

MY HANDBOOK

Survive first and then thrive



Toye Oyelese, MD

MY HANDBOOK

(Survive first and then thrive)

by Teye Oyelese

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DISCLAIMER

"My Handbook" is based on my life journey and experiences and is not provided as a scientific text but as a storybook with lessons that can be very useful in anyone else's journey. It is intended to present ideas that excite and incite your imagination as a work of art that would allow anyone to develop their life skills.

My goal is to provide mentorship and this book is not a substitute for medical, psychological or psychiatric treatment or counselling.

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In my quest for perfect expressions

May 26, 2015

Hi Toye,

I breezed through the 25 pages I just read, which were a very very comfortable read. A massive improvement, even just breaking the paragraphs down into smaller segments makes the information so much more digestible. Each short paragraph will give the reader frequent milestone rewards of understanding and self accomplishment. Funny enough a few months ago, during one of our conversations, my good physicist friend pointed out that his holy Koran is written in small "Suras" or verses like a poem.

It's always struck me how nature delivers everything macroscopic in "quanta" or small packets. Even the colours are delivered to us with their individual frequencies to combine to make the white light with which we see so clearly. If I don't misunderstand your therapy Toye, its nature is cellular or quantized too. Whereby the subject advances one day at a time, self validating, accruing self worth currency, passing the survival only balance, until they can survive and then thrive.

I really like how your revision takes prologue full circle to epilogue. The prologue will initially intrigue the reader and the full circled epilogue will be that final realization moment that, mesh all the pieces tightly into place. It's really neat.

Keep up the fantastic work my friend!

Preet

FOREWORD

If I had to fill a swimming pool with a bucket I could debate the fairness of it or realize my options:

- 1) Whine about it
- 2) Shut up and fill the swimming pool with a bucket
- 3) Fill the swimming pool with a bucket while I whine about it

My adaptation to Canadian life involved choosing option 3. Although it is important to fight unfair situations, it is more important for me to do so in a manner that allows me to survive and then thrive.

Many times, I found myself unable to fully grasp or understand what was going on in my new environment, I remember sometimes feeling completely overwhelmed, angry, frustrated or just giving up. What I discuss in “My Handbook” influenced my life. Looking back I can see that I did not lack desire, drive or ability but the right tactics.

I adapted because I had to and not always because I wanted to. It was necessary to do this if I wanted to **survive first and then thrive**. I learned that what I had to do always took precedence over what I wanted to do and I became skilled at understanding what was relevant and what was important.

I grew up in an African culture that exposed me to the art of story telling as a form of therapy and the use of proverbs and analogies to illustrate and stimulate the imagination. I have used this as an effective tactic in my medical practice. I was often surprised by how unfamiliar my “North American” patients were with this method, but very gratified by how quickly they responded to it. The feedback from these many patients, friends and strangers whom I have shared these experiences with convinced me that a book like this is worth writing.

PROLOGUE

WINNERS & LOSERS

I am told that there are about forty million to one billion sperm cells in every ejaculation, each one of those guys hoping to be the one that wins the favour of a little egg, sitting at the end of what can only be described as a precarious journey, through a very hostile birth canal, designed to separate the strong sperm from the weak. Only less than a hundred make it to the end and then the timing had to be just perfect because fertilization is never guaranteed.

You have been taking care of yourself since you were a 2 celled organism, something told you to leave the fallopian tube and start to implant in the uterus, the same mechanism had you start to replicate cells and create the complex structure you now inhabit. Your very ability to survive and make survival decisions definitely pre-dated your brain.

Possibly 50% of pregnancies are lost with the mother never knowing she was pregnant. The trimesters (every 3 months of pregnancy) all present their unique challenges, each of which you manage to scale some before you even had a brain. With every breath, with every metabolism cycle, you fought to be here realizing that the only thing guaranteed without much effort is death.

Everywhere you turned there was always something trying to kill, you even your mother's immune system could turn against you if you made the mistake of getting close and yet like a cellular ninja you negotiated your way through this battle of survival.

You spent nine months in an aquatic environment, instinctively drawing food from your maternal source before you even had awareness of self. You accomplished one of many critical events by successfully transitioning from an aquatic environment and taking your first breath at birth. All these amazing things, accomplished without your awareness of any thoughts or conscious sense of your existence.

You negotiate your way through the early hours, mostly blind and deaf and yet you instinctively know to reach for the nourishment of your mother's milk. While in the womb, you have developed unique systems designed to help you survive the rocky road on the outside.

There are so many things out of your control, like what environment you end up in, whether you are surrounded by factors that will enhance your survival and yet you do not focus on this, but simply focus on surviving the next sixty seconds to the next minute, the next sixty minutes to the next hour, the next twenty four hours to the next day, the next seven days to the next week and the next fifty two weeks to the next year and as you maintain your focus you continue to grow, you continue to adapt and you continue to learn. You continue to live and to survive.

You had survived some of the biggest threats to your very existence long before you even knew you were here, all around you, at every stage, countless perils on your way. The lottery of life is the biggest lottery you ever played, with the odds constantly stacked against you and your unique abilities constantly making lemonade out of lemons and finding a way to hang around.

You stand before me now, you have a brain and conscious awareness of what you have always been unconsciously aware of, that nothing was ever guaranteed but death, you call yourself a loser and tell me that you are helpless. Look around you my friend for in this moment and every moment that exists for you, does so because you won.

So my winning loser who continues to win even though you perceive you lose, continue to enjoy the gifts you are giving to yourself, because your sense of losing, is your fruit of winning, but remember all the eggs and sperm cells that didn't make it here.

1 - CHANGE

Nothing ever stays the same and everything is different all the time, change is constant and ongoing, sometimes almost imperceptible and at other times completely inescapable.

Change is an abstract concept. Do I create change or am I simply adapting to it? My experiences have convinced me that change can only bring two outcomes:

- 1) **The results that I want**
- 2) **The results that I don't want**

Either way I am an integral part of the process and define the relationship that I have with change. I become aware of change through the wanted or unwanted results that occur from it.

Change can be scary when it challenges my sense of control, and yet this sense of control is an illusionary framework that allows me to act in a manner that increases my chances of success.

If you think about it for a moment, I live on a planet with a precarious ecosystem, hurtling through space at an amazing speed with a chance of being hit by a meteorite and all life obliterated, the middle of it is molten lava and yet I talk about control? Once I realized that **my sense of control was an illusionary framework**, I found ways to recreate that sense of control anytime I wanted.

I have always been ambivalent towards change and this may explain my fascination with it. Although I deal very well with the wanted results of change, I do quite poorly with the unwanted results, but ironically, they have been responsible for my framework.

My father was tragically killed in a motor vehicle accident before my tenth birthday. The suddenness and finality of the change was devastating, but the process of adapting to this change taught me

some of the most important lessons of my life. This is reflected in some of the concepts that I discuss.

How do we respond when we are confronted with the impossible? Plunged suddenly into a situation that nothing before has prepared us for? What do you do when your sense of control is so brutally challenged by change?

I remind myself that the only thing that I have lost is my “illusion” of control, to get it back all I have to do is focus on situations or things where I have control. I force myself to focus on the here and now, what I am doing in the next minute, then next hour and next day and in this manner, I only bite off as much as I can chew and my sense of control is gradually restored.

When I feel frustrated, it is because I am trying to control a potentially uncontrollable situation. Once again, to counteract this feeling I focus on areas where I have control, for example my breathing or my speech. Techniques like these are “functional adaptations”.

I can **influence change by focusing on my choices**, realizing that, the results of change that I want are a natural consequence of the choices I make. I am always aware of the fact, that in any situation I find myself, I always have a choice to make and when I don't exercise this responsibility, I am asking “the system” to make a choice on my behalf, further reducing the likelihood that I will get the results that I want.

No matter how terrible my previous choices may have turned out, or how uncertain I may feel about my ability to choose in the future, the truth is, I am still the one in the best position to invariably understand which choices are the best for me.

It is important to **own my choices and take responsibility for them**, be willing to reinforce my chosen direction through repetition of the appropriate action, until I finally get the results that I want.

When I am mentoring anyone, I remember that no method can solve every problem, that energy and resources are limited, so I very quickly introduce the idea that although feelings and emotions are relevant, they are not always important in adapting to change. Our actions are what determines the final results.

In 1987 when I first arrived in Canada from Nigeria I was constantly struck by how very different things were. Most of the things that Canadians were very familiar with were very new to me and I required a very steep learning curve to adapt.

I remember riding the public transport in Toronto, a gentleman politely said, "do you want to close the window please?" I answered "no". I was surprised when he got visibly upset. The lady beside me quietly said, "he wants you to close the window". I replied, "why did he not say so?" He had actually done just that, but being British trained, I was not familiar with a request being presented in the form of a question.

Could you close the window, meant that I should close it when I could, will you close the window meant that I did not have a choice and should close it right away, but do you want to close the window meant that he was simply seeking my opinion on whether I wanted to close the window or not but was not requesting me to act.

I use this example because, over the years I have come to understand how Canadian society is uniquely different from some of the other societies that I have been exposed to. I find that Canadians are very subtle with their requests and expect the same from me, while I on the other hand have been brought up to be more direct and so I was often viewed as confrontational or upset.

I learned the hard way that passion can often be mistaken for anger, modulating both the tone and intensity of my voice was a very important part of adapting to Canadian society. It also highlights how important it is to understand the subtle aspects of change that are required to fit into a new environment.

The ability to define anything is an integral part of the ability to perceive it, in turn, the ability to perceive something is an integral part of the ability to adapt to it. Defining something allows it to be remembered, giving it a name increases the ability to recognize it when it is encountered again.

Even when I have defined things wrongly and my perception of them are wrong, this erroneous definition still impacts my reality and affects the way I perceive whatever is going on. My perception of things creates my reality. What I am perceiving is what I think is going on and so it is what I experience, even when this may not be accurate. My perception only changes when more information becomes available to me.

For example if I am afraid of snakes because I perceive them to be dangerous, when I encounter a non-poisonous snake, I would treat it as dangerous until I gather more information that alters that perception.

When change is implemented properly there is a good chance of getting the results that are wanted. The need for change often arises because there is dissatisfaction with the situation or status quo (I do not have the results that I want), things may happen that force a change of view or present a need to do things differently.

When I am required to change, it is easy to become resistant because of my fear of the unknown and my tendency to be more comfortable with what I am familiar with (even when it is not working well). When trying to create change in others it is important for me to remember that it is hard to influence another person's behaviour but it is much easier to influence mine.

The only thing I can (because I want to or because I have to) change is myself, by doing this, everything around me changes. My reluctance to change will often impede the change in others. The motivation to change is often low when I am being compelled to change but the motivation is stronger when change is something I want or have initiated.

Generally when the motivation for change is low it is often because a need to do this is not well appreciated by the person in whom the change is requested. When a person is compelled to change this change may only occur if the unwanted results outweigh the benefits of not complying. This can sometimes be used as a motivator when change is necessary and the individual is reluctant to do so.

When introducing this “**Model of Change**” I start off with a leading statement such as, “I have made some assumptions to facilitate our relationship, I will review them with you and encourage you to let me know if you agree or not”

1) You are seeing me because **change is required**. We don't know what the change is but know that it is required because we know that you are not completely satisfied with the status quo

2) This **change has not happened**. We don't know what the change is but we know it is required and we also do not know why it has not happened but we simply know that the status quo is not fully satisfying our needs and that our hope for our needs to be met has not occurred.

3) Through our interaction we have hope that **we will facilitate this change**. Although we don't know what the change is, we know that it is required and also that it has not happened yet but we are invested in the possibility of it occurring.

4) **Change will happen**. Although we have many unanswered questions we are fully invested in this change happening and we will not quit, we will find ways to facilitate this change.

When a consensus is reached on the “Model for Change” I document it so that we can both remember “the agreement”. It may be necessary as time goes on to remind ourselves of the agreement especially when motivation is low. Remember this model is intended for someone that is willing to engage with the process, capable of some degree of reflection and motivated to use the tactics that

would bring about the change that they want. It is not intended for someone who is pre-contemplative, uninterested or with poor cognitive function or in an altered state of mind.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with starting with an assumption of success but it is important to stay focused on the process and allow the outcome to develop from the process. Even though some direct questions about the change have been asked prior, these questions are simply starting blocks and so there should be a certain amount of flexibility that allows a response to the change that is occurring, even if it was not the change that was expected. Sometimes what is needed is different from what is wanted.

When using this framework, often times we may start out with a set of assumptions that are anxiety provoking and discover that part of the reasons for this was these assumptions were not consistent with our process, by changing things we would end up with outcomes that were both unexpected and delightful. Often times when I see people who are in distress they are stuck and have not moved on with the changes that they had experienced. Not only had they not adapted to the unwanted results of change but they have held on tightly to the memories of how things were.

Points to remember:

Change is constant and ongoing producing **results that you want** and **results that you don't want**

To be functional adapt to change in a manner that allows you to get more of the results you want and less of the results that you don't want.

2 - DIRECTION

Survive first and then thrive for we aspire through desire but succeed through actions, our desires are the stimulus for action but our actions are the architects of our success.

I am more likely to get to where I want to go when I am constantly headed in the right direction.

“I take a set of complex variables that has been called the problem and replace it with another set of complex variables that is now called the solution, in this manner it is clear to me that throughout my life I am always resolving complex variables, sometimes we already have the right answers we are just asking the wrong questions”.

- Toyé Oyelese

Where I am coming from is always relevant but never as important as where I am going. No matter how good or bad things may be I always ask myself the question “ where do I go from here?”

I know that in order to get the result I want it is essential for me to perform the actions that are consistent with that result. It would be frustrating if I was trying to go up north but kept taking steps that took me down south but however the lack of success in reaching my destination would be both expected and anticipated. It has always surprised me how many people I have mentored who were doing exactly that.

When I came to Canada I realized very quickly that I had to survive first before I could thrive so that became my mantra and the direction I chose. **It is the duty and responsibility of anything that wants to exist to make every effort to survive and then thrive.** It is also important that once it starts to thrive it does not forget how to survive.

Growing up in a third world country required me to be vigilant about my survival and never take anything for granted. Even now I am constantly aware of my surroundings and options to the extent that when I am at a social function the first thing I take notice of is how many exits the hall has before I even notice the guests.

Most dictionaries define survival as the state of continuing to live or exist, in spite of difficult circumstances. To survive I need to have the ability to identify my needs and develop an appropriate decision to action interval. What I mean is that I am able to identify the essential thing or action required, make a decision quickly and act accordingly. The desired outcome with survival is an opportunity to continue to exist and then thrive.

The same dictionaries define thrive as to grow or develop well, to prosper, and to flourish. To thrive I must have the ability to identify and achieve my wants and the desired outcome is “self actualization” i.e. the realization or fulfillment of my talents and potentialities.

I can survive without thriving but I cannot thrive without surviving. Developing a balance between my surviving and thriving mindset was key to my optimal function. Thriving is the reward of surviving and can only occur after my survival goals have been met. The more successful and affluent the society is the more the people within it focus on thriving and less on surviving.

In a “secure” society the individual is concerned about the best thing that could happen to them and what they can do to enhance this. If this goal is not achieved there is a sense of disappointment and sadness. If it is achieved there is a sense of anxiety or concern about trying to maintain it. In a less “secure” society the individual is concerned about the worst thing that could happen to them and what they can do to prevent it. If this goal is achieved there is a sense of elation and hope.

Surviving and thriving both require tactics however the person trying to survive is constantly aware of the need for these tactics and while the person thriving often forgets them.

Survival mode: Plan for the worst

Thrive mode: Plan for the best

Survive & Thrive mode: Plan for the worst and hope for the best

Survival mode: What are my needs?

Thrive mode: What are my wants?

Survive & Thrive mode: What is the balance between my needs & wants?

When my direction is unclear despite my best efforts I simplify it by remembering to survive first and then thrive. I often despair that because in North America the focus is on thriving there will be a whole generation that have no idea how to survive and will invariably no longer thrive. But then again I am no expert on sociology so I may be wrong.

A lot of energy is often spent trying to understand what has happened to us, how we feel about it and how it affects our behaviour and the decisions that we make. Though all of these things are relevant they are energy consuming and don't always answers the most important survival question "**where do we go from here**". Feelings are relevant, desire is relevant but it is the action that we perform as a result of our feelings or desires that produce results. The importance of feelings and desire relates to how they make us act.

When I arrived in Canada it became clear fairly quickly that I may have underestimated the obstacles. I had come at a time when medical school positions were being cut and some Canadian graduates had to do their internship in the USA. This was before the information highway (internet), so there was very little information available on how to get back into the medical system and even fewer people willing to give me the time of day.

I started work as a security guard two or three days after arriving in Toronto. It was October and winter was coming fast. I had to catch four different buses to get to work and I had never been so cold. To

make matters worse I was relatively socially isolated and I only knew one family in Toronto. I tried to work every shift I could find. Sometimes on weekend when I could not get an extra shift I would find the longest route the buses and trains could take and stay on just to pass the time so I could be around other people. Loneliness is standing amongst thousands of people and nobody knows you are there and if you died nobody knows you are gone.

I lost my job as a security guard because I refused to fold personal flyers for the boss, I looked for work for three weeks and could not find anything. I even went from Scarborough where I lived to downtown Toronto (a two hour journey by bus and train) to interview for a job as a dishwasher and did not get it. I came home and cried. I was eating once a day and a few dollars from being on the streets.

I realized that I was alone and would have to figure out things for myself. I started having audible conversations with myself out of necessity as I did not have anyone to talk to and I was forgetting the sound of my own voice. I thought that only crazy people talked out loud to themselves, I was surprised at how comforting and reassuring talking to myself out loud was. I started to realize that my most important relationship was the one I had with myself.

I decided to view every experience as a lesson and so make a conscious effort to discover the lesson in every experience. I was intuitively changing my direction and aligning it with what I wanted. I talked to myself out loud (mostly in third person) and encouraged myself. I chose to see the up side of every situation. I started to visualize where I wanted to be and permitted myself to believe in the certainty of it even though everything else around me indicated otherwise.

When I encountered situations that I had no idea what the solutions might be I adopted the attitude that every complex situation is made up of multiple simple blocks and so I would find a way to uncover the simplest notion while maintaining a keen sense of the complexity. I soon discovered that every system no matter how

small, large, simple or complex had an underlying set of rules that governed them, knowing and understanding these rules was key to understanding these systems.

I realized that frustration used up a lot of my energy and only arose when I was trying to control things beyond my control, to counteract this I would create a sense of control by focusing my attention on aspects that I actually could control (even if it was just my breathing) and then build things up from there. I started to define things properly, rather than obstacles they were challenges, rather than failure it was finding ways to succeed and so on.

My new theories were soon put to test. I started work in a chemical factory in Toronto and initially I simply worked on the production line performing mundane tasks like putting caps on bottles. I had been working there for approximately two months when the compounder (the fellow who did all the mixing) quit one afternoon leaving the company in a jam. I was asked if I could read chemical formulas and although I did not have a clue what I was doing initially, I was a quick learner and was soon doing all the mixing of soaps, lotions, oven cleaners and so on.

I passed my initial medical examination and I now needed to find an internship/residency position, I wrote to every program I could find and most of them did not even bother to reply me. Using my new method of problem solving I wondered if the Canadian Armed Forces might have a program for training physicians. I went to the recruiting office on Sheppard and Yonge in Toronto to ask, this was in 1988 .

I discovered that they had a medical officer training program (MOTP) that trained military officers in civilian schools. For two years of residency I would have to give the military three years of active service. The military would pay for the residency but the “catch twenty two” was that I had to find the residency position myself. Once again I wrote to all the programs I knew and now I had a few polite replies but nobody had anything to offer for the year.

Shortly after I had been turned down by these medical internship programs, I came home from my factory job and noticed that my answering machine light was blinking. I realized that someone had left me a message. It was a program in Saskatoon looking for an immediate replacement because the program starts in a month.

When I look back I now realize that it started with setting the direction using my imagination, refusing to take no for an answer and an unbending will but the X factor was luck. Focusing on the areas where I had control increased my chances of being lucky. I had to survive before I could thrive.

When I use the term survival I am referring to the ability to perceive and respond to threats and danger.

Setting direction involves **aligning**:

- 1) **Thoughts:** I form a realistic mental image of the results that I want and use my imagination to develop this image until it is tangible enough that I could literally touch it, I can see it clearly and know precisely what it is anytime I think about it.
- 2) **Words:** I say things in a manner that is consistent with the results that I want. I put it out there, express what I want to take place. Rather than say I don't want to fail, I say I want to succeed, rather than say I am afraid, I say I want to be more confident.
- 3) **Deeds:** I perform actions intentionally and consciously consistent with the results that I want. As the saying goes "if I talk the talk I must walk the walk".

It is easy for me to focus on things that are not going the way that I want, though these things are relevant they are only important if they would help me understand how to get to where I want to go. So what I do is focus most or all of my energy in the direction that I want to go irrespective of the factors that have made it almost impossible for me to get there. I focus on the solutions and not the

problems, I spend most of my time focusing on getting the results that I want and less time reviewing the results that I did not want.

It is important for me to be aware of my needs (what I must have and cannot do or survive without) and my wants (what I want or desire to thrive) and know the difference between these two things. **To survive and then thrive I should always do what I have to even if it is not always what I want to while I strive to get what I want.** Just because I don't get it right away is not a reason to give up and sometimes the same process has to be repeated many times in many different ways before I get the results that I want.

Some self help books have sold the idea that I have a right to what I want and that I am entitled to it. Although this is an ideology that is very appealing, in reality change happens with or without my permission or consideration. I believe that it is my duty to try and get the results that I want and not simply expect it to happen.

The concepts that are explained within this book would further illustrate what I think direction is and how to successfully align vision, words and deeds. At some point during my difficult years I realized that I had to survive before I could then thrive. I would often say to myself **“if I wake up in a burning building does it matter how I got there?”** Although how I got there is relevant but if I want to survive it is only important if it will show me the way out, otherwise what was most important to my survival was, “where do I go from there?” This became my mantra and my compass and no matter the roadblocks, I seemed able to find my way back to the path I wanted.

All the things that have happened to me (especially those that have impacted me with unwanted results) are the burning building, how this makes me feel is me wondering how I got there and all of these are only important if they would assist me in getting out of the building, otherwise the only important question is “where do I go from here?” In other words what is my desired direction.

This approach is survival based and helps me to conserve energy and optimize resources by keeping focus on the desired direction thereby maximizing the opportunity to obtain the results that I want.

I was reminded how effective this method could be in a crisis situation when I mentored someone who was under a lot of stress from an ongoing investigation resulting from a misunderstanding. This person was very distraught crying and feeling very powerless. We discussed the analogy of the **“burning building”** and through this the person was able to self identify that even though feelings were relevant the most important decision was where to go from here.

We then reviewed the rules of functional adaptation and the person was able to properly identify the system but it became obvious that there was an information deficit about the rules of the system. This information deficit inhibited the ability to fully understand and identify the choices.

By the time the fifteen minute visit was over this person felt very empowered and confident adapting to the changes being encountered. A follow-up visit the next week confirmed that the results from the initial encounter were sustained.

Sometimes without meaning to, people spend a lot of time focusing on all the things that were not going their way and not enough time on the things that were going well. The “burning building” analogy was very helpful in refocusing on what was important.

Feelings are always relevant but like I have said before, it is what we do (our actions) with or without these feelings that will provide the results that that we want. “Being stuck” is an adaptation to change but not a functional one because although it helps us survive, it keeps us from thriving. Letting go is a functional adaptation because it allows us to develop a new relationship with change thereby improving our chances of getting the results that we want.

Points to remember:

Survive first and then thrive

Make sure that your thoughts, words and actions are always in the direction of the results that you want.

MY CONCEPTS

1. VISUALIZE

2. FEAR

3. HOPE

4. FEELINGS & ACTIONS

5. PROCESS & OUTCOMES

6. VALIDATION

3 - 1 - MY CONCEPTS - VISUALIZE

To succeed have a healthy imagination and a stubborn will.

Use your imagination to find your direction and use your will to focus on reinforcing this direction through the repetition of the required action.

Negative imagery is not always deliberate but it always makes it difficult to obtain the results that I want. Often times it is because I do not fully understand the power of my imagination. **When there is a contest between my will and my imagination my imagination always wins.** The purpose of my imagination is imagery, to provide me with direction, it allows me to appreciate what I want, to see where I am going and where I want to go. The “will” is the machine that gets me there, it lacks imagery, as this would distract it from its task of making me do the same things over and over again until I achieve the result that I want.

My imagination and my will should always be working as a team, together and not against each other and so it is important for me to be aware of the things that stimulate my imagination. It is almost impossible for me to will myself to imagine anything, as the act of imagining itself is a form of letting go of reality and visualize what I want reality to be. Verbalizing my intended direction is a very important tactic for stimulating my imagination.

There are times when I may be hoping for something but saying the exact opposite of what I want thereby decreasing my chances of ever getting it. For example, hoping not to fail is not the same thing as trying to succeed. When I am hoping not to fail my imagination is engaged with failure because I am trying to avoid it and so I am thinking of all the many ways that I could possibly fail. Most of my energy is focused on avoiding failure with very little left to try and succeed therefore I have a lower probability of success.

When I am trying to succeed I am focused on success and all the things I have to do to get there, although I am aware failure is a

possibility, I am not consumed by it and if at first I don't succeed I keep finding ways to get the results that I want.

If I am trying to prevent someone from dropping an expensive vase, "hold on to it" is more likely to produce a positive result than, "don't drop it". In the first case the person imagines holding on to it while in the second case the person imagines dropping it. Action words are a very important stimulus for the imagination so how I define things and verbalize my actions are an important step in taking control of my imagination.

Practice makes perfect, the more I visualize a situation the more familiar it becomes. My will is responsible for making me imagine the same situation repeatedly. Imagination hates boredom and repetition is boring but necessary to achieve results through action. The will on the other hand thrives on repetition and in fact the more able I am to repeat and stick with an action the more willful I am. To succeed I need a healthy imagination and a stubborn will.

The following steps help my imagination and my will work as a team:

- 1) Self-affirmation statements
- 2) Appropriate verbalization
- 3) Appropriate action

What I say influences my imagination, which in turn influences what I do. Verbalizing the words out loud and saying it like I mean it (even if I didn't fully understand what they meant) surprisingly was more effective than when I thought about it and reflected on it. I find self-affirmation statements very helpful when trying to visualize.

At a clinical hypnotherapy seminar I was introduced to the "Coué method" named after Émile Coué de la Châtaigneraie (February 26, 1857 – July 2, 1926) who was a French Psychologist and Pharmacist who developed a method of psychotherapy and self improvement based on optimistic autosuggestion.

He used the phrase in French, "Tous les jours à tous points de vue je vais de mieux en mieux" that translates in English to every day, in every way, I'm getting better and better. It was a form of conscious autosuggestion repeated as much as twenty times a day usually at the beginning and end of each day. Coué maintained that curing some of our troubles requires a change in our unconscious thought that can be achieved only by using our imagination and this in turn creates physiological changes through autosuggestion.

I modified it slightly:

Every day
 In every way
 Getting better and better
 More capable, more able

I felt that my unconscious mind did not relate to itself, hence pronouns were not particularly useful for me and were distracting. I found that it was the expression of the idea or intent that engaged and excited my imagination the most. I felt by organizing it this way each line presented a particular idea that my unconscious mind could connect with in any way it deemed fit but the end results would be what I wanted.

I asked whomever I was mentoring not to reflect on the meaning of what they were saying but simply say it like they meant it, as if they were trying to sell the idea to someone other than themselves. I have found it very useful as a way orientating anyone in the direction that would provide them with the results that they want.

When I use this saying I do not consider it important to reflect on what I was saying but rather felt that it was important to verbalize it out loud (quietly) and to say it like I really meant it. Each line projects a picture that helps visualize the direction:

Every day: **I visualize time**
 In every way: **I visualize all actions possible**
 Getting better and better: **I visualize direction of getting better**

More capable, more able: **I visualize ability**

Visualize is a form of purposeful fantasizing where we may indulge in grandiose ideas but don't distort reality. I would often remind myself that if I could not believe in myself it would be impossible for me to imagine that anyone else would.

To achieve the results that I want, it is important to visualize it repeatedly even when it appears unlikely that it would occur. My expectations when I visualize should always be consistent with reality but flexible enough to accommodate unforeseen circumstances.

I refer to it as a form of "self-programming" because my expectations are consistent with reality, even though the probability may be low, the likelihood of occurrence of the results that I want is possible as opposed to "self-delusion" when the expectations are not consistent with any form of reality and the likelihood of occurrence of the the results that I want is impossible.

It is important to verbalize "can do" statements more often than "can't do" (see the section on Can Do) statements and to say things in a manner consistent with what I want, for example rather than say I hope I don't fail I say I hope that I succeed or instead of I don't know if I am good enough, I say I hope I am good enough. I avoid false statements like I know I will succeed or I know I am good enough because my unconscious mind is aware that I am unsure and that I am trying to use my will instead of my imagination.

I am not pretending to be something I am not, I am simply hoping to become something I know that I can be. In the same manner saying I am in my happy place in an attempt to make myself happier is not as effective as visualizing going from sadness to happiness. **"Visualize" is not about denying reality, it is the 'mind process' of transforming reality from one state to another**

following a natural progression.

There are times when I have felt helpless or out of control, in order to regain my sense of control, I would imagine myself in situations where I had experienced a sense of control and hold on to those images in my mind. There is enough medical research to support the fact that neurophysiology is influenced by our minds and our imagination so we can make use of this process even if we don't fully understand why it works.

When I am trying to stop or change a habit I consider undesirable, I should make sure that my imagination is engaged with the change I desire and not the habit that I don't. For example if I feel I talk too much and want to change that, I will imagine myself talking less and not focus on the fact that I talk too much.

Like everybody else I do have thoughts of undesired results but rather than resist them or try to alter them (which consumes a lot of energy) I process them by reminding myself of things that I desire. For example, I may be involved in solving a very difficult and complex problem, but while I am doing this I remind myself of five to ten simple things that are going my way, such as, how my eyes work well, I can taste, or that I have the ability to solve problems at all, I don't dwell on them but simply list them very quickly while I am grappling with the problem and in this manner I maintain the perspective that I want.

Visualizing does not guarantee that I will get the result that I want but it makes it more likely to occur giving me the edge that I need. My experiences in life have convinced me that success is a habit and I can form this habit through proper "visualizing".

Points to remember:

Visualize

Make sure that your **imagination** (thoughts), your **words** (verbal expressions) and your **actions** (deeds) are consistent with the results that you want.

Repeat the above process as often as possible in order to get the results that you want.

3 - 2 - MY CONCEPTS - FEAR

Be fearful but don't be ruled by fear.

Caution is a careful forethought to avoid danger or harm and paying close attention or vigilance to minimize risk.

Take time to properly define danger, harm or risk otherwise your cautious nature or instinct will work against you and prevent you from experiencing some of the most beautiful things that life has to offer.

Fear is a very unpleasant or disturbing feeling caused by the presence or imminence of danger. My sense of fear is an early warning system that alerts me of possible danger and the need to take action. So when properly utilized it is the best friend I have but when not it can be my worst enemy.

Fear is the price of being human, so it is normal to be frightened when I encounter something unfamiliar or unsettling. Fear is a spectrum of emotions that ranges from being mildly uneasy and apprehensive to intense overpowering feeling of terror. It is important to remember that fear is a mental state that arises spontaneously rather than through conscious effort, then accompanied by physiological changes that are recognizable.

It may occur in contrast to reason or even when there is no apparent reason for it. In other words I don't ask to be fearful, it happens as a response to real or imagined danger, conscious or unconscious.

I still remember it like it was yesterday it was just before my 24th birthday that I had made a decision to come back to Canada. My heart still pounds when I think about it, it was one of the most terrifying decisions I have ever made but also the most pivotal (although I did not know it at the time).

I verbalized this decision to my brother and this seemed to make it real. Now I was committed and could not just back out, someone else knew about it. Although I was born in Canada, Nigeria was the only country I really knew and despite all its problems, at least it was a society I understood. If it was not for my perceived lack of opportunities I would have questioned my decision to try and be successful in Canada, in a society that I knew nothing about.

The months went by very quickly and it was soon the day to depart. I can still remember the intense overpowering sense of fear as we approached the airport. I had never really been away from home and I could always count on running into a familiar face so the thought that I may never see any of them again left me in a state of extreme anxiety.

I must have silently changed my mind fifty times or more before it was time to check in at the airport, even though all my loved ones were there to see me off I still was not sure if I would get on the plane, I felt like a high flying trapeze artist who in a moment of bravado had decided to do the act without a safety net and was just coming to the realization that he had put his survival in jeopardy.

There are many good things I have been able to accomplish, these have happened while I was fearful, my ability to process my fear has been key to these accomplishments. In the military we used to say “there are old soldiers and bold soldiers but no old bold soldiers”. Anyone who has ever been called a hero has accomplished this feat because they somehow learned how to “process” fear.

Ever since I can remember I have always been afraid, it started when I was very young about the time I realized that people die and nothing lasts forever. At some point I was reassured by the constancy of my parents presence and I soon convinced myself that good things happened to good people and bad things happened to bad people, so as long I stayed good I had nothing to worry about.

This theory was seriously tested when my father died suddenly and tragically in a car accident two months before my tenth birthday.

After many years of mourning and being terrified most of the time, I realized that it was okay to be afraid, in fact I would be an idiot not to be afraid considering the fact that being alive meant I was always in imminent danger.

It was not my fear that was handicapping me, it was what I was doing with my fear. I was allowing it to occupy most of my attention and my imagination was constantly in the direction of the results I did not want

The more I tried to understand my fear the more entangled my imagination was in fear having the opposite effect of what I wanted. I tried to conquer it by denying its existence or doing daredevil things to convince myself that I was not afraid but this was time consuming and potentially dangerous.

As an adolescent and young adult I suffered from crippling panic attacks that simply appeared out of nowhere and stayed with me until I learned how to adapt. When these attacks occurred, things would suddenly seem like I was in a tunnel, sound was muffled and nothing seemed real. I felt like I was losing my mind, my thoughts would race until a full blown panic frenzy developed.

There was a tingling around my lips and I would feel that I could not breathe as I was engulfed with sheer terror and my legs turned to lead, I felt rooted to the spot, fully convinced that I was about to die. My fingers and toes would start to curl in spasm as though they had a mind of their own and on some occasions my body would shut down resulting in a fainting spell, with things returning to normal when I awoke.

These attacks grew more frequent and unpredictable holding me complete hostage and making it almost impossible to do anything socially, I was always wondering when I would make a complete fool of myself.

I decided to make a list of what I experienced during the attacks and these were:

- 1) A fear of losing my mind,
- 2) A feeling of depersonalization or disconnection from everything around me
- 3) Noise and light sensitivity
- 4) Lip tingling and limb cramping
- 5) Profound fatigue after the attack was over

I found that by detailing and reviewing my experience it made the next attack somewhat familiar and not as scary. Rather than trying to control these attacks, I started adapting to them. In my mind, I visualized I was on a beach, the waves were coming in and it was impossible to control the surf so I climbed on my surfboard and rode the waves.

I figured out that if I was losing my mind I would be unlikely to know it. So if I could even think that I was losing my mind there was a good chance that I was not because I still had insight. So from then on when I experienced that feeling I reminded myself that I was having a panic attack.

I also determined that any form of thought when I was having a panic attack acted as an accelerant in the same manner that pouring gasoline on a camp fire is always a recipe for disaster. However since it is virtually impossible to empty my mind of all thoughts to make my mind still, I would have to distract myself by focusing on just one thing, repeatedly and to the exclusion of everything else.

It could be a phrase or number but I had to be able to repeat it continuously without the need to think about it. I soon realized that it was important to say it aloud while breathing into my hands, firstly, it reminded me that I was alive, that I was breathing and to remember to pace my breathing as slow as possible. I repeated the phrase over and over again (I chose 99) without any attempt to think or interact with anybody around me even when they asked me questions.

The first few times I tried this technique I failed quite woefully but I was not discouraged. I realized I had to practice it before I was

actually in an attack, so I did it over and over again until it came very naturally.

I will never forget the moment I first successfully took control of a panic attack and felt the wave receding without making a fool of myself, I had to ride six waves in that one attack but I had successfully adapted, I have not had a panic attack in many years.

When I arrived in Canada and was inundated with so many challenges I stopped trying to understand why I was afraid, I simply did not have the time or luxury for self analysis, nor did I try to conquer my fear because I did not have the time or energy to do so. What I did was “process” my fear.

I found peace when I discovered how to “process” my fear. I recognized that I was afraid (which is most of the time) by becoming aware of the psychological and physiological effects it produced, I then reminded myself that it meant that I felt threatened or in danger and so I needed to reassess what I was doing.

I soon realized that I was most fearful when I was experiencing significant changes. When I allowed myself to be aware of this fear (rather than suppress it), I seemed more able to channel my energy into getting the results that I wanted.

Over the years I have concluded that there are two types of fear that I experience, **“productive fear”** and **“unproductive fear”**. Productive fear is one of my best friends and is created when I “process” my fear properly, it reminds me of my mortality and allows me to continuously monitor my environment and make survival decisions some of which I do unconsciously without even being aware until much later. Unproductive fear however occurs when I do not process my fear and it overwhelms me decreasing my ability to make appropriate decisions.

I find now that I experience productive fear as a strange mixture of excitement and trepidation, hope and dread. It is usually a clear

indication that change is required and imminent.

The important step in processing my fear to make it productive are:

- 1) **Recognition:** I become aware of the psychological and physiological effects of my fear and recognize them when they occur
- 2) **Acceptance:** I do not spend energy trying to understand my fear or try to control it but simply accept the fact that I am afraid and move on to action.
- 3) **Action:** I allow my imagination to engage in non fearful imagery and in this manner I create the actions that move me in the direction of the results that I want. So rather than focus on trying to be less fearful (and have my imagination engaged in fear)) I focus on what I have to do get the results I want. For example I have a phobia for heights but I am able to ride over the trestles of Myra Canyon in Kelowna by not trying to understand my phobia, accepting it and focusing on riding my bike instead of how frightened I was. It took three or four unsuccessful tries but now I can do it without any problem. Desensitization and flooding are already well established forms of therapy in treatment of phobias.

My first job in Canada was working as a security guard. The security company I worked for gave me an assignment at a pharmaceutical company on Steeles Avenue and Yonge Street in Toronto and I worked in the guardhouse with 3 other guards. Where I lived (Birchmount & Finch) was a significant distance from this location and it took me over an hour to get to work with multiple bus changes. The other members of the crew were not very friendly.

I had racial slurs used on more than one occasion and being unaware at the time that this was not considered an acceptable practice in Canada I did not take any action. An elderly gentleman was particularly brazen and would repeatedly take out his white handkerchief and wipe his hand after shaking my hand or say things like “take your cotton picking hands off me.”

I had never really been bullied before (in fact I am not sure that I

thought of it in those terms) and so I did not know what to do. I was very afraid of losing my job so I kept my head down and hoped that they would ignore me but the harassment just got worse.

It was unclear to me at the time why I was so afraid of these men but I allowed myself to recognize this fear and accept it. I started considering what kind of action I could take. I observed that the elderly gentleman was quite religious and had a bible with him all the time sometimes reading silently from it.

One day, I said to him, "I know you are a very good man and one day when you die, which I hope would not be for a long time, you will definitely go to heaven". He seemed genuinely surprised and touched by my comment (probably started feeling a little guilty) and he then said "that was a very nice thing to say Toye, thank you very much". Then I continued by saying "I only worry about one thing for you", so he asked me what that was and I said, "what will you do when you get to heaven and find out that God is black"?

The look on his face was priceless and for once he was speechless, he did not say anything at all and I went about my business. I noticed that he stopped harassing me and two weeks later he emotionally came to apologize for the way he had treated me, he told me that he had never considered the possibility that God may be black and after I had said that to him he could not stop thinking about it.

I felt quite elated by this result but unfortunately two days later I was in conflict with the man in charge of security of the building. I refused to fold some personal flyers he brought into the guardhouse (about two hundred of them). It was clear to me that this was definitely not my job and after 6 months working as a guard in Canada I was starting to realize that I had the right to be treated like a human being. He informed me that I had two choices, fold the flyers or make sure I was not there when he got back so I got up and left.

In retrospect, I realize that the organization would probably have

been horrified if they knew how I was being treated but I was clearly unaware of my rights at the time. I was unemployed for the next three weeks and almost ended up on the streets, I even interviewed for a job as a dishwasher and was not hired but I invariably found a job in a chemical factory. This experience allowed me to realize that my worst fears were not as bad as I thought they would be when I actually experienced them, though I remained fearful of many things (and I still do), I would never allow it to rule me again.

I have accomplished a lot of things through processing my emotions and my fears. For example, when I am angry I realize it is because I feel threatened and so I don't try to feel less angry but simply identify the threat (real or imagined) and process it i.e. identify what I can do about it and then do it. It is important when processing fear that the intervals between recognition, acceptance and action are as such as possible.

Note that taking action with fear is different from trying to control it. Being with fear is not a sign of weakness but a sign of strength. By recognizing how fearful I am and being comfortable with it makes me less vulnerable to fear mongers and people who profit from fear. Not trying to control it brings about a realization that there are a lot of things that I have no control over and it allows me to focus on where I have control.

I discovered that trying to understand or control my fear would often result in my imagination being focused on it with the development of "unproductive fear". Unproductive fear is characterized by energy wastage, dysfunctional movement (non-directional, non-movement, excessive movement) and dysfunctional action (overcompensation and bravado, terror, inactivity and complete de-compensation).

I now take ownership of my decisions and my existence. I have taught myself to understand that all change is fearful so when I feel fear I know change is coming and I welcome the fear and focus on the results that I want.

Points to remember:

Fear is an important early detection system

By properly processing fear you create a “productive fear” that has significant survival value

Processing fear to make it productive involves:

- 1) **Recognition:** Being aware of the psychological and physiological effects of my fear and recognizing them when they occur
- 2) **Acceptance:** Not spending energy trying to understand it or try to control it but simply accept the fact that I am afraid and move on to action.
- 3) **Action:** Allow my imagination to engage a manner that creates the actions that move me in the direction of the results I want even though I still remain fearful.

Trying to understand or control fear can often be counter-productive when quick action response is required.

3 - 3 - MY CONCEPTS - HOPE

Hope is the state that promotes the belief in good outcomes related to events and circumstances in one's life.

Hope is free. By being hopeful you increase your chances of getting the results that you want.

I grew up in Nigeria and was very influenced by the “Yoruba” cultural belief in fate and destiny. The belief was that every individual was pre-destined to accomplish certain things or achieve certain things in life and whether this happened or not was very dependent on, the choices we made (things we had control over) and fate (things we have no control over).

In Yoruba culture of storytelling and analogies are useful in gaining or regaining perspective and making good choices especially in difficult situations. Any challenge provides an opportunity for growth if I allow myself to perceive it in that manner. When things do not go as planned I have a choice, to perceive the outcome either as a work in progress or a total failure. How I perceive anything is just as important or sometimes more important than what is really happening.

Life is like a journey where nothing is ever easy or hard but relative to how I choose to see (perceive) it. I have learned more from the experiences that I initially perceived as unpleasant than from the ones I perceived as pleasant. Although I do not recommend unpleasant experiences as the main source of learning (I personally prefer mentorship) it is important to make the most of whatever life throws our way and find ways to get the results that we want.

How I choose to see things (**my perception**) is a remarkable tool that can work for me or against me. I am always influenced by how I see things and this in turn is directly related to how I have defined them in my mind therefore to do it differently, I have to be willing to define it differently in my mind.

To be functional I have to be able to adjust my perception as I am provided new information that challenges my previous knowledge and indicates clearly that there is a need for change. Dysfunction arises when I fail to recognize this information or simply ignore or deny it.

Every experience in life is an opportunity for learning and I am the one who defines an experience as good or bad. I try to discover the lesson in every experience although I admit there are some lessons I would have gladly skipped. What I have discovered is that every complex situation is made up of multiple simple blocks and the way I deal with a complex challenge is to break it down to its simplest form while still maintaining a keen sense of its complexity.

The most important relationship is the one that I have with myself and so I take time to take care of myself. It is only when I truly care for myself that I am able to truly care for others and I can't really give to anyone what I refuse to give to myself.

Any sense of control that I feel is a state of mind designed to keep me functional. To maintain this state of mind, it is important to differentiate between what I want to do and what I have to do, realizing that when there is a conflict between these two it is more functional to do what I have to. Frustration arises when I try to control events beyond my control, to counteract this and create a sense of control I focus my attention on the things that I can control (even if it was just my breathing) and then build it up from there.

Things do not always go the way I had hoped or planned but I have a choice on how I view the outcome, either as a work in progress or a total failure. The way that I perceive things is just as important or sometimes more important than what is really happening as this perception is what determines my response and the actions I take. I choose to discover the lesson in every experience and give myself the **gift of "hope"**.

Like my "sense of control", **hope is a state of mind** that can keep me functional. **The decision to be hopeful is a personal choice, it**

does not guarantee the results that I want but it makes it more likely to occur. Remember hope is free. **Being hopeful is a habit that is formed over time through repetition and reinforcement** and although getting the results that I want is a strong motivator I should learn to be hopeful even when results I want seem unlikely to occur.

A good analogy would be wishing to win the lottery but not buying a ticket. Although the odds of winning are quite slim there always is a chance but the odds become zero if I do not buy a lottery ticket. Life is a gamble and being hopeful in life is like buying a lottery ticket, there is no guarantee that I will win but at least I am one step closer to making it happen.

Being hopeful is not the same thing as wishing or fantasizing, it is a very active process that involves a willingness to convince myself over and over again about the possibility of what I want occurring. It is important to be cognizant of how things are while allowing myself to imagine how I would like them to be. Being hopeful is not about trying to will myself to succeed, it is about simply imagining myself succeeding, a form of “self programming”,

To be hopeful I have to:

1) Allow myself to believe in the possibility of what I hope for. To believe, I have to allow myself to imagine it, use my imagination to see it in my mind.

Using my imagination involves a willingness to put myself in an “awake trance state” such that I am fully aware of the present reality (based on probabilities) while allowing myself to experience an alternate reality (based on possibilities). I define possibilities as anything that can exist whether it is real or imagined but it may sometimes not follow the present laws of reality (i.e. our present understanding) and probabilities as something that is likely to occur or that can occur and it follows the present laws of reality.

2) I verbalize this expectation (say it out loud) consistent with the direction of my choosing. I do a ten and ten routine i.e. I say it ten times to make a unit and then say ten units a day. I say it out loud so

that my unconscious mind and brain hear it. It is important that I say it convincingly without necessarily reflecting on what I am saying but simply repeating it in a manner that when my brain hears it, it sounds like I mean it. I think of it as “self programming”.

3) I repeat the above process often. Reinforcing the results that I want occurs through repetition of the process. I become what I do most often and remember that being hopeful is a habit that can be formed through repetition. I become what I most repeat and this is one of the important factors that determine my direction. So I always make sure that my thoughts, words and actions are heading in the direction that I want to go.

My ability to succeed increased when I learned to **define things properly**, rather than obstacles I saw challenges, rather than failure I was finding ways to succeed and so on. During some of my most difficult experiences I would challenge myself to see (perceive) things differently, in a manner that allowed me to focus my energy in the direction I wanted to go. I was surprised to find that this produced unexpected but very beneficial results.

How I define a situation is integral to how I respond to it therefore I always strive to define things properly, in a manner that will take me in the direction that I want to go. Remember that trying not to fail is very different from trying to succeed and rather than seeing it as an obstacle or problem, define it as a challenge and rather than seeing failure, see it as finding ways to succeed. This step important in the same manner that learning how to walk is before I learn to run. I talk to myself out loud and encourage myself verbally to choose to see the up side of every situation.

Visualize where you want to be and permit yourself to believe in the certainty of it even though everything else around you may indicate otherwise. It is normal to experience a sense of frustration when trying to control events that you have no control over. You can recreate a sense of control by focusing your attention on things you can control (even if it was just breathing) and then build things up from there.

When I encourage someone to be hopeful I am actually asking them to be cautiously optimistic and not to willingly ignore the reality of the situation they are in, especially if it is bleak, but simply to entertain the notion or possibility of a more favourable outcome despite it all. People who are overly optimistic and approach life with excessive enthusiasm have always irritated me and I concluded (rightfully or wrongly) that they were overcompensating.

Intuitively the concept of balance makes sense to me, sometimes things are very good and sometimes they are very bad but the goal is to find that area, the sweet spot where things are just right and try to get everything to oscillate around it on a regular basis. I refer to it as being centred and I think different people have different ways of describing it but seem to recognize it when they find it.

Being hopeful is a choice I make and it is sometimes a very difficult one to make in a world that is high on facts and short on faith. It involves a willingness to accept and accommodate my vulnerability, to be accepting of things the way they are but stubborn enough to imagine a more desirable outcome and a willingness to make it happen.

Storytelling has always been a way of introducing the idea of hope, most children are introduced to this either through fairy tales with stories that start with “once upon a time” and end with “they all lived happily ever after”. Although well meaning, this over enthusiastic and unrealistic approach often poorly prepares us for the disappointments that may lie ahead. As we encounter more and more “once upon a times” and less and less “live happily ever after” we develop the habit of being less and less hopeful and some of us lose this gift all together.

Our ancestors were hopeful beings and have found ways to pass on this culture. Hope gives meaning to our existence, reinforces purpose and the notion that there is a reason why we exist, that it is worthwhile to be here and worthwhile to contribute to the existence and propagation of our species. The absence of hope is felt as despair, it is a natural consequence of not being able to fill the void and reinforce our purpose. When hope is absent or lacking our

perception of reality is often undesirable to us.

I have witnessed fortunate and unfortunate outcomes within or outside the control of the individual. Although the individual often had a role in the outcome, it was not always determined by this role i.e. just because you try hard does not mean that you will succeed (although it does increase your chances of succeeding). I have also observed people who don't try at all and continue to succeed in spite of themselves. In this regard, I feel that life is only as fair as we believe it to be and does not guarantee or promise us anything. We make things happen through our actions and being hopeful.

I found that people when very sick often presented with an intense feeling of vulnerability that made the notion that there are things out there greater than us more acceptable to them. The thought that something or someone cares for us is very appealing and the concept that our existence matters and is of value seems to be an important part of being human and remaining hopeful.

People who buy into this concept of value seem to attach importance and relevance to their existence and the existence of those around them, they thrive and their perception of wellbeing is heightened, their experience of life reported as very positive. When this concept is not reinforced the person does not do as well and the journey to find oneself could be more difficult.

Points to remember:

Being hopeful is not the same thing as wishing or fantasizing but it is a very active process that involves a willingness to convince yourself over and over again about the possibility of what you want occurring.

To be hopeful you have to:

- 1) Allow yourself to believe in the possibility of what you hope for.
- 2) Verbalize your expectation consistent with the direction of the results that you want. A form of “self programming”.
- 3) Repeat the above process often to reinforce the results.

3 - 4 - MY CONCEPTS - FEELINGS & ACTIONS

Feelings occur to remind me of the need to take action.

How I feel and how I act are two independent processes. The relationship between them is one that I have created.

“My feelings are like the paint of an artist, they colour my existence and fill me with awareness, creating a sense of purpose and endless potential, in the same manner that my actions are like the brush strokes of the artist, repeatedly dipping in the paint and painting the picture on the canvas of my life”.

- Toye Oyelese

My intent here is to explain how I view the relationship that I have formed between my feelings and my actions and how this relationship can be modified and changed. Once the relationship is understood you will be able to successfully apply the “Best friend tactic”.

I am always motivated to survive and then thrive so because of this my primary task is to determine very quickly what might threaten or enhance my survival. When my survival is threatened I want to be able to recognize what the immediate danger is and take immediate action to avoid it. The action I take is defensive in nature and geared towards neutralizing a result that I don't want.

In order to act quickly in future I pair the feeling that I have just experienced with the action that I had taken, the purpose being offensive action to neutralize the threat more quickly and put me at an advantage. My motivation is strong but my objective is survival and my action is always designed to manage a threat.

When something enhances my survival I am getting the results that I want and I want to be able to recognize the opportunity if it occurs again. In order to obtain results that I want I need to determine how to repeat this when I need to. In order to act quickly

in future I pair the feeling that I have just experienced with the action that I had taken. My motivation is dependent on the intensity of the experience but my objective is to thrive.

A feeling is something that I experience consciously and I am aware of as emotions. These emotions create changes in my mental state and body physiology that makes them recognizable to me if I have experienced them before. The first time I experienced these feelings I gave meaning to them even when I did not have a name for them. The more intense the experience the more likely I am to remember the feelings I had and the actions that I have associated with them.

In psychology feelings refer to the conscious subjective experience of emotions. Emotions are subjective conscious experiences characterized by psycho-physiological expressions, biological reactions and mental states.

The feelings I experience are relative to my personal perspective and so how I interpret them is relative to how I see or perceive things. How I recognize what I am feeling is related to past interpretation or cataloging and when I experience something for the first time I can classify it as something I desire or not.

The relationship between my feelings and my actions is one that I have created and not a cause and effect as most people imagine. It is quite possible to feel strongly about something and yet act differently from how I feel. An example is a tired parent who feels angry because of the incessant all night crying of the little baby but yet is still able to take appropriate action (cuddle the baby) rather than inappropriate action (smother or shake the baby).

Often times people do not allow themselves to feel because of a conscious or unconscious fear of the actions that these feelings may produce and so they simply suppress these feelings while they choose what they consider to be an appropriate action. The problem with this approach (denial) is that these feelings are never truly processed and it becomes harder and harder for them to know who they are and how they really feel.

Processing my feelings involves allowing myself to become fully aware of them and embrace them even as I make a choice to act in accordance with or separate from what I am feeling. The goal is to allow myself to feel completely (and not make an attempt to pretend as though I did not feel that way) and then to choose an action that is in keeping with “being my best friend”. Note that I did not say act but deliberately used the term choose an action.

When people feel and act they will often act in a manner that is consistent with previous conditioning and this may not always be the best or most appropriate action. On the other hand when they choose an action they are allowing themselves to be consciously aware of their choice.

The tactic of “being my own best friend” allows me the option of unlimited feelings and this singular action. In other words it is okay to feel sad, angry, disillusioned, ashamed or any “positive” or “negative” feelings but the only action available is that of being my own best friend.

Being my own best friend is a process of self-acceptance without judgment, understanding my assets and liabilities, taking responsibility for my actions and shortcomings but never throwing myself under the bus. Anything I would do for my best friend I should do for myself first, before taking any action I always ask the question “am I being my own best friend by this action”.

It is simply impossible to truly give to others what I don't have or will not give to myself. If I don't love myself I cannot truly love anyone else, if I don't respect myself I cannot truly respect anyone else, I would simply be pretending or trying to make it up. Getting in touch with and being intimate with myself allows me to get in touch and be more intimate with those around me.

In any good relationship effective communication will lead to trust and trust will lead to intimacy. These principles also apply to the relationship that I have with myself.

I know that I am programmed to be validated it is the way I attach value to my existence. These doses of validation give me a feeling of wellbeing and sense of usefulness. External validation is what is provided by the things external to me and internal validation arises from the conversations I have within myself.

A person that validates themselves will very often do well even in the absence of adequate external validation but however a person who is very dependent on external validation and has poor internal validation would often self destruct as external validation is not within their control. I cover this topic in more detail in the section on “validation”.

How we feel about ourselves is integral to our “self identity”. I cannot control how people feel about or think of me and although this is relevant, what is more important is how I feel about or think of myself. That is what impacts my “self identity” the most. It is okay to feel ashamed but it is not okay to be ashamed.

Feeling ashamed of myself is okay but being ashamed of myself is not. It sounds like I am saying the same thing but there is a profound difference. Feeling ashamed is intangible but gives me a sense of awareness of my state of affairs and the consequence of this feeling relates to the action I take.

Being ashamed however is a tangible action that will result in me becoming ashamed of myself. My feelings are like the paint of an artist, they colour my existence and fill me with awareness creating a sense of purpose and endless potential. My actions are like the brush strokes of the artist repeatedly dipping in the paint and painting the picture on the canvas of my life ultimately determining what things look like.

The only relationship between feelings and action is that which I create. People suppress feelings because they are worried they would choose an inappropriate action and this suppression of feelings creates a dishonest communication within the person. Feelings are the very essence of being alive and so we should allow

ourselves to feel and then choose appropriate action.

The beauty of our existence is free will and choice and even not choosing is a form of choice in the same manner that non-believing is a form of believing therefore we are always engaged and involved and we sometimes choose our direction by not choosing our direction. The key is to be comfortable with the realization that we have all control and we have no control at all at the same time.

Points to remember:

Feelings occur to remind us of the need to take action.

How we feel and how we act are two independent processes. The relationship between them is one that we have created.

No matter how we feel about ourselves we should always take an action that is in keeping with being our best friend.

3 - 5 - MY CONCEPTS - PROCESS & OUTCOMES

“Life is a process, outcomes are the products of this process. When I focus on process I will always get the outcomes I need even if it is not the outcomes I expected”.

- Toye Oyelese

I think of an outcome as the result I want and the process the manner in which I get there.

I do not know what happiness is but I am happy anyway, for what I feel fulfils for me what happiness would be.

I was brought up to think about outcomes and so I would spend so much time worrying about how things were going to turn out, often times forgetting to focus on and enjoy what was happening in each moment and the series of actions that bring about the results I wanted.

I could worry about how next year is going to turn out and how I can get a good outcome or simply realize that sixty good seconds give me one good minute, sixty good minutes give me one good hour, twenty four good hours give me one good day, seven good days give me one good week and fifty two good weeks give me one good year. It is important to choose to be more focused on what I am doing in each unit of time.

A process is a series of actions, changes or function that brings about a result. An outcome is an end result of a process. Life is a process, outcomes are the products of this process. When I focus on process I will always get the outcomes I need even if they are not the outcomes I expected.

When I put my outcome ahead of my process I run the risk of what I call a process / outcome conflict in which the process I am involved with is not consistent with the outcome I desire. An example would be where I want a healthy outcome and spend a lot of energy worrying about how to achieve this outcome but I am not

involved in enough healthy processes.

When I experience a conflict between the process I am involved in and the outcome I want, process always wins and in this case where I am involved in unhealthy processes it is unlikely that I will achieve a healthy outcome.

In this regard if I was wondering how to be happy (this is an outcome that may be difficult to achieve because I may not know what happiness is), I would simply reflect on the moments I am experiencing and how I feel in each moment adjusting it to approximate with what I find enjoyable or satisfying, for example step one may be my eyes pop open and how does that feel? If it does not feel good and I don't have time to do it again I simply imagine what a satisfying eye opening experience would be like.

A process / outcome conflict uses up a lot of energy and will affect my direction in life so I am very motivated to avoid them. I believe that process / outcome conflicts are the reason why some of the most well meant intentions that are not consistent with the processes of those it is meant for always seem to fail woefully?

My belief system is a very important part of my ability to engage in processes and so changing or modifying my belief system could be an important step in obtaining the outcome that I want. Every complicated puzzle is made up of individual more simple pieces in the same manner that every complicated process is made up of less complicated pieces, being able to process these pieces provides a better chance of a desirable result.

I remind myself to take bite sizes i.e. small baby steps and reflect on what I feel and be more present in the moment so that I am experiencing the steps as I move towards the outcome that I want. An analogy for me would be, if I was taking a trip to New York to say maybe see a show or buy something that I thought was unavailable in Canada, getting there would be the result I want (outcome) but this would not happen unless I buy the ticket, get my passport, pack, make sure I leave for the airport in time, board the

plane etc. and all these steps are what refer to as process. It would be impossible for me to accomplish what I want without them. As I go through the steps I may find out that wanted was available in Canada and I could accomplish the same thing without necessarily having to go to New York.

Process is a series of steps that lead to an outcome, in a process directed approach the steps are as important (or sometimes even more important than the outcome) and there is inherent value in experiencing each step, ultimately the goal is the experience and becoming skillful.

The process steps are a form of progressive planning that allows me to focus on the next stage within a series of stages, thereby allowing my imagination to fully engage in the direction I want. If I want to succeed naturally I am worried about failing and quite possibly my imagination can lock on to the idea of trying not to fail rather than trying to succeed.

What I see that is often used is an outcome based approach, the steps are only important if they achieve the outcome and ultimately the goal is the outcome. By focusing on the process (steps to get there) rather than the final outcome I am able to counteract this tendency. Another example would be I have a terrible fear of heights but I can counteract it by focusing on each step I am taking and not that I am trying to get across a hanging bridge. Although it is important to focus on the results we want it is more important to be aware of the steps that get us there.

If I am looking for the answers I should also be creating a set of circumstances where the answers can find me. Routines are helpful processes because they help me form the habits I require and create familiar patterns consistent with results that I want. It is important that I engage in processes that are consistent with my desired results.

When someone is consistently not getting the results they want they need to recognize that they are becoming skillful at not getting the

results they want and a change of tactics is required. Skill is developed through repeated action and this action involves repeating the processes that will get us the results that we want.

There something else I do that I have called **substitution of processes**, if I have a problem and I can't figure out the solution I keep it in the back of my mind while I rearrange the furniture in my living room, surprisingly when I find a very desirable arrangement I usually get a solution to my problem within a short period of time. I initially considered this a coincidence but the frequency at which it works had convinced those around me that it was authentic, the only downside of course was my sitting room kept changing and my kids grew up not realizing that most people leave the furniture in the same spot for years, but luckily I now have fewer problems.

Points to remember:

Process is a series of steps that lead to an outcome.

In a process directed approach the steps are as important (or sometimes even more important than the outcome).

There is value in experiencing each step as the ultimate goal is to become more skillful through this experience.

3 - 6 - MY CONCEPTS - VALIDATION

The most important relationship is the one that I have with myself.

Love is an expression of value and the more I value myself the more I love myself and the more opportunity I have to value others.

I am worth what I perceive my worth to be and not what it actually is and this ultimately determines how I value myself.

I have no control over what others do to me but I always have control over what I do to myself and so I choose to validate myself even when others do not.

During some of my most difficult times it was very hard to feel good about myself. I remember being unemployed for three weeks and applying to any job I found listed in the papers, I even interviewed for a job as a dishwasher and was not hired despite the fact that I was willing to travel two hours one way to this restaurant in downtown Toronto. I came back home and cried bitterly feeling very sorry for myself.

I attended Toronto cab school in the hope of finding a job as a taxi driver but was unable to pass because I did not know the city well enough and in those days there was no GPS. It was hard to remain positive. The future looked bleak and I certainly did not feel like the hot shot that had graduated medical school by his twenty second birthday.

Part of the problem was I was so new to Canadian society and had no mentors, so I was unable to take advantage of some of the opportunities, like meeting new people, or benefit from new ideas, for example I did not realize that perfect strangers could rent a place together and split the rent so I did not make any attempt to do so.

Even when I started meeting people I was constantly encountering unusual situations, like when a girl I was dating said we should go Dutch for supper and I found this confusing because it was an Italian restaurant or I had not given a workmate who offered me a soda money for it because I did not want to insult him (trying to pay someone for an offered gift would have been considered an insult in Nigeria), but instead of asking me for the money he told anyone who would listen how I was a cheap skate.

It was very difficult to feel good about myself. I felt isolated and was wrecked with self-doubt. I started wondering why I was so affected by these incidences. I came to the conclusion that I was hardwired for validation (information that made me feel valid) and this need was there whether I liked it or not. I also observed that most people around me seemed to have the same predicament.

It was as if my very being needed to be reminded that my existence mattered and that I was worthwhile. I came to the conclusion that this validation could only be generated by me (internal validation) and whatever was provided to me by others (external validation) worked because it reminded me to provide it to myself. When my internal validation is weak I am dependent on external validation to feel good about myself.

I had no control over what others did to me but I had control over what I did to myself, I could validate myself even when others did not. So every time I felt put down or less valid I reminded myself of two or three things that made me feel valid (I would always say it out loud so I that my brain could hear it) and over a period of time I found I was feeling much better about myself.

I decided to get ahead of the game and not wait until I felt bad but to do it every day like putting a deposit in a bank for when I needed to make a withdrawal.

I have observed over the years that being a problem solver I have a tendency to look at and remember the things that are not going well

(because they need solving) and less likely to remember the things that are going well. In the same manner I was less likely to say nice things about or to myself and more likely to correct myself or remember the things I don't like.

Once I became aware of this I spent a lot of energy trying to think positive and suppress the negative thoughts. My real break through happened when I stopped thinking of things as positive or negative but simply as **results I wanted** and **results that I did not want**, I realized that it was not the "bad" thoughts and expressions that were causing my problems but my lack of "good" thoughts and expressions.

I adopted a "ratio" approach to counteract this problem and started with two good things or thoughts for any bad thing or thought and gradually increasing that ratio as I deemed necessary. The worse things were the higher the ratio that I applied.

My sense of self worth is determined by my internal validation which is a form of self-talk consistent with the results I want (feeling good about myself). I found self-affirmation statements to be very effective when I repeated them often and aloud so I could hear them.

The most important relationship is the one that I have with myself. I am not talking about being narcissistic and self absorbed but I am referring to being self reflective and "being my own best friend", doing unto myself as I want others to do unto me and through this process really discover how to do unto others.

I should always be truly responsible for my own choices. Although the need to be liked and valued is strong what is more important was if I liked and valued myself or not, this would determine whether I got the results that I wanted or not .

Self-awareness means that I would always know everything about myself, that I will have conversations with myself acknowledging the things I like and those I don't, the things I am proud of and

those that I am not. Nobody would be able to tell me anything that I do not already know about myself. Self-acceptance means that this is who I am and it is okay. It does not absolve me of responsibility, in fact it encourages me to take responsibility but without judgment.

Self Awareness + Self Acceptance = Self Love

The bank, the banker and the value of balance

I use this analogy to explain the concept of value and to emphasize how easy it is to increase your chances of getting the results that you want. When you have deposits in the bank you can cash the emotional and psychological cheques that we have to write.

The currency is validation, the bank is where my sense of value resides, I am the banker and the only one who can make deposits but I am also the client and the only one who can make withdrawals.

I have the most to gain if my bank is prosperous and the most to lose if it does not succeed. The balance of value within the bank indicates the state of my account or how I feel about myself. I am also the only one who has access to the bank and external validation works by reminding me to make deposits.

Self-affirmation (internal validation) = Deposit

External-affirmation (external validation) = reminder note to deposit

Anything else = Withdrawal

Every time I appreciate myself and acknowledge my ability and effort to get the results that I want I affirm myself and put a deposit in the bank, although it is effective just to think of it, I have found that I have a greater deposit when I say it out loud, in a convincing manner, so that my brain can hear it (in the same manner a chant is more effective when said aloud). Any process that I am involved

with that is not making a deposit is making a withdrawal and as far as the bank is concerned there are no neutral processes.

I am the only one who controls or influences my deposits and withdrawals, a good portfolio is one where I make more deposits than withdrawals at any given time on any given day. Any forms of validation no matter how trivial are deposits and any other interactions (including problem solving i.e. rectifying a potential or actual adverse outcomes) are withdrawals.

When I initiate the reason for a withdrawal I am writing a cheque, when something else other than myself initiates the reason for a withdrawal I am cashing a cheque. The more money in the bank the better I am able to cope with withdrawals and the more cheques I can write or cash. The importance of continuous self-affirmation is that:

- 1) it is free,
- 2) it is within my control,
- 3) it is easy to administer,
- 4) it is always in line with the results that I want,
- 5) it ensures a continuous deposit in my bank

It is important that I maintain balance in everything that I do.

Points to remember:

Self Awareness + Self Acceptance = Self Love

The bank, the banker and the value of balance

Self-affirmation (internal validation) = **Deposit**

External-affirmation (external validation) = **reminder note to deposit**

Anything else = **Withdrawal**

MY TACTICS

1. THE RULES

2. CAN DO

3. BEST FRIEND

4. MIND ENCLOSURE

4 - 1 - MY TACTICS - THE RULES

Often times when people are confused it is not because they lack the ability to know but it is virtually impossible to figure things out properly if you are not truly aware of what game is being played.

Rule One: Identify what is going on. What is the game being played? Be aware of the system, think and reflect.

Rule Two: Know the rules of what is going on (whether or not you agree). Gather information, do some work, research, find out how to be involved.

Rule Three: Know your choices under these rules (whether or not you agree). Make a detailed list of your choices consistent with the rules, take control and be empowered.

Rule Four: Choose and move on. I pick a choice from rule three that is in the direction I want and I take responsibility for my own destiny.

This tactic made it easier for me to simplify many of the new strange and complex problems that I encountered. I viewed life as a game made up of many games within it and each one of these games had their own set of rules, it was important for me to know what game was being played so I could find out what the rules were, then using various methods to solicit information, I was able to determine what my choices were and then come up with a plan of action.

Rule One starts my awareness and challenges me to think and reflect on what is going on. In Rule one I determine what I think is going on (what I think that the system is). It is possible to be wrong when determining the system but the more I do this step, the more accurate I get at recognizing what system I am in. I have taught this method to people struggling with adapting to different situations and looking for tools. They were impressed by the simplicity and

repeatability of the method.

Rule Two challenges me to seek information and become well informed on what is going on, irrespective of what my opinion may be, it asks me to suspend judgement and realize that although my opinion is relevant, ultimately what is more important and would help me adapt is my knowledge of the rules of the system, how they apply to me and my situation.

Rule Three empowers me and challenges me to take control by clarifying my choices under the rules. It provides me with an understanding that in order to adapt to the system, I need to spend my energy on the choice or choices I have under the rules and pick the one that is most in line with my goals. The reality is even if I wanted to change the system I still have to understand the rules. Again surprisingly I discovered that although my opinions of my choices was relevant, understanding these choices and making a list of them was more important if I wanted to adapt and succeed.

Rule Four highlights the fact that once I have arrived at rule three procrastinating is a waste of my time. I have to make a decision and choose the best of all the choices that I have. No matter how bad my options are I should choose the one that is most aligned with the direction I want to go. Even a bad choice is still better than no choice at all. When I refuse to choose all I am doing is asking the system to choose for me and I lose control of my direction.

Choosing puts me in charge and makes me responsible for my own destiny, it does not guarantee success but it makes it more likely to occur.

I have found over the years that these rules work much better with someone who has the ability to think deeply, carefully and reflect on the situation they are in. It is not helpful for anyone in an altered state of mind or with significant cognitive deficits. The more insight the person has the more likely they are to succeed with this method.

It is important for me to work at my own pace and only deal with as

much as I am comfortable with at any time (never bite off more than I can chew). As I continued to repeat and reinforce the method I found myself more able to deal with more complex situations and systems.

Within my reality a system is any situation that involves interaction with a defined set of rules that determine this interaction. It was initially hard for me to grasp that although I may be a part of a system the system's priority is to maintain the integrity of that system and my individual needs are secondary to that system.

It is my responsibility to adapt to the system and not vice versa. Functional adaptation is required for success within the system although this is not a requirement to belong to the system.

Rule One: Identify What Is Going On.

This involves forming an accurate impression or what is going on. To play the "game" I need a starting point and that starting point is naming the game. I am not afraid to define it wrongly as more information becomes available I can always come back to this step and through my re-evaluation I would be able to correct myself.

This is not a step that I spend very much time on as the purpose is simply to recognize what is going on, all other details are addressed in the next steps. In fact the most important aspect of this step is the realization that I need to recognize what is going on.

It is as if life is a game made up of so many other games that I am required to be proficient in, then in order to live a functional existence I have to be able to identify which game I am in at any point in time. That would be a fundamental first step in being able to play the game properly, after all if the game is **Monopoly**® there is not much point trying to play it with Poker rules.

Identifying the game could be difficult or easy but it should never be an extensive process, once I recognize what is going on I should be able to describe it with a word or sentence nothing more. It

could be as simple as, I am taking my dog for walk to as complex as, investing under complicated terms, whatever the case may be, it is important to first of all make some assumption about what game is being played. It is also important to realize that sometimes the game changes shortly after I have identified it, so this step needs to be reviewed often to determine if I am still in the game I think I am.

There are a lot of times when I have mentored people who are very frustrated about their lack of results and seeming inability to head in the direction that they want, the problem often becomes glaringly obvious with this first question when they find out that they are in a completely different game from the one they thought that they were in.

With rule one my goal is to simply define what I perceive the system to be. It is okay if the initial assumption is wrong as it easy to correct this as more information becomes available. This step should really be accomplished relatively quickly and often times takes just a few seconds of my time but it is interesting how often it can be ignored and so rather than adapting to the system I spend a lot of energy trying to make the system adapt to me.

I believe that I have a finite amount of energy at any given time and knowing how to utilize it wisely and efficiently is a key part of being able to survive and then thrive. My ability to adapt is significantly enhanced by my ability to think deeply and carefully about things. Reflect, consider, review, contemplate are words that accurately describes this process. By finding out what system I am in or what game is being played I improve my chances of using my energy more wisely and reduce the possibility of frustration.

Imagine that people were playing a game of **Scrabble**® and I thought it was **Monopoly**® how frustrating would that be? What are the chances of me being productive? What are the chances of me bonding with the other players? I realize that this sounds like an over simplification but my experiences have led me to the conclusion that more often than not it is the simple things that are overlooked, they are so simple that we often ignore them or no

longer see them as worthy of our attention.

There are times when I have been mentoring parents and their rebellious teenagers and realize that they are both operating in two completely different systems but continue to communicate as though they were in the same system. A few questions often revealed that the parent thought they were operating in the parent and child system but their communication was that of the friend system and so the child was responding appropriately.

Often times when people are confused it is not because they lack the ability to know, it is virtually impossible to figure things out properly if you are not truly aware of what game is being played. It is the reason why I consider this the first rule or step in becoming functional within systems.

It is important to note that this step is the same irrespective of how simple or complex the system is, the first rule is not an attempt to analyze the system (the other rules clarify that) just to simply identify it.

Some systems (games) are quite easy to identify and others are a little more difficult, sometimes because the system is made up of two or more systems, each with its own set of rules. For example appropriate interactions between the opposite sex has its set of rules that may be different when interacting with the opposite in a workplace, and even more different when they happen to be your supervisor. A certain behaviour that may be appropriate in a particular setting (e.g. socially) may be totally inappropriate in another circumstance with the same person e.g. at work.

A functional individual would be able to identify these different systems and adapt, but this could prove very difficult for someone who has difficulty recognizing subtle changes. The ability of anyone to function appropriately is very closely related to their ability to identify what game is being played and society as a whole is very invested in helping us develop this ability.

As we are provided with more and more complex information that we need to sort through, categorize, master, we often forget or ignore the simple underlying principles that allow us to be able to make use of the complex information in a functional manner.

Rule Two: Know The Rules Of The System (whether or not you agree with them).

Every game has its own set of rules most of us understand this concept and would not show up at a poker game complaining that no one is playing by Monopoly rules. We would not expect to be accommodated under those circumstances and yet in my practice I often see this happen when people have become frustrated and don't recognize that they are not following the rules of that system. Frustration is something that we experience when we try to control a potentially uncontrollable event or situation and it is understandable why people trying to succeed in a system where they are oblivious to the rules seldom succeed and often get frustrated.

Educating myself on the rules is my responsibility, contrary to what some people may think, the system does not owe me anything and is seldom concerned with my individual needs. Within any system, how well I do is determined by many factors, some I have control over and some that I don't. The goal is to focus more on the areas where I do have control and be aware of the important areas where I don't have control but not spend time dwelling on them.

I gather as much information as possible in an unbiased manner. How I feel about the information though relevant is not important to my success within the system. The more informed I am about the system, the intricacies, the traditions, the regulations and how it operates, the more empowered I am to choose a direction that will help me succeed.

I gather information from as many sources as possible within a reasonable period of time and I verify the information and make sure that it is valid and factual. Interestingly sometimes the people

in authority within the system may not be fully aware of the rules and how they apply, this has often provided me with an unexpected advantage.

The internet has made this rule very attainable and easy to fulfill, I utilize it often but I also remember that the information I obtain from it is only as good as the site, so I take time to determine the credibility of the site and verify the information prior to adopting it.

I find it is a lot easier to gather and review information objectively when I withhold my opinions about it (judgement) until I have gathered all the information I need. If I do not do this, my opinions would often affect the way that I gather and review information.

Although my opinions about the rules are relevant, knowing and understanding the rules is more important and determines how functional I am within that system.

I have often been surprised about how uninformed individuals would be about a system they complain very bitterly about and how they would sometimes try and pass on unreliable second-hand information as facts. It was little wonder that they were often not successful within these systems and end up being very frustrated and angry.

I remember when I worked as a physician within the Workers' compensation board system, I would often encounter very angry injured workers who address the system as a living entity and the case manager as someone who was out to get and destroy them.

On further questioning they would have no idea about the policies and procedures of the system, they were often unaware that these policies were within the public domain and easily accessible and often times they had very little knowledge about what case management was all about. It was no surprise that they were frustrated and did not know how to make themselves better understood within the system.

I discovered that by providing them with this information and

providing the opportunity for them to educate themselves on the rules of the system made them more willing to partner in their own recovery.

The process of and time taken to gather information on the rules of the system would often vary depending on the complexity of that system, sometimes it could take a few moments to determine all the rules, while at other times extensive research may be required. It is important to constantly check “Rule one” to make sure that the system is still the same one that you started with and it has not shifted or evolved as a result of the information that you gathered on it.

During my transition into Canadian life I often found that I felt less frustrated when I had a clearer idea of the obstacles I was encountering within the system. The more information I had the more empowered I felt and in fact the more empowered I was. The process of discovering and accessing the information resulted in significant growth and helped orientate me towards my choices and the changes required of me to adapt.

Rule Three: Know Your Choices Under The Rules (whether or not you agree with them) Make a detailed list of all the choices that exist under the rules.

I construct a detailed list of all my choices that exist under the rules and I do this without any attempt to determine whether these choices are desirable, acceptable or not. My goal is to be as objective as possible when listing my choices so as to not overlook anything. It is important that I only consider the choices that exist under the rules as this helps me maintain focus and conserve energy.

I realize that without knowing and having a working understanding of the rules it is impossible for me to fully understand and be aware of all my choices. When I use this approach I am always surprised at the number of choices I actually have even when I thought it was in a dismal situation.

I don't always like the choices I have but being aware of them and having a list of them allows me to accomplish rule four.

Rule Four: Choose And Move On

I pick a choice from rule three that gives me the best chance of getting the results that I want. I have convinced myself that what is worse than a bad decision is no decision at all. When I don't choose what I am doing is asking the system to choose for me and this greatly reduces my chances of getting the results that I want. Making a choice can be overwhelming and it is very easy to get stuck. There is a thin line between being thorough and procrastinating, it is very easy to procrastinate when I am feeling overwhelmed.

As I go over these rules in my head I am always checking to make sure the system has not changed because sometimes simply by successfully resolving rule two or three I am actually now encountering a whole new system with a different set of rules and choices that I have to acquaint myself with.

There are times when I had not observed rule four and failed to stabilize a bad situation at that level, sometimes because I was unduly occupied with how unhappy I was with my choices, this always resulted in things deteriorating to the point where the original choices I was dissatisfied with looked pretty good if I could get them back.

Points to remember:

Rule One: Identify what is going on. What is the game being played? Be aware of the system, think and reflect.

Rule Two: Know the rules of what is going on (whether or not you agree). Gather information, do some work, research, find out how to be involved.

Rule Three: Know your choices under these rules (Whether or not you agree) Make a detailed list of choices consistent with the rules, take control, be empowered

Rule Four: Choose and move on. Pick a choice from rule three that is in the direction you want, take responsibility for your own destiny.

4 - 2 - MY TACTICS - "CAN DO"

I can only make withdrawals where I have deposits so if all my deposits are in the bank of goodwill then I can make withdrawals from there.

The life that I experience is always directly related to the things that I reinforce the most.

It was easy for me to make the assumption that the reason why I was not getting the results that I wanted was because I was not doing the right things. Although this assumption was accurate it still did not clarify for me what the right thing were.

Trying not to fail is not the same thing as trying to succeed. In the first instance I spend all my energy trying to figure out the different things that could make me fail and how to prevent or avert them and without realizing it my imagination, words and actions were engaged with failure, this was also very exhausting work.

On the other hand when I am trying to succeed my energy is focused on what I need to do to succeed and my imagination, words and action are aligned in this direction, this is a more efficient way of getting the results that I want.

If I was trying to prevent someone from dropping an expensive vase "hold on to it" is more likely to produce a positive result than "don't drop it".

The action word stimulates the imagination and in the first case the person imagines holding on while in the second case the person imagines dropping it. Action words are very important stimulus for the imagination, so how I define things and verbalize action are important steps in taking control of my imagination.

Using the concept of "Visualize" I realized that my imagination (thoughts), words and action (deeds) were not always lined up in the same direction. There were even times when I was saying the

exact opposite of the results that I wanted and my imagination was caught up in this. For example I found myself trying not to fail rather than trying to succeed. In the first scenario my imagination was engaged with all the ways of failing and my actions trying to prevent this from happening, my words were tentative and lacked conviction and more importantly the whole process of trying to prevent all the different ways of failing was very time and energy consuming.

If my plan is to go up north, it makes perfect sense to make sure that my steps are headed in that direction rather than down south. If circumstances beyond my control forced me to go south as well, it is important to remember that two steps in a north direction followed by one step in a south direction is still one step in the direction that I want. Often times my focus is directed to trying not to go in a direction I don't want and I spend my energies trying to change it rather than simply focus on the direction I want.

When I became aware of this and made the decision to try and succeed I made sure that my words expressed this desire on a regular basis, I engaged my imagination in all the different ways I could succeed. It was important that I did not lose sight of the things that could jeopardize my success but now I made sure that when I considered them, I also considered an exponentially more number of things that would help me succeed.

In other words when I review the things I "can't do" I also make sure I look at the things I "can do" so as not to lose my perspective. I maintained a ratio of "can do" to "can't do" and the more difficult the task the higher the ratio i.e. the harder the challenge the more reinforcement I needed to stop me from panicking and losing my focus for success.

An analogy I like to use is that I can only make withdrawals where I have deposits so if I don't put my deposits in the bank of "goodwill" then I can't make withdrawals from there. The life that I experience is always directly related to the things that I reinforce the most. Although this "can do" tactic does not guarantee success it

makes it more likely to occur and so I find it very useful.

I always take care not to forget the importance of balance. A good analogy is cooling hot water either by waiting for it to cool down, this takes a lot of time, or speeding up the process by adding cold water until I reach the desired temperature.

Another example would be stress, I always hear talk about stress reduction and the need to live a less stressful existence but for someone like myself who is stress dependent trying to reduce stress is stressful. I realize that it is the lack of balance with non stressful activities that was creating a problem. So I now like to use the term balance stress as opposed to stress reduction.

A balance philosophy encourages me to spend my energy incorporating stress free activities without any conscious attempt to reduce the number of stressful activities (although more often than not a reduction in the number of stressful activities occurs as a result of introducing the stress free activities).

What I am trying to say is that I have learned to accept the things I can't change or do anything about and focus my energy where I have the best chance of getting the results that I want. I achieve this by consciously reinforcing the things that I "can do" in a manner that far exceeds the things that I "can't" and I maintain a ratio that increases proportionately with the complexity of the task ahead. I want to emphasize that I do not practice denial or avoidance but allow myself to be completely aware and acknowledge my "can't" and then I remind myself of my "can" in such a manner that say a 3:1 ratio I review three "Can" for every one "Can't" that I become aware of.

The can do method encourages me to remember to reinforce what I can do while encountering what I can't in such a manner that the final results are in the direction of the results that I want.

It is important to verbalize "can do" statements more often than "can't do" and to say things in a manner consistent with what I

want. For example rather than say I hope I don't fail I would say I hope that I succeed or instead of I don't know if I am good enough I would say I hope that I am good enough.

I would avoid false statements like I know I will succeed or I know I am good enough because my unconscious mind is aware that I am unsure and that I am trying to will my imagination. In other words I do not pretend to be something that I am not, instead I am hoping to become something I know that I can be. In the same manner saying I am in my happy place in an attempt to make myself happier is not as effective as visualizing going from sadness to happiness.

Points to remember:

The tactic of Can Do is best achieved using the concept Visualize.

Consciously reinforce the things that you “Can Do” in a manner that far exceeds the things that you “can’t”.

Maintain a ratio that increases proportionately with the complexity of the task ahead.

Do not practice denial or avoidance but allow yourself to be aware of your “can’t” but remind yourself of your “can” in a ratio that allows you to get the results that you want.

4 - 3 - MY TACTICS - BEST FRIEND

“Remember that what belongs to the heart can never be taken from you, can never be stolen or bought but is given freely by those you love and who love you and this love is a precious substance from which we all derive our existence. Find time to enjoy the beauty of your existence, to revel in and maximize the opportunities you have, to love and be loved in return. Let your eyes be open so that you can capture forever the images that are dear to you that they may forever remain with you even after they may have left you and like distant stars continue to glimmer in the night of your existence light years after they have gone”.
- Toye Oyelese

I will be my own best friend

When I do not feel like hearing myself
 I will find a way to listen

When I do not feel like seeing myself
 I will find a way to look

When I do not feel I love myself
 I will find a way to care

When I do not feel I deserve anything
 I will find a way to give

When I feel that no one is there
 I will be my own best friend

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Remember self love = self awareness + self acceptance

Self awareness = I will know everything about myself, the assets and liabilities so that no one will be able to tell me anything that I do not already know. I will have conversations with myself no

matter how difficult they may be. I will know everything even though there may be things I would never discuss with anybody else I will discuss it with myself and I will not hide.

Self acceptance = I will fully accept my liabilities and assets as a confirmation of who I am and so I will learn to market my assets and manage my liabilities depending on the circumstances I encounter. I will take responsibility for and ownership of these assets and liabilities and continue to be the best me that I can be. I will not entertain shame nor will I apologize for who I am but simply continue to understand and be aware of how to be functional in any circumstance that I find myself in. I will not judge myself but simply understand how to manage myself better so that I can survive and then thrive.

Being my own best friend does not mean that I love myself or that I am satisfied with how things are, it simply means that no matter how I feel about myself (and there may be a million feelings), there is only one action option open and that is the action of being a best friend. How to use this tactic would be better understood by reviewing the sections on “feelings and actions” and “validation”.

The method of “being your own best friend” allows you the option of unlimited feelings and this singular action. In other words it is okay to feel sad, angry, disillusioned, ashamed or any “positive” or “negative” feelings but the only action available is that of being your own best friend. Being your own best friend is a process of self-acceptance without judgment, understanding your assets and liabilities, taking responsibility for your actions and shortcomings but never throwing yourself under the bus. Anything we would do for our best friend we should do for ourselves first, before taking any action always ask the question “am I being my own best friend by this action?”

I wrote a poem to explain how I define “self love”

I need to know myself
Know how I define me

The good and the bad
The ugly and the lovely

When every bone is counted
Behind every cupboard door
Nothing that is recanted
Would make me hit the floor

Nothing there to hide
No more fear to harness
I can now enjoy the ride
For I have **self-awareness**

When all the parts of me
My body and my soul
Have found a home to be
I have achieved my goal

For all the things I am
The assets and the "Asses"
Make me who I am
So I give no excuses

My mind is the only place
To find full repentance
I can now keep the pace
Because of **self-acceptance**
The self that is now aware
The self that is accepted
No more harbours fear
Self-love is now created

The most important relationship is the one that you have with yourself. The triad of a successful relationship is:

- 1) Communication leading to
- 2) Trust and trust leading to
- 3) Intimacy

When we learn how to communicate with ourselves properly we develop trust in ourselves and we can be more intimate with ourselves and others.

Points to remember:

Being your own best friend does not mean that you love yourself or that you are satisfied with how things are it simply means that no matter how you feel about yourself (and there may be a million feelings) there is only one action option open to you and that is the action of being a best friend.

4 - 4 - MY TACTICS - MIND ENCLOSURE

Thoughts are the conversations that we are having with ourselves.

My mind enclosure is the centre of my reality where everything makes sense or nonsense.

There are many sides of me and I constantly have conversations with myself that are often intriguing and enlightening. These personalities within me make up who I am and there appears to be an aspect that I was born with (nature) and an aspect that I acquired over a period of time (nurture). The dominant traits show up on a regular basis defining who I am and while the others reside in background.

I have spent a lot of time wondering about who I am, I have come to realize that I am like a group of individuals (or residents as I call them) residing within this that dwelling I refer to as myself. These residents have developed rules or patterns of communication that are either functional (when it helps me get the results that I want) or dysfunctional (when it does the opposite).

I found that I was able to clearly identify these individual (about 7 of them) residents of my mind enclosure (ME) that I now refer to as my house. What I observe as my thoughts or me talking to myself, could now be more accurately described as me observing these residents (that are me) discussing their different points of view, from the perspective of the personalities that they are.

It is fascinating how I can describe each one of them by the feelings that they generate and convey. I am not describing a multiple personality scenario where the dominant personality could constantly change and the individual describes a dissociative state. Within my house the individual personalities are always present and interacting, each one offering opinions but there is a dominant personality that takes all these points of view into consideration and then speaks for everyone and so speaks for the house..

I liked the idea of the house because it fit comfortably with my Yoruba cultural background. I was always told that a house divided could not stand and I realized the importance of peace and harmony. In the Yoruba culture peace and harmony meant people getting along well even if they did not really like each other.

There are individuals that reside in my house that I don't care very much for but it is important to realize that they are in fact me and have a right to be there even though it is best that they do not speak for the house, their opinions are still important and need to be heard. In that manner when I find myself confronted with a somewhat "shady" situation I depend heavily on the opinions of "conniving Toye" (who can be very destructive if let loose and allowed to speak for the house) and luckily these opinions are then expressed by "responsible Toye" who speaks for the house.

It is important to point out that there is nothing scientific about this it is simply a process I created to understand myself better and learn how to resolve conflicts within myself. There are times when these parts of these residents would merge to form a new resident who is a combination of the personalities that merged in the same manner that red, yellow and blue are primary colours and mixing yellow and blue produce green.

My house has developed over time and the hierarchy of the residents has occurred through my reinforced experiences over the years. "Little Toye (the child in me)" does not talk very much but his presence can always be felt at every meeting.

I have spent many hours speculating on why I am who I am and if I was born with all these traits? Do I develop new traits or simply reinforce the ones I have? In other words can I adopt new residents and evict the ones that I don't like? I now believe that that once a resident exists within the house it is impossible to evict them and the focus should be on how best to manage the house so there is peace and harmony.

There are residents within my house that I am not particularly proud of and some that are downright embarrassing in the same manner there are residents that I think are okay but people around me seem unable to stand. There is always a dominant personality that speaks for my house and this is the one that people around me recognize as myself. This dominant resident or leader happens through reinforcement of the attributes associated with this particular individual within me.

I do have a say on who speaks for the house (the dominant personality or leader). This leader is determined through reinforcement of that trait so for example when I suffered from panic attacks and generalized anxiety disorder “fearful Toye” spoke for the house and although he still resides within me, through reinforcing the traits that I wanted, he no longer speaks for the house and “confident Toye” is the dominant leader.

What I realized was focusing on a trait I did not want was a form of reinforcement even though my intent was to make it less dominant the focus actually reinforced it and so I was inadvertently voting for it, so now I simply focus on the trait I want to reinforce and ignore the one that I don't.

Through careful observation I have gained a better understanding of my house rules.

- 1) Every resident has a place and has a right to be respected. It is important to accept them as they are (self-acceptance) while still choosing appropriate action that is likely to provide the results that I want.
- 2) Every resident will be heard (self-awareness). This means that I will be aware of all the residents in the house irrespective of how I feel about them. Denial and avoidance of self may provide short-term relief but do not give me the long-term stability of self-love that I crave. I believe that self-awareness and self-acceptance equals self-love.
- 3) I recognize the residents by the feelings they generate and these feelings in turn influence my actions.
- 4) The dominant resident/residents in the house is/are the one/ones

whose attributes I have most often repeated through expressions or attempts at suppression i.e. the one in whom most of my time and efforts are invested becomes the leader.

5) The dominant resident/residents speaks for the house and therefore interacts with my external environment and are most recognizable as who I am.

Points to remember:

Thoughts are the conversations that you are having with yourself.

How you have these conversations is important.

Recognizing and being accepting of the different parts of you (the residents in your mind enclosure) is important.

EPILOGUE

STEP ONE

Model for Change

Getting the results that you want:

- 1) Change is required
- 2) Change has not happened
- 3) This will facilitate change
- 4) Change will happen

Change is ongoing and constant

It happens with or without our involvement

Change produces wanted and unwanted results

Functional adaptation involves using tactics that increase the chance of us getting the results (of change) that we want

We become skillful through repetition of these tactics

STEP TWO

Direction

Survive first and then thrive

“The Burning Building

If I wake up in a burning building does it matter how I got there?” Although how I got there is relevant but it is only relevant if it will show me the way out, otherwise the most important decision if I want to survive is “Where do I go from here?” All the unwanted results of change that have impacted us are the burning building.

How we feel about these unwanted results of change is like wondering how we got in the burning building. Although how we feel is relevant, to survive what is more important is getting out of the building (where we are going).

Energy and resources are limited so efficiency is important

Feelings are relevant but only important in getting the results (of change) that we want if they initiate appropriate action

Appropriate actions are always important in getting the results (of change) that we want

STEP THREE

My Concepts

- 1) **Visualize:** Align your imagination (thoughts), words and actions (deeds) in the direction of the results of change that you want
- 2) **Hope:** A belief in the possibility of getting the results of change that you want.
- 3) **Fear:** Fear is a spectrum of emotions and when processed properly it could be useful in getting you the results of change that you want.
- 4) **Feelings and Actions:** The relationship between feelings and actions is the one created by you. Appropriate action is the process of doing something tangible to provide the results of change that you want.
- 5) **Process & Outcome:** The process is the journey and the outcome is the destination. This concept explains a process focused approach.
- 6) **Validation:** This is the process of giving official approval to yourself (Internal) or receiving from others (external).

STEP FOUR

My Tactics

1) **The rules of functional adaptation**

Rule One: Identify the “system”. **Task** - Be self-aware

Rule Two: Know the rules of the system (whether or not you agree). **Task** - Resolve information deficit

Rule Three: Know your choices under the rules (whether or not you agree). **Task** - Make a detailed list of your choices

Rule Four: Choose and move on. **Task.** Do not procrastinate

2) **The Can Do:** An approach that ensures your imagination (thoughts), words and actions (deeds) are in the direction of the results of change that you want through constant awareness of the ratio of “can do” and “can’t do”.

3) **The Best Friend:** This is an approach that emphasizes the need to be in touch with our feelings no matter how difficult to acknowledge these feelings and own them completely with only one course of action available – be your best friend.

4) **The Mind Enclosure:** This approach views the mind as a group of individuals residing in a house each with distinct characteristics. It describes the manner in which they interact and how harmony is maintained.

BIOGRAPHY

I was born on January 21 1963 in Montreal Canada to Nigerian parents. I grew up in Nigeria where I attended the College of Medicine University of Ibadan and obtained a medical degree graduating in June 1985. I left Nigeria on October 16 1987 and came to Canada at a time when Canada was convinced that it had too many physicians.

I was on social welfare assistance for two months and then worked as a security guard and later in a chemical factory in Toronto. I attended but did not pass "cab school" in Toronto.

I passed the medical evaluation examination and was accepted to the medical officer training program (MOTP) with the Canadian armed forces. I completed a medical internship program at the Saskatoon City hospital from 1989 to 1991.

In 1991, after my medical internship, I started with the Canadian armed forces as a full time regular force officer and my first posting was to an infantry unit called 1st Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry (1PPCLI) from July 1991 to August 1993.

I was deputy base surgeon, base hospital, Canadian armed forces base, Calgary, Alberta. From September 1993 to November 1994 and during my time with the Canadian Armed Forces I also qualified to be a "Flight Surgeon" this involved attending a course in aeronautic medicine.

I retired as a Lieutenant (Navy) from the military in 1994 and I moved to a small town in southern Alberta called Milk River from November 1994 to May 1997. I was also the Medical Examiner (Coroner), representing the Alberta Ministry of Justice in this area.

I moved to Spruce Grove, Alberta in May 1997 and worked as a family physician and emergency room physician. I also started a career in "disability medicine" working as a medical advisor with the Workers' Compensation Board, Edmonton, Alberta from April

1998 to April 1999, and a medical consultant with the minor traumatic brain injury program and the complex psychosocial pain program at Millard Health, Edmonton from July 2001 to November 2003. My interest in “Wellness Medicine” started during this period and I completed a medical acupuncture certificate program at the University of Alberta, Edmonton.

I moved back to Calgary, Alberta in January 2004 where I worked as a travel medicine consultant, from March 2005 to July 2009, a medical consultant, with Orion Health Calgary Alberta from October 2006 to July 2010, an urgent care physician with Calgary Health Region (Okotoks Urgent Care Centre), Calgary Alberta from October 2006 – 2009, a disability medicine consultant for Lifemark Health Calgary Alberta & Kelowna, BC from March 2007 – 2009, a pain medicine physician at Canmore pain clinic, Canmore, Alberta from October 2008 – June 2010.

I was also a certified independent medical examiner (CIME), American Board of Certified Medical Examiners, from October 2006 – June 2011 and a medical review officer (MRO – drug & alcohol) from March 2005 to June 2011.

In August 2009 I moved to Kelowna, British Columbia and I have a family practice at the Westside Medical Associates in West Kelowna. I have a fellowship in family medicine and volunteered as a coordinator at the Canadian College of Family Medicine (CCFP) qualifying examination for many years; I was a clinical instructor at the southern medical program – University of British Columbia Okanagan and I worked at the Health and Wellness Students’ clinic at the UBCO campus in Kelowna.