

Praise for the *Screw Meditation!* Workshop, the Book and Sue Belton

Sue Belton is a very intelligent and sensitive coach, a talented author, and of course a thoroughly lovely lady whose insight - as a professional coach to me - has been profoundly invaluable. I experienced Sue's excellent "Screw Meditation" workshop online - packed with handy hacks for busy people to lead a better-balanced life - and I'm sure her book will be just as enlightening!

Andrew Porton Wine Division Managing Director, Lanchester Group

Screw Meditation! is an absolute game changer! As someone who struggled to meditate, Sue's approach was a breath of fresh air, truly unique and impactful. The hacks she provided were invaluable and easily applicable to everyday life. I wholeheartedly recommend the workshop (and this book) to anyone seeking a practical and effective approach to rediscovering calm, clarity and balance in everyday life.

Nicola Smith VP, Talent Acquisition

The *Screw Meditation!* workshop was unique and super helpful and I came away better informed in new ways to develop self-care and resilience. Sue ran the group with warmth, compassion and a deep understanding of what makes modern business leaders tick, and how to avoid burnout.

Rob Day MDHUB Business Coach & Facilitator

I attended Sue's *Screw Meditation!* workshop along with members of my team. It was really enjoyable thinking about how we act and why we act the way we do, and how this can link to our actions and behaviours. Everyone took something specific to work on to make a difference to them, their work and their effectiveness. In my book – that's a big tick from a training point of view. Great fun as well, as ever.

Background – I have known Sue for a few years now and she is my go to person where C-Suite executives need to consider next steps and if a coach should be part of their continuing journey. Sue is fantastic at having this initial conversation to understand their needs and always helps their thinking about the help that is available and what may suit their needs at a specific time.

Richard Aston Advisory Partner, KPMG

Screw Meditation! is a brilliantly fun, and actionable approach to managing work and finding more joy in it. Sue's years of experience in finding things that actually work for her clients shows.

Madeleine Geach Founder, The Good Life

Sue is one of the best in the game so no surprises that her *Screw Meditation!* workshop delivered. I've been struggling with a busy brain for as long as I can remember so to learn that I am 'normal' and not alone but also to understand what's happening in my brain is really helpful... And then... workable strategies! Hallelujah!

Wendy Shand Founder & CEO, Crossing the Chasm of £1m to £10m

Are you a leader, and you are constantly busy? Do you struggle to switch off? Then this book is for you. Sue provides research-based, actionable techniques that will

help you improve your leadership and life, and even more, your partner, family, and your team will benefit, too. I can speak from personal experience as one of Sue's clients, I also found her coaching very valuable, as you can go much deeper in her sessions. In addition to acquiring new techniques, I particularly enjoyed learning aspects of cognitive science and physiology, as this further improves understanding.

Meik Reimar Managing Director Technology, Member of the Executive Committee, Partner, Zuhlke Group

Sue is an outstanding coach. She listens very carefully and understands immediately what you need to do, then gets straight to the point with practical tools and solutions. I had recently been appointed member of the board with a new team of direct reports and difficult business challenges. Sue's coaching led to significant improvements in my leadership.

She was adaptive, easy to work with and at the same time stretched and challenged me to my limits. The coaching felt very 'safe' and was extremely rich in terms of approaches methodologies and concepts. It is a real gift to work with Sue if you are committed to developing and improving your leadership skills and behaviours.

Rodolphe Plouvier Head of Distribution, Generali

Sue is simply at the forefront of her field. She used her insight, skills, understanding and empathy to help me understand how to grow into the leader I want to be.

Maurice Roach Head of Financial Services, Zuhlke Group

Sue has been a trusted advisor to me for the past five years, helping me navigate a career change as well as many life changes. Her work is underpinned by neurological science that she

translates into practical exercises in a way that you feel complete control and ownership over.

I'm very lucky to have Sue in my life and highly encourage you to get in touch with her if you are facing any big life questions and want a professional, scientific and wholehearted companion to help you through them.

Olivia Rzepczynski Clasper Founder/Managing Director,
Assembly Interiors

Sue has a dramatic impact on my life, both professionally and personally! She helped me to clearly articulate long-term goals and achievable ways of meeting them. She taught me exercises to deal with anxiety and self-doubt, and tools which enabled me to better coach my team and grow them as leaders. She helped me feel more in control of my life and celebrate my successes.

Katie Lewis VP, Transperfect

Sue is a phenomenal coach. Insightful and thoughtful, she carefully takes the time to understand what makes you who you are. Her approach is focused on honesty, respect and accountability. She challenges you to look further than your established beliefs and pushes you to commit and follow through with any plans or goals you make.

Sue is friendly and approachable; I found working with her to be thoroughly enjoyable. She effortlessly creates an environment of trust and I've come away from my time working with her with clarity, purpose and a plan with tangible steps for my future.

Sarah Conway Client Partner, Havas UK

I wanted to change the way I operated and engaged with the leadership team – to make a difference, and prepare for challenging times ahead.

Sue taught me mindfulness techniques that have been so helpful to deal with any anxiety I have ahead of confronting situations. She gave me the confidence to stand up for myself and to take the lead. Sue is very encouraging and more importantly non-judgmental. She is very wise, has lots of tools and techniques that can be applied, and also has the great skill of being able to ask the right questions – that make you probe for the answer yourself, somehow allowing those lightbulb moments come to the surface.

Maria Melton Project Director, Costain Group PLC

Sue's had a huge impact on both my professional and personal life. Sue's a wonderful coach and mentor – great at listening and incredibly empathetic. She's certainly taken me out of my comfort zone, but in a good way, leading to real improvements in my approach to leadership and my own coaching style.

Neil Moorcroft Managing Director Technology, Member of the Executive Board & Partner, Zuhlke UK

I was six minutes late to our first session. Her first questions to me were 'What stopped you getting here on time today?' and 'What does that cost you in your life?' I knew straight away that this was someone who would give me candid feedback and ask hard and, at times, uncomfortable questions when needed while remaining incredibly kind and supportive.

The coaching identified my important goals, old beliefs that were holding me back, and a way forward. I can't recommend her highly enough.

Odharnait Ansbro Founder, Solas

Sue is an incredibly astute, insightful and pragmatic coach. I could easily connect with her approach of viewing me as a whole, realising that who I am in my personal life directly affects who I am in the business context.

She is warm and welcoming, which allowed me to trust her to help me work through blockers that were inhibiting aspects of my development. Within three months, I gained new skills to deal with challenging situations on my own terms. Her work is as deep and meaningful as you allow it to be. I highly recommend Sue for individuals and companies alike.

Rebecca Fowler Head of Customer Services, Semaphore

Having been very apprehensive about seeing a leadership coach I can honestly say I have been converted. Sue has been a breath of fresh air and her honest and challenging approach has given me the confidence to believe in myself. She has given me a number of really great techniques in leadership which I use on a daily basis. I can't recommend Sue enough – she has a fabulous way of making you self-aware and enabling you to grow as an individual as well as a leader.

Mark Womersley Managing Director, Burgess Pet Care

Sue has been an incredible consultant for me and for Squiz. She has helped me cut to the core of issues, understand why they were happening and resolve them in a positive way.

Stephen Morgan Co-Founder, Squiz

Did you know that maximising your performance and behaviours at work is actually more scientific and therefore addressable than you think? This book simply explains biological and psychologically proven reasoning to your current behaviours, and how you can work with them to improve your performance, your relationships, and ultimately your happiness. Simple knowledge you wished you'd known before... read this book!

Peter Tosland Commercial Director, M Group Services

SCREW Meditation!

How to switch off a busy brain,
be more productive and enjoy life.

Sue Belton

Screw Meditation!

Sue Belton

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SUE BELTON

SCREW MEDITATION!

Dedication

To Little Sue ...

May you take it steady, know that you are loveable,
and have some fun!

I've got you.

SUE BELTON

At A Glance

Sue Belton is a leadership coach who specialises in coaching senior corporate leaders worldwide. Her clients typically are successful, ambitious and high achieving professionals functioning in high profile, demanding roles.

Invariably, they are always 'on', working 60-80 hour weeks, plus evenings... plus weekends... plus holidays.

Almost always their demanding work schedule includes a busy brain that cannot switch off.

Screw Meditation! is an invaluable guide written for busy professionals who want to switch off a busy brain and have tried everything - specifically meditation and mindfulness - without much success.

Screw Meditation! explains why.

Sue Belton carefully unpacks the link between long working hours... and time management, productivity and performance issues... and cognitive impairment, biological factors and emotional Drivers, that keep a busy brain... busy!

She explains why the vicious cycle of work and *busy-ness* can keep a smart professional stuck with no time to step back. She also explains how this leads to more debilitating issues such as burn out, imposter syndrome and poor health.

She then gives the reader six proven hacks road-tested on busy, time-poor executives worldwide, that will give the reader impeccable strategies and tools to manage time, tasks and team... and a clear strategy for switching off a busy brain.

SUE BELTON

Part 1

The Problem



SUE BELTON

Is This Book For You?

Who this book is *not* for, and why

This book is *not* for leaders and executives who have a busy schedule but have already found a solution to switching off their busy brains. They're happily meditating or practicing some other form of mindfulness, and have discovered that sweet spot of work life balance – one that has them achieving what they want to in life, has them spending quality time with friends and family, and has them feeling fulfilled and enjoying life to the full. Even if this sounds like you, you will find this book a useful reference, especially for others you know.

Who this book is for, and why

This book *is* for you if you're a leader or senior leader working within an organisation, or you're an established founder. You're working all hours - long days and often into the weekends, but you never get to spend enough time, professionally on long-term strategy, and personally focused on who you want to be and where you're heading in life.

You don't spend enough time with your family and friends, and when you do, you're rarely fully present - instead, still thinking about work and all the things you have to get done (and the things you should have).

It is especially for you if you can't switch off that busy brain of yours, you've tried loads of fixes (some healthy and many not so healthy), including meditation, but nothing has worked.

'Failing' at them only made you feel worse and had you returning to your beliefs that you just had to plough on through and that 'this is just the way it is' if you want to be successful. You're worried about what you're missing out on in life, and are starting to question whether this is all there is.

So...

Welcome to Screw Meditation!

I promise that you are going to find out why you can't meditate. (And why all of the other fixes and solutions haven't worked either).

You are also going to find out why work feels so hard and relentless, why you're working so many hours, and the effects this is all having on your brain.

I'm then going to take you through six proven hacks that are going to help you turn off that busy brain of yours. They will also help your brain to start functioning better, so you'll also get to be more productive when you are working. All of this, with the added bonus of enjoying life more too.

I could actually write pages and pages on every single one of these hacks and there are deeper dive pieces of work that you can do around this – such as working with me one to one, or within my group programmes. I'm going to share more details on those at the end of the book (see *Work With Me*), but for the purpose of this book, I'll keep things top-line so you can get the information you need right now, and some actionable takeaways to start using immediately.

Why Listen To Me?

I'm certainly not a psychologist, mindfulness coach, or health practitioner. But I am a leadership coach whose been successfully working with senior leaders who can't switch off their busy brains, need to be spending more time on long-term strategic thinking, for the past 15 years.

Before this I used to be a BBC TV producer, working on prime-time documentaries and factual programmes. I have been where you are...I was working twelve, fourteen, sixteen, eighteen hours a day, working hard, partying harder. Ploughing on through, going and going, working harder and harder, and then doing all the usual unhealthy stuff - to try and cope with it all and switch off and relax wherever possible.

Working like this for fourteen years, one morning on a shoot at 5am, I woke up with severe stomach cramps. Five months pregnant, we had been filming in a pub until midnight, and were due to start again at 6am. Having an internal debate with myself in my hotel bed. *Was it bad enough for me to leave the shoot?... What if something serious is happening... If I just get the shoot underway I'll then see how I feel...*

I finally decided to continue with the shoot and go to A&E later if I was still in pain. It was only when the cameraman, having taken one look at me, said he really thought I should go to the hospital, that I acquiesced and left the shoot. Once at the hospital, when I got in front of the on-duty doctor, when I told her the shoot schedule and what I had been doing in the lead-up, she looked at my in absolute horror and asked, *'What are you doing?!*

She proceeded to sign me off for the remainder of my pregnancy.

Fast forward a couple of years, having had my daughter Amelie, taken a full year off and another year of thinking through what I wanted to do next (something more fulfilling and that would have me be able to raise my daughter) I had a coaching session that blew my mind – it gave me the insights, clarity and self-belief I needed to make my next steps.

It was such a great experience I researched the industry myself, decided to retrain and set up my own coaching business. I thought: Great, I can now work how I want now, no more slogging away for hours and hours – I wanted to work a maximum of thirty hours a week and be around to raise my daughter. But within a short amount of time I found myself again, working long hours, into the weekends, and feeling all of the busy brain symptoms of before. This time it took a friend of mine, to find me on all fours, having a full-blown anxiety attack, and taking me to the doctor, to again make me look at how I was working.

What I also then noticed was the exact same issue showing up again and again with all of my clients.

As I worked through the myths and mistakes, developed and did all of the research into how to fix this situation, I discovered what worked for me and for my clients.

It was on one sunny morning a couple of months ago that I then wrote a post titled ‘*Screw Meditation!*’ on LinkedIn. I was walking to see a client and was experiencing a moment of pure joy. I was walking across the park to the tube station, had on one of my favourite playlists, the sun was shining, and all just felt good in the world in that moment. It was then that I thought – ‘Yeah, screw meditation! Joy is where it’s at!’ and took the photo of myself in that moment, for the post.

When I got on the tube I then wrote about the fact that although meditation is touted as the cure-all for switching off a busy brain

and finding peace of mind, most of my clients just can't do it, and in the 'failing' then beat themselves up and think there isn't another way, and so continue just thinking 'this is the way it is'.

It clearly hit a nerve. When I came out of my client session my post had received over a thousand views, over a hundred comments and a load of reshares already.

Over the next few days it went on to have over a hundred thirty thousand views, seventeen reshares and the comments mounted up to over three hundred and fifty.

As I read through the comments, I heard the same story over and over – from people who had also tried and failed at meditation in an attempt to switch off a busy brain.

What I shared in that post, and what I'll share here, is that there absolutely is another, and much more enjoyable, way....

But just in case you missed that post...

The LinkedIn Post



Screw Meditation!

A controversial statement I know, but bear with...

I have spent years meditating and advocating for it to my clients.

It IS fantastic for slowing down, becoming calmer, and generally all-round more self-aware and able to regulate your emotions.

However, if you have a fast brain, a tendency to ruminate, stress or anxiety...

...if you can barely find the time to tie your own shoelaces let alone sit cross-legged for ten minutes...

Then moments of pure joy (+ NOT loading any more information

into that frazzled brain of yours) may be the better option.

For a good couple of years now I have switched out meditation, and stopped filling my brain with podcasts, leadership books, training courses, blog after blog any moment I had spare...

With pure joyful, pleasure-giving, brain-resting stimuli that allow my brain to:

- have a good rest + reduce anxiety/stress levels
- wander into it's own natural creativity and problem-solving zone
- create it's own feel-good calming cocktail of dopamine, serotonin and GABA

If you fancy a bit of the same (and just can't bring yourself to sit down and meditate) here's a few activities that just might do the trick for you too:

- Turn off all phone notifications and listen to your favourite music while walking / commuting – like me in this picture
- Sit and watch some birds in your garden / the park
- Painting, drawing, crafting (especially good for creating dopamine!)
- Cooking or baking
- Dancing, yoga or spinning (high intensive activity is especially good for creating the anti-anxiety hormone GABA)
- Grounding (AKA lying on the ground) I often do this in my garden on a break
- Spend time looking at plants/trees/get out into greenery if you can
- Play with your pet (or borrow one if necessary!)

SCREW MEDITATION!

When did you last feel a moment of pure joy?

What 'mindfulness' practice do you rate?

(If you feel like now is the right time to reduce your stress levels, be able to think more strategically and be better at managing your own emotions and reactions, then get in touch to arrange a no-obligation consultation with me via the link in the comments below.)

So who did I write this post for, exactly? Clients just like Dave.

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/suebelton_if-youve-tried-and-failed-at-meditation-activity-7114507706123571200-SeXH/

Meet Dave



Let me introduce you to one of my clients, Dave. I do this work day in, day out, in terms as part of my one-on-one and group leadership programmes.

Dave is a typical client. He's not alone. He is operating at board level, a senior leader in a multinational engineering company.

I was contacted by Dave's CEO regarding leadership coaching because, while Dave was technically brilliant, as a leader, he needed to improve his leadership skills. For example, Dave needed to delegate more. However, because he felt he had to personally check every aspect of every project handled by his team, he was fast becoming the bottleneck on productivity and achieving tight deadlines. And because Dave struggled to give constructive feedback to his team, valuable team members were increasingly frustrated when he praised them for their input... then later discovered he had actually double-handled or even changed work they thought they had completed.

Importantly, the CEO was worried about the amount of time Dave was spending at work, his health, and the impact his work habits were potentially having on his family life. He was concerned that Dave had early symptoms of burnout* and didn't want to lose a valuable member of team so integral to the success of their key projects.

When Dave came to me to develop his leadership skills, the focus was on delegation and time management, but it quickly became apparent that we needed to address some underlying issues that were impacting his overall effectiveness as a leader.

In the initial session, we discovered he was working seventy plus hours a week, leaving his house Monday to Friday at 6am... not getting back until at least 8pm.

Dave has a wife, and two young children under ten, and was clearly not seeing much of them. On top of that, when he was seeing them, he was rarely fully present with them - his mind still running through all the things he had to do, all the conversations he'd had, what he should have done, and what he had to do next.

He literally could not switch it off.

He was experiencing symptoms of burnout: feeling tired, feeling drained most of the time; feeling anxious, helpless and trapped, feeling detached from everyone and the world around him; feeling more cynical than usual; doubting himself more than usual; procrastinating and taking longer to get things done; and feeling overwhelmed.

On top of all of this, he was seriously worried he'd be living a life of regret for years to come – by just not being around to see his kids grow up. When Dave was getting home at night, having missed the children's tea-time, he'd sometimes get back to say goodnight, he'd get some time with his wife, but then would get straight back onto email and continue working.

He would also continue working into Saturday, to do all of the catching up he'd missed in the week, and getting ready for the next week ahead. He would then only start attempting to wind down on Saturday afternoons. But, with all of the stress running around his body, he wouldn't start to relax and unwind well into Saturday evening, and despite best intentions, only with the help of a good few glasses of red wine, yet another take-away, and by binge-watching Netflix with his wife.

Waking up on Sunday mornings (slightly worse for wear from the wine and take-away), spending some valued time out and about with his wife and family, getting some moments of reprieve. But come Sunday evening, starting again to remember things he still needed to get back to, and the full-one week he had ahead of him, the anxiety would start creeping back in again.

This was how Dave's weeks went when we met... but let's gauge how your weeks are for you...

Quiz - How Dave Are You?

Read through the list below, and write a 'Yes' for any that apply to you:

1. You're working all hours but never seem to get to the end of your to-do list.
2. You're rarely fully present with your friends or family when you are with them.
3. You're available 24/7 on email and phone.
4. You feel like you need to get everything done right now.
5. When you do have a spare moment, you'll squeezing in 'one more thing'.
6. You spend a lot of time dealing with other people's or your team's crises and meetings.
7. You berate yourself for any failures.
8. You never have any thinking or strategic time at work.
9. When you do get home you're back on email/calls.
10. Your exercise routine has either gone out of the window, or you do it full-on and briefly, but it never sticks.
11. You're drinking/drugging/shopping/social media scrolling/gambling/porn habit etc is creeping up.
12. You either eat out, or order in, a lot (despite best intentions)

- 13. You flip between feeling exhausted and wanting to jack it all in to wanting to do all of the things 150% of the time.
- 14. You tried meditation, you couldn't do it right, and it only made you feel worse.

Count up your 'Yes's'. So, if you answered 'YES' to even one of the above... then this book is for you! Now, just take a moment, and review what you said 'Yes' to then...

...pause and think:

What's the cost of living and working like this?

Importantly, if you don't change this now, what are the implications?

Where Are You Now?

We've heard where Dave was, but now let's see what he'd already tried to sort this out for himself, and what most of my clients (and I) have tried, look at the categories and see if any of these *fixes* sound familiar or apply to you, too.



Toxic Quick Fixes

Toxic quick fixes include drinking, drugging, shopping, 'comfort' eating, social media scrolling, gambling and porn... (name your poison). They are all activities that give you a moment of feeling good, they're mind-numbing, and then afterwards you feel bad about yourself because they're not good for your health and/or mental health, and make you feel worse about yourself in the long run.

Dave's versions were copious amounts of red wine, binge-watching Netflix, and 'comfort'-eating.

Magic Pill Solutions

Then there are the magic pill solutions. For Dave this included starting up (and repeatedly not keeping up), a hardcore running regime. For others (and you maybe) this would include things like juicing or fasting, hot yoga, extreme juicing/hot yoga/fasting retreats (again, name your extreme, short-lived health-kick). These are all activities that you are convinced will make you feel OK and make everything alright in the world again, but they don't.

Waiting for a Miracle

Then there's the whole principle of waiting for a miracle, the really common thinking that *'everything will be OK when...'*. For example, *'It's all going to calm down when... this project is over/ my boss leaves/we're over this busy period (insert your version here)'*.

Dave was waiting for a couple of miracles - one two-year project to be over, and that of his boss moving on, believing that once both things happened, the pressure to work so many hours, in the office, would be off.

Changing X or Y

Another 'solution' I see a lot of, and the other thing Dave was seriously considering, was moving to another company. He believed that if he worked in a different environment, a slower-paced culture, he would work less hours, and ultimately see more of his family – something he desperately wanted.

And of course, there can be some truth in this belief, but as you'll realise reading this book, that's not the whole picture. And so, believing that moving jobs, changing career (as I did), moving house, moving country even, thinking that everything's going to change once you change these external factors, becomes yet another 'failed' attempt and solution for being able to switch off that busy brain of yours.

Success = Happiness

My clients want to be happy... but have the belief that *'in order to be happy, you need to be successful'*. They don't want to let go of success because they believe that is the be-all-and-end-all of life and their existence on this planet. Underneath that belief is...

Hard work = Success

In order to be successful, *you need to work hard*, and that means working long, hard hours... and when that's not working for you, you've just got to tough it out, plough on through (because that's what's required right?).

You'll also believe that however much you do just isn't enough (there's always someone working harder and being more successful than you to benchmark your efforts against), that you then also beat yourself up for somehow 'failing' or falling short....

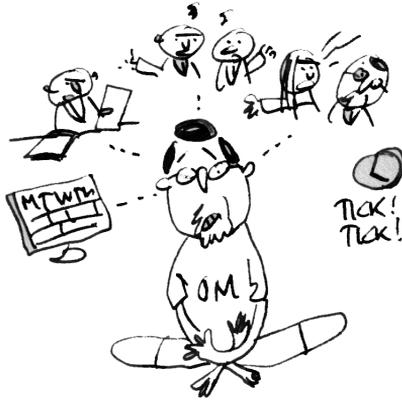
Success = I am good enough

You're only 'good enough', worthy, of any value or any purpose in this world if you are working hard and achieving 'enough', but of course there's no such thing as 'enough'.

When you do achieve anything it doesn't touch the sides, you barely acknowledge your wins or achievements (however big), let alone celebrate them, keeping you in a constant loop of needing to achieve more and more, and keep on going and going.

Meditation

Then of course, there is meditation. Seen as the ultimate magic pill solution that's going to do everything – switch off your busy brain, give you peace of mind, get rid of your stress and anxiety, and basically make everything in your world all shiny and good again.



Only for Dave, when he did try this, it only made him feel worse.

This is because when he sat down, because he was usually go, go, go all of the time, when he physically stopped, because his brain was still going ten to the dozen, it made him fully focus and think about all the things he had to do, and all of the thoughts swimming around in his head.

On top of making the thoughts seem louder and faster, because he seemingly couldn't get it 'right', it made him beat himself up even more than usual for 'failing', sending him back into the loop of working harder and harder and feeling even worse than he did before. This is the story I hear over and over again from my clients and it's the reason I'm writing this book right now.

Let me be clear, I'm not saying meditation is 'bad' or 'wrong', I know it works really well for a lot of people out there. I just know it also doesn't work for a lot of people, and I work with them so see how it makes them feel. If this sounds like you too, I want you to know there is another way (and a much more enjoyable one in my opinion - as someone who has meditated).

So, let's look at what is going on.

And if you want to fix and sort this, what you need to do, if you can't meditate.

Poll Activity

Research seems to repeatedly suggest that the main factor that's keeping your brain busy, is simply the number of hours you work.

Dave, like most of my other clients, is working a solid seventy plus hours per week in the office. On top of that, he works on the commute, in the evenings, on weekends, and on any holidays. He is never 'off', always checking his phone and devices, and at all hours.

So, while the important issue is the number of hours he works, an even more important issue is *how* he works those hours.

Anyone familiar with the work of Stephen Covey will know that Dave is stuck in the weeds doing things that are not important but *feel* very urgent (and if you don't know, you will do very soon). Frustratingly, Dave fully understands this better than anyone. But what he didn't understand was what keeps him stuck there.

Practically all of my clients (and workshop attendees) – all smart, successful, qualified and senior leaders – admit to working *exactly* like Dave. They don't however, connect *how* they work, and the number of hours, with the fact they now have a busy brain they can't switch off.

In order for you to get an idea of where you sit in all of this, how, and how much you currently work, answer the poll question I ask in my workshops on the next page.

How many hours do you typically work on any given day?

- 5 hours
- 8-10 hours
- 11+
- 24/7 (What is sleep?)

(If your commute, include those hours as your brain has to be very active during those periods, too. Studies show commuting has been shown to cause stress on the brain).

On a recent workshop, these were the results:

- 12% working 5 hours
- 52% working 8-10 hours.
- 36% of you working 11+
- 0% working 24 hours!

Note: many of my clients actually don't know how many hours a day or per week they are currently working. I ask them to monitor their hours over a six week period and calculate the average. It's a lot. I can say most are shocked... but not surprised. I suggest you do this activity, too.

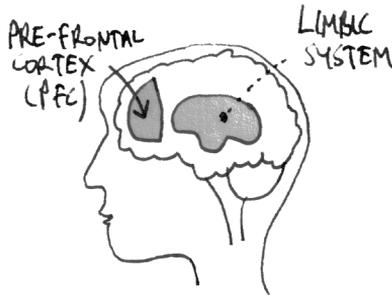
So, what the importance of this?...

‘Too Much’ Stress = Cognitive Impairment

The important thing about asking you how many hours you work a day is that scientists say we all have only a *finite* amount of *cognitive function* a day.

That’s brain function or brain power.

I’m talking what happens up here in the Pre-Frontal Cortex (PFC) of the brain.



This is where all of your ‘executive function’ happens – all of your ‘thinking’. It’s where you work things out, come up with solutions, connect ideas thoughts and concepts. It’s where you make sense of and understand others, where your memory is, where you make judgement calls, make good judgements, make good decisions – all of that really good, useful stuff.

This is also where you have your ‘impulse control’ ie. your ability to control impulsive behaviours, your ability to delay gratification, and your ability to be patient.

Once your amount of cognitive function per day runs out (much like a battery), your brain function switches over from the PFC, to way back and deep within your brain – the limbic system.

The problem being, that this is where the fight/flight/freeze response lies. So, when you're operating from here, you're operating from a place of fear and the threat of danger. One study even found that up until the age of around forty we have approximately eight hours of cognitive function per day, but once we hit forty that drops off dramatically, to around five hours a day.

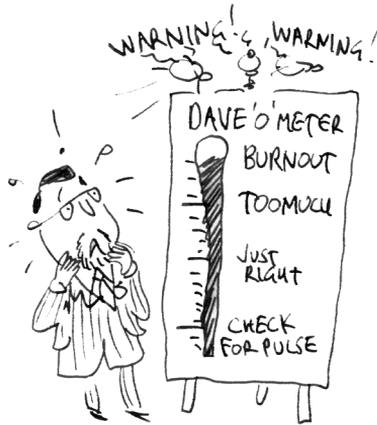
Now I don't know how old you are, but if you're forty plus, unless you are with the 12% on my recent workshop who answered '5 hours' to the previous poll, you are with the other 88% who answered that they're working 8-11+ hours a day and clearly pushing beyond that.

If you're younger than forty, then I'm really glad you're reading this book now, and are getting ahead of the game...

When you go beyond your brain function limits, you not only switch over from the PFC to the limbic system, but your brain (and body) also get flooded with the stress hormones adrenaline, noradrenaline, and cortisol.

When this happens, this is when you go into something known as '*cognitive impairment*'.

You'll probably recognise this as 'foggy thinking'. The most common signs of this, that I usually notice when I first start working with a client, are that they've started mixing up dates in their calendar, turning up for meetings at the wrong time or wrong day. They also tell me that they often walk into rooms and then... forget why they've gone in there. They often find it hard to concentrate on conversations, instead their mind wandering off into other thoughts. Or this one: they will be making an important point... and then, totally forget the point they trying to make!



Importantly, in terms of leadership (as well as life in general), the other symptom I notice is their frustration levels – they’ve gone through the roof; and their empathy levels have dropped through the floor. They also have poor or zero control over impulsive behaviours including flying off the handle in response to what people say or do (when they know they really shouldn’t do and it has a really bad impact – on both them and those around them, not a good look for anyone let alone someone in a leadership position), and making more impulsive decisions – rather than fully thinking them through.

When you also relate this back all of those toxic quick fixes, and your inability to manage your impulses or delay gratification ie. being able to resist the urge to have that one extra glass/bottle of wine, those drugs, that fatty takeaway or sweet ‘treat’, you can see that it all becomes a vicious cycle, and you are going to be reaching for all of those old, quick yet short-lived fixes, those things that you know are no good for you, but (because you’re well into cognitive impairment land), you just can’t resist.

Not only that, but stress has been shown to kill off your brain cells, but not just any brain cells – those in your important PFC.

This is all on top of all of the other, well-documented symptoms of stress:

- Mental health problems, such as anxiety depression and personality disorders
- Cardiovascular disease including heart disease, high blood pressure heart attacks and strokes
- Obesity and other eating disorders
- Sexual dysfunction such as impotence, and premature ejaculation in men; and loss of sexual desire in both men and women (libido)
- Menstrual and fertility problems
- Skin and hair problems such as acne, psoriasis and eczema, and permanent hair loss
- Gastrointestinal problems, such as gastritis, ulcers and irritable colon

Not such a sexy list hey? These are all the longer term effects of stress, which as you now know, is what happens to your brain and body when you keep on working long hours, day in day out.

Just Right, Too Little

So far I've only talked about what happens when you have 'Too Much' stress in and on the brain.

It's also important to know that 'Too little' and you'll also veer over into cognitive impairment and all it's symptoms. This happens when you haven't got enough going on, you get bored, and then suffer similar symptoms as when there's 'Too Much'. I'm guessing however, that if you're reading this book, this doesn't apply to you – it doesn't to any of my clients, and it didn't to me.

The other point to know is that some quantities of stress hormones are actually good for the brain. As well as a 'Too Much' or 'Too Little', there also is a 'Just Right' level for each of us (and it depends on what that is from person to person).

You'll know you've reached your 'Just Right' level, in those moments where your brain feels like it's firing on all cylinders – you know, those times when you've had full-on clear thinking, focus, you were really connecting the dots, coming up with ideas, making great decisions, you were great at getting on with everyone, understanding their points of view, great at inspiring and motivating and taking people along with your ideas – all of the good A-game, peak performer stuff.

Remember *that* feeling?

Hormones For Success + Happiness

At your 'just-right' you'll not only be at your optimum levels of stress hormones, but you'll likely also be at optimum levels for the 'good' hormones AKA DOSE: The Hormones for Success:

- Dopamine
- Oxytocin
- Serotonin
- Endorphins

These are also the recognised hormones for Happiness, so when I'm talking about being more productive and enjoying life, they are also key to the whole picture.

Firstly, I'm going to briefly take you – entry level – through each one of the Success Hormones, and how they impact you when you're at that 'Just Right' point. This is when these are really firing off:

- **Dopamine**, the hormone for achievement, anticipation, that's the one that gives you focus, creativity, alertness, great memory recall.
- **Oxytocin**, this is the attachment and belonging hormone. This enables you to be empathetic, really a good listener, have high levels of belonging and trust with others.
- **Serotonin**, this is known as the status and leadership hormone.

This is where you get much of your willpower from. This is where you get your inner confidence and your sense of self-esteem, and basically feeling good about yourself.

- **Endorphins** are the fulfilment and bliss hormones. This is where you feel really aligned and on purpose, you feel that you're creating an impact on the world. Plus, you've got a really good, elevated mood, and also pain relief. They're also great for stress reduction, and overall brain function as well.

All sound great don't they? But when you are stressed...

Add Cortisol = Bad News!

The problem being that when all of these hormones are mixed with cortisol, it all goes haywire up in that brain of yours.

High levels of cortisol have a negative impact on your Hormones for Success + Happiness.

Take a look at what happens when your stress levels are elevated and you introduce higher levels of cortisol into the mix:

- Dopamine + Cortisol

This when you get that feeling irritability and lack of patience, or that heightened feeling of anxiety. Or this particular mix can take you in the absolute opposite direction – to that feeling of hopelessness, or depression.

- Oxytocin + Cortisol

This is where you feel a lack of belonging, you become more cynical, despondent. This is what happened (amongst other things) for people during COVID.

- Serotonin + Cortisol

This is a really important one, especially for leadership, and one that I see a lot of. This particular mix not only reduces your willpower, but also plays into and exacerbates things like Imposter Syndrome, comparison, not feeling good enough. It ramps up any levels of low self-esteem.

- Case study: Serotonin + Alcohol

I know that a lot of my clients, including Dave, revealed they were hitting the wine, and quite heavily, when we first started working together. This is also something that I was doing – both during my BBC days, after I had my daughter, and the initial days of setting up my business.

If this sounds familiar, it's important to know what this is also doing to your brain.

- Short-Term Effects of Serotonin + Alcohol

Drinking, initially, gives you a boost of serotonin – making you feel instantly in a better mood, and more relaxed at the same time. However, the effects are short-lived. As alcohol goes through your body, serotonin levels quickly drop, leading to potential disruptions to your mood and how you regulate your emotions.

- Long-Term Effects of Serotonin + Alcohol

Regular and heavy drinking can then disrupt how serotonin is produced in your brain - it can both reduce the actual levels, and also how it is transported around the brain. This can then more regularly affect your mood, and leave you being more susceptible to depression and anxiety.

It can also make it more difficult for you to feel joy and pleasure, or regulate your emotions.

- Serotonin + Alcohol-Related Mental Health Disorders

The effects of alcohol and serotonin are all linked to the development and worsening of certain mental health disorders. Alcohol abuse and dependence often go hand in hand with major depression disorder, generalised anxiety disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. All of these disorders involve a disruption to the serotonin pathways in the brain, and alcohol can further disrupt them, making symptoms worse, and recovery even harder.

A sobering read to say the least (pardon the pun). The problem being, that when you are in a stressful state, because *serotonin + cortisol = lower levels of willpower*, you're going to be *more likely* to reach for the alcohol as one of your toxic quick fixes (because it does make you feel good in the short-term) – so it can quickly become a bit of a vicious cycle, and then, one that can become very hard to get out of.

Endorphins + Cortisol

If you've got high levels cortisol running through your brain, you may have also been edging into that sense of, and questioning, *'Is this all there is?'* That's because when these two are mixed together you can develop a real sense of futility and a lack of joy and meaning to your life.

Low Cortisol

Cortisol is not bad nor the enemy – just high and low levels. Just so you know, too little cortisol may be due to a problem in the pituitary gland or the adrenal gland (Addison's disease). The onset of symptoms is often very gradual. Symptoms may include fatigue, dizziness (especially upon standing), weight loss, muscle weakness, mood changes and the darkening of regions of the skin.

Adrenal Fatigue

Adrenal fatigue is a lay term applied to a collection of nonspecific symptoms, such as body aches, fatigue, nervousness, sleep disturbances, digestive problems; and poor stress response and mood regulation.

There are three stages of adrenal fatigue – acute, mild and high. Most people experience them as ‘energy crashes’ during the day.

We know that when you are under pressure feeling stressed adrenaline kicks in. When you mix *adrenaline* + *cortisol* you are more susceptible to experience adrenal fatigue, which typically inhibits your performance, your ability to cope and may even take you out of the game.

Either way – high or low cortisol and adrenaline spikes – most of my clients will report high and low energy periods, times when they can’t concentrate, and times when they are simply ‘offline’.

The problem is ignoring those symptoms.

And while meditation can help reduce stress, that’s why...

Why You Can't Meditate

Everything you've just read is also the reason why you can't meditate.

Just for a moment, think about all of those symptoms. (If you are like Dave)... and you have a load of norepinephrine, cortisol and adrenalin running through your brain and body... and are feeling several if not all of those symptoms, firstly, it's a miracle that you can sit down to try to meditate in the first place. But if you do, it's highly unlikely that you're going to be able to objectively observe your thoughts, separate them out, let them drift by you unattached, and come back to yourself – all to find that elusive inner peace.

That's a really, really tough call.

As you've read, when you are stressed, when you have cognitive impairment, when you're operating from the fight/flight/freeze centre of your brain, when you've got high levels of adrenaline cortisol mixed in with all of your DOSE hormones, your mind will be racing; you won't have the patience; you won't have the focus; but you'll want to get results quickly, and then when you don't, you won't have the willpower to stick with it.

On top of all of this, because of the stressful state you're in you'll think you're getting it 'wrong', you'll beat yourself up for being a failure, which will in turn feed into any existing self-esteem issues of either not feeling 'good enough' or even Imposter Syndrome.

For now, let's check how true this is for you.

Activity

Reread pages 41-45 and highlight anything that sounds like you.

How many of these symptoms of stress, high adrenaline/cortisol levels and cognitive impairment do you recognise straight away?

You might even rate the symptoms ie. *sometimes, often, rarely* or *never*. *Don't skip this activity*. It is important that you do this activity now because it will add useful distinctions to what we cover next.

Just so you know, some of my clients experiencing distressing episodes of stress or burnout have consulted clinical practitioners ie. counsellors, psychologists who usually seek specific details about their 'episodes' to better treat the symptoms. They typically ask a battery of clinical symptom questions such as:

- How often do these 'episodes' happen? (Frequency)
- How long do the 'episodes' last? (Duration)
- How intense are the 'episodes'? (Intensity)
- Do the 'episodes' stop you from working? (Function)
- Do you ever have ideation of self-harm? (Ideation)

If you are experiencing any of the above consult your family doctor who may refer you on to a specialist. While coaching is highly effective in dealing with limiting beliefs and behaviours, it does not replace clinical support from a qualified mental health practitioner.

Importantly, don't ignore any of the above symptoms.

Part 2

The Solution



SUE BELTON

Inside Job



Let's now get on to some good news. Some great news, actually.

Firstly, how are you feeling after I've just landed all of that heavy news and information on you? Let's be honest, I'm guessing if you're reading this book, a lot of what I've just said applies to you, you kind of knew it, but you didn't really want to know it either.

But the fact that I've made you fully know it now, means that you are much more likely to do something about it. And that's the really good news – this is an Inside job. Contrary to what you might have thought – if you've been trying all of those external quick fixes and 'solutions' or believing that you don't have a choice, that this is just the way it is, the answer lies within as they say, and as such, you do have a choice about how you respond and you can actually change all of this.

Now I'm not saying it's particularly easy, change is hard, but I'm also guessing you can do hard – can't you?

That's why you're here. You do hard day in, day out.

All I'm asking you to do is apply all of that tenacity, that commitment, that effort, to learning how to really be able to switch off your busy brain so you can be more productive yet enjoy life more – all at the same time.

What Works?

Let's look at the proven methods I've been using with my clients over the past fifteen years – clients who, just like me, and I'm guessing you, have all been working long hours and suffering the symptoms of cognitive impairment.

1. Identify Your Time-Wasters
2. Recognise Your Drivers
3. Be Your Own I Client
4. Power-Down
5. Dose-Up
6. Be Kind To Yourself

So let's go into it....

Hack 1: Identify Your Time Wasters

Going back to how many hours you work, what's really helpful is to then look at how you spend all of that time.

	URGENT	NOT-URGENT
IMPORTANT	<p>#1 NECESSITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impending deadlines (important + long term consequence to your career/business/life)• Crises/Emergencies• Resolving immediate problems• Certain emails that may change your life (eg job app/biz opp)	<p>#2 QUALITY & PERSONAL LEADERSHIP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Long-term vision, strategy and project work• Building long-term systems and solutions• Building career/business• Relationship building• Improving health and wellness
NOT IMPORTANT	<p>#3 DECEPTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interruptions/distractions• Most phone calls/emails• Attending inconsequential meetings• Spending a lot of time on task (report/email) that has little or no impact to your goals/life/bottomline short or long term• Dealing with others' requests• Doing the work you pay others to do	<p>#4 WASTE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mindless/TV/social media/social surfing• Reading gossip sites/forums• News/Gossip news• Certain phone calls/emails• Excessive gaming• Idling• Any obvious distraction or time wasting activity• Busy not productive

Adapted from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* - Stephen Covey

This is the first step – a really great tool I use with my clients, *The Time-Management Matrix*.

This is adapted from Stephen Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* – a really great book I recommend you read if you want to look further into this.

This tool is all about *consciously* looking at what you do that is *important, urgent*, and also the *not-so important* and *not urgent*.

I'll walk you through *The Time-Management Matrix* on the previous page. It has four quadrants segmented into *Urgent/Not Urgent* and *Important/Not Important*. Let's review the four quadrants and then I'm going to ask you a couple of questions about how you use your time..

Quadrant 1: Necessity

Quite clear this one – this is the stuff that you have to do on a daily basis. The immediate problems, tasks that have to be done, the emails that have to be responded to, the calls that have to be made.

This also includes any crises or emergencies that only you can deal with.

If you spend all of your time here, however, you are going to go over into that zone of cognitive impairment when you're constantly 'doing', never taking time to think, and are regularly dealing with last-minute crises or emergencies.

Quadrant 2: Quality & Personal Leadership

This was the quadrant that Dave and every single one of my leadership clients is *not* spending enough time in (or typically nothing at all) but definitely need to be.

This is the quadrant their role demands them to be in – as either senior leaders or established founders, this is always the

quadrant they are craving to be in, and always the one we shift them into, during our work together.

Quadrant 2 is all about creating long term systems and solutions, vision, strategy, purpose, building their career, developing their leadership skills, building their business, relationship and network building. Underpinning all of this is investing time into taking care of their health and wellness. This is because without your mental health, your physical health, there's no way you're going to be performing at your peak, especially at any senior level.

Quadrant 3: Deception

This was Dave's absolute hangout zone (so I might actually rename this one 'The Dave Zone').

Remember that Dave used to leave his house at 6am? This was so he would get in ahead of everyone else, so he could get some of his work done, before everyone else arrived and he would inevitably get distracted or interrupted. The problem being, that even at this time, there would always be someone in and he would always end up dealing with their problems, issues or even tasks (we'll come to why in Hack #2).

This is also where he (and you) end up spending time on calls and emails that you really do not need to be involved in and are often other people's concern or responsibility. This is the quadrant of being 'in the trenches', sleeves rolled up, being involved in the 'doings' or operational side of business, that so many of my clients find themselves in, when they really should be up, spending time in quadrant two.

For Dave, he was doing a lot of the things that he'd asked his team to do but they'd failed to deliver on. He was also responding to a lot of other colleagues requests and invites to meetings, and was even admittedly, doing one of his colleagues work on a regular basis (again, we'll come to why in the next Hack).

I had a client who said they, along with several other colleagues, were contacted by another colleague, calling for an 'urgent' meeting the next day. They, and everyone else turned up, having all cancelled their respective other meetings and engagements. The agenda and content of the meeting was *not urgent* at all. It was standard process and something they all already knew about and were working on. So know that this is a huge issue and common time-waster, especially if you work in a large organisation.

Quadrant 4:Waste

If you are spending a lot of time in Quadrant 3, as well as being up in Quadrant 1, you are undoubtedly going to be pushing your brain over into cognitive impairment and feeling pretty exhausted much of the time.

This is when you'll be much more prone to be over in this quadrant, going for the toxic quick fixes and time-wasters that sit over here. They'll give you that moment of escapism from all of the stress of being in one and three for sure, but they'll also make you feel really crappy about yourself afterwards, and/or are really bad for your mental and physical health.

Your goal is to get out of Quadrants 3 and 4 and hang out in Quadrants 1 and 2. Coaching fast tracks that result. If you can already recognise you are wasting too much valuable time in Quadrants 3 and 4, then let's now explain why smart professionals end up busy and stuck in those Quadrants.

How To Hack The Time Wasters

I'm going to give you the first hack, and you may not like this and you may push back on this, most of my clients do. And here it is anyway. Again, study the diagram below.



Adapted from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* - Stephen Covey

If you want to be working much more effectively, if you want to bring your stress levels back to 'Just Right', you really, absolutely, need to be up in Quadrants 1 and 2.

You need to *delegate* or *dump* anything in Quadrant 3 and dump everything that you can from Quadrant 4

By doing this, you are going to reduce your stress levels, free up a shed load of time, and shift your energies up into Quadrant 2.

Activity

Look at Quadrants 3 and 4

- Make a list of the things you can delegate or dump from Quadrant 3.
- List any 'Yeah but(s)...' (resistance /reasons for not dumping your time-wasters)
- Make a list of the activities you will dump from Quadrant 4

‘Yeah But... !’



When I was talking to Dave, when we went through the Quadrants Hacks activity he was like:

‘Yeah but... I need to be in there in the office every day to be ahead of everyone and ahead of the game.’

‘Yeah but... they’re not doing it. They’re not showing any initiative. If I don’t do it... it won’t get done!’

‘Yeah but... if I don’t check everything over, it won’t be up to standard.’

‘Yeah but... I can’t say no, I’d hurt their feelings.’

‘Yeah but... that person needs me to help them.’

Whatever your ‘Yeah but (s)...’ are, make an actual note, because they are what we are going to look at in our next hack.

They are really important, because they are what's keeping you stuck in Quadrant 3 (and maybe 4).

Let's be honest, if you are reading this book, I guarantee you're a smart person, you've already achieved a lot in your life and overcome a lot of obstacles in the process. If this was really as simple as just *delegating* and *dumping*, you would have done it already.

What I want to do next, is give you some **self-awareness** around what's keeping you there; and then some **actions** for how to get you out.

Hack 2. Recognise Your Drivers



What keeps you stuck in a holding pattern are Drivers. Your Drivers are ways in which you learnt how to think, feel and behave.

For example, you may be one of those people who feel the need to do everything quickly – you might rush around from one thing to the next, eat quickly, talk quickly, walk quickly, even drive quickly.

Or, you might be someone who needs to get everything ‘right’, and can’t settle or stop working on something until it’s perfect, however long that takes.

You will have developed these Drivers as a way of being accepted and loved by those around you, mainly your family.

Drivers are a way of making you feel OK - worthwhile and valuable in your own right. (The principle of OK’ness is that we are all special, all as important as each other – how good is that?!)

Your Drivers will have been very useful to you, they will have served you well in life and meant that you have been loved and accepted by others in life. But, they can also be a double-edged sword, because what they mean is you are 'Only OK, if...'.

'I am only OK if I am perfect...' for example.

So they end up *costing* you, and you pay in stress or anxiety when you are not able to live up to the Driver behaviour.

It's these Drivers that will be keeping you in Quadrant 3 – Deception, and Quadrant 4 – Waste, working all hours, and firmly out of Quadrant 2 – Quality & Personal Leadership (where I hope, by now, you know is a much more productive and time efficient place to be).

There are five main Drivers*:

1. Be Perfect
2. Hurry Up
3. Please Others
4. Be Strong
5. Try Hard

Let's look at the five main Drivers in more detail.

*Taibi Kahler/Transactional Analysis

Driver 1: Be Perfect



Writing about this Driver makes me smile because this is a big one for me, as well as Dave's. This is a killer, though.

If you have a Be Perfect Driver you will often say things like: 'Yeah but... no one can do it as well as me' or 'By the time I've explained it, I might as well have done it myself!' or 'It's just *better* if I do it.'

You will also, like our Dave, do so many edits or iterations, and spend so much time on things, getting them 'perfect', because you absolutely have to get it 'right'.

The other thing that's really insidious about this Driver, and I speak from personal experience on this, is that the thought or anticipation of getting something 'wrong', can have you in absolute terror, and high levels of anxiety in the process as well.

The prospect of getting something wrong, can haunt you – often in the early hours of the morning, and for weeks at a time, flooding your brain with stress hormones and forcing you into overwork with the sole aim of avoiding getting the thing 'wrong'. This is because as a child, if you did get something wrong you could have been punished, or worse, rejected.

Driver 2: Hurry Up!



Another one of mine...

Just think about when you put Hurry up with Be Perfect... you're going to be in a constant state of stress, anxiety and overwork.

If you have a Hurry Up Driver, you'll eat fast, you'll walk fast, you'll talk fast.

For example, my boyfriend and I recently went into the Apple store to pick up my computer which had been faulty. The young woman who brought it out started to explain to us – at break neck speed – what was wrong with it, and what we needed to do next. (Just for context, I'm a complete tech luddite but my boyfriend is very tech savvy).

Because she was talking so rapidly, she was literally tripping up on her own words and going at such a pace I couldn't keep up with her and I could not understand what she was saying. But being the tech luddite that I am, I thought it was just me. I looked at my boyfriend, but he just looked back at me, equally non-plussed. When we both told her we just didn't understand what she was saying, she carried on (but at the same pace), and seeing we were

none the wiser said, 'Let me get the technician who worked on your computer.' As she walked away, we both looked at each other, and at the same time said, 'Hurry up Driver!'

This can be the impact – if you have this Driver – guaranteed – you will often talk so fast that you're difficult for others to follow or understand.

You'll also barely allow yourself a minute to relax.

You'll also often be overweight or carrying a few more extra pounds than you'd like – you eat so quickly that you don't allow your brain to register that you're already full.

You can rack up loads of speeding tickets too – you like to drive fast! (ahem, talking about myself here). You'll also find it very difficult to sit still and do nothing. So even if you do manage to veg out watching Netflix, you'll probably be scrolling social or playing a game of Candy Crush etc on your phone at the same time.

The other thing to note, and this was certainly the case for Dave, you always feel the need to get back to everyone straightaway.

I can spot people with Hurry up Drivers, as they email me back instantly. I mean, it's great for me on the receiving end, but I know it will be costing them. There will always be someone to get back to, it's never-ending, and they will be in a constant state of stress feeling they have to get back to everyone right away.

Remember, this goes back to early days of your childhood - seven years and younger in fact. If you have a Hurry Up Driver you will have learned that you had to do things or respond to people quickly, 'You're only OK if ...you act fast, respond quickly.'

If you have this one, you'll find it extremely to stop, slow down, smell the roses, enjoy the ride, whatever you want to call it.

That's Hurry Up!

Driver 3: Please Others



Please Others was the strongest Driver for Dave. Just remember for a moment, and tie it back to Quadrant 3: Deception.

This was the one that had Dave doing everyone else's work for them, including that of fellow colleagues.

The thing about Pleasing Others is it makes you put everyone else's priorities above your own. You end up being busy not productive. And on top of that, you then feel angry and resentful about it.

When I met Dave he was so angry because that's what he was doing. He was absolutely furious that his team were not doing what he'd told them to do, plus they were not showing 'initiative' and coming to him with ideas and solutions (which was part of their role). The problem being that people just won't do the thing – not if you're in there, sleeves rolled up, doing it all for them. It's just human nature.

The other issue with having Please Others is that it actually makes you a great team member because you are in there doing

everything for everyone – people will love you for that, it's great being on the receiving end. But it's not a great one to have when you're a leader like Dave, because as well as being in there 'doing' it all, you also find it super difficult, and you will avoid, giving any constructive feedback or having difficult conversations.

This not only means you end up disempowering your people by doing things for them, but you're also robbing them of learning, growing and developing and being better – all because you will avoid having those important conversations for fear of upsetting them or hurting their feelings. This then also creates low trust levels as people will not trust you to tell them the truth.

As you can see, this is therefore a really important one for leaders to be aware of.

If you do have this, you'll also expect others to behave the same way back, but you won't express your needs (again, for fear of hurting someone), and when they don't respond in kind, you'll again feel really angry and resentful, and missed by others.

Driver 4: Be Strong



This Driver is all about being able to do it all, take the strain, soldier on through, toughing it out. If you have this Driver you'll likely have been told or learnt to Man up, or Stop being so sensitive!

If you have Be Strong, you'll have learnt that it's just not OK to show emotion. If you did show emotion as a child, you'll likely have been called weak, sensitive, girly or a woos. Our friend Dave was definitely running on all of those old beliefs, and, having been brought up in the military, so was I.

The thing about having to Be Strong, is that you put a lot of pressure on yourself.

You shoulder a lot of responsibility because you believe you can take it.

You're often the first to volunteer yourself for even more, and are often the first person people ask for help – this is because on the outside you appear cool and calm under pressure (however overloaded and stressed you feel on the inside). Again, this will have been how you needed to appear as a child.

Having Be Strong can be a very lonely place. You tend to take it

all on yourself. You're not great at asking for help (that would look weak), and you're not particularly good at collaboration – again making you feel like you're in it all on your own.

Remember me back in my hotel room, having stomach cramps at four months pregnant having been up filming in a pub until midnight up again at 6:00 AM ready to film another full day? ...

Wrestling with the thoughts of 'Oh something feels very wrong here' and the responsibility of being the producer on a shoot. In that moment the Be Strong Driver had a full hold of me – diminishing any feelings or needs I may have had as a woman whose four months pregnant and worried she may be losing her baby, and focusing on the responsibility of a full day's filming, a crew waiting for me at breakfast, and a shoot that needed to happen.

That's the kind of thing this Driver will do to you.

Driver 5: Try Hard.



The whole principle of Try Hard is the exact opposite to Keep it simple, stupid!

If you have this Driver, you believe it's the effort that matters and you'll only feel OK if... you work very hard, whether you actually achieve anything or not. At least you tried.

You'll have a tendency to make things really difficult or complicated, and can easily get lost in the details instead of seeing the bigger picture.

If you have Try Hard you'll often have five plus projects on the go. And you'll just keep on hanging out in there. You're spread out tasks, because the basic message is that you are not working hard enough.

So you can see how this one can have you hanging out in Quadrant Three: Deception a lot too.

Your Turn

Go back and look at the list of the five Drivers:

1. Be Perfect
2. Hurry Up
3. Please Others
4. Be Strong
5. Try Hard

Activity

Which Driver(s) sound like you?

Think about the Quadrants. What happens if...?

On my workshops, it's at this point that I get a lot of questions, and they typically start with '*What happens if....?*' Here are a few, and if you've got one that I still haven't answered here, please do drop me a line and I will get back to you: sue@suebelton.com

What happens if you can't see or acknowledge or don't want to see that you are impacted by the Drivers?

This is when working with someone like me, having someone notice them, see the impact of them, is really helpful.

It's a good solid piece of work to do in terms of developing your leadership skills style and impact, because not knowing or shifting and challenging them, will get in the way of your leadership and success in life.

What happens if perfection is prized in your work culture?

I was asked on a recent workshop: My job is running a design company in which I'm not sure how letting go of perfection is possible. My clients demand perfection. So what do I do about that?

This is a great question because it's a pressure that so many people I work with feel. The problem being, that there is no such thing as perfection it will only ever be perceived perfection and as such, is often difficult to reach and makes people feel scared of getting it 'wrong' or not making the grade in the process. When there are such high expectations of perfectionism within a work culture, it has a really negative impact on levels of trust, collaboration, psychological safety, openness sharing and creativity.

So when you're talking about a design company especially, it's not going to be serving anyone in that company or the process of creativity. Therefore, it's a really good one to get a hold of, challenge and shift, not only as an individual leader, but culturally as well.

What happens if people are happy with their Drivers, they don't want to change them?

It's not black and white. Your Drivers will have served you very well up until this point. And remember, they have made you feel OK (valuable, worthy) in the world.

But as you're only now starting to realise, they are costing you too.

When I do work with someone on shifting and challenging these Drivers, as well as doing the work in the sessions to disrupt and replace them with new ways of behaving, I also hold them accountable. Accountability ie. having someone there by your side, witnessing what changes you do make or don't make, has a huge impact on your ability to change very old ways of behaving.

Remember that these Drivers are really old ways of thinking feeling and behaving, and so are not going to disappear overnight. They take effort, reflection and commitment to break, and having someone there like me, to be accountable to, can really help make that difference.

What happens if you're not able to catch your Drivers in the moment, does that take time?

Taking Dave as an example, after he became aware of them, he was able to catch them in the moment sometimes for sure. However, we did have to do a lot of work around reducing his stress levels and work schedule in the immediate, in order to be able to do that.

The two things – stress levels and mindset/behaviour change, go hand in. Depending on how high the stress levels and working hours are, it can take more time to make the changes. Remembering the cognitive impairment and Too Much... If you're working all of those hours and tipping over into that zone, you're going to be reverting to your old ways. So yes, this does take time, and that's why people work with me – we speed that whole process up for them.

What happens if you know which ones you've got... but you don't know what to do about it?

That question leads me directly onto the next section....

The Antidote To The Drivers



Think back over the last 24 hours. Were there moments during that time where you now recognise that any of the Drivers? Where you were being perfect... or hurrying up... or pleasing others... or being strong... or trying hard? If you recognise any of the Drivers in you, and you too want that last question answered, *What happens if you know which ones you've got... but you don't know what to do about it?* then stay with me...

The first step towards making any kind of mindset and behavioural change is self-awareness and that's hopefully what you now have after me taking you through the five main Drivers.

The second step towards making any such changes is taking action. That's where we are now.

I am going to take you through an *Allower Statement* for each of the Drivers. An *Allower Statement* is designed to *consciously* neutralise the Driver.

The purpose of telling you about the Drivers was to make you *aware* of what keeps you stuck being busy not productive with a busy brain you can't switch off. It's great to become aware of your Drivers because that is most of the battle. But now what?

You now want a very fast way to unhook from the negative impact of that Driver. The *Allower Statements* do just that. They are like a fast relief, get-out-of-jail-free card. They work because they act rapidly like any antidote. They flip the switch and give you that positive state change. And the more you use them, the more effective and efficient you become at recognising and the neutralising the impact of your Drivers.

And best yet, this is something you can start using, right here, right now, as soon as you put this book down.

So, do you want to know about the *Allower Statement* for each Driver?

Be Perfect? Allower Statement: You Are Good Enough As You Are



One of Dave's Drivers is Be Perfect.

Remembering that Be Perfect is all about you *only being OK* if you get it right, you get it perfect. That's why, when you start easing off of this need to Be Perfect, as Dave did, and when you go into *You are good enough* as you are, you automatically start easing off of any self-criticism. You start being kinder to yourself, more loving and accepting of yourself – as you are right here right now (more on the importance and positive effects on this later too).

With Dave, as a practical way of shifting this one, for a major presentation to the board that he was massively over-preparing

for, I said, 'OK what's ten out of ten look like...what would a nine out of ten look like?' I then get him to dial down his efforts to the nine (saving him hours of work and stress).

If you use this technique do not be tempted to go straight down to a six – you've got to take baby steps with any behavioural change like this. Remember, this is a really old Driver. This was a means of survival - belonging, being loved as a little kid. You don't want to freak yourself out and make it too big or scary a change in one go (this goes for most mindset and behavioural changes by the way).

In this case, once you've dialled down to a nine and are able to maintain that level, then go down to an eight until you can again sustain it, and so on. When you make changes in this way they'll stick, and for this Driver, you will quickly notice you'll start saving huge amounts of time and energy, and you will automatically start taking those stress chemical levels down in your brain.

You know, most things don't need to be done perfect. They just need to be done.

I'm saying that to myself right now too, obviously.

Hurry Up? Allower Statement: Take It Steady



This Allower Statement is all about slowing down and enjoying the ride, and it's one I am working with right now – it's a game-changer.

Just in slowing down itself, you will start immediately reducing your stress levels.

When you start using this you might notice you stop getting so many speeding tickets and parking fines (as one of my clients did). You will also start making less mistakes, you'll actually save time, and stress and energy, you'll be easier to understand, and to follow (as that Apple woman would if she practised with this one).

In terms of leadership, if you have been speaking very quickly, you just wanted to get things done, and for people to get on

with things as quickly as possible, when you slow all of that down, and do Take it steady, especially when communicating with your team peers and stakeholders, you will be much more engaging, motivating and inspiring.

Again, it's in the slowing down that you'll start to make time (instead of lose it), and your brain and body will experience much less stress and anxiety.

You'll then have much better brain functioning – better focus, decision-making and understanding of complex situations etc., and you'll be able to start creating much more time for reflection and strategic thinking.

A pretty good result considering it's also a much more enjoyable way to operate too.

Please Others? Allower Statement: Please Yourself First



This was the main one of Dave's Drivers, and the main one that kept him in Quadrant 3: Deception, when he needed to be up in Quadrant 2 – Quality & Personal Leadership.

This Allower Statement reminds me of what some wise soul said to me very recently: *Giving should never hurt the giver.*

For Dave, the levels that he was giving at, were not only hurting him, but also hurting the people he was 'pleasing' too. By constantly diving in and doing the work for others, and by being 'nice' but not giving constructive feedback to his team, he was not developing or empowering them to be better. Because of this, we switched Dave to a coaching approach of leadership.

Remember, when we first met, he was complaining that his team just 'weren't up to the mark', they weren't doing what he'd told

them to do (so he would have to jump in and do it), and they weren't showing any initiative and coming to him with solutions or ideas (so he was forced to do the thinking for them).

A coaching approach shifted that focus of responsibility – from him, to them.

When Dave started using this Allow Statement, and learnt a basic coaching method and structure, he started getting results quickly. He started making them think into the solutions and what they needed to do, themselves. He was empowering and motivating them – by asking certain questions and using active listening skills, and he became much more inspirational as a leader – by discovering what they needed to be engaged and excited by their work, and then being able to give them that.

The other big thing Dave changed, was to start putting down boundaries around his time and energy, he learnt how to say No, and most importantly, that and it's OK to say No. This gave him a lot of extra time – especially when it came to the workload he had been carrying for that one colleague of his.

Again, this gave him a lot of extra time that he could then spend up in Quadrant 2: Quality & Personal Leadership.

Be Strong? Allower Statement: Be Open, Express Your Needs



Remembering this was a major one for Dave (and I), the Allower Statement for Be Strong is all about listening to and expressing your emotions and needs. This is important Emotional Intelligence leadership work.

For Dave, this meant learning about emotional literacy – being able to name the emotions he was feeling. This involves firstly recognizing that he was so shut off, because he had always felt the need to be strong all of the time.

Emotional literacy is about acknowledging the emotions you are having in any given moment, and then being able to express or

act upon them. This is not namby-pamby work, we are all run by our emotions (contrary to what you might currently believe). Emotions are data from the body, and in not listening to this data we are completely missing a whole load of important information.

Emotional literacy is about getting super conscious of exactly which emotions are running us (for example anger, sadness or fear), rather than being unconsciously run by them.

In becoming more tuned into his emotions, and subsequently more able to name and act upon them, Dave became much better at managing and acting on his own emotions, much better at relating to others, and much better at decision makings. He also realised the impact and huge cost that Be Strong had been having on him – and those around him.

The other useful thing about using *Be open, express your needs* is that he also learned to be much more collaborative, be more receptive to others' advice and opinions, and asking for help. Whereas before he was Be Strong, I've got to do it all myself, he opened up to be much more connected to and collaborative with others – essential when operating at his senior level.

It's a lot less lonely as well (again, speaking from experience).

Try Hard? Allower Statement: Just Do It



The last one, Just do It is actually quite a hard one to do, but as you can imagine, will save you a shed load of time.

If you have this Driver you'll often get into a struggle with things and flap around the edges without getting stuck in and completing things.

By just doing it you'll teach yourself that you can be successful and don't need to do all of the faffing around to achieve things.

You'll also create less work for yourself, instead just cutting to the chase and doing them - freeing up a lot more time to be up there in Quadrant 2 – Quality & Personal Leadership.

Your Turn



Which Driver, and importantly, which Allowers Statement do you want to start working with? Which one do you already feel will deliver a quick win?

Spend some time reviewing both the Drivers and Allowers Statements in Hack 2. This seemingly simple hack consistently delivers profound results for my clients provided you invest time in understand the Drivers and the Allowers Statements as they apply directly to you.

So let's go on to the next hack, which completely follows on from the Drivers....

Hack 3: Be Your Own #1 Client

If you want to make all of this happen, sooner, you absolutely have to start treating yourself as if you were your own number one client.

What I mean by this is, you know the most important client(s) you have? The ones for whom any meeting is non-negotiable. You wouldn't dream of shifting or moving any meeting with them in the calendar. Nothing would ever take priority over them (sometimes even your family)?

You need to start doing this... for yourself.

Case Study: Dave's Week – Before



When I met Dave, he was leaving his house at 6am, getting back about 8pm, Monday through to Friday. He was often in back-to-back meetings. Not only that, but when we did some online sessions, I noticed he had notifications pinging in from everywhere, so even when he was in our sessions (or doing any other type of work), he was never doing just the one thing – his brain was constantly being pulled in all directions, never able to focus on one singular thing.

He never had any time to pause, reflect, relax, have a break even. There was certainly no time to focus on any long term or future projects and ideas. This also bled all the way into his Saturdays.

There's a subtlety here. Dave says that his family is important to him, *and yet*, he spends so little time, let alone quality time, with them. The message he sends to his family is: *my work is more important than you*.

And he argues, 'Let me just finish this one thing... and then I will focus on you.' But of course, that rarely happens.

Dave's Week – After



Through our work together, Dave's working week changed dramatically. This is Dave working from home.

One of the quickest wins Dave had was to shift his belief that he had to be in the office five days a week. Remember that Please Others Driver that was keeping him in Quadrant 3? Because we shifted that, and I challenged him to do this, he started working from home Mondays and Fridays.

That instantly cuts out all of those hours he'd previously spent commuting (In Dave's case a total of eight hours). Not only that, but he made Monday's his none-negotiable thinking time. This meant no meetings, no interruptions, and all notifications taken off his computer, nothing – unless it was an absolute emergency. Full-on Quadrant 2 territory.

What he also put in his calendar as a non-negotiable, was breakfast with his family. One big thing that Dave was really worried about, at 48 years old and with two kids under ten, was living a life of regret – that he'd missed most of their childhood. This was something that was happening when we met and something he really wanted to change – and he did.

Another big shift for Dave, because he was really out of shape, unfit, and did not look his best (by his own admission), was that he started really taking care of his exercise, nutrition, and diet – they became a core number one client activity for him.

Again, Dave says health is important, but the reason he is not as healthy as he aspires to, is because he is too busy.

The way he was also able to start doing that and start spending time on that, was that he was starting to upskill his team. He was learning to delegate, attend less meetings he didn't really need to be in, and even push back on the colleagues that had been doing work for.

Our work was heavily focused on clearing out Quadrant 3 for him. As you'd expect, he fell off the wagon, but built on those learnings until being his own #1 client became a reality.

Added Bonus

Know that when you start doing this, you'll get the knock-on effect of your family being much happier with you – for being around more (and much happier when you are).

Reportedly, my clients families love me - the common theme is they get back their husband or wife, and they're much less stressed too. They're much nicer to be around. Also the kids are a lot happier, a lot better behaved funnily enough - that's the typical response.

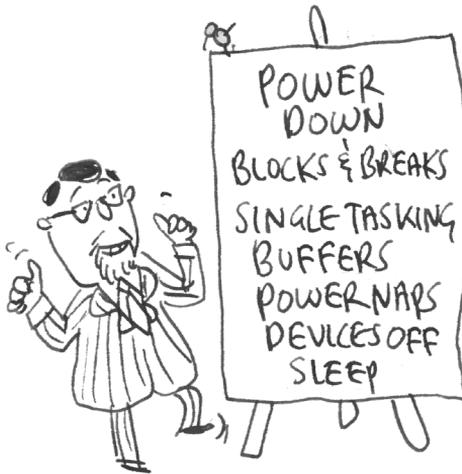
Activity: Your Turn

OK, do you agree that making yourself your #1 client is a good idea? If so, why? What do you secretly like about this hack? If you agreed that you should make yourself your #1 client then what would you want some of your #1 client calendar appointments to be?

(For example, for Dave Mondays and Fridays he worked from home, breakfast and dinner with his family, rowing, the gym and lunchtime light exercise. Again, he blocked out those 'appointments with self' into his calendar... and made them non-negotiable... *just like he would treat his #1 clients.*)

This is the whole point of this powerful hack. This hack works but you will not know unless you try it. Most of my clients wonder why they hadn't done this a lot sooner!

Hack 4. Power-Down



Powering-down is all about knowing the amount of hours you need to work (especially if you're working for an organisation and need to put in at least eight hour days), taking into consideration your age, and taking rests throughout that time – all to stop yourself going into cognitive impairment territory.

Especially, if you're 40 plus, and you're regularly hitting cognitive impairment, just know that the more you tune in and start thinking about this, the more you'll notice: 'Oh, I've gone into foggy thinking', 'Oh, my brain's dead'. Then, where you'd normally just push on through, you'll notice the signal that you're tip-toeing into cognitive impairment land and be able to stop yourself making it worse.

Also, and more importantly, if you do have to do eight hours plus, you can start preventing yourself from going into that state in the first place, by resting your brain throughout that eight hours.

It's about really spreading out that time, and giving your brain a break.

When I say break I mean a real break... this is not about switching from a work task, to something else that also uses your brain power, AKA a consumption habit – something else you are consuming. Consumption habits are things like listening to podcasts, watching or reading the news, social media scrolling, anything that involves you taking in and having to process further information.

You might think you're taking a break from work (and technically you are), but you're still consuming and using up that precious daily cognitive function allowance.

There is a tsunami of research on the benefits of powering down. But while we recognise the value of powering down, most professionals do not know where to start to get the best results immediately.

I have personally road tested a lot of powering down concepts, and road tested them on a broad range of professionals and the following consistently produce the best results.

Let's look at the most effective powering-down hacks:

- Blocks & Breaks
- Single-Tasking
- Buffers
- Power Naps
- Devices Off
- Sleep

Blocks & Breaks

There's been a lot of research on this and there are loads of theories on what the ideal blocks and breaks timings and ratios are. By all means read all you want about it, and I know time is short so I would say to start with working in blocks of an hour, followed by a ten minute break. That's my version, and that's what typically works for me, and some people like longer, shorter, or both – depending on the task at hand.

The important thing is, it's just got to be what works for you, but try it out and feel into what works best for your brain, and the task in hand.

When you're having your break, spend it making a coffee, sitting outside, walking around the block, listening to some music, maybe chatting to a friend (but not speaking to a colleague about a work issue). Just don't fill it with one of your go-to consumption habits, otherwise your brain will not get any true rest.

Also, when you're working in those blocks, work on only one kind of thing.

If you're having calls, do calls, if you've got to write up a report, just do report writing work. Because if you're flitting between different types of task, that actually uses up cognitive function and energy, as well.

Which brings us nicely onto...

Single-Tasking

Remembering Dave with his notifications pinging off all over the place – every time that happens, and you're having to switch your focus, you're again, using up valuable cognitive energy .

Therefore, when multitasking, you are forcing your brain to do something it wasn't designed for. It then becomes less efficient in the moment, and is much less able to focus on anything, even when you're not multitasking. Our brains are actually designed to be 'monotaskers', that is, to focus on and complete one task at a time.

When you're multitasking you are also directly increasing stress levels, which raises your blood pressure and your heart rate. Multitasking is also linked to the symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as all of the other symptoms of cognitive impairment.

Single-tasking, therefore, is a really great way of conserving cognitive function, and reducing stress levels all in one.

Buffers

Another thing I noticed when I first started working with Dave, was that he would always be having our sessions back to back with other meetings, he always had a 'Hard Out'. There was literally no break in between meetings.

What that does, again, is it puts your brain into stress, pushing you into cognitive impairment.

Studies have shown that when you do go directly from meeting to meeting, levels of stress from those meeting builds up in the brain – it has that cumulative effect. A study done by Microsoft even showed the difference in brain activity in those who took breaks compared to those who didn't take breaks.

Studies have also shown that back-to-back meetings decrease your ability to focus and engage when you're in those meetings, and that the transitioning between meetings itself causes additional spikes of stress - because you're coming to the end of the meeting knowing you have another one coming right up, and need to switch gear.

However, when you take even short breaks between meetings, this allows your brain to 'reset' - reducing that cumulative build-up of stress from across all of those meetings. It also increases your ability to focus and engage during those meetings, and prevents those additional spikes of stress you get going directly from one to the other.

This is why putting meeting buffers into your calendar –

preventing any back to back meetings happening in the first place, is an absolute non-negotiable in my mind, and is the one thing I suggest to all of my clients as an immediate stress-reducer.

(Buffers are literally that – little buffers of time you can set to be automatically added around any bookings made in your calendar – whether by you or others.)

That said, if you are super busy... I can guarantee the Drivers will be keeping you in a state of no-buffers and worse, I can predict you will - initially - like Dave, have some resistance to inserting buffers between meetings.

As with all of these hacks, find out what works best for you, but start small, and increase incrementally.

The research tells us small baby steps works best for making any sustainable change.

I personally like thirty minute buffers between appointments, but I also understand that may not be immediately possible for you. I have clients who start out with ten minutes, then, feeling the benefits, and depending on their diary restraints, increase that incrementally.

Devices Off

Remember Dave – when we first met he was worried things would go wrong if he wasn't there? He would also fret if his phone was getting low on power. He would also check his emails first thing in the mornings, even when he was on holiday with his family, and get anxious if he was anywhere with a bad Wi-Fi signal. These are all typical signs of 'always on' stress caused by mobile phone addiction. He was both glued to his phone, but also confessed to me that he would also love to get rid of it and replace it with an old Nokia – so no one could get hold of him and he couldn't be tempted to check his emails at all hours and wherever he went.

Women in particular (I'm afraid to say), are even more prone to doing something called 'triple-shifting' – working a full day in the office, coming home to make tea and look after the kids, then putting in a late shift before going to bed.

Being this attached to your phone or laptop means you're never able to switch off, fully relax, or rest and recharge your cognitive batteries.

Then there's the issue of using devices in bed when you finally do get there – and this further disrupting your sleep.

'Devices off' is all about setting times of the day when you either fully turn off any notifications and sounds, or better yet, put your device in another room. This worked especially well for me several years ago when I started breaking my phone addiction.

I started out by leaving it at home when I went out on the

weekends, and built up to considerable chunks of the day even during the week. I now only check my phone at certain times of the day, and have also removed my email for when I'm out on the road – which means instead of continuing to work I chill out and read a book or listen to music when travelling.

I also introduced, and we've kept to, the house rule of no phones in the living room in the evenings – which has been a great one in helping my teenage daughter get used to being without her phone for hours on end too.

So, turn your devices off – and give your brain a decent rest.

This is a major game changer for my clients. I cannot emphasise this hack enough. When I work with a client I am simply trying to get them to consciously become aware of just how much time they spend on devices. And once again, like me, they gradually wean themselves off excessive use.

Devices are so immediately immersive that you can easily park the ability to discern how much time you are spending. If you have ever said, 'I'll just check my email... or social media...' only to discover you've been scrolling for an hour, then you will understand what I am saying.

That said, once you start to exercise some discernment, your will be stunned at the immediate benefits.

Power Naps

Power naps have been shown to have a ton of mental health benefits including better memory, more creativity, stronger logical reasoning and decision making, and all-round improved cognitive performance and productivity.

Power Naps Vs Meditation

Even though they're quite different, napping and meditation seem to have some of the same benefits and effects on the brain. While you're obviously conscious when you're meditating, and unconscious when you're asleep, both activities give you an improved mental state afterwards, along with lower blood pressure and lower levels of stress and anxiety (I know which one I prefer).

One of my clients felt such a massive shift in productivity after power-napping in his office after lunch, that he had a whole floor refurbished with sleep pods – so everyone else could do the same.

Sleep pods (or anywhere employees can go for a nap), are brilliant for when you are working in the office, especially if you're more introverted, as a noisy office and constantly being around people will cause you even more stress than anyone else.

Different experts say different things when it comes to the ideal duration, with some saying ninety minutes, to others saying ten minutes is the best length.

I say again, you need to find what works for you and experiment to find that.

Your sweet-spot being you wake up feeling refreshed (not groggy), and you feel a definitive lift in your mood and cognitive energy levels (my ideal seems to be anything between thirty to forty-five minutes, and practically, it's whatever I can manage to fit in that day).

Sleep

The next big thing to take care of in terms of literally powering down, is sleep.

Sleep is unequivocally linked to stress levels and cognitive function, with a lack of sleep being known to cause higher levels of stress, frustration, depression and anxiety.

(It's also a bit of a vicious cycle, as when you are stressed, you are much more likely to find it harder to either go to sleep, or you're much more likely to wake in the early hours, mind racing, thinking of all the things you need to do).

Sleep deprivation also has a massive effect on your cognitive function – think about it - if you only have five to six hours of cognitive function a day and you start that day sleep deprived, you are already starting in deficit.

It's has been linked with all of the symptoms of cognitive in impairment, it's been shown to lower your thinking and problem-solving skills, attention span, memory, patience, and ability to have empathy for and connect with others.

Sleep deprivation has even been named as the 'new smoking' because of how it's often glamorized and celebrated in business, but has such a damaging effect on your health.

It's been shown to massively age you – inside and out, and damages your brain. It's been linked with dementia, Type 2 diabetes, Alzheimer's, heart attacks, strokes, and cancer (as well

as the immediate effects on your cognitive function as mentioned before).

So, getting at least six (but ideally seven to nine) hours a night, will have a huge effect on you being able to switch off and be more productive to boot.

There's no silver bullet solution (and all of these tips take consistent doing), but if you put in the effort, you will start getting more sleep:

- Have a consistent sleep schedule – going to bed and waking up at the same time (going to bed any time between 10pm and 11pm is the recommended time for getting the best quality sleep)
- Make your bedroom as sleep-conducive as possible – comfortable mattress and bedding, temperature, with as much quiet and darkness as possible.
- Switch off and remove all devices from your bedroom at least thirty minutes (preferably an hour) before you want to go to sleep
- Read or listen to relaxing music instead
- Eliminate other sleep-disruptors: alcohol, caffeine, even exercise too near to bedtime.

Now that we've looked at ways of helping your busy brain switch off and be more productive, let's look at the fun stuff – how to also enjoy it all more too!

Hack 5: DOSE-ing Up



This is what I was banging on about in my original *Screw Meditation!* LinkedIn post. You know, you don't have to sit down and meditate to switch off that busy brain of yours, it doesn't have to be hard. You can do things that you actually enjoy instead.

The key to doing things that you enjoy, is that not only do they force you to be fully present in the moment, but they also increase the levels of all of those fabulous hormones for success and happiness.

As well as doing the other hacks to reduce your stress levels and all of the effects of the stress hormones cortisol, norepinephrine and adrenaline, we're now in the zone of dosing-up on the good hormones – giving you a two-pronged approach.

These hormones will absolutely help you to switch off, be more productive and help your brain work better, and have you enjoying life too.

Win-win all round!

Ready for the fun stuff to add on top of all the other hacks we've gone through so far?...

Here's a reminder of the hormones we're talking about:

- **Dopamine** – Achievement & Anticipation hormone (boosts your alertness, focus, creativity, long-term memory)
- **Oxytocin** – Attachment & Belonging hormone (helps you feel loyalty, trust, empathy, generosity)
- **Serotonin** – Status & Leadership hormone (gives you will-power, self-esteem, inner confidence, purpose)
- **Endorphins** – Fulfillment & Bliss hormone (lifts your mood, increases pain-relief, increases all round cognitive function, reduces stress levels)

Case Study

For Dave, Dosing-Up had him reconnected with his health and fitness.

He got back into the gym, but more importantly, he got back into rowing, which was something he used to do, and loved, in his 20s.

Rowing is great because it's an example of an activity that boosts all of the hormones at once:

- Through rowing, he was pumping up his levels dopamine - rowing gives you that sense of achievement in getting from one place to another, hitting targets and timings.
- It also beefed up his oxytocin levels - because he was doing it with

others. He was not out there rowing alone most of the time.

- Then serotonin, because he was doing it outside (you get a boost of serotonin from being outside even for 15 minutes).
- Then of course endorphins because of the physical exertion – he was really going for it out there (any activity that raises your heart rate will give you a boost of endorphins).

He was hitting all of those in one go. Not only that, but the big thing for Dave was that he was spending more time with others (outside of work).

Remembering Dave had a Be Strong Driver – he thought he had to tough it out, go it alone, be THE responsible one...

What was also really wonderful for him was that he started doing games nights with his family. He started to spend a lot more time with his two kids. At the weekends especially, and in the evenings just helping them with their homework or taking them to things, hanging out with them. Walking the dog with them.

He also started doing date nights with his wife again, that again beefing up his oxytocin levels (as well as dopamine and endorphins as their sex life consequently improved too).

He also started seeing his mates again, something he had let go of because he had previously been working all the hours.

Let's look at some other possibilities for you too....

Dopamine

Anything that has you making, creating or building something is a huge dopamine booster – that's why there's been a boom in the crafting world. Anything that gives you a little win (crosswords, Sudoku puzzles etc), will again give you a hit of dopamine.

Setting goals and targets generally, and the anticipation of doing things you enjoy will also give you a dose – so planning and putting things in the diary is also a good one, as will spending time in nature.

In Dave's case, as well as all of the above, he also started doing Sudoku on the commute instead of scrolling and checking his emails, and started planning trips and holidays with his family as a matter of priority.

Oxytocin

Oxytocin is the love hormone.

Because this hormone plays such an important role in human bonding, this is the one that had so many people buying Covid dogs – because they were missing their usual levels of human interaction and bonding (and you do get it from cuddling animals in the absence of there being another human around).

Apart from stroking dogs, any hugging, kissing, cuddling and sexual intimacy will boost your oxytocin levels.

Giving or receiving a massage, telling someone how much you care about them, doing something nice for someone, active empathetic listening... spending time with friends, cooking and eating with people you care about – all will boost your oxytocin levels too.

Serotonin

Doing any of the above outside, will also increase your levels of serotonin - this is from breathing in fresh air and also from the vitamin D produced by being out in the sun – both naturally boosting your serotonin levels.

(A seasonal affective disorder (SAD) light being a great option to boost your levels during the winter months when there's less sunlight around – I have one on my desk which doubles up as a video light).

Massage again (as well as for oxytocin levels), has been shown to boost serotonin by as much as 30%, exercise such as yoga walking and running, as well as listening to music, and even acupuncture have all been shown to increase levels too.

And if you're not yet convinced on the sleep issue, it also has been shown to increase serotonin levels (I just love the fact that by literally doing nothing but sleep, I am already winning).

Endorphins

Anything that increases your heart rate or physical strength will give you a boost of endorphins.

Then again, if you do it with other people, that will also boost oxytocin, and if you do it outside you'll also be getting a boost of serotonin – so you can see why something like a running or cycling club (or Dave's rowing club) are going to be great all-round dosing options.

I for example, do a mixture of spinning, lifting, rowing and running, all within classes where I have got to know a great bunch of people, and exercise alongside them.

So, apart from my serotonin levels, I am getting a good dose of all of the hormones in one.

Dancing is another great dosing source of endorphins plus dopamine – which again if you do it with others you'll also get the oxytocin from, better still if you do it outside (summer BBQ or outside concerts etc), you'll also get the serotonin.

Saunas and steam rooms also gives you an endorphin boost,

as does sex (plus a dopamine boost if you orgasm). As one of my workshop participants added – if you have sex in the sauna, you’ll get an even bigger boost, plus a dose of oxytocin on top!

Active Mindfulness

All of these things I’ve been talking about could arguably be classed as Mindfulness: noticing what’s happening in the present moment, without judgement.

Being mindful, being fully present in the moment, switching off all of those busy thoughts is what we’re all ultimately wanting to get to. That’s where the peace of mind is, where the pure, in the moment joy is. It’s also what everyone who is doing (or struggling with doing) meditation, is ultimately striving for.

The good news being that (on top of all of the enjoyable activities listed above), you can also do pretty much anything that you would normally do in your day to day life, in a mindful way.

So, making tea - really focusing on the making of the tea, listening intently to the boil of the kettle, consciously dropping the bag into the cup, in the pouring of the hot water – noticing the sound, the steam rising into the air, very deliberately stirring the tea and tapping the spoon against the side of the cup.

Or, mindful walking - really feeling each foot as it makes contact with the ground, as it lifts off the ground and moves forward, the air as it touches the skin on your face.

Another one I love doing is mindfully hanging out the washing – shaking each piece of clothing , really consciously putting the pegs onto the material and line, feeling the two beneath the peg (I realise this might be starting to sound a bit weird right now if you’ve never done anything like this) In which case, as ever, give it a go – see how it is, see what works for you.

Another thing that I do when I'm working from home, is to lie on the ground when I'm on a break. If I'm feeling particularly stressed or anxious about something, I lie on my lawn, look up at the sky, and if I'm lucky I get to see some birds feeding too. It's actually known as Earthing or Grounding and over twenty studies have discovered that lying or walking in direct contact with the earth's natural electric charge, stabilises our physiology at the deepest levels. It's been shown to reduce inflammation, pain, and stress, and to improve blood flow, energy, and sleep, so another good one to do whenever you can.

I'm all for achieving little pockets of mindfulness throughout the day, all much more achievable than yet another thing you have to 'do' (especially when it's in conjunction with things you're already doing any way).

Extreme Mindfulness

If you're more of a sense-seeking personality (like me), you might need to do more extreme things to really bring you into the present moment. This is because you're always seeking intense and/or new experiences often because of, or despite, the risk of injury.

Apparently, a lot of men (although I see mainly women sense-seekers in my classes!) after 'men are sense-seeking are sense-seeking, and a lot of risk-taking entrepreneurs are too. So if you are an established founder, or are very entrepreneurial in general, this may apply to you, and you may need to do more extreme things ie. extreme mindfulness.

Extreme mindfulness activities that fall into this category are risk sports - anything like free climbing, mountain climbing, kite-surfing, surfing, water skiing, skiing. Also, anything that gives you more intense sensations when working out (and subsequent higher levels of endorphins) such as spinning or cross-fit, are also

great at bringing you into the present moment and switching off that busy brain of yours.

You may also (again like me) need to change things up on a regular basis. I typically get bored of my exercise routine every six months and used to beat myself up about this: ‘Why can’t I stick to things!?’ But understanding the nature of being more of a sense-seeker, I now know it’s because I like new experiences, I’m adventurous, and I love trying out new physical activities and sports. In the past few years for example, I’ve done cross-fit, running, rowing, water-skiing, skiing, golf (definitely not intense enough), and am currently doing a mix of spinning, lifting and rowing.

Activity: Your Turn

Out of all the activities I’ve listed, what’s your top three?

Which one will you start with?

Are you a sense-seeker? If so, what might you try next?

Hack 6. Be Kind To Yourself

This hack is completely contrary to what Dave, most of my clients, and I certainly believed, that you've got to: push on through; be hard on yourself ; tough it out; don't let up; stop being a woos, man-up!...

All of these beliefs were thought to be what would make you successful in life, make you achieve, have you do well.

That's how you may have been raised too. It's certainly how I was raised.

But contrary to all of these beliefs, the absolute opposite is true.

Self-Compassion (aka being kind to yourself), has been shown to be much more effective and much more motivational in terms of you being successful in your life and whatever you choose to do.

There's a whole body of work on this out there, and it's a subject I'm really passionate about because I know how important it is in terms of being more productive and happier at the same time. If you do want to find out more, I've written a whole chapter plus activities you can do, in my first book: *Change Your Life in 5: Practical Steps to Making Meaningful Changes In Your Life*.

And what we're going to do now is look at one simple, yet very effective hack around this.

What I'm talking about is shifting how hard you are on yourself, and what you say to yourself *in your head* on a daily basis.



These are the top three things that Dave identified as the negative self-talk; that he used to say to beat himself up on a daily basis.

What I'm talking about, is replacing these phrases, that mindset, and changing that neural pathway in your brain. For Dave:

- I am/you're so stupid
- I/you can't get anything, right!
- I am/you're not good enough

In terms of replacing that, what you need to start doing is saying something else to yourself instead. Any belief or behaviour has a corresponding neural pathway in the brain. I see it like a woodland pathway – well trodden down, well formed, the route you'll automatically take because it's the easy route to take.



What you need to start doing is saying something completely different to yourself – something positive, healthy and grown up – for example, in Dave's case:

- 'Hey, failures happen, all part of the process. What did you learn?'
- 'What would I say to a dear friend?'
- 'What's the kindest thing I could say to myself right now?'
- 'What's the kindest thing I could do, right now?'

Once you do that, you've created a brand new neural pathway. When you say that, and you say that *repeatedly*, the neural pathway will get stronger and stronger – just like the woodland pathway gets more and more trodden down and clear. As you do that, the old one that you're no longer using will get weaker and weaker and grass over, or 'atrophy' as the scientists call it (meaning 'die away'.)

Of course, you will occasionally go back to the original pathway while you're building the new one (especially during times of stress), all normal (as with the formation of any new habit), but again, be kind to yourself, and get back onto the new one.

You absolutely can change your mindset on this (or anything else).

Again, contrary to the old saying, you absolutely CAN teach an old dog new tricks!

Activity: Being Kind

Take a moment to reflect...

- What's one harsh criticism you regularly say to yourself ?
- Would you say that to a dear friend?
- If not, then why say it to yourself?...
- What's the kindest thing you could say or do for yourself instead?

OK, so we've come to the end of the hacks, but...

What If You Do Nothing?

Let's just start thinking into the option of you not doing anything about all of this (let's face it, it does sound like a lot of time and effort – and you don't have much if any of that left to spare do you?)...

If you are working all of the hours like Dave was... and you are already experiencing some of those cognitive impairments symptoms, you will have answered 'Yes' to one or more of those questions at the beginning of the book.

Here's a reminder of what they were:

- You're working all hours but never seem to get to the end of your to-do list.
- You're rarely fully present with your friends or family when you are with them.
- You're available 24/7 on email and phone.
- You feel like you need to get everything done right now.
- When you do have a spare moment, you'll squeezing in 'one more thing'.
- You spend a lot of time dealing with other people's or your team's crises and meetings.
- You berate yourself for any failures.
- You never have any thinking or strategic time at work.

- When you do get home you're back on email/calls.
- Your exercise routine has either gone out of the window, or you do it full-on and briefly, but it never sticks.
- You're drinking/drugging/shopping/social media scrolling/gambling/porn habit etc. is creeping up.
- You either eat out, or order in, a lot (despite best intentions)
- You flip between feeling exhausted and wanting to jack it all in to wanting to do all of the things 150% of the time.
- You tried meditation, you couldn't do it right, and it only made you feel worse.

Continuing like this, where will you be in five years' time?
Or one even?

Because Dave was absolutely heading for burnout.

Understand, for many, *Ignore Your Awareness and Do Nothing*, is a strategy they are currently using. Even if you are aware that you are doing nothing, pay close attention to the rationalisations that keep you there in place like, 'I have to...', 'I can't because...'. As we've emphasised, ignoring and doing nothing comes at a very high premium, sooner or later.

So, are you doing nothing?

Just further pause for a moment and think about what you just answered.

To give you pause for thought, let's give you an extreme example...

The Top Five Regrets of Dying

Putting on my workshops and writing this book reminded me of the bestselling book *Top Five Regrets of the Dying* which has sold over three million copies worldwide. It was written by palliative care nurse, Bronnie Wair, who over eight years, interviewed hundreds of patients in the final days of their life.

The top five regrets are:

1. 'I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.'
2. 'I wish I hadn't worked so hard.'
3. 'I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings.'
4. 'I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.'
5. 'I wish I had let myself be happier.'

Take another look at the list above. Notice how they relate to everything you've been reading about. And notice how there's not one that says:

*'I wish I worked harder...
and I wish I spent more time in the office.'*

What If You Do Something?*



Dave Then...

And Dave Now

Let's return to Dave.

Remembering that when he came to me, he was not in a great way, as he said. He had tried meditation, failed, and was beating himself up about it.

He was suffering most of the symptoms of cognitive impairment, he was working all hours yet was not spending the time he needed to be spending on being strategic and visionary and he was not fulfilling his new role as a senior leader (up in Quadrant 2: Quality & Personal Leadership). He was busy, not productive, working 60-80 hours a week and spending most of his time in Quadrants 3 and 4.

He was also spending less and less time with his wife and kids, and when he did, he was barely present, distracted, impatient and itching to get back to his never-ending to do list.

He was also in poor physical shape, exhausted and knocking on an empty tank.

Importantly, he knew he had to do something. He recognised that he had a busy mind that he was finding impossible to switch off. He had tried everything to relax including meditation... and found that nothing worked for long, or at all.

Dave had sought a leadership coaching but you now know what was undermining his ability to lead effectively. Dave's leadership coaching was comprehensive but it included the hacks in this book.

I got Dave:

- To identify the time wasters.
- To understand the Drivers that were keeping him stuck being busy and not productive
- To start using the Driver Allowance Statements
- To consciously start treating himself as his #1 client
- To consciously monitor his ON habits and to consciously start using the six Power-Down hacks
- To understand DOSE and start apply the happy hormones hacks; and
- To start being a lot kinder to himself.

Understand, that Dave's turnaround took about nine months and I acted as his accountability coach. You may not think you need a coach just yet. If that is the case, have a go at applying any of the strategies and hacks included in this book. If you apply yourself, you will start to experience a positive shift, usually within 90 days. Of course, if you want to deep dive and fast track any of the hacks in this book or need focused help applying what you have read here, then let's chat.

So what happened to Dave?



Dave Now

Now Dave is spending a lot of his time up in Quadrant 2, and barely a moment down in Quadrant 3: Deception).

He has stepped up in terms of his leadership, adopted a coaching approach, and consequently has a greatly empowered and motivated team who are more than happy to be following his big vision for the business.

He now spends two full days working from home and gets to see his family for breakfast and dinner, and is fitter and healthier than he has been in years.

Importantly, using the hacks you've just read about, he was absolutely able to switch off that busy brain of his – with all of those lovely dosing activities, in conjunction with reducing his hours (and subsequently his stress levels), dramatically.

At the same time he is being much more productive and successful at work, with his CEO especially acknowledging the huge shifts he's made, and the difference that has made to him becoming a much more effective leader in the business.

Significantly, he has achieved an enviable work/life balance

that has given him back quality time with his family, enhanced meaning and purpose, more confidence and a more rewarding and satisfying approach to life.

I want to emphasise that Dave, like all my clients, succeeded because he did this *consciously*. The hacks in this book were applied consistently over time; and Dave routinely reflected on what was working, what wasn't working, and focused on what needed to be adjusted.

The Performance Plan

As Dave started to implement the strategies in this book he deliberately applied a proven performance feedback plan which is:

- 1. Stop doing what isn't working.** Obviously, you need to recognise what isn't working such as how the Drivers keep you stuck and busy in Quadrants 3 and 4.
- 2. Start doing more of what is working.** For example, Dave focused on making new and positive, healthy, mindful choices. And;
- 3. Continue to do more of what is working.**

You need to understand, that the hacks don't work... if you don't work them. Please note: I am not saying you need a massive effort. As my clients like Dave discovered, even applying the hacks a little can be enough to generate a satisfying state change and positive, healthier outcomes.

Understand, Dave had a lot of responsibility – board level stuff – and some pretty big bases to hit – professionally – and his leadership coaching programme focused on giving Dave the strategies and tools to perform most effectively in that role. That said, the by product of applying the strategies and hacks in this book, was Dave was able to switch off his busy brain.

Frequently Asked Questions

When I do the live *Screw Meditation!* workshop people totally resonate with the six hacks for turning off a busy brain – especially the Drivers – but always ask a lot of questions to make sure they can start applying the hacks successfully. Here’s a sample of questions I get asked that you might also be wondering.

Did Dave fall off the wagon?

Yes, relapsing is part of the process. Remember I said in terms of neural pathways, if you’ve got a really well-trodden way of being even though we’re introducing effective ways of thinking, feeling and behaving – that work – and make total sense – like Dave, under pressure, you’re still likely going to fall off the wagon and go back to your default behaviour. Expect it. That’s part of the process. And that’s also part of learning not to beat yourself up, as well, but also understanding that’s how we’re wired.

What hack did you get the most pushback from Dave?

The most pushback that I got from Dave was his need to be in the office for that many hours. If you think about our society and culture, it’s so ingrained that working hard appears to be valued, and a sign of working hard is being in the office all hours. That was a really, really tough one for Dave.

How long did it take before the hacks were automatic?

It took about nine months. Understand, the hacks were included in a much broader and more comprehensive leadership coaching programme. If you don't have a coach and you are working through this book then you can work with a colleague or a buddy. (You will find the next section useful.)

What feedback did Dave get from his team?

Dave had amazing feedback from his team.

So remember the behaviours he exhibited to his team were the result of out of control Drivers. He was often angry and impatient and frankly demotivating his key people. And, he also shied away from setting and holding accountability. Specifically, his delegation skills were a liability which was one key reason the CEO put him forward for leadership coaching.

Dave went from *that* approach – thinking and acting as if it was all *their fault...* to taking self-ownership of his Drivers... and switching to a coaching approach. Trust levels really increased because he started having difficult but more professional conversations.

You mentioned a six-week masterclass. Do you do a week on each of the hacks?

Yes, the six week masterclass specifically focuses on the six hacks. I do a session per week on the hacks with a worksheet and accountability in between.

So, did Dave have symptoms of burnout? How did you deal with that?

If any coaching client has symptoms of burnout I refer them to their GP, and...

Burnout

While we are on the topic, let's briefly look at executive burnout.

Executive burnout can have a significant impact on your mental and physical well-being . While symptoms can vary from person to person, there are six common ones:

- **Fatigue:** feeling constantly exhausted, both physically and mentally, despite getting adequate rest. This persistent fatigue makes it difficult to concentrate and perform tasks effectively.
- **Emotional exhaustion:** a sense of emotional depletion, making it difficult to manage and regulate emotions. Feeling increasingly irritable, frustrated, or detached from work and colleagues, leading to a drop in overall job satisfaction and enjoyment.
- **Reduced performance:** being busy not necessarily productive. If you're suffering from burnout you may find it challenging to maintain what you insist is your 'normal' and usual level of performance and productivity. Note; tasks that were once manageable may seem overwhelming, leading to a reduction in work quality and output.
- **Cognitive difficulties:** burnout can impact cognitive function, resulting in difficulties with memory, concentration, and decision-making. This cognitive impairment can also badly affect problem-solving critical thinking and decision-making.
- **Physical symptoms:** various ailments such as headaches, gastrointestinal issues, increased susceptibility to illnesses, and disturbed sleep patterns. These physical issues can further

contribute to your overall sense of exhaustion and diminish your ability to cope with the demands of your role well.

- **Relational issues:** Dave's CEO was most concerned that work was affecting his family life and relationships. Remember, Dave was commuting three to four hours a day, leaving home early and returning late. It was his CEO who guessed this might easily be placing a strain on things at home. Note: Dave heavily defended his current 'regime' and was initially resistant to say, working from home.

Remember, Dave's CEO was concerned that Dave was showing signs of burnout, and felt that leadership coaching might address them early, to stop them getting much worse.

As you'll notice from the list above, a lot of these burnout symptoms cross over with what you've now read about the symptoms of cognitive impairment, and the reasons why you may not have been able to meditate. So, if any of these do sound familiar, you could already be in the zone of being burnt out, or heading there rapidly.

Even more reason to take action, and now.

Part 3

Next Steps



SUE BELTON

How To Get Even More From This Book

After working with so many leaders over the years, I've noticed their key strategies that will help you get the most from this book.

1. You know something needs to change

You'll remember that Dave's CEO wanted him to have leadership coaching programme specifically to improve his delegation and therefore the performance of his team.

Dave was initially hesitant about committing any time or energy to coaching, mainly because he felt he didn't have any time to spare in his already packed schedule. But this was of course the very reason why he needed coaching. Also, Dave hadn't yet realised that it was his own underlying behaviour's, thoughts and feelings that were stopping him be the best header he could be.

To be fair, in spite of that, Dave did agree to lean into the coaching, and in our first session agreed that there were things he had already recognised as problematic, and things he had already tried to change. For example, Dave acknowledged he had a busy mind that he couldn't switch off, and had tried a number of strategies without much success, primarily meditation. (Again, I am not saying meditation doesn't work. It does. But for many of my clients it just doesn't, and 'failing' makes them feel even worse.)

Ultimately, Dave saw the need to change. But not everyone does.

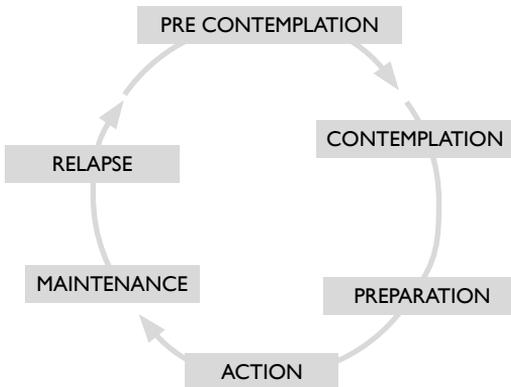
The Stages Of Change

Do you know someone who thinks that their way of thinking or behaving works just fine, but in reality, it isn't working for them... or you? If you try and tell them to look at what they're doing, they get resistant, reactive and defensive. They believe they are OK. How they are *being* is certainly not registering as a problem. But clearly it isn't working.

For example, Dave thought that mentally (and practically) managing his team members was just him being helpful, but they saw it as micromanaging and interfering. His top talent also saw it as a vote of no confidence in their skills and knowledge and some opted to leave and go to a job where they felt appreciated and could show initiative. Dave didn't like giving constructive criticism to his team but his team felt confused and disgruntled when Dave corrected their work.

So how *do* you typically get someone to change?

Two American psychologists, Prochaska and DeClimenti worked in a rehabilitation centre with drug addicts and over time developed a theory of change. They identified six stages:



- **Precontemplation** - at this stage you don't see the need to change anything. You're not even thinking about changing. Yes there might be niggles. 'Yes, I work late at night, *but...*' You will recognise the *yeah/buts*. If you've got this far, then I would suggest you are beyond the rationalising of precontemplation. You are at the next stage...
- **Contemplation** - at this stage your awareness has cut in and you have recognised that something needs to change. For example, Dave recognised he had a busy mind he couldn't switch off.
- **Preparation** - at this stage you are now considering what might help. For example, Dave thought about diet, exercise, sport, drinking, leisure activities... and meditation. Again, if you are at this stage, my guess is you are already thinking about trying things out.
- **Action** - at this stage you are trying stuff. So Dave, tried changing his diet (but stopped), bought a state-of-the-art exercise bike (but stopped using it), had started rowing (but quit) and then tried meditation.
- **Maintenance** - at this stage you may not be getting the results you want but you are testing, tuning and modifying. If something is working, you will continue doing it. In Dave's case, meditation did not work. So...
- **Relapse** - at this stage you fall off the wagon, and go right back to what you were doing in the first place. In Dave's case, Dave went back to binge watching Netflix, drinking red wine, ignoring his wife and family, starting early and coming home late, being frustrated and impatient with his team... whatever, he was accepting, compromising and settling... 'Oh well, this is who I am...', 'Oh well, at least I tried. This is as good as it gets...' The problem is Dave could have easily slipped back into a pre-contemplation state had it not been for his CEO.

2. Now, Where, Hurdles

To change anything you need to understand where you are now... where you want to go... and what's holding you back. You also need a workable plan to get around the major hurdles such as limiting beliefs. (I cover this comprehensively in my book *Change Your Life in 5.*)

- **Now:** Understand that Dave started the programme by clearly identifying a list of issues that were impacting his leadership such as poor delegation, not being able to have difficult conversations, working excessive hours etc. In this stage we focused on how Dave is being now; the current state.
- **Where:** We then spent a lot of time describing where he wanted to go; the ideal state. Who he needed to become. Dave reflected carefully on what 'good' looks like to the industry; to others; and to himself. Being better at delegating, for example.
- **Hurdles:** Importantly, we identified what was stopping Dave from transitioning to his ideal state. While the remit was to improve Dave's delegation skills, we needed a workable plan to address any obstacles to achieving that outcome.

3. You need to stay conscious

It's good to recognise the need to change something, but once you have a plan, it has to be a conscious choice and you have to apply yourself consciously. You need to catch yourself when you relapse. For example, Dave's major Driver is Please Others. We talked about this and identified the instances where his default behaviour is to... please others. It's OK to please others, of course, but not when pleasing others is beyond good judgement. There were times when he was in full flight pleasing others... double checking a submission for a colleague... when he caught himself

in the very act of being busy not productive. Over time, Dave got very good at catching himself in the act, using the Allower Statement Please myself first, and slowly but gradually the force of the Please others Driver decreased.

This requires you to pay attention. Conscious change is adult work.

4. You need to be realistic

The clients I work with are smart enough to realise that changing any deeply ingrained default behaviours, thinking or feelings takes time. Yes, they want the needle to move, but they are not naive enough to think they will transform a habit overnight. This is why we talk about...

5. Baby Steps

The research tells us that if you want to change anything and lock in positive, healthy behaviours take baby steps. Small, gradual and incremental.

The old model of change and performance is very similar to launching a rocket. A rocket requires escape velocity - enormous amounts of fuel, thrust and power – and a big effort - now - to break free of the earth's gravitational pull. Vast resources are initially consumed at a startling rate to achieve lift-off, but once free of gravity require little effort to maintain momentum. If you have vast resources and reserves great, but in human endeavour, when we try new things, we exhaust rapidly, and it is easier to fall back to earth.

The Drivers tend to focus your efforts on bigger... sooner... better... stronger...

There is an expectation however, to achieve big powerful

changes quickly – and this is likely to happen, shorter term – but this is rarely the case longer term. It's not usually sustainable.

A proven strategy is baby steps or incremental gains. We saw this with the Olympic gold medallist British cycling and rowing teams who modified their performance, incrementally - a bit at time, but consistently.

The Driver/Allower Statements allow you to slow down... to speed up.

6. The Performance Plan – Stop, Start, Continue

The simplest performance plan is *stop*, *start* and *continue*. What do you need to stop doing, start doing and continue doing. This relies on being conscious as we mentioned earlier.

- Dave had to *stop* pleasing others.
- He had to *start* recognising when he was pleasing others, beyond good judgement. It meant he had to start delegating tasks, upskilling his team, and using a coaching approach to get them to step up and take on the responsibility he had previously taken on their
- He had to continue exercising that discernment.

What do you need to stop doing, start doing and continue doing?

7. Expect setbacks

My clients want positive change to occur, but the reality is, even when a client has a win, they can experience a setback or even fall off the wagon. Dave had several breakthroughs on Pleasing Others and delegation but ran into situations where he lapsed right back into full blown Pleasing others. It was like he developed...

8. Amnesia

It's like he forgot that he achieved the breakthrough! He started delegating... which empowered his team... which made them happy... which ticked his box to Please others... and then he stopped delegating effectively... and started... Pleasing others, again! The goal is to pay attention.

9. Don't try and do it alone

You might have noticed that Dave was not alone on this journey. His CEO was supportive, his team aligned behind him, and his wife was very supportive. His mates encouraged the new Dave. And he had a coach.

This required Dave to open up and be vulnerable at times with the people around him who all wanted him to succeed. If you are doing this alone, in almost all cases, you will be doing it the hardest way. If you are using the book only, for best results try and do it with a trusted colleague.

10. Have fun and enjoy the journey.

Understand, as Dave's coach, I was holding him accountable for close on nine months. At times I had to call Dave out on his behaviours, thinking and feelings. At times that was difficult for Dave. But Dave started to enjoy the ride... whatever obstacles and challenges showed up. Remember, Dave was aiming to improve his leadership skills. As we progressed, and as Dave leaned in, his development accelerated... naturally... and he started to look forward to the leadership coaching sessions and following through. It even became fun and enjoyable.

There are other hacks but these are definitely my top ten if you want to make the changes bigger and sooner, and at a sustainable pace.

And of course, if you need help contact me.

Change Your Life In 5

In 2020, I published my first book, *Change Your Life In 5* which asks you to *Clarify, Conquer, Choose, Celebrate* and *Commit* in order to significantly change the things in your personal and professional life that you are unhappy with.



Using proven tools, visualisations, and journaling techniques you are able to discover what exactly is stopping you from living the life you want.

Specifically:

- **Clarify** what's really important to you, how you feel right now, your values and purpose.
- **Conquer** self-sabotaging voices, fears and doubts.
- **Choose** fresh, new, positive, healthy ways of looking at your personal and professional life and how to change anything you are not satisfied with.

- **Celebrate** your achievements, be kinder to yourself and learn how to switch off a busy brain and beat imposter syndrome
- **Commit** to putting your self first, reducing stress and making incremental changes every day.

In addition to coaching, my clients will usually also work through the exercises in *Change Your Life in 5* because they consolidate what they are discussing in the active coaching sessions.

This is a remarkable resource and a perfect companion to *Screw Meditation!* because it takes the concepts in this book that much deeper. It is available worldwide on Amazon in digital and paperback versions.

Here's a link: <https://a.co/d/hupHpKc>

You can either get it from Amazon at full price, or for free directly from my website (just pay p+p):

<https://coaching.suebelton.com/freebookoffer>

Take Action



Let's just recap.

We've looked at what you might be doing now, your busy brain you can't switch off and why you can't meditate. Then we've gone through the top six hacks:

Hopefully now you've realized that this is an inside job contrary to your former beliefs. It is not just the way it is. You absolutely do have a choice, and can do something about this.

There are now two options:

- Do it yourself
- Work with me

1. Do It Yourself

As you have just read, there's lots you can do for yourself.

You've now got the top-line information and some potential quick wins – you now have much more self-awareness, plus a whole load of actions that you can take. Like Dave, you now know how to switch off your busy brain, have your brain work better, and enjoy your life more.

2. Done With You

Now, if you do want to go further, if you do want to do a more intense, deeper dive into this work, you can work with me in four ways:

- **Conscious Leader Programme:** This is the programme that Dave is continuing to do with me. It's a 1-1 personalised leadership development programme, incorporating the six hacks.
- **121 SM! Programme:** A 1-1 personalised coaching programme taking you through and supporting you implement the hacks into your daily life.
- **6-Week SM! Masterclass Series:** This is a much deeper dive into the six hacks, over a six week period. There's implementation exercises, accountability and a cohort by your side as you go through the process of making the changes.
- **In-House SM! Workshop / Masterclass Series:** If you're working for an organization, if you're an HR director, or senior leader or want to refer me into your business, these are the other options for you. I'm delivering: a 90 minute SM! SM! One Day Intensive; and the SM! Masterclass Series all in-house for organisations.

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If you're interested in any of these, scan the QR code to book a call with me:



Or email me directly: sue@suebelton.com

Ultimately, the best strategy is to take action.

What course do you choose?

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Thank you to my fabulous close circle of girlfriends aka my sisters. You know who you are, and you have been with me every step of this tumultuous journey.

Thank you to you, you brave reader. If you're reading this you'll no doubt know the pain of working too much. You'll also know the pain of not being able to stop, despite the costs. Hopefully now you know you can, but that it will take hard work.

And I know you can do hard.

About Sue Belton

Sue Belton is an Award-Winning Leadership Coach, Best-Selling Author and Speaker.

She specialises in working with senior leaders and established founders who have a great track record, but who know they need to become a lot more strategic to grow their team and business.



She works with them to develop their resilience, strategising, empathy, adaptability, influence, and ability to create high-performing teams.

London based, her global clients include established SME founders, senior professionals and C-level executives in large multinational companies such as Zuhlke, Virgin Wines, Curtis Brown, Costain, and Generali.

She has been awarded Best Coach, Female Entrepreneur of the Year, she's the best-selling author of *Change Your Life in 5: How to make meaningful changes in your life*, and her podcast *Change Makers*, has been downloaded in twenty eight countries.

Results-focused, she knows it's win-win: when leaders focus on their own performance and development, they and their teams become happier, perform better, and get better results for the business.

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