

**Scarecrow:** How do you do?

**Dorothy:** Very well, thank you.

**Scarecrow:** Oh, I'm not feeling at all well. You see, it's very tedious being stuck up here all day long with a pole up your back.

**Dorothy:** Oh, dear—that must be terribly uncomfortable. Can't you get down?

**Scarecrow:** Down? No, you see, I'm—well—I'm—

**Dorothy:** Oh, well, here—let me help you.

**Scarecrow:** Oh, that's very kind of you—very kind.

**Dorothy:** Well, oh, dear—I don't quite see ...

**Dorothy:** o.s. ... how I can—

**Scarecrow:** Of course, I'm not bright about doing things, but if you'll just bend the nail down in the back, maybe I'll slip off and ...

# CHAPTER 1

## What's the Problem?

### **KEY TASKS FROM THIS CHAPTER:**

- ◆ Think about the problem that's keeping you stuck, and determine if it's your *real* problem or a symptom of your real problem.
- ◆ Make a list of ways your life would be better if you solved that problem.

In 1945, Sears Roebuck Company made about one Taylor Swift Eras Tour (\$1 billion) in revenue. (That would be the equivalent of \$16 billion today.) By 1969, Sears' sales represented 1% of the US economy, and they were easily the largest retailer in the world. Sears employed 350,000 people and decided they needed to have one big fancy office space for their workforce.

Construction was completed on the Sears Tower in 1973. Standing at an impressive 1,454 feet, the Sears Tower became the tallest building in the world. And it maintained that record for 22 years.

One would think that global dominance would survive Walmart and the Internet, but apparently not. In 1991, Sears started losing market share when Walmart came along. They decided their problem was that they weren't big enough. So they merged with Kmart to try and create a larger retail footprint.

Sears's size wasn't the problem. Their problem was that they showed up too late for the digital game. By trying to get bigger, they just started to drown. More stores meant more overhead at a time when their competitors were figuring out how to be lean and agile by going online.

**Scaling an ineffective system leads to failure.**

It's like the time I ran over a nail and ended up with a punctured tire. Every morning I had to go out of my way to put air in it. I would then have enough air to last for a day. Then it would go low, I would have to fill it up again, and so on and so forth. To me, the problem was that I needed to go get air all the time. But the *real* problem was that I had a hole in my tire that had to be fixed.

Symptoms of the real problem can mask where your efforts need to go, leading to systems and processes being created that time and time again fail to deliver absolution. The problem, to me, transformed into blaming gas stations for not having working air hoses or not having Apple Pay because I didn't have any cash or quarters. I was late "because other people were filling up their tires" or "because two gas stations had broken tire inflation stations and one didn't have one at all."

My solution was to find better gas stations. I ignored and avoided the real problem and chose to deal with the consequential problems. But that was unnecessary.

Find the hole and patch the tire.

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Getting to the core of the issue and assessing whether your answers are actually helping are really difficult to do though when you are committed to one course of unchecked action. We see this issue with scaling broken processes across America's transportation systems.

As populations increase, motorists increase. It seems only obvious to assume more motorists on the road create more traffic. So to solve the traffic debacle, more lanes would be needed to accommodate the motorists and eventually reduce and improve traffic, right?

But what if I told you adding more lanes not only does not improve traffic on roadways but actually, and even though it is counterintuitive, it contributes to even worse traffic?

The federal government has spent billions of dollars expanding highways and building bridges and overpasses in efforts to reduce traffic congestion. The efforts to lessen traffic, while appreciated (not the construction and delays due to the attempts to improve traffic by worsening it), are not factually sound. New roads, new lanes, and new expanded highways don't account for one thing—new driving. This feedback loop, known as *induced demand*, encourages drivers who normally avoided those congested roads to now use them. Induced demand is a concept that essentially states more resources for a problem might not necessarily solve the problem. Added roadway motivates more motorists to reroute, inevitably converting traffic on highways to more traffic on more highways.

Think about some of the largest highways in the United States: Los Angeles, Atlanta, Houston, New Jersey. Aerial shots of these 12- to 26-lane highways can hardly be found not in gridlocked traffic. The largest highway in the country, the

Katy Freeway in Houston, expanded to 26 lanes in 2008 and was praised as a success initially. But if economics has taught us anything, it's that when you provide a free beneficial resource, over time, that supply will not be able to keep up with demand. Five years after the widening of Katy Freeway, the *New York Times* reported, "Peak travel times were longer than before the expansion."

We're often too busy or overwhelmed or committed to our belief to see the bigger picture. But if we want to create or adapt to change, we have to dig deep and find the root of what it is that's keeping us stuck.

I didn't take the time to step back and look at the situation to see whether I was solving the right problem. And as a result, I was dealing with a by-product of the problem. That was keeping me frustrated and stuck and late for a lot of meetings.

Every single one of us has something in our life that we wish could be different ... like I wished my tire didn't need to be filled up with air all the time.

**One or two (or all) of these might be making you feel stuck:**

- ◆ A feeling of being unsatisfied in your work
- ◆ Experiencing burnout, stress, or lack of work–life balance
- ◆ Recognizing limited growth opportunities or stagnation
- ◆ Enduring frequent communication breakdowns or conflicts in relationships
- ◆ Feeling emotionally drained, undervalued, or underappreciated
- ◆ Discovering a lack of compatibility with a partner
- ◆ Health issues, chronic conditions, or physical discomfort
- ◆ Experiencing low energy, fatigue, or the inability to perform daily tasks
- ◆ The consequences of an unhealthy lifestyle

- ◆ Feeling stuck or lost in your life
- ◆ Dealing with fears, self-doubt, and/or a lack of confidence
- ◆ Financial instability
- ◆ Living paycheck to paycheck
- ◆ Overwhelming debt

The characters in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* teach us what happens when you stay stuck, and the amazing progress that comes when you break free from that stuckness. They were all putting air in the tire instead of patching it.

Maybe you want to be more physically fit. Maybe you're unhappy in your relationship. Maybe you would love to have a better job with a higher salary.

If you're like the majority of people I've worked with, there's usually one core issue that affects almost every area of your life and keeps you the same version of yourself year after year. This problem usually boils down to a deeper concept.

People *think* they want to lose weight, but what they're really seeking is the feeling that weight loss promises. If you lost 60 pounds but looked and felt the exact same, you wouldn't be happy.

Your problem is not necessarily that you need to find a new job. It's that you feel trapped by your current one; it's not giving you the financial freedom you seek.

Only when you recognize the root can you start to address the real problem.

For years, I kept my physical disability hidden away from the world. On a surface level, it would have seemed that not being able to show my hand was my core problem. But that didn't quite capture the issue. In reality, the problem I needed to address was a crippling fear of being alone. I had created a false narrative in my head that if I showed my hand, people

would stop wanting to be around me. And I couldn't handle how that would feel.

As humans, we often treat feelings as facts.

Did you start thinking of your own problem as you read about mine? Or maybe you don't have a single thing in your life that you want to change. You may want to have a look at that, though, because there's a fine line between being stuck and being complacent.

Being stuck means you're repeating past mistakes despite knowing better. Being complacent is deciding things are good enough as they are.

True contentment, on the other hand, is the goal. It's about finding peace in whatever situation you're in. People who are genuinely content aren't stuck. They're in a state of acceptance and stability but derive continuing satisfaction from a sense of progress in life.

Deep down, you likely know what your real problem is—even if you haven't begun to address it yet. Whether it's understanding the roots of your problems or finding contentment in the journey, it's all about managing your perspective and your habits.

Change isn't about constant upheaval; it's about finding stability in both peace and chaos. It's recognizing that change happening and needing to change are both part of life so you need frameworks to manage it actively.

Let me ask you: How would you feel if you continued down the path you are currently on for the next six years? Yeah, you might get a raise or date people or take a few vacations. But what if you woke up six years from now and you were the same person on the inside as you are right now? Same mindset. Same view of the world. Same regrets. Just older.

Because you're reading this book, I will assume you wouldn't feel very good about that scenario.

The Greeks believed that “metabole,” or change, is the general fate that awaits everything. From the smallest particles to the largest political parties to the constant chemical process of *metabolism* taking place in your body as you read this, change is everywhere.

Organisms undergo constant biochemical transformations to sustain life:

- ◆ Seeds to plants
- ◆ Plants to flowers
- ◆ Flowers to fruit
- ◆ Fruit to pie
- ◆ Carbohydrates into energy
- ◆ Fat into carbon dioxide (weight loss is mostly breathed out)
- ◆ Time into money
- ◆ Money into materials
- ◆ Hardship into story
- ◆ Obstacles to opportunities

We are in a constant evolution from state to state. And no state remains constant.

“You can never step in the same river twice.”

—*Heraclitus*

**Before you move on to the next chapter, here are some questions to ask yourself to help uncover the real problem that's standing between you and the life you want:**

- ◆ What is the problem? (Clearly define the problem without making assumptions.)
- ◆ What are the specific issues causing the problem?
- ◆ What is the cause of this problem happening?
- ◆ Why is it a problem now if it wasn't before?
- ◆ Why is it a problem that needs to be solved?
- ◆ When does the problem come up? (Is it a constant issue, or does it happen at specific times? Does it occur under certain conditions?)
- ◆ Where does the problem come up for you? (Is the issue contained to a specific area of your life/business?)
- ◆ Who (if anyone) is involved or affected by the problem? (Identify the people or groups who would benefit by you solving this problem.)
- ◆ Are there specific people who play a role in this problem?
- ◆ How long has the problem been happening? (If you can figure out a timeline, you might have some clues to the root issue.)
- ◆ What have you already tried (if anything) to solve this problem?
- ◆ Can you identify any underlying factors contributing to the problem?
- ◆ Are there any patterns or trends surrounding this problem that could give you clues about when/why it comes up?

- ◆ What assumptions are you making about the problem? Are they all valid?
- ◆ What pieces of data would help you to understand the problem better? (Then go searching for them.)
- ◆ What are the consequences of not solving the real problem?
- ◆ What are the potential impacts and consequences of leaving this issue unaddressed?