

CHAPTER 1

Principle 1: Crisis creates opportunity

In 1959 John F. Kennedy delivered a speech in which he said, ‘When written in Chinese the word *crisis* is composed of two characters. One represents danger, and the other represents opportunity.’ Since then this insight has entered popular culture and is widely used in politics and business and by inspirational speakers the world over.

There is no doubt that crisis presents both danger and opportunity, but this much-loved interpretation isn’t actually accurate. A more faithful translation of the two characters that make up the Chinese symbol for crisis would be ‘danger’ and ‘crucial point’. Most people take crisis to involve some sort of personal or professional emergency that must be weathered. It doesn’t. At least it doesn’t have to. If you look up *crisis* in your dictionary you will find that the definition usually refers to a ‘crucial or decisive moment or turning point’. In fact, the word itself comes from the Greek word *krinein* — to decide. A crisis therefore is a call to action — a situation or event that demands

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your attention and forces you to decide how to react and what to choose for yourself going forward.

Events, situations and circumstances do not in themselves create crisis. What creates the danger that is inherent in crisis is an unwillingness to face the truth and take constructive action to change the outcome.

For example, when it comes to a crisis, they don't come much bigger, certainly in living memory, than the global financial crisis (GFC). Since it began toward the end of 2007 the GFC has caused unprecedented financial destruction to international stock markets, countries, businesses, governments and individuals. The meltdown that occurred between 2007 and 2012 is considered by many leading economists to be the worst financial disaster since the Great Depression of the 1930s. And yet, according to the *World Wealth Report 2010* published by Merrill Lynch and Cag Gemini, there was a 34 per cent increase in Australian millionaires between the end of 2008 and the end of 2009. By the end of 2008 there were 129 200 individuals in Australia with net assets, excluding their home, of at least \$1 million. By the end of 2009 there were 173 600 such individuals. The year 2007 may have marked the beginning of the GFC, but it also marked the end of one of the longest economic booms in living memory. In other words, crisis? What crisis? For some 44 400 people crisis created opportunity and they bucked the negative trend to come out on top.

And these individuals are not alone. Some of the most successful businesses in the world started out during an economic downturn of some type, including Procter & Gamble, CNN, Hyatt Hotels, Kraft Foods, Disney, Revlon and IBM. The US publication dedicated to wealth, *Fortune* magazine, was launched during the Great Depression.

Even the technology powerhouse Apple has weathered a few considerable economic storms. Although Apple started life in

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1976 it didn't move into hyperdrive until the middle of the dot.com crash. When all things tech were considered bad news Apple's Steve Jobs instructed his team of engineers to develop a personal music player, and the iPod was created in less than a year.

Launched in November 2001, it became an instant hit. Two years later Apple launched iTunes, and the rest is history. The iPhone and iPad followed, and who knows what funky new 'must have' products they will create in the future. All because they refused to see the crisis and focused on innovation.

Still more recently, Groupon, the online 'deal-of-the-day' discount coupon company, started life in November 2008 during the GFC. What better time to launch a business that offered people the opportunity to buy stuff at a discount price? Within the space of two years Groupon had reached more than 200 markets worldwide and was reported to have some 35 million registered users seeking discount deals. In 2011 Google offered \$6 billion for the business. The GFC created a phenomenal opportunity for this business. According to *Forbes* magazine and *The Wall Street Journal*, at projected revenue Groupon was on target to make \$1 billion in sales faster than any other business in history.

A 2009 study conducted by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, 'The Economic Future Just Happened', concluded that challenging economic times can inspire entrepreneurial rebirth. In fact, the study found that 'more than half of the companies on the 2009 *Fortune* 500 list were launched during a recession or bear market, along with nearly half of the firms on the 2008 *Inc.* list of America's fastest-growing companies'.

Obviously, crisis isn't always negative. Crises simply force us to look outside our comfort zone and actively seek opportunities that were probably there the whole time. When life is easy and times are good we don't see these opportunities

because we don't need to. This is not just common sense — it's biological too.

The biology of innovation

In *Eat, Fast and Live Longer*, a great documentary that aired on UK TV, British journalist, physician and TV presenter Dr Michael Mosley investigated the health benefits of fasting. In one particular segment of the show he visited Dr Mark Mattson, Chief of the Laboratory of Neurosciences at the National Institute on Aging in Baltimore, Maryland, USA, and professor of neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University. Dr Mattson was conducting some startling experiments on mice. The mice were fed different diets and released into a maze, where they needed to work out and remember where the food was. The mice fed a high-fat, western diet fared pretty badly: either they couldn't figure out where the food was or they could find it but later couldn't remember where it was. However, the mice fed one day and starved the next did really well. When the researchers examined the brains of the fasting mice they discovered something amazing — newly created brain cells. Sporadic bouts of hunger trigger the new neurons to grow, making the mice more resourceful and mentally focused. Asked why this should happen, Mattson replied, 'If you think of it in evolutionary terms it makes sense. If you are hungry you better increase your cognitive ability. It will give you a survival advantage if you can remember the location of the food.'

This documentary was looking at the health benefits of fasting, and certainly the evidence suggested that occasional fasting might be good for you — not only with weight loss and other health benefits but also for brain function. It also has far wider implications, however. Mattson is now conducting human trials to test if the same phenomenon occurs in human beings, but it's highly likely that it does. We already know

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that the brain can and does change itself depending on the environment — it’s known as *neuroplasticity*.

If hunger stresses the brain matter in the same way that exercise stresses the muscles, then hunger really does make the brain sharper. Hunger is a physical crisis that forces the body out of complacency and comfort; it triggers action. It’s highly likely, therefore, that a crisis of any sort that initiates a physical stress response will also trigger intense brain function. In short, we get more creative in a crisis. Why? Because we are fighting for survival!

In moments of crisis or severe adversity our mind and body will shift gear and often access resources that we simply didn’t know existed prior to the event.

On 9 April 1982 Angela Cavallo’s teenage son Tony was out in the yard tinkering under his beloved 1964 Chevy Impala. Without warning, the two jacks holding up the car slipped and the car fell, pinning Tony underneath. Hearing a loud noise, Angela went out to the yard to see what had happened and was horrified to find her son unconscious beneath the car. Angela, in her late fifties at the time, lifted the car and held it up for five full minutes while two neighbours replaced the jacks and pulled Tony to safety.

It’s unlikely that Angela would ever have known her own capabilities had she not been in a crisis. Physiologists Michio Ikai and Arthur H. Steinhaus demonstrated that human strength could be increased by up to 31 per cent in certain situations, one being panic. In an article published in the *Journal of Applied Physiology*, they concluded that what we ‘think’ we are capable of is nothing more than a conditioned response or habit that limits our full potential. In other words, we are all capable of considerably more than we consistently demonstrate but it often takes a crisis for us to shift gears and effectively tap into that capacity.

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Considered from this vantage point, it's easy to see crisis as a potential blessing. Sometimes severe adversity is simply the universe's way of telling you that you are on the wrong path and need to make some changes. Crisis is good for you! Without crisis it is so easy to drown in mediocrity — a no-man's-land where the status quo is not bad enough to change but isn't very good either. Crisis forces our hand. It demands change while also giving you fast-track access to resources such as creativity, innovation and strength that you probably didn't know you had.

Obviously crisis situations are not easy to handle. They can be extremely stressful and too much stress, especially over a long period of time, can adversely affect our health.

In periods of panic, for example, the body will move into fight- or-flight mode for self-preservation. All the blood will be pushed into the extremities, the limbs, ready for action — as illustrated by Angela Cavallo! Brain function can also be inhibited as the neocortex, the thinking part of your brain, effectively shuts down. When you find yourself in a stressful situation your limbic system, the emotional centre of your brain, will kick into gear and move you into action long before the message of danger has even reached the thinking part of your brain, the neocortex. In his groundbreaking book *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goldman explains how Joseph LeDoux, a neuroscientist at the Center for Neural Science at New York University, was the first to discover the important function of the amygdala. These two almond-shaped clusters of interconnected cells that sit above the brain stem, one in each hemisphere, essentially act as our 'emotional sentinel'. Goldman tells the story of a friend of his in England who, having eaten lunch at a canal-side café, took a stroll along the canal. After a few minutes he saw a girl gazing into the water, her face frozen in fear. Before he knew it Goldman's friend was in the water. Only once in the water did he realise why — and he was able to save a toddler who had fallen in.

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It was his amygdala that caused him to jump in the canal. Our brain is switched ‘on’ all the time; it processes all the information it receives from the five senses and makes decisions on the basis of that data. It had always been thought that the neocortex, or the conscious thinking brain, receives the information first and sends out signals to the respective parts of the brain for action. What LeDoux discovered was that the amygdala gets the information first and is effectively able to hijack the brain and initiate a reaction, often before the thinking brain even knows what’s going on. Goldman’s friend picked up a danger signal from the face of the girl looking at the water and reacted immediately by jumping into the water. It was only once he was in the water that his neocortex got with the program and he could understand why he had done it.

So while a crisis or challenging situation can sharpen the mind, if the body feels stressed over a long period this can backfire. The solution, therefore, is to engage the thinking brain as quickly as possible and get into action.

This idea of increased brain activity and function also ties into learning. For years scientists thought the brain was hardwired. It was assumed that whatever brain cells we were born with were our lot and when some died they were not replaced. In the 1980s it was discovered that we could generate new brain cells in response to certain demands. As we’ve seen, one of those demands is physical hunger. Another is learning, and again this is related to the neuroplasticity of the brain during crisis.

Neurons or brain cells are created or regenerated in response to a new learning challenge. When we are faced with a crisis of any type, the situation usually demands that we adapt and learn new ways of thinking and working in order to navigate the crisis effectively. Being challenged is therefore an important part of growth and development. We literally think differently when challenged and stressed. It appears that brain function responds favourably to demands and actually performs better in a

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crisis or difficulty, all of which makes sense from an evolutionary perspective. Your brain needs to be stretched and challenged. Sharp, clear and innovative thinking is therefore more readily available when push really comes to shove. It would appear that when we *really* need to find a solution, the brain will adapt and help us find one.

At least, it will if you foster the habits that determine whether you will be able to turn crisis into opportunity.

Habits: Crisis creates opportunity

When crisis hits or you find yourself in a difficult or challenging situation, there are certain things you need to do and actions you need to take consistently if you want to emerge stronger from the experience. In short, you need to foster the following habits:

1. Connect to your why.
2. Think impossible thoughts.
3. Direct your focus.
4. Create another crisis.

1 CONNECT TO YOUR WHY

As I mentioned in the introduction, I genuinely believe my accident was a blessing for me because it forced me to realign my purpose by looking at my life and what was *really* important. I got my half-time opportunity long before mid life and I consider myself extremely fortunate for that alone. Crisis is tough. It can be traumatic and extremely painful emotionally, physically and financially, but when viewed from a new vantage point crisis is one of the most powerful and effective initiators of change because it allows us to connect or reconnect to our purpose.

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One of my favourite books is *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* by Simon Sinek. Sinek opens by telling the story of Samuel Pierpont Langley and how he set out to be the first man to pilot an airplane at the start of the twentieth century. Langley was a highly regarded mathematician, astronomer, physicist, inventor and aviation pioneer. He had influential and powerful friends, including Andrew Carnegie and Alexander Graham Bell. And he had money: based on the success of his previous aviation models, Langley was awarded a \$50 000 grant from the War Department and a \$20 000 grant from the Smithsonian Institute, where he was also a senior officer.

In today's money that's about \$1.8 million, so it was a significant level of funding with which to pursue his dream. It allowed him to attract a 'dream team of talent and know-how'. They had access to the finest materials and equipment and the press followed their every move. Langley had everything he needed to secure success.

Several hundred miles away in Dayton, Ohio, two guys you may be more familiar with — Wilbur and Orville Wright — were working in a bicycle shop on the same dream. The Wright brothers didn't have powerful friends or university degrees or distinguished careers, and they didn't have access to funding or materials. In fact, no-one on their team had so much as a college degree — not even the brothers themselves. Working in a cramped shop with a small group of equally committed and passionate aviation nuts drawn together from the local area, on 17 December 1903 Wilbur and Orville Wright became the first to make a controlled, powered human flight.

So what happened in this David and Goliath battle? Langley had everything: he was smart, he was educated, he was cashed up and he had powerful connections. What he didn't have,

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however, was a big enough *why*. Wilbur and Orville Wright had none of the obvious advantages that Langley enjoyed, but they had something far more valuable: they were obsessed with flight, it was their passion and that gave them a compelling *why*.

Sinek writes of how the founders of Apple were not motivated by money. Considering the price of Apple products today compared with its competitors it's a little hard to credit, but Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak believed that technology was not just for business. They saw the personal computer as 'a way for the little man to take on a corporation.' They wanted to create simple, beautiful and elegant technology that made life better, easier and more fun. And by starting with the right *why* they were able to revolutionise the industry despite being the underdog for many years.

Sinek goes on to tell us about the Golden Circle model, which introduces the three key words *what*, *how* and *why*. We all know 'what' we do each and every day: what work we are in, what services we provide, and what products we offer. Many know 'how' we do the what, so we know how we create the results we do, our differentiating value proposition, our uniqueness. Yet few of us can answer 'why' we do what we do. Why do we get out of bed each morning? Why are we involved in this business and not that one? Why have we chosen to work in one profession instead of another, and why should anyone care?

When you have a strong 'why', the 'how' becomes almost secondary. When the goal is important enough, people will surmount all types of obstacles and endure all sorts of hardship to achieve that outcome.

One man who stands out in this regard is Viktor Frankl. Frankl was a respected Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist when the Second World War began. As a Jew he was first

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ordered to stop treating ‘Aryan’ patients. On 25 September 1942 he and his wife and parents were deported to the Nazi Theresienstadt Ghetto. On 19 October 1944 Frankl and his wife were transported to the Auschwitz concentration camp.

Before this Frankl had finished writing his life’s work and, desperate to keep it safe, had sewn it into the lining of his coat. In an interview when he was 90 years old Frankl told how he had begged the guards who discovered it, ‘Look, this is the manuscript of a scientific book . . . I must keep this manuscript at all costs; it contains my life’s work. Do you understand that?’ They simply mocked him and the manuscript was destroyed. Frankl recalled, ‘At that moment I saw the plain truth and did what marked the culminating point of the first phase of my psychological reaction: I struck out my whole former life.’

What followed was unspeakable horror. His wife died in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp; his mother was killed in the gas chambers of Auschwitz; his brother also died at Auschwitz. Apart from Frankl himself the only other member of his family to survive the Holocaust was his sister, who escaped from Austria and emigrated to Australia.

What makes Frankl unique is that he was able to live out his own theory. He used his own ideas to find meaning in utter hopelessness. He became obsessed with his why, which was to survive so he could share his insights with the world. Desperate to re-create the book he had lost, he wrote on every scrap of paper he could find. After he was eventually liberated by the Americans in 1945 he went on to write a little book called *Man’s Search for Meaning* and to develop his theories of logotherapy and existential therapy, which have helped millions of people to find meaning in their own lives, regardless of the darkness they may face.

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Without that why, having lost almost all of his family and his life's work, and experiencing the daily atrocities of the Nazi concentration camps, it would have been easy to give up. But as Frankl said, 'Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.' There may have been nothing he could do about his external circumstances, but the Nazis could not control his internal condition, and that final freedom saved his life.

Without that why, there is nothing to pull someone through difficult times, so they quit at the first sign of trouble. Having a goal is one thing; having the courage to pursue it once things get difficult is quite another. And having a strong enough why is the key. The great thing about crisis is that it can force you to think about your why. As a result, it offers unprecedented opportunity to re-create and revolutionise your life moving forward.

For most of us life just happens. Chances are you didn't sit down one day to map out your life plan. You didn't decide how old you'd be when you got married or when you would have children or what profession you would enter. Often these big life choices just happen as a result of circumstances.

In my training programs I often ask the audience, 'How many people in this room spend more time planning their holiday than they do planning their lives?' I've found that more than 90 per cent of the thousands of people I've spoken to around the world spend more time planning their holiday than planning their lives. This highlights two issues: first, that our education systems have not taught us the importance of consistent life planning and, second, that we lack the passion and drive for long-term personal life planning.

If you are like most people, when you left school or university you just took one of the first jobs you could find, and that accident of timing is what directed your fate more than any

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soul-searching that you may or may not have done. It's the same in business: once a business generates momentum, the leader becomes a firefighter rather than a strategist or tactician. The months melt into years and before you know where you are you are in a different market, providing a different service and wondering how you got there.

Crisis can be a fantastic opportunity to jam on the brakes and really assess what is happening and match that back to your own hopes and dreams. And often those hopes and dreams have become so obscured by day-to-day life and work that it can take a little while to reconnect.

That was certainly true for me. I thought I was happy with life. I was super busy, I had a job I loved and I had a lot of freedom in that role, which I enjoyed even more. I also had my own studio, a beautiful wife and two gorgeous daughters. But I can't say I ever really planned all that. It had just evolved that way, and although I was exhausted and I didn't see much of my family I thought I was successful.

Then I had my accident and everything changed. As I lay dying in the smashed-up Holden my mind was racing. It felt like my life was on fast-forward on an old videotape — I got glimpses of what was being covered and I knew it all made sense, but I couldn't make everything out. As I said earlier, I was aware of my entire life up to that point, how one thing led to another and how connected everything was. Then suddenly the tape stopped and three questions came into clear focus:

- » Was I PASSIONATE?
- » Was I PRODUCTIVE?
- » Was I MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

I remember feeling totally lost and utterly alone, despite knowing that there was a crowd of people around me willing me

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to survive. I didn't realise it at the time but I was coming face to face with my why.

The weird thing about a question is that once it's asked your brain, even a bleeding and bruised one, has to answer. So I remember struggling to think about the questions. Was I passionate about life, about business, about my family, my job, my work colleagues and about the things that I said mattered to me? Was I productive in my life, toward my family, my parents, in my team, in my dreams, my social community, to others less fortunate than me? And was I making a difference to my family and friends, to my neighbourhood, to the wider community, to humanity?

I knew in my heart that the answer wasn't always what I wanted or hoped it would be. Before the accident I was always rushing from place to place. It was the life I'd wanted, and although I was enjoying most of it I knew I was failing in the most important area. I remembered a night a few months earlier when I arrived home late, again. I'd been away most of the week and a client was waiting for me in my home studio. As I rushed in the door I went straight to my study, getting ready to apologise to the client. Emelia ran up to me and squealed, 'Daddy, Daddy, you're home.' I just brushed her off: 'Look out Milly, out of the way, I'm late.' I still get choked up thinking how I dismissed her.

My crisis forced me to connect to my why. I wasn't interested in scaling some corporate ladder or graduating to a bigger and better house. I wanted a life of meaning and experiences that put my family at the heart of my life, not the periphery. I wanted to spend the second half of my life being passionate, caring and making a difference to others.

Just by seeing crisis differently you can shift the meaning from nightmare to blessing. Take Al Gore as another example. You might imagine that Gore's why was political — to effect

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political change through government. After all, he rose to the office of US Vice President in 1993. By that point Gore had been in politics since 1977 and in 2000 he ran for president against George W. Bush. But then a crisis hit and the election ended up being one of the most controversial in recent history. Although Gore won the popular vote by some 500 000 votes, he lost the Electoral College when the US Supreme Court stepped in over the Florida vote recount and ruled 5–4 in favour of Bush.

Gore had failed to achieve his goal. I can only imagine how devastated he must have been. But what you might not know is that ever since his senior year at Harvard, when he took a class with oceanographer and global warming theorist Roger Revelle, Gore had been fascinated by environmental issues including climate change. His ‘failure’ in the presidential campaign had forced Gore to reconnect to his real passion, motivation and why. He probably thought the best way to effect change in the environment was through government legislation, but Al Gore’s contribution to environmental issues may have been considerably greater since his exit from politics.

Gore didn’t leave politics a bitter, angry man, even though he had every right to following the scandalous injustice of the 2000 vote. Instead he reconnected to his why and went on to create the game-changing documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*. And he has probably done more to further the environmental cause since leaving politics than he could ever have achieved as president. Al Gore even won the Nobel Peace Prize for his climate change activism.

Everyone has a different why, but in my experience it rarely revolves around money or making a profit. Money is an outcome; in itself it has no meaning or purpose. Most people want to be financially comfortable but meaning, experience and using their talents and abilities are much more important. The problem is we can become so focused on paying bills, meeting

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sales targets and attending endless meetings that we lose sight of the things that really make us happy and fulfilled.

Crisis is the universe’s way of calling time on the status quo so you can work out what it is you really want. It gives you the opportunity to bounce forward into not just any future so you find yourself in another crisis down the track, but *that* future. You can’t hit a target you don’t know you have!

Start bouncing

The car crash test

Although this may sound a little morbid, take a moment to imagine that tomorrow you jump in your car and on the way to your destination you are involved in an accident. You can hear the sirens approaching and you have a few moments to review your life.

You don’t understand what happened and you’re not 100 per cent sure you are going to be okay. What do you think about first? Who shows up in your thoughts? What do you most regret not doing? What do you regret doing? What makes you smile? What makes you cringe?

If, by a miracle, fate allows you another chance, what would you change? Write down five things you would change and why.

Start bouncing

The Felix Felicis test

In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* Harry wins a small vial of Felix Felicis in his potions class at Hogwarts.

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Felix Felicis is 'liquid luck' and whoever drinks it is guaranteed success in whatever they attempt. Imagine you had a permanent supply of Felix Felicis so whatever you do you cannot fail. What would you do with the rest of your life?

2 THINK IMPOSSIBLE THOUGHTS

Albert Einstein famously said, 'The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.' This is pretty logical and yet often when we find ourselves in crisis we attempt to find a solution using the same information and thinking that got us into the crisis in the first place. The same thinking leads us to bounce back to the place we were before the crisis happened.

It doesn't work. We need to start fresh, wipe the slate clean and begin to think impossible thoughts, and this won't necessarily happen naturally. William James, one of the most original thinkers in history, said, 'A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.' In other words, what we consider thinking is nothing more than moving around the same ideas and thoughts we've already had. We need to upload new information and deliberately seek new ideas and possibilities. Only then can we activate the full potential of our brain, unlock innovative solutions to curly questions and bounce forward.

For decades personal development literature has discussed the power of thought, but it's only relatively recently that scientific research has backed up the idea. Physicist and pioneer in psychoenergetic research Dr William Tiller of Stanford University has conducted many studies that have demonstrated just how much intention and thought influence outcome.

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In one of his most widely cited studies Tiller had four skilled meditators focus on an electrical device to ‘imprint’ it with a specific intention — to increase the pH by one unit. These devices, together with control devices, were then placed six inches from separate samples of water taken from the same source. To clarify the significance of this increase, if you were to increase the pH in the human body by one unit it would be fatal. Statistically the chances of it happening accidentally or naturally are less than one in a thousand. However, the boxes that had focused mental energy directed toward them did indeed alter the pH of the water.

In his book *Hidden Messages in Water*, Dr Masaru Emoto also demonstrates the power of thought to influence outcome. In a series of experiments Emoto took 50 samples of water from the same source and froze them for three hours. At -5° C the frozen crystals were photographed through a microscope. The experiment was then repeated using the same water, only this time the water had been exposed to various stimuli such as music, words and prayer. What he discovered was that music by Beethoven, prayer and words such as ‘love’ and ‘thank you’ taped to the sample produced beautiful, intricate and perfectly symmetrical crystals. Heavy metal music and phrases such as ‘You make me sick, I will kill you’ created incomplete, distorted and malformed crystals.

We can sense the energy of others or the ‘energy in a room’. On a really basic level we already know that it feels better being around positive, happy people than being around negative, unhappy people. So while Dr Emoto’s research is highly controversial and dismissed by some as pseudoscience, it points to something we already instinctively know — that energy matters. And considering that what we think about affects energy, then his findings are not that surprising after all. This is why it’s so important to consciously direct your focus

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and take charge of your thinking, especially during difficult times. If all your energy is directed toward what you don't want to happen, then, these studies imply, you could actually be bringing about the outcome you desperately want to avoid by focusing on the negative as opposed to the positive.

As a result of his own research Tiller concluded, 'From these studies and more like them, it can be seen that belief fuels expectations and expectations, in turn, marshal intention at both unconscious and conscious levels to fulfil expectations.' According to Tiller, 'We are running the holodeck. It has such flexibility that anything you can imagine, it will create for you. Your intention causes this thing to materialize once you're conscious enough and you learn how to use your intentionality.'

For those readers not familiar with *Star Trek*, Tiller's reference to the holodeck is from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Like the crew of the USS *Enterprise*, who could enter the holodeck and dial up any simulated alternative reality either to assist with training or to relax from the rigours of space travel, we use our thoughts — consciously or unconsciously — to dial up our own reality based on what we choose to focus our intention and habitual thinking on.

Tiller is by no means alone in his thinking. Philosopher and theologian Dr Micheál Ledwith puts it this way: 'Reality is not solid, it's mostly empty space and whatever solidity it has seems more to resemble a hologram picture rather than solid harsh reality. It's a shimmering reality that seems to be very susceptible to the power of thought.' Interestingly, Ledwith was ordained as a Catholic priest in 1967. He was appointed a lecturer in theology at the Pontifical University, Maynooth, in 1971, becoming professor, then dean of faculty, vice president and finally president. From 1980 to 1997 he also served three terms as a member of the International Theological Commission, a

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small group of theologians who advise on matters referred to them by the Pope. Ledwith suggests:

We are creating our own reality every day, though we find that very hard to accept— there’s nothing more exquisitely pleasant than to blame somebody else for the way we are. It’s her fault or it’s his fault; it’s the system; it’s God; it’s my parents . . . Whatever way we observe the world around us is what comes back to us, and for that reason why my life for instance is so lacking in joy and happiness and fulfilment is because my focus is lacking in those same things exactly.

There is now irrefutable proof that what we think about on a habitual basis influences what we experience. If we expect the worst, then we can’t really be very surprised when it comes about.

It follows that Einstein was right: whatever thinking brought about the problem will not be good enough to solve it.

In my own life I have experienced many traumas and adversities, yet none was as great as my accident in 2006. The doctors, nurses, occupational therapists and physiotherapist were ‘beyond impressed’ at my remarkable rehabilitation and healing following my accident. One doctor even told a newspaper that my recovery was nothing short of miraculous. Many people go through horrific trauma, some greater than mine. But why did I overcome my adversity physically, emotionally and mentally faster and better than most other people? I believe that part of the answer is because I was thinking impossible thoughts. I was constantly focused on the positive daily, weekly and monthly results I was aiming for through my recovery stages. My thoughts strongly contributed to my rehabilitation mentally, emotionally and physically, and I would even go as far as to say spiritually and financially too.

It has also been proven that thought alters the biological make-up of the body and can change the neural networks of the

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brain. In one study published in the *Journal of Neurophysiology* in 1995, four groups of volunteers were monitored to assess how well they improved their ability to play the piano. The first group were told to memorise a specific one-hand, five-finger sequence, which they had to physically practise for two hours on a piano every day for five days. The second group were told to play the piano for two hours without any instruction over the course of the same five days. The third group never touched a piano but were given the opportunity to observe what was taught to the first group, until they had memorised it. Then they were told to mentally rehearse the same sequence for two hours every day for five days. So they didn't actually play a piano but they *imagined* themselves playing the piano. The final group was the control group, who didn't do anything related to the piano.

Once the five days were complete the researchers used a technique called *transcranial magnetic stimulation* to measure any brain changes that had taken place. What was surprising was that the group who had not played the piano but imagined themselves going through the same routine as the group who actually played the piano showed almost exactly the same neural expansion and development in exactly the same specific area of their brain. And this group showed greater proficiency than the group who did actually play the piano but played whatever they liked!

By now I hope you recognise that what you think about and how you direct your focus will have a profound effect on your results. Get creative, turn your thinking upside down and think impossible thoughts and you are much more likely to find innovative solutions to difficult situations.

NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION.

– ENGLISH PROVERB

How to Bounce Forward

When we need something — say, to achieve a goal or solve a problem — and that objective becomes imperative, then we are often forced to find a way.

By the 18th century Niagara Falls was becoming a popular tourist spot and pressure was mounting to build a bridge to support tourism and trade between Canada on one side and the United States on the other.

In 1847 an innovative civil engineer, Charles Ellet Jr, was commissioned to build a bridge across the narrowest point of the falls above the beginning of the Whirlpool Rapids. Most bridge builders and the general public thought the idea was crazy and didn't believe that a suspension bridge was even possible. The narrowest point the bridge needed to span was 800 feet and the first problem was how to get a line across the water. It was far too dangerous to cross the falls by boat. Airplanes had not yet been invented and 800 feet was far too far for even the best bowshot. Ellet could not build the bridge if he could not first connect the two sides in some way. Necessity being the mother of invention, he decided to hold a kite-flying contest. The first person to fly their kite across the Niagara Gorge would win \$5 (equivalent to \$120 today). It would have been quite an incentive for the local kids.

The winner was a young American boy named Homan Walsh, who successfully completed the task from the Canadian shoreline. A light string was attached to his kite, and it was then fastened to a tree on the US side and used to pull across progressively heavier string, cord, rope and finally wire cable. A similar technique is still used to moor large ships. Often the mooring lines used to secure the vessel are far too heavy and awkward to throw from the ship to the quay. To solve this problem light 'heaving lines', attached to the mooring lines, are thrown to the quay first. The

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heavier mooring lines can then be hauled across to secure the ship.

Ellet attached the heaving line to Homan Walsh's kite, and it worked! The first Niagara Falls Suspension Bridge was completed on 26 July 1848.

Sir James Dyson, the British industrial designer who founded the Dyson Company after creating the first bagless vacuum cleaner, is a classic example of what can be achieved when you think impossible thoughts. Until Dyson, manufacturers had no incentive to create a bagless vacuum cleaner because the bags provided them with an additional revenue stream. But Dyson believed there was a better way and set out on what he called 'purposeful failures', in which he deliberately set out to try things that conventional wisdom said wouldn't work. Dyson says, 'It was wrong-doing rather than wrong-thinking. That's not easy, because we're all taught to do things the right way.'

After he'd exhausted all the probable solutions he turned to all the improbable solutions, eventually experimenting with a shape that was the opposite of what he thought would work. It took Dyson many years and 5127 prototypes before he cracked it, but his Dyson Dual Cyclone vacuum cleaner revolutionised the industry and today Sir James Dyson is a billionaire. Not a bad result for 'wrong-doing'.

While researching this section of the book I discovered that in 1876 Maria Spelterini became the only woman ever to cross the Niagara Gorge on a tightrope. At the age of just 23 she made four separate crossings within weeks of each other. On 8 July she crossed using a 5.7-cm wire. Four days later she crossed the same wire with wooden peach baskets strapped to her feet! A week after that she crossed again, only this time she was blindfolded. Finally, before retiring from Niagara, she made the crossing with her ankles and wrists handcuffed. Gives you a whole new perspective on impossible, doesn't it!

Start bouncing

Mission impossible

Take a moment to think of a problem or difficulty you are currently experiencing. It could be a personal problem or a business challenge. Imagine an eccentric millionaire is offering a \$100 000 reward for the worst solution to your problem. Don't think too hard about this but write down 10 of the worst, most outlandish, crazy ideas you can think of as possible solutions to the problem. Deliberately write down things that feel wrong or are the opposite of the solutions already playing around in your head.

3 DIRECT YOUR FOCUS

Our experience of reality, our interpretation of a crisis or challenging situation, depends largely on what we decide the situation means. And often that decision comes down to what we choose to focus on.

Ever since my accident in 2006 I have experienced something called 'phantom pain.' This means I feel pain in my right arm even though I no longer have a right arm. When I close my eyes I can still feel my fingers, my wrist and my elbow as though they're still there. My right elbow was 'alienated' in the accident, which meant my hand was only just attached to what remained of my right arm. When the doctors realised they couldn't rebuild it, while I was in a coma they asked my wife for permission to amputate. Today I live with an above-elbow amputation of my right arm.

It wasn't an easy decision for Kate to make, especially given that it was my right arm. I was right-handed and she knew it would be difficult for me to adjust. I used to love playing guitar too. She worried that I would resent her for making the decision.

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Of course I never did. What’s interesting looking back is that Kate had already started to consciously direct her focus as a way to navigate the stress *she* was under. Kate had always been taught the value of trying to find a positive in even the worst situations, so when the doctor was waiting for her response she was busy searching her mind for a positive spin on the surgery. After a few moments she looked up at the doctor, smiled and said, ‘Well . . . at least he can still wear his wedding ring!’

She laughs about it now because the doctor looked at her as though she was nuts, but Kate gave her consent and the surgery took place. And once I woke up it became pretty clear to me that I was going to have to start consciously directing my focus too.

Even today, years later, I am often woken up in the night by the phantom pain. To give you an idea of what the pain feels like, imagine that you have been leaning against your arm for hours until you get those really stabbing pins and needles. Normally when you get that sensation you can stretch out your arm to get the blood circulating again and the feeling subsides. Obviously I don’t have recourse to that solution so it just gets more and more intense. If you imagine the worst pins and needles you’ve ever had and multiply that by 100 — that’s what I experience in my right arm 24/7.

Phantom pain is a common phenomenon among people who have lost a limb through amputation or injury, and unfortunately there is little in the way of cure or treatment. In 2012 I had the most amazing privilege of meeting and speaking on the same stage as Dr V. S. Ramachandran, a neuroscientist known for his work in the fields of behavioural neurology and phantom psychophysics. He is director of the Center for Brain and Cognition and currently a professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of California, San Diego. Dr Ramachandran has theorised that there is a link between the phenomenon of phantom limbs and neural plasticity in the adult human brain. He believes that neuroimaging can

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reduce the sensation of phantom pain. To this end he invented the mirror box and mirror visual feedback as a treatment for conditions associated with phantom limb pain, stroke and regional pain syndrome.

As the first scientist to emphasise the role of cortical reorganisation as the basis for phantom limb sensations, Ramachandran is often referred to as ‘the Marco Polo of neuroscience’. His contribution to neuroscience has been considerable and in 2011 *Time* magazine listed him as one of ‘the most influential people in the world’.

After thinking about my conversations with Ramachandran and using his mirror box technique with little result, I’ve concentrated on conditioning myself to use the phantom pain as a reminder to consciously direct my focus elsewhere. Today, if I bruise myself I can consciously shift my focus to my amputated arm and the pain of the new injury will basically disappear. So I’ve conditioned myself not to experience the pain. It is something we can all do just by gaining control over our thinking. I do this through a formula I like to call *cognitive disassociation*.

Cognitive disassociation is a process by which you deflect your thoughts and energy elsewhere. It’s like rerouting your focus. If you experience pain or discomfort, you can neurologically shift your focus onto something else. You’ve probably experienced this process yourself. Perhaps you felt queasy and just as you were beginning to focus on this feeling something distracted you — maybe you got an urgent phone call or you were called into a meeting. Ten minutes later you’ll remember you felt sick and realise the feeling disappeared. All parents are very familiar with the distraction technique!

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Below are the five steps that can help you to embrace cognitive disassociation in your own life — personally or professionally.

1. Consciously disrupt your focus. The quickest and easiest way to do this is to change your physiology. So do something different and physically move your body — go for a walk or run, or just put on your favourite track and dance about for a few minutes!
2. Purposely create a new state that is pleasurable and appealing. Initially you may have to force this new state or pretend you feel confident or excited, but persevere and it will become second nature.
3. Stay stimulated in your new state. Find ways to stay connected and motivated in this new state.
4. Anticipate uncertainty. Constant stimulation is key as it keeps engagement levels high, so stay busy and in motion.
5. Create a new state. The faster the pace, the more distraction from the initial pain you will experience.

Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov is famous for uncovering the process of conditioning. What Pavlov discovered was that if he fed his dogs while also ringing a bell for long enough, the dog would come to associate the sound of the bell with food. After a relatively short period of time all Pavlov needed to do was ring the bell and his dogs would start to salivate. He called this discovery a *conditioned reflex*, and it's since been discovered that human beings learn in much the same way.

What few people realise is that thought and feeling are connected by a two-way loop. If you think you are depressed,

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you will begin to create the internal chemical signature of depression and you will feel depressed. Depression has a particular chemical composition, as do all emotions. Alternatively, the body can create this chemical composition and you can start to think you're depressed. Thoughts and feelings are therefore a two-way system. Or, as cancer pioneer Carl Simonton puts it, 'Mind, body and emotions are a unitary system — affect one and you affect the others.'

This means you can pretend you don't feel the pain or you can pretend you are confident or excited or positive, and the brain will activate the internal chemical cocktail maker, which will produce the recipe for confident, excited or positive so you will begin actually to feel confident, excited or positive. This may sound a little delusional, but pretending you have certain feelings or character traits is not like pretending you can play the violin or speak five languages — those things are skills that must be learned and practised.

I can't change my phantom pain; it is something I am probably going to have to live with for the rest of my life. But I can change the way I think about it and I can change what it means; I can tone down the pain so I just don't notice it. You have considerably more control over what you think and how you feel than you perhaps currently realise. And if you can master your internal landscape, then you can master anything.

**IF YOU ARE PAINED BY EXTERNAL THINGS, IT IS
NOT THEY THAT DISTURB YOU, BUT YOUR
JUDGEMENT OF THEM. AND IT IS IN YOUR POWER
TO WIPE OUT THAT JUDGEMENT NOW.**

— MARCUS AURELIUS

How you see the world and how I see the world are different. I know that for sure because I have a different background from you. I am one of 11 children, brought up on a farm in Tasmania,

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Australia, with an Indian mother and a Scottish father. That upbringing, which was very much focused around religion, has influenced my life profoundly. As a result of that upbringing, the people I've met and the experiences I've had, I have a set of beliefs and values that influence how I view the world.

You also have a set of values and beliefs that influence how you see the world. You and I interpret the vast amount of information that is available through our five senses, which in turn is filtered through our beliefs and values, and that's how we make sense of the world. Interestingly, one of the really quirky consequences of my accident was that all my senses were heightened. I asked my doctors about this and they explained that because the right side of my body had been so badly damaged my brain began to compensate by increasing the access to data from my senses of sight, sound, taste, touch and smell.

Of course, the different influx of data we each experience means that 'reality' is not objective. Your version of reality and mine are likely to be quite different. If you doubt that, ask a policeman how different witness statements can be at the scene of a crime. Ten people could see the same event and each one would remember it differently. Witness one might have noticed the time because she had just received a phone call from her mother telling her that her favourite TV show was about to start. Witness two noticed what the perpetrator was wearing because his brother has the same jacket. Witness eight might have seen something completely different based on their particular experience.

So everyone experiences the world slightly differently based on their own filter system, which involves their beliefs, attitudes, values, experiences and so on. This means that in any given moment we are interpreting and adding meaning to the information available to us through our five senses. We think we

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make objective, rational decisions because we are aware of all there is to be aware of, but we are not.

According to author and psychology professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced *cheeks-sent-me-hi*), our capacity to process information accurately is actually very limited. In his book *Flow: The Psychology of Happiness: The Classic Work on How to Achieve Happiness*, he argues:

At this point in our scientific knowledge we are on the verge of being able to estimate how much information the central nervous system is capable of processing. It seems that we can manage at most 7 bits of information— such as differentiated sounds, or visual stimuli, or recognizable nuances of emotion or thought— at any one time, and that the shortest time it takes to discriminate between one set of bits and another is about 1/18th of a second. By using these figures one concludes that it is possible to process at most 126 bits of information per second.

That’s actually not so much considering that it has been estimated that we are privy to around 2000 000 bits of information per second. If we were to become consciously aware of all that data we would go insane, so the brain filters it. In his book *The Doors of Perception*, Aldous Huxley refers to this brain function as a ‘reducing valve’ that ensures only a tiny, manageable proportion of information makes it through to conscious awareness.

In effect, your brain is like a newspaper editor; it assesses all the data or stories ‘behind the scenes’ then decides what headline to release to your awareness based on its relative importance in your life. Or, as Csikszentmihalyi puts it, ‘An individual can experience only so much. Therefore, the information we allow into consciousness becomes extremely important; it is, in fact, what determines the content and quality of life.’ What you focus on will shape your life and will help you to bounce forward. And unless you consciously direct that focus, the content and quality of your life will be left to chance.

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One famous experiment that brilliantly demonstrates the implications of focus was conducted by Dr Daniel Simons of the University of Illinois and Christopher Chabris of Harvard University. In this study university students were asked to watch a short video of two teams playing basketball. They were told to focus on one team in particular and to record the number of passes made between the players in that team.

Halfway through the game a woman in a gorilla suit walked onto the basketball court and wandered through the players for a full seven seconds. At one point the ‘gorilla’ even turned to face the camera and beat its chest! When reporting back their answers and providing feedback on the experiment, half the participants hadn’t even seen the gorilla. In fact, many were so irate over the claim that they could have missed something so obvious that they insisted on seeing the video again. They had been so focused on counting the passes between the players that they had missed the gorilla altogether. What could we be missing when we are totally wrapped up in a crisis? What opportunities have we ignored already?

In another experiment organised by the *Washington Post*, a young man entered a Washington DC subway station just before 8 am on Friday, 12 January 2007. He took position against a wall and started to play his violin. He played six pieces of music by the composer Bach and played for a total of 43 minutes. During that time 1097 people passed him, most on their way to work. Only seven people stopped to listen — even for a minute or two. Twenty-seven people gave money, mostly on the run, and the busker collected the princely sum of \$32.17. When he finished no-one noticed and there was no applause. They didn’t listen because their focus was elsewhere, and because of that they missed a musical performance by Joshua Bell, one of the greatest musicians in the world, playing one of the most intricate pieces of music ever written. He was playing a 1713 handcrafted violin by Antonio Stradivari valued at \$3.5 million. Three days before

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the experiment Joshua Bell had played to a sell-out audience at Boston's Symphony Hall, where his talents commanded a fee of about \$1000 a minute, rather than \$32 an hour.

If we can miss a gorilla on the basketball court and fail to notice one of the most brilliant musicians of our time playing in a subway station, isn't it fair to assume that we are missing opportunities and possibilities that could improve our life tenfold, just because we are not directing our focus properly? And if that is true on a normal day, is it not especially true in a crisis?

In times of crisis we tend to batten down the hatches. Our focus becomes even narrower and more rigid as we struggle to cope with the influx of additional information. In effect, we either narrow our focus so far that we can't see the wood for the trees or we expand it so wide that we are overwhelmed by the scale of the challenges. Neither response is productive.

It's important that we consciously take charge of our focus. Often we can be tempted to take action — any sort of action — in an effort to resolve a situation. But unless you have assessed the scale and nature of the crisis you face, you are probably wasting time and energy on details and decisions that make no measurable difference to the crisis just so you can comfort yourself that, 'well, at least I'm doing something'. Getting busy does not always mean being productive. Scattering your focus to the four winds is often as useless as narrowing it to a single obsession. You need to control your focus so you can actively direct it toward solutions and positivity and away from fear and negativity. It's not always easy but this habit can change your life.

One company I really love is Wikipedia. This online encyclopaedia has opened up a new world of information to all of us. It's made access to information incredibly easy, fast and surprisingly reliable. Founder Jimmy Wales, who graduated from the University of Alabama with a master's in finance, was

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inspired by his love of print encyclopaedias and his craving for knowledge. But it was not all smooth sailing — far from it. His first attempt at creating an online encyclopaedia, Nupedia, failed. Then Wales shifted his focus toward collaboration, and today Wikipedia is the world’s most visited online resource for reference material and information, while 2012 was the last year *Encyclopaedia Britannica* was in print.

Here’s another example of the power of focus. When the director and the producer of a theatre production I was involved in both ditched, the project descended into crisis. After a vote from the cast, I was asked to direct, produce and choreograph the production. I had little experience in theatre at the time, but after seven months and directed focus and determination we managed to pull off a very successful sell-out show.

Consciously direct your focus to find some good from every situation. And if that’s too hard initially, then direct your focus to the other good things in your life. This can often remind you that things are not all bad. Do you have two arms and two legs? Well, that’s a start — you’re already one up on me! Do you still have a roof over your head? Do your family and friends still love you? Now when I experience a particularly painful episode of phantom pain I use the pain to remind me how lucky I am.

Remember, the content and quality of your life do not depend on events or circumstances; they depend on you and what you choose to focus on. Will you focus on the problem or the solution? Will you focus on the past or the future? Will you focus on the positive or the negative?

Think of your crisis like an advanced driving lesson. The biggest reason people crash when they get into difficulties is that they panic and all their focus is directed toward the thing they don’t want to hit. You’re driving at speed heading into a corner and your instructor is telling you to look past the corner

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to where you want to go, but all you can see is the corner — and sure enough you crash into that corner. Crisis is the same. Often you're moving at speed toward a brick wall. You can focus either on the wall or what's past the wall. If you focus on the wall you *will* hit the wall. If you drag your focus away from the wall to the place you want to be, then you massively increase your chances of successfully manoeuvring past the obstacle. In the end we get what we focus on.

So if you find yourself in a pickle, if you've been made redundant or your business has gone into freefall and sales are drying up, dwelling on what went wrong isn't going to shift your focus. You need to break the cycle, expand your thinking and shift your focus in a new, positive direction. It may not be the right one, you may have to finetune it as you go along, but shift your focus and you will shift your results.

**THE HIGHEST STAGE IN MORAL CULTURE AT WHICH
WE CAN ARRIVE IS WHEN WE RECOGNIZE THAT
WE OUGHT TO CONTROL OUR THOUGHTS.**

– CHARLES DARWIN

Start bouncing

Kate's game

Take a moment to think of a problem or difficulty you are currently experiencing. It could be a personal problem or a business challenge. Write down a brief description of the issue. Now imagine that eccentric millionaire is back to offer you \$100 000 for every positive perspective, idea or outcome you can come up with in relation to your current problem.

4 CREATE ANOTHER CRISIS

Even in the most turbulent life or business, crisis is not normally an everyday occurrence. Problems and challenges are.

We face problems all the time. Business challenges — cash flow, sales, people management, scheduling, meetings, new business, manufacturing, legal — are never ending. As a result, it’s really easy to zone out from the constant pressure. Daily problems and frustrations can be annoying but are rarely enough to push you into action. There is no urgency to address these irritations. Problems tend not to demand the same attention as a good old-fashioned crisis. They can be ignored, deferred or forgotten. In fact, this procrastination is often the root cause of crisis. Most crises arise because a smaller, relatively inconsequential issue has been ignored for so long that it has become neither small nor inconsequential.

Create another crisis is about getting into the habit of escalating everything into a crisis so as to generate the types of creativity and innovation that only a crisis seems to initiate.

I first learned about this idea before my accident. I had been working in retail for a few years and had worked my way up to management level. I enjoyed it and it paid the bills — which was especially important when we discovered that Kate was expecting. After seven months she stopped work and I became the sole breadwinner, so I was acutely aware of the need to provide for my family.

I had picked up a solid business grounding in retail and at the time I was also involved in musical theatre, which really helped my confidence. But the hours were demanding and with a new member of the family on the way I wanted to secure a position that would give me a little more freedom. Sales seemed like the perfect solution, especially as I would be provided with a company car, mobile phone and laptop computer. So I applied

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for a position as a photocopier salesman. The role was very autonomous, which I loved as I could manage my hours around Kate and my baby daughter, although I have to admit it was hard motivating myself every day and the first six months were really tough. I think I sold one photocopier!

In time I got better and my improvement was definitely encouraged by the news that Kate was expecting our second child. The knowledge that soon there would be another little mouth to feed fuelled my determination and I managed to outperform many of the other leading photocopier brands. I was making good money. My performance had obviously caught the attention of the number one photocopier company, Xerox, who headhunted me for a new position and we were relocated to Launceston in northern Tasmania.

I didn't know many people in Launceston and I didn't have a network to tap into, so it took months to build up a client database. The job was a disaster and after a few short months I was fired because of a miscommunication, mainly by me. I was in crisis mode. I didn't really enjoy selling photocopiers, but I needed the money and I had a family that relied on me. The reality of my situation soon kicked in and I worked my tail off to secure something new. Looking back it was this financial crisis that forced me into creating a better life. And I remembered that experience when I was laid up in hospital after my accident.

**OPPORTUNITY IS MISSED BY MOST PEOPLE
BECAUSE IT IS DRESSED IN OVERALLS AND LOOKS
LIKE WORK.**

– THOMAS EDISON

After my accident the sole focus of my rehabilitation team was on getting me back to the same job I'd been doing at the time of the crash. But my body was very different. I was different — not just physically but mentally, emotionally and spiritually too.

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I wasn't content going back to the same job. I had reconnected to my why — whether I'd wanted to or not — and my old life was no longer the life I wanted. It wasn't stimulating me and I felt there was something bigger and better out there with my name on it. I was frustrated by everyone around me who seemed hell-bent on getting me back to where I had been. I knew they were trying to help me, and I'll be eternally grateful to them for their perseverance and care during my rehabilitation, but it irritated me that they didn't want to entertain the idea that I could be *more* than I was. Sure, in a sense I would never be as healthy and fit as I had been before the accident, but that didn't mean I couldn't be something different *and* better.

I was reminded of the crisis that was created for me when I lost my job with Xerox. I was super stressed by the experience but my obligation to my family forced me to find a solution — and fast. So in an effort to ratchet up the pressure and kickstart the creativity goodies unleashed by crisis I created another crisis by quitting my job!

I was so grateful for that role and they had been so supportive after my accident, but I didn't want to do it anymore so I quit, even though Kate was pregnant again so it wasn't as if she could get a job as a fallback position. I'd been out of the wheelchair for only a few months when I manufactured this new crisis, removed any chance of a safety net, and jumped into the unknown. And this forced me to find opportunities to reinvent my life.

Although I considered myself lucky to be alive, injured or not injured, I did not believe I was the best I could hope for. I know if I had gone along with my rehabilitation team and believed that the best I could hope for was to bounce back to my old life, then my life would not be the way it is today. I had a choice to make: hang on to a job I was no longer passionate about out of fear and gratitude, or create a new crisis and find something better. Remember, necessity is the mother of invention!

Start bouncing

Amplify the frustration

When you find yourself frustrated or you feel like a problem is looming or you are just annoyed that something didn't happen, use the following thought process to amplify the irritations and turn them into mental crisis. That way you are energised to deal with the situation and you can bounce forward from it.

1. Highlight and focus on the frustration/problem/annoyance.
2. Feel how much it upsets you, how angry you get.
3. Imagine how you would feel if it was resolved.
4. Stop procrastinating and TAKE ACTION — short-term pain for long-term gain.

Start bouncing

The escalation exercise

Take a moment to think about your current situation. Right now what is the absolute worst thing you can imagine happening? Perhaps it is that you lose another major account or that you lose all your money. Imagine that situation has actually happened. What would you have to do to recover from that situation?

I'm not suggesting you orchestrate such a predicament, but getting into the creative mindset that it would create can be very useful. You don't always have to create the new crisis — just imagining what you might do under those circumstances can be enough to

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initiate new ideas. Remember the piano experiment – doing the mental work was enough to improve the performance of participants who didn't even touch a piano. So doing the mental work that would be required if you were to experience a crisis can also yield improved results.

How to ensure that crisis creates opportunity

To bounce forward stronger and better you must learn the five steps of F.O.C.U.S. to ensure that crisis creates opportunity. When crisis comes knocking at your door, F.O.C.U.S. so you can begin a positive turnaround.

- » *Futuristic.* Be inspired by strong vision and purpose. Concern yourself only with positive possibilities for the future.
- » *Optimistic.* Visualise and expect the best result or outcome all the time. Attitude is everything.
- » *Communication.* Effective and efficient communication will always ease the change process. Be honest, be open and be kind to others.
- » *Unity.* There must be uniformity and commitment. Everyone *must* be on board and committed to finding a positive outcome.
- » *Strategic.* Be strategic in your approach and seek to maximise every opportunity, no matter how obscure or unlikely.

Each step in the F.O.C.U.S. process works together with every other, and not until you have understood, practised and applied

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each step will you see a positive turnaround. Remember, attitude is everything; everything is attitude.

On 11 September 2001 the world stood still — it was a crisis almost beyond imagining. When the first plane crashed into the World Trade Center in New York, the world was shocked. How could such an accident happen? Then as the second plane crashed into the towers and the world realised it was not an accident the scale of the horror was realised. As far as crises go, September 11 was monumental and the images we saw on that terrible day are seared into our memories forever.

And yet even that crisis created new opportunities. September 11 resulted in a sharp decline in executive travel as people simply did not want to fly to business meetings. When they recognised this shift in behaviour, business partners Tim Duffy and Steve Gandy applied the principles of F.O.C.U.S. Taking a futuristic, optimistic approach, they created MeetingZone to strategically fill the gap in the market by creating a new communication channel for busy executives unwilling to fly.

MeetingZone used the best technology to allow people to collaborate without being in the same physical location — very handy for busy executives who were keen to cut back on their business travel. Rather than video conferencing, which could be patchy and unreliable, they focused on simple, reliable voice conferencing and web collaboration tools. Today MeetingZone is operating in the UK, Germany, Sweden, Canada and the US, with sales in excess of £8.2 million. MeetingZone has gone from strength to strength and for three years running has featured in the *Sunday Times* Microsoft Tech Track 100 list of the fastest growing technology companies in the private sector, with average annual growth rates of 50 to 60 percent.

The big picture: Adversarial growth

With all the military conflicts and violence in the world, most of us have heard of the term post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a condition particularly related to war experience. Often people who have witnessed horrendous violence and bloodshed are told they will never be the same again.

There is, however, a flip side that psychologists have called post-traumatic growth or adversarial growth. A new body of research indicates that when people are faced with severe adversity such as bereavement, medical transplant, cancer, chronic illness, heart attack, military combat, physical assault or natural disaster, they are often driven to use the crisis to transform their lives in profoundly positive ways.

It's clearly an idea that has been around for a long time — just think of the maxim ‘What doesn't kill you makes you stronger’ — but it's only been in the past few decades that science and research have begun to build up a solid empirical framework to support it.

Thanks to this research we can now say without question that adversity and severe crisis can lead to great personal growth and positive change across a wide range of experiences. In his brilliant book *The Happiness Advantage*, Shawn Achor cites many examples of this phenomenon in action and suggests that a person's ability to transform crisis into opportunity depends largely on their mindset and their willingness to accept that something good might come of it. Researchers who studied the psychological effects of the Madrid train bombings of 2004 noted, ‘It appears that it is not the type of event per se that influences post-traumatic growth, but rather the subjective experience of the event.’

**ADVERSITY HAS THE EFFECT OF ELICITING
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– HORACE

Bottom line? Only those who have failed in a big way are likely to succeed in a big way. If you shift your perspective and attitude toward crisis, you can see adversity as an invitation to change and reinvent the situation to bounce forward rather than back. As Viktor Frankl puts it, ‘What is to give light must endure burning.’

Bounce shows you that crisis can be good. Adversity and challenges can ignite some of the greatest opportunities in your life. Sometimes we need a failure to see the new opportunities that were right in front of us all along.