

Chapter 1

The Inception

“First comes thought; then organization of that thought, into ideas and plans; then transformation of those plans into reality. The beginning, as you will observe, is in your imagination.”

Napoleon Hill

What happens in your mind when you think about the idea for your challenge? Do you hear a voice saying ... “That’s a ridiculous idea. Surely I couldn’t do anything like that, could I?”

It’s tempting to dismiss thoughts like this before they take hold. I guess it is similar to seeds that fall on the ground but never germinate or take root. Whilst they are still embryonic, these ideas are at their most vulnerable. It would be so easy to crush them with a thought such as, “That’s just bonkers, there’s no way I could do that” or, “I wouldn’t even know where to begin” or, in my case, “I’m not an endurance athlete”.

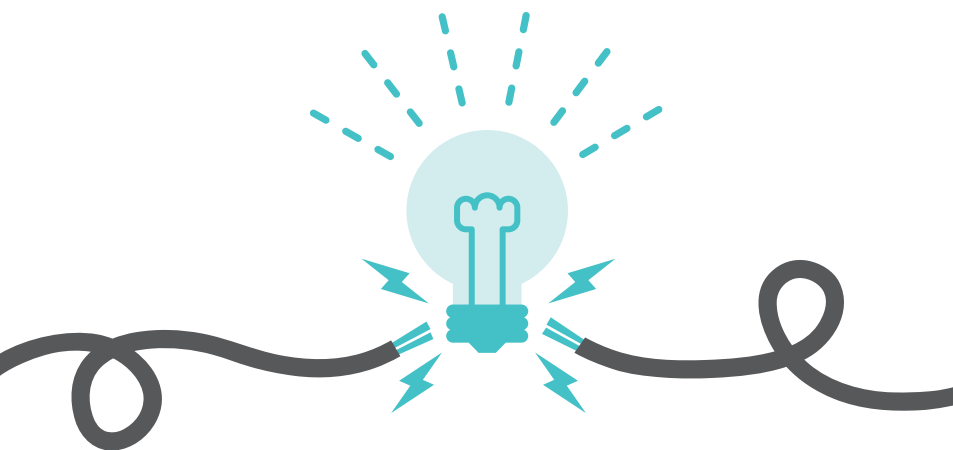
How often do we use our own self-perception to limit our potential? Do we subscribe to the notion that if we haven’t done

it before, we're not capable of doing it? I wonder how many people throughout the course of history have conceived of great inventions but never developed them, simply because they don't see themselves as "an inventor". How many great businesses have never existed because the person with the idea "wasn't a business person"? How many times have you been frustrated by a product that doesn't quite do what you need, and said the words, "Someone ought to invent a ..."? How many times have you heard friends say, "Why doesn't someone come up with a ..."?



**WE ALL HAVE
OPPORTUNITIES
TO BECOME
EXCEPTIONAL**

I suspect that it is in these moments that many billionaires are born. In these tiny, split-second moments in time, we all have opportunities to become exceptional. Sparks are being ignited all the time inside our minds. Each one is an idea that could potentially change your life, and potentially the lives of other people too. Some people take these sparks of inspiration and nurture them. They actively seek out ways to explore the ideas further, to fuel them and grow them. Others let them die out. Perhaps it is this characteristic that differentiates entrepreneurs. Maybe it is their willingness to invest in the ideas, these tiny sparks, and give them life.



**Sparks are being ignited all the
time inside our minds.**

In the movie, *Inception*, Dom Cobb (played by Leonardo DiCaprio) describes how an idea is like a virus:

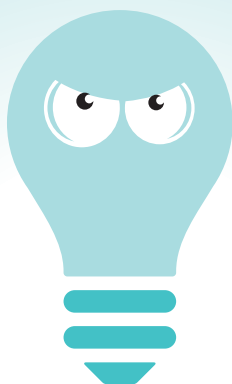
“Resilient, highly contagious. Once an idea has taken hold of the brain it’s almost impossible to eradicate. An idea that is fully formed, fully understood, that sticks, right in there somewhere” [he points to his temple].

“... And even the smallest seed of an idea can grow. It can grow to define or destroy you ... ”

So how do we ensure that our ideas survive and grow? How do we start to bridge that gap between us and what we’d love to do? How do we begin to take that spark and start to create flames?

I suspect that the answer is embarrassingly simple. Imagine, for a moment, that you simply didn’t kill the idea at the point of inception. What if you didn’t dismiss it immediately? What would happen if you entertained it for a while, pondered it, mulled it over and even began to imagine embarking upon it? Thankfully, we can do this all within the safety and privacy of our own minds. We don’t have to tell anyone else about it straight away. We don’t have to risk humiliating ourselves. We don’t have to try it and fail. In the safe confines of our mind, we can let it incubate. The truth is, we can begin to give our idea life just by resisting the temptation to snuff it out.

Of course, not all ideas are good ideas. As Dom Cobb said in *Inception*, these ideas have the potential to define or destroy. Some ideas are probably best squashed. However, it is the other ideas, the good ones, which we need to give our attention to. These good ideas might look a little scary, but perhaps that’s not a great reason to dismiss them.



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From Ground Zero

It is very easy to think of all the reasons not to do something. There are always potential hurdles and barriers. Tough challenges are never easy (the clue is in the word "tough"). As we know, they're also the most fulfilling. It's entirely possible that you'll be bombarded with a myriad of thoughts as you conceive of your challenge. If your life is already full to bursting point with day-to-day tasks, responsibilities and duties, how on earth are you going to fit in another major challenge? If clearing your inbox seems daunting enough, where do you find the time and energy to really push yourself? Sometimes, in just managing what we have in front of us, we can feel like we're already pushing ourselves to the limit. However, it's not quite the same as doing something that truly extends us. Managing the demands of our day-to-day life is not the same as embarking upon a potentially life-changing adventure. And, whilst it may be satisfying to clear down our inbox, exploring our potential can be deeply enriching. It's always possible to find the reasons not to engage with those challenges that

seem to take on almost epic proportions. Sometimes we need to balance this by also understanding the reasons to engage.

There are an awful lot of very good reasons for me not to take on this ridiculous challenge. Did I mention that I'm not an athlete?

My starting point is the same as many other people. As this challenge was born in my mind, I was running three to four miles a couple of times a week. Very few of my runs exceeded half an hour in duration. My weekly mileage didn't normally reach double figures. In fact, before I started training for this event my longest ever run was a half marathon, which I ran three years previously. And my greatest sporting achievements? Well, I played under-18s football for Yeovil Town (don't snigger) and represented my university in rugby league. It's not spectacular is it?

I didn't own a road bike and hadn't been on a bike for over six months when I started this. My longest ride ever was 19 miles, which I did when I was a 12-year-old boy scout. In my adult life, the longest cycle ride was around 12 miles, so I think it's fair to say that I'm a novice on the bike too.

I haven't got any real adventure experience. I haven't climbed any mountains, kayaked around the UK or swum across any oceans. I once hiked up Ben Macdui (the second highest peak in Scotland) with some friends when I was at university, around 15 years ago, but that's as close as I have come. I don't have any equipment or massive resources. I can't just buy what I need, or take huge amounts of time off to train, plan and prepare. I have a life, a family and work, just like most other people. I run my own business so there is a constant need to balance time in the business and time with the family.

With a young family, cash is tight, so I can't just solve problems by writing cheques either.

I think it would be fair to say that I'm starting from scratch. From my perspective, this makes any challenge much tougher. It's not simply a case of honing skills that I already have, because I don't have any. I don't have the option of drawing on my experiences either, because I don't have any. In fact, I don't have many reference points at all for this challenge. In some ways, this naivety is probably an advantage. There are no reference points, so there are few self-imposed limitations. A cyclist might consider that 200 miles a day sounds ridiculous, if their own personal best is around 100 miles. A marathon runner might say the same about running consecutive ultra-marathons. However, with no reference points, there are fewer limitations. The mind is free to work on the basis that the targets are all possible. All I have to do is work out how to achieve them.

"In 2004, at the age of 26, I set out to cross the Arctic Ocean from Russia to Canada. At the time there were panels of experts saying that it couldn't be done. Fortunately, no one told me."

Ben Saunders, polar explorer, who I interviewed when I wrote How To Shine

Sometimes it helps not to know what everyone else perceives to be possible. If we don't know that a challenge is "impossible", we're free to carry on as if anything is possible.

Interestingly, double Olympic gold medallist, Steve Williams, was not a natural athlete when he was young. He explained that his school, at the time, was a modest rowing school with modest ambitions. Added to that, he was a late developer. Steve remembers being either last or second to last in the school cross country and struggling to make the second team in sports. Like many kids, he had dreams of becoming an Olympian but it took a long time before his dreams translated into a genuine ambition.

If Steve can go from being last in the school cross country to becoming a double Olympic champion, maybe there's hope for me! Ben and Steve show that it doesn't matter if you have absolutely no direct previous experience. You don't need to be "a natural" either. Everyone has to start out somewhere, even the best in the world. You can set out without a track record in the challenge you want to take on, you just have to work out how to do it. Many of us might conclude that coming last in the school cross country must mean that we're just not athletic. Surely if you're no good at sport at school, the idea that you could become Olympic champion is simply ridiculous. Steve Williams shows that your past does not equal your future!

What If Your Challenges Choose You?

What if you don't choose your challenge? What if it chooses you? Andy Reid didn't choose to have both of his legs and his right arm blown off by a Taliban IED. He explained that his challenge started as he awoke in Selly Oak Hospital in Birmingham, after being flown back from Helmand Province in Afghanistan.

"When I woke up I was in the UK; it was two days after the IED exploded. The doctor explained what had happened and that I'd lost

my arm and my legs. To be honest, I wasn't that surprised when he told me because I knew there was nothing where my arm and legs had been. I just thought, 'well, I'm still here and there are friends of mine who aren't'. I thought to myself, 'I'm a survivor not a victim'."

Andy went on to explain that the first stage was to accept what had happened.

"I knew I'd lost my legs, I'd accepted it. I joined the Army, I knew the risks and so I took responsibility for what happened to me. So I began thinking, 'Okay, what's next? What do I have to do?'"

For many people, Andy included, the challenge can seem daunting, almost overwhelming. However, having accepted it, he decided to take it on.

Sometimes our challenges do choose us. I've been made redundant twice so far in my life. Both occasions presented me with a challenge. In these situations there is an opportunity to engage with the challenges and take them on. Of course, we also have the choice to back away from them and to disengage. Denial can masquerade as the comfortable option at times. Andy Reid could have chosen that path too. He could have opted to become a victim and settle for life in a wheelchair. Perhaps our perception of these opportunities dictates how we approach them. Do we see them as a challenge or as a threat? Do we focus on the potential to come out of the experience stronger, or the chance of failure? In many ways we're presented with these opportunities – some big, some very small – every single day. Some people recognize them, others don't. Some people embrace them, others decline. What do you tend to do?



To help an idea take hold and grow we need to invest in it.

From Inception to Commitment

Wherever it comes from, in order to help an idea take hold and grow, we need to invest in it and cultivate it. We need to spend time thinking about it and allow our imagination to play with it. If we do this, we could even start to feel excited about the prospect.

Ultra-marathon runner, Andy McMenemy, describes how he feels “a tickle of adrenaline” when he starts to conceive of a new challenge. This simple process helps us develop an emotional connection to our ideas. If a challenge is exciting, it is more likely to engage us.

Have you heard of S.M.A.R.T.E.R. goal setting? Each letter relates to a word that apparently helps us to set goals effectively. You’ll find that there are several versions, but here’s a fairly common one: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound, Evaluate, Relevant.

I wonder if Walt Disney followed SMARTER principles when he conceived of the idea to build Disney World. He decided to take a swamp, several miles outside of Orlando, and invested millions of dollars building a giant fairy-tale princess castle on it. Imagine the conversations that he must have had when he positioned the idea with his bank manager. Does his idea appear SMART? How many people would have described it as “attainable”, “realistic” or “relevant”?

I suspect that my goal setting process for this challenge would be more accurately described as D.U.M.B.E.R. That stands for Daft, Unrealistic, Mental, Bonkers, Exciting, Ridiculous.

Which one sounds more engaging to you? Which one is more likely to ignite your passion?

Personally, I’d advocate DUMBER goals.

In order to commit to something fully, we need to be able to immerse ourselves in it. To do that, we need to love it. It's very similar to marriage (now marriage really is a challenge ... oops, sorry love!). This is also true of our challenges. We need to be able to fall in love with them in order to dedicate ourselves to them completely. It is no surprise to me that the world class performers I've met all have a deep passion for what they do. Passion and love go hand in hand.



So, how do we develop a love and passion? Life experience tells us that we could experience that “love at first sight”, or “lightning bolt” moment. Sometimes it might be as simple as being struck by Cupid’s arrow.

However, sometimes falling in love happens more slowly. Often we’ll start by liking something, then liking it quite a lot, then really liking it and eventually loving it.

My brother, Jon, explained his reason for giving up a comfortable job and life in London to start a business in Germany. It all started when he took trips to Germany for the World Cup, to watch football, to visit Oktoberfest, and so on. He began to appreciate German culture and German football. Over the course of several years he became enamoured with it all and started to imagine life in Germany; what life might be like and how to adapt to a new culture. Jon was also looking for a new challenge. He’d lived in the US but was intrigued by the challenge of living in a country where English is not the first language. He’d also reached a point in his profession where he was looking for the next challenge. It seems that the combination between yearning for a challenge and this intrinsic love sparked Jon’s decision to make the move.

Just for a moment, put yourself in Jon’s shoes. Imagine that you’ve started to envisage life in a foreign country and that you’ve become excited and curious about the prospect. Imagine also that to make this a reality you need to make a leap of faith; leaving your comfortable, familiar life and knowing that when you make that move you’ll feel completely out of your depth. How would you feel? What would you do?

To allow our ideas to grow, we need to allow them to germinate, let the roots take hold and nurture them for a while. Your own mind is like a nursery; it gives them a safe space and an environment in which they can flourish. By resisting the urge to judge them, or squash them, we give them a chance to engage us and excite us. These ideas might look a little scary, but maybe that's not such a bad thing. And then there comes a time when we start to wonder what it would be like if this idea were to become reality; a time when we decide whether we are willing to commit ourselves to it. If we want to take our idea from inception to commitment, maybe we simply need to fall in love with it first. Those who become successful often have a complete devotion to what they do. In short, they really, really want it.

Chapter Summary

- ★ Do you have challenges you'd love to take on, but haven't dared to attempt?
- ★ How can you bridge the gap that stands between you and what you'd love to achieve?
- ★ What would happen if you resisted the temptation to squash your ideas?
- ★ What if you allowed yourself to entertain them for a while?
- ★ Are your current goals SMARTER or DUMBER?
- ★ Are you in love with your goals?