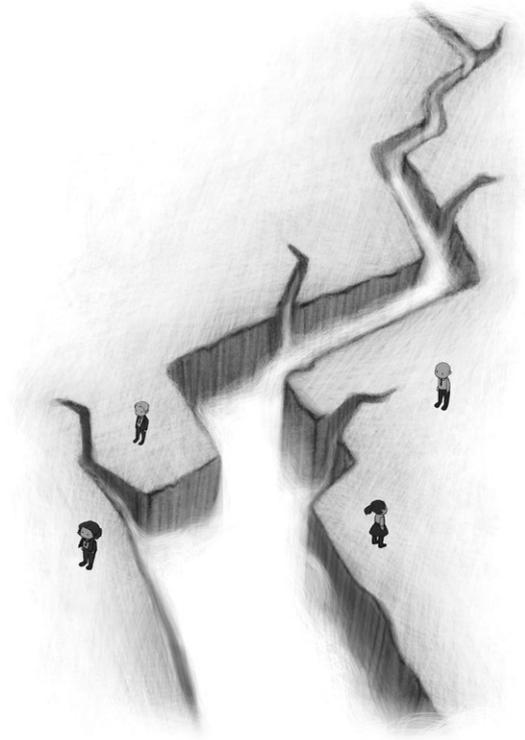


Obstacle 1: Self Awareness

A bird's-eye view of the chasm



The hardest fact of all is that your success is ultimately limited by your biggest weakness, and your biggest weakness is usually the one that no one dares to tell you about.

But true leadership is about being aware. You're more effective when you're able to observe and control your responses.

Often, *how* you do something is more important than what you do. As the old cliché goes, actions speak louder than words!

The saddest (and most common) piece of management speak: what we have here is a failure to communicate.

Have you ever wondered why organisations continue to employ people who are obviously behind the pace, not contributing, or actively ‘white anting’ other people’s efforts?

I have a theory that the majority of leaders would rather let performance and revenues slow down than have the hard conversations with their fellow leaders and staff.

In my experience the majority of problems in any organisation, when you pick them apart, are simply communication problems. Yet we let them fester. Why? Because often these conversations mean we have to tell someone how they are perceived by others. And that can be very uncomfortable. For you. For them.

We often see organisations where the majority of people are giving lip service to honest communications between them, but smiling sweetly at behaviour that is unacceptable. They’re ignoring behaviour that is against the values of the business.

On one side of the chasm we can have a leader with their entrenched behavioural habits, such as poor listening, fluffy communication, too direct, too soft etc., and on the other side are the people who play the subordinate role and suck it up rather than rock the boat.

It takes incredible courage to give your boss or your peer some unrequested feedback.

And it takes real maturity for a leader to ask others for feedback on how they're perceived, and more importantly to implement that feedback, or to get some help.

Because of the chasm that exists between what we say and what we *really* think, people rarely, if ever, give each other feedback that will assist in improving their relationships, their work and their lives.

It's just plain awkward. It's easier to leave things left unsaid than to courageously and vulnerably state your view and assist a colleague with some constructive feedback. And, of course, the ultimate leader, the executive team member or the CEO, gets little or no constructive feedback at all. Sometimes even when they ask for it!

On one side of the chasm you have the employees who are so frustrated by a manager's lack of clarity, the slapdash impulsive decisions and the constant changes that don't seem to derive from any calm strategy. And on the other side is a manager who wants what's best for the business and the staff, who works long and hard every day, whose driving motivation is to get results, and who can't understand why everyone doesn't see the world the way that they do.

We have all seen this chasm. Chances are, if you picked up a book entitled *I am the Problem* you have a feeling that some cracks with chasm potential may be emerging.

Of all the chasms, this is the hardest to look at with unblinking determination. Why? Because when your direct reports feed back

to you, it's rare that they will tell you the whole story for all the obvious reasons — their future, their relationship with you and the impact that the feedback may have on the business. There's a little voice inside their head that justifies maintaining the status quo rather than telling the whole truth.

This can be the most important chasm to close because responsibility for every chasm begins at the top.

As you read on, keep this thought front and centre. Great leaders in any field demonstrate introspection, self-awareness, and deliberate encouragement of, and listening to, feedback.

The feedback chasm

Close your eyes for a moment and think back to the best boss that you ever had. What did you like most about them? Was it their ability to achieve extraordinary results? Their persistence? Their focus? Their ability to prioritise? If you could boil it down to just one word, what would it be?

Now think about your worst boss? Why was he or she so bad? What was it about their style that bothered you? Why?

It's easy to spot great leaders. They're the ones who are spoken of with enthusiasm, who the masses swarm to when the teams get together. They're the people who have something to say that others want to hear. They're often quoted and they have an incredible capacity to get things done, to deliver results, and to make a measurable difference.

It's just as easy to notice the worst bosses. From a first meeting with them they're complaining about anyone but themselves. Bizarrely, these people can often appear extremely upbeat and positive and yet they have an uncanny knack of slipping out the door when the finger-pointing begins. They are often too busy criticising others to do a good job themselves. One of my friends calls them 'smiling assassins'. I think we all know managers like this.

Which category do you fit into for your staff? Are you up there with the best or down there with the worst? Are you somewhere in-between? Do you know?

Earlier this year I was invited to assist with a merger. I started by interviewing the leadership team to understand the challenges in merging these two successful businesses. Every member of the leadership team spoke poorly of their current CEO. They had some positive things to say and yet it was his limiting behaviours that seemed to be holding the business back.

I asked whether anyone had bothered to provide the CEO with feedback. The responses were revealing, and predictable.

'Well sort of. I have told him that people are dissatisfied.'

'Yes, I have mentioned that he needs to refocus priorities and take more time with each of us.'

'No, I'm too old to be looking for another job. Who'd hire me?'

'Yes, I told him that things needed to change but I don't think that he was interested in hearing me.'

‘Why would I bother? He’s not going to change.’

With each piece of the feedback puzzle I found some common themes. Most members of the team weren’t game to provide constructive feedback to their manager because of concerns that their relationship may be damaged. Secondly, the feedback that *was* given lacked clarity, examples, support and measurement.

Don’t think that this was a first-time experience for me either. Almost every time I’m engaged by a CEO, direct reports take the opportunity to tell me (an external consultant) about how the CEO could do their job better.

Time and time again, I see the communication chasm widening as we speak. Especially when I ask the question ‘What are the top three areas in which your CEO could improve performance to expedite the success of your strategy?’

Well, I suppose I am leading the witness, to be fair. But in my experience every direct report can answer this question. But do you think that they would ever bother to give their boss the feedback? Eighty per cent of the time, the answer is ‘No!’ But why? That’s easy. Fear of threatening the boss, damaging the relationship, causing disharmony within the business, losing their job, missing a promotion. The list goes on.

And yet, choosing *not* to provide the feedback is inhibiting the success of the business and driving a bigger crack in the chasm between the CEO and everyone else.

The lonely CEO

On a recent four-hour flight, I happened to be sitting next to an exhausted man who turned out to be the CEO of a public company.

He opened up for three hours and spoke about his major challenges which all, essentially, came down to this: it's lonely being the CEO.

You do your best to involve others in major decisions and yet ultimately, it's up to you. The Board are great at a strategic level but they're not involved enough in day-to-day stuff. He went on: direct reports have a job to do and are responsible for their own departments. They don't involve themselves in the decisions that matter in other silos. Ultimately, it's the lonely role of CEO that carries the biggest responsibility. He's in the helicopter on his own; who can he ask for advice?

If you're relating to this, what are you going to do about it?

What would you like to do differently? To help you along the way, here are some recent answers to 'What are the top three areas in which your CEO could improve performance to expedite the success of your strategy?' These have been collected from a bunch of organisations that I have worked with.

- Clarify what we're doing.
- Stop talking and start listening. No, start *hearing* (because he pretends to listen).
- Stick at one thing. Stop moving our targets.
- Take time to understand me and my priorities.
- Get to know the staff better.
- Smile occasionally — look as though you're enjoying yourself.

- Learn to trust the leadership team.
- Be here more.
- Involve us in decision-making on expenditure.
- Let others solve the problems. Stop micromanaging.
- Manage your time better.
- Get some anger management training.
- Ask for involvement from the leadership team before making changes.
- Let me use you as a sounding board — don't always try and solve the problems for me.
- Be a role model for the leadership team by working more sensible hours.
- Share a bit about yourself personally. Who *are* you?
- Take the time to say hello.
- Be present when we're talking. Take the time. Look at me.
- Have some fun occasionally. Come along to drinks on Friday night.
- Take other people's ideas seriously. Provide feedback.
- Understand the difference between being consultative and getting things done.
- If you think something's a waste of time, still show interest.
- Tell us what we need to change to work more effectively with you.
- Trust me.
- Explain the thinking behind the decisions.
- Involve us more in decision-making.
- Stick at the plan that we have agreed.
- Don't tell, SELL.
- Consult the leadership team before giving directions to staff.
- Be aware of the way you behave under pressure and the effect that it has on the business.

- Tell us why we're here. What's expected and how we measure success.
- Be clear.
- Follow through.
- Let us learn from our mistakes. Give us the chance to fail occasionally.
- Let others have a voice.
- We need a clear vision.
- Stop acting on the advice of external consultants. We (the leadership team) have the answers.
- Stop playing favourites.
- Improve clarity in communication.

And the list goes on, endlessly. Note how many of these relate to communication.

The other side of the chasm — why attitude, skills and experience are not enough

Every comment on the list above has come from people within organisations we have worked with: the majority of whom enjoy their work, their colleagues, their environment and yet they are still suffering on the other side of the chasm.

And tragically, the majority of people would rather leave the organisation than address any of these challenges with their manager.

Here's the thing.

You have worked so hard to get to where you are. You've spent time at university, time working your way up the corporate ladder,

time taking extra skills-development training, time learning from your consultants, lawyers, accountants, time learning about the business and the industry that you're in. And, yet what if there was just one crucial limiting behaviour inhibiting your success?

What if *all* of the effort that you have put into your career and your life up until this point isn't enough to get your business more profitable, to get your staff happier and more engaged, to increase your revenues? What if this is it? The brick wall?

Yet, what if the potential answer to your current challenges (and the reason that you bought this book in first place) lay in the answer to a few simple questions? Would you be interested?

You would? Great!

Then the starting point is to get some feedback on yourself as a leader: your strengths, your limitations, and your critical areas for development.

In my experience, the most efficient way to do this is through using a 360° feedback tool*. The best tools that I have found are those that provide a number of answers (as drop down box options) to each question rather than giving the employee or colleague an open opportunity to comment.

The 360° process will assist you in prioritising the critical areas that are going to have the biggest impact on your success.

When choosing a 360° feedback tool, find a tool that's behavioural-based rather than competency-based. Why? Because ultimately

it doesn't matter how high your competency level is, if it's your *behaviour* that is blocking your success.

When choosing people to rate you for your 360° review, use a combination of peers, subordinates, clients and key stakeholders — at least five of each. The more raters you have, the more valid and robust your feedback will be. Choose raters who you know will be constructive but honest. You're after courageous, useful answers.

Ensure that your 360° feedback report is reviewed with someone who has a deep understanding of the tool and has the expertise to align your learning outcomes and actions to the strategic objectives of the business and measure your success.

What's really interesting to me is that it's often what we consider our greatest strengths that ultimately become our biggest limitations — if we let it happen. Here is an example:

CASE STUDY

Simon is the CEO of a manufacturing business. He's a people person in every sense of the word. He focuses on ensuring that everyone is happy, engaged in what they're doing and that they enjoy coming to work every day. Everyone loves Simon. In fact, if you were to meet many of his staff for the first time, it wouldn't be unusual if the first thing you hear about is how much they admire their CEO as a person.

When meeting Simon for the first time, we quickly got to the challenges in the business. He was losing sleep over business growth. The business had stagnated and revenues had slumped consistently over the previous two years. It turned out that in putting people first, Simon had created some significant challenges in the business such as people working part time, working from home, on different salary package arrangements, some were paid for study, others weren't, etc.

From the outside in, it seemed that all of Simon's business decisions were made as a reaction to what the staff wanted.

When I lifted the rock and interviewed people across the business in depth I found a huge chasm between the CEO and many of the staff. Although they *liked* him, it appeared to many staff that Simon had his favourites and that some of those so-called 'favourites' treated other staff poorly and took advantage of the CEO's generosity.

A them-and-us culture had grown up between corporate services and service delivery, there was a lack of formal measurement and a lot of mediocre performance.

In a business of eighty staff, this problem should be easy to fix simply by coaching the CEO to put the business first. In putting the business first and making every decision in line with business growth, Simon would be making the best decisions for the staff.

Simon's first major task was to bring the leadership team together and let them know about his desire to be a better leader and his request for feedback.

The result of his 360° degree feedback was no surprise to me.

John Wiley & Sons (the Everything DiSC® 363® for Leaders* surveyors) encouraged Simon to consider the following statements.

The three critical areas in which Simon had to focus were:

1. Communicating with clarity.

- a. You may find that it's sometimes difficult for others to understand you.
- b. You may struggle to put your thoughts together before communicating.
- c. Because you like thorough information, you may spend more time than necessary explaining things to others.
- d. You may not always remember to clearly state the topic before you explain your points.

2. Stretching the boundaries.

- a. You may be reluctant to give up the current way of doing things if people seem to like it.
- b. You may fear that people won't like you if you push them beyond their comfort zones.

- c. You may see little need to stretch the boundaries as long as conventional methods are getting the results you need.
- d. While you may appreciate innovative and creative thinking, you may feel that you just don't have time to explore new territory.

3. Communicating about problems.

- a. Because you don't want to ruffle anyone's feathers, you sometimes let inefficiencies slide.
- b. Because you dislike conflict, you may gloss over problems rather than address them directly.
- c. Because you don't want to hurt people's feelings, you sometimes hesitate to speak up when there is a problem.

Once he had his feedback, Simon and I clearly determined performance measures for each of these critical areas in line with his three year business strategy. From there Simon started working on his thinking, behaviours, daily planning, communication, processes and best use of energy each day.

Within twelve months, the business had increased revenues by twenty per cent despite the fact that we had to reorganise teams, re-structure some of the service lines and even replace some of the leadership team.

What's the value of a 360° degree feedback survey to Simon?
About \$2.7 million!

If you are going to spend serious dollars on professional development, then I would like to challenge you with the thought that often the best place to start would be to increase the self-awareness of every member of the leadership team *and* — AND! — transparently SHARE with each other, courageously, those critical areas that each member of the team needs to work on to increase the success of their division or department in line with overall strategy. Don't let the 360° feedback turn to mouldy dust on the shelf. Throw a dinner party, open a decent bottle of red, and read each others' evaluations.

See, I'm a believer in keeping things simple. The fish rots from the head. And when it rots, it stinks up the whole place.

Don't bother investing millions in the professional development of your staff and ignore the absolute requirement for the management team to function expertly and efficiently.

To improve the functioning of your organisation, *start* with you and your leadership team. Head to head and toe to toe, agree to act on the three critical personal behavioural areas that are going to give the organisation every chance of success. Commit to sharing the results, and thus increasing your self awareness and the awareness of your colleagues so each of you are taking action each day in those areas that require attention.

I am well aware that there is a school of thought that suggests that we shouldn't concentrate on our limitations. Instead, we should work to our strengths and continue to build on them. There is an element of truth in this but you need to first understand whether your limiting behaviours are also limiting the business's success, and which of your positive behaviours make the most difference.

Feedback from and within your leadership team will help you and them to focus on good behaviours and reduce bad ones. As a result, and increasingly, your day-to-day activities will more closely align to successfully executing your strategic plan.

Don't go it alone. If every member of the leadership team gains further insight through 360° feedback and shares their TOP 3 development areas, and the actions that they're going to take, you can all courageously and vulnerably support each other on the path to achieving greater success for yourselves and your business.

Sharing the TOP 3 development areas

Jennifer was the head of sales for a global IT infrastructure firm. She was brilliant in sales. The CEO had headhunted her from a competing firm and her nickname was Missy Million because she rarely brought in a deal under one million dollars. I received a phone call from the CEO one day that went something like this:

'Soozey, we have an issue with turnover in the sales team. Ever since Jennifer started working here, she's been leaving behind her a wake of crying account managers and resignations from administration staff. Hell, even some of the blokes are unsettled. Now, I like Jennifer. She's like me. She gets things done and she's bloody great at what she does. So, I need to work out a way of keeping her here with no more tears and no more resignations. Also, I need the admin team to get out of the bathroom and back to their desks!'

Jennifer had been on many professional development sales courses but she had never participated in 360° feedback. The results spoke for themselves.

Jennifer's greatest learning was that she didn't always need to have all the answers. In fact, her role as a leader was to create the space for others to have a voice. Yes, to her clients, Jennifer was the 'problem solver'. In the office Jennifer was the 'people leader'. Behaviourally, these roles are very different.

Initially somewhat confronted, it took her a couple of weeks to realise that the feedback was one of the greatest gifts that she had been given in her career.

I will never forget the moment when Jennifer looked at the differences in the feedback from her clients and the feedback from her subordinates and said 'I just have to think from the moment that I wake up every day, that if I respond to my staff the way I currently respond to my clients, I'm going to love my job much more.'

Within that moment, Jennifer's self awareness increased exponentially. Sure, she still loses the plot occasionally when under extreme pressure (apparently especially in the tender writing process) but it's much rarer these days and everyone around her is much happier and more productive.

Sink thinking and swim thinking

OK, you've got your 360° feedback. How can you successfully use the information within it to your advantage?

Ponder this for a moment. It is your thinking that creates your environment, your reality, your world. YOU are the sum of your thinking and all of the decisions that have led you to this stage in your life.

You have a choice how you think — positively or negatively — in any given situation. I call these two thinking choices 'Sink or Swim Thinking'.

Do you control your thinking? Do you influence your decisions? Have you made a conscious plan getting to this point or did it just happen?

Thinking *does* just 'happen'. We make 50,000 decisions every day and the majority of these decisions are unconscious or automatic. Most of these decisions fall into a daily pattern: for example, we always get out of bed on the same side, eat a certain cereal for breakfast, drive the car to work on the same route and have lunch at the same time every day. (It's actually a psychological state called 'Repetition Compulsion', but that's another story.)

Sometimes something out of the ordinary jolts us out of our routine such as road works holding up the traffic so we have to take a different route, or maybe a song on the radio triggers a happy memory and gets us grooving and singing on our way to work.

This change in our routine, however minor, affects our thinking, our outlook, our energy levels, our attitudes, our behaviours, and the way we choose to manage our time through the rest of the day.

You arrive at the office and a colleague, who hasn't even had a conversation with you yet, says 'Hey, you are particularly perky this morning.'

These 'out of the ordinary jolts' don't come along all that often when we are comfortably stuck in our routine, but they come along more regularly when we have a clear goal that we want to achieve, with a written plan to support it. Because our every action is conscious and has a purpose, we become more alert and aware of the opportunities and ideas around us that can help us to our goal.

If you become more 'conscious' over a long period of time you will find you form new thinking habits, giving you greater control of yourself, ultimately resulting in you controlling your thinking rather than your thinking controlling you. For example, take the case of an enthusiastic entrepreneur who is always buzzing around, always eagle-eyed, looking for new business activities or investment opportunities. It's what turns him on. Needless to say, as he is constantly looking for them, because he expects to find them, he finds them. That's how it works. We are what we think about.

Over the years, I have found that a significant percentage of clients have self-limiting beliefs about their ability to succeed. In fact, just about everyone has them in one manner or another. It will be well worth your while giving some thought to your self-limiting beliefs and why they exist. Then, restate each belief with a solution-seeking question. For example:

Sink Thinking: 'I've never been involved in a merger before. This is way outside of my comfort zone. I am going to mess this up.'

Swim Thinking: 'I've never been involved in a merger before. How could I increase my knowledge? Who could I speak with who has succeeded with a merger and could mentor or support me through the next two months?'

Use this 'Sink or Swim' process to challenge your self-limiting thinking at an activity level. For example, consider the following scenario:

Goal To increase revenues by twenty-five per cent this financial year.

Activity To achieve all the success measures for the merger.

Situation Two members of the leadership team have resigned due to the impending merger. You arrive at the office and another member of staff shares their concerns about communications regarding the merger.

Sink Thinking: 'I'm not in charge of internal communications, don't know where to start, so I can't solve this problem. So I am probably not going to achieve the targets that I have agreed with the Board.'

Swim Thinking: 'I'm not in charge of internal communications so I'd better find out who is and get to know them fast. I reckon we can improve the clarity in communication and optimism throughout the business if we're intentional about it.'

So, out of the 50,000 thoughts that we think every day, how many are good for our motivation levels and how many are bad? The trick to improving our motivation levels is to ask ourselves the questions that will give us *positive* answers.

You perform better when you're happy. Simple as that. And as your happiness is determined by your thinking, your thinking is a critical determinant of your success — so think about it!

People who cultivate a positive mind-set perform better in the face of challenge. I call this the 'happiness advantage' — every business outcome shows improvement when the brain is positive. I've observed this effect in my role as a researcher and lecturer in 48 countries on the connection between employee happiness and success. And I'm not alone: in a meta-analysis of 225 academic studies, researchers Sonja Lyubomirsky, Laura King, and Ed Diener found strong evidence of directional causality between life satisfaction and successful business outcomes.

—Shawn Achor, *The Happiness Advantage: The Seven Principles that Fuel Success and Performance at Work**

Success? It's all in the mind!

Your life is an expression of your mind.

—Lawrence Olivier

The daily news is full of the stories of leadership failures. But conversely, the way in which we measure and recognise success in leadership appears steeped in mystery.

When I started as an executive coach fifteen years ago, my focus was primarily on the personality, values and beliefs that ultimately drive leadership behaviour. These days scientists and researchers are able to watch the brain at work using FMRI machines (functional magnetic resonance imaging). Combining research using this advanced technology with more traditional studies is fundamentally changing the way in which we view leadership, management and business. And what have we discovered?

- Some styles of feedback (positive or negative) may not actually improve performance because they do not ‘light up’ the pleasure centres of the brain.
- Many people are not particularly motivated by their next salary increase.
- The majority of people are motivated by engaging work in which they have the opportunity to learn, grow and connect.
- Celebrating, recognising and rewarding many small wins is more successful than focusing on the big wins.
- Many leaders do not *really* believe in personal change.

I mentioned earlier Dr Carol Dweck’s book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success**. A world-renowned Stanford University psychologist, Carol has spent more than forty years researching the topic of motivation and says that our achievement is determined by whether we approach our goals with a ‘fixed’ or ‘growth’ mindset. Dr Dweck’s research divides the world into ‘learners’ and ‘non-learners’.

The fixed mindset sees talent as a non-developing trait: it is what it is. It doesn’t grow or adapt according to circumstances. The fixed mindset is self-handicapping and does not offer a recipe to recover from failures. The growth mindset sees talent as essentially learnable.

The growth mindset cares more about learning than getting a particular result or achieving the goal. It capitalises on mistakes and confronts deficiencies. With a growth mindset, nothing restrains future potential.

Or to put it as our mothers might have taught us, ‘Try, try and try again’ — using what we have learnt to increase the likelihood of success, of course.

The mindset of leaders can permeate values, relationships and activity throughout their organisation. So the question becomes: do you know whether or not you are fostering a culture of learning — of the growth mindset — within your business?

According to the work of Peter Heslin, Associate Professor of Management at the University of New South Wales, fixed mindset managers do not welcome feedback, are not good mentors, do not recognise and reward others’ success and are not open to employee growth or change.

If that sounds like you, don’t despair or fire yourself. The great news is that mindsets can be changed. It’s a choice.

A growth mindset, led from the top down, will have a significant impact on your culture and your revenues. How? By adhering to some simple rules outlined by Dr Dweck:

- Presenting skills as learnable
- Conveying that the organisation values learning and perseverance, not just ready-made genius or talent

- Giving feedback in a way that promotes learning and future success
- Presenting managers as resources for learning

Without a belief in human development, many corporate training programs become an exercise of limited value. With a belief in development, such programs give meaning to the term ‘human resources’ and become a means of tapping enormous potential.

How to Grow Your Mindset

(with thanks to Dr Carol Dweck, from
*Mindset: The New Psychology of Success**):

- Are you in a fixed-mindset or growth-mindset workplace? Do you feel people are just judging you or are they helping you develop? Maybe you could try making it a more growth-mindset place, starting with yourself? Are there ways you could be less defensive about your mistakes? Could you profit more from the feedback you get? Are there ways you can create more learning experiences for yourself?
- How do you act toward others in your workplace? Are you a fixed-mindset boss, focused more on your power than on your employees’ well-being? Do you ever reaffirm your status by demeaning others? Do you ever try to hold back high performing employees because they threaten you?
- Consider ways to help your employees develop on the job: Apprenticeships? Workshops? Coaching sessions? Think about how you can start seeing and treating your employees as your collaborators, as a team. Make a list of strategies and

try them out. Do this even if you already think of yourself as a growth-mindset boss. Well-placed support and growth-promoting feedback never hurt.

- If you run a company, look at it from a mindset perspective. Think seriously about how to root out elitism and create a culture of self-examination, open communication and teamwork. Read Lou Gerstner's excellent book *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance?** to see how it's done.
- Is your workplace set up to promote groupthink? If so, your whole decision-making process is in trouble. Create ways to foster alternative views and constructive criticism. Assign people to play the devil's advocate, taking opposing viewpoints so you can see the holes in your position. Get people to wage debates that argue different sides of the issue. Have an anonymous suggestion box that employees must contribute to as part of the decision-making process. Remember, people can be independent thinkers and team players at the same time. Help them fill *both* roles.

Old habits die hard

Habits are comfortable, and they are automatic. And annoyingly, that goes for both good *and* bad habits.

Habits start in the mind, and turn into behaviours. 'It's raining; I won't go to the gym today' is a thinking habit that turns into a habit of not going to the gym in the winter. Three months pass.

How do you go about replacing the old, comfortable, nurturing reflexes with something challenging, new — uncomfortable! — conscious and ultimately more rewarding habits?

To change your habits, first recognise that they exist, and secondly turn the unconscious and automatic into conscious and thoughtful. Think about John, for example:

CASE STUDY

John is a forty-year-old entrepreneur who describes himself as being inspired by the new, easily bored with the status quo, and a motivator. I am working with him right now.

He has acquired three businesses in the last five years and appears to be highly successful: great staff, long term clients and contracts, excellent revenues and an awesome culture across all of his businesses.

Even though things look rosy on the outside, John has a major challenge that he is grappling with on the inside. He has ‘lost his mojo’. John still jumps out of bed each day, has an hour at the gym and is in at the office by 8:30 am but from the moment that he arrives, he finds it painstakingly difficult to motivate himself. He thinks he can’t fix it. It’s become his new norm. His very lack of mojo has become expected, comfortable and habitual.

Earlier today, John read his business goals to me over the phone, as though he was reading the back page of a newspaper he wasn’t very interested in. *Nothing* that he was working towards was lighting him up. All of his goals were predominantly finance, administration, and process driven.

The crux of the problem? He was lacking a big, personally meaningful goal and concentrating (at an activity level) on the things that didn't suit his passions or his behavioural style. His business had grown to a point where his role as CEO had become a firefighting, reactive 'job' and he couldn't see a way out.

So, what does John need to do to break out of his new status quo? Start by determining the things that he enjoys the most and then work out how to get more of those things into his day. Another acquisition is not on the cards right now although there are many elements of the acquisition process that John really enjoys such as the research and negotiation that could be incorporated into his day, aligning to a 3-5 year plan and a longer term personally meaningful goal. John's biggest challenge in making this happen is to trust his direct reports in taking on more responsibility of the day-to-day running of the business.

This is a challenge for many entrepreneurs, by the way. The opportunities that really light up their world are the big deals, the next acquisition, potential partnerships and alliances. It's so important to mix it up and always have a few serious goals on the horizon.

Our thinking habits — our default settings — have a tremendous effect on our productivity, our performance, our motivation, our happiness, our income, our relationships, our lives. If we let them!

Do you feel it's time to start changing some of your thinking habits? Or your behavioural habits? Or your communications habits?

I will be the first to tell you that it isn't easy. The amount we spend as a

society on dieting and gyms, while we become steadily fatter and less fit is testament to how difficult people find it to change their lives.

The really interesting thing is that as your habits change, so too does your brain. In effect, you can re-wire yourself. So, if you are like John and don't quite understand why you're not responding to your environment the way you'd like to, explore your habits — the ones in your head, and the ones in your life.

Here are some good tips:

1. Increase your self-awareness. At the same time every morning, think about the habit that you are working on and write it down. Reinforce your desired modification by asking yourself a positive question about it. 'How will I benefit if I think/do this?' Choose to try and keep your new habit front of mind throughout the day. (See 'Memory triggers' below.)
2. In the evening, spend a few minutes to reflect on your day. What worked well and what could be improved in modifying your habit? Do this every day for thirty days and thirty nights and watch the dramatic difference.
3. The moment that you have any negative thinking, block it out by re-stating the negative as a positive question. Not 'Damn, I didn't get a chance to talk to Bill today and now he's in the air. That's the project derailed for another week.' Rather, 'What else can I do besides talk to Bill to keep the project moving?' Repeat this re-stating process as often as it takes until you have a positive alternative.
4. Be open with other members of your leadership team about the habits that you are working on, and how dealing with

them will align to the continued success of the business. Ask them for feedback on behavioural strengths and areas for improvement.

5. Use memory triggers as reminders. For example, use stickers that are particular for the behaviour or habit that you are working on. Put the stickers in obvious places such as the fridge door, front door, steering wheel, inside your wallet, on your diary, in your handbag, on your desktop, etc. Every time you notice a sticker it will jolt the memory of your new habit or behaviour. Even the most successful people continue to do this!

I have found that the best way to change a habit or form a new habit is to use all of these four tips *in unison for 30 days without a break*.

This is all about being vulnerable. It's about considering how you feel, what you think, how you respond. These are not activities that are consciously part of our business day, but nevertheless our thinking determines our responses and our ultimate success.

Does this all sound like too much effort? Well, what if these simple tasks could increase your profitability by two per cent and your revenues by twenty-three per cent in the next twelve months? Worth trying? This is the result one CEO I worked with saw.

I am not naïve or mindlessly enthusiastic. I do understand that this is the most challenging part of this book. But if you truly seek success then tapping into those 50,000 daily thoughts and taking note of the way you think is unavoidable because if many of those thoughts are negative, they will be affecting your self-esteem, your outlook, your productivity, your communication, and ultimately

your revenues and profitability. Equally, positive change — change towards what you *really* want in your life — begins with positive thinking.

I have read a couple of wonderful books this year that will help you better understand how habits work: *The Power of Habit: Why we do what we do and how to change* by Charles Duhigg*, and *Making Habits, Breaking Habits: How to Make Changes that Stick* by Jeremy Dean*. And remember:

All our life, so far as it has definite form, is but a mass of habits.

—William James, 1892

The benefits of journaling

In case you haven't guessed, I have a particular interest in the latest brain science research. The reticular activating system (RAS) sends a strong message to your cerebral cortex **when you write things down**. Using pen and paper. There are many reasons for this.

There is a thoughtfulness that comes with handwriting that doesn't come as easily when using a keyboard. You connect spatially to your pen and paper and move through a process which involves more conscious thought than using a keyboard. You can't write at the same speed as you type, so you go more slowly, which equates to more thoughtfully. In short, the connection between the task and brain is stronger.

Getting you away from your desk, away from the office environment, away from distractions to writing, reinforces this

thoughtfulness. It's about reflection, planning, innovation and possibilities. To help you to think differently, it's important to create the environment to assist you in doing just that. I could go on, but I know that if I had to hand-write this book and post it to you, it would be a different book! Maybe, just maybe, it might be a better book.

Recent research explains the benefits and the impact that journaling — writing down your reflections on the day — has on your mindset.

Journaling allows us to pause and consider consciously the positives and negatives in our day. It affords us the opportunity to reframe our day in our minds to our benefit. And it's one of the simplest ways to cultivate a positive mindset so we can perform better in the face of challenges.

Journaling is a great way to train your brain to achieve the 'happiness advantage'. To find out more about this research, buy yourself a copy of *The Happiness Advantage* by Shawn Achor.

Chasm closers



Grab a big sheet of paper. Just start writing:

What would you choose to do differently if you were more present, more conscious and if your daily actions were consistently aligned to strategy?

What are the TOP 3 areas in which you could change your thinking and behavioural habits to improve performance and expedite the success of your strategy?

What strategies can you put in place immediately to keep you focused on those TOP 3 areas every day?

Let your mind wander. If you consciously manage the way in which you choose to respond to your environment, what will change? Write it down.

What would happen if you became conscious enough, in the moment, to respond out of a choice in line with your strategy, instead of responding habitually?

What change would have the single biggest impact on your personal and professional success? How would this impact the business? Can you put a measure on it?

How can you learn and grow those skills which will make you more effective as a leader?

What is one professional challenge that you're currently facing? How could you approach your challenge with more of a growth mindset?

Leadership is scarce because few people are willing to go through the discomfort required to lead. This scarcity makes leadership valuable. It's uncomfortable to stand up in front of strangers. It's uncomfortable to propose an idea that might fail. It's uncomfortable to challenge the status quo. It's uncomfortable to resist the urge to settle. When you identify the discomfort, you've found the place where a leader is needed. If you're not uncomfortable in your work as a leader, it's almost certain you're not reaching your potential as a leader.

—Seth Godin, *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us**