

# Chapter 1

$$E + R = O$$



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**H**as anyone ever said something to you and you've thought, 'Well that's just common sense'? Or have you ever made a discovery about how things work and thought 'Why didn't I think of that before'?

Me too. In fact I guess we all have. One such incident happened to me whilst I was in my late twenties. I was listening to the author and speaker Jack Canfield explain a concept that had a profound impact on how I saw the world and dealt with situations. On reflection I realize that most people will think that what Canfield said was 'just common sense' and 'fairly obvious'. And maybe they're right. But here's the interesting part. Until that moment it hadn't been common sense to me and it wasn't obvious until it was pointed out.

So what was this insight, this idea that has had such a profound impact? I guess you could call it a formula for life. For me it's become the foundation upon which my SUMO principles are based.

The formula is simply this:  $E + R = O$ .

Now, in order to explain the formula and why understanding it is crucial to our lives, let's explore a scenario.

Imagine you're driving in the fast lane of the motorway, when you notice a car flashing its headlights at you. It's clear from their aggressive driving that they are not pointing out your car needs washing or you forgot your change at the toll booth. No. The driver behind you is in a hurry and you're in their way.

So what do you do?

I asked that question to a group of twelve managers I was working with. As you read their responses ask yourself which, if any, you can relate to.

Karl said he would refuse to be intimidated, maintain his current speed and not pull over for the driver behind him. He may even use a particular hand signal to highlight the fact that he didn't appreciate the other driver's behaviour.

There were nods of approval from other members of the group.

Brian interjected.

'Guys I can't believe what you're suggesting; I'd simply move in at an appropriate time and allow them to overtake me...'

Before he could finish his sentence pandemonium broke out around the room.

'No way would you do that Brian. I've been in a car with you,' said his colleague Darran. 'I know how you drive. It's like a battle out there when the traffic's busy and there's just no way you would react in such a calm and submissive manner.'

‘And quite frankly I wouldn’t want you to,’ piped up another colleague.

Brian, clearly enjoying the reaction of his colleagues to what he’d said, added, ‘Hey, let me finish. That’s not the whole story. After the car had overtaken me I’d immediately pull back out into that lane and flash my lights at them!’

The room erupted into laughter.

The energy and emotion in the group was quite extraordinary. A simple scenario had provoked such an animated reaction.

Then Linda spoke up.

‘Guys I’ve never seen such high levels of testosterone bouncing around the room. You remind me of a group of monkeys on heat.’

There was more laughter.

‘Seriously though guys,’ Linda continued, ‘what Paul’s just given us as a scenario happens a lot in our job. But whilst you lot are getting het up and animated about such an event, I’m using the same situation as my chuckle time.’

Linda’s colleagues (all of whom were male) calmed down momentarily and looked intrigued and perhaps slightly bemused by Linda’s introduction to the discussion of the phrase ‘chuckle time’.

‘You see, whilst you bunch of primates are seeing your blood pressure rise and your aggression levels soar, I’m having a laugh.’

'OK Linda,' I interrupted. 'You need to put us out of our misery. What exactly is chuckle time?'

'It's quite simply this. In my experience most people who drive aggressively, flashing their lights and tailgating you, are men. And they're usually men in big cars. Now I've got a theory about men who drive big cars. So when they start flashing their lights and start driving in an intimidating way I will signal and move over. However, when they drive past me I will take a momentary glance in their direction and think "small penis". You know what? It makes me chuckle every time.'

There were a few smiles in the room when Linda finished but no audible laughs. Linda's way of dealing with a situation that was common to all of them seemed to put her colleagues' reaction into perspective. I broke the silence and the slight tension building in the room.

'Well thanks for sharing that Linda. I'm just relieved I drive a mini.'


The room erupted into laughter again.

With her humorous insight Linda had made a valuable point, and one that brilliantly illustrates  $E + R = O$ . Quite simply it's this: it's not the Event but also how I Respond that influences the Outcome.

It's not an aggressive driver that's influencing my outcome but how I'm responding. One response can lead to stress and confrontation, whilst another can lead to a calmer journey.

Common sense? Obvious? Perhaps. But in my experience very few people live their lives with an awareness of such a formula. For many years I certainly didn't.

In fact many people seem to live their lives by an alternative one:  $E = O$ . In other words, the outcomes in my life are down entirely to whatever events I've experienced. I have no control. Certain events will trigger certain outcomes. Period.



***Life is rarely just about what happens to you. It's how you respond that makes the difference.***

What Events have you experienced?

Have you ever faced any of the following in your life? (Simply tick 'yes' or 'no')

	Yes	No
Been made redundant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experienced significant change at work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not achieved your expected grades at school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Over-reacted to a situation and then regretted what you said and did	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Failed your driving test	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Been dumped by someone you loved	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Applied for a job and not got an interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Missed out on the house of your dreams through no fault of your own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Found someone driving aggressively behind you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt badly let down by a family member or close friend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

It would be surprising if, of the above scenarios, you hadn't experienced at least a few of them.

You see, life is full of events. It's full of opportunities, challenges, setbacks and even some dull, boring moments at times.

But it's not the events alone that determine your outcomes.

It's how you respond.

Succeeding in life is therefore not a matter of chance; it's not whether fate, luck or destiny bestows upon you a set of favourable events. It's about the choices *you* make.

### **What influences your response?**

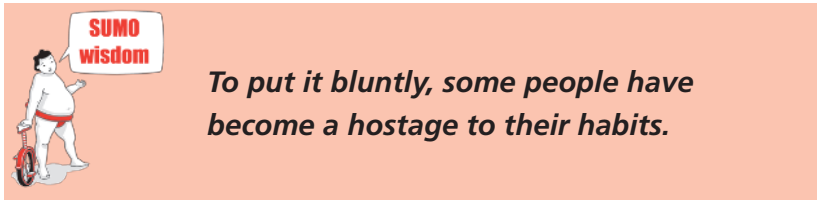
OK, let's get off auto-pilot for a moment, press pause and explore why we respond the way we do to events and how those responses impact our outcomes. Let's focus on three reasons in particular.

#### **1 Habits... are they helping or hindering you?**

As you will discover in the SUMO principle 'Remember the Beachball', a whole host of factors influence how we see the world and therefore how we respond to what we see. Interestingly, the filters through which we see the world have been shaped, influenced and coloured by a number of factors that many of us are now oblivious to.

Our responses to situations have now become habits; habits which were not necessarily consciously chosen but acquired unconsciously over time.

That's why, even when we begin to understand the impact our responses have on our outcomes, it's still not easy to change them. To put it bluntly, our habits can handicap us and prevent us from succeeding in life.



Let's explore that statement a little further.

Imagine you're off for a walk in the countryside. You come across a field of tall grass; so tall, in fact, that it's higher than you are. You're tired and know that taking a short cut through this field will get you to your destination sooner.

Slowly and tentatively you begin to move forward through the grass and as you do so you begin to leave a pathway behind you. Eventually you make your way across the field and reach your destination.

Now imagine that the next day you go for the same walk and come across the same field of tall grass. You decide to take a short cut across the field. You notice the pathway that you created yesterday. You know it got you to the other side of the field. It might still not be the most direct way through the field – that would be hard to tell without an aerial perspective – but you do know this path will lead to where you want to go.



But you still have a choice. Take the same path as yesterday, or, if you're feeling particularly adventurous, you could create another one.

So what would you do?

What do you think the majority of people do? Create a new path or take the familiar and already established one?

From my experience of human behaviour, most people stick with the path they took the day before. Why? Well, for a start it's easier and the majority of people like solutions that are easy. You also know this path will get you to where you want to be. It's also safer. By taking this route you know what to expect. Now, of course it might not be the quickest route across the field (there could be many others that you've not discovered) but it's a familiar one and the one you're most likely to take.

The brain works in a similar way. When you do a task for the first time the brain begins to establish a series of neural pathways. The more a particular task (or response to an event) occurs, the stronger and more established the neural pathway becomes. That's why deciding to do something differently can sound easy in theory but prove difficult in practice. It's like taking a new path across the field, and unless you see an immediate benefit you're more likely to return to the route (or behaviour) you've previously taken.

Let me give you an example of this. If you were to clasp both hands together you'd notice that one thumb is on top of the other. Try it now. Go on – no one else is watching. In my case it's my right thumb that's on top of my left one.

Now repeat the exercise (and if you're reading this book whilst on a train or plane, do this as subtly as you can without drawing attention to yourself or elbowing the person next to you). However, when you do so, whichever thumb was on the bottom last time (which in my case was my left) put that one on top this time.

Now how does that feel? Strange? For most people it does. And that's how responding differently to events can feel sometimes. It can feel strange; almost not normal. The temptation is to revert back to how we've always responded. We stick with what we feel comfortable with. We go back to our familiar path.

That's absolutely fine when there are no ramifications to your behaviour. Whether your left or right thumb is on top is not going to be the deciding factor in you getting the new job, managing your stress or building a better relationship. But in many cases how you respond to events *will* have ramifications. Just as Linda demonstrated with her story about how she deals with aggressive drivers, people can have very similar events and experiences but have very different outcomes from each other.

Go back to that checklist you completed on page 12. Other people reading this book would have put ticks in the same boxes as you. But just because they've experienced the same event doesn't mean they've had the same outcome. Does it?

Here's the good news. You don't have to become a hostage to your habits. You can create some new pathways. There could be a quicker and better route across the field.

***Just because a path is well worn doesn't  
make it the best route to take.***



Procrastination is a habit, as is being continually late or losing your temper. But whatever your current habits that are hindering you, you can change. If you genuinely want to respond more effectively to events that happen then look for ideas in this book to create some healthier habits.

Here's the deal. Where you currently find yourself in life has been influenced by your habitual responses to events. And when you change the habits that hinder you and replace them with more helpful ones you will see a change in your outcomes. Things can be different. Just remember it takes time and persistence to create a new pathway and form a new habit. The question is – are you up for the challenge?

Now onto something else worth considering about why we respond the way we do to events.

## **2 Conditioning (or You, Me and Pavlov's Dog)**

Have you ever heard of Pavlov's dog experiment?

Don't worry if you haven't, but that's a question I ask my audiences when I'm speaking.

And I get some strange answers.

They can border on the bizarre. They tend to have a common theme, however – the ringing of a bell is usually mentioned somewhere. However, one person thought the experiment involved dissecting a dog's head, after which when the bell rang the dog's eyes still moved. (I always love working in Yorkshire.) Another believed the experiment involved placing electrodes on a dog's testicles and when the bell rang the dog was either electrocuted or given some food. As the dog didn't know if it would be fed or electrocuted it developed psychosis. Well, to the best of my knowledge neither of the above experiments ever took place – certainly not by Ivan Pavlov anyway.

Here's what did happen.

Pavlov (1849–1936) was a Russian scientist based in St. Petersburg. He studied animal behaviour and one experiment involved him measuring the salivation levels of dogs. He noticed that his dogs' salivation levels increased when they saw food. Just as humans may lick their lips in anticipation of a veritable feast, dogs will salivate. Pavlov took the experiment further. Using a variety of sounds, one of which is commonly believed to be the ringing of a bell, Ivan Pavlov would ring the bell as the dogs were fed. He repeated this over several days – ring the bell, feed the dogs; ring the bell, feed the dogs; ring the bell, feed the dogs. Then came the interesting part. Pavlov then began to ring the bell and not feed the dogs. The bell rang but no food came. The dogs still salivated. He continued the experiment. He kept ringing those bells; there was still no food and the dogs' saliva continued to flow.

The experiment has been referred to as an example of conditioned response. Pavlov's dogs had become conditioned to salivate at the sound of a bell even when there was no food. In other words, their previous experiences had influenced their current responses.

OK, so what has Pavlov's dog experiment (conducted in the 1890s) got to do with you and me living in the 21st century?

Well, quite a lot actually.

You see, in many ways we're a bit like Pavlov's dog. It might not be bells that cause us to salivate, but the media, our education, our upbringing and who we spend time with can all influence or condition how we see and therefore how we respond to our world and the events around us. Some of our responses to events come as automatically as Pavlov's dog salivating at the sound of a bell. Rarely do we think about our response and the reasons why we behave the way we do – we simply tend to operate on auto-pilot – without thinking.

***Some people are sleepwalking through life  
oblivious to their behaviour or the impact  
of their responses.***



That's why the whole SUMO approach is designed to help you stop, press pause and think about what outcomes you want in life and how taking control of your responses can create better outcomes for yourself and others.

You see, we need to challenge the lie that says ‘I can never change’ and learn to recognize we’re not simply an upgraded version of Pavlov’s dog. Yes, how we’ve been conditioned to see and understand ourselves and our world can have a profound impact on us, but it doesn’t have to be permanent. If we genuinely feel dissatisfied with our current outcomes to events in life then, in a sense, we need to change our conditioner. We can choose to change our mental diet and feed our minds on different information that can positively influence how we see ourselves and the world.

By becoming more aware of why we respond to events the way we do, we can, over time, work on making better responses. This won’t happen overnight; the SUMO approach is not a quick-fix instant cure, but it will equip you with ideas and insights to help you break free from what may have been unhelpful and perhaps rigid ways of responding to events.

So that’s a brief look at how our conditioning can affect us. Now let’s explore a third factor.

### **3 Emotions... why sensible people do stupid things**

I was watching a TV documentary called *Neighbours from Hell*. One episode featured two families, one of which enjoyed bird watching whilst the other family had their elderly mother living with them.

One day the bird-watching family noticed a bird in their garden they had rarely seen before. The father grabbed his binoculars to study the bird. After a while the bird flew into next door’s garden.

The father followed the bird through his binoculars. At that precise moment the elderly mother was enjoying a cup of tea

in the conservatory. She noticed her neighbour looking into her garden. She spotted the binoculars. She thought she was being spied upon.

Now just stop for a moment and imagine it was you in the conservatory. How would you respond to the fact that it looks like your neighbours are taking a rather unhealthy interest in what you're up to? Would you...

- Ignore it and carry on drinking your tea?
- Leave the conservatory and go into another room?
- Wave at your neighbour?
- Strip off and reveal a part of your body?
- Plant fast-growing conifer trees between your properties in order to protect your privacy?

So what would you do?

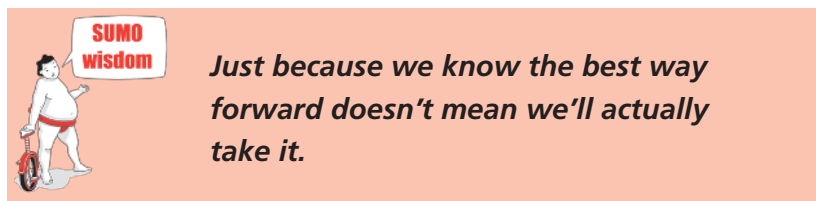
And the response of one of the families?

They grew those conifers. In fact, they planted so many that eventually the people who liked bird watching felt like they were living in darkness. The trees grew so tall that they blocked out their sunlight.

So what happened next? Well, they asked their neighbours to trim back the conifers. They refused. The dispute escalated and they ended up fighting a legal battle that went to court. The legal costs for both families totalled over £50,000. It sounds ridiculous doesn't it? But it's true. Perhaps the most revealing insight from the whole episode came when one of the neighbours was interviewed:

'When my mother saw she was being spied upon she was devastated. We had no choice but to grow those conifer trees to protect our privacy.'

Ridiculous? Possibly. Laughable? Maybe. But it happened.



Now a different response would have led to a different outcome wouldn't it? Of course it would. But it's revealing that the neighbour felt they 'had no choice'. And here's the key point. Whether we're going through a relationship break-up, have failed an exam, missed out on a promotion or whatever our current challenge or opportunity may be, *we do have a choice* about how we respond. After all, you're not Pavlov's dog.

Now nothing as ridiculous as the above scenario could ever happen in our lives, right? Our minor issues would never escalate into major ones, would they? Well, to be honest it's at this point I start to shuffle uncomfortably in my seat. Fortunately, I get on well with my own neighbours and fast-growing conifers are not an issue. But I have to admit that there are times when, on reflection, I'm left wondering 'Why on earth did I do that?' 'What in the world was I thinking?' 'How could I have been so stupid?'

Can you relate to that?



Or what about the following? Cast your mind back to a time when a friend, family member or colleague told you about an issue they were struggling with. As you listened to them, did you ever find yourself thinking, 'Well the common sense thing to do would be to...' Or thought, 'Well it seems obvious what you've got to do now.' Perhaps you've even offered an opinion that began with the words 'Well if I was you I would...' But have you then found that despite your crystal clear, incisive perspective on what to do they then completely ignore you and do something entirely different?

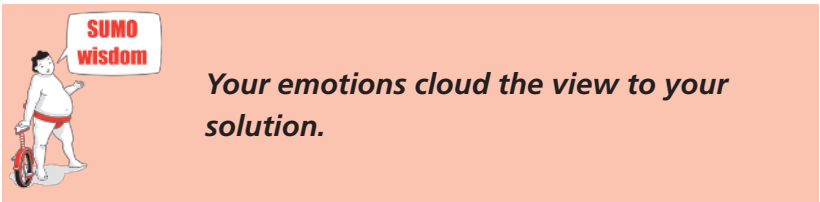
If so, why is that?

Why is it that something that is common sense and obvious to you seems complex and unclear to someone else? Why is it that you can see that responding differently to an event could create a very different outcome, yet other people live life with their blinkers super glued firmly in place, oblivious to other options and reciting their favourite mantra, 'Well, I had no choice'? Why on earth do so-called intelligent (well, in most cases anyway), rational, experienced people do stupid, irrational things? Why, despite all the opportunities we have, do many people fail to succeed in life?

Ready for the answer? I guess it's obvious when you think about it.

When the event or the problem is happening to someone else, it's easier for you to take a more objective perspective. The less emotionally involved you are, the easier it is to engage your rational brain (we'll look at this in more detail when we explore the SUMO principle 'Develop Fruity Thinking').

But when you're emotionally involved, when the issue affects you or can have a significant impact on someone close to you, then you see things less clearly. You've heard the phrase 'You can't see the wood for the trees', well, another alternative would be 'Your emotions cloud the view to your solution'. It's like trying to complete a jigsaw puzzle through steamed-up glasses – it's possible, but it's not easy.



A way to represent the above would be as follows:



So, when our emotional involvement is low, our rational perspective is high. Conversely, when the emotional involvement is high, our rational perspective is low.

In a nutshell, the equation  $E + R = O$  does seem like simplified common sense – and it is. But this insight can, at times, completely bypass our rational minds. It's like saying to a small child as you switch off their bedroom light, 'There's no need to be afraid of the dark.' Rationally you know that to be the case – but you're not the five-year-old who's just watched the latest episode of *Doctor Who* and is left fearing an alien invasion. Emotional engagement in an issue can have the same effect. We become less rational, lose a sense of perspective and our judgement can suffer as a result.

***Take some time out now to consider an issue or challenge that you're facing or have recently faced. Think about the equation  $E + R = O$ . Now answer the following:***



- 1 Describe briefly the event.**
- 2 Who else was involved?**
- 3 How did the event affect you personally?**
- 4 On a scale of 1–10 (where 1 = low and 10 = high) how emotionally involved were you?**

- 5** *Using the same scale, where would you rate your rational perspective of the situation?*
- 6** *How would someone who was less emotionally involved have seen the situation?*
- 7** *What outcome have you arrived at, at this stage?*
- 8** *Think of three other responses you could have made in that situation.*
- 9** *How would responding differently have affected the outcome?*
- 10** *What are your reflections on doing this exercise?*

## THE PERSONAL STUFF

At the time of writing my daughter Ruth is nineteen. I'm hugely proud of her. Actually I adore her. But pride and adoration don't necessarily always equate to a calm and harmonious relationship. Quite the opposite in fact.

I struggle with clutter. I despise it with a passion. I allow it to stress me. Ruth copes with clutter. So does my wife Helen. Although I may not be the world's tidiest person, I do like things to be tidy. When Ruth chills out in the lounge watching TV, she likes nothing more than a hot chocolate and the occasional piece of fruit. When it's time for bed she leaves the room. Alas, her empty cup and apple core rarely do. That frustrates me. I sometimes make a big issue out of it and demand she comes back down and tidies up after herself. In my emotional state I interpret her behaviour as a lack of respect.

I'm concluding that Ruth believes she can create whatever mess she likes and someone else will clear up after her.

My wife sees it differently. Helen gives a different meaning to the event. The issue of respect or, in this case, a lack of it does not

come onto her radar. Forgetfulness and perhaps a slight degree of laziness on Ruth's part are the reasons she believes for the empty cup and apple core. Helen can chill; I can fume. It's the same event but we can experience very different outcomes (as, indeed, can Ruth!). I place a higher importance on the event than Helen does. Therefore I respond differently. But it's just an empty cup and apple core. It's not quite conifer trees and I won't take Ruth to court over the matter (certainly not at this stage anyway) but the seeds have been sown whereby a small and relatively insignificant event has the potential to escalate.

Now if you're a parent reading this, I think you will fall into one of two camps. Some of you do think I've got a point don't you? Ruth should be tidying up after herself. She needs to be taught good habits. Others of you are on the same chill-pill prescription as Helen. You're thinking 'What's the big deal?' Do you know what? Both views are right (you will learn more about this in the SUMO principle 'Remember the Beachball'). The above example is not seeking to determine who is right or wrong but to illustrate how 'events' or other people's behaviour can be

perceived or interpreted differently. I guess that's why playwright William Shakespeare wrote in his play *Hamlet*, 'Nothing is either good nor bad, but thinking makes it so.'

So what's the way forward?

We've seen how habits, conditioning and emotions can influence how we 'see' and therefore respond to events, but what do we do now? Are we simply a prisoner to our past – do we really have much control over our future?

## Self-awareness can unlock the door to a brilliant life

The key to success is having the awareness to appreciate that, in the words of the French novelist Anaïs Nin, '*we see the world not as it is but as we are*'. It's recognizing that we see events through our own mental filters and give our own meaning to those events – a meaning which may be very different to someone else's. However, the SUMO principles will help you see the events in your life perhaps differently from how you're currently seeing them. They will help you challenge your perception of yourself, other people and life's events.

By seeing differently you can respond differently.



***It's not the event, but the meaning you give the event that determines your response.***

Success is about recognizing the role we play in influencing the outcomes we and others may experience by understanding the effect of *our* responses. Success is about waking up to the fact that the equation to life is not  $E = O$ . The Event does not solely determine the Outcome. Our success comes when we become more flexible in our responses and explore alternatives to our usual way of responding.

The journey to success gathers real momentum when we embrace the fact that, in most cases, we can choose both how we will see the event and how we respond. The purpose of the following six SUMO principles is to help you see and understand yourself with greater clarity. The SUMO principles will equip you with insights, ideas and the inspiration to take different actions and make different choices to create better outcomes. They can help lead you to developing healthier habits, to freeing yourself from negative conditioning and to managing your emotions more effectively. If you want to know where the journey to creating and enjoying a brilliant life begins, it begins with the formula  $E + R = O$ .

So let's explore our first SUMO principle which will both challenge and equip you to achieve those better outcomes. It's time to Change Your T-shirt. Which Rs does it address?



## SUMO SUMMARY

- Shut Up automatic responses, Move On to recognizing you can make some different choices.
- Shut Up  $E = O$ , Move On to  $E + R = O$ .
- Shut Up old harmful habits, Move On to making some better new ones.
- Shut Up unhelpful conditioning, Move On to a new way of seeing the future.
- Shut Up being a slave to your emotions, Move On to managing them.

