

**PART ONE**

# **The Essential Foundations**

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# Misunderstanding: The Hidden Trap

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***“None are more hopelessly enslaved than those  
who falsely believe they are free.”***

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,  
Poet, playwright, novelist  
and philosopher

**“An addict is someone who’s trying to use a visible solution to solve an invisible problem...”**

I was no stranger to addiction when I heard this. I started drinking when I was 12 years old and didn’t stop for good until I was 30. In the process of recovering from alcoholism, I explored a variety of approaches ranging from the spiritual to the material and all points in between.

I found value in much of what I learned, and my life improved in ways that I didn’t even imagine were possible. But, in the process, I discovered an even deeper addiction, one that sits at the very heart of modern culture. This addiction is so subtle, it’s almost *invisible*; a superstitious and life-eroding trap that has hooked countless millions of people; the trap I call “the *hidden hamster wheel*.”

## **The hidden hamster wheel**

As you’re going to discover, the hidden hamster wheel is a pervasive example of superstitious thinking, and one of the most common barriers to clarity.

It’s based in a superstition that’s taken to be “obviously true” by most of modern society. It’s so subtle and pervasive that it shows up in everything from children’s books to leadership programmes; from movies to marketing campaigns.

When a person deeply believes in a superstition, it informs everything they believe, everything they do, and how they do it. When a culture believes in a superstition, it gets reinforced from all sides.

### **The Power of Misunderstanding**

In the 1800s, it was widely accepted that illnesses such as cholera and the plague were caused by “bad air” (also known as atmospheres or miasmas). At the time, huge numbers of people were moving to Soho in London, with an associated increase in sewage. The council of the day

decided to dump the excess waste into the River Thames, unknowingly contaminating the water supply.

The impact was felt in 1854 when the Broad Street cholera outbreak claimed the lives of 618 Soho residents in just a few weeks. The physician, John Snow, was sceptical of the miasma theory, and managed to trace the epidemic to a water pump in Broad Street. His analysis of the outbreak pattern was compelling enough that the council removed the pump handle and the epidemic ended.

The miasma theory was a misunderstanding that was seen as fact. As a result, the decision to pump sewage into the water supply was taken from *within* that misunderstanding. While you and I know it's crazy to let human waste anywhere near your water supply, that's because we have a better understanding of how the world works; an understanding that just wasn't available to the people trapped within the miasma misunderstanding.

Misunderstanding can lead to needless misery, suffering and even death. But as soon as people get a clearer understanding of the nature of reality *as it already is*, there can be a massive and widespread improvement in quality of life.

John Snow, Joseph Lister, Ignatz Semmelweis and others had insights that allowed them to see through the misunderstandings of the time, leading to the creation of germ theory and modern medicine. As a result, millions of people are alive today who *wouldn't* be if we were still living in the miasma-theory superstition.

## Thought Experiment

Imagine this: It's 1853, you live in Soho, London. It's crowded and smelly, so you're in the habit of carrying a small bunch of flowers to protect you from illness; a posy. Everyone you know does the same thing, and the posy industry is big business.

Then, one day, you meet a scientist who's convinced that diseases aren't caused by bad smells; that they're transmitted by tiny *invisible* creatures

he calls “germs” and “bacteria.” Would you believe it? Maybe, maybe not. Most people would probably say, “*Don’t be silly – it’s not as simple as that. Everybody knows that illness is caused by bad smells. It’s obvious...*”

## An essential question

If you were to be presented with the evidence that one of the most widely-held beliefs of modern society was in fact a misunderstanding about how life works, would you be able to listen with an open mind? The fact that you’re reading this means that the answer is probably “Yes,” so here goes...

The life-damaging misunderstanding that I call the *hidden hamster wheel* is the mistaken idea that our “core states” such as security, confidence, peace, love, happiness and success can be provided or threatened by our circumstances; by something “visible.”

We have it because we’ve been conditioned to believe that there’s somewhere to get to, and that “there” is better than “here.” And “there” comes in a variety of tantalizing flavours that look something like this:

I’ll be [*happy/secure/fulfilled/peaceful/better/successful/ok*] when I...

- Get the money/the car/the yacht/the house – the “there” of *stuff*.
- Find the right work/hobby/exercise/pastime – the “there” of *doing*.
- Have the right partner/friends/children – the “there” of *people and relationships*.
- Write the book/start the business/learn the language – the “there” of *accomplishment*.
- Can take a year off/travel the world/eat at the best restaurants – the “there” of *lifestyle*.

- Achieve time freedom/financial freedom/social freedom – the “there” of *freedom*.
- Lose the weight/stop smoking/start going to the gym – the “there” of *self-improvement*.
- Change my thinking/my limiting beliefs/do my affirmations – the “there” of *mindset*.
- Meditate properly/find the right practice/get enlightened – the “there” of *spirituality*.
- Accept myself/love myself/just let go – the “there” of *surrender*.

You may have experimented with none, some or all of the above. You may have made big changes and improved your life in a variety of ways. Or maybe not. At times, you may have felt like you’re nearly there, like you’re very close, like the pot of gold’s just around the corner. And yet...

No matter how close you get, doesn’t it always seem like there’s a little more you need to do? A little further to go? Just a little bit more to fix, change or improve? Or a lot more?

I know, because I’ve done it – virtually everything on this list and more. I got value from many of my efforts but, sooner or later, after a week or a month or a year, I’d find myself feeling in some ways like I was back where I started, feeling like there was something missing, something wrong, something I couldn’t quite put my finger on...

As it turns out, the story behind that sense of “something missing” doesn’t just stop people from enjoying their lives to the full – it often stands in the way of having the life you really want. You see, as strange as it may sound, we’ve fallen into a trap. And it’s a trap that’s so subtle, most of us have never even noticed it. Subtle, powerful and all-pervasive.

The “*I’ll be happy when...*” trap is an example most people can identify with. The core states and circumstances vary, but the basic structure of the superstition is the same:

I’ll be [*core state*] when I have [*circumstance*]

It’s based on an even simpler structure:

[*circumstance*] causes [*core state*]

And like pieces of Lego, this simple structure can be used to assemble all kinds of larger structures:

I couldn’t be [*core state*] if I lost [*circumstance*]

I’m [*core state*] because of [*circumstance*]

I can’t be [*core state*] because I don’t have [*circumstance*]

I was [*core state*] until I lost [*circumstance*]

I’m convinced that [*core state*] comes from [*circumstance*]

They can take a variety of shapes but, at heart, they’re all based on the idea that our felt experience of life comes from our circumstances, from something relatively visible.

You may have seen studies showing that feelings of well-being and high self-esteem come from accomplishments, or from doing vocational work, or from meditating. But that’s all an example of the superstition in action. When I use the word “circumstance,” I’m using it in the widest possible way, to refer to pretty much anything you can imagine, including:

- Physical environment (e.g. home, holiday destination, workspace).
- What a person does (e.g. work, hobbies, exercise).
- Techniques (e.g. meditation, affirmations, reframing).
- Stuff (e.g. houses, boats, cars).



- Status (e.g. job title, position, medals).
- Material wealth (e.g. money, shares, income).
- People (e.g. partners, friends, children).
- Etc.

The idea that our core states are, at least to some degree, the result of our circumstances seems so “obvious” to people that calling it into question can seem ridiculous at first.

And while many people who have explored the domains of “brain-change” (through NLP, spirituality, personal development, meditation etc.) would say that they *know* that their core states don’t come from their circumstances, their behaviour often suggests that they *don’t* really know it.

In fact, people often replace one set of circumstances with a “higher level” version of the same thing...

- I’ll be happy when I change my limiting beliefs.
- I’ll feel fulfilled when I know that I’m on-purpose and doing work I love.
- I’ll be on-track once I become an authentic leader.
- I’ll feel secure when I’m generating passive income.
- I’ll feel a sense of freedom when I have the lifestyle I want.
- I’ll be able to enjoy myself when I retire.
- I’ll be OK when I go on the next course/read the book/do the exercises – etc.

The circumstances may be different but the superstitious structure is still in place:

[*circumstance*] causes [*core state*]

Once again: we've been conditioned into the superstitious thinking that our clarity, security and well-being come from outside of us; that there's somewhere to get to, and that "there" is better than "here."

## Reality Check

*"Don't be silly!" I hear you say. "Everybody knows that circumstances give us feelings. I'll give you some examples right now..."*

- *"My sense of security comes from the fact that I've got a good job, and money in the bank.*
- *"I feel a sense of love and connection because I've found the right partner.*
- *"I feel stressed out because I've got a high-pressure business.*
- *"I feel peaceful when I go for a walk in the park.*
- *"I feel relaxed when I go on holiday.*

*"Are you really trying to tell me that these examples are just a superstition? That my work doesn't actually stress me out? That my security doesn't come from money? That I don't feel love because of my partner? That I don't like going on holiday?"*

Yes and no.

Your examples of your experience are real for you. I'm sure you can identify numerous circumstances where you experience certain feelings. I'm not saying you don't enjoy the things you enjoy, or that you shouldn't want the things that you want. What I'm saying is that the feelings aren't the result of the circumstances – they're coming from something else entirely. And, as you start to understand where they're coming from, and how the system works, some wonderful things can start to happen.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

These days, I experience more clarity than I ever thought possible, with all the considerable benefits it brings. But I didn't get here in the way you might expect.

In brief: I grew up in an alcoholic household and started drinking heavily when I was 12 years old. By age 19, I was a scholarship engineering student and a full-blown alcoholic. The alcohol was like rocket fuel for my life – I got jobs, was promoted rapidly, and started experiencing many of the trappings of success – expense accounts, foreign travel, luxurious surroundings – but on the inside, I was slowly falling apart.

At the age of 30 I got married. A month later, her bags were packed; so I decided to stop drinking in order to save my relationship.

Oh yeah – I missed one. I'll be happy when I get a cigarette/a drink/a line of coke – the “there” of *addiction*.

That was in 1996, and I haven't had a drink since. Today I live a fulfilling life that's beyond anything I dreamed was possible for me, but how I got here is a story of struggle, frustration and heartbreak (much of which I could have avoided if I'd known what you're going to be discovering in this book).

Just to give you an idea, in the time-period from 1996 to 2008, I...

- Got married, had two daughters and moved to London.
- Managed several multi-million pound projects and became fascinated with the process of how individuals and organizations change.
- Was paralyzed by a combination of fear of failure and fear of success (I felt like I was a fraud, always worrying that I'd be “found out”).
- Read hundreds of personal development books and went on dozens of courses.

- Quit my job and became a consultant, doing strategy workshops, team-building, executive coaching and training.
- Tried my hand at stand-up comedy and overcame my fear of public speaking (mainly by doing lots of public speaking).
- Lost weight, gained weight, lost weight, gained weight, lost weight, gained weight etc.
- Spent countless hours talking to a Freudian psychoanalyst and participated in various addiction recovery programmes.
- Learned NLP (neuro-linguistic programming), built a successful training company and grew a tribe of over 80,000 people.
- Was left by my wife, and struggled with worry, anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts.
- Had numerous false horizons, thinking I'd finally "got it," only to find myself feeling like I was back where I started.

By the end of 2008, I was unhappy, stressed-out and at the end of my tether. I felt like I'd been giving it everything I had for over a decade. While some areas of my life were better than ever, in many ways I felt like I'd been running on the spot. I had many of the circumstances of success (passive income, time-freedom, foreign travel etc.), but I wasn't having a *feeling* of success. I was on the verge of giving up.

I understood *intellectually* that material success wouldn't give me a more profound and fulfilling experience of life, but I'd been *conditioned* into believing it would. The trick of the mind that tells us that our feelings come from somewhere other than our thinking is both persuasive and persistent.

Then I was introduced to the understanding you're going to be discovering in this book. As I write, it's four years on, and they've been the best years of my life. I'm experiencing a sense of clarity, peace, security and aliveness unlike anything I've had before. And as my level of understanding has continued to increase, my relationships, results and external circumstances have been improving too.

The good news is that it can be replicated. My clients are getting similar results, including:

- less stress, more clarity and peace of mind;
- being more creative and innovative, finding solutions to problems more easily;
- better working relationships, and more harmony in their personal lives;
- being more productive, getting more done and having more free time;
- better business results, and better performance where it counts;
- fears, anxieties and limitations falling away effortlessly;
- natural motivation, making real progress with the things that matter;
- better health, with more vibrancy and aliveness.

It's working for them, so it can work for you; because seeing through a superstition can give you an "out of proportion" increase in the results you get. Why? Because a superstition is really just a misunderstanding, based on a piece of flawed logic. A simple misunderstanding that often leads to unwanted...

Stress	Worry	Addiction	Poverty
Pressure	Anxiety	Mental illness	Bullying
Poor productivity	Irritation	Depression	Criminality
Dissatisfaction	Frustration	Burnout	Violence
Conflict	Resentment	Divorce	etc.

So how do you escape from this addictive, life-damaging trap? How do you start seeing through the misunderstanding, and begin to experience an enormous increase in clarity and quality of life?

***keep exploring ❖ connect with others  
share your discoveries ❖ deepen your understanding***

**Reflection point:** *We all fall into the “I’ll be happy when...” trap from time to time. As you reflect on your life so far, what are some of the ways you now realize you’ve been accidentally hoodwinked by this illusion?*

Once you’ve taken a minute or two to reflect, you can share whatever you’ve discovered. Just scan the QR code with your smartphone or type the URL below into your browser. In addition to posting your comments and sharing what you’re learning with others, you’ll also find powerful *Clarity* resources relating to Chapter 1 – Misunderstanding: The Hidden Trap. Experience shows that this is a simple but powerful way for you to continue integrating what you’re discovering, as your understanding of innate thinking continues to deepen...

[www.ClarityBook.biz/chapter1](http://www.ClarityBook.biz/chapter1)

