

The background features a network of red and black lines connecting various circular nodes of different sizes. Some nodes are solid, while others are hollow or have a gradient. Dashed lines also crisscross the background, creating a sense of movement and connectivity. The overall aesthetic is clean, modern, and tech-oriented.

# ESCAPING AVERAGE

18 Tips to **Spark Positive  
Momentum** And Transform  
Your Life

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## Chapter 2

### INTELLECT - OPTIMIZE YOUR THOUGHTS

*“We are our thoughts. We cannot change anything if we cannot change our thinking.” – Unknown*

In this chapter, we are going to talk about your mental state as it affects your life. Our brains are incredibly complex and control your entire life. They have such an impact on the quality of your life, and your thoughts dictate much of your happiness. The human brain is capable of much more than we realize, and it's vital to our fulfillment that we nourish it in the best ways possible.

Have you ever heard the phrase mind over matter? Mental health affects your ability to enjoy your life. Your mind has a significant impact on your life and how you choose to live it. Your mental attitude toward the world plays such a large role that it affects how you interact with people, the choices you make, and what you ultimately decide to do with your life.

Your mental fortitude is what separates successful people from everyone else. It's how Roger Bannister ran the first four minute mile in 1954 when humankind thought it was impossible. It's how ultra-marathoners run 100 miles and entrepreneurs succeed after countless failed attempts. Your mental state determines your drive and how you take action. Your mind has an absolute power that you do not realize until you nourish it properly.

Research shows there is a tendency for people to be happier if they focus on good past experiences and transform negative ones into a more positive light. Dwelling on anything negative in your life will be sure to affect your attitude in the world. You can focus on the negative and be unhappy, or you can look at the positive in each and every situation and train your brain to think this way. You will feel happier when you are in control of your emotional state.

A study by Cornell University researchers found that spending money for an experience can improve well-being. It notes that volunteering can boost one's level of happiness. Other tips include spending less time on online social networks, praying with other people, and practicing gratitude. (Saunders 132-133.)

Let's discuss three ways in which you can feel more mentally fulfilled right now.

## **Gratitude**

*“Acknowledging the good that you already have in your life is the foundation for all abundance.” ~Eckhart Tolle*

Thanksgiving is a time every November in which Americans gather together with loved ones to celebrate all the good in their lives. This holiday is based on a couple key things: lots of food and gratitude. Why does this holiday only denote one day out of the entire year to be thankful? The simple act of thankfulness can have profound effects on your mental state.

A research study conducted by Eastern Washington University in 2015 tested the effectiveness of a week-long daily gratitude 3-blessing treatment. They found that this gratitude treatment enhanced well-being and also continued to increase well-being after the treatment was over. “The study showed people who practiced gratitude daily, remembered positive memories more easily. Gratitude exercises such as this may train cognitive biases that are healthy for your satisfaction in life.”

This exercise is so incredibly simple and effective and can have numerous positive impacts on your life. We are naturally inclined to want more. This is the way humans are built because it is essentially a survival mechanism. In the days of our ancestors, wanting more meant more clothing, more shelter, and more food to get through the winter. Today, this wanting curse has gotten out of hand.

We default into constant dissatisfaction with life because if we just had that ONE more thing, then we'd be happy. We want to meet that special person, get a bigger house, make more money, get a promotion, have better body, longer hair, etc., and the list goes on and on and on.

When you do get that thing you've been wanting, you are still left feeling unsatisfied. Why? Simply because you can always have more. If you have ever suffered from this wanting phenomenon, you are not alone. Everyone feels this way at some point. It isn't necessarily a bad thing because you can achieve enormous amounts of success with this thinking. However the problem lies in which it has become a way to delay happiness and satisfaction in life.

After your basic needs are met, it is up to you to decide whether or not you are grateful for what you do have. You have many things to be grateful for, despite all the

hardships you may be facing. Everyone has something to be grateful for. Everyone has something that other people want. Everyone is given a gift. This is just the way the world works. Remember that.

The ability to see the beauty in your life versus the darkness is going to have such a positive effect on your fulfillment. When you wake up and are simply thankful for a new day and a new chance at life, your attitude shifts. You are happier and deal with stress in a more constructive manner. Believe it or not, life becomes easier for you.

Wake up each day, and ask yourself three things you are grateful for in your life. Put a sticky note on your bathroom mirror reminding you to ask yourself this question first thing in the morning, perhaps while you are brushing your teeth or getting ready for your day.

It could be as simple as being thankful for the sun shining outside or getting a brand new day. Whatever you are thankful for, remind yourself every single day. You may even want to keep a gratitude journal and write your blessings down. After doing this consistently for a few days, your brain will become more aware to the positive in your life rather than always defaulting to the negative.

## **Give**

*“Let us not be satisfied with just giving money. Money is not enough, money can be got, but they need your hearts to love them. So spread your love everywhere you go.”*  
~Mother Theresa

“We as human beings are called to be in community with each other.” Chris Woodard is the Director of Mission at Valley Presbyterian Church in Phoenix, AZ. He meets people in the community, identifies needs that they have, and links them with people from the church who can help them. They work locally, nationally, and internationally to see how they can impact our world.

Woodard says, “There’s a direct correlation between my work in the community and the fulfillment I feel in my life. As we’re becoming more advanced in technology, we’re becoming global citizens. We’re in a unique position now in our lives where we can be in local settings as well as global settings.”

The mission work his church does includes everything from education and medical needs to compassion needs. They work in a variety of programs including Family

Promise, which helps recently homeless families transition into jobs and housing. Mentor Kids is an after school reading and homework club to help students who have fallen behind on their education to get back on track. They help a local Navajo Elementary School collect school supplies and make sure no student goes hungry over the weekend.

Internationally, they work with Ministry of Hope in Malawi, Africa, which provides twenty-five hundred orphans food at six different feeding centers during the lean season. They provide mobile medical clinics in the village and two crisis nurseries for babies whose mothers have passed away. They also provide educational opportunities for teenagers in Malawi and teach sustainability via farming techniques.

“Personally, I feel a calling to engage in the lives of other people and help out. When I’m able to be a part of their lives, I feel complete as a person. We’re relational people. There’s an inherent connection people have toward each other. I believe it’s good for people to get involved in each other’s lives when it’s done well and right. It’s something we as people need and crave.

“When I’ve been able to identify and engage in something I feel called to be a part of with a purpose behind it, I feel really fulfilled as a person. It brings me joy, happiness, and contentment. Being a part of something bigger than yourself is helpful in your development as a person.

“Each person has a different purpose when it comes to service; it may not just be working with other people. It could be building or creating something. When people can identify what that purpose is in their life, something that’s outside of themselves in their community, that’s where the joy and fulfillment comes from.

“Challenge yourself to look outside and see if there is something you can get involved in. Be bold. Try something out. Even though we have the ability to communicate like never before, it also can allow people to become isolated.

“Pay attention to what’s going on in your specific community and look outside your day to day activities. Try serving at a soup kitchen, volunteering at a homeless shelter, or in an after school program for kids. Give something a try, and if you do, you’ll eventually find what that purpose is. Don’t be content with just living your ordinary life. Stay involved.

“You can see amazing things happen when people are committed to weekly service.

When you can really invest in something, even just for an hour a week and stay connected with that for about a year or so, you can begin to see people flourish in that.

“You have to be intentional about serving your community and make it a part of who you are. If you do it once a month, that’s great, but when you are able to do things more frequently, such as once a week, it really can become a part of your life. It could be as simple as working with a student at the local elementary school, reading with them for a half an hour a week, and seeing where that relationship goes.

“Sometimes people get intimidated because we as culture are a culture of soundbites. You’ll hear of a person who did this really incredible thing, like they built an orphanage in Chile. You think to yourself, ‘I don’t know how to do that, so I’m not going to do anything.’

“However, if people can just get continuously involved in something simple, there is huge power in that. I’ve seen return in people’s lives, both in the people who are serving as well as the people being served. Don’t feel like you have to do something extravagant. Do something that’s reachable and attainable in your community, and stick with it.

“I’ve seen most growth in people who were a little nervous at first in getting involved with something, whether it was mentoring with a child or serving in a homeless shelter. When they did it once, they got past that initial difficulty and fear of it. Then they did it again and again, and it got easier. Then, it became a part of who they were. It became second nature for them.

“I’ve been able to see how people have grown through investment in each other and community. People change because it forces you to be a part of your community outside of yourself. You grow as a person. It’s neat to see.

“We are people, and we need to be in connection with each other, especially with people who are different than ourselves. It’s easy for us to stay associated with people like us. That’s well and good. But when people are able to work across cultures, socioeconomic lines, or even age lines, real growth happens.

“We as people are designed to engage in that. When we do, we grow as people, and we learn a lot more about ourselves and what it means to be in real community with our world.”

The work Chris does involves in large part giving to others in his community. He

doesn't just give money and food, but he gives his time with purpose. Giving to others can greatly affect your mental state.

In an article in the *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, researchers conducted a study on spending money and happiness (Aknin & Norton, 41-47). They found that how people spend their money matters for their happiness. "These experimental studies show those who spend money on others report a greater sense of happiness." The rewards can be seen both in the brain and the body. Giving actually enriches the reward centers of your brain.

Have you ever met someone who is constantly giving or volunteering their time? Someone who finds pure joy in helping others and making them feel good? Giving is incredibly important to our well-being.

If you've ever received incredible pleasure from giving to someone, whether it be a family member, friend, or complete stranger, you too have experienced this feeling of elation. Giving to someone else and helping someone fulfill an unmet need causes our mental state to achieve an incredible sense of warmth and glow.

Giving has outstanding effects, especially when you know it made the person feel good. You alone put a smile on someone's face. At the end of the day, it doesn't matter what you have if you don't share it with anyone. As Chris mentioned, giving can involve a variety of different forms.

People seem to think they don't have anything to give, and this simply isn't the case. Examples of giving can include:

- \* Buying the person behind you coffee at Starbucks
- \* Writing a letter to someone you love about what you admire about them
- \* Putting a note on someone's car telling them they are beautiful
- \* Sharing your lunch with someone
- \* Buying your friend's movie ticket
- \* Giving a homeless person a packed lunch instead of spare change
- \* Volunteering your time
- \* Putting a smile on someone else's face in any way you can

A good friend of mine recently had to do community service for a traffic violation. She found a program in Washington DC that mentors women who were recently incarcerated and are trying to get back on their feet. She said even after her community

service hours were met, that she continues to mentor a girl in the program because she truly enjoyed the time they spent together. She says it makes her feel good when she knows spending as little as an hour per week with her mentee can make such an impact in both of their lives. Her life has more meaning because of this simple act of kindness.

In a world controlled by money, power, and greed, sometimes it's easy to forget the good, selfless people in this world. So many people are willing to give selflessly to others because it's important that we help one another and relate with each other.

No one ever got anywhere without the help of another. No one. Giving opens up this new experience and shifts your perspective. When you realize the world isn't just about your happiness, but also about helping others achieve their happiness, this comes back to you tenfold. Just as Chris who makes his life's mission to help others, being in a community contributes immensely to your growth.

So GIVE. Give today. Give Tomorrow. Give the next day. See how it changes your life.

## **Learn**

*“Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.”*  
*Mahatma Gandhi*

There comes a time in your life when you are no longer forced to learn. This typically ends after school. Learning at this point becomes voluntary. It becomes a choice, a choice that far too many people forego.

Learning begins after you end formal education because you are in control of what you want to learn. You are no longer restricted to textbooks and school curriculums and can actually choose what topics interest you. So why do so many people choose not to learn anything again in their life?

Learning takes effort. It requires work. It requires you to read a book instead of watching TV. Just as with anything in your life, achieving true fulfillment isn't the easy path. It is, however, the most rewarding path. By reading this book, you are already taking action to learn and grow more as an individual, so you have already surpassed those who don't make this choice.

There is an endless amount of available information about every topic imaginable. If

you want to learn how to cook, there are thousands of books, blogs, and YouTube videos available at your fingertips. The same goes for learning about cars, investment accounts, relationships, etc.

Average people stop learning when they don't have to. They go to work, watch TV, and never open a single book. You are not average. You are better than average because you made a choice to learn more by reading this book. You've decided to take action on your life because you want more for yourself.

So many people rely on the mainstream media to tell them everything they "need" to know about life and the world. This is what average people do. They don't seek to find the truth. Instead, they trust the media who only filters the information they want you to know.

Because our world runs on money and power, the information you're fed every day isn't necessarily in your best interest. It's in the best interest of those trying to make more money and have control. Therefore, it is up to you to learn from credible sources if you truly want to maximize your fulfillment. It's your life, and you have to choose what information you wish to feed your brain.

Other sources of information in the form of books, podcasts, webinars, and blogs are completely free from media restrictions. This is where you can actively seek out valuable information on any topic you wish from experts in the field and people who devote their life to growing in a certain area. If you want to know more about investing, for example, you can seek out books from Warren Buffet, one of the most successful investors in the world.

What's the point of learning? You have already decided that you don't want to lead the life of an average Joe Schmo. You want more from your life. You want greater freedom, fulfillment, and happiness.

This is where learning comes into play. No one knows everything. People have to start from somewhere, and books are usually the best resource. When you engage in constant learning, your mind continues to expand and grow. I believe self-education is the greatest precursor to life advancement.

If you choose not to learn, you won't have a knowledge base for further improving your life. You will know what everybody else is told to do: go to college, get a 9 to 5, get married, have kids, obtain a mortgage, eat fast food, pay for cable, and watch the news.

These are some of the tips mainstream society tells you for living your life.

Engaging in the latter isn't a bad thing, but do you think ultra-successful people follow the status quo? Absolutely not. They choose their own path. They choose self-education. Strive to be more than mediocre. Strive to be excellent. This is the only path to ultimate fulfillment.

After graduating from college, I never read anything. I thought it wasn't important anymore. I was finally done with school and didn't have to open another book again. Over time, I became bored. My mind didn't feel stimulated. I didn't feel like I was progressing in any way.

One day, I stepped into the bookstore and picked up two books on self-development and nutrition. They changed my life. I became hungry for information. I became hungry for learning. I began learning about numerous topics, which has laid the foundation for this book. I have spent hundreds of hours and read countless books on fulfillment and how to achieve more out of life.

Learning will do the same for you. Today it is incredibly easy and convenient to obtain new information. I challenge you to learn something new every day. Instead of listening to music on your commute to work, find a podcast or audiobook to listen to.

Find motivational speakers such as Tony Robbins and consume your head with positive uplifting content. Read inspirational quotes. When you are inspired a little bit each day, it can jump start your life. Your brain will default into positive thoughts instead of negative mental blocks. Your thoughts have an effect on your life. Choose them wisely.

Pick a valuable topic and immerse yourself in it for one month. Let's say you want to learn more about living a healthy lifestyle. Find an interesting educational podcast that you can listen to on your drive to work. Find a blog, and subscribe to their email list for healthy recipes. Read a book on health by reading a little bit each day.

Note how much you've learned by the end of the month and what changes you were able to implement in your own life because of it. Set goals for yourself to always learn. When you learn a little bit each day, you will be amazed at much you've learned over the course one month, three months, or even after a year.

Pick a new topic each month or each quarter, and learn as much as possible. You

won't believe how stimulated your brain will be and how you can learn so much in such little time. We need a healthy mix of stability and variety. Learning adds variety to your life, which is a human need.

### **Give it a Try - 30 Day Intellectual Challenge**

1. Write down 3 things you're grateful for - try to keep them different every day
  
2. Give to someone every day. Examples:
  - \* Give a thank you note
  - \* Write a letter to a dear friend
  - \* Call your parents and tell them you love them
  - \* Buy a stranger a cup of coffee
  - \* Pack a lunch for a homeless person
  - \* Let someone cut in front of you in line
  - \* Give a flower to a little girl
  - \* Give anything you can to make someone smile
  
3. Pick a topic and find a podcast to listen to every day. I recommend Tony Robbins for incredible motivation and inspiration

#### **BONUS TIPS:**

- \* Learn a new hobby
- \* Take a free educational class on iTunes University

We learned about our mental state and how our thoughts and emotions can affect our day-to-day living. We discussed gratitude, serving others, and learning continuously to keep our brains developing and alert.

By engaging in these actions, you will achieve great intellectual fulfillment. Now that we've touched on our inner being in terms of body and mind, let's move onto our physical bodies to see how we can efficiently take care of our health for optimal living.