

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Busyness is a great enemy of relationships. We become preoccupied with making a living, doing our work, paying bills, and accomplishing goals as if these tasks are the point of life. They are not.

Rick Warren

Too busy to think straight

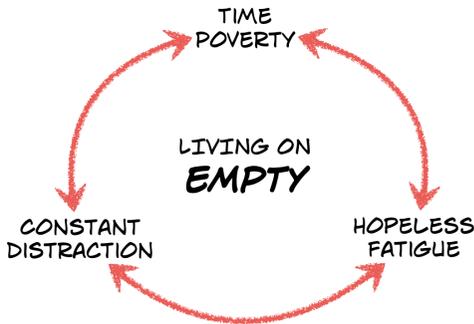
Do you remember a time when your work just flowed? Was the result something in which you took pride? I'm sure it was good work. And what kind of feelings did you experience during and after that work was finished? Joy? Satisfaction? A greater regard for yourself?

If you are like most of us, such moments can be all too rare. The usual experience for many is that work is a struggle.

Then there's the matter of time. Do you have enough time? Again, most people I talk with in business are time poor. There never seems to be enough time in our working day. In many workplaces, there seems to be a pressure to work longer. And there is a cost to our private lives.

My guess is that you have a lot of distractions in your work. This doesn't help you focus or allow you to do your best work. Now, there are some practical steps you can take to protect yourself from distractions, steps that will help you focus better.

And I wonder if you are, to some degree, weary with your workload. Maybe you are even feeling overwhelmed. If your tiredness is more extreme and you have felt it for some time, then you might even be losing hope that it will ever get better. Here is a vicious cycle I've observed in past times in my own experience and also in many of my clients:



Well, from what I have learned and practised, I'm pretty confident that I can help you break this syndrome.

This is not like many self-help books. You will know the sort of books I'm referring to: that operate at the superficial level of this technique or that. The solutions that I explore in this book are far deeper than merely using an app or a technique. Yes, you will find a number of techniques referenced and explained¹, many of which could give you immediate and remarkable improvements to your work. For example, one exercise early on this book helped one of my clients reclaim about 10 hours of her working week. Nevertheless, the key insight you will find here is that this is about self-leadership, the self we bring to our work. It is about how we lead ourselves, rather allow ourselves to drift or be driven.

This approach comes out of research I and my colleagues conducted into the lives of exceptional change leaders. Our conclusions were:

- Lasting and prevailing improvements in our work experience and the results we get are drawn from within;
- We can all grow into this exceptional way of working; and

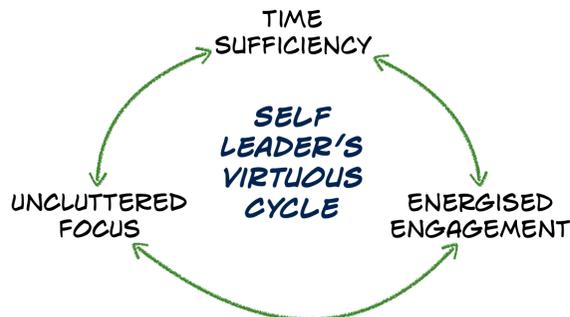
1 See Appendix A.

- This approach and the working skills that come out of this inner place are more vital than ever. The world of work is now far more turbulent on a sustained basis than it ever used to be. It is more brutal than it ever has been. In fact, I know of no other viable and sustainable way of working in today's environment.

As well as the techniques, I will share breakthrough principles and concepts for engaging with your work. Apply these principles, adopt this mindset, and you can enjoy a more pleasurable and positive pattern of working. I want to help you get back to those times or moments when you were able to do good work, your best work. Sometimes we all need someone to come alongside us and remind us of experiences that for some reason we have lost and maybe have forgotten altogether. So some parts of what we will cover may feel like meeting an old friend. My aim is to make your experience look rather more like this:

Other elements of this book are likely to be quite new to you. In these cases, take your time - some of the precious time I will help you get back! Experiment with these new approaches. I will provide practical exercises for you throughout.

We are all different. I respect your uniqueness. That is part of discovering what leadership academics call your "personal mastery." Some techniques and approaches will suit you very well. Others less so. I want to respect your uniqueness and not make the exercises in this book prescriptive. However, we all master what is useful to us by practice until they become natural to us. We will look at this in more detail later.



As a knowledge worker, I will show you how we can care for and nurture our brain, the main piece of equipment we use in the course of our work, whilst getting better, more productive and more effective.

I know that from my own area of business, there is a strong bias towards technology rather than how we think, and how our thinking informs our behaviour. When I visit project management conferences, for example, vendors stress the need for this software or that app, rather than a mindset that works. From what I have seen and experienced, I'm increasingly uneasy about that bias. So in this book, we consider concepts, principles and practical techniques rather than software. Sorry to disappoint you; it would be all too easy for me just to promote a software package that I claimed would revolutionise your life.

A Better Way

Many of us are waking up to these better ways of working that are far more rewarding. We consistently do good work. Good work is not merely surviving, but growing and becoming more resilient in an increasingly challenging world of work. At the same time, we bring to the world our best work. We think what we do now is our best, but as we grow in self-leadership we do something we thought we never could: we produce even better work. We practice self-leadership at two levels at least.

1. The physical level

This is the level that we see and can measure. At the physical level, it is about personal order, personal organisation, how we order our private world². And because it is personal, many of us are inclined to resist someone else telling us what to do and how to do it. Others find themselves intrigued about how people do this “organisation thing” differently. As we will see, it is possible to make huge improvements in our personal productivity, as well as significant improvements to overall satisfaction in our work, by some fairly simple changes to the way we work. So we might call the first level of self-leadership *techniques of efficiency*.

People who intentionally lead themselves use tools and techniques. There is a physical practice of certain habits and rituals that can pay huge dividends in our productivity. For example, there are techniques about how to limit our current focus, and habits like the daily heads-up, that I will explain later, that all make a huge difference to people's daily work experience and outcomes.

2 Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World* (2003).

This level is probably the more superficial level of the two, but it is one that we all can immediately understand and apply in our own contexts. It is the level of quick wins. Immediate positive feedback is important to us in motivating ourselves to persevere, what psychologists call our intrinsic motivation. Otherwise, after a short period, we get discouraged, give up, and drift back into old habits.

The Section in the book called *The Physics of Self-Leadership* deals with this level. It's the physics of self-leadership because we learn to manage our own lives, the way we achieve good work.

2. The mental and emotional level

This is our inner world, our thought life. We can choose to examine our thoughts and emotions. Our self-perception, our identity emerges as more important than we might first realise. Do we see ourselves as captives or as free people who can lead ourselves? This area of identity is supremely important. Our identity, our ability to be present in our work, our ability imagine better futures for ourselves and those around us, and our clarity about our own purpose, our destination, all are huge areas that can make or break our use of the techniques and tools at the physical level.

This is the realm of the soul. We will explore these areas in the Section on *The Soul of Self-Leadership*. We do our best work when we master the deeper issues within us:

For as [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he...

Proverbs of Solomon 23:7

The region of our soul is pivotal to how we function. The soul, our intentional thinking and emotions, can draw upon the reality of our spirit. Whereas the interaction between the body and the soul is much more two-way.

For example, when we are tired, we can be tempted to depression; so the state of our physical body affects our emotions. When we are acutely stressed by an external threat or acute pain, we can find our cognitive agility somewhat impaired: we say things like, “I can’t think straight.” Also, our soul can have a great affect on our physical health. There is growing medical evidence, for example, that an unforgiving and hateful attitude towards others can damage our bodies through, for example, arthritis and immune system disorders. The opposite is also true: if we choose to be thankful and appreciative, it can energise us and often can even reverse disease in our bodies.

Personal mastery & Inner Leadership

Very often a change of self is needed more than a change of scene.

A.C. Benson

These two levels of self-leadership are what the leadership academies call personal mastery¹. What exactly is personal mastery? Essentially it is about our leadership of ourselves, our inner leadership. This has to do with more challenging areas of our internal thoughts and our habits, at the level of the soul. When we consider how we maintain commitments we make to others, whilst being able to focus on the matter at hand, this is a matter of personal mastery. Another example is when should we consider saying “No” to a request from

¹ Leadership programmes and academies around the world commonly now have a module on “Personal Mastery” and the outcomes from this area on the lives of delegates are often very impressive.

another person? We can change our own habits, grow in an awareness of our personal boundaries, and a grow in a sense of personal mission. This is called by some as emotionally intelligent self-management, as in the work of Daniel Goleman².

For the reader who is keen to focus on the more challenging aspects of self-leadership, I would caution that there is much in the first level for all of us. *The Physics of Self-Leadership* is the area of quick wins and these are important as we seek to motivate and encourage ourselves to replace old habits with new ones.

Nevertheless, I agree that leading ourselves well is far more than a few productivity techniques.

Summary

So in this introduction, we have looked at the combined effect on our working lives of

- Time poverty
- Constant distraction
- Hopeless fatigue

This is living on empty. My aim is to help you lead yourself to a life of good work, where you enjoy:

- Time sufficiency
- Uncluttered focus
- Energised engagement.

This will not be primarily through technology. It has to do with looking at ourselves as complete human beings, body and soul. In this book we will look at:

- The physical level, the level of our external world and organising strategies; and
- The soul of self-leadership, the internal level of our own identity, thought patterns, and our sense of destiny.

The first level is the level of “quick wins”, whereas the level of the soul is where enduring changes to our performance come from.

Reading a book is not for everyone, so I have also designed a developed an online course here (<http://pearcemayfield.thinkific.com/courses/time-freedom>) that will help you work through some of these practices and techniques.

In the next chapter, we will look at the major shifts in recent years in the world of work and how this affects how we grow and produce good work.