

RETHINKING INSPIRED THINKING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Inspired Thinking is an innovative way of discovering new ideas to achieve meaningful success. When someone or something inspires you, it pushes and propels you to do something new or different. It gives you new ideas and a strong feeling of enthusiasm and excitement. And this is the key point of this book; helping you discover inspiration from new ideas and insights which will lead you on a journey of discovery, meaning, enjoyment and purpose.

Neil Francis is the author of *Positive Thinking*, *The Entrepreneur's Book* and *Changing Course*. He is currently the chairman of a digital agency, director of a software company, a trustee of a national charity and a trustee of a sporting

"What does success look like? Ask a million people and they will give you a million different answers. Many answers will centre around making as much money as possible. But meaningful success requires an understanding of some key human values. Neil Francis understands this well and his latest book gives important insights into how to combine business or personal success and human impact at the same time."

Mel Young, President, Homeless World Cup

"Neil's books knit together theory and practice in a way that is both easy to follow and easy to adopt. And why would we not wish to adopt practices that add value, encourage creativity and inspire others? Unlike some books which use global phenomena as case studies, Neil's latest book uses realistic, close-to-home examples which enable the reader to empathise with the protagonists and identify with the situation thus encouraging changes in behaviour which in turn make a difference and help to deliver success."

Malcolm Cannon, National Director, IoD Scotland

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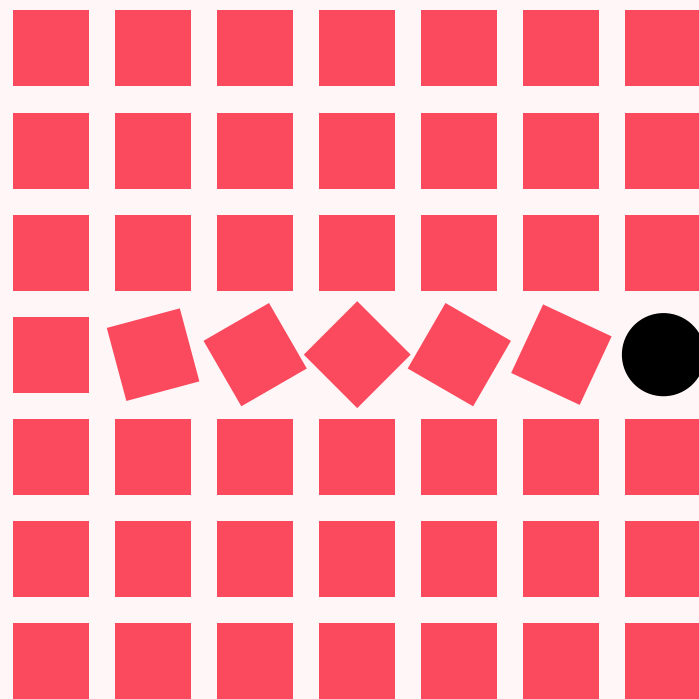


INSPIRED THINKING

NEIL
FRANCIS

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HOW TO DISCOVER NEW IDEAS
FOR MEANINGFUL SUCCESS



ADVANCE PRAISE

“What does success look like? Ask a million people and they will give you a million different answers. Many answers will centre around making as much money as possible. But meaningful success requires an understanding of some key human values. Neil Francis understands this well and his latest book gives important insights into how to combine business or personal success and human impact at the same time. Neil has an insightful and important story to tell which will certainly encourage inspired thinking.”

Mel Young, President, Homeless World Cup

“Neil is an inspiration himself. His books knit together theory and practice in a way that is both easy to follow and to adopt. And why would we not wish to adopt practices that add value, encourage creativity and inspire others? Unlike some books which use global phenomena as case studies, Neil’s latest book uses realistic, close-to-home examples which enable the reader to empathize with the protagonists and identify with the situation, thus encouraging changes in behaviour which in turn help to deliver success.”

Malcolm Cannon, National Director, IoD Scotland

“What is ‘inspiration?’ How can inspiration propel you to achieve remarkable things, even in the face of extreme adversity? How can you see new possibilities when the odds are stacked against you? How can you use ‘bad luck’ to enrich your life and find deeper meaning and purpose? How does inspiration relate to motivation and passion?

“In this wonderful book, Neil Francis explores these questions through examples of inspirational people. With optimism, positivity, gentleness and understanding, he provides useful, practical tips, tools and strategies to find inspiration and propel us to a life full of deeper meaning, purpose and satisfaction.”

Gillian Mead, Professor of Stroke and Elderly Care Medicine, University of Edinburgh

“I did not know the real meaning of the word ‘inspiring’ until I came into contact with stroke survivors when I myself suffered a major stroke at only 48 years old. Neil is an inspiration in his own right, and his new book shares the stories of numerous people who inspire us with their real life experiences; all told through the eyes of someone who knows what he is talking about.”

Michael Lynagh, Managing Director, Dow Jones Corporate, and former Australian rugby player and World Cup Winner 1991

“Knowing how find sources of inspiration from the world around you is the key to ongoing motivation and happiness in life. *Inspired Thinking* has lots of practical tips on how to do just that.”

Nicole Soames, CEO, Diadem Performance, and bestselling author, *The Coaching Book*

“Neil Francis has an eye for a motivating story. Thought-provoking, helpfully short and pithily expressed, the reader arrives rapidly at practical action that they can implement straight away.

“The result is indeed inspirational, so treat yourself to some inspired thinking.”

Kevin Duncan, Author, *The Intelligent Work Book*

“I have known a number of inspirational people in my life and Neil is right up there with the best of them. Overcoming adversity is one thing, but to do it in his way is a truly amazing experience to witness. He wants individuals to strive for – and to achieve – fulfilment in their lives and then pass that onto others. That is truly inspirational. He’s a true 21st century role model.”

Craig Paterson, Chairman, Globalcelt

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INSPIRED THINKING

HOW TO DISCOVER NEW IDEAS
FOR MEANINGFUL SUCCESS

NEIL FRANCIS



MADRID | MEXICO CITY | LONDON
NEW YORK | BUENOS AIRES
BOGOTA | SHANGHAI | NEW DELHI

In memory of my friend Howie,
one of life's good guys

“ONE DAY YOU WILL
WAKE UP AND
THERE WON'T BE
ANY MORE TIME
TO DO THE THINGS
YOU'VE ALWAYS
WANTED.
DO IT NOW.”

Paulo Coelho

TO START, A STORY TO GET YOU IN THE RIGHT MOOD FOR MY BOOK

A philosophy professor stands in front of his class. Wordlessly, he picks up a large, empty glass jar and proceeds to fill it with golf balls. He then asks his students whether the jar is full. They agree that it is.

The professor then picks up a box of pebbles and pours these into the jar too. He shakes the jar lightly, and the pebbles fall into the spaces between the golf balls. He again asks the students again if the jar is full, and they agree that it is.

Next, the professor picks up a box containing sand and pours this into the jar. Of course, the sand fills up the remaining gaps. He asks once more if the jar is full and the students respond with a unanimous 'yes.'

The professor then produces two bottles of beer from under the table and pours their entire contents into the jar, effectively filling the tiny spaces between the grains of sand. The students laugh.

"Now," the professor says, as the laughter subsides, "I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life. The golf balls are the important things – your family, your health, your friends and your favourite passions – and if everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full.

"The pebbles are the other things that matter, like perhaps your job and your house. The sand is everything else – the small stuff.

"If you put the sand into the jar first," he continues, "there's no room for the pebbles or the golf balls. The same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you'll never have room for the things that are important to you. Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness.

"Spend time with your children. Spend time with your parents. Visit your grandparents. Take your spouse out to dinner. Play another 18 holes of golf. There will always be time to clean the house and mow the lawn.

"Take care of the golf balls first – the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand."

One of the students raises her hand and enquires what the beer represents. The professor smiles and says, "I'm glad you asked. The beer shows you that, no matter how full your life may seem, there's always room for a couple of beers with a friend."

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Finally, as always, my daft Golden Retrievers, Dougal and Archie, whose long walks on the beaches of North Berwick provided me the space and environment to plan the book.

To all of you, a big hug of gratitude.

INTRODUCTION

THE
RUCKSACK

After that amusing anecdote, it might seem strange to launch into a book about inspirational thinking with a sad story, but bear with me through the next page or two. It will all make sense.

This is the story of an incredibly brave, positive and inspiring young lady named Becca Henderson. If you read my last book, *Positive Thinking*, I introduced her to you there. I knew of Becca because her dad, Michael, was a close school friend of mine and we stayed in touch over the years.

In 2017, at the age of 23, Becca was diagnosed with a rare form of heart cancer. The doctors tried to treat it with chemotherapy and radiation, but to no avail. The only path left to save Becca was for the doctors to remove her heart. And that is what they did.

But Becca didn't receive a biological heart from a transplant donor. Instead, she was given a Total Artificial Heart (TAH), a life-supporting cardiac system with an external mechanical driver and tubes that went into her abdomen. She carried it in a rucksack on her back.

Even with all of this going on in her life, Becca was always full of optimism, positivity and hope.

Before her operation, she regularly updated her Facebook page, sharing her thoughts and experiences of living with cancer of the heart. When she became very ill and was in intensive care, her parents kept the updates coming, allowing family and friends to stay abreast of how things were progressing. Then, she went through the operation to remove her heart and replace it with the TAH.

Over the months that followed, she made a fantastic recovery and again started to personally post Facebook updates on her progress.

Through all of this, she had been determined not to allow her condition to rule her life.

Every time I saw a Facebook update with Becca sitting in a restaurant, or out with her friends, or playing with her dog in the garden, it blew my mind that she actually had no biological heart, and yet was 'living' as normal a life as possible!

In 2018, she resumed her Master's course at the University of Oxford and went to classes carrying her TAH in its rucksack. She even applied to do a PHD at Oxford and her proposal was accepted.

I marvelled time and again at Becca's bravery, resilience and positive attitude in the face of everything she had to deal with.

And then, in early 2019, she was told by the doctors that a suitable heart had been found. The operation initially seemed to be a success, but things quickly took a turn for the worse. Six days later – on 27 February – Becca died.

Even though it was incredibly sad, in the weeks and months after her death, I became more and more inspired by her life. The same could be said of vast numbers of family, friends and people she'd never even met, as was evident from comments posted on her Facebook page. Her story made the front page of the BBC website and many local and national newspapers wrote articles about her.

Oxford awarded her Master's degree posthumously, a decision the university made based on her progress toward successfully completing a degree in English. Her tutors noted,

“Becca was a person of extraordinary courage, humour and intellectual achievement.”

Everybody who knew her, or had heard of what she’d gone through, was inspired by her story.

Above all, it was Becca’s resilience that stood out. Whatever life threw at her, she would bounce back with her positive attitude. That resilience, in turn, inspired me to think of ways I could be more resilient in my own life. And that sparked the idea for this book, as a way to share sources of inspiration that others can draw from.

When someone or something inspires you, it can push you to do something new or different. It gives you new ideas, and strong feelings of enthusiasm and excitement, and you feel energized. This is the key point of this book. I’m confident you’ll be inspired by the ideas in these pages, which you can harness and translate into meaningful success. This will help you discover new strategies and ideas for achieving the goals and objectives you set, pushing your own boundaries and addressing difficult challenges, setbacks and obstacles in a far more positive way.

However, it is important to understand that *the application* of these ideas and strategies will always be more powerful than the ideas themselves. The key to getting the most out of this book is to apply an idea or a strategy that inspires you in your life, and actively use it. The best inspiration comes from the application of ideas, not the consumption of them.

“The inspiration is not the receiving of information,” wrote the entrepreneur, musician and TED Talk speaker Derek Sivers. “The inspiration is applying what you’ve received.”

Each chapter of this book starts with a story from the life of an individual that encapsulates the importance of a particular theme. This is backed up by various sources of inspiration, including practical examples, tips, tools and strategies that will help you harness all of this to achieve meaningful success.

Along the way, we’ll explore ideas around personal value, individuality, risk, ‘the blind self,’ self-belief, triviality, purpose, staying young, proactivity, determination, heroes, goals, collaboration, being lucky and legacy. They are ideas that will inform your way of thinking and inspire you to achieve success.

First, a brief word about ‘success.’ When I talk about success, I don’t mean material success, even though that could be a by-product. Instead, I’m referring to accomplishment of those things that give you purpose, meaning and fulfilment. That might focus mainly on what you do – your occupation – or it could be volunteering, family, friendship or another form of success.

As for my part, I am an entrepreneur and an author, not a psychologist or a social scientist. I don’t have a PhD and don’t employ researchers. What I try to do is interpret and condense what I think are interesting, relevant and useful bits of information that others can benefit from. This information is drawn from what I read, podcasts, webinars, seminars and dialogue with relevant experts.

As I have explored the world of ‘Inspired Thinking,’ I’ve tried to ensure that the examples, case studies, methods and tools referenced in this book are based on scientific evidence. Having said that, I’m grateful to all the researchers, scientists, psychologists, entrepreneurs and explorers I’ve drawn my material from.

“THE MOST
IMPORTANT THING
IS TO TRY AND
INSPIRE PEOPLE
SO THAT THEY
CAN BE GREAT IN
WHATEVER THEY
WANT TO DO.”

Kobe Bryant

IMPORTANCE OF INSPIRATION

Before we start, and for clarity, it is important to explain the difference between inspiration and motivation. Although they have two very distinct meanings, these terms are often used interchangeably.

Inspiration is something that you feel on the inside, while motivation is something exerted from the outside that compels you to take action. Inspiration is a ‘driving force,’ while motivation is a ‘pulling force.’

Inspiration lasts longer than motivation. Motivation will get you through the workday, or help you achieve a specific goal, but it won’t last a lifetime. Inspiration is enduring. It can extend for a very long period of time, influencing all aspects of your life.

Inspiration comes from passion; motivation does not. Typically, when you’re motivated to do something, you simply want to achieve that goal and move on. Inspiration is deeper than motivation. It stems from passion; from being influenced by something or someone in such a way that you want to change things and do things. Motivation, in the moment, can seem powerful, but its power fades when compared to the brilliance that is inspiration.

Inspiration and passion are closely linked to one another. You can be motivated without being passionate, but you rarely see inspiration without passion close by.

But what exactly is inspiration? When we think about it or talk about it, what do we actually mean when we say, “I feel inspired” or “That really inspired me?”

When you have the feeling of inspiration, there’s a surge of energy, with a thrilling rush of elation and excitement. The senses are amplified, and you’re far more aware of the possibilities that seem to be opening up for you. You enter a state of ‘flow,’ where you lose track of time. You don’t feel self-conscious, but rather assured that what you’re doing is intrinsically rewarding, purposeful and enjoyable.

In that special moment, it feels as though you have acquired some new perception, a new way to see things. This leads to a burst of energy, and true inspiration gives us motivation and liveliness to take action.

The word itself comes from the Latin *inspirare*, meaning ‘to breath into.’ One inspirational achievement – say, to land a probe on Mars – has a tendency to raise the sense of possibility in others. It could, for instance, compel a teenage boy to study astronomy at university or excite an adolescent girl who dreams of becoming an astronaut. The one who is inspired eventually performs their own feats, and inspires others, and so on down the line.

Finding inspiration from a person, a team, a piece of art, a scientific solution or the wonders of nature brings with it a wave of energy that by itself can propel you to start doing things you may not have thought possible. It’s so important because it keeps the mind positive and focused on the bigger picture.

Dr Scott Kaufman, a Columbia University psychologist, explored the phenomenon in “Why Inspiration Matters,” an article in *The Harvard Business Review*.

“In a culture obsessed with measuring talent and ability, we often overlook the important role of inspiration,” he wrote. “Inspiration awakens us to new possibilities by allowing us to transcend our ordinary experiences and limitations. Inspiration propels a person from apathy to possibility and transforms the way we perceive our own capabilities.”

Psychologists Todd Thrash and Andrew Elliot, of the University of Rochester in Upstate New York, have been studying inspiration for decades. They’ve identified three things that occur when we’re inspired: we see new possibilities; we’re receptive to an outside influence; and we feel energized and motivated.

Fortunately, inspiration is not a static state of mind, but a process you can cultivate. While we can’t force ourselves to be inspired, we can create an environment that’s conducive to inspiration.

And this is the ‘environment’ I want to create in this book, which grew out of the inspiration I found in how Becca lived her life. Hopefully the stories, the ideas, the insights and the suggestions will inspire you to achieve meaningful and rewarding success.

Not a bad legacy. In fact, I think it is a brilliant and inspiring one.

PART 1

LAYING THE
FOUNDATION
TO FIND
INSPIRATION

“IT IS NEVER
TOO LATE TO BE
WHO YOU MIGHT
HAVE BEEN.”

George Eliot

CHAPTER 1

WHAT ARE THE ODDS

PERSONAL VALUE

In May 2015, three teachers at Buckton Vale Primary School, in Greater Manchester, England – Deborah Brown, Kelly Quinn and Jenny Brierley – sent a letter to all Year 6 pupils. The communiqué went out a week before the children were to sit their Standard Assessment Tests (SATs), which in the UK are used to evaluate educational progress.

From personal experience, I can tell you that most parents dread getting a letter from their children’s school. It usually means that their child has done something wrong, or has a bad attendance record. But this was a letter of a very different type.

It told the youngsters how special and unique they were. It highlighted all the natural skills and abilities they possessed, and everything that made them smart individuals.

They were told how their laughter could brighten the darkest day, and that the SAT examiners didn't know how kind, trustworthy and thoughtful they truly were.

This is the text of that letter, which was reprinted by newspapers and websites, and shared globally across social media:

Dear Year 6 pupils,

Next week you will sit your SATs tests for maths, reading, spelling, grammar and punctuation. We know how hard you have worked, but there is something very important you must know:

The SATs test does not assess all of what makes each of you special and unique. The people who create these tests and score them do not know each of you the way that we do and certainly not in the way your families do.

They do not know that some of you speak two languages or that you love to sing or draw.

They have not seen your natural talent for dancing or playing a musical instrument.

They do not know that your friends can count on you to be there for them; that your laughter can brighten the darkest day or that your face turns red when you feel shy.

They do not know that you participate in sports, wonder about the future, or sometimes help your little brother or sister after school. They do not know that you are kind, trustworthy and

thoughtful and that every day you try to be your very best.

The levels you will get from this test will tell you something, but they will not tell you everything. There are many ways of being smart. You are smart! So while you are preparing for the test and in the midst of it all, remember that there is no way to 'test' all of the amazing and awesome things that make you, YOU!

It ends with a quotation from Aristotle: "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all."

What a brilliant letter!

Yes, exams are important. But as the letter highlights so well, there is so much more to a child's makeup than being successful (or not) in exams. It's all about a child being valued, and that's why what these teachers did was – and continues to be – so inspiring.

The message of encouragement tapped into a basic human need: being valued for who you are. It's not about your income, your qualifications, your job, the type of car you drive, where you live or whom you know, but about being valued for *just being you*. This letter spotlighted the notion that every child is to be respected and appreciated for who they are, regardless of ability.

“THE DEEPEST
PRINCIPLE IN
HUMAN NATURE IS
THE CRAVING TO
BE APPRECIATED.”

William James

THE UNIQUENESS OF YOU

One of the most inspiring ideas you can ever have is when you realize that you're a unique human being. There is nobody else on earth like you. You are one of a kind, and you should therefore start to value and appreciate yourself more. You were born and you are alive and you're wonderful just the way you are.

Perhaps the following examples will help you to appreciate the uniqueness of *you*.

As author Mel Robbins explains, there was about a one in 400 trillion chance of you being born as 'you.' This is the probability of you being born when and where you were, to your particular parents, with your distinct genetic makeup.

Dr Ali Benazir, an author who studied at Harvard, received a medical degree from the University of California, San Diego, and studied philosophy at Cambridge University, expanded upon Robbins' thought.

He worked out the odds of your parents meeting, given the billions of men and women populating our planet. He then pondered how many people of the opposite sex your mother and father would have met in their first 25 years of life. Next, he looked at the chances of them talking, meeting again, forming a long-term relationship, having kids together, and the right egg and the right sperm combining to make 'you.' He went even further back to look at the probability of

all your ancestors mating, and of all the right sperm meeting all the right eggs, to produce each one of those ancestors.

Benazir's conclusion: "The odds that you exist at all are basically zero."

He explained it this way: "It is the probability of two million people getting together, each to play a game of dice with trillion-sided dice. They each roll the dice and they all come up with the exact same number – for example, 550,343,279,001. A miracle is an event so unlikely as to be almost impossible. By that definition, I've just shown that you are a miracle. Now go forth and feel and act like the miracle that you are."

So, please be inspired that 'you' were even born at all!

YOU BELONG TO A UNIQUE AND FANTASTIC SPECIES

If an alien in a UFO arrived in our atmosphere and observed our planet, there's no doubt that among the millions of species on Earth, homo sapiens would stand out. We are at the top of the food chain, we've tamed and extended our habitats over the entire planet, and in recent centuries we created an explosion of technological, engineering, societal and artistic advancements.

It's remarkable how far we've come in what, from an evolutionary perspective, has been a very short period of time.

Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins has a superb analogy to highlight this fact: Stretch your arms out to represent the span of the history of life on Earth, from the origins of life to where we are today. With this scale, the whole history of our species is represented by the thickness of one fingernail clipping. All of *recorded* human history is represented by the dust from one light stroke of a nail file.

Of all the species that have ever lived on Earth, 99.9% are now extinct. One can't help but wonder: how did our species ever get so far? Not only have we survived, but we've achieved intellectual and technological progress beyond any other form of life on the planet.

So, what is it that makes us unique?

First, it's our ability to think abstractly about objects, principles and ideas that are not physically present. We can imagine doing things in the future, like planning a holiday or attending a sporting or cultural event. We can communicate through writing, talking and drawing.

Our genes rely on procreation to be passed on, but memes – units of cultural information spread by imitation – can be transmitted much faster, through writing, speech, gestures or rituals. Memes facilitate cumulative knowledge and experiences that can serve as a powerful force for human progress.

Many of mankind's inventions have helped us transcend our biology. Philosophers Andy Clark of the University of Edinburgh and David Chalmers of New York University, who put forth 'The Theory of the Extended Mind,' describe how we use technology to push the boundaries of human consciousness beyond our skulls. We use tools like computers

and smartphones to enhance our cognitive skills, or powerful telescopes to extend our visual reach. Technology has become a part of our exoskeleton, they argue, allowing us to push beyond our limitations.

The very fact that we as human beings can write, read and contemplate the unique nature of our mental abilities is awe-inspiring. It is inspiring to even think that you are an individual who belongs to such a fantastic species.

VS Ramachandran, a professor of neuroscience at the University of California, San Diego, perhaps said it best: "Here is this three-pound mass of jelly you can hold in the palm of your hand. It can contemplate the meaning of infinity, and it can contemplate itself contemplating the meaning of infinity."

Hopefully these examples will help you to feel absolutely valued for who you are. The fact that you are alive and breathing, and that you're a part of a very special species, should blow your mind! So, stop measuring your self-worth by how much money you earn, what car you drive, where you send your children to school or where you live, and really appreciate who you actually are.

This simple act – valuing yourself – is the starting point for discovering inspiration, harnessing it and translating it into success. When you start to value yourself more, you're more likely to have a positive outlook on life in general. And that, in turn, makes you more likely to seek out sources of new inspiration.

Along the way, there are two other important factors that will lead you to that breakthrough experience: individuality and risk.

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

START

LET'S START SMALL.

What is the probability of your dad meeting your mom?

Though the world was smaller 20 years ago, your dad *could have met* almost **200 million** of its women (go dad!)



But over 25 years, he probably met around 10,000 women.

So the odds that your mom was in this small group and met your dad is:

1 in 20,000

BUT WE KNOW HOW TRICKY LOVE CAN BE.

What is the probability that they stay together long enough to have kids?



It is a 1 in 10 chance that they talk to each other.

X



Also a 1 in 10 chance that they go on a second date.

X



Another 1 in 10 chance that they keep dating for a while.

X



And a coin toss if they stay together long enough for offspring.

Thus, the odds that your parents' meeting results in kids is: **1 in 2,000**

So far, the combined odds of you being here are: **1 in 40,000,000**

That is about the size of the population of California.



NOW THINGS ARE GOING TO GET PRETTY INTERESTING.

Why? Because we are about to deal with eggs and sperm, which come in large numbers.



Mom has about 100,000 eggs in her lifetime.



Dad makes about 4 trillion sperm during the years you could have been born.



[Sally.]

What are the odds that the 1 egg...

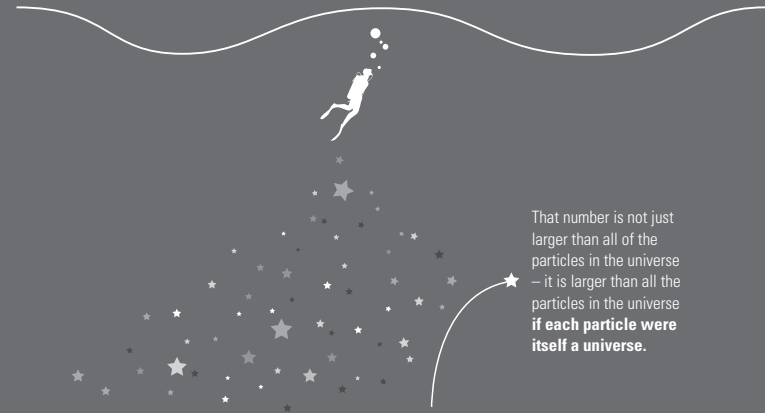


[Harry.]

... met the 1 sperm, which together made you (and not your brother)?

1 in 400,000,000,000,000,000 (1 in 400 quadrillion)

That is approximately the volume in cubic meters of the Atlantic Ocean (3.236x10¹⁷ cubic meters).



That number is not just larger than all of the particles in the universe – it is larger than all the particles in the universe if each particle were itself a universe.

BUT WE'RE JUST GETTING STARTED.

Because your existence here, now, and on planet earth presupposes another supremely unlikely and utterly undeniable chain of events. Namely, **that every one of your ancestors lived to reproductive age** – going all the way back not just to the first *Homo sapiens*, first *Homo erectus* and *Homo habilis*, but all the way back to the first single-celled organism. You are a representative of an unbroken lineage of life going back 4 billion years.

1 in 10^{45,000}

That's a 10 with 45,000 zeroes after it.

How large is that number?





That is 1 quadrillion multiplied by 1 quadrillion for every generation.

THAT'S PRETTY BIG – BUT WAIT A MINUTE.

The right sperm also had to meet the right egg for every single one of those ancestors.

ODDS OF THE RIGHT SPERM, MEETING THE RIGHT EGG 150,000 TIMES?

1 in 10^{2,640,000}

LET'S ADD IT ALL UP

$$10^{2,640,000} \times 10^{45,000} \times 2000 \times 20,000 \approx$$

1 in 10^{2,685,000}



BY COMPARISON:

The number of atoms in the body of an average male (80kg, 175 lb) is about:

10²⁷

The number of atoms making up the earth is about:

10⁵⁰

The number of atoms in the known universe is estimated at:

10⁸⁰

THINK OF IT LIKE THIS:

It is the probability of 2 million people getting together (about the population of San Diego) each to play a game of dice with trillion-sided dice. They each roll the dice, and they all come up with the exact same number – for example, 550,343,279,001.



SO, THE ODDS THAT **YOU** EXIST AT ALL ARE:

Basically zero.

CHAPTER 2 THINK DIFFERENT

INDIVIDUALITY

In April of 1976, Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak co-founded Apple, the bellwether tech company that just turned 44. Apple is, of course, one of the most valuable and admired companies in the world, having developed a series of amazing products that include the Mac, iPod, iPad and iPhone.

But it hasn't always been smooth sailing for the company. After the phenomenal success of the trailblazing Apple I and Apple II personal computers in the 1970s and early 1980s, Apple had some serious failures. The Apple III, Lisa and the Macintosh all failed for various reasons, and Jobs was sacked in 1985. Apple found itself struggling again in the early 1990s, and in 1996 the company's board convinced Jobs to return as CEO.

While Jobs and team were busy developing the new products that would revive the brand's fortunes, he wanted an ad campaign that would remind Apple's loyal fan base of the qualities that had made it great in the first place. He retained the ad agency TBWA/Chiat/Day, which crafted what would become one of the most talked-about campaigns ever. It revolved around a deceptively simple, grammatically clumsy slogan: 'Think Different.'

Rob Siltanen, the agency's creative director and managing partner, wrote one of the most famous commercials in history for Apple's 'Think Different' TV marketing campaign. He named it 'The Crazy Ones.'

Narrated by actor Richard Dreyfuss, the ad started out with an instantly memorable salute to counterculture icons, with black-and-white images of more than a dozen 20th century visionaries. Images of people like Albert Einstein, Amelia Earhart, John Lennon and Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, appeared alongside copy praising the power of bold ideas. It extolled 'the round pegs in the square holes' who see things differently and push the human race forward.

The campaign wasn't solely responsible for the reversal of Apple's fortunes, but it played an important role in rallying customers, employees and shareholders at a difficult time for the company. It reasserted the brand's goals and aspirations, and more importantly, it told the world that with Jobs now back at the helm, Apple had its mojo back.

I think the ad copy Siltanen wrote was brilliant, powerful and inspiring, primarily because, at its core, it promotes

the characteristic of individuality. It's about not following the crowd, but rather sticking to what you believe in and making a difference.

It's all about examining the views and opinions you've accumulated or formulated over the course of your life, but which, deep down, you don't actually believe. Stop conforming! Start spending your time doing things that you know you'll excel at!

Basically, it is time to become one of the crazy ones, and to 'think different.'

WHY INDIVIDUALITY IS INSPIRING

There are many reasons why individuality can be inspiring. It encourages innovation and creativity. It allows you to disregard conventions and boundaries. Individuals who aren't limited by notions of what can or can't be accomplished are able to view situations in a different light and devise innovative solutions to problems.

Similarly, a strong sense of individuality means not being swayed by the fears or doubts of others. Many are plagued by uncertainty and self-doubt, but seeing traits of individuality in others encourages people to address and conquer their fears. Those with a true sense of individuality are able to weigh potential risks and benefits for themselves,

without considering what may be commonly accepted or discouraged in society.

Individuality also encourages others to try more innovative approaches. Those who see the success of an individual with a unique idea are often inspired to pursue their own endeavours.

By being 'yourself,' you're likely to be less stressed and anxious, leading you to experience positive emotions such as joy, compassion, optimism, happiness, kindness and enthusiasm. Positive emotions are not simply 'happy feelings' that we chase to feel momentary pleasure. They play a significant role in everyday life.

The benefits of positive emotions are well documented by Barbara Lee Fredrickson, a psychology professor at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, who's a leading researcher in this field. Among the outcomes she's noted are living longer, being more resilient, experiencing better mental and physical health, and being more engaged.

THE STANFORD PRISON EXPERIMENT

Conversely, removing individuality or limiting it can have serious consequences. An infamous example of this is the Stanford Prison Experiment.

In 1971, Stanford University in northern California enrolled 24 men in a psychological experiment intended to show the effects of the power dynamic between guards and prisoners. It was played out in the basement of a school building that had been turned into a metaphorical prison for purposes of the study. Half the men played the role of prison guards and the other half assumed the role of prisoners.

It started by giving twelve of the men prison uniforms, which were essentially long shirts with numbers on them. They supposed to be put into the lockup for two weeks, but the study only lasted six days due to the severe psychological trauma experienced by the prisoners. This was not due to physical violence, which wasn't allowed. But other than that prohibition, the guards had been given complete power and were allowed to discipline the prisoners as they saw fit.

Setting the stage for what was to follow, the psychologists who conducted the experiment had stripped the prisoners of their individuality. The guards treated them all the same, they had a number instead of their name, and their

long shirts looked more like dresses, which had the effect of emasculating them.

After a series of provocations, punishments and physical altercations – as the guards exhibit increasingly cruel behaviour – the prisoners literally began to act ‘crazy.’ They screamed, cursed and seemingly lost control.

Researchers concluded that this was brought on by de-individuation, a state where one becomes so immersed in the norms of the group as to lose any sense of individual identity and personal responsibility. The guards may have been so sadistic because they didn’t feel that what happened was down to them personally – it was a group norm. The prisoners lost their sense of personal identity because of the uniform they wore.

After the fact, most of the guards found it difficult to believe that they’d behaved in such brutalizing ways. Many said they hadn’t known they were capable of such behaviour. The prisoners, too, could not believe that they’d responded in the submissive, cowering, dependent way that they had. Several claimed to be normally quite assertive.

Obviously, this is an extreme example of what can happen if you lose your individuality completely. I am not suggesting that ‘following the crowd’ would lead to serious psychological outcomes. But, it does illustrate how powerful individuality is.

So, if you feel, in parts of your life, that you are not being true to yourself, how do you start to rediscover your individuality?

HOW TO BE YOURSELF

Most of us are too concerned with what others think of us. As such, we may disguise or manipulate features of our personality to better assure that others aren’t judgmental or adversely reactive to us. If you’re overly worried about what others think of you, then you are more likely to manipulate your personality and communication, either to seek approval or avoid disapproval.

For most of us, revealing our true selves can feel like a huge risk now that we live in a world where everyone is presenting themselves online as interesting and attractive. Being yourself can feel risky, as your ‘public’ or ‘social media’ face is invariably not who you really are. If you start showing your true self, these people may indeed treat you differently, and that’s a perceived risk. But if you have to hide who you really are to be around these people, you can end up feeling lost, lonely, or even worthless, with no deep connections with them.

That can be very difficult to manage. So, here are five simple ideas to help you start rediscovering your individuality.

1. **Accept yourself.**

Whatever you've been through, the starting point to being yourself is to accept whatever situation you find yourself in and just accept who you are. Remember this from Chapter 1: you are a unique human being. There is nobody else on earth like you, and this is your 'now' – the reality of your life as it currently is.

When you accept your 'now', you will find that a huge weight has been lifted from your shoulders. I realize that this will be incredibly difficult for some people, but the only alternative is to keep the status quo and put on an act, both in person and through your online persona.

2. **Identify negative self-talk.**

When facing any given situation, the first step is often self-talk. This is the endless stream of unspoken thoughts that run through your head. These automatic thoughts can be positive or negative. Some of your self-talk comes from logic and reason, while some may arise from misconceptions and misunderstandings. A lot of this can be 'promoted' through what you view on conventional media and social media, and how you relate to it. So, simply limiting your media time can help reduce negative self-talk.

3. **Focus on your strengths.**

In addition to negative self-talk, you can also easily slide into the habit of focusing on your weaknesses instead of celebrating your strengths. Playing to your strengths will enhance your well-being, improve your performance at work, help you become more engaged and make you more likely to achieve your goals. Leveraging your strengths can increase your resilience, confidence and happiness.

4. **Express who you really are.**

What else stops you from being yourself? Mostly, it's fear of what others might think if you showed your true self. So, people try to show the best sides of themselves – or, a carefully crafted fantasy image – whether in the flesh or via their social media profiles. They put on this act, revealing only slivers of who they actually are.

But it's important that you express who you really are. You need to be genuine with yourself – and genuinely be yourself – because if you stop doing that, even for some of the time, you might start to forget who you really are deep down. Then, it will be very difficult to be the 'individual' you really want to be, on any level.

5. Be vulnerable.

Another important step to being yourself is showing your vulnerability. It's scary to be openly vulnerable. But to fully be yourself, you have to be your full array of selves. You can't just pick and choose the parts that you like; you can't just show the manicured, photoshopped version of yourself. You have to be vulnerable from time to time.

To start with, choose specific people or opportune moments to show your vulnerability. Whether you share your personal stories with everyone, or just a few, it will help you to be all of yourself, at least some of the time.

If you untether yourself from insecurity and fear, and value yourself by focusing on your strengths, which will allow you to become more vulnerable, this can set the stage for a self-empowered life. Freeing yourself from worrying about what others think of you emboldens you to be sincerely genuine, which leads you to be far more open to new sources of inspiration.

So, become authentic, join the 'crazy' ones and reclaim your individuality.

CHAPTER 3

THE MINORITY

RISK

Let me introduce you to someone who you've likely never heard of, but his invention made the world a safer place.

Dr David Warren is an Australian scientist whose specialty is rocket science. In the 1950s he worked for a part of Australia's Defence Department that was focused on planes. In 1953, he was seconded to an expert panel trying to solve a costly and distressing mystery: why the British de Havilland Comet, the world's first commercial jet airliner and the great hope of the new 'Jet Age,' kept crashing.

The problem was that there were dozens of possible causes, and nothing but death and debris as evidence. "People were rattling on about staff training and pilots' errors, and did a fin break off the tail, and all sorts of things