Principles

Of

Performance and Control

Using Psychology to Manage Change and Maintain Performance

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Principles of Performance and Control

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I trust that these principles will help you to achieve your dreams.

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Preface

This book intends to provide as much impact as succinctly as possible. In many ways, this is the book that I wish I had been given many years ago. It seems that while knowledge is plentiful, the information often feels disjointed and with missing links. I hope to reveal the relevant pieces concisely and cohesively, and in a digestible way that can be immediately applied to your life.

Understanding the principles of performance and control have been the cornerstone to my life's work. These truths have acted as guiding principles whether it's with my loved ones, in a psychotherapeutic or psychological space, or in an advisory meeting with an organization. I have seen these truths help individuals, business leaders, and organizations to grow to their full potential. I firmly believe that life's truths are often easy to grasp, yet difficult to fully execute. Even when we try to better ourselves with the help of professional or self-help tools, we can feel as if the information is scattered about and is rarely ever pieced together. One of the biggest issues we face within a technologically advanced society is that information and data is prevalent, but much of it has not been sorted through for efficacy.

I have heard many times how life is overwhelming: failure feels inevitable, and should you find success, it feels short-lived. Most people have very clear visions of what they want, but aspects of change and adversity very easily distract them from remaining focused on further development. Resilience in the face of change and adversity can feel difficult amidst co-

occurring mental health struggles, and various other internal and external barriers.

It became apparent to me that this book was not only necessary, first and foremost for my personal use, but also for my clients and organizations. Without an understanding of how to regain control amidst change, which seemingly a lot of us unknowingly lack, we will never achieve sustainable performance. Without a strong foundation of skills to assert control in adaptive ways, adversity may feel insurmountable rather than difficult but manageable. I hope you view this book as a starting point to a life full of greater learning with a positioning towards ongoing progression.

This book represents thousands of hours culminated through mentorship (thank you most greatly to my mentor Karen Carr), two Master's degrees, psychological practice, owning and operating organizations, and advising boiled into 98 pages. To have all of what I've learned in one succinct space is nothing short of rewarding.

This book is based on psychological principles that work to manage change more effectively through actionable steps. When applied, one can expect to experience performance that is more efficient, productive, and sustainable.

Once integrated, the outlined principles will change how you respond to some of life's most difficult situations. Part 1 is the groundwork of psychology, and Part 2 is the teachings turned into principles. These principles suggest that you can manage change by learning to regain control and that it's possible to have more control than you might even be aware of. The book closes with an in-depth Executive Summary,

allowing for the book's most valuable points to coexist in conclusion.

These principles have directed me in each area of my life. I trust that these principles will allow you to begin to move past barriers and towards a more sustainable level of performance. After all, if we can manage change and remain in control, then we can ultimately perform better in our lives.

Introduction

What if the things that previously have taken power from you no longer existed? The things that distract and slow you are no longer impenetrable obstacles you must confront. That the things that have historically limited you from reaching your full potential become smaller in size. Wouldn't something like this be worthwhile to learn and absorb?

We face situations with perceived or real powerlessness on a regular basis as a mere reality of being human. Whether it be people requesting our time and attention or personal insecurities lending themselves to a sense of powerlessness, we're constantly in this dance of trying to get ahead but never fully catching up. This experience is only magnified as we acquire and take on more responsibilities and lead more people.

If you were able to regain control from the things that have historically stolen it, I would assume much of your current stressors would drastically decrease. Maybe this would allow for greater productivity at work, more presence as a parent, or just create an increased sense of internal peace. At the very least, it's possible that your overall interactions would be more thoughtful, and your actions would be more intentional.

If you're someone that feels as if you're out-of-control, whether it's due to mental illness or life's innate challenges and stressors, let's commit to regaining control through concrete steps. I promise that this process is possible. Consider the life narrative you currently hold: does it tell the story of

unmanageable and chronically unresolved difficulties, or rather challenges that you will in fact be able to navigate? Does it tell the story of an individual who has surrendered to life's adversity, or one who understands the guaranteed complexities of life and chooses to still confront them regardless?

It is possible to find a sustainable solution, but it requires a willingness to identify current limiting beliefs, unlearn past reinforced habits, and move towards continuous progress. The truths listed in this book are perhaps easy to understand yet take consistent effort to fully integrate into one's professional and/or personal life.

This book is the answer to the question that I've been asked many times in the past that goes something like: *"I've got so many difficult things happening all at once, what can I actually do?"*

In many ways, this book is the answer to this question. Yet, the answer itself is not a magic pill of quickly digestible information. Anything worth understanding is likely to take time and energy. This book is for individuals who seek to manage change and adversity more effectively, and as a byproduct, encounter greater control and performance.

Whether you are a spouse, a business leader, a parent, or a self-development junkie, I am confident that the words contained in this book will feel and be applicable. It's also likely that the mindset shift you experience will work to positively impact those surrounding you. Even as one individual learns, grows, transitions, and evolves, the entire system changes as well. Though the principles in this book do not guarantee short-term comfort, the long-term results are certainly worth this learning process.

The principles set forth in this book have changed my life and that of my clients. Put effort into absorbing this information and enjoy the results. I'm excited for you to join me in what has been so helpful for me to learn.

PART ONE

Psychology Overview

An Intro to Anxiety

Anxiety manifests as we come in contact with certain triggering, activating, or unpleasant internal or external stimuli. It is most often revealed during times of change and adversity, or when we lack information (and certainty) alongside an increase in pressure. Anxiety is a byproduct of facing the unknowns, vague or absent predictions, and perceived and/or real loss of control. The experience of anxiety is an innate aspect of the human experience, and therefore is impossible to eliminate. Rather the goal is to approach anxiety with a level of openness (despite the discomfort it may produce), curiosity (despite the urge to immediately rid oneself of it), and ultimately, the desire to manage versus "fix" it.

Imagine the Whac-a-Mole game we're likely to run into at a carnival or arcade. The premise: plastic moles pop out of various holes, and you're tasked with hitting their heads with a mallet until they retreat. It's simultaneously quite fun and quite frustrating. Anxiety can feel like a never-ending game of Whac-a-Mole, in that once we've dealt with one mole, or one worry, we're left confronting five others that all sprung up in unison. Hitting anxious thoughts in the form of little plastic moles can feel like an infinite endeavor. We'll address this question throughout the next few chapters: what if instead of squashing the anxious thoughts, we learned to manage their existence?

What if, instead of seeking and applying quick fixes, we sought out long-term solutions?

When we face internal and proximal stressors within ourselves, or external and distant stressors in our environment, our bodies and minds innately respond. Maybe you seek reassurance or certainty as you're trying to control a mind that is involuntarily racing; or perhaps your body alerts you through a racing heart, dizziness, or impaired focus. External stimulus is the "thing" itself: the quickly approaching deadline, the purchase of a home, the presentation you're reluctantly giving to your entire team, the first date you're about to go on. Internal stimulus, in contrast, is often the meaning we assign to the external stressor. This might expose itself as internalized unhelpful beliefs about oneself *("I am and have always been inadequate")* or attaching a disproportionately unpleasant emotion to an otherwise neutral task or situation. In other words, we may internally over-exaggerate the difficulty or complexity of a task and enter a state of self-inflicted anxiety as a result.

As we discuss anxiety, we also must consider the way the very experience and management of it has evolved over time. Our ancestors may not necessarily have used the word "anxiety," but certainly experienced it as they were thrust into their survival instincts. Anxiety might have presented itself in the form of a threat to their community as another tribe attempted to seize their land, food shortages, or cold winters without adequate shelter. To survive, our ancestors had to confront their anxieties directly, often requiring effort, energy, and potential risk and danger.

While we are not necessarily in constant contact of life-threatening dangers as our ancestors were, we remain on the

lookout for threats. However, our society today provides the technology, media outlets, and plentiful supplies of other distractions to passively approach anxiety versus managing and reducing it in the way our ancestors were forced to. I'm getting ahead of myself here. This book wouldn't be complete without addressing avoidance as an ineffective means to manage anxiety, which we'll get to shortly. Back to anxiety itself.

How often have you been told to "calm down" when you're anxious? That you should just relax and "stop feeling so anxious?" Does this actually help? While it's a well-intended suggestion, it proves to be ineffective. The advice insinuates that "stopping" anxiety is like holding one's breath: one can be done instantaneously through a quick finger-inflicted nose plug, while the other requires more time, energy, and practice. Many of the recommendations related to anxiety are to "stop" the anxiety altogether, rather than effectively move through it and manage it. The suggestion to "calm down" also indirectly implies that you don't possess the capacity to sift through unpleasant emotions, which is ultimately unhelpful and defeating. The advice to "relax" and to "stop feeling" perpetuates the idea that the expression and experience of anxiety should be constricted; that while feeling anxious is valid and common, one should only be anxious so long as it doesn't impede another person's experience or become "excessive."

This gets additionally tricky when you get a collection of people together in a team or organization dealing with internal and external stressors. These situations lead to high levels of attrition, decreased innovation and growth, and certainly decreased efficiency. What if we viewed anxieties as an opportunity for growth and increased self-understanding, rather than

something to fix? Consider symptoms of anxiety as your body's internal warning system asking us overtly, *"how do you plan to respond?"* We, unfortunately, do not possess the ability to completely alter our environment to be one that is free from adversity; rather, we can learn to effectively respond to and navigate difficult situations while simultaneously regaining control. We cannot modify our personal or work environment to be free from challenging tasks and pressure-inducing projects; however, we can develop an internal system to effectively navigate all the stressors that work occasionally has to offer.

Anxiety is not meant to numb out from, but rather to deliberately confront. As you experience the discomfort of change and anxiety, move towards a mindset of management versus disregard. To be alive is to feel some level of anxiety. To thrive is to learn how to manage it, especially in the midst of pressure. Accepting that anxiety is an inevitable part of being human ironically allows for more control. Acceptance of anxiety opens mental space to consider whether the emotion itself could be communicating or indicating a need. Anxiety may be communicating that your balance feels threatened and you need to create a greater sense of stability, that the current situation feels similar to a traumatic or painful experience from the past and you need to reestablish safety, or that you're facing an important decision and you need to slow down and obtain more data before making it. As you consider this, keep in mind that anxiety is not always the best conveyor of truth depending on a variety of factors, namely that we may have a hypersensitive threat system. In other words, one can feel the emotion of fear without realistically being in immediate or real danger.

What would happen if you or an entire organization, or even an entire community had this mindset? That the anxiety felt could serve to communicate vital information, and indicate a need? For example, company-wide felt anxiety as a result of unexpected systemic changes is not necessarily an enjoyable experience; however, it can prove to elicit a "coming together" of various teams to ensure smoother, more cohesive, and more successful management and hopeful resolution. The anxiety many of us felt throughout the global pandemic of 2020 as our home became our office could indicate a need to restructure workplace culture to create greater support and increased opportunities to virtually connect. This would truly be a culture change that would allow people to be mission focused, agile, and committed to forward movement. Sounds like a unicorn.

As we enter this next chapter, reflect on the concept of a dialectic, where two seemingly conflicting ideas can be present at the same time. This is a paradox for most people as we often think that there is a singular experience, feeling, thought, or truth at any given time. While contradictory, these two experiences can in fact occur simultaneously.

Consider the following as truths:
- One can feel terrified of change, *and* still intentionally move towards it.

- One can desire to avoid, *while simultaneously* desiring to proceed forward.

- One can have pre-formed thoughts, *while actively* inviting new thoughts in.

- One can hate the experience of anxiety, *while also* feeling a level of compassion and curiosity towards and for it.

An Intro to Control

T he way in which we manage our emotions and stress is automatically revealed when we're confronted with pressure inflicted either from the self or others. Internal and/or external pressure is likely to accompany the experience of change and adversity. Pressure can sound like: *"this must be completed perfectly, or it's bound to result in failure."* Pressure can look like a micromanaging boss, requesting hour logs that clearly document your minute-to-minute work. Pressure can feel like you're trapped in a pool of unrealistic expectations, and the ladder to get out is miles away. It's in these moments and situations that we can learn to rebuild our relationship with anxiety, and as a byproduct, more effectively control our responses to pressure. Developing an effective level of control allows us to manage emotions while experiencing adversity, change, and various systems of pressure in consistent, predictable, and adaptive ways.

As you confront challenges, consider whether you accept them, despite the likely discomfort involved, or resist them with every ounce of effort. While resistance and avoidance of course, provide immediate relief, the initial stimulus and stressor itself will likely become more intense, and the avoidance behavior is likely to be reinforced. You've just confirmed that it is, in fact too scary, too difficult, and too uncomfortable to navigate. We continue to behave in the same way

over time if we consistently receive a "positive reward," and in this case, an "immediate fix." It makes sense that we might be less-than-thrilled to begin using new skills and interventions and adopt a new perspective regarding anxiety management if there is not yet a proven reward system.

The fundamental principles I use within my work of scaling organizations are in some ways modified and "transferred" as I also step into my other role as a Psychotherapist in my clinical practice. I work with individuals suffering from severe and complex anxiety. My clients often feel trapped by their mind, as it tells them what they can and cannot do (i.e., Agoraphobia, OCD, and Phobias). They're confronted with decreased quality of life and increased general distress. The clients I work with feel controlled by a narrative whose author is Anxiety which is reinforced by both internal and external responses. They feel fused and attached to a story that creates significant limitations and impairment in the way they move about the world and view themselves.

My clinical work with clients involves Prolonged Exposure and Response Prevention techniques, which essentially "forces" an individual to directly confront their anxieties and fears. With regular, deliberate, and gradually more intense exposures, the intended purpose of exposure is to desensitize an individual to their feared stimuli, and form a more neutral and Adaptive response to it. We work collaboratively so that the fears that once "paralyzed" them are in fact surmountable, and that the loss of control they once felt is reclaimed. Witnessing my clients rebuild their relationship with the fears that historically held them back is nothing short of completely rewarding.

While I'm speaking on behalf of my psychotherapy clients, I've also observed a surprisingly similar narrative held by high-functioning and high-performing business leaders and employees. It may not reveal itself in the same way with the obvious levels of distress but they, too, can feel consumed by a narrative that causes them to doubt their competency, attribute their success to luck, or feel paralyzed by deadlines and tasks that reveal their insecurities. No matter what issues come up in your situation or context, the goal is for you to learn how to better manage and develop.

It is inevitable that all individuals to some extent experience a perceived or real loss of control; and with that loss of control, individuals have learned both effective and ineffective ways to manage it. Learning or relearning how to enact a more Adaptive sense of control requires a sense of humility (to admit you might very well have been "wrong" in your approach), and deliberately placing oneself in a position that elicits openness. We'll look at this more as I introduce the concept of Intellectual Humility.

Understanding how we can regain control amidst anxiety and/or change requires us to first identify and understand the various messages we've received about anxiety itself. Society may tell us that anxiety is a sign of individual weakness, one's culture may hold the belief that anxiety is fabricated, and our interactions with others may indirectly imply that anxiety is something to be ashamed of. We may have also been told that anxiety is something to "fix" through means of medication and avoidance-tactics. While medication is certainly indicated in many cases, and there is nothing intrinsically "wrong" with medication, the belief that anxiety needs to be avoided or

solved immediately rather than learning how to manage it could potentially be more harmful than helpful. In my clinical practice, I often explain that a reliance on anything can be harmful as it acts more like a crutch rather than personal empowerment. While a crutch in the form of substance dependency, social avoidance, or some other means may initially foster feelings of safety, it will only prove to leave us vulnerable at some future point.

Three psychological principles, Object Aversion, Virtue Signaling, and Unconscious Bias, help to explain how we are controlled by things that we may not expect. Each of these concepts uniquely correlates with control. Object Aversion explains how we view and interact with objects we come across, and either develop "friendly" and positive, or unfavorable and negative dispositions towards them. It is founded on the idea that we learn that certain stimuli will produce aversive outcomes.

Let's consider a child that has been bitten by a dog at a young age, resulting in a lot of blood, a lot of pain, and a dozen too many stitches. The child who once voluntarily pet the neighbor's pup becomes hesitant, fearful, and avoidant of dogs themselves and even stimuli that remind them of dogs. It makes sense, right? An individual learns to keep themselves at distance from adverse stimuli as a means of self-protection and physical and/or emotional survival.

However, unchecked and unchallenged Object Aversion lends itself to long-term anxiety, panic, and phobias. Initially, it might be more helpful (and even emotionally safe) to avoid feared stimuli. It gets a little tricky when this intentional and protective avoidance becomes a long-term mechanism to

"remain safe." Though it feels paradoxical, interaction with fears is a healthy habit to practice. Intentionally exposing one-self to feared stimuli gradually and consistently over time works to shift the relationship with the feared stimuli itself.

Again, the individual with a dog-inflicted wound will likely avoid dogs for quite a bit of time, and perhaps indefi-nitely. At first, avoiding a dog is beneficial. Maybe the child is still healing and doesn't want to risk getting bit again. But, how long before this mindset is no longer helpful? Is it possible that after a certain point, the anxiety surrounding dogs begins to control the child?

The goal here is to have some level of interaction with your fear-based objects, which can be physical or conceptual. In this scenario, physically confronting the feared stimuli may be visiting a local dog park and sitting inside versus looking inwards from the gate. Emotionally confronting the fear may be processing the traumatic experience itself in therapeutically safe ways, or perhaps looking at photos of dogs similar to the one who caused pain. In either case, avoidance only serves to perpetuate the fear, while intentional interaction with it allows for greater mental freedom.

Maybe the situation involving a dog bite doesn't reso-nate with you. Perhaps instead, you experience anxiety when conversing with your manager at work or leading a presenta-tion. The anxiety is so overwhelming that you avoid the con-versation with your manager altogether, or you subconsciously procrastinate on presentation preparation until just hours be-fore. Sure, the anxiety we're experiencing is immediately lifted. We've spared ourselves a potentially difficult conversation with

our manager, and we've been able to put our thoughts elsewhere rather than on the dreaded presentation.

Yet, the conversation still needs to be held, and the presentation still needs to be given. Relying on short-lived anxiety relief unintentionally creates ineffective patterns within ourselves as we confront similar anxiety-provoking situations in the future. We reinforce the idea that avoidance "works." We're unintentionally creating ineffective patterns within ourselves as we confront similar situations in the future. Reflect on your feared experience, situation, thought, or emotion. Go ahead and name it. Are you in control in the moments you're directly facing the feared stimuli? Or has it begun to control you?

Virtue Signaling, by definition, also overlaps with the concept of control. Virtue Signaling involves an external plea for what is right, and covertly or overtly tells you what to do (or what not to do.) It is a visible way of indicating "what I believe, what I am doing, the way I think, is morally correct;" It incidentally implies that the way another does, feels, thinks is morally inferior. It's not uncommon to see displays of not-so-subtle religious beliefs in the form of large highway ads depicting Jesus himself, or loud and proud flags letting neighbors know where you stand politically. In both cases, these ideologies are no longer mere opinions, but rather pillars of morality displayed for the world to see.

Virtual Signaling is a way to showcase certain attitudes, beliefs, or even actions to deliberately appeal to a larger mass, increase personal likability, or gain social approval. This can show up in the form of a public announcement that you've donated to a charitable cause, or visibly supporting certain

movements as it is the "fashionable" or appealing thing to support at the time. It can be a plea for action or a declaration of desired action, unfortunately without any follow-through in many cases.

Also consider your subjective childhood experiences, and the lessons that your parent(s) may have imparted on you. Our first belief systems owe much credit to what was communicated within the household; the perspectives we held as children and teenagers likely closely matched that of our parents, as these were the reinforced and consistently discussed topics at home. As you grow up, you realize that your parents were merely speaking from their perspectives, opinions, and experiences. While their intention was to pass along wisdom, support, and a solid value system, this automatically doesn't leave much space for an individual to create their own. Consider whether these teachings are linked to limited viewpoints or inflexible ways of thinking, and whether they are implicitly or explicitly being projected onto you. In other words: are you receiving a signal in terms of what is considered virtuous or moral to do, believe, or think?

You cannot control the act itself of Virtue Signaling, as it exists in multiple streams of media and marketing. However, you can control what you're digesting as truth and how you act in accordance or discordance with it. Think about what you're often being told is right or wrong, and ask yourself: do I actually believe it? Am I allowed to have a nuanced belief? Not all accounts of Virtue Signaling are necessarily "bad." It's possible that visibly indicating your recent volunteer work may motivate and inspire others to lead with the same actions; the public declaration of what you believe to be moral may elicit similar

responses and helping-behaviors in others. The issue arises when you are not in control of your actions, or when you fall victim to rigidly held beliefs that you never wanted in the first place. The fundamental problem with Virtue Signaling is when it is used to control (and ultimately boost) a public image and seeks more so to promote oneself rather than engage in a "good" and moral deed.

Unconscious Bias, if considered the ultimate truth, can also enact a level of control over us. Unconscious Biases are belief systems and social stereotypes that are formed outside of one's own conscious awareness that ultimately favor one thing, person, or group, while simultaneously opposing the other. The experiences we've held innately predispose us to certain belief systems. The unknowingly exclusive attitudes we hold can lead us to make poorly informed decisions. The cultural norms we've historically been delivered may unfortunately cause a shutting down of all opposing values without fully considering their potentially helpful impact. Unconscious Bias can clearly control the way we approach others who identify as culturally different than we do. The inability to identify biases and steelman opposing sides is not a lack of intelligence, but a lack of regard for your personal growth and that of others.

Consider how Unconscious Bias can influence hiring processes, promotion decisions, and create a workplace that lacks diversity. Unconscious Bias also controls the ways in which we evaluate performance; we may unfairly judge one's performance based on their physical attributes and appearance rather than the nature of their work. We may associate certain qualities with certain genders, causing us to unjustly "lean"

towards one more than the other when delegating project re-sponsibilities.

It is also revealed as we choose who we'll sit by at lunch, who we interact with, and who is promoted. It's the very large and polka-dotted elephant in the room that often goes unaddressed. Naming our biases is of course paramount; how-ever, actively mediating and challenging them is arguably more important. This requires an ongoing commitment to holding regular conversations with oneself: *"was my decision or interaction fully informed, or was it influenced by my own biased attitudes and be-liefs?"*

Let's take a temperature check. If you're a business leader or a part of an organization, how often have these three levels of control come up in your experience? I'd suggest you've probably experienced it, but these are some of the most toxic things that decay our personal lives, culture, organiza-tions, and society at large. Life would be more manageable when dealing with others if we were personally accountable.

Let's take another temperature check.

Donald Trump.

What immediate thoughts or emotions came up for you? This individual is maybe one of the most well-known and current psychological examples of how bias shows up. Have you ever heard of 10 combined letters that create such a vis-ceral reaction? Maybe you feel the utmost respect or utmost dislike. Only a few of you might have a less polarized opinion. So again: what did you notice within yourself as you read his name? I'm personally unaffected by your thoughts as we're tak-ing this temperature check. I'm more concerned with whether you feel in control of your thoughts, in that they are fully your

own. Take a minute and write down on a piece of paper what came up for you.

You might have immediately experienced negative judgment or overwhelming praise. You might have felt a strong level of hatred, or a sense of gratitude for his time in office. I'm less interested in what you emotionally experienced and am more curious to hear whether you're willing to open a dialogue that offers differing perspectives, opinions, and thoughts. I'm wondering if you can create space for beliefs that challenge your own. It's less about being "right" or "wrong" within a dialogue, and more about a vested interest in fully hearing another whether you land on an agreement. Rigidly held biases are revealed if you find the urge to immediately defend your view, without another to speak. You are likely stuck in an inflexible mindset if allowing the mutual sharing of conflicting beliefs feels like an attack or threat.

If you've made it this far, you've completed your honorary Master's degree in psychology. Yet, with any degree, a lifelong process of continued learning is involved, and this certainly holds true for understanding anxiety and effectively navigating it. Part of this process also involves understanding the different control styles one might adopt.

We are contextual and situational beings. A lot of who we are and how we respond depends on different factors, such as our surrounding environment, the individuals we associate with, and the meaning and influence we assign both. I speak specifically on behalf of what I call Authoritarian and Passive Control styles.

Remaining solely Authoritarian or Passive within your control mechanisms and responses to change may indicate that

you operate according to habit, while inadvertently limiting your opportunities to learn and grow. It's likely that those around you may have an unhelpful level of dependency on you if your primary control style is Authoritarian. You will likely silence collaboration and reduce a sense of "we" as a team. If you remain solely Passive, then you will likely rob yourself and others of innovation and growth. The goal here is to build an understanding of when and how, and in what contexts you respond with an Authoritarian or Passive style of control; and more importantly, if the chosen response is the most effective response.

Authoritarian Control

Those who more frequently make decisions from a place of individual versus collective opinion, or those who often assume responsibility in situations that call for a team mentality are more Authoritarian in their control style. When faced with alternative perspectives or input, Authoritarian individuals may quickly become defensive. Authoritarian individuals may also be less likely to welcome delegation and collaboration and are somewhat more inclined to complete the work project independently. While this solution-focused mindset lends itself to efficient project completion, it also decreases potential opportunities to learn and grow throughout the process.

Those who are Authoritarian in their leadership style are more likely to mentally hyper-fixate on the end output or solution. They are more readily able to sift through blurry and

out-of-focus details, and to the precise issue at hand. The by-product? A sense of over-control enacted on the surrounding individuals who are left void of a chance to help and provide input. This can make delegating tasks to others an impossible and last-resort choice. This is especially true as pressure, stressors, and urgency arises, which tend to throw an Authoritarian individual into even more of a controlling state. Authoritarian control will undoubtedly result in a completed project; however, the completion is potentially at the expense of others' development. The Authoritarian individuals desire and goal to perform efficiently and successfully is not without residual negative implications on others.

Consider an upcoming deadline at work, and the task's various components remain untouched. An Authoritarian individual will likely take it upon themself to either do the work independently or, in rare cases, reluctantly delegate to others. The individual takes it upon themself to control the situation through the potentially inefficient decision of independent work completion, rather than inviting the team in for a more collaborative process. The ultimate result? The deadline will be met, yet there is no productive learning from the team besides the reinforced narrative: *"when a deadline exists, the manager alone will get things finished."* This is not sustainable or productive for anyone in this situation. Also consider the very indirect message that this style of control, when ineffectively used, sends to the surrounding individuals: *"you are not capable of doing this task, and so therefore, I will."*

I am not implying that an Authoritarian style of control is "bad" or wrong." Rather, I'm encouraging an active awareness of when you fall into this control style, how it manifests,

what triggers it, and to consider its potential helpful and unhelpful outcomes.

Let's look at another example. Imagine you hold a leadership position that also "affords" you some level of authority. There is an organization-wide team meeting that you of course must attend. During the meeting, do you often encounter the impulse to speak first? Leaders who consistently speak first and share their opinions immediately in a meeting can unintentionally and indirectly silence the rest of the team members. Speaking first can inevitably and indirectly set the stage for the meeting's agenda. Alternative viewpoints and perspectives that do not fit into this predetermined agenda set by the Authoritarian leader are not invited in or are disregarded.

As you're reading about Authoritarian control, does any of it resonate? If so, consider the possibility of reorienting, and focusing on the process of a task or situation, versus the goal itself. Consider situations where you unconsciously or subconsciously "bull dozed" others and their ideas, and mistakenly allowed an excessively goal-driven mindset guide behavior. How did this negatively impact the work environment? What message does this send to your team? Is it possible that helpful and productive ideas were disregarded as only your thoughts took the main stage?

An Authoritarian style of control also permeates our personal relationships outside of the office. Assuming the role of organizing and planning date night can of course lend itself to creative and novel activities and ways to connect. Yet, you may unknowingly limit your partner's subjective interests and passions from being both heard and experienced. Authoritarian control within our personal relationships is bound to lead

to internalized resentment for the individual whose voice has been unintentionally silenced and ideas invalidated.

Work to consider the effectiveness and workability of an Authoritarian style of control and leadership. Ask yourself: is an Authoritarian mindset effective for this context and situation? Authoritarian individuals have come to believe that nothing will get accomplished if they individually do not control the situation. Perhaps this has proved true in some cases; I cannot imagine, however, that generalizing this mindset to all situations is either applicable or helpful. Remaining Authoritarian in situations where this style of control does not actually apply will diminish your ability to learn and connect. Sure, you complete the goal, but might stray away from building a team around you.

My hope from this chapter is that those who identify with a more Authoritarian style of control build awareness of their common reactions, and the consequences. And with increased awareness, I hope individuals move from solely acting according to habit and pattern, to asking, *"what is most effective right now?"* Adopting a more humble mindset will allow for new and potentially more effective ideas, versus staying stuck in historically held workplace and personal belief systems.

Passive Control

Those who are Passive within their control style have a greater inclination to lead with a more "hands-off" approach as stressors and adversity arise. This is not to say that you're disengaged or not invested in the outcome, but that you're more likely to allow someone else to take the lead. You might assume that your role is to provide feedback only when requested, and that giving space for others to make the decisions is a role you've become adept at playing. Individuals may fall into a Passive style of control for various reasons. Perhaps deep-rooted insecurities make it difficult to offer ideas, or real accounts of professional and personal rejection have led you to believe you're "better off" remaining closer to the sidelines. At the risk of getting too psychodynamic here, perhaps the environment you were raised in taught you to refrain from taking the lead and instead displacing trust in others to do so.

Another all-too-common activator of Passive control is the experience of Imposter Syndrome, or imposter feelings. Imposter Syndrome is a psychological experience where one questions their abilities and struggles to internalize their successes. Taking the lead may feel like an impossible endeavor when you question and doubt your own capabilities. Sharing your thoughts may feel overwhelming when you consistently feel incompetent. Passively approaching a work or personal situation may allow an individual to temporarily avoid being exposed as a "fraud." While remaining Passive may elicit greater feelings of psychological safety within your environment, they are often short-lived.

Individuals with a Passive style of control are typically more cognizant of the language they use, how they speak, and can be hesitant at times to speak at all. Perhaps you'd prefer another colleague take charge than confront the discomfort of voicing your own thoughts. Perhaps you'd rather not volunteer to lead the next meeting, and instead offer to take over the task of sending the team meeting-minutes/notes. It may be intimidating to speak your mind if your boss or colleagues are primarily Authoritarian in control. Passively moving through work may look like blindly agreeing to a new hiring practice that ultimately is misaligned with your hope for a more culturally diverse environment. Perhaps you intentionally choose to omit the fact that you possess a unique knowledge set needed for the project out of fear of failing. Within personal relationships, you might find yourself consistently leading with an "I don't care" response when it comes to planning in an effort to appear "less difficult" and "more likable."

Consider sharing your thoughts and ideas in gradual steps; rather than initially using your voice, consider an email to a direct manager whom you trust. Perhaps you then challenge yourself to email the team as a whole. And within time, you are more inclined to give feedback at a meeting, regardless of the likely anxiety that accompanies you. The initial dread of speaking up and creating more of an active presence on the job is likely to become a more chosen experience over time and after consistently challenging yourself.

Let's take it to the personal and relational realm of things. Imagine the ways in which a Passive style of control can sustain unhelpful and unwanted roles in a relationship. A Passively controlled individual may possess the knowledge needed

to make financially informed decisions around a home-buying process. Yet, their pattern of input-containment leaves the other partner in charge and at the risk of making a decision that may be less informed and unintentionally self-serving. The unfortunate (and hopefully not entirely realistic) outcome of this scenario: the pair ends up purchasing a home that is more financially straining than expected, and partner B gets his bachelor pad basement while Passively controlled partner A is left without the floor-to-ceiling windows she dreamed of.

I want to reiterate: a Passive style of control is not intrinsically a "bad" thing. As with all concepts set forth in this book: this form of control is only problematic when it is consistently used in situations where it is not indicated or productive. There are times, contexts, and situations in which we all adopt a certain style of control based on the intended outcome. There are of course scenarios where leading with more Passive control is warranted and preferred. Imagine a new team of employees that you, as a leader, hope to contribute to the comfort, ease, and support they feel throughout orientation. It's likely you take a passive step back during workshops and team meetings to allow for the new employees to cultivate their own voice.

As we move towards more Adaptive control, our responsibility is to reorient when needed, which first requires us to notice when we are in a state of under-control or over-control. The goal here is to learn how to engage your body when it wants you to disengage, or to learn how to invite others in when it feels an urge to move independently.

We learn from and are shaped by our positive and negative experiences. Your culture, family, and environment all

likely influence your adoption of a Passive or Authoritarian control style. Much of what is learned, can also be unlearned. Changing ones' control and leadership style is a structured process: 1) identify what exactly is occurring, 2) understand what is causing you to respond with an Authoritarian or Passive style of control, 3) replace the typical behavioral response with small and micro level changes. Perhaps this is sharing one piece of feedback during a meeting if you lean towards the Passive style. Maybe this is delegating the work project to your colleague versus assuming full ownership.

We are constantly on a pendulum of change. On that pendulum of change, humans tend to respond in one of the two ways that we discussed: Authoritarian or Passive. Again, when faced with stressors, our control style reveals itself. To gain a more Adaptive and effective level of control, consider your ideas and beliefs around control and leadership, where they originated from, and ultimately whether they are helpful within your current context. *"How do I know that what I am doing is effective? Is there other information that I am not considering?"* or *"How are other people responding to me? Does their response align with my intended outcome?"*

This pendulum works much like a grandfather clock. In this analogy, the clock gets wound up, then the pendulum swings, allowing the clock to operate. If the pendulum remains on one side too long, then something is clearly wrong with the clock! This mimics our internal working system. Developing an expansive and flexible mindset is automatically limited if one finds themselves falling disproportionately to one end of the spectrum, rather than allowing for greater movement across.

Ineffective control occurs when we consistently react in the same (maladaptive) way to all situations, without allowing for variability. As a direct result, you might notice friction in relationships, annoyance, and a lack of positive change. No one side of the pendulum is better than the other. The beauty is when the clock is moving smoothly through its pendulum, all the dials and hands working in unison. Effective performance derives from opening ourselves up to the possibility that another response or style of control might not only exist but might be more productive.

Adaptive Control

The hope for managing any situation is not to have an over-control or under-control style, which elicits negative outcomes, but to be both cognizant and intentional in your responses. I refer to this as Adaptive control, which asks us to challenge our maladaptive behaviors and rigidly held beliefs, and instead consider the most effective response even if it is the unfamiliar response. In this case, the content, context, and situation guide the response, rather than history and comfort. Adaptive control considers the reality that the ways in which we interact with others, make decisions, lead others, and generally move through life is bound to evolve and require alterations that are dependent on the current situation.

It's not uncommon to disproportionately lead with greater Passive or Authoritarian control. Humans tend to feel more comfortable when they can distinctly define themselves according to one end of the spectrum or another. We feel uneasy with the grey or ambiguous area. However, remaining Adaptive in control ultimately lies in that nuanced area. Adaptability asks us to modify our behaviors and ways of thinking based on the scenario at hand. It requires an internal willingness to challenge ineffective habits and control styles when faced with new and difficult circumstances, and new individuals. We limit our capacity to learn and create more effective

outcomes when we find ourselves solely in one control and response style.

What would change if you took deliberate consideration of your response, versus reacting based off information that proves to no longer be helpful? What feels comfortable isn't always the best response. Regaining control inherently requires us to be adaptable. An adaptable mindset is one that is synonymous with constant growth and rebuilding, similar to that of evolution. Humans have the capability of evolving from past failures and missteps and adapting to what is necessary for "survival." I might be biased, but the initial significant effort needed to adapt proves fruitful and has longer-term advantages.

Most of us are not naturally accustomed to adaptation, and so we must consider key enablers to help to promote individual "evolution." These key enablers include self-awareness of your reactions/responses and the workability of them, intellectual humility that rests on the notion of unlearning and relearning, and mental resiliency that serves as navigation past internal and external resistances.

Behavioral modification is ultimately impossible without first leading with self-awareness and self-understanding. Regaining a sense of control over our actions and responses requires knowledge around the self: how one is typically inclined to react in context-specific situations, the way one has historically confronted and managed anxiety in unhelpful ways, and patterns that are self-serving at the detriment of greater collective success. Without self-awareness, we're highly unlikely to alter our historically held reactions that prove to no longer be effective. An absence of self-awareness makes it

impossible to consider that the rigidity and short temper we've held during high-stress work deadlines are only limiting us. The lack of self-awareness makes it difficult to acknowledge that the way we emotionally shut down and lead with coldness during conflict is sustaining maladaptive relationship patterns.

The concept of intellectual humility is in many ways the glue that connects the principles of control into one cohesive whole. Remaining intellectually humble welcomes in new thoughts, innovative ideas, and even belief systems that may put your own into question with a level of openness. It is fundamental to a team, partnership, and friendship as it begs of us: *"what perspective can I shift? Are there alternative thoughts I haven't considered, and need to?"* Intellectually humble individuals will acknowledge that other opinions separate from their own may be more productive; they have an inherent sense of curiosity that they seek to fulfill through expansive and ongoing versus contained learning.

Mental resiliency is developed not through avoidance or resistance to adversity, but rather by directly confronting and tackling it. We build a sense of trust in ourselves over time as we experience and ultimately navigate challenging situations and emotions. Mental resiliency does not imply that one can free oneself from all of life's difficulties; but rather, stressors and anxieties are manageable. And with each challenging scenario we overcome, we ultimately build greater trust in ourselves to confront life's next wrenches it throws at us.

Finding oneself in a state of mental fragility is, unfortunately an all-too-common experience. Perhaps you have experienced a succession of adversity without a minute to breathe. Maybe you encounter a lack of resources or access to

resources due to a minority or low socioeconomic status. Or perhaps the familial and social environment you grew up in viewed challenges as an inescapable trap, and you adopted the same defeatist mindset. I can validate, empathize, and even relate to the notion of mental fragility. The shift to a resilient mindset starts first with even an ounce of hope that things can look different, that you can feel differently, and that difficulties won't always feel so suffocating.

Adaptive control requires a combination of these three outlined enablers, along with active, deliberate, and regular self-reflection. Self-reflection provides the chance to consider how you've previously responded, and how you plan to currently respond.

Avoidance as an Unhelpful Antidote for Anxiety Management

Consider the presence and the symptoms of anxiety as the body's internal alarm system, asking us directly to fulfill an unmet need. The anxiety we feel due to some perceived or real threat communicates that self-soothing is needed. The anxiety we feel as we approach an unknown situation communicates that we need a moment to regroup and organize our thoughts and action plan. The uneasy and "on edge" feelings we experience might simply communicate the need for rest.

How can you respond to versus avoid these cues? If anxiety could talk, what would it say? The body communicates to us constantly; our role is simply to respond to and honor our needs when faced with challenges. From a psychological basis, we know that avoidance leads to a myriad of issues in our lives: persistent fears that remain unchecked, internal and external barriers to forward movement, loss of control, and diminished confidence in oneself to overcome adversity. Bypassing anxiety or difficult emotions of course can lend itself to a short-term relief; however, those very emotions we attempted to avoid are the same emotions that arise again and with retribution.

Our innate reaction when confronted with change is to react according to what feels the most comfortable, which can

mistakenly be interpreted as the "best" option. This makes sense: humans are creatures of habit. We generally tend to behave in predictable ways. Humans also tend to reinforce their thoughts by surrounding themselves with like-minded people and, as a byproduct, remove variability in thought. Opening oneself to ideas different or contradictory from those that one has historically held is inherently vulnerable, risky, and may feel threatening.

We typically avoid any perceived or real barrier that may stand in the way of proving our [rigidly held] beliefs. It's not uncommon to become defensive when the thoughts, ideas, and beliefs one has held become challenged. This would force an individual to modify their script, consider new perspectives, and approach their interactions with a new mindset, and they might not be ready or willing to. Instead, I encourage individuals to adopt a more Adaptable and open mindset; one that asks you to remain flexible and humble, especially where you may have previously been fixed in mindset. Are you willing to be wrong in the moment if it allows you to learn and to be better positioned for the future?

It's also not uncommon to have an exaggerated reaction to a difficult situation; specifically, while also navigating the effects of anxiety, the mind can react disproportionately to the actual intensity of the situation. If left unchallenged, these inflated reactions can leave an individual metaphorically paralyzed, and engaged in avoidance as a solution. In the short run? It works. The individual may instantaneously feel relief, a sense of reward in the form of comfort. However, these short-term (and short-lived) impacts do not produce any long-term gain, and certainly do not improve our ability to manage on a more

sustainable level. A behavior's level of effectiveness and long-term workability is not necessarily proved by its instantaneous reduction in anxiety. The relationship we have to anxiety ultimately determines how we respond to it. If my relationship with anxiety is one that is fear-ridden, I'm of course more likely to avoid it. If my relationship with anxiety is one of dread, I may find quick solutions to "get rid" of it. In contrast, if the relationship I hold with anxiety is one that is neutral, accepting, or even curious, I may be able to approach adverse and difficult scenarios in a way that is more Adaptive, and ultimately less avoidant.

Even though our legacy behaviors might be maladaptive and prove to provide no long-term success, we feel uncomfortable as we even consider replacing them. It's like the behaviors that we feel the most comfortable using are the same ones that can keep us stuck. That very feeling of relief following avoidance is likely to cause continued engagement in patterns and behaviors that produce avoidance. Over time, these behaviors are reinforced to the extent that considering any alternative options, or ways to manage versus circumvent, are nonexistent. Imagine the impact on one's confidence as they consistently use avoidant tactics to overcome difficult situations. The dependency that is built on safety behaviors and avoidance patterns will surely make it challenging to trust yourself as you directly confront undesired and unpleasant emotions or situations.

In any given unfamiliar context, and within the inevitable anxieties and change that we'll encounter, we have a choice to adapt, or to not adapt. Choosing to bypass the change through avoidant tactics, withdrawal, or other means

of disengagement is bound to make it difficult, or nearly impossible, to adjust to new contexts and change. Consider if you've witnessed others surrounding you fall into this avoidance cycle; is it possible you have, as well? What would happen if you instead chose to mitigate or minimize an unwanted outcome through consciously adapting and adjusting as needed?

To paint a more vivid picture, let's parallel anxiety with physical pain. Imagine you're a parent to an 8-year-old child who was just recently gifted their first LEGO set. It's evident they're pleased with their gift, as the LEGO pieces have found themselves strewn across every floor imaginable in your home. Now imagine yourself stumbling out of bed and down the dimly lit hallway to use the restroom at 2:30 am, and you haphazardly step on a LEGO piece that managed to find itself pointy-side-up.

Pain instantly fills your foot and sends a shock up the rest of your leg. The floor catches you as you fall with zero grace.

At this point, and to your dismay, you realize your foot has been pierced with one of your child's LEGO pieces. At this point, you are also in a deep state of regret for the LEGO purchase you made. Your reaction to this pain might involve an under-the-breath curse word, a face that is quickly warming and reddening, and a theatric fall to the floor.

While the pain is not voluntarily sought after, and certainly not enjoyed, it does serve a function. While uncomfortable, the pain may in fact be utilitarian. The physical sensation of pain serves a protective function for future experiences while hobbling to the restroom half-asleep. Perhaps to avoid the same pain in the future, you decide a light ought to be

turned on. Or perhaps, the LEGO pieces can be placed back in their rightful home should you convince your child to do so.

Now you might understandably be curious as to how a foot imprinted with LEGO holes leads to improved control, and how a LEGO story can be applied to other scenarios. Let me further explain.

Imagine conceptualizing anxiety in the same way we view pain. We have a natural and innate predisposition to pain and discomfort. We need to assess if our immediate response is the right response, and by that, I mean the most Adaptive response. In the example I provided, we might solely focus on our physical discomfort versus considering a prevention plan going forward. In the example of the LEGO-jammed-into-foot experience, I'd argue it's inherently impossible to completely avoid the pain.

Brief and important aside: I will not be addressing the very valid and real experience of dissociation as a body's learned response to repetitive accounts of trauma. Physical pain is tangible; perhaps your foot is throbbing, the tears welling up in the corner of your eyes communicate that *"I am hurt,"* and it might be difficult to catch and slow your breath. Trauma can inflict on an individual a residual loss of control, disconnection from the self, and distrust in society at large. While I validate these experiences of Trauma and acknowledge the additional layer of difficulty when owning or changing one's mindset, I also challenge individuals to consider the "what" versus the "why." This might sound like: *"what do I need to support myself? What can I gather from this awful experience to grow?"* versus *"why is this happening to me?"*

Emotional or cognitive discomfort, on the other hand, tends to be less visible, and therefore easier to avoid and actively choose not to think about. With the LEGO-inflicted physical pain, we might rub our foot, bandage it if needed, and carefully make our way back to bed. Emotions are quite a bit less black-or-white, and so approaching them and supporting ourselves through them seems like a much more ambiguous task. Keep in mind: difficult emotions themselves are not necessarily the issue, but rather the avoidance patterns we use to seek and retreat to safety. We fail to listen to what the uncomfortable emotion is communicating, and we fail to tend to it and honor what is needed.

Consider whether it's possible to rebuild your relationship with change, and as a byproduct, foster a more neutral, or even "friendly," relationship with anxiety. Humans are not immune to moments of suffering as a result of external, environmental, and systemic forces that surround them. While we cannot control the external, we can learn to internally manage how we respond to the chaos around us. Anything external to us has a myriad of variables and possibilities of influence. How one manages, controls, and takes full ownership over their reaction and responses is ultimately what will help to manage adversity. The goal is to modify our relationship to "change" itself; rather than a perceived threat, is it possible to view change as not only normal and inevitable, but sometimes necessary?

Change, newness, unfamiliarity: these are not inherently "bad" situations, they may, however, produce "unpleasant" emotions depending on one's relationship to change itself. It's understandable that change can feel scary if we haven't learned how to effectively respond to it. It also makes

sense that change can feel like an entire disruption in our sense of homeostasis if we have otherwise lived a life of a great deal of predictability and routine. Often when change arises, we view these situations as threatening to us, and may confront anxiety as a result. Rather than concluding that change is always "bad," is it possible that it takes time and energy to process novelty and familiarity?

I am not insinuating an anti-emotion propaganda or a way of gaslighting ourselves: one can name and recognize their valid emotional experience, while simultaneously choosing to adapt and manage. One can make sense of the "why" behind their emotion and provide rationale, while also taking proactive efforts to meet the emotion's need. I beg the question: would you rather grow into what could be, or remain stagnant in what is [and is no longer effective]? Humans are gifted with the ability to learn, grow, and bolster resilience in the aftermath of hardships. The moment we stop learning, we forfeit the extent of our own capabilities.

Personal development and progress often require some level of change; and the change itself requires commitment, dedication, and patience, as behavioral and cognitive evolution is a lifelong process. I have witnessed this happen countless times: an individual may communicate the desire for change, yet there is an incongruence between their desire and their behavioral action steps to create that change. An individual may say they desire to "get healthier," and yet they snooze their alarm clock set to exercise in the morning at least five times before finally surrendering back to sleep. An individual may express the desire to earn a new certification or license,

and yet turning on the television takes constant priority over opening up their study materials and books.

Accepting that change is needed, and then fostering it, requires effort and the willingness to navigate feelings of uncertainty and discomfort that often accompany it. The identified change may ultimately be helpful, and yet it initially feels like a threat to the patterns and behaviors one has always known. Humans are hard-wired to resist change as change is full of feared unknowns and unclear benefits. There is a basic survival need for security and safety, and namely how a change will impact us. When clarity and assurance are not immediately given, or are entirely unavailable, our survival instinct will likely choose the status quo over the unfamiliar. Why put forth the effort if the outcome is not better, but possibly worse?

I typically witness one of two experiences: dreading change with every ounce of one's being, or welcoming it with (semi or fully) open arms. I rarely see a nuanced or neutral relationship with change. Regardless of your disposition to change, it requires energy, and therefore can take a mental and physical toll. The unfortunate reality of being human is that we do not have an unlimited supply of energy; and so, in cases where we are faced with two scenarios - one which requires more effort and individual change, and one which requires minimal energy as we allow "what is" to remain - we're more likely to choose the latter.

In the face of change and accompanying anxiety, regaining personal control is absolutely necessary to both Adapt and perform more effectively in evolved contexts. More effective performance may also lead to desired outcomes: perhaps

a pay raise, increased confidence, and workplace acknowledgement. It's clear the crucial role that control plays here.

Concepts of Control

We cannot fully discuss anxiety without considering the intersecting and correlating relationship with control. The less control one may feel they have, the greater anxiety as a result. The greater control one fosters, the diminished effects of anxiety as a result. As a reminder: the whole premise of this book lies on the notion that regaining control directly influences performance outcomes. With an Adaptive level of control, one can typically expect behaviors and interactions that feel more intentional, work that feels more productive, and anxiety that is either significantly reduced, or at least managed more effectively. I digress; let's look at four vital components of control.

Responding vs Reacting

These two words are often used interchangeably and mistakenly thought to overlap in definition. In reality, the distinction between responding and reacting is significant, specifically during adverse, anxiety-provoking, or stressful situations that involve others. Reactions are instinctive and an immediate expression of our emotions; perhaps it is a shriek of excitement as we're reacting to a surprise party in our honor, or aggressively yelling in defense when an outcome was personally

unfavorable. A reaction can be appropriate and favorable, or inappropriate and unfavorable depending on whether it "fits" the context of the situation at hand. It might be "appropriate" to scream and run for your dear life as you react to a lion chasing after you. It may be unfavorable to fall into an adult-tantrum in reaction to a 10-minute traffic jam. We tend to act from memories, experiences, or old habits when leading with reactivity.

In contrast, responding considers the consequences of their contributions and role within an interaction, and deliberately acts accordingly to produce favorable outcomes. It also lends itself to more empathic interactions with a deep understanding or desire to understand the impact of your actions and communication on others.

Responsive individuals acknowledge that there is a pause between a specific stimulus and a chosen behavior. The delay is difficult to see if we often rely on reactivity to guide our actions. However, we can intentionally choose to sit within the space between and process, evaluate, and decide the most effective course of action. Reacting is instinctual and often feels good for the moment, yet we're left with longer-term implications. We might create distance between ourselves and others, damage relationships, and place ourselves further away from the desired end goal. Responding is learned and considers all aspects of a situation before speaking or acting. It is the deliberate decision to activate the brain before the body.

It's not uncommon to fall on more of the reactive side of the "communication spectrum." Humans tend to be reactive for various reasons; perhaps an inability to emotionally regulate or self-soothe, an absence of modeling effective

interpersonal interactions throughout their developmental years, the faulty belief that heightened and loud reactions ensure you're "heard," or even that reactivity requires less immediate energy and effort than responding does. Reactivity involves minimal to zero brain power, while responding requires effort and energy to overcome the initial urge to react.

The result? Simply put: well, it's not good. Reactivity lends itself to ruptures within communication, failure to feel fully heard and understood as the individual on the receiving end is likely to become defensive, and longstanding negative interaction patterns are likely to surface. Reactivity can also limit one's ability to develop fully informed opinions, make decisions based on rational thought versus solely on emotion, and lead individuals to act based on assumptions. Consistently and inappropriately reacting to a situation that calls for a more deliberate response will naturally stifle our interactions. The consequences of one's action are often not considered, and as a result, often lend themselves to future regret.

Much of modern-day communication is short-formed bits of information such as text messages or media bites. This has us more accustomed to quick reactions, rather than fully digesting what we've read, heard, or seen and leading with a more well-informed and deliberate response. Reactions happen so rapidly that they almost feel like they've been programmed into our interaction systems. Responsiveness requires and intentionally considers:

"What outcome am I hoping to achieve, and how can I contribute [through my interactions] to the ideal end result?"

A response is considerate and deliberate, in that it is cognizant of how others might experience you, the situation, or the way you choose to communicate (including tone of voice, nonverbal cues, and body language.)

A response inevitably also requires and produces control. When I use the word "control" as it relates to interactions and relationships, I am not insinuating control **over** another. Rather, I'm speaking on behalf of control around our own communication styles to create greater consistency, safety, and stability within our relationships. This absolutely favors responsiveness over reactivity: deliberation before speaking versus immediately expressing, and thoughtfulness versus uninformed opinions.

The scenario I'm about to dive into isn't a rare one. Imagine you're knee-deep in deadlines, and you receive an email from your manager requesting (but ultimately, ordering) you to create and lead the meeting agenda and presentation for this upcoming Friday. It's Tuesday afternoon by the time your manager hits "send," and you've been at your edge point since Monday morning. You're immediately flooded with irritation, and your quickly rising internal temperature instructs you to react: *"how the hell do they expect me to not only finish the other 20 tasks I've been assigned, but now this meeting on top of it? I should be done with this company and all the people in it."* While the frustration may be completely valid, the reaction itself does not necessarily lead towards any helpful movement. Rather, we're more likely to stay "stuck" in the reaction, which only fuels more of the initial anger itself.

Responsiveness is not void of emotion. A responsive individual may very likely still feel irritated in this scenario.

However, they're more inclined to self-validate their emotion, and then intentionally move towards a solution. They may respond to their manager, *"I've still got quite a few tasks with deadlines all falling around the same time. Is there a way we can delegate parts of Friday's meeting to other team members?"* You're not only more likely to get your own needs fulfilled, but also that of your manager and company: the task gets completed, and you enter the weekend with slightly less stress.

Perhaps this is overstated at this point, but a familiar habit (reactivity) is not necessarily an effective or workable one. We tend to operate in ways that feel familiar for a range of valid – yet, sometimes unhelpful – reasons. It's not uncommon to confuse what is comfortable with what is the most productive. We frequently lead with the historically chosen behavior as the "best" behavior on the notion that it has predictable outcomes. Behaving solely on habitually created comfort is inherently reactionary, and gives little thought or consideration to more appropriate, productive, or sustainable responses instead.

We mistakenly believe that the immediacy and quickness of reactivity is synonymous with efficiency and effectiveness. When we engage in reactive interactions, we're likely more concerned with self-promotion and preservation of the ego. Reactions are rooted in assumptions versus strategy and are often established entirely on emotion versus rationale. Reactivity leaves very little room to respond with any level of variability to a situation than our historical method instructs us to. This proves to be an inherent barrier to responding effectively and considering whether "the way it has been" is no longer workable.

Adaptability vs Inflexibility

One might assume that maintaining control is dependent on firmly grasping onto one's already-formed systems of behavior and thought. We might fall into the wrong way of thinking: *"If I let go of what I know, I surely am also letting go of the control that I've worked to develop."* Considering a change in plan, a modification in what was already determined as the solution, or starting over on a blank canvas after months of tirelessly working on the final project will undeniably create discomfort and ring the internal-alarm-bell system. Ironically, we lose control the second we cling on so tightly to it that we fail to consider alternative options, perspectives, and ways of doing things. The ability to shift mindset based on the presenting context is paramount in regaining control.

The moment you close your mind to alternative thoughts, you will only hear a reverberation of your own ideas. At this moment, you are reinforcing past beliefs that may no longer be helpful. You are only comfortable in the absence of any type of ideological challenge. Clearly, this thinking can be a danger if the past belief was not fully contextualized, tested, or thought through. It's often "easier" to reflect on which of your current thoughts are worthy of remaining fixed, than to deconstruct historical and unhelpful thoughts and repurpose them. This is obviously a daunting task, especially if you realize that many of your current thoughts are fixed. Though a difficult task to undertake, a proper identification of limiting beliefs and thoughts will give room as you work towards a more sustainable rebuilding of ineffective thought patterns.

Scenario time. It's Friday at 11:00 am, which means the company-wide team meeting that has been held consistently over the past 17 years of your employment is seconds away from beginning. The meeting that was previously a deterrent from getting your late morning coffee fix during year one of your employment, has over time become something predictable and comforting. You looked forward to the conversations you could reliably predict would be held, and relished the opportunity to present your competency at this point in your career and time at the company. The expected, however, is interrupted by the news that a new software system would be installed and replace the system that you've grown accustomed to for over the past decade. The rest of the team is thrilled, as the current system is clearly outdated, yet you are irritated at the idea of learning and implementing something new, especially given the uncertainty that it would prove to be "better." And so, you continue to use the old system to communicate with coworkers; you remain on the same platforms that management has requested you to replace.

While all feels comfortable, "in control," and familiar, you find that Friday meetings begin to feel less collective, and instead more exclusive. You're unaware of the language your coworkers use, as it is one that you chose not to be fluent in. You begin to feel like an outlier, with limited opportunity to contribute ideas; not because you are void of them, but because they no longer sync with the newly installed platforms. The desire to remain inflexible in approach clearly strips one of the possibilities for innovation. I can only safely presume that had this fabricated employee led with Adaptability – even at the expense of what they've known for the past 17 years – they

may have noticed greater workplace and individual efficiency and fostered a more supportive company culture as the entire team embarked on a system-wide change together.

Inflexibility, in many ways, is the poison to the human mind. Unintended residue is the unfortunate byproduct of rigidity in thought. Individuals who lead with inflexibility often become trapped within echo chambers that reiterate the same ideas and perspectives that one has always known and has determined are "right." The echo chamber serves to reinforce these thoughts, resulting in a mind that remains shut to anything that feels remotely "new" and unfamiliar (and threatening.) Inflexibility sends the very direct message to coworkers, colleagues, and friends that you'd rather win than be willing to welcome novel ideas, and ultimately confront the perceived "loss" as a result. When what we have historically known to be true is challenged, we also falsely mistake our identity to be challenged. As you can imagine, one is likely to lead with high levels of reactivity and defensiveness in cases where the ego is involved.

In stark contrast, Adaptability communicates openness, curiosity, and humility (which I will reference in just a bit here.) An Adaptive approach to work, relationships, and life in general does not assume complete agreeableness. An individual can lead with Adaptive responses even if they do not entirely agree with the novel idea itself. Rather, one will metaphorically "shelf" their preformed notions and opinions as they welcome thoughts they haven't once considered. The foundation of an Adaptive response lies on intentional versus combative questioning to understand the rationale for change, and considers

the plausible reality that leading with flexibility lends itself to more positive outcomes.

Again, Adaptively responding is not to be confused with complete agreeableness. Adaptively responding to situations sometimes does call for leading with a mindset that is ultimately more contrarian. When I use the term "contrarian," I'm speaking on behalf of offering opinions and ideas that may not be congruent with the populous ones. Though it may initially hold a taboo or negative connotation, to be contrarian at times in your mindset is not an inherently "bad" thing. Taking the road less traveled, especially in regards to how we manage difficult situations in life, is a worthwhile journey to take.

A contrarian mindset does not blindly accept perspectives without first contemplating them, seeking to understand and become well-informed, and proceed to either correcting your viewpoint as needed, or offering your contrarian idea with even greater confidence. Individuals that are contrarian in nature play offense versus defense; they arrive prepared to share their input, open to receive others, and may realize that one or neither of the approaches make sense and its ultimately time to discover another one. It is not initiating conflict for the hell of it; rather, contrarian in mindset involves going against the prevailing norms, and instead offering invaluable and novel input. It asks us to think differently to elicit different results. It recognizes the reality that while many popular opinions, processes, and systems might be "good" or productive, there are many that just don't work as well as they intend to. Contrarian thinkers are willing to sift through all information and data they receive and embrace the complexities. They are interested and

invested in asking questions of others as much as they are of themselves.

Try to identify areas in your life that may spark the greatest amount of inflexibility within you. Hint: it's most often within the situations that we've developed a sense of pride or competency, or changes that pose themselves as an identity threat. Try also to identify the spaces in your life that you may have conformed to widely-held beliefs and ideas that weren't relevant or "correct" at all. Are you open to the challenge of rethinking what you've once known to be inflexibly true, and move towards adaptive flexibility instead? Are you willing to share a contrarian viewpoint, even at the risk of social rejection, if it means that the contrarian idea is the most workable one?

Remaining Values-Aligned vs Outcome Focused

Within both my professional and personal relationships, I've witnessed the stronghold that individuals have on "goal achievement." Focusing on the outcome is tangible, results-driven, and often provides a more immediate and all-encompassing dopamine effect; and so, it makes sense that many of us are outcome-focused. I've also witnessed these same individuals run into a literal dead end of motivation as they do not instantly reach the end goal. Initial inertia formed on a goal-oriented mindset without the required action is like waking up to our alarm in the morning yet failing to get out of bed. The desire for goal accomplishment falls empty if there are no

behavioral steps that follow. To sustain motivation inherently involves some level of control, which is also reliant on attaching value to the behavior, action, or goal itself.

Running the marathon and earning the medal to show for it feels good. It's the visible sign of success. What often feels less tangible is the process itself to reach the elusive and simultaneously shiny goal. At times, it can even feel mundane and with no endpoint in sight. What the outcome-focused mindset doesn't consider, however, are the potential encounters of various barriers, challenges, and factors we couldn't possibly have expected or planned for. Perhaps at mile 17 of the marathon, there is a severe weather warning that is, in fact, so severe that the marathon was prematurely shut down—no medals were given, as the 26.2-mile finish line is completely enveloped by darkness. An individual who focuses solely on achievement, success, and the "win" is bound to feel disappointed; and possibly a level of disappointment so significant that instead of "redoing" the marathon the following weekend when the weather clears, they drop the idea altogether. *"What's the point now?"*

Values-aligned behavior is synonymous with a process-oriented mindset, and a level of responsiveness versus reacting. Refer to a previous section, as we differentiated reacting versus responding. The runner who reacts to the unexpected weather barrier is more inclined to opt out altogether. They act quickly based on the emotional mind, which may feel overwhelmingly convincing to drop training and the marathon altogether. Responding to the situation allows for more control around our thoughts and making decisions based on our identified values.

The runner will justifiability be hit with a wave of sadness as the marathon is called off; yet the "why" attached to the marathon remains. The runner might have associated the training process with that of improving health, connecting with fellow runners, and overcoming physical and emotional challenges that inherently accompany the marathon. While the marathon comes to an unprecedented halt, the values that initially guided one's actions still exist.

Focusing on the process can certainly feel daunting. Shifting our mindset to the individual steps that are necessary to reach the identified end goal is not void of impatience and restlessness, and as intrinsic motivation fluctuates and wears thin, the values that are foundational to the goal must be firmly held onto. As we encounter complications, unexpected challenges, and roadblocks to the end goal, we have at least two decisions. Opt-in or opt-out. Move forward or exit without hesitation. Show up or avoid fully. Take on the risk and experience discomfort (and growth,) or avoid the risk and experience temporary comfort and longer-term stagnation. Aligning with our identified values tends to produce behavior and outcomes that are not only more meaningful, but we also develop a warranted appreciation for the process itself.

A greater level of internal motivation is positively correlated with doing things that provide purpose, are done out of choice versus force, and are aligned with core parts of how you identify. The process to reach the end outcome is more likely to feel Adaptively controlled when its route has been informed by one's values. If the end outcome is without any value (outside of the ability to say, *"I did it"*), sustainable movement forward is likely to wane. Consider various roles you play within

your life. Perhaps a parent, a spouse, an employee, an exercise junkie, or an aspiring chef. And now, consider the values that are attached to and acted out within these roles. When we adopt an identity, consider adopting the values that are conjoined.

Let's use a Medical Doctor as our case example. I'll presume the underlying values within this profession include education and knowledge, supporting others, and a level of selflessness. The Medical Doctor who is solely focused on the degree itself, the prestige that follows, and the verbal accolades from friends and family for their success are likely to feel disconnected from and dissatisfied in their work post-residency. The Medical Doctor who views graduation not as a highly anticipated relief, but rather a door open for more possibilities, is better positioned for more sustainable satisfaction and meaningful work. They are more likely to attend additional and ongoing trainings to orient themselves towards their value of knowledge. They may be more inclined to develop new initiatives to support medical staff to align with their value of sincere care for others.

I'll end this section by asking you:

- What truly matters to you? What do you want to stand for in the bigger picture?

- When do you feel most aligned with your values? When do you feel misaligned or inauthentic?

- Are there any values you've historically held that need modification or complete removal?

- What is something you can commit to, today, to feel more closely aligned with what's important to you?

Intellectual Humility vs Intellectual Rigidity

Interpersonal conflict is at the foundation of many larger concerns; and it is not always the conflict itself that is problematic, but the way in which individuals resolve, repair, and move forward. What was intended to feel like a nonchalant conversation can quickly turn into a debate when two individuals join together with diametrically opposed viewpoints, and with limited willingness to acknowledge the others. As you can imagine, this lends itself to little productivity, aided likely by defensiveness and disregard.

For many of us, the conflicts we find ourselves in may showcase our inability or even unwillingness to fully listen to another person. They may make very apparent our rigidity and inflexibility within thought. One of our most valuable resources we possess is our attention, and the ability to fully engage with another human. When we give it or choose not to give it, it creates ripple effects of either positive or negative impact. An unwarranted interjection during a conversation only lends itself to a dead-end one. An instantaneous "rejection" of another's perspective only creates a stone-walled interaction. An immediate sharing of your opinion versus allowing another's to be completely stated is downright constricting.

Thoroughly and thoughtfully listening to another is not internally planning on what opinion on the topic you have to offer as the other is mid-sentence. It is not forming sentences in your mind of what you'll say next. Complete engagement is not acting on the urge to interrupt before the other has the opportunity to complete their thought. Leading with curiosity is not actively and internally searching for reasons why you are still "right."

If you encounter stalemates or interpersonal debates often, consider what responsibility you can take. What personal contributions are you making that lend itself to the conflictual interactions? What role have you played? What individual interaction patterns are you willing to change within yourself? The (sometimes unfortunate) reality is that we do not have the power to modify others' behaviors, choices, and communication patterns. We do, however, have control to manage our own responses.

Intellectual humility asks of us to open our minds to new opportunities, seek out alternative understandings of what we historically proved to be true, and invite in a level of curiosity to the way in which we approach all aspects of life. It is not to be confused with complete agreeableness or gullibility, as changing one's mind any time one receives new information is far from helpful. Intellectual humility involves an active and ongoing recognition that our current beliefs might not be workable, or that they're even inaccurate and incorrect. Letting go of the idea of being right, while leading with acceptance in being wrong, is fundamental to cultivating a mindset of intellectual humility. It also requires you to remain vigilant for opportunities that provide individual reflection: how often do you

believe you are 'right' during disagreements? Are there certain conversations or conflicts that require more curiosity from you?

Unexpected and confounding variables are bound to happen, and with deliberate use of intellectual humility, you better position yourself to learn rather than fall accustomed to the use of historically used and ineffective responses. It's not uncommon that when difficult situations arise, individuals may react in a way that provides immediate relief, without active consideration of the Adaptiveness of such a reaction.

Intellectual humility asks us the question; *"how can I most effectively get through this? Are there things I haven't considered, or ways of going about this that others can guide me towards?"*. In contrast, intellectual rigidity says, *"I can't believe this is happening again. I'll just try what I did last time and hope for a better outcome."*

Intellectual humility begs us to consider the alternatives that exist, open our minds to the possibility of other outcomes, while inviting in the valuable ideas and thoughts of others. Intellectually humble individuals are willing to own the reality that their subjective ideas and viewpoints are imperfect and fallible; they acknowledge that the evidence and information gathered to support their opinions could be limited, incomplete, or based on faulty information.

Since establishing an internal database of beliefs, knowledge, and thoughts, have you been positioning yourself to relearn and lead with a greater level of intellectual humility? To open yourself up to learn and relearn versus remaining fixed? To lead with curiosity versus potentially unhelpful familiarity? Cultivating a sense of internal intellectual humility requires us to take our ego out of the conversation, receive new

ideas with welcoming and open arms, respect beliefs that are in opposition to your own, and ultimately to revise your deeply held and important viewpoints as needed.

Effective Performance as a Byproduct of Control

I can safely assume that most of us want to experience improved levels of performance within our professional, relational, and personal lives. We may desire to increase the efficiency of how we complete work tasks, or improve our public speaking abilities, or better the ways in which we lead a team. We may want to improve the way in which we communicate with our partner, in hopes for fewer misperceptions and conflicts. Within ourselves, we may want to improve our emotional and physical strength through an exercise regime that simultaneously challenges both.

Focusing solely on the end outcome of "successful performance" can lend itself to greater levels of anxiety. Rather, performance is best seen as a byproduct of the concepts addressed in Part I: understanding your individual styles of control and challenging the effectiveness of them, considering the positive impact of responding versus reacting, adopting an intellectually humble mindset, and remaining values-aligned in all that you do and all that you take on.

Successful performance is not solely tied to "grand," tangible, and widely praised endeavors. Rather, successful performance is also a culmination of daily - and potentially

mundane - behaviors that ultimately lend themselves to greater headspace and less stress. Keep in mind: being a high performer at a company does not completely absolve an individual from holding inefficiencies; their performance is not linked to perfection, but rather the ability to pinpoint and work through inefficiencies. Additionally, a high "relational performer" who typically leads with respect, self-awareness, and inclusion is not free from occasional arguments with their partner.

Effective performance cannot be measured by perfection, but rather by consistent, effort-filled actions with the intended outcome for the betterment of oneself, relationships, or an organization or team. Performance should not be measured by how things appear, but by how consistent, sustainable, and practical the underlying actions are. Effective performance also is founded on a collectivist mindset, one that takes a present focus on what is needed to achieve the most optimal outcome.

Individuals and organizations that view collectivism as foundational to their success tend to celebrate the best option during a decision-making process, even if this option "threatens" historical ways of being and doing things. Collectivism is a framework that pushes innovation forward by celebrating effectiveness and uniqueness of thought. It evaluates the extent to which one's historically and/or currently held biases influence thought-formation and decision-making. As we read in the first section, we often make decisions based on what we are familiar with, despite unknown or known disadvantages. A collectivist framework asks us to consider alternative ways of thinking, and openly collaborate with others instead.

When we create a professional or personal space where novel perspectives are welcomed, ideas are mutually shared, and the final decision is based not on the individual ego or "popular" belief, but on the most sound and well-informed choice, everyone grows. Individual envy will inevitably destroy the potential of a team that is structured on a collectivist mindset. This is not a "me vs. them" mentality, but rather one that emphasizes other's valuable contributions, sometimes at the replacement of your own. This framework flips the script as we take the pressure away from our personal success and think about how we can position ourselves to bring value to others. It asks business leaders to sincerely listen to the needs, requests, and thoughts of their employees and team, as failing to do so surely inhibits collective growth.

When we value and genuinely care about others, their performance is your performance. Your success is theirs. There is a mutual sharing of responsibility and ownership around the process and the outcome. In its simplest form, collectivism champions collaborative performance rather than individual ego. When considering collective betterment, you ought not lean too far to the other side and hand hold every individual's emotion and opinion. There is no individual success without regard for the growth of others. Effective performance is a byproduct of collective betterment.

PART TWO

Principles in Action

Introduction to Principles

Part 1 concludes the psychology-based overview of the intersecting relationship between anxiety, control, and ultimately performance. The experience of adversity and change that historically has felt threatening and overwhelming has instead become something manageable. Control requires the combination of responding versus reacting, effectively adapting to new situations and concepts, leading with curiosity versus rigidity, and engaging in values-aligned actions.

Part 2 pieces together the information set forth in Part 1 and provides Principles that can be readily and accessibly integrated into your life.

As you move forward, I invite you to pause here and reflect for just a moment:

- What situations could have resulted in a more productive outcome had you led with flexibility?

- Have you encountered personal defensiveness in any recent interactions when you could have approached it with a level of intellectual humility?

- Were there unexpected issues where you delayed an immediate reaction, and instead responded in a way that allowed for effective problem-solving?

- Have you been willing to allow for the mutual sharing of ideas and opinions that welcome innovation versus sticking with the familiar?

Regardless of your subjective answers to the above questions, I invite you to consider the Five Principles raised in Part 2 and their applicability to your life.

Principle 1:

Be Aggressively Self-Aware and Assume Complete Ownership

This book would be nearly 50 pages longer if I chose to write a more fully expanded on definition of self-awareness. For the sake of brevity, I'll reduce the conversation to self-awareness within personal and professional interactions and situations. Self-awareness is an elusive concept, in that there is no formally decided endpoint to when we reach a "full" sense of self-awareness. The ultimate and final state of self-awareness simply does not exist, as humans are constantly changing, and so the way we understand ourselves and others also must evolve.

Rather, the more realistic goal is forming a greater sense of understanding around what activates certain maladaptive patterns of interaction, behavior, and responses. Self-awareness requires a mindset of curiosity *("I wonder what led me to that behavior…")*, a sense of understanding *("Ah, that makes sense, this happened before")*, and ultimately modifying your future responses and actions in intentional ways.

Let's pause here: we might find ourselves in an active state of resistance towards self-awareness. The reason why is clear. Self-awareness automatically requires of us to confront our own behaviors, thoughts, and response styles that are no

longer workable, helpful, or Adaptive. Admitting this to ourselves and especially others can result with defensiveness. Engaging in maladaptive behaviors without awareness is simply ignorance. However, when we develop fuller awareness and acknowledgement of our growth edges, we're left with the choice: based on your awareness, do you want to put forth the effort and energy to change? Or should you simply maintain the status quo of what is?

Understanding our individual "landmines" does not necessarily provide permission to continue acting according to the same maladaptive script(s). Rather than pointing your finger at the triggering situation or placing another individual at complete fault, take ownership of your own internal response system, and the ways in which we personally contribute to workplace or interpersonal difficulties. We also must and assume full responsibility in resolving them. I've had clients ask the valid question, *"what if I'm truly not at fault?"* Sure, it would be easier to use this truth to diffuse responsibility and resume your own work. I cannot help but think, however, that supporting your colleagues through collective problem-solving is the more efficient and effective option.

Self-Awareness for Passive Control

Those that are Passive in their control style come to understand that when change occurs or difficulties arise, they often disengage and instead rely on their team to make the decisions and form the solutions. In this moment, you are

robbing those around you of your insight, and ultimately isolating yourself. Passively controlled individuals usually take a hands-off approach when faced with anxiety-evoking situations and provide space for others to step in as they step out. Make productive use of this knowledge: one can either reinforce and repeat the maladaptive use of Passive control through disengagement when overwhelmed or choose to redirect and replace this routine behavior to one that is more productive and helpful.

Some questions to reflect on:

- What topics or situations do I find myself withdrawing from? What is it about these topics that is activating the part in me that wants to shut down?

- What am I scared of or anxious about? Should I start to lead with more control, and more of an active voice? Is it fear of rejection, failure, or appearing incompetent?

- What might be the benefit in sharing more of my thoughts, and engaging more consistently with my coworkers?

Self-Awareness for Authoritarian Control

Those that are Authoritarian in their control style will likely notice a sense of immediacy and urgency within their reactions and input. Maybe you're a senior leader at an organization, and assume full responsibility for leading the meeting,

providing the ideas, and ultimately making the decisions. Sure, you're attempting to increase productivity and arrive at a solution, but the unfortunate byproduct is a work culture that is stifled and silenced. It's vital to build awareness around the situations that tend to trigger an Authoritarian style of control; only with awareness can one proactively modify behavior as needed.

Some questions to reflect on:

- Are there certain topics or scenarios that elicit an intense urge to control the situation? What is it about these topics that is activating the part in me that wants to over-control?

- What do I perceive would happen if I didn't assume control and take the lead? What am I threatened by, or scared of?

- What might be the benefit in allowing more of a collaborative effort and inviting other team members in?

In both cases…

The ultimate goal is to fulfill the larger mission and purpose. If this is a service-based industry, then to be Passive means to rob those around you of your input. Being Authoritarian is to rob yourself of the input of others. The crucial question we should be asking ourselves is: how can you, as a leader, position yourself to help the organization grow? And are you willing to do what is needed to foster growth? We are required to develop self-awareness even when we'd rather not confront

our growth edges, and work to shift our own responses and actions in ways that are aligned with the overall purpose.

Historically used behaviors and control styles, while comfortable and familiar, are not necessarily effective or workable in every professional or personal context. Adopting a sense of agility implies that you can move between being Passive or Authoritarian as the situation indicates. There may naturally be contexts that taking an Authoritarian style of control is beneficial for a team that is otherwise dysfunctional or disorganized, and a quickly approaching deadline is looming over the office. There also may be cases where Passively controlling the situation may create greater confidence in newly hired employees who are building their own voice in the company.

Consider your past reactions, specifically the reactions that may have produced an unintended outcome. Now consider whether a different response may have been more effective. Once you realize that there is opportunity for change, then failure to progress cannot be justified. This ought not to breed perfectionism which only proves to increase stress and anxiety. Rather, we want to lead with curiosity and self-inquisition surrounding our reactions and responses. Self-awareness, and awareness of the contexts in which you most commonly automatically and maladaptively react, will empower you to pause and instead rethink your approach.

There are constant variables that compete for our attention and elicit an anxiety response. We do best when things are consistent and secure, which can be understood as homeostasis. Our body naturally enters a state of allostasis when change occurs and attempts to return to the comfortable homeostasis. As humans, we have the ability to regain control

and regulate according to our needs in the midst of adversity. While our body does this naturally, it seems that we need to actively train our minds to do the same thing.

Principle 2:
Clarify Goals and Know the Why

Wh
hen there is no direction, it is easier to get lost. When there is no internal map, the risk of arriving at an ineffective solution or endpoint increases. Humans must both accept the reality that plans can (and sometimes do) change at any point, and set themselves up with a rough blueprint of action.

      Unfortunately, we may run into scenarios where we put forth a great deal of effort in both the process of planning and the acting on it, and yet are left with minimal positive traction that follows. Imagine driving a car without a steering wheel. The vehicle of choice is intended to transport you directly to your destination, and yet without a working steering wheel, you are unable to stay on path. A car without a steering wheel will never head in the desired direction or reach the sought-after destination, regardless of your expended energy, time, and commitment. Actively steering the vehicle is clearly paramount in this simplified example.

      Clarifying goals provides intention for behaviors and helps to identify the necessary process-oriented steps to achieve the stated goal. Imagine you are an elite swimmer training for the Olympics, and your eyes are dead set on placing first. The swimmer who fails to beat the sun to rise in the morning to train, or the swimmer who fails to follow training

recommendations, is obviously engaging in behaviors that are not necessarily goal aligned. The swimmer who is committed to the regime despite exhaustion, and the swimmer who nourishes their body in a way that supports their Olympic endeavors, is more likely to come close to or achieve the end goal given their mission-aligned behaviors.

Know your "why" attached to the goal!

This is what the modern, hippie-dippie movement of manifestation looks like. Manifestation, at its core, is psychologically sound. Manifestation, or the idea of clarifying and focusing on goals, is vital for task accomplishment. Manifestation proposes that if you want change, you must position your mindset to one that believes an idea can transform into a reality.

Let's refer back to the Olympic swimmer scenario. As a child, the now-adult swimmer likely watched hours of content around professional swimmers achieving their goals and being celebrated on the world stage. They likely stayed up late at night thinking and dreaming about what it would be like to have a tangible representation in the form of a medal for their commitment to their sport. The child would also make friends who thought and behaved similarly. They probably surrounded themselves with coaches who possessed the knowledge to support them in their growth. The idea is simple: if you want change, then position yourself to allow change to happen.

Let's also look at a Ford f250 truck as an example. It is obvious from the brand name that it is "built tough" and is intended to be used in a utilitarian way (hauling and transporting). Let's say you plan to use the truck for a cross-country trip; you (and your truck) will certainly arrive at your destination;

however, you'll also likely face very high associated costs. The price of fuel for an f250 to drive cross-country versus a Ford Fusion is astronomical. Both have the same manufacturers. Both have a similar build playbook that the mechanics and builders use. However, they are entirely different in terms of what missions, goals, or tasks they are intended to fulfill. An understanding of the goal makes it easier to identify what is needed to "get there."

Knowing your "why" associated with the goals will clarify where effort should be placed and what behaviors one should engage in. Clarity is cultivated, intentions are further grounded, and the pathway to goal accomplishment is more clearly paved.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the unhelpful impact of confusing perfectionism with goal achievement. Let's say the Olympic swimmer solely sought out perfectionism, while giving minimal value to the process involved. This inherently can create mental vulnerability as they consider the risk of failure. In this situation, anything less than perfect execution will lead to frustration, shame, disappointment, and a defeatist mentality. Seeking perfection even when the goals are clear will breed unsustainable results.

What do you actually care about? Motivation, excitement, and dedication is fundamental to individual and systemic effectiveness. To be effective in any measure is to know that your effort output "matches up" with your identified goal. Internal and external resistance is a direct byproduct of misalignment with what provides you fulfillment and value. In other words: there is a level of incongruence between what one cares about, and the actions one takes. Internal resistance may feel

like a dip in motivation and may look like apathy or sluggish-
ness. External resistance might feel like pushback and may look
like defensiveness and disrupted cohesion amongst the group
or team.

Aligning with our values serves to create greater inter-
nal stability; as we reach a stronger sense of stability, we're also
more inclined and capable of remaining on the path to our
identified goal and destination. Ideally, our behaviors, actions,
and processes are informed by our values, which work to clar-
ify our goals.

Principle 3:
Create Desire in Others

While externally controlling all of that and all of whom exist in our environment is an impossible endeavor, we can control the ways in which we elicit desire, excitement, and motivation in others when faced with otherwise unappealing or difficult tasks. More effective performance is not only dependent on an individual's Adaptive control, but also that of their surrounding environment.

On an individual level, consider utilizing your awareness of others to proactively mitigate complications before they arise. Perhaps you have some historical data that your colleague tends to procrastinate on the final tasks until two days leading up to the deadline. Consider ways to model your own level of ease throughout the project as you implement time-blocking, use organized timelines, and as you spend the final days making tiny modifications versus drastic overhauls. Maybe this involves a conversation at the onset of the project itself where collaboration, delegation of tasks, and understanding of individual and collective strengths all lend itself to the shared and common goal: a completed project.

Let's apply this principle to an even more common scenario, and one that is surely to elicit some comic relief. You quickly discover during the initial stages of your relationship that choosing what to eat for dinner was not, in fact, going to

be a fun experience. The simple question, *"what do you want for dinner?"* sends your partner into an immediate state of decision paralysis. What is intended to be an open question begging for a single food suggestion has evolved into a 45-minute-too-long of a conversation debating what pizza spot has the best pizza, even though the menus you're choosing between are essentially identical. The goal in this scenario is also clear: eat good food, reach fullness.

Ultimately, we cannot control our partner's internal decision-making process; however, we can potentially mitigate a delayed dinner in the future. The data you've gathered points to one conclusion: your partner struggles when too many options are available. Proactively using this information while simultaneously emphasizing the shared goal might sound like, *"Hey, I'm pretty sure we're both starving. That new pizza spot you mentioned looks great, but delivery is about an hour. How does Pequods's sound instead? We know they deliver quickly, and we love their pizza. And in the meantime, I'll get a reservation for the spot you want so we can go this weekend."* In this case: you mitigate the 45-minute conversation of doom, you reach fullness in the form of pizza, and your partner's need is also met. A win for all parties involved.

Time travel back to age 10 or a moment and recall when persuasive essays were introduced during our elementary school career. We were all instructed to write about something we so intensely desired and wanted, and present in written format to the identified individual (i.e., our parents) how they, too, would benefit from accepting the proposal. Creating desire in others is the adult-form of a persuasive essay. As 10-year-olds, we explicitly shouted our needs throughout our essays; as adults, creating desire in others is a far more implicit form of

persuasion modeled through our behaviors and interactions. It is not solely "me" or "I" focused, but also takes others into account and empathetically understands another individual's needs. The end goal is trying to get the other person on board rather than resisting your position.

Creating desire in others is also reliant on establishing workplace environments, relationships, and interactions that feel secure. A sense of safety requires that we learn and address others' concerns and fear. Individuals are more likely to get "on board" and join the team when the work culture ensures inclusivity and individual involvement. Individuals are often more inclined to show up when they feel consulted with, listened to, and when they provide a vital role to the team. While the entire team benefits, the individual also must feel as their concern of *"what's in it for me?"* also is considered and addressed.

Principle 4:
Leverage Others' Talent and Abilities

Principle 4 further iterates the concept of collective performance that we read earlier. This considers that historically used processes, ideas, and beliefs, are not necessarily synonymous with current-day effectiveness and success; rather, individuals who see consistent performance welcome in new concepts and thoughts on the notion that they may prove to be more productive.

We have deduced that personal flexibility is crucial to shifting our maladaptive behaviors and responses to more Adaptive ones. In the context of working with others, remaining open requires us to consider the context of the situation, and the best outcome that exists regardless of its newness or irregular application. Leveraging others' talent is founded on the idea that collaboration versus excessive autonomy is likely to have more desired and productive outcomes. It involves recognizing and building on others' strengths. It requires that we identify traits in others that can be further developed or utilized for the betterment of the overall goal.

Willingness to work with others and to lead with humility is undoubtedly necessary within both professional and personal relationships. However, this alone is not enough. You must also believe that others can in fact, support you, so long as you invite them to. Believing that you are solely responsible

to enact positive change, complete projects, and to make decisions will inevitably limit consideration of other opportunities, ideas, and concepts that exist.

For an example: as a business leader, leveraging your employees' strengths first requires awareness of what strengths exist. Leaders may assume that employees can readily acknowledge their superpowers; rather, it is the leader's role to also discover these through thoughtful observation, and by deliberately placing employees in positions or on projects that amplify those identified strengths. For even greater overall success as a team, leaders ideally should group together employees with a diverse range of strengths on a shared task. Effective leaders should also inquire about their employees' interests outside of work, and creatively identify whether these passions are transferable to work, and whether they intersect with work objectives. Consider the employee who completely immerses themselves in travel planning, and no trip is without a detailed itinerary. It's clear that the employee's organizational skills, attention to detail, and ability to structure a well-thought-out plan would be vital to planning the next companywide meeting or yearly fundraiser.

Principle 4 recognizes the reality that so single individual necessarily possesses all strengths, traits, and abilities to complete a task; rather, the team and system as a whole should be well-rounded and varied in skill. It acknowledges the need for strengths-based conversations at the outset of each new project, and an allocation of roles based on the identified strengths. This begs the individual to provide opportunities for the growth of currently identified strengths, while uncovering others.

Ultimately, how you recognize and leverage the powers of those around you is vital to both individual and company-wide success. An employee's overall wellness and professional motivation is positively influenced by the ways in which the business leader empowers the development of their unique strengths. Consider as well within non-professional relationships how working collectively and in alignment with those around you can create positive impact. It all makes sense: when we use our talents and receive positive reinforcement for them, we become more confident in our ability to positively contribute to the mission or goal.

Principles 5:
Expect Change and
Lead with Intention

S ituations of change and adversity bring about a sense of uncertainty; and with uncertainty often comes difficulty and discomfort. We may become nearsighted in the way we react, and fail to consider the impact of our immediate but uninformed decisions. Consider what it might feel like to shift from avoiding and dreading change and adversity, to expecting it and ultimately learning how to thrive in it. Accepting that change is an inevitable aspect of the human experience allows us to jump towards growth rather than remain stuck. Keep in mind: it often isn't the change itself that is the issue, but rather our reaction to it. Is it possible to not only anticipate change, but actually start to embrace it?

Lead with self-inquisition and self-awareness if you notice rigidity in behavior or stagnation in movement; it's possible you're using maladaptive patterns as a way to manage the discomfort that accompanies change. Avoiding change only reinforces historically used, routine, and ineffective behaviors. Adopting a mindset that accepts change requires patience, as this is not an overnight process. To expect and accept change means that you are pursuing personal and intrapersonal growth over comfortable stagnation.

What would it feel like, and look like for you to deliberately anticipate change, and expect the range of emotions that come with it? Avoiding change at all costs is not only a tiring game that leads to no progress, but it will also only create greater internal resistance. I wonder if rather than approaching change with dread, we can lead with the curiosity of it - and perhaps even acceptance. Is it possible that change-related anxiety can act as an opportunity to master your own ability to regain control?

Anticipating the potential for change reduces the chance of figurative paralysis when the unexpected inevitably happens. We must assume proactive readiness to confront change, rather than freeze in its presence. When we falsely predict that all will go according to plan, we unintentionally place ourselves in a position to be consumed with overwhelm when something goes "wrong." Expecting the reality of change allows for the co-existence of acceptance and problem-solving behavior.

As you approach anxiety with openness versus dread, you inherently begin to build trust in yourself to overcome adversity. You gain historical and important information about yourself that can ultimately increase your levels of self-trust: in your ability to work through rather than work against change, and in your capacity to manage even the most unpleasant and uncomfortable of emotions. Even if things don't go as expected, and even if you must confront anxiety and all the distress that accompanies it, you trust yourself and your ability to manage it.

Brief reminder: avoiding adversity sends the indirect message to ourselves that we don't necessarily trust our ability

to overcome it. It feels easier to avoid altogether, than have to confront feelings of distrust in ourselves, or to confront "failure." Self-trust does not imply that we seamlessly overcome challenges; it rather means we trust our capacity to work through even unintended and unfortunate outcomes.

Acceptance and expectation of change and adversity lends itself to more intentional behavior. Should we consistently be shocked by life's modifications, we are likely to stand with arms crossed and eyebrows furrowed; it becomes easy in this scenario to lead with habitual behavior, familiar patterns, and maladaptive reactions when adversity is thrown upon us with little warning. Not to be confused with cynicism, remaining in a proactive state of readiness and acceptance for change provides us with a moment to consider how we would like to proceed, respond, and intentionally move forward.

I'll paint a rather rudimentary picture to further explain this principle. Imagine the employee who is just hours away from project completion; their previous weeks have been filled to the brim with tasks, deadlines, consult calls, and meetings, all for the sake of this project to come to its highly anticipated closure. The employee is running on adrenaline as they consider the temporary and desired emptiness of their workday following project completion; in fact, so much adrenaline that they mistakenly place all trust in the technology that is housing the project's contents, and they fail to save the final draft as they head out of the office.

The employee arrives back at his computer the following morning, only to find that the computer automatically installed new updates over the course of the night, and the project's final pieces were lost and not to be retrieved. While this

is such an unfortunate experience, it is not an entirely unique one. In this case, the employee didn't anticipate having to spend the next eight hours reconstructing what they had already completed the day before. And while it is also not preferred that we move about the world with a cynic mindset, we certainly do want to prepare ourselves in workable and sustainable ways for a range of outcomes, both "positive" and/or "negative." Expecting change and the potential difficulties accompanying it elicit greater intentionality in how we manage our emotions, thoughts, and interactions.

Executive Summary:
Principles in Action for Business Leaders and Founders

Effective performance is a byproduct of remaining intellectually humble, fostering an environment that is founded on collectivism, leading with responsiveness versus reactivity, viewing periods of change as an experience to move through versus resist, and remaining values-aligned and process-oriented.

The biggest trap that you will find yourself in is believing that your viewpoints are infallible. Assuming that your current beliefs are the "only way" will only alienate you from those with opposing and potentially more productive thoughts, and stifle individual and systemic development. You ironically regain control the moment you "surrender" your rigidly held beliefs, and instead invite in the ideas, perspectives, and opinions of others. Consider if you have been championing your historically held beliefs that are ultimately no longer workable or helpful. Surely this reflection requires a mindset of sincere humility to do so.

When we take our own ideas off their metaphorical pedestal, we create space for a personal and professional culture that is inherently more collective and inclusive. For the business leader, this looks like embedding in your team an environment that welcomes innovation, one of genuine respect for the opinions of others, and a culture that supports the ongoing growth and development of all involved. Leaders that possess a collectivist mindset acknowledge that collaboration versus strong holding of the individual ego is paramount for increased control and effective performance.

We've also recognized the inevitability of facing difficult situations and experiences that reduce or completely remove our sense of control. We all face levels of *internal* stressors, which can look like our own mental health concerns, our developmental background, minimal coping skills or limited opportunities to acquire them, and a general predisposition to "bigger" emotions. We also confront *external* stressors, such as systemic oppression, economic disparities, financial struggles, war, poverty – the list is unfortunately not a short one.

While we cannot alone dismantle some of the external stressors we face, we can actively assume ownership over how we manage and control our internal stressors. We often have the highest level of ownership potential around internal stressors. Imagine you hold a management position, and the organizational founders implement a companywide policy change that immediately sends your employees into a state of overwhelm. This requires you, as the manager, to learn and adopt the procedural changes; and requires you to manage your employee's distress as they also adapt.

You are unable to completely control the external, which in this case is the structural changes set forth by the company's founders. The control you do have exists internally, in how you manage your own potentially ineffective reaction, and instead respond to the change and to your employees with support and optimism. Deliberately controlling the internal response system in the face of distress and anxiety works to simultaneously manage the external. Your employees may be more willing to adapt if they notice the acceptance modeled by you.

As a reminder, facing challenges and points of uncertainty is a certainty in life. We may have falsely taught ourselves, learned through society, or were modeled by those that we trust, that adopting avoidance patterns would reinstate our control. It's clear that the goal of regaining control is not attained through avoidance, but rather through active and

deliberate management of unpleasant emotions and scenarios. Pushing against your inclination to avoid requires an acceptance of the discomfort you are likely to face, the emergence of potentially unfavorable emotions, and a willingness to shift old behavioral patterns while actively adopting a mindset that is focused on management versus "fixing."

These truths might have confirmed that the level of control you currently have is Adaptive, and that your current performance is effective and sustainable. For others, these truths might have emphasized patterns, interactions, and habits that are no longer workable, and elicited the need and desire for behavioral change. Any modification in action, specifically those that are longstanding and reinforced, require that we understand the "why" behind the change we're making. Without value or purpose, we often find ourselves lost in our mission, unfulfilled, and dissatisfied.

Consider reflecting on the following:

- During a challenging or frustrating scenario, did you react in a way that felt personally "best," or did you consider what the most effective response would be?

- When a decision must be made, are you open to opposing beliefs if it means helping the overall cause?

- Do you lead with rigidity or humility and openness when interacting with new people and new knowledge?

- Have you been willing to trade in unhelpful comfort for the unfamiliar that may be more productive?

- Do you feel that what you value is congruent with how you move through the world? With the interactions you hold? With the goals you set for yourself?

There are five primary guiding principles to reach a place of greater control and improved overall performance.

The principles are intended for use during company-wide meetings, within social interactions, as a foundational piece for healthy relationships, as you're making difficult decisions, and as you continue to foster personal and systemic growth.

Principle 1: Be Aggressively Self-Aware and Assume Complete Ownership

Developing self-awareness requires a willingness to directly assess your own limitations and growth edges. It is an ongoing process, and one that also asks us to assume complete ownership over our behaviors, reactions, and interactions.

Principle 2: Clarify Goals and Know the Why

Identifying the desired end point is of course crucial; however, understanding the "why" behind it is arguably more so. Progress wanes in an absence of value attached to the goal itself. The willingness to progress and the motivation to maintain progress is highly dependent on an identified purpose.

Principle 3: Create Desire in Others

Incentivizing others to change is not synonymous with manipulation. Rather, creating desire in others intends to decrease relational friction while simultaneously coming to a collaborative decision. "Getting on the same page" can occasionally erupt into arguments; creating desire in others seeks to address this by also considering the other individual's needs and emotions.

Principle 4: Leverage Others' Talent and Abilities

While attaining "success" can be an individual endeavor, it is undoubtedly more notable and sustainable when others are contributors alongside you. We are surrounded by individuals with a variety of superpowers and abilities. Leveraging the skills of others not only aids more effective performance, but creates positive shifts in work culture founded on inclusivity and collaboration.

Principle 5: Expect Change and Lead with Intention

You will continue to experience change and adversity throughout your life. Expecting change allows individuals to become better equipped and prepared to respond effectively; and with greater acceptance of life's inevitable changes and challenges, individuals move with a greater sense of intentionality.

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As a business leader and/or founder, you likely have many responsibilities and members on your team. You are ultimately tasked with identifying and restructuring limiting beliefs, remaining open to alternative viewpoints, and committing fully to creating a culture that is collective, all while meeting your mandate. Position your mindset towards the long-term value versus falling victim to the lure of short-term familiarity. Maintain a firm grasp on the team's overall purpose and mission, and lead with behaviors that are dedicated towards it. Hold yourself accountable for the necessary behavioral changes to regain control and improve performance, while also inviting trusted members in to provide you with feedback throughout this process. Lead with humility always, as the knowledge you possess is only positively utilized when in the context of other's valuable skill sets.

Notice when you lead with rigidity or inflexibility, when you shut down versus open up to novel ideas, and when adversity-induced fear asks you to avoid rather than confront. Lead with curiosity, as these are all "warning signs" that historical and ineffective patterns are resurfacing, which isn't uncommon during any sort of change process. Acknowledge the perceived threat, discomfort, and resistance, and deliberately regain control by implementing the Five Principles. If I were to be reductionist in the way I conclude, it would sound and look something like this: regain Adaptive control on an individual level → build/rebuild systems surrounding you using the same methods = individual and collective performance increase in effectiveness and sustainability.

About the Author

Spencer Potesta is an Organizational Psychologist, and the Founder and Principal of Potesta Practices & Consulting ("Potesta Ventures"). He focuses primarily on helping organizations scale through advising and investing. He is passionate about assisting founders, business leaders, and organizations to reach full capability and create maximum impact. His work is built on the belief that the world's most challenging issues are most effectively solved through well-run organizations and their potential impact.

Spencer specializes in resolving business problems with a deep understanding of the human interactions that are inherently at the foundation of it. In addition to his work in advising and investing in organizations, Spencer has also co-founded a Psychotherapeutic Clinical Practice, and is an active double-board certified Psychotherapist in the state of Illinois where he is afforded the opportunity to support 1:1 clients. His multi-disciplinary approach gives him a unique perspective as he supports and creates long lasting and effective change in people and organizations.

In addition to his professional work, he is President of Social Capital ("Social Capital Foundation, Inc") a 501(c)3 endowment fund with the mission of providing access and opportunity to those in need. A portion of book proceeds will be allocated towards this mission. As a lifelong learner himself, he understands that increasing access and opportunities for others is socially and systemically paramount.