

'If you take two steps towards  
God,' he used to tell me,  
'God runs to you!'

Yann Martel, *Life of Pi*

Habit 1

SWIM  
DON'T  
FLOAT

## Life lessons from a sea squirt

Sea squirts begin life looking much like a regular tadpole. Hatched from an egg they swim around the ocean looking for nutrients and a place to settle.

For so long as the sea squirt is swimming with purpose through the water, feeding and looking for a rock to perch on, it uses its brain. Upon finding a suitable rock or ship wreck it attaches itself. It will never move again.

Thereafter it is not the sea squirt that directs itself. The ocean moves as it will and if this should happen to bring nourishment to the sea squirt then so be it.

The sea squirt is reactive. It is not a motive force in its own life. It cannot control its fate.

Having no further need for it, the sea squirt consumes its brain.



Your human brain is a greedy pig. It weighs just 1/50 of your total body weight yet consumes 1/5 of your daily energy. To send a solitary signal a brain cell uses as much energy as a muscle cell in your leg uses during an entire marathon.

**The first lesson of the sea squirt is this: if you're not going to use it; eat it.**

Otherwise you're wasting energy.

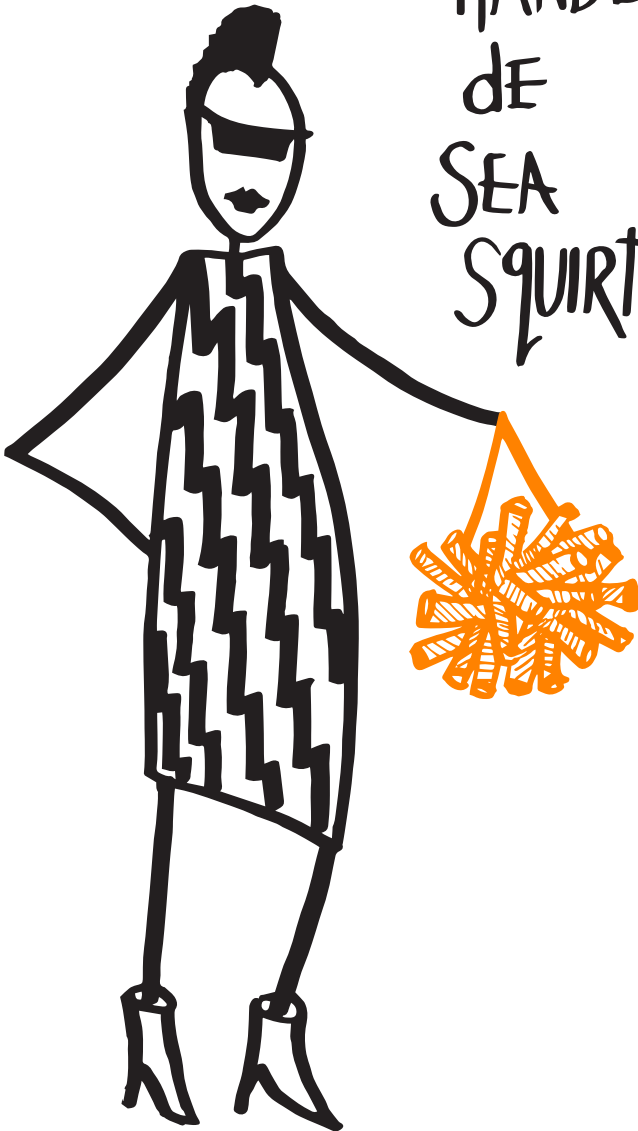
The sea squirt gets a burst of growth energy when it consumes its rudimentary brain and nerve cells.

This energy helps it to metamorphose into something that looks like an avant-garde hand bag.

THE FIRST LESSON OF THE SEA SQUIRT

USE IT  
OR  
EAT IT

HANDBAG  
DE  
SEA  
SQUIRT



## Energy begets energy

If you choose to keep your brain it will use a lot of energy. But the energy it consumes is nothing compared to its output; which can do anything from raising your mood to raising a flag on the moon.

Maximizing that output is the purpose of this book.

You came into this world bursting with wonder, imagination, curiosity, the urge to be creative and, as any crawling wanna-walk baby will show you, you were born with unflinching and boundless ambition.

Over the course of the days and weeks and years these natural-born traits rub up against the real world and shape your fascinating, compelling essence. Your core.

You develop tastes, interests, pleasures, aversions, ambitions and dreams.

But these traits also take a pounding from real world pressures like work life, fear of being laughed at, social media judgement, nine-to-five drudgery, financial pressure and the strong urge to fit in, conform, and follow instructions or routines.

And under this siege sometimes you yield and smother your white horses; you lose track of your imaginative spark, your dreams and your daring ambition.

But they're still there. You can realize your extraordinary potential and expand your horizons at any stage of life.

The simple truth of this book is that where you direct your mind you move your life.

'The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitude of mind...  
If you change your mind, you can change your life.'

*William James*

## Any mind will do

Thinking bigger doesn't require you to bring a certificate of astrophysics or etch a philosopher's frown onto your forehead. You only need to commit to using the energy-hungry grey cells in your cranium.

We are not all superstar scientists, businessmen, artists or chefs. But we can all reach greater heights with the tools that we have.

Each of us has inside us an original view of the world. To open these windows you must activate your mind and your imagination.

You have a short time left to you. Your wave left a distant shore many years ago.

The sooner you get into the right frame of mind the further you will see and the more you will achieve in every aspect of your life.

Hustle.



The trouble with thinking is that it's not much to look at.

Everything else about it is capital B-Big.

Thinking bigger will produce better decisions, better ideas, increased creativity, more understanding, greater insight, better judgement, more resilience and more fortitude. It will unleash your imagination and harness your intuition.

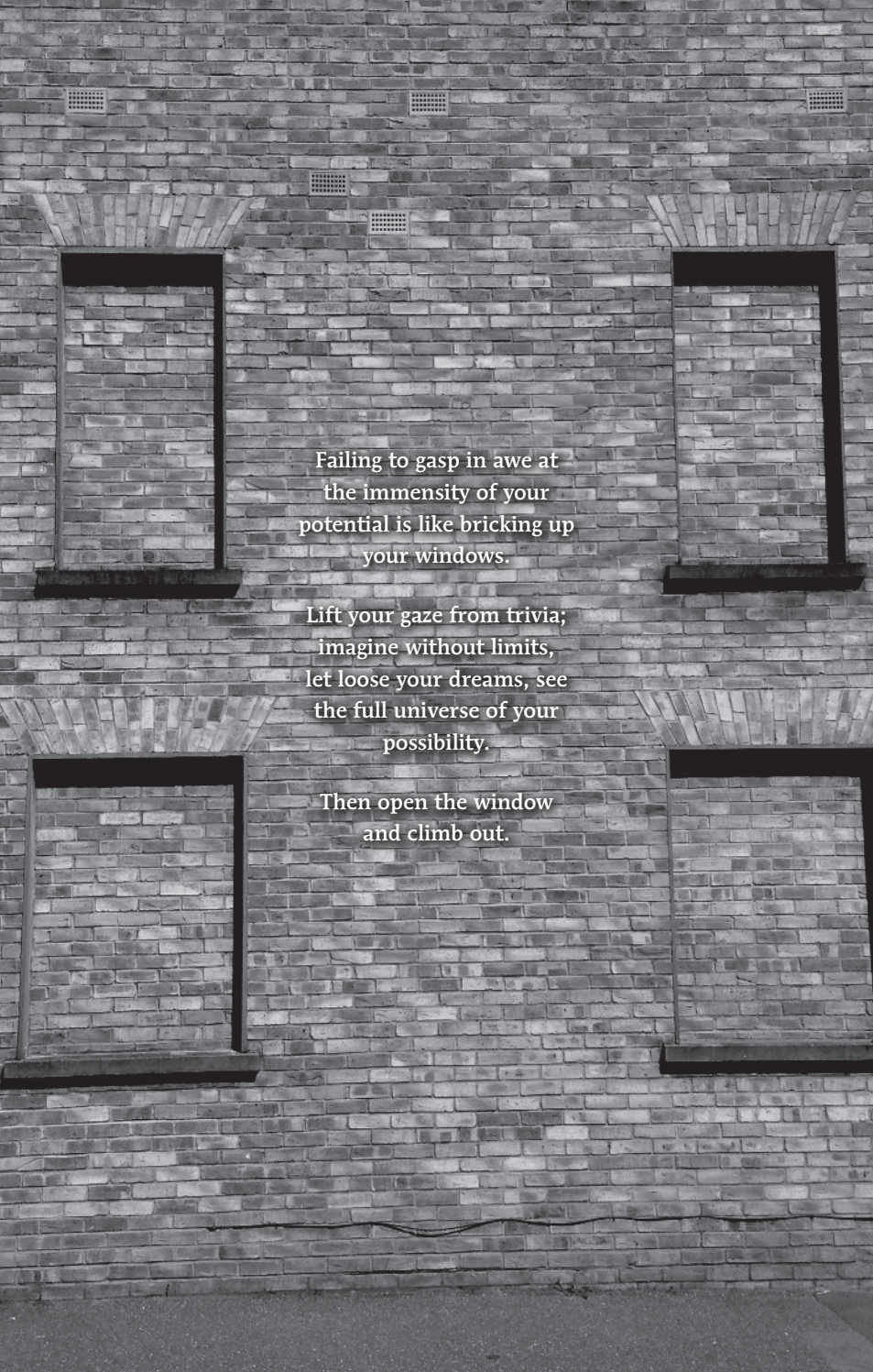
And these, the products of thinking bigger, impact positively wherever you direct your grey matter.

This might be the office environment, career trajectory, home life, relationships, art (your own and others'), entrepreneurial achievement, sports training, marvelling at the wonders of the universe or starting smaller and just learning to cope with everyday life.

That's the prize.

So let's start.





Failing to gasp in awe at  
the immensity of your  
potential is like bricking up  
your windows.

Lift your gaze from trivia;  
imagine without limits,  
let loose your dreams, see  
the full universe of your  
possibility.

Then open the window  
and climb out.

# W.A.I.T.

## WHAT AM I THINKING?

Here's the thing.

There isn't a secret door, a magic bullet, an Elvish oath, or a golden ticket.

There's you.

That's all.

And nothing else is required. You are your own key.

There is no ambition, courage or imagination you need which isn't already inside you. This is about bringing it roaring to the surface.

To make progress in all your daily battles the starting point is resetting how you choose to think all day.

This is the platform from which all your small victories and big success will sputter and then gush forth. This may seem abstract. Don't be fooled. This is the only route to unleashing your ideas, building on your life's experiences and changing your world.

Where you direct your mind's awesome potential will steer and shape your life.

'Life', said Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'consists of what a man is thinking all day'.



Everything that follows starts from this principle.

Your brain is humming with energy all day long. Whatever it's humming about is what your life is.

What you can do right now, this instant, is begin to exert conscious control over what you are thinking all day.

Get used to thinking 'W.A.I.T.' (What Am I Thinking?).

Controlling your thoughts means switching off your mental auto-pilot and the unreflective, unconscious way you react to life's hiccups, tragedies and opportunities.

David Foster Wallace wrote:

'Learning how to think really means learning how to exercise some control over how and what you think. It means being conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to and to choose how you construct meaning from experience.'

The important word here is: **choose**. You can allow yourself to be

bothered all day long about, let's say, the personal slight that you once suffered or the endless fictional arguments in your head. That's a lot of your energy being buffeted around to the benefit of precisely no-one.

Or you can choose not to.

As you get better at disciplining your thoughts your life gets bigger because you invest more of your life's energy into the activities that increase your happiness and success while putting less energy into the things that don't.

And that is how you create a bigger life.

And ultimately it is how you will surprise yourself by gripping on tight, yodelling wildly and riding a white horse back to shore.



I'm not saying this is easy.

The easy thing, the cruelly easy thing, is not to do this. The easiest thing in the world is to be a brainless sea squirt whose life drifts here and there, but ultimately nowhere, subject to the push and pull of the tide. This is the life of a puppet whose strings are pulled by advertising, hearsay, fears, slogans, bullying, peer pressure, road rage, hunger pangs and sharp flashes of emotional response.

It's actually quite hard to control your thoughts all day long. Even those who were fortunate enough to be taught to think at university, or taught by a religious teacher, a spiritual leader, Mary Poppins or the school of hard knocks sometimes need reminding.

**'Thinking is a skill', said Edward de Bono, one of the leading contemporary writers on the way we use our minds. 'It is not intelligence in action'.**

Happily it's something you can get better at.

If it's a skill then anyone can improve, just as anyone can get better at playing the piano, public speaking, drawing, boxing, swimming, programming, baking, texting on a smartphone, World of Warcraft and The Sims.

Yes, this takes effort, but it's far from impossible and it's unbelievably important. More than important. It's the foundation for everything you experience. Life, as we have already said (and will repeat many times precisely because it is so important) is what you are thinking.

This is no mere flim-flammy about airy-fairy wish fulfilment. This is hard won practical advice. What could be more practical than to realize that where you focus your mind is where you will focus your time and your energy?

You can think your life bigger. Or smaller.

Before I protest too much, it's time for an example.

The father of gonzo journalism and writer of *Fear & Loathing in Las Vegas* advised a friend:

'... And indeed, that IS the question: whether to float with the tide, or to swim for a goal. It is a choice we must all make consciously or unconsciously at one time in our lives. So few people understand this! Think of any decision you've ever made which had a bearing on your future: I may be wrong, but I don't see how it could have been anything but a choice however indirect— between the two things I've mentioned: the floating or the swimming.'



## Massive Monday

In the world of recruitment they call the first working day of the New Year, 'Massive Monday'. The number of people looking for change – a new job, career or life – peaks on Day One of the year.

...Aaaand then it tails off. People begin each year intending to achieve more, to bend the world to their ambitions. The timing, of course, is obvious. It is when the obligatory (for most) holiday from work meets the psychic and emotional milestone of crossing off another year. It means people take time to reflect, pause and breathe. They use their minds and rediscover their boundless ambition, and this brings to the surface an irrefutable conclusion: they insist on change.

...Aaaand then stuff gets in the way. They lose control of what they thought was important. They get caught in the mental fog of to-do lists, money worries, exhaustion and other priorities, and they postpone their dreams. Ambition gets forced to the bottom, the courage to demand change is exhausted by the courage of battling through the headwind of mere existence.

Autopilot takes over. The busyness of life takes over. Real priorities get lost in the noisy small stuff.

The tide pulls them this way and that.

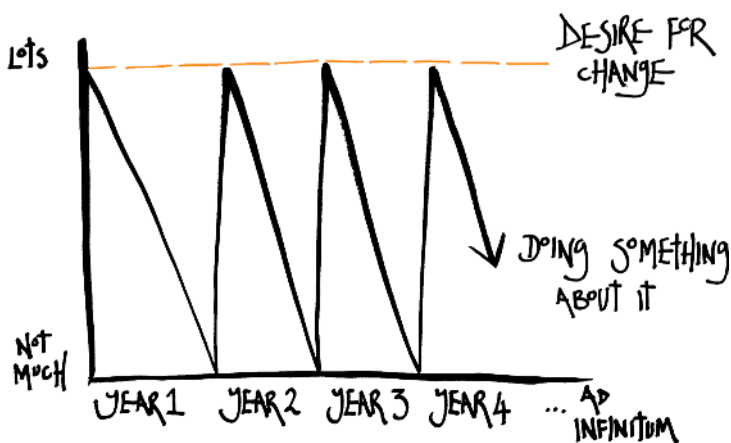
Another 12 months of unfulfilment passes until it cannot be borne any longer.

And Massive Monday comes round again.

This happens every year.



# THE BALLAD OF MASSIVE MONDAY





Every year.  
This is normal.  
This is stupid.



Sea squirts eat their brains.



Life consists of what someone is thinking all day



It takes discipline to maintain focus on the big picture; to keep focused on the big stuff.

But then again, don't the biggest rewards in life pretty much always demand at least some effort?

(By the way, if you know how to achieve change through sitting on your butt and making no effort then, watch out, we all want a passport to your world.)

But as Massive Monday shows, the easiest thing is to operate on autopilot, to move with the eddies of the sea.

'The brain is a wonderful organ; it starts working the moment you get up in the morning and does not stop until you get into the office.'

*Robert Frost*

## It's very easy to stop thinking

But the costs may be high.

An entire culture once stopped critical, scientific thinking.

Baghdad was the intellectual capital of the world in AD800–1100. It was an open society where people from around the world, with different backgrounds and diverse religions came together to trade, create art and develop science.

During this period Arabian numerals were invented – these are the numerals we use today in place of say Roman Numerals which are rarely used outside the Superbowl.

Two thirds of all the named stars in the universe have Arabian names because they were discovered during this period.

This was the centre of the advancement of the world's knowledge. And then in the twelfth century the religious cleric, Hamid al-Ghazali, declared that mathematics, logic and physics was incompatible with Islam.

And that was that. That was the end of Baghdad's position as the world's leading city of science.

Revelation replaced discovery. Scripture replaced science.



Kurt Vonnegut wrote a novel about the absurdity of the way we live. Actually he wrote quite a few of them. In one, *Breakfast of Champions*, he described in passing why people might choose to stop using their minds.

'Unusual ideas could make enemies', he explained. This wasn't

ideal when people needed all the friends they could get.

‘So in the interests of survival, they trained themselves to be agreeing machines instead of thinking machines. All their minds had to do was to discover what other people were thinking, and then they thought that too.’

As a result some characters decided to be ‘stupid on purpose’.



But that’s fiction. Being stupid on purpose seems like the sort of thing no-one would ever do.

...Aaaand yet people do it all the time to fit in with everyone else.

The phenomenon of being deliberately stupid to fit in with the group is described in The Abilene Paradox. The management expert Jerry B. Harvey described it like this:

‘On a hot afternoon in Coleman, Texas, the family is comfortably playing dominoes on a porch, until the father-in-law suggests that they take a trip to Abilene [53 miles north] for dinner. The wife says, “Sounds like a great idea.” The husband, despite having reservations because the drive is long and hot, thinks that his preferences must be out-of-step with the group and says, “Sounds good to me. I just hope your mother wants to go.” The mother-in-law then says, “Of course I want to go. I haven’t been to Abilene in a long time.”

The drive is hot, dusty, and long. When they arrive at the cafeteria, the food is as bad as the drive. They arrive back home four hours later, exhausted.

One of them dishonestly says, “It was a great trip, wasn’t it?” The mother-in-law says that, actually, she would rather have stayed home, but went along since the other three were so enthusiastic. The husband says, “I wasn’t delighted to be doing what we were doing. I only went to satisfy the rest of you.” The wife says, “I just went along to keep you happy. I would have had to be crazy to want to go out in the heat like that.” The father-in-law then says that he only suggested it because he thought the others might be bored.

The group sits back, perplexed that they together decided to take a trip which none of them wanted. They each would have preferred to sit comfortably, but did not admit to it when they still had time to enjoy the afternoon.’

And time, that precious resource, drains away, wasted, whenever we don’t use our minds to make the most of it.

**And this is the second lesson of the sea squirt:**

**Either your mind digests life and makes it the best it can be.  
Or you sit stationary on the sea bed and life digests your mind.**

Burp.

THE SECOND LESSON OF THE SEA SQUIRT

EITHER  
YOU DIGEST  
LIFE OR LIFE  
DIGESTS  
YOU

## The Wild Pigs of the Okefenokee Swamp



A stranger halts his horse and wagon alongside a general store on the fringe of the untamed Okefenokee Swamp.

He calls over: "I'm here to catch pigs."

The locals burst out laughing. "Those wild, dangerous beasts? No chance."

"The most powerful guns won't stop them. Go home."

"I lost my leg escaping the pigs, stranger. Turn around."

"I wanted to buy some corn, actually", he says. And every week he buys more on his way to the swamp.

The hunters scratch their heads, tap their guns and the months pass until one day the stranger says: "Gentlemen, I need help to take 600 pigs to market."

To stunned silence he explains: "First I put some corn on the edge of a clearing. Each week I led the trail closer to the center."

First, the young pigs but eventually even the largest, fiercest pigs could not resist the lure of easy food.

"They stopped fearing me and one yard at a time I built a pen. Eyes on the corn – they never even noticed."

"It's not possible!" gasped the old-timers. "That's not hunting!"

"Oh it is", he said. "And this morning I shut the gate."

This tale, which I first came across in an article written by Steve Washam, is a two sided morality tale. Both sides beg one thing – Use your mind:

1. The stranger challenges old methods of catching pigs and thus triumphs.
2. The pigs cease thinking and fail to see that gradually (and helpfully) they are being fenced in.

