

1 Embrace Reality and Deal with It

There is nothing more important than understanding how reality works and how to deal with it. The state of mind you bring to this process makes all the difference. I have found it helpful to think of my life as if it were a game in which each problem I face is a puzzle I need to solve. By solving the puzzle, I get a gem in the form of a principle that helps me avoid the same sort of problem in the future. Collecting these gems continually improves my decision making, so I am able to ascend to higher and higher levels of play in which the game gets harder and the stakes become ever greater.

All sorts of emotions come to me while I am playing and those emotions can either help me or hurt me. If I can reconcile my emotions with my logic and only act when they are aligned, I make better decisions.

Learning how reality works, visualizing the things I want to create, and then building them out is incredibly exciting to me. Stretching for big goals puts me in the position of failing and needing to learn and come up with new inventions in order to move forward. I find it exhilarating being caught up in the feedback loop of rapid learning—just as a surfer loves riding a wave, even though it sometimes leads to crashes. Don't get me wrong, I'm still scared of the crashes and I still find them painful. But I keep that pain in perspective, knowing that I will get through these setbacks and that most of my learning will come from reflecting on them.¹⁴ Just as long-distance runners push through pain to experience the pleasure of “runner's high,” I have largely gotten past the pain of my mistake making and instead enjoy the pleasure that comes with learning from it. I believe that with practice you can change your habits and experience the same “mistake learner's high.”

could largely be one and the same and mutually reinforcing. Over time I learned that getting more out of life wasn't just a matter of working harder at it. It was much more a matter of working effectively, because working effectively could increase my capacity by hundreds of times. I don't care what you want or how hard you want to work for it. That's for you to decide. I'm just trying to pass along to you what has helped me get the most out of each hour of time and each unit of effort.

Most importantly, I've learned that there is no escaping the fact that:

1.2 Truth—or, more precisely, an accurate understanding of reality—is the essential foundation for any good outcome.

Most people fight seeing what's true when it's not what they want it to be. That's bad, because it is more important to understand and deal with the bad stuff since the good stuff will take care of itself.

Do you agree with that? If not, you are unlikely to benefit from what follows. If you do agree, let's build on it.

1.3 Be radically open-minded and radically transparent.

None of us is born knowing what is true; we either have to discover what's true for ourselves or believe and follow others. The key is to know which path will yield better results.¹⁵ I believe that:

a. Radical open-mindedness and radical transparency are invaluable for rapid learning and effective change. Learning is the product of a continuous real-time feedback loop in which we make decisions, see their outcomes, and improve our understanding of reality as a result. Being radically open-minded enhances the efficiency of those feedback loops, because it makes what you are doing, and why, so clear to yourself and others that there can't be any misunderstandings. The more open-minded you are, the less likely you are to deceive yourself—and the more likely it is that others will give you honest

feedback. If they are “believable” people (and it’s very important to know who is “believable”¹⁶), you will learn a lot from them.

Being radically transparent and radically open-minded accelerates this learning process. It can also be difficult because being radically transparent rather than more guarded exposes one to criticism. It’s natural to fear that. Yet if you don’t put yourself out there with your radical transparency, you won’t learn.

b. Don’t let fears of what others think of you stand in your way. You must be willing to do things in the unique ways you think are best—and to open-mindedly reflect on the feedback that comes inevitably as a result of being that way.

Learning to be radically transparent is like learning to speak in public: While it’s initially awkward, the more you do it, the more comfortable you will be with it. This has been true for me. For example, I still instinctively find being as radically transparent in the ways that I am in this book uncomfortable because I am exposing personal material to the public that will attract attention and criticism. Yet I am doing it because I’ve learned that it’s best, and I wouldn’t feel good about myself if I let my fears stand in the way. In other words, I have experienced the positive effects of radical transparency for so long that it’s now uncomfortable for me not to be that way.

Besides giving me the freedom to be me, it has allowed me to understand others and for them to understand me, which is much more efficient and much more enjoyable than not having this understanding. Imagine how many fewer misunderstandings we would have and how much more efficient the world would be—and how much closer we all would be to knowing what’s true—if instead of hiding what they think, people shared it openly. I’m not talking about everyone’s very personal inner secrets; I’m talking about people’s opinions of each other and of how the world works. As you’ll see, I’ve learned firsthand how powerful this kind of radical truth and transparency is in improving my decision making and my relationships. So whenever I’m faced with the choice, my instinct is to be transparent. I practice it as a discipline and I recommend you do the same.

c. Embracing radical truth and radical transparency will bring more meaningful work and more meaningful relationships. My experience, based on watching thousands of people try this approach, is that with practice the vast majority find it so rewarding and pleasurable that they have a hard time operating any other way.

This takes practice and changing one's habits. I have found that it typically takes about eighteen months, which is how long it takes to change most habits.

1.4 Look to nature to learn how reality works.

All the laws of reality were given to us by nature. Man didn't create these laws, but by understanding them we can use them to foster our own evolution and achieve our goals. For example, our ability to fly or to send cell phone signals around the world came from understanding and applying the existing rules of reality—the physical laws or principles that govern the natural world.

While I spend most of my time studying the realities that affect me most directly—those that drive economies, the markets, and the people I deal with—I also spend time in nature and can't help reflecting on how it works by observing, reading, and speaking with some of the greatest specialists on the subject. I've found it both interesting and valuable to observe which laws we humans have in common with the rest of nature and which differentiate us. Doing that has had a big impact on my approach to life.

First of all, I see how cool it is that the brain's evolution gave us the ability to reflect on how reality works in this way. Man's most distinctive quality is our singular ability to look down on reality from a higher perspective and synthesize an understanding of it. While other species operate by following their instincts, man alone can go above himself and look at himself within his circumstances and within time (including before and after his existence). For example, we can ponder the ways that nature's flying machines, swimming machines, and billions of other machines, from the microscopic to the cosmic, interact with one another to make up a working whole that evolves through time. This is because the evolution of the brain gave man a much more developed neocortex, which gives us the power to think abstractly and logically.

While our higher-level thinking makes us unique among species, it can also make us uniquely confused. Other species have much simpler and more straightforward lives, without any of man's wrestling with what's good and what's bad. In contrast with animals, most people struggle to reconcile their emotions and their instincts (which come from the animal parts of their

brains) with their reasoning (which comes from parts of the brain more developed in humans). This struggle causes people to confuse what they want to be true with what actually is true. Let's look at this dilemma to try to understand how reality works.

When trying to understand anything—economies, markets, the weather, whatever—one can approach the subject with two perspectives:

1. **Top down:** By trying to find the one code/law that drives them all. For example, in the case of markets, one could study universal laws like supply and demand that affect all economies and markets. In the case of species, one could focus on learning how the genetic code (DNA) works for all species.
2. **Bottom up:** By studying each specific case and the codes/laws that are true for them, for example, the codes or laws particular to the market for wheat or the DNA sequences that make ducks different from other species.

Seeing things from the top down is the best way to understand ourselves and the laws of reality within the context of overarching universal laws. That's not to say it's not worth having a bottom-up perspective. In fact, to understand the world accurately you need both. By taking a bottom-up perspective that looks at each individual case, we can see how it lines up with our theories about the laws that we expect to govern it. When they line up, we're good.

By looking at nature from the top down, we can see that much of what we call human nature is really animal nature. That's because the human brain is programmed with millions of years of genetic learning that we share with other species. Because we share common roots and common laws, we and other animals have similar attributes and constraints. For example, the male/female sexual reproduction process, using two eyes to provide depth perception, and many other systems are shared by many species in the animal kingdom. Similarly, our brains have some "animal" parts that are much older in evolutionary terms than humanity is. These laws that we have in common are the most overarching ones. They wouldn't be apparent to us if we just looked at ourselves.

If you just looked at one species—ducks, for example—to try to understand the universal laws, you'd fail. Similarly, if you just looked at mankind to understand the universal laws, you'd fail. Man is just one of ten

million species and just one of the billions of manifestations of the forces that bring together and take apart atoms through time. Yet most people are like ants focused only on themselves and their own anthill; they believe the universe revolves around people and don't pay attention to the universal laws that are true for all species.

To try to figure out the universal laws of reality and principles for dealing with it, I've found it helpful to try to look at things from nature's perspective. While mankind is very intelligent in relation to other species, we have the intelligence of moss growing on a rock compared to nature as a whole. We are incapable of designing and building a mosquito, let alone all the species and most of the other things in the universe. So I start from the premise that nature is smarter than I am and try to let nature teach me how reality works.

a. Don't get hung up on your views of how things "should" be because you will miss out on learning how they really are. It's important not to let our biases stand in the way of our objectivity. To get good results, we need to be analytical rather than emotional.

Whenever I observe something in nature that I (or mankind) think is wrong, I assume that *I'm* wrong and try to figure out why what nature is doing makes sense. That has taught me a lot. It has changed my thinking about 1) what's good and what's bad, 2) what my purpose in life is, and 3) what I should do when faced with my most important choices. To help explain why, I will give you a simple example.

When I went to Africa a number of years ago, I saw a pack of hyenas take down a young wildebeest. My reaction was visceral. I felt empathy for the wildebeest and thought that what I had witnessed was horrible. But was that because it *was* horrible or was it because I am biased to believe it's horrible when it is actually wonderful? That got me thinking. Would the world be a better or worse place if what I'd seen hadn't occurred? That perspective drove me to consider the second- and third-order consequences so that I could see that the world would be worse. I now realize that nature optimizes for the whole, not for the individual, but most people judge good and bad based only on how it affects them. What I had seen was the process of nature at work, which is much more effective at furthering the improvement of the whole than any process man has ever invented.

Most people call something bad if it is bad for them or bad for those they empathize with, ignoring the greater good. This tendency extends to groups:

One religion will consider its beliefs good and another religion's beliefs bad to such an extent that their members might kill each other in the mutual conviction that each is doing what's right. Typically, people's conflicting beliefs or conflicting interests make them unable to see things through another's eyes. That's not good and it doesn't make sense. While I could understand people liking something that helps them and disliking things that hurt them, it doesn't make sense to call something good or bad in an absolute sense based only on how it affects individuals. To do so would presume that what the individual wants is more important than the good of the whole. To me, nature seems to define good as what's good for the whole and optimizes for it, which is preferable. So I have come to believe that as a general rule:

b. To be “good” something must operate consistently with the laws of reality and contribute to the evolution of the whole; that is what is most rewarded. For example, if you come up with something the world values, you almost can't help but be rewarded. Conversely, reality tends to penalize those people, species, and things that don't work well and detract from evolution.¹⁷

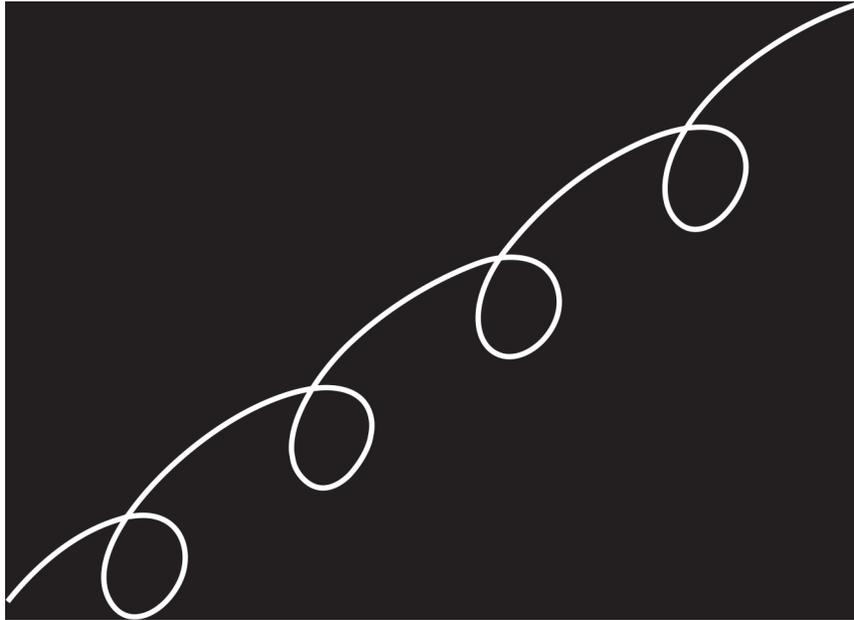
In looking at what is true for everything, I have come to believe that:

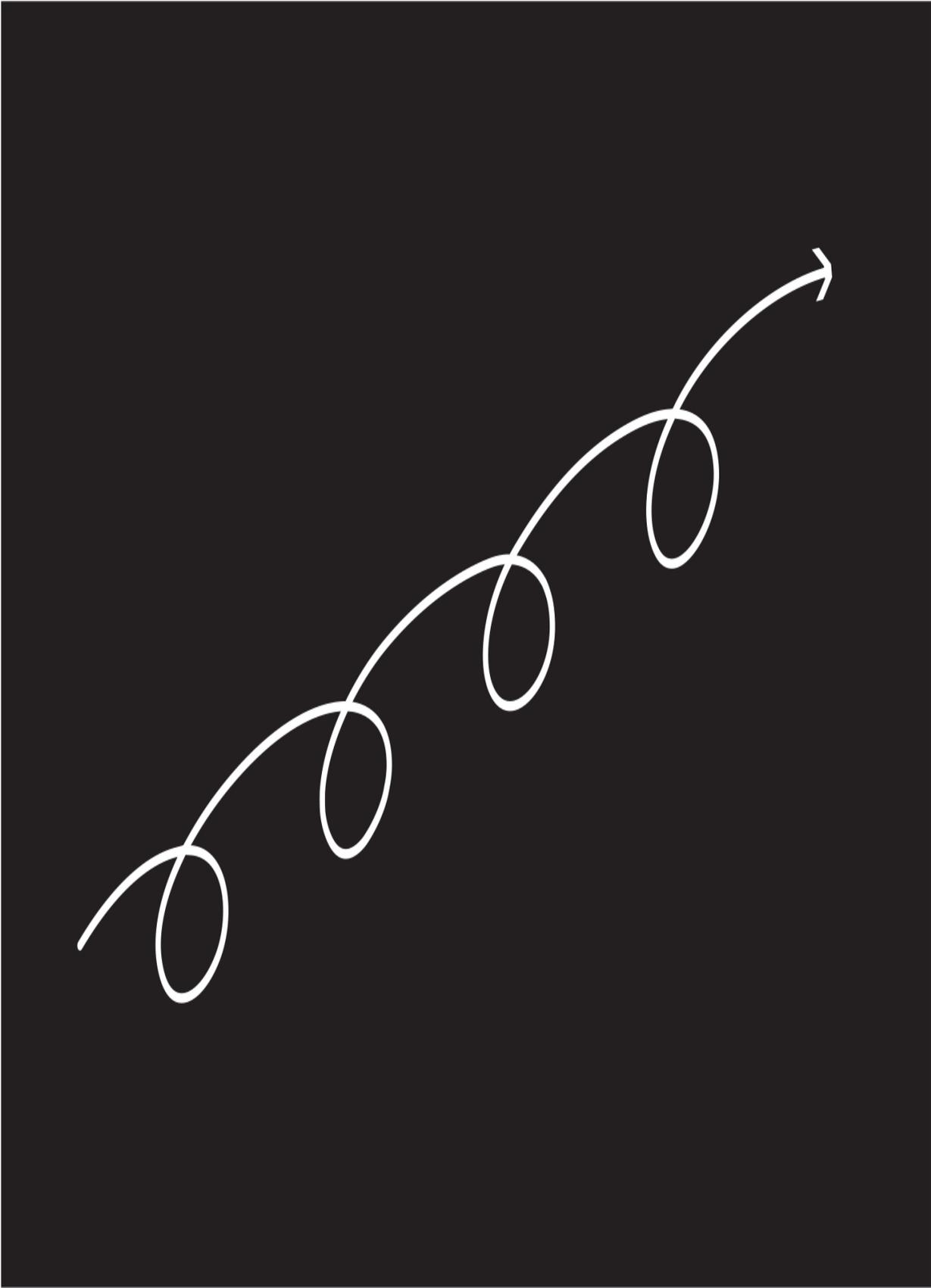
c. Evolution is the single greatest force in the universe; it is the only thing that is permanent and it drives everything.¹⁸ Everything from the smallest subatomic particle to the entire galaxy is evolving. While everything apparently dies or disappears in time, the truth is that it all just gets reconfigured in evolving forms. Remember that energy can't be destroyed—it can only be reconfigured. So the same stuff is continuously falling apart and coalescing in different forms. The force behind that is evolution.

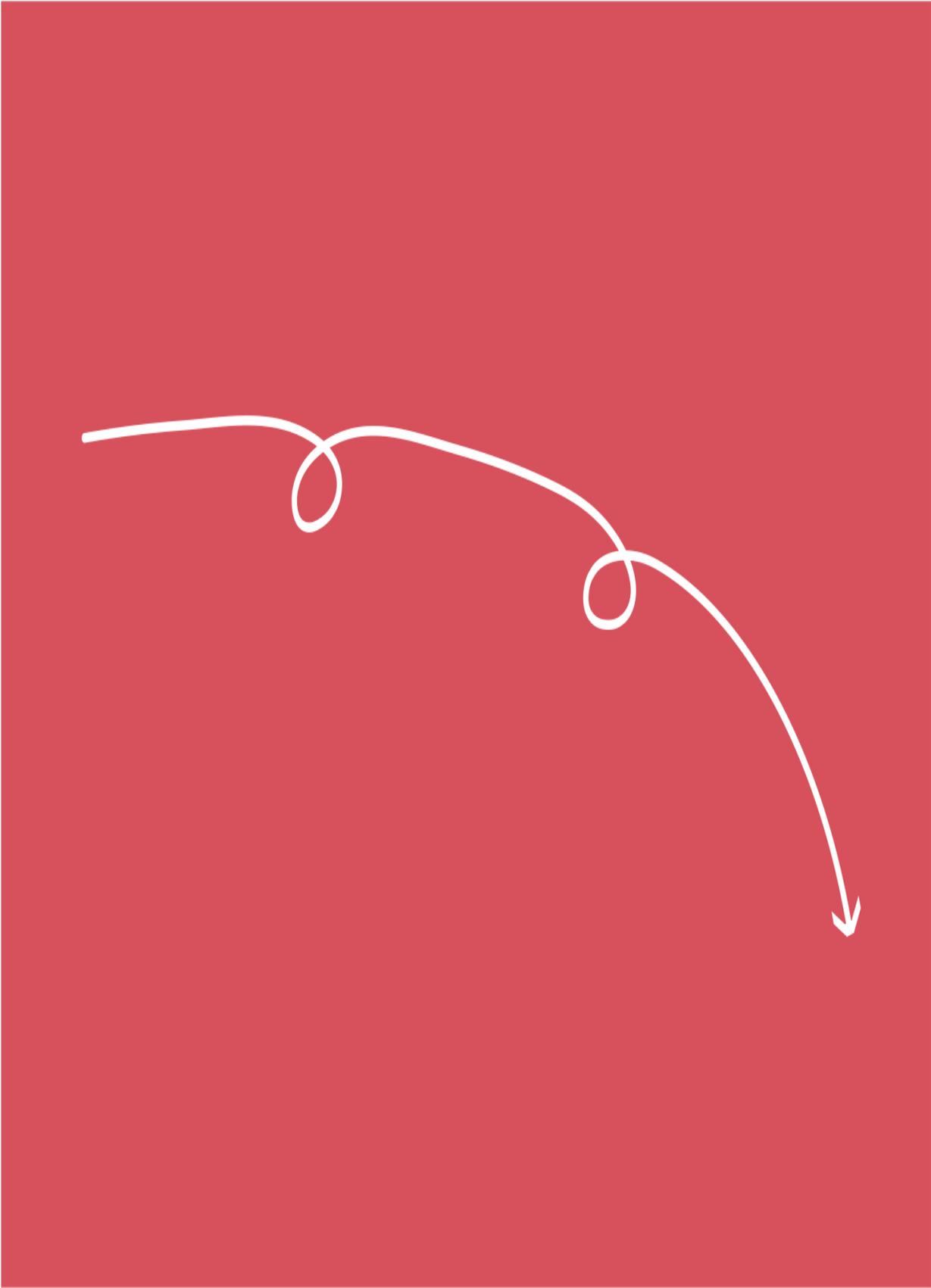
For example, the primary purpose of every living thing is to act as a vessel for the DNA that evolves life through time. The DNA that exists within each individual came from an eternity ago and will continue to live long after its individual carriers pass away, in increasingly evolved forms.¹⁹

As I thought about evolution, I realized that it exists in other forms than life and is carried out through other transmission mechanisms than DNA. Technologies, languages, and everything else evolves. Knowledge, for example, is like DNA in that it is passed from generation to generation and evolves; its impact on people over many generations can be as great or greater than that of the genetic code.

Evolution is good because it is the process of adaptation that generally moves things toward improvement. All things such as products, organizations, and human capabilities evolve through time in a similar way. It is simply the process by which things either adapt and improve or die. To me this evolutionary process looks like what you see on the right:







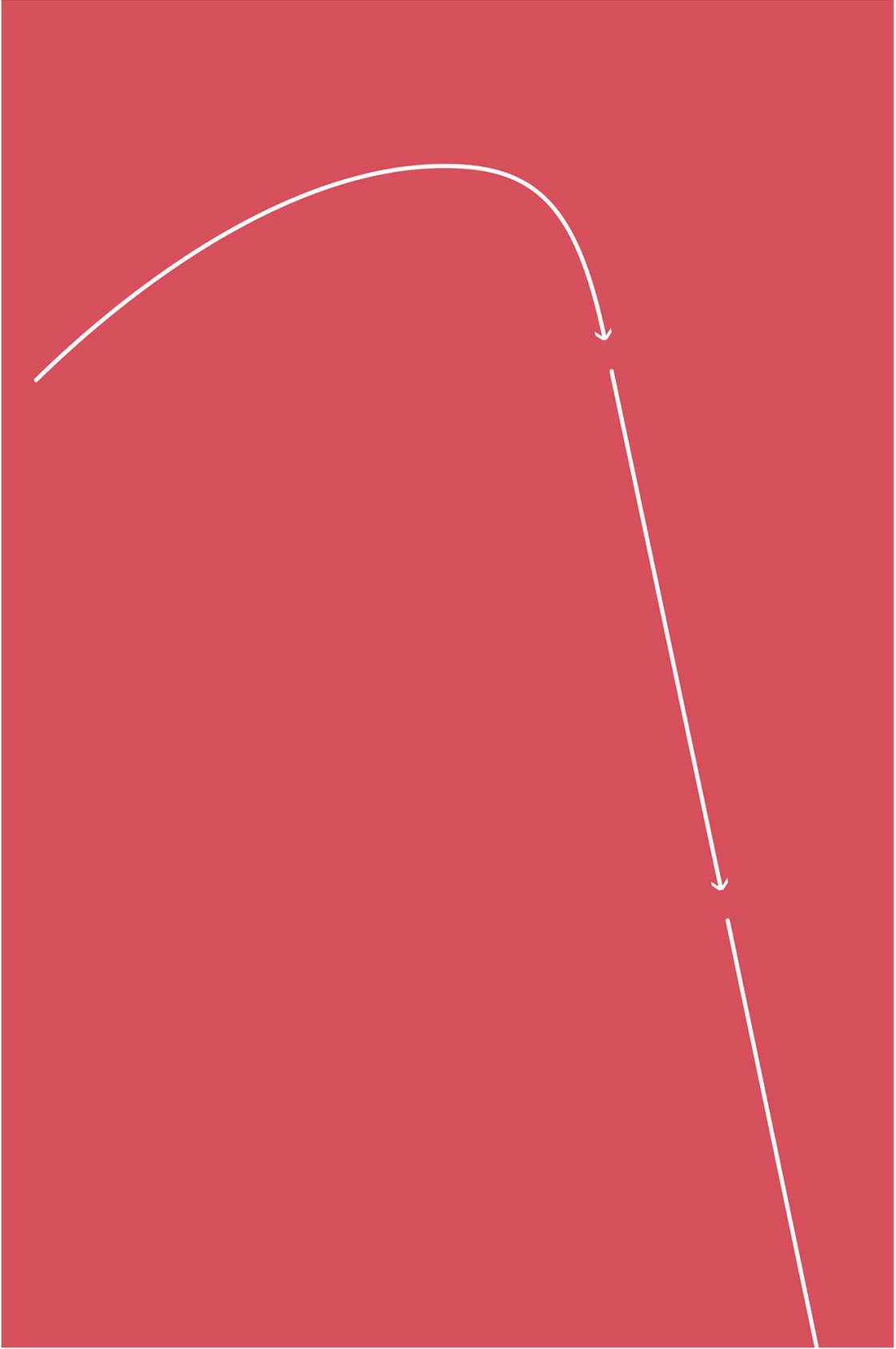
Evolution consists of adaptations/inventions that provide spurts of benefits that decline in value. That painful decline leads either to new adaptations and new inventions that bring new products, organizations, and human capabilities to new and higher levels of development (as shown in the top diagram on the facing page); or decline and death, which looks like the diagram at bottom left.

Think of any product, organization, or person you know and you will see that this is true. The world is littered with once-great things that deteriorated and failed; only a rare few have kept reinventing themselves to go on to new heights of greatness. All machines eventually break down, decompose, and have their parts recycled to create new machines. That includes us. Sometimes this makes us sad because we've become attached to our machines, but if you look at it from the higher level, it's really beautiful to observe how the machine of evolution works.

From this perspective, we can see that perfection doesn't exist; it is a goal that fuels a never-ending process of adaptation. If nature, or anything, were perfect it wouldn't be evolving. Organisms, organizations, and individual people are always highly imperfect but capable of improving. So rather than getting stuck hiding our mistakes and pretending we're perfect, it makes sense to find our imperfections and deal with them. You will either learn valuable lessons from your mistakes and press on, better equipped to succeed—or you won't and you will fail.

As the saying goes:

d. Evolve or die. This evolutionary cycle is not just for people but for countries, companies, economies—for everything. And it is naturally self-correcting as a whole, though not necessarily for its parts. For example, if there is too much supply and waste in a market, prices will go down, companies will go out of business, and capacity will be reduced until the supply falls in line with the demand, at which time the cycle will start to move in the opposite direction. Similarly, if an economy turns bad enough, those responsible for running it will make the political and policy changes that are needed—or they will not survive, making room for their replacements to come along. These cycles are continuous and play out in logical ways—and they tend to be self-reinforcing.



The key is to fail, learn, and improve quickly. If you're constantly learning and improving, your evolutionary process will look like the one that's ascending. Do it poorly and it will look like what you see on the left, or worse.

I believe that:

1.5 Evolving is life's greatest accomplishment and its greatest reward.

It is instinctually that way, which is why most of us feel the pull of it—in other words, we instinctively want to get better at things and have created and evolved technology to help us. History has shown that all species will either go extinct or evolve into other species, though with our limited time window that is hard for us to see. But we do know that what we call mankind was simply the result of DNA evolving into a new form about two hundred thousand years ago, and we know that mankind will certainly either go extinct or evolve into a higher state. I personally believe there is a good chance man will begin to evolve at an accelerating pace with the help of man-made technologies that can analyze vast amounts of data and “think” faster and better than we can. I wonder how many centuries it will take for us to evolve into a higher-level species that will be much closer to omniscience than we are now—if we don't destroy ourselves first.

One of the great marvels of nature is how the whole system, which is full of individual organisms acting in their own self-interest and without understanding or guiding what's going on, can create a beautifully operating and evolving whole. While I'm not an expert at this, it seems that it's because evolution has produced a) incentives and interactions that lead to individuals pursuing their own interests and resulting in the advancement of the whole, b) the natural selection process, and c) rapid experimentation and adaptation.

a. The individual's incentives must be aligned with the group's goals. To give you a quick example of nature creating incentives that lead to individuals pursuing their own interests that result in the advancement of the whole, look at sex and natural selection. Nature gave us one hell of an incentive to have sex in the form of the great pleasure it provides, even though the purpose of having

sex is to contribute to the advancement of the DNA. That way, we individually get what we want while contributing to the evolution of the whole.

b. Reality is optimizing for the whole—not for you. Contribute to the whole and you will likely be rewarded. Natural selection leads to better qualities being retained and passed along (e.g., in better genes, better abilities to nurture others, better products, etc.). The result is a constant cycle of improvement for the whole.

c. Adaptation through rapid trial and error is invaluable. Natural selection’s trial-and-error process allows improvement without anyone understanding or guiding it. The same can apply to how we learn. There are at least three kinds of learning that foster evolution: memory-based learning (storing the information that comes in through one’s conscious mind so that we can recall it later); subconscious learning (the knowledge we take away from our experiences that never enters our conscious minds, though it affects our decision making); and “learning” that occurs without thinking at all, such as the changes in DNA that encode a species’ adaptations. I used to think that memory-based, conscious learning was the most powerful, but I’ve since come to understand that it produces less rapid progress than experimentation and adaptation. To give you an example of how nature improves without thinking, just look at the struggle that mankind (with all its thinking) has experienced in trying to outsmart viruses (which don’t even have brains). Viruses are like brilliant chess opponents. By evolving quickly (combining different genetic material across different strains), they keep the smartest minds in the global health community busy thinking up countermeasures to hold them off. Understanding that is especially helpful in an era when computers can run large numbers of simulations replicating the evolutionary process to help us see what works and what doesn’t.

In the next chapter I will describe a process that has helped me, and I believe can help you, evolve quickly. But first I want to emphasize how important your perspective is in trying to decide what is important to you and what to go after.

d. Realize that you are simultaneously everything and nothing—and decide what you want to be. It is a great paradox that individually we are simultaneously everything

and nothing. Through our own eyes, we are everything—e.g., when we die, the whole world disappears. So to most people (and to other species) dying is the worst thing possible, and it is of paramount importance that we have the best life possible. However, when we look down on ourselves through the eyes of nature we are of absolutely no significance. It is a reality that each one of us is only one of about seven billion of our species alive today and that our species is only one of about ten million species on our planet. Earth is just one of about 100 billion planets in our galaxy, which is just one of about two trillion galaxies in the universe. And our lifetimes are only about 1/3,000 of humanity's existence, which itself is only 1/20,000 of the Earth's existence. In other words, we are unbelievably tiny and short-lived and no matter what we accomplish, our impact will be insignificant. At the same time, we instinctually want to matter and to evolve, and we *can* matter a tiny bit—and it's all those tiny bits that add up to drive the evolution of the universe.

The question is *how* we matter and evolve. Do we matter to others (who also don't matter in the grand scope of things) or in some greater sense that we will never actually achieve? Or does it not matter if we matter so we should forget about the question and just enjoy our lives while they last?

e. What you will be will depend on the perspective you have. Where you go in life will depend on how you see things and who and what you feel connected to (your family, your community, your country, mankind, the whole ecosystem, everything). You will have to decide to what extent you will put the interests of others above your own, and which others you will choose to do so for. That's because you will regularly encounter situations that will force you to make such choices.

While such decisions might seem too erudite for your taste, you will make them either consciously or subliminally, and they will be very important.

For me personally, I now find it thrilling to embrace reality, to look down on myself through nature's perspective, and to be an infinitesimally small part of the whole. My instinctual and intellectual goal is simply to evolve and contribute to evolution in some tiny way while I'm here and while I am what I am. At the same time, the things I love most—my work and my relationships—are what motivate me. So, I find how reality and nature work, including how I and everything will decompose and

recompose, beautiful—though emotionally I find the separation from those I care about difficult to appreciate.

1.6 Understand nature’s practical lessons.

I have found understanding how nature and evolution work helpful in a number of ways. Most importantly, it has helped me deal with my realities more effectively and make difficult choices. When I began to look at reality through the perspective of figuring out how it really works, instead of thinking things should be different, I realized that most everything that at first seemed “bad” to me—like rainy days, weaknesses, and even death—was because I held preconceived notions of what I personally wanted. With time, I learned that my initial reaction was because I hadn’t put whatever I was reacting to in the context of the fact that reality is built to optimize for the whole rather than for me.

a. Maximize your evolution. Earlier, I mentioned that the unique abilities of thinking logically, abstractly, and from a higher level are carried out in structures located in the neocortex. These parts of the brain are more developed in humans and allow us to reflect on ourselves and direct our own evolution. Because we are capable of conscious, memory-based learning, we can evolve further and faster than any other species, changing not just across generations but within our own lifetimes.

This constant drive toward learning and improvement makes getting better innately enjoyable and getting better fast exhilarating. Though most people think that they are striving to get the things (toys, bigger houses, money, status, etc.) that will make them happy, for most people those things don’t supply anywhere near the long-term satisfaction that getting better at something does.²⁰ Once we get the things we are striving for, we rarely remain satisfied with them. The things are just the bait. Chasing after them forces us to evolve, and it is the evolution and not the rewards themselves that matters to us and to those around us. This means that for most people success is struggling and evolving as effectively as possible, i.e., learning rapidly about oneself and one’s environment, and then changing to improve.

It is natural that it should be this way because of the law of diminishing returns.²¹ Consider what acquiring money is like. People who earn so much

that they derive little or no marginal gains from it will experience negative consequences, as with any other form of excess, like gluttony. If they are intellectually healthy, they will begin seeking something new or seeking new depths in something old—and they will get stronger in the process. As Freud put it, “Love and work are the cornerstones of our humanness.”

The work doesn’t necessarily have to be a job, though I believe it’s generally better if it is a job. It can be any kind of long-term challenge that leads to personal improvement. As you might have guessed, I believe that the need to have meaningful work is connected to man’s innate desire to improve. And relationships are the natural connections to others that make us relevant to each other and to society more broadly.

b. Remember “no pain, no gain.” Realizing that we innately want to evolve—and that the other stuff we are going after, while nice, won’t sustain our happiness—has helped me focus on my goals of evolving and contributing to evolution in my own infinitely small way. While we don’t like pain, everything that nature made has a purpose, so nature gave us pain for a purpose. So what is its purpose? It alerts us and helps direct us.

c. It is a fundamental law of nature that in order to gain strength one has to push one’s limits, which is painful. As Carl Jung put it, “Man needs difficulties. They are necessary for health.” Yet most people instinctually avoid pain. This is true whether we are talking about building the body (e.g., weight lifting) or the mind (e.g., frustration, mental struggle, embarrassment, shame)—and especially true when people confront the harsh reality of their own imperfections.

1.7 Pain + Reflection = Progress.

There is no avoiding pain, especially if you’re going after ambitious goals. Believe it or not, you are lucky to feel that kind of pain if you approach it correctly, because it is a signal that you need to find solutions so you can progress. If you can develop a reflexive reaction to psychic pain that causes you to reflect on it rather than avoid it, it will lead to your rapid learning/evolving.²² After seeing how much more effective it is to face the painful realities that are caused by your problems, mistakes, and

weaknesses, I believe you won't want to operate any other way. It's just a matter of getting in the habit of doing it.

Most people have a tough time reflecting when they are in pain and they pay attention to other things when the pain passes, so they miss out on the reflections that provide the lessons. If you can reflect well while you're in pain (which is probably too much to ask), great. But if you can remember to reflect after it passes, that's valuable too. (I created a Pain Button app to help people do this, which I describe in the appendix.)

The challenges you face will test and strengthen you. If you're not failing, you're not pushing your limits, and if you're not pushing your limits, you're not maximizing your potential. Though this process of pushing your limits, of sometimes failing and sometimes breaking through—and deriving benefits from both your failures and your successes—is not for everyone, if it is for you, it can be so thrilling that it becomes addictive. Life will inevitably bring you such moments, and it'll be up to you to decide whether you want to go back for more.

If you choose to push through this often painful process of personal evolution, you will naturally “ascend” to higher and higher levels. As you climb above the blizzard of things that surrounds you, you will realize that they seem bigger than they really are when you are seeing them up close; that most things in life are just “another one of those.” The higher you ascend, the more effective you become at working with reality to shape outcomes toward your goals. What once seemed impossibly complex becomes simple.

a. Go to the pain rather than avoid it. If you don't let up on yourself and instead become comfortable always operating with some level of pain, you will evolve at a faster pace. That's just the way it is.

Every time you confront something painful, you are at a potentially important juncture in your life—you have the opportunity to choose healthy and painful truth or unhealthy but comfortable delusion. The irony is that if you choose the healthy route, the pain will soon turn into pleasure. The pain is the signal! Like switching from not exercising to exercising, developing the habit of embracing the pain and learning from it will “get you to the other side.”

By “getting to the other side,” I mean that you will become hooked on:

- Identifying, accepting, and learning how to deal with your weaknesses,
- Preferring that the people around you be honest with you rather than keep their negative thoughts about you to themselves, and
- Being yourself rather than having to pretend to be strong where you are weak.

b. Embrace tough love. In my own life, what I want to give to people, most importantly to people I love, is the power to deal with reality to get what they want. In pursuit of my goal to give them strength, I will often deny them what they “want” because that will give them the opportunity to struggle so that they can develop the strength to get what they want on their own. This can be difficult for people emotionally, even if they understand intellectually that having difficulties is the exercise they need to grow strong and that just giving them what they want will weaken them and ultimately lead to them needing more help.²³

Of course most people would prefer not to have weaknesses. Our upbringings and our experiences in the world have conditioned us to be embarrassed by our weaknesses and hide them. But people are happiest when they can be themselves. If you can be open with your weaknesses it will make you freer and will help you deal with them better. I urge you to not be embarrassed about your problems, recognizing that everyone has them. Bringing them to the surface will help you break your bad habits and develop good ones, and you will acquire real strengths and justifiable optimism.

This evolutionary process of productive adaptation and ascent—the process of seeking, obtaining, and pursuing more and more ambitious goals—does not just pertain to how individuals and society move forward. It is equally relevant when dealing with setbacks, which are inevitable. At some point in your life you will crash in a big way. You might fail at your job or with your family, lose a loved one, suffer a serious accident or illness, or discover the life you imagined is out of reach forever. There are a whole host of ways that something will get you. At such times, you will be in pain and might think that you don’t have the strength to go on. You almost always do, however; your ultimate success will depend on you realizing that fact, even though it might not seem that way at the moment.

This is why many people who have endured setbacks that seemed devastating at the time ended up as happy as (or even happier than) they

originally were after they successfully adapted to them. The quality of your life will depend on the choices you make at those painful moments. The faster one appropriately adapts, the better.²⁴ No matter what you want out of life, your ability to adapt and move quickly and efficiently through the process of personal evolution will determine your success and your happiness. If you do it well, you can change your psychological reaction to it so that what was painful can become something you crave.

1.8 Weigh second- and third-order consequences.

By recognizing the higher-level consequences nature optimizes for, I've come to see that people who overweigh the first-order consequences of their decisions and ignore the effects of second- and subsequent-order consequences rarely reach their goals. This is because first-order consequences often have opposite desirabilities from second-order consequences, resulting in big mistakes in decision making. For example, the first-order consequences of exercise (pain and time spent) are commonly considered undesirable, while the second-order consequences (better health and more attractive appearance) are desirable. Similarly, food that tastes good is often bad for you and vice versa.

Quite often the first-order consequences are the temptations that cost us what we really want, and sometimes they are the barriers that stand in our way. It's almost as though nature sorts us by throwing us trick choices that have both types of consequences and penalizing those who make their decisions on the basis of the first-order consequences alone.

By contrast, people who choose what they really want, and avoid the temptations and get over the pains that drive them away from what they really want, are much more likely to have successful lives.

1.9 Own your outcomes.

For the most part, life gives you so many decisions to make and so many opportunities to recover from your mistakes that, if you handle them well,

you can have a terrific life. Of course, sometimes there are major influences on the quality of our lives that come from things beyond our control—the circumstances we are born into, accidents and illnesses, and so forth—but for the most part even the worst circumstances can be made better with the right approach. For example, a friend of mine dove into a swimming pool, hit his head, and became a quadriplegic. But he approached his situation well and became as happy as anybody else, because there are many paths to happiness.

My point is simply this: Whatever circumstances life brings you, you will be more likely to succeed and find happiness if you take responsibility for making your decisions well instead of complaining about things being beyond your control. Psychologists call this having an “internal locus of control,” and studies consistently show that people who have it outperform those who don’t.

So don’t worry about whether you like your situation or not. Life doesn’t give a damn about what you like. It’s up to you to connect what you want with what you need to do to get it and then find the courage to carry it through. In the next chapter I will show you the 5-Step Process that helped me learn about reality and evolve.

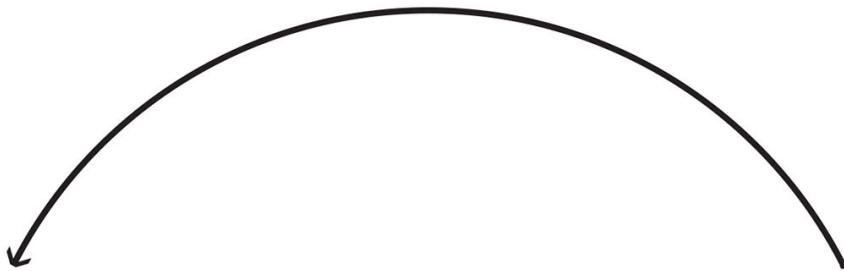
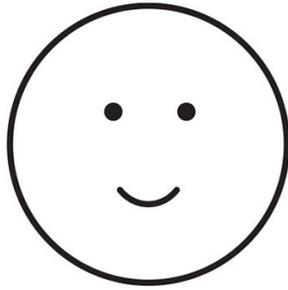
1.10 Look at the machine from the higher level.

Our uniquely human ability to look down from a higher level doesn’t apply just to understanding reality and the cause-effect relationships underlying it; it also applies to looking down on yourself and those around you. I call this ability to rise above your own and others’ circumstances and objectively look down on them “higher-level thinking.” Higher-level thinking gives you the ability to study and influence the cause-effect relationships at play in your life and use them to get the outcomes you want.

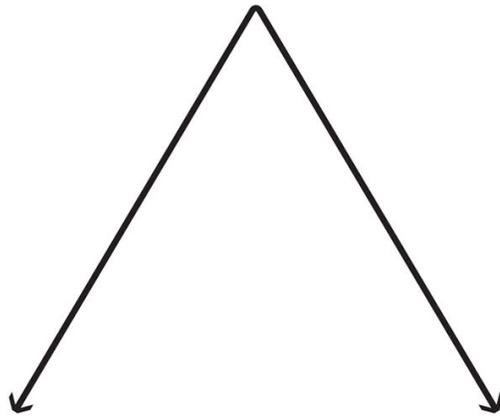
a. Think of yourself as a machine operating within a machine and know that you have the ability to alter your machines to produce better outcomes. You have your goals. I call the way you will operate to achieve your goals your machine. It consists of a design (the things that have to get done) and the people (who will do the things that need getting done). Those people include you and those who help you. For example, imagine that your goal is a military one: to take a

hill from an enemy. Your design for your “machine” might include two scouts, two snipers, four infantrymen, and so on. While the right design is essential, it is only half the battle. It is equally important to put the right people in each of those positions. They need different qualities to do their jobs well—the scouts must be fast runners, the snipers must be good marksmen—so that the machine will produce the outcomes you seek.

b. By comparing your outcomes with your goals, you can determine how to modify your machine. This evaluation and improvement process exactly mirrors the evolutionary process I described earlier. It means looking at how to improve or change the design or people to achieve your goals. Schematically, the process is a feedback loop, as shown in the diagram on the opposite page.



GOALS → **MACHINE** → **OUTCOMES**



DESIGN ↔ **PEOPLE**

c. Distinguish between you as the designer of your machine and you as a worker with your machine. One of the hardest things for people to do is to objectively look down on themselves within their circumstances (i.e., their machine) so that they can act as the machine's designer and manager. Most people remain stuck in the perspective of being a worker within the machine. If you can recognize the differences between those roles and that it is much more important that you are a good designer/manager of your life than a good worker in it, you will be on the right path. To be successful, the "designer/manager you" has to be objective about what the "worker you" is really like, not believing in him more than he deserves, or putting him in jobs he shouldn't be in. Instead of having this strategic perspective, most people operate emotionally and in the moment; their lives are a series of undirected emotional experiences, going from one thing to the next. If you want to look back on your life and feel you've achieved what you wanted to, you can't operate that way.

d. The biggest mistake most people make is to not see themselves and others objectively, which leads them to bump into their own and others' weaknesses again and again. People who do this fail because they are stubbornly stuck in their own heads. If they could just get around this, they could live up to their potential.

This is why higher-level thinking is essential for success.

e. Successful people are those who can go above themselves to see things objectively and manage those things to shape change. They can take in the perspectives of others instead of being trapped in their own heads with their own biases. They are able to look objectively at what they are like—their strengths and weaknesses—and what others are like to put the right people in the right roles to achieve their goals. Once you understand how to do this you'll see that there's virtually nothing you can't accomplish. You will just have to learn how to face your realities and use the full range of resources at your disposal. For example, if you as the designer/manager discover that you as the worker can't do something well, you need to fire yourself as the worker and get a good replacement, while staying in the role of designer/manager of your own life. You shouldn't be upset if you find out that you're bad at something—you should be happy that you found out, because knowing that and dealing with it will improve your chances of getting what you want.

If you are disappointed because you can't be the best person to do everything yourself, you are terribly naive. Nobody can do everything well. Would you want to have Einstein on your basketball team? When he fails to dribble and shoot well, would you think badly of him? Should he feel humiliated? Imagine all the areas in which Einstein was incompetent, and imagine how hard he struggled to excel even in the areas in which he was the best in the world.

Watching people struggle and having others watch you struggle can elicit all kinds of ego-driven emotions such as sympathy, pity, embarrassment, anger, or defensiveness. You need to get over all that and stop seeing struggling as something negative. Most of life's greatest opportunities come out of moments of struggle; it's up to you to make the most of these tests of creativity and character.

When encountering your weaknesses you have four choices:

1. You can deny them (which is what most people do).
2. You can accept them and work at them in order to try to convert them into strengths (which might or might not work depending on your ability to change).
3. You can accept your weaknesses and find ways around them.
4. Or, you can change what you are going after.

Which solution you choose will be critically important to the direction of your life. The worst path you can take is the first. Denial can only lead to your constantly banging up against your weaknesses, having pain, and not getting anywhere. The second—accepting your weaknesses while trying to turn them into strengths—is probably the best path if it works. But some things you will never be good at and it takes a lot of time and effort to change. The best single clue as to whether you should go down this path is whether the thing you are trying to do is consistent with your nature (i.e., your natural abilities). The third path—accepting your weaknesses while trying to find ways around them—is the easiest and typically the most viable path, yet it is the one least followed. The fourth path, changing what you are going after, is also a great path, though it requires flexibility on your part to get past your preconceptions and enjoy the good fit when you find it.

f. Asking others who are strong in areas where you are weak to help you is a great skill that you should develop no matter what, as it will help you develop guardrails that will prevent you from doing what you shouldn't be doing. All successful people are good at this.

g. Because it is difficult to see oneself objectively, you need to rely on the input of others and the whole body of evidence. I know that my own life has been full of mistakes and lots of great feedback. It was only by looking down on this body of evidence from a higher level that I was able to get around my mistakes and go after what I wanted. For as long as I have been practicing this, I still know I can't see myself objectively, which is why I continue to rely so much on the input of others.

h. If you are open-minded enough and determined, you can get virtually anything you want. So I certainly don't want to dissuade you from going after whatever you want. At the same time, I urge you to reflect on whether what you are going after is consistent with your nature. Whatever your nature is, there are many paths that will suit you, so don't fixate on just one. Should a particular path close, all you have to do is find another good one consistent with what you're like. (You'll learn a lot about how to determine what you're like later, in *Understand That People Are Wired Very Differently*.)

But most people lack the courage to confront their own weaknesses and make the hard choices that this process requires. Ultimately, it comes down to the following five decisions:

1. Don't confuse what you wish were true with what is really true.
2. Don't worry about looking good—worry instead about achieving your goals.
3. Don't overweight first-order consequences relative to second- and third-order ones.
4. Don't let pain stand in the way of progress.
5. Don't blame bad outcomes on anyone but yourself.

14 I'm sure Transcendental Meditation, which I have been practicing regularly for nearly half a century, helped provide me with the equanimity I needed to approach my challenges this way.

15 You shouldn't assume that you are always the best person to make decisions for yourself because often you aren't. While it is up to us to know what we want, others may know how to get it better than we do because they have strengths where we have weaknesses, or more relevant knowledge and experience. For example, it's probably better for you to follow your doctor's advice than your own if you have a medical condition. Later in this book, we will look at some of the different ways people's brains are wired and how our understanding of our own wiring should influence which choices we

make for ourselves and which we should delegate to others. Knowing when not to make your own decisions is one of the most important skills you can develop.

16 I'll explain the concept of believability in more detail in later chapters, but to cover it quickly: Believable parties are those who have repeatedly and successfully accomplished something—and have great explanations for how they did it.

17 There are many things people consider “good” in the sense that they are kind or considerate but fail to deliver what's desired (like communism's “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”). Nature would appear to consider them “bad,” and I'd agree with nature.

18 Everything other than evolution eventually disintegrates; we all are, and everything else is, vehicles for evolution. For example, while we see ourselves as individuals, we are essentially vessels for our genes that have lived millions of years and continuously use and shed bodies like ours.

19 I recommend Richard Dawkins's and E. O. Wilson's books on evolution. If I had to pick just one, it would be Dawkins's *River Out of Eden*.

20 Of course, we are often satisfied with the same things—relationships, careers, etc.—but when that is the case, it is typically because we are getting new enjoyments from the changing dimensions of those things.

21 The marginal benefits of moving from a shortage to an abundance of anything decline.

22 Your unique power of reflectiveness—your ability to look at yourself, the world around you, and the relationship between you and the world—means that you can think deeply and weigh subtle things to come up with learning and wise choices. Asking other believable people about the root causes of your pain in order to enhance your reflections is also typically very helpful—especially others who have opposing views but who share your interest in finding the truth rather than being proven right. If you can reflect deeply about your problems, they almost always shrink or disappear, because you almost always find a better way of dealing with them than if you don't face them head-on.

23 To be clear, I am not saying people should not be helped. I believe that people should be helped by giving them opportunities and the coaching they need to become strong enough to take advantage of their opportunities. As the saying goes, “God helps those who help themselves.” But this isn't easy, especially with people you care about. To be effective in helping people learn from painful experiences, you must explain the logic and caring behind what you're doing clearly and repeatedly. As you read in “*Where I'm Coming From*,” this was a large part of what compelled me to explain my principles.

24 Your ability to see the changing landscape and adapt is more a function of your perception and reasoning than your ability to learn and process quickly.

BAD

Avoid facing “harsh realities.”

GOOD

Face “harsh realities.”

BAD

Worry about appearing good.

GOOD

Worry about achieving the goal.

BAD

**Make your decisions on the basis
of first-order consequences.**

GOOD

**Make your decisions on the basis
of first-, second-, and third-order
consequences.**

BAD

**Allow pain to stand in the way of
progress.**

GOOD

**Understand how to manage pain
to produce progress.**

BAD

**Don't hold yourself and others
accountable.**

GOOD

**Hold yourself and others
accountable.**

2 Use the 5-Step Process to Get What You Want Out of Life

It seems to me that the personal evolutionary process—the looping I described in the last chapter—takes place in five distinct steps. If you can do those five things well, you will almost certainly be successful. Here they are in a nutshell:

1. Have clear goals.
2. Identify and don't tolerate the problems that stand in the way of your achieving those goals.
3. Accurately diagnose the problems to get at their root causes.
4. Design plans that will get you around them.
5. Do what's necessary to push these designs through to results.

Together, these five steps make up a loop, like the one on the facing page. Let's look at this process more granularly.

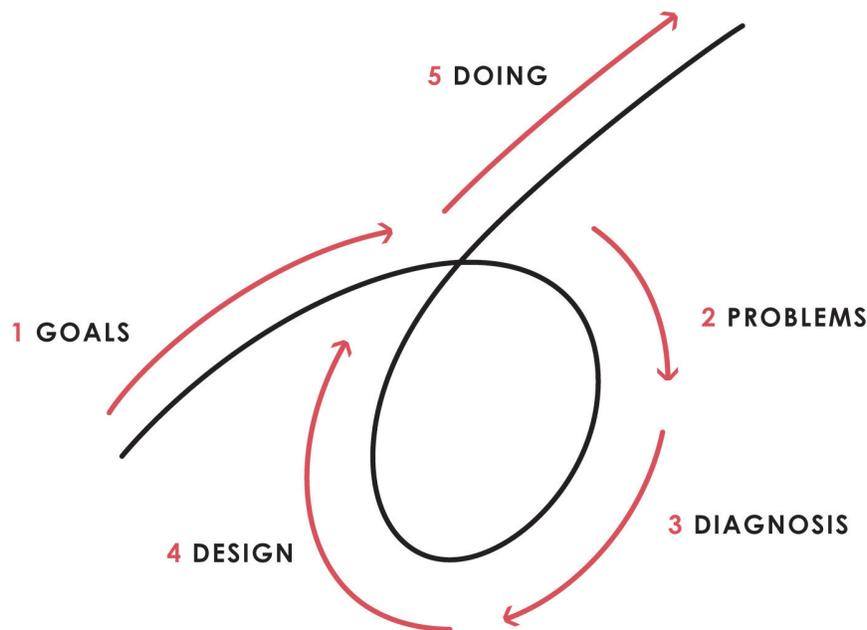
First you have to pick what you are going after—your **goals**. Your choice of goals will determine your direction. As you move toward them, you will encounter **problems**. Some of those problems will bring you up against your own weaknesses. How you react to the pain that causes is up to you. If you want to reach your goals, you must be calm and analytical so that you can accurately **diagnose** your problems, **design** a plan that will get you around them, and **do** what's necessary to push through to results. Then you will look at the new results you achieve and go through the process again. To evolve quickly, you will have to do this fast and continuously, setting your goals successively higher.

You will need to do all five steps well to be successful and you must do them one at a time and in order. For example, when setting goals, just set goals. Don't think about how you will achieve them or what you will do if

something goes wrong. When you are diagnosing problems, don't think about how you will solve them—just diagnose them. Blurring the steps leads to suboptimal outcomes because it interferes with uncovering the true problems. The process is iterative: Doing each step thoroughly will provide you with the information you need to move on to the next step and do it well.

It is essential that you approach this process in a clearheaded, rational way, looking down on yourself from a higher level and being ruthlessly honest. If your emotions are getting the better of you, step back and take time out until you can reflect clearly. If necessary, seek guidance from calm, thoughtful people.

To help you stay centered and effective, pretend that your life is a martial art or a game, the object of which is to get around a challenge and reach a goal. Once you accept its rules, you'll get used to the discomfort that comes with the constant frustration. You will never handle everything perfectly: Mistakes are inevitable and it's important to recognize and accept this fact of life. The good news is that every mistake you make can teach you something, so there's no end to learning. You'll soon realize that excuses like "that's not easy" or "it doesn't seem fair" or even "I can't do that" are of no value and that it pays to push through.



So what if you don't have all the skills you need to succeed? Don't worry about it because that's true for everyone. You just have to know when they

are needed and where you can go to get them. With practice, you will eventually play this game with a calm unstoppable centeredness in the face of adversity. Your ability to get what you want will thrill you.

Now let's look at how to approach each of the five steps.

2.1 Have clear goals.

a. Prioritize: While you can have virtually anything you want, you can't have everything you want. Life is like a giant smorgasbord with more delicious alternatives than you can ever hope to taste. Choosing a goal often means rejecting some things you want in order to get other things that you want or need even more. Some people fail at this point, before they've even started. Afraid to reject a good alternative for a better one, they try to pursue too many goals at once, achieving few or none of them. Don't get discouraged and don't let yourself be paralyzed by all the choices. You can have much more than what you need to be happy. Make your choice and get on with it.

b. Don't confuse goals with desires. A proper goal is something that you really need to achieve. Desires are things that you want that can prevent you from reaching your goals. Typically, desires are first-order consequences. For example, your goal might be physical fitness, while your desire is to eat good-tasting but unhealthy food. Don't get me wrong, if you want to be a couch potato, that's fine with me. You can pursue whatever goals you want. But if you don't want to be a couch potato, then you better not open that bag of chips.

c. Decide what you really want in life by reconciling your goals and your desires. Take passion, for example. Without passion, life would be dull; you wouldn't want to live without it. But what's key is what you do with your passion. Do you let it consume you and drive you to irrational acts, or do you harness it to motivate and drive you while you pursue your real goals? What will ultimately fulfill you are things that feel right at both levels, as both desires *and* goals.

d. Don't mistake the trappings of success for success itself. Achievement orientation is important, but people who obsess over a \$1,200 pair of shoes or a fancy car

are very rarely happy because they don't know what it is that they really want and hence what will satisfy them.

e. Never rule out a goal because you think it's unattainable. Be audacious. There is always a best possible path. Your job is to find it and have the courage to follow it. What you think is attainable is just a function of what you know at the moment. Once you start your pursuit you will learn a lot, especially if you triangulate with others; paths you never saw before will emerge. Of course there are some impossibilities or near-impossibilities, such as playing center on a professional basketball team if you're short, or running a four-minute mile at age seventy.

f. Remember that great expectations create great capabilities. If you limit your goals to what you *know* you can achieve, you are setting the bar way too low.

g. Almost nothing can stop you from succeeding if you have a) flexibility and b) self-accountability. Flexibility is what allows you to accept what reality (or knowledgeable people) teaches you; self-accountability is essential because if you really believe that failing to achieve a goal is your personal failure, you will see your failing to achieve it as indicative that you haven't been creative or flexible or determined enough to do what it takes. And you will be that much more motivated to find the way.

h. Knowing how to deal well with your setbacks is as important as knowing how to move forward. Sometimes you know that you are going over a waterfall and there is no way to avoid it. Life will throw you such challenges, some of which will seem devastating at the time. In bad times, your goal might be to keep what you have, to minimize your rate of loss, or simply to deal with a loss that is irrevocable. Your mission is to always make the best possible choices, knowing that you will be rewarded if you do.

2.2 Identify and don't tolerate problems.

a. View painful problems as potential improvements that are screaming at you. Though it won't feel that way at first, each and every problem you encounter is an opportunity; for that reason, it is essential that you bring them to the surface. Most people don't like to do this, especially if it exposes their own

weaknesses or the weaknesses of someone they care about, but successful people know they have to.

b. Don't avoid confronting problems because they are rooted in harsh realities that are unpleasant to look at. Thinking about problems that are difficult to solve may make you anxious, but *not* thinking about them (and hence not dealing with them) should make you more anxious still. When a problem stems from your own lack of talent or skill, most people feel shame. Get over it. I cannot emphasize this enough: Acknowledging your weaknesses is not the same as surrendering to them. It's the first step toward overcoming them. The pains you are feeling are "growing pains" that will test your character and reward you as you push through them.

c. Be specific in identifying your problems. You need to be precise, because different problems have different solutions. If a problem is due to inadequate skill, additional training may be called for; if it arises from an innate weakness, you may need to seek assistance from someone else or change the role you play. In other words, if you're bad at accounting, hire an accountant. If a problem stems from someone else's weaknesses, replace them with someone who is strong where it's needed. That's just the way it is.

d. Don't mistake a cause of a problem with the real problem. "I can't get enough sleep" is not a problem; it is a potential cause (or perhaps the result) of a problem. To clarify your thinking, try to identify the bad outcome first; e.g., "I am performing poorly in my job." Not sleeping enough may be the cause of that problem, or the cause may be something else—but in order to determine that, you need to know exactly what the problem is.

e. Distinguish big problems from small ones. You only have so much time and energy; make sure you are investing them in exploring the problems that, if fixed, will yield you the biggest returns. But at the same time, make sure you spend enough time with the small problems to make sure they're not symptoms of larger ones.

f. Once you identify a problem, don't tolerate it. Tolerating a problem has the same consequences as failing to identify it. Whether you tolerate it because you believe it cannot be solved, because you don't care enough to solve it, or because you can't muster enough of whatever it takes to solve it, if you don't

have the will to succeed, then your situation is hopeless. You need to develop a fierce intolerance of badness of any kind, regardless of its severity.

2.3 Diagnose problems to get at their root causes.

a. Focus on the “what is” before deciding “what to do about it.” It is a common mistake to move in a nanosecond from identifying a tough problem to proposing a solution for it. Strategic thinking requires both diagnosis and design. A good diagnosis typically takes between fifteen minutes and an hour, depending on how well it’s done and how complex the issue is. It involves speaking with the relevant people and looking at the evidence together to determine the root causes. Like principles, root causes manifest themselves over and over again in seemingly different situations. Finding them and dealing with them pays dividends again and again.

b. Distinguish proximate causes from root causes. Proximate causes are typically the actions (or lack of actions) that lead to problems, so they are described with verbs (*I missed the train because I didn’t check the train schedule*). Root causes run much deeper and they are typically described with adjectives (*I didn’t check the train schedule because I am forgetful*). You can only truly solve your problems by removing their root causes, and to do that, you must distinguish the symptoms from the disease.

c. Recognize that knowing what someone (including you) is like will tell you what you can expect from them. You will have to get over your reluctance to assess what people are like if you want to surround yourself with people who have the qualities you need. That goes for yourself too. People almost always find it difficult to identify and accept their own mistakes and weaknesses. Sometimes it’s because they’re blind to them, but more often it’s because their egos get in the way. Most likely your associates are equally reluctant to point out your mistakes, because they don’t want to hurt you. You all need to get over this. More than anything else, what differentiates people who live up to their potential from those who don’t is their willingness to look at themselves and others objectively and understand the root causes standing in their way.

2.4 Design a plan.

- a. Go back before you go forward.** Replay the story of where you have been (or what you have done) that led up to where you are now, and then visualize what you and others must do in the future so you will reach your goals.

- b. Think about your problem as a set of outcomes produced by a machine.** Practice higher-level thinking by looking down on your machine and thinking about how it can be changed to produce better outcomes.

- c. Remember that there are typically many paths to achieving your goals.** You only need to find one that works.

- d. Think of your plan as being like a movie script in that you visualize who will do what through time.** Sketch out the plan broadly at first (e.g., “hire great people”) and then refine it. You should go from the big picture and drill down to specific tasks and estimated time lines (e.g., “In the next two weeks, choose the headhunters who will find those great people”). The real-world issues of costs, time, and personnel will undoubtedly surface as you do this, and that will lead you to further refine your design until all the gears in the machine are meshing smoothly.

- e. Write down your plan for everyone to see and to measure your progress against.** This includes all the granular details about who needs to do what tasks and when. The tasks, the narrative, and the goals are different, so don’t mix them up. Remember, the tasks are what connect the narrative to your goals.

- f. Recognize that it doesn’t take a lot of time to design a good plan.** A plan can be sketched out and refined in just hours or spread out over days or weeks. But the process is essential because it determines what you will have to do to be effective. Too many people make the mistake of spending virtually no time on designing because they are preoccupied with execution. Remember: Designing precedes doing!

2.5 Push through to completion.

a. Great planners who don't execute their plans go nowhere. You need to push through and that requires self-discipline to follow your script. It's important to remember the connections between your tasks and the goals that they are meant to achieve. When you feel yourself losing sight of that, stop and ask yourself "why?" Lose sight of the why and you will surely lose sight of your goals.

b. Good work habits are vastly underrated. People who push through successfully have to-do lists that are reasonably prioritized, and they make certain each item is ticked off in order.

c. Establish clear metrics to make certain that you are following your plan. Ideally, someone other than you should be objectively measuring and reporting on your progress. If you're not hitting your targets, that's another problem that needs to be diagnosed and solved. There are many successful, creative people who aren't good at execution. They succeed because they forge symbiotic relationships with highly reliable task-doers.

That's all there is to it!

Remember that all 5 Steps proceed from your values. Your values determine what you want, i.e., your goals. Also keep in mind that the 5 Steps are iterative. When you complete one step, you will have acquired information that will most likely lead you to modify the other steps. When you've completed all five, you'll start again with a new goal. If the process is working, your goals will change more slowly than your designs, which will change more slowly than your tasks.

One last important point: You will need to synthesize and shape well. The first three steps—setting goals, identifying problems, and then diagnosing them—are synthesizing (by which I mean knowing where you want to go and what's really going on). Designing solutions and making sure that the designs are implemented are shaping.

2.6 Remember that weaknesses don't matter if you find solutions.

You almost certainly can't do all these steps well, because each requires different types of thinking and virtually nobody can think well in all these ways. For example, goal setting (such as determining what you want your life to be) requires you to be good at higher-level thinking like visualization and prioritization. Identifying and not tolerating problems requires you to be perceptive and good at synthesis and maintaining high standards; diagnosis requires you to be logical, able to see multiple possibilities, and willing to have hard conversations with others; designing requires visualization and practicality; doing what you set out to do requires self-discipline, good work habits, and a results orientation. Who do you know who has all those qualities? Probably no one. Yet doing all 5 Steps well is required for being really successful. So what do you do? First and foremost, *have humility so you can get what you need from others!*

Everyone has weaknesses. They are generally revealed in the patterns of mistakes they make. Knowing what your weaknesses are and staring hard at them is the first step on the path to success.

a. Look at the patterns of your mistakes and identify at which step in the 5-Step Process you typically fail. Ask others for their input too, as nobody can be fully objective about themselves.

b. Everyone has at least one big thing that stands in the way of their success; find yours and deal with it. Write down what your one big thing is (such as identifying problems, designing solutions, pushing through to results) and why it exists (your emotions trip you up, you can't visualize adequate possibilities). While you and most people probably have more than one major impediment, if you can remove or get around that one really big one, you will hugely improve your life. If you work on it, you will almost certainly be able to deal successfully with your one big thing.

You can either fix it or you can get the help of others to deal with it well. There are two paths to success: 1) to have what you need yourself or 2) to get it from others. The second path requires you to have humility. Humility is as important, or even more important, as having the strengths yourself.

Having both is best. On the following page is a template that some people find helpful.

2.7 Understand your own and others' mental maps and humility.

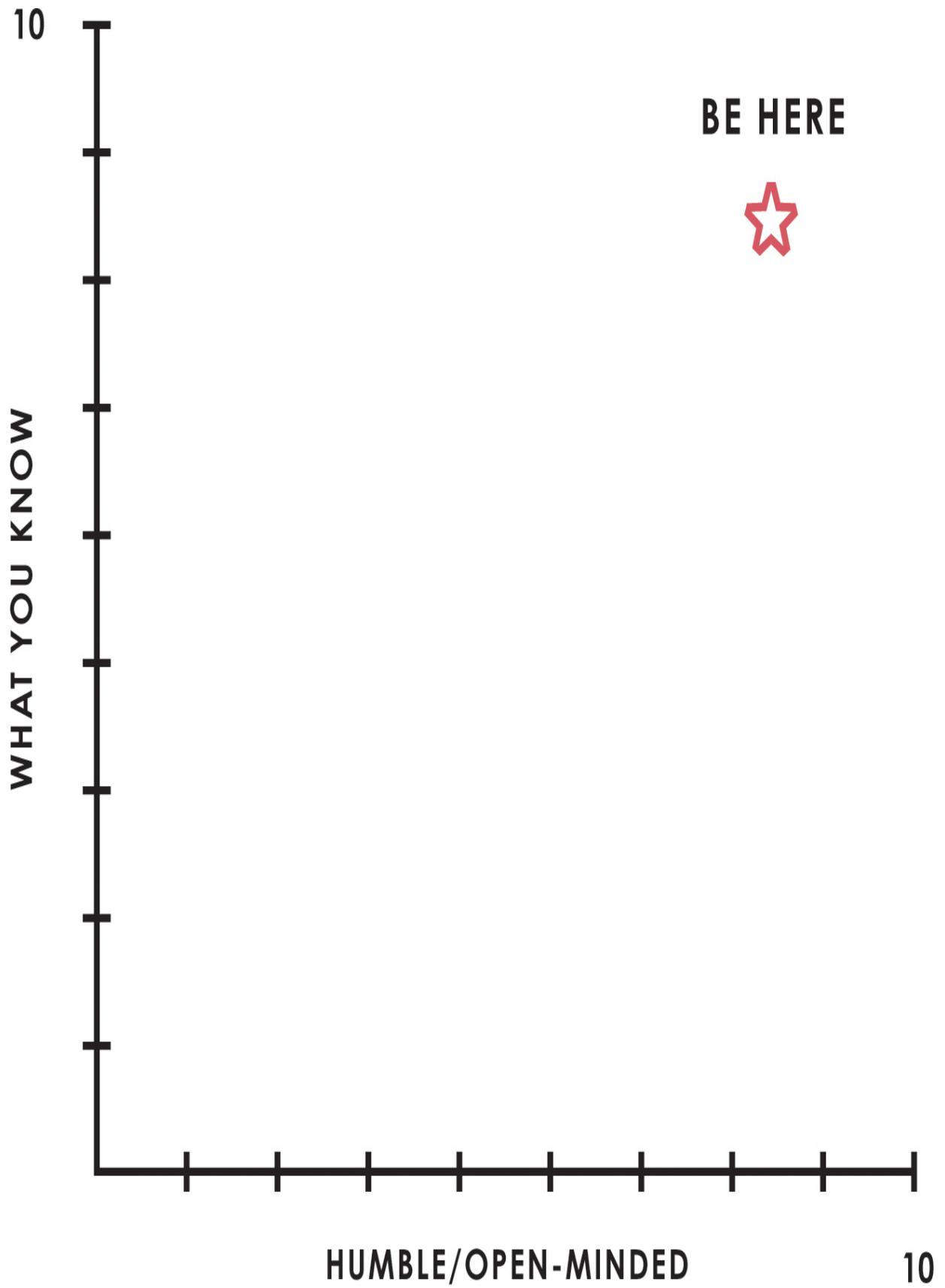
Some people are good at knowing what to do on their own; they have good mental maps. Maybe they acquired them from being taught; maybe they were blessed with an especially large dose of common sense. Whatever the case, they have more answers inside themselves than others do. Similarly, some people are more humble and open-minded than others. Humility can be even more valuable than having good mental maps if it leads you to seek out better answers than you could come up with on your own. Having both open-mindedness and good mental maps is most powerful of all.

To convey this simple concept, imagine rating from one to ten how good someone's mental map is (in other words, what they know) on the Y-axis and how humble/open-minded they are on the X-axis, as shown on the opposite page.

Everyone starts out in the lower left area, with poor mental maps and little open-mindedness, and most people remain tragically and arrogantly stuck in that position. You can improve by either going up on the mental-maps axis (by learning how to do things better) or out on the open-mindedness axis. Either will provide you with better knowledge of what to do. If you have good mental maps and low open-mindedness, that will be good but not great. You will still miss a lot that is of value. Similarly, if you have high open-mindedness but bad mental maps, you will probably have challenges picking the right people and points of view to follow. The person who has good mental maps and a lot of open-mindedness will always beat out the person who doesn't have both.

Now take a minute to think about your path to becoming more effective. Where would you place yourself on this chart? Ask others where they'd place you.

Once you understand what you're missing and gain open-mindedness that will allow you to get help from others, you'll see that there's virtually nothing you can't accomplish.



Most people fail to do this most of the time. In the next chapters, I'll explore why and how to rectify that.