

Jodie Rogers

The Hidden Edge

Why **Mental Fitness** is
the Only Advantage
That Matters in Business

Resources & Exercises

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Introduction

Break Barriers. Change Perspective. Take Action.

In an increasingly complex and uncertain world, we all need tools to understand and manage our most important asset - our own minds.

The reality is that everything we do, or want to do, starts inside of us, in our minds. It is our inner game that makes the difference in how we see and respond to the world:

- Whether the ongoing narrative in our heads (known as mind chatter) is on our side or playing against us
- Whether we manage fear and uncertainty or unknowingly use our worries and concerns to keep us in a state of anxiety
- Whether we're telling ourselves we can do something or telling ourselves we can't

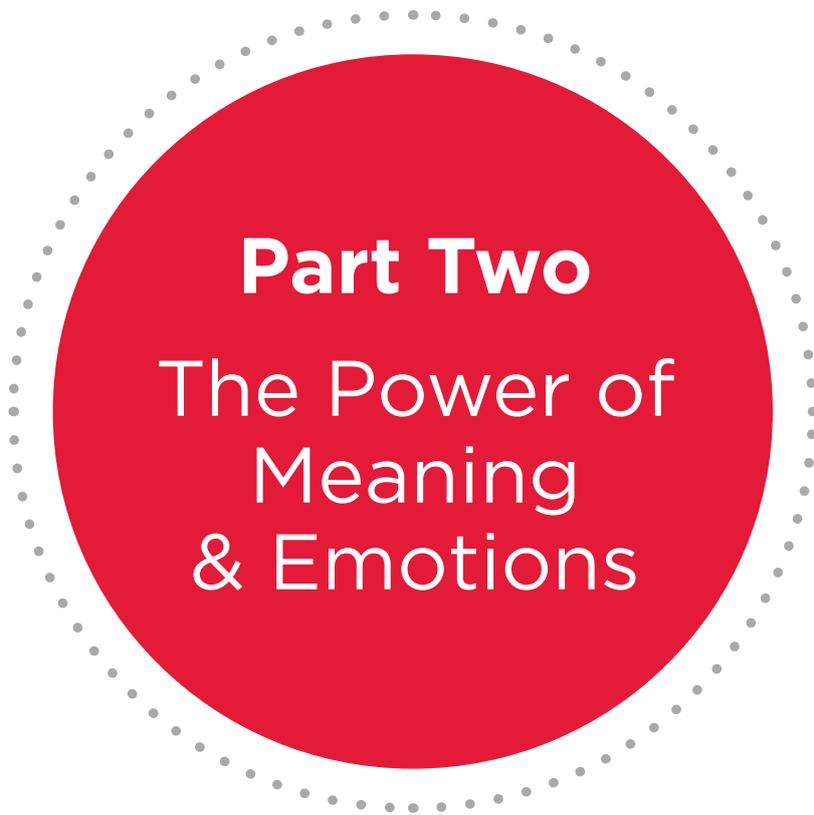
Sometimes, it's easy to feel helpless and that everything is out of our control, but the one thing we have control over is how we let life's events affect us. If we can master our thinking and our mindset, we can release confidence and potential we didn't know were there.

The Hidden Edge and these accompanying exercises will help you to **break barriers** and overcome the mental obstacles which may be holding you back. We focus on **changing perspective** because this in itself can reveal new possibilities and opportunities. And arguably most important of all, we've curated a set of impactful tools and techniques to inspire to you to **take action**.

We cover:

- Demystifying the workings of the mind by sharing some basic neuropsychology and showing you how it directly affects our behaviour
- Perception and how often it plays tricks on us
- Thinking traps: what they are, and how to challenge and overcome them
- Tools and techniques that you can use to make an immediate positive change to your mindset and your thinking.
- And most importantly, we're going to give you the foundations to kick start your own Mental Fitness journey - so that you can make sure your mind is playing for you not against you.



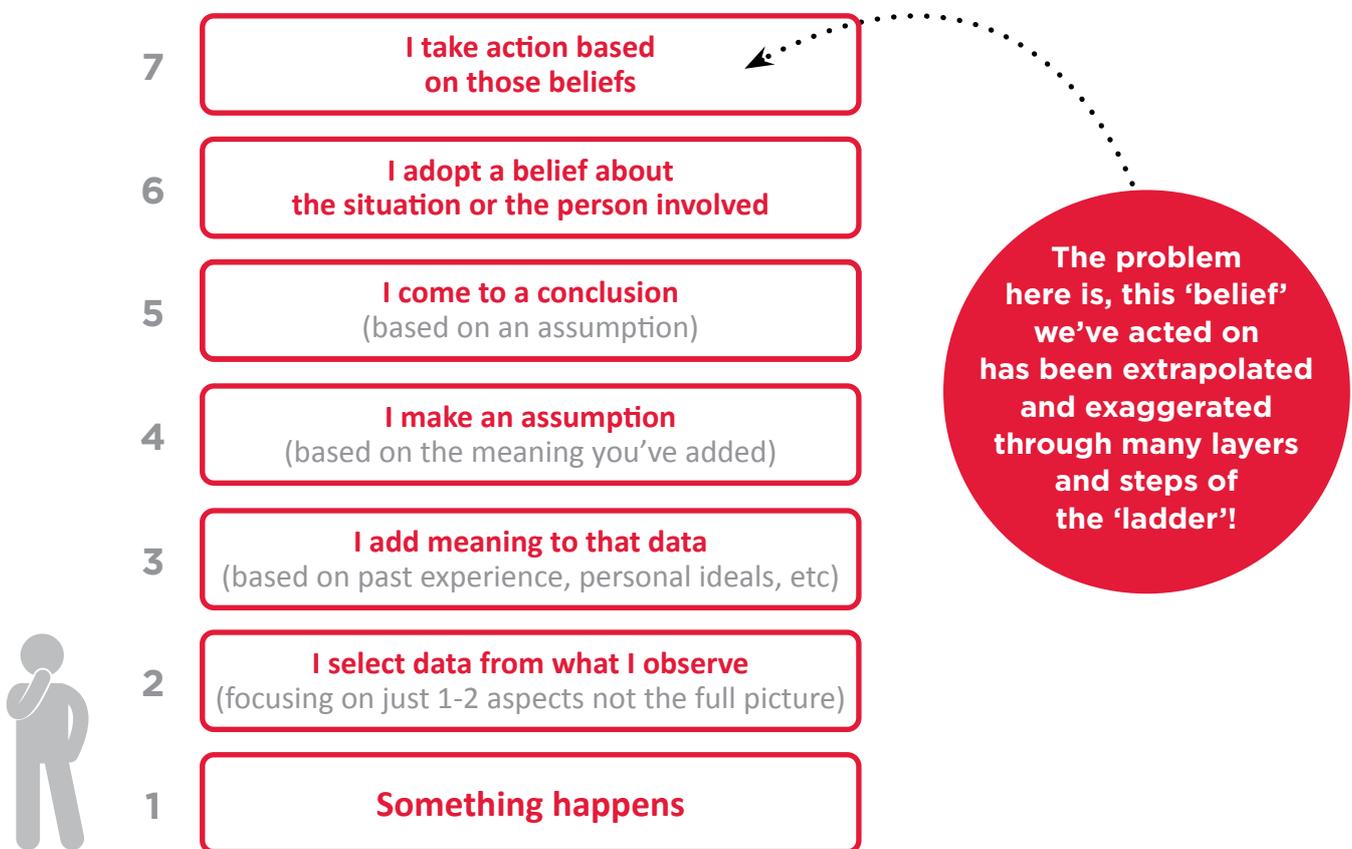


Part Two
The Power of
Meaning
& Emotions

How interpretation can lead us astray

It's important to be aware of how we are interpreting the world around us and how that interpretation is not always right. It's not just *what we're seeing* but also *what we're telling ourselves about what we're seeing* because this narrative is influencing our decisions in life.

When we find ourselves having exaggerated feelings about events or situations, it's very easy to continue to layer on further meaning and before we know it, we often find ourselves in an extreme version of where we started! Let's start by breaking down the steps:



Climbing 'up' this ladder can happen instantaneously, over a few hours, or even a few days – we often don't even realise when we've applied all those layers. What's important is that we learn and practice how to come back from that kind of exaggerated thinking, which we refer to as "The Ladder of Inference."

The Ladder of Inference

To best illustrate how the 'ladder' works, see the example below. Start with the red column to see how exaggerated thoughts can get, then move to the green column to see equally if not more plausible thinking on the same situation!

| | |
|---|---|
| What happened was... I SENT IMPORTANT EMAIL TO MY BOSS | |
| I observe that... MY BOSS DIDN'T RESPOND | But what I didn't see was... THEY WERE IN 3 DAYS OF TRAINING |
| So, I decided this meant... IT'S BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T AGREE WITH MY OPINION | But it could have also meant... THEY WERE JUST BUSY |
| Because of this I assume... THEY ALWAYS TAKE A LONG TIME TO RESPOND TO ME, I THINK THEY JUST DON'T VALUE ME | But I might've been wrong because... IT'S AN IMPORTANT TOPIC AND THEY WANTED TO SPEAK TO ME RATHER THAN SEND AN EMAIL |
| I then conclude... THE ISSUE IS WITH ME... THEY DON'T VALUE MY WORK... THEY DON'T EVEN LIKE ME... | But I could have equally concluded... THEY JUST NEED MORE TIME |
| Which made me believe... I THINK THEY THINK I'M NOT THAT GOOD AT MY JOB | But it's also possible that... OTHER THINGS ARE TAKING PRIORITY RIGHT NOW |
| And so I... ACT STRANGELY AROUND THEM... START DOUBTING MY WORK... START LOOKING FOR A NEW JOB! | When I could have... SIMPLY BOOKED A MEETING WITH THEM TO DISCUSS IT |

What can we learn from this?

As we challenge our thinking by filling in the different prompts of the ladder (e.g. 'But what I didn't see was...' 'But it could also have meant...'), it's this new thinking, reframing and opening of perspective that allows us to see the previously unseen.

It's easy to become selective in our focus, then add layers of meaning and end up in an exaggerated thought process. But when we take the time to open up our perspective it can lead us to better quality thinking (one not tainted by emotions) and ultimately to better actions, which gets us better results in life and in business.

Try it for yourself on the next page.

Exercise

Ladder of Inference

Part 1 To stop an emotional response from getting us even deeper into frustration, it's important to pause, and try to see things from more than one angle. Use the template below to examine your thinking, either on a current or past situation and reflect on how your actions are being or have been impacted by perception.

| | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| What happened was... | |
| I observe that... | But what I didn't see was... |
| So, I decided this meant... | But it could have also meant... |
| Because of this I assume... | But I might've been wrong because... |
| I then conclude... | But I could have equally concluded... |
| Which made me believe... | But it's also possible that... |
| And so I... | When I could have... |

Exercise

Ladder of Inference

Part 2 Once you've completed your Ladder of Inference, either for something you are experiencing now (in the moment) or as a reflective piece (something that has already happened) – try answering the below questions to help you see the new possibilities or how you can evolve your thinking for the future.

1 Looking at the ladder I now realise...

2 What I could have thought / assumed / acted on differently is/was...

3 In what way could the outcome be/have been different?

Technique

Reaction Control

Before reacting to a situation, take 5 minutes to ask yourself the following questions:

- 1 What else is going on here?**
- 2 Have I experienced a similar situation in the past?**
Did I have a negative reaction? Is that what's happening now?
- 3 How was I feeling before this event/situation? Angry, happy, average?**
Could this be impacting my interpretation of the situation now?
- 4 What's my physiology like? Am I tired, hungry, sick or stressed?**
Is this also impacting my perception?

If you answered YES to any of questions in black then your perception is being influenced by the meaning **you** have overlaid onto what you see.

You need to take space & time before reacting or be prepared to deal with the consequences...

To move forward, you have 2 options:

1. Give the other person / situation the benefit of the doubt. Assume they come with the best intentions and react according to these positive intentions (not your negative interpretation).
2. Remove yourself from the situation and respond when you are able to say NO to all of the questions.

Why reframing your perception is important

1 To highlight that we sometimes get things wrong

If we consider the perceptual illusions as a metaphor for how we are interpreting our world generally, no doubt other illusions exist (e.g. **cognitive illusions, decision making illusions** and so on).

We aren't as **objective as we hope we are**. Therefore we need to be open to the fact that sometimes how we are seeing and interpreting our world, events, situations around us might be wrong.

2 To demonstrate that if we change our perception we can change our world

If you consider that our perception is a lens by which we view the world through, then it stands true that if you change your perception you can change how you see and interpret your world.

3 To do this we need to raise our self-awareness

Given that our experiences and our perceptions ultimately shape how we interpret the world and the meaning we give to it. It makes sense to know as much about ourselves as possible.

It's important to know: **who we are, what we believe, how we respond to things.**

Because all of these elements are impacting our perception of the world and ultimately the decisions we make. And the culmination of all our decisions determines our results in life.



Part Three
Owning Our
Thinking

Common thinking traps



Negative thoughts tend to happen automatically, half the time you don't even realise they're happening. The mind has a habit of projecting our fears, many of us even tend to catastrophise.

Why is that?

Common thinking trap examples

Personalisation

Believing that things others do or say is a direct, personal reaction to you – when it's likely nothing to do with you at all!

Example:

"My boss seems irritated and distant today... I must have done something to make them angry with me."

(When, in reality they may just be jetlagged and catching up from that week-long business trip!)

Catastrophising

Exaggerating how badly something will turn out and how you'll be unable to cope with it.

Example:

"My doctor asked me to call the office. There must be something wrong with my test results. I just won't be able to handle it if I'm seriously ill."

Mind-reading

When you believe that you know what others are thinking (even though this isn't possible!) and assume the worst.

Example:

"She hasn't met me for dinner in weeks even though I've asked 3 times. She probably thinks I'm annoying now and is avoiding me because of it."

Filtering

Only paying attention to the negative aspects of a situation while ignoring all the positives. This stops you from drawing a more balanced conclusion.

Example:

"My boss looked so bored... my presentation must have been awful!"

(Even though other colleagues looked engaged and gave feedback on how useful they found it)

Exercise

Learning from thinking traps

We all have a tendency to fall into a number of thinking traps – it's normal, we're all people with very human emotions that we've been wired to feel!

But it's how you respond to the situation and what meaning you give to it (*"It's because they don't like me," "It must be because they lost their phone,"* etc.) that's all determined by **your mindset, your past experiences, your beliefs, and your values.**

Try answering the questions below to see what you can change for the future.

Reviewing the situation: Think of a recent issue that you could have handled better and write down what happened as objectively as possible

Exercise

Learning from thinking traps

Identifying the emotions: Really think about the emotions you felt. “Angry” is an emotion, but challenge yourself to question what else might be behind that anger – did you feel disrespected? Misunderstood? Etc

The impact on behaviour: How did you react because of those emotions (yelled and walked out of the room, said something you didn’t mean, etc).

Exercise

Learning from thinking traps

Thinking about change: Look back at your notes, what could you have done differently in the moment or how could you have managed yourself for a different or even better outcome?

The Committee

We speak to ourselves throughout the day, sometimes we don't even hear the words or sentences, we just get the feeling that comes with it (scorn, disappointment, etc).

Whilst the voice may be ours, it's often coming from a place that we don't always recognise and we can be really tough on ourselves. Indeed, there's little chance we would say to others what we say to ourselves as it's likely to lose us friends!

It's important to tune into these voices and even identify the different ways we talk to ourselves.

“The Committee” is a great exercise for doing just this.

The objective is to hear the different ways we talk to ourselves and then name them. By creating these “characters,” we disassociate ourselves from the voices (“It's not me, it's Sarcastic Susie”) thus taking some of their power away.

Let's give it a try!

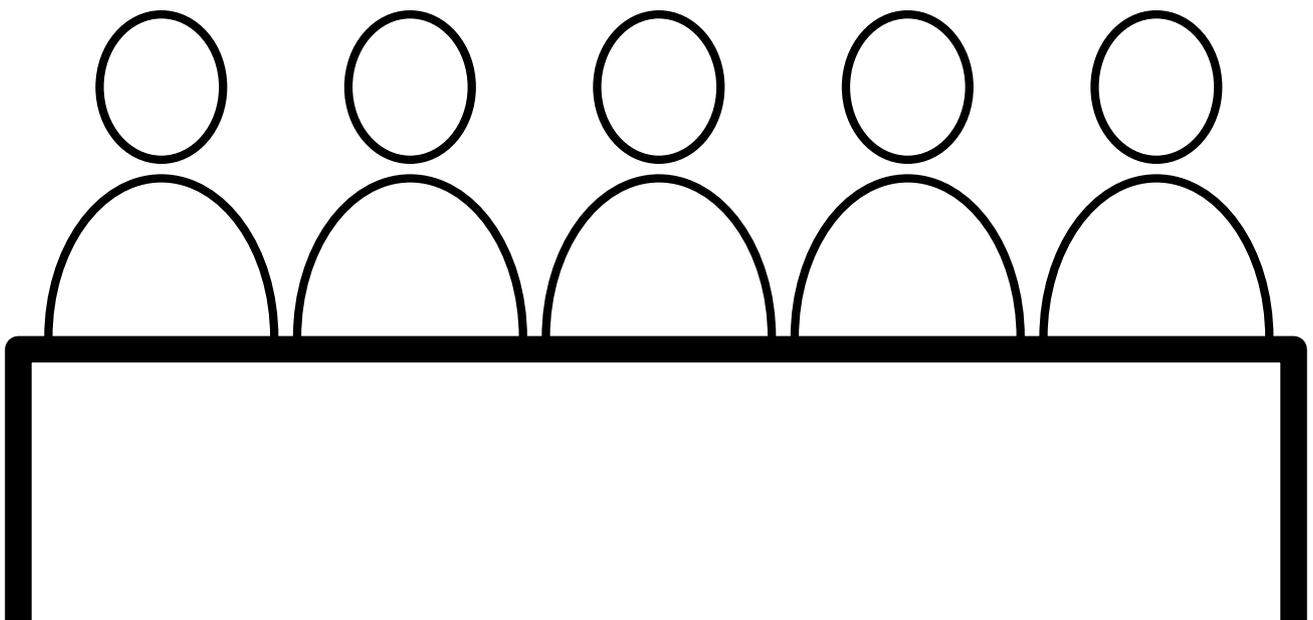
Exercise

The Committee

Part 1

- Think of the different situations when you tend to say something to yourself (“You’re not good enough,” “I can’t believe you just said that!” etc).
- For each voice, decide if they’re male or female (they might all be male, all female or a mixture of both).
- Next, think of the tone or the emotion that comes from each voice. Maybe you get angry with yourself, perhaps you speak to yourself sarcastically or in a ridiculing tone.
- For each voice think of a character’s name which works with the description of the tone / emotion (e.g. Sarcastic Suzy, Ridiculing Richard). Write their names below.
- Draw a face to represent the person – don’t fall into the trap of telling yourself stories about whether you can or can’t draw. It’s not important, the exercise is what is important.
- Fill in the speech bubbles with what each character would typically say to you.

“ “ “ “ “



Exercise

The Committee

Part 2

Once you've brought all your different characters to life go back around the table and write the reason(s) why they are the way they are under each character.

See the example below for inspiration.

“WHY DID YOU SAY THAT?!?”



Angry Anthony

Angry Anthony gets angry fast because his expectations are very high. He doesn't mean to shout, he just wants me to get things right and is nervous about not doing his best.

“Oh yea, that was real smart.”



Sarcastic Susie

Sarcastic Susie is actually quite shy and doesn't want me to look foolish. She thinks she's being protective, but it doesn't always help.

“Hahaha, wow you really embarrassed yourself, didn't you?”



Ridiculing Richard

Ridiculing Richard is very insecure and because of this he lashes out. Deep down he just wants us to have connection and love.

“That's a dumb idea”



Condescending Cathy

Condescending Cathy never thinks she's good enough, and doesn't want us to look stupid. She masks this insecurity through her 'put downs'. She is good enough, she just doesn't know it.

Tip

Assume that the voices are coming from the best of intentions, even if their message, tone, or delivery is harsh.

The Committee

...

Now moving forward, when you speak to yourself in a negative way, try and pinpoint who in your Committee is talking.

Name them and give an explanation for why they are talking to you the way they are...

“Oh that’s just Angry Anthony, he didn’t get much sleep last night so he’s very sensitive and quick to fly off the handle today. He just needs a good night’s rest.”

“That’s Judgemental Julie, she wants the very best for me but no one can meet her ridiculously high standards.”

By doing this you are dissociating (or distancing) yourself from the voice. It makes it much easier to ignore the voice or at least limit its power.

This means the voice will have less control over you and you can liberate yourself from its desire to self-sabotage!

...

Exercise

Getting in touch with your inner voice

First, locate your inner voice. This could be tricky because it may not be a voice at all, you may see words in your head, you may get a sensation of what's going on, a feeling. Either way get in touch with it and answer the questions below:

1 **Where does it live?** *(in your head, on your shoulder, etc)*

2 **Give it a name.** *(Gremlin, Monkey, "It," etc)*

3 **What tone of voice does it use when it's talking to you?**

4 **What percentage of negative thoughts does it give you?**

5 **What does it do? Encourage you, support or inspire you?
Or does it tell you things are too hard? Does it remind you of all
the things you can't do?**

6 **What excuses do you feed yourself?** *("I would if I could...")*



Part Four
Limiting and
Empowering
Beliefs

Exercise

Reframing your thinking

| What is the limiting belief? | What is the 'opposite' belief? |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | |
| List the evidence to support it | List the evidence to support it |
| | |

| Now that you have evidence for both beliefs, the reality is that <i>neither</i> are the only 'truth' - so what becomes possible now? |
|--|
| |
| What are the actions steps you should take to make this possibility a reality? |
| |



Part Five
Values:
Principles
We Live By

Exercise

Uncovering your values

This exercise aims to take you through 6 steps of uncovering your personal values. These values will be based on your own personal experiences of happiness, pride and fulfillment, ensuring we are truly uncovering what's at your core.

These steps below outline how we will work to explore and refine your values:

1. Identify the times when you were **happiest**
2. Identify the times when you were **most proud**
3. Identify the times when you were **most fulfilled and satisfied**
4. Determine your top values, based on your experiences of happiness, pride, and fulfilment
5. Prioritise your top values
6. Reaffirm your values

Let's get started!

Exercise

Uncovering your values

1. Identify the times when you were happiest

Use examples from both your career and personal life to ensure there is balance in your answers.

- What were you doing?
- Were you with other people? Who?
- What other factors contributed to your happiness?
- What did the experience give you a sense of?
- What was it about the experience that made you feel happy?

2. Identify the times when you were most proud

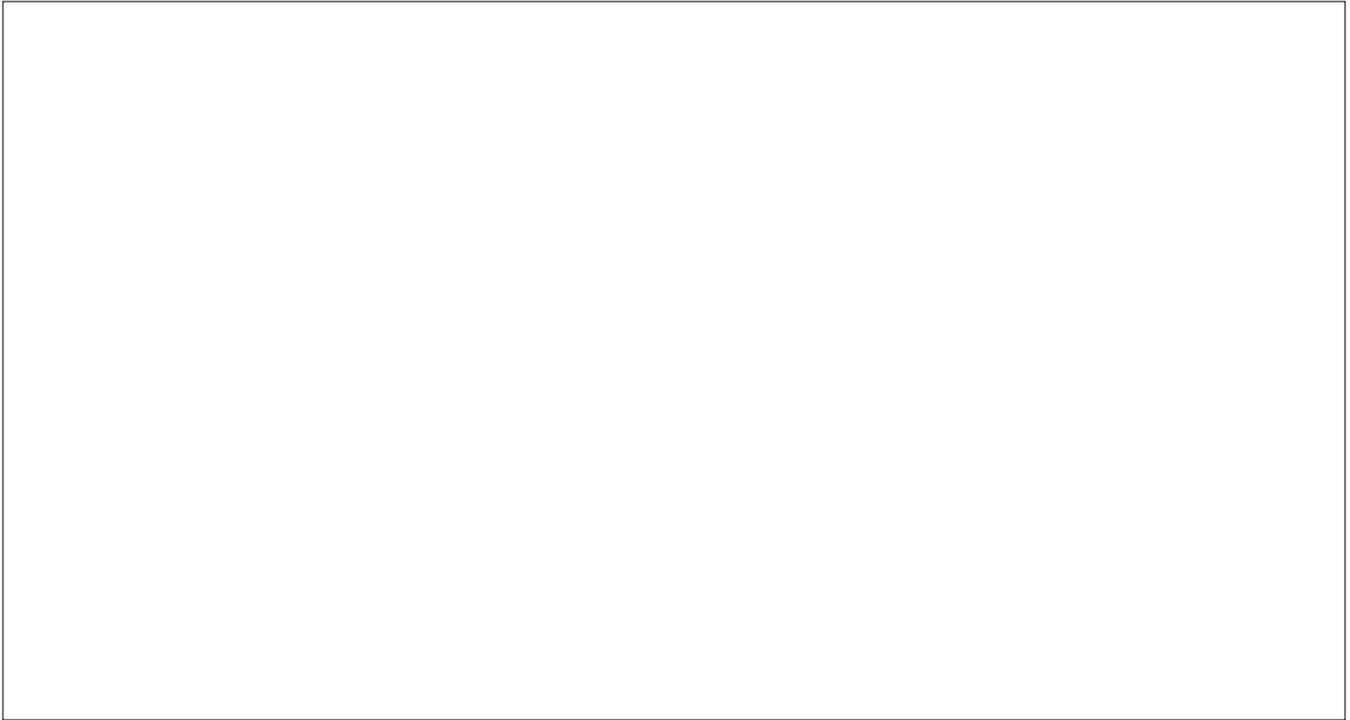
- Why were you proud?
- Did other people share your pride? Who?
- What other factors contributed to your feelings of pride?
- What were the characteristics you displayed to get you to that point?

Exercise

Uncovering your values

3. Identify the times when you were most fulfilled and satisfied

- What need or desire was fulfilled?
- How and why did the experience give your life meaning?
- What other factors contributed to your feelings?



4. Determine your top values, based on your experiences of happiness, pride, and fulfillment

Think about why each experience truly important and memorable.

Then, using the list on the following page to help you, choose the values that resonate with you. Be sure to include ones that are being communicated in your answers in steps 1-3. You are not limited to the list, feel free to add your own!

As you work through, you may find that some of these naturally combine. For instance, if you value philanthropy, community, and generosity, you might say that service to others is one of your top values.

What values will you uncover?

Exercise

Uncovering your values

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Accountability</i> | <i>Diligence</i> | <i>Honesty</i> | <i>Security</i> |
| <i>Accuracy</i> | <i>Discipline</i> | <i>Honour</i> | <i>Self-actualisation</i> |
| <i>Achievement</i> | <i>Discretion</i> | <i>Humility</i> | <i>Self-control</i> |
| <i>Adventurousness</i> | <i>Diversity</i> | <i>Independence</i> | <i>Selflessness</i> |
| <i>Altruism</i> | <i>Dynamism</i> | <i>Ingenuity</i> | <i>Self-reliance</i> |
| <i>Ambition</i> | <i>Economy</i> | <i>Inner Harmony</i> | <i>Sensitivity</i> |
| <i>Assertiveness</i> | <i>Effectiveness</i> | <i>Inquisitiveness</i> | <i>Serenity</i> |
| <i>Balance</i> | <i>Efficiency</i> | <i>Insightfulness</i> | <i>Service</i> |
| <i>Being the best</i> | <i>Elegance</i> | <i>Intelligence</i> | <i>Shrewdness</i> |
| <i>Belonging</i> | <i>Empathy</i> | <i>Intellectual Status</i> | <i>Simplicity</i> |
| <i>Boldness</i> | <i>Enjoyment</i> | <i>Intuition</i> | <i>Soundness</i> |
| <i>Calmness</i> | <i>Enthusiasm</i> | <i>Joy</i> | <i>Speed</i> |
| <i>Carefulness</i> | <i>Equality</i> | <i>Justice</i> | <i>Spontaneity</i> |
| <i>Challenge</i> | <i>Excellence</i> | <i>Leadership</i> | <i>Stability</i> |
| <i>Cheerfulness</i> | <i>Excitement</i> | <i>Legacy</i> | <i>Strategic</i> |
| <i>Clear-mindedness</i> | <i>Expertise</i> | <i>Love</i> | <i>Strength</i> |
| <i>Commitment</i> | <i>Exploration</i> | <i>Loyalty</i> | <i>Structure</i> |
| <i>Community</i> | <i>Expressiveness</i> | <i>Making a difference</i> | <i>Success</i> |
| <i>Compassion</i> | <i>Fairness</i> | <i>Mastery</i> | <i>Support</i> |
| <i>Competitiveness</i> | <i>Faith</i> | <i>Merit</i> | <i>Teamwork</i> |
| <i>Consistency</i> | <i>Family</i> | <i>Obedience</i> | <i>Temperance</i> |
| <i>Contentment</i> | <i>Fidelity</i> | <i>Openness</i> | <i>Thankfulness</i> |
| <i>Continuous Improvement</i> | <i>Fluency</i> | <i>Order</i> | <i>Thoughtfulness</i> |
| <i>Contribution</i> | <i>Focus</i> | <i>Originality</i> | <i>Timeliness</i> |
| <i>Control</i> | <i>Freedom</i> | <i>Patriotism</i> | <i>Tolerance</i> |
| <i>Cooperation</i> | <i>Fun</i> | <i>Perfection</i> | <i>Traditionalism</i> |
| <i>Correctness</i> | <i>Generosity</i> | <i>Piety</i> | <i>Trustworthiness</i> |
| <i>Courtesy</i> | <i>Goodness</i> | <i>Positivity</i> | <i>Truth-seeking</i> |
| <i>Creativity</i> | <i>Grace</i> | <i>Practicality</i> | <i>Understanding</i> |
| <i>Curiosity</i> | <i>Growth</i> | <i>Preparedness</i> | <i>Uniqueness</i> |
| <i>Decisiveness</i> | <i>Happiness</i> | <i>Professionalism</i> | <i>Unity</i> |
| <i>Democraticness</i> | <i>Hard Work</i> | <i>Quality</i> | <i>Usefulness</i> |
| <i>Dependability</i> | <i>Health</i> | <i>Reliability</i> | <i>Vision</i> |
| <i>Determination</i> | <i>Helping</i> | <i>Resourcefulness</i> | <i>Vitality</i> |
| <i>Devoutness</i> | <i>Society</i> | <i>Restraint</i> | |
| | <i>Holiness</i> | <i>Results-oriented</i> | |

Exercise

Uncovering your values

5. Prioritising your top values

Of the values you chose in step 4, you will now choose 12 of them to represent your top values (or operational values). You will then organise them in order of importance to you.

This will likely be difficult, because you'll have to look deep inside yourself. However, this is important, because, when making a decision, you'll have to choose between solutions that may satisfy different values. This is when you must know which value is more important to you.

1.

Score (see next page): _____

7.

Score: _____

2.

Score: _____

8.

Score: _____

3.

Score: _____

9.

Score: _____

4.

Score: _____

10.

Score: _____

5.

Score: _____

11.

Score: _____

6.

Score: _____

12.

Score: _____

Exercise

Uncovering your values

Next, look again at each value you have listed in the previous table. Answer the question ‘which is more important to me – number 1 or 2?’ If you answer number 1, select the circle to the left of 1 in the first column. Then proceed for every one of the values: 1-3, 1-4, 1-5 and so on, until 11-12. Work quickly. **Some values may overlap, but nevertheless make a choice.**

It might also help to visualise a situation in which you would have to make that choice. For example, if you compare the values of service and stability, imagine that you must decide whether to sell your house and move to another country to do valuable foreign aid work, or keep your house and volunteer to do charity work closer to home.

- 1-2 2-3 3-4 4-5 5-6 6-7 7-8 8-9 9-10 10-11 11-12
- 1-3 2-4 3-5 4-6 5-7 6-8 7-9 8-10 9-11 10-12
- 1-4 2-5 3-6 4-7 5-8 6-9 7-10 8-11 9-12
- 1-5 2-6 3-7 4-8 5-9 6-10 7-11 8-12
- 1-6 2-7 3-8 4-9 5-10 6-11 7-12
- 1-7 2-8 3-9 4-10 5-11 6-12
- 1-8 2-9 3-10 4-11 5-12
- 1-9 2-10 3-11 4-12
- 1-10 2-11 3-12
- 1-11 2-12
- 1-12

Now count up the number of circles you’ve selected for each value. This is your weighted score. On the previous page where you’ve listed your 12 values, write down the scores below each value. They are now ranked in order of ACTUAL importance not ‘ideal’ importance.

Exercise

Uncovering your values

6. Reaffirm your values

Check your top-priority values and make sure they fit with your life and your vision for yourself by answering the questions below:

Do these values make you feel good about yourself?

Are you proud of your top three values?

Would you be comfortable and proud to tell your values to people you respect and admire?

Do these values represent things you would support, even if your choice isn't popular and it puts you in the minority?

When you consider your values in decision making, you can be sure to keep your sense of integrity and what you know is right, and approach decisions with confidence and clarity. You'll also know that what you're doing is best for your current and future happiness and satisfaction.

Making value-based choices may not always be easy. However, making a choice that you know is right is a lot less difficult in the long run.



Part Six
Stress &
Performance

Stress vs Control

Stress is not necessarily the result of the heavy workload, the demanding boss, or the “traffic jam” of unfinished projects. It occurs when the demands of a situation exceed your perceived ability to control them. The more you perceive you can control, the lower your stress levels, and vice versa.

It's very important to know what you have influence and control over in your life to determine how and when to react to stress. When you control a situation, you influence the outcome. Every time you exercise control you

determine what happens in your brain, body, and the situation itself. In a confident and calm state, you work faster, solve problems more easily, and make fewer mistakes.

You can create immediate and dramatic shifts in your effectiveness and stress level by exerting control in small situations throughout the day. But before you can do that, you need to be able to determine what you can and can't control along with what you can and can't influence.

Matrix of Influence & Control

Using the matrix on the next page, map out your current stressors to determine what you can only influence and what you have neither influence nor control over. Once you've filled out your matrix, read the notes below on how to start taking action over your stressors:

Control + Influence

The things within your control and influence which are stressing you out you must take action on, whether that's killing the task, changing the perimeters, delegating, etc.

If you need help in assessing your task list, use the exercise on page 24 that might help you organise this.

No Control + Influence

The things you can't control but have some influence over you must influence but then let go – you can't control the outcome so it's important to recognise that.

Remember, it's our perception of control or rather lack of control over a situation that's what stresses us out. However, if we have never had control in the first place, it's important to acknowledge that we can't dictate the outcome.

Once we've influenced as much as we can, we must let go and accept the outcome for what it is.

No Control + No Influence

For the situations or events stressing us that are both out of your influence and control, we need to adopt a more 'zen' attitude and really LET GO of the anxiety.

Meditation and mindfulness help create space between stressors and our reaction to them. But allowing something we have neither influence nor control over affect our emotions, our stress levels and overall well-being is irrational – we must practice and perfect the art of 'letting go'.

Exercise

Matrix of Control & Influence



Stress Management Toolkit

This 'toolkit' is intended for your reference to help better manage stress in your work and personal life. Over the next few pages you'll find simple exercises and tips for the following:

In the moment



Dealing with pressure & stress in the moment, returning you to a calm and confident state

At work



Helping you better organise, plan, and manage work & workload pressures

At home



Reducing the likelihood of unnecessary stress in your personal life

Exercise

Tracking your stress response

One of the most important things to learn is how to recognise when you start feeling stressed. What does your body feel like? Where does the tension start? How do you behave when you're stressed? When you can recognise those, you can head off the ticking stress/anxiety bomb and not allow it to get the better of you.

Increasing your awareness to what happens to you internally when you're stressed, enables you to head

off the symptoms *before* you spiral into a typical stress response. When you're aware of it then you can do something about it.

So think of the last stressful situation you were in and answer the questions below. This will help you start recognising your typical stress responses so you can tune you into them and have a better chance of controlling your reaction.

Briefly describe what happened

What sensations did you experience in your body? Where?

What thoughts did you have?

What did you do and has this happened before?

What can you do differently next time?

Managing stress in the moment

When you're feeling overwhelmed and need a mental break to reboot or refresh your brain or if you're feeling anxious, nervous or stressed about something or someone, consider these quick easy methods to get yourself back on track.



In the moment

- **If you're in conflict with someone**, first, don't judge the other person because you don't know what else might be contributing to the tension outside of the situation. Next, take a deep breath and demonstrate openness by helping them verbalise their needs and encouraging them to share. You can ask questions like:

"Where is your uncertainty coming from?"

"What can I do to help you right now?"

"Tell me more about why you're feeling that."

Above all, *listen* to what they're saying instead of planning your response. You can and should also ask for the same courtesy when it's your turn to speak.

- **Breathing: 4-6-8 Technique.** First, breathe in and exhale through your mouth, making a whoosh sound. Next, inhale quietly through your nose for a count of 4. Hold your breath for a count of 6 then exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of 8. Repeat 5 times.
- **Walk away.** This doesn't mean *run* away or ignore the situation, this means give yourself at least 5 minutes to remove yourself from an escalating situation before it gets out of hand. If you are in an argument with someone, politely say you need X amount of time and you will promise to come back to them then.
- **The Silent Scream.** If you're in an anxious state (heart beating fast, shaking hands etc.) and you want to regain control, you need to release the adrenaline that's been building in your system. Find a private place (toilet stall usually works just fine!). Tense up all of your muscles, clench your fists and jaw, arm and leg muscles, scrunch your eyes closed, etc and scream - without sound (you can whisper your scream if you like)!

- **555.** Sit down and take a minute or two to observe your surroundings (indoors or outdoors). In your head, take note of: 5 visuals, 5 sounds, 5 feelings or sensations. Pause long enough to connect to each of the 5 visuals, sounds and feelings. Really absorb the senses and notice how the mind begins to settle in the present.

- **Ask yourself why.** Why exactly are you feeling stressed out? Have you done everything you could to help the situation? If the control of the situation is out of your hands, and you cannot do more, is there a reason for being stressed? If you need help, what specifically can someone help you with and do you know who you can ask for it?

Use the exercise on the previous page to record any stress responses you're having.

Managing stress at work

In nearly every second of every day we are bombarded with input from our external and internal worlds. We are forced to process and multitask at an alarming rate and are often attempting to put out fire after fire. While productivity is important, equally as important is the need to give your mind proper rest to recharge, recenter, and work out thoughts and ideas. The following are simple behaviour 'hacks' to help begin to manage and control your environment and thus your relationship with stress.



At work

- **Don't start the day with email**, instead check emails at 10am and use the time before to write down your 3 core objectives for the day and the plan to implement and work on them.
- **Accept all meetings you are invited to** but only join the ones with clear objectives that you can actively contribute to. Don't shy away from asking for agenda and objectives and if you can share info via email instead, do that.
- **Do not eat lunch at your desk**, if you do it should be an EXCEPTION (max. once per week). It's important to give yourself and your mind a rest. Even if it's just a short 30mins, sit or walk with a colleague to get lunch. This is not a marathon, you can take a break!
- **When working on a project that requires deep concentration**, consider setting an out of office reply explaining that you're working on a big project and will only be checking emails at 10am and 2pm for the next X days. For anything urgent, refer them to your communication channel of choice. You may still get unnecessary messages, but at the very least people will think twice before contacting you!
- **Break it down**. A project can seem overwhelming when looked at as a whole. Breaking it down and into milestones and manageable steps make it easier to reach your goals. Use post-its to map your project milestones out on your office wall!
- **Delegate, postpone, eliminate**. Assess each task on your list by asking:
 - Is the task important to you/the business?
 - Will it relieve pressure?
 - Is it 'on strategy'?
 - Can it only be done by you?
 - Does it help you move forward?If not, check if you can delegate, postpone or eliminate the task completely. See the table on the next page to help you.
- **Remind yourself of the 'bigger picture'**. To ensure the greatest output of your energy, understand the bigger purpose of the task. It's easy to get tunnel vision and burn energy on small tasks but progress on things that do not ladder up to the bigger picture are just distractions. Always check in on how what you're about to do relates to the bigger picture.

Assessing Your Task List

| Task | Is it important to you or the business? | Will it relieve pressure? | Is it 'on strategy'? | Can it <u>only</u> be done by you? | Does it help you move forward? | Delegate, Postpone, or Eliminate? |
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Managing stress at home

Setting boundaries on your home or personal time is important. Work is only a part (albeit a big one) of the overall scheme of life and this is the space where you can explore and work on the *other* things that can bring great reward and satisfaction like your well-being and health, personal goals, family, interests, hobbies, etc.



At home

- **Mindfulness apps** improve your ability to remain calm under pressure. A daily 10 min practice can increase flexibility, adaptability, creativity, and focus. Suggested apps: Ten Percent, Headspace, and Calm
- **Decide what time you officially go offline** and switch off ALL phone/messaging notifications on your phone. You should also let your colleagues know that after X time they should not expect a response. If you still get messages, ignore them, you need to protect this mental space for yourself.
- **Do not send emails after 6pm or at the weekends.** Even if you have to work, keep your inbox set to 'offline' - sending emails might feel productive - but they could stress out others or signal that they can start emailing you. Set your boundaries and commit to them.
- **Break the screen addiction.** Yes this is an obvious one, but also one that's so easy to get drawn into when you're "bored" waiting on line at the store, waking up in the morning or winding down after (or even during!) dinner. There are several apps to help fight, limit or block social media like Offtime, Moment, Flipd, or Space to name a few. If you prefer less involved methods:
 - Use airplane mode or turn off your notifications and put your phone in another room during important moments like dinner with your family.
 - Make it harder to access your phone and apps by setting an obnoxiously long unlock passcode.
 - Set a rule at home, no phones/screens between or after the hours of X - and stick to it!
- **At minimum, don't use any form of technology at least 1 hour before sleep** - this will increase the quality of your night's rest.
- **Don't charge your phone, laptop, or tablet in your bedroom.** You may be tempted to 'quickly check' your email or get sucked into an Instagram blackhole if your phone is within easy reach. If you use your phone for an alarm - buy an old fashioned alarm clock!
- **Define your 'self-care strategy'.** Think about the following categories: Basic, Emotional, Relationships, and Physical. Use the table on the following page to write down things for each that help you relax and feel 'ok' again - this will be your go-to list for making sure you're taking care of your needs. When you start to feel stressed, refer to the list to choose an activity to help lower your stress levels.

For example:

 - Basic - eating a delicious meal, drinking enough water, getting 8hrs of uninterrupted sleep
 - Emotional - Writing in my journal
 - Relationships - weekly contact with mom (even if it's just a quick text), quiet dinner with my husband
 - Physical - time in nature, walking, yoga, listening to my favorite bandUse the template on the next page to define your self-care strategy.

My Self-care Strategy

Basic

Emotional

Relationships

Physical

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Symbia

team@symbiapartners.com

+34 673 452 976

www.symbiapartners.com