

Life under the
LIMBO BAR

Life under the LIMBO BAR

*Secrets for navigating it without
losing your mind*

FAITH WOOD

Double Your Faith Productions

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- * For your unwavering support even when I wanted to quit.
- * To my friends who believed it was possible and encouraged me to get my thoughts and presentations down on paper.
- * To you, the reader, for believing (at least in the possibility) of an easier dance through life and for picking up this book.

Thanks for sharing this journey with me!

“For a long time it had seemed to me that life was about to begin—real life. But there was always some obstacle in the way, something to be gotten through first, some unfinished business, time still to be served, a debt to be paid. Then life would begin. At last it dawned on me that these obstacles were my life.”

FATHER ALFRED D SOUZA

Inspirational writer/philosopher
from Brisbane, Australia (died in 2004)

*Famous for the phrase:
“Dance like no one is watching”*

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Prologue

WARNING: This book might just cause you to break a smile... even (gasp) make your cheeks hurt from smiling or laughing.

For the record, I am one of those way too serious types. I take my business seriously, I work too hard, and it definitely has impacted my sense of humor.

My saving grace has been my twin daughters, who are now 10 yrs old. Those little girls keep me laughing and smiling at the silliest of things they say and do. I have learned to look at life from a more childlike perspective, and it always amazes me how quickly the right solution can come to me when I get stuck.

What I love the most about Faith's book is that it helps you distill the most difficult of situations into a more simple way of solving the problem.

Much like a kid can be faced with a problem one minute, and be completely turned around playing the next, Faith's book helps you do that in your personal and business life.

Here's the problem though: Not everyone has little ones to help them lighten up a bit and start acting or thinking more like a kid again. And when the economy takes a turn for the worse, like we see before us right now, happiness tends to be much more elusive for many.

We get wrapped up in the stock market decline, real estate prices plunging, our savings disappearing, and security from a job becomes non-existent.

The worst part? The media. Watching television and listening to the radio will doom you to depression. All they want to do is hype up the latest “pandemic” or make you realize the sky is falling and the earth is warming. They care about one thing, and one thing only: getting people to watch and listen to their show.

If you fall for it... you have no choice but to see an increased level of stress in your life.

If you find yourself more stressed out over the simple (or big) things in life... read this book.

More importantly: take the techniques Faith shares with you in this fabulous resource, memorize them, and make them an everyday practice in your life.

Undoubtedly, you will become happier... easier going... less likely to fall victim to mass media hypnosis... and enjoy a much more enjoyable life.

PROLOGUE

Faith's book delivers the goods... will you accept them?

I did... and loved it.

My highest recommendation.

TROY WHITE

Responsive Direct Marketing, Inc

* Winner of the 2008 Leaders of Tomorrow Award

* 2009 Calgary Business Oscar Nominee

Dear Reader,

Different books are read in different ways. Novels may cause you to turn pages with eager anticipation of what's going to happen next. Other books you may skim for information and just to get the essence of what the author is trying to say. Still some are meant to just look at the pretty pictures and leave out on your coffee table to add décor to your home. But this book is meant to be read at least twice.

As the reader, you will want to read through quickly to get to the end and in the process maybe catch an epiphany or two. And this is, well, let's say acceptable. But Faith has written this book to be read with patience.

Before you begin, you should accept that she has written this book just for you. And as you read it, imagine you hear her voice speaking directly to you. See the pictures she creates in your mind from the stories and ideas she shares with you. Let them become as real as possible. And as this happens, feel your emotions to their fullest so that you can develop a better understanding of you, your life, and the path you choose in life.

As you read this book, maybe a little slower than you normally do, take a moment or two to consider what you have just read. Put the bookmark in the book and sit back, close your eyes and totally open your mind to what you have just read. And when you open the book again, you may even want to make notes in the margins (or a separate piece of paper if you are just borrowing the book)

PROLOGUE

about your self-discovery. Let yourself completely become part of the reading process like never before and you will find that you can keep your head and still not lose your balance as you pass under the limbo bar.

ROGER J. WILLARD

Author, Speaker, Private Detective

Note from the Author

It started out so innocently at first. I began by speaking to groups and writing articles that spun the most stressful moments of my own life into something that resembled a stand-up comedy routine. It made me feel better and apparently it had a similar effect on my audiences. Time after time, they asked for more of my unique perspective on life. I resisted at first, but friends and family continued to push me to take the time and write it down, and so I have.

One word of caution before you read on—I am not a researcher, nor do I profess to have all the answers or be the most accomplished author ever. I am, however, willing to share some of my tougher moments as a parent, spouse, colleague, and entrepreneur and how I spun those moments in such a way that they adjusted my focus.

This is not really intended to be a “self-help” manual—so please, do not contact me to contradict my point of view. Rather, take my example and develop your own unique lens for viewing the world around you.

There are no hard and fast rules for reading this book. Each chapter stands alone, so feel free to skip to those that have the most

relevance for you, or read cover to cover. Have fun and keep your sense of humour—nothing is meant to be taken too seriously or too personally—*unless the shoe fits!*

Where I have quoted others (who had the chance to say it before me), I have made every attempt to credit the original source and recognize their brilliance. Please forgive me if I inadvertently missed any. I truly believe that nothing new has been created in centuries; we are all just repackaging great works. The wisdom and wisecracks you find embedded in the following pages could easily have come from a great many brilliant minds. I am grateful to all who came before me and to those who have shared their own unique perspectives in books or seminars, or over a glass of dry red wine. Thank you, one and all (*especially if you purchased the wine.*)

May the following pages bring a smile to your face and inspiration to your own particular set of circumstances.

Enjoy!

FAITH WOOD

Understanding the Metaphor

“If you can’t see the bright side of life, polish the dull side.”¹

The limbo² is a high-spirited dance game of flexibility and balance. While Caribbean music is being played, limbo participants bend their bodies backwards and sideways in an attempt to navigate themselves under a horizontal bar or stick without falling. There are no specific rules governing how dancers may manoeuvre under the bar, but if they hit their head on the limbo bar or lose their balance and fall down, they are out of the game.

At first, the bar is held high, and it does not take much effort to get underneath. However, after each successful round, the stick is

1 <http://laughatthis.wordpress.com/>—July 2009

2 Learning to limbo. It is believed that the people of Trinidad used this dance to portray going down in the hold of slave ships that carried their people off into slavery. As they progressed deeper and deeper into the hold, they had to twist, turn, squirm, and arch. Some would make it, and some would not. The reason for all the twisting and turning was that the space between the upper deck and floor was narrow, designed for packing and not standing; hence it was referred to as going into limbo. <http://www.tntisland.com/limbo.html>—September 2009

lowered a notch, challenging dancers to be more careful with their balance, flexibility, and coordination.

When I was a young girl, I used to love this dance game. My sister and I would giggle and laugh as we showed the adults how easily we could contort ourselves to fit neatly under the bar. We never considered that we might not be able to do it; our carefree attitudes helped us achieve success at ultra-low heights.

Several years ago, I had the chance to limbo as an adult while on vacation in Mexico. With childlike enthusiasm, I embraced the opportunity. At first, I was feeling pretty smug, laughing and dancing as I easily slid under the stick (yes, it is good to be vertically challenged). But, as the bar was lowered with each successive round (and my fellow vacationers were bonking their heads and dropping out of the game) I started taking it all too seriously. My inner critic began talking, and the stress of thinking I wouldn't make it through the next round became all-encompassing. Eventually, my belief that the bar was simply too low threw my balance off, and, predictably, I fell flat on my butt in the sand.

The limbo game of life can have the same effect on us. It is easy to keep things in perspective when the limbo bar is high in the air—life coasting along smoothly and without hazard, not too many decisions to be made, minimal demands, no one agitating or making us crazy. But what happens when the bar gets lower and requires more tactical manoeuvring than we're used to; when our effortless existence and well-laid plans start to go awry?

UNDERSTANDING THE METAPHOR

As our daily lives intensify and our limbo bar continues to drop, we have the capacity to be our own worst enemies. Our self-talk begins to interfere with our objectivity, and we begin to doubt whether or not we can continue to manoeuvre under the limbo bar at all. Pressures rise, worry increases, and soon we are in danger of stumbling and falling flat on our butts, just as I did on the warm sand in Mexico.

Fortunately, it is when we are standing hip-deep in life crises that we realize we can often bend more than we ever dreamed we could. These defining moments show us how to tap into the resilience we need to maintain our balance as we navigate life's challenges and scoot below the bar.

When we slow down and relax our standards, we soon find that we have quite a lot of balance and flexibility within us, no matter how low the bar goes.

“There is no situation that occurs that can cause you to bonk your head on the limbo bar unless you allow it.”

FAITH WOOD

*“Congratulations,
thus far you have survived your own life!”*

LORETTA LAROCHE

CHAPTER I

A Month in Tahiti Sounds
Really Good Right Now



“The beatings will continue until morale improves.”

UNKNOWN SOURCE

It's 6 a.m. and your alarm clock is ringing. Refusing to let the light in too early, you navigate your way, bleary-eyed, out of bed and into the day. Stumbling, you trip over the dog and bang your knee on the bed frame. Wounded and limping, you make your way toward the shower. Adjusting the taps as you brush your teeth, you step in to find that the water is not just hot; it's boiling. It is searing your skin to your bones. Now you are awake and likely screaming. Your day is off to a great start.

Shuffling into the kitchen to put on the coffee and catch the news before heading out for the day, you drift in and out of a daydream involving warm sand and large, fruity drinks. As your attention returns to the room, you notice coffee pouring onto the floor rather than into the pot. Tired, frustrated, and annoyed, you head out the door with a stormy disposition. “Why me?” you ask. “Could this day get any worse?” you wonder. And then it happens—you are stuck in traffic, inching along the freeway. As you bang your head on the steering wheel and weep, you marvel at what you would do for a month in Tahiti.

Ah, stress. We can't live with it, and for some reason it won't leave us alone. Imagine how you would react after a morning like this when you walked through the office door into the never-ending demands, chaos, and conflict that are part of the work world. Would

you be able to turn your mood around? What if you were late for an important meeting? Would that make you feel worse?

This type of day happens to everyone. (If you're shocked because you've never experienced such a day, please put this book down, pick up the phone, and tell me which cave you have been living in for the past few years so I can move in with you.) The reality is that we all experience events like this. And we've all run into others who are locked into foul moods. For example, my husband and I were walking our dogs when we heard a woman loudly cursing at some boys on their bicycles, all because they dared to enter the intersection as she approached. The tirade continued long after everyone had moved on. Now that's someone having a bad day!

Even in the most laid-back of lives, there are moments of profound stress. Learning to recognize your triggers and developing some strategies for counteracting the effects of stress can change your life, making it easier to do what you need to do even during difficult periods.

This is all about getting through challenging days without losing your head, without stressing to the point that you stay in bed all day eating Häagen-Dazs (although that seems to be a pretty sensible response).

What is stress?

Stress is something we all experience and understand, even if we don't understand why we have to have it. We are living fast-paced lives with increasing demands. Although stress may be difficult to define, most of us would agree that it is a state where our minds and bodies feel overwhelmed.

Early work on stress, conducted by Walter Cannon in 1932, established the existence of the now well-known fight-or-flight response. Cannon's work showed that when an animal (and that's you) experiences a shock or perceives a threat, it releases hormones to help it survive. These hormones help you run faster and fight harder. They increase your heart rate and blood pressure, delivering more oxygen and blood sugar to power important muscles. They increase sweating in an effort to cool your muscles and help them stay efficient. They divert blood away from the skin to the core of your body, reducing blood loss if you are injured. These hormones also focus your attention on the threat, to the exclusion of everything else. All of this significantly improves your ability to survive life-threatening events.

Unfortunately, this mobilization of the body for survival has negative consequences, too. In this state, you are usually excitable, anxious, jumpy, and irritable. You may find it difficult to execute precise, controlled movements because you are trembling and your heart is pounding. And the intensity of your focus on survival interferes with your ability to make judgments based on information drawn from many sources. You may find you are more accident-prone and less able to make good decisions. Stress has also been

found to damage the immune system, which explains why we catch more colds when we are feeling overwhelmed.

Research shows that we experience the fight-or-flight response when simply encountering something unexpected. The situation does not have to be dramatic: you can experience this response when frustrated or interrupted, or when facing a situation that is new or in some way challenging. (Clearly, parenting a teen would fit neatly into this category.)

The stress response causes people to doubt their abilities to respond effectively and may cause them to choose poor ways of responding. While under pressure, some people drink heavily or smoke as a way of getting immediate chemical relief. Some of us choose to avoid stress rather than address it head-on. We refuse to talk about what is happening for fear others will judge us unfavourably, but this only contributes to loneliness and feelings of isolation, compounding the effects of stress.

Looking on the lighter side

A series of challenging events, coming one after another, can toss even the most stable person into a tailspin. This is such a common event that, in Western culture, we talk about Murphy's Law, the concept that anything that can go wrong will, and at the worst possible moment. Referring to the entertaining Murphy's Law in times of struggle is a way of capturing the light side of life—a moment of reprieve from our own helplessness and frustration. Murphy's Law

gives us a glimpse into a humorous reality. By framing our frustrations à la Murphy, we stimulate a more positive mindset and reduce our sense of worry and discouragement.



Been there, done that

Consider the following examples of Murphy's Law in action and see if you can keep a smile from your face or avoid recalling a memory of when this happened to you:

- Any time you put an item in a “safe place”, it will never be seen again.
 - Any tool dropped in a workshop will roll to the least accessible corner.
 - Any object dropped on the way to the least accessible corner will land on your toe.
 - Just when you finish putting it together, you notice that the most important part is still there on the floor.
-

Having a positive, or at least twisted, sense of humour is a great start to counteracting stress. However, sometimes a smile just won't do it. For myself, I have had to learn through life experience—that is, the hard way—on certain occasions.

As a professional hypnotherapist and trainer, I help people find ways to adapt to stressful situations. Nevertheless, I feel a bit like a fraud when I have to live through powerfully stressful events myself. In fact, when my mother used to tell me that God would never give me more than I could handle, my pat answer was always that God had overestimated my abilities.

After raising my children to be independent thinkers, I was shocked to find that they were thinking independently of me. All of a sudden, I felt like a spectator in their lives, watching from the sidelines and unable to cheer enthusiastically about any of the decisions they were making.

At a point of high stress with my son, who was 17 at the time, I began to understand and appreciate why mother tigers eat their young. I asked myself some fundamental questions:

- * Is there a magic moment in time when we get to disconnect from the daily worry and stress of parenting our children?
- * When do we allow our children to be accountable for their own behaviours and actions?
- * Is there a time when we get to enjoy the opportunity of simply being a spectator in our children's lives rather than feeling somehow responsible for all that they accomplish or fail to accomplish?

With a powerful need to do something about how I was feeling, I conducted an informal survey. What I learned was that I was not alone and that many other parents had this overwhelming urge to eat their young and start over again. My husband summed it up best when he said that sometimes parenting was more about a moment of passion rather than purposeful consideration of future consequences. (Ah, but if we did not have children to bless our lives, what else would we have to complain or brag about?)

Although this may sound very light-hearted, my purpose is to share what I have learned about stress, the effects it has on us, and how you can manage it so you can live life as joyfully as a child doing the limbo, even during difficult times.

My secrets—for what they're worth

Let me be clear: stress management is truly overrated. The reality is that there is very little that can actually be managed. Survived, maybe. Managed, no.

Striving to be perfect and live a stress-free life is wreaking havoc on our lives and on our overall health. You will never be perfect. I probably won't be either. What we can do is learn some tips and tricks to lighten up so we are better able to make one of the only three possible responses you can make to stress:

1. **Take action.** Taking action isn't always possible; you have to have some control over your situation. If you do, go for it! Focus on the most important or critical items and get others to help you solve the problem. Seriously address those items that are within your sphere of influence and leave the rest alone.
2. **Alter the emotional impact.** This response is useful when you have no power or influence over the situation. It is often not as attractive an option as the action-oriented approach, but it can help you come to grips with stuff you cannot control. In my case, I altered my perception by choosing to believe

that my son was raised in a good home with excellent values and would eventually grow to be a mature and prosperous young man. It worked.

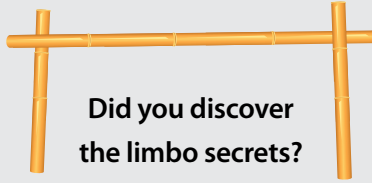
- 3. Accept what you cannot change.** This response can be really challenging. It reminds me of the saying, “Sometimes we have so little power over a situation that all we can hope to do is survive it.” To choose this response, you must first accept your own lack of power or influence over the person or situation. (And no, you cannot eat your young!)

There are many other responses to stress, but they aren’t going to get you anywhere. Still, I am the first to acknowledge that these three responses can be difficult to use. It’s hard to know, for example, what you can control and what you can’t.

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

REINHOLD NIEBUHR

Which is why I’m going to show you a variety of methods and tools you can use to help you become more stress-resistant, such as developing a sense of humour, learning to communicate, managing your emotions and attitude, rediscovering the joy of play, and developing a support team you can turn to when times are tough. Using these tools, you can reframe how you look at the limbo game of life. And the next time the bar is set frighteningly close to the ground, you’ll be able to relax, focus, and go as low as you need to go to keep the dance going.



- Everyone has “one of those days” once in a while, but looking at the seemingly never-ending frustrations in terms of Murphy’s Law is a good way to relax and smile about the challenges.
- Learning how to de-stress is an essential skill for everyone, especially you poor people with teenagers.
- Stress creates a physical reaction in our bodies. You feel better when you slow down, breathe deeply, and relax when stressed instead of running around, jumping up and down, clenching your fists, and hollering, “I can’t take it anymore.”
- A third option to the fight-or-flight response could be to nap, something I learned from a cat.
- You can learn to manage stress and limbo through the madness successfully!

CHAPTER 2

Laugh and the World Laughs with
You—Or Is That at You?



There are some things in life that should be taken very seriously. The other 95 per cent are up for laughs. Yes, there are times when you need to cry, when you need to grieve, and most definitely, when you need to be serious. But, fortunately, the majority of life can really be quite ridiculous—when seen through the right lens, of course.

In 1883, American author and poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox³ provided the world with advice from her poem “Solitude” that has endured the passing time. It reads, “Laugh, and the world laughs with you / Weep, and you weep alone.” Of course, these days, it could possibly read, “Laugh, and the world looks at you kind of funny ...”

Wilcox’s poem is a perfect analogy for everyday life, especially when it comes to taking yourself too seriously. Sure, there are many serious aspects of life, such as the health and well-being of your children, family, and loved ones; paying the mortgage or rent; getting to work on time. But when you think about it, many of the circumstances or situations that spark anger or frustration inside don’t need to have that effect, if you change the way you look at things.

Let’s go back to the limbo. If you’re taking the dance seriously, if you’re stressed about getting under the bar, how well are you going

3 Ella Wheeler Wilcox (November 5, 1850–October 30, 1919) was an American author and poet. Her best-known work was *Poems of Passion*. Her most enduring work was *Solitude*, which contains the lines “Laugh, and the world laughs with you / Weep, and you weep alone.” Her autobiography, *The Worlds and I*, was published in 1918, a year before her death.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ella_Wheeler_Wilcox—September 1, 2009

to do? But what would happen if you changed the way you looked at the situation and saw that it was just a game, a bit of fun?

How weak is your funny bone?

Ask yourself: Do you imagine that everyone else is out to make you miserable? Do you fuss and fume when you have to wait in line at the bank or grocery store for what seems to be an inordinate amount of time? Do you find yourself wanting to scream and run from the building when faced with the innumerable forms you have to fill out when dealing with government?

If the answer is yes, then consider this. Why is your time so much more important than everyone else's?

Have you ever skipped the grocery store line you were in for one that appeared shorter? I know I have. Of course, it always seems that once you make the switch, something happens, and wouldn't you know it, you would have been better off staying in the first line. In this sort of situation, we should learn to laugh at ourselves.

I was once caught in a huge traffic jam on the highway, and all three southbound lanes were diverted through a one-lane detour. There was no place to go and nothing to do but inch forward for almost two hours. The majority of drivers accepted the fact that they couldn't do anything to change the situation. A few drivers, however, obviously thought they were more important than everyone else and had to get where they were going right now, or apparently the world

would come to an end. The impatient drivers drove *creatively*, along the shoulder or in the ditch, to get as far forward as they could. While the situation at first ticked me off, I soon found something to laugh about. I was in the outside lane, with a semi-trailer right behind me. After a couple of vehicles had zipped past on the shoulder, the semi driver decided to do something about it and pulled his cab onto the shoulder, thus blocking any others who thought they should be able to jump the line. I actually laughed out loud at his *creative* genius.

The drivers who stressed and forced their way out may have made it to their destinations five minutes earlier than the rest of us, but I believe keeping life light-hearted is a much healthier way to live.

On many occasions, I have found myself cut off by careless and aggressive drivers on city roadways who feel that their time is more valuable than mine. I take great pleasure in rolling up beside them, one lane over, at the next red light—honking my horn and waving. “REMEMBER ME? Look, we are here at exactly the same time!” (Always remember to have a huge smile on your face when you do this and never give the one-finger salute, as that can lead to a whole lot more trouble than you were going for.)

Being able to laugh at yourself and the world around you is one way of staying relatively sane. When you can see the humour in situations and laugh at them as well as at yourself, you’re better able to be flexible and find solutions to your problems. You’re also more likely to continue to get under the limbo bar of life without a head injury.

What are you laughing at?

It is important to figure out when it is appropriate to laugh out loud and when it is not. There are some people who may take offence if you let out a snort or guffaw when they are trying to make a serious point. Knowing how to keep a good balance between serious and light-hearted is a great quality to possess.

I am sure you can recall a moment when you missed the mark on this one. To avoid that type of unpleasant situation, practise the following:

- * **Pay attention to how emotionally invested the person is in the story.** The deeper the emotion, the more inclined people are to take it very seriously. This is especially true if dealing with the death of a loved one, loss of a job, etc.
- * **Find out how much time has passed since the event.** This can help you understand how everyone is coping. When you first get terminated from a job there is often nothing funny about it, but give it a week or so and your perspective may change.
- * **Watch people's body language.** Emotions are often displayed in body language, and you can learn to read the clues before opening your mouth and putting your foot in it.

Catching the humour bug

Humour serves a wide range of purposes, such as developing strong relationships between groups and individuals. It can also become a strategic coping mechanism for handling stress because, by its very nature, it gives us the ability to alter our perception and refocus on the positives.

During Ted Kennedy's funeral, his children shared fun memories of Dad. One spoke of a particularly funny moment with Dad after both his sons were elected to the Senate. At that celebration, Ted stated how happy he was: "Now when they say 'That damn Kennedy,' there is only a one-in-three chance they are talking about me."

Sharing this kind of fond and funny memory helps lessen the sadness of loss and puts smiles on the faces of friends and family. It is easier to remember loved ones who have passed for who they were, rather than for where they are not.

I recall attending a funeral for my husband's boss, who died tragically in a motor vehicle collision. At the service, his young family was struggling to cope with tears until they played his favourite song and told the story of how he used to dance ridiculously around the house with a tea towel on his head. This started all the mourners laughing outrageously and made it easier for everyone to cope with the difficult day.

Take the time to discover humour wherever possible!

Those who work in the public service are often good at incorporating quick humour into their daily interactions. It is not meant to belittle anyone, but rather to reframe some of the challenges and complaints they face on a day-to-day basis that would otherwise leave them feeling overwhelmed, bitter, and resentful.

When I worked as a first responder, learning to adopt a comical perspective was truly an art form that got passed on from one colleague to another. Spontaneous and quick, humour often helped alleviate a crisis. In addition to the calls they respond to, first responders' interactions with the public, co-workers, other emergency responders, supervisors, and politicians can be fraught with conflict. Compound this situation with working long hours in less-than-optimal working conditions, and it can seem as if the non-jaded are the strange ones. Being able to get everyone else to step outside the moment and find humour is a real gift.

I once pulled over an agitated gentleman who demanded to know why I was not out catching real criminals—didn't I have anything better to do? Without hesitation, I grabbed the radio, called dispatch, and inquired over the air whether there was anything else that I could be doing right now. Upon hearing the negative response, I turned to the offender and advised, "Nope, I guess not. It's just you today!"

While spontaneous humour is usually the most joyful and energetic type, it is not likely to appear at the moment when you need it most. It is unrealistic to expect a higher power to place Robin Williams, Bill Cosby, or Ellen DeGeneres next to you when you find

yourself facing a difficult moment. But when you are lucky enough to catch the humour bug, you can often affect others' states of mind by finding a quick statement, analogy, or idea that distracts the receiver from his or her current focus. This is often referred to as a reframe. If someone is experiencing a traumatic event or crisis moment, choosing the right words or uncovering the humour in the situation can dramatically improve the outcome of the event. What a great skill to possess!

The thrill of time travel—an example of the power of humour

If you'd like to explore how humour can change your perspective and the attitudes of others around you, try using it the next time you fly.

I often travel by plane and have discovered that many airline staff members have adopted a pretty warped sense of reality that serves them as well as it did me as a first responder. I am often astounded by how intense passengers can become when a flight is delayed or cancelled. Seriously, wouldn't you rather be put on a safe aircraft than one with technical problems? I am personally inclined to wait for another plane, thank you very much. Now, I appreciate that we often have tight schedules to keep and connecting flights to make, but rather than fuss about whether or not the airline will lose your bags in the process, try keeping in mind what a treat it will be to purchase your new clothes, courtesy of the airline. It's always a lot more fun to shop on someone else's dime.

Since the introduction of the new security protocols after September 11, 2001, frustration has reached an all-time high, resulting in a greater need for a sense of humour. It used to be that I could take carry-on luggage when I was taking a short trip, but those conveniences are long gone. Now, with the expectation of placing all toiletries into their specially designed clear plastic bags, it's simply not worth the extended delays.

And what about the scanner? You used to be able to get through the scanner if you weren't wearing a belt, but these days? Remove your shoes and your shirt, submit to a pat-down, and avoid the bra (seems they set off half the machines in the country.). Perhaps we should all go through in our bikinis. It would make for an interesting sight, but we might have better luck.

Tips for weary travelers:

- * Show up early, be patient, and keep your sense of humour.
- * Do not argue with security. It will just cause you to miss your flight.
- * Arguing with each other or telling the flight attendant how your sick wife and child are home alone won't make the storm pass more quickly.
- * Don't even try to outwit the customer service agents. They have tackled your type before and they have one-liners for everything.



Humour to the rescue

I remember seeing this story making the rounds on the Internet.

A flight had been cancelled or delayed, and a businessman was extremely agitated by this situation. He marched up to the customer service staff members, who were madly scrambling to arrange for passengers to be seated on other flights, and demanded to be taken to his destination immediately. The service agent advised him that they were working as quickly as they could to arrange seats and he would need to wait his turn. At this point, the man shouted at the attendant, “Do you know who I am?” The quick-thinking attendant grabbed the airport paging system and inquired if anyone in the terminal knew who this man was.

Cultivating your own garden of humour

It is easy to laugh when times are good. When things are rolling, potential conflicts and challenges are dealt with almost effortlessly. But when the pressure mounts and life appears to be more difficult to manage, and when we face significant challenges, our sense of humour has a tendency to recede.

It doesn't have to. You just have to develop a strategy for thinking on your feet and adapting to the situation with a light-hearted attitude. Learning how to laugh and find situations comical is a skill anyone can develop. Peter Ustinov, the late British actor and playwright, stated, “Comedy is a funny way of being serious.” Life of-

fers up many opportunities to find and create humour. If you simply wait for humour to magically appear in tough circumstances, you'll be disappointed.

One way to cultivate humour is to stop taking everything so darned seriously. Sit back, take a deep breath, relax, and reframe how you view the world or the particular situation in which you find yourself. By looking at things from a different angle, you can create a new spin on the current frustration or anxious moment. You can actually dissolve your own agitation by adopting, in the words of Zig Ziglar, an "attitude of fascination."

It is difficult to remain irritated if you are fascinated. It may be an old saying, but it remains true: when life gives us lemons, there exists the opportunity to make lemonade. We need to take advantage of those "opportunities." (There! You've just done it. You have just used the word "opportunities" instead of "difficulties"; in other words, you have just altered your perspective.)



Shifting perspective (reframing)

A woman phoned in to report that she had been sitting at a lighted intersection in town when a vehicle being chased by a police car at a high speed made a sharp turn in front of her, followed by the police car. The woman said, "I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it—and I work in the ER, so it takes a lot to amaze me—but I could see the bottom of the police car as it made the turn." She seemed to be in awe of this feat. Later on, when the dispatcher relayed the story to the constable involved in the pursuit, he found a unique way to put the

whole event into perspective. He said, “I can believe it—after all, all I could see was the ground.”

Having a good sense of humour is energizing, giving you the power you need to keep dancing even when the bar appears to be much too low. One great way to cultivate an energetic attitude is to be sure you enjoy what you do. Look for things that are fun to do, and find new ways to have fun with what you’re already doing.

A librarian at a local elementary school was responsible for the daily care of the resident myna bird. Whenever she undertook the task of cleaning out the large cage, this bird would wait until her head was fully inside the cage and then poop on her head. After months of this, the librarian marched down to the principal’s office and demanded to know where in her contract it stated that she was required to be sh*t on every day. Without hesitation, the quick-thinking principal grabbed her employee file and flipped open the section that read, “And other duties as assigned.”

Having the ability to find timely humour in everyday stresses and frustrations is a gift, and it is a gift that can be developed. By watching how others employ humour strategies and by appreciating the ridiculous in your own life, you can face events with a smile instead of a frown.

I recall one such moment several years ago. I was working with a colleague on traffic enforcement when we had the great pleasure of detaining a particularly irate construction worker for speeding and

unsafe driving. As he was about to leave, he spun around the corner giving us both the one-finger salute. My colleague instantly pointed out the window and, with a huge smile on his face, exclaimed, “Look, we’re number one!” This one utterance immediately deflated any defensiveness I felt and has succeeded in bringing a smile to my face each and every time I have seen that salute since.

Humour is not a magic potion for all ills. Healing, personal growth, and moving on from large and little hurts are inevitable parts of life. However, humour is a valuable life skill that can help us make it through the tough times, enjoy the good, and keep limboing. So smile and laugh as much as possible and watch as the world laughs with you.



Actual label instructions on consumer goods.

These are excerpts from an e-mail chain letter that was making the rounds in 2006. Timeless, and too funny not to share.

- On a hairdryer: “Do not use while sleeping.”
- On a bar of soap: “Directions: Use like regular soap.”
- On a frozen dinner: “Serving suggestion: Defrost.”
- On a bread pudding package: “Product will be hot after heating.”
- On packaging for an iron: “Do not iron clothes on body.”
- On a sleep aid: “Warning: May cause drowsiness.”
- On a Japanese food processor: “Not to be used for the other use.”
- On a bag of peanuts: “Warning: contains nuts.”
- On a packet of nuts given out on an airplane: “Instructions: Open packet, eat nuts.”

LIFE UNDER THE LIMBO BAR

- On a child's Superman costume: "Wearing of this garment does not enable you to fly." (I don't blame the company. I blame the parents for this one.)
 - On a Swedish chainsaw: "Do not attempt to stop chain with your hands or genitals."
-



**Did you discover
the limbo secrets?**

As you read this chapter, perhaps you were able to relate to the stories and recall your own moments of irritation and impatience. Hopefully you were able to see that humour exists for each of us if we realize that how we perceive a situation determines the ultimate effect of that situation. Just keep in mind:

- Peaks and valleys are inevitable in the game of life. Accept it and get over it.
- You can't control every situation. Whatever will be, will be.
- When life's pace gets in the way of your plans, keep a light-hearted attitude and be open to meeting the fascinating people around you. Who knows? You may just meet the most influential person of your career, the love of your life, or someone who really needs a chat and a laugh.
- Laugh and it really doesn't matter if the world laughs with you or at you. You know what's funny and what's serious.

“Throughout all history, the great wise men and teachers, philosophers, and prophets have disagreed with one another on many different things. It is only on this one point that they are in complete and unanimous agreement. We become what we think about.”

EARL NIGHTINGALE—
1921-1989, AUTHOR OF “THE STRANGEST SECRET”

CHAPTER 3

It Takes a Village to Reduce
One Person's Stress



Why do we so often feel we have to do it alone? There is no shame in asking for, and even demanding, help from the people you love and the people you work with. Knowing that you have a team to back you up and lean on during difficult times can make life a lot less stressful.

When the going gets tough, the tough support each other

Solidarity is very important. It's fine to argue behind closed doors, but once you are out in the public eye, the shoulder-to-shoulder mentality has to be upheld. For example, during my time in law enforcement, it did not matter whether or not I liked my fellow peace officers (and believe me, there were times when I did not). When times were tough, we all helped each other. We looked out for one another, especially when we faced high-stress calls or workload challenges. There was no room for "self-preservation" thinking; we were all in it together and relied on each other for help when necessary.

The lesson of public solidarity is sometimes lost within marriages. If you look for a dictionary definition of being supportive, you will find such phrases as "providing for," "strengthening," "bearing the weight," and "keeping from falling, sinking, slipping." That's quite a responsibility for anyone to take on. The sense of responsibility grows even greater when a spouse is coping with stress at work, extended family, children, health issues, or social obligations.

In the early years of our marriage, my spouse had this *great* line he used with me when I was upset about something: “Why would you think that? That is so stupid.” That hurt. Of course, he was saying it out of frustration, but these types of statements undermine and devalue the feelings of the other person. They can, especially over time, result in resentment and hurt feelings. But there is an easy way to deal with them. Ask for clarification and remind the person that that kind of talk won't fix anything. My favourite response was a clear “Not particularly helpful!” That single line has saved us hours of marriage counselling.

When things get tough, we need to take time to support one another. This is a time when “paying it forward” and supporting others really pays off. You need to stay in touch and offer support where you can, giving your spouse or colleague, or whoever, encouragement, not distance.



Household support

It took my husband 5 years to learn to stop making statements that were not terribly helpful. If you want to shorten that time frame, here are a few tips on how to be a more supportive spouse:

- Show that you have faith in your mate.
- Be the shoulder to lean on when your spouse is sinking.
- Work with your spouse to maintain balance in your life together.
- Don't be threatened by your spouse's accomplishments. Tell people, especially your partner, how proud you are of his or her talents and skills.

- Don't try to solve your partner's problem. Just show that you are listening.

Be realistic as you encourage your spouse. Stop exaggerating!

Never give up

All things considered, 1991 was not my best year. I had recently left my live-in boyfriend, was a single mother with two small children living in low-income housing in Calgary (far away from family who could help me), and had discovered that I was pregnant. To add insult to injury, I lost my job. Three days later, I went into labour three months early and delivered the smallest of my three children. She weighed in at a terrifying two pounds.

Now all of this would have been stressful and challenging for a rock-solid couple, but imagine the strain for a young mother in her mid-20s, without a job, and with two little ones waiting at home. Thankfully, there was an upside: when you're the only one everyone depends on, giving up is not really an option!

I spent some time in the hospital because of the C-section that saved my little girl. She stayed in neonatal intensive care to protect her fragile heart and airway. While I recovered, I remember the Welcome Wagon group coming down the hall, all smiles, handing out celebratory baskets to all the new moms. Finally, I thought, something to brighten my sterile environment. But my room was quietly passed over. When I asked the nurse why no one stopped, she

told me, “Your daughter is in intensive care, and those babies usually don’t make it.”

I suppose they didn’t want to leave any reminders behind. But I never believed that she wouldn’t make it. With all the strength I could muster, I squared my shoulders and said, “Giving up is not really an option.”

Two and a half months later, I brought my four-pound baby girl home to her very excited siblings. An amazing, unforgettable day. Two weeks later her heart almost stopped, and although she recovered, she was in and out of the hospital for a year.

That first year wasn’t the end of our challenges, though. In school, my daughter was bubbly, easygoing, and eager to please. The teachers loved her. Unfortunately, because she was quiet, no one realized how far behind she was falling. When they finally realized she couldn’t read, she was in grade three. In grade eight, they told us to lower our expectations and send her to vocational school. “She won’t obtain a high school diploma,” they said. “Stop pushing her.” But we had never considered giving up on her, and we weren’t about to now. We believed that she could learn and that her hard work and dedication would carry her forward, as long as no one ever told her that quitting was an option.

In June 2009, my husband and I proudly sat in the back row of a large gymnasium watching rows of caps and gowns parading by. Among them was a giant success story: a girl who never gave up, who walked proudly across the stage and accepted her high school

diploma. It was not an easy road. So many times, it would have been easier to take the path of least resistance. But, in that moment, the commitment to never give up shone clearly on the beautiful, excited face of a young high school grad who earned every single academic achievement the hard way!

In life, there are so many challenges that can pull us off our path. There are always obstacles to overcome and choices to be made. Do you take the easy path and live a life of mediocrity, or do you struggle to achieve your greatest potential?

The pride of accomplishment comes to those who persevere through the challenges and emerge victorious in spite of the odds. Today, my daughter has completed her college diploma in graphic design and is working towards a new career. Never underestimate what you can accomplish when you never give up!

When things aren't working, look at the situation as your opportunity to fix whatever needs fixing or make the changes that will make your life work better. As Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and writer Carl Sandburg so wisely said, "The time for action is now. It's never too late to do something." And if you do not know how to make things better, ask for help! Someone out there has experienced exactly what you are experiencing now. Remember, your problems are really not all that unique.

Team mascots

Our four-legged, furry friends are also members of our support network. After all, they can teach us a lot about how to truly enjoy life. In fact, the next time stuff gets you down, imagine living life as a cat—it's sure to put a smile on your face.

Cats truly seem to have figured it all out—and they really do have our number. It's amazing how much cats can get away with, exhibiting behaviours we would find unacceptable in our own children, let alone another adult.

Cats know how to play on our emotions and just make our day better. A friend of mine says that she automatically relaxes when she comes home from a stressful day of work and her cat greets her at the door.

These animals have such a wonderful way with body language, and they are very explicit. Wouldn't it be fun if people communicated in the same way? Yes, people do use body language, but not to the same extent as cats do. Now imagine yourself as a cat: quickly turning away and swishing your "tail" to express disdain; pulling your head down toward your shoulders and squinting to indicate suspicion; dropping on the floor and rolling when you want to play. The list goes on, and you just have to smile when you think of all the possibilities.

Consider that boring office meeting—wouldn't you love to be able to slink through the door, stretch, cruise the room, sniff your colleagues, yawn, and then curl up at the window in the sun?

You could rub against people you really like and purr to show your affection. And those you don't trust? Well, you could always wrinkle your nose and back away.



Lessons we can learn from cats

- Sleeping and eating are highly fulfilling activities.
 - Persistence pays off.
 - Patience is a virtue.
 - Words aren't always necessary.
 - Cherish each moment and take pleasure in the small joys of life.
 - Be honest.
 - Don't be afraid to express yourself.
 - When in doubt, nap.
-

Then there are the life lessons we can learn from our dogs. There is a certain humbleness that canine family members bring to the household. They serve as a reminder to all of us about unconditional acceptance and love. Dogs also allow us to learn about the true meaning of commitment. We humans should take notes some days.

My husband and I are the proud owners of two wonderful dogs: a German shepherd named Kodiak and a young Golden Retriever named Bentley. We rescued Kodiak as a puppy when he was thrown out of the back of a moving pickup truck onto the highway. Lucky for our Kodiak, he has lived comfortably with us for the past 13 years.

Once Kodiak achieved the ripe old age of 10, he began to develop some neurotic tendencies relating to loneliness and boredom. So when he turned 12, I decided to bring home a puppy—on trial—to see if the little rug rat would provide adequate companionship for our old dog.

Integrating the two dogs was quite an experience, and I had forgotten how much attention a puppy required. The first week was a roller coaster of emotions for both me and my husband. We were torn about the responsibility that the new puppy would bring into our lives. After all, the children and the old dog would be out of the house completely within the next few years. With the breeder giving us the option of returning Bentley, pros and cons were carefully weighed. Then partway through the first week, I read an article about happiness and the ability to change your mind.

Author and Harvard psychology researcher Daniel Gilbert believed that people are happier when they can change their minds. But in 2002 he and a colleague discovered that people are generally happier about irrevocable decisions. Once you are locked into a decision, you tend to focus on its positive aspects and ignore the negative ones. But if you are allowed to change your mind, you ruminate on both the positive and negative aspects of the choice, which makes you less happy.

As a result of this article, we decided to make Bentley a permanent member of the family and stopped obsessing about whether or not he would fit in. We started enjoying his playfulness and stopped complaining about the sleepless nights and the potty training.

Puppies are extremely curious. They explore boundaries and need quick and consistent messages all the time in order to learn how to interact in their new environment. They are enthusiastic and filled with optimism. During this impressionable time period, it is important to provide constant praise and recognition for the positive behaviours you want to promote and encourage. Bentley needed consistent feedback and constant attention in order to understand what was expected of him. Kodiak needs them as well so he does not feel ignored and replaced.

Bentley taught us that it was not his fault when accidents occurred; it was ours, because our inattention, our lack of support, and our lack of consistency played a role in the outcome. The things we learn from our dogs have so much application in the real world. Not that we need to potty train our employees, but that consistency in our communication is absolutely critical. When employees, co-workers, and family members don't get appropriate feedback, they tend to grow bitter or display unwanted performance outcomes due to lack of clarity. The question we need to ask ourselves if people are not interacting well is this: what steps do we need to take to ensure everyone feels valued and knows what is expected of them?



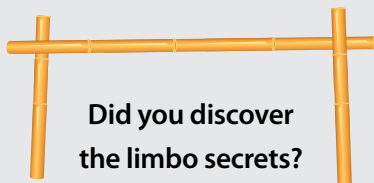
Lessons we can learn from dogs

- Really, really enjoy the simple things in life.
- Present yourself as absolutely calm and indifferent when faced with the wiggling, overexcited exuberance of youth and inexperience.
- Demonstrate saint-like patience when mistakes are made time and time again.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO REDUCE ONE PERSON'S STRESS

- It is important to make your expectations clear and be consistent with your feedback.

Make a commitment and be happy with it.



Did you discover the limbo secrets?

- Be supportive of your loved ones and friends. Learn to listen to their hopes and fears.
- Learn from your pets. They have an uncanny way of teaching us a lot about human behaviour. When we interact with them, we receive instant feedback. If only human beings were as forgiving of our mistakes.
- When faced with a difficult choice, just make a decision and move on.

CHAPTER 4

What We Have Here Is a Failure
to Communicate



“These days, we can be absolutely overwhelmed by the number of clichés built right in to our everyday lives.”

Believe it or not, a lot of the stress we feel is a result of putting too much pressure on ourselves. We try to be superheroes, doing everything for everyone. At the same time, we don't want to burden others with our silly little problems, so we keep them to ourselves. *“What? I look like my head is about to explode? Nonsense. What can I do for you?”*

Learning to communicate—to say what you *really* want to say and to hear what others are *actually* saying—can make a big difference. If you know how to communicate clearly when the pressure is on, you'll get rid of an enormous amount of stress and give yourself a little room to manoeuvre.

What do you mean you don't understand?

Whether you're a chatterbox or the strong, silent type, you're communicating all the time. Your words, silence, body language, and activity or inactivity all speak volumes, whether you mean them to or not.

It seems like communication should be easy. We know how to talk. We understand language. Others speak the same language. So we communicate, right?

Communication can be easy when you're composed and in control, and when you have time to prepare. But what about relating to someone who's angry or being unreasonable? What about trying to communicate when emotions are running high? That's a real skill, and if you can do it, you'll be more productive, more valuable as an employee and more effective in your relationships.

The ability to communicate well when the pressure is on is an essential life skill that can take an enormous amount of stress out of your life.

In moments when someone wants an immediate response from you, wouldn't you love to be able to respond on the fly? We all know that it is far easier to be effective when we have the time to prepare our thoughts in advance. Unfortunately, in today's high-pressure society, prep time is a luxury we can't always afford. While nobody gets the message right every time, there are some general tips that can help to increase your odds of having a successful interaction:

- * **Breathe.** This gives the brain essential oxygen. At the same time, it provides valuable thinking time.
- * **Don't get caught up in trying to win.** Look for opportunities for shared responsibility and agreements.
- * **Involve others.** Don't insulate yourself from those who could help you most.

- * **Give the gift of time.** Stop trying to get to the solution so quickly. Pressure situations are often emotionally charged—not an optimal state for problem solving.
- * **Don't become defensive.** Relax and refocus the discussion on the real issue.
- * **Laugh it off.** Lighten up and keep your sense of humour.

Haven't I heard that somewhere?

The next time you are going through a really tough time in your life and some perky little twit says to you, “When a door closes, a window opens,” or “It's always darkest before the dawn,” try to resist the temptation to tell them where they can shove their cliché. That person probably has the best of intentions.

When people don't know what to say or can't find the words to express themselves, they often fall back on trite, overused expressions. Many clichés are based in reality and once had a valuable point to make, but they have been used so often that they come across as shallow and meaningless. Using them makes you, the speaker or writer, appear superficial; it's just not the best method of communication.

These days, we can be absolutely overwhelmed by the number of clichés built right in to our everyday lives. Take business and advertising, for example.

“By giving 110 per cent and proactively thinking outside the box, we have come up with a value-added proposition that will maximize customer satisfaction, seamlessly integrating into your current set-up and providing the footprint for the paradigm shift needed to take your business to the next level. It’s a win-win situation.”

All right, just what does that mean? Are these cute little phrases effective in telling us what is being sold? Does the seller actually have a product that is any use at all? Does the seller even know what is being sold? Or do the company’s marketing whizzes have way too much time on their hands (aha—another cliché)?

Real communication, be it business or personal, can be difficult. In order to communicate, your own words (the real McCoy) are what will truly get the message across (clear as a bell). Coming up with your own words may take some time and thought, but it is better than superficiality, and you won’t run the risk of offending those close to you with trite advice.

Admittedly, there are times when clichés are the perfect fit, as in a book section on clichés. For true communication, though, if you find yourself spouting tired old phrases, you’re barking up the wrong tree. But don’t throw in the towel—head back to the drawing board, burn a little midnight oil, and create your very own communication labour of love. Then put your best foot forward; try, try again; and communicate to your heart’s content. After all, no pain, no gain.

And while you’re at it, you might as well stop and smell the roses, too.

Read my lips

Believe it or not, an important part of learning to communicate is getting comfortable with the word “no”. It’s such a simple word—only two little letters. So how come it is so hard for most people to say?

At some point in our lives, many of us begin to cave in to the pressures around us and start being much too agreeable. If you have a strong desire to fit in or be liked by others, this tendency becomes even more ingrained. We begin doing anything to protect us from disappointing anyone.

If you don’t learn how to be comfortable with those two little letters, then you could end up with a huge workload, extra weight on your body, and a house full of rescued puppies and adopted children. YIKES!

There are several types of no:

- * **The tentative no.** You will recognize this one, as it is often accompanied by very weak excuses and rationalizations, and usually sounds like a question. When you don’t feel confident saying no, you feel the need to disguise your feelings with other reasons.
- * **The overstated no.** Let’s face it; you can say no without being rude. The overstated no is usually delivered with contempt and may include an attack on the person making the request.

“Are you crazy?” “Would you like it in this century or the next?” “How much?”

- * **The purposeful no.** This is a simple, direct “no” that requires no further explanation. If you feel you must add a reason, you keep it short and to the point. “No, I am not able to take on another project.” “No, I am already booked.” “No, selling the house and living life on the road does not appeal to me.”

You can also use non-verbal communication to help you get your “no” across. Examples of this include moving your head side to side rather than up and down and making a windshield wiper movement back and forth with your hand. These are universally accepted as “no” signals. A simple hand up in the STOP gesture, palm facing the requester, can also ease you into the habit of saying no.



Learning to just say no

One of the most effective communication skills you can have is the ability to say no courteously and judiciously. There are times when an appropriate no can save you hours or even days of effort.

It is important for you to recognize that your own time is valuable, as is your sanity. Take the following example: “No, I won’t bail your son out of jail using my rent money.” Saying no in such a situation does three things for you:

1. It avoids putting you into financial crisis.
2. It keeps you out of someone else’s family drama.
3. It sends a signal to that drama queen that you are living

your life in the “no-drama zone”. Saying no is a powerful lesson.

(Excerpt taken from author Bart Baggett, from the book:
Success Secrets of the Rich and Happy)

Practise saying no the next time you are shopping and the clerk asks for your phone number on a return item. Or say no to the telemarketer or collection agent who insists on calling during dinner, or to the receptionist who asks if she can put you on hold! Commit to saying no to something or someone every day until you are truly comfortable using the phrase.

Two ears, one mouth—coincidence?

Another important aspect of communication is being a good listener.

The average person speaks at about 135 to 175 words a minute, but comprehends about 400 to 500 words a minute.

My former boss used to pick up the phone and start checking his voice mail when I asked if I could have a word with him. This is a classic signal that the listener is not actually planning on listening.

There are five basic reasons we fail to listen well:

1. **Listening takes work.** To really listen, you have to concentrate on the other person. When you're actively listening, your blood pressure increases, your pulse quickens, and you perspire more. Because it takes so much effort, a lot of people just don't listen.
2. **Life is filled with distractions.** There is enormous competition for our attention from radio, TV, movies, computers, cell phones, books and magazines, and much more. With all these incoming stimuli, we've learned to screen out information we deem irrelevant. Unfortunately, we also accidentally screen out things that are important.
3. **We jump to conclusions.** Often, we think we already know what someone is going to say. We assume that we have a full understanding right from the start, so we jump in and interrupt. We don't take the time to hear people out.
4. **We lack the skill.** Although we do more listening than speaking, reading, or writing, most of us haven't taken a course in how to do it well.
5. **Human beings need others to recognize their feelings and opinions.** In fact, the need to be loved, heard, and understood is right up there with the needs for air, water, and food.

Better listening equals better understanding. Listening promotes openness in relationships and encourages others to share their ideas more willingly. It facilitates relationships that produce creative so-

lutions and helps to eliminate misunderstandings, communication errors, and confusion.

People appreciate, respect, and value others who are great listeners. Think about how it felt the last time you tried to talk to someone who you knew was not listening to you. Did you feel hurt, sad, angry, or frustrated?

I know that when my former boss used to type on a keyboard or check his voice messages when I had something important to say, I felt dismissed, unheard, and resentful. Whether or not his unspoken message was intentional, the bitterness still built.

Through empathic listening, the listener lets the speaker know, “I recognize your problem and how you feel about it. I am interested in what you are saying and I am not judging you.”



Listen to this

Katie Couric received a five-year contract from NBC for \$45 million to anchor the *Today* show, the highest contract ever for daytime television. Why? NBC representatives said she is rare in that she truly “connects with people.” When she interviews people, they open up and share themselves with her as if she is a close friend and confidante. They feel she is very real and genuinely interested in them. Guests on the show are often surprised at how willingly they reveal themselves because of the trust level they feel in her presence. What is this “magic” of emotional connectedness and empathy that NBC chose to call charisma?



Why did Stephen Covey, author of the immensely popular book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, find “empathic communication” to be the most important habit in his study of effective leaders in America’s corporate world? Empathy is the ability to share “pathos”, “have feeling” for another person, a level of compassion that lets you see the world through their eyes and sense what they are feeling from their perspective.

(Excerpts taken from *SUCCESS* magazine)



Guidelines for empathic listening

- Be attentive. Be interested. Be alert and not distracted. Create a positive atmosphere through non-verbal behaviour.
- Be a sounding board, allowing the speaker to bounce ideas and feelings off you while assuming a non-judgmental, non-critical manner.
- Avoid asking too many questions.
- Don’t discount the speaker’s feelings by using stock phrases such as “It’s not that bad” or “You’ll feel better tomorrow.”
- Avoid letting the speaker “hook” you. This can happen if you get angry or upset and allow yourself to get involved in an argument or pass judgment on the other person.
- Follow the ground rules for good listening:
 - Don’t interrupt.
 - Don’t change the subject or move in a new direction.
 - Don’t rehearse what you’re going to say next in your head.
 - Don’t give unsolicited advice.

This may take practice, but it is well worth the effort.

This call is much more important than you

One of the reasons we're all so stressed today is that there is so much going on. Consider for a moment the world of interruptions introduced by our newfound passion for cell phones. These days, everyone has a cell phone glued to the ear, and we are losing the ability to speak with—to communicate with—the people who are right in front of us.

I was having coffee with a friend who was expressing his frustration about the lack of etiquette most cell phone users exhibit. What was his frustration? Speaking with individuals face to face, only to have them break away from the conversation without so much as an “I’m sorry, I am going to have to take this.”

*The person on the end of the phone is much more interesting than you
will ever be.*

At the time, I recognized my friend's irritation but had yet to become overly agitated by such users myself. Then I taught a workshop, and while I was talking, my students took calls and sent texts endlessly. If you must take a call, what stops you from moving out into the hallway where you will be less of a distraction?

When did we become a generation of individuals who constantly check our phones rather than focusing our attention on the people standing right in front of us? What makes the incoming call so

much more important than the person with whom we are actually connecting? Do we even realize what we're saying to people when we abruptly ignore them and take our calls?

No wonder our individual stress levels are on the rise. Here's an idea: consider letting today be the day that you decide to pay more attention to those standing in front of you than those who may be requesting your attention via your cell phone. If it is really important, they will leave you a message.

As a public speaker, I sometimes offer to answer the phone for those who feel it unnecessary to put their phones on vibrate during the presentation. There is always some joker who states that the call could be a pending emergency. Fascinating tip: the odds of an actual emergency occurring during a given moment in time are slim to none. Besides, if there were an emergency, it would already have happened by the time they called you. You would already not have been there, and the people who could actually do something would already have done it.



Rules for using those little technological marvels

- Turn off your cell phone before a job interview or boardroom meeting, and at the courthouse, library, or museum. I once heard of a platform speaker who was in the middle of a presentation when his phone went off. He answered it. Does this seem like a good idea to you?
- Stop talking so loudly! The little microphone on your phone actually has the capacity to amplify your voice quite nicely.

- Take note of public versus personal space. No one needs to hear how wasted you were last night or how intimate you are getting with one of your co-workers.
 - Stop interrupting face-to-face conversations. I have often felt as if the only way to maintain a conversation with people right in front of me was to call or text them. It is very frustrating to be sitting in a restaurant while your friend or spouse ignores you and texts someone else.
 - Do not use a cell phone while driving. Have we really not had enough press on the dangers of distracted driving?
-

Maybe you should tell your face that!

When you speak, your face—more clearly than any other part of your body—communicates your attitudes, feelings, and emotions. Therefore, when you are face to face with someone, it is important to remove expressions that don't belong.

A friend's Italian brother-in-law uses his hands whenever he speaks. My friend was driving along the highway when a familiar car appeared in the distance. As it approached, she recognized immediately, even at highway speeds, that it was her brother-in-law because as he communicated with his passenger he was gesturing, with both hands off the wheel.

Our non-verbal communication can be some of the most difficult to control. We may be unintentionally giving off inconsistent messages just by the way we stand and look.

Social psychologists will tell you that non-verbal communication makes up about two-thirds of all communication. You have fewer than ten seconds (and realistically closer to four seconds) to make a good first impression. Since we are usually unaware of the signals that are being sent, it can be difficult to consistently project the openness we may desire. I hate to point it out to you, but whatever you are thinking in your head is likely showing up in your body.

No matter what we say to each other in conversation, our bodies send very clear messages. The way we sit or stand, the expressions on our faces, and the gestures we make are mostly unconscious, but other people respond to them. If our words and our body language match, then everyone should feel comfortable in the conversation.

Whenever you speak to people, make an extra effort to notice how you communicate non-verbally. Observe, too, whether the facial expressions of your listeners indicate that they do or do not understand what you are saying.

When you speak, your face—more clearly than any other part of your body—communicates to others your attitudes, feelings, and emotions. Therefore, when you are face to face with someone, try to remove expressions that don't belong on your face.

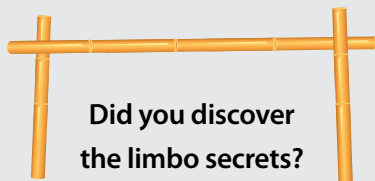
Inappropriate expressions include distracting mannerisms, such as excessive blinking, scowling, or twitching. In much the same way that some speakers perform random, distracting gestures and body movements, nervous speakers often release excess energy and ten-

sion by unconsciously moving their facial muscles (e.g., licking lips, tightening jaw).

The adage “The eyes are the mirror of the soul” underlines the need for you to convince people with your eyes as well as your words. Making 70% eye contact with others helps listeners feel that you are talking directly to them. It helps convey sincerity, interest, and the idea that you actually care whether or not they accept your message.

When you speak, your eyes also function as a control device you can use to see if your listener is attentive and concentrating. And watch the listener’s eyebrows; they are a clear indicator of how someone is feeling about your conversation or topic.

With all of these signals contributing to your overall communication effectiveness, it is critical that you develop a few techniques for controlling your inner space, or attitude. When the pressure is on or the emotions are high, we are really very suggestive individuals.



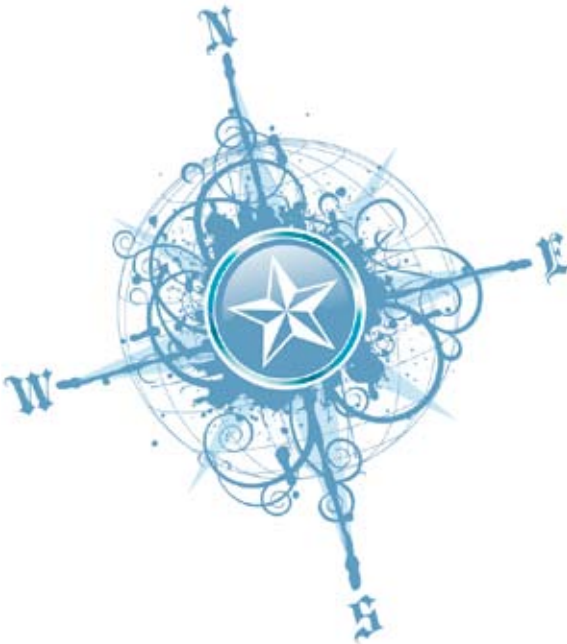
- Clichés abound, but while they are sometimes apt, they aren't always the best way to express something.
- While it's always nice to be highly prepared, learning how to communicate under pressure is a much-needed talent that can be learned.
- "No" is a very useful word.
- Knowing how to truly listen is an essential part of communication.
- Just because you can communicate with your cell phone, pager, etc., 24-7 does not mean you have to. It's polite to ignore the phone now and then, and when you don't feel on call all the time, you'll reduce your stress level too.
- Your body communicates, and you need to interpret what it is saying. Is your jaw clenched? Is your heart racing? Are your hands shaking? Perhaps you need to step back and take a deep breath before proceeding.
- None of the following are true:
 - People always pay attention when you are speaking to them.
 - When people say they are paying attention, they really are.
 - When someone says "I know," she or he really does know.
 - Saying something over and over will ensure that your listener understands.
 - Saying something over and over slowly or loudly will be even more effective.

“My father used to say to me, ‘Whenever you get into a jam, whenever you get into a crisis or an emergency... become the calmest person in the room and you’ll be able to figure your way out of it.’”

**RUDOLPH GIULIANI—
FORMER MAYOR OF NEW YORK CITY**

CHAPTER 5

The Good, Bad, and Ugly Parts of
Being a Control Freak



I'd love to control everything. I'm betting you would too. After all, wouldn't life be easier and less stressful if we could arrange other people, traffic patterns, and taxes exactly the way we want them to be?

We can't, of course. And when we try, life gets even more stressful, just like when we try to control our movements as we inch under that impossibly low limbo bar. What we can control, though, is our response to situations and people.

I was all set to enjoy a holiday at the lake, planning to do nothing but sit outdoors, drinking tall, cool drinks, reading, soaking up the sun, and occasionally dozing off—you know, your typical busy vacation. However, the local insect inhabitants of the area had different ideas, and the wasps decided to play havoc with all my carefully laid plans. They chased me inside. I was just a wee bit irate with these pushy, demanding, and highly unpleasant creatures.

At first, all I could do was think of how my long-awaited holiday had been ruined by something I could not control. Then I decided to change my attitude. The wasps weren't around all the time, so I learned to appreciate the time I could spend outside. During the times I was forced to remain inside, I reminded myself that I was *choosing* to be indoors. I enjoyed the beautiful vista through the windows, and reminded myself that I was not getting sunburned and I could read and doze pretty much anywhere. (Besides, tequila sunrises taste great no matter where you are.) What was important was that I was spending valuable time with my family and friends, and that can happen anywhere. I'm still irked by wasps and mosquitoes,

but I do appreciate that even these little creatures have a purpose in our ecosystem. (Please note my level-headedness.)

This frame of mind can be applied to most people and situations. That highly irritating person you have to deal with can be viewed as a challenge to be met and a chance to practise your patience. You can show off to others just how virtuous, how incredibly tolerant, you can be when faced with idiots. You can paste a martyred smile on your face, nod, and say things like, “Really? How fascinating!”

You can tell yourself that this person will walk away from you feeling much better about him or herself, because you have taken the time to show interest (even if your mind was a million miles away). In other words, you can be a fine example to those around you, who will soon become fed up with your righteous attitude and let you know in no uncertain terms that it’s time to cut it out.

The point is that you are the one in control of how you feel, whether you’re stuck in traffic when you’re already late for an important meeting or you are interacting with absolutely uncompromising people. You can’t change people or the situations in which you sometimes find yourself, but you can change your outlook.

What is a control freak?

A control freak is someone who tries to dictate how everything is handled or gets done.

You might be a control freak if you:

- * Have difficulty trusting others.
- * Are uncomfortable acknowledging that someone's (anyone's) opinion could possibly be more right than your own.
- * Tend to offer unsolicited advice and expect that others should appreciate your wise counsel.
- * Feel you have to do everything yourself or it just won't get done right.

Control freaks have also been known to criticize heavily and have a constant need to be in charge (or in control—hence the name). Most of the time, this comes from a place of insecurity and self-protectiveness. Control freaks are afraid to let go of command in case someone discovers that they don't know as much as they appear to know.

Consider for a moment the role these personality types excel in. Many of you are probably thinking management or leadership roles. I would say self-employment; these people do like to be the boss, after all, even if they are not! Just look at me. I hate being told what

to do, especially by someone whom I perceive to be less informed or incompetent. Now doesn't that sound like control freakism?

There are, in fact, a fair number of control freaks holding middle management roles, and you may have even had to work for them. As Dr. Phil might ask, how did that work out for you? I am betting not well, since control freaks expect everyone to go in the direction that they see as appropriate, even if they are woefully off base. They often refuse to delegate and want everything done according to their specific set of rules. They micromanage everything! You may even find control freaks who do not have control in the workplace. They will exert their influence on everyone they can anyway.

Another familiar facet of control freaks is perfectionism. Have you ever found yourself straightening the pictures on the walls of a hotel room before you could even unpack? Have you ever completely redone your nails after discovering a microscopic speck on one fingernail? Have you rewritten a paper or presentation over and over and over, seeking the perfect wording, until your brain no longer recognized the English language? These could be signs that you are a perfectionist.

A friend of mine remembered a teacher in journalism school whose motto was "Good enough isn't." That can be a wonderful credo to live by, and certainly can lead to great writing, but in reality there are times when "good enough is". For the perfectionist, nothing is ever good enough; nothing is perfect. Yes, striving to be your best is a positive practice, but perfection is an unreachable goal, an ideal. Perfectionism can be an indicator that you fear failure and that you

don't think you are "good enough" just as you are. It is also a great way of putting off until tomorrow what you could reasonably do today.

If you can learn to laugh at yourself and your impossible expectations, life can become a whole lot easier. Yes, there are times and situations where you need to be your absolute best, when a high expectation of others is a good thing, when good enough truly isn't. There are also times when you need to relax and accept that the world will not come to an end if that picture on the wall is one-tenth of a millimetre off level.

Living and working with a control freak (even if that person is you)

Now, of course, understanding why control freaks act the way they do does not validate their behaviour or mean that you should automatically like or enjoy them. However, it may change your response to those people you'd just love to stuff into the nearest closet.

An important thing to keep in mind is that, while the features of control freaks appear to be negative traits, there are beneficial qualities you can borrow from this group. No, I am not suggesting that we all make an effort to be more controlling; we need to soften the edges a bit first.

Control freaks would never allow their career choices to be made by someone else. Additionally, control freaks often spend very little

time contemplating the past. They are too busy making sure it does not catch up to them and that no one else gets a chance to pick it apart. Because controlling personalities are afraid to get things wrong, they work diligently to stay on top of projects and stay ahead of schedule. And, of course, they always manage to be in control of their own choices and their own lives.

When we think about why and how people behave, it is important to remember that whether it's control freakish or super agreeable, every behaviour has a primary purpose or intention. To put it simply, I believe there are four general intentions that determine how people may react in a given situation, and these relate to a desire to:

- * Get the task done
- * Get the task right
- * Get along with people
- * Get appreciation from people

Under stress, expect people to behave without rational thought. People react defensively to situations in which they feel there is a threat, conflict, or pressure. Control freaks often feel threatened by others and as a result may come across as defensive in many situations.

While in a defensive mode, your ability to think or plan clearly and rationally will be disrupted. Initially, defensive strategies are not consciously employed. We often respond emotionally to events before the exact nature of the events registers in our consciousness.

So, how can you achieve better results or performance from yourself and your colleagues? Expect more and you get more, especially if you are clear at the outset what your expectations are. Having high expectations does not automatically mean that you are a control freak. It is realistic for you to have high, but not impossibly out-of-reach, standards and to expect that those standards be met.

Controlling work-life balance

The ideas of the newest group of young people hitting the workforce appear to be the epitome of control freakishness. Generation Y, sometimes referred to as the Net Generation or the iGeneration, is made up of young people who were aged 16 to 30 in 2010 and who have very different thoughts about how to approach work and life.

Understanding what motivates the younger generation can be difficult, as it sometimes seems as if they expect the perfect, high-paying job to walk in and present itself to them, without any effort on their part. They are very much the generation of entitlement. Their attitudes toward work seem very different from those of their parents and grandparents. They have not lived through a depression, two world wars, or a cold war. They have grown up in a fairly affluent society. And they have been connected globally through the Internet since they were born. Their world is truly wired, and perhaps this is where their demand for instant gratification and a fast track to success has come from.

But is this an unwarranted sense of entitlement? Do they really wish to control everyone and everything? Or is this generation simply pragmatic? Are they really pushy? Or do they have a better grasp of their own self-worth than previous generations? Perhaps there's something to be learned here.

According to a report from Deloitte, Generation Y members are simply demanding what their forebears wanted: recognition and respect, flexibility and choice, responsibility and autonomy, and meaningful work. It's just that these young people are willing to stand up and ask for it.

The 21st-century work world is vastly different from what came before. The Baby Boomers, aged 45 to 65 in 2010, had a nine-to-five, Monday-to-Friday work week and often worked for the same employer or held the same type of job throughout their careers. Then came Gen X, aged 25 to 45 in 2010, which began to incorporate technology in life and work. The idea of changing jobs or even careers was not out of the question, and entrepreneurship was valued. This generation is willing and able to work inordinately long hours in order to succeed, perhaps with early retirement as a motivator.

For Generation Y, though, the idea of an 80-hour work week is anathema. Talented, dynamic, multi-tasking, and forward-thinking, these young people are expected to hold 10 to 14 jobs throughout their lives. They have seen previous generations fall victim to corporate downsizing and restructuring, and therefore have no real expectations of guaranteed job security. Because they do not expect to stay with one employer for a long period of time, they look to gain expe-

rience and skills on the job that will make them more attractive in the job market and open up more opportunities for advancement.

A realistic work-life balance, job flexibility, and an open workplace, where their ideas are heard and respected and where communication is two-way, are all expectations of Generation Y.

How do we take what they're doing right and expand on that? Can we continue to teach and encourage discipline, persistence, tenacity, and commitment? And should we learn from them how to better value our own self-worth and be in control of our own lives?

Opening up the lines of communication between the different generations is important. While experience is invaluable, so, too, are the new ideas of Generation Y, who can become catalysts for positive change. Honesty, understanding, respect, and an appreciation of what Generation Y brings to the workplace—from suppleness and adaptability to rapid information processing and problem solving—are essential. These attitudes also foster a fulfilling and appreciative workplace for older generations.

Motivation is intrinsic, but your work and home environments can be created to stimulate motivation and show others that you appreciate what they have to offer. Generation Y members, like many others, need stimulation and to believe that their work is not only valuable, but valued. They do not automatically respect someone who is older or in a superior position; they respect those who show them respect. Pay equity with others who hold the same job is important, as is direct communication with their bosses. They need to

hear praise when they do well and to get support when they need assistance. They also recognize that while a job can be meaningful, it is not the be-all and end-all and that there is life outside of work. These are goals anyone of any age can and should aspire to have in the workplace.

When it comes to truly understanding Generation Y, though, it may help to remember that the younger generation's aspirations for instant gratification and immediate wealth are nothing new.

In Agatha Christie's book *Murder at the Vicarage*, one of the main characters, a minister, is bemoaning the choices of his 16-year-old nephew, who has decided that he doesn't want to join the navy, but rather go "into finance" and make his mark "in the City". According to the vicar, "By 'going into finance' [my nephew] simply meant getting rich quickly, which, with the optimism of youth, he imagined was a certainty if one 'went into the City'".

That book was written in 1930.

Let go of the security blanket

Life is too short to be unhappy and stressed out. Take a breath and start letting go. Let go of the familiar and the security that familiarity can provide. I know that is much, much easier said than done. In fact, I might not have done it myself if not for a terrifying incident. For myself, the first step to letting go didn't exactly present itself as a "revelation moment".

On December 7, 1997, while on routine patrol, I attended a call for service related to a dog at large—a St. Bernard guard dog, as it turned out, who used my left arm as a chew toy and altered my career aspirations permanently. The event brought me to a wonderful hypnotherapist who taught me how to control the pain and inspired me to focus on the mental aspect of human behaviour. I used these skills to begin a part-time business venture focused on supporting others in similar ways.

By June 2007, I was burned out from juggling two full-time careers and a growing family. I made the ultimate decision to leave my “safe” government job and focus my time and energy on one job, not two! No, this was not an easy decision, but it is one I have never regretted.

Today, I am in business for myself, helping others put the brakes on conflict and stress before it puts the brakes on them. I have unleashed my sense of humour on the masses, openly sharing how funny the situations and events in our lives truly can be. And all of this is thanks to the obstinacy of a large, shaggy dog. Law enforcement was my security blanket, but since I left it behind in 2007, I have never looked back.

How about your own life and career? Are you finding it tougher and tougher to stay motivated and enthusiastic? Are you becoming that person who worries about losing your job, attracting the next customer or client, or feeling as if you are living paycheck to paycheck, wondering just how you will manage to survive or even thrive financially? You are probably not alone!

If you are just punching a clock like the rest of the worker bees and it's all you can do not to fall asleep with boredom or scream out loud with frustration, perhaps it is time to re-evaluate and allow yourself more control over your choices and your life. Step back, take a breath, and ask, "What do I need to do or become to be more excited and enthusiastic about my life?"

If you are not excited and energetic, it is impossible to attract success, initiate change, or influence any other desired opportunity. In fact, when you keep your head down like that, it is quite likely that when opportunity knocks, you will miss it entirely and simply complain about the headache, all the while wondering why you seem to have no control over your life.

It would be magical if we all had an "easy" button like they sell at Staples, and it actually worked. We could hit the button and—poof!—we'd have everything we need to thrive. Since such a button does not exist, we have to take action for ourselves, take control, and make the decisions that will positively affect us and our lives. This does not mean we can control others or the environment around us, but it does afford us possibilities we may not have seen before.

Really, it's OK to surrender control

It is impossible to change a person's hard-wired personality. No matter how much you wish certain people would change, they are who they are based on their own experiences, education, and environment. Although you cannot change an individual, you can con-

trol your own reaction to that person and understand what causes the person's behaviour. By changing the way we react, we have the opportunity to alter the behavioural patterns of others—after all, we do teach others how to treat us.

Surrendering control in certain situations often means facing our fears. According to psychologist Dr. Shirley Winslow of the University of Alberta, we all have four fears:

- * Fear of failure
- * Fear of humiliation or embarrassment
- * Fear of losing power
- * Fear of rejection

These fears often cause us to act in ways that make us difficult for others to deal with. But, of course, some things that drive me crazy may not bother you at all. From this, we can draw another conclusion: each of us is quite likely to be a difficult person for others at times.

Take a break—you deserve it

Many of us, especially women, often put ourselves at the bottom of our lists of priorities. We need to take care of things, stay in control, and make sure that all is well—and we end up feeling guilty if we even consider taking a 15-minute “vacation”.

An article on Forbes.com (“Stressed Out? Find Some Me Time”) cited an American Psychological Association (APA) poll, which

showed that women “tend to report higher levels of stress in general and have a higher tendency to feel they aren’t doing enough to manage it.” So not only are women stressing out, they’re stressed because they aren’t able to manage that stress. You figure it out.

Whether you’re male or female, you may have trouble taking time off. Here’s a quick way to check. Ask yourself whether any of these sound familiar: But what if such-and-such has to get done? What if the children have to be picked up or dropped off? What will happen if I’m not there to do the job/make the dinner/clean the house/(you fill in the blank)?

Let it go! You don’t have to be in control all the time, and, in fact, you shouldn’t be. You need time to focus on you, to take care of yourself and get to know yourself.

There are several things you can do to incorporate relaxation or “me” time into your life:

- * **Change your attitude.** Say this every morning upon rising: “The world will not come to an end if I take time to relax today.” Make this your mantra and use it whenever necessary, or you will find yourself falling back into bad habits.
- * **Say no.** It’s difficult, but it will become easier as time goes on. Practise saying it during your commute to work—as in “No, I won’t make dinner for you and 30 of your friends in the next 20 minutes.” “No, although the debate continues about the space-time continuum, I can’t have that report to you by yes-

terday.” “No, I’m not going to forego my long-planned-for and scheduled vacation so you can go to Las Vegas to get married.” “No, I’m not going to bail your second cousin out of jail for the 15th time.” Prepare yourself for some unpleasant reactions the first few times you say no, as some people may not actually understand what you are saying. This, too, will get better with time.

- * **Delegate.** Again, here’s where your own attitude plays a role. For example, your children may not clean the house to your standards, but they can learn. (Do *not* go back and re-clean after they have finished.) Learning to delegate at work is also important. This not only adds valuable time to your day, but it gives those to whom you delegate tasks a chance to learn.
- * **Unplug.** Turn off all electronic devices when you take time for yourself. Believe it or not, your phone can actually record messages and your e-mail will still be there when you come back from that refreshing walk at lunchtime.

Remember, the only way you are going to get time for yourself is to make it happen. Five minutes here, ten minutes there—it’s worth it. You’ll have more energy, feel happier, reduce stress, and be able to slink under that limbo pole much more easily.



**Did you discover
the limbo secrets?**

If you are struggling with a control freak or find that you are exhibiting those nasty control freak behaviours, remember:

- You are OK—you will always be OK. (Remember that 1969 self-help book *I'm OK—You're OK*, by Dr. Thomas A. Harris? A control freak might have titled the book *I'm OK—You Could Be OK If You Do Just What I Tell You to Do*.)
- There are things we can all learn from controls freaks, including all those over-controlling members of Generation Y.
- It is not imperative that you organize and control absolutely everything.
- Stop waiting and hoping, and start moving and shaking.
- Life is all about choices; complaining about what is going awry will never fix or alter the course.

*“It is easy to sit up and take notice.
What is difficult is getting up and taking action.”*

**AL BATT—
WRITER AND SPEAKER**

CHAPTER 6

If You're Going to Be Stressed, You Might as Well Be the Leader



*“Setting a good example for your children
takes all the fun out of middle age.”*

AMERICAN PUBLISHER AND AUTHOR WILLIAM FEATHER

Which goose do you think is the least stressed out? The one leading the flock or the one in the middle, who only has to follow along? Many people would choose one of the followers, reasoning that a goose nestled securely in the middle of the flock doesn't have to think, make decisions, or take risks. I disagree. Leaders have more control over their lives, and because they set an annoyingly good example, they can often teach others how to behave, effectively reducing the amount of stress others cause them.

You're already leading by example. The good news is that you can work on developing your leadership skills so that you can set the kind of example you want to set and create the success that will help you rise above life's challenges.

You are under surveillance

“Do as I say, not as I do.” Surely most people have found themselves in the position to say this at least once, usually with their children. It's something you can fall back on during the odd, understandable lapse when you have been caught scarfing a pound of jelly beans shortly after you spent an hour telling your child why she needs to eat a balanced diet with lots of fruits and vegetables,

or when you are sipping a pre-dinner daiquiri, trying to explain to your child that your drink is an “aperitif” designed to whet the appetite, whereas his appetite will be ruined with a pre-dinner Slurpee.

This may be acceptable at home on the very, very rare occasion and with a great deal of fancy explanation, but it will not pass muster at work. In the work environment, expecting others to do what you are unwilling to do does not go over well. Nor does articulating a whole bunch of good intentions and never following through. Actually being a good role model, or “walking the talk”, is what separates effective leaders from the rest. (For some wonderful insights on what it’s like to work with bosses who do not grasp this concept, check out *The Dilbert Principle*, by Scott Adams.)

Being caught not practising what you preach can be embarrassing, but it can also be a good wake-up call. For example, if you have been encouraging a friend or client to organize his time throughout the day to include breaks, you could end up with a red face when that same person points out that *you* have no breaks built into your schedule. If this type of situation occurs, be thankful, as it gives you the chance to “do as you say” ... and then lord it over everyone else, ensuring that they recognize just what a fabulous role model you are. (As Mark Twain said, “Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example.”)

Regardless of where you are, leading by example is what counts. It not only tells others about who you are, it also allows you to evaluate those around you to see if they walk the talk. According to An-

drew Carnegie, “The older I get the less I listen to what people say and the more I look at what they do.”

One reason great leaders are great is that they translate their words into actions. In other words, they follow through on their intentions. Richard M. Ayres, of the Center for Labor-Management Studies, perhaps says it best when he speaks about the ability to turn intention into reality through action. That ability, Ayres says, comes from commitment, and commitment “consists of a set of positive beliefs coupled with an equally appropriate set of positive action and behavior.”⁴

The most successful people are those who follow up their ideas with decisive action. Along with tenacity and the willingness to forge ahead despite difficulties, leaders live their lives with integrity. True leaders do what is right, even if it is not easy. When it comes to how others perceive them, it’s great to be liked, but true leaders don’t base their decisions on that premise. They realize that one doesn’t necessarily have to be liked in order to be respected. This is certainly true in business.

Try never to do something you cannot take back.

True leaders also make mistakes and learn from them. This is a valuable lesson for life in general. Yes, you will lapse on occasion. So, too, will your children, and letting them make their own mistakes

4 www.neiassociates.org/leadbyexample.htm

is a way of helping them grow into responsible adults. Everyone is allowed “mulligans” in life (and some mistakes are just so much fun that you want to repeat them a couple of times until you have really learned your lesson). No one is perfect, and it’s OK to scarf a pound of jelly beans now and then (try not to get caught though). But if you follow through on your intentions, your actions will truly speak more loudly than your words. And that will allow you the very occasional “Do as I say, not as I do.”

Don't take advice from someone with whom you wouldn't trade places

You can learn great leadership skills simply by observing those around you. How about that exceedingly difficult person in your life? Are there lessons to be learned there? Of course! And, for a bit of fun, you can put those lessons into practice right away and see what happens.

I was once part of a great conversation on what makes someone difficult. Here is what I discovered:

- ✱ **If you want to be the most difficult person in your office (or at home), start by focusing intensely on all the problems.** Let people know every time you notice something wrong, particularly if you notice something that your co-workers are doing wrong. Make minor problems into a really big deal. For example, if you find a typo in a memo, circle it and bring it to the attention of the person who wrote it. Even better, bring

it up in a staff meeting. When people try to come up with solutions or better ways of doing things, be pessimistic and tell them why nothing they suggest will ever work. Avoid contributing any solutions that have the potential of being even moderately successful—in other words, be skeptical and vocal at every possible opportunity.

- * **Talk too much.** Whenever someone casually asks how you are, assume they really want to know. Tell them about all the problems you are facing, particularly your health and relationship problems. If a co-worker asks how your weekend was, describe in great detail what you watched on television, what you shopped for, the relatives you saw, what you ate, and anything else you can remember. If you notice that the other person is turning away, talk more loudly and rapidly. Continue talking without taking a breath to avoid giving them an opportunity to end the conversation and get back to work. If they start walking away—follow them! If you can't find a co-worker to talk to, make numerous loud personal phone calls throughout the day—position yourself in close proximity to others while doing this. When you run out of people to call, set your cell phone to an annoying ring tone and turn the volume up. Then call yourself periodically just to hear it ring.
- * **Take all the credit for anything good that happens.** If you overhear an idea, act as if you thought of it yourself when you bring it up at a meeting. Forget people's names, particularly when it comes to giving them credit. On the other hand, avoid taking any responsibility when things don't work out. And

never admit you're sorry if you make an error. Promote your own greatness with these simple steps:

- * If a project is a failure, tell your boss someone else did it!
- * If a project works out, say, "We did it."
- * If a project is a great success, say, "I did it."

It is normal for almost everyone to exhibit a few bad behaviours on occasion, so if you really want to stand out, being difficult must become habitual.

With minimal effort, you can probably come up with many more ways to achieve the status of most difficult person in your office. By becoming that person, you should be able to do your job without worrying about the possibility of ever being promoted. Or, even better, you might find that you finally get that well-deserved time off—*permanently!*

Obviously, this has all been written with tongue firmly in cheek, and I am certainly not encouraging anyone to work at being difficult. That's no way to climb the ladder of success, either professionally or personally. But you get the point—and you may even have recognized some of these behaviours in yourself from time to time.

Viewing these behaviours and the people who exhibit them with a sense of humour can help you lighten up and perhaps start changing the way you live.



How *not* to win friends and influence people

- When you want something, yell and demand that it be done NOW!
 - When you disagree with someone, use both verbal and non-verbal communication to let them know. Cross your arms, roll your eyes, shake your head and say, "That is ridiculous."
 - Whenever someone asks you for something, say, "That's not my job."
 - If people seem upset, don't listen to find out what the problem is. Insist that they calm down or relax.
 - When someone has an urgent deadline and asks for your help, point to a sign by your desk that says, "A failure to plan on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part."
-

Stop making excuses

Walk into any bookstore or library and your senses will be assaulted by the sheer volume of all those *self-help* books, each promising to deliver the answers to questions you have not even thought of asking yourself. Each title promises to reveal the clues, the secrets, or the steps necessary to create the perfect life. The themes appear to be the same: eliminate your fears or capitalize on fear; channel or eliminate apprehension; build strength, character, understanding, awareness, and wealth ... the list goes on and on. Over the years, I have devoured these books, thinking that each one would take me closer to understanding myself, and to understanding others. I have been fascinated and captivated by the insights, but have I succeeded

in understanding my own “limiting beliefs”? Or have I succeeded only in adding to my arsenal of excuses as to why I have not taken action? I guess the answer would be yes to both.

Each of us seeks to understand how it is that some people seem to have it all while others don't. How is it that Tom and Dave can score the same on an IQ test, yet Tom is a total waste at school and Dave gets straight A's? Why is it that Robert has been able to rise up from his abusive childhood while Amy has felt hopeless because of hers? Have you ever noticed that some people are good-natured and so friendly that you will go out of your way just to be near them while others are so negative that a few short moments of conversation suck you dry of all energy and enthusiasm? Do people who have successful and satisfying lives simply have more natural gifts than those who do not? Were they born with better genes?

The reality is that successful people, those we classify as “driven”, have simply stopped making excuses for inactivity. They have pulled their heads out of the clouds and decided to learn how to make the world work for them. They have eliminated the behaviours and belief systems that don't benefit them in the long run and have figured out what it is going to take to get the results they desire. They have chosen to develop excellence rather than wait for it to bump into them.

All our beliefs in life are established at an early age—usually by the age of seven. From that point on, we are simply honouring those early programs. Beliefs are the learned results of our education, experience, and repetition. The first time we touch a hot burner on the stove, we learn how hot it is and we very quickly learn how to avoid

the pain associated with touching it. As this simple example shows, our entire decision-making processes are motivated by one of two things: pain or pleasure.

Every behaviour choice is, therefore, giving you a benefit—a payoff of sorts. Most people will do anything to avoid pain, tending to gravitate toward those behaviours that bring us pleasure. When we evaluate the most powerful driving force affecting our decision making, it is quite clearly the avoidance of pain. If we link any part of our goal to pain, we literally sabotage our dreams before we ever begin moving toward them.

Some people stumble through life, blissfully unaware of the world around them. They remain preoccupied with thoughts of work, or personal problems, or how to get a date, or other trivialities. By not paying attention to their surroundings, they place themselves in needless jeopardy. Go sit in your neighbourhood hospital emergency room one evening, just as an educational exercise. Observe the patients who come in for treatment, and you will discover an excellent illustration of this point. Discount the 20 per cent who are actually sick. Focus your attention on the remaining 80 per cent who are there because they didn't pay attention to their environments. These will be people who walked off loading docks, or stepped off ladders 20 feet up, or backed into running machinery, or stepped into the path of a vehicle. You can be careless, inattentive, and oblivious day in and day out and get away with it until, one day, the odds catch up with you and you get hurt. If being oblivious to our physical surroundings can cause this level of risk, imagine what impact your lack of mental focus is having on your ability to create a life of excellence.

The (gag) good examples

Take the time to notice the people around you who are living a successful life. Who do you respect and why? What are the true leaders doing to live authentically and accountably? How do they demonstrate the value of leadership in their life? There are so many great examples—from Richard Branson, who discovered the unquantifiable value of believing in others, to Colonel Harland Sanders, the creator of Kentucky Fried Chicken—who persevered beyond every “no” and epitomized the value of persistence in following your dreams.

Think about the people who inspired you to do your best, who encouraged you to tackle challenges and pursue your dreams, whom you would have followed through thick or thin. While those people may not have made it into the history books, they had an incredible impact on your life. Can you remember why?

Great leaders are great because they inspire. They are not concerned so much with what others think of them, but rather with what they see in others. This truth was recognized by George S. Patton, who certainly exemplifies the meaning of leadership. Patton’s famous advice—“Don’t tell people how to do things, tell them what to do and let them surprise you with their results”—demonstrates his understanding of how to inspire. This does not mean insisting everyone do things your way (even when you want to), but rather helping others to develop their own potential. As counterintuitive as it sounds, leadership involves letting go. Theodore Roosevelt understood that concept, as well: “The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint to keep from meddling with them while they do it.”

*“Only one man in a thousand is a leader of men—
the other 999 follow women.”*

GROUCHO MARX

Great leaders have never become great by finding fault. The ability to encourage the best in others is key.

According to businessman and philanthropist Charles Schwab, “I have yet to find a man, however exalted his station, who did not do better work and put forth greater effort under a spirit of approval than under a spirit of criticism.”

Of course, another aspect of leadership involves a good grasp on how to delegate. As another famous leader, Dwight D. Eisenhower, said, “Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.” Now there’s a great way to take some of the load off and get rid of stress, too. (But don’t forget, you do occasionally have to do some of the work.)

By simply taking note of the leaders or people you respect in your community, you can begin to emulate their positive attributes. I encourage you to stop short of actually stalking them, but do take the time to observe how they behave in their day-to-day interactions.

Of course, you can always watch those you don’t respect, too. By noticing their mannerisms and characteristics, you can pat yourself on the back for “never doing that”. A bit of reverse psychology and a whole lot of fun as you measure your own performance against theirs!

What your mind can conceive, you can achieve

As human beings, we are born with a truly valuable gift—the gift of choice. Many people give this power away in the stories they tell themselves about why they don't deserve success or are not good enough to have it. The *only* thing preventing you from achieving your dreams is the story that you tell yourself about why you can't have them.

True leaders aim for top performance. To train the body to the limits of its capabilities without simultaneously training the mind is to invite, at best, mediocrity. Sports psychologists have claimed that, for Olympic teams, 80 per cent of an athlete's performance is in the mind. Championship players in virtually every form of competition have echoed this statement. Mental rehearsal, also termed visualization, can create and reaffirm the confidence necessary to achieve top performances.

Our minds have the awesome capability to reduce our heart rates and minimize physical fatigue, leaving us with more endurance and motivation. Pro athletes have learned to harness this power so they can achieve consistently higher outcomes. Athletes use this power of the mind to stay calm, relaxed, and focused on their goals. Through positive self-talk and coaching, they are able to maintain a strong personal belief in their abilities. At the 2006 Winter Olympics, Sara Renner and Beckie Scott used sheer will and determination to finish in second place during the women's cross-country team sprint, despite Sara Renner's broken ski pole. "I fight every moment," Renner said of her difficulties. "That's all you can do."

Athletes face stumbling blocks you may identify with. The biggest block of all is fear, and fear comes in many forms. Fear of failure is always restrictive and is very common in sports, as is its hidden partner, fear of success, which can create the expectation *among others* for further improvements. Fear of humiliation can also be very strong.

To perform well, an athlete must be relaxed enough to allow natural timing and co-ordination to flow with the movement of the game. When he or she is in the flow, every movement feels right. The critical, doubting mind can be bypassed to allow the athlete to experience his or her fullest potential.

If mental conditioning has such a positive impact on athletic performance, imagine what it could do to help you achieve your personal best. Mental focus is not just for athletes; each of these skills and techniques can be used to create astounding results in your life. Success is all about attitude, so what are you focused on?

“You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do.”

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT



**Did you discover
the limbo secrets?**

- It's extremely difficult to get away with the old "Do as I say, not as I do", although you may be able to swing it on very rare occasions. It's much better to "walk the talk" (see Chapter 3 for information on clichés).
- It is all right to make a mistake, but you should learn from it. Ignore those who always point to your mistakes; rather, adopt a saintly demeanour and say, "After all, I can't claim to be perfect" even if you think you are.
- Stop taking over and start being more flexible in your attitude.
- Idiots are useful—they provide great examples of how not to act and they make you look good.
- Terminal seriousness or terminal playfulness? The choice is yours.
- Suffering is always optional.
- Success begins and ends in the mind.

*If stupidity got us into this mess,
then why can't it get us out?*

WILL ROGERS

CHAPTER 7

Time Management for the Desperate yet still Conscious



*“I am definitely going to take a course on time management . . .
just as soon as I can work it into my schedule.”*

LOUIS E. BOONE

Do you get the feeling that you are running full out but getting nowhere fast? Do you spend your day in a frenzy of activity and then wonder why you haven't accomplished much? Are you saying no to event invitations and time with friends because you have too much to do? Are you feeling agitated, moody, judgmental, or short-tempered at work because projects keep getting dumped in your lap?

If you break into hysterical laughter at the thought that you have time to limbo, it is time to regroup and focus on some practical, and sometimes amusing, methods of becoming more effective with your time so you can create that elusive life balance, start achieving your goals, and have more fun.

It's all in how you look at the clock

It is not possible to actually manage time per se. It is much more important to consider how you manage your attitude about time. Everyone has the same amount of usable time in a day—about 1,000 minutes, all told. (Personally, I think that sleep is overrated, so I get to use more minutes than most.)

There are several types of time-management personalities. Whether or not we exactly match those personality types, most of us can recognize ourselves to a certain extent. By looking at ourselves and our behaviours objectively—and with a sense of humour—we can make changes and manage our time more successfully.

Making the most of wasted time

Have you ever grown frustrated at the time you're wasting when you're waiting for a delayed flight? I have watched many people become completely unglued over inevitable delays. Since I am a people watcher by profession, I like to keep myself amused during these spontaneous moments of "down time" by observing my fellow human beings. Comedian George Carlin said that during that wasted time while waiting for a plane, he liked to play a game: there's a spy in the airport. Your job: find him. There are hours of creative adventures that can be had inside the privacy of your own mind, and each of these moments can give you some much-needed relief from the harried existence of running from one appointment to the next.

Next time you find yourself waiting, waiting, waiting:

- * Watch the people in the room and determine who is agitated because of being late for a meeting or a rendezvous with someone special.
- * Find the most important person in the room. Ask yourself what makes that person so important, and put a crazy spin on it.

- * Evaluate relationships and guess which partner wears the pants in the family.
- * Make up stories about who might be likely to make a scene over nothing and why.

In restaurants, I like to look for couples on their first or last date. Blind dates are even more fun! My husband and I have even been known to make up conversations for the couples. I particularly love a good public fight for making up stories about what caused all the chaos. (Obviously this is only some light-hearted fun and not to be taken too seriously.)

During a holiday in Montreal, we watched just such a public display. A young couple came into the restaurant all lovey-dovey, and by the time half a bottle of wine was consumed there was a definite chill in the air. My guess was that the gentleman picked a public place to disclose something he shouldn't have done. Although I followed the girl to the restroom (discreetly, of course), I was never able to determine the real cause of the chill. All I know is that even the waitress was afraid to approach by the end of dinner.



From time to time

From client meetings to dentist appointments, it's impossible to avoid waiting for someone or something. But you don't need to just sit there and twiddle your thumbs. Always take something to do with you, such as a report you need to read or edit, an article that you want to peruse, or just paper you can use to

plan your next brilliant idea. Technology makes it easy to work wherever you are—your BlackBerry or iPhone can be of immense use during waiting periods. Or you can simply spend the time observing life around you and appreciating the fact that you are fully relaxed, while those about you are losing their heads.

Just who do you think you are?

When it comes to how we cope with life's little inconveniences or waiting periods, environment, genetics, education, and temperament all play a role. If your parents were crazed when their schedule was pre-empted, in all likelihood you will be as well. If your boss barks and howls at delays, you may find yourself doing the same.

For better or worse, we are heavily influenced by the five individuals with whom we spend the most time. If we hope to alter our response to time management (or lack thereof), we first have to become aware of the management strategies we are using.



Which of the following time-management types are you?

- **Crisis Junkie:** For you, every event is an emergency. You are so busy scrambling to put out daily fires that you have no time to deal with anything else—especially the boring, mundane things (such as time management). The tasks pile up around you while you rush from crisis to crisis all day long. This personality type is typically seen making a run for the car.
- **People Pleaser:** Your problem is that you have not learned how to say no. When someone begs you to chair another

committee, complete additional projects, or organize yet another event, you find yourself agreeing in spite of yourself. In the running for the busiest person award, you gave up on your task lists ages ago. This personality type is often found hiding out in restrooms or closets.

- **Dreamer:** There is such a thing as being too laid-back, especially when it starts interfering with your ability to finish tasks or return phone calls. Getting to things when you get to them is definitely not time management—it is called *avoidance*. This personality type is typically found hanging out with feet on desk, daydreaming about priorities and planning holidays.
- **Chatty Cathy:** Born to socialize, you have astounding oral communication skills and cannot resist exercising them at every opportunity. Every interaction becomes a long, drawn-out conversation—especially if there is an unpleasant task that you would like to put off in the hope that someone else (e.g., the People Pleaser) will pick it up. This personality type can often be seen talking animatedly on a cell phone.
- **Perfectionist:** You have a compulsion to cross all the t's and dot all the i's. "It has to be right" is your motto. No rushed job can be a good job. Getting it right is such a problem that nothing ever gets finished. You don't just need more time, you need more time zones. This personality type can usually be found hunched over the latest project, working late into the night.

You may discover that you are not just one of these time-management types, but all of them, or any of them, depending on the day.

In addition to your time-management type, you also have to discover whether you have a formal or casual attitude about time.

According to comedian Mimi Donaldson, formal people are the designated worriers of society. They are constantly engaged in a daily activity known as “waiting”. These people are *never, ever* late for an appointment. Being only five minutes early causes their pulses to quicken in the direction of a full-blown panic attack.

Those who are casual with their time are inclined to avoid wearing watches. Meeting times are more guidelines than directives. Being 30 minutes late for appointments is not uncommon, and they will not feel the least bit ruffled by the delay, offering a good-natured smile and lame apology. Casual people never worry about being stuck in traffic; they just expect that the traffic will eventually clear out of the way, so why rush to beat it?

An interesting side note is that if you are formal with your time, you may also be formal with your things—a big fan of compartments and order. Everything has its place in your environment so it can be found easily.

If you are a casual with your things person, you are quite the opposite—you carry bags with no defined bottoms and spend your day constantly looking for things you have misplaced. Your motto is “People who are organized are just too lazy to look for anything”.



Because time matters most to you formal people, I would like to share some tips with you on how to handle the more frustrating attributes of the casual types in your life:

- Stop hoping they will change.
- Offer to hang on to items they will need again, like parking passes, boarding passes, security clearance forms, tickets to the big game, etc. Casual people will not take offence at this offer—they are familiar with this strategy and will quickly relinquish control.
- Tell the casual person that the meeting starts half an hour earlier than it really does.

My tips for the casual people:

- Find a formal person and make him or her your best friend. Better yet, get married!
-

So now that you recognize some of your triggers and behavioural tendencies, what can you do to manage time more effectively? Well, start by getting over it. Recognize and accept that everyone has a different approach to time and no amount of influence will dramatically alter a person's general outlook. Start influencing your own behaviours, and let others worry about theirs.

Ask me later

Now let's take a look at time itself. Isn't it interesting that we sometimes feel as if time is moving incredibly slowly, like when we are sitting in a boring meeting, or waiting for an appointment or a call-back? At other times, though, time moves rapidly, like when we are on vacation, or attending a great party or a fun event.

No matter how organized you are, there are always only 24 hours—or 1,440 minutes—in a day. Time doesn't change; that's all you have to work with. Yet look at how your attitude changes your perception of time. Notice how much you actually speed up time by telling yourself you are running out of time, or you don't have enough time. Phrases like "Hurry up", "Time's almost up", "I can't fit that in", or "There's no way I can finish in time" start a chain reaction and send you spiralling into a frenzy as you try to jam it all in.

The answer is not more hours in a day; the secret is in exerting powerful influence over your daily to-do lists.

What you need to do is recognize that you *have* done everything you have ever needed to get done. When was the last time you actually ran out of time? You finished every term paper you waited until the last minute to write. Every big presentation got done and in exactly the amount of time you had.

The amount of time I have to get something done is exactly the amount of time it takes to get it done. If something can be put off or

delayed until later, I do that. My strategy has been to create an artificial deadline if I want to complete something early. Let's face facts: if you think you have lots of time, what's the rush?

The problem is not with time. It is with your priorities (and perhaps your habit of turning everything into an emergency). The answer is not more hours in a day; the secret is in exerting powerful influence over your daily to-do lists. If you don't make these lists, start. I like to put achievable items on my list, things like get up, shower, get dressed, eat. There is something truly cathartic about being able to check things off—kind of gets your day kicked into high gear.



Time to pull up your socks

If there is one thing on your plate right now that you feel pressured to get done:

- Tackle it immediately. (This does not include e-mailing your friends and acquaintances or surfing the Web.)
- As you work on it, repeat this sentence in your head: "I have plenty of time."

You will be amazed how you'll no longer feel the need to rush through everything. You do not have to do it all at once. You can pick the most important task and slow down and maybe even enjoy yourself!

The fact is that most of what is on your plate can wait—an hour, a day, a week, a month, or even a year. What can't wait is learning how to adjust what you say to yourself about time and how you prioritize im-

portant items. We are always prone to putting off tasks we view as too hard, too confusing, or taking too long, but have you noticed that we are able to justify taking that holiday, a TV break, or a 20-minute nap? Naturally these all contribute to our performance outputs—really!

Your finest hour

Many of us fall prey to time wasters that steal time we could be using much more productively. What are your time stealers? Do you spend too much time surfing the Internet, checking e-mails, or making personal calls during your most productive time slots?

Explore when you are at your best and performing well. Is it in the morning, afternoon, or evening hours? In the wee hours of the morning? Do you need gallons of caffeine to keep you going to the finish?

If you discover that you are most productive between 8 a.m. and 11 a.m., with a lull in energy from noon to 2 p.m., save your e-mails for the lull period and use the peak times for your most important or creative projects.

What is your finest hour, the hour in which you feel your best and have the most energy? Schedule this hour to work on your top tasks. For many, it's early morning, but the important thing is that it is when you are operating at your best. Keep out those pesky interruptions—this is your productivity time. Cherish it! It is easy to reserve the hour in your day when you feel the most productive. Enter it as a standing appointment, then keep your appointments!

Not sure when you do your best work? This week, make a commitment to record your daily activities and the amount of time you spend on each. Do not distinguish between business and personal activities at this point. You need to have a complete picture of your schedule so you can easily see where to make the changes that will develop greater efficiency and reduce your stress level.



Infiltration

A great method for filtering those endless e-mails is by generating itemized category folders for all incoming mail. This can save you hours of searching for time-sensitive or important e-mails. It also allows you to store interesting e-mails out of the way, where you can view them at your leisure.

- Create folders with relevant names. Create a “newsletter” folder or a “Grandma’s photos” folder.
- Create rules in the mail program that will direct e-mails to the right folders.

I gave this tip at a corporate workshop only to receive an e-mail the next day from a delighted staff member. She recounted how she ran back to her office, quickly established the rules in her e-mail and dashed off to a meeting.

Later, after enjoying several hours of uninterrupted silence, she discovered that she had set a rule where all incoming e-mails went straight to the deleted folder.

Effective, but not a great long-term strategy!

You might wish to slow down when implementing this tip.

Procrastinating your way out of the rent money

Beating procrastination is critical to your personal and professional development. It is easy to find something—anything—to do other than focus on the task at hand. You may even find yourself willing to clean the bathroom with a toothbrush rather than getting to work. (Of course, you can always rationalize this as cleaning the house, a necessary chore. You may end up with a beautiful, sparkling clean house—but your work still awaits you.)

Procrastination is one of the greatest contributors to stress and pressure and it robs you of energy. It is the main culprit when you feel overwhelmed and burdened. No matter what your goal is, avoiding taking action pulls you further and further away from what you really want.

Perhaps Sir John Lubbock (1744–1816) said it best: “In truth, people can generally make time for what they choose to do; it is not really the time but the will that is lacking.”



Five simple steps to overcoming procrastination

- 1. Reframe your focus.** Tell yourself the task is something you *choose* to do, not something you *have* to do. Altering your emotional state can help you develop the energy you need to be positive and proactive.
- 2. Chunk the project down.** You don't necessarily have to complete the project today—you just have to get started.

- 3. Remember, there is no such thing as perfect.** Despite your efforts to the contrary, you are only human.
 - 4. When you finish a project, make time to celebrate your victory.** All successful people take time to celebrate and recognize accomplishments.
 - 5. Minimize or eliminate distractions.** Less distraction equals more action. Reorganize your workspace, stop answering the phone, develop a filing system, and keep your workspace clean and uncluttered. When you reduce interruptions and eliminate distractions, you have more time to spend on productive activities.
-

Delegating: the art of telling others what to do

Effective delegation is another useful time-management skill. There is no value in being a one-person show. For effective time management, you need to ask other people to carry some of the load. But remember ... ask nicely!

Learning how to delegate means learning how to hand some of the hats you now wear to other people, who are perfectly capable of wearing them in your place. I know that this can be agony for those of you who think that no one else can do the job properly (i.e., exactly how you would do it). Please don't let fear prevent you from delegating. After all, you'll still have final say and won't lose control of a task just because someone else is doing it.

By learning how to let go, you will find more time and energy to focus on what it is you do best and want to do most. This will translate into increased success in both business and life.

When I started in business, I told myself the story that I could not hire others to do what I was capable of doing because I couldn't afford it. As a result, within the first year, I was in danger of losing my mind; I was not sleeping, and my books were behind by six months. My husband and I were fighting over journal entries that were woefully inadequate and long-forgotten receipts missing or faded. Finally, I realized that I truly hated doing the books. I hired a woman from my business networking club to take on the task. At first, it was so difficult to just let her do the job, but within a few minutes the feeling passed—like a kidney stone or a stomach bug. I was especially elated when I left to see clients and came home to an office that was cleared of paper, with all the filing neatly put away. It was in that moment that I realized that having a professional bookkeeper would not only save my life, but likely save me a whole lot of money, too. Now, I delegate everything I can.

Consider delegating one task at a time until you get comfortable with the concept. Maybe you can even pay someone to work out for you. Wouldn't that be a worthwhile investment?

Minute minders

Efficient time usage isn't rocket science. When it comes to getting stuff done, we grossly underestimate the value of what can be accomplished in one minute:

- * File your loose papers.
- * Put five files away.
- * Clear a spot on your desk.
- * Throw something—anything—away!
- * Collect loose sticky notes to process later.
- * Call and make that appointment that you have been putting off.
- * Answer an e-mail and delete the original.
- * Make a to-do list.
- * Set a time limit for projects.
- * Delegate something that someone else can easily do.

Once you appreciate the value of a single minute, there are many simple practices you can build into your routine. I receive a great e-zine each month (that I actually read) from Georgina Forrest at Smartworks! Office Organizing Services (www.sworganizing.ca). She has a lot more tips if you found the above suggestions useful.

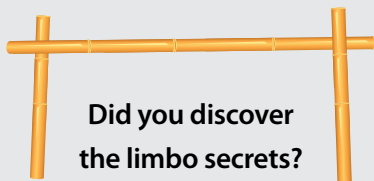
Batching similar tasks together for simultaneous completion is a great time saver. You will eliminate repetition and minimize effort. You can also create routines for your recurrent tasks. After a while, they'll become automatic and you can breeze through them using a minimum of thought and energy.

Why approach organization the hard way? Take the lazy man's approach. Create a specific and unique place for everything, and you'll be able to find everything quickly. Simplify, simplify! Of course, you'll have to remember where you put things. A lot of time can be wasted as you stand around, scratching your head and saying to yourself, "I put that in a special place so I would always know where to find it—now where the heck is it?" With that in mind, make a list of storage places until you are used to your new and efficient storage system.

When it comes to filing, Georgina Forrest shares a great tip: generate names for your files based on what you mumble under your breath. Here are some that I use:

- * Damn reports
- * Folks I should have called back and didn't
- * In my dreams
- * When I win the lottery

Well, you get the idea.



- Find ways to use or simply enjoy “wasted” time.
- Recognize the type of time-management person you are and make changes, if necessary. If you are happy with how you manage your time, celebrate! (And be sure to let everyone else know just how efficient and organized you are.)
- Accept the fact that you can’t change others, but you can change your responses.
- Don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today. I know this is an old adage that usually makes you gag, but it isn’t a bad motto. You’ll feel a lot less stress with that one task finished.
- Learn to maximize your finite amount of time and delegate, delegate, delegate. If you are really successful in doing this, you might get to the point where everyone else does the work and you get the credit or pay.
- Ants are some of the hardest-working creatures on the planet, and even they take time out for a picnic. The bottom line is take a break, for heaven’s sake! Periodically, go for a brisk walk, move about energetically, do knee bends—anything to increase your energy level and stretch your muscles. Stretching is an excellent way to maintain your energy, and deep breathing is the best way to promote mental stimulation. Build these physical breaks into your daily schedule.
- Listen to your body—and your mind—and remember the lesson you learned from the cat: nap as often as possible, preferably in the sun!

CHAPTER 8

Either Do Something or Don't



“I am like a superhero minus the powers and the motivation.”

DISPLAYED ON A T-SHIRT

We all go through changes, phases that can try us, challenge us, terrify us, and bring us joy. Much of how we deal with everything life throws our way has to do with the choices we make. You are always making choices, but if you're like most of us, you're making them unconsciously, without evaluating whether or not they are going to contribute to a less stressful life.

In every situation, you have a choice. You can make the conscious choice to appreciate the sublime and laugh at the ridiculous. You can make the conscious choice to be optimistic, even if you must go through times of sadness, grief, anger, and frustration. You can make the conscious choice to live life to the fullest. And you can make the conscious choice to accept what you cannot change and just get on with it.

Freaking out is optional

“Don't freak out” should be everyone's mantra. Your first, knee-jerk reaction to a challenge is often the wrong reaction and will only make the situation more stressful for you.

I learned long ago that when the pressure is on (and sometimes even when it is not), I usually experience some sort of emotional

hijacking. In other words, I don't think objectively or calmly. My best intentions are heavily influenced by defensiveness, fear, or stress. This is a pretty common situation and one that puts you in jeopardy if you don't take time to monitor the volume of your inner voice and of your speaking voice.

When emotions are running high, your ability to be rational and maintain a reasonable perspective is often compromised. You lose the ability to analyze and be objective. To deal with this, you can train yourself to develop a more desirable method of responding when the pressure is on.

When I first started speaking in front of groups, my biggest fear was a catastrophic failure of my technical devices—either the projector or the laptop—making it impossible for me to go on with my planned presentation. I'm not sure whether I thought such a situation would make me look less professional or whether I was worried it would rattle me to the point where I was unable to proceed, but this concern always niggled away at the back of my mind.

Well, that nightmare came true a few years ago. I was preparing to present to a large group. I arrived ahead of schedule, as I had been taught to do—*just in case*. I plugged in the equipment and was preparing to load my presentation when the laptop produced the dreaded “Blue Screen of Death”! As my heart skipped a little faster, I rebooted the computer again and again and again—at least 10 times. Then, I called my husband (a.k.a. tech support) who was unable to diagnose the problem from a distance and suggested I continue to restart or borrow a laptop.

After hanging up, I spent another five minutes attempting to get my laptop to reconsider, all to no avail. Nobody had a laptop I could borrow. This was my nightmare come true! But the show, as they say, had to go on. So, a few deep breaths later, I proceeded with the presentation “off the cuff” and acted as if that had been the plan all along.

The results were astounding. The group interacted at a higher level (because they had to), and, in the end, I think we all were better off with the question and answer format I chose to use.

What did I learn? Well, that I would not die on the spot from technical failure. Also, that the entire audience would not leave the building en masse if I couldn't deliver my planned presentation. I also gained self-assurance, self-trust, self-confidence, and the belief that I could deliver the materials without PowerPoint. But most importantly, I learned that by controlling my urge to freak out, I was able to calmly handle the situation and bring about a successful outcome. Ultimately, being prepared and knowing my material helped me escape what could have been quite self-sabotaging. I discovered that audiences are a lot more generous than most people give them credit for. By staying composed and carrying on, I saw that most of the group applauded me for remaining calm under pressure.

Over the years, I have seen many individuals make rash decisions because they have felt under pressure or feared an outcome. I've also found that most of them later regretted those decisions.

It can be very hard to control the freak-out urge when dealing with your children. No matter how patient a parent you are, there are times when your children push all the wrong buttons. My children used to push my husband's buttons particularly hard when I was away. Being the wise adult, he would always manage to get the last word by ordering them to their rooms with one final instruction: "You are grounded for the rest of your natural life."

Now, when you make a threat or give an ultimatum, you'd better be able to back it up or you risk losing all your credibility. Unless you want your children living on the couch long after your retirement, it may be in your best interest to issue punishments after you have had time to cool down! This was quite true of our family. Once we learned the necessity of a cooling-off period, I was able to gently ask my husband, "Is there any chance for parole?"

Play a little—or a lot

Negative thinking has become the new epidemic in North America. Impatience has become the virtue to which we are now adhering. The carefree, fun-loving spirit that was a part of childhood is lost to many of us adults as we succumb to "terminal seriousness." Believe me, constant seriousness is a sure-fire way to bring the limbo bar down.

Do you remember how old you were when you had the capacity to create a world of fantasy and actually live within it? How long ago was it when you could pretend to be anything or anyone you wanted to be? For some of you, the memories won't seem too distant. For

others, it may feel like entire lifetimes have passed. It may even be impossible to imagine that you ever had that spirit or that enthusiasm at all.

As children, we were able to transport ourselves into fantasy worlds at the blink of an eye. Without restraint, we had the willingness to enter new dimensions, opportunities, and daydreams, which seemed so real. We were not inhibited by thoughts of embarrassment, right or wrong, responsibility or obligations. We created our desires and lived our fantasies, and they were tangible.

One of my favourite childhood memories is of my brother climbing onto a chair with a towel tied around his neck, leaping off, and crying out, "Mighty Mouse!" He believed he was a superhero and no one could prevent him from saving the day. What happened to that innocence, that creative spirit, that intensity for dreaming? If we had it once, can we not find and experience it all over again?

I remember enjoying a real laugh at a Calgary Stampeders' football game (and not for the reason you all are thinking). Sitting in the stands nearby was a gentleman proudly displaying a shirt that read, "I am like a superhero minus the powers and the motivation." Perhaps we all need one of these shirts to remind us not to take ourselves, or our lives, quite so seriously. In fact, we could all benefit from *choosing* to take a more childlike fascination in our approach to life.

Who are you and how do you want to live?

Even with today's fast-paced and hectic lifestyles, which can easily suck the life out of many of us, you can choose not to be a victim anymore. I've done just that. Now I take control of what I can, including my attitude, and accept that I cannot control everything. I don't wait for motivation to find me; I look for and maintain motivation, even though I prefer to spend my time sitting in my backyard, drinking mai tais and soaking up the sun. That, too, is a choice, but it doesn't pay the mortgage. Motivation may not always be readily available, but it can be encouraged.



Finding—and keeping—motivation

- 1. Refocus your thoughts.** Our thoughts have energy, and they will propel us toward whatever we spend our time thinking about. When you are feeling powerless to effect change, tell yourself, "I am unstoppable." By focusing on what you want rather than what you don't want, you are able to propel yourself in the direction you choose rather than following pessimism and doubt.
- 2. Express gratitude.** Look in the mirror and identify at least three things that you are grateful for. Avoid the tendency to make the endless list of all the things you would like to change. Then project your gratitude outward. Write a note, send an e-mail, or make a phone call to thank someone. Be specific about what you are most thankful for. Remember, a compliment is a gift given in both directions—it makes them feel good, and it makes you feel good!

3. **Generate a positive night-time ritual.** When you first close your eyes at night, list three things that you are looking forward to the following day. Small or large, these will stimulate good dreams and help you wake up with optimism.
 4. **Activate the “power of five”.** The greatest influences in your life relate to the five individuals with whom you spend the most time. Who are they? Are they driven, optimistic, and success-oriented, or are they worried, anxious, and pessimistic? How do these people speak in your presence? Do they feed you energy or feed you fear? Choose your influencers wisely. Spend time with those who are constantly moving forward, not stuck in reverse.
 5. **Discover effective time-management tools.** Most of us don't realize that we have a problem with time management. We are all so busy, but that may be exactly what is sabotaging our motivation. Start learning how to prioritize your time so you don't get sucked into the vortex of negative dialogue and doubt. When we get organized, we become less overwhelmed. We become empowered because we can use our time to unleash our creativity and achieve even greater accomplishments.
-

Seeing the nest as empty can be a good thing

As we grow older, the choice remains as to which lens we will use to view our lives. We can be bitter about the loss, or perceived loss, of youth, of those supposedly carefree days before we had so many responsibilities. Or we can accept the fact that we chose to shoulder

many of those responsibilities (children, mortgage, job) and move on to enjoy this new phase in our lives.

You can accept change as natural. For example, having an empty nest doesn't have to be viewed as negative. In fact, this can be a really fun time in your life. The children have grown up and moved away, your house is your own, and your schedule is now open for anything you wish to pursue. So why do so many of us feel upset when our children grow up and leave home?

For some parents, this is an uncomfortable time because we discover the *child* in the adult child. The first shock hits when your daughter comes home from college for a weekend—with a huge bag of dirty laundry and the uncanny ability to eat everything in the house that isn't bolted down—and is exceedingly perturbed because her bedroom has been changed into a conservatory (apparently before she was even out the door). Or your son, who has moved into his first apartment, a 300-square-foot basement pad he shares with seven friends, has dropped by unannounced—with a huge bag of laundry and the uncanny ability to eat everything in the house that isn't bolted down—and is visibly upset because you and your spouse have other plans for the weekend, which don't include doing his laundry, feeding him, or doting on him as if he had just spent a year sailing solo around the world.

Even though your children are technically of age, they still want to know that home means home. They may have stated loudly and clearly that they are independent, self-sufficient *adults* ... but they still want to know that Mom and Dad are there for them, at their beck and call, no matter what.

Other parents may have a hard time letting go. Your identity has been tied up in your children, and you aren't sure who the new "you" is. After two decades as caregiver, nurse, cook, cleaner, chauffeur, tailor, teacher, coach, handyman, and psychologist, you are suddenly on the unemployment line—at least, that's how you feel. This is a normal transition period. Don't forget, you will always be parents, no matter how old your children are. Remember when your daughter e-mailed for that favourite family recipe? Or your son called to find out how to do a load of laundry? So take heart—your children do value your opinions and experience, and your input into their lives will most likely be sought for many years to come.

Finding yourself—in much the way your child is discovering himself or herself—can be an exciting journey. Filling the void when your children leave may feel uncomfortable at first, but the payoff is huge. It's almost like when you graduated from high school: the world is yours. Take a class, learn to paint, start hiking, garden, volunteer, travel, or just veg around the house in your sweats. Relish the fact that you are at a time in your life when you can continue to pursue your dreams ... and may actually have the wherewithal to do it.

When you do start moving from the role of hands-on parent to stand-alone adult, dealing with your children's responses can be challenging. Your children tend to see you as an extension of themselves, rather than the other way around. When you decide to backpack through Europe for a year or go skydiving, the response can come as something of a surprise. Your children may have been the ones encouraging you to try new things, to "get a life" ... but they

can also be unexpectedly conservative when you actually take their advice. The answer is to simply smile and nod, thank them for their concern, and then go on with your plans anyway. You always have the option to keep things to yourself until after whatever you have planned is over.

In the meantime, relish the moment. One of the real pluses of having an empty nest is that you are no longer on view as a role model 24-7. You can truly live the expression: “Do as I say, not as I do.” This means that you can sit around the house in your pyjamas all day Saturday, eating nothing but heavily buttered popcorn, jelly beans and ice cream bars without having to explain to your offspring why this diet is not healthy for them, but just fine for you. You can let dirty dishes sit in the kitchen sink for a few days or not vacuum the house for a couple of weeks. You can read trashy romance novels until the wee hours of the morning or watch TV all night. You can come and go as you please. In other words, you can virtually regain your youth, tempered with the wisdom life experience brings.

Take advantage of this wonderful stage of life. You have the opportunity to grow as a human being, even as you watch your children grow and see the world anew through their eyes. What you live and learn now will be of benefit to those same children when they reach your age.

And you can always derive a great deal of entertainment from making pithy comments to them, starting with the phrase “When I was your age” Yes, you sound like an old coot, but it can be really, really fun to watch the expressions on their faces, as they think

to themselves, “Mom (or Dad) has really lost it this time.” Then you hop on your motorcycle and head off into the sunset.

Finding alternatives

There are several things all of us can do to reach that place where we are living life more on our own terms, making the choices that feel right for us. I can't offer any easy solutions here; I don't have a guaranteed secret for how to make a fortune working only minutes a week. What I can offer are a few concrete steps I have used that may help you live the life you really want.

- * **Brainstorm ways of making money working for yourself.** Write down a list of activities you love and then consider whether or not someone would pay you to do them. Consider every possibility because you never know. Browse through Craig's list or Kijiji to see what other people are doing. You might be surprised!
- * **Consider new money-making opportunities.** We're not even thinking “career” here, just things that might not have occurred to you before. How about working as a nanny, a tutor, or a virtual office assistant? What about starting a business where you go to people's houses and help them assemble furniture because they don't have the time or talent to do it themselves?
- * **Move to a less expensive area.** If you live in one of the many overpriced major urban areas, you may be amazed at just how

much less your cost of living would be if you moved further north or across the border. Sure, you may have to give up some of the amenities you're used to, but look at it this way—if you're killing yourself with overwork just to afford where you live now, how much time do you really have to enjoy all of the supposed benefits your area has to offer?

- * **Give up some things so you can work less.** My husband and I saved a fortune on coffee and lunches when I stopped working as a law enforcement officer. When I travel now, I take a to-go mug of my own fresh brew with me—approximate annual savings of \$400.

Let a smile be your umbrella

Aha—another cliché. Yet, as with most clichés, this one has a grain of truth. Ultimately, your outlook on life is your choice. How you approach challenges, whether you live life with joy, how you allow yourself to feel anger or grief, what you consider important, if and how you pursue your dreams—all these are entirely up to you.

The Dalai Lama travels the world spreading the word about compassion and inner strength. He says that the only control we have in our lives is over our thoughts. The more anxiety and irritation we feel, the faster we lose our self-confidence and strength. He states that a life of happiness and certainty equates with enlightenment, and comes from compassion and doing little things for others. This is the real secret.

It is time for all of us to let go of unrealistic expectations and judgments and start accepting ourselves and others just as we are. It is time to quit taking things so personally—some days it is going to rain. We can head outside and complain about getting wet, or we can do something effective about it, such as carrying an umbrella. Remember when you were a child and the rain was fun to play in? Perhaps all it takes is finding that inner child and letting him or her come out to play in the rain.

Have you ever worked with someone with a bad attitude? You know who I mean. The person exudes negativity. It doesn't matter what happens; something is wrong with it. You would never ask how that person's weekend was because you already know it was terrible. Sure, every office has one of these. I say that a bad attitude is like having mould in your bathroom—once it's in there, it's virtually impossible to get out!

However, you can overcome the negative villain and keep your positive attitude in the process. It's just going to take a bit of effort. Negativity seeps into our subconscious before we even realize it. Many people ask me if just ignoring it will work. I say no. Have you ever bought a CD that you listened to over and over again? When you hear one of those songs on the radio, don't you automatically know what song should come next? Did you memorize the order?

Through repetition we are almost brainwashed. Commercials work the same way. My dad used to tell me that if I knew my school-work as well as I knew commercials, I'd be a straight-A student. I

didn't spend time trying to memorize commercials; I just heard them a million times. And yes, we hear the negativity a million times, and, without even realizing it, we start thinking that way, too.

Be prepared for negative attitudes; instead of an umbrella, consider wearing a full "wet suit" to the next staff meeting. Now wouldn't that be a pretty sight? Set boundaries when it comes to negative energy in your life, and resolve that Mr. or Mrs. Cranky Pants will not get under your skin. It can become mind over matter.

Everyone has a story to tell or act out. Some of us are living a wonderful comedy; still others a great love story. There are those who are re-enacting *War and Peace* and some who are living a Stephen King novel. (Be wary of those.) Remember that you are merely collateral damage when you spend time with these groups. Whatever they are creating, they likely have a role designed for you.

Script writing and editing usually occur in the lunchroom of most offices—often referred to as the "whine and cheese" party. I used to go to lunch with colleagues from my department and just listen. They would spend the entire lunch break complaining about what is wrong with the company as well as about specific people. I would go back to my desk or out on patrol and feel totally frustrated or angry, sometimes at people I didn't even know.

I needed to stop spending time with negative people, so I started creating reasons why I couldn't make it to coffee or lunch that day. Instead of confronting them, I was always just very busy.

If you suddenly find yourself in the centre of a whine and cheese party and without a clear line to the exit, consider the following tactic for counterbalancing the discussion. When you hear someone criticizing another person, interrupt with a comment like one of these:

- * “I’ve never had any problems with Jane.”
- * “I find that department so easy to work with.”
- * “I consider myself fortunate to work for this company.”

At this point, it doesn’t really matter if you agree with what you are saying or not. The point is to defend the invisible party. Complainers will stop complaining to you because they really don’t want to hear the positive; they only want to complain, and you are not giving them what they need (a pair of willing ears or a bobbing head).

The *New York Times* did a survey of companies across the country, asking about the most important attribute in an employee. The number one answer given was “attitude.”

We must have and keep a positive attitude. It shouldn’t be considered optional. The Dalai Lama would say that your attitude must be one of compassion in order to have the strength required to succeed in this world. Naturally, maintaining such an attitude is no easy task, especially if negative influences and difficult people surround you.

Start by focusing on what you want, not on what you don’t want. Figure out what “happy” really means for you, and then take action each and every day in the direction of that goal. If you are strug-

gling to smile, remember that neuroscience believes that the faces we make trigger our moods. So start smiling!

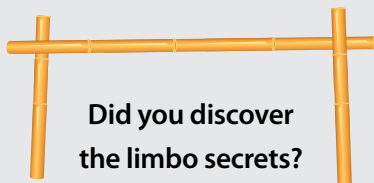
Some other tips for changing your attitude:

- * Listen to a baby laugh.
- * Sing to the radio.
- * Dance as if no one is watching (another cliché).
- * Go for a walk in the sun.
- * Jump into a mud puddle or a pile of leaves just because you can.
- * Read a funny book.
- * Call a happy-happy-joy-joy friend.
- * Smile at strangers (if they look startled, know you just positively influenced them).
- * Hug a child.
- * Volunteer your time.

True happiness is pretty easy to manifest. It is a mood we choose to nurture. Everyone can slide into irritation and impatience; only the gifted can cultivate a sense of amusement when the world is collapsing around them. Let's face it: our lives give us a lot to laugh at!

Ultimately, it's up to you what kind of life you have and how you face the challenges. Remember the photos of those fascinating pre-historic cave drawings? The pessimist calls them graffiti; the optimist calls them art and learns something from them.

Take control of your world view and you can live a life you love, without all the stress.



- Just make up your mind to do something or to not do it—it's all up to you.
- Sometimes it's nice to retreat into fantasy, as you did in childhood. (Of course, you need to use some common sense here.)
- Change what you can (that's what the democratic system is all about, isn't it?) and accept what you cannot change, such as other people.
- Yes, you can find and keep motivation.
- A simple thank you every now and then is a good thing. Don't say it because you think you should; say it because you truly feel grateful and appreciative.
- Rediscover yourself.
- There are so many fun things to do when you hit middle age and beyond. Enjoy!
- Choose to live on your own terms.

That's a Wrap

I hope you enjoyed reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it. May you have discovered opportunities to laugh, smile, and refocus your own set of life circumstances.

Please note that this book offers my own personal perspectives on situations and events. Any similarities to real events are therefore purely accidental. My objective for this book was to help you unearth a few simple and effective reframes for those stressful moments in your own life. My hope is that you will enjoy life more, both when the limbo bar is set high and things are easy and when the bar is just inches from the ground. It really doesn't matter what life throws at you. You can limbo successfully no matter what!

Remember: life will never be perfect. Your family will continue to fight about everything. Teams will continue to have personality conflicts, and even the most carefully laid plans will go awry. The goal is to maintain your balance as you navigate the limbo pole, ensuring you don't bonk your head as you pass underneath. Finesse and style can be abandoned in pursuit of the ultimate objective.

If you found this book insightful or useful at any level, please share it with others who might benefit from the stories. If your team

at work is suffering from terminal seriousness, please feel free to buy the book in bulk and give a copy to everyone.



Final Limbo tips:

Stress management and learning to live with joy aren't rocket science (now there's a stressful career if ever I heard of one). Here are a few more tips I have found useful over the years:

- Don't overestimate your own importance. Remember, 100 years from now, there will be all new people.
- If you can't be kind, at least have the decency to be vague.
- Smiling creates endorphins and dopamine—even when you fake it. So why not give it a try?
- Get out in your garden. There's nothing like pinching the heads off dead blooms while imagining that they are your co-workers for getting rid of anger and stress.
- Caffeine makes you edgy. Drink water or juice when you are in need of an energy boost and save the caffeine for a treat (as in triple lattes with vanilla, lots of sugar, whole milk, and whipped cream).
- Eliminate destructive self-talk.
- Time is relative. Take care of today. Yesterday and tomorrow will look after themselves.
- Do unpleasant tasks early in the day and get them over with. According to Brian Tracey, author of *Eat That Frog*, once the most unpleasant activity is over, everything else is a breeze. (If getting out of bed constitutes an unpleasant task, think how virtuous you will feel once your feet hit the floor.)
- Get up 15 minutes earlier every day to ensure you don't feel as if you are constantly rushing around trying to make up time.

THAT'S A WRAP

- Be prepared to wait.
 - Laugh as often as possible.
 - Say no to extra projects and activities.
 - Take time to meditate, stroll, practise yoga, or do Tai Chi. These activities allow you to generate a fresh new perspective, completely free of stress and tension.
 - Accept what is done. When my daughter had a get-together at our house and later discovered that her acquaintances had robbed the place blind, there was not much point in getting all worked up about it. We simply expressed our disappointment, set restrictions, and gave her a few repayment options.
-

Author's Profile



Faith is the mother of four children, a grandmother and a wife. Call her stubborn, ambitious and strong-willed, and she'll smile because she is exactly all those things and more.

She is based in Airdrie, Alberta, Canada, and is happily married in spite of—or perhaps because of—a busy travel schedule.

FAITH WOOD is also the author of *Fundraising on a Shoestring*. She's written hundreds of articles and a few dozen eBooks; created numerous podcasts, CDs and workshops on how employ-

ees, businesses and families can communicate in ways that produce more equitable outcomes (and create greater stability in our lives).

When a crisis strikes, most of us are unprepared and ignorant about how to take a first definitive step. With her optimism, sense of humor and highly honed people skills, Faith shows us how to keep moving regardless of the chaos. As a result, she has become more than your average life coach and speaker.

Faith thrives on balancing a busy career with a playful, hard-working attitude and looks to inspire others to follow her lead. She is renowned for presentations that are engaging, entertaining, and compelling.

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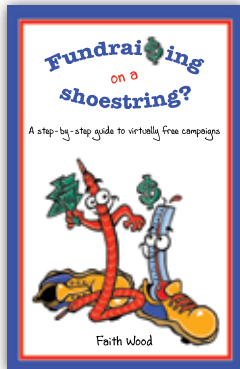
Are you interested in booking Faith for an interview, a speaking engagement, a training session or as a coach on these topics?

You can contact her through email at: info@imind.ca or
visit her website: www.imind.ca.

Fundraising on a Shoestring?

A step-by-step guide to virtually free campaigns

When Faith Wood, a Calgary-area entrepreneur, learned that her very ill twin sister, Fern, urgently needed to find money to access a risky, out-of-country (and last resort) treatment for her debilitating disease known as RSD (reflex sympathetic dystrophy), she rallied her colleagues (and her own expertise) and pulled together an online campaign aimed at raising the necessary funds in less than four months. Although Faith had been involved in many previous live fundraising events she had no experience and no guide for tapping into social media and online campaigning. With no time to spare in additional research, Faith and her team dove head-first into the campaign and successfully achieved their goal, becoming trendsetters in the process. This book, *Fundraising on a Shoestring?*, identifies the challenges they faced and how they overcame them. Not only does this book share the framework of what Faith did to raise the capital, but she went further, interviewing other fundraisers as well as those who donate to causes, to give the reader even more fundraising tips and secrets.



Unique benefits of this book:

- * Bring the experts home with you—get real experience and mentorship.
- * Step by Step road-map to getting started—including how to put the team together, followed by effective strategies for keeping the momentum.
- * Explains the pitfalls and opportunities learned and then provides an analysis of which strategies/initiatives yielded the best results (bang for the buck).
- * How to tap into the online world of marketing and communication for the benefit of fundraising, based on real life success stories.

This book is also available as an ebook.

Price is \$27.95 CDN.