What do you mean it's not all about me? The Me Myth Andrew Griffiths

'The Me Myth' – living with the limiting belief that the world revolves around 'me'

THE ME MYTH

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Welcome to the world of 'The Me Myth'

Me, me, me – welcome to the battle cry of the modern world. When did we become such a self-obsessed race? Tom Wolfe called the seventies the decade of 'me'. Have we become any less self-absorbed in the last 30 years? Not really. If anything we have become more self-centred with most of us living, to some degree, with the very limiting belief that the world revolves around 'me'.

Most of us are desperately seeking a sense of peace, spirituality, contentment and satisfaction in the midst of a crazy and chaotic world. We are looking inwards for the answers. But are we finding them?

Not really. And every day we are bombarded with messages reinforcing this idea that the world revolves around 'me'.

Messages telling us what to eat, what to wear, what type of car to drive, the friends we should have, where we should live, the people we should marry (and divorce), and what imperfections we have and what we should be doing to fix them.

This massive amount of information has a significant impact on us. We feel constantly overwhelmed from the minute we drag ourselves out of bed till the moment we collapse back into the same spot at the end of the day. And rightly so. For many of us, this bombardment has become a way of life and it's all we can do to tread water. The notion of getting a life, in any shape or form, seems to be a dream that is slowly fading away.

I'm not just talking about getting ahead with money or material possessions. I mean in all aspects of our lives, including our sense of wellbeing, our health, our spirituality, our relationships and our passion for life. Who the hell has time to appreciate everything we have when we are so busy processing this mass of information telling us what to do?

It all leads to a sense of 'over-analysis paralysis', a condition where we get overwhelmed with information, options and demands that are all about 'me'. We become confused, we lose direction and we struggle to achieve clarity in our lives, which ironically are the things we spend so much of our time and energy looking for.

But the single most powerful impact that this over-analysis paralysis can have is a sense that we are no longer in control of our lives, and that, to me, is the greatest tragedy for any person.

Most of us desperately crave to become better people, it's part of being human. We want to feel contentment, love, passion, energy and excitement every day. But when we live in a constant state of over-analysis paralysis, becoming a better person is lost in the struggle to survive.

My advice in this book is really very simple. There comes a time for each and every one of us, when we need to step up and take responsibility for our lives. A powerful place to start is by accepting that the world doesn't revolve around 'me'. It may seem like a contradiction in the world of self-development and growth, but the less time you spend thinking about 'me' and the more time you spend getting on with living, the greater your life will become.

We need to overcome our own over-analysis paralysis, ignore the communication bombardment, let go of the self-scrutiny, and stop beating ourselves up over our shortcomings and the shortcomings of those around us. It's time to get on with life!

In other words, stop thinking and start doing. Getting on with living is the greatest self-development tool we can ever have. Like most profound realisations, the concept is simple. If you live in the world of 'The Me Myth' it is impossible to have a rich, rewarding and joyous life. Simply shift your focus outwards instead of inwards and you open yourself to a world of miraculous opportunity.

It sounds like a piece of cake, doesn't it? And I am sure you're

thinking that I couldn't possibly understand how complicated your life is. The demands that you have, the issues that you are dealing with, the responsibilities that you are trying to cope with and the fear of loss that you battle every single day of your life.

Well, you're right, I don't know the challenges you face, but I have had plenty of my own over the years. In fact, I started life with nothing but challenge. I was abandoned as a baby when I was only a few months old and that set the stage for the next 40 action-packed years.

I have spent a lifetime trying to prove to the world that I am worthy of existing. I have had to deal with tragedy at the most intimate level. I have tried to kill myself slowly through self-abuse and workaholism. But, at the same time, I have spent every year trying to become the best man I can possibly be. I have achieved things that no one believed I could and I have not only come to peace with my past, but I have learnt to use it to thrive, prosper and, most importantly, to help others to set themselves free from the chains that tie them to their old stories and beliefs.

Throughout The Me Myth I will share my journey with you. We all have a journey with many twists and curves, perhaps even the odd pothole and breakdown, but the quality of our lives today is really about the decisions we make along the way. In my journey I made the decision not to be a victim and to get on with living rather than over-analysing every little part of my life. By doing this I have had some big insights into myself and people in general. The realisations for me have been quite amazing and I am sure they will be for you too.

There is no doubt that parts of this book will cause you to reflect on your own life and the way you have reacted to past experiences. Hopefully you will be better able to understand why you react to certain situations in a particular way today. I never claim to have all of the answers, but I very honestly open up about my life and my own realisations for all to see. Some of it isn't pretty, but all of it is real.

I hope that, as you share my journey, you will have your own realisations and moments of clarity. But mostly, I hope that when you put this book down you will feel a growing sense of excitement about the life you can have – the life you deserve.

We all have endless possibilities, but they can only be realised if you understand that you are the one in the driver's seat. It's time to take control, get on with living and love the journey.

How to get the most out of The Me Myth

I am not that much of a traditionalist when it comes to writing a book. I tend to write so that you can open one of my books at any page and get some insight or information that is relevant to you right then and there. I believe that just as certain books end up in our hands when we need them, so the right information jumps out of a book when we need it. So what I am saying is that you don't need to read *The Me Myth* cover to cover to get it. It's not a process, it's a way of living.

You will notice several themes running through *The Me Myth*. These are what I consider the fundamentals of behavioural evolution. We all have certain repetitive behaviours, both good and bad. The objective is to change the bad and do more of the good. This will require some internal soul-searching and, even though that is what we need to move away from, to get there we have to go backwards to go forwards. Bear with me, and I promise the journey will be worth it.

I ask you to take a moment to read the quotes at the end of each chapter. Please don't just glance at them; close your eyes and think about what is being said. The simplest of ideas are often the most stunningly profound.

I have included 'Key points' in each section just to make sure that I get my message across in a clear and simple way. I have also asked

a few questions and made suggestions in each section that can be used to help you overcome your own battle with living in 'The Me Myth'.

Reading a book like this is a journey, just like our lives are a journey. We can read a chapter today that doesn't really impact on us a great deal, then we might read it again a month later and feel deeply inspired or moved. What we need at any one time in our lives changes. I hope that you will keep The Me Myth close by for many years to come and that in times of need you will open it at the perfect page for what you need right then.



What do you mean it's not all about me?

Where we come from doesn't matter - where we are going does

I don't have a birth certificate and I'm not completely certain when or where I was born. I do know that I started life in Melbourne in early 1966, but I wasn't registered as being alive until December 1975. How does someone in Australia not have a birth certificate? Well. let me share some of my early days with you.

For some reason my parents left my older sister, Wendy, and me with an old lady, Winifred, who used to live up the street from us. I was about six months old and Wendy was about 18 months old. Our parents never came back and we started living with Winifred.

I have an enormous amount of respect for this selfless woman in her seventies who took us in. She had no reason to look after two small children, other than some sense of duty and compassion.

Winifred was born in 1896 in London. She had moved to Australia as a teenage girl, chasing the man she loved. She had never quite forgiven Australia or Australians for the life that followed. She'd lost all of her brothers in various wars, she'd lost two husbands (again to war), she'd had a breast removed due to cancer as a young woman and her family had disowned her the minute she'd left England.

We lived a surreal kind of life with Winifred. Although she looked like a petite, well-groomed granny, she was a compulsive kleptomaniac, constantly filling her pockets at the shops and making us kids wander the streets at night stealing things from people's front gardens.

We lived an isolated, gypsy-like existence constantly moving around the working-class areas of North Perth, with a prim and proper public face that hid the darker side of our world. Winifred talked to herself incessantly, and I always remember those conversations were angry, bitter and hateful. She was filled with resentment towards the world for all she had suffered – and it had to erupt.

She would scream at Wendy or me, inches from our faces, spittle flying, as she told us how much she hated us, how filthy and disgusting we were, and how she wanted us dead. She would drag us around the house by our hair, she would beat us with lumps of wood. I lost track of the number of times I was woken in the middle of the night as she attacked me with a shovel or a walking stick, screaming at the top of her lungs. She threw boiling water on us, stabbed us with scissors, smashed our heads into walls and doors, and bashed us with anything she could get her hands on.

We were always covered with bruises, cuts and burns, with clumps of hair missing. As a grown man I struggle to understand the fear this little old lady brought out in me, but as a child she terrified me.

To escape I started to wander the streets of Perth. I remember knowing exactly when the deliveries were made at the shops close by and I would treat the milk and bakery deliveries as my own personal smorgasbord. I was out and about at all times of the night.

There were a number of brothels close by as well. I didn't really know what they were, but the ladies were very friendly towards me. They all had large busts and smelled really nice. They would take me to a room out the back and give me big cups of hot chocolate and generally make a fuss of me. It was a kindness that I wasn't used to and I was scared by it, but at the same time I craved it. In all the time I lived with Winifred she only ever kissed me once – the day Gough Whitlam, the then Prime Minister of Australia, was sacked.

From my various safe hide-outs I would watch drunken men swagger across the road to the brothels and re-emerge in about half an hour. I assumed they were all going in to get hot chocolate, and I guess in many ways they were.

Eventually the welfare became involved. One day during swimming lessons at our primary school I took off my shirt, revealing a big cut on my stomach and arm from where Winifred had attacked me with a pair of gardening shears. I had bruises from head to toe and countless half-healed injuries. The headmaster asked me what had happened. Winifred had always told us to say, 'I fell down in the garden,' but the headmaster didn't believe me for a second. The welfare was called in to investigate the suspected abuse.

They inspected the house where we were living, they brought in psychologists to interview us, doctors gave us medicals and our teachers gave statements. Winifred reacted to all of this 'fuss' with anger and bitterness. She blamed it on Wendy and me for being 'evil' children.

The welfare laid down rules and conditions for her to follow. Tough things, like I had to be able to sleep on a bed inside the house. We had to wash daily and if there was any further evidence of violence we would be sent to live in an orphanage.

Of course nothing really changed. Many years later, when I read the welfare reports, it was clear they didn't know what to do with us if they took us away from Winifred. They tried to find our parents, but that proved fruitless. Foster parents were thin on the ground and far less likely to take in two battered and emotionally scarred kids. So they left us with Winifred for a while longer.

A short time later, things flared up badly. Winifred went on a rampage, attacking me with a metal rake, and she knocked me unconscious. At the same time distant relatives of Winifred's who couldn't have children expressed interest in adopting us. Finally Wendy and I were taken away and put in emergency care.

After a few stints in various forms of shelter, we finally ended up in Sydney with new parents. But it wasn't to last. Our foster mother died from a terrible and aggressive form of cancer not long after we arrived in Sydney. And our new daddy lost the plot. This was understandable, but his actions were not forgivable. He started to abuse Wendy. I knew something was going on, but I was too young to really understand it fully. So as a budding teenager I took my anger and headed elsewhere.

I went to a very big and very rough school, Asquith Boys High, north of Sydney. I wanted so badly to fit in that I would do just about anything to belong. I started smoking, drinking and taking drugs. Smoking was the easy part. On my first day at school I looked for the toughest kid I could find and asked him if he wanted a cigarette. This opened a number of doors to the rough part of town for me.

One day Wendy told me about what was happening at home. I was furious. I confronted our foster father about it and we had a huge fight. I left that night and never went back.

Drinking became a huge part of my life. With the various groups that I hung out with, we always drank. I snorted lighter fluid with some, I smoked dope with others, I took LSD with some of the older fellas, then hashish, speed and ultimately I even smoked heroin, just once, but enough to know that it existed and what it felt like, and to know that I liked it.

I stole a car to learn how to drive. Not a great idea, particularly as it was a manual. My fleeing from the scene involved bunny hopping up the hill. Very impressive, I must say. I hung out with friends and we broke into houses and stole things. I started growing marijuana and selling it at school (my entrepreneurial streak started early).

Today I look back at those times and I cringe. I can't believe that I did those things and I am ashamed that I did.

I knew that my life was heading down a predictable path. Soon I would either end up in jail, dead in a car wreck or lying on a trolley in a hospital emergency room with doctors thumping my chest.

One Friday afternoon I was standing at the end of the driveway of the house where I was living, waiting to get picked up for a night of partying. I had long since moved away from my foster father and, fortunately, a wonderful woman called Val had taken me in and provided a safe haven for a number of years. Throughout my life there have always been a few angels close by and I think of them often.

It was quite a spiritual moment for me as the late afternoon clouds split and the sun started to slide behind the hills. Pondering what was happening around me, it was easy to see the road that so many people follow. I saw Winifred kill herself with bitterness and anger. I saw friends kill themselves with self-loathing in the forms of drug and alcohol abuse, and I saw far too much violence from people who were tragic and lost and looking desperately for someone to be angry with. I was on the verge of heading down one of these dark paths myself.

I realised right then and there that I had the power to choose my way in the world. I didn't have to follow the predictable path that I saw so many others on. I was in control and I could change if I wanted to. I knew I expected more out of life and I believed in myself enough to have the confidence to do it. This was incredibly profound for me and I knew that now was the time to break away from the world unfolding around me and to be my own man.

So that is exactly what I did. From that day on I have tried my best to live my own life, changing what needs to be changed and becoming a better person in any way I can. Sometimes it's been hard, other times very easy.

Now, I have given you a very compressed version of the first 17

years of my life. There is a lot more stuff to share, some of it will come out in other chapters, some will stay locked in my head for the time being. But I have been very open and very honest with you.

Today I am an international bestselling author. I have a pile of books sold in over 50 countries around the world. I live in Cairns, north Queensland, right on the Great Barrier Reef with a lovely American lady called Debra Ruth Lawson. I travel the world presenting to organisations, sharing my experiences and giving advice on how to build powerful, ethical and successful businesses. I have been lucky enough to do some amazing things in the first 43 years of my life and I can't wait for the next 43 years. I have a huge list of incredible things that I intend to get done before I die.

I have shared my story with thousands of people at conferences. When they see me bounce up on stage, they see a somewhat portly, successful-looking, educated man in his early forties. They assume a lot. When they hear about my background they are often shocked. 'How did you overcome this hard start to life and become the man you are today?' they ask. But mostly they are inspired because I share a very powerful message. Where we come from doesn't matter, where we are heading does.

How many people live their lives bound by the chains of their past? Yes, it is absolutely horrible to be on the receiving end of violence, or rape, or neglect, but we all have the ability to choose whether we will learn from these experiences and move on, or be chained to them, destined to live a life of fear, anger, inadequacy and despair.

The years are whistling by and as you get older they will go even faster. Are you still being held prisoner by events from your past? If you are, perhaps today is the day to stand up, take a deep breath and let them go. You are in control of your life, you are the one who decides where you're going, not some deep, dark past that is no longer relevant. We all have a truly incredible opportunity to live the life we want and, when we do, nothing makes you feel more alive.

'The more time we spend living vesterday the less time we have for living today.'

Key points

- 1. We all have a history, some of it we are proud of, some we are not, but what you were is not who you can and will be.
- 2. You have to let go of the past to embrace the future. Too many people live in yesterday and they are destined to stay there until they make the decision to change.
- 3. Life does not have to follow predictable paths. You are not destined to failure because of what happened in the past, unless you believe that
- 4. Living as a victim is a sad, hollow, lonely life. We all have the choice to live the life we want

It's time to change your Me Myth

What part of your past are you hanging onto?

What price have you paid so far for holding onto this belief?

Are you really ready to let it go?

So what is stopping you?

Write one sentence and read it out loud as often as you can, saying what you are letting go of and what will change in your life when you let go of it. This will give you the motivation to let go of something from the past that is still holding you prisoner today.

Put a pea under your cushion, Princess

The greatest threat to living a rich life is complacency. The more comfortable we are, the more likely we are to accept things that are just not right. As we get older we seek comfort, or status quo, and we are willing to compromise ourselves to keep it.

We start to make mental calculations about situations, like being in a job we hate or in a relationship that has run its course. When we start to think 'It's easier to stay in this job, even though I hate it' or 'I'm retiring in ten years so why leave now?' or 'I'm not happy in this relationship but it's easier to stay in it than find someone else', our alarm bells need to start ringing.

I am not suggesting that you should throw in your job at the drop of a hat, but you should be honest with yourself. Ask yourself why you are staying if you really don't enjoy what you do or the company you are working for?

The same applies to relationships. We all know they take work, there are ups and downs and challenges, but sometimes a relationship simply runs its course and needs to end. I met a married couple recently who live in the same house but have completely separate lives, right down to different bedrooms. They both date other people and, in reality, they don't even like each other any more. They say the charade is for the sake of their children who they don't want to put through the distress of a divorce. Really?

A divorce can be devastating with long-term effects. But is it really better to stay together, living a lie? What kind of message does this send the children about loving relationships and honesty? Wouldn't they prefer to see their mother and father happy?

The truth is that this couple is too comfortable in the scenario they have created, despite its difficulties. It is easier to stay with what they know than to leave and face the unknown and start a new life. As human beings we learn to get comfortable in even the most unusual and unfulfilling situations, mainly because we have certainty in staying where we are. It can be incredibly scary to break away, to make the changes and to get uncomfortable, but once you do, you can start to feel the blood pumping through your veins again and your passion for life coming back.

Do you remember the fairytale about the princess and the pea? The gueen hides a pea under a pile of mattresses to see if it causes the princess discomfort. I believe we all need to put a pea under our cushion to stop us from becoming too comfortable with our lives. It's nice to be comfortable, but our greatest growth as human beings comes when we are challenged.

The achievements that I am most proud of are the end result of me getting uncomfortable. I was terrified of public speaking, as most people are (statistically most people would prefer to burn to death), but I pushed through my fears and made myself get up and talk. Today I present to large groups of people all over the world. I still get nervous, I still feel uncomfortable and there are times I look at the door and think about making a run for it. But I have learnt to turn the fear into excitement and I absolutely love public speaking now,

even if I have butterflies. It has become a real passion of mine and this passion has enabled me to make it a rewarding career travelling the world.

Making yourself uncomfortable often precedes great accomplishments. People rise up and do great things when they are challenged because necessity makes them. So why not get uncomfortable more often?

When I came up with the idea for my first book, 101 Ways to Market Your Business, I spoke to a number of people in marketing about it.

Many of them told me, 'It's really hard to get published, so why set vourself up for disappointment? Best to just let the idea go.' It's true that writing a book takes a lot of discipline, creativity and hard work, and many books are rejected. The easiest thing for me to do, the most comfortable thing to do, would have been to put the manuscript in the bin and just get back to life as normal. Fortunately, while their comments did make me question my dream, they also motivated me to succeed. But it told me a great deal about people's attitudes and their fears. Several books later, I am very glad that I didn't listen to those people and stay comfortable.

I know how hard it is to move out of your comfort zone, even when the situation you're in is hurting you. Growing up with Winifred was not a great experience. But when you live in a strange situation you don't really understand why it's strange, you just accept it. My friends at school went home to a mother and father, but for some reason I didn't. There were other differences too.

I didn't brush my teeth until I was about eight or nine years old. Winifred had false teeth, so she wasn't concerned about things like oral hygiene and even though we learnt about it at school it didn't seem to apply to us. Likewise we only had a bath once a week and we took it in turns using the same water. I was always last, so you can imagine how clean I was.

I wasn't allowed to sleep inside the house. I had to sleep on a

mattress on the veranda, no matter how cold it was. I remember being so scared on wild winter nights, shivering and hearing footsteps with every gust of wind. I was locked outside on a soggy old mattress like a dog, often without even so much as a blanket. Ironically we had a number of dogs over the years and they all slept inside.

After a while I wasn't scared any more, I just accepted that was where I slept and that was that. When I grew older I realised that Winifred had a hatred and distrust of men and, even as a young boy, I was put into the same category.

We moved house often. Wendy and I used to hate it. We had to load up shopping trolleys and push them up the road to wherever the next house was. I suspect we moved because the houses became filthy, covered in dirt and grime, and packed to the rafters with huge amounts of stolen stuff.

Winifred's son, Uncle Ted, lived with us from time to time. He was a giant of a man and he scared me a lot. He'd been a prisoner of war in Burma in World War II and I don't think he ever got over the experience. Mind you, he got a job at the Swan Brewery as a beer taster, which seemed to suit him just fine. Unfortunately he took his work way too seriously, working pretty much all day every day tasting beer.

When he stayed with us he lived inside the house and Wendy and I would sleep with Winifred in her room. I was so glad to be inside that I didn't ask any questions. My biggest memory of Uncle Ted was of his stubbly face and the stale smell of beer on his breath. I never trusted him.

But despite all of the problems, when the welfare finally became involved, Wendy and I were absolutely terrified at the thought that we would be taken away from Winifred. All of the abuse and all of the violence amounted to nothing when faced with the possibility of being taken away from her. And I found this confusing.

Although she certainly had her down side, Winifred had provided a roof over our heads, we were always well fed and clothed, and there was a strange kind of certainty in living with her. Wendy and I lived in fear of Winifred dying. We both wanted her dead in many ways, but our fear of what would become of us outweighed our hatred of her.

We wanted to stay in a situation that really was not good for us because we were scared of what change would mean. Change brings uncertainty in many different shapes and this creates fear if we are in a vulnerable place emotionally. We generally just think of how it will affect us (remember, it is all about me!), without giving a second thought to those around us.

It wasn't just us who were scared at the thought of change. When the welfare finally did take us away Winifred went wild with rage. I would have thought Winifred would be glad to see us go, but she was clearly distraught and dealing with her own uncertainty about the future. As I get older I realise that she was scared of being old and alone.

When we left Perth and moved to Sydney with our new foster family I was worried - who would look after Winifred? But we went to Sydney anyway, and a few years later, she was found dead. She had been dead for several weeks before her body was discovered.

Things didn't change for Wendy and me overnight by any means, but once we were out of the situation with Winifred we could see that life didn't have to be lived the way we were living it. We didn't have to live in fear, we didn't have to be scared all the time and we had the right to be treated in a certain way. As strange as this may sound, I certainly didn't feel like this growing up. So leaving was a confronting option, but it was the best choice. I learnt then that change is not a bad thing. This became a very significant factor in the coming years, to the point where I craved change and the challenge to grow.

When I talk about challenging ourselves, it doesn't mean we all have to climb Mount Everest. For some people challenging themselves is simply taking a different route to work or trying a

different type of food. That's good. What is most important is that we challenge ourselves in any way that we can, both big and small.

I have encountered so many extraordinary people in my life, many of whom you will get to meet in this book. They all share one magnificent trait – they have big peas under their cushions. They don't let themselves get too comfortable and they never accept second best, in themselves or those around them.

Getting uncomfortable means that we stop focusing inwards on our fears, our perceived failings and our shortcomings and get on with the task at hand, which is living a full life.

'You know you are alive when you surprise yourself by doing the things you (and others) never thought you could.'

Key points

- 1. The greatest way to grow is to be challenged. If you don't have any challenges find some.
- 2. Being comfortable is nice, but there is a price to pay. We only get to live this life once, so why not make it count?
- 3. Look around you for examples of people who constantly challenge themselves. They are the best examples of the benefits that come from challenging yourself.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Ask yourself if you have become too comfortable with life?

What have you been putting off because you are just too comfortable?

Find someone who seems to always challenge themselves and ask them about their life and their levels of joy, satisfaction and contentment. Then ask yourself what is stopping you from doing the same?

Start every day with a little magic

Every morning you get to choose your state of mind. No matter what you have had to deal with, or are dealing with now, each day is a chance to wake up and start afresh.

Each morning I spend a few minutes thinking about my life. I think about where I have come from, the things I am grateful for, the people in my life whom I love and adore, the people who help me to make a living and how I want my day ahead to unfold.

When thinking about my day ahead, I get very specific. I think about what I want to wear based on how I want to feel, I think about actual meetings, the people who will be in the meetings and the outcomes I would like to achieve. If I am writing for the day I visualise the words flowing easily, the ideas coming into my mind being great ones and I start to get a sense of wellbeing as I know that the day ahead is going to be not just good, but spectacular.

I know this sounds really simple, but it has a very profound effect on me. It puts me in a very loving and grateful state of mind, it puts my life and where I am right now into perspective and, most importantly of all, it puts me in a positive, energetic and passionate state of mind about the day ahead. It is pretty hard to have a bad day when you start it like this.

Sometimes I lie in bed and think about these things for a few minutes, sometimes I do it in the shower and other days I sit in the morning sun with a hot cup of tea and my eyes closed, soaking up the rays and energy.

It may seem like a very simple idea, but that's the beauty of it. Everyone can do it and you will notice the powerful effects it has on your life.

Every single day is a gift. Sure we all have crappy days and sometimes it is really hard to sit and think beautiful thoughts when the kids are screaming, the washing machine is overflowing, you are now late for the biggest presentation of your career and you get into your car and the battery is flat. But that is life. It isn't the world out to get you. Sometimes we just have to go with it, laugh out loud and accept what is happening. How we react is entirely our choice.

You have probably heard about the power of gratitude. Sometimes it is really hard to be grateful. When we have lost a loved one, or a relationship has ended, or we have been diagnosed with a terrible disease, it's hard to put on our happy face and go skipping off into the sunset. But these are the times when we really do need to be grateful for everything. Gratitude is the emotion that can conquer most emotional ills. It brings perspective into our lives, it moves our focus away from what we don't have to what we do have and it reminds us of the things in our lives that are profoundly important.

Knowing what to be grateful about can sometimes be a stumbling block. After our loved ones and food on the table, the list often seems to end. But, when you think about it, we could spend all day every day being grateful for all the things our lives have had in it and perhaps some of the things we have been lucky enough to avoid. We might even be grateful now for some things that seemed terrible at

the time yet ended up being incredible opportunities.

As an example, I am extremely grateful that I got decompression sickness when I was a commercial diver and almost died. Sounds strange, I know, but if that hadn't happened to me I would never have started down the road I am on now. I wouldn't be a writer or a presenter, sharing my experiences and philosophies with people around the world. One little nitrogen bubble lodged itself in my brain and my world was turned upside down. Today I give thanks for that bubble every morning.

In fact the things I am most grateful for have all come from the most challenging situations in my life. Somehow being thankful for these situations stops them from being painful and allows me to see them as pivotal moments that led to where I am today.

So every morning take a few minutes to think about others, to think about everything that has brought you to this place and how you want to handle things. The results are empowering.

The best part about this ritual is that the more you do it the better it feels. Whenever you get a quiet moment, when you are sitting in traffic, waiting for an appointment, in-between jobs or waiting for the train, just focus your thoughts on the positive aspects of your life – the things you are grateful for, the people you love and care for, and the actions you are taking right now.

When you do this, the world will change right then and there. It will become less harsh and less loud, and you will notice the little kid eating the ice-cream, the cloud that looks like an elephant, or a sign that makes you laugh.

The world we live in is spectacular in every way. It simply depends upon how you look at it. You can choose whether it is dull and grey, or bright and beautiful. Look at those people who seem to go through life aware that we have the choice. They are vibrant, they are happy, they are content and they are filled with love. You can be too. As simple as this sounds, it has had the most profound effect on my life.

'Choose your attitude early and it will guide you till late.'

Key points

- 1. How you start the day will often set the mood for the rest of the day.
- 2. Taking time to just sit and be still and extend your thoughts beyond yourself is the first step to creating a positive reality.
- 3. Look for every opportunity to be grateful for the things that you have in your life.
- 4. You control your state of mind.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Right here, right now, close your eyes and think about the rest of your day and how you want it to evolve. If it is late at night, think about tomorrow. Visualise it all, just the way you want it to be.

If you struggle to find things to be grateful for, you simply need to look deeper and perhaps go back further. We really should all be able to find pages of things to be grateful for.

Changing your state of mind takes time. Every morning for a week, take a couple of minutes to visualise your day ahead. Write down how you feel at the end of that week. I am sure you will be wonderfully surprised.

The art of empathy

When I was about 30, a good friend told me about a brilliant therapist, Helen, who did a lot of work with people who'd had troubled childhoods.

At this stage of my life I had convinced myself that I was perfectly at peace with all my past hurts. I felt as calm as a Zen monk. But some part of me was still intrigued to meet this therapist and see what she had to say.

As I waited to meet Helen I felt a growing sense of foreboding. At the time I wasn't sure why I felt this way, but now I know.

Helen was a lovely-looking mature lady with a big smile on her face. Her first question was very direct. 'Andrew, please tell me who has had the biggest influence on your life?"

Without hesitation I said, 'My mother,'

This answer completely surprised me and I had no idea where it had come from. After all, I was a 30-year-old man who had never even met his mother.

Helen then asked me to explain my relationship with my mother and to talk about my feelings rather than my intellectual rationalisations. Next thing I knew I was blurting out how hurt I felt at being abandoned by my mother. How could she have left us with such a crazy old lady? I realised that I had been deluding myself. I wasn't Zen, there was a sea of rage and resentment bubbling away under the surface just waiting to get out. I blamed my mother for every single bad thing that had happened to both my sister and me, and I hadn't even realised it.

We started to talk about how my mother must have felt to leave us, which was something I hadn't ever considered before. I didn't have a lot of information from my past or from the period when my parents left, but we had enough information to piece together what it must have been like around the time my parents left my sister and me.

Helen painted a picture of a young woman, around 16 or 17, who found herself with two small children. She was an unwed teenage mother in the 1960s. Her family had forced her away because they were ashamed of her, despite how much they probably loved her.

My father was a drinker. My sister had early memories of fighting and screaming at home, which were probably true.

I started to get the picture. I saw my mother as a vulnerable teenage girl with two babies. A boyfriend who drank too much and who was probably out a lot. She would have had little or no money of her own. She was estranged from her family and only able to communicate with the odd letter or phone call. She was alone in the world.

I felt an overwhelming sense of sadness for this frightened girl. Then I imagined how this girl would feel if she met an old lady who lived up the road, who looked responsible and loving, like most grandmothers do. Surely this lady would be better able to care for two young children? And maybe that is why she left Wendy and me with Winifred. Perhaps she thought we'd be better off.

My mother hasn't been seen or heard from ever since then. A few years back I wrote to everyone in Victoria and New South Wales with the same surname as my mother, Higgins. It took over 500 letters but I finally found two of my mother's brothers. I didn't even know they existed. We all met up and had an emotional reunion, but they hadn't heard from my mother either. She literally disappeared over 40 years ago. No amount of tracing, tracking down or searching has managed to find her.

I had spent 30 years of my life harbouring resentment and anger towards her. After an hour with Helen, this was replaced with sadness and love. How incredible that a person can feel such shame that she never makes contact with her parents or her brothers again? Maybe she has died, I have no way of knowing, but I certainly know that my feelings towards her completely changed that day.

Lunderstood how hard the decision to leave us must have been. I understood that she left us with someone whom she thought would be better able to care for us. I understood that she acted out of love for us.

This rocked my world. All I wanted at the moment was to be able to see my mother and tell her that I understood now. I know she did the best she could at the time and I have no ill feelings or anger or resentment any more, just a huge amount of love for her. I still hope that one day I will be able to look at her beautiful face and tell her these words.

But Helen didn't stop there. She started to question me about my life now. The things I do, the successes I have experienced, the challenges, the joys, the lot. I knew I was a good man, I had my flaws but I helped others, I was loval and loving, I was successful in business, I had big dreams and ambitions.

She asked me, 'Are you happy with the man you are today?' And I said, 'Yes,' and I meant it. Helen then posed the question, 'Imagine if you had stayed with your parents, perhaps you wouldn't have turned out to be the man you are today?'

Wow, another profound moment. I had met my father – a sad, drunken and bitter old man. I was glad I'd never lived with him.

Now my feelings towards my mother were of intense gratitude. I actually found myself saying, 'Thank goodness she left us,' in a very loving and understanding way.

I realised that my mother had had the greatest impact on my life in just about every way. For years I had been fighting to control deep feelings of anger and resentment towards her for leaving us and for putting us in harm's way. Now I felt absolute understanding for a frightened teenage girl, in a dead-end relationship with two small children. A girl who made the hardest decision any mother could possibly make and then spent the rest of her life hiding from it. Not only did I understand, but I felt incredible gratitude and love for her.

At the end of the session, I was speechless. Helen sat across from me with a loving smile on her face. She knew that the penny had just dropped. And not just on my feelings towards my mother, but my feelings towards so many people in my life whom I carried both resentment and anger towards. My inner sea of rage was suddenly growing much more calm.

We spent the next few hours working our way through a series of people who had influenced me, both positively and negatively. It was interesting to see who came out of the woodwork. We worked through the same process for each and every one of them, and my feelings all turned to the same place. One of understanding, forgiveness, acceptance, love and finally gratitude for the part they played in making me the man I am today.

Some people were not as easy as others, but I just kept working my way through the process. At the end, so much emotional baggage was thrown away that I felt if I'd stood on a set of scales I would have been much lighter.

Empathy is a very powerful tool. We can all intellectualise people who have had a big impact, either positively or negatively, on us. We think we forgive bad behaviour, neglect or abuse, but it is often so entrenched in our systems that while our brain says, 'I forgive my

mother for abandoning me,' our heart doesn't forgive or forget so easily.

We have to work hard to change the feelings that we have attached to a person. It is rare that the emotions change easily, especially those that have been built and reinforced over many years, but it can be done. The first step involves changing the brain and then the heart will follow.

My former wife used to fly into fits of rage when we had a fight and her behaviour used to make me just as angry. Until one day I realised that she became angry when she was scared. I found this out because I saw her dad do the exact same thing. When he became scared or uncertain, especially as he grew older, he flew into a rage. My understanding of this made it so much easier for me to deal with any angry outburst. I would calmly and sincerely tell her that she didn't have to be scared, it was all okay. And she would calm down and we would talk about whatever she was scared of.

Empathy is the very essence of 'The Me Myth'. When we are hurt by a person it becomes about 'me'. 'How could they do this to me?' 'What have I done to deserve this?' 'It's just not fair.' But by thinking about the person or situation from another perspective and transforming our feelings so we stop making it all about 'me', we can actually let go of the negative feelings that are so deeply ingrained in us. It's these feelings that are often holding us back from the life we deserve.

Anger, bitterness, resentment, self-righteousness and self-pity all lead to an empty life. Sometimes our issues are still too deep or too raw to feel empathy for another person. I get that. But the longer you hang onto them the harder they may be to get rid of and, surely, we all want to conquer these feelings.

Empathy can be used in every single interaction and situation in your life. If you can let go of your own ego, your internal fears and failings, and look at any situation from the other person's perspective, amazing things start to happen. Your connection with other people becomes stronger. People like you more because you 'get them'. You become more successful in your work and you have far less conflict in your life.

Mastering the art of empathy will have a huge, positive effect on your everyday interactions with others. Your life will become richer and filled with so much more love and joy that you will wonder why you didn't do it sooner.

'To have great empathy one needs great humility.'

Key points

- 1. Our hearts often hold onto issues that we think our brains have resolved
- 2. If you take the time to think about a particular situation from the other person's point of view, you will be able to release pain, anger and burt
- 3. Empathy is an art, but it is one that can be mastered by anyone.
- 4. A rich, rewarding life can be achieved when you make empathy a habit.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Think about a recent situation when you had a fight with someone. Now take a few moments to think the situation through from the other person's perspective, until you get to the point where you understand how they must have felt.

Spend a day thinking about every interaction from the other person's point of view. It might be your children, staff in your business, a salesperson in a shop or a friend. Focus on the other person, their life, what is going on for them (as much as you can tell), and just observe and try to understand. You can learn a lot by doing this. Talking to people in an open and loving way is the best possible path to empathise with them. It takes some of the guesswork out of what they may be thinking and what is going on in their life.

Is there anyone you hate? Now is the time to get rid of that feeling. You need to go back to that time in your life and try to think it through from their point of view.

Whenever you have a fight, stop, think and empathise.

If you want to make big changes in your life you might just need big motivation

We all have parts of our lives that we want to change, but for whatever reason we seem to struggle to do it. In fact the problems we want to change can be causing us enormous suffering and pain and they may even be threatening our lives, but we still find it difficult to make the change.

I want to share a brief story about how I made a very dramatic change in my life. After many years of failed attempts, I was finally able to make this change because I had the right motivation to take control of my life and do what was necessary.

As I laid back on a padded bench, in a round tiled bungalow on a strange island off the coast of Thailand, with a tube up my bum, I asked myself if I had perhaps taken just a little too much control of my life. But to really answer this question (and I am sure a few others that you may have) I have to go way back to my childhood.

I have always been fat. No big bones, no slow metabolism, no genetic issues – just plain old fat. My weight has gone up and down a lot during the past 43 years, but I have never been what you would call 'skinny'.

Somehow, even though I was fat, I progressed through life pretty well and I kidded myself that I was very happy with my shape and size for most of those years. Of course, deep down I didn't want to be fat, but I never really did anything about it. My health was a secondary thought to me – my body was just this 'thing' I used to hold up and support my brain because that was where I felt I did all of my best work.

Eventually I reached a stage where I got really big. I had been travelling the world, staying at flash hotels and entertaining clients over long breakfasts, long lunches and long dinners, day after day.

My weight started to go up but I was too lazy to exercise. Finally I quit my travelling job and started my own marketing company. At the time I also married a delightful Italian woman, Caz. Anyone who has had anything to do with an Italian family can confirm that life revolves around eating and drinking. She was an amazing cook, but she didn't hold back on the oil, cream, salt or sugar. I was certain that I could feel my arteries close up a little more after each meal. But I loved her food and I would eat mountains of it. It certainly wasn't Caz's fault, she cooked what I liked and I was the one who shoved it down my throat.

I had no idea if my family had any history of disease. After all, I didn't know any of my family apart from my sister at this stage. But I had regular check-ups and whilst my blood pressure was higher than it should have been, my cholesterol and other indicators that I might drop dead of a heart attack were all very low.

Around this time I had to get a special medical check-up for my life insurance. I hopped on the scales and I stared in shock as they rotated around to 150 kilograms. Man, that was fat.

I knew I had put on a lot of weight, but I had managed to avoid

scales as much as possible. But finally I realised that I had an issue.

As always, the universe sent me some very strong messages to really make me pay attention. But the most painful was when my sister dropped dead of a heart attack at 35 years of age. Wow, did that change my world. At Wendy's funeral I remember looking at her in the coffin, and I realised very clearly that it would not be that long before I would also be lying in a coffin if I didn't make some serious changes to my life.

Now I had some big motivation to change my life.

A friend of mine bought me a pass to the local yoga studio. Yoga is great for us fatties. It is as tough as you want it to be, it gets your body moving and flexible, and it feels wonderful during and after every session. Plus it works on your mind as much as your body, leaving you in a beautiful state of mind. You don't see many brawls in a voga class.

Next came some personal training. I didn't hire one trainer, I got two (I knew that one wouldn't be enough). My wonderful trainers, Kelly and Sam, made sure that I had a training programme to suit me. I get bored easily so we were doing all kinds of things, from kickboxing to bike riding. But all of these activities had one thing in common: they made me sweat like a pig. I would come up with all kinds of excuses about why I couldn't train and lift lots of heavy things and, either together or individually, they would nod their heads in sympathy and then completely ignore what I said. They were perfect and they certainly helped me to break the camel's back in terms of shaking off that first big chunk of weight.

Losing the 50 kilograms I wanted to drop seemed like such a huge, unreachable task. But we set five-kilogram weight-loss goals and, before I knew it, I was around the 100-kilogram mark. I had lost my 50 kilograms and I felt incredible. It took a lot of sweat, a few tears and quite a considerable financial investment, but I got there.

Around this time I met an amazing woman called Debra Ruth Lawson. We were both speaking at a conference and I was immediately attracted to this little minx. She was from Indiana in the United States and she stood less than five feet tall but had an iron will and a passion for health, vitality and prevention of illness that I had never encountered before. Soon we became much more than friends.

Deb set about educating me on every aspect of health and wellbeing. I learnt about the importance of drinking the right kind of water, avoiding processed foods, cleaning the colon with colonic hydrotherapy to help the body remove toxins, taking vitamins and supplements, fasting to give the body a break, food combining and so much more.

So this explains why I was in a small room on an island off the coast of Thailand, with a tube up my bum and no food in my belly. This was the culmination of my new healthy life. Deb and I had booked into a health retreat for a week of fasting and two colonics a day as a major detoxification programme. It was incredible and, whilst I had a few ups and downs in the process, my body felt amazing. If you told me ten years ago that I would be doing this on a holiday I would have fainted.

Today, I am still not skinny. But I have taken control of my life and my wellbeing.

I am aware of my body now, how important it is and how I need to treat it with love and respect. I don't live a puritanical life. I enjoy having a beer or a gin and tonic, going out for a good meal and laying on the couch all day with a good book. But the difference is that I lead a healthy life most of the time, whilst allowing myself to be human.

I have accepted that I won't be a threat to Brad Pitt, but I am much more content than I have ever been. I want my body to be healthy and fit because I have a lot that I want to achieve before I go and I have many great reasons to live. In other words I am in control of my life, my weight is not in control of me.

We all have our own 'demons' to deal with. For some people it is

weight, for others it might be self-esteem or just plain old-fashioned fear. Whatever your demons, you have to conquer them to take control of your life. Most importantly, you need to have the right amount of motivation. Without it, nothing changes. We might give our demons a bit of token attention but, generally, we slide back into our old habits in a short amount of time.

Once you make dramatic alterations in your life everything changes. The benefits for me in taking greater control of my life have been enormous. I didn't realise how much my weight was really impacting me and everything I did.

If you have struggled your entire life to overcome particular demons there are two things to consider. One is that you simply haven't had enough of a reason to change. Or, two, you haven't found the right way to change yet. Keep trying.

We will normally change when we get desperate enough. For example, if you sit across the table from a doctor and they say you are going to die soon, that fear generally wakes us up and gives us the motivation to make the changes we need to make.

Having massive motivation certainly helps us make changes, but I would like to give you an alternative strategy as well. One that is a little different, but often equally as effective.

Stop working on what you perceive to be the 'Big Problem' in your life. If you spend all of your time and energy trying to fix one issue and it isn't getting better and, worse still, it hasn't changed in years, clearly you need to try a different approach. Here again is 'The Me Myth' at work.

The best example I can use, and one that most of us can relate to, is trying to change our partner. We can nag, moan, beg, implore, demand and force them to alter some bad behaviour because we don't like it, but does it ever really work? It might work for a day, or a week, or even a month, but it rarely works for the long term. Why not? Because other people don't necessarily want to change and they are only trying to because you are telling them to. But, interestingly enough, if you stop trying to change them and instead focus on changing yourself, often they start to change of their own accord. Now they change because they want to, not because they feel they have to. This is the way to create lasting change in others and, if it doesn't work, well perhaps you have grown in different ways and that relationship has run its course.

Taking this concept one step further, if you have been struggling in your career and you feel sad, frustrated and upset, then this is probably flowing into other areas of your life and bringing everything and everyone down. If you can't seem to find the motivation to make a change in your career, then make the change in other parts of your life. Get motivated to go out more and do things – to exercise, to eat well, to stimulate your mind, to spend time with people you love and to have huge amounts of fun. This passionate and energetic living will become the focus of your world and, very soon, the career blockage you may have experienced will suddenly be cleared and strange things will start to happen – like new job offers, promotions, reinvigorated passion towards your job and so on.

All we are doing is changing our focus from a part of our lives that isn't working and putting it onto making other parts that are working even better. The spin-off is wonderful. Look at those people who seem to love life, who are full of beans and energy. Is every part of their life perfect? Absolutely not, but they are not spiralling down and spending all of their time stuck over-analysing the bad stuff yet being unable to change it.

There is a lot to be said for changing your methods if what you are doing is not working. There is an old saying that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing again and again but expecting a different outcome.

Big changes take big action, but there is a big reward. Whichever part of your life you are not happy with, and I mean really not happy with, you can change it. At the very least you can change the way you react to it. If you are terminally ill, you may not be able to change that, but you can choose to make your last few months on the planet your best ever.

We are always in control of our lives, especially when it comes to how we react to events, situations and challenges. If your life feels out of control, it is up to you to make the changes necessary and put yourself back in the driving seat. If you are at your wits' end because you have tried to make changes but they haven't worked, it just means that you haven't found the right way yet, so keep looking and, most importantly, keep trying.

You control your life, no one else.

'The more excuses you can find for not taking control of your life the more important it is that you do.'

Key points

- 1. We are 100 per cent in control of our lives. It is just a matter of being prepared to take responsibility.
- 2. If there are parts of your life that you don't like, the solution is simple: change them.
- 3. If we are faced with a situation that we can't change, we can still choose how we will react to that situation
- 4. All too often we moan about the things we want to change, but we don't actually take any action. Perhaps this means that we really don't want to change.
- 5. When we have enough motivation we can change virtually anything.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Is there one part of your life that you really want to change? What is it?

What excuses are you using to not make this change?

Do you think you really want to change or are you just saying that because you think you should change?

Do you really believe that you are in control of your life? (Because nothing will change until you do.)

Go back to the one thing you really want to change in your life. Take away all of the excuses, get up and do what needs to be done right this minute.

What is your moral code?

To me this is a question I have thought about a lot throughout my life. In many ways I was morally challenged as a kid. I don't say this to elicit any kind of sympathy or to justify what I did. I take full responsibility for all of the crappy things I have done and I intend to spend the rest of my life making up for them.

I mentioned earlier that I was brought up by a lovely old lady who was also a hopeless kleptomaniac. She was forever shoving little items into her pockets and stealing things from people's front yards. She lived by the philosophy that if it wasn't bolted down, it was hers.

My sister and I simply learnt to do the same. We became shocking shoplifters at a very young age. We stole money from the canteen at school, we broke into the local church and stole money, we would climb in through any open windows and steal whatever we could find. I am ashamed to say it, but when we were doing it, it didn't actually feel wrong.

We were worried about getting caught, but there was no guilt for what we did. We came close to getting caught many times, but I

think that people felt sorry for these two smelly little children who lived with the crazy lady up the road. So they turned a blind eye and let us go.

But eventually I was busted big-time. I was in grade six at primary school and my best friend was a little Greek lad called George. His parents ran a big greengrocers shop and they were always at work. One day George and I decided to wag school and get into some mischief at his house.

George made the fatal error of showing me the special biscuit tin that his parents kept on top of the cupboard. I climbed up and opened the tin – it was jam-packed full of \$20 notes. Even now, that much money would make you stop and take notice. There had to be thousands of dollars hidden away and I realised that we had hit paydirt.

We took wads of \$20 notes each. My pockets were bulging and, as kids do, we headed to the corner store to spend some of our ill-gotten booty. We were both very clever so we agreed that rather than buying a lot of stuff and facing awkward questions at home, we would just spend a little and go back every day for the rest of our lives.

So I took my first lot of booty home and laid in bed that night wondering how to spend our windfall. The next day at school I had a Robin Hood moment and I stood in the middle of the playground handing out \$20 notes to everyone. There was quite a riot. George was freaking out (for very good reason) but I felt really good about my new-found philanthropic life.

The problems started after school, when about 100 grubby primary school kids descended onto the same corner shop, splashing \$20 notes around like pimps. The crafty old shopkeeper worked out that something was wrong and called the cops.

The first kid they grabbed squealed like a pig and George and I ended up in the back of a police car on the way to George's parents' shop.

Let's just say they weren't very happy and I was glad to have

two burly policemen standing between them and me. Clearly I had corrupted George, he was whisked away and I never saw him again. The kids at school who had called me their hero the day before now hated me and did their utmost to remind me for the next year. No charges were pressed and the old lady didn't even seem to notice when the police dropped me home and told her what I had done.

I did get a good scare, though, and it stopped me doing anything that I could get arrested for for quite some time.

When I moved to Sydney as a teenager my life of crime recommenced, but it was more about being seen to be cool. I started to grow marijuana and sell it at school. (I like to think that I was a budding entrepreneur but I doubt that the police would have been so understanding.) I hung out with some of the wrong people and, next thing I knew, I was breaking into houses again, drinking enormous amounts of alcohol and taking heavy drugs like LSD, speed and cocaine. To blend in with some of the people I wanted to impress, this is what I felt I had to do.

As teenagers we got drunk all the time and we would always drive. There were times that I would be too drunk to walk and would drive down a main road, with a car full of mates, doing over 150 kilometres an hour. I am so ashamed to think I did stuff like that all the time. How on earth did I survive? My heart starts to race at the mere thought of doing something so stupid today.

Soon my friends started to get arrested. Some killed themselves and others died in car accidents. When I was younger fights involved kids pushing each other around. Now there were gangs with knives and guns and vendettas.

We started to hang out in the famous and very seedy red-light district of Kings Cross. Down the backstreets of the Cross you saw things, or got involved in things, that were about as unsavoury as you could imagine. I started to see more people getting hurt – seriously hurt. My world was full of drugs, alcohol and anger. And I knew it was not the life for me.

In amongst my madness, my reckless living and not really caring about anyone, including myself, I met good people. Some were teachers, some were parents of friends of mine and some were just day-to-day people who I encountered. They were honest and friendly and they were living a good life. I started to see and understand the difference between right and wrong and the inner strength that people with positive morals have. I admired them and this was a major catalyst in my desire to change.

Like most teenagers, though, my conflict was between being accepted and being true to myself. I knew that staying with many of my friends meant doing things that were morally wrong. I saw that when drugs and alcohol were involved people did stupid things that they would not normally do. That the more drugs and alcohol you took, the more you wanted, and this led to crime, violence and pain. I also noticed that people who lived this life didn't have a lot of dreams, or drive, or ambition. They were content to live in a crazy world where their internal conflicts were resolved with a pill, a bottle or a lump of wood. I knew deep down that this was not what I wanted.

For a while I lived a dual life, spending time with a foot in each world. But I had started to change. I knew what I wanted out of my life and I certainly wasn't going to get it with drugs, booze and crime. It was time to leave if I was going to survive.

So I made a break for university and started down a much more positive road, where I was in control of my life and I no longer had to be filled with conflicting emotions.

I had a lot of guilt. I still do. The things I did, the stuff I stole, the people I hurt, either knowingly or otherwise – it was disgraceful and they play on my mind.

So I started to make up my own moral code in the form of a list of things that I would never, ever do again. It was a long list and included things like: I will never steal from another person, I will never drink-drive, I will never take drugs, I will not drink to excess,

I will protect others not hurt them, I will never cheat on my partner, I will devote myself to becoming the best person I can possibly be, I will make up for the things I have done to others, I will be honest.

I still have this list and I add to it from time to time, and I ponder how I am going. But most of the time I just actually get on with life and make sure I live the life I promised myself I would.

I found that when my moral code was spelt out for me, it made life easier. It was like I had my own personal rule book and it gave me a sense of peace. I have done my best with my moral code. I haven't always got it right, but I certainly get better every single year that goes by.

Establishing a clear moral code for yourself is critical. It makes it easier for us to be honest because we know what we will do and what we will not do when faced with a specific situation. Obviously we all have shades of grey and sometimes it is easy to be black and white on a certain issue until you are actually experiencing it first-hand. But if your moral code has too many shades of grey, it is hard to grow into the person you want to be. We are all masters at justifying our own bad behaviour. I can easily blame just about anything on my poor childhood, but I refuse to do that. I am responsible for every one of my actions, the good and the bad. When we stand up and realise this and accept, rather than blame, we all become better people.

I am sure that you know how it feels inside when you compromise your own standards. It feels terrible because it is a real conflict for our brains. We know something is wrong, but we still do it. We may start to beat ourselves up, develop self-loathing, abuse substances to ease the pain and generally spiral downwards. There will be times when we slip below the line, but rather than jumping off the cliff, learn from the experience and return to your moral code.

So much can be resolved simply by clarifying your own moral code and living up to it.

'Knowing what is right or wrong is one thing. Doing what is right or wrong is a whole other thing.'

Key points

- 1. Your earlier actions in life do not set your moral code for the rest of your life.
- 2. To grow as human beings we need to know what is right and what is wrong for us as individuals.
- 3. There are always shades of grey. Dealing with them is often a case by case experience.
- 4. Life becomes simpler and clearer when you know what your moral code is.

It's time to change your Me Myth

What are your moral beliefs about stealing, lying and adultery? Put yourself in the position where you could do any of these things and imagine how it would make you feel?

Are you living up to your moral code?

Do you feel compromised or conflicted by actions you are taking now that don't match your moral code?

How judgmental have we all become?

A few years back I was presenting a seminar to about 250 people in a remote Australian town. The crowd was very warm and welcoming, and while I spoke about the way to build a dynamic business I noticed one man at the front of the room who could barely contain himself. I assumed he was a little strange because he was wearing a tattered pair of shorts, a smelly old singlet and he was barefoot - none of which is considered normal attire at a seminar.

Now I made a number of assumptions about this man simply by looking at him. I assumed that he was a bit strange, that he had no money and that he may even have been mentally challenged in some way. Subconsciously I probably made another 100 assumptions about him based only on how he looked.

At the end of the seminar he came over to me and started to chew my ear off. He was nice enough, but I didn't really know what he wanted. We had a pleasant chat, he seemed satisfied and he wandered off, to my relief.

A little later the event organiser and I were chatting and I had a bit of a chuckle as I told her about the strange little man at the front of the room.

'Oh yes, Henry,' she said. 'He's the wealthiest man in town. He's a little eccentric but he's highly respected. He started his own property development company from scratch and now he's worth about 50 million dollars.'

It's not the first time I've jumped to conclusions about another human being based on their appearance.

We have all made a similar mistake. We jump to conclusions very fast and generally we're wrong or, at least, unfair. We all know the saying 'never judge a book by its cover' – it's one of life's great lessons if we are open-minded enough to use it. Now I always try to see beyond the car someone drives or the clothes they wear.

I know that when I walk into a shop wearing an expensive suit, I get served almost immediately and I am generally lavishly looked after by the sales people. But if I turn up in a pair of jeans and a T-shirt the level of service is completely different. Most of the time I am ignored, even though the amount of money in my pocket is exactly the same.

We have learnt to judge other people in so many ways and it seems that these days we jump to conclusions faster than ever before. Look at the media. We read magazines that examine people's every move. But how on earth could the majority of what they write about celebrities be even close to the truth? We watch game shows where we are asked to vote people off the island or out of the dance show. We are asked to judge others on a daily basis, to the point where it has now become second nature for most of us.

To emphasise this at some of my seminars I ask the audience five questions about their initial thoughts of me to get the event started.

I ask them if I look like I have come from a wealthy and stable family, if I am well educated, what my physical status is (for example,

am I getting fat), what types of jobs have I had and do I look successful or not?

The answers are overwhelmingly ves: I clearly come from a wealthy and stable family, I appear to be well educated (probably a private school background and with several degrees), I have middle-age spread, I have worked in an office all of my life and I look successful.

These responses are based on nothing but my appearance. But, as you'll see as you read through this book, the truth is I was raised as an orphan, I made it through high school with a very brief stint at university before I bailed out, I am actually getting thinner not fatter, and I have worked in a diverse range of indoor and outdoor jobs.

When I tell my audiences this, they get the point. I often get them to pick someone else out in the room and work out who they think they are. Sometimes people are incredibly accurate, other times they are way off. We get it wrong more often than we get it right.

The reason we judge others is so that we can compartmentalise them to fit into our view of the world: they are that kind of person or they do that for a living so by association they must be this kind of person. Sometimes it is because we are too lazy to get to know a person or to take the few short minutes necessary to have a brief conversation.

Breaking the habit of jumping to conclusions is a tough one. For starters, there is a biological and caveman-like requirement to evaluate any person we meet to determine if they are a threat, if they are a potential mate or perhaps to decide if they would be good to eat. Whilst the evaluations may be slightly different in the modern world the issues are almost the same.

All too often we cast judgment and find faults that make the person doing the judging feel better.

To not judge takes training. The next time you are sitting in a crowded place, listen to the thoughts that come into your mind when you see an overweight woman walking by, or a man dripping in gold wearing a suit that is way too tight, or a boy wearing a heavy-metal T-shirt who is covered in tattoos. When we listen to our internal thoughts we can hear how judgmental they really are.

If you find it hard to stop being judgmental start slowly by looking for positive features in people, rather than the negatives. Next time you find yourself in a people-watching mood, or you meet a person for the first time, start the process of looking for their positives.

It is easy to notice a giant wart on someone's nose, but if you can learn to look past that and see the rest of the person, you start to have much more rewarding interactions with people. How do they treat other people? Do they look you in the eye? Look a little deeper and use your own instincts. Do they look happy, sad, distracted, tired, gentle or lost? If you do this, you start to get a more complete picture of the person, and with this comes understanding and acceptance, not judgment.

Teaching diving for many years gave me a real insight into people's personalities. It was always amazing to see how people reacted when they were underwater and it taught me a lot about the importance of not making assumptions.

The most memorable diving class I had was a group of deaf people. There are all kinds of concerns with teaching people with hearing disabilities to dive. The odds are they have ear damage that may be aggravated, they would not hear instructions, and they might not be able to hear boats coming, which is a real concern.

At the first class, I found myself in front of a group of highly expectant, bright-eyed, stone-deaf people. It was hard work. I had to talk much slower to let the sign language translator do her job, I had to learn how to pronounce my words better so that my students could read my lips easier and I had to stop talking when I turned my back to write on the board.

I was filled with dread at the prospect of our first ocean dive. It was clearly going to be difficult to manage.

But something magical happened. As we went below the water it

soon became apparent who had the handicap. My students engaged in intense communication with each other, while I sat idly trying to join the conversation with my pitiful repertoire of five prehistoric hand signals.

Underwater I was the one with the handicap, they were most certainly not. For me this was profound and I spent lots of time just watching them communicate in such an excited and passionate way.

They were an amazing group of individuals and I think of them often. They showed me very clearly how wrong our assumptions about other people can be.

When you can keep an open mind regarding other people, and resist the urge to judge, wonderful things start to happen. You get to meet some truly exceptional people who perhaps you wouldn't have even bothered talking to before. You meet and connect with people who are interesting and interested in you (something we all love). People tend to stop judging you when you are non-judgmental yourself. You attract people into your life who are positive, open-minded, enthusiastic about life and other people, rather than close-minded people who are guick to judge and condemn others. Surely we all want more of those positive people in our lives?

It is easy to judge and to put someone in a pigeonhole. But it is spectacular to have an open mind and to accept and welcome other people for who and what they are. It is hard at first, but give it time and it will become second nature.

'Before you judge others be prepared to stand in front of a crowd of people naked.'

Key points

1. We all judge others, but the key is to look for the positives not the negatives.

- 2. To be less judgmental we need to be more patient when we first meet other people.
- 3. To get through to other people you have to connect. You cannot connect if you are not genuinely interested in them or if you have already compartmentalised them.
- 4. If you can retrain your brain to stop judging people, you will find people incredibly interesting, and they will return the favour.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Is there someone you are judging right now? Why? Is your judgment fair?

The next ten people you meet, look for something that you really like about them

Think about someone you know a little. Next time you see them ask them some questions and see just how right or wrong your judgments were.

Being judgmental is ingrained in us all. The secret is to change it over time. Think about the people you didn't like when you first met them, only to find out that as time evolved you actually really liked them and in some cases maybe even married them!

Lie down with dogs and you get up with fleas

I love this saying because it always makes me feel a bit itchy. The people we spend time with have a huge impact on the type of person we become. When thinking in terms of 'The Me Myth', if you really want to grow as a human being, look at the people you are surrounded by. Will they help you to evolve or will they give you fleas?

Sometimes it's not that easy to replace the people we share our lives with. But you can, it's just a matter of how much you want to change your own life.

I worked in the exploration industry in outback Western Australia for a few years as a field assistant, which was basically at the bottom of the heap. It was a hard life. I spent many weeks in very isolated parts of the country, often with only a dog and a radio for company.

One of my best friends in the industry was Bill, a tough little angry ant. He worked hard and played hard. He was a Geordie from Newcastle, England, so it was ingrained in his psyche. Anyone will tell you that you don't mess with a Geordie and I would have to agree.

We worked together for three years and, on my last day, Bill confided that he was a heroin addict and that he had been for over 20 years. I was speechless. Bill functioned fully in the field. He worked harder than any other man, he was the first one up in the morning and if there was a hard job to do he was always the first to put up his hand.

I struggled to accept that Bill was a drug addict. He just didn't fit the picture. Over a couple of drinks, he explained the life of a functioning drug addict. He told me that giving up heroin is not as hard as giving up your friends, who are also addicts. They accept you for who you are. They know your needs, your weaknesses, your fears and they don't judge you. Bill made it very clear that he expected to be a junkie till he died because he would be too lonely if he didn't have his 'support' group. Tough stuff.

A few years back I was invited to sit on a panel of business and community leaders in my hometown of Cairns. This panel was put together to distribute grants for parents who were experiencing financial difficulty and had children in their final years of school.

We interviewed around 100 parents and one mother and daughter almost broke my heart.

They were Indigenous Australians, living in a predominately lower socio-economic suburb. The young girl was clearly very bright. She was in her final year at school and she was getting fantastic grades. Her dream was to become a lawyer and stand up for Aboriginal rights. Her mother was clearly a proud and noble woman who was embarrassed to be asking for money. We tried to reassure her that we were there to help, not to make any judgments.

The mother explained that she wanted the money so she could put her daughter into boarding school to finish her final year because, if she didn't, the girl's siblings and relatives would take her out, get her drunk and get her pregnant. They didn't want her making them look bad by rising above them.

I was flabbergasted. We all were. Surely this wasn't true? But the

young girl reassured us that it was very common. We gave her the money she needed, but clearly it was not going to be easy for her to remove herself from that environment.

We all have people around us who don't necessarily want us to grow and realise our full potential because they are scared. They are scared that your success will make them look less successful, they are scared that if you grow they will get left behind, and they are fearful that your rich and rewarding life will make theirs look empty. Sometimes they may be scared that if you change and grow, you will stop loving them. And sometimes you might.

Other people's fears about what you will become are exactly that - their fears. But they will manifest in ways that are not supportive and encouraging. They may be hurtful, they may be manipulative and they may be so powerful that you compromise yourself.

Over many years I have learnt to identify others people's fears coming to the surface. As soon as I hear someone telling me what I can't do, or why I shouldn't be doing something, I get a small internal smile and I look at them to see why they are scared of my desire to reach for my dreams. That is their issue, their problem, their challenge, but I never let it stop me.

I encounter many people who can't see the things holding them back are actually the issues of those around them. These individuals or groups can be keeping them down or holding them back. It may not be malicious or even intentional, but sometimes people subconsciously don't want others to change because it will affect their own world.

It's like the crabs in the old crab pot: if one crab tries to get out the others will pull him back in. So call it fleas or crabs, but be strong enough and aware enough to realise the effect the wrong people can have on your future. Choose wisely because you either need to be willing to do what it takes to pull them up with you or they will certainly pull you down.

When I was a kid getting into alcohol, drugs and crime the biggest

reason was because I wanted to fit in. Well, I fitted in perfectly and it almost killed me. I learnt my lesson at a young age. Luckily I am older and wiser now.

It is imperative to have not just good but great people in your life. They need to be honest, they need to be ethical, they need to be compassionate, they need to inspire and motivate you, and, most importantly, they need to make you want to be a better person.

Today I simply refuse to let people into my life who aren't honest, ethical and positive. I know this sounds tough but I have a lot I want to do with my life and if I don't have the right people around me it is unlikely I will get it done.

In saying that, one of my missions in life is to help others to achieve their dreams. So if I see other people's fears and insecurities coming out, I will always do what I can to help them overcome them.

Over time you become like the people you spend most of your time with. Have a long, hard look at the people around you and decide if you are happy becoming like them. Hopefully you are. But I am sure there will be some people who you really need to let go. It is tough to do, but if you remember Chapter 2, then you'll remember that putting a pea under your cushion and getting uncomfortable will bring you great benefits.

So where do you find the right people? Well, that depends on what kind of person you want to be. I love reading inspirational books and attending self-development workshops. Is it because I learn new and amazing things every time? Partly, but what I really enjoy is the injection of energy and passion I get from being with like-minded, energetic and passionate people.

Break out of your comfort zone and mix in new circles. Take a risk and make a point of doing something you're interested in, like going to a foreign film festival and paying attention to the people who are sitting around you. If you want to be fit and healthy, don't go to the local hotel to find the right people, join a sporting club or

gym. Surround yourself with people who inspire you and hold you to the standard that you want to hold for yourself.

Try to find people that you want to be like and become an active and contributing member of this group. It will change your life as it has so profoundly changed mine.

'Look around you. Are you soaring with eagles or gobbling with turkevs?'

Key points

- 1. If you don't have the right people around you there is little chance of achieving your dreams.
- 2. Breaking away from the pack is hard but essential. Some of the people around you won't like to let you go because of their own inadequacies.
- 3. The feeling of being around people who stimulate, support and challenge you is incredible, especially if you haven't experienced it hefore

It's time to change your Me Myth

Is there anyone in your world who you feel is giving you fleas?

Why do you keep spending time or energy with them?

Are you too comfortable with the people around you? Are you scared that if you try to improve yourself you will end up alone?

List the characteristics of the people you would really like to be around. For example, energetic, smart, motivated, creative, understanding, gentle etc.

How many people do you have in your life right now who fit this bill?

Where would you find people like this?

If you let go of fear, could you go and connect with people like this right now?

We all need someone to look up to

Having a person to look up to is one of our fundamental needs but sadly not everyone has a person like this in their lives.

I had a lot of trouble with role models as a kid. The people in my life seemed to end up hurting me, either physically or emotionally. So I developed fictional role models who would be 100 per cent perfect, completely flawless. As an orphan you are like a puppy at the local animal shelter living in hope that the next person will take you home. I hoped that one day my parents would turn up in a big black car and take my sister and me away to the perfect life. Of course they would be perfection personified successful, rich, loving and beautiful. That concept faded away as I got old enough to understand reality, but it was a dream that kept me going as a kid.

And it helped me realise that role models can be fictional people. Many of us relate very deeply to characters in movies and we like to think that we share similar traits to the actor or, more importantly,

to the role they play. Clearly we need to understand that they are fictional people, who are generally able to do things that real people cannot, but I'm talking more about identifying with their moral code, their values in helping others and doing right from wrong. So picking Hannibal Lecter as your role model is not particularly healthy, but choosing Captain Kirk from *Star Trek* may be.

I am particularly drawn to the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*. It is the story of a good man whose dreams are shattered by his sense of duty to his family. Along the way he starts to feel that his life is useless and in despair he plans to commit suicide only to be saved by his guardian angel, Clarence. It is a great movie that I watch at least once a year and many consider James Stewart's portrayal of George Bailey to be some of the finest acting.

George Bailey made the decision to abandon his own dreams and to serve his family and the people of Bedford Falls by taking over the reigns of the community bank. He was an honourable, loyal and committed man, qualities that I value very much and I certainly aspire to. In the end George realised how important his life was, the positive impact he had on others and just how lucky he actually was. How nice to realise this stuff!

There are times in our lives when we are lost and seek some direction but none is forthcoming. How do we make a life-changing decision? Or how should I act as a human being? Some people just seem to know what to do, but others don't. By having someone to look up to, you can ask yourself, 'What would they do?'

We can all benefit from having role models in both our personal and professional lives, but be careful that you don't start comparing yourself to others. It can encourage envy, which leads to being judgmental, something I talked about earlier. We need our role models for a different purpose, which is to give us someone whom we can relate to and admire, someone to look up to with respect and someone to hold us to a higher standard. And remember, sometimes role models may stuff up. Does that mean they are bad people? It

depends on what they do, but generally no, it simply means that they are human and they make mistakes.

We can all use role models to help us have the life we want. We can learn from them, be guided by them and even challenged by them. Find a person or a character to serve as your role model and you may find their gentle guidance a wonderful way to get through some tough times.

Last, but not least, don't forget that whilst you are looking up at your role models it is very likely that someone will be looking up at you as theirs. This is a big realisation for many people and it is a role that we as individuals all need to take seriously. People who look up to us will see things about us that they respect and admire, things that we probably don't even know we have. We can learn a great deal from those who seek guidance in life from us.

'Success mirrors success. All you have to do is find the right reflection.

Key points

- 1. Having someone to look up to gives us someone to live up to.
- 2. We don't need to know the person personally to aspire to be like them
- 3. Role models give us guidance, knowledge and experience, often without even knowing it.
- 4. Pick a role model who will make you want to be a better person.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Do you have someone in mind who can inspire you to be the person you want to be?

What are the characteristics that you admire in this person the most?

Is there anything that will stop you living up to your role model?

'Respect' is a powerful word

Throughout my unconventional childhood, I really grew to understand the value of respect, specifically respecting other people. As I have grown a few more grey hairs I have come to realise that respect for yourself is just as important as respect for others.

So what is respect? The best description I can give is that it is a deep feeling of admiration for a person as a result of their abilities, qualities and achievements, or their age and standing in the community. When it comes to women, I think men should just respect them, full stop.

Respect manifests itself in many ways. The old lady who brought my sister and me up made sure that our manners were perfect. I would always stand up for a lady or an older person on the bus. She taught me that when you are walking with a lady the man should always be closest to the road to protect the lady. You always helped old people or ladies with their bags and groceries, or anything that they needed. For all of her madness, I truly appreciate being taught how to show respect for other people through your actions.

Today I am one of those men that opens doors for women, helps

them with their bags, and I always let them order first in a restaurant and I always pay. Old-fashioned habits certainly, but I have no intention of changing them. I have been verbally abused (and on one occasion almost physically abused) by women who consider my behaviour to be chauvinistic. I think that losing manners and respect for women is a tragic loss in the world, but I think that it will make a comeback. I certainly hope to drive that comeback.

I am a very big believer in treating everyone the same and treating everyone with respect. We have to earn respect, but I believe that we should respect everyone we encounter until they give us reason not to.

So I respect the person who brings me coffee in my local café as much as I respect the CEO of the company who happens to be my biggest client.

Respecting ourselves, however, is the most important form of respect, but unfortunately many people struggle with it. Many of us go through stages in our lives when we really don't like whom we are or what we have become.

To respect ourselves, we have to learn to admire and acknowledge the good qualities we possess. Most of the time we focus way too much on the areas where we are not that good and the things we are not that proud of. Generally what you focus on is what you get more of. Focus on the bad stuff and you will find more of it.

Why do we find it so hard to see the good within ourselves? We all have good qualities that can be admired, even the worst person imaginable. Fortunately we usually have people around us who can point out these good characteristics, but we need to learn to do it for ourselves too. Spend time focusing on the good things that you love and admire about yourself and, before you know it, you will start to find other good qualities. Like so many parts of life, the more good we see within the more good we find around us.

People who don't have a lot of self-respect generally don't treat themselves very well. They lose interest in their appearance, they don't exercise or eat well, they don't care about their surroundings and they certainly don't treat others very well. Classic candidates for 'The Me Myth' awards because it is all about them. They are often so caught up in their own self-loathing that it is hard to bring them back to the world of the living and loving, but that is what they need to do.

The place to start is by having respect for how you look. Get a haircut, buy some new clothes or at least give the current ones a good clean. Tidy up the house, get outside and get moving. Physical activity is a great way to start feeling good about yourself. Interact with other people, be challenged and do the things that make you feel like a good person. Before you know it you will be full of respect for yourself. Don't worry about how bad you might feel now because it doesn't take long to start feeling better about yourself.

Show respect for everyone you encounter. Do this by being courteous, polite and compassionate. Tell people what you admire about them. The more respect you show others, the more respect others will show you and the better you will feel about yourself.

As we climb the ladder of success (in whichever form that may take for you) humility is a wonderful ally for respect. There is nothing nicer than a person at the top of their game who has the humility to show respect to others who are still working out their way.

'Respect' is a big word. It can be hard to get and easy to lose. The more you focus on others in a respectful way, the more respect you will develop for yourself. Life is nice like that. Once again we look inwards for the answers, when we really should be looking outwards.

^{&#}x27;To give respect is mandatory. To keep respect is a privilege.'

Key points

- 1. To grow as individuals we need to respect every other person we encounter
- 2. We have to respect ourselves at the same time.
- 3. If you learn to give respect to those around you they will radiate it back to you.
- 4. Spend less time looking for your faults and more time looking for your good qualities, then self-respect will happen naturally.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Do you really respect yourself?

Have you lost some of your self-respect and does it show in your physical appearance?

Do you want others to show you more respect?

Is there one person in particular who you really do respect? If you do, why? Be specific. What is it about this person that you so admire and respect?

Do you have any of these qualities? (I bet you do.)

For the next few days, spend five minutes in the morning and in the night thinking about the qualities that you like the most about yourself. Given time you will really grow to love these things about you, just as others already do.

Where do you put your best energy?

I never realised just how important and valuable a commodity energy is. It is something that we all want and it makes our lives a lot more enjoyable when we have it, but for some reason we generally seem completely unaware that we don't always use it wisely.

Professional athletes understand energy and how to use it. These days they figure it out down to the last kilojoule. Controlling the use of energy is a science and it is just as important for everyday folk as it is for professional athletes.

I used to work ridiculous hours. I would get up before the sun even thought about getting out of bed, I would gulp down a coffee and head to the office to start work by 6 am at the very latest. I would work through until at least 8 pm, sometimes as late as midnight. And I would do this pretty much seven days a week. Add to this the fact that I would eat nothing much during the day and then gulp down a huge meal whenever I finally got home. Not much of a life, is it?

When I had my health wake-up call, which I spoke about earlier,

I realised that I was actually getting it all wrong. By the time I got home at night I was physically exhausted, with no energy to really enjoy being at home. I had worn myself out to the point where it would take a long time to fully recover and revitalise my body. More importantly I knew that if I didn't change soon I would die early.

The reason you direct all of your energy into work like this is because you need to financially, or you think you need to do it, or more likely because there are parts of your life where you not fulfilled and you are looking to hide from them by immersing yourself in work. Lucky me, I had all three scenarios.

Work has always been a constant for me. If I am worried or dealing with a big issue in my life, my answer has always been to throw myself into my work and let my brain process the problems along the way. It has helped me get through some very tough times. But when you live this way, you have to pay the price sooner or later.

I realised that I had a finite amount of energy to use each day. When I got into the office hours before everyone else, I turned the music up loud and I danced around the office like a madman. I felt great and usually I got more done in the couple of hours before everyone else arrived than I got done during the rest of the day.

My business at the time was a marketing company. It was full-on and very demanding. There were lots and lots of meetings, there were deadlines, there were crises to manage, there were staff to support and always there was a financial figure in my head that we had to reach to cover our costs.

So gradually as the day wore on my energy level dropped lower and lower, and by the time I got home it was fully depleted. I would collapse for five or six hours and then go for it again.

I have an enormous amount of energy and stamina. I can work ridiculous hours for years on end and I can get things done in periods of time that no one thinks possible. I am a doer. But I realised that I don't want to be like this all the time. I was sick and tired of being exhausted from 10 am on. It wasn't fair to me, and it certainly wasn't

fair to the people in my life who cared for me and loved me. I realised that I had to change and make my energy work for me.

I knew that I had a limited amount of energy, but if I lost a pile of weight and exercised more that would increase my energy levels. So I set about doing that. I changed my diet to make sure that I had more energy. I started eating breakfast – something I hadn't done before, ever.

Now I could feel the energy coming back to me.

The next thing I had to do was to work out what zapped me of energy. I knew that there were certain people who seemed to suck the life out of me so I made it harder for them to access me all the time. I delegated jobs and I decided that I wouldn't work weekends unless I absolutely had to.

This process made me question my whole work/life balance. I wasn't interested in sitting on a mountain picking fluff out of my bellybutton. I like stress – the buzz of meeting a deadline, having lots of things to do and achieving great things. But I don't like feeling overwhelmed, waking up in the middle of the night thinking about all of the things I had to do. I realised that balance means something different to each of us and I had to define what it meant for me.

So far I had done what I could to get my energy back by looking after my body. Then I had removed as many of the distractions and energy suckers that I could. Next I had figured out what I wanted my life to look like. Last, but not least, was allocating my energy.

I had to learn to ration my energy. I wanted to get home full of beans and feeling great, rather than dragging my sorry bum through the door to collapse on the couch. So I learnt to pace myself. I made sure I pencilled things into my day that could recharge my energy. The energy-boosting activities that worked for me were things like starting work later than usual, catching up with a friend for a coffee, doing particular jobs that I really liked, going to see a client who I liked and who was an hour's drive along the coast, or just taking time out to go for a stroll around town.

The difference was truly amazing. I still haven't mastered energy control but I am light-years ahead of where I was. My energy level is now constant during the day. I feel the same at 11 pm as I do at 5 am. It feels good. There are times when I still work hard to make a deadline, but I have learnt the importance of offsetting these times with periods of recharge. The senior management in my relationship, Dr Deb, reminds me when I need to top up the tank and we will spend a weekend lying around sleeping, eating good food, reading and doing other things that most definitely relieve stress.

So how does 'The Me Myth' apply here? It is pretty simple. It is very hard to have a fabulous life if you are too exhausted to enjoy it. When you are a workaholic, or any kind of 'holic' for that matter, you live a life of internalisation. Everything revolves around you and with that comes a kind of craziness.

Your energy is precious. Save your best energy for those who deserve it the most, the people you love and who love you. It is impossible to do this when you are caught in the madness of workaholism or whatever obsession affects you. Overcome this and you will truly enjoy even the smallest of life's pleasures.

'Passion creates energy. Energy creates passion.'

Key points

- 1. We have limited amounts of energy so we should treat it as a prized commodity.
- 2. Most of us waste our best energy in the places where it is least important.
- 3. There are lots of things that drain our energy. We need to know what they are and get them out of our lives.

- 4. When you keep your best energy for the parts of your life that truly deserve it, everything becomes so much better.
- 5. If you are a 'holic' of any sort, your best energy is wasted.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Where do you spend your best energy now?

Are you happy with that?

Do you get home and bounce through the door to greet the family, the dog or the goldfish? Or do you drag your sorry bum through the door to collapse on the couch?

What would you do if you had bucketloads of more energy?

What do you think drains your energy?

What can you do right now to stop the drain? Do it!

Dreamtime

I love having dreams about the possibilities that lie ahead in my life. I am not one of those people who believe that anyone can do anything. Some things aren't realistically possible. For example, it's hard to imagine someone like me, weighing about 100 kilograms, as a jockey. Unless I was riding an elephant. But, luckily for all of the horses in the world, I have no plans to become a jockey.

I do, however, believe very strongly that if you have something that you truly want to achieve, and you are motivated enough to do it, you will.

I have had many big and small dreams in my life. I have achieved many but the ones that are ahead of me are the biggest and the boldest. We need a reason to drive us forward and a dream will do that in a more positive way than necessity.

I always wanted to be a marine biologist. I didn't really know what a marine biologist did, but I had romantic notions about riding whales around the ocean and saving the planet. As a small child, I never wanted to be a fireman, policeman, doctor or builder, just a marine biologist.

When I was ten my welfare officer arranged a trip to a marine science laboratory on the Western Australian coastline where I was fascinated by giant crayfish. In high school I did my work experience at the CSIRO's marine laboratories, where I got to count fish, look at things under microscopes and, best of all, wear a white jacket that made me look like a scientist. I remember being a bit upset that I didn't get to ride a whale or two, but I imagined that would come later.

I saved up some money and paid to do my first dive course when I was 14. I just loved it. The ocean fascinated me, I had no fear of sharks, eels or drowning, and I took to the aquatic environment like, well, a fish to water. (In later years some people suggested I was more like a walrus, but that's just ridiculous! My teeth are nowhere near that big.)

In amongst all of the craziness of my early years – my tango with drugs and alcohol as a teenager and obstacle after obstacle – I still managed to finish high school and somehow get enough points to enter James Cook University, a world leader in marine biology.

I received a government scholarship to attend and I think the New South Wales welfare was hoping I was going to be their shining-light success story.

Within a few weeks of studying chemistry, physics, botany and zoology, I started to get a strange feeling in my belly. I met quite a few marine biologists and chatted to them about their adventures on the high seas, only to realise that very few of them got to do anything as exciting as riding a whale. Some do travel the world, going to exotic places and doing strange things to coral, but most spend their days stuck in a laboratory.

It dawned on me that I didn't want to be a marine biologist at all. I wanted to be a diver. I went on to have a successful diving career and I absolutely loved it. But, even though I didn't become a marine biologist, I had learnt the power of having a dream and the sweetness of achieving it. The day I arrived at James Cook University I had a

smile from ear to ear and I think it was the first time I ever felt truly successful.

I can't imagine going through life without dreams or purpose. Once you have a dream, it feels right inside of you. It brings you a sense of purpose that feels so good. It is a reason to get up in the morning. It is the thing that makes hours fly like minutes. It is passion, it is excitement and it is feeling scared but still getting out there and doing it.

It's not about how big or bold your dreams may be, but more about having a reason to live. This might sound melodramatic, but who wants to go through life simply existing, day in, day out? You need something to strive for.

Sadly many people go through life without dreams. I have certainly had periods where my life was very grey and sad, and what I remember the most about those times was that I didn't feel like I had any dreams or a strong purpose.

For a lot of people finding their dream is the toughest part. Their life may have moved so far away from what they imagined that they have lost the ability to dream. But rest assured, you can get that back. The best way to figure out what your dreams are, or what your purpose in life may be, is not to sit and navel-gaze, but to get out and experience everything you can. Try different things, meet different people, challenge yourself and keep your mind open. I am certain that dreams will come to you in time, but you simply can't force them out. If you do they are often intellectual dreams but not really dreams from the heart – those dreams that make you so excited, the ones that make you want to leap out of bed in the morning and tell everyone about your plans and what you are going to do.

I had coffee with a very dear friend of mine recently. He just turned 82 and he is in great shape. He told me that he was having trouble figuring out his next dream in life but he was enjoying the process immensely. He is travelling the world, running his own business, chasing girls (well, 70-year-old girls) and filling every minute of his day with experiences with the one desire of figuring out what his next passion in life will be. All I could do was sit and smile warmly at this wonderful man whose entire life was one big dream, even if he didn't realise it.

When you do find your dream and start following it try and surround yourself with people who encourage your dream. Unfortunately there will always be plenty of people who will tell you what you can't do, but you can use this as motivation.

When I was thinking about writing my first book I asked a few people what they thought about the idea. Most people said not to bother. They told me that it was really hard to get published, the world was full of business books and what was I going to say that was any different to what anyone else had already said? I was really upset by this response but I picked myself up and decided that I was going to do it no matter what these people thought. The rest is history.

Those people were giving me advice based on their fears. I bought into this at first, but now whenever someone says that I can't do something or is negative about an idea, I stop and listen even harder. It is important to determine if their opinion makes sense or if they are giving me their views based on their own fears of failure.

I have been guilty of this myself in the past. I have listened to a person who is telling me their dream and, in the back of my mind, I will be asking myself how on earth they will ever achieve it. But I have been incredibly surprised more times than not by everyday, down-to-earth people doing quite extraordinary things. It is not for us to judge the likelihood of the dreamer achieving their dream. Now, when someone tells me their dream, I look them in the eye and wish them the very best, and I truly hope that they achieve their dream.

Today I meet thousands of people every year, people with quite incredible dreams that will change the face of the earth and people whose dreams are simply to have more time to spend with their grandchildren. The one thing I know for certain is that people with dreams generally get them.

But dreams don't happen by themselves. For instance, wishing we were thinner probably won't be enough to make it happen. We also need to get our lazy bum off the couch, start exercising and lay off the potato chips and beer. I believe that we can make dreams happen and that the universe will help you, but it will only meet you halfway. You have to put in the effort yourself.

If we live a life filled with fear and negativity about all of the things we can't do and the reasons we shouldn't do them, we end up with an unfulfilled life. But if we focus on the things we can do and that we want to do, our lives are filled with the possibility of what we can achieve. I know which one I prefer.

'It's better to dream in colour than to live in black and white.'

Key points

- 1. A life without dreams can be an empty one.
- 2. Dreams, like people, come in all different sizes. The smaller ones are no less significant than the big ones.
- 3. Dreams don't just happen they take effort.
- 4. There will always be plenty of people around who will tell you want you can't do. Use this as fuel to drive you forward.
- 5. People never cease to amaze. They do unbelievable things, impossible things, every day of the week.

6. Whenever you feel that your dream is slipping from your grasp, grab a book written by someone who has overcome all odds and succeeded. Success of others will spur you on.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Do you have a dream?

Do you honestly believe you can achieve it?

What are you doing to make it happen?

Is that enough?

How will your life look when you have achieved your dream?

Do you have people who support you and your dream?

Listen to your gut instinct about everything

I read a fascinating newspaper article recently that claimed scientists had now proven we do have a sixth sense. The article explained how a completely blind man could navigate his way around a room simply by sensing pieces of furniture blocking his way. They could show the same man a range of photographs of people with various facial expressions, from angry to happy, and he could sense the emotions in each picture. Truly amazing.

I believe that we all have this sixth sense, but we tend to use it less these days, preferring to rely on data that we can actually see. In other words, if we can't see it we don't tend to believe it.

We have all had those strange experiences that make us scratch our heads in wonder. Like when we are thinking about a person and the phone suddenly rings and – surprise, surprise – it's them. Or perhaps when you have been thinking of someone who you haven't seen for a while and you literally walk right into them on the street.

I have had so many of these situations I don't know where to start. This sixth sense, or gut instinct if you prefer, is both incredibly complex and incredibly simple at the same time. We all get certain feelings when we meet a person for the first time. We often form very strong opinions about them in a matter of minutes. Certainly a lot of the formation of this opinion will come directly from their body language, what they say and how they react to what you say. But there are certain feelings and situations that cannot be as easily explained.

My sixth sense has saved my life many times, particularly when I was a commercial diver. But I had an experience a few years back that was altogether different.

I had just released my third book and I was basking in the success of my new-found writing career. I was starting to get enquiries from all over the world for speaking opportunities and media interviews. It was all very flattering and I got caught up in the moment (with more than a little ego).

Out of the blue I received a phone call from a man in Africa. He was setting up an adventure tourism company that was going to operate ballooning trips, white-water rafting safaris and mountain-climbing expeditions. It all sounded very exciting and he was passionate and compelling. He told me that he had read my books and was very impressed, and he wanted me to come to Africa and set up the marketing of his new business venture.

We chatted for about an hour and I felt that this was a great opportunity, but my schedule for the rest of the year was completely full and, as much as I would have liked to do the job I would have had to let too many other people down, so I said thanks, but no thanks.

Then he said the magic words 'money is no object'. He told me how his family had made lots of money mining diamonds and he had a big budget to get this business off the ground. I said I would think about it and get back to him with a quote.

Now the initial project required me to go to Africa for three months. I really couldn't go but I went through the motions of doing background research. I checked his website, which was fantastic, and I rang his office several times for more information. After about a week I sent him a quote – \$250 000 for the three months, plus expenses. I knew that this was outrageous and he would certainly say no.

Within five minutes of me sending the email he had responded and agreed to the fee. I was flabbergasted. I'd expected him to at least barter. Then he asked me for an address to send a bank cheque for a deposit of \$50 000 and the airline tickets.

I reminded myself that I was a very important and successful (nothing like a gorilla-sized ego to block the sixth sense from working) and I told myself he was simply a man who knew what he wanted and he wanted me. But as I was emailing him my postal address I got a little shiver down my spine. Something wasn't right. My head and ego were busy telling me to shut up and take the money, but my sixth sense was hitting me over the head with a shovel.

I started to think a bit more about this whole scenario. A complete stranger was asking me to come to Africa for three months, he was sending me \$50 000 and he hadn't even met me. I like to think my books are good, but why would someone commit so much without even meeting me or at least getting some testimonials from other clients of mine?

So I decided to do a bit of homework. I rang the Australian Trade Commission in Johannesburg and spoke to a very helpful lady. I explained the situation, she was immediately alarmed and cautious, and she advised me to be the same. I gave her everything I had and she promised to get back to me. Within an hour I had the South African Federal Police on the phone warning me of the sting that I was caught up in.

Basically this is how it unfolds. The criminals troll through the internet looking for individuals who are experts in their field and, specifically, those who look financially successful. Then they build a business scenario that would attract their victim. From here they set up an office in a dodgy area where it is hard to trace numbers, but if someone was sent to check it out, they would find a legitimate-looking office with all the right signage and even company vehicles. They go to the extent of setting up a website, printing brochures and business cards, even making corporate DVDs.

Once the trap is set, they make contact with the individual with an offer that is too good to refuse. They will even send the money and tickets, which would convince even the most sceptical of people that the whole thing is legitimate.

Once the victim arrives, they are met at the airport and kidnapped. If the family of the victim doesn't pay a multimillion-dollar ransom, the person is never seen again. Simple as that.

All of a sudden I was smack bang in the middle of an international conspiracy. The police asked me to make contact one more time, to confirm with the criminals when the cheque and tickets were sent and they would then work out a way to track them down, possibly with me meeting them at the airport and the police swooping to arrest them (something I was not overly keen on).

So after much communication and correspondence with a range of government bodies I rang my contact, but the phone wasn't answered. The website had disappeared and the whole operation was gone. The police told me that there were many leaks and the criminals were probably tipped off by a contact on the inside.

I was ready to get that ticket and get on the plane for a trip of a lifetime to a remote part of Africa. How lucky was I that my sixth sense stepped in just when I needed it most? And, even more significantly, how fortunate that my sixth sense spoke up loudly enough for me to hear it.

Today I put a lot of credence in my gut instinct – in my business, in my personal life, in my health: everywhere. I have found that the more you listen to your instincts the more they evolve.

Your sixth sense is no different to any skill or muscle. The more you use it, the better it gets. I know when it kicks in because I get a strange feeling in my stomach and the front of my head. I notice a mood change within me and I seem to stop doing what I am doing and the issue that I am concerned about comes to the surface.

Sometimes it is even more simple and profound. Recently I had this nagging feeling to write down the important numbers in my mobile phone, just in case. A week later my phone died and all of the numbers were gone. Now is that coincidence? We have all experienced things like this and felt that little Twilight Zone sensation.

How about when you are thinking about someone and they ring in the middle of your thought? Once, I was thinking about a person I knew on a trip to Los Angeles. The next day I was walking along Venice Beach – and who did I run into? There was no logical explanation for this. He'd never been to LA before. I hadn't seen him for years. How on earth can these things happen?

I had a friend many years ago who didn't trust his own sixth sense but he trusted his dog. Anyone who did business with him first had to pass an examination from his blue heeler. I used to laugh when salesmen would come in and he would tell them that they had to stand still while his dog determined if they were ethical or not. If the dog started to growl, it was all over. Nothing would change this man's mind. And, as far as I know, he was never ripped off or had bad dealings with people.

Now, how does this concept fit into 'The Me Myth' I hear you ask? Well, it fits in perfectly. We often spend so much time overanalysing things in our lives that we stop listening to our sixth sense. Our mind gets so filled with monkey chatter, we weigh up so many options, we process so much data, that it is impossible for our sixth sense to be heard.

If we can teach ourselves to hear our sixth sense and listen to it, we will make better decisions. We all have a wonderful friend inside of us, a friend who is 100 per cent concerned about our wellbeing. If we ignore our friend, he or she will stop talking to us and then we will make many more mistakes and our life will be so much harder than it needs to be.

Spend some time getting to know your best friend again. They will never give you bad advice.

'We know so much instinctively, but sadly too many of us have simply forgotten how to listen.'

Key points

- 1. We all have our own sixth sense. We know it, but many of us have stopped listening to it.
- 2. We need to learn to hear that voice within again.
- 3. Your sixth sense may just save your life one day.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Do you believe in the idea of the sixth sense or gut feeling?

Have there been any examples of it in your life?

It is a subtle feeling, but one you can get used to. Allow yourself to hear your sixth sense by being aware and present, particularly when you meet new people.

Stop analysing the world within and explore the world around

We have all been told that travel broadens the mind and that we should ship our children to a poverty-stricken African nation for a year so that they get to see how lucky they are to be living in a modern, western world. Well, I agree.

I have travelled a lot, seen some amazing things and certainly grown as a result of it. To me travel has the ability to wake us up, to shake off the shackles of self-obsession, to make us realise the enormity of the world we live in and to appreciate the extraordinary nature of the people sharing this planet.

Travelling around the world, or around our own country, can be challenging. Even if you travel first-class and stay in five-star hotels, it still has its challenges, although they are a little cleaner and quieter. Slide down the food chain and travel with a bag on your back and a budget and things get more interesting. I have done both and I know which one I prefer. But, either way, you meet incredible people, do amazing things and have memorable experiences.

Travelling is challenging, even more so these days with increased security at most airports and the sheer volume of people on the move at any one time. Travelling is also confronting. We see things that we don't understand, that go against our own values or that we just don't like. Most importantly of all, travelling gets us out of our comfort zone and there is generally not a thing we can do about it. Bring it on, I say.

I have learnt more from travelling than just about any other experience I've had.

My books are published in India and I planned a trip to see my publisher in Mumbai and have a holiday travelling around the country. And what a few weeks it was. India opens your eyes and blows your mind.

It doesn't matter whether you are doing India first-class or on the back of a truck, your experience will be mind-blowing in every way. Every single thing I'd read about India was true. It is very ugly and unbelievably beautiful at the same time.

You don't 'do' India, it does you. From the moment you land you realise that this is a country steeped in tradition, which for all of its chaos and madness, works. I read a guidebook that said the most important thing to take to India is a sense of patience. Always have a book on you as you will stand in lines for hours and there is absolutely nothing you can do about it. No amount of fist-pounding, jumping up and down and yelling will make the slightest bit of difference. It will just make you look stupid and rude and the line will not move an inch faster for all of your protesting. I came away from India a much more patient man.

The crowds, the smells, the pollution and the endless noise are what I remember the most about India. It is a land of contrast and contradiction every time you turn your head. There are wretched beggars with nothing but rags on their backs, wallowing in filth with rabid dogs under the balcony of a five-star hotel filled with people having afternoon tea and scones. Both sides ignore each other. The

sheer mass of humanity moving through the streets and watching you is unsettling. They are not hostile, just envious. Drive from Mumbai airport into the city at sunrise and you will see kilometre after kilometre of sidewalks filled with people sleeping. People who get up with the sun, dust themselves off and then go to work.

I sat drinking Indian tea in a café in the small Indian city of Jodhpur, in the Rajasthan part of the country, watching the scene grow in front of my eyes. Away to my right was a lady going to the toilet in a gutter, close enough for me to smell what was happening; there was a bundle of rags with a badly disfigured hand emerging, moaning and begging me for money; there was a painted elephant coming up the street; a camel tied to a rail outside the café; dogs and cows everywhere, you could barely see through the smog from the cow dung; and the noise was incredible. As I looked around I realised that I was the only one who thought anything was strange because to the Indians around me this was completely normal. Very eve-opening indeed.

I was in a taxi in Mumbai and a homeless lady came up, opened the back door, threw two babies onto the seat and ran off. I looked at the taxi driver, but he kind of smiled and didn't say anything. I asked him if the children were his and he laughed a little. Then in very broken English he explained that this lady wanted me to have the children because I was white and rich and they would have a better life with me. I calmly let him know that I wasn't ready to be a daddy yet. During the whole episode the babies just laid there making gurgling sounds and laughing.

In true Indian style, there was a booth that you could drive to and drop off any babies who were abandoned in taxis. They think of everything in India. The mothers all go to the booth at the end of the day and see if they were lucky enough to have found a new owner for their children. I hate to think what must happen to some of these children.

India is a place that most normal people can't wait to leave. But

give it a few weeks and your heart will be yearning to go back there. I can't explain it, I certainly don't understand it, but it is the most emotionally confusing, challenging and beautiful place I have been to. I plan to visit India as often as I can.

Papua New Guinea is only an hour's flight from my hometown of Cairns. I have spent quite a lot of time in this country which, like India, is a place of contradictions. It is easily one of the most scenic countries I have been to, but like many pretty places, the politics are ugly. The capital, Port Moresby, has been ranked 'the most violent and dangerous city in the world', for very good reason. There are horrendous crimes committed between the locals and against the expat community by the locals. Rape, murder and violence are simply a part of life.

To live in Port Moresby as an expatriate means you live behind barbed wire fences and generally in high-security compounds. There are guns everywhere and you have to keep your wits about you.

I was walking down the main street of Port Moresby one afternoon and somehow I had got into the worst part of town. The gutters were red with the spit that comes from the locals chewing betel nut and lime to get a buzz.

As I looked up and down the street I realised I was the only white man in the vicinity and there were groups of locals standing around, looking at me with absolute hatred in their eyes. Luckily a police car came around the corner. They stopped, grabbed me, threw me in the back of the car and sped to the hotel where I was staying. Along the way they gave me a serious lecture about how close I had come to death that day. At the time people were murdered almost daily in that part of town.

I laid on the bed in my hotel room (with the door barricaded), trying to shake the sense of hatred that I felt in that street and how scared it made me feel. It made me understand fear and the feeling of isolation that many minorities must have every day. The feeling that some people will kill you simply because of the

colour of your skin makes you feel very small and vulnerable.

Of course you don't have to travel overseas to learn about life. Australia is huge, diverse and wildly big. I have been fortunate enough to travel to the far corners of this land, to some of the most remote parts of Australia. Along the way I have met some very colourful people and, at times, it has certainly felt like I have been in a different country. It is easier to travel in your own country because at least the people speak the same language (unless of course you get in a Sydney taxi, where a totally new dialect of Australian English is being used). But it still comes with its own challenges and experiences.

I could write a book about my own travel experiences, from trekking through the jungles of Borneo to meet orang-utans, to diving on the largest shipwreck in the world in Vanuatu, to being in absolute awe of everything on the streets of New York. The things I have seen, the people I have met, the emotions that these places evoked, stay with me forever.

It is really easy to stay close to home, but is it the way to grow as a human being? I don't think so. I also know that travel is not cheap and it takes some sacrifices to be able to afford it. But that is what makes it even more worthwhile.

From my experience with people, those who have travelled widely to a range of countries tend to be more worldly, understanding and flexible in their outlook on life. Those who haven't are more rigid, less accepting of others and less able to deal with the challenges that life throws at them. I know these are big generalisations, but I find it to be true.

We live on a planet that is getting smaller every day. We mix with many different cultures and know what is happening on the other side of the world minutes after it has happened. I recommend travel as a wonderful tool to open minds, to grow and to become more grateful for what we have in our own lives. The greatest thing about travelling is that you really don't get a choice - you have to open your mind. Find the money, take the challenge, rise to whatever the world throws at you and create incredible memories, experiences and life skills.

'Life is like a wonderful book. To really enjoy it you need to read all of the chapters.'

Key points

- 1. Travel means getting out of our comfort zone. This is how we grow in the most delightful way.
- 2. The more different the place you visit, the more you learn.
- 3. Five-star or backpack both have their own unique experiences.
- 4. Travel makes you better able to deal with challenge.
- 5. You don't have to go to the other side of the world. Travelling within your own country will teach you many great things and certainly help you to grow as a person.

It's time to change your Me Myth

What have you learnt by travelling?

Is it time for you to pack a bag again?

Where do you want to go and why?

Have you got a little lazy about travelling? Is it all too hard?

My 'Pretty Woman' experience

I had my own 'Pretty Woman' experience, which I am going to share with you now. If you aren't familiar with the movie it is basically a love story about a hooker and a billionaire. No, I wasn't a hooker or a billionaire, but I certainly learnt that victim or victor, the choice is ours. My experience taught me that what at first can seem like the greatest tragedy ends up being an incredible blessing. It is about taking what the world dishes up to us and making the most of it.

I was a professional diver for many years. I loved diving and it was a natural progression for me to turn it into a profession. I had my own dive shop, I taught people to dive and I did commercial work, such as recovering sunken boats, underwater photography and putting in moorings for things like helicopter pontoons. It seems like a lifetime ago.

I was working in Cairns, on the Great Barrier Reef, for a large Japanese company. We ran day tours out to the reef every day. The company had major operations in every country around the world so our Cairns Cruise company was just a dot on a page to our Japanese owners.

I was managing the installation of some new moorings for vessels out on the reef. Our team spent many weeks moving concrete blocks around the bottom of the ocean, ensuring that we didn't do any damage to the delicate coral that makes the Great Barrier Reef so spectacular. The deadlines were tight and I found myself getting stressed and spending more time in the water than I should to get the job done in time for its grand opening.

On the last day I went on a dive to check some shackles. I was only down for about 20 minutes in 18 metres (60 feet) of water, which is well within normal decompression table range. As soon as I surfaced I knew that something was very wrong. It felt like someone had stuck a thousand pins into my body and I realised that I had decompression sickness.

Decompression sickness is a condition where nitrogen bubbles form in a diver's body. They block blood supply, they press against nerves and they lodge in joints. Divers need to get recompressed quickly because the bubbles keep getting bigger and doing more damage as they grow, often leading to a painful death. The neurological symptoms I was experiencing – like being stabbed with a thousand pins over and over – is considered very serious.

It took a couple of hours to transport me to the local hospital, by which time I was in really bad shape. The pain was excruciating. It felt like someone had their hands inside of me and they were pulling on veins and arteries. I was certain that my head was going to explode and I started to wonder if this was the end.

I was put into a tiny recompression chamber with a nurse and they flew us both down to Townsville where there was a bigger chamber. Now I am not a small man, which soon became apparent as they tried to squeeze me into the chamber. It was a very snug fit. I was laying on my back, the nurse sat upright with my head in her lap and a knee by each ear. At any other time it would almost have been romantic (oh yes, I am sure that is exactly what this poor nurse was thinking).

Unfortunately for the nurse they had to super-saturate my tissues with fluids to help flush out the nitrogen bubbles. Of course, any fluids coming in had to come out. I could barely move my arms, let alone pee in a bottle, and this stuff was flowing out of me like Niagara Falls. Let's just say that the nurse and I had very few secrets left between us when we finally arrived in Townsville five hours later.

A crane was used to get us out of the plane and onto a truck and we started our drive into town. There was a procession of police cars, ambulances and fire trucks in front of us and, as I peered through the chamber window, it felt surreal.

When we arrived at the hospital the portable chamber was craned up three floors and connected to a bigger chamber. Finally we could move through and have the luxury of some space (and some attention to hygiene).

Now all the nurse and I had to look forward to was another nine or ten hours in the chamber together. I was in a really bad way, but I slowly started to feel better once we were in the bigger chamber. The aim of recompression is to put the diver under pressure to make the nitrogen bubbles small again and then to very slowly reduce the pressure (simulating bringing the diver to the surface), allowing the nitrogen to be released into the blood and passed out. It is very tricky and the doctors had to be careful not to get the nurse bent in the process. I had to breath pure oxygen for hours and every breath felt like someone was dragging sandpaper over my lungs. And I had many more hours of this to look forward to. The doctors can't knock you out as you have to let them know what is happening. You can't even take painkillers. All in all, it is not a very pleasant experience.

Finally we were back at surface pressure and my symptoms were still there, but greatly reduced, so they put me into intensive care and let me sleep. I ended up going back into the chamber a further six times for more treatment until the last of the symptoms simply wouldn't budge.

I had to spend the new few months recuperating and dealing with a number of ongoing issues. I had residual nerve damage in my feet, which meant my walking was funny and I would trip over quite a lot. My short-term memory was shot to pieces. I often forgot where I lived. So I made a label with my address on it and I stuck that on my car dashboard. 'Your address is 298 Draper Street. PS Your name is Andrew.' I would be out and about and completely forget where I was going, but I figured it was all good training for when I became old and senile.

After all was said and done I had suffered some brain damage. My neurologist said it was similar to going through a car windscreen at 100 kilometres an hour. There are some things my brain struggles to do but I think I have learnt to compensate and I don't notice it at all today.

Unfortunately, my doctor also told me in no uncertain terms that I could never, *ever* dive professionally again. If I got decompression sickness a second time there was a good chance it would kill me.

Even though I expected this news, I was devastated. Diving had been my life. I was the youngest Master Instructor in Australia. I had my own dive shop, which I'd bought when I was 18. I had dived around Australia, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. I had taught thousands of people to dive and I loved it. What was I going to do now?

It is funny how often we fail to appreciate something until it is gone.

The company I worked for were fantastic and offered me a job in sales and marketing.

Now I knew that everyone in sales and marketing wore suits and ties. I most certainly was not going to become one those people. I was a commercial diver. We had long hair, earrings and a very colourful collection of chequered flannelette shirts, blue jeans, bawdy T-shirts and cowboy boots. I was going to be an individual in a sea of suits.

I went to Sydney to represent the company at the largest tourism trade show in Australia. Travel wholesalers from around the world came to meet with tourism operators who set up booths to showcase what they were selling.

I was manning our booth, at the biggest event of the year, with our company CEO. I was dressed like a slob. I had a bad attitude and I virtually dared anyone to tell me to act differently. Deep down I think I was angry at the world because I couldn't dive any more.

So I sat behind my little desk and snarled as people walked by. No one dared to come in and speak to me, and even the appointments I had prearranged sat across the table from me looking nervously at their watches. The CEO dropped by from time to time and to his credit he didn't say much, but the look on his face said it all.

The day came to a close and I realised that I was going to fail at this new career. I hadn't sold anything. I hadn't even made any good contacts. Instead I had made a fool of myself.

I left the building and wandered the streets of Sydney, feeling ashamed of myself and trying to understand why I was so angry and upset. I realised that it didn't matter what job I was doing, I had to give it my absolute best. I wanted to be the greatest sales person ever. But I had no idea what to do next. Strangely I found myself inside a large department store full of men's suits. A very mature man approached me, introducing himself as the manager of the Men's Formal Wear Department.

Before I knew it I was blurting my story out to him. I had tears running down my face and he just stood there listening, nodding his head and putting a reassuring hand on my shoulder. When I was finished, he leapt into action.

In a matter of seconds I was getting measured up for a suit, he had arranged for a lady to come in and cut my hair, a tailor arrived with a sewing machine to adjust my hems and I became the centre of a hurricane of activity. The store had closed but these people stayed on and did my makeover.

A couple of hours later I stood in front of a mirror, clean-shaven, hair cut, in a thousand-dollar suit looking like a million bucks. I had a new matching leather briefcase, a smart pen, expensive shoes, the lot. I looked great and I felt amazing.

I was profusely thankful to this wonderful man and his helpers. Even though I had spent just about every cent in my bank account, I knew that I had made one of the best investments in my life.

I was so excited to get to the trade show the next day that I didn't sleep. I wore my suit most of the night parading around the room and looking at myself in the mirror, being careful not to crease it in any way. I had arranged to meet my CEO in the hotel lobby at 7 am the next morning. He walked right by me (twice) before he recognised me. His jaw hit the floor. He confided that he wanted to meet me early to tell me that he didn't think this was working out and I should head home.

That day at the trade show I was on fire. I made contacts with the leading international companies, I sold literally millions of dollars worth of long-term business and I absolutely, totally embraced my new life in sales. I finally got it.

From here I became the International Sales Manager for the company. I spent five years travelling the world. I had huge success, I saw the world from the comfort of a first-class seat and stayed at some of the finest hotels available. I learnt about different cultures, I got to see how the international world of business operates, I made some exceptional friends and I loved my life.

After I had enough of travelling the planet nine months of every year, I decided to settle down in Cairns and start my own marketing company. This eventually led to me writing my first book, 101 Ways to Market Your Business, which has led me to doing what I love – helping people to live the lives they really want. I have so much more that I intend to do and my life today gives me the opportunity to do it all.

What would I be doing now if I hadn't got decompression sickness?

I imagine my life would have gone in a very different direction. Every single day I take a moment to thank those nitrogen bubbles for turning my world upside down.

I learnt a lot of lessons from this experience. I learnt that sometimes what appears to be the very worst thing that could happen to us actually ends up being the very best thing that could happen. We simply have to let the story play out.

How many times have we been devastated when a relationship ends only to meet someone who is so much better for us in every way? Or got the sack from a job only to land the dream job that we wouldn't have even applied for if we were still stuck in the old job?

In times of chaos and change, it is important to try your hardest and not get caught up in the moment. Think big picture, look into the future and let events play out. We burden ourselves with so much angst and fear about changing situations, but if we let it evolve, we often end up exactly where we want to be, or in a much better place than we ever expected.

So now when I get fearful about change in my life I turn it into excitement and anticipation about the opportunities ahead.

The second most important lesson I learnt from my 'Pretty Woman' experience is that if you are going to do something, do it full-on. Don't play half the game, don't be passive and expect everything to work out your way. If life puts you into a situation that you didn't want, well at least give it 100 per cent. You may find that it puts you on the path to where you want to be, but the road there is simply a little different to the one you expected to take.

There is a saying that I am sure you have heard, but it is very apt here - 'When life gives you lemons, make lemonade'.

Too many people wear the shroud of 'victim'. The longer they wear it, the more comfortable it gets. If you really want to grow, ask yourself if you are giving it all that you can? Are you really putting your best efforts into your love-life, your work, your friends or even vourself?

If you are, I am absolutely positive that you are having an amazing life and that you are able to deal with whatever life throws at you. If your life isn't what you want it to be, this is a great place to start making some very big changes.

Being stuck in the midst of change is scary, but if you get out of your own head, out of your own fears and let the situation play out, who knows where you will end up?

Maybe you will have your very own 'Pretty Woman' experience.

'What may appear like a life-ending experience today, may prove to be a life-making event tomorrow.'

Key points

- 1. When we are in the midst of major challenge or upheaval, remember that the story has to play out in full before we know how it ends. Don't assume that it is a disaster.
- 2. Often we are going to end up in the exact place where we want to be, but the road to get there is not what we expected.
- 3. If you find yourself in a situation that you hadn't predicted, that is no reason not to give 100 per cent. In fact it is the very reason to give it everything you have.
- 4. If you want to win, play full-on.
- 5. Sometimes it really is better to row with the current rather than against because the stream is often taking us exactly where we want to go.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Do you play full-on in your life? Do you give 100 per cent whatever you do?

Are you in the midst of major change and are you filled with worry and anxiety about your future? If you are, how do you want it to work out?

Have you ever had a makeover? If you haven't, why not have one now? It feels great and it will change your life in many ways.

Is there anything that has happened in your past that you didn't like at the time, but perhaps you really should be grateful for? Perhaps like me, it changed your world.

If you truly want to grow give your greatest asset

There is little doubt that we live in a world where a lot of people need help. Some are starving on the streets, some are in war-torn countries, many have deadly diseases or emotional issues that make being an active member of society almost impossible.

At the same time, people are incredibly kind and giving to those less fortunate than them. How many billions of dollars are donated every year by very generous folk wanting to make a difference? Look at Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, two of the world's richest men who between them spend over \$60 billion to make the world a better place.

Throughout history there have been many incredibly rich people who have left a legacy of generosity to help others.

Obviously we don't all have billions of dollars to donate. Many people struggle to make ends meet, yet interestingly enough, the people with the least are often the most generous. We can all give something.

Whilst every charity needs money to operate, many need manpower more than anything else. They need people who are prepared to get their hands dirty, to do what others won't do and to help people directly.

We all have something to offer; the key is to work out what your most valuable asset is and then give it away to make a difference. I admire anyone who is generous enough to write a cheque, but if you want to grow as a human being, there are even better things to give – like your time, your expertise or even your name.

A few years ago I was approached by the Abused Child Trust (which is now called ACT for Kids), a not-for-profit organisation that has the mighty objective of wiping out child abuse in Australia.

They knew that I had a relatively high profile around the country and that I also had a childhood with extreme abuse and neglect. I assumed that they wanted me to give them some money, which I would gladly do, but they didn't. They wanted me to become an ambassador for them. I would promote ACT for Kids to people within my sphere of influence, talk at events and raise awareness about child abuse and what the ACT is doing about it.

Every year I make five or six presentations for them to various organisations and groups. I talk about the reality of child abuse, the many forms it takes, the real impact on children and the difference organisations like ACT for Kids make. I am living proof that, with a bit of help and support along the way, abused children can grow into successful people.

The wonderful folk at ACT for Kids realised that my profile and my own personal experiences were far more beneficial than asking me for a cheque. They can use me to help raise hundreds of thousands of dollars. It is a win/win situation all round. I love presenting for them and when I meet their counsellors and the people at the coalface who deal with some truly horrific things I know I am making a difference.

Another wonderful way to give is to offer your time to mentor

someone who needs help. I have done this a lot over my career, generally without even realising. Typically I meet someone who has a business and is struggling. My mentoring is about listening and letting them talk to get their frustration and anger out. Then I can gently give them advice based on my own experience to help steer them in the right direction. I let them know I am there for them, I don't expect anything in return, I won't judge them in any way and all I ask is that they are honest with me.

I realise now that this is one of the ways that I can help others. Listen to them, share my own experiences and give them support in any way that I can. I never underestimate just how important a few words can be in someone else's life.

If someone reaches out to you they are doing it for a reason. Even if you don't know what advice to give them, let them talk and honour the fact that they trust you enough to open their heart to you.

I have a friend called Peter. Every year he buys two big hams, loads them into the car with his kids and takes the lot to a homeless shelter. He gets the kids to carry them in and explain what the hams are for. They do this before they get any presents to open and Peter makes it a fun outing, but there is no doubt that this is a serious annual event. Peter is worth millions and he is very generous in other ways, but he gives up a couple of hours every Christmas morning, probably his most precious day of the year. Now that is generous.

Another friend and client of mine is a professional photographer called Steve Rutherford. His own life story should become a book. He was a prison guard at the notorious Long Bay Jail in Sydney, he was a federal police officer and he worked for customs. Clearly this is a man who has seen a lot and plenty of it not very nice.

I was hosting a fundraising event called Harald's House. The objective of the charity is to raise a million dollars to build a house for homeless kids living on the streets of my hometown, Cairns. Harald, who the house is being named after, is one of the most giving men on the planet. For the last 17 years he has collected food and helpers and set up a food stall in a local park to feed the homeless kids, some as young as three or four. Harald is remarkable in every way. He corresponds with some of 'his' kids who have ended up in jail (he writes over 300 letters per year). He has people all over Australia who write to him and stay in touch with him because they claim that he 'saved their lives'.

Steve was so touched by this event, and by Harald, that he offered to use his photographic skills to take images of the homeless kids, which could be used in promotional material and on the website. But he went one step further. He decided to make a book out of the images and raise corporate sponsorship so that the books could be produced for free. The Harald's House fundraisers could then sell the books for \$25 each and raise over \$100 000.

Now Steve is in full swing taking images, working with the helpers, preparing the food, meeting the kids and getting to know how it all works. He will spend hundreds of hours of his own time, at all hours, getting these images and the end result will be amazing. Steve is giving his greatest asset, his ability to take powerful images. It will not only raise money for Harald's House but also raise awareness about the plight of homeless children living on the streets of many regional Australian towns.

When I asked Steve why he wanted to do this he looked me in the eye and said that he wanted to make a real difference. He could have written out a big cheque, but what he is doing is so much more valuable.

Why do people give so much of themselves? Why has Harald spent thousands of nights feeding kids on the streets of Cairns? Why am I so passionate about preventing child abuse? Because by giving selflessly of yourself, you are rewarded tenfold with feelings of compassion, love and a sense of real satisfaction that you are making a difference and that the world is a better place because you are in it. Now that is not the reason to do it, but it is a lovely bonus.

The more you do for others, in whatever shape or form that may

take, the better person you will become. No one has enough time - all the more reason to give up some of yours. The more we value something, such as our precious time, the more important it is to give it away.

The Me Myth is all about the need to overcome this inwardlooking philosophy that keeps us small and close-minded. By looking outwards and helping others in need, we cannot help but grow as individuals.

'The less you have of anything the more it means when you give it away.'

Key points

- 1. To really grow the best thing we can do is give.
- 2. Money is important to give, but time is equally important.
- 3. The more you give, the more you receive but that is not the reason to do it.
- 4. The most content, peaceful and successful people are often those with the biggest hearts.
- 5. Anyone can learn to be a great giver.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Is there a charity, an organisation or a cause that you believe in passionately? What is it?

What can you do to help?

How much time can you commit to your cause?

How would you feel if you worked for your cause every day, week or month?

Inspired communication

Today we communicate more than ever – but do we actually say anything more significant? If anything, we communicate at a much more superficial level in spite of all of the new communication tools.

Words are powerful, whether they are spoken or written. I learnt this when I was still in primary school. My school entered a poetry competition open to every primary school in Australia. Each student could write a poem and they were sorted by age and then submitted to the judges. They received tens of thousands of entries and it was a surprisingly big deal.

We could write our poem about anything we wanted to so I wrote my poem about drunks. I used to see a lot of drunks near where I lived at the time.

I remember the poem went along the lines of a drunk opening the hotel door, he walks out followed by a waft of smoke and bar-room noise. He looks upon the back alley as his kingdom, the rats are his servants and the mound of rubbish his royal bed.

Somehow, I won the competition. I was so happy, until I found

out the prize was a pile of books and an Australian flag for the school and I got nothing. Just what a kid wants to hear! But what I did get out of it was an appreciation of the power of words and just how much impact they can have on people.

Since that time I have tried to be the very best communicator I can be. Being able to speak in front of a group of people doesn't make you a great communicator. Some of the most impressive people I have seen speaking have been terrible presenters. Some were really nervous, some mumbled, some were disorganised or late, but all of that was forgotten because what they had to say was so incredibly powerful and inspiring.

A few years back I was approached by the local businesswomen's club and asked to present at their monthly meeting. Typically there would be about 200 of the leading businesswomen in town attending this event and it was quite a big deal. I asked them if they would like me to talk about something to do with business, but they said that they would prefer to know more about me.

I was a little uncertain about what to say, so I decided to tell them my whole story, right from the beginning, much of which I have shared with you in *The Me Myth*.

About halfway through this 40-minute presentation I stopped and looked around the room. I knew many of these women and what I saw on their faces was a look of shock, some were even crying and some just sat shaking their heads. Others had huge beaming smiles and looks of pride spread from ear to ear. Whatever emotion they were feeling, I knew that for the very first time I had got through and connected at a very real level to a group of people.

At the end of the presentation I had an overwhelming response and many of the ladies came up and gave me a big hug. I had no idea that my story would have such an emotional impact.

A good friend of mine had snuck into this same event. He came up to me at the end of my presentation and he was really angry, which shocked me a little. He said, 'I have known you for almost 20 years and I had to come to a public talk to find out more about you in 40 minutes than I have learnt in 20 years.' My friend stormed off and I stood there a little perplexed.

Before that I rarely made mention of my earlier life, certainly not the ugly parts. I simply didn't think that anyone was interested in my background. I realised that I had been communicating all my life, but was my communication inspired? Not at all.

So why would we want to talk so openly and be so real? I often get asked if I feel exposed when I talk so openly about my life. Strangely enough I don't. The experience I have when I talk using inspired and real communication is so much better than the experience of just getting up and talking about business.

When I tell my story, I make fun of my past. Some people struggle with this because a lot of it is serious stuff, but I know that my experiences are powerful and they stir emotions, particularly in people who had to battle their own demons during childhood. I have had grown men burst out crying and run from the room, not what you would normally expect in a business environment.

When I am real and lay it on the line, saying things as they really are, I get incredible connection with people, powerful emotions fly, everything is just a bit out of control and I open my heart and speak from deep within. At the end I feel amazing, I feel inspired and I am filled with love and respect for those around me. I think it is hard to get that same level of emotional connection when you are holding back and saying what you think your audience wants to hear.

The world is craving real people, people who can talk openly and who can inspire simply by their actions. This is the most powerful of all communication and we all have our own great story to tell. It doesn't have to be about climbing Mt Everest or amassing a billiondollar empire. Most people can't relate to these feats. But they can relate to people who live a similar life to them, who have to deal with the same challenges and overcome them however they can. In other words, real people.

Inspired communication is from the heart. It is forthright conversation and communication that have power and impact. It is not just a pile of words spewed out for the sake of making noise. It is important regardless of whether you are speaking to a room with 10 000 people in it or just you and a friend having a chat over coffee. Life takes on a whole lot more meaning when you can communicate at this level.

That said, inspired communication doesn't come naturally for most of us so we may need to learn a few new skills. These are areas that I work on every day and I have found that it doesn't take long to get the hang of them.

Firstly being able to have inspired communication means being an excellent listener. Most of us are not, even though we think we are. How many times do we finish sentences, listen to someone else talking and turn the conversation to make it about us? To be an exceptional listener, which has to be the goal for anyone wanting to have deeper connection with others, you have to really listen to what people say. That means being patient, that means letting them finish their words, that means asking good questions at the right time and most of all, it means looking them in the eye and giving them your full attention.

To do this we have to learn to keep our ego in check. Anyone who has read some of Eckhart Tolle's work will be very aware of his views on keeping the ego under control and identifying when it has come out to play, particularly in conversations. Personally I don't think having an ego is all that bad, as it does drive a person forward to achieve, but we all know when someone has gone too far and become self-centred. No one wins when the ego is that in control.

The next stage of inspired communication is to be genuine. To say what you feel more than what you think. We are masters at intellectualising our feelings but it is so much more powerful to let the emotions be and find the words to express them rather than change them. If something makes you angry, talk about it with the passion

that anger deserves. If something makes you feel joy, then talk with the joy in your voice.

From here, we have to be prepared to talk openly and honestly. This means being vulnerable because you have to share parts of yourself that maybe you don't share very often. This is the part that I struggled with for most of my life, but once I learnt to be open, I grew to love it. You will make some people uncomfortable, or maybe it will challenge you personally, but if you hold back, your communication will always be at a lower and more superficial level and have less meaning and effect.

There is a book that I have read every year for the last 25 years. Clearly I am not a quick learner. It is Dale Carnegie's iconic piece, How to Win Friends and Influence People. It shows the value of connecting with people simply by making the effort to talk to them in an effective manner, rather than on a shallow level.

This book was written around 1930 but I don't think that there is a more relevant book on any shelf today.

If you can master the art of inspired communication there are many rewards. Connection is the most significant reward, especially as we live in a world struggling to connect effectively. Being able to connect at a deeper and more honest level with others will have a profound effect on each and every relationship you have, both personally and professionally. People will respond to your new level of communication by opening up and communicating in the same way. I have seen it and experienced it many times, yet it never ceases to amaze me. It isn't easy, but taking small steps and knowing how wonderful it is when you have truly connecting conversations with people will change your life. Please don't be afraid of being yourself, of being real and honest and saving it how you see it. And, last but not least, please don't ever think that you have nothing interesting to say. I have yet to meet any person on the planet who doesn't have something of value to say, even if they don't realise it yet.

'Sometimes we have to say a whole lot less to actually say a whole lot more.'

Key points

- 1. We communicate more than ever but we say much less.
- 2. Inspired communication is the way to really connect with people.
- 3. We have to learn to communicate again, by opening our ears and our hearts.
- 4. True connection means being brave enough to open up.
- 5. Master inspired communication and your life will become much richer and more rewarding.

It's time to change your Me Myth

How would you rate your communication skills?

How well do you listen?

Do you ever open up and talk from your heart?

How does it make you feel?

If you don't – what are you afraid of?

What is the worst that can happen if you open up?

Chain yourself to a tree once in awhile

I didn't learn much from an academic perspective during my brief stint at university, but I did learn a fair bit about life. One particular experience taught me a lot about being passionate about a cause.

I had two very good friends from my short stay at James Cook University. Junior, a fresh-faced third generation fisherman who had decided to become a marine biologist, was one. The other crony was called Filter because he had a goatee beard, which made him look like some bottom-dwelling filter-feeding marine animal.

Junior, Filter and I would run amok, doing the dumb things involving alcohol and pranks that first-year uni students tend to do. One afternoon Filter came running in with a flyer about a protest to stop the government bulldozing a road through the middle of the pristine Daintree Rainforest. We had no idea what it was all about but we thought it would be a great way to chase girls and have a weekend away in some exotic location so we signed up and began our new careers as protesters.

We paid ten dollars each to cover our share of the fuel and got into a bus full of people who were absolutely, totally committed to the cause. It was like a military operation in many ways. We were given a detailed briefing regarding our expected conduct (drugs were not tolerated as the protesters didn't want the police to be able to call us a group of drug-crazed hippies) and we were given the facts and figures about why this road should not go through. It was about an eight-hour drive to our destination so we settled down to a long night on the bus.

Along the way we would stop and pick up other protesters that had come into town to join the protest. There was a steady procession of them along the side of the road and it wasn't long until our little bus was full.

After an eventful trip we made it to the protesters' site. Now this was in the era of Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, Queensland's longest-serving leader. I didn't know much about Joh back then but what I learnt during my little adventure was that he wasn't afraid of being heavy-handed. Things were done Joh's way or the highway. He just loved hippies.

I found this out when our bus was searched on the way in. The police were present in big numbers, they had dogs, they were angry and they certainly didn't like hippy protesters. Not a nice feeling as we entered our very feeble-looking commune.

Inside we found a wonderful community that was remarkably well organised with washing, cooking and eating areas all neatly set up. Everyone lent a hand, the atmosphere was beautiful, with lots of musicians and gentle people wandering around half naked. Filter, Junior and I found ourselves in the midst of this little piece of paradise on somewhat false pretences. But we got into the adventure in our own way, each wandering off to get into various forms of mischief.

There was a huge bulldozer pushing the track through. There were other associated machines, trucks and workmen. The police

guarded the bulldozer day and night and our job was to hinder the operation as much as possible. As a group we would sit on the track in front of the bulldozers, chain ourselves to trees, taunt the workmen, sing peace-loving songs and at the end of the day head back to camp to talk about the day ahead.

It was a lot of fun but what really impacted on me was the passion that these people had to save the rainforest. Many had come from the other side of the country (some from the other side of the world) to put their lives on hold for however long it would take, to try and save this forest. I was so inspired by people seeing beyond themselves. This was about saving the Daintree Rainforest forever, not a concept that I had thought through. The fact that these people had nothing to gain personally from saving this forest was the biggest eye-opener for me. They were doing it because they believed it was the right thing to do. That was impressive.

I was also moved by the passion of the people who organised the protest. People who got up and spoke, and whose words evoked the real emotion of the situation, especially when other people were starting to get scared or worried. This was my first taste of true leadership and the role that passion plays in being a great leader.

I don't think I'd ever had anything that I felt passionate about before, but after that experience my flame was ignited. I had a taste for this passion creature and I wanted more. I felt that passion was what made colours more colourful, people more incredible, the world more amazing. I wanted to feel passionate and I wanted to make others feel the same – so I set about doing it.

Since then my life has been filled with passion on many different levels. I absolutely love what I do for work. Writing, consulting, presenting – they are all wonderful because I get to help other people. I loved my time as a commercial diver and teaching people to dive. I adored travelling around the world working for a large multinational corporation. I even had a blast knocking on doors and selling encyclopaedias. To me one of the greatest feelings in life is that sense of excitement and joy when you leap out of bed to start your day. Anticipation builds as you get ready for a new day ahead.

One of the things I really enjoy doing is finding out what a person's passion really is. I spend a lot of time sitting around talking business in meetings, but I always like to connect a little deeper to try and find that one certain thing that makes the person on the other side of the table sit up straight, show all their teeth in a big audacious smile and start waving their arms about all over the place. It's like someone has turned on their button and given them an injection of energy. It is the wonderful side of being human. There is no rhyme or reason to it but everyone has that one special thing that makes them light up like a Christmas tree. When they are in this passionate zone they become a different person. Passion is the fuel of life and the more we have the more we love our lives, no matter what we have to deal with.

Many books and philosophers will tell you that if you do what you love you will never have to work another day in your life again. I agree completely, but I also think that if you become passionate about life, everything becomes amazing. Why limit it to work? To me passion is a strong and barely controllable emotion that is infectious. Who wouldn't want that in their life?

One of the greatest tragedies I see is people who have lost their passion for living. They feel that their job or their business sucks, their relationship has flatlined, their friends are just going through the motions, and their health and vitality have stalled. Now I know that we all have our own stuff to deal with, but what amazes me is that the people who seem to have the most 'stuff' to deal with are often the most passionate about living.

I would go one step further and suggest that you look for the most sincerely passionate and energetic person in the room and take a few minutes to get to know them (they are normally easy to find because they seem to radiate warmth and passion). I bet they have had a life that has been filled with all kinds of trials and tribulations,

but somewhere along the way, they discovered how incredible it feels to get the blood pumping and the emotions flowing and to feel passionate about something.

Surely we all want to live in this zone rather than the other subdued, low-energy place where we often get stuck? But rest assured we can change that if we are brave enough.

If it has been a long time since you felt any passion in your life, it doesn't mean that you never will again. It just depends how much you want it. It takes energy to be passionate. There are days when I am just content to sit on the couch and do nothing but count the hairs on the back of my hand (which by the way seem to be increasing every year). Those are the days when I feel sad, or upset, or lost, or uncertain about the future. But I let those days pass and accept them for what they are. And then I get myself supercharged and I go forward, thinking about what can be, the future, the people I love, the opportunities ahead, the experiences I have had and those to come and, most importantly for me, the difference I can make to other people's lives.

Being passionate doesn't have to mean being loud or leaping around the room like a maniac. Sure it does for some people, but it is so much more than that. It is about that feeling deep within that simply feels right. That inner glow and warmth that makes you feel great about yourself and your life – even if it is far from perfect, you know it's getting better. There is a sense of peace that comes with finding your own passion, whether it be the joy of watching your grandchildren growing up or getting behind the controls of a Formula One racing car.

We all have the ability to be passionate. Sometimes we just have to find that one thing to get passionate about to get us started. If you keep an open mind you might be surprised which direction your one thing comes from. Try looking for passion in others. You might not share the same passion but their emotion is powerful and it helps when looking for yours.

How about that feeling when you first get together with a lover, the crazy passion that comes with the 'honeymoon' period? Why does it have to end? Why can't we have a passionate sexual relationship with our partner for life? Even if we don't make love five times a day it doesn't mean we can't be passionate about each other. Passion takes many shapes and forms – how we look into each other's eyes, how we kiss hello, how we spend time together – but all have the same joyous feeling.

We lose passion when we stop trying, when we give up, when we get lost and don't know what else to do, when we lose confidence in ourselves or those around us, or when we lose hope.

The answer to finding and keeping passion in your life is to address each of the areas that you know are not working. When we stop being focused purely on ourselves and start focusing on others, and we take the necessary action to make changes we want and need, the end result is a passionate life on every level.

By being aware of what is going on around you, by taking the time to stop and look, by being open to new people and new experiences, by looking at the world through the eyes of a child, we can reignite our passion.

Keep negativity at bay. Don't watch the news or read a paper for a while if it makes you despair. Go outside and walk through a park, right now. Instead of glancing over things, really look. Read numberplates, read signs, look at people's faces, listen. How many of these beautiful experiences do we miss because we are in a rush or because we have simply stopped looking, listening and feeling?

Being passionate about our lives is the birthright of every human being. Sadly many people have tragic lives, where there is little to be passionate about. Even more sadly, many people choose not to have passion in their lives for their own reasons. If you want a satisfied life, one with much happiness, satisfaction, connection and many wondrous experiences, you can have it.

I hope this book helps bring back some of the passion in your life.

'Never underestimate the difference you can make to others and the difference it will make to you in doing so.'

Key points

- 1 Passion is the fuel of life
- 2. We are all passionate, sometimes we just forget what to be passionate about.
- 3. If your life lacks passion, it's up to you to do something about it.

It's time to change your Me Myth

What are you passionate about?

What do you do about it?

What do you need to change to do it more often?

If you don't feel passionate about anything, think back to your childhood. What did you really love as a kid?

Why not try to relive some of this passion?

Are you blaming anyone else for your lack of passion?

The greatest teacher is Mother Nature

I was attacked by an octopus once and it was a life or death situation - I was intent on living and I was certain that I was going to kill that damn octopus. The life of a dive instructor is fraught with danger.

At the time of my attack I was teaching a group of students to dive at Shelly Beach in Sydney. It was a perfect place to teach diving; the ocean was always calm, the sand was soft and the beach had a gentle incline into the water. There was also enough wildlife to turn new divers onto the wonders of the underwater world.

Because of these features every dive school in Sydney used to frequent Shelly Beach and it was like an underwater highway. Often two groups of divers would collide and you would slowly pull apart only to find that you had lost two of your students and picked up four of someone else's.

Most of the instructors, like myself, dived at Shelly Beach ten or 20 times a week so we knew every little nook and cranny. We knew the local fish, we knew where the one isolated and eternally nervous crayfish hid and we all knew where the numerous octopi hid. As a dive instructor it's your duty to show marine life to your students and impress them by handling these apparently wild creatures (mainly to impress the girls, I might add).

Octopi live in holes in the seabed. They cover the entrance with shells, bits of coral and rock, and they blend in with the sea floor. They are the chameleons of the ocean. At Shelly Beach there were about ten octopi that lived in the bay on a permanent basis.

Dive instructors would lead the students to one octopus's lair, drag it out of its safe and sound home, hold it up for all to see and then ram it back into its burrow. This happened to each octopus about a dozen times every day.

I approached my octopus late one day and I suspected that something was wrong because as I reached out to grab it, it turned black and glared at me. I hesitated a little, but not wanting to look like a chicken, I reached out for him. Suddenly all I could see was a black body and two angry eyes stuck to my face mask. The octopus had shot out of his lair like a bolt of lightning, wrapped his legs right around my head and was now trying to bite my nose off (they have nasty beaks like a parrot).

He was really angry and while I didn't think he could hurt me too much, I was getting a tad nervous. His tentacles grabbed onto my, at the time, heavily pierced ears and I thought he was going to rip them off. Then I felt one of his tentacles trying to get into my mouth (at least I hoped it was one of his tentacles).

By this stage I could see through a sliver of my face mask and all of my students were sitting there, paying very close attention to this scene in front of them. I was giving them the okay signal, trying to reassure them that this was perfectly normal and I was in complete control. Finally one of my assistant instructors came over and tried to help. He grabbed the octopus by the head, stuck his knee in my chest and started pulling, which of course made the octopus even angrier.

Finally, after about 20 minutes, much laughter, a hint of panic and bruises all over my neck and face (which looked like love bites and no matter how often I told people that I was attacked by an octopus they always looked at me like I was some kind of sexual deviant), the ordeal was over. The octopus most certainly won that battle and I made a point of not messing with him again. He had been pushed too far and I was the last straw. From that day on whenever I went within ten feet of his home he would turn black and I would turn tail and swim away like the chicken I had become (octopi have amazing memories and they are very smart). Today octopus is my favourite food.

I have been attacked by a pelican, bitten by a kangaroo, electrocuted by a numb ray, mauled by an eel, stung by every kind of marine stinger possible, freaked out by an eagle, cut open by a goanna and held hostage by a monkey. But throughout it all, I have maintained an intense love of nature and living animals.

I am one of those people who chases after spiders with a jar to catch them and put them outside rather than swatting them with a newspaper.

I find incredible beauty and tranquillity in nature, and I use it at times when I am stressed out or feeling run-down.

There is a magnificent freshwater river about 40 minutes drive from my home. It is in the wettest part of Australia, getting over 4000 millimetres (or about 13 feet) of rain per year, so you can imagine how green and lush this place is.

Whenever I need to, I get up really early and drive there for a swim before anyone else gets there. The water is freezing, you can skinny-dip because no one else is mad enough to be out and about so early, and as the sun's rays start to poke through the rainforest canopy you can see rare animals like a platypus going about their business (I have yet to be attacked by one of these playful animals but I have to assume it is only a matter of time).

I know that not everyone loves nature and all of its critters as

much as I do. I remember when a friend of mine, Sue, came to visit from New York City. The closest she had come to seeing animals in the wild was the pigeons in Central Park.

At the time I was living in a very open house amongst the rainforest in North Queensland. We had everything coming through the place, from snakes to wild pigs. The insects were huge, the frogs came to eat the insects, the snakes came to eat the frogs, goannas and kookaburras came to eat the snakes and so on. One thing that we had no shortage of was spiders – big, mean hairy ones that looked scary but were completely harmless.

We all sat on the balcony with Sue, having some wine, and Sue became progressively more tense and agitated as animals emerged from the rainforest around us. The last straw was when a bat crashed into a window right beside Sue, a big python stuck its head around the corner (again, right near Sue) and a couple of native white-tailed rats, the size of a small cat, ran along the wooden railing to get away from the snake. Sue virtually collapsed, then she started screaming and became inconsolable. I had to take her to a five-star hotel immediately and she spent the rest of her stay in Cairns locked in her luxurious room.

It was quite funny but I really did feel sorry for her. She had spent her life hiding in her New York apartment where she could have 100 per cent control. She realised how much she was missing (though it scared her) and she left Australia planning to change her life and experience more of what the world could offer.

As Australians we accept our overactive wildlife as part of life. In most parts of the world, particularly in cities, wildlife is not a common occurrence, especially not wildlife that can kill you.

Living in the tropics for most of my life, and spending a lot of time underwater, I gave up being too worried about all of the things that can eat me or poison me or scare the daylights out of me – simply because there are too many to worry about.

My partner in crime, Dr Deb, has a house on the beachfront

about 50 kilometres out of Cairns. There are only a few houses there and a little beach, but it is quite common for a big crocodile to slide out of the muddy water and lay on the beach in front of our house for a few hours. It shows that raw and wild side to nature that I find so appealing.

Now I have digressed a bit here to share some of my experiences with you, but my point is that many people find great energy and inspiration in nature, and I am one of those people. It recharges, it invigorates, it teaches and it transforms people. Who can argue about the power of watching a miraculous sunrise anywhere in the world?

Nature puts our lives into perspective. We spend so much of our time over-analysing, over-thinking and often doing everything but living. Nature just happens, without a lot of thought, and generally it is perfect. We can all learn a powerful lesson from nature and get on with living.

The beauty of nature is all around us, even in the biggest cities. Animals find a way to adjust to people and move back into populated areas. Plants do the same. The sun rises and it sets. Powerful storms clear the air. Developing an appreciation for nature simply involves sitting quietly and watching. Nothing more.

In a world of chaos, commitments, mayhem and demands, nature is the greatest therapy. People I know who share this realisation seem to have a bigger spring in their walk and an appreciation for all creatures great and small, including other humans.

My love of wildlife and wild places has taught me about perseverance, survival, making hard decisions, patience, beauty, sorrow, happiness and so much more.

Anyone who has looked into a whale's eye or held hands with an orphaned orang-utan knows that there is a depth to nature that we barely understand.

Fortunately the beauty of nature and the lessons it can teach us are never far away. Many people share this love so there are

thousands of books, incredible documentaries, museums, wildlife parks and aquariums. I find incredible calm by flicking through the pages of a beautiful landscape book, no matter how much craziness is around me.

Of course, if this isn't enough, you can always just look out your window.

'Nature is life ... without all the thinking.'

Key points

- 1. Nature will teach us many lessons if we take the time to listen.
- 2. We can learn more about living by watching what happens in nature.
- 3. You don't have to go to the Amazon rainforest nature is all around us and it is magnificent.
- 4. Make nature part of your life.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Do you spend any time sitting in a park or on a beach, just listening and watching?

Much of Chinese and Japanese philosophy is based on observations of nature. Spend a few minutes searching online for quotes by Confucius, Lao Tzu and Buddha.

Next time you are feeling stressed out and overwhelmed, find your

own piece of nature, take off your shoes and sit quietly. See how long it takes your stress to pass.

Have a look around your own home, garden and neighbourhood for signs of nature. You will be amazed at what you find.

Figure out what you don't want in life

We spend years trying to come to terms with what we want our lives to look like, what we want to do for work, where we want to live, who we want to be in love with (like we have any control on that one) and a hundred other variables. We have so many choices it can be confusing and add to our constant feeling of over-analysis paralysis. I have spent many years figuring out what I want to do, only to slowly and inexplicably move closer towards my target without actually realising it.

We all go through crossroads in our lives. These are the times where we change our jobs or careers, our lover or our home, or even the city or country where we live. I always find that there is a period of introspection or solitude in between the old and the new stages of our lives. This is a period where you reflect on your last job, lover or home, and where you get a chance to be removed from the situation and the emotions attached to it. It is a chance to think about the latest stage of our lives and what we liked and didn't like.

Whenever I am at one of these crossroads I make a list of what I don't want in my life, ever again, based on what I just experienced.

A wonderful thing happens when you do this. If you figure out what you don't want in life, working out what you do want becomes much easier to define. I have done this throughout my life and 'suddenly' I find myself living the life I want, even though I didn't necessarily plan it this way. I kind of 'anti-planned' and, by eliminating a pile of negative things, I reached my life today.

Let's talk about relationships. My first really serious girlfriend was great, very caring and nurturing, but when we were together we both drank a lot and partied pretty hard. Our house always had people drinking in it. After our relationship had run its course I made the decision that I didn't want to be involved with a woman who drank too much. I realised that it really wasn't my scene, I had grown out of it a long time before and I could see where it led: to borderline alcoholism, poor health and a wasted life. None of which I wanted.

Now I don't think ill of her for living this life, after all I lived it too, but I realised that it just wasn't for me. The same has to apply for any of the 'don't wants' that we discover. It is unfair to judge other people, or try to change them; instead be clear that this is your choice about what you don't want in your life.

For example, I was in a relationship with an English lady for a while and it was very claustrophobic. I could barely get five minutes to myself and it drove me crazy. But it wasn't her fault; it simply made me realise that, when I am in a relationship, I need a partner who understands that I like time to myself.

The list goes on and I have no doubt that my former partners also realised a few things about what they don't want in a relationship by spending time with me. But when I make up my list of things that I don't want in a relationship, the opposite of all these things becomes clear.

I don't want a partner who:

- abuses their body by drinking or taking drugs

- is overly needy and clingy
- is racist or ignorant of others
- has no self-respect
- is judgmental
- is critical or negative
- doesn't like to travel
- is dishonest
- has no compassion for others

The end result of this is that I want a partner who has a positive lifestyle, who is independent enough to give me the space I need and happy for me to give her the space she needs. She will be worldly and understanding of the plight of others less fortunate than us and she will have a high level of self-respect. She will not be judgmental or overly critical of others. She will love life, really enjoy travelling and be energetic. She will be honest and open and committed to growing as a human being, and very compassionate towards others.

Clearly a tall order, but I know what I want in a relationship. Could I have been that specific if I didn't first figure out what I don't want? I doubt it. Lucky for me I managed to find a lady who has all of the above and more. I have seen her 'What I don't want' list and. believe me, I need to lift my game!

The same principle applies to jobs. Working out what we really didn't like about our last job, or the company, or the people we had to work with is often easier than figuring out what you want in the new job. I know for me my list of 'don't wants' for my career evolved into something like this.

In my work I don't want:

- to be on call 24/7
- to be wet and cold all the time (from my life as a commercial diver)
- to have to work seven days a week
- to be away from home all of the time

- to be limited to how much I can earn
- my work to result in a bad lifestyle
- to be stuck in a boring, repetitive job
- someone telling me what to do every minute of the day
- to be limited in any way
- to have to work with people I can't relate to
- not to make a difference to other people's lives

This list has grown over the last 20 or so years. What I was left with was a job where I can work the hours that I want, where I have the freedom to work anywhere I like, to have the potential to earn a lot of money, to have variety, to not have a direct boss looking over my shoulder and to really be unlimited in what I can do and where I can do it (and to be warm and dry when I want to).

So now I am a writer, who can pretty much live or work anywhere in the world when it suits me, with the ability to make a good living and the freedom that I love and crave. If you told me 20 years ago that I would be in this position I wouldn't have believed it for a second. But by working out my 'don't wants' over a period of time, my life was slowly but surely pushed into the direction I did want.

I have had this discussion with a lot of people, in various stages of their lives. Normally they are stuck on what they want to do and where they are heading. It is a terrible place to be, not being sure of our purpose in life. With the mass of information being thrown at us, it gets even more confusing because the options seem unlimited.

If you can figure out what you don't want in life, you are halfway to figuring out what you do want. From here your decision-making processes become so much easier and your mind becomes much clearer. I am a bit of a list person. I constantly get teased about my need for lists – to do lists, project lists, ideas list, goals list – but they work for me. I always find that the decision-making process becomes much easier when the information is on paper in front of me.

We are all different. Writing a list may not work for you but it

has helped a lot of people I have met to make big decisions in their lives (and also to avoid repeating the same mistakes). Try it out on one aspect of your life by making up your own list of 'don't wants' and see what comes out the other side in your 'do want' list. Then see where you are at today.

'Figuring out what you want out of life becomes so much easier when you know what you don't want.'

Key points

- 1. When you figure out what you don't want, figuring out what you do want becomes so much easier.
- 2. This applies to every aspect of our lives.
- 3. Once you are clear about what you want in life, it generally has a way of finding you.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Pick one part of your life and work out what you don't want.

So can you see now what you want?

Go through each part of your life - love, finances, work, relationships – and figure out what you don't want. Then, most importantly, work out what you do want in each area of your life.

Why worry?

Some of us seem to worry about things much more than others. Those of us who do worry sit back in wonder at those people who seem to breeze through life seemingly without the slightest concern, even when their world is falling apart around them.

I grew up a worrier. As a little kid, not having a whole lot of security or stability created a world of uncertainty for me. At times it was good, but most of the time it left me wracked with a whole pile of 'what ifs', which scared me half to death.

Now just because someone is a worrier doesn't mean they are a negative person. Generally worry is an internal complaint and you rarely even know a person is worrying. I am incredibly optimistic about life, but I still worry. It is important to be clear on that point.

From my observations, it seems that we pick up the worry gene from our parents or whoever brings us up. When you meet a worrier, look back into their family tree and I am certain you will see a long line of worriers, sitting in the branches fearful that they will fall out.

The old lady who brought my sister and me up was a constant

worrier, mainly about making ends meet. So what do I worry about? What did my sister worry about? You got it. I have certainly had some tough times financially, but I always get through and I have finally conquered that part of my life. But do I still worry? Absolutely.

We worry about so many different aspects of our lives that at times it can be overwhelming. There are lots of things that can go wrong but the very act of worrying creates its own set of issues to worry about. Now we are heading for ulcers, insomnia and exhaustion and, in the long run, more serious challenges such as anxiety and depression. The results can be fatal. So there is great incentive to stop worrying, if for no other reason than to live longer. The real incentive is that if you can get control of your worry, you can redirect that nervous energy to making your life more enjoyable and fulfilling.

But it isn't easy to give up worrying, especially when it has been a constant companion for a very long time. We can become almost too comfortable with it, to the point where if we stop worrying, we worry because we are not worried. As crazy as this may sound to any non-worriers, those afflicted with this ailment will be nodding their heads in agreement.

When we worry we let our fears in. It is really hard to grow as a person when you are constantly in a state of fear. The longer you have had negative habits, the harder they are to get rid of, but you can change them. A small change here, a small change there and before you know it you are much closer to the life you want and deserve. So how can you overcome this life of worry?

I don't believe that there is one simple way to wipe worry out of our psyche, especially if you have lived with worry for most of your life. Instead I would like to suggest a range of techniques. One or more might just resonate with you enough to help you overcome your own battle with worry. So let's get started.

Dr Susan Jeffers wrote the wonderful book *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*. The underlying theme in this book is the importance of

developing the belief that whatever the world throws your way, you will deal with it, no matter how hard it is.

As life rolls on we get to see this in action. We all recover from a broken heart, we get over money hassles and the pain from the death of a loved one lessens with time. In others words, experience becomes a good friend. It lets us see the bigger picture. I survived the death of my sister, even though at the time I didn't think I would. Now I know that whatever the world throws at me I will deal with it and survive. I might not like it at the time, but I will survive and I will certainly do everything in my power to grow from it.

If you spend a moment thinking back about all of the challenges that you have had to deal with and that you survived, why on earth wouldn't you survive the challenges ahead? Generally we don't give ourselves enough credit for being survivors. And we often don't make the mental leap that if we have survived this long, why won't we survive, and ideally thrive, for a few more years yet? If you really believe that you can survive whatever the world throws at you – you will.

When you are a good worrier you learn how to turn a molehill into a mountain in a heartbeat. Your mind can race years ahead and see the myriad of problems and fears hurtling your way. If you are one of these kinds of worriers you need to bring your focus back to the present and overcome the urge to let your fears get ahead of you. Now this is no easy feat, but like most emotions and attitudes, the more you do it the better you get at it. Every time your mind starts racing – STOP. Don't let it race away, stick to the facts and what you know about what is happening, keeping everything right here and right now.

Ironically, the next technique might seem like I am saying the exact opposite. But remember, worries come in all shapes and sizes, and what I am trying to do is to provide an 'anti-worry solution' that will work for you. So if you find you worry about a particular thing a lot and the worry paralyses you, this might help.

In reality most of what we worry about never happens. Yet that doesn't seem to stop us worrying. I guess that is because we don't know what will become reality and what won't. Horror film-makers have used this premise very successfully for years, playing on the power of our fear of the unknown.

Let's say you are worrying about losing your job, maybe things are going on around you to give you reason to worry, or perhaps it is just worry for worry's sake. Close your eyes and visualise that you have actually lost your job, go through the initial panic and then start to see yourself without a job. What will you be doing now? Imagine the types of companies you will be aiming to work for. Or perhaps it is time for a change of life and you'll move to that place you have wanted to live for years? Or maybe you can take on a job with less pressure so you can spend more time with your kids? Or perhaps now you can finally start your own business? Or, at long last, you can have a few months holiday to get into shape, relax, write a book or do a course of some kind?

By thinking through the situation and looking beyond the immediate panic and fear of what could happen, a lot of the sting is removed. It almost seems like it would be a blessing if you lost your job. This doesn't work in every situation that we can imagine (as we imagine doom and gloom really well), but it has certainly worked for me over the years. Let me share an example of how this 'thinking it through' process worked successfully for me during a very challenging time in my life.

A few years back I honestly thought I was going to go broke. My biggest client got into financial trouble, my business partnership was a disaster and cash flow was non-existent. All kinds of issues appeared out of nowhere and they seemed insurmountable.

I was almost paralysed with fear and worry, and I started the inward, downward spiral. Then I started to think about what would happen if I went broke. I would have a lot more time to write, to exercise, to spend time with my family and friends, and to do a few

more of the things that I really loved to do but rarely found the time for. I would have a new experience that would teach me new things about life and about myself. Whilst it didn't stop the fear or worry totally, having a plan for what would happen if I was forced to go bankrupt made the idea much easier to handle.

Fortunately I survived – once again, I was worrying about something that didn't happen.

That's partly why it is also important to get the facts straight before you start worrying. A lot of worry is caused by idle gossip, hearsav and rumour – nothing factual. I have learnt the hard way to ensure that I have all of the facts before making a decision or becoming concerned about a particular situation.

Clearly worry has many shapes and forms. The secret is working out a way to manage and overcome it that works for you. It might be living in the now, it might be playing it out in your mind and coming to terms with the worst that could happen or it might be simply learning to accept what life sends our way – after all if you can't change it why worry about it? But we all have to work out what works for our particular kind of worry. Sometimes doing simple things can be all that it takes.

Being grateful for what you have is a wonderful way of lessening the impact of worry. My partner, Deb, has developed a great routine to overcome worry. When she wakes up her first thoughts in the morning are about all of the things that she is grateful for in her life. This takes away the emphasis on the things that she would normally worry about. Most of the time I make it onto the list of things to be grateful for, but if I have been naughty I might slip down a notch or two.

Making others happy is also an excellent way to break the worrying habit. There are many examples of how to do this throughout The Me Myth and they all work. It is really hard to worry when you have a big smile on your face and a warm feeling deep within. It also helps you gain perspective – sometimes your own worries pale into insignificance when you realise the difficulties other people are facing and the ways you can help them.

Worry makes us focus inwards, sometimes it makes people stop eating, sometimes they eat too much, they can stop exercising, smoke, drink, take drugs and get addicted to virtually anything. To reduce the risk and impact of worry it is really important to eat well, get plenty of sleep, reduce stress in positive ways like exercise (gentle or vigorous) and by occupying your time with positive activities and positive people. So many of our daily issues can be resolved simply by living a healthier life.

If you want certainty you have to live a very dull, protected life. If you don't want to get eaten by a shark, don't go into the water. That is one worry that you can take off your list. But I couldn't imagine not swimming, so I have come to terms with getting eaten by a white pointer (okay, I admit I won't enjoy the experience but I guarantee I will give the damn thing indigestion).

I wouldn't say that I have beaten the worry bug but I certainly don't let it rule my life. I know that when I get tired and run-down it seems to sneak up on me. But I use the techniques above to take control of my head, push the worry away and stop it from controlling me. For that I am grateful. If you are a worrier, don't let it reduce the quality of your life or make you live in fear of what will probably never happen. Step up and banish worry from your life.

'If you live your life worrying about swallowing a fly, you will never open your mouth.'

Key points

1. Most of what we worry about never happens. So why do we spend so much time and energy worrying?

- 2. If something is really worrying you, think it right through to the conclusion that you are scared of. Now how does it feel?
- 3. If you can master worry, fear will have far less grip on you.
- 4. Removing worry and fear from your life allows you to enjoy the positives and live a healthier life.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Pick something you are really worried about. Now, think about what would happen if it came to be reality. Think it through all the way and look for the positives. They are always there and they may not necessarily be positives just for you.

Whenever you are worried about something take a few minutes and apply this process. Once you make it a habit, life will become a lot easier

If there are things that you can't control, at all, yet you find yourself worrying like crazy, focus on the things that you can change.

It's time to be honest

Let's not beat around the bush, we all lie through our teeth at times in our lives and the person we lie to the most is generally ourselves. Well this chapter talks about the need for honesty in our lives and at the same time the need to deal with issues head-on. Often the two are closely linked. There are the lies that we learnt as kids to stop us getting into trouble, a pattern we carry into adult life, and there are the lies we tell ourselves to make us feel better and to cover our own perceived inadequacies. It's time to stop the lies and confront vourself.

During my life I have lied about lots of things. As a kid I lied to avoid getting into trouble.

As an adult, if a lady asks me if her bum looks big in a dress I am going to lie and tell her she looks great, no matter what. (Men really need some kind of amnesty for those questions.) There is no excuse for downright lies about infidelity, stealing and bad behaviour, but they are not the types of lies I am talking about here.

The lies I really want to talk about are the lies we tell ourselves. I learnt about honesty by meeting my very direct partner, Deb. Now I am not saying that she is little Miss Perfect in the honesty stakes because she is human, but she made me stop and question my own acts of dishonesty with myself and it really opened my eyes. I considered myself to be an extremely honest person and I took pride in that. But when we lie to ourselves we also get good at justifying it.

Shortly after I met Deb, I was going on a trip to Melbourne. I planned to have dinner with my ex-wife, as it had been a while since we had caught up. Our divorce was very amicable and we did our settlement over a cup of coffee one morning. Since then we have tried our best to be supportive of each other. I thought about telling Deb I was going to see Caz, but I thought that if I told her she would get upset. Now Deb is not that naïve, so a few nights before I was heading away she asked me if I was seeing Caz in Melbourne. I told her that I was and we ended up having a huge fight, we said some horrible things to each other and parted ways that night.

Of course I was very sanctimonious about the whole ordeal. There were no evil intentions, I just didn't tell Deb to protect her. How noble of me. In reality I didn't tell Deb because I was scared of her reaction. I was afraid and really I was trying to protect myself. I learnt that night that not saying something is as much of a lie as not telling the truth, and that is where I think many of us go wrong.

The old excuse 'I didn't want to hurt you' is thrown around way too much. It really translates into 'I really didn't want to deal with your response to what I should have told you'. Being honest is sometimes very hard. It might mean that you hurt someone, it might mean that they no longer want to be with you and it might cost you in many ways, but the reality is not telling the truth will probably cost you far more.

I have lied to myself about so many things. I have lied about how I feel about relationships I am in. I have lied about working myself to death to avoid confronting issues in my marriage. I am disappointed in myself for acting this way and I am certainly not going to make

up any excuses, even though I have about a hundred on the tip of my tongue.

I know that I have lied to myself to avoid dealing with issues. Did my issues get any better by lying about them? Absolutely not.

Of course if we were better at confronting our issues perhaps we wouldn't feel the need to tell fibs.

I used to know this amazing old man. His name was George and he was tough as nails. When he was 13 he worked as the bagboy for local gangsters in Sydney in the 1930s. He used to go around the brothels and pick up the money. Some men tried to mug him down an alley one afternoon and he shoved a gun down the biggest man's mouth and told him what would happen if they didn't get lost. George was from that old school of hard men who solved issues physically. Ironically, he was a loving father, having remarried late in life and, when I knew him, he had a seven-year-old daughter who he absolutely doted over.

One day when I was about 15, George sat me down and told me that he was going to give me some advice. He gave me a cigarette and a beer (he knew what kind of a kid I was) and he told me, 'Son, if you have a problem in life you confront it and you confront it straightaway.'

He went on to explain that in his life he had always seen situations get out of hand the longer they went on. When people start telling lies, they keep telling lies until they forget what is the truth and what is not. If you have a problem with a person you pick up the phone (my words, not his – I hate to think what George would have done if he had a problem with someone) and confront them. Simple words indeed, but they are words that work.

There have been many situations in life that I have dreaded dealing with. But at times like that I find there are two options. I can lie to myself and hope the issue will go away, or I can deal with it head-on. I always hear George's voice in my head saying, 'If you've got a problem – front it.'

When I lie to myself and choose to ignore the issue I feel a part of me dying. When I confront an issue head-on, I feel strong and relieved. It is over and done with.

We can all grow enormously as human beings by simply being absolutely honest and dealing with the issues we face in life head-on. The two are closely related. Being strong enough to be honest with ourselves and those around us will help us to deal with our issues.

Every day I make the commitment to be honest with myself and those around me, even if it is hard to do. I also commit to taking action on issues and challenges that come my way, right then and there. I have certainly found that the more I address problems or issues in my life the less I need to lie, to myself or others. So the two concepts go hand in hand and they do require some reprogramming of old habits, like most of the topics I talk about in *The Me Myth*.

'Problems are like diets. The longer you put them off the more you have to lose.'

Key points

- 1 We all lie and we lie to ourselves most of all
- 2. Not telling someone something is as much of a lie as being blatantly dishonest.
- 3. If you have a problem confront it now.
- 4. Being honest can be really hard in the short term, but it pays off in many ways in the long term.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Is there any part of your life that you are lying to yourself about?

What are you scared of?

Every time you tell a lie – to others – ask yourself why you are lying? What are you scared of?

You don't need to lie. Get it out of your life. The minute a lie starts to leave your lips – stop. Tell the truth.

Practise living lie-free for one week – see how you feel.

Make a decision and move on

There are all kinds of excuses that stop us making decisions. I know because during my life I have used them all, many times over. Good leaders make decisions. Good people make decisions.

I remember a great story about an American general. The US army was deciding whether or not to buy some new weapons. The cost was in the billions but the decision to proceed was proving difficult. Millions and millions of dollars were spent assessing the options, experts argued for and against the acquisition, the military itself was divided.

At last one general was given the task of making the final decision. He was given a presentation, where both sides of the argument could present their cases, reams upon reams of information were produced from the millions of dollars in research and everyone involved argued passionately for their respective side.

After all of this, he made his decision in ten minutes. Everyone was stunned. This was such a huge decision, how could this man possibly respond in such a short amount of time?

The general's response was simple – the arguments for and against

were equally balanced. Both cases were valid and there was clearly no clear-cut winner, otherwise this decision would have been made long ago, before all of this time and money was spent.

The only responsible course of action he could take was simply to make a decision. If he was wrong, time would tell, if he was right, time would tell. There was no other way to move forward. Someone had to make the call.

Many of us have lost the ability to make decisions, mainly due to living in a constant state of overwhelm. Now I am not talking about making a decision about what to have on our pizza, but more significant decisions like the direction we want our lives to take, decisions in our relationships and other important and real areas of our lives.

I think we need to learn to make decisions again, particularly on the big issues. One example that I will share is not necessarily a happy story but it is to do with my relationship with my father. I grew up without him in my life – in fact, I was told that he was dead. So when I found out he was wasn't a lot changed in my life and I had to make a very hard decision.

I met my father for the first time when I was 22. It was a very strange experience, to say the least. I received a phone call from a friend who said that my father had tracked me down and wanted to come and see my sister, Wendy, and me. This is the phone call that most orphans want and it was easily the biggest phone call of my life.

A few days later we headed to Sydney airport to meet our dad. We were both very nervous, filled with a combination of anticipation and trepidation as we stood waiting at the gate for our father, Larry, to come down the walkway. We waited and waited and still no sign. There was, however, a strange-looking man standing a few feet away who kept looking up at me and smiling. Finally it dawned on me – this was Larry.

We all hugged and kissed and cried. It was just like a scene from

those shows where people are reunited after 50 years apart. There were so many questions to ask, so much to say and so many emotions that it was all a blur.

We spent the next few days just hanging out together and getting to know one another. The first thing I noticed was that Larry liked to drink, *a lot*. At first I thought that he was just caught up in the moment, then I realised he was actually an alcoholic. The second thing that concerned me was that he virtually ignored Wendy and her beautiful son, Ric. This made me very angry. He was all over me yet he hardly seemed to acknowledge Wendy. At that stage I was a successful dive-shop owner and I had an exciting life with some money in my pocket. I mentioned it to Wendy and she just said it was a father—son type thing, which I accepted but didn't really believe.

We asked all of the questions you ask of a parent that left you as a baby and never came back, and Larry answered them in his own way. We were not there to be angry or accusing; it was more a desire to try and build a family unit. We found out that we had two half-sisters and that was kind of nice.

Larry went home after a few days. Things were a little strained between us all. I was still grumpy because he'd ignored Wendy and because he was a boozer. The icing on the cake came when he started asking me for money.

In the following months there were lots of late-night phone calls from him, telling me how much he loved me and how important I was to him. I really struggled with this. I told him that I barely knew him but I was willing to see how things worked out. The phone calls continued and I got sick and tired of being woken up in the middle of the night with a drunken Larry rambling down the end of the phone. My feelings of anger dissipated and turned into sadness and sorry for him. His life was empty, he had made quite a lot of mistakes and he was caught up in his own self-pity.

But at the same time I made a very big decision. Twenty-three years ago this man had donated some sperm. After that there hadn't been much more contribution. I didn't need a father now, I'd needed one all those years before. I was prepared to try and make our relationship work as friends but I certainly wasn't going to get caught up on the guilt trip of 'he's your father'.

I told Larry that we could work on being friends, but I chose not to have alcoholics in my life, so he would need to do something about that. He didn't, so I stopped all communication. I can empathise, forgive and understand pretty much anyone, but I choose wisely the people I let into my life.

I am sure some people will find my decision harsh. The bottom line is that I made a decision, a very tough one. Throughout my life I have often struggled with making decisions, particularly hard ones. The situation could have dragged on and been a long and tumultuous relationship, one that would have been filled with disappointment and challenge. Tough stuff, I know, and probably not a situation that most people will find themselves in but it illustrates my point.

How many of us waste years in a dead-end job or relationship because we don't make a decision to do something about it?

Part of the whole over-analysis paralysis issue is that feeling over-whelmed stops us from making a decision. I meet so many business owners who should simply get out of their business. It doesn't make them any money, their lives stink, there is nothing on the horizon that is going to change and worst of all they know it, yet they get stuck on making the decision to let go of the business and get on with their lives.

How often do we spend way too much time trying to make a decision? Should I leave this job? Should I marry this person? Should I move to another city? Should I have tuna or chicken for lunch (okay, this one is really only here for a laugh)? I know that these are all big decisions that shouldn't be taken lightly, but this word 'should' breeds a race of procrastinators.

When it comes to making decisions, I try to adopt the following approach as much as possible:

- I make sure I have the facts (not the emotions)
- I listen to my intuition what is it saying?
- I think about the worst that can happen
- I think about the best that can happen
- I make a decision and I accept responsibility for making that decision

I know too many people who have spent a lifetime making a decision. By the time they do, it is too late. Sometimes right or wrong doesn't matter as much as making a decision does.

There is also a sense of relief when you finally make a decision. Some people must go through life so tormented because they struggle to make decisions, even the most simple ones. It is very powerful when you stand up and say, 'I have made a decision – I am going to ...' The more you say it the better it feels.

The final part of this decision-making process is to learn that once you make your decision, move on. Accept that you have made up your mind, if it's wrong, well, so be it. But don't spend the next ten years waiting for it to be wrong. If it was a bad decision, you now have a wonderful life experience to learn from. So move on.

Just as it is a waste of life to be stuck in procrastination, it is also wasteful to spend a life stuck in regret over bad decisions. I have shared many of my mistakes very openly with you in this book, but one thing I am very clear about is that I have learnt so much from each and every mistake. That is a wonderful gift.

I have learnt so much from my business and financial mistakes and my relationship blunders that I consider these to be my university degrees in life. Now when I have to make decisions in any of these areas I am so much more grown-up, aware, informed and capable, thanks to my many and varied poor decisions. Thank goodness.

So if you struggle to make decisions, about big or small things, today is the day to change. Start small if you need to and work up to the big stuff. Be realistic about the pros and cons and once you make up your mind, proclaim it out loud and move on with your life and your decision.

'Never let the opportunity to make a good decision slip by.'

Key points

- 1. We all have the power and the right to make decisions. The trick is to make sure that we make them.
- 2. Many people spend a lifetime making a decision. By the time they finally decide, they are often too old to enjoy it.
- 3. In 20 years time we will regret far more the things we haven't done than the things we have done.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Is there an important decision that you really need to make but you are struggling to make? What is stopping you? Fear is the normal culprit – but is it fear of hurting someone else or fear of getting hurt yourself?

If you have been trying to make this decision for years, are you really serious about making it or have you actually stopped trying to decide?

Think about your life in a year's time. What would you be regretful of not doing? Now is your chance to change that story – success or failure are not as important as giving it a go.

Which emotion is driving you?

I bought my first real business when I was 18, thanks to the help of a friend's mother and a very understanding bank manager. It was my dive shop and I was so incredibly proud to own it.

The dive shop was about 30 kilometres from the sea, perhaps not the brightest of moves on my part. It was typical of every dive shop in Australia in the 1980s: fish nets were nailed to the walls with plastic crabs strategically located around the net, the shop was packed to the rafters with equipment and there was little space for customers.

Dive instructors were cool dudes who taught people from all walks of life to dive and chatted up any available (and sometimes unavailable) girls. We developed a club with a few hundred members, we socialised together a lot and, all in all, it was a great scene.

The downside was that I had absolutely no business acumen. I didn't even know how to balance a chequebook, although I soon learnt how to bounce cheques. I am ashamed to look back and realise just how lousy I was at running a business. I made every single mistake time and time again, and then I started to get desperate. I was losing money and I didn't even understand profit and loss.

I loved the dive shop, I loved the industry and I loved teaching people to dive, but the rest was all too hard. The bank manager would call me in once a week to personally hand over all of the cheques I had bounced. It was humiliating.

There were times that I didn't have enough money to put petrol in the car and I would sleep at the shop, hoping that I would get a customer the next day to give me some money. My poor girlfriend at the time, Ros, was very patient and understanding, but she knew that I put the business before our relationship and eventually she bailed out. I don't blame her.

One day I was in the shop worrying and a man pulled up outside in a red porsche. He came in, dressed in a flash suit, introduced himself and told me that a friend of mine had suggested that he get in touch with me to talk about how to save my business. Of course I got all defensive and did a bit of ego bluffing about how everything was fine, and just at the same instant the bank manager walked in to drop off that week's bounced cheques. My bluff was over.

The porsche man told me he could tell me exactly what I needed to do to make my business survive and become financially successful. It all sounded wonderful until it came to the price. His report was going to cost me \$5000, money I simply didn't have. So I sent him on his way and set about going more broke.

Then a strange thing happened. I saw an advertisement in the newspaper looking for people to join a lottery syndicate. The cost was \$100 per person and for some bizarre reason I thought 'what the heck'. Lo and behold – we won. We all received, you guessed it, \$5000. I immediately took this as an omen that I should give this money to the stranger driving the red porsche (another one of my great business moments).

He spent a few days lurking around the business, talking to customers and my dive instructors and, finally, he came to me with a one-page list of recommendations. His ideas were all insane. Get rid of the fish net on the walls, paint the shop sky-blue and make it like a boutique with quality underwater images all around the top of the walls. Get your dive instructors to take out all head jewellery, cut off their cool ponytails and wear suits complete with ties. Double the price of all of the equipment but also double the length of the warranty. The list went on and as I read through it my heart sank. Clearly this man was on day release from some very nice hospital with padded rooms.

There was no way a dive shop could operate without a fish net and plastic crabs on the walls!

So I accepted that I had made yet another disastrous business decision and I got on with going broke. For some reason a little while later, I reached the end of my tether. I pulled out his report and decided that I had nothing to lose so I did everything on the list.

I begged, borrowed and stole paint, fittings and pictures to make the improvements. The local second-hand shop did a roaring trade on cheap suits and ties and changed not only our look but also our attitude.

One thing he had written at the bottom of the page really stood out and I remember it to this day: 'Someone has to be the most expensive and it may as well be you. But if you are going to be the most expensive you have to be the very best at what you do'. A motto I have tried to adopt ever since.

So we changed our attitude to customer service. The customer got whatever they wanted. We didn't sell any cheap equipment any more, only the top-of-the-line stuff. Our instructors were the best around and we charged more for everything than any other dive shop at the time.

As soon as we reopened the doors, business started booming. People came from all over Sydney to buy from us and to do dive courses with us. We had truly turned the business around and things were looking rosy.

I had been so set in my mind about how a dive shop should look and feel and operate that I was blind to what was going wrong. I was

living with a major fear of failure and the one thing that fear does very effectively is paralyse us, which stops creativity and thinking outside the box.

Ironically, today I do the same thing that the man in the red porsche did for me. I travel all over helping both large and small organisations to transform their business. I provide a fresh perspective and every day I meet myself, sitting across the table, giving me all the reasons why they can't change. And, just like I was, they are often paralysed by fear.

So back to the dive shop. It had been a very long few years and I was exhausted. I was starting to get some stress-related issues, including anxiety attacks, and I knew that I really needed a holiday. At the same time a friend expressed interest in buying into the business.

I agreed on one proviso: that I could have a few weeks break as soon as the papers were signed and the money paid. Dave agreed and I made plans to go sailing. The date for the yacht to depart was upon us and Dave was just getting the money together. We were good friends and I told him to pay me when I got back.

So I went sailing for a few weeks and ended up in Brisbane where I rang home to see how things were going and to see where the money was. There was no answer on the dive-shop number so I rang home. My girlfriend answered the phone and starting screaming down the phone at me. She just kept saying, 'The dive shop is gone, the dive shop is gone.' I couldn't really comprehend what had happened so I jumped on a train to Sydney immediately.

When I got home I went around to the shop. Everything was gone. And I mean everything, right down to the sink in the bathroom.

Bit by bit, I pieced together what had gone on.

The day I left Dave had ordered a pile of stock. He then started to promote a huge sale, including all of the rental equipment, the compressors, the shop fittings the lot. He told the customers and staff that we were going to buy all-new equipment and totally refurbish the shop. As business had been going well, no one really questioned it and Dave was well known to everyone.

Then he disappeared with all of the money. But the worst part was that all of the accounts were still in my name. I owed all of the money. I was devastated, completely broke and I felt so incredibly betraved.

I managed to track him down and call him. I asked him why he had done this to me and his response was 'That's business'. I was in shock. I saw the police, lawyers and anyone else who would listen, to find out what could be done. The answer was nothing - except sue him in court, which would have cost thousands of dollars that I didn't have.

I made a decision when I realised I couldn't do anything legally. I was going to save up enough money to get him killed. Now I am not proud to admit this desire but I knew some shady characters at the time who could do what I wanted and, in the months that followed, I kept coming across more people who would have been very happy to accommodate my request. I had to save \$10 000. My life had a purpose. I was driven by revenge.

I got a job immediately selling encyclopaedias door to door in Tasmania. A strange choice of jobs but it was the first one in the employment pages and for some strange reason they gave this lost, angry and slightly insane version of me the job. I soon realised why. To sell encyclopaedias door to door in Tasmania these are prerequisite personality traits.

I spent six months doing this weird but fun job. We travelled in a group and I was the oldest one, being all of 22 at the time. I was pretty good at selling and I slowly saw my bank account getting closer towards the magical \$10 000 figure. But it wasn't climbing fast enough. I headed to Perth and hooked up with Ros again. She managed to find me a job working in mineral exploration out in the desert. It was hard work but it paid well and my bank account was rising much faster. And, as a bonus, I happened to be working with some very hard men, keen to make an extra \$10 000.

Then it happened. I remember the day very clearly. I had gone into town to pick up the mail and supplies and I had to drive 600 kilometres back to the camp where I was working alone at the time. I got my payslip and I had just over \$10 000 sitting in my account.

I sat by the fire and realised that, up until now, this had only been an idea. Now it was reality. It was about 12 months after Dave had ripped me off and I'd thought about it all the time, from the minute I woke up until I finally put my head on the pillow at night. I had been constantly sick throughout it all. I had developed huge angry boils all over my back and on my legs. My hair had got thin, I drank too much, I ate badly and I struggled to communicate with people. I started to hang out with people that I shouldn't and I suddenly realised that my rage and thirst for revenge were eating me up.

That night, I let Dave go. I threw my payslip into the fire and I said out loud, 'Dave, I forgive you.' I said it over and over again, until I believed it.

Then I was overcome with exhaustion. I curled up by the fire and fell asleep in an instant. I woke up long after dawn, feeling like I had slept for a hundred years. And then, good things happened. My energy was incredible, my boils cleared almost instantly, every single one of them just disappearing. Every ache and pain, the constant cough and numbing headaches, all stopped. I felt like a new man.

That day I came across an orphaned kangaroo. I wasn't really sure what had happened to the mother, who was dead in the spinifex grass. The joey was very young, but old enough to survive if I could get her to drink and wee (yes, you have to teach joeys how to wee and believe me it is not what you imagine).

This little kangaroo was incredibly calm with me. She just looked at me and surrendered to me caring for her. I felt overwhelmed with love for this fragile creature, who I called Rebecca, and I started nursing her back to health.

In many ways I think I was nursing myself back to health. I

couldn't leave her, she had to stay warm and she needed to be fed regularly. The same things I needed. So we nursed each other back to health.

Throughout the days that followed, I made a pact with myself that I would never let my actions be driven by such horrible emotions as anger, revenge or hatred again. I had finally realised that all they did was hurt me. Let karma sort out Dave, which I have no doubt it will.

So, I have told you about two situations where I was driven by a negative and powerful emotion. But, there is a third emotion: fear. I have always had a lot of fear in my life. It was my earliest memory and if I am not careful I slip back into it quickly. It makes me forget everything I have learnt, it makes me shut off from people, it makes me withdraw and hide.

Today I am much better at recognising these 'me' emotions. The ones that make us become the centre of our own universe - and not in a good way. They are strong and overpowering emotions designed to keep us alive as cavemen, but not really necessary today. I ask you the question – which emotions drive you? Are they love, empathy, understanding, forgiveness and honesty? Or are they anger, resentment, bitterness, jealousy, envy and hatred?

There is no way you can ever grow as a human being or have a life filled with joy if you are driven by the latter. We all need to be honest enough with ourselves to identify the emotions that drive us and control our lives.

We all have a choice. I make mention of this point throughout The Me Myth. We are not prisoners to our emotions and we can choose how we want to live. If you are being controlled by negative emotions, only you can make that end right now. The key is to take action – find the points in this book that strike a nerve and work on them first and foremost. It will be hard, negative emotions are powerful, but the reward is worth it.

'Emotions are like food. Live on the wrong ones and your life will be shorter.'

Key points

- 1. It is important to determine which emotion is driving you.
- 2. We can decide to let go no matter what the situation. If Nelson Mandela can spend over 20 years in prison and forgive those who put him there, surely we can let go of some old hurts that no longer mean that much?
- 3. People ruin their lives by hanging onto negative emotions for way too long. We all need to go through the anger, pain and hurt stages but being healthy means moving to the next stages of forgiveness, letting go and empathy.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Which emotion is driving you? Is it positive or negative?

If it is negative – why? What won't you let go of?

What has hanging onto this emotion given you? List all of the pain, angst, ill health, burnt relationships, loneliness etc.

What is stopping you from letting it go now?

Why don't you take control of your life and let go of the negative emotion, and whatever caused it, so you can actually get on with your life? It is never too late to let go.

When did you stop having fun?

Sometimes it seems that when you mention the word 'fun' and put it in the same sentence as 'life', the room lets out a collective sigh, indicating the feeling that another cliché has just left somebody's mouth.

Well, I for one think that we need to spend a lot more time revisiting this particular cliché because it has never been more relevant than it is today. Somewhere along the line we have all become far too serious, particularly at work. It seems that the line between being professional and having a good time has become like the Great Wall of China – big, bold and completely useless.

I could have become the most miserable bastard on the face of the planet and blamed everyone for everything that has happened in my life. However, somewhere along the way, I learnt to laugh out loud, and often, and I have absolutely no doubt that this has saved my life.

There was an incident that I think triggered my fun gene. I was about six years old, sitting on the bus and going into the city with the old lady to do some shopping. We arrived at our stop and, having been taught good manners, I waited for the other people to get off and then headed out the door. Just as I was getting off the last step (which was a big step for a little fat kid with short legs), I thought I heard the bus driver say something to me so I turned as I was making the leap to the ground.

Then things turned ugly. The driver had released the mechanism, which closed the front door at exactly the same time as I turned to see what he said. The door clamped shut on my right ear and I was suddenly stuck on the outside of the bus, which started to pull away from the curb. The doors were solid metal and the driver couldn't see me on the outside of the bus, but my little legs were going 100 miles an hour as we started to drive down St Georges Terrace in the heart of Perth. People started screaming and waving at the bus. I imagine I must have looked like one of the Three Stooges.

After what seemed like hours but in reality was just a few seconds, the driver slammed on the brakes (which didn't really help my ear one little bit), opened the doors and I fell to the ground, sobbing and clutching my ear.

I vividly remember looking up at a sea of adults standing around me with looks of fear and concern on their faces. Then one of them burst out laughing. This spread like wildfire and in no time at all, the entire crowd, including the bus driver and the old lady, were all belly-laughing as I sat on the ground nursing my injured pride. It didn't take long for me to start giggling as well and, even though it felt wrong, after all everyone should have been deeply concerned and lavishing me with sympathy, it felt so much better than sitting there feeling sorry for myself.

There is something very Australian about laughing in times of adversity. Many nationalities don't get it. Some feel that we are almost irreverent, but I think it is a form of stress relief. We laugh, we have fun, we make fun of each other, no matter how terrible the situation may be, but all the while we grow closer as a result. As any Australian knows, we only make fun of people we like. So if you

are getting to know some Australians and they start teasing you or making fun of you, that is a good sign.

I went to India to see my Indian publishers a couple of years back. I met so many people who were not just poor, they were wretched. They literally had nothing and they looked like skeletons. But the thing I saw the most in India was smiles. Everyone smiled, all the time. Small children smiled, mothers with arms full of babies smiled. old men smiled, Indians living in the gutter smiled. I even think the cows were smiling.

Whilst I like to think that was the result of my magnetic personality, I actually think that there is an air of positivity and optimism in India. It seems out of place in such a poor country, especially when you come home to a modern, western country where we all have so much and yet so many people seem so unhappy.

People choose whether they will be happy, miserable, outrageous, conservative, angry or any other emotion. Often they don't realise that they make this choice but they do. I think that being miserable is hard work. Being a bit outrageous and fun is very easy.

I realise that people also choose whether or not they are going to have fun in what they do. And without a doubt, there is a very clear correlation between people who choose to be happy and those who have a lot of fun doing what they do.

There are so many rewards for choosing to have fun in life. For starters every interaction is so much more rewarding, even something that seems as mundane as ordering a coffee.

I learnt this first-hand at my local coffee shop. As was my ritual I strolled in around 7 am, said a cheery hello and had a chat with my local coffee dealer, a man by the name of Michael. We did this early morning ritual every day for several years and one morning he came up to me for a chat and told me he was leaving. Michael went on to say that hearing me whistle as I walked up the corridor to his coffee shop was one of the highlights of his day. He mentioned that I always came in with a big smile on my face, I had a cheeky comment or two

to make and I sincerely asked how he was doing on this fine day.

Michael told me that my early morning visit was the best part of his working day and I put him in a good mood, which he passed onto everyone who came into the café.

How did I feel after he told me this? I felt both humble and proud. I was lost for words, but it reminded me that being nice to people, having fun with them and just saying a big hello with a nice smile on your face, always comes back at you. But, and of course there is a but, most people wander around looking like undertakers when they should be bounding around like puppies.

We get miserable going to work because we are supposed to be miserable. We don't leap into our favourite coffee shop and scream hello every morning because everyone else will be standing there looking like they are at a funeral and we don't want to appear weird.

My advice is to forget what everyone else has to say or has to think. Step out of your comfort zone and be playful, have fun and make the extra effort to connect with people. Like attracts like – the more fun you have the more fun you will attract. We choose our state of mind and we can always choose to have a positive state of mind. We just have to want it bad enough.

There are many sections in *The Me Myth* that reinforce this concept of choosing our state of mind to get the most out of life. The problem is that if you are totally focused inward, you don't really care about making other people's day, or playing with people, or just having fun. When you start to focus outward you see a hundred opportunities every single day to give and get love, to give and get passion, to give and get fun.

The more you do it, the easier it gets. If it feels a bit weird at first, don't worry, I guarantee you will grow into it. Give it time and people will respond in ways that will blow your mind. I have started humming a song in an elevator only to have the lady next to me start singing and people join in as they got into the lift. It was an

incredible moment and we all burst out laughing when we got to the ground floor.

Most importantly of all, don't worry about what other people think. I used to be terrified about that and, as a result, I would turn my focus inwards and go through life having dull, bland interactions. Now I just don't care what people think. I have fun with pretty much everyone I meet. I love to make people laugh. I love to laugh and absolutely love making someone's day. It is amazing just how easy this is to do. A few sincere words, a compliment or two, laugh at yourself or share an experience. It really isn't that hard.

Imagine how this wonderful world of ours would be if we all spent more time laughing, having fun and playing with the people we encounter every day, particularly those people who are close to us who perhaps haven't seen us have fun for far too long.

Remember, it's only life, it ain't that important, with a bit of luck we will get another go. Put your hands on your belly, shake it around, feel the laugh start deep inside and let it come out. We all get to choose our state, no matter how tough our lives have been or the challenges we face. Being miserable certainly won't help, but having a pile of fun really will.

'Thank goodness being miserable is such hard work. It sure makes having fun so much easier.'

Key points

- 1. In the craziness of life, many of us have forgotten how to laugh.
- 2. Having fun should be mandatory, not optional.
- 3. You can have a profound effect on other people by having fun and simply being cheerful.

- 4. If it has been a while since you had a belly laugh, get back into training. Having fun is a lot easier than most people make out.
- 5. Don't worry about what other people think. Most of the time they will join in with your fun.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Have you forgotten how to have fun?

When was the last time you had a great big belly laugh?

Do you take life too seriously? When did you stop having fun?

What can you do to bring more fun into your life every day?

Tomorrow make a point of having lots of fun experiences with people you meet.

Don't put the important things off

I have always been a very busy person and I think that I always will be. Most of life has been spent determining my worth by what I achieved. The more clients I had, the more money my business made, the more people I had working for me, the kind of car I drove, all contributed to how I felt as a human being. The more successful I looked, the more important I felt.

During most of this period I didn't have two cents to rub between my fingers but I did have lots of debt. I may have looked successful financially but I was really living a lie, simply waiting for someone to find out. Self-delusion seems to be a place where many of us live, often because we don't know any different.

I was always way too busy. I worked ridiculous hours, I rarely took holidays and my entire focus was on doing whatever it took to keep the wheels of my empire turning. My sister had moved with her family to Sydney and it had been several years since I had seen her. We were extremely close, yet as soon as she moved away I was

always too busy to talk to her, let alone get on a plane and visit her. I worried about Wendy, she wasn't in the best of health and she had never quite been herself after she lost a beautiful little baby girl to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome or cot death.

My wife at the time, Caz, was a beautiful person who came from a big Italian family. My family and Caz's family were about as different as two tribes could be. I was pulled into this enormous, crazy but incredibly loving family who immediately made me feel like one of their own. My cheeks were sore for weeks after the first encounter as the aunties insisted on pinching my cheeks whenever I walked within arm's reach. I protested on the surface but deep down it felt wonderful.

Caz knew how important Wendy was to me and she was always telling me to take some time to go and visit her. But there was never a good time as far as I was concerned. There was always way too much important business to do.

After fighting about it (how dumb was I to fight about something like this?) I finally planned a week's holiday with Wendy. At the time her husband was in the navy and based at HMAS *Cresswell*, a naval base nestled in amongst national park in the magnificent Jervis Bay, south of Sydney.

As soon as I arrived I knew I should have made the trip long ago. The kids were at school so each morning Wendy and I packed a picnic basket and went and sat on huge cliffs overlooking the ocean. We talked for hours on end, day after day, and we spoke long into the night, not wanting our days to end.

That week we spoke about so many things that we hadn't spoken about before. These were important things, our biggest and boldest dreams and our deepest and darkest fears.

The holiday came to an end, I went home and set about continuing my busy life. I was grateful that Caz had pressured me into visiting Wendy because it really was just what I needed. I vowed to not wait so long between visits next time.

A few months later I was in a meeting with one of my sale reps. I got a phone call from Caz asking me to come back to the office, right now. I asked what was wrong and she just said to come back. I knew that something was really wrong so I raced back to the office and the minute I walked in I knew what had happened. My brotherin-law had rung to say that Wendy had died from a heart attack. She had been unwell, fighting a lung infection, and when she stood up to make a cup of coffee, she literally dropped dead. I was numb. I couldn't believe it, not Wendy. But as much as my head didn't believe it, my heart knew that it was true.

Wendy died at the age of 35. I think she died not of a heart attack but of a broken heart. Life had thrown so much at her and she just struggled to fight back. I think that sometimes people run out of life force to keep them going.

My life was thrown into chaos and turmoil. I was totally devastated. The next few months were very dark for me. I felt like my heart had been broken. But as the dust settled and my insanity slowly passed, I remembered my holiday with Wendy. The hours we'd spent talking and laughing, just us, watching the might of the ocean crashing against the rocks below.

I became overwhelmed with gratitude that I had been given the opportunity to have that time with her and those loving memories. I cried for hours with this realisation. I will be forever grateful to Caz for making it happen because, if she didn't, Wendy would have died and there would have been so many things left unsaid between us. Whereas when she did die, I knew how much she loved me and she knew how much I loved her. That is a blessing.

The experience made me realise so much about life. It made me understand how important it is to tell the people we love how much they mean to us. It made me realise just how important it is for us to do the significant things in our lives and not to leave them for later because there may not be a 'later'.

People often ask me what they should do to make their business

financially successful. Most of the time my advice is the same – have a holiday. There is never a good time, there is never enough money and there will always be a compelling list of reasons why not, but do it anyway. I make this recommendation because I simply don't think you can create a successful business if you are burnt out, exhausted or bored.

We all come up with lots of reasons to not do things that we know are truly important in our lives. But when you become a person of action, a person who doesn't put off doing the important things, your life changes in so many ways. It is truly miraculous.

For starters you stop having regrets about what you haven't done. These are replaced by warm memories of what you have done. Your relationships become much closer and more rewarding if you treat them as a priority. And how about health and wellbeing? Treat exercise and eating well as important, and you will be rewarded with a long and vital life.

The key here is being able to decide what is really important in the big scheme of things. I know we have to make a living to feed our families, but what are the truly important things in our lives that perhaps we are neglecting? Once we are really clear about what is important to us, we can set about doing what we really know we should be doing. The pay-off is enormous for all involved.

Sometimes we need a little more motivation. I have learnt to imagine how my life will be if I don't do the important things. What if something happened to a person I care for and I didn't have the chance to tell them how much they meant to me? When I think like this I take every opportunity to share my feelings, to live life to its fullest and to be grateful for every important thing that I get done. My life is much richer as a result.

'Imagine how you will feel if it is "too late".'

Key points

- 1. There is always a time when it is 'too late' to say or do the important things in life.
- 2. We have no idea what tomorrow will bring. That is why today is so significant.
- 3. Tell people how you feel, how much you care, how much you appreciate them and what they mean to you as often as you can.
- 4. No one gets sick of being told how much you care or how much they are appreciated.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Do you tell people the important things that need to be said?

If you don't, why not? ('Because they already know' is not that good an answer.)

Today is a *great* opportunity to tell someone who is very important to you just how much he or she means to you. Pick up the phone and call them now, or send them a letter, or even better, go and see them

Put away the self-development books for a while

I completely understand the irony of making a statement like this in a self-development book, but I believe it to be a critical aspect of getting the life we all want. In fact I would prefer to call The Me Myth an 'out of self' development book, but that is a whole other point.

We live in an over-analytical world where there is a mass of information and opinion on every subject imaginable. It is very easy to get confused in this mountain of information and end up more lost than when we started the journey. If you read enough you will find there is always an equal and opposite opinion on everything.

Now let me explain exactly what I mean about putting away the self-development books. I have been a self-analysis junkie for many years. I have a huge number of books on every single aspect of personal and business growth lining the shelves in my living room. I have attended many seminars around the planet, again addressing growth and development. I am a very big fan of Anthony Robbins,

Jack Canfield, Robin Sharma and the Dalai Lama. My personal investment in this part of my life is considerable and I certainly plan to keep investing in my own personal growth and development by attending seminars and buying countless books, CDs and DVDs on the subject.

During my life I have also seen psychologists and psychiatrists to help me understand my life, to come to terms with problems that I may have been experiencing and to stop making the same mistakes over and over in relationships, in business and in life. Most people are too embarrassed to tell people they seek professional help in this arena because they think others will see them as mentally unhinged. One thing I learnt long ago is that if you can ask yourself the question 'Am I crazy!' – you are not!

To grow as human beings we need to do some analysis of our lives, of our actions, of our dreams and aspirations, of our past and the challenges we have faced. But today, we have so much information on hand and so many avenues to self-analyse that we can easily spend more time doing this than actually living.

If you truly want to grow as a human being – go out and live life to its fullest. We learn about people by interacting with people. You can't learn about love from a book. You learn by loving another human being. How can you describe the pain of a broken heart? You can't – it is something we all have to experience for ourselves, the good, the bad, the ugly and the amazingly beautiful.

I love to watch kids learning about life. Tell them not to touch something hot and what do they do? Of course they almost have to touch it. They seem powerless to control themselves as they are drawn to this thing that they must not touch. They learn from the experience, not from being told about it.

I have a very good friend called Paul Hockey. He is an amazing man on every level. Three weeks after he was born his doctor was holding him up in the air in a playful way and he noticed a lump on Paul's arm and he became suspicious. Within hours this new baby was in surgery having his arm removed at the shoulder to get rid of cancer.

Clearly this is a tough way to start life. But Paul was born with a fighting spirit that he put to good use. He was different to the other children and, as we all know, children can be cruel. Paul went on to get a black belt in two martial arts. He lived in Japan for years and learnt the language fluently. He got a job as a courier riding a huge motorbike through the streets of Sydney (a job most of us couldn't do with two arms). But this was only the beginning.

Paul lost his mother, father, stepfather and aunty to cancer. He decided to raise money and awareness on the subject by climbing Mt Everest. Can you imagine how tough this would be? It was (and is) almost beyond my comprehension. He was going to be the first disabled person to climb the North Face of Mt Everest, which is universally considered the most gruelling approach to the mountain.

As part of his training for his Everest attempt, Paul carried 20 kilograms of books in a backpack ten kilometres up a mountain road every second day for a full year.

I won't go into the details here but he came to within 200 metres of the summit and his lungs started to fill with blood. Normally at this stage a climber is considered a 'dead man walking'. He was in terrible shape and fading fast. The climb was aborted, he was taken back to base camp and somehow he survived, but only just. Imagine getting that close to the summit of Mt Everest and not being able to touch it?

For Paul, being the man he is, his Everest attempt of 2004 wasn't a failure, it was the best practice run he could have. Failure was not an option so he planned to return to Mt Everest the following year.

For his second attempt, Paul carried 30 kilograms of books, plus 2.5-kilogram ankle weights up the same road. But this time he did it for 14 kilometres. And he did it every single day for a year.

This time he made it to the summit and claimed the title of

the first disabled person to climb the North Face of Mt Everest, a mountain that claims the lives of many able-bodied people every year.

Today Paul travels the world spreading his inspirational story. He is tenacious, humble and real. He has a philosophy of never giving up and he lives this philosophy.

In Paul's words, nothing can prepare a person for the hardship of Mt Everest. Every book, every interview with other climbers, every other mountain you have climbed can help, but the only way you can really understand it, is to climb the mountain yourself.

Life is like that. By all means, do the training, do your homework, talk to others who have travelled the same road before you.

But to truly experience life, we all have to climb our own mountains. We have to put down the books, turn off the iPod and go out and live.

Life is filled with challenges. At times it is incredibly scary. Along the way we will meet truly amazing people and we will also meet some not so nice people. We will build a bank of experiences that will mean more than any book, film or seminar. We have to laugh, we have to cry, we have to care for others, we have to feel alone, we have to feel loved. We have to feel it all. But we have to step outside to experience all that life has to offer.

Today we have a real problem on our hands. If we want to, we can shut off from the world. We can control communication. We can decide whom we will let in and whom we won't. We can turn off phones. We can be part of an online community and never really run the risk of being hurt or actually having to be the real us. If we want to, we can live in a totally unreal world, one that is so much more appealing than the real world because we can control just about everything in it.

The only problem is that hollow feeling we get, when we know that we are deluding ourselves.

We are complex critters. That complexity is why we are so

successful as a species. But we are not that far removed from the cavemen we came from. Yes, self-analysis is a good thing, but we must balance this out with life experiences. The more the merrier.

As you read through this book you will obviously have a pretty good insight into me as a person. I haven't held back on anything. I have opened up and shared some of my most humiliating moments, the things I have done that I am ashamed of, but also the things I have done that I am incredibly proud of.

Throughout it all, the two things that drive me forward are the desire to be the best man I can be and the thirst to experience everything that life has to offer. To do both of these I need to spend time reflecting and learning, and I need to spend time experiencing and living. As always the universe wants us to live a life of balance.

'Instead of reading the book why not try writing the book.'

Key points

- 1. The essence of overcoming a life lived in 'The Me Myth' is to get out and live.
- 2. Analysing why we do what we do is healthy and part of being a human being. But over-analysing and micro-analysing are what cause the real problem.
- 3. Pondering serves a purpose, but we need to actually live to get the practical experience required to pull the whole realisation together.
- 4. The greatest periods of evolution come when we balance our roles of human beings and human doings.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Is your brain starting to feel full with this self-development stuff?

I get it – and you are almost finished this book. Can I suggest that when you do, you put it and others away and get out there and live?

Step up and take responsibility for your life

It is easy to find an excuse for just about anything in life, if you are prepared to look hard enough. How many criminals get away with a slap on the wrist for doing atrocious things to innocent people by blaming their bad childhood for their actions?

We all need to step up and take absolute responsibility for our lives. Look at the litigious world we now live in. We can sue just about anyone for just about anything. How many freedoms have we lost because people are scared of getting sued if something goes wrong? And can you blame them, when there are people ready, willing and able to abuse the system simply to get some money?

Surely we individuals have to accept some responsibility in our lives?

I had to be responsible in my early days because the people around me generally were not. The downside of this is that I had to grow up fast.

But as I got older I slipped into the trap of blaming others for what

was wrong in my life. One day I had a wonderful lesson imparted on me by, of all people, the Australian Taxation Office (ATO).

I would never have imagined that the ATO would teach me one of the greatest lessons of my life, but they did. I had gotten a bit behind on my taxes. I had a bad attitude regarding paying money to the taxation department so they came last on the list.

My debt grew, I had some business challenges, a divorce and a bad partnership, and suddenly the bill was well over a hundred thousand dollars and the nice letters were turning less nice, and the phone calls were getting less understanding and more impatient.

Eventually the ATO was going to issue bankruptcy proceedings against me and I had to have a conference to argue my case and explain my position one last time. I prepared a wonderful story about my challenging life, the business issues that had caused the cash crisis, my tragic divorce, how my biggest client had gone broke and so on. I was particularly proud of the pitch, certain that it would elicit a sympathetic response guaranteed to result in tears all round and a simple warning to pay the outstanding bill when I could. No rush.

So I finished, and wiped my eyes accordingly. The lovely lady from the taxation department said, very sincerely, 'Mr Griffiths, that is a terrible story, but we really don't care. Your name is at the bottom of the page, you owe the Australian Government this money. If you don't pay it immediately we are going to make you bankrupt.'

Well at first I was outraged, angry and shocked. But mostly I was embarrassed because I didn't have the money to pay the debt. That day I learnt a lesson that, when it comes to business, if your name is on the paperwork, you are absolutely, positively responsible and no amount of 'hard luck' matters.

I grew up a lot after this encounter and my entire business philosophy changed. I made much quicker decisions, I knew my liabilities in full and I became far less tolerant of people who didn't perform in my business. I was far too easygoing before and, as a result, I didn't run a very tight or profitable business.

lust for the record (and in case someone from the ATO is reading this book), they did let me pay off my debt, which I did in full as promised. They really were very nice people. (Please don't audit me.)

Living a life where we can conveniently blame other people is not much of a life but it is surprising how many people do blame others. Deep down, most of us do. Someone didn't love us enough when we were kids, we had to guit a good job because of a bad boss, we are broke because credit cards are too easy to get and we are fat because of the food served to us.

We all need to stop this. I am overweight because I eat too much and I spend too much time sitting on my bum writing. My credit cards are maxed out because I spent too much money. I had to leave my job because I wasn't mature enough to manage a difficult boss. Tough stuff, but it sure makes you feel good when you finally step up and take responsibility.

I came across a quote recently – 'The price of greatness is responsibility', Sir Winston Churchill. I thought about that for quite some time. Greatness comes in many shapes and sizes, but responsibility has only one. When we as individuals step up to the plate and take ownership of everything in our lives, we become great people and have great lives.

I know that at times taking responsibility is very hard to do. People act badly, sometimes shockingly. There is violence, people steal, we get lied to, deceived, hurt and betrayed. We don't have to take ownership of what someone else does to us, but we have the choice of carrying it around with us for the rest of our lives, or acting out against other people because we got hurt, or standing tall and saying out loud that we are not going to take their crap. This is my life, they are not going to ruin it.

Relationships are the perfect opportunity to take responsibility. It is easy to say that everything is our partner's fault, but from my experience it always takes two to tango. If your partner was a mongrel, why did you stay for 20 years? If you stay, don't blame them. You had a choice, even if you convinced yourself that you didn't. Deep down you always know that you could have changed the situation but perhaps you were too scared, too lazy, too comfortable or too dishonest with yourself. Don't worry, most of us have been in the same situation.

This book is not about beating yourself up for the past, it is about your future. Today is a great day to stand up and take responsibility for what is not working in your relationship. Call your partner, have that conversation, be brave and step up. But if you don't, for whatever reason, don't blame them for what you won't do. Tough love, but when you act responsibly you grow up and you realise that you have absolute control of your life if you want it.

The same applies to every other situation in life. If you have issues at work, step up and deal with them or make the decision and leave. But don't stay there blaming everyone else for what is going on. Being responsible is empowering.

Our health and wellbeing is probably the biggest area where responsibility is needed. I had a friend who was a very heavy smoker and had been smoking for almost 30 years. He had been ill for some time and he went to the doctor, who told him that he probably had emphysema. He immediately stopped smoking. A week later the doctor rang with the test results and told my friend that he didn't have emphysema, yet. My friend started smoking again, straightaway. Now there is so much wrong with this I don't even know where to start.

I mentioned earlier in the book that I had never taken responsibility for my health and wellbeing. It just wasn't a priority for me. So I had the body of a person who didn't take responsibility and I had the life expectancy of the same. It took my sister dropping dead at 35 for me to realise that I had to step up and take control of my body, and that started an odyssey to get healthy. Whilst I am not a Greek god, I am a healthy man, who is careful of what I eat. I exercise, I

don't abuse my body or take drugs and I make sure I do things that nurture my mind and my body.

I have reprogrammed my thoughts. As soon as I start to blame someone or something for my actions or circumstances I stop and change my thoughts. Rather than blame, I accept what has happened and get on with fixing the issue. I don't know that I get it right all the time, but I try my best and I think I am a responsible person. I certainly know that I feel better inside by taking responsibility for everything that I can in my life. I don't feel like a victim and that is a nice feeling.

If this section struck a nerve in you, then maybe it is time for you to step up and take responsibility for things in your life that need to change. It may be your job, your relationship (or lack thereof), your health or your finances. It may be everything. Take responsibility and take action. The two go hand in hand with impressive results.

If you want greatness in your life, it's time to be responsible.

'Taking responsibility is not a spectator sport.'

Key points

- 1. Taking absolute responsibility for our lives is a powerful step in our growth as human beings.
- 2. We are never victims when we take responsibility.
- 3. It is easy to find excuses for what we haven't done, or where our lives are right now, but it will do us no good. Stepping up and taking responsibility will change our lives.
- 4. Responsibility and action go hand in hand.

5. Changing our head space to take responsibility instead of living a passive life is not easy. But it can be done.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Do you take responsibility for your life?

Is there one part of your life where you don't?

How does that make you feel?

Is there anything that stops you from taking responsibility?

Is it a real reason or is it fear?

Step up and take responsibility for a part of your life where you feel that you are being submissive or passive and see how the rest of your life changes.

Get back to doing the things you love

I run a lot of work/life balance seminars. I love working with others in this arena because it is something that has challenged me all my life. One of the exercises I get the participants to do is to write a list of things that they absolutely love doing in their spare time.

Interestingly enough, this is a major stumbling block for at least 50 per cent of the room. They have simply forgotten what it is that they love doing. The most common response is 'How can I make time for me when I have to look after the kids, my job is incredibly demanding and my partner needs my support?"

Eventually people get at least a couple of things on the page and the next task is to write beside each 'love' item when they did it last. There is always at least one fella who puts down his loves as camping, fishing, playing football, car racing and climbing mountains. But in the 'when they did it last' section, most of the loves haven't been done for at least a few years. They are no longer things we love to do, they are distant memories.

Right now, sitting on my computer screen is a list of the things that I love to do when I am not working. They are there to remind me to do them more often.

Today, more than ever, the importance of a work/life balance is well documented, we all talk about it, but how real is it when the pressure is on? Who can tell the boss that they are going home at 5 pm, when the year's biggest project is due tomorrow and it needs another ten hours work to finish it? Whoever does go home is probably going to be able to spend as much time at home as they want because they won't have a job for very long.

So how do you make time to do the things that you love? It has to become a priority in your life. Sure you have to keep making money, but as I have mentioned throughout this book, we feel that we have little control over our lives when we actually have total control. It is as simple as oxygen on a plane. You put your mask on first and then the kids'. You cannot help anyone if you are a mess.

Now this may sound selfish, like a *me* thing to do. But one of the best ways to stop looking inwards and over-analysing your life is to get active doing the things you love. Why?

I am glad you asked. When you are doing the things that you love your entire body responds in a positive way. If your partner is a fisherperson, how is their state of mind when they come home after a day of fishing? If you love seeing a movie with friends, how do you feel when you get home from your movie outing? What happened to all of your issues, all of the problems that you are battling with – your stupid job, your noisy neighbour and your out-of-control kids? They are all replaced with a dumb grin and a warm feeling inside that life is really not that bad after all.

For a number of years I used to go camping at least once a year with a few friends. We came from all different walks of life and we really had nothing in common when it came to work. But we could all sit around a fire and make fun of each other, drink beer, make loud noises from various parts of our bodies, tell lies about the one

that got away and not wash for at least a week (sorry ladies, but this is what they mean by 'male bonding' – ugly stuff really).

We used to go up into the wilds of Cooktown, a remote, magnificent part of Australia filled with everything that will gladly kill you in a heartbeat. But we loved it. At the time I had a very stressful business, money was tight and I spent a lot of time worrying about everything. A week camping at Weary Bay and I came out feeling like a new man. Sure I smelt like a garbage dump but my whole outlook on life would change in that week and I was ready for action.

Today I do other things to recharge my batteries, but the most important lesson for me was to realise that I needed to recharge. I spent way too many years not letting myself recharge because I lived with the belief that I had to work like a dog to make my business successful. I felt guilty having a holiday, a break or an afternoon off.

I encounter a lot of older business owners who seem to be proud of the fact that they haven't had a holiday in ten years. They wear it like a medal or a badge of honour. I used to enjoy being the same kind of business martyr, until I realised that it was just plain dumb. We have to have a break and we have to recharge our life force in whatever way works for us individually.

My advice is simple. We all need to know what it is that truly makes us happy. We need to find a way to make it happen. And then we have to do these things as often as we can. If you struggle to get started, write your own list and do the exercise I described earlier.

Sometimes we need to make ourselves the best we can so that we can create the right emotional environment to make the changes that we really want to make in our lives. We have to fix those things that need attention, rebuild solid foundations, create positive lifeaffirming habits and then move forward.

Once you are in this positive, energetic and passionate state of mind, it rubs off on everyone around you in a beautiful way.

One final, important point, you may have decided that you love the ballet and that it is critical your partner accompanies you to every opening of *Swan Lake* that comes to town. If your partner wants to do that then wonderful, but please don't force anyone else in your life to adopt your new-found list of things that you love to do. This is a very personal thing and a mature and loving partner will be more than happy for their significant other to go off and do the things that nurture their soul.

Do the things you love and your life will become so bright and rewarding that you may just burst!

'If we don't do the things we love, we simply stop loving.'

Key points

- 1. We have to do far more of the things we love (it sounds obvious but why don't we do it?).
- 2. If you can't remember what it is you love to do, have a wonderful time figuring it out.
- 3. When you do more of the things you love to do, your life becomes much more positive and enjoyable. This rubs off on everyone around you.
- 4. It is up to us as individuals to keep doing the things we love to do. 'Stuff' will aspire to stop us. Don't let it.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Make a list of the things you love to do.

Next to each item, note when you last did each of your 'loves'.

Is there anything on your list that you would like to do more often?

So what is stopping you from doing it? Is this a real excuse?

This is a process we need to do often because 'stuff' sneaks in and messes up our plans.

Celebrate loud and celebrate long

I have had many periods in my life that could only be described as absolutely crazy. Working too hard, taking on too many responsibilities, worrying about too much stuff and struggling to make my way in the world. One of the greatest losses in times like these is that we stop celebrating our victories.

The best example that I can use to illustrate this point is with my writing. Clearly a lot of blood, sweat and tears goes into writing and producing a book. There are a lot of people involved, it is a big production all round and the end product represents a lot of people's hard work.

Throughout my writing career I have always run a marketing company at the same time, usually with an office full of people, and it has always been way too busy. On one occasion when we were all starting work and getting ready for a big day ahead, I was opening my mail and I noticed a courier bag. I ripped it open and there was the first copy of a book that I had just written. I looked at it, smiled,

put it down and started to get on with organising the day and my team.

My right-hand man and close friend, Sen Ekanayake, asked me what the book was. I mentioned that it was my latest one and then I set about changing the subject. Sen stopped me in my tracks and said, 'Why aren't we out celebrating such a huge milestone?' I didn't have an answer. I was too busy looking after clients, managing deadlines, struggling to make ends meet and working hard like every small business owner. It was the sixth book that I had written and I had only ever really celebrated the first one, which had been published almost ten years before.

Now that is plain wrong. Clearly a milestone such as the publication of your book should be celebrated, and it should be celebrated very loud and for a long time. But how many things do we simply not make the time or the effort to celebrate? Sure we remember birthdays and Christmas, perhaps even the odd anniversary, but what about the other important moments?

I have learnt my lesson. Today I like to celebrate anything significant. There is something wonderful about taking some time out of the craziness of the average day to go 'Wooohoooo' and acknowledge something that you have done, either individually or as a group.

The most successful teams are those who know how to celebrate their individual achievement, their co-workers' or the achievements of the group as a whole.

We all respond well to people celebrating our victories. The big, the small, even the victories that may not seem significant to the outside world should be celebrated.

Sadly too many of us have forgotten how to celebrate. How to let our hair down and really laugh out loud, how to pat ourselves on the back and acknowledge that we did a good thing. Our successes are overshadowed by the pressure to achieve and get results; few people have time to stop and celebrate and many managers feel that celebration is a waste of time (seriously). To re-familiarise vourself with the custom of celebration look around you and start celebrating and acknowledging other people's success first and foremost.

Every time I release a new book I get a card from a lady who lives in my town. Her name is Hilda Rose and I have never met her, but she always sends me a lovely little note and a card congratulating me on my success. I don't even know her address to send her a thank you card but this has been a ritual for over ten years.

I really admire people who are aware enough, and considerate enough, to acknowledge other people's success. We should all do it. There are so many reasons to congratulate people for a job well done or for reaching a milestone. Just pick up your local newspaper and there are always great stories about ordinary folk's achievements. Sending them a card, or an email, or a telephone call may have more of an effect than you realise. Every time someone like Hilda Rose contacts me in this way I walk around about a foot taller and more motivated than ever to help others however I can.

The very best place to start with giving others a pat on the back is close to home. When was the last time you gave your lover a huge back-breaking hug, looked them in the eye and told them how proud you are of what they do? Or grabbed one of your kids and did the same? Or sat down with one of your grandparents and thanked them for helping you to exist and setting such a great example for you to follow? Or how about people that you buy things from, those that go above and beyond the call of duty? How about your neighbours - have you thanked them for always being there when you needed them?

The list goes on and on, giving praise and acknowledging people for what they do, or what they have achieved, is a wonderful feeling - a gift that keeps on giving. Doing the same for absolute strangers takes the whole process to a new level. It is truly exceptional to get a letter from a complete stranger who has taken the time to say thank you for something you did.

So why bother? I know some people think this way because that is simply where they are at in their life right now. We all know the saying that the more you give, the more you get.

If you spread love, acknowledge other people, congratulate them, thank them, appreciate them and then go out of your way to let them know, you will get all of the same directed back at you.

If you make this kind of positive behaviour a natural part of your day, all kinds of wonderful things will happen and you will want to do it even more. The end result – everyone wins, we all celebrate and life is so much better.

If you are stuck in the rut of over-analysis paralysis, caused by too much inward focus, one of the best tools to break you out of it is celebration. It doesn't matter whether you are celebrating your own good news or the good news of those around you. Make it a habit and you will be truly rewarded.

Last, but not least, the more you celebrate the more you find to celebrate. It is all about seeing more of what you focus on. So celebrate your life, celebrate your family and friends, their achievements and milestones, and sometimes celebrate for no reason at all other than to just be grateful for everything you have in your life.

'We should learn to celebrate the smallest of things, like the opening of an envelope.'

Key points

- 1. The more we celebrate our victories the more we will enjoy living.
- 2. We all need to celebrate much more no matter how busy we are.
- 3. Put some time and energy into celebrating. There is always a good reason if we look hard enough.

- 4. Celebrating should be big and bold.
- 5. Celebrate other people's achievements it will make you feel happy too.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Do you celebrate your victories loud and long?

Are you too busy to celebrate?

When did you stop celebrating?

What would it take for you to get back into the spirit of celebration?

Find someone and celebrate.

Have a love affair with life

I always get a tingle down my spine when elements in our lives conspire to send us a message. Whilst writing The Me Myth I had been trying to come up with a term that really captures how I feel about the opportunity we all have to live a magnificent life and having a love affair with life sums it up perfectly.

This is how I view life. It is like a wonderful love affair that is filled with passion, expectancy, pure joy, sadness and, of course, love in all its various shapes and guises. This isn't one of those weekend love affairs, this is the real McCoy, where every moment apart hurts and when you fight you feel an incredible sadness. It is about being together and not seeing the rough edges, the wrinkles or the odours that have a nasty way of sneaking out. We forgive the imperfections of our lover and we should do the same with ourselves. That doesn't mean we don't want to make ourselves better but we have to at least start with accepting where we are now.

It is such a powerful and energetic feeling to be so excited about the future and all of the incredible things you will do as a couple. It's the same when you have a love affair with life. You almost burst

at the seams thinking about the future. But you are also content to just sit and be together, enjoy each other's company and reflect on what has been.

We all have the opportunity to have our very own love affair with our own life. But, like any relationship, it takes work, it takes effort and there are ups and downs. But there are so many positive aspects that it seems crazy to not want to try.

Too many people have forgotten how to love themselves and, consequently, they struggle to love anyone else. We get to choose love and, yes, it is scary at times, but a dull grey life devoid of love is no alternative.

To have a love affair with life you need to do everything in this book. You need to leap out of bed in the morning and get excited about the day ahead. You need to spread energy, love and passion. You need to treat everyone you meet with an open mind and be quick to laugh and slow to judge.

I have decided to have a love affair with life. How about you?

'When you love life it loves you right back.'

Key points

- 1. Life is truly spectacular if you let it be.
- 2. We get to choose how rich and rewarding life is.
- 3. Just like any love affair, it will have a few ups and downs.
- 4. Make your love affair with life *the* love affair of your life. Do this and you will attract everything you want.
- 5. Having a love affair with life is a daily state of mind.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Do you love your life? Most people don't. We all need to make some changes to embrace life in this way. The place to start is to work out what parts of your life you don't love and make the changes that I have spoken about in this book.

Are you letting other people steal your love of life? If so, it might be time to change your people.

Think about a time in your life that you really did love. Why? Because there was less responsibility, less stress, less demands? Figure out why and try to bring some of this back into your life.

Think about your life in terms of a relationship – wouldn't you invest more in it, celebrate it and show it how happy you are?

The battle with perfection

Most of my life I have battled with perfection. I don't mean that I am perfect in any shape or form, but I have tried to achieve perfection in my work. For some strange reason, no matter how hard I try, I keep getting clear messages that the world is far from perfect and, interestingly enough, that this is okay.

Imperfection is a wonderful way to learn. It is the way we discover new things and new ways of doing tasks that being rigidly perfect would never allow.

As a marketing consultant, I encounter a lot of people who are seriously uptight about the use of the English language. As a writer, I think they expect me to be equally concerned and they chastise me when I dare to start a sentence, or God forbid a paragraph, with the word 'and'.

And this drives me crazy.

For me, language evolves. If it didn't, I imagine we would still be sitting around grunting at each other like Neanderthals.

Please don't get me wrong, we should all aspire to do what we do with the best of our abilities, but there are times when near enough really is good enough. Why? Simply because being too rigid and too inflexible creates far more pain and anguish than perhaps the use of a wrong word, or placing an object in the wrong place, or someone turning up five minutes late.

The key is to learn to let go when it is appropriate. If you are an airline engineer working on a jet engine, it is important to get it right. But often the need for perfection is a need to control, which is caused by fear and self-esteem issues. I know that when I was a kid my life had very little safety or control and my self-esteem was virtually non-existent. Because of this, I wanted everything to be perfect as an adult and I would control what I could to make sure this happened.

When your self-esteem is low you clutch to what other people compliment you on. For me, it was my work. I was praised for what I did and the results I got. So I started to take myself far too seriously and, again, my desired outcome was perfection.

Somewhere along the line, I realised that I couldn't control everything and, more importantly, trying to control everything was exhausting. People don't like to be around other people who are that controlling or tightly wound. Secondly, I realised that my work was a part of who I am, not all of who I am. So I learnt to appreciate positive feedback, but it doesn't rule my world any more.

With these two realisations came a sense of freedom. I could finally relax and accept that sometimes near enough is okay. I still aspire to do the very best job I can, but I don't obsess over it and lie in bed at night beating myself up when I make a dumb mistake. Instead I tend to laugh at myself, groan if it has cost me money and set about fixing the problem at hand. And then I move on.

Some people seem to go through life always swimming against the current. Everything is a life or death struggle and there is a sense of the dramatic surrounding every aspect of their life. My biggest realisation with living this way is that the people around you, the ones you love and care for the most, really find it hard to just be themselves if you are busy trying to be the perfect mother, father, brother, sister, boss, employee and so on. Your struggle rubs off on them. In the long run, this means that they may not want to spend that much time around you.

A big part of living in 'The Me Myth' is that we spend a lot of time wondering what people think about us. Will they admire us, love us, like us or respect us if we are not 'perfect'? The reality is that they will probably admire, love and respect you even more if you are not perfect, and let's be honest, what other people think of us is none of our business.

Being great at what we do is a good thing. But feeling that we need to be perfect is not. Let your guard down, be human and be real and you will stop beating yourself up, and those around you will be more inclined to connect with you at a deeper level, which leads to all kinds of wonderful things.

'Life was never meant to be perfect - it was meant to be lived.'

Key points

- 1. Many people struggle with perfection and find it difficult to live up to their own ridiculously high standards.
- 2. Being perfect can be a very lonely place. It is very hard for other people to live up to your expectations.
- 3. Sometimes near enough is good enough.
- 4. People will love you for who you are.
- 5. Letting go of the rigidity of perfection lets many more important things come into your life.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Are you a perfectionist?

Ask people around you how your perfectionism makes them feel – honestly.

Try being less 'perfection' oriented. It is tough, I know, but people will feel more able to connect with you when they are not living up to your perceived impossible standards.

The pain of comparison

When we live with the belief that the world revolves around 'me', we often find ourselves comparing our lives to that of others. This kind of comparison can bring with it a sense of pain or envy. It can make people feel that life is unfair because 'I am the same age as them and look how little I have and how much they have'.

If we look hard enough we will always find someone just like us who has done more, who earns more, who has a better body, a more attractive partner, who has a bigger house, better children and so on. So why on earth torture ourselves by actively looking for people like this?

People who are inspired by the achievements of others, see the achiever and see the possibility of what they can do and be themselves. They see someone who has 'made it' as a role model, as a motivator and as proof that they are on track to achieve their own goals and dreams.

For the people who look at the achiever with envy and even resentment, all of their fears, insecurities and frustrations come bubbling to the surface.

It is okay to admit if you feel envy and resentment at others' success but start doing something about it. Surely it would be much better to look at these achievers and to be inspired by them rather than resentful of them?

The best way to start doing this is to look at success a little deeper. Most of the time we find out about someone once they have become a success. In other words, we only see the final product. Everything looks perfect and the successful person is the epitome of all the things that deep down we want to be.

The bits we don't see are the sacrifices they have made, often over many years, to achieve their dreams. We don't see the things they missed out on to achieve their goals and we certainly don't see the price they have paid.

I remember listening to an interview with Ian Thorpe, Australia's swimming legend, talking about the life he led to become a gold-medal Olympian. Every single day, from when he was a kid, he was in the pool from 5 am for hours before school. Then, after school and on weekends, he was back in the pool, again for hours. Imagine the things he missed out on as kid. Imagine what it must have been like day after day, year after year, getting back into that pool, swimming lap after lap? Most of us would give up after a few days!

Zig Ziglar, American entrepreneur and all-round guru, said, 'Success is dependent upon the glands – sweat glands.' I see so many people who are hugely successful in business and have all of the trappings of success. What is the common trait they all share? They work incredibly hard. The sacrifices that many of these people make to succeed in business are really quite daunting. They have to risk everything and they often fail before they achieve success.

It is hard to imagine this if you have never had your own business, but think what it would be like if your world could come crashing down pretty much every day due to circumstances beyond your control, like a global financial crisis. Why would you bother? Who would live with this risk? Millions of people do.

If we are prepared to do everything they have done – work crazy hours, have enormous amounts of stress and sacrifice time with family and loved ones – we can have the same degree of success. Of course there is no guarantee, but if you are not prepared to put in the effort, I guarantee that you won't have the success. Even those people who appear to become successful easily have put a huge amount of effort into getting where they are.

Even more simple success – like a friend who seems to have their life together, the perfect partner, a good job, a nice car and so on – takes effort and sacrifice and hard work, just in a different way. They have worked on themselves, either consciously or not, and made their life the way they want it to be. We can all do this, but it won't happen unless we make it happen.

Being envious of other people's achievements in life is not healthy. We need to be aware as soon as we slide into this frame of mind and snap ourselves out of it. Instead, be inspired by what others achieve and learn from their success. What can you take from their stories and apply to your life?

'Comparing others always leaves you feeling short.'

Key points

- 1. Envy of others' success is not healthy.
- 2. Success takes hard work and sacrifice we can all achieve it if we are prepared to do what it takes.
- 3. Be inspired by other people's success rather than envious of it.
- 4. We can learn from other people's success and apply what we learn to our lives. In many ways, this is a gift from them to us.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Do you find yourself comparing where you are in your life with where other people are? Do you do this in an envious way?

Find someone who you are envious of and, if you can, talk to them and find out what they did to be successful, the sacrifices they have made and the effort they put into their life. It is unlikely to be as easy as it seems.

The moment you start to feel envious of another person's success – stop! Think about what they have done for many years to get to where they are now.

Find someone who you feel envious of and think of how you can use their success to inspire you instead.

The Great Wall of You

I used to have the tragic ability of being able to cut people out of my life with little more than a dismissive thought. If I felt that I had been wronged in some way, no matter how long I had known a person or how close I was to them, I could literally stop all communication in a heartbeat and never give them another thought. I could do this even as a small child. I was ruthless - cross me and you were out of my life. Now that is a modern-day tragedy.

How scared must I have been to have had such strong feelings to protect myself that I would shut people out the minute there was any possibility of me getting hurt? This was not about me making a positive decision in my life, it was much more of a defence mechanism.

It took me a few years, and a taste of loneliness, to realise that to be human is to make mistakes and sometimes these mistakes hurt others. It is wonderfully easy to be sanctimonious and self-righteous and to act hurt when you feel that you have been wronged. But it leads to a hollow life where other people don't want you in their life because it is too difficult to live up to your expectations.

We all get it wrong. We all do things that we regret and, intentionally or not, we all hurt other people at some stage in our lives. There is a saying that to love is to feel pain. I agree, but the alternative is to feel nothing. I know because I have been there. This is the place where you don't let anyone into your world because you are too scared.

In my life I have been particularly scared of being abandoned by women. My mother left when I was about six months old, the old lady who looked after us shut off emotionally and I lived in fear of her dying until she did die, my foster mother adopted me and died from cancer, my sister died and left me, and there have been other women in my life who have 'abandoned me'.

So for years to cope with this fear of being abandoned, I never let myself get close to women. I love women, I can communicate better with them than men, I understand them and I respect and appreciate them. But I never quite trusted them.

With a belief like this how could I ever build an incredible life? I knew that I had to change my way of thinking and have a long hard look at this wall I had built around me.

First, though, let me talk about life behind the wall. It is wonderfully safe. No one can get in and hurt you because you are the only one with the key. And there is no way you will open that door if there is the slightest chance that you may feel something for the person hoping to come in. You have many friends but no truly close ones who love and accept you unconditionally because no one knows you well enough. Emotionally you flatline. There are no real highs or lows, just a beautifully bland existence that always feels hollow. But it is safe.

I wanted to change. I wanted to feel emotions and to let people in, but I struggled with the idea because I was so afraid of getting hurt.

Earlier in *The Me Myth* I spoke about the time I got up and opened my heart to a group of 200 businesswomen. I told them my

story, warts and all. It was the day I tore down my wall and let people in. What happened next floored me.

The more I opened up and let people in, the more love I was showered in, the more incredible people I met, the more experiences I had. At the same time the more challenges I had, the more conflicts I experienced and the more people demanded of me. But I didn't care about any of the negative stuff because it was all real. I felt it all. I opened myself up 100 per cent and, just as I have in this book, I held nothing back.

The emotional reward has been simply unbelievable. I consider it a gift to have so many people who let me share my story and my experiences with them. This culminated recently when I decided to put on an event in my hometown to get people to come along and change their attitude towards the global economic crisis. Within a few days 350 people registered. And again, I opened up completely, shared many of my deepest and most revealing thoughts and I felt blessed to feel their embraces, both physically and emotionally, at the end of the event and for months afterwards.

I have walked through many shopping centres and had strangers come up and throw their arms around me, hugging me and sobbing and thanking me for sharing my life with them.

I have incredible friends, my own small family, wonderful people who I work with and complete strangers who send me emotional messages about how I have changed their life. All of this happened after I tore down my wall and made the mental decision to let people into my world, warts and all. My life is so much better as a result.

How many people go through life without the fortune of this incredible realisation? Sadly, too many. So why not look for the walls you have built to protect yourself and see which ones can be pulled down. Once you start the demolition process it gets easier. The point to remember is that walls keep everything out, both the good and the bad. Life without either is empty and grey. So get that mental wrecking ball out and demolish away. Enjoy the process.

'Walls keep more things in than they keep out.'

Key points

- 1. We are all afraid of getting hurt some people are so afraid that it stops them from letting anyone get close to them.
- 2. It is better to feel the kaleidoscope of emotions than to feel nothing.
- 3. The more you let people in, the more you will feel. There may be pain, but there will be joy, love, passion and excitement too.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Do you struggle to let people into your heart because you are afraid of getting hurt?

Is there someone who you lost because you wouldn't let them in?

Is there a specific person who hurt you that made you put up your barrier? Is your life better off living behind this wall?

If you are ready, make a mental picture of your wall then visualise a big wrecking ball knocking it down. Living life behind a wall feels safe but isn't really living.

It's time to define the new you

One of the challenges many of us have is figuring out where we are going in life. Statistically people who set goals achieve them, but for many people trying to figure out what their individual goals are is really tough. I have had periods in my life where I struggled to come up with my own goals so I developed a different system.

I like to write a script of who I am going to be in the future. Sometimes I might imagine what I will be like in one year, other times I might go further and visualise myself in ten years from now.

I spend a few weeks working on this script. I have a notebook with the key headings written down, the parts of my life that are most important to me – my relationships, my work, my health and wellbeing, my finances, my spirituality and my fun stuff.

During this pondering time I refer to these notes often. I add things to the various topics, I rub a few things out and slowly, but surely, I get more clarity about who I want to be in the future.

Once I am happy with the information, I write a paragraph about each key area of my life and how I see the future. For example, here is my latest 'Andrew Griffiths's Work Vision'.

'I am one of the world's most successful authors, with 20 books sold around the world. I help millions of people every year to live the life they truly desire and deserve. I present to large audiences in many countries and I regularly appear in the media, sharing my own life experiences to help others. I have been on Oprah and many other shows, spreading my beliefs. I get to travel a lot with my beautiful partner, Dr Deb, and we meet incredible people every day and have wonderful experiences that help us in the work we do. I generate enough money to ensure that we can continue doing this work, helping and inspiring others. Along the way we meet people who can help us to achieve our dream. We get to take plenty of time-out to recharge our batteries and make sure that our health and relationship are our priorities. Every day we have bucketloads of fun and we live the life that we truly want.'

I read this often, I change it when I need to and I have a very clear visual picture of what my life will look like in five years. That is what makes it happen. From my own experiences when I have this clear mental picture and plan, I meet people who will help to make it a reality. Opportunities come along that fit this vision perfectly.

When our picture of where we want to be is clear, we can actually set about making it happen. I find it even more powerful than just setting goals. It is shaping your destiny, it is painting a picture and giving your desires more focus and reality. The better you are at doing this the more likely your dreams will come true.

Throughout this book I have discussed many ways you can get the life you really want. Stand up and take responsibility, be honest, learn to become an inspired communicator, let go of your past and so many more. This exercise lets you write the script for living the exact life you want. This is a way to take the ideas out of your head and onto paper, a surprisingly powerful thing to do.

Write about the kind of relationship you would like to have, be clear about what it means to you, the type of love you will have, how your life will look and feel. This is a visual process and we need to imagine pictures of what our lives will look like to make it work even better. If you are not in a relationship imagine the person you will be with. Don't worry if you meet someone who doesn't look like you imagined – that is what pheromones were invented for. If you are in a relationship describe how it will look and feel in the future and what steps you will be taking to make it happen.

Financial visualising is also very powerful. I actually visualise what my bank statement will look like when I have the amount of money that I intend to have. Picture what your life will be like and how you will feel inside when you reach your financial goals.

The more you can visualise, the more you can feel what it will be like when you reach this place in your life, the more profound your script will be and the more likely you will achieve what you desire.

Once we have done this exercise, covering all areas of our life, we need to read it often. This keeps it at the front of our minds and it helps us to attract what we need to get the job done. But, at the same time, allow yourself to daydream often and think about your life to be. Feel it in your bones. See if your pulse goes up a bit when you start to think about the endless possibilities of what can be.

I keep my life script handy so I can read it when I am on a plane, waiting to go into a meeting or any other opportunity where I have a few minutes to spare. Every time I read it, I become excited and filled with anticipation about my life.

Last, but not least, we still have to get off our bums and make these things happen. You won't become a millionaire if you sit on your couch and never leave the house or take a risk. Accept that you have to be the one to make this happen. The universe may help you out along the way, but you are the one who will do it.

Everybody has the ability to paint a picture of how your life is going to be in the future. The most wonderful part is that you get to make it reality. Please remember, it is your life, you are in control if you want to be and no one can change that.

Please paint a spectacular picture for the new you.

'Our script for life is written in pencil not carved in stone.'

Key points

- 1. We can rewrite our scripts for life whenever we want. This script is how we want every part of our lives to look.
- 2. Once we have our new script it is much easier to set our goals to achieve the life we want.
- 3. To build the life we want we have to take action. If you have a big life planned, you will need to take big action.
- 4. We are in control of our lives and we get to make the changes that we want we should never let anyone else take that away from us.
- 5. Today is a great day to start building your new life.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Do you have your own life script that you are following? Does it cover every part of your life, including relationships, financial, business, physical, spiritual and perhaps parenting? If you don't have a script start writing the script on how you want every aspect of your life to look.

Is there any part of your life that you have surrendered control to someone or something else? If you have, why?

Are you prepared to take the action necessary to change your life? If you aren't, ask yourself why not?

Right here, right now

Well we have come to the end of The Me Myth. I hope that you have enjoyed the stories that I have shared. I also hope that you were able to relate to some of the experiences I discussed and my realisations as part of my own journey.

But, most importantly of all, I hope that you feel inspired enough to take action in your life, to break out of your own 'Me Myth'. We have the ability to live the life we want, but sitting back and wishing for it to happen will not get the results you want or make the changes you need. You have to take action and be responsible for your own life. So why not take action today?

To achieve everything we want in life, we have to realise that the world doesn't revolve around us. Once you have made this realisation, you will be well on the way to getting everything you want. For me, the things I have spoken about in The Me Myth have helped me and I am sure they will help you.

There is a great saying that goes something like 'a year from now you will wish that you had started'. How true is that for all of us when it comes to making changes?

Most of us have experienced how hard it is to get started. When you are 20 kilograms overweight, getting to your ideal weight seems so far away. Changing the people in your life seems impossible when you are sitting amongst them. Getting the perfect job is a million miles away when you start thinking about paying the mortgage, the kids' schooling, car payments, medical insurance etc. I truly understand this, but I also know that every step forward brings you one step closer to your goal.

People who get what they want out of life take action. Some people can take big action and get big results. That is great if you are one of those people, but what if you're not? Even small changes can have big results. So take the biggest steps that you can and then push yourself further.

Think back to a time when you mastered something. When I first started writing I was a two-finger typist. It took me forever to write anything and my fingers could never keep up with my brain. Not only was I slow, I was incredibly inaccurate. I realised that if I was going to take my writing seriously I needed to figure out how to type.

I normally write at night, so I decided to type on my computer with the lights turned off. This way my fingers had to learn their way around the keyboard. And, slowly but surely, they did. I became faster and faster, to the point where I would easily be able to get a job as a typist. But I also knew that speed was just one aspect of being a great typist so I needed to make sure I was accurate. I made the effort to learn words and not rely on 'spellcheck'. I didn't want to waste my time going back and fixing mistakes so I committed myself to learning to be a better writer.

I keep a copy of the first manuscript that I sent to my publisher to remind me just how far I have come. There is no way I will ever show it to another living soul – it is simply too embarrassing. Apart from the fact that it took me an eternity to write, it is terribly laid out, filled with mistakes and basically a disaster.

Thank goodness for wonderful editors and proofreaders who fix up manuscripts. I think their names should be in big print on the front cover and the author's name should go in small print on the hack

We live in a world of instant gratification and anything that takes longer than a cup of coffee to achieve is considered unreasonable. Yet the things we put our best efforts into are the things that give us the greatest sense of satisfaction.

Going back to the losing weight analogy, no one can lose weight overnight. It takes time, effort and sacrifice. But putting on the jeans that you haven't been able to fit into for ten years is without doubt the most wonderful feeling there is.

When I was 15 I decided to hitchhike across Australia from Sydney to Perth. I got a train to the outskirts of Sydney, left the train station and stuck my thumb out. This was a round trip of close to 9000 kilometres. The experiences on this trip could easily fill a book and I was very lucky to survive (there are some very strange people in the remote parts of Australia). I could have spent a lot of time planning the trip, weighing up the risk, figuring out the best route, putting a story together to elicit sympathy from people so they would give me a ride. But instead, as teenagers often do, I simply stuck my thumb out and let life happen.

I will never forget this experience. When you stop over-analysing things and get on with living, amazing experiences come your way.

The greatest journeys in life are long. The road has many twists, potholes and hazards that in the beginning you could never even imagine. But along with these hardships are the wonders. The people you meet on the road, the sights you see, your sense of achievement, your resourcefulness and the inner realisations that make you stop and give yourself a pat on the back.

We all have different roads to travel on, but they all share common characteristics; there will be twists and turns, unexpected challenges, beautiful views, speed bumps, long boring bits, smooth sections, rocky roads, other cars and interesting places to stop for a little while.

Sure there are times when it is nice to pull over by the side of the road and watch the world go by, but after a while it is much nicer to be driving down that road, filled with excitement, wonder and passion for what lies around the next bend.

Personally I feel that there is nothing more exciting than embarking on a journey to somewhere that I haven't been before. The anticipation, the excitement, the sense of purpose and the thrill of what is to come are the same feelings that we should have every morning as we get ready for the day ahead.

I hope that your journey will be all the more rewarding for having read this book.

'We all talk the talk, but the richest of lives are led by people who can walk the walk.'

Key points

- 1. Creating the life we really want will take effort and it will take time. But the rewards are worth it.
- 2. There is an incredible sense of satisfaction in mastering anything. Mastering life is the ultimate challenge as there is no clear-cut line saying when this has been achieved. The key is realising that mastering life is all about the journey, not the destination.
- 3. To get great results in life requires you to take great action.
- 4. Life is something we will never really experience if we don't get out there and live it.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Are there any parts of your life that you have struggled to master? (I know that this is a question that we will all answer yes to, but please humour me.)

Are you prepared to do what it takes to make the changes you want? In other words, do you have enough motivation?

If you have read this book cover to cover, go back to a section that really resonated with you. Today is the day to make the changes that you want and need.

Where to from here?

Firstly let me thank you for taking the time to read *The Me Myth*. I hope that you have enjoyed sharing some of my experiences, observations and recommendations for living a rich and rewarding life.

We are all very different and every human being is unique. What works for one may not work for others. But I have been as open and honest as I can with what has worked for me. There were many times in my life when I could have just given up in despair and entered the dark side of life full of anger and sadness, but I learnt at a young age that the choice was mine. And I think I chose wisely.

We get just one go at this beautiful life of ours. We owe it to ourselves to make every moment count and to rise above what others think we should be doing. At the same time, we need to make certain that we spread the same message of passion and possibility to those around us. This means not getting caught up in petty differences, negativity, resentment, envy and judgment.

So read all of the self-development books you can, go to seminars and subscribe to all of the newsletters that encourage living a great life, but please don't ever forget that you will learn the greatest lessons in life by actually living. Go out, meet people, have wonderful experiences, challenge yourself whenever you can, get passionate about everything, travel, communicate in a loving and honest way, have respect for everyone you encounter and be grateful for all that comes your way.

I truly hope that I have inspired you enough to realise that you are in control of your life. You get to decide what your life will look like, no one can take that away from you unless you let them.

Last, but not least, looking at your life just like a book has its own therapeutic value. It is filled with chapters, some more memorable than others, and most importantly, the future is yet to be written. You are the author of your life. How wonderful is it to have a blank page just waiting for you to start writing, with the only limitation being your mind.

Until we meet again, Andrew

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it; Linda Richardson, my friend, colleague and enforcer; Carmel Robertson for threatening to put the ABC onto me if I didn't write this book; and Kelly Sinclair, my incredibly patient, loving and loval friend and personal-trainer extraordinaire. You all mean the world to me.

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Last, but certainly not least, a big thank you to my loyal readers. This is my tenth book and I doubt very much that I would have got much further than the first one without your help. I never take your support for granted.

About Andrew Griffiths

Andrew Griffiths is a serial entrepreneur with a passion for helping people to achieve both their business and personal dreams and goals. He is an internationally renowned author, dynamic keynote presenter and specialist consultant.

He started his first business at the age of seven when he sold newspapers in the red-light district of Perth. Since then he has gone on to sell encyclopaedias door to door, travelled the world as an international sales manager for a large Japanese shipping company, worked in the Great Sandy Desert for a gold exploration company, been a publisher, had his own scuba school and retail store, and worked as a commercial diver throughout Australia and Papua New Guinea.

Andrew has founded and run two boutique marketing and corporate communication firms in Australia.

Inspired by a desire to see others reach their full potential, Andrew has written eight hugely successful books. His '101 Business Building Books' offer business owners smart, practical and realistic advice. This series is sold in 50 countries, and has been translated into many languages including Chinese, Indian, Vietnamese, Nigerian, Estonian and Indonesian.

Known for his ability to entertain, inspire and to energise, Andrew is considered one of the leading small business experts in the world. He is highly sought after as a keynote presenter and trainer.

There is no doubt that anyone who meets Andrew Griffiths, reads one of his books or experiences him presenting, will come away from the experience inspired, entertained and ready to make changes in their life and their business.

www.andrewgriffiths.com.au

To find out more about *The Me Myth* please visit www.thememyth.com

Stop analysing, start living!

Me, me, me! Welcome to the battle cry of the modern world. These days we all feel overwhelmed and bombarded from every direction with messages encouraging us to concentrate on 'me'. But it is this very focus that is stopping us from achieving the rich and rewarding life that we all crave.

Bestselling author Andrew Griffiths has a brilliant, inspiring alternative – stop looking inwards for answers and start looking outwards. His simple yet profound message is a result of an eye-opening personal journey. He knows first-hand the benefits of breaking away from the limiting belief that the world revolves around 'me'. And now you can discover how to make your life richer too.

Refreshingly direct and entertaining, Andrew Griffiths will fill you with enthusiasm and passion about the life you can have – the life you deserve.

We all have the ability to live the life we want.

So what are you waiting for?



Andrew Griffiths is a serial entrepreneur with a passion for helping people to achieve both their business and personal dreams and goals. He is a dynamic keynote presenter, specialist consultant and internationally renowned business author.

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