



Ready, Steady,

Calm

Gary Weigh

滅却心頭火自涼

Mind strategies for success in life and business

Front Cover

Design by Steve Weigh

滅却心頭火亦涼

“When thoughts are quieted down, fire itself is cool and refreshing.”

Verse from a 9th century Chinese poem made famous in Japan by Zen Master Kaisen as he died in the 16th century.

© Copyright 2009 Gary Weigh
All rights reserved

You may reproduce this material in unaltered form for your own non-commercial, personal use. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, you must not copy, adapt, publish, distribute or commercialise any material contained in this publication without the permission of the author.

Gary Weigh, B.Comm. MFP,
Director
Gary Weigh & Associates Pty Ltd

- Business Coaching
- Financial Planning

PO Box 201
Indooroopilly, Queensland
Australia, 4068

Email: gary@garyweigh.com
Please visit my website at **www.garyweigh.com**

Contents

Foreword

1. Decisions Under Pressure
2. Mind and Body Centered
3. Present in the Moment
4. Strengthen Your Spirit
5. Powerful Presence
6. Never Too Late
7. The Process Of Change
8. Don't Worry, Just Plan
9. There Is No Better Time
10. Move Forward
11. No-Conflict Mind
12. Millionaire Mindset
13. Opportunity Seeking
14. Wealth Habits

Exercise

15. Calm Yourself

Self-test

16. Can You Pass Your Driving Test?

Foreword

Our dreams still fall well short of our true potential

This book builds on the premise that deliberate good fortune begins with a calm mind. A calm mind is one of the foundations of good decision making. Moving forward and realising short term goals and long held dreams requires positive thought, good decision making and purposeful action. A calm mind alone does not guarantee that all decisions will be good ones, but it does provide the blank canvas upon which to create the necessary positive mindsets to take you wherever you wish to go in life.

The development of my calm mind came through the regular practice of Aikido. Also known as the art of peace, Aikido is a non-aggressive Japanese martial art founded in the early 20th century by O-Sensei, Master Morihei Ueshiba. However, its origins can be traced to the Samurai era of feudal Japan.

There are many styles of Aikido but they share one powerful ingredient. That is 'Ki', the Japanese term that describes the concept of vital internal energy that passes through our bodies and connects us to the universe and indeed to each other, as beings from essentially the same source. 'Ki' is so important that it features prominently in the name Ai-ki-do. 'Ai' means harmony and 'do' means the way or the path. The concept of 'ki' is not restricted to Japanese culture. The Chinese equivalent is 'Chi', a term popularly recognised by the western world in the art of Tai-Chi.

Aikido has something for everybody. Its martial applications are effective and, if necessary or carelessly used, can be dangerous. Its immobilisation,

restraint and removal applications are popular in police and prison guard training. It is an effective form of self defence particularly for females and older people because Aikido does not rely on superior strength or speed. There are no kicks or punches, no sit-ups or push-ups, only relaxation, balance, movement and timing.

For me, the jewel of Aikido was finding 'calmness under pressure' because pressure is the one common adversity we all face in our daily lives. The pressure we put on ourselves is stress and can be found at home, at work, in business, in sickness, in debt, in a crowded shopping centre, in heavy traffic or just sitting alone. The responses we choose depend very much on how we deal with the pressures we feel. They can be expressed in many ways including exercise, cigarettes, alcohol, discussion or venting frustration and anger.

Pressure management solutions and life building strategies are more difficult to implement because they usually involve real change and change means moving out of a comfort zone. It is when stepping out of that comfort zone that we meet our real enemies. They go by the names of fear and self doubt.

These two team up to form the mind's sabotage team and can be very effective in sinking every good idea and every cherished dream before either can get close to becoming a reality. A mind that can remain calm under pressure provides an environment for clearer thought. With clearer thinking,

strategies can be developed to sidestep the internal sabotage team. So whatever the problem, a calm mind has a much better chance of finding a solution, and usually more than one.

In this book I share with you some very valuable mind strategies that will help you on your way to whatever success you seek and will enable you to realise your dreams and, beyond that, perhaps even your true potential. The key to bridging that gap is to immobilise your sabotage team and to truly believe in your self.

Some of the strategies I discuss are based on the principles of Aikido and, in some cases, on principles that I have personally drawn from my Aikido training. Others are founded in solid business practice, which I discuss in my capacity as a professional business coach and financial planner. The strategies in this book are applicable to both business and personal life, which are both founded in human relationships.

I do hope you enjoy this book and if you have the desire or the opportunity, go practice Aikido for a while. Aikido people are friendly and welcoming everywhere. If you try it, you will begin to understand what all the fuss is about.

Gary Weigh

Decisions Under Pressure

A moment of powerful decision making

Empty handed I stand my ground, calm and relaxed as the dark skinned swordsman approaches with his menacing blade held high in the classic daijodan position. Step by step, we cautiously close the ma-ai distance. Through my bare feet, I instinctively feel for the familiar connection with the earth as we close towards our destiny. There is colour, excitement and movement all around us but our minds have already fallen silent, empty of all conscious thought. There is nothing but the universe of two energies moving together in this moment. We are connected, alert and aware, both trying to sense even the slightest change in the energy field. There is no narrowing of vision; no adrenalin-charged fight or flight responses; only alert calm and stillness. He seems to float towards me without making any movement perceptible to the eye. The upper part of his body and his expression never change. His sword does not waver, not even slightly. There is no emotion, only his dark eyes hint at the power within. The smooth and measured movement of his feet is well hidden beneath the folds of his black hakama. I take it all in but focus on nothing in particular, especially not his eyes or his sword. In the dance of life and death they can be far too mesmerising.

This encounter will be decided in a fraction of a second. There will be one strike only and no second chance. One cut, one kill! He is now at engagement distance cutting off all escape. Even the very thought of retreat now would be enough for this swordsman to sense the change in our connection and the

blade would come flashing down before I could move. My only chance at survival is to wait until he is committed to his strike. I must wait until the blade is actually falling and, in that fraction of a second it takes to reach me and commence its deadly cut, I must act. Timing is everything. A moment too early and his blade will follow my movement.

A moment too late and his deadly strike will find its intended target. Moments pass and suddenly I feel it. The intention to strike has formed in his mind. Call it sixth sense or call it by any other name but I can feel it as an energy vibration. In my mind I am already behind him but it is still too early to move. His thought hasn't yet translated to action. Like a slow motion movie I can see in my peripheral vision his shoulder and leading sword hand starting to move. Wait. Wait. Wait. With each relaxed breath I feel the universe being slowly inhaled into my centre and out through my fingers. Then after one more heartbeat, there is perfect stillness and calm. It seems like an eternity as the sword arcs down. Just at the instant the swordsman executes his killing strike I move. He cannot follow. I don't move far; just enough so that the blade brushes past my outer clothing. The swordsman is committed and has no option but to go through with the cut. Not expecting to be cutting thin air, the extra momentum causes him to overextend slightly at the bottom of his strike. Too late he realises his error. I sweep into the safe point behind his right shoulder. In the next heartbeat it is over. A small but well practiced movement

takes his balance and his own energy catapults him down into the void I have created between us. The dark skinned swordsman is on the ground, disarmed with his own sword at his throat.

I smiled down at my friend Ben, release the wooden sword from his throat and he jumps to his feet. Practice resumes with many more strikes towards my head and thrusts to my torso. Over and over, I move in and repeatedly disarm him, never focusing on the sword, only on the direction and timing of Ben's energy.

This is Bokken Tori practice which at first is one of the scariest exercises in Aikido. A Bokken is a wooden practice sword made to resemble the katana, the traditional fighting sword of the Samurai. In its martial application, this practice helps develop hand-eye coordination and promotes anticipation and awareness beyond the self. Over time, it instills calmness under pressure and helps control fear.

Another important combat lesson to be learnt is that any encounter takes place between two people, not between a sword and open hands. To focus on the swordsman, not the sword is the path to survival, but survival is far from guaranteed. To focus on the sword is the certain path to destruction. Disarming yet not harming the opponent is testament to your own calmness, control and personal freedom.

This martial lesson can be easily transposed to everyday life. A conversation,

a difference of opinion or a business negotiation is an interaction between two people. It matters not that one person might be rich, well-dressed, bullish, overbearing, noisy and flanked by obedient employees. These are just the modern day versions of colourful feathers, shiny armour, beating drums and war-cries meant to intimidate and distract.

Bokken Tori practice is a good learning ground for decision making. When time is of the essence and a decision must be made, I simply recall the image of the ancient Japanese swordsman in front of me with razor sharp sword raised high ready to strike. I am unarmed and too close to run. I must deal with the situation, as dangerous as it is. I must make a decision.

The raised sword reminds me that at this precise moment nothing else in the entire universe matters. Yesterday and tomorrow are now irrelevant. The only moment that matters is now. Not only must a decision be made, it is a 'seishi' decision of life or death. To live, there must be a movement out of the way of the sword; but which way to move and when to move? To not move at all is to surely die. To move too early gives the swordsman enough time to change direction and track my movement. To move too late is to be cut down where I stand.

Taking the decision to move now seems exceedingly obvious but the direction and timing of the movement are the critical elements of the decision. There is not much time to decide and the pressure is extreme. Fear must be

overcome and movements must be fast and decisive. This can only be achieved with a calm mind. A mind full of worry and fearful distraction will produce slow and indecisive movement or no movement at all.

A high risk strategy to say the least, but moving toward the sword is the only direction of survival. Again, this can only be done with a clear, calm mind totally focused on the task.

Holding one's nerve until the swordsman has fully committed to the strike must be done in complete stillness with total focus and alert calmness. Taking one step forward off the line of the strike as the sword falls is the step to life.

Aikido contains many other metaphors for life and business. Regardless of how overwhelming the odds may appear or how disadvantaged you may feel, any encounter in any moment can only occur between two beings, even if you are dealing with a group. To narrow your focus onto a perceived disadvantage is to entertain certain defeat.

In the case where you encounter a hostile group, for example in a boardroom, it is possible to deal with them effectively as a series of single, momentary encounters in rapid succession. The aim is to move and take control of the group, redirecting their energy to your advantage. In this case, the movement may be verbal. Such a group teamed up to overwhelm you can be quickly disorganised and lose its structure and dynamics. The once seemingly invincible closing circle or advancing storm front can have its energy redirected and can

be transformed into a manageable queue of individuals, each involuntarily lining up for an encounter with you.

Decision making in the face of adversity can be a solitary major decision or it can be a series of rapid fire choices, but either way it requires a calm, positive mind projecting strongly forward. Making decisions under pressure is always easier and less stressful if it is borne out of practiced responses.

The falling sword also serves as a reminder that trivial stuff is not worth your focus and attention. It is usually someone else's problem and should remain so. Cut through that which is not important and get to the heart of the matter. Stay on your own path.

It is not your role to be drawn into the negative energy of others. All of your day can be taken up fighting fires that other people light. Don't allow other people's priorities to become your priorities. Stay calm, stay centered and stick with your own priorities. You need concern yourself only with those decisions that move you closer to your goals.

Mind and Body Centered

Mind and body as one

Being centered is a beautiful state of mind where mind and body are congruent, working in unison. It is a feeling of total relaxation, great awareness and calm control; a powerful feeling of oneness, where mind and body are exquisitely in synch, meeting any challenge peacefully, enjoyably and with minimal effort. It is a feeling of powerful presence in the moment. Decisions come easily and naturally. It is often referred to as being 'on a roll' or 'in the zone'.

However, the art of being centered is about feeling coordinated all of the time, not just when 'big moment concentration' is required for a good performance on the field or at a client presentation.

Losing your centre is easy to do. It happens when you are distracted or upset in some way; when your mind is somewhere else and not concentrating on the job that your body is doing. If your mind is thinking one thing and your body is doing another, you lose the feeling of being present and become uncoordinated. At this point, mind and body are no longer unified and your once congruent 'being' becomes unbalanced. This may manifest itself as a physical clumsiness or it could be an emotional state of weakness and vulnerability. The result could be a feeling of sadness or a physical response such as dropping something on the floor, tripping over, bumping the furniture or the car in front. More serious consequences at work include poor decision making, poor performance, losing temper or conflict.

Being centered is not the sole property of martial arts practitioners. It lies at the heart of calm focus and concentration in any endeavour. Whilst descriptions of 'in the zone' are most often ascribed to elite sports people, the concept of mind-body coordination is central to effective leadership, optimal work performance and quality relationship building. It is a place of inner peace, harmony and self control that enhances all facets of life.

Mind-body coordination and the feeling of being centered can only exist while the mind is calm and your body relaxed. At the first feeling of stress mind-body coordination is gone. Therefore, stress can be kept at bay by constant 'mind-body coordination' practice. As an added bonus, the body is able to conserve energy that would otherwise be expended on powerful, non-productive negative feelings.

Being centered makes decision making a lot easier. The mind is calm and focused on the task at hand. Concentration is easier when the mind is uncluttered, even when the odds are stacked very unfavourably.

Facing the wooden sword in Aikido practice teaches us a very valuable lesson in life. That is, being disadvantaged does not mean being defenceless. When standing under the sword, it appears at first that the defender is facing insurmountable odds and that injury, at the minimum, would be a certainty. How could it be possible for empty hands to overcome a wielding sword, albeit a wooden one? Surely an experienced person holding the sword and

intent on striking could do so long before the defender could move.

However, with repeated practice however, the answer emerges. With more practice the less difficult it becomes. As the defender becomes more used to the movements of the swordsman, it is easier to anticipate the strikes and harmonise with the swordsman's energy. After a while, provided that the defender stays centered and in the moment, the lightning fast strikes appear slower and slower because experience allows earlier anticipation and a keener sense of the movement starting. Much sharper hand-eye coordination allows the defender to act sooner and with more speed and economy of movement to disarm the swordsman.

It is no different in the business world. Disadvantaged does not mean defenceless.

However, the common problem is that most people don't know how to conduct themselves or defend themselves in business. Like learning Aikido, being in business requires constant training. I don't mean that everyone should have a business degree. Whilst that might be a useful start, people in business should have 'time on the mat' with a good instructor, learning about business from the ground up. Families do it for the purpose of succession. A son or daughter, brought into the business at an early age, is effectively apprenticed for years, and groomed to take over the business when the parents step down. Outside of family businesses, this is not a common model.

Many business people are overbearing, abrupt, rude and aggressive because they think they have to be in order to be taken seriously. Others develop arrogance and a sense of superiority because they think it is necessary to appear tough and experienced. Some develop a win-lose mentality where success is only about winning and taking everything. Then there are the opportunists out to make a fast dollar, usually at someone else's expense.

Business is not a contest, it only appears that way because there are too many ill-advised, poorly trained, lifestyle driven, egocentric people out to make fast money and a name for themselves. Worse, the competition they create is rarely with a competing business (which would be a sign of a healthy economy). Unfortunately, it is with customers and with colleagues inside the walls of a business; the very people who need trust and teamwork. In many businesses I have seen, wild animals in a zoo would be kinder to each other and to the people who feed them.

Of course, there is a different path to follow in business for those who are a little more enlightened. It involves calmness, empathy and a kindly respect for others. Treating people fairly is a foundation stone. Not surprisingly, what goes around comes around. Collaborations based on trust start to occur. People become your advocate, and you become theirs. People bring opportunity to you because they know that you treat everyone involved respectfully and fairly. Conflict is reduced and competition is taken outside the doors of the

business where it belongs. Such a change is not always easy and, for many, it is impossible. However, all change starts from within and the starting point is a calm mind and relaxed body.

Present in the Moment

“You must be the change you want to see in the world.” – Ghandi

Choosing to be present means actively making a choice to be present in the ‘now’ and choosing not to concern yourself with the negative influences of other people, nor with the pain of the past nor fear of the future. Being present means living in the moment and living it with integrity and self respect. It means having an honest appreciation of ‘who you are’ rather than ‘what you are’ or ‘what you own’. It implies being comfortable in your own skin and exacting enjoyment from the present by shutting out the negative distractions of things not within your power to control.

By choosing to be absent from the moment you allow things to get on top of you. By not being present in your own space you are not focusing on yourself in the present moments of your life. All of your ‘now’ moments become filled with thoughts of past and future and influences of other people. They cease to be ‘now’ moments and instead become moments of concern for another time and place. The result is that you are doing very little that is positive in the present moment. You become passive and reactive in your day-to-day thinking and decision making.

With nothing appealing or positive to occupy your mind, you become pre-occupied with worries outside your sphere of control. You feel trapped and controlled by circumstances rather than a being whose spirit is free to influence the world. Negative thoughts invade. Giving these negative thoughts lots of focus and energy will surely give life to unwanted outcomes. Thought and

intent are always precursors to action, both positive and negative. So by not actively choosing to be present, you are choosing by default to be absent. The result is that mentally, you paddle in 'poo'.

So how do you know if you are absent (not present) in the moment? Here are some signs to look out for:

Are you:

- Feeling fear?
- Experiencing thoughts of failure?
- Worrying about the future or past?
- Experiencing anxiety?
- Giving or receiving judgments?
- Doing things out of feelings of obligation?
- Making negative comparisons with others?
- Allowing ego to drive your thoughts & activities?
- Feeling alone?
- Feeling as if you don't have a choice in life?

If so, it is time for a change. Avoid the trap of 'blaming yesterday' and don't allow the future to become more of the past that just keeps happening to you. You can influence and change your future by the choices you make right now.

By choosing to be present, focus on your life right now, moment by moment as you are living it. Each moment is important and valuable. What you choose to do in each moment is also another series of ongoing choices. If you are unhappy with what you are doing in the moment, then simply make some changes. By making changes, albeit small ones, you are choosing to act positively and moving forward.

It is only when you are present that you will realise what you are truly capable of. To master your thoughts is to master your life and how you present yourself to others. Being present is not an accident or a chance of fate. It is a deliberate choice.

Strengthen Your Spirit

Be at peace with yourself

Spirit is the collective internal resources that we use to face the world and present ourselves to others. Spirit springs from a well of internal energy that fuels confidence, self-belief, optimism, drive and persistence. In some people the well is deep and in others, it is shallow.

Strong spirit also reflects in the way we treat others. Argumentativeness, arrogance, aggression and showing off do not reflect strong spirit. Such displays are more likely to stem from a fragile and defensive ego. Projecting genuine respect, empathy and compassion for others is a reflection of internal strength of character.

It is easy to weaken the spirit. Worry, stress, distraction and absence from the present moment tend to weaken internal energy and the spirit. It also leaves the door open to a range of negative feelings.

Strengthening and maintaining the spirit is best achieved in a calm positive mind which is both congruent with the body and present in the moment. Strengthening the spirit is more to do with building your self from the inside out. It is exuding quiet confidence not external toughness. It is extending compassion not harshness or indifference. It is being assertive rather than aggressive. It is developing self-satisfaction not selfishness.

Strong spirit does not require heroics but certainly does include the courage of ordinary people overcoming their fears and self doubt to move forward in their lives.

Constant practice in any field of endeavour helps build confidence and self-belief. The more you practice and learn, the more knowledge and skill you acquire. Over time, you will develop confidence in your own abilities. However, it is your level of energy and persistence that will distinguish you from others.

Those who excel at Aikido are those people who return to training day after day, night after night, regardless of weather or season and regardless of how they feel. They were probably not the most talented when they started but they were the ones who didn't quit, and hung in there practicing regularly. After years of learning, training and dogged persistence they eventually become very accomplished practitioners.

Countless examples of this 'tortoise and hare' story can be heard echoed from every dojo, school, university and sporting group around the world. It is not always the most confident or the most talented beginner who makes it. It is the most committed and persistent. A person with strong spirit.

Commitment to practice in any field can at times be quite difficult and many give up after losing interest or being overtaken by more exciting aspects of life. The person growing in spirit is the one who plateaus or reaches their limit, yet digs deep, continues to practice and somehow finds a way to progress just a little more.

At the end of the day, commitment and persistence have less to do with

dreams of status, prestige or reward and more to do with passion and self truth. If your field of endeavour is not your passion or your truth, then it will be difficult to find long term peace and happiness inside your own skin. Those who find the path the easiest to travel are those who happily accept their practice as a routine part of life. Why? Because they truly enjoy it and they derive enormous self satisfaction.

Whilst practicing something and becoming good at it helps to develop spirit, there is no necessity to compete to be the very best or to be good at everything. To do so is to risk entering a world of comparison and criticism which can adversely affect ego and upset the calmness and harmony of your mind. You need only to be in harmony with your truth and be honest with yourself. After that, simply accept your strengths and weaknesses and know your limits. If you are living your truth you have to be delighted with that. Not many people do.

Powerful Presence

Change begins inside

Powerful presence is not a gift bestowed on a fortunate few at birth. It requires some development work over a long period of time. It is not the kind of thing that can be acquired overnight. It is something that is nurtured and developed.

Powerful presence is the combination of attributes that makes up a whole person. It can't be acquired simply by wearing a red 'power' tie to a business meeting. Powerful presence is a combination of four attributes. Two of these can be acquired in the shorter term. They are physical appearance and personal development. However, the remaining two attributes are deep-seated and defining. They must be developed over a longer period of time. They are the development of a calm, positive mind and the development of positive attitudes toward others. After all, powerful presence is really about connecting with other people.

A calm mind is the blank canvas upon which a positive mindset can be crafted. Creativity, self-belief, integrity, optimism, patience, initiative and adaptability are some of the attributes that describe a positive mind. They are also attributes that are generally attractive to other people. However, without a process to dispel negative thoughts and develop a calm mind, nothing actually changes. Changing your personal process is the only way to change the outcomes in your life.

It is not enough to simply say 'keep your mind filled throughout the day with positive and happy thoughts'. Whilst this is an admirable goal, it is like wishing that you could win Gold Lotto but never buying a ticket. You have to have a personal change process if you want to give yourself a good chance of achieving the goals you want.

It takes a lot of practice to be able to dispel negative feelings in an instant and to shut out all distraction, but it is a very powerful feeling. Chaos may be all around, but being centered and maintaining 'powerful presence' means staying positively alert, relaxed and focused, whilst maintaining a solid connection with the earth. With it come acute awareness, anticipation and total self control. This state can never be achieved if your mind and body are not congruent and acting in harmony.

People with powerful presence recognise the difference between power and influence. They know it is influence that wins the hearts and minds of others, not the blind wielding of power. It is the one quality that sets apart leaders, whether leading a nation or leading by showing initiative at work.

Powerful presence will always weigh heavily in your favour. Many problems will be solved before they arise. Doors will open naturally and barriers that would have once stopped you will be lowered. People will want to work with because they are attracted to who you are and how you present yourself. You are interesting because you speak with passion and self belief. Others feel

comfortable in your presence and they enlist in your cause because they sense your integrity, trust and leadership. Some of these attractive qualities are worthy of further discussion.

Creativity

Just because you can't see it doesn't mean it isn't there. Creativity is an important ingredient in developing a positive mind. When seeking new solutions to the same old problems that have nagged you for years, the imagination is the number one catalyst of change. The good thing is that it doesn't have to be your imagination at work. More often than not, someone else's fresh eyes looking at your problem can create new solutions. You know very well that the more you sit and stare at a problem and stress about it, the more invisible becomes the solution. So open it up for wider discussion. This might include the views of your colleagues, friends or even a professional opinion.

Once a problem has a possible or even a feasible solution, the weight of worry and negative thought is lifted and positive action can follow. It may well require considerable effort and application in order to work through the solution but to find a new path when the self-belief system insisted there were none is the kind of the breakthrough moment you need. It is the positive reinforcement necessary for the development and growth of the new positive you.

Finding the creative breakthrough is to have the battle half won. Never to seek such an experience is to end up living a life of mediocrity and mental poverty.

Strong Self-Belief & Optimism

Self-belief without arrogance is an attractive quality. To develop strong self-belief, you need to have confidence that you are good at something in this life. When you practice a profession, a trade, a sport or an art for some years, you increasingly develop a strong sense of “I can do this and I can do it quite well, and most of the time I can do it even without thinking about it.” The more you practice, the less likely you are to stumble under pressure, provided that the challenge is reasonably familiar to you. This builds a positive self image of your ability to perform a task. The same logic applies in the practice of business. The more you practice and the more different challenges you face the more you build up your store of experience. Past experience in solving problems and achieving desirable outcomes builds strong self-belief and an optimistic view about facing future challenges.

It all sounds very straight forward and, for many people, it is. However, at times of pressure, the gremlins can creep into the mind and plant seeds of fear and doubt.

The result is a negative self-statement that goes something like “I’m not sure of the outcome so I am hesitant to start. I am fearful, what if it doesn’t

work or I get it wrong?” “People will laugh at me. I will feel such a failure.” Self-sabotage of the mind is one of our very popular pastimes and it is all related to fear. Lose your fear and let your self-belief shine through.

Losing your fear doesn't mean that you should rush out and go skydiving, go bungee jumping, handle a snake and let a spider crawl over you. Losing your fear in this context means stopping the negative thoughts that reinforce your inertia and stop you moving forward. Losing your fear happens when you try something and succeed. You take a certain action and the positive result reinforces your decision. Do this over and over and the repetition improves your skill and even further reinforces your decisions to act.

In my opinion, part of the answer to losing fear and improving self-belief is to be good at more than one thing in life. Be good at the activities that earn you money and be good at something else that brings you pleasure. Knowing that you are really good at more than one thing sows the seed of a positive self-belief that you could be good at anything that you really turn your mind to. For me these are business coaching and financial planning, being the activity from which I earn money. The second is Aikido from which I derive pleasure and the unexpected but very valuable benefits of mind development.

Focus & Purpose

Focus is the ability to concentrate attention. Purpose is having the intention, determination and resoluteness to achieve a desired result. There are plenty of people who are calm, relaxed, laid-back, happy and optimistic who have no ability to concentrate for any significant length of time and are not given to undertaking purposeful action on a regular basis. Focus and purpose are the two traits that distinguish people of action from those of inaction. If you are to have a powerful presence, you must be a doer; a man or woman of action who leads by example.

Great leaders have vision and a strong determination to realise that vision. Doing so, projects an image of greatness. However, your vision doesn't have to be vast. It just has to be capable of being conveyed in a few well chosen and inspiring words. People will sense your focus and purpose in the words you say and in the silent language spoken by your face and body.

Initiative & Flexibility

Leaders initiate action. They make things happen. That's one of the standout traits of leadership. Although initiative is closely allied with focus and purpose, initiative is taking the very first step that translates thought into action. Initiative is the trait that differentiates doers from procrastinators. You can lead from anywhere – the front, the back, just as long as you are initiating action.

Flexibility is the ability to adapt quickly to changing circumstances without losing composure. Being responsive to change and adaptable are traits that actually allow success. Allowing success means opening the mind to the concept of being on a wider path with many possibilities that allow you to easily circumvent potential barriers. On the other hand, being on a narrow track means being attached to a single method and outcome where any barrier has serious potential to become a permanent blockage.

Patience & Empathy

Patience is borne out of a calm mind. It is the ability to wait or endure calmly without complaint or retort. A lack of patience reflects an upset mind and can result in friction with other people or conflict within. Powerful presence requires a calm and composed mind, together with an optimistic expectation of a positive outcome at the end of the wait or endurance. Patience has many applications. It can mean remaining unruffled after a taunt or an insult. It can mean waiting for someone to calm down or it can mean remaining composed during a heated argument. It can mean politely overlooking the many mistakes a new graduate makes during his first month of 'on the job' training. It can also mean waiting peacefully and uncomplainingly for an hour at the doctor's surgery. When it comes to developing powerful presence, patience is a virtue.

Empathy goes hand-in-hand with patience. Patience is only one half of the journey into another person's heart and mind. To wait or endure silently and uncomplainingly is one thing, but to patiently take the time to understand the thoughts and feelings of another is to make a true human connection. Empathy is to listen to and understand other points of view, to take a walk in another's shoes, to be appreciative or to connect with the spirit of another person. Patience requires only a disciplined mind whereas empathy requires that you reach out to others. Both are hallmarks of powerful presence.

Personal Integrity

Integrity is a personal code of honesty and a genuine caring for the wellbeing of others, particularly when placed in a position of trust. Honesty is not only telling the truth; it is also not being silent with deceptive intent. Honesty and integrity are linked directly to upbringing. Personal gain is a strong motivator that can erode one's integrity. Money can create a huge temptation to do the wrong thing by others. It can occur anywhere – in the family, amongst friends, the workplace and in business dealings.

Genuinely caring for the wellbeing of others also requires a lot of effort. Doing nothing can have adverse effects on others. It takes much more effort to actively care for another than it does to ignore or inflict hurt. It is an easy temptation for people to lose their integrity and to care less about other people

as their personal or career roles require less human interaction. Distance and remoteness from interpersonal contact can create a perception of less need to care and can become strong motivators to compromise integrity. It is a lot easier to injure people from a distance. It may not be physical injury. It could be financial injury at the click of a computer mouse. It is much harder to inflict that injury face to face in an environment of truth. That a test of personal integrity.

Temperance

Overindulgence is not conducive to developing a powerful presence. Excesses of food, alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, gambling or socially abnormal sexual activity tend to destroy personal magnetism. Moderation is an admirable trait in the people we regard as leaders, particularly in the business world.

A calm, positive mind does not usually countenance personal excesses. Quite the opposite. Overindulgence is usually a sign of internal conflict, commonly characterised by feelings of guilt.

Never Too Late

“To improve your wealth portfolio, you will have to make some changes to your psychological portfolio.” – Anon.

Learning the art of Aikido was a sea change for me. When I learnt how to relax and maintain a calm mind under pressure, I discovered the ability to think very clearly. For the most part, stress gradually became a thing of the past as I slowly worked out how not to put pressure on myself. Maintaining a calm mind under pressure is a much easier thing to do when you don't feel pressure in the first place.

As a result, life became much more enjoyable. I worked through and solved some serious health problems and am still actively on the path of becoming healthier than I have been in a decade. Even the process of making money changed. It is now a much more enjoyable activity because I go with the flow and choose what I want to do and who I want to do it with.

Aikido wasn't entirely responsible, but real wealth started to flow in my life when I learnt to relax my mind and stay calm. By real wealth I mean wellness, happiness, family and good friends. I still had to make some important decisions and some real changes in my life but Aikido training was certainly the catalyst I needed.

When I feel relaxed and I am in a calm frame of mind, I find that money just flows. Making money is not that hard. It was battling the enemy of poor health that took the effort. In hindsight, I would take a much relaxed and calm approach to any health problems that arise in the future. Waging any battle

against one's self is also waging battle against the current and the tide of the Universe. It is plain hard work. It is very tiring and can be stressful. That is not the desired outcome. Relaxation and calmness are the keys.

All big life decisions involve an element of risk and it is easy for the negative mind to fast forward ahead to imagine a whole range of disastrous outcomes. It is a lot easier to plan a strategy that involves non-resistance and going with the flow. Once I learnt how to stay in the moment and not worry about the future I effectively silenced the devil inside who would invariably come up with a million reasons why a new challenge could not be met.

Once the little devil inside was silenced I found it very easy to trust my training, my decision making and my much improved intuitive connection to the Universe. I would not dare suggest that I have found anything approaching 'enlightenment', but my experience can be best described as a beautiful state of mind that occurs without stress and internal unrest, where thinking and logical planning can become very calm and clear. I have achieved another level of clarity in relaxed thinking that I had never experienced before, not even my nimble-minded days at University.

A quick and active mind is not necessarily a clear and calm mind. At University I, like all other good students, learnt to absorb and manipulate vast amounts of information within serious time constraints and towards the end of each semester I managed to produce quality output under pressure in the

form of examination answers and assignments. However, it was some time later that much of that information was actually processed and became useful in my profession.

Time, relaxation and reflection can bring together a lot of seemingly disjointed and unrelated information and create a 'thought powerhouse'. The calm and relaxed mind is indeed a powerful machine.

I don't know if I could have reached this level of relaxed decision making when I was younger but I know that becoming older has resulted in a decrease in physical activity which in turn has prompted a search for rejuvenation. When I started learning Aikido, I for one didn't expect that the search for physical rejuvenation would also turn out to be a rejuvenation of the mind but a stronger mind has certainly allowed me to put years of knowledge and experience to good use.

So it is never too late to change anything in your life. Whether it is business or personal – money job or relationships, tomorrow is indeed the start of the rest of your life.

The Process Of Change

Without health there is no wealth

Change is not a momentary transformation. It is a process that requires you to make a decision and follow through with purposeful action and commitment. The decision to make a change can be done in an instant because it only requires a thought, nothing more. A decision is no more than a thought expressed as intent to act. However, making change actually happen will always require action, and the actions you choose are, by definition, going to be different to those of the past. If a decision is expressed without any follow up action, it is merely procrastination.

Change is about letting go of what is routine and comfortable; walking away from the certainty of a particular habit or routine. Of course, the act of letting go can be quite difficult because it firstly requires your acceptance that change is necessary and secondly it requires your willingness to let go of the known and the certain. Change means that you step out of your comfort zone and choose a different path where destinations and outcomes are not certain. Because there is an element of uncertainty, the mind's sabotage team of fear and self doubt can be quick to open the big book of negative thoughts and let them slowly creep into your mind. With the risk of the new and unknown on one side and with familiarity and certainty of the old, beckoning you back to the comfortable side, the mind can quickly become bogged down in a stressful flurry of circular thinking where all sorts of devastating outcomes are imagined.

The process of business change is similar to the process of personal change.

The 'business' part is merely a different application, but the process is no different if the challenge was to give up smoking.

The change process that I have used for myself and my clients is this:

Critical Self Analysis

It is typical in a business setting that the need for change arises because something goes wrong or some problem occurs. Lack of customers, falling sales, flagging profit, increased returns of faulty goods, low morale, poor productivity, internal or external conflict can all be a trigger for change. Often the urgency for change is directly related to the size of the problem or the loudness of the noise being made about the problem. So it is not surprising that small problems and quiet problems often don't result in any change at all. It is the squeaky wheel always gets the oil. So it is usually the glaring problems or those that people are most vocal about that actually result in any change. When there is no commitment to change, there is a tendency to stop the noise rather than solve the problem.

Critical self analysis is a deliberate process of reviewing your business and seeking out problems – big problems, small problems, noisy problems and quiet problems. For many people this is quite hard to do because it requires putting ego aside and having a good hard and honest look at the business. It

will be a lot easier if you engage the help of an experienced colleague who is not too close to your business, or a business coach or similar professional to help with this task.

Connect With Yourself

I have already discussed the concept of ‘living in the now’ which means staying focused in the present and not being distracted by what has happened in the past or by fanciful imaginings of what might or might not happen in the future. Such distractive thoughts serve only to derail an otherwise good business venture or sound investment. Such thoughts are driven by risk associated with the unknown. Contrary to the belief of most people, risk can be both positive and negative however, being human we tend to focus on the negative and its implication of loss.

Aikido is great training for the mind. Over time you will learn to focus your mind on the present in a calm and relaxed way. Most people are surprised to learn that the warm-up routine at the beginning of every Aikido Yuishinkai class is not about building punishing strength, but about finding calmness of mind and relaxation of body. There are no push ups, sit ups or bag work but there are plenty of relaxation exercises and movements designed to develop the power of your centre (the imaginary point between the hips). The power of Aikido, like most other martial arts comes from the hips. However, the mind

stays calm and the upper body and arms remain totally relaxed. It is a state of alert readiness and it feels good.

‘Unifying mind and body means having the ‘whole you’ working together in calm and purposeful action. A calm mind and a relaxed body is a pre-condition of learning to live peacefully inside your own skin. You should be aware that your own presence influences your relationships with others. Your own inner peace and calmness is infectious. It radiates outwards and in turn, has a calming effect on other people. If you are at peace with yourself, there is a good chance that your presence around others will have a positive calming effect. If you are not at peace with your self you are likely to have the opposite effect. The propensity for conflict with others will be quite high and you will have little chance of coexisting harmoniously with others, whether they are family, friends or work colleagues. To achieve any level of inner peace you need to be less reactive to people and the things that go on around you. Therefore, ego needs to play a much reduced role in your life. It is only when your mind is open enough to appreciate the re-learning phase of change that real change is able to take place. None of this can happen while you are in conflict with yourself.

Change doesn’t occur easily in a non-harmonious environment. A lot of words about the need for change might be spoken but actual progress will be slow or non-existent. If you are angry, contentious or distracted or your mind

is entertaining negative thoughts, then you are not in the head space for real change. Staff will not believe that the change process is real and customers will sense your negative energy, turn away from you and buy nothing.

Accept The Need For Change

Change doesn't happen unless you accept deep inside you that there is a real problem and that you are truly ready to do something about it. Such deep acceptance requires a great deal of humility because no one likes to admit they are wrong, particularly when their vocation generally requires them to get it right. The business owner is no different. Forget that most owners don't have nearly enough training to prepare them for all aspects of their own business. Everybody, with the possible exception of bank managers and business coaches, expects that a person in their own business will somehow make all the right decisions and follow through successfully all the time. That is simply not true but the pressure of expectation felt by business owners to know what to do and to get it right often prevents them from asking for help. So when help arrives it is understandably met with the ego of the business owner blowing smoke while the real person inside is crying for help but is unable to be heard.

The truth is that business practices are built on routines and habits of people and sometimes they are just plain wrong or they become inappropriate as times change. It is important for every business owner to put themselves

and their business under the microscope on a regular basis. For employees it is called a performance review, but I don't know too many owners who voluntarily review their own performance. Even if they do, it is one thing to find out the lack of performance but quite another to do something about it.

Let Go Of Old Habits

This is a case of out with the old and in with the new. Letting go of old habits is the follow through action that occurs after you have first accepted the need for change. Old habits die hard so it is not always easy to quit a long-standing habit overnight. I don't know how many times I have heard business owners and their employees tell me that the reason they do a particular task or routine is "because that is the way it has always been done." It's as if the passage of time has somehow enshrined that particular routine in a glass case in the middle of their business trophy room. Changing a time-honored habit or routine is like losing an old friend and then having to make new friends as you take a giant step forward into a new era. However, once it is done you are ready to re-learn new habits.

Plan New Outcomes

It is now time for some serious forward thinking. Look to the future, set new goals and find ways to achieve them. If the old ways of doing things no

longer work for you, then your way forward will involve choosing a different path. You know the old saying “If you do the same old things you will get the same old results.” Well the converse is also true. If you do things differently, you will get different outcomes.

The critical ingredient is always the steeliness of your intent to act and your persistence to see it through. Without those attributes you are once again procrastinating. So it's best not to become overloaded with dozens of big goals and fancy strategies. Business, like life, is meant to be simple. So set yourself a few goals that are achievable and devise a simple set of orderly actions to achieve them. In fact, that's what a strategy is – a simple set of orderly actions designed to achieve a goal. If you make your goals achievable within a realistic time frame and you devise simple strategies to achieve those goals, then you set your self up for easy success. Don't be drawn into the belief that you must always shoot for the stars. Let yourself experience some small successes because once you have experienced a few, your new found momentum will provide you with the heart and the self-confidence to go on and tackle the bigger goals.

Planning and strategy are strengths of some business coaches but not all, so find one who is good at it. Planning is a discipline that requires the ability to step back from the day to day ‘shop-floor’ activity and view your business enterprise in the wider perspective, at market and industry levels. It usually takes someone with fresh eyes and a large helping of business savvy to assist

you. So unless you buy or borrow those resources you may very well go around in circles in a closed loop of self-fulfilling but stagnant thinking.

Re-learn

Once you have set your new direction, the next step is to re-learn new habits and new routines that are part of your improvement strategy. If you expect anyone else associated with your business to change then you really need to lead from the front here. Good learning requires a good teacher and I recommend that you retain your business coach to guide you here, or if it is something specialised like website marketing, industrial relations, manufacturing, then you will need input from someone else who is suitably skilled.

To learn you have to become open to it. You need a little humility and a genuine self-acceptance that you don't know everything, even though you might have been trying hard for years to convince everyone that you do. One sure way to develop the humility to learn and the passion for knowledge is to go outside and have a long hard look at the world around you.

Experience it richly by talking to people and understanding other points of view, even if it is simply getting to know the other businesses around you. They are probably not in the same business as you, so go talk to them. Find out just how much you don't know and build relationships at the same time.

By asking questions and listening you will come to realise that regardless of how much you do know there is always something more to learn. Someone always has a better way of doing things. Your level of knowledge, experience, and satisfaction in business has and always will be a function your relationships with people. The more you go out and experience the world the more knowledge and experience you will gain. But a final word of caution – never allow a lack of knowledge to become a stumbling block or an excuse for inaction.

Purposeful Action

The final and most critical step in the change process is action. Fiddling about, playing at the edges and walking around with a clip board looking important is not enough. You must apply purposeful action to achieve the change that you desire. It is not someone else's job to do the actions necessary to bring about the change you desire. It is your job. People still look for leadership in every aspect of their lives. So be a leader and lead. Lead by example from the front, by your actions, to reinforce yourself as the leader. Leading by encouragement from the back is also appropriate when dealing with employed managers. You are placing your trust in them to step up and use their initiative. It then allows them to also lead their teams from the front.

All new growth is a leap in the dark without the benefit and hindsight of

experience. The outcomes are never certain so it is important to work to a well thought out plan and trust your intuition and judgment. Still, it is not easy staying strong and focused when results are not immediate, particularly at that vulnerable time of three o'clock in the morning when you are awake and alone and easy prey for the demons in your mind. This is the time when so many good ideas and strong intentions are sabotaged.

This is where I have found my Aikido training to be a great help. It is critical that when things aren't going as well as you'd like and you spending money on a strategy with no guarantee of success, that you stay calm, relaxed and centered. When you are feeling fragile and vulnerable and your mind is slowly filling with self doubt – breathe. Breathe deeply. Breathe in slowly through your nose and out through your mouth. Fill your Buddha belly with air, not your chest.

Focus on the positive and self healing energy coming in through your feet with every incoming breath and out through your fingers. If your are lying down on your bed and if you can relax enough to slow your breathing down to two long inhales and two long exhales each minute, sleep will come in a few minutes. Also audibly shoo away the night time demons. Get them out of your head. I find it to be a positive first step in calming my mind and preparing for sleep.

Don't Worry, Just Plan

The problem is almost solved

It was Winston Churchill who said “let our advance worrying become advance thinking and planning.”

Positive thinking, a little planning and some purposeful action will eliminate most looming threats in life and in business. Even without doing any of these, most things we worry about simply never happen. It is in our minds where we give energy to our fears. We love to flirt with gloom so we tend to act out fearful scenarios in our minds as if we are already living them. By doing so, our fears rapidly overcome us and we are paralysed into inaction. These are the same sentiments that drive securities prices down on every world stock exchange.

“If we focus on the sword, the sword will surely find us.” A positive mind and advance preparation is great defence against adversity. The more we know, the more we have experienced, the more we have learnt from our mistakes and the more we plan ahead, the easier it will be to have the confidence or find the courage to make difficult decisions in the future.

The only certainty in the future is the prospect of change and uncertainty. The key to preparation is planning and practice for any likely eventuality. Preparation increases the opportunity to exert some control and positively shape the future as it rapidly approaches the present. By taking positive action, the chance of an unwanted eventuality occurring is also reduced.

When we create a planning mindset, we define our goals, seek out

opportunities, determine the way we will go about things and address uncertainty. It is smart to diversify so that we are not at the mercy of downward pressure in any one particular area. With practice, we push back the boundaries of our personal unknowns. The unfamiliar becomes the familiar, the unknown becomes the known, and we can walk further forward with more confidence and less risk. At some point though, when we decide to push past our limits we have to accept more risk as we step into the unknown. But as the ‘Sword falls’ story (above) amply illustrates, doing nothing when action is required, can be the biggest risk of all. It is the very thing responsible for destroying dreams and putting the lives of people everywhere on the backburner of dull and ordinary. It is also responsible for countless business declines into obscurity and ultimate oblivion.

Planning and practice make decisions of the future a lot easier to make. What you will effectively achieve by planning is to bring the future or what you expect it to be, forward to the present moment and give it a thorough examination. Practice is rehearsal of your planned responses so that if and when the eventuality occurs, you will know what to do. It means that while you are present in the moment and living in the here and now you are positively shaping your own future rather than waiting to be surprised or shocked by it. Importantly you gain more control over your own destiny and worry a lot less.

You are effectively solving anticipated problems before they arrive and

thereby reduce risk. When the future does arrive, it may not be in exactly the form that you planned for but it may not be totally unfamiliar either. There is the added bonus that by giving your plans positive thought and energy, there is every chance that they will be given life, and you will inevitably lead yourself to your desired outcomes. After all, it works so well with fear and self-doubt.

Business Planning

Planning is an absolute must-do activity in business but most business owners either don't plan at all or they plan to add 10% to last years sales revenue and allow the rest of the business to look after itself. It is only under threat of serious decline or extinction that most businesses think it is a good idea to invest time and other resources into planning. Good business planning is to review every aspect of the business, not just growth and short term profit but also sustainability, adaptability and longevity. Most business owners don't realise that sustainability, adaptability and longevity are directly tied to their health and wellbeing, so it is important to strike a good balance between work and healthy leisure.

In most SMEs (Small to Medium Enterprises) if the owner dies, so does the business. Protection and succession are two of the least considered planning topics. They also happen to be two of the most fatal threats to any business and rarely appear on a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis.

It is true that KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) are important but, at the end of the day, they are only numbers. Business is really all about human relationships and desired behaviours and it is these underlying relationships and behaviours that are responsible for achieving the often ill-considered target figures that become KPIs.

Marketing gurus have transformed 'desired human buying behaviours' into an art form but little is done in the area of improving human relationships. There is a lot written about but still little done. There is no doubt that focusing on relationships in the form of 'relationship marketing' is another important part of the marketer's toolbox but that focus is still on achieving more sales. It is true that most planning activity is dedicated to sales. Whilst sales are very important and without sales there would be no business, it is only half the planning story.

Planning is vital in the product delivery and support areas as well. It is generally not regarded as a priority because these areas are viewed as 'cost centres' rather than 'profit centres'. Smart owners realise that reducing costs is just as valuable as increasing sales. In fact, it is more valuable because every dollar of cost saved contributes to profit at a full dollar in value whereas every dollar of increased sales only contributes to profit at the gross margin rate which is something less than a full dollar.

Even in the case of internet marketing businesses where computer software

programs do all the sales and delivery, it will eventually be the case, as markets becomes saturated with every available online product, that the businesses rising above the pack will be those that can differentiate themselves. In the fully automated sector, differentiation has been achieved with slick websites, blogs, emails, key words, cleverly designed buttons and animated graphics. Already some internet businesses are seeking differentiation in the form of the human touch; a combination of automated sales, delivery and some good old fashion service. Instead of presenting an impersonal internet sales presence, many are showing their face, personally introducing the team, personalising communication, offering personal interaction and support. How cyclic business really is.

It always has and always will be important to address human relationships in the business planning process, not just as a means of achieving sales but as a means of increasing profit and providing a salvation for long term sustainability and succession. In the short term, reducing the cost of human turnover and increasing productivity will increase profit. However, increased productivity does not mean retrenching some staff members and making everyone else work harder. It can mean encouraging people to work not as hard but a lot smarter (e.g. with new technology, systems, training, shared information, team management, job-sharing and so on).

Increased productivity can also be achieved by reducing the amount of

conflict in the workplace. Working smarter and reducing conflict can relieve a whole lot of work-related stress and with the right incentives, people have the opportunity to lift their self-esteem and value the company they work for. A culture where people work 'with' the company rather than 'for' the company will begin to provide long term solutions for sustainability and succession.

The minority of business owners who do plan the productive wellbeing of their team still often fail to plan for themselves. They worry about everyone around them and overlook the most valuable key to their business – themselves. Whichever way you look at it, the purpose of employing other people is to not have to do that part of the work yourself. In spite of that, so many owners drive themselves into the ground with work. The reasons are many and varied. Some like to work to avoid their personal relationships, which were jeopardised by work in the first place. Others allow the distractions at work to become the main event. They dance to the noisy tunes of others whilst ignoring their own priorities. For others it is fear of failure and some simply don't know how to delegate work or responsibility. They can't let go.

Whatever the reasons, planning is an excellent grounding activity for a business in any stage of its life cycle. It allows all people involved to have a say and to buy into the planning process and its agreed outcomes. It is a great way to revisit the grass roots and it is a valuable communication tool that can develop a desirable culture and a comfortable fit for most.

The process is just as important as the outcomes. Planning provides a high degree of predictability going forward. Whilst not everyone who has a say gets their way, everyone does know what to expect which in turn removes a lot of fear and uncertainty, particularly in hard economic times.

Finally, some useful tips on good business planning:

- Find a quiet environment away from the place where you conduct your business. It is important to plan in quiet peace and calm without distraction.
- All those present should have a mandate to speak honestly and openly without recrimination.
- Clearly define goals. Be specific, be realistic, add time frames and quantify each goal so that you know when you have achieved it.
- Align your actions with your desired outcomes. Make sure that the actions in your plan will actually achieve your goals. It is quite common that they don't.
- Stick to your plan. If you don't want to stick to your plan then make a new plan that you will stick to.
- At no time is your plan merely a ruse to appease a bank manager or a sham document to be thrown in your bottom drawer never to be looked at again.

- Your plan is the set of building instructions for your business. It should be action-based, not procrastination.
- Prioritise and add time frames. Others involved should take ownership of the actions they agree to do.
- Your action plan should be concise and to the point. If the actions are done, your goals should be achieved.
- Your business plan should be written by you for you. It should not be instructions written by you for others to do.
- A budget is not a business plan. It is simply a financial reflection of the plans you make (i.e. a profit feasibility).
- Everything else you need to know about business planning can be found in my E.M.P.O.W.E.R.M.E.N.T. business planning model.

There Is No Better Time

Look at where you're standing

There is no better time than now. There is no better place than here. There is no better person than you.

There is no perfect moment to decide to take action. One moment is like another, but for every one that passes, fewer remain. It is only your mind's fear reaction that allows time to pass and be wasted, dreaming of a magic moment that will somehow become apparent when everything else in your life appears to be perfect. Of course it is only a dream without any real commitment to action so it never happens. It is procrastination and most people in the world are guilty of it. To make matters worse, when you look around you, procrastination looks so normal because so many people are doing it. If you wait for the planets to be in perfect alignment before making a decision to act you are simply wasting your life.

There is no place other than where you are standing at this moment in time. You exist only where you stand at any given moment and in no other place. So this is the place to make a decision, to prepare, to practice, to act and to live your life. Whilst it may not feel like the perfect place to be and many other places may feel more appropriate, here is all you have right now. Dreaming of better places and a better time is simply your mind's delaying tactics at work again.

You don't need an office to make a decision. You don't need to wait until tomorrow to be healthy, you don't need to be standing under the Eiffel Tower

to commence a relationship and you don't need to have a pile of money to set yourself free. You only need to make a decision to act – here and now.

Finally, it is down to you. There is no better person than you and, in fact it is only you who can make the decision to act. The decision to act is yours and yours alone. No one can help you with that. Help from others can only come in the form of encouragement before the decision and implementation afterwards, but you alone must make the commitment to act – now. Once you have made that decision, help is all around you. All you have to do is ask for it which, in itself, takes a little humility and a lot of courage.

There are dozens and dozens of people who can and will help you. Some may be friends and family or you can ask your online social networks. Every online friend has a career skill or is good at something. Often, people you haven't met yet will help you once they understand that you are genuine and that you are willing to help yourself. Others who provide the expertise you seek as a means of making their living will need to be paid. The point is that someone will always help you.

Wherever you are standing, you can communicate with the entire world. A laptop computer and a mobile phone are all you need. Your office too can be a coffee shop.

A friend of mine is a natural therapist, a true healer of people. For all of the few years that I have known her, she has been wedded in her mind

to the significance of the premises from which she practices. Location, visibility, signage, ambience, high passer-by rates were all important and prime locations are always expensive. She has always leased rooms from others but the arrangements have never been comfortable and it has always come down to a conflict of goals. She moved out of her most recent premises and whilst looking around for new premises, she began seeing potential clients in coffee shops. Out of necessity she changed her approach and her dialogue as well. She obviously couldn't treat clients in a coffee shop so she stopped asking for single appointments and started promoting longer term natural health and healing programs that involved her own services and those of other complementary professionals. Clients happily committed to their own long term wellness, coordinated with a well managed natural health plan. The locations of the treatment rooms no longer matter. They can be anywhere and everywhere, which only adds to client convenience. The business of gaining client commitment to the treatment is now done in coffee shops and the treatment is done by others in a variety of clinic locations. Whilst my friend does some consultation and treatment work herself, she now spends the majority of her time not working directly in the business. She helps more people than she ever did and spends less time doing it.

So you just never know what opportunity you find when you are locked out in the cold.

Important decisions and difficult decisions require courage but with positive thought and imagination you can achieve great things. You will rarely have perfect information with which to make your decision and you will often be taken outside your comfort zone, which means there is fear to overcome. It is fear of the unknown and fear of your own ability to cope. Nevertheless, the decision is always going to be easier to make with a calm, clear mind. You are right here, right now and there is no better time.

Take a long deep breath, believe in yourself ... and go for it.

Move Forward

Irimi – a movement forward

‘*Irimi*’ is a Japanese term used in Aikido to describe entering or forward movements towards an opponent. However, moving forward does not mean moving directly into the line of an opponent’s power. After all, Aikido is about not fighting; it is all about working smart not hard; outsourcing the hard physical work and the expenditure of energy to the opponent. So in that context, ‘*irimi*’ means not meeting the onrush of force head-on but still moving forward to a position where his or her power can be redirected.

Moving forward can also be achieved merely by thinking strongly forward, before any physical movement is commenced. In fact, strong forward intention can be just as powerful as a physical movement forward. In Aikido, moving forward with the mind only is referred to as ‘extending Ki’. With practice, this strong forward intention can take the mind of an opponent before their attack is ever launched. The experienced aikido practitioner can also ride on the intention of the opponent with his or her own powerful forward intention. That requires a highly refined sense of awareness and anticipation as well as a strong commitment to action.

So how does the Irimi Principle apply to other areas of your life? In just the same way – by applying strong forward intention to your opponent even when the only opponent you are facing is the one inside your mind. Life can often appear as a continuous set of physical experiences that just happen to you without any requirement for your input. Although it may

appear that way, it is actually the result of an endless series of decisions and choices you make each day, both consciously and subconsciously, even though you decision in every case, is to do nothing.

Moving forward is about making appropriate choices for you. These are 'irimi' decisions – sidestepping the negative thoughts of your mind's own sabotage team to a comparatively safe position from where you can take maximum advantage of opportunity. Firstly you must decide what it is you desire. Attaining it then requires focus and purposeful action. It is essential that there is a strong and persistent 'doing' component that follows through with your decisions to act.

Irimi requires focus. Firstly, you must focus your attention strongly forward with acute awareness and concentration. But this alone won't cut it. Whilst awareness of every thing around you is a big plus, focusing on everything around you achieves nothing. This is the scattergun approach to life, where everything around you competes for your equal attention.

There is an old saying that originates from ancient Japanese martial arts, that is "Don't look, just see." It means that you take in everything around you without focusing on anything in particular. So this brings me to the second point. Whilst having an appreciation of everything that is going on around you, the way forward is to focus on making appropriate choices. To do this, you must prioritise by considering what's important and what's not. Your total

focus should then fall only on the ‘high payoff actions’, being those that most effectively achieve your goals. Everything else you do is simply filling in the day; it is ‘filler activity’ only; a lot like running on the spot. Its only purpose is to work up a sweat and make you feel as though you have been busy, but when you finish you are still stuck on the same spot. You haven’t advanced one step forward. It is a common mistake in business particularly amongst those who have a ‘self-employment’ mindset rather than a ‘business building’ mindset.

One of the hardest concepts for business owners and other busy people to come to grips with is working less and finding balance in life. To achieve such balance is such an uplifting and self-enhancing experience and a much nicer person usually emerges – usually because of the amount of stress that is lifted.

There is no rule that says that you have to work eight hours a day or fifty hours a week or day and night seven days a week. That is only fear and self doubt working against you. Some people simply don’t know what else to do with their lives but to be at work. For others, unproductive filler activity is a justification of the mind that says “If things go wrong or if I don’t make money, I worked really hard and gave it my best shot.”

And so it may be that you do work really hard, and hard work in its appropriate context is necessary, but you probably aren’t working as smart as you could. Smart business owners delegate and outsource the ‘no payoff activities’ to people whose chosen path in life is to do them. Every time that a

business owner does this and steps back from his or her business, away from the familiar and the routine, focusing only on those critical things that actually make money, their wealth inevitably grows and they enjoy more family and leisure time.

Life can be dull and depressive if you let it. If you choose to focus on the negative and allow it the energy it seeks, you too can attract relationship problems, work difficulties, financial shortage and isolation. Or life can be a thrilling new challenge to be met on each new morning of your life.

It just depends on how you choose to view your life. Is it the vehicle with the engine off, in idle or accelerating forward? It's your choice, but make a conscious effort to include more irimi decisions on your daily agenda.

Calm your mind and take a step forward.

No-Conflict Mind

“There are no contests in the Art of Peace. A true warrior is invincible because he or she contests with nothing. Defeat means to defeat the mind of contention that we harbour within.” – Morihei Ueshiba (O-Sensei), Founder of Aikido

Your spirit is the basis of your self protection. Your spirit projects to the world. It is made up of many things – your self confidence, self-belief, self-happiness and your calm presence fuelled by the power of your internal energy. There is no need to fight, with your self or with anyone else. Once you can accept that there is no reason to fight, there is nothing more daunting than deliberate powerful calmness in the face of aggression, and nothing more ridiculous than another person losing control in a one-sided contest that you choose not to join.

In Nature, conflict isn't good or bad; it just is. The forces of pressure, irritation, eruption and abrasion contribute to the way our planet is formed and shaped. Diamonds are made under extreme pressure; pearls are the result of irritation; new land is created by devastating volcanic eruptions; beautiful landscape is carved by the constant abrasion of air and water-borne particles.

Conflict is a natural process. People create the contests. Even for people, conflict doesn't have to be a contest. If a verbal interaction resulting from a difference of opinion is conducted without ego, without emotion and without the need for a winner and a loser, it simply comes down to a direct conversation; a simple, direct exchange of views. It may seem a little

abrupt to many because there are no niceties, no frills and it is very much to the point. It is generally the abruptness, the lack of smiles or small talk that we often find offensive. Nevertheless, this type of discussion characterises the verbal interactions of many busy people, particularly business people.

Fear is another major factor in any conflict or confrontation. Fear can stimulate the very primal 'fight or flight' response which can in turn induce some quite unexpected body reactions. For example, fear can result in reduced visual, audio and vocal ability and can render a person slow or completely helpless to respond to confrontation or verbal conflict. Alternatively, a person might respond aggressively which is the flip-side of our hard-wired 'fight or flight' response.

It helps not to have a fragile ego or to develop what is commonly known as 'a thick skin'. This is very useful in lessening the effects of confrontation and conflict, including the sometimes lingering feelings of humiliation and shame. Not everyone in this world is kind and it helps to realise that many harsh words may be said, but relatively few are meant as personal insults.

Even if the harsh words are meant as a personal attack, it is the other person who is out of control, not you. Whether conflict arises or not, largely depends on you and how you react to the words and actions of others. It always takes two.

Unfortunately, we all have an ego, which drives the instinctive reactions

that can turn conflict into ugly contests. Ego is more often than not, the cause of trouble. Ego is our self image that we all construct; that individual sense of self that distinguishes our own 'self' from the 'selves' of others. Ego is the part of us that experiences, feels and reacts to the outside world. It makes comparisons, passes judgments and forms criticisms. It is ego that causes us to feel insulted and wounded when something is said or done to us.

Not surprisingly, many of our negative feelings can also be attributed to ego. It is ego that drives much of our internal conflict, including fear of ridicule, humiliation and shame. It causes us to needlessly stand our ground and fight instead of running. It is ego that makes comparisons and induces feeling of inferiority because we don't have a University degree, a great job or new car like the person next door.

Dealing with confrontation and conflict from another person requires a calm mind and clear thinking. This is very difficult because confusion and fear are two common reactions that the mind has to deal with initially and fear can induce a wide range of helpful and unhelpful physical reactions in the body. It will only be practiced responses that will be of any use to you in a difficult situation; those that are imprinted instinctively on the body's muscle memory. In the absence of any practiced response, the body's hard-wired 'fight or flight' reactions will be the default responses.

There are a number of practiced 'first response' skills that can override the

body's default reactions. Staying calm is paramount and it is essential to disengage your ego and overcome the temptation to enter into a contest. Furthermore, it is very useful to have the ability to blend with the other person's energy, rather than receive its force head on. This requires flexibility and adaptability. There is always more than one solution to a problem so being immovably fixed on one resolution process or one outcome can be very limiting and quite frustrating for everyone.

Looking past the conflict to a peaceful solution is essential. That means you must place no emotional value on the heated words, irrational actions, insults or name-calling which is merely symptomatic of the other person's anger and frustration. Therefore, having some empathy and understanding of the other person's point of view is very important. At the time however, this can be very difficult. Listening is a very good first response skill to have, particularly at the start of the interaction. There is no rule that says you must agree but listening and understanding is an essential part of the solution process.

The circumstances will generally dictate your course of action. Your choices include doing nothing or else withdrawing and leaving the scene. Both options should be carried out in a calm and confident manner. If you decide to stay, you have the options of listening, talking, appeasing or negotiating. None of the options above mean that you have given in. It simply means that you have chosen not to enter the contest and fight back.

It is an interesting phenomenon that most conflict has a limited duration. It normally doesn't last all that long. It starts, it grows it peaks and then loses steam. So if you stay with the interaction, it shouldn't be long before you can find an opportunity to redirect the energy to another place of your choosing and work towards a mutually agreeable peaceful solution.

The advantage of remaining calm is that the other person can never read your intention. If you lose your cool and get angry, your intention becomes obvious and it can easily be read by the other person. For the same reason, it is important not to adopt any form of aggressive body posture. Hands on hips, fighting stances, a face creased and stretched in anger, all send signals to the other side. These signals are welcomed because they confirm that their strategy is working. They are winding you up and you are playing their game. They are in control, not you. It is vital in any confrontation or conflict that you maintain calm control, at least over your side of the interaction. Once you have done that you can then work on guiding the other person to a place of self control. If they lose control and become physically aggressive then the martial side of Aikido can be used to bring them under control without inflicting injury.

Never turn your back either. Not only is it a little rude if done mid-conversation but every animal species on Earth finds it instinctively easier to attack from behind. It is much more difficult face-to-face.

Moving forward is about making appropriate choices for you. These are ‘*irimi*’ decisions – sidestepping the negative thoughts of your mind’s own sabotage team.

Millionaire Mindset

Start as you mean to go on

The reason that you are not a wealthy entrepreneur is because you don't think like one and you don't act like one. Most people exhibit 'herd' thinking. They think and do the same as everyone else. I do believe that this type of thinking originates from our childhood need to fit in and be the same as everyone else. To be different as a child could get you bullied. To be different as an adult could make you rich.

An entrepreneur does two things very well. He or she:

- (a) thinks differently and therefore sees opportunity where most don't, and
- (b) takes action, as opposed to doing nothing or doing the same as everyone else.

Most of the business population have the 'me-too' mindset, follow the herd and do nothing to make a difference.

Those with the millionaire mindset 'zig' when others 'zag'. They enter markets when everyone else is leaving. They seek market niches that others retreat from or don't sell to. They buy shares when everyone else is selling. Why? Because quality stocks are cheaper when supply is high and demand is low. The same principle applies to all assets. It is logical.

Therefore, why doesn't everyone else do the same? The answer is because they are too busy panicking about a relatively sudden change of economic circumstances called a recession. It is a calm clear mind that enables the entrepreneur to reason logically and make wealth building decisions.

Recession is a time of immense opportunity. The business world has been turned on its head. It is like running on to a fresh new playing field to play the first game of the new business season. Entrepreneurs welcome it because they know that change brings opportunity. The devastating change of recession brings a feast of opportunity.

Still have doubts? Before you build the wall of impossibility in your mind, reflect on some of the success stories that were born out of recession. The Disney Corporation began in the 1923-24 recession and a few years later, the Great Depression of the late 1920s and 1930s spawned the creation of Revlon, Motorola, Fortune Magazine and the Hewlett-Packard Development Company.

The recession of 1957–58, known as the Eisenhower recession, gave birth to the Hyatt hotel chain, Burger King and the Jim Henson Company. The 1973 Oil Crisis saw the start of Microsoft and FedEx.

In Australia, Dick Smith started Dick Smith Car Radio in the recession of 1969-70. Over 20 years later, John Symond started Aussie Home Loans in the recession of 1992.

None of these entrepreneurs was endowed with a multiple business degree, years of experience, pots of money and an instant business support network. They saw opportunity where others saw despair and hardship. Certainly they worked hard, endured and persisted but what was the key to

their stunning success? It was their instinct for finding market demand and taking full advantage of the opportunity with a unique selling proposition. Entrepreneurs don't follow the crowd. They set themselves apart because they think differently.

So think less like a victim of tough times and start thinking like a person who could just as easily take positive action to adjust to changing circumstances. It is important to stop focusing on the money. Worrying about your lack of money won't bring you more. It will bring you less because you will always achieve what you focus your energy on. Negative thinking about lack of money will simply reinforce your poverty. Besides it is putting the cart before the horse. You have some entrepreneurial thinking to do and some action and follow through to do before you even get close to the money.

Realise now that money does not describe who you are, nor is money any real measure of your potential. Money shouldn't be the first goal you set for yourself and it will be a sad day indeed, when money is a complete definition of what success means to you. Money is simply a necessity to live and the means of funding a lifestyle. It should not be directly linked to your ego or self esteem.

Here is the next myth you need to dispel. Hard work is honourable and is to be admired. However, hard work and determination applied to following a dead-end path will get you nowhere. By that I mean 'knocking yourself

out' selling a product you thought people want but in fact they don't need will eventually send you broke, regardless of how hard you work or how determined you are.

Doing the same thing as everyone else in your market and believing that hard work, determination and persistence alone will lead to your success is not the right approach. That is what every one does and, at best, it yields average results. You have to be a lot smarter than that. The idea is to work with your brains, not with your brawn. Work smart, not hard.

For now though, let's start at the start and take small steps towards changing your business mindset. This is not always easy because you have been conditioned by your experiences all your life. So far dreams have filled your mind but true entrepreneurship has not yet featured in your thinking.

If you are newly unemployed and considering your own business, then you have some big changes to make in your thinking. For a start, you must stop thinking like an employee and start thinking like a person in business. You have fallen into the habit of becoming accustomed to the discipline and structure provided by your previous employers. Now there is no such structure, so you must create it for yourself. Although it is quite natural that your mindset is that of an employee, it is dangerous thinking because it will spell certain death for your new venture. You must change your mindset quickly and realise the core tasks you must do well before you can ever expect to be paid.

It is not easy to grasp the idea that you must still go to work (for yourself) each day but without the guarantee of a pay packet each week. That is often a very difficult transition to make for most people because of 'employee mindset' conditioning over many years. It is likely that your self-esteem and sense of self worth both rested on your recently terminated job title and salary. If it didn't, then why did you feel so bad when you lost your job? It is crucial to your success as a business owner / operator that you let go of these old badges of rank and the accompanying sense of shame about losing them. You must work at developing a deep sense of belief in yourself.

If you are thinking about starting a business, there is no better time than now, during a recession. Opportunity abounds and everything you will need in business is much cheaper, and I do mean everything.

Opportunity Seeking

Opportunity knocks – it is you who doesn't open the door

Recession does not destroy wealth, it transfers wealth. Some lose it, others gain it. The aim of every entrepreneur is to ensure they are on the winning side of the transfers. Opportunity is not where it used to be. Money simply flows in different directions during a recession. The challenge is to find it.

Finding opportunity starts with a simple change of mindset. Entrepreneurs develop a high level of awareness for opportunities. They have the instinct to recognise an opportunity to sell to customers who have a need. They find out where the money is flowing because the money doesn't stop flowing. It is always flowing somewhere.

The majority of small business has possibilities but is blind to opportunities. The dictionary meaning of 'Possibility' is the potential for a favourable result. Even business owners who are reasonably successful become too comfortable and ignore opportunities that could catapult their business into the stratosphere. As for the vast majority of people who dream about starting their own business one day, that's where it ends – hopes and dreams only without a spark of initiative.

The dictionary meaning of 'Opportunity' is an appropriate time or favourable occasion arising to act for the attainment of a goal. If you are to make the transition to entrepreneurial thinking, you must turn possibilities into opportunities with clear money-making potential. The difference between the two is awareness and action.

Possibilities become opportunities only when you have the awareness to see it and you then take decisive and purposeful action. But it is difficult to see opportunity or even possibility while your head is down, immersed in the day to day detail or routine of life, career or business. Therefore, it is important to lift your head up and look further than you ever have before. That will require you to rise above the distractions of your day-to-day activity and observe the landscape. Opportunities are there just waiting for you to notice them.

Opportunities are the doorways that can lead to growth in your business and result in a significant increase in your wealth. However, they must be found, acted upon and managed through to ‘goal-achievement’ before they can be converted into dollars. Business opportunities don’t always impact sales revenue directly. They can equally result in an increase in productivity, a reduction of expenses or a streamlining of technology and capital assets. All will impact profit.

Opportunity is central to business growth and development. It is a fallacy to believe that opportunity is a random ‘lucky strike’. Yes it can fall unexpectedly into your lap, but it only appears unexpectedly to those who don’t look for it. Opportunity hammers endlessly on your door – it is you who chooses not to open the door. For those who do open the door and actively embrace opportunity, it comes as no surprise. It is reward for initiative.

Opportunities generally involve three critical elements:

1. People
2. Knowledge
3. Research

So the more people you meet, the more knowledge you have and the more knowledge you gain through research, the more opportunities you will have. If you put some planning into it, you will be able to deliberately seek out people in your target market and you will generate more quality business opportunities that fit well with your strengths.

Opportunities are so often borne out of change. In recession, there is a lot of change over a short period of time. Although hardship and adversity prevail for many, remember the old sayings “Every cloud has a silver lining” and “One door closes and another one opens”? Even in the bleakest of times opportunities abound. You just have to maintain an optimistic outlook and have the awareness and alertness to recognise it right there in front of you.

Opportunity can arise out of legislative changes. A change of law, the allowing or banning of an activity (e.g. using lawn sprinklers in times of drought and water shortage), the introduction or removal of a rebate or subsidy can all cause an industry change overnight.

For example, in mid-2006 The Queensland Government in Australia introduced rebates for the installation of household rain water tanks.

At the time the State was in prolonged drought and experiencing severe water shortages. Rain water tank merchants flooded the market. In mid 2008 the subsidies were removed. It had also started to rain to demand for tanks plummeted by 70%. Rain water tank merchants went broke and left the market in droves.

Opportunity is also borne out of technology advancement which, of course is a form of change. New technology presents market opportunities that never existed before. Consider the advancement of computer technology and the explosion of the internet. The current recession will be a time of internet expansion as many people try internet business activity and entertain themselves at home.

Opportunity is the cornerstone of business evolution, which surely follows the inexorable forces of nature. Just as the natural forces of a changing universe creates and destroys planets and stars, so changing economies, markets and the unstoppable forces of supply and demand continue to create new businesses and make extinct those that cannot find renewed energy to adapt and evolve. Business does not operate in a static environment. Your business together with every other business, are part of a dynamic, ever changing economic universe. Consequently, every business has the potential to be affected by a life cycle of positive and negative growth. Market awareness, opportunity and innovation all work to extend the growth phase and stave off the decline phase.

Opportunity can be staring you right in the face and still you don't see it. The reason is that at times of change, even though opportunity abounds, you are too busy fearing the change itself. Focusing on fear and on adverse consequences that may or not occur is a complete waste of time and energy. It is much more productive to move your mind past that internally generated conflict in the direction of a positive solution. That won't happen unless you can train your mind to be calm and positive.

Where you are standing right now can be either your heaven or your hell. It is always your choice. The only difference is how you view the world. It is the state of your mind and how you think and perceive that makes the difference. Two people standing side by side can face exactly the same circumstances. One feels the warmth of opportunity while the other feels the cold of an empty void. That is why some people are rich and others are poor. The same opportunities are there for all of us. Some see and others don't. Some act and others don't. Some capitalize on the opportunity and others don't.

Those who find opportunity are present, focused and alert. Those who don't or won't find it are those who are distracted and not present in the moment at all. Your mind is the foundation of your life, your relationships and your wealth. You can change anything in your life by changing your mindset. For those who actively seek opportunity the biggest risk is that of trying to capture too many all at once. This could result in a loss of focus and having

many activities started but none finished. However, it is not generally a problem for those who organise and plan. Opportunity is everywhere, so it only remains to be very clear about what you are looking for and pursue only those opportunities that fit your qualified hit list.

Beware the comfort zone. As soon as a culture of apathy and routine sets into your business organisation, momentum will slow and your business activity will become static while others will overtake you and continue to grasp evolving opportunities. Feeling comfortable and thinking that the good times last forever is a sure fire way to miss good opportunities and induce a slowing and eventual decline in your business.

So what does opportunity look like? It wears many cloaks. It could be a person, a place, a meeting, a conversation, an idea or an action taken that might have been for a completely different purpose. However, there is one important ingredient that unmasks all opportunity. That is information and knowledge. That is why you hear of people 'researching an idea'. The more knowledge you have and the more knowledge you seek, the clearer will be the opportunity when you find it. Knowledge can be the difference between recognising an opportunity and overlooking it.

Finally there is the matter of assessing opportunities. Not all opportunities are of equal value to you. You will probably have to research and compare a few before you find the right opportunity for you. For money making

opportunities use the following rules in your assessment:

- (a) Make sure you are selling what people want to buy
- (b) Your product must meet a need or solve a problem
- (c) The need or problem must actually exist in the buyer's mind (not just yours)
- (d) Match what you sell exactly to the need of your niche market
- (e) Make sure your market niche, or your share of it, is big enough to produce the money you desire
- (f) To do a financial comparison, it may be necessary to perform a 'present value' calculation of each opportunity

Wealth Habits

Find your hot niche, money follows

It has been my observation for many years that some people are able to attract opportunity while others do not. Those who do attract opportunity develop a positive set of 'wealth' habits, while those who don't are too busy giving negative energy to 'poverty' habits. Such negative thinking repels opportunity and money. If you start thinking and acting like a successful person, you will begin to behave differently as you slowly change to a positive mindset. As a result, you will become more willing to seek and exploit opportunities. Opportunity will appear to find you also.

Although the development of wealth habits can require a lot discipline and persistence, there is no reason why you can't make the change and easily achieve the goals you set for yourself. It is important to remember that 'success' is a relative term. It relates to your goals only and nobody else's. Success for you is whatever you want it to be. Therefore, the opportunities you seek may not need to be huge. They can be quite modest, so long as they are right for you. You don't have to find a cure for cancer but you might find a market niche crying out for low cost 'green' cleaning solutions.

To kick-start the desired change within, you can start with the outside and work inwards or you can start with the inside and work outwards. Either way, your career as an entrepreneur will not begin until you have a change of mindset.

If you start by improving the outside, then do things to make yourself look

good and feel good. Looking good and feeling good can often kick-start your change of outlook. Looking successful and feeling good about the way you look and the way you present yourself to others can begin to change the way you perceive both yourself and the external world.

If you have a low opinion of yourself then it is likely that the whole world is less than perfect. But if you put on nice clothes, treat your self to a haircut, shave / beauty treatment and maybe relax yourself with a massage, then in the short term the world mightn't look so bad. While you are feeling good and looking good, try going to places where other like-minded people go when they seek opportunity. Get to know a few people and stay in touch with them by telephone and email.

There is nothing like the acceptance of a like-minded group to give you positive reinforcement and the feeling that you are on the right track. It is now likely that you might progress your ideas further with some more positive action. Team up with one of your friends and chase down an opportunity. You do not have to be in partnership to do so. There are other ways of sharing the rewards of opportunity besides a business marriage.

If you start by improving the inside then your first step is to address the way you think and the way you perceive the world. Major change here is not easy. The starting point is choosing to be present. This means actively making a choice to be present in the 'now' and choosing not to concern yourself with

the negative influences of other people, nor with the distractions of the past nor fear of the future.

Being present means living in the moment and living it with integrity and self respect. It means having an honest appreciation of 'who you are' rather than 'what you are' or 'what you own'. It implies being comfortable in your own skin and exacting enjoyment from the present by shutting out the negative distractions of things not within your power to control. By doing this, you reduce your worrying and distracted mind and give yourself a much better chance to be calm and focused.

Negative thinking really does kill off opportunity and any likelihood of growing a profitable business. Procrastination, apathy, lack of focus, negative thinking, lack of self-belief, knowing it all, closing your mind to new ideas, disregarding good advice, resisting change, acting in greed, trying to get rich quick, and being jealous of the abundance of others are common attitudes that are guaranteed to get you nowhere.

These are not the attitudes that lead an entrepreneur to positive growth and success. You will always get what you truly wish for in this world because it is the thing that you give most of your energy to that prevails. We fool ourselves into believing that we should win Lotto because we wish for it. There are two reasons that we don't win Lotto.

Firstly, it is a game of chance and the odds are millions to one against

winning. The odds are only marginally better if we actually buy a ticket. Secondly, it is a passing wish and we don't really give it a lot of serious mental energy. We only say that we do. In reality, while wishing for a Lotto win, we are actually spending far more time thinking about failing relationships, lack of money, and how life's choices have deserted us. These are the outcomes that come true and grow in enormity. We dream that a Lotto win will make all our troubles go away. For people with a poverty mindset winning Lotto simply add another problem to the list. It solves nothing.

To give energy to negative thinking in business will only result in stagnation, growth paralysis, inward focus, cost-cutting, reduced investment and demoralisation. Business will simply decline as existing customers perceive the negativity and leave in droves. It will eventually spiral downwards into non-existence.

There are so many good things that will happen to you if you can control your mind, stay calm and adopt a positive attitude. Instead of persisting with your long time poverty habits why not try adopting some of the habits that successful people exhibit? When you do embrace these behaviours, your mind is much more likely to be open to seeking and finding new opportunities.

- Dream big and tell everyone. Convert your dreams into real 'honest-to-goodness' intention. Write them down and make them your goals.
- Make a decision and then act. Turn possibilities into opportunities.

- Change your mindset. Develop a calm mind. Work on being present and staying present and focuses on the ‘now moments’ of your life. It is important that your mind doesn’t live in the past or the future
- Don’t give energy to outcomes you don’t want or situations that are beyond your control. It is self control you are striving for. That is all you need
- Develop a positive point of difference
- Develop positive intention and purposeful action
- Believe in yourself and your worth. Become committed to success.
- Make an ‘action plan’ with time frames. Then act and follow through.
- View the world richly. Go outside and get to know more people and build a momentum of opportunities. Build them with others if it means that you will do it.
- Nurture your own enterprise, network with successful people and share with others.
- Be persistent. It will pay off.

Finally I return to the critical ingredient that will set you apart from everyone else. It is your positive point of difference. That is your ‘Unique Selling Proposition’ (USP). Your USP is your spearhead; the sharp point of entry into the target market you have identified. Everything else you do should support and deliver on your USP.

In general terms, your USP should say, ‘Buy this product, and you will get this specific benefit.’ It is important that the ‘specific benefit’ offered be something different to everyone else; something that your competition either cannot or does not offer.

There have been some classic advertising USPs over time. The three examples below were pioneers when they were introduced and are now legendary:

FedEx

“When your package absolutely, positively has to get there overnight”

M&M’s

“The milk chocolate melts in your mouth, not in your hand”

Domino’s Pizza

“You get fresh, hot pizza delivered to your door in 30 minutes or less – or it’s free.”

Most business owners don’t have a USP. They have a MSP – a me-too Selling Proposition. There’s nothing unique or even different about their offerings. Their proposition is no more than ‘we are the same as everyone else, so buy from us’.

Calm Yourself

Exercises

Breathe

The key to being centered is to relax the body and calm the mind. Breathing is the simplest and easiest way to calm the mind. It can be done anywhere – at home, at work, out walking or when feeling stressed. It will always help to calm you down. If you do this while laying in bed it is very likely to relax you to sleep. Wherever you are sit stand or lie down but get comfortable and allow your body to relax.

Take long slow inhalations through the nose into your ‘Buddha belly’, not into your chest. Then slowly exhale through the mouth. Your inhalation should be slow and silent and your exhalation should be slow and barely audible as a ‘Haaaaaa’. Keep your shoulders down and relaxed as you feel the each rejuvenating breath come in through your nose, around your entire body and out through your finger tips.

As you become calmer your breathing will naturally slow. As you continue, you will find that with deeper relaxation comes even slower breathing. It shouldn’t take much practice to reduce the number of slow inhalations to four per minute – one complete breath in and out every fifteen seconds.

You will notice that, as your mind becomes disturbed or distracted, your breathing quickens. The idea is to banish all thoughts from your mind so that you can reach a deep relaxed state. People have various ways to do that but here is a method that has worked well for me.

Visualise

Imagine a room floating in outer space. Four walls, a ceiling, a floor and a window – that's all. The room is a visual representation your mind and any thoughts that enter are placed in a bubble and gently pushed out the window to float away. When all thoughts are expelled, close the window and if necessary pull down the blind. When there is nothing in the room there is nothing in your mind. The room is empty. Your mind is calm and silent. There is no movement. If any further thoughts intrude, the process is repeated. They receive the bubble treatment and float out the window and once again the room is empty and silent.

Breathe In The Universe

Once you have expelled all extraneous thought, begin to focus on the breath moving in and out of your body. Visualise each inhalation as the entire universe being drawn into your body. Your breathing is now very slow so enjoy the length of time it takes to draw it in. Feel the warmth as its energy fills your lungs, your core, your head and your limbs. Allow the rejuvenating energy refresh your body. Breathe the universe out of your lungs but not before it has tracked a loop through every part of your body. In your mind follow it around your body.

Breathe Through Your Feet

Now imagine breathing in and out through your feet, drawing the energy of the Universe up through your feet and into your body. If your feet are in contact with the floor or the ground, as they would be if you are sitting or standing, feel the strong connection with the Earth, particularly if you have bare feet.

Now imagine exhaling the energy of the Universe out through your fingertips. Feel your arms, hands and fingers fill with energy like a fire hose fills with water. Now imagine that your fingertips are the nozzles of your arms and allow the energy to flow down your arms, through your hands and spray out through your fingertips. Imagine that the build up of energy is strong and that the spray travels a long way forward. Move your mind a long way forward to where the end of the spray is.

You should now be strongly extending mental energy. You are calm and you are feeling a pleasant peacefulness. At this moment your mind is in a very positive mode.

Your challenge is to maintain this feeling all the time even when the going gets a little tough.

Can You Pass Your Driving Test?

A daily self-test

Imagine that you are driving your car. You are concentrating on the task of driving and you are very aware of what's going on around you, both inside and outside the vehicle. Although the traffic is heavy, you are sitting comfortably, feeling relaxed with a light grip on the steering wheel. Without conscious thought you make small adjustments on the accelerator, clutch, brake and steering wheel in response to changes in the fast moving and potentially dangerous environment around you. You signal when appropriate, slow, stop, start, turn, check the rear view mirror, give right of way and look out for pedestrians. You do all this with the sun in your eyes, in fog and through driving rain on slippery roads. One mistake could result in death or injury. But you don't entertain such negative thoughts; your mind is brilliantly clear and you remain calm, relaxed and confident. It's mayhem out there on the highway but you are focused, acutely aware and in total control. You can think ten steps ahead and it feels like you are reading the minds of other drivers around you. You are aware of them all. You sense what they are going to do. Your actions behind the wheel are decisive and purposeful. You are flexible, adaptable and you can cope with anything. Your mind, your body and your car are operating in harmony; as one entity on the road. The car is merely an extension of you. You are in the zone – you are centered.

Your mobile phone rings and even though you won't answer it while you are driving, you instinctively look down at the screen to see who's calling; just

as the car in front stops abruptly. You look up and in a moment of gut wrenching terror you realise you can't stop in time. You instinctively take a death grip on the steering wheel and push the brake pedal down so hard it locks up the wheels and you skid uncontrollably to a screeching, crashing halt into the car in front.

You allowed yourself to be distracted and you lost your centre. It was only a fraction of a second but it was enough to take your mind away from the task of driving. Mind, body and car became separately functioning parts; no longer unified; all coordination lost. The mind that was controlling the body and the ultimately the car was no longer connected. One fleeting moment was all that it took to transform the energy of a calm, relaxed, centered person with total control into a panic stricken, disoriented and very much off balance accident victim. In that fleeting moment of distraction, the road claimed you.

So here is your challenge. Driving a car is just one microcosm of life. It's a high risk activity that for most is a necessary part of each day, so start practicing here. Your challenge is to pass your driving test every time you drive.

Acknowledgements

I sincerely thank my instructor, Dr. Daniel James for patiently teaching me the art of Aikido. He made a difference.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to learn the teachings of **Master Koretoshi Maruyama**, Tokyo, Japan, founder of the Yuishinkai style of Aikido and past student of Morihei Ueshiba (O-Sensei). I also express my deep gratitude to **Michael Williams** Sensei, Chief Instructor of Aikido Yuishinkai International.

To my many friends and training buddies, past and present, at the **Griffith Aikido Institute** Inc., in Brisbane Australia, you have all taught me a lot about unconditional friendship and how to relax and smile whilst being thrown around a very large blue mat.

Gary Weigh

References

Crum, Thomas E. *The Magic of Conflict: Turning a life of work into a work of art*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987.

Dobson, Terry; Moss, Riki; Watson, Jan E. *It's a Lot Like Dancing: an Aikido Journey*. Berkeley California: Frog Ltd, 1993.

Saotome, Mitsugi. *Aikido and the Harmony of Nature*. Boston & London: Shambhala, 1993.

Tohei, Koichi. *Ki in Everyday Life*. (5th Edition) Tokyo Japan: Ki No Kenkyukai HQ, 1982

滅却心頭火亦涼

“When thoughts are quieted down, fire itself is cool and refreshing.”