

*'Brilliant! Jam-packed with inspiration. Epiphanies leaping off every page. Encouragement everywhere to help you stop the search for happiness and start following your joy!'*

**Robert Holden Ph.D.**, Author of *Happiness NOW* and *Shift Happens!*

The title is surrounded by several red-outlined stars of various sizes. Some stars are connected to the text by dashed blue lines that curve around them, creating a sense of movement and inspiration.

# BE BRILLIANT EVERYDAY

ANDY COPE & ANDY WHITTAKER

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**Robert Holden Ph.D., Author of *Happiness NOW* and *Shift Happen***

‘The world's greats, those who are truly brilliant, make the impossible appear possible and the complex, simple; Messi can dribble, Branson can dabble and Picasso could doodle. Cope and Whittaker distil the complexity of life like no other authors today; their charm, insight, wit and wisdom is touching, provoking and achingly funny. Read this and being brilliant every day will be .. a doddle!’

**Richard Gerver, Speaker, Author and Broadcast**

‘Do NOT read this book – it's far too good and it's making me insanely jealous’

**David Taylor, Author of *The Naked Lead***

## 'Happy'

---

(By 9-year-old Aaron, who attended 'The Art of Being Brilliant' at his school. He just happens to be dyslexic.)

*Choose to be happy*

*Sadness never got you anything*

*When you start to feel sad*

*Just remember friends and family*

*And kind strangers too*

*All support you.*

*Look on the bright side*

*At least you have a family.*

*When I am sad*

*And need cheering up*

*I run around with my dog*

*And eat lovely food.*

*Back flips, front flips*

*Trampoline bouncing*

*These make me happy and glad*

*To always be me.*

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# BE BRILLIANT EVERY DAY

Use the power of positive psychology  
to make an impact on life



Andy Cope and Andy Whittaker  
Illustrations by Laura E. Martin



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# Andy and Andy's Big Day Out

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Andy W's from Mansfield and I'm from Derby. So we're always excited to get an invite to London. And it's doubly exciting to be going to a meeting with our publishers.

Andy's not allowed on the underground on his own, not after the last time, so I held his hand on the Tube. We ascended the escalator, Andy standing in the middle, innocently blocking the rushy people. I got to the barrier, inserted my ticket and the gate opened. I was through. But Andy wasn't. And he was looking nervous. Sure, they have recently started having trains in Mansfield but not ones that live underground. And there aren't any moving staircases. And they certainly don't have electronic swishy gates.

He inserted his ticket. *Nothing*. I could see the panic in his eyes. A queue started building up so I summoned a guy in a London Underground hat. He opened the gate with his cool key fob and Andy fell through. The man in the hat examined Andy's ticket and looked my co-author in the eye. 'Thick cut,' I think he said.

We emerged, mole-like, blinking in the brightness of the over-ground. The city was a blur.

We had an hour to kill so we made our way to Starbucks. Double espresso for me and a sparkling water for Andy. He's not allowed coffee. Not after last time. 'In fact, make it a still water.'

And we made our way to the meeting. We'd rehearsed. I was going to do all the talking. (Andy W wasn't allowed, *not after last time ...*)

Our instructions were clear. Yes, Capstone wanted another book. *Yippee!* 'But do NOT write a book about happiness,' said our publisher. 'Or, at least, if you do, don't say that it's a book about happiness. Hide it.'

Our publisher explained that 'happiness' has gone and got itself a bad name. Its wishy-washy pink fluffiness turns people off apparently. The 'happiness' brand is tarnished. He reeled off some stats. People are more likely to buy books about how to be 'confident' or 'optimistic' or 'lucky' and especially 'stinking rich'. 'In fact, what a great idea. Why don't you and Andy write a book called *The Art of Becoming Stinking Rich*? Even if it's rubbish, you'll shift a million copies!' He grinned at us as the irony sank in. '*Thereby becoming stinking rich!*'

Andy W gave me one of his looks. He started fidgeting and his eyes were gleaming. He's not very good at bottling things up and I thought it best to give him the nod, before he exploded with enthusiasm. 'It'll be a book about "wealth",' he blurted, a broad smile spreading across his chops. 'In its *widest* sense.'

Because Andy knows, like you and I know, that money is nice. And it's useful in smoothing the path to having a superb life. But 'wealth' is what you have left over after all your money's run out. Wealth is a measure of life that involves more than your bank account. Because 'wealth' is about true riches. It encompasses relationships, emotions, habits, health, happiness and all the lovely trappings that philosophers say 'money can't buy'.

So, this book does contain some stuff about happiness ... and so much more. Read it. Apply the principles. Our aim is not to make you rich. It's much bolder than that.

Nine-year-old Aaron's poem nailed it. We want to make you wealthy beyond your wildest dreams.

# LOST PROPERTY



Reg wondered if anyone would ever claim what was rightfully theirs

# The Tinker Man

‘If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.’

Vidal Sassoon

Chelsea Football Club used to have a manager called Claudio Ranieri, affectionately known as ‘The Tinker Man’. He kept tweaking the team, looking for small improvements.

And I guess this book is similar. It's for the tinkerers – the ones who dare to tweak and change things about themselves in the quest to be better. It's also for those who've read other personal development books and found them too earnest, difficult, pious or simple. It's for those who want to seize the moment, who are not afraid of hard work and who refuse to snuggle down on the wonderfully inviting bed of excuses.

Although this book falls into the ‘personal development’ genre, my sneaky suspicion is that you probably haven't got massive ‘problems’. At least, no more ‘problems’ than Andy and I have. You'll have issues with feeling knackered a lot. You'll have more pressure at work than ever before. Your weeks will be flashing by far too rapidly. You'll be frustrated that your kids sometimes irk you. You'll be dragged down when you're surrounded by negative people. When you catch your naked reflection in the mirror you'll be noticing some imperfections. But they're not really ‘problems’. They're just ‘life



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

Alfred D'Souza

On the other hand, you might be drawn to this book because you're *not* feeling very brilliant. There will be times in everyone's life when things get on top of them. In which case, I'm confident you'll

find this book helpful. It's a reminder that we all have brilliance within us. It's just that sometimes it's hidden behind a big bag of bad habits. Or sometimes life just throws so much shit at you that some of it sticks. In which case, think of this book as your very own personal face cloth.

I recently went to a university reunion and met up with Clive. He'd ballooned in weight, from a lithe, sporty, football-mad student to a bloated, 23-stone, middle-aged manager. I was rather taken aback and, after having my confidence stiffened and my tact loosened by a couple of beers, I asked him what had happened to 'Slim Clive'. He looked at me with a big, wobbly face and said, almost greedily, 'I've eaten him'.

So there's a lovely slim Clive fighting to get out! Now, I'm not going to get into the debate about who or what made Clive fat. Clive happens to think it's his job. He travels a lot with work and is always staying in hotels where the sausage and bacon are calling him. '*Come here Clivey. You've a big day ahead and you never know where your next meal's coming from, so fill up baby. Come to daddy.*'

So Clive was pretty much like I used to be. For 35 years, there was a brilliant Andy – *inside*. I kept him hidden. I'd shine sporadically. So I guess this book is for the old me. The muddling through, self-doubting, quietly unconfident me.

At its heart, this book isn't really about changing who you are. It's about being more and more of who you already are when you're at your brilliant best. It's about coming alive. Because that's what the world needs. Too many people are conforming to what they *think* the world needs whereas the reality is that what the world needs is simply the awesome version of you.

Before we crack on, just a couple of sentences about our content and style.

First of all, is the work in this book original? In places, yes. A lot of the themes are based on my thesis, parts of which are appearing in print for the first time. You can't get 'newer' or more 'original' than that. But, fair's fair, I agree that significant chunks of it aren't original. I guess what we're attempting to do is dig out interesting material and present it in a way that it's never been presented before.

This book isn't a step-by-step guide to inner happiness or millionaire status. Nor will it provide a concrete list of things you have to go away and practise. It's a little more ethereal in the sense that we will present 'This is what the science says' ... and it's for you to ... *now go away and make of it what you will*. The aim is to make you think about *how* you think.

We've all seen bags of peanuts that contain a warning, 'might contain nuts'. And in Toys-R-Us I saw a child's Superman cape that came with a warning; 'Wearing of this garment doesn't allow you to fly'.

In a similar vein, we reckon it's OK to have a positive mind-set, but let's not go too far. Let's not be ridiculous about positivity.

There are many instances where it's appropriate to be downbeat, cautious and pessimistic. There are some jobs where negative thinking is actually a requirement. If I was recruiting pilots for British Airways I would go out of my way to select cautious, risk-averse, negative people. As a passenger, the last thing I want is to be taxiing on the runway when there's a bing bong, '*This is your captain speaking. Air traffic control have said it's too icy to take off but, do you know what, I thought I'd give it a go.*'

No thanks. That's the dangerous cloud-cuckoo end of the positivity spectrum. We're positioned a note or two down from there at the 'optimistic but realistic' end. The part of the spectrum that allows you to stand out a mile for the right reasons. The exact point on the 'brill-ometer' of being your best self,

consistently and appropriately.

It's also worth noting that we have a rather self-deprecating style. (I've warned Andy W not to confuse that with 'self-defecating'. That'd just be awkward.) Ultimately, we thought, let's just write something that we enjoy. Something that's fun and makes us giggle like a pair of schoolboys.

While on the topic of humour, it also begs the question, is 'self-help' a laughing matter? A lot of personal development can be rather earnest because, I guess, ultimately, life is a serious business. A fellow trainer warned us against being too light and frivolous. People reading this might be depressed or suicidal or in the depths of despair. If you are, quite frankly, the last thing you need is a heavy tome. You're much better off having a chuckle.

But be careful folks, even humour can be a form of self-harming. Someone once died laughing at *The Goodies* (for the younger generation, *The Goodies* was a madcap 1970s TV show. Google it.) We know the following is true because it's on Wikipedia.

On 24 March, 1975, Alex Mitchell, from King's Lynn, England, died laughing while watching the 'Kung Fu Kapers' episode. It featured a kilt-clad Scotsman with his bagpipes battling against a master of the Lancastrian martial art 'Eckythump', who was armed with a black pudding.

After 25 minutes of continuous laughter, Mitchell finally slumped on the sofa and died from heart failure.

Obviously, someone dying isn't funny, per se. But someone dying laughing? We've all got to pop off some point and in the grand scheme of ways to pop off, it's got to be up there.

In the modern world *The Goodies* would have been banned and Tim Brooke-Taylor, Graeme Garden and Bill Oddie hauled up in court to be sued by the family for 'damages'.

So it warmed my cockles to find out (again, from Wikipedia) 'His widow later sent *The Goodies* a letter thanking them for making Mitchell's final moments of life so pleasant.'

Now, we're not intending that you'll laugh so much that you die (although if you do, please send us a nice letter not a court summons), but we do want to make you grin.

And, to paraphrase Stan from *South Park* ... just because we laugh doesn't mean we don't care.

I think personal development boils down to various flavours. There's 'cheesy cliché' flavour. You know the sort. 'Winners never give up'. *What, never ever?*

Then there's the 'heavyweight medicinal' books that you struggle through as if they've got some magic healing powers. Andy and I call these books 'academic porn'. *Whisper me those big words, baby. You know, the ones I don't understand.*

Or 'sugary advice' flavour. 'Live every day like it was your last'. *What, in a hospital bed, being leered at by 14 close family members?*

And there's good old 'All-American Apple Pie' flavour, which involves a lot of punching the air and asking gung-ho questions like, 'What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail?' But the voice inside you says, *'But I can fail. And I do. Often!'*

Or classic, best-selling 'soulful chicken soup' flavour – hearty and warming, if, dare I say, a bit rich?

So what flavour are we? I'd love to be able to say this book is tangy, zesty and full of fizz. But I'd be

fibbing. This book is good, old-fashioned 'common sense' flavour. It's got quite an earthy, realistic taste to it. It acknowledges that most people are simply exhausted by modern life. You may well be stuck in a job you don't particularly like, or have an irksome manager, and you'd like to jack it all in but you can't. Most people have responsibilities, mortgages, mouths to feed and satellite TV to subscribe to. The weather can be a bit grim and the cost of living is out-stripping the cost of surviving.

**'Some mornings, it's just not worth chewing through the leather straps.'**

Emo Philips

So our book may be 'earthy', but it's by no means bland, because there's another strand of personal development that is currently undergoing something of a renaissance – the broadly Eastern philosophy that encompasses the meditative 'living in the now' school of thought. So we've added a liberal sprinkling of 'Eastern Promise' to our earthy, common-sense approach. And you'll notice just a dash of something else, a certain *je ne sais quoi* that you can't quite place.

In short, we've devoured every personal development book on the planet, so you don't have to! We've garnered the very best of what we know and attempted to present it in the most palatable way we can.

*Bon appetit!*

# Forget 'Self-Improvement', Try 'Self-Remembering'

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'There is nothing better for self-growth than someone challenging your own viewpoint.'

Richard Gerver

If you're of a certain age, you'll remember Victor Kiam's Remington advert. For those too young to remember, Victor loved his razor so much that he bought the company, which, I have to admit, is kind of cool.

Victor Kiam is to Remington what I am to positive psychology. I love the subject so much I bought into it and have, so far, invested 10 years of my life in study, culminating in a PhD.

I appreciate that you can know *too* much. People can become nerdy in their subject knowledge. You can, for instance, develop an unhealthy interest in trains. Or moths. And it can also happen with personal development. I acknowledge that I'm at the nerdy end of the spectrum. Thankfully, Andy W isn't clever enough to be a geek, so he keeps me grounded with comments like '*Be careful boss, you're disappearing up your own backside again.*' Thanks Andy.

Studying, for me, is a strange combination of joy and struggle. For the first four years of study I simplified things and presented my PhD findings in flowing language that your average human being would want to read. I presented pages and pages of lucid and entertaining material. And I was perplexed because my academic supervisor would tut. '*Not academic enough.*' So I'd go away and make it more complex. And I'd come back and she'd tut again.

It wasn't until fairly recently that my PhD tutor confided that my aim should be to write in such a complicated way that she has to read everything three times to fathom it. Four or five times would be even better. If she couldn't understand it at all, that'd be perfect. And the penny dropped. I have to go beyond nerdy. It's a game. I have to torpedo the science of happiness and sink it to 100 fathoms.

And, speaking of fathoms, I liken it to pearl diving. First of all, oysters reside on the sea bed and are very well sealed, which makes them hard to access. Plus, only one oyster per hundred has a pearl. So that's a lot of effort to find something worthwhile. For me, studying at this level is taking a lot of effort and I have spent a great deal of time opening up worthless lines of inquiry. But, just occasionally, I come across a pearl. And that's what this book is about – sharing the pearls of wisdom.

You're probably familiar with the principle of parsimony.

No, me neither. At least not until recently. Sometimes called 'Occam's Razor', it states that among competing hypotheses, the hypothesis with the fewest assumptions should be selected. In plain, simple English, the simplest theory is usually the better one.

Oh boy, do I love Occam's Razor!

Let me give you an example of when I went too nerdy and Andy W nailed it. A couple of years back, we were guest speakers at an audiologists' conference. Lovely people. They fit hearing aids and do some marvellous life-changing stuff. But if you boil their job down to the basics, they spend a lot of time shining lights into people's ears. And they've all got Masters degrees and doctorates in this, that and the other. So I prepared a talk that I thought would engage them. I made sure it was pitched at the clever end of the spectrum with lots of detail and some stats. And I bored the pants off them.

Next up was Andy 'Occam's Razor' Whittaker, distilling everything down to its very simplest form. In his own seemingly effortless way, he sold the science of happiness to them with an opening line

something akin to, 'Look here you lot, if you're looking into my lug holes, I want you to be doing it with a smile on your face.'

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And, I have to say, that made a lot more sense.

A paradigm shift is when you suddenly see things in a different way. Most other books use flat-Earth thinking or Roger Bannister's four-minute mile as examples. In *Countdown* language, they're both a 'safe 7'. So we'll choose a different one. Let's gamble with a 'risky 9'.

Here's a paradigm shift applied to a current problem. In the UK, ill people are struggling to get doctors' appointments. Doctors' surgeries tend to be open 8 till 5. Basically, to suit the doctors. So, if you're poorly out of hours or, heaven forbid, at weekends, you'll die. The government keeps asking, rather too politely, for surgeries to open longer hours and the doctors keep saying, slightly less politely, up yours.

I like the Japanese model. In Japan, your doctor's job is to keep you healthy. You pay every month if you're healthy and you don't pay if you're sick! I think this simple paradigm shift would get UK doctors' surgeries open on Saturdays, Sundays and late nights. You might even get 24-hour, drive-through surgeries because it would be in the doc's interest to get you fit and well asap! Same problem *New thinking*.

So here's a bit of a paradigm shift for the world of personal development. Maybe self-improvement is a waste of time.

Maybe *self-remembering* is where it's at.

We fall into a routine. We take things for granted. We stop taking risks. We sink into being comfortable. We settle for mediocrity. But what if the solution isn't to learn a whole load of new stuff but, instead, just peel back a few layers to reveal the good stuff that's already inside?

Welcome to your reminder!

'You cannot be anything you want to be – but you can be a lot more of who you already are.'

Tom Rath

It might sound a little righteous, but this book is for your heart of hearts, for the voice inside your head and for the person you want to be. But, more than anything, it's for the person you already are. It is a reminder that you are already brilliant, *sometimes*. And that you need to start being brilliant *a bit more often*. This book is about reminding you to surround yourself with those who refill your reserve of energy, love and gratitude. Not the miserable bastards who deplete you.

'I ordered a wake-up call the other day. The phone rang and a woman's voice said, "What the hell are you doing with your life?" '

Demetri Martin

May I finish this section with a lovely story, embellished and exaggerated ever so slightly, but pretty much true. We will often sneak these 'silly stories' into the book, partly because they're not so silly and partly because, without exception, they have a lovely meaning.

We'd like to think this book is a wake-up call, so we thought it would be appropriate to share this little beauty – a story about the *ultimate* wake-up call.<sup>1</sup>



A few years ago, I was working in South Africa and was put up in a nice hotel in Durban. I wasn't jet-lagged, merely knackered. My mobile phone battery was low and I didn't have my charger, so I was saving its juice to call home. I booked an early-morning wake-up call, explaining to the desk that 7.00am would be fine.

06.45am – phone rang. I thrashed around in the dark and picked it up, not quite sure what to expect. It was a smiley man with a black voice. ‘Good morning Mr Andrew Cope. If I may be so bold as to call you Mr Andrew?’

‘Morning,’ I grunted. ‘Who is this?’

‘Robin, sir. This is your early-morning call, Robin-style sir.’

‘Err, thanks Robin.’ But he wasn't finished.

‘You requested 7 o’clock Mr Andrew. But it's only 6.45. And that is because we have a wonderful South African breakfast waiting for you sir. I figured you'd need a little extra time to enjoy it.’

‘Thanks Robin. That's, err, very kind,’ I offered, now more than half awake.

‘And, Mr Andrew, you need to know that it's a chilly morning today so please wear a sweater. I wouldn't want you catching a chill and taking it back to dear old Eeengland.’

‘No,’ I chuckled, ‘that'd never do.’ And he still wasn't finished.

‘So, before I go, are there any taxis you need me to book or any arrangements I can help you with this morning Mr Andrew?’

I was sitting up and smiling. ‘No thanks Robin. And you can call me Andy. I'll see you downstairs in a few minutes.’

‘Excellent Mr Andy. And I know you're going to have a fabulous day.’ I could hear him grinning down the phone.

I had a Cheshire Cat look about me as I leapt into the shower, got dressed and skipped downstairs. I sought out Robin at reception. *Nope*. Concierge? *Nope*. And then I heard him, outside, ‘... *and I hope you have a fabulous day.*’

Robin was the bell boy. His job was to meet, greet and carry cases. He also did wake-up calls. In hotel terms he was on the lowest rung of the corporate ladder.

And I've never met a happier man.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Borrowed and embellished from Sir John Jones.

# A Thoroughly Modern Maslow

‘For three days after death, hair and fingernails continue to grow but phone calls taper off.’

Johnny Carson



The emotional spectrum runs from depression at the dark end to exuberance at the other. Think Eeyore and Tigger. And, like most spectrums, there are various shades of emotion in between. Most people live somewhere in the middle. They're ‘fine’.

‘Fine’ is synonymous with ‘average’. And ‘average’ is, by definition, what most people are. And, to coin a phrase I use in my school workshops, it's easy to be yourself, *averagely*. It always amazes me how much trouble folks go to attending to their clothes and hair. They polish their shoes. They apply their make-up just so. And then they walk around with a face like a bulldog caught in a swarm of kill bees.

The reality is that life can be rather hard work. We get ground down by ‘busyness’. In fact, the word ‘busyness’ has not only crept into the dictionary, it's also crept centre stage in your life to the point of becoming a standard greeting:

‘How are you Andy?’

‘Oh, you know, keeping busy.’

It's not just the UK. ‘Busyness’ has crept insidiously into the developed world. There are so many examples. My son plays ‘Kwik Cricket’, which, as well as teaching him how to mis-spell the great game, has also shortened it to half an hour.

There was a guy on a course recently and he had four mobile phones on the desk in front of him. *Four*. Just so you know, he had two ears just like the rest of us. He was fixated by his mobile phones all day.<sup>2</sup> At break time he had a special ‘technology belt’ that he put them in. Andy W nicknamed him the ‘John Wayne of modern communications’, lighting up like a Christmas tree as his BlackBerry, iPhone and whatever else vied for his attention. BlackBerrys are nicknamed ‘CrackBerrys’ for a reason!

I delivered some training in London recently. Canary Wharf. *Get me!* That involved a trip on the docklands railway or the ‘DLR’ as us Canary Wharfers like to call it. For the rest of you, it's an extension of the underground that goes overground! I arrived at St Panc tube, stood for half an hour working out where all the coloured lines went and worked out that I needed the yellow one. Rather proudly, I used the self-service ticket machine (*get me, again!*) and I followed the yellow signs, descending into the Victorian underground to await my carriage. I was idling track-side when there

was a tannoy announcement along the lines of 'please accept our humble apologies but there's a severe delay on the yellow line'. The regular London crowd went berserk. This 'severe delay' was causing them some severe stress. As you will have gathered, I'm from out of town so I approached a guy with London Underground uniform and asked him how long the delay was. He looked ashen faced, delivering the news as though one of my relatives had died. 'Seven minutes sir. I'm so sorry.' He was choked with emotion.

Look here, dear reader, we seem to have reached the point in our evolution when a seven-minute delay causes gnashing of teeth and frothing mouths. For context, I'm from a village seven miles from Derby. If the bus is 'severely delayed' that means you won't be going to town until a week on Tuesday!

This book is an interruption to your busyness. And, yes, we know you haven't got time to read it! And we know you're skimming it to the point that you missed that there were two 'tos' in the previous sentence.

Robert Holden calls modern life 'the daily blur'. We wake up, hit the autopilot button and the semi-hypnotic world passes us by. We're locked into a routine. And while autopilot helps you get through your day, it doesn't always help you maximise the enjoyment of your day.

Robert proffers some really cool activities. For example, on your happiness scale of 1–10, what would have to happen for you to raise one notch? And then one more notch? In this scenario you'll probably find that happiness is dependent on things that will happen to you in the future.

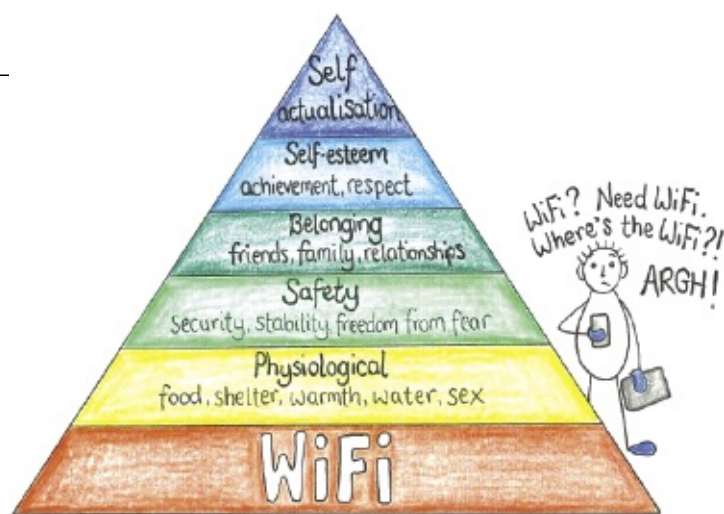
But if you reword the activity, thus: 'What would have to happen for me to feel better right now?' you might well find that there's a whirring of the cogs *within*. This question often points to changes you can make, in your thinking and attitudes, that will get you a better result.

Some people are so busy that they've erased themselves from their lives. Your routine is more important than you! I spoke about the busyness epidemic at a conference recently and an exasperated non-ironic voice shouted from the audience, '*I haven't got time to slow down!*'

And that's our point, exactly! Busyness has got a grip of us to the point that we're not immersed in life, we're skimming the surface of it. At work, most people no longer have a 'job for life', just a 'job for the life of the project'. That leaves a permanent undercurrent of uncertainty. There will be a re-structure coming soon. Or, even worse, business is now so footloose that you could be closed down and outsourced to China. Work is squeezing you. Guaranteed, your boss will be saying 'Here are more tasks. We're not taking any of the old ones away, but we'd like you to do these fresh ones too.' *Nice one!*

And, of course, it's not just work. Twitter forces you to squeeze everything into 140 characters. BBC3 has the 'One-minute news'. I recently caught a cookery programme where, in a delicious twist of irony, the winner got their meal immortalised as a microwave dinner. #WTF?

Here's Maslow's seminal 'hierarchy of needs' revamped for the new world. Yes, yes, I appreciate it's an academic gag, but it makes a very good point.



For too many people, modern life has become a dash. A race to the finish line, hurtling through life as if your thumb was pressed on fast forward. And, let's be clear, Andy and I aren't immune. I was stuck in a convoy of slow-moving cars the other day. And I mean *sloooooow*. We were being held up by an elderly driver going way below 30mph. I had my family in the car and we had places to go, people to see and things to do.

I started chuntering. 'They're doing it on purpose. Just to annoy me!' I looked in the rear-view mirror. 'There's a massive queue,' I hissed. 'Old people shouldn't be allowed on the road.' We came to a standstill and I couldn't take it any more. I opened the window and shouted, 'For heaven's sake. Get a bloody move on!' And my family started getting annoyed with me. 'Dad, please shut up. You're ruining grandma's funeral procession.'

Scott Adams's clever take on ancient philosophy, '*I get email, therefore I am*', is a good summation of modernity.

The result? Jamie Smart argues that our mental clarity is under attack. Smartphones, hyperlinks, emails from your bed and ticker-tape news are eating our attention like a drunken man eating a kebab (that's hungrily and without caring whether it's good or not). We get mental congestion. Or is it mental indigestion? Or mental constipation? They all seem to fit! And, whichever way, the feeling is the same as the man with the kebab – bloated, lethargic and unsatisfied.

'I've got more important things to think about. I've got a yogurt to finish, the expiry date is today.'

Scotland football manager, Gordon Strachan

The modern world is damaging our health. Last year there were 50 million prescriptions written for people who need chemical assistance to feel normal. And despite being better connected than ever, there are an awful lot of people feeling isolated and alone.

You've almost certainly heard of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, probably by its shortened name ADHD. This is a neurological disorder that has a strong genetic component. If you're a teacher, you've most certainly experienced the constant struggle to maintain the attention of children who are easily distracted. Recent research has found a growing number of adults with no neurological disorder who are driven to behave in ADHD-like ways. Maureen Gaffney describes it as '*experiencing an inner frenzy of distractability, impatience, difficulty in setting priorities, staying focused and managing time.*'

Edward Hallowell calls it ADT – Attention Deficit Trait. It's not a disorder, as such. It's a cluttered head caused by overdosing on information. Basically, we're becoming self-inflicted stress-heads.

Check this out for another modern disorder. There's something called 'vibrating thigh syndrome' – the feeling that your phone is buzzing when, in fact, it isn't. You keep checking your pocket because you can feel the phantom vibration. And, even more salient, I read a report that says doctors are seeing more and more people who are suffering from 'toasted thigh syndrome' –burning of the skin caused by having a laptop sat on your knee all day. True, I promise.

Single tasking is an anachronism. Even men are having to multi-task (albeit badly, in most instances). My new Kindle has pretty much killed reading for pleasure. It now allows me to access emails and the web, so the magic of reading is thwarted by the opportunity ('for just a second') to check on email or an incoming text message.

And the problem with skimming the surface is that you experience a great deal but, as Robert said earlier, it's a blur. You miss the hidden depths.

Ask yourself, are the best authors the ones who can write a book the quickest? Are the best chefs those who can knock up a meal the fastest? Are the best artists the ones who can paint the quickest? Are the best lovers ... ?

Apparently, life doesn't always have to be about speed!

'Thousands of people are living lives of screaming desperation, where they work long, hard hours at jobs they hate to enable them to buy things they don't need to impress people they don't like.'

Nigel Marsh

Please indulge me and allow one more example of 'busyness'. It's my pet subject and is actually a massive impediment to modern-day happiness and wellbeing, so it's worth hammering the point. I did some work at one of the major supermarkets and they told me that sales of oranges are down by 30% in the last five years. The reason? *We haven't got time to peel them.* We're so busy that we'd rather get scurvy than peel a piece of fruit. But grated cheese, ready meals and, get this, pre-peeled hard-boiled eggs are all on the up. The wonderful capitalist world is finding ways of accommodating our 'busyness'. If you haven't got time to stick your eggs in a pan and boil them for ten minutes, we'll provide that service for you.

Now, of course, none of this is wrong. I'm not asking that we harp back to the 'good old days' where there were three TV channels and we actually had time to get bored. I'm arguing that the hectic pace life is, for the most part, normal.

'My grandfather is always saying that in the old days people could leave their back doors open. Which is probably why his submarine sank.'

Milton Jones

But if 'busyness' has conned you into thinking working half a day means quitting at 4pm, then it's time for a re-think. If you get impatient as your laptop boots up, you need help. If it's not only the battery on your mobile phone that's drained and you're exhausted by the thought of spending time with your own kids, things are worse than we thought.

Are you sitting comfortably? Then consider this lovely story about the three bears ...

Baby Bear goes downstairs and sits in his small chair at the table. He looks into his small bowl. It is empty. 'Who's been eating my porridge?' he squeaks.

Daddy Bear arrives at the big table and sits in his big chair. He looks into his big bowl and it is also empty. 'Who's been eating my porridge?' he roars.

Mummy Bear pokes her head through the serving hatch from the kitchen and yells, 'For God's sake, how many times do I have to go through this with you idiots? It was Mummy Bear who got up first. It was Mummy Bear who woke everyone in the house. It was Mummy Bear who made the coffee. It was Mummy Bear who unloaded the dishwasher from last night and put everything away. It was Mummy Bear who swept the floor in the kitchen. It was Mummy Bear who went out in the cold early morning air to fetch the newspaper and croissants. It was Mummy Bear who set the damned table.'

Baby Bear's bottom lip is now trembling but she continues, 'It was Mummy Bear who walked the bloody dog, cleaned the cat's litter tray, gave them their food and refilled their water. And now that you've decided to drag your sorry bear-arses downstairs and grace Mummy Bear with your grumpy presence, listen carefully, because I'm only going to say this once ...

I HAVEN'T MADE THE F\*\*\*\*\* PORRIDGE YET!'

I love the pertinence of this familiar story. I especially like it because it makes the very important point that even brilliant people are allowed to lose their rag. Let's look at what being brilliant isn't. Being 'brilliant' *isn't* about always being right or nicey-nicey. And it's certainly not about being walked all over. It's not about sticking an inane grin on your face and pretending to be happy when you're seriously hacked off. Sometimes it's perfectly OK to be angry and upset. Just not all the time!

And, hopefully, if this message has sunk in with Daddy and Baby Bears, you might just make Mummy Bear's porridge in future.

We can't cure your busyness. It's just the way the modern world happens to be.

This book is like hitting 'Ctrl Alt Delete'. Let's have a bit of a re-boot and start afresh. Because, thinking aloud, the chances are that you are living life fast. But are you living it well?

## Note

<sup>2</sup> *I was thinking what you're thinking ... drug dealer.*

# Bonus (True) Story

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## Busking

Washington, DC metro station on a cold January morning. A man with a violin was busking. He played six classical pieces for about 45 minutes. He was being filmed and, during that time, approximately 2000 people went through the station, most of them on their way to work.

After three minutes, a middle-aged man noticed there was a musician playing. He slowed his pace and stopped for a few seconds and then hurried on by.

Four minutes later, the violinist received his first dollar – a woman threw the money in the hat and, without stopping, continued to walk.

Six minutes in, a young man leaned against the wall to listen to him, then looked at his watch and started to walk again, presumably with a train to catch.

After 10 minutes, a 3-year-old boy stopped but his mother tugged him along hurriedly. The child stopped to look at the violinist again, but the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk, turning his head all the time. This action was repeated by several other children. Every parent, without exception, forced their children to move on quickly.

Forty-five minutes later, the musician had played continuously. Only six people stopped and listened for a short while. About 20 gave money but continued to walk at their normal pace. The man collected a total of \$32.

He finished playing and silence took over. No one noticed. No one applauded, nor was there any recognition.

None of the commuters knew, but the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the greatest musicians of our generation. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written, with a Stradivarius violin worth \$3.5 million. Two days before Joshua Bell sold out a theatre in Boston where the seats averaged \$100.

This is a true story. Joshua Bell playing incognito in the metro station was organised by the *Washington Post* as part of a social experiment about perception, taste and people's priorities. The questions raised: In a common place environment at an inappropriate hour, do we perceive beauty? Do we stop to appreciate it? Do we recognise talent in an unexpected context?

One possible conclusion reached from this experiment could be this: If we do not have a moment to stop and listen to one of the best musicians in the world, playing some of the finest music ever written, with one of the most beautiful instruments ever made ... how many other things are we missing?

# Wired for Struggle?

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‘So I got home and the phone was ringing. I picked it up and said, “Who's speaking please?” And voice said, “You are.” ’

Tim Vine



Alice was pooped.  
She realised that by the time she had  
recovered from yesterday then prepared  
for tomorrow, there wasn't a lot  
left of today

According to my esteemed co-author, we're all born perfect. But, of course, in the interests of generating some debate, I totally disagree. We're born completely and utterly flawed. You pop out in the world and someone slaps your backside. *Nice welcome!*<sup>3</sup> You open your lungs and the starting pistol of life signals that you're off...

You are you. You just don't know it yet! And, eventually, you get used to being you. You work out what works and doesn't work for you. You suss the system.

Now I don't want to get too deep too quickly, but have you ever stopped to consider which bit is ‘you’?

Is it the body bit? Grab your ear lobe and feel the smoothness of it. The little hairs. That's a bit of ‘you’, right? Or bite your lip. *Ouch*, that's definitely ‘you’. Pull your hair. That's attached, so that's ‘you’ too. So there's a physical ‘you’. That version of ‘you’ that's basically a bunch of trillions of cells stuck together. And the physical ‘you’ is very important.

But this book is less about the ‘you’ that you see when you stand naked in front of the mirror. Yes, yes, we know there are a load of lumps, bumps and imperfections. But herein lies the clue to you #2. Who's the one *noticing* your reflection? Who's the one saying, ‘Best suck your belly in mate’? Who's the one *imagining* how good you'd look if you actually put some effort into getting fit?

We reckon this is the *real* you. The lumpy, visible bunch of cells is just the mechanism you use to transport yourself around. The one in your head is the most important. The one that feels and connects. Some call it your spirit, or personality or inner voice. Steve Peters calls it your inner chimp, that little voice in your head.

If I ask you, ‘Do you talk to yourself’? The *real* you is the one who says, ‘I don't know, do I?’ And that's the version of ‘you’ that we want to engage. The one inside. Because if we can get through to the *real* you, our job is done.



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