

Search Inside Yourself By Chade Meng Tan(Google Engineer)

This book abstract is intended to provide just a glimpse of this wonderful book with the hope that you may like to read the original book at leisure and enjoy its real beauty.

This book is based on Search Inside yourself curriculum at Google. We saw this knowledge and practices enhanced creativity, productivity, and happiness in those who took this course. You will find many things in this book that are useful to you, and some things that may surprise you. For example, you will learn how to calm your mind on demand. Your concentration and creativity will improve. You will perceive mental and emotional processes with more clarity. You will discover that self confidence arises naturally in a trained mind. You will learn to uncover your ideal future and develop optimism and resilience necessary to thrive. You will find that you can improve empathy with practice. You will learn that social skills are highly trainable and that you can help others love you.

What I find most rewarding is that this program has worked for real Americans working in high stress environment.

This program works in 3 steps.

1. Attention training
2. Self knowledge and self mastery
3. Creating useful mental habits.

Attention training

It is the basis of all higher cognitive and emotional abilities. The idea is to train attention to create a quality of mind that is calm and clear at the same time. It is the foundation of emotional intelligence.

Self knowledge and self mastery

Use trained attention to create high resolution perception into your cognitive and emotive processes. With this, you can observe your thought stream and process of emotion with high clarity, and to do so objectively from a third person perspective. With this you can create the type of deep self knowledge that eventually enables self mastery.

Creating useful mental habits

Having a habitual instinctive thought of “I wish this person to be happy” when you meet anybody, changes everything at work, because this sincere goodwill is picked up consciously by others, and you create the type of trust that leads to highly productive collaborations. Such habits can be volitionally trained.

Chapter 1: Even an engineer can thrive on Emotional Intelligence

What lies behind us and what lies ahead of us are tiny matters to what lies within us- Ralph Waldo Emerson

EI is the ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions. It can be classified into five domains

1. Self awareness: Knowledge of one's internal states, preferences, resources and intuitions
2. Self Regulation: Management of one's internal states, impulses, and resources.
3. Motivation: Emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals
4. Empathy: Awareness of others' feelings, needs and concerns
5. Social skills: Adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others

Benefits of EI

It enables stellar work performance and outstanding leadership. Studies show that Emotional competencies are twice as important for excellence as pure intellect and expertise. The top six competencies for star performers are

1. Strong achievement drive and high achievement standards
2. Ability to influence
3. Conceptual thinking
4. Analytical ability
5. Initiative in taking challenges
6. Self confidence

Out of these, only conceptual thinking and analytical ability are purely intellectual competencies. All others are emotional ones.

The Ability to Create conditions for sustainable happiness.

Mathew Ricard(happiest man in the world) defines happiness as "a deep sense of flourishing that arises from an exceptionally healthy mind...not a mere pleasurable feeling, a fleeting emotion, or a mood, but an optimal state of being". It is a profound emotional balance struck by a subtle understanding of how mind functions. It is a skill that can be trained.

EI helps you to optimize yourself and function at a higher level than what you are already capable of.

Cultivating EI:

In this we focus on expanding the range and depth of emotional capabilities. EI is a collection of human skills which are trainable. EI development automatically solves behavioural issues.

Train Attention:

Strong, stable, and perceptive attention which leads to calmness and clarity is the foundation of EI. For example, self awareness develops the ability to examine our thoughts and emotions from a third person perspective. Attention results in self regulation which allows response flexibility. In a situation, you experience a strong emotional stimulus, but you pause for a split second before responding. That pause gives you a choice about how to respond. This is freedom. The calm and clear mind increases the space. In our response lies our growth and happiness.

The way to develop attention is through “mindfulness meditation”. You can regulate your brain through this.

There is a simple technique of self regulation called “affect labelling”, It simply means labelling feeling with words. For example, when you are angry, if you label your emotion as “I feel anger”, it helps you to manage anger. This has been scientifically proven.

Train at the level of Physiology:

We focus the strong, stable, and perceptive attention on our bodies. This enhances vividness and resolution. This is because every emotional experience is not just psychological but physiological as well. Moreover, we experience emotion more vividly in the body than in the mind.

More importantly, body attention allows high resolution perception of emotion when it arises, its subtle changes as it waxes and wanes, and finally ceases. With this we can better manage our emotion, because we are observing a slow motion response. For this we apply mindfulness to the body. Watching anger is not easy in the mind but easy in the body(tightness in the chest, forehead and shallow breath). It also strengthens our intuition.

Mindfulness in two minutes: To be done before going to sleep. It is a life changing practice.

Easy way: Just bring attention to your breathing for two minutes. Start by becoming aware of breathing and then pay attention to the process of breathing. Every time the attention wanders, just bring it back very gently.

Easier Way: Just sit without agenda for two minutes. The idea here is just to shift from “doing” to just “being”.

Chapter 2: Breathing as if your life depends on it: The Theory and practice of mindfulness meditation

Lao Tze: By non doing all doing becomes possible.

Meditation is just mind training.

Relaxed and alert at the same time: The big secret of meditation is that it gets you to a state of mind which is relaxed and alert at the same time. Mind become focussed and stable, but in a way that is relaxing. It is like riding a bicycle on an easy terrain. With enough practice, you can bring your mind to that state on demand and stay in it for a prolonged time. This produces three wonderful qualities of mind: calmness, clarity, happiness. It is like a pot of water with sediments. If the pot is agitated, the water appears dirty. But if the pot is at rest, the water will become calm, the sediments settle down and the water appears clear.

Happiness is the default state of mind:

When mind is calm and clear, happiness spontaneously arises. It is naturally joyful. This is because it is the default state of mind. That means happiness is not what you pursue, but what you allow.

Meditation is like exercise:

Through physical exercise we develop physical capabilities. Through meditation, we develop mental capabilities. In both cases, growth comes from overcoming resistance. Both can significantly change the quality of your life.

There is no bad meditation. Every time the mind wanders and you bring it back, your mental muscles become stronger.

Practice of mindful meditation:

It starts by creating intention for meditation. It may be to reduce stress, or something more. You can do it any time. The act of creating intention is itself a form of meditation. Doing it repeatedly creates a mental habit. If you repeatedly create an intention of taking care of your well being, in every situation you will bias every thought and action accordingly. This is even more so when the intention is for others' well being. You become kinder and nicer and people start liking you.

Next thing to do is to follow your breath. Like the guard at the gate, just watch breath come in and go out. This improves the attention, and the mind becomes calm and concentrated. Initially, this may be for a few seconds before distractions (worrying, fantasizing) come in. After a while, we realize the attention has wandered away. Don't criticize, just bring the attention gently back to breathing.

You also become aware of your attitude to yourself. Shift your attention to self directed kindness and curiosity. It is another kind of meditation, and forms mental habits. Through this we overcome self hatred and become our own best friend. This practice is to see yourself in the eyes of a loving grandmother.

Posture and stuff: Any posture comfortable to you is OK. It must help you to remain alert and relaxed for a long period of time.

When distracted by sounds, just acknowledge. Experience without judging or reacting. If you need to react, continue maintaining mindfulness. And then let it go. If not, just let it be. It is like an invitation. The recipient may accept or decline the invitation. We are happy either way.

Do this for 10 minutes or as long as you want.

Chapter 3: Mindfulness without butt on cushion

Buddha: Mindfulness is useful everywhere.

It may be one of the most important things you can ever learn in your life.

In general, generalize mindfulness:

The challenge is to extend meditation into all situations in life.

Our attention naturally gravitates towards pleasant or unpleasant things. If you can train yourself to keep attention on something neutral like your breath, then you can keep your attention on anything else.

There are two areas in which you can extend mindfulness. First one is from rest to activity. The second one is from self to others.

Mindfulness in activity:**Walking Meditation:**

Start by standing still. Become aware of the pressure on feet as they touch the ground. Take a moment to experience this body standing on the ground. Now, take a step forward. Lift one foot mindfully, move it forward mindfully, plant it down mindfully, and shift your weight to this foot mindfully. Take a short pause, and do it with the other foot. If you like, you can say “lifting, lifting, lifting” or “moving, moving, moving”. When you wish to stop, “standing”, and when turning, “turning”. You can have any speed while walking. You can do it anywhere, even while going to restroom. This is very restful for the mind and enhances creativity.

Mindful Listening:

When a friend or loved one is speaking to you, remind yourself that this person is valuable to you, and hence entitled to all your attention and all the space and time needed to express.

Give full attention to the speaker. If attention wanders, gently bring it back. Do not ask questions or lead the speaker. You can nod your head, and say “I see”, “I understand” only if necessary. Everyone loves attention. They will love you for that. They bloom like flowers with such attention.

In mindful conversation, you listen mindfully, check with the other person whether you have understood what he/she said, then check how you are feeling about what you are hearing. After that, you may speak.

Lightness and joy in meditation:

Don't try hard, stay relaxed, and enjoy the process. Don't have any expectations during meditation. Use joy as an object of meditation.

Mindfulness brings joy to neutral experiences and makes joyful experiences even more joyful.

Both types of meditation, sitting, and activity based are important. Both complement each other. Sitting one being most important.

Focussed attention is an intense focus on a chosen object. It is stable, strong and unwavering. Open attention is a quality of attention willing to meet any object that arrives at the mind or senses. It is open, flexible, and inviting. In mindfulness meditation, you are training both.

Meditation Circuit Training:

For focussed attention, do breathing meditation for 3 minutes. After a long pause, shift into open attention. In this every object you see/experience is an object of meditation. There is nothing like distraction. Do it for 3 minutes. You can do these in a cycle for a few times.

The benefits are, strong meta attention(attention of the attention), and clarity and vividness of attention, like a torch light. The third feature is developing a balance of effort and relaxation. Too much of effort is tiring and unsustainable. Too little effort makes you lose attention. It is like having the right tension in the strings of a musical instrument, or the right degree of difficulty while playing the games. The final benefit of either meditation is the ease and flow developed. When you are

engaged in an activity which is fun, easy and sufficiently challenging, you get into this flow. You are performing at your best and the mind is still at ease.

Zen and walking baby: When a baby starts walking, the initial progress is very slow. But, one day, the progress is sudden. Then, again there is a lull in progress, and then a burst of progress. Meditation progress is also like that.

Chapter 4: All Natural, Organic Self Confidence

Self awareness leads to self confidence.

Albert Einstein: You can't solve the problem with the same mind which created it.

Deepening self awareness is about developing clarity within oneself. There are two specific qualities we like to develop- resolution and vividness.

Self awareness competencies:

1. Emotional awareness: Recognising one's emotions and their effects
2. Accurate self assessment: Knowing one's strengths and limits
3. Self Confidence: A strong sense of one's self worth and capabilities

Self awareness leads to understanding of failure and recovery modes. If we clearly understand how and when our system fails, and also how and when it can recover quickly, then failure becomes inconsequential.

The flag is like a mind. It can be turbulent due to strong emotions, flag fluttering violently. The flagpole is like mindfulness- it keeps the mind steady and grounded despite all that emotional movement.

Body scan

Setting attention. Sit comfortably for two minutes

Scan Body:

Head. Bring attention to the top of your head, ears, and back of your head. Notice sensations, or lack of it. 1 Minute

Face: Now, move attention to your forehead, eyes, cheeks, nose, lips, mouth, and inside of mouth for 1 minute

Back: Now, bring attention to your lower back, mid, and upper back for 1 minute

Front: Now, bring attention to the chest and stomach for 1 minute.

Entire body at once for 1 minute

Scan for emotion

Did you find any emotion in the body? If yes, just notice. If not, notice that as well. Catch one if it arises for next 2 minutes.

Positive emotion: Bring mind to a happy memory(an event) when you felt optimally productive or felt confident. Notice how it feels in the body(check all parts), and breathing. Do it for 3 minutes

Return to grounding. Return to present, and be there for 2 minutes.

Body scan works better than just mindfulness in day to day activities. The main reason is focus. It makes you aware of your suppressed emotions into your body. Second benefit is better sleep.

Journaling:

It is a practice of writing to yourself. It helps you to discover what is in your mind that is not in a clear, conscious view.

Take 3 minutes time out for yourself. Then you give yourself a prompt like “What I am feeling now is...” For 3 minutes, write down whatever comes to your mind. Don’t think, just write. Do not stop writing even if you have nothing to write. Keep writing “I have nothing to write” in that case, and resume writing if you have something to write.

Journaling is mindfulness of thoughts and emotions. This is moment to moment, non-judging attention to thoughts and emotions as they arise.

You can change prompts to any one of the following

“What hurts me is...” , “I am aware that...”, “I wish..”, “What motivates me is..”, “I am inspired by..”, “Today, I aspire to..”, “Love is...”

Journaling for self assessment:

Priming the mind: Spend 2 minutes thinking about one or more instances in which you responded positively to a challenging situation, and the outcome was very satisfying to you. 30 seconds pause

Journal:

Prompts(2 minutes per prompt):

“Things that give me pleasure are..”, “My strengths are...”

Prime: Now spend 2 minutes thinking about one or more instances in which you responded negatively to a challenging situation and the outcome was very unsatisfying. 30 seconds pause.

Journal:

Prompts(2 minutes per prompt)

“Things that annoy me are...”, “My weaknesses are...”

Take a few minutes to read out what you wrote.

My Emotions are not me

With self awareness we realize that we are not emotions. For example, “I am angry”, “I am happy”, “I am sad”, are wrong descriptions. We are not what these emotions are. We feel anger, happiness, sadness. In the former, you are a victim, in the latter, you can master your feelings.

Thoughts and emotions are like clouds(dark or beautiful) in our core being like sky, which is clear.

Chapter 5: Riding Your Emotions Like a Horse

Theme of this chapter- From compulsion to choice

About Self Regulation:

It involves

1. Self Control: Keeping disruptive emotions and impulses in check
2. Trustworthiness: maintaining standards of honesty and integrity
3. Conscientiousness: Taking responsibility for personal performance
4. Adaptability: Flexibility in handling change
5. Innovation: Being comfortable with novel ideas, approaches, and information

A common factor in all these is choice.

Self regulation is not avoiding or suppressing emotions:

In some situations it is appropriate to feel painful emotions. Feelings carry valuable information feedback. Hence, suppressing these is not good. Self regulation means being skilful with them.

Anger and indignation are different. In the former, there is no choice, whereas in the latter, there is choice and hence, power. Gandhiji's example.

Like Writing on Water:

While we cannot stop an unwholesome thought or emotion from arising, we have the power to let it go. It is like writing on water. The moment it arises, it disappears.

Practice of letting go:

One of the most important life changing insights gained in meditation is that pain and suffering are qualitatively distinct, and one does not necessarily follow the other. The origin of this practice is in letting go. It is one of the essential foundations of meditation practice. This is possible when we cease to have preferences.

Is it possible to let go and still appreciate and fully experience the ups and downs of life? Yes, it is possible. The key thing is to let go of grasping and aversion. Grasping is when the mind desperately holds on to something and refuses to let go. Aversion is when the mind desperately keeps something away and refuses to let it come. These two account for 90 % of the suffering we experience.

When we experience a phenomenon, we begin with a contact between sense organ and object, then sensation and perception arise, and immediately after, grasping or aversion arises. However, with mindfulness becoming stronger, you may notice the distinction, and may be even a tiny gap

between them. We can distinguish the difference between pain and aversion experiences. Then we have two important opportunities.

The first one is the possibility of experiencing pain without suffering. Because aversion is the actual cause of suffering, not the pain.

The second one is the possibility of experiencing happiness without clinging on to that experience, feeling that it might go away. That fear causes suffering.

We then enjoy flowers without fearing that they will wilt.

General Principles of Dealing with Distress:

1. Know when you are not in pain
2. Do not feel bad about feeling bad.
3. Do not feed the monsters
4. Start every thought with kindness and humour

Know When You Are Not in Pain:

This is very important practice and allows you to increase happiness by enjoying freedom from pain. At other level, we notice that even when experiencing pain, we know that it waxes and wanes, with intervals of no pain. Noticing these intervals gives temporary relief and provides a launch pad for recovery, and finding strength to face our problems.

Do Not Feel Bad About Feeling Bad:

We have distress about experiencing distress. We blame ourselves for not being good. It is an act of ego. It creates new distress for no reason.

Do not feed monsters:

Monsters cause distress. We can stop feeding them and then they go away. For example when we get angry, we notice that we are constantly feeding anger by telling stories. If we stop that, anger will subside.

Start every thought with kindness and humour:

Kindness for self and others is healing. Finding humour in our failings also reduces stress.

Dealing With Triggers:

Self regulation helps in dealing with triggers which cause a disproportionately large emotional response to a small situation.

The first step is “knowing” when you are triggered. For this be on the lookout for

Body: Shallow breathing, rapid heartbeat, and sick to the stomach.

Emotions: Experiencing “fight” or “flight” response

Thoughts: Feeling like a victim, blame, judgement, difficulty in paying attention

Triggers are due to past history of experiences.

Practice of dealing With Triggers:

Stop, Breathe, Notice, Reflect, Respond

The first and most important step when you feel triggered is to stop. It is a very important skill. Do not react just for a moment. This moment is known as a sacred pause. It enables all other steps. If you have to remember just one step in this practice, it is this one. In almost every instance, this step is enough to make a big difference.

The next step is to mindfully breathe to reinforce the sacred pause. Taking conscious deep breaths calms body and mind.

After that bring attention to the body and notice any emotions. Scan entire body, check tension, temperature changes. Try to experience emotional difficulty as simply a physiological phenomenon, without judging. Eg. I am experiencing anger in my body.

Next step is to reflect. Where is the emotion coming from(history)? Don't judge right or wrong.

Finally, bring to mind ways in which you might respond to bring a positive outcome. Just imagine the kindest, most positive response.

Practice:

Start with 3 deep breaths. Do mindful breathing for a minute.

Negative Emotion: For 2 minutes. Bring to mind a memory of an unhappy event, an event of frustration and anger, hurt. Basically a trigger. See if you can relive the event and associated emotions.

Managing negative emotion: For 7 minutes

First two steps are stop and breathe. This is sacred pause, which is reinforced by slow, deep breathing. Stay in this pause for 30 seconds.

The next step is to notice emotion experience through body scan. Let us take a minute to experience the physiology of emotion.

Now we reflect on the source of the emotion. 30 second pause.

Now we respond. Just imagine the kindest, most positive response. In a minute or so create that response in mind. You don't have to do it.

Return to grounding:

Return to present for 2 minutes. Bring awareness back to breath. After a short pause, make a tight fist with your hand, holding all residual emotion there. Slowly open your fingers to let go of that energy.

Bring your attention back to your body, or breath. Stay there for a minute.

The first 3 steps can be strengthened with sitting meditation practice. The last two steps are best strengthened in a real life setting.

Other ways to handle Triggers:

The timeline begins with the triggering event and goes from left to right. We begin with attention control, but move increasingly toward cognitive change.

In attention control, we calm the mind and observe the body through Counting up to 10, taking deep breaths, and thinking of something else if things appear overwhelming (reading something on hand, or a restroom break).

Attention control is good and necessary, but not sufficient. Even if you become calm, the issues behind the trigger will remain unresolved. Hence, cognitive work is necessary. This requires reframing or reinterpreting meaning of situation through checking past memories, other's perspective. See the positives in the situation and use kindness and compassion towards yourself and others. The positives may include the feedback about what aspects of meditation practice you need to still work on.

The final piece of the framework is creating a willingness to experience and accept the emotions. Visualize yourself as a mesh or screen through which the feelings pass through your body.

From Self Regulation to Self Confidence:

When we tame aversion, we tame ruminations and obsessive thoughts. Then self confidence increases. This is step forward from understanding failure and recovery mechanisms. The recovery after failure will then be much faster and cleaner.

Making Friends with Emotions:

When panic strikes you, learn to make friends with panic, neither taking orders from it nor wishing it to go away, but just allowing it to come and go at will and treating it with kindness.

Rumi's poem- Guest House

This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all! Even if they are a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture,

Still treat each guest honourably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.

Chapter 6: Making Profits, Rowing Across Oceans, and Changing the World

You are the world's top expert at figuring out what motivates you. In this chapter you will learn to discover them.

Pleasure, Passion and Higher Purpose:

Tony Hsieh describes in his book "Delivering Happiness" three types of happiness.

1. **Pleasure:** It is about chasing the next high. Very difficult to sustain.
2. **Passion:** also known as "flow", where peak performance meets peak engagement, and time flies by.
3. **Higher purpose:** This is about being part of something bigger than yourself that has meaning to you.

These three have varying sustainability. The happiness that arises from pleasure is highly unsustainable. The one from flow is much more sustainable. The one from higher purpose is highly sustainable. It is very resilient, and can last for a very long time, if the purpose is an altruistic one.

Interestingly, we do exactly the opposite. That is why we spend most of our time seeking pleasure, sometimes we enjoy flow, and once in a while, we think of higher purpose.

This insight suggests that the best way to find motivation at work is to find our own higher purpose. Then, flow automatically follows, and you also get pleasure as a bonus.

Motivation in Three easy Steps:

Alignment, Envisioning, Resilience

Alignment:

Having Fun for a Living:

Alignment means aligning our work with our values and higher purpose. Then your work is your hobby and you get paid for that as well. This work is deeply meaningful to you, and it generates a state of flow in you.

Flow: It is most important, and an ultimate motivator. It is a state of peak performance. It is being completely involved in the activity for its own sake. The ego falls away, the time flies. Your skills are optimally utilized.

Flow occurs when the task at hand matches your skill level. Difficult enough to challenge you and keep your interest, but not so much as to overwhelm you. It requires focussed attention provided through mindfulness exercises.

Autonomy, mastery, purpose:

Best motivators are not external(money), but intrinsic ones. These are

Autonomy: The urge to direct our lives

Mastery: The desire to get better and better at something that matters

Purpose: The yearning to do what we do in service of something bigger than ourselves.

Know and Align Thyself:

Alignment is built upon self awareness. When you know yourself at a deeper level, you begin to understand your core values, purposes, and priorities. With this clarity, your chosen work will become a source of your happiness. Mindfulness practice provides all these. Sharing these with others(near ones) and journaling also help in this.

Envisioning:

It is much easier to achieve something if you can visualize achieving it. Expect what you want to achieve.

Discover Your ideal Future:

This writing exercise is done for 7 minutes. The only prompt for this is

“If everything in my life, starting from today, meets or exceeds my most optimistic expectations, what will be my life after 5 years.” Consider the following questions before you write

Who are you and what are you doing?

How do you feel?

What do people say about you?

Spend a minute in contemplation before writing.

Another way is to write your own obituary. One based on current status and one an ideal one.

Talk about your future a lot.

The more you talk, the more real it appears, even if it appears highly improbable and impossible.

Resilience:

It is the ability to overcome obstacles along the way. Alignment and envisioning help you to find where you want to go, resilience helps you to get there. This is trained at three levels.

1. Inner Calm: It is the foundation of all optimism and resilience.
2. Emotional Resilience: success and failure are emotional experiences. We increase our capacity for them.
3. Cognitive resilience: Understanding how we explain our setbacks to ourselves and creating useful mental habits that help us develop optimism.

Inner Calm: Think happiness as a deep ocean. The surface may be choppy, but the bottom is always calm. This is also true for resilience.

Emotional resilience : Emotions are most strongly felt in the bodies. Make them your friends. Let go of grasping and aversion.

Meditation on Resilience :

Start with 3 deep breaths.

Breathe consciously. Then bring attention to the body. Take a long pause.

Failure: for 4 minutes

Bring to mind the memory of a failure- having let yourself and others down. See, hear, and feel it.

Observe the emotions in mind and body. After a 2 minute pause, see whether you can create ability to experience these without aversion. Let them come, stay and go as they wish. Take a long pause.

Success: For 4 minutes

Bring to mind a memory of a significant success. See, hear, and feel it.

Observe the emotions and feel in the body. After a 2minute pause, check whether you can experience this without grasping. Let the emotions come, stay or go as they wish. After a long pause, return to present moment for 3 minutes. After that check how you feel in the body. After a pause, take a deep breath and let go. Continue relaxed breathing. Continue noticing what happens in the body. Slowly open your eyes.

Cognitive Resilience:

An athlete(Michael Jordan) was brave enough to tell the world how much of a failure he was:

“I have missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I have lost almost 300 games. 26 times I have been trusted to take a game-winning shot and missed. I have failed over and over again in my life...”

And he continued, “...and that is why I succeed.”

How we talk to ourselves when we experience setback is important. Optimistic people react to setbacks with a presumption of personal power. They feel that setbacks are temporary, are isolated to particular circumstances, and can eventually be overcome by effort and abilities. The reverse is true for pessimists. They feel helpless after a setback, think these are long lasting, generalized across their lives, and are due to inadequacies they can't overcome. An optimist responds to a setback by figuring out how he can do it better next time. The pessimist feels that nothing more can be done and gives up.

Learning Optimism, unlearning Pessimism:

Happily, optimism can be learned. Ironically, it starts with being realistic and objective. We naturally pay more attention to negative than positive occurrences in our lives. If there are ten reviews of our work, nine glowing and one nasty, we remember the nasty one. Positive psychology experts say that it takes 3 positive experiences to overcome one negative one.

The first step in learning optimism is becoming aware of our own strong experiential bias. It is likely that we have much more success in our lives than failures, but we pay much more attention to failures than success. Just understanding this thing can change how you see yourself.

The second step is mindfulness. Learning optimism requires us to create objectivity toward our experiences.

The last step is transformation. While experiencing success, take conscious note of it and accept the credit for it. When experiencing failure, focus on realistic evidence suggesting that the setback may be temporary. If you have thoughts of inadequacy, recall past successes of which you took conscious note and accepted credit. If you find evidence suggesting reasons for realistic hope, bring your attention to it. Doing this often creates new mental habits. This creates optimism.

Chapter 7 : Empathy and the Monkey Business of Brain Tangos

Our brains are pre wired for empathy and compassion. Compassion means suffering together.

Brain Tango: If you are strong in self awareness, you are very likely to be very strong in empathy. Empathy works by physiologically mimicking the other person. It does not mean psychologizing or agreeing. In empathy, we understand the problem, in the latter you dismiss the problem.

It is possible to make tough decisions while still being empathetic. Best way tough decisions are done is with kindness and empathy.

How to increase empathy?

It increases with kindness. It also increases with perceived similarity. We must create a mind that feels others are "just like me."

Creating Desired Mental Habits:

Whatever one frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of mind. For example, every time you see another person, you wish for that person to be happy, then eventually, it will become your mental habit. After a while, you develop an instinct for kindness. It shows in your face, posture, and attitude every time you meet somebody. People will be attracted to your personality, not just your good looks.

A formal way to practice this is "Just Like Me/Loving Kindness Practice

Setup: Sit in a comfortable, relaxed and alert position. Start with 2 minutes of mindful breathing.

Bring to mind someone whom you care about. Visualize him/her(use photograph if you wish)

Just Like Me: Now read the script below slowly to yourself, pausing at the end of each sentence for reflection.

This person has a body and mind, just like me.

This person has feelings, emotions and thoughts, just like me.

This person has, at some point in time in his life, been sad, disappointed, angry, hurt, or confused, just like me.

This person has, in his life, experienced physical and emotional pain and suffering just like me.

This person wishes to be free from pain and suffering, just like me.

This person wishes to be healthy and loved, and to have fulfilling relationships, just like me.

This person wishes to be happy, just like me.

Loving Kindness: Now let's allow some wishes to arise.

I wish for this person to have strength, the resources and the emotional and social support to navigate the difficulties in life.

I wish for this person to be free from pain and suffering.

I wish for this person to be happy.

Because this person is a fellow human being, just like me. Pause

Now, I wish for everybody I know to be happy. Long pause.

Closing: end with 1 minute resting the mind

You feel happy after doing this exercise. Kindness is a sustainable source of happiness. You can use it when you get into conflict with someone you care about in family or at work. It may save relationships.

Traditional Practice of Loving Kindness: Metta Bhavana

It starts with few minutes of mindful meditation. Once you are calm, you invite a feeling of kindness towards yourself. Quietly, repeat these phrases to yourself

May I be well

May I be happy

May I be free from suffering

After a few minutes of this, do it for someone you like, or admire.

After a few minutes of that, do the same for a neutral person(no like/dislike, not even known well).

After a few minutes, do it for a person you dislike, who creates difficulties for you.

Finally, extend the feeling to all sentient beings.

One of the best things about this practice is that by the time you come to the difficult person, your mind has already marinated in loving kindness, making it easier for you to break your mental habits about that person.

After a while, you may run out of people you dislike.

Bringing Out Best In people:

This practice facilitates growth of others and brings out best in them.

Empathy helps build trust. Steps in mentoring/coaching

1. Establish trust
2. Listen
3. Ask probing and open ended questions
4. Provide feedback
5. Partner to create options and practices

This vulnerability based trust is when team members trust intentions of each other enough that they are willing to expose their own vulnerabilities because they are confident their exposed vulnerabilities will not be used against them. Hence, they are willing to admit the issues and deficiencies and ask for help. They focus on achieving the team's common goals, rather than wasting time trying to defend their egos and look good to teammates.

Start with Sincerity, Kindness, and Openness

Engage the other person as a human being, not just an opponent, a customer, or a co-worker. Tips for building trust are

1. Practice giving people a benefit of doubt: Most people do what they do because it feels like the right thing at the right time, based on what they want to accomplish and the information they have. Their reason makes sense to them, even if their actions do not make sense to us. Assume that they are making a right choice, even if we do not understand it.
2. Remember that trust begets trust:

Three Assumptions in a meeting

1. Assume that everybody in this room is here to serve the greater good, until proven otherwise.
2. Given the above assumption, we therefore assume that none of us has any hidden agenda, until proven otherwise.
3. Given the above assumption, we therefore assume that we are all reasonable even when we disagree, until proven otherwise.

These assumptions build trust.

Empathetic Listening

The following 4 things strengthen our ability for empathetic listening.

1. Mindfulness- More perceptive, receptive
2. Kindness-we can better listen to feelings
3. Curiosity-practice wondering feelings of the person
4. Practice more of empathetic listening.

Informal Practice of Empathetic Listening

Preparing for conversation:

If you have time do mindfulness meditation. If you have more time, do Just like me/loving kindness exercise. With this, you become more receptive, and other person also becomes more receptive to you.

During the Conversation:

Begin the conversation thinking “I want this person to be happy.” Use above mentioned 4 tips. Give generous amount of time to the person to express.

If it is appropriate, and comfortable, you may ask the person how he is feeling. If the situation warrants, and comfortable, you may tell gently and with kindness, “I hear that you are feeling....”. Generously, allow him to respond.

If it is appropriate, ask him “was the conversation useful to you?”

Praising People Skilfully:

Praise authentically and skilfully. Instead of person praise(you are smart) , process praise(you must have worked hard) is better. This is because the former reinforces a “fixed mind-set” about fixed traits that you have. When you fail, you feel you are inadequate and nothing can be done. In the latter, we reinforce a “growth mind-set”. This creates love of learning and resilience. Then, you can take up challenges.

Chapter 8: Being Effective and Loved at the Same Time

Research has shown that the most successful managers show more warmth and fondness towards others.

Using Kindness to Grow Friendship from an Ugly Situation

It requires a kind heart, an open mind, and the right social skills.

Real world is best place to sharpen your emotional skills. These are compassion, goodness, and communication with insight.

Compassion is the happiest state ever. The happiest persons underwent tests to measure happiness. They have revealed that during these tests they were meditating on compassion. They say that open awareness in which the mind is extremely open, calm and clear. Compassion needs to be practiced in the real world.

Compassion should feel like fun. It also has business benefits. It creates highly effective leaders.

Compassion has 3 components

Cognitive-I understand you.

Affective-I feel for you

Motivational-I want to help you

The process of compassion is going from “I” to “We”.

Top leaders have ambition and personal humility.

Training Compassion by Multiplying Goodness

We can train compassion like we do loving kindness. The more you think of something, the stronger the neural pathways conducive to that thought become. Eventually, the thought becomes a mental habit. We increase our ability to perceive and increase goodness, both within ourselves and toward others.

For this purpose, we employ another powerful tool of visualization. The practice is extremely simple. When we breathe in, we visualize that we are breathing in our own goodness, we visualize multiplying it by ten, and then breathe out, visualizing giving all that goodness to the world. After that, we breathe in goodness of other people and do the same.

Multiplying Goodness Meditation practice

Start with 2 minutes of resting the mind on breath.

Now, let us connect with the goodness within ourselves. Short pause.

Breathe in all your goodness, multiply by 10 and breathe out that to the world.

After a 2 minute pause, connect with the goodness within everybody we know and repeat the process.

After a 2 minute pause, connect with a goodness within everybody in the world, and repeat the process.

2 minute pause. Then close with 1 minute rest of mind on breath.

This practice develops three useful mental habits.

1. Seeing goodness in self and others. Strengthens the affective and cognitive components of compassion.
2. Giving goodness to all. This strengthens motivational aspects of compassion.
3. Confidence in the transformative power of self in multiplying goodness. Develops self confidence

Influencing with Goodness

The brain likes to minimize danger and maximize reward. The brains respond far more strongly to negative experiences than positive ones(Gottman's 5:1 ratio). We expect much more from spouses and near ones than others.

Model of social Brain

Status(relative importance) is important for all.

Our brain loves certainty. Uncertainty generates error responses,takes valuable brain resources. Larger uncertainties can be highly debilitating.

Autonomy: Perception of exerting control over one's environment. It is not the stress that gets you, but the feeling of helplessness in the face of stress does.

Relatedness- Perception of others being a friend or foe. Threat or reward.

Fairness-Humans are known to injure their self interests to punish the perceived unfairness of others.

Four steps to expand your influence(magnitude and reach)

1. Know that you already have influence
2. Strengthen self confidence
3. Understand people and help them succeed.
4. Serve the greater good

A person who did not like Dalai Lama was forced to have a 10 minute chat with him by his daughter. Dalai Lama did a strange thing by just holding his hand lovingly during the conversation. Dalai Lama did not even speak. The person experienced an abundance of goodness which transformed him.

Difficult Conversations

Since these are hard, one tends to avoid them. Conducting these is an extremely useful skill.

Five Steps in conducting conversations

1. Prepare by walking through "the 3 conversations."
2. Decide whether to raise the issue.
3. Start from the objective "third story."
4. Explore their story and yours.
5. Problem solve.

Three Conversations: They are the content(what happened?), the feelings conversation(what emotions are involved?), and the identity one(what does it say about me?)

Decide whether to raise the issue. Whether the intention is productive or not? Sometimes, it is better not to raise the issue.

Third story is from a third person's perspective. This forms a common ground with the other person.

Explore Their Story and Yours. Empathise with their story. Reframe stories from blame and accusation to learning about how each contributes to the situation and emotions involved.

Problem Solve. Invent solutions that meets each side's most important concerns and interests. Find ways to continue keeping communication open.