

Managing Personal Change

An email series of articles addressing different aspects and perspectives on managing personal change

Each article is approximately 1200 words. All of the ideas and resources referred in this series are based on my own personal experiences and are available on the website. Use the site index and site search tool to access:

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Contents

1. Welcome and Introduction.....	3
2. How Things Are.....	7
3. 4 Big Reasons Why We Get Stuck.....	12
4. Key Point Summary & Recommendations.....	18
5. Why We Think The Way We Do.....	20
6. How Inner Resistance To Change Occurs.....	26
7. Beyond Belief.....	28
8. A Whistle Stop Tour – Part 2.....	34
9. Recommendations.....	39
10. Not So Odd After All.....	42
11. How We All Get Stuck In The Mud.....	47
12. This Too Will Pass.....	51
13. How To Do Mindfulness Practises.....	56
14. And The Beat Goes Om... ..	59
15. Who would you be without that thought?.....	64
16. Is that really you?.....	68

Managing Personal Change (1)

Welcome and Introduction

Welcome

Welcome and thank you for subscribing to the “Managing Personal Change” series of emails.

In this first message I want to manage your expectations carefully. I am going to lay out my stall – declare my agenda – nail my colours to the mast so that you are in no doubt about where I am coming from, and why, and what’s in store.

All based on my direct personal experience

Everything that you read from here onwards is based entirely on my own direct, lived experience of life. Everything I suggest and all resources that I suggest or recommend are things that I have done (or still do) and that work for me.

I am NOT a therapist, priest, Zen master, psychotherapist, mullah, rabbi, teacher or counsellor and I am no way qualified to offer any form of professional support or guidance. You alone are responsible for how you use or apply anything I may recommend or suggest. Are we clear and are you OK on that?

Only the healthy

If you are undergoing any form of counselling, professional treatment or support (or if you feel you need to be) please stick with what your professional expert is telling you – or seek professional help (if you need to.)

Nothing I share with you will harm you, quite the contrary, but experience has shown that it is far more beneficial to follow one path or line of treatment and stick to it for the duration of the treatment – and as I have already told you, I am not a professional!

It's probably best to think of this series of emails as one fellow traveller sharing with others...

Spiritual?!

A few paragraphs back I used the word “spiritual” – why did I do that and what do I mean by it?

When I use the word “spiritual” I am not referring to any particular faith tradition nor am I seeking to push or promote any particular belief or faith position.

I use the word in a more generic sense to refer to or to point to the higher or more transcendent dimensions of human experience, awareness or consciousness.

My whole perspective on life is (as far as I am capable) holistic and multi-dimensional. So I look for generic truth in all sorts of seemingly unlikely and unconnected places.

The duck test and the big assumption

I want to tell you briefly about an observational analytical process that I frequently use and that I refer to as triangulation – or more commonly the “duck test”.

In trigonometry and geometry, triangulation is defined as the process of determining the location of a point by measuring angles to it from known points at either end of a fixed baseline, rather than measuring distances to the point directly.

Before I explain what I mean by triangulation (aka the “duck test”) and how to apply it, I must declare a belief or big assumption that I hold and that underlies this approach, and that is that truth is generic and universal – however, whenever and wherever it manifests.

If you do not hold or share this belief, then this process probably won't work for you. But that's OK – we're all different, and we function

differently. If this offends you – umm maybe you need to hit the “unsubscribe” link below?

Truth may appear in different ways – “*the truth may come in strange disguises*” - but if the filters in our minds are set wide enough and our minds are truly open we will see it. Or “seek and you will find”.

So when I see something in any diverse area of life or field of enquiry that resonates - it maybe an idea, a perspective, or a dimension - I pay careful attention to it.

Pointing to a generic or universal truth

When at some other time, I see the core or essence of the same thing reappear in my “mental field of vision”, re-expressed in a different framing, context and language I really start to pay attention.

If this occurs a third time I apply the “duck test” – that is “if it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, then chances are it is a duck” – in which case the triangulation applies and I can see that each of the three seemingly different manifestations (by framing, context and language) are in fact pointing to a generic or universal truth.

Everything that follows from here on is my perception of generic or universal truth.

Hands on and not a talking shop

I love philosophising and “shooting the breeze” but this is not the place for that. This is a business site for business minded people – so in the emails that follow I am going to “cut to the chase” and show what works and (briefly) why.

There is of course much philosophy, information and knowledge that sits behind the material that follows – and I may even know just a bit more than I’m prepared to let on in this context – but our main focus is going to be hands on and practical.

We are going to be focused very specifically on suggesting and providing proven resources that can help you develop and enhance your capacity for adaptive responses to imposed change and that can significantly help you reduce your stress levels.

OK, more than enough said!

If you are still reading this – great - let's get the “show on the road!”

Coming up...

- ❑ **How things are**
 - ❑ **“I did it MY way”**
 - ❑ **Yes but...**
 - ❑ **2 simple things**
 - ❑ **4 big reasons why we get stuck**
 - ❑ **So how on earth do I learn to think and stop thinking?**
-

Managing Personal Change (2)

How Things Are...

How things are...

Nobody has the perfect life. We all struggle and strive to attain health, wealth and personal happiness. Yet these three big areas: our health, our wealth and our relationships are where we all get “hung out to dry” – sooner or later.

I say “sooner or later” because there have been many people I have known and whose lives I have been able to observe, from within the context of normal social interaction, and who really did seem to “have it all”.

In some cases I went through periods of feeling quite envious of these folk who led – or appeared to lead – such charmed lives. Yet over a period of time – usually five to ten years but sometimes quite a lot longer - what I have noticed is that even those seemingly special ones who lead such apparent charmed lives were in fact nursing secret and private difficulties and unexpected tragedies – fractured family relationships, deaths, serious illness, sudden illness, business failure, redundancy, money problems etc.

I too have been severely tested in some of these areas.

It is as though there is an inbuilt design flaw that ensures that we all suffer at some point - one way or another.

Suffering is an integral part of the human condition

It is how things are.

There are often times when despite our best efforts, there is nothing more we can do to alleviate or mitigate the suffering that we are experiencing.

There also times when there is nothing at all we can do to alleviate it.

In these circumstances we have two powerful options:

We can resist it or we can accept it.

“I did it MY way”

We are all constantly impacted by change. Things manifest, are created and appear and then they decay, dissipate and disappear.

Nothing lasts forever. Well that's not strictly true – no THING lasts forever.

In my experience, most of us are deeply ambivalent about change. On the one hand we generally welcome new things appearing in our lives yet on the other hand we feel deeply threatened by change and it is the source of a great deal of stress, hassle and strain.

The tipping point is choice.

Change that I choose is welcome - but change that is imposed upon me is not welcome.

An additional factor is what imposed change means to ME! What does this change mean to MY life, MY job, and MY financial security?

The way our minds work, we automatically create what we perceive to be MY life and it is usually all nicely packaged up with clear boundaries defining my own personal sense of who I am and how things are.

Another way of expressing this is to say that we all automatically develop our own unique inner map of reality shaped by our own personal early influences and from this we develop our own personal beliefs based on that map - largely unconsciously - to navigate us through life and primarily to keep us safe.

Functioning, as we do, in this way - things are seen as separate and largely static, our perception and general experience is that time proceeds in a linear manner from past to future, there is "me here" and the world "out there", and there are events and things that I don't like that happen to me.

This is our "default setting" – and so much of what we do is motivated by our deep inbuilt need to keep things as they are - to preserve the boundaries around "my life" - to preserve MY survival and MY safety and MY comfort.

So change – and especially imposed change - becomes something to be avoided and/or resisted, unless it's on my terms and within my control.

This immediately creates a problem for most of us because we are now living through times of great turbulence and many of us are experiencing imposed change that seriously affects all areas of MY life.

This perspective is very much in line with Charles Darwin's famous observation that:

"It isn't the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones who are most responsive to change"

However, an adaptive response is only possible when we either have the personal capacity to do this, or when we have the resources to help us.

There are only three possible responses to imposed change:

We can resist it, and increase our suffering. We can adapt to it. We can accept it.

To paraphrase Reinhold Niebuhr:

- ❑ We need the courage and the capacity to adapt to the imposed change when it is possible to DO something
- ❑ We need to know how to stop resisting and to accept imposed change when it is NOT possible to do something
- ❑ We need the insight to recognise the difference and to determine the most resourceful response

Yes BUT...

I hear you say - Stephen you don't understand, my employers are taking advantage of me, I am about to be made redundant, I am in debt and my finances are a mess, my wife/husband/partner and I keep arguing, I am under so much pressure – I need to DO something – anything NOW.

My friend I have been there – believe me – more than once, and over many years, I do know what it feels like to be \$200k in debt, with no credit, no paying clients, a mortgage company foreclosing, creditors suing me and with no apparent prospects of recovery... It's hard and it is painful and it is very difficult.

There is no magic bullet.

So how to cope?

2 simple things

It all boils down to these 2 simple things:

- (1) How to think
- (2) How to stop thinking

We need to learn how to change the way we think so that we can maximise our capacity to think in the most constructive and positive way.

We need to learn how to NOT think – that is to STOP thinking – and to be able to do so at will.

This may all seem deeply simplistic, and it is in fact very easy to understand the idea of “how to think” and “how to stop thinking” but it is extremely difficult to put into practise.

This is what we will be focusing on over the next few weeks, and I will show you how to put this into practise - so you needn't take as long as I did to master it!

I spent the first 30 years of my adult life learning how to think and the last 5 years learning how to stop thinking.

Like many/most people I believed that if only I could master this mental skill or that skill I could change my life. If only I could always stay positive, exercise enough faith, do my affirmations etc I could “crack it”.

It took me at least 30 years – much soul searching and a lot of suffering to discover that I needed to learn how to stop thinking – that my thinking mind is actually very limited.

Managing Personal Change (3)

4 Big Reasons Why We Get Stuck

4 big reasons why we get stuck

This is a common experience - and we get stuck with this for at least 4 reasons:

(1) Misguided beliefs and the BIG lie

The “self-help industry” generates \$billions per year, and many of us buy books and attend courses on how to “improve” ourselves. Yet most of the time we don’t change. We can’t change. We have unconscious - and thus hidden - resistance. And yet we believe that if we keep on trying we can somehow gain control of our lives. Then we deal with our resistance and still life is hard and things don’t always improve – or move in the directions we think that we want.

We are told by the “experts” that if we take “massive action”, practise positive thinking, or learn this or that skill we can somehow create or “co-create” the future we desire.

There is a prevalent belief circulating the western world in general and the US in particular that our thoughts create our total experience and that ultimately we are responsible for everything that happens to us.

This belief postulates that at some deeper level - or maybe in a previous existence or pre-existent state - we have chosen these things that happen to us.

There are the “science of the mind” teachings, positive thinking teachings, and more recently the “law of attraction” teachings.

But – whilst all of my lived and observed life experience has shown me that how we think does very largely affect how we experience what happens to us – and that identifying and dealing with unconscious

resistance and limiting beliefs is extremely important – it most definitely does not create, attract or repel everything - or indeed much at all of that which we experience.

I say this with conviction because the evidence does not support the “I can create any future I want” belief.

Life is infinitely more complex than we can comprehend, and it also inter-connected and inter-dependent in ways that we do not conventionally fully appreciate.

Our lives are woven together in ways and for reasons that we often cannot comprehend – and yet – each of us is a vital thread in another person’s tapestry.

There are many people who have been inordinately commercially successful and/or personally successful in their relationships and family life – or who have enjoyed remarkably good health - and there is nothing to suggest that their success is attributable to how they think.

There are many people who think good positive uplifting and empowering thoughts and they are not successful or blessed in these areas.

I headed this section “the big lie” because in my experience the lie is in the overstatement of a partial truth and in the misdirection that anything can be resolved anywhere “if I put my mind to it”.

This is a gross deception and it leads so many people to keep on striving to find “it” – “the missing piece of the jigsaw” and thus to stay in a perpetual state of seeking and aspiration and desire for something “out there” in the future that will “make me feel happy, fulfilled and complete”.

Yes how we think matters – but far less than we think it does.

It matters to the extent that we are as well equipped as possible to cope with what is happening to us NOW – what is often imposed upon us. But it does not create very much of what happens to us.

(2) Most of what we think is outside of our conscious awareness

Jung is supposed to have said something along the lines of that until we make that which is unconscious conscious, it will control us and we will call it fate.

We like to think – and are often led to believe by the zeitgeist or spirit of the age – that we are masters of our destiny. Yet that is just not true, as the vast majority of what we think is outside of our conscious awareness.

And a lot of that thinking that is going on outside of our conscious awareness is deeply resistant to our conscious efforts to change.

So even though how we think matters far less than we think it does, and even though how we think has far less effect on the circumstances of our lives than we are often taught, even our feeble attempts to change our attitudes and behaviours towards what we experience are largely blocked by hidden unconscious resistance to personal change.

(3) We can't let go and TRUST

And as if all that isn't bad enough – even when we are able to accept the limitations of the power of our thoughts and even when we are able to identify and deal with our inner resistance to personal change we run into another big problem...

We eventually come to the realisation that we just can't sort it out ourselves – it is beyond our capacity to deal with – we reach the limits of our thinking minds.

We reach the point where we have to let go and trust... something that is beyond us – and it is this realisation that is very, very threatening and scary because it means relinquishing control – letting go of the notion that I AM IN CONTROL – eventually to the point of letting go of the whole notion of who “I” is.

Most of us would rather – and in most cases we actually do – die before we are willing and able to give up – to surrender – to let go of control of our lives.

And underlying this problem is an even bigger deception or lie...and that is the lie that “I” am in control of anything...

And yet it is in letting go and trusting... that we find the only path to real and permanent personal change and transformation.

[And just as a footnote: I know we are not getting into religious or philosophical discussion in this short series – but this is what lies at the root of the idea of the Christian “way of the cross” and “death to self”, the Buddhist “dropping of the self” and “realisation of emptiness” and the Islamic jihad in the sense of a personal and internal “holy war” to achieve submission to “righteous living”, and similar expressions in other faith traditions.]

(4) We can't stop thinking

A big part of letting go – even just for a while – and escaping the tyranny of our thought is to learn the “unthinkable” – how to stop thinking.

I feel that Eckhart Tolle summarises this rather well:

"Most people spend their entire life imprisoned within the confines of their own thoughts. They never go beyond a narrow, mind-made, personalized sense of self that is conditioned by the past.

In you, as in each human being, there is dimension of consciousness far deeper than thought.

It is the very essence of who you are".

So how on earth do I learn to think and learn to stop thinking?

Well firstly, you have got to want to!

Reading this will not change you. Doing as I have done, and spending years and \$1000's on books and course and materials won't change you. Why? Being informed ABOUT something is not the same as knowing it from personal experience.

To change you have to do some work on yourself – test and experiment and engage with change processes. You have to be prepared to let go of old ways of being, thinking and behaving.

In my experience, the vast majority of people who say they want to change don't change.

Most people reading this won't change because they don't really want to change. They may on the surface – consciously – believe that they want to change, but there is usually another hidden belief or assumption that will resist their apparent desire to change.

Most of us are so attached to how we are – at an unconscious level we feel safe with how we are (even when it so obviously isn't working) – that in practise we would rather die than change (and we usually do).

The "knowing doing gap"

There is a “knowing doing gap”, and this is: *"The gap between our intentions, things we actually want to carry out, and what we are actually able to do."* [Kegan - “Immunity to Change”]

A dramatic and poignant illustration of the "knowing doing" gap can be seen in research in the US healthcare sector.

"If you look at people who are prescribed maintenance medications, people who should take, for example, a statin drug for the rest of their lives to control blood pressure or high cholesterol and stay alive, you would assume 100pc of these people would do so, wouldn't you?"

It turns out that research carried out here in Massachusetts shows that anywhere from between a third to a half of all Americans on maintenance medications, who understand why they're on them, don't take them after a year."

Even more dramatically:

"Another study showed that if heart doctors tell their seriously at-risk heart patients they will literally die if they don't change their lifestyle, only one in seven, on average, is actually able to make the changes..."
"These are the kind of stark reminders which show us that the usual explanations for why people don't make changes are pretty weak..."

This reminds me of the story of the Zen master who was asked by a student what it took to reach enlightenment.

The Zen master grabbed the student by the scruff of the neck and held his head under water in a nearby water trough. 30 seconds later he pulled the students head up and then immediately plunged his head back under water.

This process repeated a few times until eventually the Zen master relented - whereupon he said to the gasping half drowned student "when you seek Zen as you now seek air - THEN you will find it."

So you are most likely to succeed with personal change for either or both of the following reasons (which are really two sides of the same coin):

(1) Aspiration – you are inwardly motivated or drawn towards this

(2) Desperation – your survival (in any sense) depends on it!

The second answer to the question of: “*So how on earth do I learn to think and stop thinking?*” is that you need proven tools and resources that have realistic and achievable objectives, and that is the whole point of this series of emails.

Managing Personal Change (4)

Key Point Summary

Key Point Summary

- ❑ **Suffering is an integral part of the human condition.**
 - We can resist it or accept it.
- ❑ **Change that I choose is welcome – but change that is imposed upon me is not welcome**
- ❑ **There are only three possible responses to imposed change:**
 - We can resist it, and increase our suffering.
 - We can adapt to it.
 - We can accept it.
- ❑ **It all boils down to these 2 simple things:**
 - How to think
 - How to stop thinking
- ❑ **The 4 big reasons we get stuck:**
 - The big lie that “I can create any future I want”
 - Most of what we think is outside of our conscious awareness
 - We can’t let go and trust
 - We can’t stop thinking
- ❑ **The "knowing doing gap"**
 - The gap between our intentions, things we actually want to carry out, and what we are actually able to do.
- ❑ **You are most likely to succeed with personal change for either or both of the following reasons:**

- Aspiration – you are inwardly motivated or drawn towards this
 - Desperation – your survival (in any sense) depends on it!
-

Coming up...

- ❑ **Why we think the way we do**
 - ❑ **How your inner map of reality gets created**
 - ❑ **Filters & the filtering mechanism**
 - ❑ **How inner resistance to change occurs**
 - ❑ **How to change the way we think**
-

Managing Personal Change (5)

Why We Think The Way We Do

Why we think the way we do

We are all the product of our own ethnic, national, social and religious backgrounds we have an inbuilt inner map that see life from the perspective of that background.

This inner map applies a whole range of filters related to the characteristics and profile of our broad environmental background.

Overview

Here's the big picture of how your internal map of reality operates to generate your feelings, thoughts, and behaviours.

First, you experience something through your senses. You see something, hear something, touch or feel something, smell something, or taste something. In other words, you have an experience.

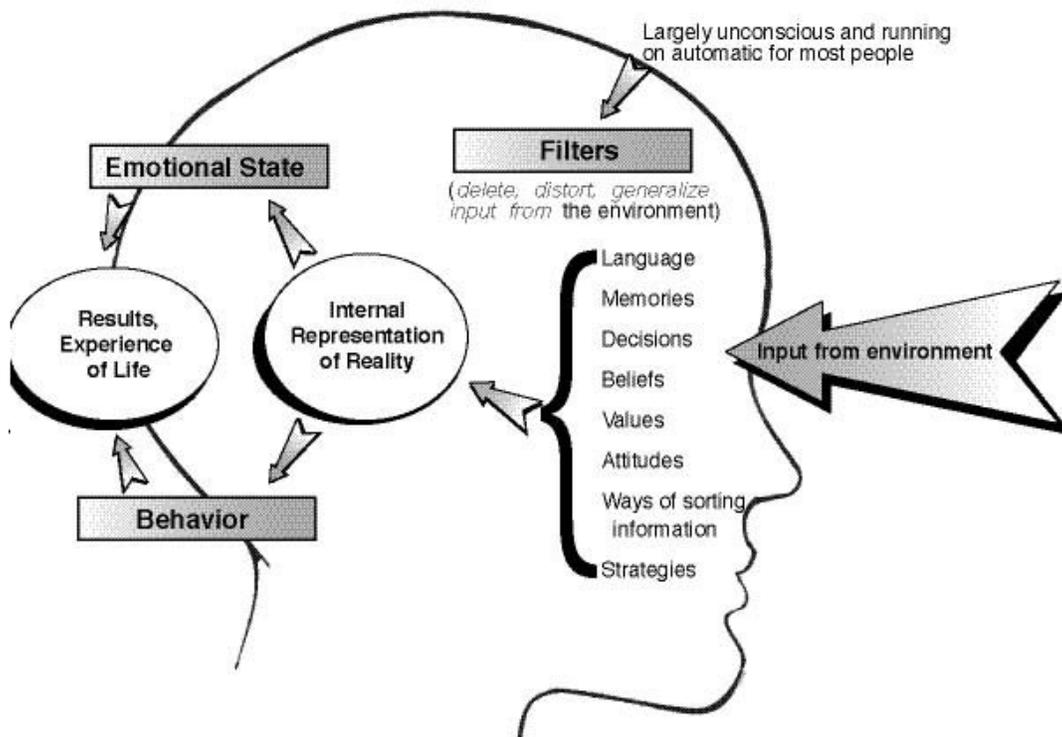
These sensory impressions first pass through a number of filters, which delete huge amounts of it, distort it in various ways, and create generalizations. These filters are hugely important in determining how you create your reality.

With what is left after this filtering process, which happens almost instantaneously and almost totally unconsciously, you then create some sort of internal representation of reality.

This internal representation is really a pretty impoverished copy of reality, because much of what came in through your senses has been deleted, distorted and generalized in a number of ways. You've made a

map that represents reality, but it isn't reality, and it isn't really very accurate.

How your inner map of reality gets created



A bit more detail...

Modalities

These internal representations are made using one of several thinking modalities, which mirror our external senses. An internal representation can therefore be an internal picture, an internal sound, an internal smell, and internal taste, and internal feeling or touch sensation, or internal dialog—what most people consider to be thinking.

Sub-modalities

These internal representations can be constructed with a number of variables, which are called sub-modalities.

Just to give you an idea of what a sub-modality is, an internal picture could be large or small, colour or black and white, close to you or far away. These are three categories of visual sub-modalities. These sub-modalities are like a filing system. They're the mental equivalent of putting some documents in a folder of a certain colour and other things in a folder of another colour, to help you tell them apart and keep track of them.

It is through sub-modalities that you make the millions of distinctions you make every second.

It is through sub-modalities that you are able to recognize faces and voices, keep track of beliefs and values, likes and dislikes, and millions of distinctions you make in every moment.

Strategies

We string these internal representations; each made in a certain modality and using certain sub-modalities, into sequences called strategies.

Everything you do and everything you feel is the end result of a strategy, a series of internal representations in a certain order.

So you can see that strategies are very important in determining how you experience life.

If you procrastinate, it's the end result of a strategy. If you're motivated, it's the end result of a strategy. If you're happy, sad, anxious, depressed, or experience any other internal state, it's the end point of a strategy.

And, as you might have guessed, by changing a strategy, you can change the end result.

Cybernetic loops

These strategies ultimately end in either behaviour or a state of mind, and these strategies and states of mind create your experience of life,

internally and externally. And, these three items—internal representations, whether singly or in sequences called strategies, internal states, and external behaviours are what scientists call a cybernetic loop.

This means that whenever you change one of them, the other two change. So if you change your internal representations, you change your behaviour and your state. If you change your state, it changes your behaviour and your internal representations. If you change your behaviour, it changes your state and your internal representations.

Filters & the filtering mechanism

Sensory input, as it comes in, is filtered in some way, through a fairly large filtering mechanism. This filtering mechanism makes up a significant part of your internal map of reality.

Some of these filters include your beliefs, values, memories, decisions, the language you speak, methods you have developed for sorting, storing, and retrieving information, your strategies for making decisions, and a few other things.

These filters do three main things. They delete, distort, and generalize. Though they do all of these things simultaneously, let's look at them one at a time.

Delete Filters

These filters delete some of the information. There's just too much coming at you all the time, and a whole lot of it you just don't notice—you immediately delete it, you disregard it.

As you walk through a room, there are an infinite number of details that hit your eye, but you don't notice them all. You don't notice every spot on the carpet, every scratch on the furniture, every whorl in the wallpaper, every item in the room, and so on. And the same thing could be said for smells, sounds, physical sensations, and so on.

When we talk about ideas coming at you, for instance, or evidence coming at you that you might take into account when deciding what to

believe, what to do, who to be attracted to, how to make a decision, or something like that, we tend to delete whatever does not agree with our current beliefs, values, and so on.

Something would have to be huge and right in your face, and also, at the same time, be contrary to what you believe, in order to override your tendency to automatically delete those things that don't agree with your beliefs.

Distort Filters

The second thing these filters do is distort what comes in. There are many ways this could happen, but the one that's pertinent here is that we distort what comes in, again, so that it verifies what we already believe and value, what we've already decided, and so on.

We take the part of what's coming in that agrees, and keep it, and take the parts that don't agree, and get rid of them, and in this way, we distort the pure input we receive. Or, we might add something that really isn't there, and distort it in that way, or create some other misperception that distorts what's coming in so that it conforms to the parameters of our current map of reality.

Here's an example. If you believe that no one will ever love you, and someone turns you down when you ask them for a date, you might see that as evidence that you are, indeed, unlovable, even if the real reason was that the person was already in a committed relationship, or had another commitment that night, or you just weren't their type. You'll either leave out some of the evidence, or add something to it, in order to distort what's happened and make it agree with your belief.

Generalise Filters

The third thing these filters do is to generalize. Generalizing is not necessarily a bad thing—in fact none of these three results of the filtering process are necessarily bad, as long as you do them consciously, as long as you know you're doing them, and have some reason for doing them, and you're doing it because it gives you a particular result you want. If

we didn't make generalizations, we would have to re-learn what a door was and how to open it every time we came to one.

Generalizations can be a bad thing, though, when they cause us to not see the differences that make something unique, and, because of that, assume that it's exactly the same as something else that's in the same general class, but has some significant differences.

Let's say someone you were in a relationship with cheated on you. They stole money from you and left. If you generalize that to mean "all men will steal from me" or "all men will take advantage of me," and assume that just because other men share the same gender with the jerk who stole from you, they're also the same in other respects, including being dishonest and unreliable, you won't be seeing things clearly and realistically, and might do something to create an outcome you don't want.

One clue that generalizations are being made is when you hear words like "all, never, always, no one, everyone"—global words.

So these filters delete, distort, and generalize the input as it comes in, and after that happens, what you perceive is not the pure input that initially came in through your senses. You perceive a filtered version, and that filtered version may or may not serve you and contribute to you getting what you want in life.

Next, what happens is that you make some sort of an internal representation of the results of this filtering process. In other words, you make an internal representation of things you see, as an internal picture, what you hear, as an internal sound, and so on. Again, this goes on automatically, very rapidly, and almost always unconsciously.

The filtering mechanisms, and the whole process of making internal representations, and the resulting states and behaviours, pretty much happens unconsciously and automatically.

Your ways of filtering—which, remember, include beliefs and values and all the other things I listed—and your ways of making, storing, remembering, and retrieving internal representations, ultimately create all the nuances of your life and how you experience it.

Please Note: This presentation draws heavily on and fully acknowledges the work of the late Bill Harris of Centerpointe Research Institute in his "Life Principles Course"

Managing Personal Change (6)

How Inner Resistance To Change Occurs

Summary - How inner resistance to change occurs

Based on the descriptions we have just examined, here is a summary of how inner resistance to managing personal change develops and why, and how it manifests:

- ❑ From early childhood onwards, we all develop our own inner map of reality
- ❑ As we develop, we understand, interpret and relate to the world "out there" through this inner map
- ❑ Our capacity to be conscious or aware of our own inner map and especially how we create our experience of life through it is determined by our level of self-awareness
- ❑ However, for most of us, most of the time, this is an unconscious process
- ❑ In accordance with this inner map we have our own inner commitments to our own personal priorities
- ❑ Our inner hidden commitments have a high priority and will over-ride any counter intentions that conflict with them
- ❑ We assign this high priority because the hidden commitment is inextricably linked to an inner hidden perception that we have of our own physical, psychological, social or emotional safety
- ❑ This hidden commitment is (nearly always) outside of our conscious awareness
- ❑ The quickest and easiest way to identify our inner resistance is to observe our reactions and our behaviour in our attempts to change

If you can take charge of these things, and choose how you do them instead of having them just run on automatic pilot, you can make huge changes in how you experience life and the what kind of outcomes you get.

Coming up...

- ❑ Beyond belief**
 - ❑ It reverses “the rules of the game”**
 - ❑ Another big lie**
 - ❑ A whistle stop tour of life beyond the “thinking mind”**
 - ❑ So what are the benefits of being able to stop thinking?**
-

Managing Personal Change (7)

Beyond Belief

Beyond belief

Ok we've already covered the "easy bits" – how to change the way you think! We've looked at how the mind works and how we create our inner map of reality and how that determines how we interpret and thus experience life.

I have shared with you the powerful resources of self-talk and NLP which will change the way you think and enable you to overcome a lot of your resistance to change and to perform at peak performance.

For many people that may be enough.

However, at the beginning of this series I promised to show you how to stop thinking – and I will. But first I want to share with you a personal journey I embarked on some years ago without fully realising what I was getting into.

It reverses “the rules of the game”

I want you to think of the film “The Matrix” as a visual analogy and a general metaphor for what follows and I want to start with what happened when like Neo in the film, I metaphorically took and swallowed the red pill.

Truth is, I really have been "down the rabbit hole" with a lot of this over the last 10 years.

What I didn't know at the beginning of all this is that when we take Life seriously it takes us seriously – and that changes everything – in simple terms it reverses the “rules of the game”.

[By the way when I say “Life” you can substitute that for God, Allah, Emptiness, the Universe etc or whatever your own personal understanding or expression of a Higher Power is.]

I have been fascinated with the dynamics and mechanics of "what makes organisations tick" for as long as I can remember - which is probably about 50 years.

But I have also been equally fascinated with the "how to do life" dynamics that affects us all.

For many years I felt that these were two quite separate fields and lines of enquiry. However, I have come to the realisation that they are not. They are inter-connected. We are all inter-connected. Everything is inter-connected.

Ultimately there is no separate "I" in the sense of the ego as a "stand alone entity" that is distinct from everything and everyone else. It's an illusion and it dies when we physically die.

When you look deep enough and persist with your enquiry with the question "who am I?" and you try and "find yourself" - if you go deep enough there is nothing there except an "operating system" of largely automatically pre-programmed thoughts and responses that runs the bag of bones that we like to think of as "me".

Like the people in "The Matrix" virtually everybody is fooled by the illusion or (another) big lie that what we see is how things really are.

The reason we are fooled is because that is the way the human mind works (as I explained in the last email) – we are fooled by our thoughts, we are trapped in our thoughts and we can't think this one through - there really is no way out via the conventional functioning of the human mind.

Another big lie

The expression of this big lie or illusion in the major world religions is articulated with words like Samsara, Maya, The Evil One, Satan and The Devil etc.

But, when we stop thinking, and move beyond the mind we experience that we are more (far more) than the limited and conventional sense of self – we are spiritual beings (or energetic beings if you prefer that phrasing), and at that level we really and truly are all interconnected and part of one all encompassing everything (for want of a better word) – and in that dimension we live for ever.

“When... you step out of the content of your mind...the incessant stream of thinking slows down. Thoughts don’t absorb all your attention anymore, don’t draw you in totally. Gaps arise in between thoughts – spaciousness, stillness. You begin to realise how much vaster and deeper you are than your thoughts” [Eckhart Tolle]

I do not simply mean this as an idea or a concept but as a felt and experienced reality. The trouble is, for the vast majority of us, for the majority of the time, we just can't see it - our minds get in the way. I accept that this may alienate some readers, and if that's how you feel - then that's really OK, let's just acknowledge that we're on different paths - for the moment. You can take the blue pill and unsubscribe.

But if you're OK with what I've just said, or at least if you feel open minded, then please read on and let's see where this leads...

A whistle stop tour of life beyond the “thinking mind” – Part 1

Limits of conscious thinking

Human intelligence has a serious limitation. It is a scanning system of conscious attention, and that scanning system is linear—it examines the world in lines, as you would pass a flashlight beam across a darkened room, focusing on one thing at a time, sequentially.

To gain an education, we scan millions of lines of information. We do it that way because that’s the best our attention can do, scanning and taking in one or at least just a few bits of information at a time, one after another.

But the real world doesn’t happen one thing at a time, one thing after another. The real world is multidimensional, with a lot happening all at once, and it comes at us so fast and all at once in such a way that we could never scan it in the narrow focused linear way humans typically think.

Our real problem is that we confuse the world as-it-is with the world as-it-is-thought-about and described.

We confuse our thoughts and more importantly our emotional associations with an experience – with the experience. Reality is the territory – the unfiltered, uncategorized, direct experience now in the present moment.

The direct experience of eating tasty food – the unconditional love of a parent or child – the energy and abandonment of a good sexual experience - cannot be confused with our inner representations of them or the words we may use to attempt to describe these powerful experiences.

Imagine how many words you would need to describe the taste of freshly ground coffee to someone who has never heard of nor seen yet alone tasted coffee, compared with the directness of brewing them a cup and letting them taste it for themselves.

And the difference between the world as-it-is with the world as-it-is-thought-about and described is vast.

One is the map, and the other is the actual territory. And when you're not aware of yourself except in a symbolic way, when you're only aware of the map you've made of yourself, the "you" that consists of consciously reviewed words and symbols, the concept you have of who you are, you're not really aware of yourself at all.

You're like person eating a menu instead of a meal.

This confusion over who you are is why you feel chronically frustrated with life.

Limitations of language

A lot of what causes us to identify with this image we have, of ourselves and the world is built into our language. Notice that in our language, every sentence has a verb, an action of some sort, and a noun that does the action. But is this really the way it is?

So if there are no separate things, how can we have a noun, a separate thing, doing something? Isn't this, too, just a social convention, but one that doesn't describe reality accurately.

The structure of our language just reinforces that our concept of what is real (that there are separate things, that acts on other separate things) is real, when it isn't.

Your image of yourself is deficient. It has to be. It's just a map, an image, a concept you have of "you." It's the menu, but you are the meal itself.

You really are all the connections, all the processes of the universe, a centre of awareness smack in the middle of everything, and that everything is you.

The image of you is no more you than an idol is God.

Your mental image of yourself, your ego, your map of reality, keeps you from directly seeing and feeling who you are.

The double bind of language and articulation

The concepts we employ, the categorizations we apply and the words we choose and use to articulate a direct experience put us in a double bind, and it is this:

For everything we gain by being to verbalize and articulate an experience we lose an equal if not greater amount of the full meaning of that experience by the very process of articulation.

This lost meaning becomes exacerbated as the words we use to describe something are always heard or read within a context, framing and language.

There is always a context and framing and language.

To illustrate and personalize this right now, the words that I am writing to you here in this article - and that I can hear in my head as I type this - have a meaning to me that is created and shaped by my inner map of reality.

However you, as you read this will be receiving, filtering and interpreting these words about managing personal change with your inner map of reality.

What I mean to say and what you hear may not be the same thing!

This insight has serious and dramatic ramifications because families and societies have been divided and many wars have been fought over the meaning and interpretation of words.

In the field of religious beliefs there is so much argument, conflict and suffering over “correct” beliefs – or orthodoxy – declarations and adherence to propositional statements of faith.

Yet if we shift our focus to the meaning that lies behind or beyond the words – the meaning that transcends the words – the meaning that can only be fully grasped by experiencing it – then everything changes and divisions and barriers evaporate as we move beyond belief.

“Dogmas – religious, political, scientific – arise out of the erroneous belief that thought can encapsulate reality or the truth. Dogmas are collective conceptual prisons. And the strange thing is that people love their prison cells because they give them a sense of security and a false sense of ‘I know’.

Nothing has inflicted more suffering on humanity than its dogmas. It is true that every dogma crumbles sooner or later, because reality will eventually disclose its falseness; however, unless the basic delusion of it is seen for what it is, it will be replaced by others.”

What is basic delusion? Identification with thought. [Eckhart Tolle]

Managing Personal Change (8)

A Whistle Stop Tour – Part 2

A whistle stop tour of life beyond the “thinking mind” – Part 2

Time

Put simply there is no time!

Time – more accurately described as “clock time” or “psychological time” is a product of the mind.

The western view is that time is a one-way motion from the past to the future, one event following another, endlessly. What happens now and what will happen later seems to be a result of what has happened. In other words, the past drives the future.

The course of time is really like the course of a ship in the ocean. The ship moves, and leaves behind it a wake, and the wake fades out, and it tells us where the ship has been in the same way our past, and our memory of the past, tells us where we have been.

And as we look back into the past, we get to a point where our instruments, and the records left behind, fade away, just as the wake of the ship fades away, and eventually disappears.

The important point here is that the wake doesn't drive the ship. The ship creates the wake, and it always creates it in the NOW, and leaves a trail behind it.

The past is not a determinative factor. Creation happens in the present NOW and trails away in our memory, and eventually vanishes.

Foreground & background

The physical world that we see and live in and mistake as reality – or all there is – is only 50% of the equation.

The other 50% is the background – also referred to as emptiness, the void, the field of possibilities, the “ground of all being”, God, Allah etc.

The physical world is the world of the mind and exists in the foreground and is experienced through our senses.

Then there is the spiritual world – the background - from which all form emerges into the foreground, and into which it eventually dissolves.

The physical world of form could not exist without this background.

This is summed up in the cryptic Buddhist saying:

"Form is nothingness, and nothingness is form."

A universe of vibration, duality and attachment

This is a universe of vibration, and whether we think of vibration in terms of waves or particles, no crest of a wave can occur without a trough, and no particle can occur without a space or interval between itself and other particles.

There can be no on without off, no up without down.

Our senses are constructed in such a way that we notice and respond to the "on" but miss the "off", but that doesn't mean it isn't there, and that doesn't mean it isn't absolutely essential. The dark, the silent, the empty, the off interval, are ignored.

Consciousness ignores the intervals between one "on" and the next "on", but it could not notice the "on" without the existence of the "off."

Another expression of this vibratory aspect of the universe is duality.

Duality, or opposites, only *seems* to exist as opposites in that each side of the duality depends on the other side for its existence.

"Here" makes no sense without "there". "Not me" makes no sense without "me". "Good" makes no sense without "evil". Each of these can only exist in relation to the other.

Each of these seemingly opposite poles is one thing, not two. In being opposite, they are also inextricably tied to each other, and cannot exist independently.

They're like two sides of the same coin.

You can't have a one-sided coin, and the two aspects of duality cannot exist separately either, nor can one win out over the other.

Beyond the mind, you jump out of subject-object relationship into a realm where there is no duality.

In the everyday realm of the mind we cause and experience so much pain and suffering by our refusal to accept that for things to be good they have to be bad, for things to be well they have to be wrong, to be understood and valued we have to be denigrated and unappreciated.

Because of our inability to understand this we get stuck or attached to states of mind and emotion, we get stuck or attached to things and people.

Our “stuckness” to one side of the duality of life or the peak of the vibratory curve or the “on” switch is the root of much of our suffering

Our “stuckness” is caused by, and is the cause of, our resistance to change and our suffering.

So what are the benefits of being able to stop thinking?

- ❑ To witness or observe (without narrative or analysis) the recurring or autonomic nature of your thoughts and feelings
 - ❑ To watch how your inner map applies the filters
 - ❑ To see how you become immersed in and identified with your thoughts and feelings
 - ❑ To learn how to stop thinking – to turn your thoughts off - at will
 - ❑ Seeing through the noise
 - ❑ Peace
 - ❑ Enhanced intuition
 - ❑ Refuge from the insanity and frantic nature of daily life
 - ❑ Clarity of perception
 - ❑ Insight into the nature of things
 - ❑ A deeper sense of what is and isn't important
 - ❑ Being able to let go and knowing you will be OK
 - ❑ Realising that there is a higher part of you that loves you more than you can possibly imagine
 - ❑ Realising that you have come home
-

How to stop thinking?

At the most basic level, the state and quality of your mind has a very large bearing on the quality of your experience of life, and very specifically on your capacity for managing personal change.

The most powerful and proven technique for gaining control of your mind and stopping thinking is meditation.

The over-arching goal of most meditation techniques is to gain a degree of control over the mind and freedom from the incessant flow of thoughts and internal chatter - the "monkey mind" as it is sometimes referred to - to relax and relieve stress, and to realise increased or higher states of insight and perception.

There are many meditation techniques and meditation practises. Regardless of the specific meditation technique you are using, the end result is that you are doing something to your mind.

If you do enough of it, your mind will become quieter.

It's bit like what happens at a party, if you stay there long enough (and reasonably sober!) the number of people thins out, the noise levels diminish, and eventually if you stay long enough it becomes quiet and you can look around at the post-party debris with a reasonable degree of clarity.

As you still your mind through meditation, it becomes much easier to watch your thoughts and emotional states as they arise and cease - to observe the recurring pattern of these thoughts and emotional states, and eventually to watch yourself as you get caught up in these thoughts and states and for a while become totally identified with them.

Then, you start to see the connection between these thoughts and states and what shows up in your life - how to a certain degree you are creating your reality, or at the very least, how you are creating your experience of what is impacting you.

Eventually, there will be intervals where you won't be looking at everything through the filters of the mind, and you'll be able to see past your mind and you will have glimpses and insights of who you really are.

In my view, adopting the practise of mindfulness meditation - or present moment awareness - is one of the best ways of developing a high level of self-awareness. Mindfulness develops the capacity to realise all of these benefits.

Managing Personal Change (9)

Recommendations

Recommendations

"Watching the thinker" - start listening to the voice in your head.... as often as you can.

Pay particular attention to any repetitive thought patterns, those old audiotapes that have been playing in your head perhaps for many years.

This really simple – but requires discipline.

And this needs to become a habit and second nature – so do it several times a day until it becomes a habit. The difficulty with this is its simplicity.

Your mind will kick up all sorts of distractions and excuses not to do this. You will think of all sorts of questions you will want to find out more about it. You'll seek proof it works.

In fact, your mind will ensure that you do anything but “watch the thinker”. If you are serious about this and motivated – **just do it!**

Practise deep acceptance of what you are feeling – right now!

Guy Finley says:

“When you feel stress, resistance or pain, you tend to see it in that moment as life persecuting or punishing you. The truth is that life is helping you to reach a higher level of consciousness. This cannot be reached without the pain that you are trying so hard to push away.

Accept what is in the moment including the pain. Accept that the pain is natural and necessary to the moment.

Drop the blaming of someone or something outside of you as the cause of the pain.

You are trying to free yourself from the problem without realising that you are the creator of the problem. If you can see the truth of this – it is done and you are free.

As you accept, let go and surrender, a new consciousness arises and the pain does not trouble you, as you drop the thinking about yourself and your life.

The pain ends when you accept the pain and drop the self that clings to it.”

This means intense acceptance of exactly what feelings are present in the moment – including and especially all resistance and negativity and fear about accepting it.

Here’s how I do it:

- ❑ Check-in internally – what am I feeling now? (Do it very quickly and no thinking about it – we do not want the mind involved!)
- ❑ Go with the FIRST feeling that comes up
- ❑ Say out loud (or loudly in your head “I accept that I am feeling angry / frightened /fearful /anxious / resentful / etc
- ❑ Say it over and over again several times like a mantra
- ❑ SAY IT WITH MAXIMUM INTENSITY AND FOCUS
- ❑ Check-in again internally - what am I feeling now?
- ❑ Go with the FIRST feeling that comes up
- ❑ Say out loud (or loudly in your head “I accept that I am feeling angry / frightened /fearful /anxious / resentful etc
- ❑ Say it over and over again several times like a mantra

Keep repeating this process without stop until no more negative feelings and resistance comes up – you will then be feeling peaceful

This is not a one-shot solution – you will need to do this maybe 40-50 times very intensely – to get a reduction of about 80-90% of the negative feelings – i.e. it wont trouble you very much at all.

Most people don't do this – because it all about repetition with intensity – and most people just give up or say “I'm feeling ok now or “I can't be bothered” and go “unconscious” in all the usual ways.

I have found that doing this about 5-10 times a day for about 2 weeks gets powerful results and forms the habit of doing it – so I don't need to think about it, I do it automatically when negative feelings and resistance arises.

I will talk a lot more about this next time and give you more support and input to assist your practise.

But for the next week or so – just try both of these exercises and note what you find and experience.

Coming up next time...

- Not so odd after all**
 - Some expert advice on developing awareness**
 - How we all get stuck in the mud**
 - This too will pass**
 - My experience of mindfulness in situations of imposed change**
 - How to do mindfulness practises**
 - Freeing yourself from your mind**
-

Managing Personal Change (10)

Not So Odd After All

Not so odd after all

Last time I was talking about what it feels like to stop thinking and to see beyond the mind. It probably sounded a bit odd or maybe a little esoteric or even eccentric.

All of that maybe true but it doesn't alter the fact that when we are able to still our minds – even if only for a brief moment – we do start to see behind and beyond the “smoke and mirrors” that our mind creates.

If we do it frequently and often enough, our awareness increases and the bandwidth of our perceptions expands.

We see things differently.

Mindfulness is a spontaneous and naturally occurring state

Have you ever woken up in the morning (without a hangover!) in a lucid awakening state and for a few seconds not known where you are or what day it is or what you're doing that day? Just a momentary blankness – your mind feeling like a clean slate – and then whoosh in come the thoughts – a bit like pulling a big thick jumper over your head and then with a jolt everything is “normal” again.

Whenever you climb a steep ladder – or a rock-face – or drive a car at speed or engage in any physical activity where there is some degree of danger – have you noticed afterwards how you became oblivious to everything except your 100% concentration totally in the present moment?

Or perhaps at a more sedate level, can you recall how you feel for a few seconds after you have ceased to be engaged in any all encompassing

activity that has absorbed your 100% attention – that clear feeling devoid of thought.

Maybe it's happened when you have been out in the open air in a wild, remote or natural setting and you have become completely still and at been aware of feeling at one with the beauty, wildness and splendour.

These are all normal, “everyday” type experiences where we are unaffected by our thoughts and where we are totally present. These are naturally occurring states of mindfulness or present moment awareness.

Being free of our thoughts, free of the incessant chatter in our heads, free of the endless grinding of the wheels of repetitious thoughts feels spacious and light.

The practise of mindfulness is simply a series of structured mental disciplines and habits that take those natural and spontaneous occurrences of present moment awareness and brings them under conscious control and in so doing it makes that freedom more possible, more frequent and eventually available whenever we need it.

In that state, time does stand still – or we cease to be aware of it, the usual sense of separation and duality does weaken or disappear, insights occur more frequently and intuition and creativity become stronger.

Mindfulness shows us how to think and how to stop thinking

The practise of mindfulness addresses both of our primary objectives in this email series: it does enable us to stop thinking and step out of the tyranny and treadmill of our thoughts, but it also shows how to think more resourcefully.

So by these criteria, mindfulness is a necessary and powerful tool in managing personal change and especially in dealing with imposed change that has a direct impact.

“The difference is that we know we do”

There are a lot of popular misconceptions about “enlightenment” and enhanced states of awareness.

There is something in human nature - a desire to glamorise, sanctify, objectify and idolise – that elevates people who have offered deep insights to the human race and create distance between them and the rest of us.

But these great ones have the exactly the same psychological, emotional, and physiological equipment as the rest of us. If one can do it so can we all - potentially. To put it bluntly – we all share the same basic equipment.

Put simply “enlightenment” means to be free of the effects of the mind, to be aware, to be present-moment-aware, and unencumbered with thoughts about the past or the future – just totally present. That’s all.

The Buddha and some of his monks were out wandering one day and a man approached him and observed (I am paraphrasing slightly!): “What is it that’s different about you guys– you walk, talk, chop wood, eat, sleep, use the bathroom – you seem just like the rest of us?”

The Buddha replied: “Yes, that is true – but when we walk, talk, chop wood, eat, sleep, use the bathroom we KNOW we do.”

Jesus said (and again I paraphrase): “I can guarantee this truth with certainty, that unless you change and become like little children - who are unencumbered by thoughts of past or future and just live and enjoy the present moment - you will never enter the kingdom of mindfulness”.

[Quick biblical footnote – the “I AM” statements of God in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament are statements of absolute present moment consciousness.]

The only difference between highly developed spiritual people and the rest of us is one of degree.

They have acquired or developed or been blessed with (however you choose to express it) the capacity to enter and maintain a mindful or present moment awareness state whenever they want to or need to and can do so at will for as long as choose to or need to – and then engage with what we conventionally refer to as the “normal thinking mind”.

The key to this is having the capability to move freely between these states at will and NOT to become stuck in either state.

States become stages become sages

The initial state of “waking up or awakening or transformation or basic realisation that things are not what we thought and that there is more” is a state that may only last briefly – but once we have experienced it, we can’t unlearn it.

And with practise, dedication and discipline that state become a more frequent part of our experience until eventually we enter it as a stage – where we can stop thinking at will – and access transcendent states of awareness at will.

True wisdom occurs when we draw daily guidance and inspiration from this source rather than the output of our thinking minds.

This is sometimes referred to as “growing in grace” or “spiritual maturity”.

Stuck in seeking

Other than the normal state of un-awakened ignorance (of the existence of a dimension of awareness and consciousness beyond the mind) – the single biggest stumbling block to “enlightenment”/awareness is the state of seeking.

It is often the most sincere, the most devout, the most dedicated who are the most stuck – in many cases almost as a badge of honour (and I say this respectfully and lovingly) – seeking truth, seeking God, seeking enlightenment, seeking nirvana, seeking deeper understanding and growth.

I have known, watched and observed numerous sincere and committed people in the Buddhist and Christian traditions (which I am most familiar with) stay stuck in this “state of seeking”. I have seen and heard experienced dedicated meditators talk about enlightenment as something to be achieved in future lifetimes, I have seen and heard countless devout Christians seek God as anywhere but here now inside themselves.

The thing is that “the state of seeking” is just exactly that – seeking. Seeking means that we don’t have it – it’s over there – up there – out there – ahead of me – away from me – in the future – separate from me - **anywhere in fact but HERE NOW.**

The same applies to the many of us who would not view ourselves as on a spiritual quest but are nevertheless seeking self-improvement and self-development.

Aside from the realisation that ultimately there is no “self” to “improve” - and the only way to “develop” or “improve” is without the self – there is nothing of truth that we can find anywhere but NOW right here in the present moment.

The rest is illusion – or not lasting – and is at best just a “temporary fix” until we face the next set of problems and we “discover” that we need more “improvement” or “development”.

Stuck in transcendence

I am sure you are familiar with the description of some religious or spiritual people as so “heavenly minded they are no earthly use”.

There is – especially in Buddhist and eastern spiritual traditions – the misguided notion that the great spiritually developed people remain in advanced states of transcendence and higher plane of consciousness.

It is true that in some traditions they have and do remain in this condition for long periods of time – but as preparation to rejoin and engage with and help the rest of us.

All those who have been of service to humanity – obvious and notable examples being Jesus, Buddha and the Prophet – have been totally engaged with the everyday practicalities of life.

The true value of mindfulness and transcendent states is the ability and capacity to use them interchangeably as is most appropriate and resourceful as the present moment requires.

Or to put it another way, **mindfulness is to act with deep self-awareness to provide the truly adaptive response.**

Managing Personal Change (11)

How We All Get Stuck In The Mud

Some expert advice on developing awareness

- ❑ The entry point (to enlightenment) is the present moment.
- ❑ The ego can only be transcended in the present moment, nowhere else.
- ❑ Making it (enlightenment) a goal, the very search, prevents you from being it.
- ❑ Use the intensity that drives you into the search in the future to drive you deeper into the present moment – use that intensity to embrace the present moment.
- ❑ So no more spiritual seeking – intensity yes – but the intensity that drives you into the “now” – not the intensity that wants to actualise an imagined (future) state.

-
- ❑ Find out where you are stuck...
 - ❑ Always ask: “What can I do with myself?”

-
- ❑ When you experience fear – look again, because when you believe what you are thinking nothing else is visible.

-
- ❑ When you feel stress, resistance or pain, you tend to see it in that moment as life persecuting or punishing you. The truth is that life is helping you to reach a higher level of consciousness. This cannot be reached without the pain that you are trying so hard to push away.
 - ❑ Accept what is in the moment including the pain. Accept that the pain is natural and necessary to the moment.

- ❑ Stop blaming someone or something outside of you as the cause of the pain.
- ❑ The pain ends when you accept the pain and drop the self that clings to it.

-
- ❑ You are trying to free yourself from the problem without realising that you are the creator of the problem. If you can see the truth of this – it is done and you are free.
 - ❑ The problem will be resolved when you see that you are the problem (that you are one with the problem and not separate from the problem) and that you should stop trying to escape it.
 - ❑ As you accept it, let go and surrender, a new consciousness arises and the pain does not trouble you, as you drop the thinking about yourself and your life.

[Eckhart Tolle, Genpo Roshi, Guy Finley, Byron Katie, Robert Anthony]

How we all get stuck in the mud

Part of the way our minds work is that:

- ❑ We get very attached - or stuck - to our thoughts and emotional states
- ❑ They arise automatically
- ❑ They are repetitive
- ❑ The repetition causes reinforcement – making us more attached and thus more stuck
- ❑ We are largely if not totally unaware of this process
- ❑ We mistake the state for who we are
- ❑ We identify totally with these states – we are immersed in them – “I am angry” – “I am happy” etc
- ❑ After the passing of a certain amount of time these states recede or pass and we are “normal” again
- ❑ After the passing of a certain amount of more time these states arise again and the whole cyclical process repeats itself
- ❑ Again and again and again...ad infinitum

This is the tragedy of the “natural” human condition.

All of this happens automatically and is the product of the composite effect of our inner map of reality – and with reference to an earlier email, the processes that do this are technically referred to as strategies and cybernetic loops.

Just a quick recap to put all this into context:

(1) Internal representations (that create our inner map of reality) are made using one of several thinking modalities, which mirror our external senses. An internal representation can therefore be an internal picture, an internal sound, an internal smell, and internal taste, and internal feeling or touch sensation, or internal dialog—what most people consider to be thinking.

(2) We string these internal representations; each made in a certain modality and using certain sub-modalities, into sequences called strategies. Everything you do and everything you feel is the end result of a strategy, a series of internal representations in a certain order.

(3) These strategies ultimately end in either behaviour or a state of mind, and these strategies and states of mind create your experience of life, internally and externally. And, these three items—internal representations, whether singly or in sequences called strategies, internal states, and external behaviours are what scientists call a cybernetic loop.

(4) This means that whenever you change one of them, the other two change.

- So if you change your internal representations, you change your behaviour and your state.

- If you change your state, it changes your behaviour and your internal representations.

- If you change your behaviour, it changes your state and your internal representations.

This “stuckness” is a major factor in our human suffering. We cannot naturally move beyond our automatic responses and reactions to things that happen to us

You may recall that we said in an earlier email that there are only three possible responses to imposed change:

- ❑ We can resist it, and increase our suffering
- ❑ We can adapt to it
- ❑ We can accept it

Mindfulness practise is so practical and powerful because it addresses this problem head on.

The practise of mindfulness enables to actually see what is going on inside our heads as it occurs – so all of the aforementioned processes become visible to us in real-time as they take place.

The practice of mindfulness weakens these processes that cause our stuckness.

With enough practise of mindfulness we move naturally through and beyond these states of stuckness and into acceptance and fully adaptive responses to imposed change.

“When you learn to be witness of your thoughts and emotions, which is an essential part of being present, you may be surprised when you first become aware of the background ‘static’ of ordinary consciousness and realise how rarely, if ever you are truly at ease within yourself.

On the level of your thinking, you will find a great deal of resistance in the form of judgement, discontent, and mental projection away from the NOW.

On the emotional level, there will be an undercurrent of unease, tension, boredom, or nervousness. Both are aspects of the mind in its habitual resistance mode.

Observe the many ways in which unease, discontent and tension arise within you through unnecessary judgement, resistance to what is, and denial of the NOW.

Anything unconscious dissolves when you shine the light of consciousness on to it.”

[Eckhart Tolle – “Practising the Power of Now”]

Managing Personal Change (12)

This Too Will Pass

This too will pass

There is a story about a king who sought wisdom. He searched all over his kingdom for wisdom and did not find it. Eventually he heard of a man living in a remote part of the kingdom who had a reputation for great wisdom.

The king sent for this man and had him brought to court, whereupon the king offered the man a great reward if he would share the secret to his wisdom.

The man agreed and departed from the king's presence.

He returned several weeks later and presented the king with a small box.

The king looked a little surprised and very disappointed as he opened the box and removed a ring. "Is this it?" he shouted at the wise man.

"Place the ring on your finger and read the inscription out loud," replied the wise man.

The king read the inscription: "This too will pass".

The wise man counselled the king: "Wear that ring that at all times and look at it frequently, and regardless of whether you are experiencing good fortune or adversity remind yourself that this too will pass..."

The king was satisfied that he had at last found true wisdom and he duly rewarded the man with great wealth.

My experience of mindfulness in situations of imposed change

Approximately 18 years ago I was in a senior management position working on a large multi-million dollar IT programme in London. The various projects involved major change in the client organisation's service delivery processes.

It was an extremely pressured role which was made far more difficult because of the adversarial relationship between my employers who were the prime contractor and our client's IT department who were our direct interface on behalf of our client's business users.

As these situations so often are, this was a highly political environment where emails were used by the client's IT people and their subcontractors to make mischief and generally stir things up.

A typical strategy was for the client's project manager or one of this team to fire off a critical – but inaccurate and misleading - email and to copy-in senior management and directors in the client organisation and with the prime contractor – and thus ensuring a continuous escalation of highly politicised issues.

This would happen several times a week.

My role in all this was to act as buffer and filter for my boss who was the programme director – to field these offensive emails – resolve the underlying issues and/or recommend a solution and to neutralise the politics.

You may find all this is a bit hard to believe unless you have worked on a large messy IT project (the large ones nearly always are messy!) – but I assure you it is true when I tell you that it was not uncommon for it to take me the best part of a day to deal with one of these emails.

Often my colleague – the programme manager and myself were unfairly and inaccurately personally criticised in these emails. It was wearing, draining and deeply unpleasant (and yes I only stuck it for the money – a lot of money at the time).

But here's the thing, even though I did not know anything about mindfulness I did rapidly discover the truth of the "This too will pass" story.

I very soon realised that these angry and defensive states arose automatically but if I just sat with them and observed them, without engaging with them for about 24 hours, they passed.

I was then able to exercise clarity and to manage the tricky politics on behalf of my boss and to best effect. This became known on our side of the programme as the 24-hour “dead bat” rule – that is, to never reply to a politically motivated email for 24 hours!

Some years later and my fortunes had changed and I was not working and experiencing a very hard time financially with all the obvious pressures associated with that. I became exhausted and completely run down. I found it hard to control my thoughts.

I would often wake up in the early hours of the morning with extremely negative thoughts. There was a voice (well several actually) that used to start up and accuse me of failing and being hopeless and unemployable. Because it was late and I was so exhausted I was in the grip of these voices and could hardly sleep. By getting up time in then morning I was exhausted. And so the cycle repeated itself for a number of days.

I realise that I had to do something – fast or I was going to be ill or worse...

Thankfully I was now aware of mindfulness practise and doing it fairly regularly and I knew what to do – I just needed to do more of it and I especially needed to find a strategy that I could use more or less automatically in the early hours of the morning.

I did 3 things:

(1) Deep acceptance

During waking hours whenever it all got too much to bear, I would go outside and find a seat somewhere that I knew I wouldn't get distracted by anyone and I practised the deep acceptance exercise that I outlined to you in my last message:

- ❑ Check-in internally – what am I feeling now? (Do it very quickly and no thinking about it – we do not want the mind involved!)
- ❑ Go with the FIRST feeling that comes up
- ❑ Say out loud (or loudly in your head “I accept that I am feeling angry / frightened /fearful /anxious / resentful / etc

- ❑ Say it over and over again several times like a mantra
 - ❑ SAY IT WITH MAXIMUM INTENSITY AND FOCUS
 - ❑ Check-in again internally - what am I feeling now?
 - ❑ Go with the FIRST feeling that comes up
 - ❑ Say out loud (or loudly in your head “I accept that I am feeling angry / frightened /fearful /anxious / resentful etc
 - ❑ Say it over and over again several times like a mantra
-

(2) Intense present moment awareness exercise using NLP

I am terrified of heights. There is a large and quite long suspension bridge over a mile wide estuary near where I live.

There are 2 thin support cables fixed on supporting struts mounted on top of the suspension cables. These are designed for workmen – wearing harnesses – to clip themselves on to the support cables as they walk up and on top of the main suspension cables that rise from about 300 feet above sea level to about 800 feet above sea level.

I know that if I had to – in an emergency, I could walk that cable – just. Even writing about it is bringing me out in a cold sweat!

So I did an exercise whereby I walked the length of the suspension cables – but on the bridge. However, in my mind and imagination I did every step for real. I could feel the wind, see the drop below and feel the overwhelming panic and terror. I visualised and experienced in my senses every aspect of that walk, as though it was for real.

The only way I could ever make a walk like that in reality is with massive and intense present moment awareness. Walking very slowly, breathing deeply and steadily with a total focus on the action of each slow step.

And in I my imaginary walk up the cable – as in reality I walked under it along the bridge - I anchored the intense feelings of present moment awareness as I coped with “walking” that cable.

After having completed this exercise and having anchored the feelings and states I was able to replay that experience at will and on demand.

Over a period of several hard weeks I “walked that cable” many, many times and each time I was brought into a deep and powerful sense of present moment awareness that would last for quite a while.

After a number of repetitions of this exercise, it became automatic and I dropped the visualisation and was just able to enter a deep state of present moment awareness fairly easily (and I still can).

(3) Intense present moment awareness exercise using a simple repetitive phrase

I realised that to cope with my problems at night I needed something even simpler than the NLP exercise – something that I could do in a semi – conscious state.

This practise came to me when I was meditating and it came in response to a request for help I made to my higher, transcendent or expanded self. (In traditional expression you would call this prayer). I will explain far more about I mean by this and how it applies to us in a future email.

What came to me was a simple phrase that had meaning for me at the time, was easy to remember and repeat and with which I also had a kinesthetic (or physical) association as well.

The phrase was: “I choose the light – I walk in the light”

I used this – let’s just call it a mantra for convenience – every night as I was falling asleep – constantly if I woke up in the night and I woke up every morning with that mantra going round and around in my head.

The point of it was that it stopped me thinking and it gave my thinking mind something to do and which shut it up. So I was able to stay mindful, present and completely relaxed.

From the moment I started doing this I never had another bad night’s sleep. After a few weeks, as with the previous practise, it became automatic and a habit.

There are many, many related practises that I have used and developed that work for me – and maybe there will time later in this series to go into all this in much more depth.

Managing Personal Change (13)

How To Do Mindfulness Practises

How to do mindfulness practises

If you are serious about wanting to learn to change how you think and to learn how to stop thinking there are 4 broad areas of activity:

❑ **Read up on it and get informed**

❑ **Find supporting mindfulness material that you can use reflectively for guided meditation**

In my view the most accessible material is by **Eckhart Tolle** and I recommend the following titles and that read them in the following sequence. They can be purchased online via Amazon:

- The Power of Now
- Practising the Power of Now
- Stillness Speaks
- A New Heaven and A New Earth

Michael Brown is very good on the practical therapeutic approach to practising and he explains some powerful and holistic approaches. This will benefit anyone with “a lot of baggage” or unresolved childhood issues.

- The Presence Process
-

❑ **Establish a daily meditation practise**

Sit still on a chair or cushion and just sit there for 15 minutes. No music, no Ipod or mobile phone or any other distractions - just sit there - and breathe in and out naturally and just focus on your breath.

Just watch your thoughts with no internal analysis or narrative - just witness, watch and observe, like watching clouds blow across the sky.

Do this everyday at least once and ideally twice.

❑ **Identify and use a range of mindfulness practises that you can use throughout the day in a variety of everyday domestic and business situations**

Freeing yourself from your mind

How to practise the present moment awareness: the following are 6 key mindfulness practices outlined by Eckhart Tolle in “The Power of Now”

1. "Watching the thinker" - start listening to the voice in your head

As often as you can- pay particular attention to any repetitive thought patterns, those old audiotapes that have been playing in your head perhaps for many years.

2. Focus your attention into the now

Just become intensely conscious of the present moment. There is one certain criterion by which you can measure your success in this practice: And that is the degree of peace that you feel within.

3. Look at your emotion: the body's reaction to your mind –

The more you are identified with your thinking, your likes and dislikes, judgments and interpretations, which is to say the less present you are as the watching consciousness, the stronger the emotional energy charge will be, whether you are aware of it or not.

4. Watch out for any kind of defensiveness within yourself.

What are you defending? Is it an illusory identity, an image in your mind, a fictitious entity? By making this pattern conscious, by witnessing it, you un-identify from it. In the light of your consciousness, the unconscious pattern will then quickly dissolve.

5. End the delusion of time + letting go of psychological time

End the delusion of time. Time and mind are inseparable. Remove time from the mind and it stops - unless you choose to use it. To be identified with your mind is to be trapped in time.

6. Connecting with the inner body

Direct your attention into the body. Feel it from within. Is it alive? Keep focusing on the feeling of your inner body for a few moments. Do not start to think about it. Feel it.

Coming up...

- The “hardware” reasons for why we think the way we do**
 - We have the technology**
 - The only time we suffer is when we believe a thought that argues with what is**
 - Teach a cat to bark**
 - The finger pointing at the moon**
 - Is that really you?**
 - Working with our many selves**
 - How I dealt with extreme stress using the Big Mind process**
-

Managing Personal Change (14)

And The Beat Goes Om...

The “hardware” reasons for why we think the way we do

In the fifth message in this series we looked at “Why we think the way we do” from the perspective of the “software” of our minds.

I now want to briefly introduce you to “Why we think the way we do” from the perspective of the physiology and neurology - the “hardware” - of our minds.

In 1996 Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor, a Harvard-trained and published neuroanatomist experienced a severe haemorrhage in the left hemisphere of her brain. Dr Taylor got a research opportunity few brain scientists would wish for: She had a massive stroke, and watched as her brain functions - motion, speech, self-awareness all shut down one by one.

As well as gaining a first-hand insight into brain recovery for stroke victims - and for which she has become a powerful voice - her experience provides a fascinating and direct insight into the roles and functions of the "left brain" and "right brain".

She says of her work: “We were essentially mapping the micro-circuitry of the brain, which cells are communicating with which cells, with which chemicals, and then with what quantities of those chemicals. And when you look at the brain, it's obvious that the two cerebral cortices are completely separate from one another.

For those of you who understand computers, our right hemisphere functions like a parallel processor. While our left hemisphere functions like a serial processor. The two hemispheres do communicate with one another through the corpus callosum, which is made up of some 300 million axonal fibres. But other than that, the two hemispheres are completely separate.

Because they process information differently, each hemisphere thinks about different things, they care about different things, and dare I say, they have very different personalities."

Right-brain

"Our right hemisphere is all about this present moment. It's all about right here right now. Our right hemisphere, it thinks in pictures and it learns kinaesthetically through the movement of our bodies. Information in the form of energy streams in simultaneously through all of our sensory systems. And then it explodes into this enormous collage of what this present moment looks like. What this present moment smells like and tastes like, what it feels like and what it sounds like.

I am an energy being connected to the energy all around me through the consciousness of my right hemisphere. We are energy beings connected to one another through the consciousness of our right hemispheres as one human family. And right here, right now, all we are brothers and sisters on this planet, here to make the world a better place. And in this moment we are perfect. We are whole. And we are beautiful."

Left-brain

"My left hemisphere is a very different place. Our left hemisphere thinks linearly and methodically. Our left hemisphere is all about the past, and it's all about the future. Our left hemisphere is designed to take that enormous collage of the present moment. And start picking details and more details and more details about those details. It then categorizes and organizes all that information. Associates it with everything in the past we've ever learned and projects into the future all of our possibilities.

And our left hemisphere thinks in language. It's that ongoing brain chatter that connects me and my internal world to my external world. It's that little voice that says to me, "Hey, you gotta remember to pick up bananas on your way home, and eat 'em in the morning." It's that calculating intelligence that reminds me when I have to do my laundry. But perhaps most important, it's that little voice that says to me, "I am. I am." And as soon as my left hemisphere says to me "I am," I become separate. I become a single solid individual separate from the energy flow around me and separate from you."

Why does this matter - how is this relevant to how we think and how we stop thinking?

The relevance of this understanding of the neurology of left-brain/ right-brain balance is that it is crux of the whole "balanced" or integrated approach to life.

In my view, there are very finite limits to a solely "rational" approach to managing personal change. However, given the present level of the physical evolution of the human brain with the "hard wired default setting" of a left-brain orientation and understanding of life, it is fairly clear that there is a case for investigating and practising techniques, tools and processes that increase and strengthen left-right brain balance.

Personally, I find it interesting to see the gradual but increasing convergence of previously disparate areas of human understanding in areas such as quantum physics, neurology and the predominantly [but not exclusively] eastern disciplines of various meditation practises.

I also feel that the increasing understanding of the underlying neurological basis of human behaviour and experience moves these disciplines and practises more into the mainstream, and away from the domain of "belief systems" which has previously excluded many who have difficulty accepting their relevance in a "rational" secular society.

We don't have to "believe" anything or subscribe to any particular religious or philosophical perspective to be able to practise and benefit from tools, practises and techniques that help us achieve balanced brains.

When we engage with these practises, all that we are doing is re-shaping or re-programming the physical neurological connections between the left and right lobes of our brains via the corpus-callosum to achieve the lived experience of a physiologically better balanced brain!

At a reductionist level - this is the whole point of meditation and many other spiritual and personal development practises. The truly integrated perspective on managing personal change (and indeed absolutely everything) is achieved by any and all means that strengthens the left-brain/right-brain connection.

We have the technology

The (balanced brain) benefits of meditation are fairly well known but, and as I rapidly discovered, the downside to all this is that meditation is simple in theory but very hard in practise!

For a start it takes considerable discipline and that requires serious motivation. Then there's the time it takes. Ten minutes twice a week just won't do it. You need to do at least two thirty-minute sessions a day EVERY day - as an absolute minimum.

And even more depressing is the elapsed time required to START to see any benefit. It can take months of disciplined persistent (and consistent) practise to start to see any serious lasting benefit.

And even longer for the big juicy benefits - like being able to control your mind, stop your thoughts at will, acquiring deep insights into the nature of oneself and the world "out there" takes many (ten plus) years of meditation practise.

Meditation is fundamentally a re-programming of the brain

So, in a nutshell the reason why meditation takes so long to deliver significant and lasting personal change is because the meditator is, (quite literally) at the physiological level, re-wiring or re-routing the neurological pathways in their own brain.

Initially this is primarily between left and right brain, and then from the balance achieved there, between all 4 major brain centres. So meditation is fundamentally a re-programming of the brain.

The easy way to balance your brain with brainwave entrainment via binaural beats

Brainwave entrainment or "brainwave synchronization," is any practice that aims to cause brainwave frequency to fall into step with a periodic stimulus having a frequency corresponding to the intended brain-state - for example, to induce sleep, creativity, meditative states etc.

In October 1973 a breakthrough report "Auditory Beats in the Brain" by Dr. Gerald Oster of the Mt. Sinai Medical Center was published in the Scientific American.

It explained, that when tones of different frequencies were presented separately to each ear, pulsation's called binaural beats occurred in the brain.

This resulted in the whole brain becoming "entrained" to the internal beat and resonating to that frequency.

So in essence what this discovery revealed is that when our brainwave patterns are subject to binaural beats the brain can be entrained in a variety of ways that can positively affect moods, creativity, memory capacity, "brain balancing" and other benefits.

Put simply, the regular use of a binaural beat based meditation product can considerably speed up this whole reprogramming process - and at considerably less time than it takes via traditional meditation.

And better still, the only effort required is physically putting on headphones and sitting in a chair for 30-60 minutes a day!

Managing Personal Change (15)

Who would you be without that thought?

The only time we suffer is when we believe a thought that argues with what is

A few days ago I offered you mindfulness practise that I use and that is based around deep acceptance of how things are right NOW in this present moment.

In essence this practise means consciously exercising deep and intense acceptance of exactly what feelings are present in the moment – including and especially all resistance and negativity and fear about accepting what is present.

As, through increased mindfulness practise, we more aware of what is going on inside of us most of the time we discover that we are almost continuously in varying degrees of resistance to something (or at least I know and accept that I am!)

“Accept what is in the moment including the pain. Accept that the pain is natural and necessary to the moment.

Drop the blaming of someone or something outside of you as the cause of the pain.

You are trying to free yourself from the problem without realising that you are the creator of the problem. If you can see the truth of this – it is done and you are free.

As you accept, let go and surrender, a new consciousness arises and the pain does not trouble you, as you drop the thinking about yourself and your life.

The pain ends when you accept the pain and drop the self that clings to it.” [Guy Finley]

Here is another approach to the same practise – but this time coming at it from a cognitive perspective.

This approach is based around a personal internal enquiry of the following 4 simple questions:

1. Is it true?

2. Can you absolutely know that it's true?

3. How do you react, what happens, when you believe that thought?

4. Who would you be without the thought?

Turn it around, and then find at least three genuine, specific examples of how the turnaround (or opposite) is true in your life.

This process is known as “The Work” and was created by Byron Katie.

The Work of Byron Katie is a way to identify and question the thoughts that cause all of the suffering in the world. It is a way to find peace with yourself and with the world. The old, the young, the sick, the well, the educated, and the uneducated—anyone with an open mind can do this Work.

Byron Kathleen Reid became severely depressed while in her thirties. Over a ten-year period her depression deepened, and Katie (as she is called) spent almost two years rarely able to leave her bed, obsessing over suicide. Then one morning, from the depths of despair, she experienced a life-changing realization.

Katie saw that when she believed that something should be different than it is (“My husband should love me more,” “My children should appreciate me”) she suffered, and that when she didn't believe these thoughts, she felt peace.

She realized that what had been causing her depression was not the world around her, but what she believed about the world around her.

In a flash of insight, Katie saw that our attempt to find happiness was backward—instead of hopelessly trying to change the world to match our thoughts about how it “should” be, we can question these thoughts and, by meeting reality as it is, experience unimaginable freedom and joy. Katie developed a simple yet powerful method of inquiry, called “The

Work”, that made this transformation practical. As a result, a bed-ridden, suicidal woman became filled with love for everything life brings.

Katie’s insight into the mind is consistent with leading-edge research in cognitive neuroscience, and The Work has been compared to the Socratic dialogue, Buddhist teachings, and twelve-step programs.

Teach a cat to bark

The only time we suffer is when we believe a thought that argues with what is.

When the mind is perfectly clear, what is, is what we want. If you want reality to be different than it is, you might as well try to teach a cat to bark. You can try and try, and in the end the cat will look up at you and say, “Meow.”

Wanting reality to be different than it is - is hopeless.
And yet, if you pay attention, you’ll notice that you think thoughts like this dozens of times a day:

“People should be kinder.”

“Children should be well-behaved.”

“My husband (or wife) should agree with me.”

“I should be thinner (or prettier or more successful).”

These thoughts are ways of wanting reality to be different than it is. If you think that this sounds depressing, you’re right.

All the stress that we feel is caused by arguing with what is.

The finger pointing at the moon

Truth has nothing to do with words. Truth can be likened to the bright moon in the sky. Words, in this case, can be likened to a finger. The finger can point to the moon’s location. However, the finger is not the moon. To look at the moon, it is necessary to gaze beyond the finger, right?

As with all of the practises and tools I have outlined in this short series on managing personal change, reading about it, becoming informed about it, will change nothing in your life.

That is why practises are called practises.

“The Work” is a simple but powerful practise that works (no pun intended) for many people.

I use it, and in my experience it is powerful, and I commend it to you.

Managing Personal Change (16)

Is that really you?

Working with our many selves

Each one of us has within us many different voices, or selves or what are sometimes referred to as sub-personalities.

What we are talking about here are the many different aspects of our “self” that go to make up the whole thing that we conventionally refer to as “me”.

From now on, I am going to refer to these aspects as “selves”.

Most of these selves are invisible or unconscious to us at any one time and they are often in disagreement or conflict with each other.

When denied a voice or direct conscious expression they seek expression in unconscious ways – out of our awareness – and frequently in ways that are negative, resistant, unresourceful and sometimes downright destructive.

These negative hidden selves are often referred to as our “shadow” side.

The world of therapy devotes an enormous amount of time and clients’ money to attempting to get in touch with these hidden parts of us, and to bringing them into conscious awareness and giving them a voice. There are many different therapeutic approaches that attempt to help people to achieve this.

As I said at the outset of this short series, I am not a therapist nor am I a counsellor nor am I qualified in any way to offer advice on what I am about to share with you. So please take this in that spirit. If what I share with you resonates and you have an “aha” moment and would like to explore this further, you may find this extremely helpful and another

important part of your “tool kit” for successfully managing personal change.

However I do realise that not everyone reading this will find this accessible or helpful. (Horses for courses and all that!)

This practise is another approach to the deep acceptance mindfulness practise that we have explored and the cognitive approach of Byron Katie with the four questions and the turnarounds based on the fundamental question of “who would you be without that thought?”

The practise of working directly with our selves is all about overcoming the “stuckness” the “attachment to states”, and identifying and working with our “immunity to change” or inner resistance.

This practise involves:

- ❑ “Checking in with yourself” and going with the first self that arises
- ❑ Asking the self that arises or presents itself it’s name
- ❑ Inviting and allowing that self to speak - literally
- ❑ Asking it questions about its role and relationship to “me”
- ❑ Asking it about its relationship and connections with other selves
- ❑ Checking in to find other selves that are present
- ❑ Working with those selves to resolve conflicts
- ❑ Deciding which (positive) selves we wish to have as dominant selves
- ❑ Finding out what is needed to strengthen the chosen dominant selves
- ❑ Enlisting the support of our transcendent or highest self for the power and energy to allow the chosen selves to become and remain dominant

Sounds crazy doesn’t it? But trust me, if you can do this stuff it’s dynamite!

Ok let’s look a little deeper into what lies behind this, and why we’d want to do it, and what this has to do with managing personal change. Then I’ll give you a couple of real examples directly from my own experience of using this process. And I’ll leave you with some links to excellent resources that will in the gaps and show you how to do it for yourself (if you want to).

The foundational background to this is “Voice Dialogue Therapy” pioneered and developed by Drs Hal and Sidra Stone and the “Big Mind-Big Heart” process developed by Dennis Genpo Merzel that builds on the Voice Dialogue approach.

Voice Dialogue

Here is a brief summary of Voice Dialogue taken from the Stone’s website:

Initially developed in 1972, Voice Dialogue, Relationship & the Psychology of Selves (also known as the Psychology of the Aware Ego) continues to evolve - and to inspire.

As a trans-cultural - and remarkably inclusive - psycho-spiritual approach to consciousness, this work has been used internationally by:

- ❑ Individuals for their own personal growth and
- ❑ Professionals in the fields of psychotherapy, counselling, personal coaching, business or organizational consulting, and alcohol and drug counselling
- ❑ Others who have found that it enriches bodywork, acting, script writing, meditation, yoga, and weight loss programs.

Key themes:

- ❑ **Voice Dialogue:** You are not one, but many. Voice Dialogue is the basic method for contacting, learning about, and working with the many selves that make up each of us.
- ❑ **The Psychology of Selves** provides a clear explanation of how these selves operate in your life and how they keep you from realizing your full potential. Learn how these selves determine the way you see the world, control your behaviour, and limit your choices. Most of us live a much smaller life than necessary. Learn to be more than any one of your individual selves.
- ❑ **Relationship:** these selves control our relationships. The Stones' approach to relationship - their theory of bonding patterns - provides

an easy to understand the technology of relationship. Learn how the difficulties in your relationships can be the source of creative change, of greater control over your life and behaviour, and more joy.

- ❑ **Energetics** - interactions in "the field". Modern science and ancient wisdom both teach about the importance of what is not seen - of the field that surrounds matter. Our emphasis on the energetics of relationship enables you to work directly with this field in both your interpersonal and intrapsychic life.
- ❑ **Dreams** - providing guidance from within. This work activates the "inner teacher". As you learn about - and separate from - your individual selves, your own source of deep wisdom becomes available to you through dreams. Learning to understand your dreams and daydreams provides an objective and steady guidance that is particularly valuable in uncertain times.

Big Mind

Here is a brief review comment from an Amazon reviewer on the Big Mind process:

“Western culture teaches us to focus on the good. This can offer merit. When we see the good in others, and ourselves we can create feelings of well being.

Yet, always lurking in the shadows are darker sides of our human nature. Seeing our shadow sides can create feelings of guilt and shame - a sense that we're not o.k.

So we run and hide from them. When our shadows are particularly scary or deeply embedded, we may not even see them. When we repress the darker aspects of our nature, we carry a weight that limits our growth.

Our shadows still emerge, but in covert ways that can damage our self and others. Conversely, allowing ourselves to embrace all aspects of our true nature can be immensely liberating. For it is only by bringing all aspects of ourselves into consciousness that we can truly awaken.

In Big Mind, Big Heart, Genpo Roshi offers us a wonderful gift. By knitting together the ancient wisdom of Zen with the more recent wisdom

of Western psychology, he has created a technology accessible to anyone ready to face the challenges of inner work.

As a Research Director for one of the world's largest professional services firms, I find Genpo's work to be among the most important I have encountered across a wide terrain of material on learning and growth. I find it incredibly useful as I continue to develop my own self-awareness. I believe his work carries tremendous possibility for organizations, too - particularly in the domain of leadership development, where a shift in consciousness is of dire need.

We are at an inflection point in society and organizations where "how" we learn is every bit as important as "what" we learn. By seeing our dualistic nature (on the longer path of non-dualism) we can release our clinging to conditioned patterns, limiting ideas, and damaging behaviours - and open to new ways of being, multiple perspectives, and wise action. Thank you, Genpo, for offering us your wise and compassionate guidance for that journey.”

[Robin L. Athey. Boston, MA]

This practise of working directly with our selves is very empowering – if we can do it - and is another practical tool for learning how to think and how to stop thinking.

I cannot go into the explanation side of this practise in any depth in this short email, but I will now illustrate the process at work with two examples of how I have used this.

If you want to take this further – then please check the resources via the links I will give you.

How I dealt with extreme stress using the Big Mind process

About 5 years ago I went through a very difficult time and was experiencing a lot of uncertainty and confusion in my life related to some business and financial issues and it was causing me a lot of stress.

Having become aware of the Big Mind process I decided to try and put into practise. So here is what I did:

I went out for a walk; somewhere quiet where I could talk out-loud and no one would hear me. Speaking in the voice of the Facilitator of the process I asked to speak to my ego – my Controlling Self – and I asked its permission to address my different selves, and I also asked it if it would undertake a task for me and ensure that my different selves would all “line up in orderly queue” and speak one at a time.

[Side note – asking the ego’s permission and then giving it a task to do works well as it basically gets the ego out of the way.]

Speaking in the voice of my ego, I granted my Facilitator self permission as requested.

I then asked who was present.

Angry self presented himself, so I asked him to identify himself, and what his role was in Stephen’s life. Then I asked him what he was feeling and what he wanted to say.

I took on the voice of Angry self and said that my role in Stephen’s life was to protect him and to express his anger. I continued to say how angry I felt and why.

[Side note – this only process works when we just go for it – just do it – with no conscious thinking about it – we just go with whatever comes up and say it without any filtering, analysis or internal commentary. When we speak as that voice – we (temporarily) become that voice.]

As Facilitator self I let Angry self keep talking until he had nothing left to say.

Then as Facilitator self I asked who else was present and wanted to speak – and next in the queue was Anxious Self – and I repeated the process.

I continued with this until all the selves who were present (which was about 10) at that time had identified themselves and spoken.

This process took about 25-30 minutes.

Then as Facilitator self I asked to speak to “Big Mind” or Enlightened self... and for a while I enjoyed the tranquillity and spaciousness of that self.

I was calm, de-stressed and completely free of my mind in a state of oneness and non-duality.

After that initial “trial run” I used the Big Mind process a number of times as a very powerful way of achieving integration, peace and freedom from my mind.

How I instantly stopped smoking using the Big Mind process

A few years ago I wanted (and needed to give up smoking). I decided to try out the Big Mind process. What I discovered was very powerful and actually quite frightening.

I went through the process and asked to speak to Smoking self who had his say – about how he enjoyed smoking. I asked Smoking self if he knew that smoking was bad for Stephen and he said yes he did, but – he was in the grip of addicted self.

Oh boy, when Addicted self spoke he was utterly ruthless, didn’t care about Stephen’s well-being or health, his sole focus was power and control and more, more, more endless smoking “because that’s what I do”.

I know this is going to sound a bit spooky – a bit like the film “The Exorcist” – but metaphorically it was like listening to a ruthless demon speaking. As Facilitator self I was actually quite shocked and horrified at the attitude and tone of Addicted self’s voice – it was quite scary. And, I had never accessed this self before.

As Facilitator I then asked to speak to Non-smoking self.

[Side note – for every self there is always an opposite self.]

Non-smoking self then said the sort of things that you would expect him to say – but (and this is very important) he said that he was weak and un-

empowered and dominated by Addicted self and he needed power, support and a major boost.

So as Facilitator self I asked ego self who, from now on, he chose to identify with and who he wanted as the dominant self in this situation. Ego self chose Non-smoking self.

Facilitator self then asked Highest self (the most spiritual powerful self) to come to the assistance of Non-smoking self and give him the power, energy and resource he needed to be the dominant self in relation to this area of my life.

Facilitator self then asked Non-smoking self to accept that help – which he did – and then told Non-smoking self that he was now empowered to be the dominant self over Smoking self and Addicted self.

[Side note – this is important – we never seek to deny or suppress a negative or “unhelpful” self we simply “power up” it’s positive opposite self. So in this case I will always have a smoking self and an addicted self but they are now far less powerful than my non-smoking self.]

As from that moment, I instantly and successfully stopped smoking.

I do appreciate that this may all sound insane – but believe me, if you can learn to do this on your own not only are you saving a fortune in expensive fees to therapists but you gain access to a remarkable process for managing your own personal experience of managing change and developing the capacity to think and not think as you choose!

Final Side Note

It is my personal feeling that when we access our higher/transcendent selves in this manner - we are connecting with the God/Allah/Divine/Buddha nature (or however you express it) and this is the basis of all prayer and all other direct experience and relationship with whatever we express as that highest nature.

END