

CHAPTER 1

SETTING OFF

Quit Battling and Seize the Moment

Accessing Energy

You Deserve Playtime

Listen to your Intuition

Technology – From Friend to Foe

Find Peace and Freedom

Sanity as You Go





We often recognise what is ‘right’ in our lives only when we experience what is going ‘wrong’. It can be a painful experience to notice that we are stuck, that some intangible ‘thing’ is missing or blocking our way, that something is not fitting just right. This is a valuable warning signal that our energy is not flowing and therefore we are not going to operate at our best or be at our happiest.

This chapter will help identify challenges that we face where our energy could be stuck or blocked – and ways to free it up. Ultimately, the aim is to remain calm, strong and at one with ourselves as we travel rather than be shattered into thousands of small pieces under pressure; to take ourselves to an edge that allows us to stretch and grow by following what is right for us as individuals.

Everybody I interviewed for this book had their own good times/bad times tales to share. In the good times they felt integrated and whole; in the bad times they felt stressed and shattered. Right now you may be experiencing either extreme.

For many people, intense back-to-back working with long hours and no recovery time is their normal routine. They become like the proverbial boiled frogs, those little creatures popped into a pan of cold water. The heat builds up and up, and they don’t notice the gradual increase until it is too late and they’re cooked. Each year these people work that bit harder and longer until the work itself loses its excitement and the rest of life gets seriously infected. Often a crisis stops them in their tracks.

Remember that we are offered more opportunities based on our track record and thus set the pattern for our lives. If



we want to create a new pattern, we have to make clear to others the new direction that we are following, rather than accepting more of the same.

Instead of being a boiled frog, you can choose to be the hero of your own life.

QUIT BATTLING AND SEIZE THE MOMENT

All of us will hit turning points where we have a strong sense that things aren't working or where they can be better, and those points come at different times in our lives. Clearly age has an impact. As I get older, I have learnt from experience and been through the personal development that enables me to recognise that I want more from my work than money; I want a healthy, sustainable quality of life.

With age we also recognise that life is actually a very short time span. Even if we live to be 110, that wouldn't be sufficient. One life is never going to be long enough to visit all the awesome places and do all the things we could do.

Each generation learns from the previous one what it wants and doesn't. My own daughter, recently graduated from university, has a job in Europe that enables her to work with an international set of colleagues, build on her language skills, and be socially responsible. She knows she doesn't want the kind of work that chains her like a young puppy to the same desk and computer in a faceless office.

Today's young professionals are well travelled and confident. They don't want to become part of what David Bolchover calls a generation of *The Living Dead* in his book of the



same name, where ‘presenteeism’ is the name of the game and you are measured by hours at your desk rather than your contribution. What’s harder to work out is what they do want and that may only become clear as they travel.

Mapping your hero’s journey

As we mature, we discover that life offers us many different roles to play at any one time – lover, spouse, friend, student, employee or business owner, product developer, computer whizz, artist, reader, writer, fundraiser, gardener, adventurer, homemaker, fighter pilot, healer, parent or child – plus many more. One life comprises a unique combination of roles which don’t always fit together smoothly.

Our navigation through life and work can be likened to the stages in Joseph Campbell’s famous ‘hero’s journey’ from his classic book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Back in the 1940s, Campbell pointed to certain consistent patterns and structures in myths and stories which contained a central character – the hero, along with mentors, allies and villains.

Campbell’s work was subsequently developed by Christopher Vogler in his book, *The Writer’s Journey*, into a 12-stage framework which is often adopted to guide the development of fiction and film scripts. Most classic films and tales from *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gladiator* to Homer’s *Odyssey* or Tolkein’s *Lord of the Rings* can be mapped onto the framework.

Essentially, the journey begins in the hero’s home, then takes him off on an adventure in which he does battle until finally returning home, weary yet triumphant, as a stronger



character. As you consider how you'd like your life to pan out, here are the most important stages that unfold in every hero's story:

- » *The call to adventure* – our hero begins in the ordinary world where he often denies or refuses to hear the call to adventure. He stays in his comfort zone until he can stay there no longer.
- » *Meeting a mentor* – our hero meets someone to help him, a teacher or guide who will show him the way forward.
- » *Crossing the threshold* – our hero takes the first brave step. He has accepted the challenge.
- » *The road of trials* – our hero undergoes a series of ordeals that test him to the limit and meets a mixture of allies and enemies on the way until he achieves his goal or reward.
- » *Returning to the ordinary world with the elixir* – finally our hero heads home, personally transformed by the experience.

The story of your experience at school, wrenched from home and out into the world is an example of a hero's journey. So too is any stage of your life where you undertake a new journey – accept a new job, leave home to set up with a new partner, take up a new hobby. It involves heeding that call to the next adventure, and bravely stepping over the familiar threshold into the unknown.

The first and most difficult step is to make a commitment to yourself to own all of your life, being fully responsible for yourself and the results you get. Only then can you reclaim your personal life and enrich your professional one.



As lawyer Steve realised, 'I have to make a commitment to myself, to own my life, because nobody else is going to take responsibility for it. Lawyer is only one of the hats I wear, and I was investing too much of my life into that one role. When I saw how some of the partners in the firm were just waiting for retirement to live, then I woke up and realised that my life is about what happens today, not in the future.'

Exercise

Your hero's journey today

You are the hero in your own life; now's the chance to develop your personal script. The starting point on any journey is to begin to assess your home surroundings and what is calling to you.

Imagine for a moment that the short story of how you live one aspect of your life and your work was captured in this book. What would it say about you? Here are some prompts:

- » Think about the different roles that you take on in your life, not just work ones.
- » Consider some of the best of times and the worst of times for you.
- » Where is there any conflict or tension for you at work?
- » How content are you with your home life? What might be even better?
- » What is calling you to an adventure right now?
- » What is the threshold you need to step over? Is this barrier within you or about the people around you?
- » Who are some of the allies, enemies or mentors you have met or would like to meet on your journey?

My story today...



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Looking at your story, consider whether yours is an attractive and enticing life; one that others would like to lead. What else do you notice as you read your own story? Consider how you'd like it to evolve as you travel through the book so that later you can write it as your legacy story in Chapter 5 – the tale of what you have actually done.

As heroes in our own lives, there will naturally be tension between our different roles because we have a finite amount of time in the day and our energy gets spread wide. How many women struggle to be a wonderful homemaker and business person, a caring daughter as well as a traveller of the world? How many men feel they need to be the good provider yet dream of a life adventure that takes them far from home or a secure job?

Playing many different roles **simultaneously** on the world's stage causes overload in a solo act. You are left wondering who you are to the point of freezing in your tracks, putting your life on hold and doing nothing – until you have the money, your children are grown up, your elderly parents no longer need you. The problem with this approach is that we have one life and no second chances. Months of stretching in different directions turn to years, turn to decades.

The only sane way forward is to stop battling and accept reality, by acknowledging the tensions each role brings. Stop 'trying' to perfect each one simultaneously; there can be no perfect balance between all these roles at the same time; the peace comes from a deeper place within yourself.

There's a paradox at work whereby the goal-setting, goal-getting measures of achievement also involve us surrendering



to what is happening around us rather than being able to control it all. If we're aiming to raise the 'success' bar all the time, going for bigger and bigger challenges that are potentially exhausting, it's worth starting from a simple place of contentment, going with the moment and moving gracefully over one foot or three foot hurdles to help prepare you for the challenge.

ACCESSING ENERGY

Getting in touch with your energy involves exercising new parts of yourself. When you are operating from your core position of strength without interference, all your energy is aligned and moving freely; all your senses are focused outwards from a strong central point. When part of you tries to split your attention by heading in a new or contrasting direction, then it creates an inner tension and your whole system needs to adapt.

Exercise

Feel the energy

Let's pause a moment while I invite you to stretch out one of your hands. Look at your hand with the palm uppermost and stretch all five digits of that hand as far out as is comfortable, really watching, feeling, moving your fingers and thumb. Get a sense of the space between each finger and the energy shifting out to the very tips of the fingers. When you are doing this, the energy through your hand is flowing freely from the core of your palm. It's strong and aligned. Experience that as you move your fingers back and forward.



Now try bending each finger in turn towards the centre of your palm, and see what happens to the stretch. Notice how comfortable it is to isolate one finger and stretch out the others. Maybe when your thumb moves in towards the palm, the stretch is still reasonable. As you bend your ring finger or middle finger, for example, I suspect it's not quite so easy to keep the other four digits fully stretched out – you will be bringing in some tension; the energy's no longer flowing so freely.

Consider your hand as a symbol for the whole of you and your life. If you want to have hands that are flexible, then clearly you need to exercise each part, regularly stretching to the edge and then relaxing without bending too far backwards. Each and every part of your hand needs to work as a complete system, each respecting the integrity of the whole.

We lose the ability to access and top up our energy when we lose a sense of space in our lives. Energy is multi-dimensional and created in different ways for each of us; those lines need to be free-flowing for us to live the life we really want to live.

Every aspect of our life takes a different quality of energy. It is possible to stay sane and reclaim your life by paying attention to different dimensions of your energy and keeping these areas topped up healthily.

Check in with your own energy and rate how you are today in the following exercise.

Exercise

Personal Energy Audit

Give yourself a score from one to ten on each factor that indicates your current satisfaction in this area. One is low and ten is high. For each section you will get a maximum score of 60.



Physical Energy

- » As you go through your day, how would you rate your level of 'bounce' from lazy at the low end of the scale to full of beans at the top?
.....
- » Are you eating regular nutritious food every day and drinking plenty of water?
.....
- » Do you get as much sleep as you need? How would you rate the quality?
.....
- » Have you a way of getting regular exercise each week?
.....
- » Does your schedule build in time for you to relax with nothing you have to do?
.....
- » Can you get through the day without more than one cup of tea or coffee?
.....

Sub-total: __/60



Mental Energy

- » Does your work fully utilise your skills and talents?
.....
- » Are you enthusiastic about what you do and working in line with your personal priorities?
.....
- » Are you relatively free of anxiety as you go about your work rather than stressed or overwhelmed much of the time?
.....
- » Do you feel you are continually learning and growing?
.....
- » When faced with a shock, can you recover fast and turn it into an opportunity?
.....
- » Do you have engrossing hobbies that give you 'me time' and a complete break from work?
.....

Sub-total: __/60

(continued)



Emotional Energy

- » Do you feel that relationships with those around you are honest and respectful of you as an individual?
.....
- » Do you manage to stay centred and calm in the midst of conflict situations?
.....
- » Do you feel you can rise above feelings of guilt, fear and anger?
.....
- » Do you find it easy to say 'no' when someone asks you to do something that doesn't match what you want to do?
.....
- » Do you feel joyful and content most of the time?
.....
- » Do you recognise the triggers that can affect your change in mood?
.....

Sub-total: __/60



Purposeful Energy

- » Do you feel that you are spending your time on activities that are meaningful and useful?
.....
- » Do you have a sense of purposefulness as you go about your daily life?
.....
- » Do you connect with nature, the great outdoors on a regular basis?
.....
- » Are you clear on your values, what is really important to you?
.....
- » Do you have a sense of where you fit or contribute within a larger community of people?
.....
- » Are you comfortable that you can be yourself without undue concern for what other people think of you?
.....

Sub-total: __/60



How to use the audit

Each of the sections here relates to one of four key energy dimensions that we'll be exploring in the following chapters.

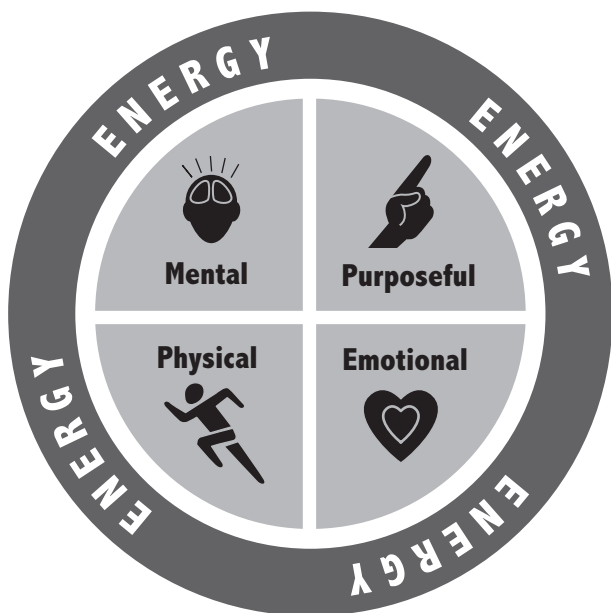
1. Physical
2. Mental
3. Emotional
4. Purposeful

Make a note of your scores for each section and make a diary note to come back to them in a few weeks' time to see how your energy is recovering as you put the ideas and exercises from the book into practice. Physical energy lays the foundation for your health and is the most ignored aspect of professionals' lives; this is the first area to look at. However, if your scores are low on one of the other dimensions, you might like to jump ahead to the appropriate chapter for inspiration before coming back to the physical aspects.

Four dimensions of energy

When we follow our energy intuitively and logically, we naturally shift to work that sings to our soul as well as loving the life that we create for ourselves. This doesn't mean to say it will be perfect all of the time, but at least we know where it has gone off track and what needs to happen for us to get focused once more on where we want to be.

The following chapters of the book address the four dimensions of energy.



- 1 **Physical energy:** It goes without saying that when we're well, we can conquer the world; we're buzzing, energetic, enthusiastic and attractive to others. Physical health is the foundation for life, and easy to take for granted until the body fails in some way. Without your health you're in trouble – you don't feel alive. Physical wellbeing starts by fuelling the body with good quality food and water that converts to energy. It involves taking sufficient exercise: relevant activities to strengthen muscles and good quality relaxation and sleep.
- 2 **Mental energy:** Mental energy relates to using your intellectual powers with the optimum level of variety and challenge. It's about recognising when you are in a state



of ‘flow’ that leaves you fully engrossed and content with the job in hand. To function at your mental best involves harnessing all parts of the brain – at both the conscious and unconscious level. When you give yourself ‘downtime’ with hobbies and interests that boost your creativity, you feed your ability to take on tough logical challenges too.

3 *Emotional energy:* Do your emotions govern you, or do you govern them? When we are emotionally strong, we have a highly tuned awareness of ourselves and what triggers our emotions. Equally, we are sensitive to the needs of others, and able to develop strong, empathic relationships. We are able to even out the peaks and troughs that form regular daily life.

4 *Purposeful energy:* Life without meaning and purpose becomes hard to sustain. Some people have a clear sense of direction and purpose; others know what feels right to them. Purposeful energy enables you to make meaning and connections in your life so that it feels ‘spirited’ and worthwhile. You know that you make a difference, just by being who you are.

YOU DESERVE PLAYTIME

When people talk about the happy times in their childhood, invariably we hear carefree stories of play and freedom, of playing outdoors in the street, the park, the fields and the beach. There’s a sense of excitement at being part of an engrossing world.

As we move into the world of work, initially full of enthusiasm, there comes a crunch time when we notice that the fun has stopped. In its place, the drudgery of delivering projects,



budgets or appraisals kicks in along with anxieties and the responsibility of working with people who behave badly or treat their colleagues as a robotic resource.

In the words of one colleague, Ian: 'It's the de-sensitisation that's hard to swallow.' After experiencing several takeover situations, he says: "The idea that customers are at the heart of what we do becomes a big lie as the systems no longer allow it. We have to tick the boxes for the systems first, and can't do the best thing or make the right decisions.'

At one time his life and work was completely entwined. 'I have worked in aggressive sales organisations that want the single-minded, focused, "get the deal" mindset, and that becomes a brutal existence to live with year in and year out.'

The loss of fun in the rough and tumble detracts from the reason why we chose to do the work we love or to be in that business in the first place. Work becomes a heavy burden, tiring to hold. The mentality kicks in that 'if it's not SERIOUS, then it's not real work.'

Thought provoker

One question to ask yourself to help open up a new quality to work is : 'Am I getting enough playtime?' When you look in your diary and identify the breaks, ask yourself: 'Where is the real fun here?' How much time out which is not task-focused do you get? Are you happy with what you see in your schedule? Have the hours devoted to work crept up on you or become so intense that there is no downtime?



Playtime for adults, as well as kids, is about having the space to fully enjoy the moment, to feel free right at your core. You know there are things you could always be doing elsewhere – jobs, chores or more work. Yet right now you're simply having fun being in the moment.

Happy workers make the day-to-day tasks fun in some way, so that the work flows easily and the pressure is lightened. You may choose to work long hours – that's less of a problem when there's humour and fun involved – but also recognise the need to take time out where no work is allowed in. We all need time with no email access or phone contact with clients; time to just hang out, listen to music, walk and read, do whatever we need for pure pleasure with no work agenda in mind.

Many dedicated professionals find it easier to allow others to play than to give themselves the permission to do so. 'I get paid a lot of money so it's OK for me to work long hours,' is a common message. These are often the same people who believe they deserve less time off than those who earn less than they do. If you're struggling to take time out for yourself, it's worth pausing to understand what it would take for you to give yourself permission to find that sense of space so essential to re-charge.

Do it today

Each day that Bev goes to work, she sees the reality of the length of a person's life; the physical evidence is there in front of her eyes, knowing that we all end up the same way in death. Bev's work is as a director in her family's funeral business. Her motto for living life is: 'Don't put things off.'



One of the reasons that she can handle clients' grief with sensitivity and respect is that she has strong boundaries around her work, and recognises that she cannot take ownership of other people's pain. She works four long days each week, takes one day off and books regular holidays; she gives herself permission to play. Unlike many business owners, she doesn't get so tied up in work that play gets lost. She loves parties, travel, sport, entertaining and her family life to the point that people are surprised when she tells them what her job is, dismissing the perception that you would have be a wizened elderly gentleman to be a funeral director. She recognises that: 'I couldn't do this job if I took it home with me.'

When at work, she gives her complete focus and professional attention to the job in hand. 'I give myself a few goals at a time, not massive ones, then concentrate on doing the important things today.'

As a working mother she says she inevitably has 101 things to do at work and another 101 at home. 'I really like to be busy and I'm not tolerant of anyone around me whingeing.' She applies the same 'can do' enthusiasm to hobbies like playing tennis or scuba diving. 'Whatever I do, I like to see progress, and I never give up, although contrary to most people, I like to start with the things I like doing most and that keeps me in a good mood.'

As adults we all need playtime to re-charge our batteries in comfort and peace without a care in the world. Our playtime is about a distinct space where our responsibilities can be set aside, where we can run free with a sense of the time-less joy in the moment.

Check out where in your life you can do this and with whom. Where do you truly laugh and giggle? Can you get this by simply walking in the park or by the river in your lunch break, packing a picnic lunch instead of eating a hasty sandwich at your desk, eating outside and feeling the sun or wind on your face? It costs us nothing but the willingness to



step for a period of time from the seriousness of our work to play.

Top tip

Block your playtime in your diary and keep it sacred: just like it was at school. Start with 15 minutes twice a day, every day, at a time that fits your schedule.

As we create more space, so we begin to break the pattern of long working hours that many professionals have got into. By shrinking the time spent on the less enjoyable parts of our work, we begin to change our relationship with it, enriching the experience and getting our lives back. It means that we re-focus on doing the right things, and evolve our work to make it a neater fit.

As you give yourself time to play more, to vent your creativity, and make this your focus, then the quality of your relationship with work changes – it becomes healthier and sustainable.

Dream jobs

The idea of more playtime appealed to John. His dream job would be to play sax in a band, yet he is committed to his formal job in hospital management which pays the mortgage. He builds two 15-minute slots dedicated to his music-making into each day. On some days that will be playing time, on others he'll walk outside the office and listen to the MP3 sound files he's recorded on his music player.

John's profile with his team changed as he revealed his musical talent. Recently, he surprised his team by playing the sax at an off-site team



building session and led by example, showing that he believed it's important to have other interests in your life than work.

In her role as a PA, Debbie dreams of the day when she'll be a published novelist. For now she's translating the stresses of train commuting to her advantage by building daily fantasies about fellow travellers into characters for her fiction. Her paid job has its uses, too, as she's developing her IT skills learning about blogging, twittering and websites, building a community of potential readers for her novels. She may never become a great novelist and that's not the point. Just for the moment she is allowing herself to have more fun.

Change often happens in small steps. Opportunities for a new dimension to your work begin by allowing more time to play.

LISTEN TO YOUR INTUITION

The business world thrives on detailed, logical thinking, precision and performance. Business dictates tangible results. So, we get caught up with a particular way of thinking about life – the ‘group think’ mentality of ‘This is how it has to be’ – that there is a real danger of burn-out from stress from intense and detailed work, as we'll see shortly in lawyer Steve's story and thousands like him.

The one person who can make the change is you and in order to open up choices for yourself, you need to be able to access more of yourself, the intuitive, creative parts that get lost because they are undervalued. Through the pages of this book I'll be encouraging you to find ways to access your true and authentic self, the part that hides in the shadows lost in the fray of work and a busy life.



Logic derives from conscious thinking while intuitive thinking accesses a much richer source of knowledge – your unconscious, sub-conscious or ‘other than conscious’ processing power.

Carl Jung described intuition as ‘perception via the unconscious’, suggesting that intuition bypasses our relatively slow conscious thinking processes and draws on everything that we have in our unconscious or subconscious mind in an instant. Just think that our knowledge, memories and experiences are there ready and waiting without us having to consciously remember them.

Jung also said that ‘intuition is the ability to perceive possibilities, implications and principles without the burden of detail’. So our intuition works with the big picture – our hopes and dreams – leaving the practical details for our conscious minds to figure out. For those who need detail plus hard facts and figures to back up an argument, it’s hard to follow a ‘hunch’.

The business world trains us on the logical path, yet entrepreneurial businesses value the intuitive dimension of listening to the gut reaction. Similarly, in designing the course of our own lives, when we find ways to step beyond the dominance of logic and notice the additional messages from the more creative part of ourselves, we are likely to be more ‘successful’ in living lives that fit us better.

Opening up possibilities

Creative sessions that involve art, drama, storytelling, humour, yoga, meditation, music and dance open us up to



new possibilities. For example, in her workshops on 'The Art of Intuition' Angela O'Connell encourages people to play with paint on wet art paper, choosing the colours that appeal and dropping some amounts of colour onto the page and allowing whatever needs to emerge, to come. The act of painting quietens the logical mind and participants are able to interpret their art to get new information on their life direction. Once the paint has settled, she invites participants to talk about the personal meaning they take from their paintings.

By taking part in one of Angela's workshops, I realised I wanted to take people out of their normal working environments to retreats and events that gave them time to think clearly. Another participant decided he would base his family and business from his holiday home in Turkey where he now has several wonderful holiday properties.

By not being open to his intuition, lawyer Steve felt he paid the price of losing three years of his life: 'I was so caught up in the system and busy doing work to keep others happy that I didn't pay any attention to the gut message. In fact I didn't want to hear it. After all, how could I tell my family or boss that I wasn't coping?'

Intuition is a gift that allows us to pay attention to what's working or not and find our natural wisdom. Fear of making changes or upsetting others can get in the way. Being over-busy limits the quality of our experience and defeats the objectives we're trying to achieve.

The power of the unconscious mind is so much greater than the conscious mind.



TECHNOLOGY - FROM FRIEND TO FOE

Ostensibly technology improves the quality of our work and lives. We are beeped and tweeted, pinged, nudged and mailed, as well as phoned on our PCs, mobiles and land-lines. Twenty years ago, the workplace was full of physical mail trays overloaded with paper: today, it's a novelty to receive a business letter. In my roles in the IT industry, I spent years telling customers how technology could solve their problems and extolled the virtues of connecting with the world. 'Ha, ha,' we joked that people would even be accessible in the bathroom; today such constant accessibility is true and beyond a joke.

It's a fine line that tips our work from exciting and purposeful activity into addiction. Technology does not always do us a favour.

Switched off

Steve was on a top talent career ladder in a law firm where the pressure was on to take on heavy long-term case loads. After three years on one case, he reached the point where he felt he had to check and answer email and text messages from his divisional partner from the time he woke up until the time he went to bed. A single man, living alone, he had no-one to share cooking with and was living on a diet of orange juice, chocolate, grapes and take-away burgers.

He felt nauseous with worry when he couldn't get through his work in regular hours and was overcome with sheer panic. Often the time between switching off the PC until turning it back on shrank to four hours, and he was accessible online for the other 20 hours. Bombarded by messages that requested action from his boss, he had become the proverbial 'worker ant'.



Like so many in that situation, he was the last person to realise how the situation had got out of hand until, taking a rare weekend off to visit his brother, he collapsed with stomach pains and exhaustion. 'I forgot how to switch off, and only learnt the hard way how important this is.'

The price we pay for connections

Technology makes the world a smaller place and we've bought into it at a price. The price we pay is to be continually distracted and interrupted (if we allow it). There's even a new field of knowledge known as 'interruption science.' For all our smart devices and connections, our attention is fragmented and our focus on one thing at a time is completely lost.

According to Gloria Mark, a leader in this field, the average knowledge-worker – that is, someone whose work is based on intellectual ability – switches task every three minutes and, once distracted, that worker takes nearly 30 minutes to get back to the original task. So the impact on the professionals who are making decisions that affect all of us – from our pension funds to the drugs we take – is massive. No wonder people feel frustrated, pressured and stressed out.

To think creatively and intelligently, we need non-interrupted time, and that time is under threat in our digital age. It's up to us to use technology intelligently as our support system without allowing it to drive us. Taking time out without phones and computers is a massive challenge for those of us used to being connected. When the online connections go down or our mobile phones get lost, how bereft can we feel?



FIND PEACE AND FREEDOM

Achieving a strong and constant sense of control over our lives is impossible when the world around us is changing all the time. The thousands of hours I've spent listening to people have taught me that, ultimately, what people want is a sense of peace and the personal freedom to make the right choices concerning how they live and what they do – for themselves, their families, and their colleagues. These are fundamental values for the hardest working person.

The call of the sea

As a manager in a Financial Services business, Jan told me through our coaching work that he'd often felt a sense of frustration with the systems at work, where he dreams of chucking in his job and opening a surf shack in Cornwall. Part of him yearns for the freedom and simplicity that the beach and sea bring.

Yet as we explored that real possibility – what would happen if he did this – he decided that a major relocation wouldn't bring him the satisfaction he gets from his work: he'd get bored with salt and sand.

Like so many over-stretched, high achievers, Jan survived from one holiday to the next. It's an all too familiar tale, to be on a treadmill with relentless deadlines – always another client whose urgent project demands working into the evening and weekends. Holidays were his only times to switch off and have fun. Life can go on hold for nearly fifty weeks of the year in the 'busyness' of making a living.

As he dreamt of escaping the business world and the sea beckoned, I invited him to become curious about how he could bring more of this dream world into his everyday work and life so that he could reclaim his life rather than walking away from all the knowledge and people



skills he had invested in. How could he enrich his work, making it fun and rewarding, and a great place to be for all?

Over the period of a year, Jan cultivated a greater sense of freedom in his day-to-day life. Now he's adopted rituals each week that include checking that his diary has space for him to enjoy simpler pleasures. He pays attention to his energy levels and knows what triggers a dip, reminding himself of the choices he has made and approaching each day with gratitude for the adventure.

He's changed his physical working and home environment to create lighter spaces with neutral walls, natural woods and stunning images of favourite surf beaches. His diet has lightened up too and he's building team walks by the river for thinking time and team meetings. In January, he books regular long weekends for the family throughout the year at surfing locations in the UK and abroad.

SANITY AS YOU GO

You can create sanity instead of slavery in your work and have a smoother time as you go. The choice is not between working and not working, yet it does mean some tough thinking about what is truly important to you and letting go of things you'd still like to do in order to evolve the way you work. Work sanity is about continually fine tuning and making choices that are right for you and your situation today.

There is no single easy or magic plan to increase the levels of happiness you feel in your life and work. Your life situation is unique to you and you may well feel stretched or confused by the choices you have to make when you want to have and do it all. What is most important is to listen to yourself from the inside as well as to the external signals



from friends and family, colleagues, clients and bosses. Allow sanity to prevail.

Achieving a balance between your professional and private life is a misnomer; life is a mix, a blend, a long-term relationship that accommodates aspects of you and your changing needs and those of others. Only you can manage this relationship for yourself in your own delightful way.