

# Chapter 1

**DON'T TAKE  
MIRACLES  
FOR  
GRANTED**

**O**K, let me start with three quick questions. When you get dressed, which shoe do you put on first, your left or your right? Secondly, when you go up a flight of stairs, which leg goes up first, your left or your right one? Finally, when you chew your food, which side of your mouth do you mostly tend to use, your left or your right?

If you're like most people you had to stop and think before giving your answer. In fact, some people are still not one hundred percent certain even when they've answered. And yet all three questions are related to things we do almost every day (except perhaps for those shoe-hating, bungalow-dwelling people on a liquid diet). In fact, we've probably done each activity thousands of times during our lives.

And that's my point.

You see, we do some things so often we don't even think about them anymore. We simply operate on autopilot.

Here's something else I'd now like you to do. Just read the following:

Richard's nickname was dig bick.

You that read wrong.

You read that wrong too.

Did it catch you out? Crazy, eh?

And the reason?

It's simply this – our brains' persistent and hardwired preoccupation for taking shortcuts. You see, our brains love to conserve energy, and as our brain cells use almost

twice as much energy as any other cell in the body, the brain has developed ways to minimize effort.

One way to do so is by recognizing patterns. If everything the brain encounters is familiar – the same office, the same route to work, the same friends – or it carries out repeated routines – getting dressed, climbing stairs, or chewing food – it hums along quite happily on autopilot. The daily repetition of our lives means the brain can relax; there's no danger to be wary of, and nothing out of the ordinary going on. The brain's thinking 'Relax, I've seen this all before.' As a result, it doesn't concentrate and consciously register all the information.

Now that can be a good thing. You don't want to spend ages tiring yourself out deciding which order to get dressed in. Neither do you want to do the same when climbing stairs or chewing food. The same goes for when you're driving – you can just do it on autopilot, relax, and let your mind wander.

But that's the problem.

If we're not careful we can switch off too often. It's easy to do – to repeat over and over again regular routines, routes, and habits. But when we do, it's like living life on fast-forward.

### **Great Life Insight**

It's easy to take for granted the richness and variety that life has to offer.

You see, to a young child everything is new, hence their sense of awe when they see animals on a farm and planes in

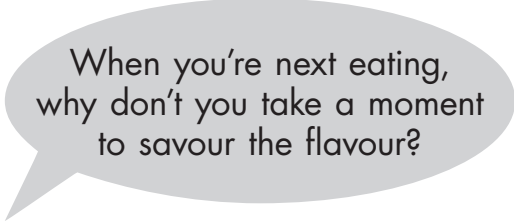
the sky. But as these things become increasingly familiar, it's easy to take their existence for granted and to almost stop noticing them (unless, of course, you're a farmer or a plane spotter).

I'm fascinated and challenged by these words from Einstein:

There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.

You know what I've realized? It's important to notice what's under your nose. To actually take time to stop, pause, and reflect. Be aware of things. Appreciate that instant running water, that hot shower, and those trees that line the street where you live.

### **Great Life Tip**



When you're next eating, why don't you take a moment to savour the flavour?

So, rather than focusing on what you will eat next, take a moment to really enjoy what you're eating now. This is something I've started to do more. I'm taking time to appreciate the extraordinary when experiencing the ordinary. And I'm a little weird when I do so. The reason?

Well, I've started to close my eyes when I'm eating my food.

Now I don't do this throughout the whole meal obviously – that could be quite awkward, fishing around my plate with my knife and fork, searching out my next mouthful to eat. It would also be off-putting for the people I was eating with! But I do now take a couple of mouthfuls and take time to notice what I'm eating and become aware of the tastes and textures when I do so.

Now maybe we would all do that if we were in some expensive restaurant and paid a fortune for the meal. But I'm suggesting we do this on a daily basis, whatever we're eating. Trust me, cornflakes have never tasted so good.

OK, that's one example, but behind the quirky illustration there's a serious point.

### **Great Life Insight**

It's so easy to live with the attitude 'so what's next?' rather than simply enjoying 'what's now'.

Life, even with all its challenges, is still an amazing experience. But I'm left wondering, perhaps due to over-exposure, if we've become immune to the awe-inspiring things that surround us.

Are we taking life, people, and places for granted?

The reality is, we seek out new experiences to impress us and fail to notice the miracles around us.

I love this quote from the Jewish philosopher and theologian Abraham Heschel:

Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement ... Get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.

You might not be aware of it, but most of us have encountered the Seven Wonders of the World. Really, we have.

Those Seven Wonders are as follows:

To see. To hear. To touch.

To taste. To feel. To laugh.

To love.

Why not take a moment to appreciate the great life you already have? We're beneficiaries of hundreds and hundreds of years of human development in relation to education, technology, health care, sanitation, entertainment, architecture, medical advancements, travel. The list is endless.

Take a moment to look around you and notice nature. Stop and stare. Get off fast-forward. We're surrounded by awe-inspiring stuff. Please don't take it all for granted.

## **Great Life Insight**

Life is not an advert. It's the main show. Soak it in. Savour it.

And remember, if you did wake up feeling tired and miserable, you woke up. So, dust yourself down and start experiencing those Seven Wonders. And when you do so, don't take those daily miracles for granted.

