as little fuss, cost and discomfort as possible. What do you think the answer might be? It's just logic, really. You want bigger, you want higher? Then you need wider, deeper, more commitment, more investment. Have a look at your life now. You want more, so you need to prepare yourself for more. Build your house on dodgy foundations if you wish – and I have tried this, I have tried to short-cut the system and always ended up broken in some place or other – but don't expect it to be stable.

Imagine a guy comes into the gym and says, 'Bang three hundred pounds on the bench, I can handle it.' Then you ask him, 'How much have you benched before?' He replies, 'Well, I tried one hundred last week and failed, but I still want to try three hundred.' You know that trying to press 300 pounds in weight when you have not even got the physical foundation to push 100 pounds is at best ludicrous and at worst downright dangerous. You'd be sending the lad for a from-the-neck-up check-up at the local trick cyclist.

Many, many of the people out there who have been thrust into fame, success and fortune before their time have ended up physical, mental and spiritual wrecks. Why do you think that so many celebrities are troubled with alcohol/drug/food/sex and emotional addictions? Because they are carrying more weight than their cerebral legs can handle. Lots of them now are rushing to yoga or Kabbalah or Buddhism, some religion or faith, to try and find solace and balance. You need to get your philosophical base in place.

Lee Evans spent many years trying to make the big time in comedy. Then he won the Edinburgh Festival and bang! Offers came in from every angle, he had work up to his ears and money dripping from the ceiling. The pressure affected him – perhaps crushed him would be a more appropriate term – so much that he had a nervous breakdown. He was not emotionally ready; his philosophical base was not in place.

Similarly after the phenomenal success of the album *Bat Out Of Hell* the singer/actor Meatloaf had a nervous breakdown and tried to commit suicide. He was not ready for his global exposure. He didn't have the base.

MASTERING THE BODY AND MIND

Many celebrities have become ugly with fame; the power has distorted them beyond recognition because they did not, or do not, have the base to handle the power that has been thrust upon them.

You might see a fat guy who is a millionaire and think, 'Well he's made it without mastering his body.' He has made it financially, but at what cost? I don't want to have a million in the bank and an ego (or a belly) the size of Florida. I don't want a big car or a great business at the cost of my marriage. I don't want to be materially successful but have no time for other people. I want success that my body and my mind can handle. That means getting the base right, that means mastering the body and mind, that means I train even though – and perhaps especially because – it is hard, I watch what I eat and don't indulge my body, because I know that this is all part of being in charge. I monitor my internal dialogue, don't indulge in negative flights of fancy, keep a strict reign on my thinking and practise meditation and contemplation and I tithe my time because I have this fantastic piece of machinery, worth billions, that will not work efficiently if I don't keep a firm hold of the wheel.



Chapter Five

What Do You Want to Be?

The next step in shape shifting is an obvious one. What do you want to shape shift into? Sounds obvious but actually you might be surprised to know that many people want to *be something*, they want to *do something*, but they don't know what they want to be or what they want to do.

You need to know.

If you don't have a destination then you are not going to go anywhere other than in circles.

If you don't know what you want first have a look at what you don't want.

You are sure to know at least that much. Many people have told me that they want to do something but are unsure of what, but I have yet to meet anyone that did not know very clearly what it is they didn't want. When

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I ask them what they want, invariably they say, 'I don't know, all I know is that I don't want to be doing this for the rest of my life.'

That is a good start. You are working in a supermarket, on a computer, at the factory, or even in a more glamorous but unsatisfying job. But you don't want to be doing it any more. If that is the case then it is time to move on. What I always recommend when looking for a new vocation is that you find something that you have a passion for, better still find your obsession, then make it your profession and you will never work again. Look closely because it might be right under your very nose, just waiting to surprise you. Even if you do not know just yet what it is exactly that you want to do, you need to make a determined and definite commitment to find out. If you commit, and I mean definitely commit, to finding what it is that you are meant for, you will find it. The answer will not come without a definite question.

Many people think that they want to know, but really they don't, because they are frightened of the truth, because the truth will set them free and often the chance of being 'free' is too frightening to even contemplate. It means a step out of the comfort zone into the dark, into the unknown, the uncharted. Every man or woman who ever made it had to take this step and it always seems hard, but have faith because when you step into the dark it will light up. It has to. Listen to what philosophical genius Goethe said:

'Until one is committed there is hesitancy, a chance to draw back... there is one elementary truth, the ignorance

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of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans. This is, that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one, that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and material assistance, which no one could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it, begin it now.'

Roger Hargreaves, the late multi-millionaire inventor of the Mr Men, was not sure exactly what he wanted to do with his life; all he was sure of was the fact that he didn't want to be working for other people any more, and he dearly wanted to work from home so that he could spend more quality time with his wife and children. He was definitely committed to this with a passion that filled him. He searched for ideas that would allow him the freedom to be able to work from home. He was by all accounts a fantastic dad, always hiding behind corners and jumping out on them and tickling them. One day, after a tickling session with his young son, his little boy asked him something that changed the course of his whole life. 'What does a tickle look like, Dad?' Roger had always loved drawing cartoons, so in answer to his son's question he drew a cartoon of a round creature with long arms and very short legs. He showed it to his son and said, 'That is what a tickle looks like.' The cartoon became 'Mr Tickle' and was followed by numerous other characters drawn in the same vein. Realising that he had found or created something special Roger showed the drawings to a

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publisher friend who agreed to publish them for him. The characters that started with one child's simple question went on to sell all around the world, one hundred million copies to date, and made its creator more money than you can shake a stick at.

My aim was the same as that of Roger Hargreaves, I wanted to be able to go to work in my slippers, I wanted to work from home and no longer clock in at 8 a.m. and clock out at 5 p.m. and have to get permission if I wanted to go to the loo, or make a cup of tea, or start late or leave early or take time out if my kids turned up looking for a chat and a coffee. I also wanted to create something that was different from what other people were creating; something original that carried my own personal voice. But I also realised that to get that kind of freedom I had to make the commitment to create the kind of environment that would allow it.

In a TV programme about the pop group Coldplay, the lead singer Chris Martin talked about how, when he first started out, he got turned down by everyone. None of the record companies got it, and when he went into a studio he'd have producers saying, 'Do it like this, no don't do it like that, it won't work like that.' He admitted that he felt like he had no idea what he 'should' be doing. No idea what constituted a good song. He was blocked by thoughts like, 'Would Sting do it like this? Would Bono write it like that?' In the end someone pulled him to one side and said, 'Listen, this is not about what anyone else wants, or what anyone else thinks, this is about you, what you want and what you think.' He realised then that to be original, to have

artistic freedom, all he had to do was listen to his own original voice, write and perform the stuff that was already getting a big following with his friends at university. It is good to listen to others and take advice, but advice is different from control.

**Advice is there to help you see something
that perhaps you might have missed, not
to change the whole thing until it no
longer has your sound.**

The legendary boxer Rocky Marciano is a great example. He was the inventor of a punch called The Suzy Q. Basically it was what we in the boxing trade call an overhand right. A big, wild, uncouth hooking punch that went right over the opponent's guard. At the time it was a very unconventional punch, unique to Mr Marciano. No one else in the boxing game was using it. Well, it wasn't a very pretty punch, and it wasn't – some said – in the gentlemanly spirit of boxing, not Queensbury rules. His trainer took him aside after a training session and said something like, 'Rocky, you'll have to stop doing that punch.' Rocky said, 'Why?' 'Well,' his trainer lamented, 'it's just not done, no one else does it, and anyway it's not even a proper punch.' Rocky looked his trainer in the eye and said, 'But I've knocked out my last seven opponents with it.' His trainer made a half moon with his mouth and said, 'Mmm. Good point.'

Who cares if what you want to do, what you want to create, where you want to go, or how you want to dress or speak or live isn't the same as anyone else? Is it what

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you want to do? Does it hold your particular sound? This is about you. This is your life, and the majority of naysayers in your life will not even be there in ten years. Most of the people who tried to talk me out of leaving the factory for a better life fifteen years ago, people who tried to influence me to go in a direction that they thought I should go, I can't even remember their names now. All I can tell you about them is that they are probably right back where they were all those years ago. Because if they were trying to hold me back then you can be sure of one thing; they were also holding themselves back.

I am fond of telling people that I haven't worked for ten years. Because I haven't. I've banged in some hours, sure, loads of them. A few years ago I did a 32 city tour to promote my book *Watch My Back*. Visited probably sixty shops, spoke with thousands of people. But that wasn't work. I got tired, yes, but it wasn't work. I was doing something that was exciting, something that I loved. And I met loads of my friends on the way. I made loads of new friends also. I visited a glut of places that I might never have otherwise got to visit. Staying in a great hotel on Princes Street overlooking Edinburgh Castle, I had my breakfast by the restaurant window and watched the sun come up with a coffee, poached egg on toast and the girl of my dreams by my side. Please. It wasn't work, it was a pleasure. I sat in the Lucy in the Sky café down Cavern Walks (where The Beatles were discovered) with my martial arts hero Terry O'Neill. Had two days in London racing around the underground visiting every corner of the capital, talking on the radio and at book shops and stopping just long

enough to grab a bite to eat, and Sharon and I smiling at each other and saying, 'What a crazy life we lead.' It was hard graft at times, long hours. It was being away from home (but together) and taking risks (will the book sell, will people like it?). But work? No. Never.

Let me tell you what work is; moving concrete blocks around a building site on my shoulder all day until my neck is bleeding from where the sharp edge of each block has rubbed. When I was working in demolition my hands would blister, pop and bleed all in the course of a working day. The work was so tough that all but the very hardy left before breakfast without even picking up their wages because the work forced you beyond yourself. And then there was the door. Four of my friends were murdered during my ten year stint as a nightclub bouncer. I was glassed, stabbed, threatened with a gun, placed on a hit list, locked up in a police cell and attacked almost nightly. Now that is hard work.

It was twelve years ago that I gave up conventional work and started to write and teach (martial arts at the time) for a living. It has allowed me to travel the world and live the life that I always wanted to live. I always hated conventional work. I dreaded just about every day. I have never regretted it, though; I needed to go through all those jobs to find out conclusively and categorically that it was not for me, even though everyone else around me was telling me that, in their view, it was. So when I say that you should look for your passion or your obsession I do mean *yours*. Not your mum's or your dad's, or your husband's or wife's or your workmates' – but yours.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE?

What are you passionate about?

What are you obsessed with?

You need to make the decision and don't look for everyone else to tell you that you are right or that they agree with you. The moment you rely on others to make your decisions you inadvertently become their prisoner. Part of building a sinewy, hardy mentality is stepping out on your own, becoming an individual who does not need the permission of others to live their life. This is not to say that you shouldn't talk with your loved ones or consult with them or take their views into consideration. All I am saying is that quite often people – usually those very close to you – have an investment in you staying exactly where you are. Change for you means change for everyone.

If you want to shape shift, you need to look after yourself. This sounds selfish I know. It is what author Charles Handy, in his book *The Hungry Spirit*, calls proper selfishness. You help others by helping yourself. There is an old saying that goes something like; 'You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.' It is only when you get a bit older and a bit wiser that you realise how false and how selfish this is. What it pretends to say is, 'I'll look after you if you'll look after me.' What it actually says is, 'I'll look after you but *only* if you look after me.' This is true selfishness. In actual fact, I have found that the only way you can truly help others is by helping yourself. Get yourself right and the whole world will be right. Get yourself right and your husband, wife, mother, father, children, friends will be right too. Gandhi got himself right and helped millions. William

Wallace got his own head in order and changed the course of history.

When I was younger and stuck in the factory and heavily investing in the blame culture I felt that the world was against ‘people like us’. Working-class people, uneducated people, ‘ordinary people’. I blamed everyone for my problems but never blamed the one person who could do anything about it. And the people around me did the same. They blamed everything from the weather to God for their sorry lot. When I wrote comedy sketches and sent them to TV stations as a naive twenty year old it was easier for me to say, when they turned me down or didn’t respond, that I had been knocked back because of *television nepotism*, ‘they only hire insiders, and friends etc.’ than it was to look at the cold hard facts; I sent my work in unsolicited, ill prepared (there is an etiquette when sending work to TV stations that I did nothing to find out about) and maybe (though it is hard to admit) my work at the time just wasn’t good enough. Friends and family would say, ‘You’ll never get a sketch on telly, people like us never get a look in.’ Similarly when I was stuck in an unsatisfying job that felt like Monday morning every day, it was easier for me to blame my wife than it was to accept the fact that, actually, this was my life, my time; that if I didn’t like where I was, I was the one that needed to do something to get myself out of it. Which eventually I did. But only after accepting the fact that if I wanted change then I needed to do something, anything, to bring that change about. When I was stuck in the factory I wanted to do something with my life, live a little, get out there on the precipice, the very

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dangerous edge and make my mark. This is what I wanted with all my heart. But I didn't know what I wanted to do to make that a reality, or what I could do, other than what I was already doing. Despite the fact that I had wanted to be a writer since junior school, it didn't seem to be an option. It was one of those things that I loved to do but, hey you can't make a living from something you love, can you? So the people around me kept saying. So I was looking for my vocation, not realising that my vocation – writing – was screaming at me from the bleachers. Occasionally, in a fit of excitement I might decide to try and then make the mistake of sharing my dream with a naysayer, only to get it clubbed like a beached seal. My vocation, my passion, my obsession was right under my nose.

What is yours?

What is the one thing that you really love, the one thing that you would absolutely love to *do*, the one thing about which the people around you have said 'Forget it' and tried to talk you out of? That – in all likelihood – is the very job for you.

Once you have decided on what it is that you want to do, you have to ask yourself another probing question. How much do I want it? How much am I prepared to pay?



Chapter Six

How Much Do You Want It?

Perhaps this question might be better phrased as *how much are you prepared to pay?* How much are you prepared to risk? How long are you prepared to wait?

If you are anything like me when I was a younger man you might want things from life but be unprepared to pay the price.

What is it that makes one man a champion and another man an also-ran?

How come only very few make it to the top?

People will tell you that it is luck, a gift, fate. They might even tell you that there is only room at the top for a rare few.

They would all be wrong.

The ones that get to the top are the ones who want it the most; they are the ones who dedicate their whole existence to it. The ones who will not be stopped, who will not take no for an answer. They are the ones who

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have made a total commitment. They risk it all. And they never, never, never give up.

A friend came to see me – a good man, a martial artist of some repute. He had read my book *Watch My Back* and he wanted to become a doorman, the bouncer. What did I think? he asked. Should he do it?

I asked him a question.

‘How do you feel about receiving a phone call at three in the morning from some nutcase threatening to kill your wife and children?’

He said, ‘I don’t fancy that.’

‘Then don’t do the door,’ I replied. ‘Because that might happen on the very first night you work.’

It might never happen, but the chances are in a violent job like the door it will, sooner or later. You risk your life, your liberty and your sanity. I am still writing to friends in prison who are there because of their involvement in the door. Many more of my mates have ended up on the psychiatrist’s couch because of over-exposure to violence and one ended up drinking bleach in a field in the middle of nowhere when his life took a turn for the worse and half a dozen gangsters threatened to stop the beat of his heart with a piece of lead behind the ear.

My friend didn’t want that in his life – and who can blame him?

Another friend, on hearing that I had become a wrestling instructor, said, ‘I’d love to be a wrestling instructor.’

I replied, ‘No problem, give me your Monday and Friday evenings for the next twelve months – we’ll have to travel because the nearest class is in Birmingham –

and you can become a wrestling instructor.' He declined my offer because, whilst he did want to become a wrestling instructor, he did not want to pay the price.

Another chap came to my class in Coventry. Bearing in mind at the time we had some of the best guys in the country there including a double British Vale Tudo champ and a European Vale Tudo champ – all guys of a high calibre. He had a roll with the lads (a wrestle) and was being beaten again and again and again. Within a few minutes it was clear that the chap was out of his league.

He was perturbed.

'I don't understand,' he said, 'your guys are killing me. I can't catch any of them. What am I doing wrong?'

I had a think about it, watched him roll. I couldn't work it out myself.

'I'm not sure.' I said, being as honest as I could without actually saying, 'They are just better than you.'

'How often are you training?' I asked.

'Oh, twice a week,' he said, feeling pretty proud of himself, 'I never miss.'

I said, 'That's why you can't catch these guys.'

'Why?'

'You're training twice a week; these guys are training twice a day. It's their job, it is all they do.'

He got it.

I greatly admire Ronnie O'Sullivan, the snooker player. Steve Davis – several times world snooker champion – described O'Sullivan as a thoroughbred amongst carthorses. He felt that O'Sullivan was that good, even above himself.

So what is it that makes him so good?

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Total and unequivocal commitment. Forget genius, think hard work, think going beyond yourself, think total dedication, total risk.

How long are you prepared to wait?

My answer to this question with regards to my own work is: as long as it takes.

At the time of writing this book I have been trying to get my first feature film into production for seven years.

The amount of energy that you invest into your goal needs to be sustainable. Can you sustain your current input for another three years? Five years? What about seven years or ten? Could you wait for ten years, or even longer?

I could. I don't want to, I want it now, but if I have wait to I will. In actual fact I waited twenty years to get published. I wanted to be a writer when I was at school, I was in my mid-twenties before I had my first article published, and thirty years of age before my first book hit the shelves. If these time frames scare the brown stuff out of you, that's good. It means that you are not fully prepared and need to look again at your intention. Maybe it is not as solid as you first thought. This is not to say that you will not make it happen tomorrow, next week or next year. You may well do, and certainly I never thought it would take me as long as it did with the writing, but be prepared for the long haul, setting early deadlines can often lead to disappointment and termination of plans.

Victor Frankl, who relates the true story of his harrowing experiences in Nazi concentration camps in

the seminal book *Man's Search for Meaning*, noted that prisoners who listened to usually inaccurate Chinese whispers about the expected date of their liberation by allied forces usually died if those dates, for whatever reason, were not met. If they had heard, for instance, that the allied forces would liberate them on 12 July and it did not happen by 13 July they would be dead. Once that date came and went without liberation their life purpose ended. Frankl said that on their death certificate it would read something like 'Tuberculosis' or 'Malnutrition' but in actuality the cause of death was lack of purpose.

In a less extreme way, your purpose in this case is your goal and if you set a deadline and for whatever reason that deadline is not met you will be very unlikely to get past it. So many people set unrealistic deadlines, and when they are not met they abort their plans. I have lost count of the number of people I know who set their deadline at first draft; 'When I get the novel written I'll be home and dry.' When their first draft comes back from the publishers with a rejection slip they have neither the inclination nor the stamina to re-write it and send it out again.

Yet completing the novel is the just the first step in what can be a long haul. There may be many re-writes (usually at least five). You might write a novel but actually your strength lies in non-fiction, or your voice better suits stage or screen or journalism, but you can't know that until something is written and the feedback collated. There is a certain amount of maturity that needs time to occur. You can get a heck of a lot of experience in a year, but maturity takes time.

HOW MUCH DO YOU WANT IT?

How much do you want it?

How hard do you practise?

How many auditions have you done this week?

**How many words have you written on your
unsold novel today?**

I was on a book signing once in Plymouth. After my usual chat in front of the audience a very nice guy got talking to me. He said that he had tried to muster up some support for the book signing by visiting local martial arts clubs in the area because I hold a lot of martial arts qualifications. At one club a Ju-Jitsu instructor said something like, 'What do I want to go and see Geoff Thompson for? Everyone knows that he's a phoney and that he bought all his grades.'

He was right. In a way I did buy them. I paid with broken bones (thank you very much). My karate grades cost me several broken fingers, broken toes, a broken ankle, a broken nose (twice), broken ribs (several times), blood, sweat and tears and thirty-plus years of commitment. One day as a younger man I remember lying on my bed and weeping because I was so scared to go training. My grappling grades cost me two cauliflower ears, injured elbows, a back-injury that has never left me, fat fingers from the grip work, pain and fear. When I did my black belt grading in judo I was so scared that I nearly went home, and it was only the fact that my wife gave me a kick up the arse and told me to 'deal with it' that I managed to get through. I never got anything without paying the piper. I tried when I was younger – like most people – to get the ribbon without

running the race and even kidded myself once or twice that it had worked. But it didn't because I couldn't lie to myself. The more adversity the more advance. The more pain the more growth. The more investment the more return.

The accusation that I bought my grades made me laugh. And in a way I can understand why he felt like this. If it has taken you the best part of your life to become a black belt in one system it must be hard to believe that a man can become a black belt in several. That is because they are looking at it from the wrong perspective; they are looking at it from their perspective, the perspective of a recreational player. When you are training two or three times a week after work, when you can fit the time in, it is very difficult to achieve the height that you aim for (and perhaps that's the problem, not aiming high enough). But I have never been a recreational player and when you train full-time, when it is actually your job, believe me when I tell you that people throw black belts at you because you get really good really fast. Imagine your job now. Eight to ten hours a day at a machine or a computer or driving your truck. Imagine taking those eight to ten hours (or more) and using them to practise the guitar, sculpting, writing, swimming, film, martial arts. Imagine just how good you would become at just about anything that you consistently spent eight to ten hours a day at.

It would be pretty hard not to get good.

Can you see what I am saying?

And I hope that you didn't just say what I think you might have said, that the concept of spending eight to

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ten hours a day on what you love is just not realistic for ordinary people, for those who are working.

I hope you didn't say that or even think it because it is an absolute cop-out.

Are you fully investing in your dream? Or are you playing recreational soccer on a Sunday and then sending your C.V. off to the premier league teams?

Talent – even when it is gifted – will not grow without attention, you do not ever get professional results by investing recreational time. You have time even if you think that you do not. Twenty-four hours in each day. Your time is being used up, but what with? You may feel that time is against you and that you have commitments that eat into your time but – let's be blunt here – it is your time, it is your *things* that are filling it.

Nearly every famous novelist I know of started their career on stolen time, that is, they worked full-time and had a family to look after but managed to get up early or stay up late or work through their dinner hour to steal the time to invest in their art. If you don't like your job and feel it is taking too much of your time, change it, it is your job, your life, your time: change it. If you do not make that choice then that is down to you, not the job or the family or anything else. It is down to you. Most people work eight hours a day, they sleep eight hours at night, which leaves another eight hours.

Or you could do what I do and learn (over a period of time) to manage with less sleep. I go to sleep around midnight and usually I rise at 6 a.m., which gives me an extra two hours a day to invest in my art. That might not seem a lot but over a week it amounts to 14 hours.

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Over a year it works out to be 730 hours. If you split those stolen hours into eight-hour days it works out to be almost three months of extra investment purely in your art. Three months. What could you get done in three months?

You can start, like most successful people, by investing a few hours a day into your passion, before or after work and at the weekends, until you can make it pay enough revenue to pack in work altogether.

Who says that you can't make your passion pay?

I did it. Even when I had three jobs I still trained every day. When I went for my first black belt I was working at the factory on shifts yet I still managed to train twice a day. I wrote my first book on the toilet in the factory where I was employed to sweep floors. And when I made the final commitment to dedicate my life to martial arts I gave up my job and trained full-time. I used the money I made from teaching to pay the bills. It is only unrealistic if you believe it is unrealistic. Believe me when I tell you that all things are possible.

Iain Abernethy, a writer/martial artist friend of mine has just at the time of writing given up his full-time job to concentrate full-time on his writing and his teaching. It was something that he always dreamed of doing and now he is doing it. He didn't just get the idea and sack his job. He did it carefully and in measured strides. He wrote his first book about karate and started selling it through the shops and mail order, at the same time as he started writing prolifically for the martial arts press

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and building his personal profile. The books and the articles got him noticed. Subsequently he was invited to martial arts clubs all around the country to teach his art. When he'd earned enough money back from his first book and his teaching he published a second, then a third and then a fourth book. He also produced some excellent martial arts videos. It wasn't long before Iain was earning almost as much from his books and his teaching as he was from his well-paid day job. At this point in his evolution, time was at a premium. He was working a full-time job and travelling most weekends to teach courses. And when he wasn't teaching courses he was writing articles or new books or producing his work on video. He found himself taking holidays from work just to keep up with the demand for his books and courses and videos. It got to the stage where he just did not have the time to go to work full-time. He was actually being forced into the direction that he always wanted to go; being a full-time writer/martial artist.

But he still had a slight dilemma. On a good week he could earn more from his martial arts and writing than he was earning in his proper job. But the money was not yet consistent. At the same time, he did not have enough spare time left to grow his business any more without going full-time. He had taken it just about as far as he could without committing himself to it eight hours a day. Fortunately Iain has a fabulous wife who was 100 per cent behind him and encouraged him to follow his heart, give up his day job and go full-time with his martial arts and writing. It was a big decision and one that he mulled over for some time. He also talked with his mentors and got their opinions. They

all agreed that it was time and that his new venture needed the injection of some concentrated hours. So he set himself a date and gave up the day job to live his dream.

As a word of caution on this, I have to say that I also know other people who have gone Iain's route and not made it happen, for lots of reasons, not least of which is a lack of preparation and impatience. The ones that made it happen did so because they prepared. And when they made the transition from employed to self-employed they landed running. It is not enough to start your own venture and then sit waiting for custom. You have to get out there and make it happen. The work that you put into the preparation needs to be consistent throughout your business life.

I had another mate who opened a martial arts gym. He and his partner worked like demons to get the gym ready for opening day, they matted it out, filled it with new punch bags and cutting-edge equipment, they even had a shop on site to sell paraphernalia. But the venture failed. Why? No one knew where they were for a start. They were on the periphery of the city, out of most people's reach – which can be forgiven, people will travel for excellent instruction – and no one knew they existed. They placed every ounce of the energy into getting the gym open but they had no plan to advertise the gym to the general public. Because of this hardly anyone knew the gym even existed so it failed to attract enough people to sustain itself, let alone grow. Within a very short time it closed down.

They blamed many things, not least the poor location and the fact that no one supported them. But even the

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best location in the world is no good if people are unaware that you are there. And people will always support you for a while, until you find your feet, but you can't rely on it forever. At some point you need to support yourself. When I go into a new venture I go into it with the intention of succeeding. It might take me longer than I expect (one of my faults is that I often underestimate the time it takes to get a venture off the ground) but – if my intention is solid – I will get there. I have learned from nature that anything will grow even in the most barren landscape if you give it light and water (sustenance). And it will only grow as long as you continue to water and feed it. As the plant grows bigger it demands more light, more water, it might even need cutting back a little if it is growing too wild. But while you feed it, it will grow. Your talent, your business, your relationship – anything in your world that has life in fact – will grow if you give it the attention it needs.

If you really want it to happen you can make it happen. You have to believe that you can make it happen.

If you can stretch your mind to it, you can do it. It might mean convincing a few people in your life to back you, it might mean dipping your toe into the water a little to see if it is really what you want to do, just to see if you enjoy it full-time as much as you enjoy it as a hobby. It may and probably will mean short-term sacrifice. It is entirely possible that your talent is not quite there yet and you may have to invest more time before you can

make it a paying occupation. But if you want it you only have to reach out and take it.

**Basically you are just a decision
away from making it real.**

People like John Lennon were not just born with their genius. They worked their socks off to develop their talent. Don't forget one thing. Before they made it very few people could see their talent. Just about every major record label turned down The Beatles. Everyone that has a sustainable career does an apprenticeship. We tend to think that people arrive without pain. No one does. And the ones that appear to short-cut the system just flash in the pan and disappear. Lennon's aunt Mimi claims that Lennon 'loll'd' against her porch wall practising the guitar for so many hours that he actually wore the brickwork away with his bottom.

Sir Edmund Hillary, the first man to climb Everest said, 'Technically there are much better climbers than me, but I will reach the top of the mountain I am heading for, I am a stubborn, determined sort of climber.'

Success is less about talent and more about tenacity and commitment.

Talent will grow with tenacity.

No one gets a free meal.

Everyone pays.

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And why would we want it any other way? It is the hard journey that makes men and women; it was the north wind that made the Vikings. Ellen MacArthur did not become a great sailor by taking her boat out in clement weather; it was the storms and the hundred-foot waves that made her not just a good sailor but a great sailor.

There is nothing wrong with being a recreational player. Nothing wrong at all. But don't expect to play Sunday league soccer with a training session once a week and then suddenly make it into a premier league side. If you play weekend soccer expect to be a weekend player. If you want more, then do more. People have often said to me, 'I'd love to do it but I don't have the facilities or the equipment.'

It's a load of denial.

Sir Donald Bradman, arguably one of the greatest sportsmen of all time, was brought up in the remote Australian outback. He didn't have any of the gear – the bat, the ball, the pitch or the trainers – in the beginning. It never stopped him from becoming the best man on the planet with a cricket bat. He honed his batting skills in cricket by practising in his back yard at home using just a cricket stump for a bat and a golf ball in place of a cricket ball. This man went on to reach a batting average of 99.94 runs over 52 tests. The nearest anyone else got to that was 40. Such was Bradman's fame and respect that when Nelson Mandela was released from prison in South Africa one of the first questions he asked was, 'Is Bradman still alive?'

What Bradman had was an absolute obsession for his sport and a total commitment. He knew how much he

wanted it: more than anything else. He was prepared to sacrifice all to be able to pursue his dream of making it big in sports.

As a child in Brazil, the legendary footballer Pelé honed his skills with the ball by kicking around coconuts on the beach. He did not have the equipment but he did have the desire. He wanted it.

It took Martin Scorsese thirty years to get *Gangs of New York* made. Thirty years. That is possibly more than the age of some of the people reading this book.

Do you want it enough to dedicate your whole life to it?

You need to know how much you want it. How much you are prepared to pay. How much you are prepared to risk.

It doesn't necessarily mean that you will lose everything in your quest for your goal, give everything up, and leave your family, mates, country. It rarely means that. I wanted to be a good judo player. I trained with some of the best players in the world at the full-time class at The Neil Adams Centre in Coventry. My wife Sharon was worried that I might get dropped on my head and be left paralysed. At that level of judo it could easily have happened. I took that into consideration but wanted the skills enough to take that chance. And I did get thrown around a little, got my ears bashed (one ear swelled up so much it was like a satellite dish, I was picking up Sky for a while there), landed on my head the odd time. But basically I took the risk and came out of it a better judo player.

I always wanted to be a writer. When I was younger I was married to a lovely young lady who did not fancy a

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writer as her chap. So when I wrote and dreamed of using my words to earn my crust we argued. But what was I prepared to risk to become a writer?

I was prepared to risk everything. It sounds selfish, I know. But half a man or half a woman is no man or woman at all. I felt that if I was with someone who loved me, I mean properly loved me, they would not try and clip my wings, their love would be unconditional, they would love me whether I was writing books on a desktop computer or righting wrongs on a nightclub door. They would back me in any endeavour. On an unconscious level I guess I always knew that I would have to make a choice. Follow my dreams alone, or stay with my partner and live a safe but unfulfilling life. I never actually made the choice, the choice made itself. I continued to write and dream, we continued to argue. In the end we didn't like each other very much. I found another girl who did like me as a writer, and my ex-wife found a chap who didn't want to write. It was very difficult and I was never really consciously aware of choosing. But because I made a commitment to making writing my life at any cost, the sacrifice was endurable.

You may never have to lose your wife or mates. I hope that you don't. When they see how committed you are, how dedicated you are, when they see that you live and breathe your passion they may do an about turn and start getting behind you. And I truly hope that this is the case. But if they don't – worst case scenario now – how much are you prepared to risk?

Be greedy – see it all.

I have a little tip for you. Something I learned after my first marriage. Be greedy (perhaps I would call it 'proper greediness'). See it all. If you want the career as a professional frisbee thrower but you don't want to lose the wife/mates/lifestyle then see it all. I wanted to get to the BAFTAs (and the Oscars) with my film but I did not want to do it at the cost of the people around me who I loved and cherished. The people who had helped me get this far with my dreams. So I saw myself at the BAFTAs with them. I saw me kissing and cuddling my wife, talking to my son and daughters on the phone, having a celebratory dinner with my mates. I saw it and I made it happen.

I wanted my first play to be staged. I wanted it totally; full commitment. It took three years from page to stage. But I didn't want to spend so much time on it that I left no time for my family and friends. So when I saw my play on stage – in my mind's eye, in my meditation – I saw all my family there with me. I saw my wife Sharon, my girls Kerry, Lisa and Jennie and my boy Louis. I also saw all of my best mates. I got the play on at the Drum Theatre in Plymouth in January 2003. Sharon and I spent the week in Plymouth for rehearsals and dress rehearsals. Sharon was preparing for the marathon and I have a daily running routine that I keep up wherever I am, so we ran every day. Plymouth is very hilly. Everywhere you go it is up a hill. Hills that make your thighs burn and your lungs burst. We ran up them every day, and we ran by the sea. It was one of the best weeks of my life. On the weekend that the play opened my kids came down and joined us. Also most of my close friends from Coventry came down. We all had the

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weekend watching the play and going for meals and talking until late in the night. It was beautiful. Just how I saw it.

So here's the paradox: be prepared to risk everything, look at the worst-case scenario and ask yourself if you can handle it, be prepared to handle it. Then do everything within your power to make sure that the worst-case scenario does not happen. The best way to do this is to be greedy (proper greediness) and see it all.

You get what you see so see what you want to get – all of it.



Chapter Seven

False Beliefs

If you are going to give it your all to make your dream a reality, you better ask yourself one question before you start, because without the answer you may not even make it to the start line.

Why?

Why do you want it?

In fact, without the why, you are unlikely to make it happen.

Nietzsche said that if you had the why you could deal with any 'how'. There was nothing you could not achieve, no discomfort you could not endure or mountain you could not climb if you knew why. The 'why' is the most important factor, it is your salvation and light when things get dark, as they invariably will.

Victor Frankl said that the prisoners who survived their ordeal in the concentration camps were the ones who had a very strong 'why'. His why was that he absolutely had to get through because he was writing a

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book about the Nazi atrocities, his life's work, and he felt compelled to finish it. Another man had made a promise to his wife that he would survive the camps at any cost. This is what kept both men going when everything around them seemed doomed. Frankl missed death on numerous occasions by being in the right place at the right time: almost, he felt, as if the universe – aware of his 'why' – had conspired to get him through. When you have a strong why no amount of pain or discomfort will stop you.

Why do you want it?

You need to know why you want to succeed. The *why* is vital.

People often say to me, 'I'd love to be a writer but I don't know how.'

If you find the 'why', the 'how' will look after itself. Once you have a very strong 'why' and you make the commitment it will be as if the whole universe conspires to bring all the 'hows' together to complete your picture.

Your *why* may be something that is difficult to define. You need to try.

Why do you want to be a professional dancer?

Why do you want to be in the SAS?

**Why do you want to write for a living,
or sculpt, or draw?**

My reason for writing is that I have a passion, perhaps an obsession, for words. I want to write beautiful, powerful, moving, emphatic, funny, honest, revealing, invigorating, encouraging, inspiring, profound words.

I want to do it with all my heart, to the point that I will spend every day of my life practising the craft until I succeed. I want it so much that when I am not writing I am not happy. Writing to me is a catharsis, it is part of what makes me live and breathe – it is in my very bones. I invest everything I have to make the words I write sing to the highest level I can. I am passionate about this. And I want to do it for several reasons, not least so that I can prove – to myself and to all of the naysayers out there – that it can be done. I want to show people once and for all that anyone who is prepared to dedicate his life, his heart and his soul, his ego and his hours to a task, can achieve the greatest accolades. Every time I tell someone this I get the reply, ‘To a degree, perhaps, but I don’t think everything is possible.’ And then they go on to list all the things that they think cannot be achieved without ‘your face fitting’, ‘luck’, ‘the gift’; they say that you can’t make it without ‘sacrificing your family’, ‘selling out’ or ‘making yourself ill’. Or the old one; ‘This is the real world. I’m all for being positive but you also have to be realistic!’

Who says so? Whose rules are we working to here? Not me! Never mine! I am not in the business of being realistic, certainly not to anyone else’s rules and regulations and limitations. If I was in the business of being realistic according to other people’s beliefs I would still be in an unhappy marriage working a factory job that placed all my potential in an oily rag.

Finding out ‘why’ is vitally important. But often, I have found, people spend too much time thinking about why *not*. They cannot get a clear look at the why because

it is so obscured by false beliefs. In this chapter I would like to examine and challenge these false beliefs in order that you may clear a pathway to your goal.

Your face has to fit

Your face will not fit if you are not ready. This is what I have always found. When you are ready everyone will want your 'face' in their world because – one way or another – your face will bring them profit.

If you have the potential to bring them profit your face will always fit. And when I talk about profit I am not really talking materialistically. Some people will be drawn to you for materialistic profit, that's a given and it's the way it often goes. And if you are in business together that is also an important factor. But it does not bring a lasting relationship. It is a transient friendship that is built on 'what is in it for me?' It will last just about as long as you are profitable. You see it all the time. A pop star is given every luxury by her record company, brought into the family, pampered, and told 'Whatever you want you'll get.' Suddenly the pop star is out of vogue. Tastes in music change like the weather. Where is the relationship then? Blue in the water. Contract cancelled. Phone calls not returned. The profit coronary stops the beats of the corporate heart. It is a transient relationship built on material gain. Your face fits. But just for a while. Ten years after the relationship has received its Decree Absolute the pop star is in the local papers talking about the fact that they were done over by the record company and that they never received the profits they were promised and 'oh how bad the world is to people like us.'

When you are ready your face will fit. And being ready is not just about having a great product (which could be you or something that you create) it is about being a great person. If people sense that you have no integrity, or if they sense that you are only in it for what you can get, your face might fit but only while your external product is a saleable item.

It's all about the money

I have read every business book around. There have not been many that I have not thoroughly enjoyed and learned from. Even the ones that didn't work for me still inspired me, because the author had managed to sit down and get a full manuscript finished and published. Not an easy task. I have also read just about every motivational book on the market, looking for knowledge, looking for inspiration. Mostly these books talk about how to make money. They may beat about the bush and they may go into the themes of staff motivation, profit share, legislation, the new 'this and that' of big business, but the bottom line is that they are about making money. Nothing wrong with that.

Money is OK. It is an organiser. Even the Bible needs money for print costs and distribution. The better of the books talk about making money, but with integrity as the key factor. Proper selfishness. Make money for you, but also make money for everyone else.

All of the books talk about assets and liabilities; assets being the things that bring revenue into the business, liabilities being the things that take revenue out of your business. They suggest – and rightly so – that by increasing the assets and decreasing the liabilities your

business will become more profitable. What I have noticed, though, is that very few of the books talk about the most important aspect of business, they don't talk about the only real assets and the only real liabilities any business has.

People are your only assets and your only liabilities.

Luck

This is an old one. 'You made it because you were lucky!'

Someone once said to a great golf player after a particularly good long range put, 'Very lucky.'

The golf player replied, 'You're right, but the funny thing is the more I practise the luckier I seem to get.'

There is a great book on the market by a guy called Dr Richard Wiseman; it is called *The Luck Factor*. I highly recommend that you read it, especially if you think that your luck (or lack thereof) is what is holding you back. In the book Dr Wiseman talks about why 'lucky people meet their perfect partners, achieve their life-long ambitions, and live a happy and meaningful life'. They have an uncanny ability to be in the right place at the right time and enjoy more than their fair share of lucky breaks. After doing extensive research involving thousands of people his conclusion was that people are not born lucky, they create their own good luck without actually realising it through their mental attitudes and behaviour. To prove his theory Dr Wiseman took a group of volunteers who considered themselves unlucky and taught them to think and behave like lucky people. Almost all of the participants reported significant life changes including increased levels of confidence and success.

Even science now agrees that luck is not a random occurrence, rather it is created. Think lucky and you will be lucky, think rich and you will be rich, think happy and you will be happy. But you have to do this for long enough so that it becomes a habit, so that thinking lucky is a part of your routine, like cleaning your teeth, shaving in the morning or hoovering the house. It needs to be a habit. And habits are things that we can form. We do it every day, only the majority of what we make into habits are not the kind of things we really want to encourage.

Write a list of all the bad things that you have made habitual. Write them down and practise every day not doing them until the habits have withered and died. Then, in their place we need to form new habits. Habits of things that we really do want in our lives. Habits that will bring health and happiness and, if you want it, wealth and fame.

Luck is a state of mind.

You will get just about as much luck as you expect to get. The more you practise the luckier you will be and the luckier you are the happier you are and the happier you are the better you treat people and the better you treat people the bigger your assets grow. Everything affects everything else. To think otherwise is to be naive. If you want to be lucky start thinking lucky. Change

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the habit of thinking, visualising and talking unlucky. Notice all the times when unlucky thoughts emerge and replace them with good thoughts, lucky thoughts, thoughts of prosperity, wealth, happiness, abundance.

I know what you are thinking. It's hard. It *is* hard, that is why we have to study, prepare constantly, and invest in ourselves. How many hours of the day do you study the art of thinking?

We become what we see. We become what we study. If we study light we get light. If we study dark we get dark. Study wealth and use the lessons and you will get wealth. Study football, climbing or fishing and you'll get ability in it. And the more you study and practise and 'see' the quicker it will come. You will create it.

How often do you practise focus, or visualisation, or contemplation?

In *The Luck Factor* Dr Wiseman talked about a salesman called Lee who was perpetually lucky. He explained that his luck was not something that he was born with, it was not an innate genius or a gift from the gods, rather it was something that he worked on. Lee said that if he wanted something, he would 'dream it through'. He would dream that he was winning and receiving sales prizes. He called it 'dream wishing'. He'd plan telephone calls even before he picked up the phone; he would focus on the person he was going to speak to and see the conversation being very positive. People told him that he was mad with this 'dream wishing', but he didn't care because all his sales figures kept increasing. So he kept doing it.

SHAPE SHIFTER

How much of your time do you invest in visualisation, in dream wishing?

For that matter how much time do you invest in expanding your knowledge about the world you live in, about your body, your mind?

How much do you read about and learn from the successful members of our species who have trodden this same path?

For a few quid (or if you join a library, for free) you get access to the greatest achievers on the globe – dead or alive.

Mother Teresa will give you her thoughts on living a good life; you have immediate access to her via the book shop or the library. Interested in business? You can read about the rise and rise of Wal-Mart, one of the biggest businesses in the world, which made its money by slashing its profits in favour of its customers. Politics? You can read about Clinton and how he became the most powerful man in the free world and then lost it all because he succumbed – like many of the great presidents before him – to the oldest weakness in the book: sex. The greatest brains in the world are available to you, free, this moment. They are there to guide you to greatness, to achievement. All you have to do is get the books, read them, and invest your time. Educate yourself. Allow your brain and your intellect and your knowledge and your charisma to swell.

It's hard! We all know that much. That's why even with all this help, all this free information, all these clues, so many people still do not move from where they are – unhappy, unfulfilled – to where they would dearly like to be. Pain preceeding growth is the natural

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process. One does not come without the other. Steel can be forged only in the flame, gold emerges only after crushing and refining, the hard rock has to be smashed away before a diamond is revealed.

You have to give out before you get back. If you are at a job that pays four quid an hour and you want to be paid ten, or twenty, or a thousand then you need to access these books, tapes and courses, and talk to the people who are where you want to be. Make yourself more valuable in the workplace by investing in yourself.

If you want to be successful then study and model successful people.

If you want to be lucky, study what the science of luck is.

Luck – it's out there waiting for you to call.

The gift

I love this one because I have heard it so many times; 'It's all right for him, he's got a gift for it.' Listen, we all know that some people are born more endowed towards a certain area than others. But we also know that there are a million successful people out there in every field, just as successful, more so in many cases, that had to work for their gift. Anastasia Volochkova never had the gift. She became a legendary Bolshoi ballerina even though she was told by everyone that she would never make it because she had no jump, no dancer's feet and no high leg extension. She had no gift. She was not deterred by any of this. 'I learned,' she says now with confidence, 'that the most important thing is not ability, but will power and belief.'

She believed in herself, she expected to succeed despite the fact that everyone around her said that she would not. Expectation determines outcome. If your expectation is to succeed then you will. And one success will lead to another and another because success attracts success. They snowball; one small accomplishment can quickly roll into something awesome. When I first got published twelve years ago I was absolutely elated. I danced around the bedroom with my acceptance letter from a publisher. My first deal had been a long time coming. At times it seemed as though it would never come. Once it did, once I got that first small success under my belt, it started an avalanche of new ideas; it was almost as if a dam had burst and within the next year I had written another five books that I was not even aware I had in me. I went on, over the next ten years to pen about thirty books, I don't know how many dozens of articles, four feature films, one stage play, two short films (one BAFTA nominated, one BAFTA winning) and dozens of television and film treatments. And it continues to pour out of me, or through me. I was told that I did not have the gift. I always wanted to write. Even though my stories were read out at school, I was still told in no uncertain terms that I did not have the gift. I never started writing as a professional until I was in my thirties. In the back of my mind there was this belief that I could have anything if I could only see it strongly enough.

Findi George was a Nigerian footballer who won just about every accolade possible in the beautiful game playing with top teams such as Ajax, Amsterdam and Betis Seville. Because of his skills he is often cited as a

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footballing genius. He had no formal training, he was self-taught, and as a kid he played in bare feet using rags for a football. His 'gift' was his quickness on the ball. He was great, there can be no doubt about that. But gifted? He believes not. 'Quickness,' he famously insisted, 'is not a gift, no, no. One is not born with speed, one works on it like any technique, repetition, repetition, repetition.'

Scottish biathlete Mike Dixon takes Henry Ford's attitude to life: 'Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right.' If you think that you can only make it if you have a gift, then that will, as likely as not, become your self-fulfilling prophecy. If you expect it, you will see it and then you will get it.

Mike says:

'I started skiing when I was nineteen and everyone told me I was too late to ever make it professionally as a biathlete. I was too short, too old and left handed, which meant that I had to learn to shoot with my right hand, which I was useless at! But I never gave up believing I could do it and one day win an Olympic medal, so I just kept at it. One summer I practised intensively and fired about twenty-nine-thousand rounds until I finally mastered shooting with my right hand.'

At Salt Lake City he became the first man ever to have competed in six Olympic Winter Games and has held the British flag at three Olympic opening ceremonies. He's also received a BEM and MBE for his services to British sport. He is the first biathlete ever to gain a perfect shooting score in an Olympic

competition. ‘The qualities I believe you need to succeed in an Olympic race,’ he says, ‘and in any sporting discipline, are a strong discipline of the mind and body, motivation, focus, determination, perseverance and very importantly, a positive attitude. Visualisation is a very powerful tool that I often use to prepare myself mentally for winning.’

If Mike had listened to the people around him who all felt that he didn’t have the natural gift (or any other attribute to make it as an Olympic biathlete) he would probably have stayed at home and – like most – watched others do it on the telly.

Gift?

Genius?

They can be developed. You attract them with your positive attitude.

People think that they have no gift, and therefore no chance. In reality we all have a gift, a fantastic gift. As mentioned at the beginning of this book, the machine that you are walking about in at this moment is the greatest gift you could ever receive. It is a magnificent organism that we have been given to take us through this game of life; it is equipped to bring us all of our dreams and aspirations. If they could make a computer to compete with your brain it would be ten blocks square and reach the moon. Your brain also has the potential to grow bigger and bigger. There is – it seems – no limitation to the brain and therefore, by extension, our potential. All you have to do is put your brain to work, feed and rest it in the right proportions and it

will grow bigger and bigger. And it doesn't matter how old you are either – it is never too late.

I spoke with a lovely friend of mine recently, Irene Ison, a psychic. She informed me that she recently enrolled to do a PhD – and she is in her seventies. There was a theory once that the brain atrophied with age. Not so. It is lack of use, and not age, that makes the brain atrophy. But isn't that the same with everything? What you don't use you lose.

Gift? Don't tell me that you don't have the gift. We all have the gift. Just not all of us use it.

Sacrificing your family for success

As we saw earlier, there are many people out there who – in their bid for the top seat – neglect those closest to them. Many people become materially successful but to the detriment of their relationships with the people they love most. I can't deny that this has happened, and will continue to happen.

I had a mate who wanted to become a professional martial artist, and she was good too. She could have made it very big. She pulled back in the end because she didn't want to sacrifice her family for her business. It turned out she had spoken with a few other friends for advice – ironically she only talked with people who had tried and failed to become full-time martial artists – and they had warned her off, telling her that in order for her to make it work she would have to put in lots of hours and there would be lots of stress and that as a consequence 'the family would suffer'.

'You'll never be home,' one of them told her. 'I was

out of the house trying to make my business work twenty hours a day, I never saw my kids, and I still didn't make it pay.'

Now do me a favour. Have a close look at this advice; how does it sound to you? Does it sound like the talk of a successful individual or does it sound like the reasoning of someone who has failed at their first attempt and then used 'family' as an excuse?

I'm not knocking them. Far from it. In my early days of trying and falling short I was the first to get out the excuse book and apportion blame to anything or anyone other than myself. Sometimes it is easier to blame than it is to get off your arse and try again.

And certainly we need to define success very clearly before we start. I don't look at a chap or at a girl who has swapped family for fame and think 'success'. That is not the first word that comes to mind, I have to tell you. We need to go back here and have a look at what success means to you. I consider myself hugely successful because I am happy. My job is writing and I love it. I am doing the thing that I love most to place food on the table. The fact that I can make good living without having to leave my own front room is entirely a bonus. I am in a business that at the bottom end allows me to make a living and at the top end allows me to become a millionaire. Either end or somewhere in the middle offers me happiness because my job is my love.

That is what I call success.

At one stage in my life I also wanted to become a full-time martial artist. I thought it would be a great way to make my living. For a long time that is what I did do, and for a while it was great.

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Did it ruin my relationship with my family?

No.

Did I have to put in twenty hours a day?

Actually sometimes I confess that, yes, I did bang in quite a few hours. Sometimes you have to stretch a little, especially when a business is new and still growing. But I made my family a part of that. Especially my kids. They came to my seminars, my classes; I even brought them along to the competitions. They joined in with the training. My eldest daughter Kerry became a black belt second dan. My wife became a fourth dan. My youngest girls and my lad used to play whilst I taught. They were constantly surrounded by some of the best influences you could find. When we had visiting instructors – I always made sure that they were positive, world-class people – my kids would be there with me. They were not sacrificed; their time was not swapped for my business success. Far from it. They actually became a part of it.

In the early days, Sharon and I started our own mail order company. We had a small but loyal group of customers who we regularly mail-dropped when we had a new book to release. We might have to address, lick, fill, stamp and send thousands of envelopes by hand. It was a long job that sometimes took a whole weekend, maybe sixteen hours of solid envelope-filling. Rather than take that time away from our kids we included them in the process. They became part of our staff for two days. We'd pay them all a few quid each, get some nice food in to eat whilst we were working, we even let them bring their friends in to help. We'd all be sitting in a big circle filling envelopes. We'd have competitions;

who could be first to fill and seal one hundred envelopes? We had a great time. Even now, when we have too many people on the mail list to do it ourselves and have it done by a professional mailing company, we still talk about the time when, as my kids say, 'we used to do all them letters'. What a great way to teach kids about the value of work and the mechanics of running your own business. Those are days that I will always cherish. My wife and I have made a great success of our business without taking anything away from our kids.

The belief that in order to become a success you have to do it at the expense of others is a lie. The modern, successful entrepreneur takes the equivalent of one week off work in every four because he values the time that he has with the people that he loves. The ones that swap family for fortune do so of their own choice and at their own peril. When you are looking to the future with your focus on success you need to ask for it all. Not monetary success with very little down time. Not material success that does not allow you to see your kids until the weekend while you are up to your nostrils in jobs that you never managed to get done in the week.

Ask for it all.

See it all.

If time with your family is crucial then find something that you can become successful in that allows you that time. Like Mr Hargreaves who invented the Mr Men. He wanted to be able to spend time with his little ones, so he dreamt of the job that would allow him more time with them. He dreamt it, he created it.

My son is fifteen at the writing of this book, and he is hardly ever at home. He is with his girlfriend just about every waking hour. And I don't blame him. She's lovely and he is at that age when girlfriends are very important. Time with them is vital in his growing cycle. But it was only last year that he wanted to spend just about every waking hour with me. I'm his dad. It's understandable. So when he was off school for six weeks in the summer and I was working he would be wandering into the extension I have made into an office, trying to get my attention.

So I altered my work habits to suit him. First of all I would get the majority of my work done whilst he was still in bed, so that when he got up, I would have already done a day's work in most people's eye. When he did get up I would spend some time with him. Then I'd go back into the office and tell him to come and fetch me out in an hour's time. One hour later – on the dot – he would wander in and remind me. I'd stop what I was doing, even if I was in mid-flow, go out into the kitchen,

make us both a cup of tea, wander into the gym (I had a gym and games room built a few years ago) and play a few games of pool with him for maybe half an hour to an hour. Then I'd go back to my office, and tell him to come fetch me once again in another hour. He would do this all day until I had written as much as I felt was in me for that day.

So I altered my day, altered my schedule to make it work for him because when they are at that age the time you have with them is invaluable, it is time that they need to spend with you because ultimately it is you who is teaching them how to go out into the world and survive.

I also know a lot of people who do not attempt to live their dreams because they have a family, as though the very fact of having kids automatically disqualifies them from becoming successful. It is really exciting to be able to include the kids in the business.

Sir Paul McCartney and his late wife Linda believed in family values. It didn't stop them from going on tour with Wings, their band, and becoming globally successful. They brought the kids along with them, the kids were a part of the tours and the campaigns. They got to meet some of the most inspirational and creative voices in the world. What better way to bring kids up than to expose them to the most positive influences on the planet? What better message can we give them than 'you can become anything you want if you are prepared to do the work and take the risks'?

If the job you do or want to do really does not allow for the inclusion of your family, just make sure that you leave enough time at the end of your day for them. You

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are the one who chooses what you do with your allotted time during this incarnation. You might say, 'Well in my profession we have to put in 15 hours a day if we are going to make it.' Again that is the choice of the individual.

We recently shot a couple of short films. My kids were either working on the film as runners or actors or they were there in the background supporting the whole project. On the first film, *Bouncer*, one of the support actors was a great actor called Paddy Consadine. It just so happened that Paddy was the star of my son Louis' favourite feature, a Shane Meadows project called *A Room For Romeo Brass*, where Paddy played a disturbed character with a real funny, quirky way of speaking, and he had some great comic lines. In between takes on *Bouncer* Paddy spent a lot of time with my lad doing the voices and the lines from the *Romeo Brass* film. Louis was in his element. And more than the entertainment factor was the fact that the experience expanded my son's belief system. These fantastic actors – as well as Paddy there was Ray Winstone, Shaun Parkes and Ronnie Fox – were there in Coventry acting in a film written by his dad. What does that say to him? It says that it can be done, it says that these actors with all of their fame and their talent are, at the end of it all, ordinary people like you and me and if they can make it then so can anyone else if they are prepared to bang in the work. It means that if my son wants to act or write or produce or direct then he has proof that it can be done.

See it all. See the lot. Be greedy. Ask for everything. See it and you will make it happen.

Selling out

Everyone knows that you don't make it big in any arena without selling out, without losing your integrity, without getting a little mucky.

Don't they?

How many times you heard that baby?

I've heard it so many times that it is beginning to bore me. It is not true. I'm not saying that people don't sell out, I'm not saying that it doesn't or won't happen. All I can say is that it hasn't happened to me and I will not allow it to happen to me. If someone accuses you of selling out, the chances are it's more to do with the fact that they are not as successful.

You don't need to sell out to make it.

My friend David – a very successful man in many respects – taught me this much: Integrity is the golden rule. Without it you have nothing. I believe that there is only one way to do things and that is *the right way*.

Does that mean that I have never gone against the integrity grain?

No. I have gone against it many times in my youth and learned hard and fast that what you give out will eventually return. When I was a doorman many lifetimes ago, I beat people up, I worked for criminals, and I told lies. I broke most of the commandments at one time or another. But like I said I paid (with returns) for every misdeed. If you are dishonest, even a little bit, it will return and with interest. In my youth I did many wrong things, sometimes unwittingly and sometimes deliberately, thinking that I could escape the

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law of cause and effect. I couldn't and I didn't. What I learned was that all things return home, everything has a return address on it. So I made it a policy never to send out stuff that I did not want back.

Another friend, Martin, a film producer, was sitting at a dinner table at an awards ceremony surrounded by Hollywood A-list celebrities. One of them was very bitter. Not a happy bloke. Martin was a big admirer of the man's work and so asked him for a little advice on how to make an impact in the world of film producing.

'Fuck everyone,' came the blunt reply.

'Excuse me?'

'Fuck everyone before they fuck you. Because eventually they will.'

That was the sage advice of a man apparently at the top of his trade.

I think that this is the advice of a man at the bottom of his trade.

It is all about expectation.

If that is what you expect, then that is what you will attract. That is what you will get. It is not what I expect. It is not what I get.

**The only sustainable wealth, happiness or
power is the stuff that you build on a
solid base of integrity.**

Sacrificing health for wealth

This is one of the reasons why people give up the chase. Because the pursuit of excellence, the chase for their dream has – along the way – made them ill. Too much

stress, too many hours, so many let-downs, not enough sleep, not enough play. The balance is off, the immune system is on holiday in the Caribbean and you get ill. Most people – especially those that are self-employed, and those that aim for the very top – at one time or another do make themselves ill because they get so out of balance. I myself, especially when I was younger and didn't understand about balance, have had several bouts of illness and depression from pushing too far. One of my problems is that I have a biological excitement for life. What that means is, I tend to go into everything as though my very life depends on it. In the early days of my writing I would think nothing of working until midnight to get a project finished. Once I wrote and finished six small instructional books (about fifty-thousand words in all) in one week. When you consider the fact that most writers work on about one- to five-thousand words a day (five thousand being seen as prolific) you will see that I was really stretching myself.

As admirable as this might seem, working at this rate left me very little time for anything else. I had no time for rest or play, not much time to train or even eat healthily. I was proud of myself at the end of the week but to be honest that kind of workload left me cold. After completing the books (which were pretty rushed I have to say and needed lots of later re-writes to make up for it) I had no inclination at all to go back to the computer. My body was aching from the very core and my head was throbbing like a hammered thumb. It was false productivity. I got loads of stuff done in one week but then didn't want to write anything again for a month.

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In those days I liked to tell people how quickly I could write a book and the next time I went in the office I didn't feel like I'd done a day's work if I didn't beat the old record. I had to finish a new book as quickly as the last one or somehow I was slipping. This kind of premise is not good if you really want to write something of quality. My novel *Red Mist*, for instance, took me about a year to write but the staying power nearly killed me because in my head I was thinking, 'I only want to spend a few weeks on it.'

Overwork has made me – like many other people – ill in the past. But I don't look back and think, 'That workload made me ill so I'm never gonna write again.' Each time I have been ill from overwork I have promised myself that, next time, I will not let this happen. But I have never said, 'This makes me ill, let's throw in the towel.' Rather I look back and I say, 'That workload made me ill so next time I am gonna break it down into more manageable segments.' So when I write now I make sure that I take my breaks, I make sure that I don't rush, I try to be relaxed so that at the end of a day's writing my back isn't bent like question mark.

These days illness and depression are rare for me because I have learned from experience that nothing on this earth is worth losing your health for.

You might want to be a pop star but everyone knows that the schedule for pop stars is horrendous and they never get the chance to have a break. It is common knowledge that there is a lot of drug and alcohol abuse in the music world because of the hard workload. But if that is the case and you are not happy with it then change it. Go into the industry and change it.

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The onus is on you to make sure that you get your breaks, to insist that you get regular R & R. I would guess that the tremendous pressure pop and rock stars are under is the reason why some of the more switched on celebrities are turning to yoga and t'ai chi and qigong for balance. I would also imagine it is why many successful artists start their own labels and organise their own tours so that they can keep control and thus stay balanced. It is important if you are going into any of the industries that are known as being pressurised environments that you get your philosophical base in place beforehand. Make sure that you have a method in place to protect you against the exterior threats of fame and fortune and the public gaze.

In my world, the industry I am working in at present, it can be very hectic and extremely challenging. Lots of *placing your soul out there* – and there can be little doubting the fact that when you send your script out to strangers (or even friends) you are placing your soul above the parapet for people to fire at – lots of vulnerability, deadlines, polarity of opinions (some people think that your work is genius while others think that it is down there in the gutter) and lots of uncertainty and ambiguity.

To cope with this on a daily basis you need to have a healthy philosophical base. And a very thick skin. If you are wounded every time someone hates your work, or turns you down, or doesn't return your phone call, you are in for a very rough time. And even the established artists are not safe. Nick Hornby is an established international author now, he has the bestseller tag and the Hollywood cash to rubber-stamp his fame, but it is

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obvious that he still gets critics out there slinging mud. If he made it his job – like many people do – to read and take personally all of the criticism that is aimed in his direction he would be a nervous wreck. He would be ill. Many people have been ill, are ill and in the future will be ill because of what someone else has written about them.

And who are the people doing all the hurting?

I don't know and I don't care.

Let me tell you what I do know; we are all critics.

You think not?

I know that I am not beyond an opinion if someone asks me about a film or a book or a play or a piece of art. So what right have I to be offended when the guy from the daily gossip paper uses his four inches of space to tell everyone that he thinks my words read like an obituary?

So what does this tell us?

It tells us that it is probably not a great idea to get too upset or take it too personally (I'm telling you this, actually I am telling *me* this) or get upset. In the whole scope of things it's no big cheese.

Every day is your time. Your twenty-four hours. You do what you want with it. Make your own rules. If the schedule is hard, make sure that you have the fitness and the staying power to cope, and make sure that you match all your hard work with rest and play and a healthy diet.

It's impossible

I am amazed by the number of people out there who want success but see, think and talk failure – and they

are not even aware of the fact that they are doing it. They actually predict their own failure when they say, 'Well I put in for that job, but I know I won't get it.' Or 'I'm going to enter but, well you know how it is, the judges have their favourites so I don't expect to win.' Or even 'In the very unlikely event that I should actually succeed...'

And then when they do fail to get the job, the contract or the prize they look to their peers, their family and their friends with a 'told-you-so' frown and say, 'What did I tell you!'

I had a friend, a budding filmmaker who would not enter his film into a festival because (as he said) 'everyone knows that it is all fixed'.

How did he know? Other would-be filmmakers had told him so. Not successful filmmakers by the way, no, the naysayers were unsuccessful filmmakers who found blame easier to reach for than they did greatness, they found blame easier to access than they did a second draft of a script or a third shoot of the film, or a fourth attempt at the final cut.

What my friend was really saying was that he was scared to send his film to the festivals because actually it just might not make the grade. Or perhaps he was afraid that it would make the grade. The responsibility of success is after all a weighty one, bringing with it a greater workload and higher expectations and pressure to maintain the new standard set.

What people fail to grasp is that their predictions are often right not because the world is against them, or that the odds are stacked heavily in someone else's

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favour or that it's impossible; rather they are right because what they thought and said affected what they did and what they did was directly responsible for what they got.

Keep talking failure and you'll keep getting failure just as surely as planting dandelion seeds will get you dandelions.

You usually get exactly what you order and what you order is what you think, say and do.

I know why certain people talk failure all the time.

They talk failure to soften the blow just in case failure is what they get. Or they talk blame; not winning is never their fault, it is the fault of the system that does not favour the new guy, it's the boss ('I doubt I'll win this promotion, the MD has got it in for me') or they blame the environment ('people from my class never get a break') or they blame genetics ('I was just born with the wrong genes, that's all'), and if you ever pull them on their negative seed-planting they rationalise their attitude by calling themselves 'realists' or 'pragmatists' and claim that thinking positive is all well and good but it does not put food on the table.

I beg to differ.

If I only set realistic goals I would not have achieved anything in my life. I pride myself on the fact that I set what others would consider completely unrealistic goals. In fact if I had listened to many of the people around me I would not have even set goals in the first

place because all of the things I aimed for seemed impossibly grand and even pretentious to them. And yet it did not stop me from achieving them, it did not stop them from happening, it did not stop the whole universe from conspiring to make my little dreams into big realities.

Take the short film *Bouncer* that we made. Our budget for the whole film was only ten grand. Hardly enough to feed the extras, let alone actually hire anyone to make the film. It starred four of Britain's biggest stars and a supporting cast of 200 extras and crew. Ray Winstone alone usually charges 75 times more than our whole budget, but he did it for free because he liked the script. We had to find the locations – free – hire the extras – free – shoot the film and then get it to all the film festivals – with no money – (at the last count it has been in 30 international festivals, winning awards and award nominations around the globe) and then get it into the BAFTAs.

Impossible!

More than one person scoffed when we said that we were aiming to get Ray as the lead, and when we told them that we wanted to enter the BAFTA competition many of them said, 'Impossible.' We were told not to expect so much, after all this was our first film. From the outside looking in of course it did all seem impossible. And yet we did it. We intended to do it and our intention created a centripetal force that drew everything we needed to our centre. So being pragmatic or realistic does not even come into the equation. If I limited myself to only realistic thoughts I'd still be sweeping floors in the factory.

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Being negative to soften the blow of failure does not work; in fact it will actually create failure. So be careful of those very powerful words you utter.

If you don't want it then don't think it, don't say it and certainly don't do it. Telling yourself that you'll *probably fail* does not soften the blow; all it does is prove to the negative part of you (that does not want to succeed – for whatever reason) that it was right. This sets up a negative precedent that eventually perpetuates itself into a life of failure.

Even now, as a seasoned thinker of positive thoughts, I still occasionally lapse into a self-pitying, procrastinating worrywart that can see only dark clouds on the horizon. But when I fall into this hole I recognise it very quickly and get my positive goggles right back on because I know – I KNOW – that my thoughts and my words and my deeds have power. I KNOW that not only do my thoughts determine my successes and failures, but they actually physically determine my environment, my town, my city, my country; we build entire universes with our thoughts.

If you think my words folly, check out the latest discoveries in quantum mechanics. It tells us that the physical universe and everything in it comes from the very thoughts we project, from our intentions. If this is the case, then we owe it to ourselves to make all our thoughts positive.

I challenge you to look around at the physical objects in your world and trace each one of them back to their birth. Where did the chair you are sitting in come from? What about the car you are driving? The coat you are wearing, the Rolex watch on your wrist, the Cartier

bracelet, the film you are watching on the telly: where did they originate from, how did they start their life?

As a positive thought in someone's mind. That is where they started.

A desire that became an intention, an intention that someone paid attention to until the point of birth or physical manifestation.

If your initial or persistent thought is one of failure why would you expect to get anything less?

Bad thinking is little more than a habit that people get into, but my recommendation is that you get out of it again as soon as possible by monitoring what you think and say until everything you think and say is either empowering or nothing at all.

Silence is good too.

It is where you will find God, as I call it, or spiritual peace, as others may term it.

Fear

I also find it interesting that people have this naive notion (I used to be absolutely the worst example of this) that they will be able to succeed in life without ever leaving their own little culture dish. I have lost count of the amount of people who want to make it big in the world but who are too scared to leave their own small environs. When I was actively teaching martial arts I noticed that there were very few teachers or students who stepped outside their local class to enable their talent to grow.

People want to succeed for free. They want the gain but with no fear. They want the higher echelon tuition but will not place themselves before higher echelon

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instructors. They want to be great writers but they do not write; instead they only talk about writing. They want to be great artists but they hide their art under a bushel for fear of critique because their fear of success or failure is greater than their intent to grow.

If you want to grow – if you really truly want to grow – get out of your small garden pot and start thinking big, let your roots stretch a little, give yourself room to expand. What I do know is this: if there are others out there doing whatever it is that you want to do then you already know that it can be done. It has been proven. And if it hasn't been done, why not be the first to prove that it can?

All you have to do is get out there and do the work.

If you lack direction let me give you a little clue; find the discomfort, follow the discomfort, immerse yourself in the discomfort, get to like it, dare yourself to do the things that you really want to do – that's the real key, dare yourself – and you will get everything from life that you want.

What is it that you are afraid of right now?

Write it down.

Take a cold hard look at it.

Recognise that your promised land lies behind that fear and that in reality your fear is insubstantial compared to the power of intention.

If you intend that fear to go it will melt before your very eyes.

It relies on your panic for its sustenance. It cannot survive without it.

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There is a lot to think about here. Take your time with it; take it all one step at a time.



Chapter Eight

Pyramidic Steps

If there is one thing that I have learned over the past forty-odd years on this beautiful planet it is that all things are possible, but they can take time to achieve. And the person that finds himself in too much of a hurry is destined for failure in one form or another. Impatience kills dreams.

I have found that it is important to treat a goal like you would treat an Everest expedition. Everything from the preparation to the actual climb needs to be planned and executed in pyramidic steps, each small step (or occasionally a giant leap) leading you closer and closer to the summit. It is not just a matter of climbing the mountain. Everest is a good example of how nature forces the climbers to prepare before they climb. The mountain can be seen by everyone for miles around. It looks as though you could just put your heavy sweater on and walk right up to it because it is so huge and

obvious. The moment you start the trek, however, the mountain seems to get further and further away. It takes about twenty days of hard hiking just to get to the base camp because the mountain is tucked away, and extremely difficult to access by all but the very determined.

Steve Goddard made the shape shift from a menial job in a factory to achieving a personal goal, he worked like a demon to make sure that it happened and then before he knew it being a self-employed printer was easy. Too easy. So he aimed for a new challenge. A new project. Each one slightly harder and more testing than the last, like a weightlifter adding another disc to the bar. Now when I see him with his 'international sculptor' persona I do not see a man who is struggling to hold his place, I see a man who is comfortable with the weight that he is carrying. I also see a man who is looking for more challenges. And when he finds one, he will experience all the same fears and doubts and worries that he felt when he first left the factory gates and his job as a cleaner. That is the nature of it. That is how it works. It is how men and women climb mountains. One step at a time, one stage at a time. Constantly pushing, resting, acclimatising, and then, when the correct window presents itself, pushing on again. And when that mountain has been climbed they start looking for new mountains.

This process can be used in any field. Whether your goal is to climb Nanga Parbat solo or simply to pay off your mortgage early, you can make it happen using the age-old principle of necessity and growth. If you slide an extra disc onto the bar your biceps will grow to meet

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the new demand. The key (where possible) is to allow the growth to be organic; you adjust the weight so slowly, up the torque so subtly, that you hardly notice that you have taken another step. A friend – a former paratrooper – walks across the Brecon Beacons (which is the mountain range used to train the SAS) with a heavy pack and meagre rations; he manages incredible distances in atrocious conditions ‘one step at a time’. If he allowed himself even for a second to try and contemplate the whole job in one go he would fail. He just thinks about taking each small step, sure of the fact that every step he takes will bring him closer to his goal.

You may sit next to a hugely successful person and when you look at him he seems ordinary enough. You look at his achievements, then you compare and measure his achievement against the man himself and you think, ‘He is no better (or worse) than me, if he can do it then why can’t I?’ And you would be right to think this. The only problem is it probably took that guy twenty years to get where he is right now. Twenty years of dedication, tenacity, hard work and risk-taking. So whilst you can see the goal, and it is so close that you can almost touch it, it is still out of the reach of anyone who is not prepared to take the long trek to base camp.

How many times have you sat in company and someone has told you the story of a self-made millionaire who has made it good with a really simple idea that anyone could have come up with? You sit around the table and you talk with excitement about how lucky that guy was and in your mind’s eye you see yourself coming up with a similar money spinner that

will get you to the top of your Everest without the trek or the climb.

I heard a story recently about a lady who started a slimming company from her front room. The company went on to become worth several hundred million pounds and the lady now spends half the year cruising the world on her private yacht. It is the stuff that dreams are made of. The trouble with these lovely fire-you-up stories is that they give you an impressive beginning and end but none of the substantial middle is present. In the case of this lady the middle was twenty years of hard graft when hurdles and pitfalls befell her and there would have been many, many times when she must have thought, 'Is it all worth it?' Similarly (and this happens with writers a lot) you may look at my beginning and my present (from writing my first book sitting on the toilet in the factory where I worked as a floor sweeper, to winning a BAFTA) and think, 'Easy peasy. If he did it I can do it.' Again you would be 100 per cent right, because you can – anyone can – but you must not make the mistake I have made so many times in my past of thinking that it will happen in five minutes. Whilst this is not impossible – if your vision is burning and urgent it can happen very fast – it is also not probable.

One of my faults, I would say, as a motivator is that I have the gift of being able to open a portal for people and show them their potential, but I often neglect to map out the honest-to-goodness detail. Sharon, my wife, knows that anything is possible, but she also knows – and does not neglect to say – that things usually take time. Whilst I will always tell people that they can be successful writers (if writing is their game) she will tell

them that it will probably take them five years to get a book in print. I suppose the reason why I don't tell people the middle is because I don't want to put them off before they start. If someone had told me when I was in the factory, sending television sketches off to Chris Tarrant on the OTT show and not selling one, that it would be another ten years of writing everything from plays to magazine articles to books before I sold anything, and then another ten years after that before I became a *Sunday Times* bestseller, I may well have given up there and then. Twenty years seems an impossibly long time. But honesty, no matter how painful, is a necessary evil if you are going to be a success.

One of the other reasons why I am not overly keen to give people timescales is because I might be wrong. My timescale may become a prophecy that they fulfil. Sometimes people do make it with their first book, their first film, their first painting, and if anything is possible, then that has to include the possibility of getting to the peak in a faster time than anyone before you. Nothing is impossible. Tom Cruise, for instance, got the job on his first ever acting audition and has gone on to be a global star.

The danger with setting yourself short deadlines is that they come around very fast and if they don't happen as you hoped it can be very disheartening.

Often it is a recipe for disaster. I have witnessed success in many fields. I know and have met people at the very top end of their chosen profession.

Let me tell you what strikes me as the one factor that makes them stand apart from the also-rans (and it is not talent, though they do usually have that in abundance). Tenacity. All day long it is tenacity. The ability to continue when everyone around you is telling you that you have not got the very important 'it', when you get rejection letter after rejection letter, when the mountain seems to get further and further away instead of closer, when no one is interested in your work or when everyone is interested in your work but no one is buying, when the kings and queens of your chosen field tell you 'you ain't got it son!' Tenacity is king when it comes to success. That is why at the top end of any field you will see people who may not have your talent, your flair, your original voice and yet still they are there. At the sharp end of the success mountain there is little difference in the level of talent, it is the staying power that separates the winners from the losers.

Take the runner Paula Radcliffe as a fantastic example. I can remember watching her on television for years and years in race after race where she came second or third, and other times where she completely mistimed her races and didn't come anywhere at all. I can even remember watching her and her husband/coach arguing on the track (on the telly and in front of a very large crowd) because she completely mistimed her run and lost yet again. And then all of a sudden what do we see? Paula Radcliffe picking up trophies left, right and centre. And not only winning but smashing world title times like crockery at a Greek wedding, at every distance and at every meet. Not only winning races and breaking records but smashing them to pieces. Not only

smashing records to pieces but being so dominant in the races that she left the other world-class athletes looking like amateurs. Many other runners at the same time as Paula were pulling out, they were retiring, they were giving up and she alone carried on and took the victory. Tenacity is what gave her the edge. She made the full shape shift by escalating her commitment to her sport and taking higher echelon instruction plus dedicating her life solely to running.

Then there is Michael Owen, lauded for his prowess on the football field, a leading light in the England squad for some years. But he wasn't always lauded and he wasn't always the Michael Owen that you see on the football pitch today. There was a time when he was little more than fodder for the unkind journalists and critics that said he had 'no left foot' – in fact they said that Michael's left foot was only good for standing on. He would not be the first nor indeed the last to be demonised by the press, but he was one of the very few that did something about it. Rather than let the critics win he used their negative energy, he transmuted it into action and set out to perfect his left foot. He was so upset by the cruel jibes that he went away and drilled his left foot over and over until he could score with either foot. It was tenacity that took Michael to the top.

The gestation period

Between thought and manifestation there is the gestation period. If you decide that you want to earn £1,000 and you put that thought to work, take on a bit of extra work, save a bit extra each week, get a job that pays more, you will manifest your £1,000. So you have

seen it in your mind's eye. You have taken opportunities to bring the money to life and all of a sudden you have the cash in your hands. If you practise this it goes without saying that eventually you will get so good at it that you will be able to shorten that gestation period to the point where – like many of the experienced businessmen out there – you will be able to make a phone call and seconds later crack a deal that makes you a grand.

Same process, only quicker.

I have a friend who found himself suddenly in need of £20,000. He needed it and he needed it fast. He had three major bills drop through the letter box at the same time and they all demanded immediate payment. One was for £12,000 – that was the most immediate – and the other two amounted to £8,000. This should never happen by the way, you should always know what is coming in and going out of your business. Suddenly he was faced with twenty-thousand-pounds' worth of bills that needed immediate attention. His first reaction was, 'How the hell did this happen?' He quickly realised it had happened because he himself had spent almost a year speculating in new areas (which is vital in business) but had badly neglected the one area that put bread on the table, his core business. He was left with what others might imagine to be an impossible task. But my friend was experienced at visualisation with a background in making the impossible possible.

The first thing he did was pray for guidance. This was important to him; he is a very spiritual man. Secondly he set about seeing very clearly what he needed. He realised that the biggest bill – twelve grand

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– was the one that needed the most immediate attention because the due date was soonest. He visualised the amount he needed, he saw it in his mind's eye with great clarity. He prayed, made a few phone calls to other businesses and within three days he had cut a deal for £12,000. He then proceeded to *see* the rest of the money that he needed and, within a couple of weeks, that had manifested also. On top of that he piled his attention back into his core business so that the cash flow was healthy once again. He also vowed that, in future he would not take his attention away from his core business for long enough to allow atrophy.

Because the need was great and the intention and visualisation strong, the gestation period in this situation was very short. The more experienced you are at manifestation, the quicker the gestation period.

You could look at this example from the outside and say that the deals he cut to pay his bills were lucky, that they would have happened anyway, you could find a million logical reasons why the money made its way to his bank account but the bottom line is he needed money, he saw money, he got money.

He made his own luck.

There are no limitations, other than those that you place on yourself.

Whether you are a complete natural or a novice working through an apprenticeship there will be an intermittent process of growth and acclimatisation.

Take my friend Rick Young for instance, a world class martial artist, who won the Brazilian Ju-Jitsu (BJJ) title. For those of you who do not know, there is only one

world title in BJJ, unlike many martial arts today where there are a plethora of world-title holders in different governing bodies and at every weight, all claiming to be the best. A BJJ title is mammoth. I can only compare it perhaps to winning a gold medal at the Olympics. It is a huge achievement because it not only pits you against the very best players on the planet (including students of Gracie and Machado – the founding families of BJJ) but it is also won in Brazil itself, the Mecca for BJJ.

Now that he holds this world title, he will become known across the martial arts world as the new kid on the block, someone perhaps that came from nowhere to beat the behemoths of BJJ, almost as though he jumped from obscurity to the global stage in one fell swoop. But to those of us who know Rick and have watched his steady ascent the truth is a little less dramatic, though I think far more inspiring. Rather than try to walk into an art and take out the top players on his first visit to the mat, Rick planned his ascent and trained accordingly. When I met this lovely, gentle man many years ago he was still working as a postman in Edinburgh. Straight away you start to get an idea of where this man came from, an ordinary man with a passion for martial arts. But even way back then, when Rick was walking the streets of Edinburgh posting letters, he had his eye on the long-term goal and he saved his meagre earning to get himself over to the United States to train with the best that the world had to offer.

His mentor was then and remains a hugely inspiring man – top student to the late, great Bruce Lee – Dan

Inosanto. While in America training with Dan in a myriad of different arts Rick also took the opportunity to train with just about everyone else that had something new to offer. A decade before it became popular to say that you had trained with the Gracies and the Machados, way before they became famous in the field for their prowess in the UFC (a not-for-the-faint-hearted and very famous no-holds-barred fighting competition) and their plush training academies, Rick used to train with them one-on-one in their garage or back room. He was taking instruction in BJJ before the world at large had ever heard of no-holds-barred fighting.

He also realised that – as good as the Gracies and the Machados were (and are) – there was a heck of a lot that he could learn without ever having to leave his home city of Edinburgh. He had a judo class on his doorstep that boasted Olympic standard judoka. Whilst the judo did not have the supposed romance and mystique of BJJ Rick recognised that, at the top end, the ground fighting in judo could match anything he had seen in the world of combat. So he enrolled in what was (and still is) known as one of the hardest grappling classes in the world of judo. People in the know travelled the globe to train at this class and it was only three miles from Rick's front door. With consistent tuition Rick soon achieved his black belt in judo and – to escalate his learning – he went with the Scottish national squad to train with the very best that judo could offer in Japan. At the same time he was making more and more visits to the USA to train in BJJ.

As he grew in both BJJ and judo, and Rick had cranked his commitment up to just about as high as he

was able bearing in mind that he was still working eight hours a day as a postman (up at 4 a.m. every morning), he made the final shape shift and gave up his job to enable him to teach and train full-time. A big decision and one that was fraught with fear and uncertainty. But he did it, and the extra hours that giving up his job offered him, allowed him to take his training to an even higher level. There is nothing like working your art full-time to create a quickening, an escalation of the learning process. Obviously with the extra time at his art Rick's prowess grew and grew until, in the end, he found himself having to travel further and further afield to find instruction that would stretch him. So he started spending time at the very heart of BJJ in Brazil with the absolute best fighters in the world.

Rick Young climbed his mountain with meticulous care and patient planning.

Look at your goal, your mountain, and your dream. What plans have you got in place to make them happen?

Are you doing the work?

Are you prepared for the long haul?

Or are you – like many, like myself as a younger man (like most of us as younger men and women) – looking for the fast track success?

The real learning (and this is very clichéd but true) is not in reaching the end of the journey, rather it is in the

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journey itself. So if you get your black belt by return of post, if you get your goal without ever kicking a ball you may well have the certificate on the wall, but you will have none of the body, mind and soul growth that the very hard journey will bring.

People often overestimate what they can achieve in a year, but they totally underestimate what they can achieve in five. And if five years, ten years, twenty years seems like too long to wait, take solace in this fact; that five, or ten or twenty years is going to fly by, whether you invest your time in it or not. All of a sudden years will have gone by and all you'll have left will be the product of your time invested. And that will not be the trophies or the certificates that adorn your shelves and walls (although they will no doubt be there as an exterior proof of your labour) rather it will be the character lines in your face, each one etched with experience, it will be the confident gait that tells the world 'this man has seen some things', it will be the glow that your experience emanates.

You cannot buy that stuff. You can only earn it. And it takes time, and time is not yesterday where your reverie lies idle, and it is not tomorrow where your romantic mind's eye is wooing success – it is NOW.

Now, now, now.

It is no use waiting for tomorrow or the next day. These fictitious dates with destiny do not exist, neither does next week, next month nor next year. They are hidey holes for the fearful souls who cannot seize the only moment that actually exists.

This moment.

Now.

So we need to find our mountain and climb it in pyramidal stages, one step at a time. How fast you ascend will be wholly and entirely determined by you. If you invest more time and energy you will get faster and better results. Your growth will be individual and, as I said, not unlike a mountain climber. He makes sure that the conditions are favourable before each phase. He makes sure that he is fully and ideally equipped. When he reaches each phase he takes time to acclimatise to the new height, making sure that he does not take the next phase of the mountain before he has acclimatised to the last. He pitches his tent, cooks his food to replace the energy that he has just expended, he sleeps and repairs and then patiently, oh so patiently, he waits for a window in the weather before he starts the next ascent. When he finally has the peak in sight (he might only be a few hundred feet away) he makes camp again and rests. It would be tempting for the novice to see the peak, and in a fit of excitement go for it, but this is a very risky strategy that has left many a climber dead. When the peak is in sight the experienced climber will pitch his tent and wait. He will rest and get his energy levels as high as he can. Then he will listen to the mountain. The mountain will tell him when the right time to peak is imminent. When that window opens he will hit the peak, plant his flag and then get back down the mountain again as fast as he can. The window that allowed him access to the peak (the great mountaineer Reinhold Messner said that you did not conquer a mountain, you just sneaked up on it) will close quickly. The climber that stays too long usually gets to stay forever. Because the descent kills them.

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The time it will take you to reach your goal is difficult to measure. I might say five years, you might take one year or ten. It depends entirely on you. What I tend to do is look at how long the goal would normally take for an average player and work from there. So for instance when I went into judo I knew that if I trained twice a week for three years I should be able to get my black belt. So as an outside target I set myself a maximum of three years to reach my goal, whilst at the same time I calculated how quickly I might be able to get there if I fast-tracked. I figured that if an average guy at an average club took three years to achieve black belt by training twice a week I should be able to shorten that period by increasing both the level of instruction that I achieved and the number of sessions that I took. If I took instruction from international players and tripled my investment to six sessions a week I should be able (in theory) to reach my black belt in one year. Obviously this meant that the training had to be unbroken by lay offs and injury – and the risk of lay offs and injury does tend to increase the more often you train. My aim was to get three years of experience in one year by concentrating all my time on judo. Which I did. In one year I achieved my goal of black belt. This method of ‘quickenning’ works for me; I am the kind of person that likes to be dropped in at the deep end. It is not the way for everyone, but it does work.

When Jimmy Carr wanted to get into the world of comedy, he knew that, in order to make it to the very top, he would have to do his apprenticeship. Most of the good stand-ups had spent years, even decades, getting the kind of experience they needed to become

seasoned pros. Jimmy wanted that kind of experience and decided to fast-track (quicken) it by putting ten years' worth of stand-up into three. He did this by doing a live stand-up almost every night of the week. For three years solid he did approximately three hundred and twenty live shows a year. Can you imagine the intensity? Jimmy got massive experience in quick time by doubling and tripling the amount of stand-up he did compared to everyone else. In that very short time he also got to work with and was exposed to the top talent that this country has to offer, plus some of the best talent in the world – the US and European comics who had come to England to grow their own talent in a similar way. In three years he became one of the top comics in the country and a popular celebrity with his own television show.

Success is often a subtle and caring creature, it will bring you change in manageable degrees, organically shifting you and your environs so that – sometimes – you are not even aware of the change. But there will be change and you have to be ready for that because not everyone can deal with it when it is of the '360 degree' variety.

My friend Steve Goddard, the sculptor, lives a completely different life now than the one he lived as a toilet cleaner. He lives a different life to the one when he was a T-shirt printer, and certainly he lives a different life to the one that saw him toying with sculpting, working from a garage in his terraced house in Coventry. If perhaps he had gone right from the toilets of Dunlop to the hallowed halls of Buckingham Palace there is a strong chance that Steve might have been overawed by

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it all and thrown in the towel. Many people who experience fast success struggle with the changes it brings because it is so outside their normal experience. As it was, he changed by degrees (pyramidic steps). And each change that occurred allowed him time to acclimatise before moving on to the next. But you will have to face the fact that success in any field means change, and you cannot change one thing without changing everything else.

So, to conclude this chapter; be prepared to grow in manageable stages. Be patient. Take pyramidic steps. See what you want and prepare for change but allow the universe to take you at a speed you can handle, a velocity that is not going to leave you unbalanced or disorientated. And remember that all you need to do is plant the seed of change, the Unseen Hand will look after everything else. When you initiate change with a definite intention worlds will move to make your goal a physical reality and all sorts of unseen forces will come to your aid and from angles and directions that you would never have expected. Planting the seed means taking physical steps toward your goal and being ready to adapt to the changes that this will inevitably bring.

But a word of warning.

Nature has its own ways of placing you where you need to be in order to best achieve your goal, even in places that might seem wrong to you at first. This is the point in the equation where you have to learn to surrender and allow yourself to go with the flow of things.

My advice is to take small steps towards your goal,

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build yourself up gradually, increasing your commitment more and more until it is total, and you are living your dream.



Chapter Nine

The Paradox of Intent and Surrender

I like paradoxes and this one is a doozy. I like this one in particular because it the one that tests me the most:

**You have to fully commit to wanting something
– really intend it – but at the same time let
go of the need to have it.**

In other words you almost have to grow a healthy indifference to your goal.

I have always found it difficult to want something so much that I am prepared to change my life to make it happen and yet, at the very same time, completely let go the need to have it.

It is something that I still practise on a daily basis. And because I have been practising it for so long I have learned enough to know that there is no better indicator

to success than a healthy indifference. It is the ability to want something with all your heart but have enough faith to concentrate intently on the mission and completely let go of the result.

In the *Tao Tê Ching* it says that you should concentrate on the process and not the result, because the results will look after themselves. My biggest successes in life thus far have happened when I have been able to do just this; let go of the result. When I was wrestling my best fights were always, without exception, those where during the fight itself I took away all thought of winning and losing. And it would usually happen by accident. As an instructor I would tell the class to scrimmage (wrestle) without submission or pins (which are your usual victory indicators in this sport). I would do this so that people could practise technique fluidly without having to stop and start all the time. It allowed them to 'float' in and out of technique. The by-product of this was the fact that everyone fought much better than usual, myself included. I would come out with moves that I did not even know were in me, I would flow beautifully and fight for an age without becoming tired. But the moment a win/lose was placed at the end of the practice I (and the others) would tighten up, become rigid, stop trusting our intuition to take us to the right move, we would stop taking chances because none of us wanted to lose. This is ego and in art there is no room for it because it triggers the adrenals, it blocks us, it tires us – it turns us all into amateurs. So the key is to develop a healthy indifference to the end result.

Easier said than done.

But I have found a few ways to make it so and all of

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them include methods in combating fear, because it is fear that truly stops us from doing the surrender part of this little paradox.

Method One: Practise

Easy enough.

Just do whatever it is that you want to do so often that the winning and losing becomes secondary. They say that the winning is not important, it is the taking part that counts. Another cliché that is also true.

The more you practise the more indifferent you become because once you have won a few times, once you have developed the confidence that winning brings, you do start to realise that the winning is not that important after all. It is creating and growing that is the real imperative. Once you have picked up a few successes and the portals are opened and the self-belief expanded you realise two things: 1. The confidence gained was not given to you by the judges or the trophy or the win; all they did was help peel away the layers of self-doubt to reveal a shining light that was already there. 2. Winning teaches you that your best stuff is not your stuff at all. Rather it is the stuff of God. It comes through you, not from you, and the more you practise the better you get at letting it through.

So method one is simple enough. Practise so much and be so prolific that winning and losing, success and failure become background noise; all that remains important is the work.

Method Two: Desensitisation

The more you expose yourself to something, the more

familiar it becomes. So if you expose yourself to stressful situations enough, you become desensitised to the feelings associated with stress. What was once a fearful situation can quickly become normal, even pleasant.

I remember when I spent a year working with some wonderful freestyle wrestlers in Birmingham under the expert tutelage of a man called Jim Ault. At that stage of my evolution I was still heavily invested in winning. It was everything to me, and every loss felt like a small death. The wrestling club was all the medicine I needed to remedy this disease. These guys were so good, and I was such a novice that I lost all the time. I don't think I won a pin or a fall for months. And even then, as I started to get better and catch one or two of the lesser players, there was such a wealth of talent in the room that losing was just the class norm. And they just fought all the time. It was scrimmage almost from the beginning of class until the end so even the best fighters there were losing as much as they were winning. They were the most humble people I have ever met. And because they had no ego they had no defences up; they were just very lovely, gentle people. And that is what I learned most from my short sojourn to the Birmingham Wrestling Club. Humility. There is nothing like being beaten a hundred times in one session to teach you how to be humble.

At the time I was working as a doorman in neighbouring Coventry, I had several books out on martial arts training and combat, I was a so-called expert, and yet here I was being taught by lads that had never stood on a nightclub door and did not think themselves experienced or skilled enough to write a book on their art.

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What you have to ask yourself is ‘how does this lesson apply to me?’ If you are a writer maybe it means getting your work out to more people. Many writers I know will not send their work out for fear of critique. They are so afraid of letting people see their work (see their soul), so frightened of being knocked back that they never actually get the stuff in a manila envelope and send it to the publishing houses. How are you ever going to get published if your work is not out there? Actually, come to that, how are you ever going to grow if you do not place your work under scrutiny?

I used to be the very same. I hated sending my baby out there. I hated waiting to hear the judgement of good, bad or indifferent. Sometimes the fear would be so strong that it would cause me to not finish the work; after all if it was not completed I did not have to let other people see it.

What is the answer to this problem? Grow a healthy desensitisation to criticism. Get your work out to so many people that in the end bad reviews will not penetrate, you won’t care, you have heard the good, the bad and the indifferent so many times that it doesn’t matter anymore. If you are scared to get your work out there (or enter a competition, apply for a new job, chat up a girl/boy, display your art) it is because you have not got your work out there enough. As with the Jimmy Carr example earlier, get massive experience fast.

Here is a good example. I have done about thirty instructional videos (now available on DVD). Each is about forty minutes to an hour long. Now you would think that a man who has made and starred in over twenty-five hours’ worth of filmed instruction would

have no fear of standing in front of a camera, right? And now, that is probably the case, I feel very little trepidation if someone places a camera in front of my face and asks me to talk. But it was not always that way. I developed a desensitisation to my fear of talking in front of a camera by doing it over and over until I found it very easy.

I remember very well the time that I did my first instructional video called *The Pavement Arena* and how scared I was. And if it was not for the fact that I had promised my friend Peter Consterdine (my partner on the videos) that I would make the film with him (and the fact that we had booked a studio, a cameraman etc.) I think I would have pulled out, thinking, 'This is not for me.' As it was I was committed so I had to go ahead. I was so nervous that Peter actually stood just behind the camera, just out of shot, so that I could talk directly to him. It was a terrifying experience, though I could not really define the nature of my fear.

The way I got past this debilitating terror was the way I always deal with all my fears. I hit it head on and got as much experience in front of the camera as I could. In this case I did it by booking the same cameraman and making another four videos – in one day. And I did it without having the crutch of my mate behind the camera telling me that I would be all right. I was literally talking to the camera all day long. Within one day I killed my fear. One day was all it took.

In that case it was standing in front of a camera. With the writing it was sending my work out for tender. I do it so often now and to so many people that I hardly think about it. And the critic that I feared so much

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turned out to be a great teacher. Some people were (and are) just mean, of course – you are always going to get that. Not everyone is going to love your work. But the majority of the people – whether they bought my work or not – offered some sort of advice and critique. And this has been pivotal in my development as a writer. The people who were kind enough to read my work and offer a little critique have helped me to hone my writing to ever higher standards. And the more times you send your work out and the more people that read it the better you are going to become at your craft. It doesn't matter what your work is, outside influence can and will help to hone it.

Start now.

The sooner you get your work out there the sooner you are going to grow.

Method Three: Meditation

I will explore the practice of this in the next chapter, but in brief, I have found that in order to create work that endures you need to switch off your conscious filter (what is known in popular psychology as 'self one') and allow your work to come through you from your unconscious (what is known as 'self two').

Self one, the conscious mind, is designed as a filter, not as a creative organism. The real key is to create from self two, the unconscious. From here all the powerful, beautiful, creative things emerge.

The problem is that most people do not know how to switch self one off for long enough to allow self two to come through. Their conscious filter is so scared to show the world anything that has not been vetted that it refuses to switch off. The creative flow is often blocked by the conscious filter (self one). Fear stops people from fully expressing themselves in case others criticise or ridicule them. Meditation calms the mind and temporarily switches off the conscious filter long enough for us to create without censorship.

The art then is to know how best to create the conditions that will switch self one off for long enough to allow self two a thoroughfare. Some of the methods of doing this are yoga, t'ai chi, qigong and meditation – in the following chapter I will go into this in greater detail.

Method Four: Consistency

This might sound simple enough, but very few people are really consistent with their art. They tend to sit around waiting for the muse, or as a very pretentious writer once said to me, 'I don't write very often but when I do they tell me that I am very good.' I don't know about you but I don't want to be very good *now and then*, I want to be consistently great. To be consistently great you need to consistently work. You need a regular routine. If you don't you may find that after each period of rest you come back very stale and the work you produce may reflect that. I always think that it is like walking into a derelict house and switching on the bath tap. If the place has not been used for some time then the chances are that when the water comes

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out it will be brown and full of creatures that have made their home in the plumbing. But, if you let the tap run for long enough the brown stuff is sure to clear itself and the good, clean water will start to flow. Similarly a car that is left unattended will eventually rust from underuse.

What works for me (you may want to try it) is to do the work every day, keep the flow going, never let it dry or rust, and you will be very unlikely to get blocked by unarticulated (or articulated) fear.

The final method I use is the most important method, and if you practise this one the others will not be a problem, because they will not find room to breath.

Method Five: Faith

It is easy for me to say that the key to success is to surrender the result, but to make that happen you need to have faith that surrender will actually work. I know it works; I have been interested in the concept of surrender all my life. I always got the girl when I let go of the need to have her; the deal always came through when I stopped trying so hard. Let nature take its course, and the grass grows, the crops flourish, the trees thrive – and all without any coercing from us. Did you ever see a farmer standing by his crops for twelve months trying to make them grow faster or bigger?

Probably not.

The farmer has many other jobs on the farm to attend to; he is too busy to stand around watching crops grow. And anyway, he does not need to stand around watching, he has faith. He has planted before, and he knows that the growing part is actually out of his hands, that is the

job of nature. His job is simply to plant the seeds correctly and bang a scarecrow up in the middle of the field to keep away the odd hungry crow. I can't tell you the amount of times that I have defied this rule and caused myself untold headaches (and heartaches). Sitting around waiting for the phone to ring with that big deal I think is coming, or watching for the postman to see if he has any news for me. As if my watching the phone or the letter box or the in-box on my computer was ever going to make things happen any sooner. It doesn't. It never did. It never will. What it might do however is push the deal away from you. A farmer that keeps digging up his seeds to see if they are still growing will certainly kill the crop.

I had a friend who came up with a great game concept that he sent to a manufacturer. It was a great idea, very original and it seemed certain to be a winner. He sent the idea off (planted his seed) to a company that said they were 'definitely up for it'. Instead of getting on with some other jobs, my very impatient friend could not let it go. He pretty much stopped creating new work because he felt sure that his idea was going to be his lottery win. Mentally he was already spending the money, planning holidays and buying a new car with the money that his idea was going to make him. He talked about it incessantly, told everyone that would listen and – worse still – he pestered the company he had sent it to for a definite answer. They asked him to be patient, told him that there were lots of things to check, lots of things to consider and that it takes time. But my mate was having none of it. In the end he got so impatient that he tried a little bluff with the company.

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‘Look,’ he told them, ‘if you can’t make a decision there are plenty of companies out there that would be interested. Maybe I should take it to them.’ They were fed up with him by now; his idea was great but he was becoming a liability. They replied, ‘Go ahead. We wish you the very best of luck with it.’ His idea was dead in the water. And he – or more importantly his impatience – killed it.

If plants thrive on water and light, does that mean that more water and light will make them grow more quickly?

It is common knowledge that if you feed a plant too much water its leaves will fall off. You will drown it. And too much light will scorch it.

You need to know when to feed and when to step back and let nature take its course. My friend lacked one major thing.

Faith.

He did not have faith in the process, in his idea, in nature, in God, in the universe to make it happen. If you do not have faith not only will you scare away the very thing that you are aiming for, but you will also make yourself very ill in the process. My worst times of bad health have always been due to the stress that my lack of faith invited in. I now have faith. I trust that as long as I do my part (my intention, my work and my maintenance), the rest will look after itself.

There is a whole world out there for you to access, myriad invisible hands all waiting to guide you to your best potential.

The best way to have faith is to practise faith, and be

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so busy with other jobs that you are no longer sitting like a prom queen waiting for her date.

Intend it to happen with all your heart and soul, do the work, then let it go and trust, have faith that if it is meant to be nothing on this planet will stop it, and if it isn't meant to be, then obviously there is something even better in store for you just around the corner.

It is time now to get on to the actual guts of shape shifting. The methodology if you will. Once you have the intention, it is time to **plant the seed**.



Chapter Ten

Planting the Seed – Preparing the Ground

Before a farmer plants his seeds, he first prepares the ground. Preparing the ground takes commitment and dedication and long-term resolve. It is not about scattering a few seeds here and there and then hoping for the best, neither is it about half commitment. You prepare to fail when you fail to prepare. In the case of enduring success, the preparation needs to be thorough and the commitment total. Any hesitancy on either of these counts will lead only to disappointment.

This chapter is about preparation and commitment. It is about committing to a development no matter how long it might take to bring it to fruition. It is not about giving yourself six months or a year to make it happen, it is about committing for as long as it takes. Even though you may have a rough timescale worked out,

setting a time limit is always a mistake, as we have seen, because the closer that timescale comes (and it will fly around, believe me) the more disillusioned and hurried and stressed you are likely to become. Stress is the dream killer because it blocks the flow of creativity, it blocks the flow of good energy, the kind of fuel that you need to make the journey. I have many friends who set themselves a time limit to achieve a goal, almost an unconscious barter with God, and they tell me that if it hasn't happened by then they will give it up. This is often a recipe for disaster. It is more fruitful if you instead were to say, 'I am going to achieve my goal no matter how long it takes.'

I'm no different from anyone else in that I would like to achieve my goal in the shortest possible time, that's human nature, but I do not set myself rigid, make-or-break time limits because there are always unforeseen circumstances that get in the way and delay your progress. As with my judo black belt, when I decided that I was going to achieve it, I set my sights on the end result; I measured my time limit by the amount of years it should take as an average player committing an average amount of time to the project. I calculated that if I invested three times the average I could – in theory – make it happen three times as quick. Which, as it turned out, I did. In my mind I had set myself an achievable goal of one year to eighteen months, which is how long it should take with the amount of time I invested, but I was also prepared for unforeseen circumstances. If things occurred that I had not budgeted for I was quite prepared for it to take three years, or even longer.

And things did go wrong. As I said I was practising

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full-time and with international players, it was very intense and I did pick up a few injuries en route, one of them the week before I was due to take my black belt grading. I injured my ankle and could not fight so I had to delay the grading for a few weeks. Things do happen that can delay your plans, this must be a part of your contingency, and it is at such times that you need to have a strong philosophy in place.

There were also mental setbacks on my journey. More than once I was told that I was unlikely to make my goal first time, I was not ready or (this was hinted at rather than said) I was not good enough. When you are investing all your time into a project, really stretching yourself, these kinds of remarks can be very debilitating, even fatal. When you are going through fast learning curves and growing out of one shell into another you're rather like a lobster that is molting. Yes, it is growing but it is also vulnerable. Your greatest moment, the moment when you shed a skin and double your size, is also your most vulnerable time because without the protection of your shell you are open to attack, from your enemies and your friends. Everyone will take a bite at you if they think that they can. You have to compensate for this by being prepared, by giving yourself a temporary shell until your new shell has grown. When a lobster or a crab sheds its shell and it knows it's vulnerable it will often find the nearest rock and lodge itself there until its new shell has hardened sufficiently to protect it. This is where your faith comes in. When your faith is solid it becomes not only a temporary shell for when you are growing, it becomes

your permanent shell, and it makes you invulnerable to all things.

If nature is for you then who can be against you?

This is why I would encourage you to develop a faith, if only for your own protection. It is also wise to have a philosophy in place for such times, and a glut of stories that will inspire you when all around you doubt your metal.

Charles Schulz, the inventor of Snoopy and Charlie Brown, was turned down by just about every potential employer that he sent his work to. He was turned down so often – people kept telling him that he did not have it, his work was not original enough or good enough, or more often than not he did not get a reply at all – that he developed a real problem with low self-esteem. He suffered from a lifelong sense of alienation, insecurity and inferiority. The more people who said he was not good enough the more he started to believe it. And as we all know it is very hard to carry on when everyone is telling you the same thing, especially when your work is just not selling. But he continued on all the same, practising his art, taking the advice on board (when it was forthcoming and constructive) and perfecting his work.

Above everything else Charles lived for his drawing and even if success had not visited him he would probably have carried on anyway, just for the fun of it. Eventually someone saw a spark in his cartoons. He called Charles in for a meeting and told him that he liked his work, there was something there, and could he perhaps draw some specific characters. Charles was

so thrilled that he went away and drew Charlie Brown and his dog Snoopy. The rest is history; he went on to become the most syndicated and beloved cartoonist of all time, attaining success that no other individual cartoonist had ever known, at his peak making the cover of *Time* magazine with his characters. His cartoons went on to become a billion dollar industry with 355 million readers the world over and earning Charles \$40 million a year in royalties. Not bad for a kid whose first drawings (something he never forgot) were turned down by his high-school newspaper. What was interesting about Charles was the fact that he actually used his melancholy and his inferiority in his cartoons. It was his sense of aloneness and isolation portrayed through his characters that really struck a chord with his readers.

Charles Schulz did not look at his art and say, 'If I haven't made it in six months, a year, five years, I'm going to throw in the towel.' He loved what he did, which is a massively important, even imperative, factor. He would have drawn those cartoons for free.

Do you love what you do enough to do it for free?

If all those around you keep knocking you back and turning you down, will you continue to write plays, produce films, pen poetry or whatever it is that you do? If not then maybe you have chosen the wrong field to be great in. I had to ask myself this same question. It is no use planting the seed to success in an area that you are not absolutely passionate about. Passion is the one ingredient that success cannot grow without. Have a

good think about this before you get out your planting tools and start digging holes in the soil. In the writing game – you may or may not know this – it is hard to get your first break, to actually get someone to pay you for your work. It can take an age. And for many of those who do get paid they do not get paid very well. People will only publish your work commercially if there is a fiscal profit in you; it is business, and I understand that. So at some point in my writing career I had to ask myself, ‘Would I continue to do this if there was absolutely no money in it all?’ My answer was a categorical yes. Now here is another question. One that, if I am being honest, I struggled with a little bit. ‘If I had all the money I ever needed (perhaps a lottery win) would I still continue to write?’ I had to really think about this one and for a while it conflicted me.

**If I was a multimillionaire, would I still write,
knowing that I did not need the money?**

In other words was money my main reason for writing? After some contemplation I realised that writing to me was like breathing. It was something I did, something I was, and no amount of money was going to make a difference to that. Whether there was no money or whether there was a boot-load of ready cash I would still be there tapping away on my keyboard. I write all the time. I carry notepads so that I can jot down thoughts or overheard conversations, or funny jokes or sad anecdotes. To me life is copy. So when I write the money is a bonus, but it is not my main aim. If it was I would drop it in a heartbeat and do something that

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thrilled the pants off me. When Charles Schulz was earning forty million a year he continued on with his same routine of drawing comic strips. In fact he was always about eight months ahead of schedule with his work.

**He drew because he loved to draw.
How do you feel about what you are
doing? Does it fill you with the same
amount of passion that drawing did for
Charles Schulz?**

If someone pulled the money out of the equation would you still continue on?

If so then I would say that you are on the right track. If not, perhaps it might be wise to reassess where you are and where you want to be.

Planting the seed of commitment is the first stage in the shape shift proper. And you plant the seed to your goal in the same way as you would plant a flower seed: in fertile ground.

Fertile ground

Make sure that the ground is fertile. If you are planting your intention and you truly desire fruition then the ground is fertile. If the desire is lacking then it is unlikely to attract the water and light it needs to grow. So make sure that you desire it so much that you place your goal ahead of everything else. Make sure that your desire is so strong that it will weather any inclemency

en route. Be sure that you are prepared to change everything that needs to be changed, irrespective of any discomfort it might incur. Because once you plant the seed change is inevitable.

Ground clearing

Before a farmer plants his crops he clears the ground of rocks and old routes and general debris. Anything that might hinder the growth of his new seed. For you the rocks and roots and debris are things like *old belief systems*, *other people's opinions*, and *the residue of past failure*.

If you plant your seeds into soil that is cluttered by one or all of the above they will struggle to grow. These are all hindrances, or debris, we have visited before, but let's look more specifically now at how to overcome them.

Old belief systems

If you are anything like me you will probably have been brought up in a culture of lack. When I was young my parents did not have very much money, they both worked extremely hard to bring up a family of four children. We did well, we had great Christmases and loads and loads of love. But we all believed that there was not enough of anything in the world and that the people who made it to the top were somehow different, special, the gifted few. This was not just the belief of my own family unit; it was also the belief of all my influences; friends, family and teachers. We were all on the same level. We did not know anyone rich, anyone famous or anyone particularly gifted. If there was

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anyone they quickly disappeared to London (or somewhere similarly exotic) where all the gifted folk lived, probably because London was paved with gold. So the belief system that I was weaned on was validated by everything and everyone around me.

They told me that there was not enough wealth, because that was their truth and it was what they believed, and that there were people around the world who were a lot worse off than we were so we should be extremely grateful that we had anything at all. I do agree wholeheartedly that we should always show gratitude, we should all thank God for what we have. It's the next bit, the bit that says 'there's not enough', that I neither like nor agree with. When you set out to put this belief system to the test and tried to do something about your lot – improve it or change it – you were made to feel either greedy or ungrateful or both.

If you want to plant a seed for future success it is important to clear the rubble of yesterday's false beliefs. You need to believe that you, me, anyone, can be successful if they really want to. Anyone can. If you don't believe this, if you have any doubts about it, then you are planting your seeds on stony ground.

So you need a change of paradigm and this will come about when you challenge your old beliefs. Clear out the bad blood and replace it with an infusion of new. You need to read about, talk to, watch and listen to all the people in the world who have been where you are and are now where you would like to be. You need enough new information to disprove the old information.

A friend of mine once said, 'I always wanted to be an

astronaut. Always wanted that, but I'm nearly forty now. I haven't had the training. I've left it too late. I agree that most things are possible but I can't see myself ever flying to the moon if I am being completely honest. Some things are just not possible.'

Says who?

I love that bit in Lewis Carroll's wonderful book *Through the Looking Glass* written way back in 1872:

Alice laughed. 'There's no use trying,' she said, 'One can't believe impossible things.'

'I daresay you haven't had much practice,' said the Queen. 'Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.'

I make it a habit of thinking seemingly impossible things. No point in just aiming for the possible. People are always limiting their potential with what they perceive as being possible and impossible.

What if I gave you a scenario like this: a man with absolutely no experience in aviation or space travel, no money to speak of, does a normal nine-to-five, but has a dream of becoming an astronaut. He says he is going to make it happen within the next six years.

Do you reckon he could do it?

Is it possible?

If you were working in the job centre and this guy

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walked in, plopped himself down at your desk and said, 'I'd like to go into space,' what would your honest reaction be?

Would you call up the 'astronaut files' or would you call for the doctor?

It is such an outrageous thing to say that most people would choke on their beer and say, 'You need a check-up from the neck up.'

But is it impossible?

Could it be done from a standing start?

Mark Shuttleworth thought it could.

Mark always wanted to be an astronaut. He was the same as my mate: similar age, similar background, but with a massive belief that he could do whatever he wanted if he was prepared to do the work and see it clearly. He wasn't sure how it would be done but he knew that it was possible. He started an Internet business in security consultancy from his mum's garage. He sold it six years later for four hundred million pounds. He spent twenty million of that on a special holiday; he paid it to the Russians and became a space tourist.

How many impossible things have you thought today?

There are no limitations other than those that you set yourself. None.

So clear the rubble before you plant the seed otherwise you might as well throw it onto the pavement for all the good it is going to do you.

Other people's opinions

How many times have you had a great idea that was

destroyed by the opinions of other people? You have this great notion of what you want to do with your life, you are excited about it, passionate even, so much so that you share it with someone, maybe your girlfriend or wife, your boyfriend or husband, your best mate, your mum or your dad. And what do they do? They destroy your dream with one barbed comment.

This has happened to me on more occasions than I care to remember and it taught me three things.

1. Don't share your idea with people unless you really trust their judgement. You know who these people are, you know before you even approach them that certain people will ridicule your ideas. So save yourself a lot of time and heartache, and discipline yourself not to – in the heat of excitement that a new venture will bring – share your ideas with people who you know will not support you. Ask yourself this question: why are you sharing your dreams with people who you already know do not have your best interest at heart?

Is this an act of self-sabotage?

Are you looking for a reason, at the ninth hour, to abandon your plans?

If you have to ask people their opinion, especially when you already know their opinion will not be good (because it never is), are you really committed to making it happen? There are certain people in my life who I never, ever share my ideas with. Because they cannot handle either my creativity or my success. So when I see them, I keep the conversation basic, I talk about them, their ideas, and their life. If I talk about me (I do, I confess, love to talk about me and

my ideas) it is on a very basic level and I absolutely and unequivocally discipline myself not to blab about what I am up to. I can't trust them with that kind of delicate information.

2. Don't share your ideas even with the people you can trust until you have worked out all the details and are sure of it yourself. There is nothing worse than giving someone a half-baked idea hoping that they will get it. If you have to share, get your idea in shape first. Just because you can see what your idea is going to be doesn't mean that they will. Again, be disciplined here. Be patient. Get it in good shape before you let anyone see it. Even the best-meaning friends will tear an idea apart if they cannot see it.

3. Do not seek other people's opinions or approval, even if you know that your idea is good, unless they are people you can trust, people of the same ilk who understand the development process. I have one or two people in my life who I like to bounce my ideas off. But to be perfectly honest when I really know that my initiative is good I don't look to anyone for validation. I just know. And if I do ask for an opinion and it is not what I want to hear, I take no notice because I already know it is good. Rather than court opinion I just get on with the work and show people the results. As you get more and more confident with your work you will need less and less feedback. You will just know.

The residue of past failures

We all have these, don't we?

The man who has not made a mistake has not made anything.

In reality, what we often consider failure is not failure at all, just a near miss – people getting closer and closer to their goal. I would say that there are no failures. Just experiences, all of which we can learn from. It is all a matter of perspective. When I aimed to get my book *Watch My Back* to number one in the *Sunday Times* bestsellers list I did not consider it a failure when it only reached number twenty-one. OK I didn't get as high as I aimed but I got close enough to be able to see the number one spot, close enough to see that it was real and that it could be achieved. Similarly when we got nominated for the Turner Classic award for a film I wrote called *Brown Paper Bag*, I did not in any way consider it a failure when we won second prize. It was a massive success. Again, I was one place away from the number one spot, close enough to see what I had to do next time to win the overall prize. If I had written the film and got it made and it never won any awards at all, perhaps it did not even get into a festival (which in these times of high competition is seen as an award in itself) I would still not have seen this as a failure in any sense. The success is the fact that I managed to get a film made. And that is a great achievement. Just finishing the script is a victory; it is one of the steps needed on the road to success.

And success is a very subjective word.

What does it mean?

Was my film *Brown Paper Bag* a success because it won a BAFTA?

Most people would probably agree that it was.

But what about the plethora of festivals that did not even think the film was good enough for basic entry?

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Does their refusal, their opinion, mean that the film was a failure? Most people would say not.

Success is subjective. For a man or woman suffering from clinical depression just getting out of bed each day is a huge and laudable success.

There is no such thing as failure.

There is no such thing as success.

They are both phantoms.

There are just goals that we aim for, and few of these are hit at the very first attempt. So before you plant your seed clear away the residue of supposed failure. There is no such thing. Just experiences that we can learn from, lessons that will help us to get closer to the target at the next attempt. And if failure (or supposed failure) is wounding you I would suggest that you just haven't failed enough yet. When you have failed as many times as I have you will change your perspective and see it for exactly what it is; another experience rich with learning.

Sweep it away.

Now that you have cleared the debris it is time to dig a hole and plant the seed. This is best done in a meditative state.

How you achieve a meditative state is up to you. Some people use traditional sit-down meditation while others prefer yoga or walking by the sea or through a forest.

What you do need to do, though, is completely quieten the mind.

Under the bonnet visualisation

Imagine that the conscious mind is the hard ground beneath which you want to plant the seed of success. Would you take a bag of seeds and simply throw them on the hard ground and hope for the best or would you dig a hole and access the soil where it is more amenable to growth?

The latter I would hope.

The best place to plant the initial seed for success is very deep in the unconscious mind where it can attract all of the ingredients that it needs in order to grow. Accessing the unconscious means bypassing the conscious guard, in other words completely quieting the mind.

There are several ways we are able to do this; the most common is during meditation.

When you practise meditation in any form, you use concentrated focus and diaphragmatic breathing (deep nasal breathing) both of which quieten the mind. I mentioned this earlier in relation to palate. Many people – because of anxiety, fear, stress etc. – spend much of their time out of balance, in what is known as the fight or flight syndrome. Whilst in this state it is very difficult to quieten the mind, and if the mind is not quiet, visualisation becomes very difficult.

In the recent World Snooker Championships it was interesting to see that the players – certainly the top tier – were hiring personal trainers and mentors to help them to quieten their minds for the big game. Even the

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legendary Ronnie O'Sullivan was being mentored by the snooker stalwart and king of cool, Ray Reardon to improve his game – this on top of a five-mile run every day to beat back his fear (running acts as a behavioural release for stress). Ronnie is widely accepted as one of the biggest talents in the world with a snooker cue, but was also well known for losing matches because of impatience and fear. In fact for many years Ronnie suffered from depression, which is often a by-product of underused energy. If the energy of someone as creative as Ronnie does not find an outlet or natural release it will turn inwards making them root-bound. He needed self control, and the ability to separate the game from the result. If you think too much about the result during the game you will create anxiety and fear, this will block the universal flow and all of a sudden a great player is missing simple shots. To be a great player you need a quiet mind.

When you make one of the internal exercises a part of your daily regime you slow the flow of adrenalin and keep the body and mind balanced. This is especially effective when it is practised consistently, and certainly it helps calm the nerves if you relax before practice (whether that be writing, snooker, art, whatever). If you find that the fear or the anxiety are already in you then some kind of physical exercise – running is favourite here – will help release the trapped adrenalin from your system and bring you back to balance.

There are many different methods of meditation, such as yoga and t'ai chi, so my advice is that you find the one that best suits you and make it a part of your daily regime.

SHAPE SHIFTER

Think of the unconscious mind as the engine of a car and the conscious mind as the bonnet. You would not see a mechanic trying to oil the engine, or put water in or work on mechanical repairs with the bonnet down. Similarly, it would be naive to throw seeds at the conscious mind in the vague hope that one or two of them find their way through to the unconscious; to try and plant your intention into the unconscious without first lifting the bonnet of the conscious mind.

Meditation entails quieting the mind, eliminating thought and switching off the conscious guard. My wife Sharon achieves a meditative state by walking around the shops; she also finds that her post-run state is also very meditative. Nature does a similar thing for her, especially water – the ocean in particular can quieten her mind as well as any eastern method of sitting quietly and chanting. For me it is Hatha yoga followed by quiet contemplation. I also run every day. Other people I know achieve this state through guided meditation on audiotapes or after reading a calming book or listening to music. It is very subjective and we are all very different. There is not a one-size-fits-all system that I can offer you in the pages of this book. You need to look at yourself and see what has worked for you in the past.

There are some givens, though, that we can explore; the main thing we are looking for is quiet. Peace. All exterior and interior noise needs to be closed down. Once it is quiet (and preferably dark) and you know that you can get a good half hour of peace undisturbed by phones and so on, then it is the time to plant the first seed.

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I will tell you how I do it; try this and see if it works for you. If not, do not hesitate to tweak it until you get it just right. Once the noise has gone, no external sounds, no internal chatter, close your eyes and direct your eyeballs to the middle of your forehead (this is known as the third eye), I have found also that it helps to gently push the point of your tongue into the roof of your mouth. Breathe deeply through your nose (diaphragmatic breathing) so that on the in breath your stomach expands, and on the out breath your stomach contracts. Do this about a dozen times until you feel relaxed.

Deep breathing is the usual entry to most forms of meditation. It can also help to focus on parts of your body, from your toes to your ankles and shins, your knees and thighs, all the way up to the top of your head. The focus helps to slow down your thoughts until you have created inner quiet. With your eyes closed all you will probably see at this point is black; a few colours may flash into your mind, but fundamentally there will be darkness. When you get to this point, when all the thoughts have slowed or are quiet, imagine a long dark tunnel, like the inside of a tornado. The tunnel offers a secure passageway through your conscious mind right down to the planting ground of your unconscious. This is where you will plant your goal-seeds. You may find that thoughts and doubts and fears and images will try to break the tunnel down. Practise so that you can hold your tunnel firmly in place until you have planted the seed. This may take time. You may need to strengthen mental muscle (and this can only come through

practice) so that the tunnel does not keep collapsing in on you.

Once the tunnel is firm, gaze steadfastly with firm determination into the very deepest point and visualise your goal, your dream, your intention there. See it, hear it, feel it, smell it, sense it.

In meditation, use all the senses to make your dream a reality; sight, sound, touch, smell and taste.

The more senses you use, the more real the goal will feel and the more likely it is to manifest.

Once your tunnel is constructed and steady you may also – if you want to add to the intensity of your practice – add positive mantras; for example, I am a professional artist; I have my first record deal; I am a great football player; bundles of love are coming to me from all directions at the same time. Practice will enable you to make the visualisation very real. You have to place yourself actually into the goal.

I believe that all things are created twice: the first creation is in the mind and the second is in reality. Some people are naturally good at seeing images, others may be stronger with sensing touch or hearing sound or sensing smell. I am very good with touch, so when I imagine my goal and plant it at the bottom of my tunnel that is the strongest sense that I bring to my practice. When my goal was a BAFTA award the greatest sense I used was the sense of touch. I imagined actually holding the BAFTA. The weight (it is unusually heavy) the

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texture (smooth on the front face and rough on the back) the shape (a square, heavy base and a flat, inch-thick face).

Sharon and I were in the centre of Leicester Square a month before the BAFTA awards looking at the Odeon Theatre and seeing ourselves there. Sharon, who is better at forming mental images than me, walked us through it; ‘This is where the limo will drop us off, this is where we walk down the red carpet, this is where the crowds of people will be shouting and screaming, and this is where all the photographers will be standing.’

We brought the place vividly to life, we could hear the crowds, feel the red carpet beneath our feet, see the flashes from photographers’ cameras and we could even imagine the celebrities who were walking with us. We actually rehearsed the awards ceremony, using our imagination to bring it to life. I felt myself smiling, I felt Sharon’s hand holding mine, I heard the announcement ‘and the winner is...’ with my name, the producer and director’s name and the name of the film attached. I saw us all going onto the stage, I heard my speech where I thanked the One that made it all possible (God) and I thanked my girl, my life (Sharon) and told everyone that I loved her. I made it real, so that on the night of the BAFTAs I had already seen the conclusion.

And we did win, as you know, and all the things that I had imagined happened just like they did in my meditation. This is not the only goal I have achieved via this method; there have been countless many before and since, from getting into the Royal Court’s writers’ group to doing a good interview on the *Richard and Judy*

show, I have pulled myself from depression with this method and I have manifested money, book deals, cars, happiness and good luck for myself and others. And I always use the same method of deep meditation, the tunnel and then visceral under-the-bonnet visualisation.

If you struggle to visualise your goal clearly you could always go and get first-hand experience of your goal. Roger Black, the British Olympian, always made a point of visiting the stadium that he was due to compete in days before the competition. He would stand in the often empty stadium and bring to life the sights and sounds and smells of the forthcoming event. He saw, heard and felt himself there, immersed in the ambience of competition day. He saw himself competing with confidence and winning, over and over again.

Other times to plant

Meditation is the very best time to plant seeds, but it is not the only time. Some people do not even make their seed planting deliberate; they do it almost by accident. However you do it the intent has to be very pure, meaning you must want it (whatever your goal is) with absolutely no reservations. People who plant inadvertently might look at something and say (with pure intent), 'Wow, wouldn't it be great to have that?' If they think it clearly enough it can happen with one very firmly (even unconsciously) planted seed. Especially if they continue to feed that thought until it is a living reality.

Other good times to plant your seeds are on waking first thing in the morning. This is a good time because the conscious guard is not awake and planting seeds in

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fertile ground is much easier. Similarly, last thing at night just before you drop off to sleep is a good time. Again, the conscious guard is closing down and it's a good time to bypass it and plant a good seed. One of my favourite times is right after a training session. The endorphins are racing around your blood and you are on a natural high so it is a good time to slip past a temporarily disengaged conscious guard and plant your seed. After reading a good book or watching an inspirational film is also a good time for the same reason.

Have you noticed how – after reading an inspirational book – a portal opens in your mind and you know, categorically, 100 per cent, that you can achieve anything?

What you see at that moment is pure truth. You see beyond the conscious guard to the infinite possibilities that you have access to.

Then the conscious guard clicks back in and tells you that actually, what you saw was little more than fantasy. It tells you to get back on with your work and to stop wasting your time with silly notions. As if to punish you for your reverie it also fills you with a melancholy that stands as a warning that you should not go there again. But once you decide to make a goal real, once you are fully determined, with no doubts, the conscious guard will get right out of your way. It will not find any room in you to place doubt or fear.

The conscious guard is a good thing. Just like the

friends and the family that try to hold you back with negative comments and discouragement, the conscious guard is making sure that you are ready, that what you aim for is what you really want, that you are fully prepared for the journey that you are taking. If your determination is so weak that it can be held back by family and friends or by a thought in your head then you are definitely not ready, and they are doing you a huge favour by letting you know.

Go away, regroup, build your strength and try again. Like a man who goes to the bench to lift a heavy weight: if he fails it is not the fault of the weight, or the bench or the people spotting for him, it is simply because he is not strong enough yet, he does not have the belief yet, neither is his technique right.

Once the seed is firmly planted the miracle starts to happen (but not before).

As long as the intention is firmly planted, it will draw towards itself all the ingredients needed to make it grow. All you need to do is make sure that the new seedling gets all the water and light that it needs.

Crows and insects

Once your intention (your seed) is planted, it needs protecting from what I like to call the crows and insects.

When the farmer plants his crop he will usually place scarecrows in and around the field to scare away the birds who will pick at his seeds before they have a chance to take root. He also has, usually, to use insecticides to stop insects from feeding on the crop once it starts to grow.

The crows that you need to look out for can be (often

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well-meaning, sometimes purely jealous) friends, family, acquaintances, people that you hardly know, people that you don't know at all or enemies. In the planting stage of the shape shift all of the above can – and at one time or another probably will – become enemies to the growth of your goal. But none of them will be as big an enemy to success as the *insects*. In this scenario the insect is the person who is influencing you twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, three-hundred-and-sixty-five days of the year. You.

You are often your worst enemy.

You need to change this so that instead you become your best friend.

In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the jewel of India's spiritual wisdom, it says it best:

**'Lift the self by the self.
And don't let the self droop down,
for the self is the self's only friend.
And the self is the self's only foe.'
(Chapter 6, Verse 5)**

Ultimately the only enemies are internal enemies and the only friends are internal friends. Because even the strongest external influences lack any potency if we do not internalise them.

This is really about being vigilant and also being very firm and self-disciplined. Vigilant in that you are constantly looking out for the negativity traps that others set for us, firm in the fact that you simply do not allow these people any thoroughfare, and disciplined in that you create, maintain and exercise on a daily basis

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a force-field around you to stop negative influences from infiltrating your mind.

Don't allow it.

People will try to draw you away from your path and if you allow them they will eat away at your resolve. Similarly if you allow the insect of self doubt to infiltrate your mind, if you give it any space, if you allow it any leeway it will also sabotage you. This can happen at any time before, during and quite often right on the cusp of success.

Look out for it.

Ultimately, though, all sabotage – whether by the crows or the insects – is in fact self sabotage. People will only sabotage you if you let them. Sabotage from without and from within is merely a manifestation of fear in one of its many disguises. No one else can ever be blamed for your failures. The buck stops with you. And you would be absolutely amazed at the power you have to influence exterior circumstances so that they thwart your aspirations if (at every and any level) you do not feel ready to succeed. Trains will mysteriously break down to stop you from going to a life-changing interview, computers will lose the manuscript that might bring in that big deal, illness, calamity, car crashes, network-breakdowns, lost dogs, lost loves, lost travel tickets, found vocations – a myriad mysterious things all brought into the physical world by your very POWERFUL unconscious because at some level you do not want to succeed.

Your mind will create the thing that it desires most.

If your fear is stronger than your desire then it is your fear that you will manifest, and it will manifest in such

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a way that you can completely detach yourself from it and say, 'I would have succeeded but *such and such* happened and it was completely out of my control.'

For example, when I was due to take my black belt grading, I did not feel ready, I felt I needed more time, but I was not brave enough to admit this even to myself. I suddenly developed a calf injury that forced me to cancel and re-schedule the grading. My injury allowed me to say, 'I'd have done the grading but I'm injured.' It was only in retrospect that I can see how I had unconsciously orchestrated the injury because my fear at the time was stronger than my desire. On the re-scheduled grading, I managed to contain my fear and pass the grade.

I have been there. But let me tell you this, a little truth that I have discovered; when you really want success, nothing, nothing, nothing will get in your way. You will be invisible to the crows and the insects will find you quite indigestible.

If people are holding you back it is because you are allowing yourself to be held back. If the insects nibble away at your resolve then it is because you are allowing your resolve to be nibbled at.

When you are fully, totally, 100 per cent committed not only will there be no crows and no insects but the rest of the universe will serendipitously come out in their droves to make your dream a living reality.

So every time you try to plant your seed and you see crows circling above, or insects burrowing below, step back and examine not the crows nor the insects (they are your best teachers, they are actually showing you that there are leaks and commitment problems in your

plans) but your own intention. If there are problems with your commitment (and only you can really know what they are) then solve them because they need to be cleared away. It is no use trying to plant a seed in spoiled soil. These are times for introspection and for self-honesty.

If, for instance, your goal is to grow a little money and you have a problem about having money (many people do) then you need to trace that problem and solve it. A usual indicator that someone associates guilt with having money is when they tell you (rather too emphatically) that ‘it is not about the money’. And yet, if you listen to their speech it is littered with examples of *this bloke* who made a million in three years or *this lady* who has her own yacht in the Caribbean. In the past I have been guilty of this myself, saying that it is not about money, while being massively impressed with people who have managed to create fiscal wealth. I was, on some level, afraid that if I said, ‘Actually I do want to earn loads of cash,’ people might think that I was greedy.

It is not easy when you have been carrying a belief system for the majority of your life – and let’s face it, a young mind is a blank disk that will accept anything that you place on it. When it is bedded in this deep it takes a heck of a lot of getting out and keeping out. Not only do you have to pull it out from the very core, you also have to make sure that it doesn’t grow again.

Removing this outdated and problematic information means fully accepting without blame or guilt that what you once thought of as true is actually a lie. You have to accept you have a problem before you can erase that problem.

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Once you have found acceptance and have acknowledged that what you thought of as truth was actually a lie, you challenge that lie each time it rears its ugly head. If, for instance, your old truth was that you do not deserve success, you challenge that by pointing out (to yourself) that you are a good person, you work extremely hard, you do all that is asked of you and therefore you do deserve success just as much as the next person.

If your old truth was that you did not care about making money, you need to give the new truth positive mantras, challenging the old truth by pointing out that you deserve it and are grateful for it, it is a form of energy which needs to be re-distributed generously, and you will not misuse it.

You must keep challenging the old truths until they lose their hold, and keep reiterating your new truths until they are firmly installed in your mind.

Now that the seeds are firmly planted and protected, it is time to give them a little ‘water and light’.



Chapter Eleven

Water and Light

I love walking around our local park and watching nature work its magic. I have learned more about life and about business from observing nature than by any other means. Everything you need to know about life is there to see in any garden or field or park. I especially love to look at the large trees like the oak and marvel at the fact that this behemoth started life as a tiny acorn.

I am amazed by the number of things that are flourishing in the wild despite the trampling feet of man and the high winds coming in from the north. And they do not flourish in spite of the trampling feet and the wind and rain, they flourish because of it.

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We recently had the back garden landscaped, part grass, part trellis with a very large area of stone and shale. We had it done professionally. It was (and remains) a job well done. In the area of shale and stone and gravel you would think it nearly impossible for anything to grow. And yet almost as soon as the rain falls and the sun shines, from one end of the garden to the other it is wall-to-wall weeds. It looks as though nothing could grow there and yet everything does. The seed finds the tiniest morsel of soil and grows, sometimes so strong and firm that I have to dig it out with my garden trowel. I find the weeds exciting (even though it takes me an hour to get them out) because they are a living example of the fact that just about anything can grow anywhere given the right amounts of light and water. You, me, your business and mine, our relationships, whatever it is that you want to grow can thrive even in stony ground providing that there is some soil to plant the seed and enough water and light to aid growth.

Things want to grow.

I planted a lovely tree in my back garden and for one reason or another it did not take properly. I suspected that I had not planted it right so I called in the help of an expert. He took a look at the tree and agreed that it was not as healthy as it should be and that it was probably due to the fact that we'd had a lot of rain recently and it had overwatered the tree. He decided that the best thing to do was re-plant it in a deeper hole, add some more soil and a few rocks at the base of the hole to act as drainage. He said that this should do the trick but added that *the rest was up to the tree*. It had – like any other life form on this spinning planet – to fight

for its right to life. And that means becoming hardened to the sun scorch, the rain, the insects and the crows and the very fact that there were also lots of other plants around the garden all vying for the same sustenance. Similarly with your goal, once you have planted the intention you must make sure that you give it all the right ingredients; access to good soil, water and light. But beyond that you have to leave the intention to fight for its own existence, for its own right to physical reality. This is where *the power of intent and surrender* comes in. You make sure that the intention is fixed and planted correctly, but then you have to surrender the process to the cosmos.

What we are talking about in this chapter is what we can do to help the intention once it is planted, and that is to make sure that it gets enough (but not too much) water and light.

The schematics for an oak tree are all neatly packed into a tiny acorn, the same as the DNA to the whole human biology is contained in a single cell so small it cannot be seen with the human eye.

When the acorn is planted in the right soil it will develop roots that will spread to find heat and moisture – the sustenance it needs to grow. If there is a lack of water the acorn will not flourish, if there is a lack of light once the plant breaks through the earth it will also die.

Water

Water is what creates the first cycle of growth. In the case of our intentions the metaphoric water is

information. So someone who wanted to build a house would devour every piece of information he could find to necessitate that growth. If you wanted to be a sculptor, once the seed of intention had been planted you would feed that intention with as much information as you can take in. This might mean reading about sculpting, watching programmes about it on the telly, talking with other sculptors, visiting galleries and museums to see the work of the masters and then converting this information into growth.

How much time and practice you put into this phase of growth will determine how fast you grow. In the early phase of the first cycle of growth you might not be able to take in too much information because there is a threat of burnout, so you limit the intake to just the amount you can handle. How many times have you seen people rush into a project with all guns blazing, promising to change the world, only to find that a few weeks later they have given up? This is what is known in the plant world as *overwatering*. Overwatering a plant or a tree will rot the roots. Once the roots are rotted the plant will die.

Overwatering

I have a friend who rots the roots of every intention he plants because of impatience. He gets so excited about a new venture that he waters it to death. Rather than build up gradually and grow organically he pulls out all the stops and takes on more than he can handle. He has a fast spurt of growth which is always followed by lethargy and eventually termination. He tries to go too

high too soon. Ultimately this means that he never really achieves anything because he never completes the shape shift.

You have to decide how much you can take and how soon. You only need to listen to your body and it will tell you. I have always been good at completing shape shifts on a fast track. This is usually because I take a lot of time to decide before I plant an intention. I know that if I plant a premature intention (one that I have not fully thought out) in shallow soil it will lead to failure, and if you start getting a series of failures behind you it sets a negative precedent. Once you are in negative equity it is very hard work getting back out again.

My advice is to start gradually, but make the sustenance consistent. If you stand by an oak tree you cannot see it growing, and yet it is growing every second of every day, right before your eyes. If you wanted to pen a novel of 100,000 words it might seem like an impossible task. But if you sat down and wrote as little as 1,000 words a day, within 100 days the first draft would be written. And the interesting thing this is those 100 days are going to pass by frighteningly fast whether you invest in them or not.

Take small, sustainable, pyramidic steps.

If you rush you risk rot.

Just as too much watering will rot the roots of a plant, too much information will drown your enthusiasm and spirit. It takes discipline in the honeymoon period of a project not to overdo it. Build yourself up until you have grown enough to be able to handle it.

Underwatering

Similarly if you underwater your project it will also atrophy. It is essential, again, that you have the discipline to go out and get the information you need to feed your passion. As I said this could be in the form of books and tapes and films that appertain to your subject matter, or it could be talking to people who have succeeded or reading about it on the Internet and so on.

I had two friends who wanted to reach a pinnacle in judo. One overwatered – he trained maniacally from the word go, with no real preparation; the other underwatered – too busy and too broke, he said, to spend any more time on judo than before, even though his dream was to train full-time. Within a very short time both of them had hung up their belts. The over trainer had lost his enthusiasm and picked up lots of niggling injuries because his body had not been prepared for the amount of training he had suddenly thrust upon it. And the other lost all interest because he did not feed his enthusiasm. Neither player was really prepared to pay the price. And the price in this case was consistency over a long period. In some professions this can mean years, even a lifetime.

Continuing with the analogy of a plant sending out roots to find sustenance (which is the first cycle of growth) it is important to recognise that the early part of a plant's life occurs underground, unseen by the human eye. Because of this people are often guilty of thinking that there is no growth at all. This can be disillusioning and again can lead people to abandon their plans. It is said,

for instance, that a bamboo plant can take up to five years to break through the ground, but once it does and it is exposed to the light it can grow up to ninety feet in six weeks.

The person who has the patience to wait five years without actually seeing any growth (trusting that the growth is happening beneath the ground) is massively rewarded once the plant hits the light.

In commerce this is common and experienced businessmen do not usually expect to see a fiscal profit from their venture for the first few years. Initiating any business is all about outlay, speculation before accumulation, so no one really expects to see an immediate profit. But once the foundation of that business is in place and the investment capital recouped the business (if it is a good one) will start to bring in a profit. The important growth is all underground. Many people invest heavily into their passion only to abandon it because they felt that it was dead in the ground, when in actual fact it was growing rapidly and just about to break through into the light.

Light

The light is the second cycle of growth.

This is where the plant breaks through the ground and gathers light which it converts, through the leaves, into energy. This is interesting. When the development is occurring underground it is not only you who cannot

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see the growth that is occurring, it is also other people. If your work is not selling yet, if you are not getting recognition for your talent, it is probably for this reason. Once you break through the ground, like the bamboo, and are exposed to the light your growth is likely to be meteoric.

In business, in life, in art we are often guilty of accusing people of not giving us any light – or money, or recognition. Often we are guilty of an accusatory attitude even when our talent is still a seedling in the ground, weeks, months or even years away from the surface. For example, people send me letters complaining that people will not recognise their brilliant writing, not realising that their brilliant writing is still at the can't-spell-bad-grammar-no-structure seedling stage. There is still a lot of work to do before their talent is in any state to attract the light of the outside world.

One thing I know is this; when the work is ready the light will appear as if by magic, and as much as you can handle. So in actual fact people are not giving us light because we are not quite ready for light. Metaphorically we have not developed the ability yet (the leaves, as it were) to transform the light into energy.

So what does this tell you?

It tells me that I have to try again, it tells me that I have to try harder, it tells me that I need a bit more time, a bit more patience, and it certainly tells me that I need a bit more faith.

What I do not need is procrastination.

Self pitying does not help matters, all it does is stunt your growth and drive your talent away. And let me tell

you that the moment you think about failure you are mentally preparing to fail.

Everyone goes through this period of frustration. It feels as though it is just you, but everyone goes through it. And I guarantee that once you break through the ground – and let's make no bones about this, the first cycle of growth has to be initiated by you and you alone – the light will be there, it is already there waiting, it is already there shining down on others. It will not shine on you until you have the ability to cope with it.

The light will not shine and the insects will not pollinate until there is something to shine on, something to pollinate, until you have grown leaves and borne fruit.

And don't think either that breaking through the ground is instant success; it is simply the second cycle of growth. Once you are out in the open you are suddenly competing with every other plant that wants light, you are in direct competition with every other plant that wants to attract the birds and the bees to pollinate them.

When a bee lands on a flower to pollinate it which one do you think it chooses?

It heads for the one that stands tall, the one that has the brightest flowers, it does not head for the head-bowed-stuck-in-a-corner-feeling-sorry-for-itself flower that feels hard done by because no one recognises its talent. No insect chooses a dowdy flower.

What kind of flower are you?

Are you bright, positive and optimistic or are you negative or perhaps a procrastinator? In life, the birds

and the bees are the people you attract towards you who might want to guide you or do business with you or want to invest in you.

Look at any of the greats out there, those that you look up to, those that you aspire to be like and you will see that the light did not shine on them until they themselves broke through and actually attracted the light.

It is hard for us to comprehend the fact, for instance, that J.K. Rowling was ever an aspiring author, that the bestselling writer was once a hopeful climbing the literary ranks and thinking, ‘Will I ever get published? Have I really got what it takes?’ And then – as if to compound her self doubts and fears – every major publisher in the country turned her down. They said ‘no’ to J.K. Rowling.

What does that mean?

It means that every major publisher in the country believed, when presented with *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, that it was not good enough to be published, that it was not good enough to turn a profit. Eventually a publisher did pick up the book – for whatever reason – and it went on to become one of the most successful book series in the history of publishing, spawning several blockbuster Hollywood films and a plethora of merchandise.

Similarly it would be hard to imagine Tom ‘the voice’ Jones as ever being a developing talent. Surely everyone could see his talent, surely everyone was shining light on him way back when? One or two saw the early signs, one or two invested their light in what they could see

was a burgeoning talent but the majority verdict was 'not interested, not today, not any day.'

Incredible, but true.

In fact Tom became so exasperated that it wasn't happening for him that he was about to throw in the towel, telling his manager, Gordon Mills, this was his plan if he didn't get him a break soon. His manager was absolutely incensed that the moguls could not see what was patently obvious to everyone else; that Tom was a rare talent. He had a great following around the clubs but the people with the money and the contracts could not see it. Gordon managed to get Tom a deal with the Decca label, he released 'It's Not Unusual' and all of a sudden everyone and his dog was claiming to have sat next to Tom Jones the superstar at school. Within a year the whole world was shining light upon him and anything he touched.

The comic and Oscar-winning actor Robin Williams was once almost impossible to sell. Incomprehensible, I know. You would think that there would be crowds of producers and directors and film companies queuing up for a piece of him. There are now, but not then. He had his own loyal following and a limited exposure on the telly and his agent Larry Brezner would continually invite film and television executives to watch his artist perform stand-up, hoping that they would get a taste for his happy madness. Larry once said, 'Robin was doing stuff from Shakespeare, carrying on, dancing on tables. I brought some United Artists executives to see him at the Comedy Store. They said "He's crazy," and walked out.'

It was only later that Larry managed to get Robin a

one episode slot on *Happy Days* playing a zany alien who offers the Fonz advice on love. The director Garry Marshall (who was also at the beginning of his career and went on to direct movies such as *Pretty Woman* and *Frankie and Johnny*) jokingly insists that Robin Williams got the part because 'he was the only alien that applied'.

Robin's guest appearance was a sensation. Henry Winkler (who played Fonz) said that it was the first time in the series that he did not have to worry about remembering lines and positions, all he had to concentrate on was not laughing at Robin Williams' hysterical antics. After the episode aired, the network received more letters about that one show than any other in any series and since all the letters wanted to see more of Mork, the character that Robin played, the next step was obvious. The *Mork and Mindy* show was born, as was Robin Williams' second cycle of growth. The rest is history; the light really did start to shine on the shy actor/comedian and a plethora of roles – each more demanding than the last – rolled in. His talent grew in many areas and it was not long before the name Robin Williams was globally recognised and loved.

There were a lot of serendipitous happenings (that the biographers of Williams called 'luck') that placed him on that particular show at that particular time, the universe conspiring to bring him to his pinnacle. But none of it happened until Williams himself was ready to break through. If the role had come two years or even a year earlier he would not have been ready, and two years later would have been too late. As with a cake baking in an oven, the timing has to be exactly right.

Again, this is where the surrender part comes into

the equation. You may well think that you are ready (and maybe you are) but this is not just about you, this is also about everyone and everything else being ready also. If it hasn't happened yet it is because it is not ready yet, it means more time, more patience, more practice and certainly more faith. When you are right and the universe is right the alchemy will happen, of that you can be very sure.

Even The Beatles had to wait their time. Did you know that everyone turned down The Beatles because (they said) four piece bands were old hat? The lads were becoming very frustrated. They were doing gigs and getting a phenomenal crowd response. The audience (and the band themselves) knew that they had something but the big labels could not see it. The time was not right. When it was – well, you know the story. And once the light shines on you, it changes lives. All of us need to be ready for that if we want to go from good to great in our chosen art.

So the second cycle of growth is when you break through the ground. Let me repeat that so it sinks in: *when you break through*. Not when someone else breaks through, or when someone else breaks you through, it is when you have reached the maturity and strength to break through the surface of obscurity and demand that the light should shine and sponsor your second cycle of growth. No one else is going to sit with you and make you practise your guitar, no one else is going to give you the backbone to sit down and do yet another draft of your film script. No one is going to take the blows for you when you are in the ring perfecting your boxing twice a day, every day, against people who are trying to

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knock you out because they are after the same position at the top as you. It is down to you. Brian Epstein did not break The Beatles, The Beatles broke The Beatles. Garry Marshall did not break Robin Williams, Robin Williams broke himself. These people were pivotal, sure, they facilitated their stars' success, yes of course they did, but it was the stars themselves who went out there night after night after night, rejection after rejection after rejection and literally forced themselves through the ground. It is having the tenacity and sheer courage to get a rejection letter in the morning and still sit down and do another day of practice.

How much do you want it?

Because if you really want it rejection letters will be little more than confetti in a hurricane, they will be blown away by the sheer force of your intention to make it.

I will never give up. Never!

How about you?

How do you feel?

Will you give up, or will you carry on despite it all?

If you want light then work hard underground. Get your foundation and roots so strong that when you do break through – which you will – every particle of light in the universe will be waiting to offer you energy. The birds and the bees will be fighting amongst themselves to get a chance at pollinating you. And all the other plants that are fighting for the same light and the same pollination will fall into your shadow because they will not have put the work in that you have, they will not have invested the blood, the sweat or the tears that you have, they will not have invested the time that you have.

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The breaking through part and getting light for the second cycle of growth is down to you. Your actions and your actions alone will draw assistance toward you. Once you break through the ground and become visible the light will start to shine in your direction, and you can convert that light to energy that will fuel your second cycle of growth.

Many people break through from the first cycle of growth to the second cycle of growth and think that they have made it, that they are home and that there is no longer any need for the hard work and dedication that was responsible for them actually breaking through in the first place. I call it the embryonic victory. Carlos Castaneda called it *false clarity, the second enemy of man*.

Breaking through is cause for celebration, for the first battle has been won, but the war is not yet over. No matter what level you are at, attention – and increasing amounts of it as your product gets bigger – is a necessity. So the time of breakthrough should be the time of increased attention.

Probably the reason why so many people who break through in any area of business or art do not last is that they fail to sustain their workload. In the pop world we see more one-hit-wonders than we ever see quality bands with longevity. This is because so many people think that breaking through is a licence to stop working and print money. It couldn't be further from the truth. And many people expend so much energy just getting to the top that they burn out when they get there. Breaking through is the time to go up a gear and pedal harder.

There are a million heartbreaking stories of people

slowing down at the very moment they should be accelerating. When I got my first book published twelve years ago I knew that this was my chance. I had broken through and now was the time to really work. If I thought that I had worked hard before, it was nothing to how I worked afterwards. In the year that I got published I wrote another five books. My window was open, and I intended to make sure that it stayed open. And as you grow you need more input to continue that growth – not just more but of a higher quality and standard. This means that the pressure is never off. You cannot stand still; if you do you automatically start to move backwards because everything else around you is evolving. You have to keep cranking it up. And just when you think you have given it all you have, you have to take a deep breath and give it some more. It does not get easier as you get more successful, it gets harder, the game gets bigger and the stakes higher. So make sure that you leave enough in the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual tank for when you break through, because once you do it will demand everything you've got.

This all sounds a little serious and it is. People looking for success are often very naive, believing that success will give them all they are looking for and that somehow – when they get there – they will be able to sit back and rest on a cushion of laurels. They also underestimate the pressure of suddenly being confronted with their dream because sometimes the dream is a lot more reassuring than the real thing. Many people find success and (in one form or another) fail to handle it when it comes.

You don't have to look far to see examples of this.

The pop world and the world of acting are full of people who have turned to drink or drugs to cope with fame, fortune and massive workload. And it is no secret that very few marriages in either world survives the pressures of success.

It is something that you need to be ready for, something that cannot be underestimated, and something that should be respected. Take heed, and be prepared but don't be put off. It does not mean that success is all doom and gloom, it is great fun to succeed in anything and it has massive benefits; living your dream can bring a life of excitement and joy.

Breaking through into the light is a very exciting (and scary) time. Your breakthrough might be like Lowry's when the Queen Mother bought one of his paintings and he was thrust into the higher echelons. It might be a 'lucky' break like Robin Williams' when he was offered a small appearance on *Happy Days*; it could be the fact that you have produced some work (maybe you are the work) that has got you noticed. Whatever it is it signals the time for you to put your foot down on the metaphoric accelerator and create a quickening. This is where the talent you have been growing steadily for a long period of time is suddenly doubled and tripled by the light you receive and the fact that you transmute that light into energy.

The quickening is a choice. You can either bask in the light (and a little of that is not a bad thing) or you can work the light and convert it. And the more you convert the more you get. Many people break through to the light, but very few embrace the second cycle of growth and create a quickening.



Chapter Twelve

The Quickening

For me this is probably the most exciting part. The quickening is the part where you make the final commitment, fully immerse yourself into your new world, trigger the third cycle of growth and everything escalates. If you find yourself at this point, preparing for the final phase, but do not feel quite ready for a full commitment, don't worry. The good thing about the shape shifting process is that there are plenty of opportunities before the quickening to opt out if you suddenly find yourself in the wrong world; or perhaps in the right world at the wrong time. It happens.

When a mountain climber gets within view of the peak he will often instinctively know that it is not the right time for him to attempt the summit. Messner, when he was aiming for the peak of Nanga Parbat reached this point twice when he just had to admit to himself – as much as it grieved him – that on these

particular days the peak was beyond him. On the second attempt his brother was killed on the mountain because he did not listen to instinct and leave the mountain for another day. Messner went down, crying and cold and lonely, just wanting to be with his wife. On his third attempt he made the peak, the first man alive to do it solo. Even the locals that actually lived on the mountain thought this an impossible feat. But he made the impossible possible by creating a quickening and making the mountain his world.

It often happens that, at the final phase of the shape shift you look closely at your goal and think, 'Actually, on closer inspection, I can see that this is not for me, not today, not any day.' Sometimes this is a cop-out and you will return to try another day. Sometimes you know that it is only the timing that is out, or perhaps your preparation was slightly wrong. One way or another, though, you do not make the final stab.

This phase is what I like to call 'the final revealing'. It is perhaps the first time you will ever see your goal naked, without the whistles and bells of ceremony, without the make-up and posh frock; you see the Monday morning goal stripped of its glamour, rather than the gorgeous vision that, until now, has held you captivated. It is at this point that you will know if the goal you have been dreaming about is what you really thought it was. But like the woman or the man that you love, if the goal is the right goal for you, you will love it just as much on its plain days as you did when it was glammed up in your mind's eye. You will be surprised by the number of people who reach this final stage and – after seeing their goal for the first time with

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true eyes – say, ‘Actually this is not what I thought it was,’ and let it go. That’s OK.

I can remember the time that I wanted to go to Salford University to do a Masters degree with the Society of Martial Arts. I was really excited about it. It was all I wanted to do. In fact my only fear was that they might not accept me, for whatever reason. I had prepared well, I knew my subject, I’d been studying it all my life, all I had to do now was convince the professor in charge that I was ready.

Almost from the moment I arrived at the university, although at first I did not want to admit it to myself, in *the final revealing* I knew that I had made a mistake. I knew that going to Salford University to do a Masters was absolutely and unequivocally wrong for me. A sense of deep dread overwhelmed me from the moment I arrived and it lasted for several days afterwards. This is not to be mistaken for fear. If it was fear I would have done my best to override it. Fear at this stage is expected and it should not force you back. This was a different feeling that came from my very bones and said to me with some urgency, ‘This baby is not for you.’ And I knew that my inner voice was right. My body was giving me the ultimate indication that this was not my world. I was offered a place at the university but I turned it down without hesitation.

What I had first imagined to be a dream goal (a Masters degree followed by a PhD) would actually have been, in the cold light of the final revealing, a prison sentence for me. Until that point I had not realised fully what sitting for a Masters full-time really meant. I have always been an on-the-job type who hated being cooped

up in a classroom, so the thought of doing it again in my late thirties with a business to run at home was anathema.

I turned it down, and my friend Peter, who knew how much I had previously wanted to do it, said that I had made a brave decision. But in actuality the decision was not really brave. I had never felt so certain about anything in my whole life, so it was really the only decision that I could have made. One, for the record, that I have never regretted. The only thing that shocked me was the intensity with which my body warned me and how ugly the goal seemed close up. It was a laudable goal and for some I am sure it would be the beauty queen of ambitions, but for me it was an ugly old troll. It wasn't so much that I hated the subject matter suddenly – I still had a passion for that – rather it was the idea of me, who never enjoyed school life, sitting behind a desk again. Later I did complete my Masters degree but from home as opposed to from the university.

You will not really know for certain if the goal you have set yourself is right until the final revealing. I have reached this point a few times in my life and it can be hard to do an *about turn* and say 'Actually I know that this is not for me.' Lots of people will be disappointed with you, many might accuse you of being scared to make the final commitment, you may even accuse yourself of this, but despite it all if it is not right it is not right and you must make the decision. It is your life.

I know many people who think they would love to write full-time but my suspicion is that when they get the final revealing they might not be so keen. I love it,

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I live for it, when I was given the final revealing the goal of being a full-time writer looked more beautiful than ever. But then I am a very self-disciplined man and I work at my writing daily, whether I feel like it or not. Most people are very undisciplined and the idea of making themselves sit down and write (even when the muse is holidaying in the Caribbean) would be hateful. One of the reasons, I suspect, why people do not make a full commitment to a goal is because they are frightened of bursting the romance-balloon, they are afraid of seeing their lover naked with the light on. Rather than risk disappointment they avoid it by finding a hundred and one completely reasonable excuses why they cannot make that commitment.

If you do get to this point and at the final revealing it is not all you had hoped for don't worry. You will not be the first and you will not be the last. You need to be philosophical about it. I try to see everything that happens to me as good.

My hope, however, is that at the final revealing your goal will be more beautiful and more exciting than ever.

So, you have broken through, the light is shining on you and we have acknowledged that at this point it is time to go up a gear (and not slack off). You will at this point start getting attention from other people in the same world as you, people who will be looking to help you grow your talent. When the Spice Girls broke through, for instance, these relatively ordinary girls were suddenly exposed to the best talent from every conceivable area in the world of pop. This meant that they grew fast and in every direction at the same time.

Singers with girl-next-door looks and average talent suddenly swelled into beautiful ladies with a burgeoning talent for song and entertainment. By being around greater talent their own abilities could not help but grow. If you place a log in a fire next to another log that is burning fiercely, it will ignite and glow a lot quicker than if it was placed into the fire alone. Talent is infectious, it rubs off, talent grows talent.

Being an understudy to your own heroes, being taken under the wing of a mentor, is all a part of the quickening. When I was working with former European boxing champion Jim McDonnell he was training Scott Welch – the British heavyweight champion at the time – for the world title. Jim would send him all over the world to train as a sparring partner with better fighters so that he could grow in their light. Similarly top heavyweight amateurs would regularly visit their gym to get in and do a few rounds with Scott. This all speeds up the growth of your talent.

The first time I broke through the ground was when I started my life as a nightclub doorman. I was just a raw kid with very little idea of how to handle myself in volatile situations. I was fortunate enough to attract the instructional eye of a veteran doorman called John ‘Awesome’ Anderson (I talk a lot more about this great mentor in *Watch My Back*). He saw potential in me; actually he saw a sincere thirst for knowledge. He worked with me every night for many years. Just watching him work and being around him helped mould me into a person with enough self-control to handle anything that life threw at me. What he showed me I took away and practised diligently.

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This never happened until I made it happen by breaking through the ground. When I did (in this case securing a job on probably the toughest door in the city) John, the other doormen, the environment, the customers, the police were the light that shone on me. I did not bask in this light (all right, I did a little bit), rather I converted it into energy. Over the period of a few years I grew beyond recognition. The shy lad with a fear of violent confrontation was suddenly handling life-threatening situations on a regular basis. The quickening changed me almost beyond recognition.

Steve Goddard, the T-shirt maker-turned-sculptor, is another case. It wasn't until he had developed his skills to a decent level that he started to attract attention. He made this happen by sending his work out for people to see, trying to sell his work, trying to get it displayed. As his work improved and he started to attract attention from the people above him in sculpting (and he converted that attention to energy) he really started to grow. Suddenly he was around and became friends with some of the best sculpting talent in the world. Although he was not yet up to their standard he knew he could get there and he did not hesitate to copy and mimic them to help develop new techniques and nurture the talent that he had already grown. And he wasn't just around brilliant sculptors, he also attracted talent from every conceivable field, other people at the top of their respective game; agents, exhibitors, sellers, artists, pop stars, models, moguls – everyone who was anyone suddenly became accessible to him. You don't just have to be around other sculptors to develop your sculpting,

you can be inspired by writers, poets, actors – in fact anyone that is in the same stratosphere can become an influence and help you grow.

This is the time for the final commitment; the quickening. When Steve started to get this kind of light, he needed the time to convert it into energy. And that takes a full on, life-changing commitment. If you have some of the best people in the world offering you advice and guidance to help you grow you need the time to be able to take that advice and convert it. There is no way that Steve would have been able to do that and run a printing business at the same time. He had to make a decision; did he want to stay as a good, but not great, sculptor and balance it with the running of his printing business, or was he ready for the third cycle of growth? In which case it would mean selling his business and becoming a full-time sculptor. He made the decision to sell his business and make the full-time commitment to his art.

He made the final shape shift. The final commitment. He has never looked back. Whereas before he had to divide his time between running a business and practising his sculpting, now all he had to do was work all day and every day making beautiful art.

So, the quickening is committing to your goal as a full-time endeavour, immersing yourself fully, making a commitment to place all your energy into being the best. That means sacrifice. Everyone in television writing wants to be Paul Abbott (one of the most prolific and successful TV writers, responsible for *Clocking Off*, *Cracker*, *Shameless*, *Linda Green* and many more) but how many people want to commit themselves to ten hours a

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day of writing (which Paul classes as an easy day)? And not only that, the pressure of writing at such a high standard – and everyone expecting better with each new effort – must be tremendous. It does not necessarily mean that you have to live the life of a monk to make it happen, but it does mean existing on a higher plane of pressure.

There are probably people out there already working full-time on their art, already in the third cycle of growth, who might be wondering why it hasn't happened for them yet, even though they have made that final commitment. Individual circumstances differ but what I can say from my own experience is that it is either not your time yet or perhaps you have not made quite the commitment you should have, even if you think you have. I once read about an actor who was being interviewed about his *quite successful* TV career. He was complaining that he had never been offered the film roles that he really wanted (Hollywood had not called) but in the same breath he admitted that as a family man he was not prepared to be away from his wife and kids for any length of time. In fact he did not want to take any job out of his own county, let alone country. Two things jumped immediately to mind; one, perhaps he was in the wrong trade, as acting is all about being away from home for long periods of time. Two, he was not thinking broadly enough. When Paul McCartney was faced with the same dilemma he found a way to have his proverbial cake and eat it. He took his wife and kids everywhere with him, including on tour. He made arrangements for his children to continue their education on tour by hiring a tutor. He made it happen.

It is too easy to look at something head on and say, 'Don't like it, can't do it!' rather than walk around the problem and find an opening that can make it work for you and for everyone else. What you think of as a full on commitment might actually be a compromised commitment. In the writing world there is a plethora of what are known as mid-list writers, who are always complaining about the fact that their publishers do not promote them enough, the shops won't take enough of their titles, or their editor cuts their best work. They are doomed to stay mid-list because they do not take responsibility for where they are.

If you don't like being in the mid-lists do something about it.

Arnold Schwarzenegger, before he was widely known, once managed to get a fitness book to the top of the *New York Times* bestsellers list by getting out on the road and literally selling the book door to door. He was told that fitness books were notoriously poor sellers (mid-list or below) and that he should not expect too much from the title he had published. Rather than take that as a given he got out on the road and toured the book into the bestsellers.

When I read this I was really inspired. I decided to do the same with my own first book *Watch My Back*. I was faced with a similar problem; mine was classed as a niche book that was not expected to sell in large quantities. I did a thirty-two city tour, visited over fifty shops, I was on the telly several times, radio loads of times, I was in a glut of mainstream magazines, one of which did a poster campaign to help me promote the tour. I saw it and I made it happen. I relied on no one

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(though many people made the tour and the sales possible, not least my publishers Summersdale). You are where you want to be. If you don't like where you are see yourself somewhere better, and when the opportunities to make that shift are proffered, do not ignore them or turn away.

To be the best, to make that final commitment – to create a quickening – you have to give everything, you have to risk everything, you may have to change everything. And when you do the universe will contrive to realise your dream.

When I was in judo this meant that I dropped everything else and just lived judo; I would live, eat and breathe my subject matter until there was no separation between me and my art. While writing I committed myself to writing for extremely long hours, re-write after re-write. I also committed myself to a higher and higher standard, constantly aiming my work at a broader, more demanding audience, the best magazines, the top newspapers. With films it meant a huge and often dispiriting learning curve that I sometimes thought would never end. I would look at a rejected script and be completely unable to see where the faults were. There were literally tears with some of the rewrites. The worst part was not knowing what I was doing right and what I was doing wrong. It meant dumping my safety harness of what paid the bills and flying solo. I could quite easily have stayed where I was, but I needed to grow.

Courage and a sense of daring are the prerequisite for growth. You cannot explore new worlds without leaving the shore.

SHAPE SHIFTER

So the quickening is simple in concept; make it (whatever your 'it' is) your entire world, surround yourself by and immerse yourself in the paraphernalia of writing, acting, skiing, running, racing, lifting, fighting, sculpting or whatever your passion is. And once you have immersed yourself have a good look around you, make sure that a higher proportion of the people around you are where you want to be, in other words make sure that they are more accomplished than you. It is no good being in a class of *pretty good* artists, there is no room for you to grow there. You need to be in a master's class, surrounded by the best talent on the planet so that there is no limitation to your potential.

Like a fish that is placed in a bigger bowl, you will grow to accommodate your surroundings.

This is a basic universal law.

People say that your wealth (artistic, physical, mental, spiritual and monetary) is proportionate to that of your top three influences. I know plenty of people who want to excel but who surround themselves not with higher influences, but with lower influences.

Who are your top three influences (and I am not talking about idols and heroes that you read about in magazines or see on the telly)?

Have a good look around you, who are you being influenced by? Who is above you?

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If you are in a class where you are top boy or girl there is no room for you to grow. Like a plant that has outgrown its pot you will become root bound.

So what is the best way to attract these kinds of influences?

Do what every aspirant does. Get your work shown.

Escher, the great artist, sent his early efforts out to the people he admired. They saw something in his work and one or two took him under their wing (gave him light). My friend John Smyth, one of the best cartoonists in the country, actually writes to everyone that he admires and many of them write back to him. A lot of playwrights and screenwriters invent characters in their plays for the actors who they really admire, just so that they get to meet and be influenced by them. I wrote the lead in my short film *Bouncer* for Ray Winstone because he was one of the people that I wanted as an influence.

When my book *Watch My Back* was being published, I sent a copy to Bob Sykes at *Martial Arts Illustrated* magazine for a review; he passed it onto Peter Consterdine who was one of the most respected martial artists in Britain at the time. He liked it so much that he not only reviewed it, he also wrote the book's foreword. We became fast friends and later partners in the BCA, a seminal self-defence association that has positively influenced the growth of martial arts (specifically self protection) around the world.

It was also *Watch My Back* that introduced me to one of the best living British playwrights, Jim Cartwright. He loved the book, he saw something raw in it that he really liked and he asked me if I would be interested in

adapting the book to film for his newly-founded film company Destiny Films. He gave me masses of light (even though he was probably not even aware of it) by encouraging my talent. By meeting Jim I also got to meet his business partner Martin Carr, a great producer and someone who has become a huge influence on me in both my writing and my life. It was because of Jim and Martin that I wrote my first screenplay and my first stage play and realised I had a future in this genre.

Similarly when I was heavily into martial arts I sent my work to people all over the world. One day I had a phone call from the martial arts film star Richard Norton. He wanted to introduce the work and me to his friend and fellow actor, Chuck Norris. This resulted in me being invited by Mr Norris to teach for him at his national convention in Las Vegas, Nevada.

When you get one influence it automatically introduces you to many more.

Many of the influences you get will come as a direct result of the work you put out. People are always looking for a new voice, a new sound, a different approach, a unique look – and you will be exactly that for someone out there.

Someone will give you a chance. If you make good with that then they will give you another chance, perhaps on a bigger project; if that goes well and you are the right person, you are on the inner circle. And once you have reached the inner sanctum the fight changes – it will no longer be about getting recognition or money for your work, rather it will be about handling success, finding the time to meet the massive demands for your work, having to say no sometimes, keeping

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your diary free for long enough to grab a tea break – the pressures vary from vocation to vocation, but the reality is the same; you will have to fight for your own time and stay centred.

We pass this way but once, if we can use our success to make another person's life a little better for having met us then it will all have been worthwhile.



Epilogue

So, there we have it. The art of shape shifting. A pragmatic method of achieving your goals and dreams.

Does it work?

If it didn't work you would not be reading this book, because it is written by a man who made his dreams a living reality with this very method. Don't take my word for it: take the information out for a ride and see what you get. I suspect that you already know it is true, so all my words will do is trigger that information tightly locked inside you and allow it free rein in your mind.

You know it is true, even if at this moment you are unable to completely act upon it. You know the same as I know and the same as everyone knows; that success is our birthright, it is our legacy and it is never, never, never a lottery.

Success is a choice, one that you make as and when you are ready. Are you ready?

Thank you for picking this book up and giving it a life.

God is already blessing you.

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