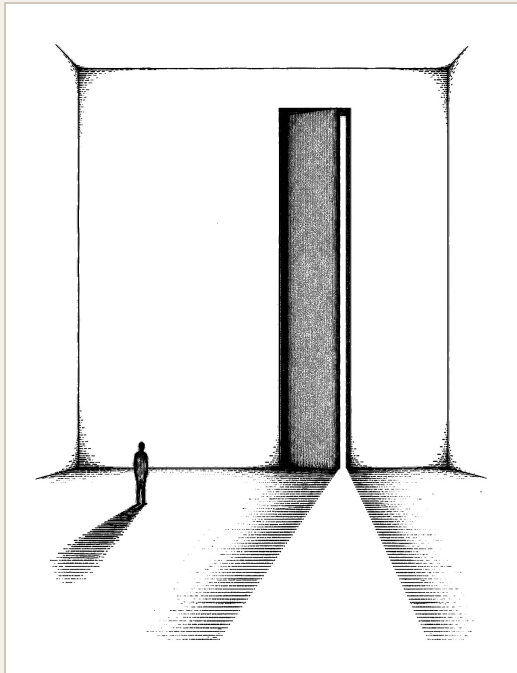


KNOWLEDGE, SIMPLY

Beyond Positive Thinking



The Law of Attraction, **Applied**
A 90-Day Method to Turn Intention into Results

VIVIEN MARSH

MANA EDITIONS

BEYOND
POSITIVE THINKING

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A 90-Day Method to Turn Intention into Results

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Beyond Positive Thinking: The Law of Attraction, Applied

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If you are experiencing significant emotional distress, or concerns regarding your mental or physical wellbeing, please seek support from a qualified healthcare professional.

ON THE CASES IN THIS BOOK

The examples and case studies in this book are composites drawn from recurring behavioural patterns, professional experience and research. Names, identifying details and circumstances have been altered to protect privacy. Any resemblance to specific individuals is entirely coincidental.

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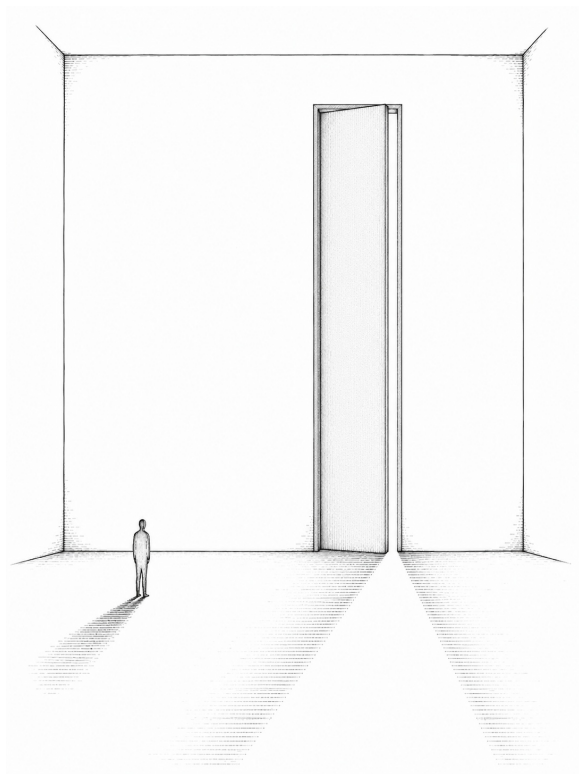
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INTRODUCTION

What Changes in This Book

*You already know what the law of attraction is.
This book begins where it stopped working.*

If it had failed you completely you would have put it down long ago. What usually happens is quieter. Something moves, then stalls. You return to the practice and the practice feels hollow.

That stall has causes. They are not mysterious and they are not about how much you believe. In my work I meet people who have read everything in this field and are still waiting and in almost every case the same three things are missing.

The first is definition. A wish your mind cannot picture in specific terms is a wish your mind cannot recognize when it arrives. The second is attention. Opportunity rarely announces itself and most of it passes as an ordinary conversation or a name mentioned twice in one week. The third is action, which visualization was always meant to prepare and never meant to replace.

So this book moves from wanting to defining, from waiting to noticing, from picturing to acting. The last part turns all of it into ninety days of practice, because a method held for a week is a mood and a method held for a season becomes character.

HOW THIS BOOK IS BUILT

I write the way I work. What is true can be said plainly and simplicity is a method of exposition rather than a discount on depth. Nothing here has been simplified past the point where it remains true and nothing has been lengthened to look serious.

That principle gives the book a fixed shape. Every chapter holds one idea and no more. Every chapter opens with the single sentence that carries it, so you know in three seconds what you are about to read. Every chapter closes with one exercise of two minutes, because reading changes nothing on its own. And every chapter ends by telling you where it meets the next one.

Read it once from beginning to end. After that it is built to be opened at a single page, which is why the chapters are short and the running heads carry the chapter title. You will not need to reread forty pages to find the one paragraph you wanted.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT

My professional work is private advisory on identity, inherited loyalty and the structures beneath ambition and it is a separate matter from these pages. This book is not consultation and it is not therapy. There is one chapter where the two come close, on the rules about what a person like you is permitted to have and when we reach it I will say plainly what a book can do there and what it cannot.

TWO MINUTES

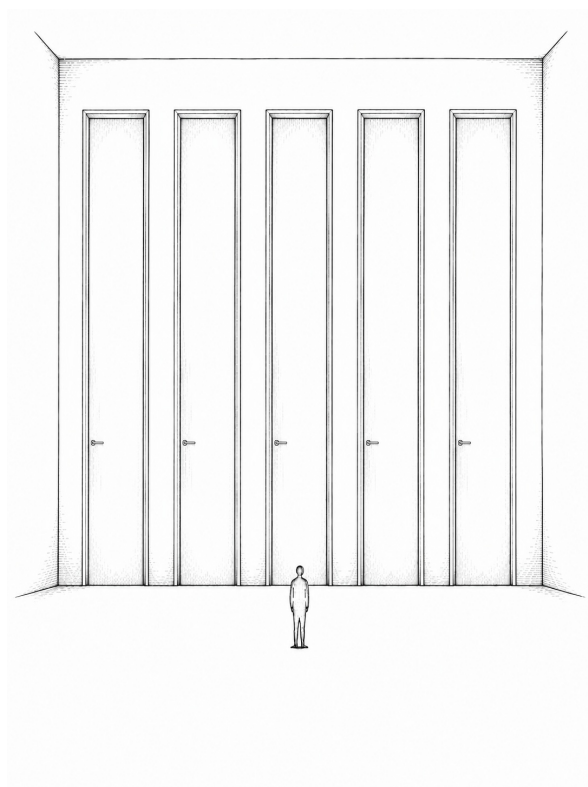
Write down the one thing you have been trying to bring into your life for longest. One line, no explanation. Put it somewhere you will find it in ninety days. You will need it in chapter one and again at the end.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You now know what this book will not do, which is repeat what you already believe.

Everything above rests on one claim: that the law of attraction fails in identifiable ways rather than mysterious ones.

The next chapter names those ways, seven of them, and tells you which one is yours.



PART ONE

The Seven Reasons It Isn't Working

Nothing here has gone wrong in a way that cannot be named.

People come to me having done the work. They kept the journal for eleven weeks. They said the words to the mirror. They can quote three books at me and they are still where they were and by the time they sit down the question has usually stopped being a question and become an accusation aimed at themselves.

It is almost never a matter of belief. Whatever stalled did so for a reason that can be written on one line and there are seven of them. Six are mechanical. One is not.

ONE. THE WISH HAS NO SHAPE. More money. A better relationship. Peace. Your mind cannot notice the arrival of something it was never given a form for and a wish this wide will not narrow itself while you wait. There is a difference you can feel in the body between wanting more money and wanting four thousand a month by March from work you would still choose on a bad day. Only the second one can be recognized when it walks in.

TWO. YOU WANT TWO OPPOSITE THINGS. You want to be seen and you want nobody looking. You want a partnership and you want no one close enough to disappoint you. Both are honest, both are yours and while they are running at the same time nothing moves. The stillness that follows is not the universe declining. It is arithmetic.

THREE. YOU ARE CHECKING. Attachment to an outcome puts you daily in the state of not having it. Refreshing the inbox, counting the weeks, asking whether it has worked yet: each of these is a small rehearsal of absence and rehearsal is exactly what this whole practice is built on.

FOUR. SOMEONE ELSE'S RULE IS STILL RUNNING. This is the one that is not mechanical. Long before you read a word about attraction you were told what a person like you is permitted to have. It was rarely said out loud. It arrived as a mother's face when money was mentioned, as a family that treated wanting as a kind of rudeness, as the quiet arrangement by which you were allowed to succeed but not more than your father did. You can visualize for a year against a rule you have never named. The rule wins, every

time, because it is not competing with you. It is you.

FIVE. YOU PICTURE THE ENDING AND NEVER THE ROAD. The finished thing is pleasant to imagine and changes nothing. What prepares a person to move is picturing the next specific step, which is far less enjoyable and considerably more useful.

SIX. INTENTION NEVER BECAME A DECISION. A decision has a date, a first move and a price you have agreed to pay. Anything without those three is a preference and preferences do not reorganize a life.

SEVEN. YOU CHANGED THE TARGET TOO OFTEN. Six weeks on one thing, then a different thing, then the original thing again in a new form. Attention compounds or it does nothing and a practice held for two weeks is not a practice. It is a mood.

IN PRACTICE

A woman I worked with last year ran a small architecture practice with two employees. She had wanted to raise her fees for four years. She had written it down, she had visualized the conversation, she had told her husband it was the year. Every proposal went out at the old number.

Her mechanical fault was the sixth. There was no date, no first move and no agreed price, so raising the fees stayed permanently available and permanently unscheduled. Her structural fault was the fourth and it took longer to find. Her father had run a building firm that failed in the nineties and the story the family told about it was that he had become greedy. Charging more was not a business decision in her mind. It was the first step of that story.

Naming it did not dissolve it. What it did was separate two things that had been fused: her price and her father's collapse. Once they were separate she could argue with only one of them. She sent the next proposal at the new number six weeks later. The client accepted without comment, which she found almost insulting.

I tell this because the sequence matters. The mechanical fault is what you fix. The structural one is what you stop obeying, which is slower and is not the same thing as fixing.

WHICH ONE IS YOURS

Read the seven again with one specific thing in mind, the thing you wrote down at the end of the introduction. Stop at the first that makes you uncomfortable rather than the first that sounds clever. Discomfort is the reliable instrument here.

Most people find two. One mechanical, from definition, action or consistency. One structural, which is number four. The mechanical ones are corrected in the second part of this book and they correct faster than you expect. The structural one takes longer and I would rather say now than later that a book is sometimes not enough for it. That is not a failure of the book. It is the shape of the thing.

TWO MINUTES

Write the number of the reason you stopped at. Underneath it write the sentence you would have to say out loud for it to be true, in the first person and in the present. Do not soften it. You are the only reader.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have a number now and a name for what has been holding the thing in place.

Six of these seven share one root: your mind was never handed a target precise enough to work with.

The next chapter hands it one and shows why definition rather than desire is what turns wanting into direction.

Definition, Not Desire

A wish your mind cannot recognize will walk straight past you.

Desire is not the scarce resource. Everyone arrives with plenty of it. What is missing is a shape precise enough that you would know the thing if it were standing in front of you on an ordinary afternoon, wearing ordinary clothes, looking nothing like the version in your head.

This is the whole of the chapter. The rest is how it is done.

SAY THE NUMBER AND SAY THE MONTH. Not because the universe requires paperwork but because your attention does. A brain given a vague instruction files it under someday and stops looking. A brain given four thousand a month by March starts noticing the rate a colleague quotes, the client who mentioned a budget, the email you had been putting off since June. Nothing mystical has happened. You have simply told the machinery what to watch for.

NAME THE OUTCOME, NEVER THE VEHICLE. People come to me having decided that the answer is a particular company, a particular man, a particular city. Then that door closes and the whole thing is declared dead, when what they wanted was recognition or steadiness or a life with fewer people in it. Define what you want to be true. Leave the route unspecified, because the route is the one part of this you are least qualified to design in advance.

SAY IT IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. Less anxiety, fewer arguments, not being overlooked. The mind holds no image for an absence, so what it rehearses is anxiety, arguments and being overlooked. Turn each one over and say what stands in its place. This is the least fashionable instruction in this book. It is also the one people report back on most often.

DESCRIBE THE TUESDAY, NOT THE CEREMONY. Most people picture the moment of arrival: the signature, the keys, the applause. Ceremonies last an hour. What you are actually asking for is a different Tuesday and if you cannot describe that Tuesday (what time you wake, who is in the room, what you are no longer worrying about at four in the afternoon) then you have not yet defined the thing. You have defined the

announcement of the thing.

SET THE TEST BEFORE YOU BEGIN. Write down now what evidence would count. Without it you will move the line: whatever arrives will be less than you imagined, because it will be real and real things are always slightly disappointing on the first day. People discard genuine progress every week for this reason alone.

IN PRACTICE

A man in his fifties came to me wanting financial freedom. We spent most of the first hour on what that sentence meant and by the end of it the thing had changed shape twice. It was not freedom. It was not even money. What he wanted was to stop opening the banking app before he opened his eyes.

The defined version was eleven months of fixed costs held in an account he did not touch, by the following December. His first draft had been a figure four times larger, chosen because it sounded like the kind of number a man in his position ought to say. The smaller one was the true one, which is why he had resisted writing it.

Then the Tuesday. He described waking without reaching for the phone, an argument with his wife about a holiday rather than about a payment and a client he could afford to refuse. Note that none of it is about money. Money was the vehicle and he had spent nine years defining the vehicle.

He reached the number in fourteen months rather than eleven. He had also written his test in advance, which is the only reason he noticed that he had arrived.

ONE WISH AT A TIME

Three defined wishes are not three times the result. Attention does not divide, it dilutes. Choose the one that would change the others if it moved first, which is rarely the loudest one. It is usually the one you have been carrying longest and mentioning least.

A WORD ON THE ONES THAT WILL NOT NARROW

Sometimes a wish refuses to take a shape. You sit with the paper and write three versions and all three feel false. That resistance is information rather than failure. It usually means the thing you are asking for is not permitted by a rule you have not yet named, so the mind declines to make it concrete because concrete things can be denied to you. We return to this in the third part of the book. For now write the false version anyway. Even a wrong definition moves faster than an undefined one.

TWO MINUTES

Take the thing you chose in chapter one. Write it in one sentence containing a number and a month, stated in the affirmative, with the route left open.

Underneath, in two lines, describe an ordinary Tuesday once it is true. Not the day it arrives. The Tuesday afterwards.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You now have a wish with edges, a date attached and a test you have agreed to in advance.

Definition matters for one reason only: it tells your attention what to look for and attention is the part of this that does the real work.

The next chapter is about that attention and about why the opportunities you are waiting for have almost certainly already passed through the room.

Attraction Plus Action: The Complete Formula

What you are waiting for has probably already walked through the room.

Your senses deliver more in a single morning than you could consciously hold in a week. Something has to decide what reaches you and that something works on instruction. Give it no instruction and it defaults to threat, novelty and whatever has your name on it. Give it a defined target and it quietly adds that target to the list of things worth interrupting you for.

This is why the previous chapter came first. Definition is not a ritual. It is the instruction.

You have felt the mechanism already. Decide on a particular car and the roads fill with it overnight. The cars were always there. What changed is the filter, not the traffic and the same shift applies to a rate, a type of client, a way of living that you had never bothered to name.

OPPORTUNITY ARRIVES BADLY DRESSED. Nobody announces it. It comes as a colleague complaining about a supplier, a name that surfaces twice in one week, an invitation to something you would rather not attend on a Thursday in November. Almost nothing important announces itself in advance, which is why people who say they had no opportunities are usually people who were expecting an announcement.

ATTENTION IS FINITE AND YOU ARE SPENDING IT. Two hours of scrolling is not neutral. It is two hours of instructing the filter to care about strangers. You do not need discipline about this so much as arithmetic: whatever occupies your attention is what your attention learns to find.

SAY THE THING OUT LOUD TO FIVE PEOPLE. This is the least mystical instruction in the book and the one that produces the most traffic. Five people who know precisely what you are looking for become five additional filters running in rooms you will never enter. Vague announcements produce nothing. A sentence with a number in it produces phone calls.

NOTICE, THEN WRITE IT DOWN. Noticing without recording is the same as not noticing,

because the thing surfaces on a Tuesday when you cannot act and by Friday it is gone. One line in one place. The point is not the archive. The point is that the act of writing tells the filter it was right to interrupt you. Filters learn.

GIVE IT TEN MINUTES ON A SUNDAY. Read back what you wrote during the week and ask one question of each line: is there a next move here that takes under an hour. Most weeks the answer is no and you close the notebook. Perhaps one week in five there is something and that week pays for the other four. Without the review the notes become a diary of things you almost did.

WHERE THIS STOPS BEING MAGIC

Let me be exact about what happens here, since a great deal of nonsense is written about it. Attention does not create opportunities. It stops you from missing the ones that were already passing. That is a smaller claim than the one you were probably sold and it is the one that survives contact with a real life.

It is also enough. Most people are not short of possibility. They are short of noticing and then of moving within the short window in which a noticed thing is still available.

IN PRACTICE

A woman of thirty-eight wanted out of corporate legal work and into something adjacent, which she could not name any better than that. We spent one session narrowing it until she could say it in a sentence: advising two or three founders a month on contracts, from her own desk, by the following autumn.

Nothing appeared for five weeks. Then she noticed that a former colleague had mentioned starting something, in a message she had already read twice without registering it. The message was six weeks old when she found it. She replied that evening.

There is a detail worth keeping. In the five silent weeks she had twice concluded that the thing was not working, once out loud to her husband. The filter was working the entire time. What it needed was material to find and material arrives on its own schedule rather than on the schedule of your patience.

She is fond of saying the opportunity arrived. It had arrived a month and a half earlier and sat unread, which is the more useful version of the story and the reason she now writes things down.

TWO MINUTES

Say your defined sentence out loud to one person today. Not as a hope. As a fact about what you are looking for.

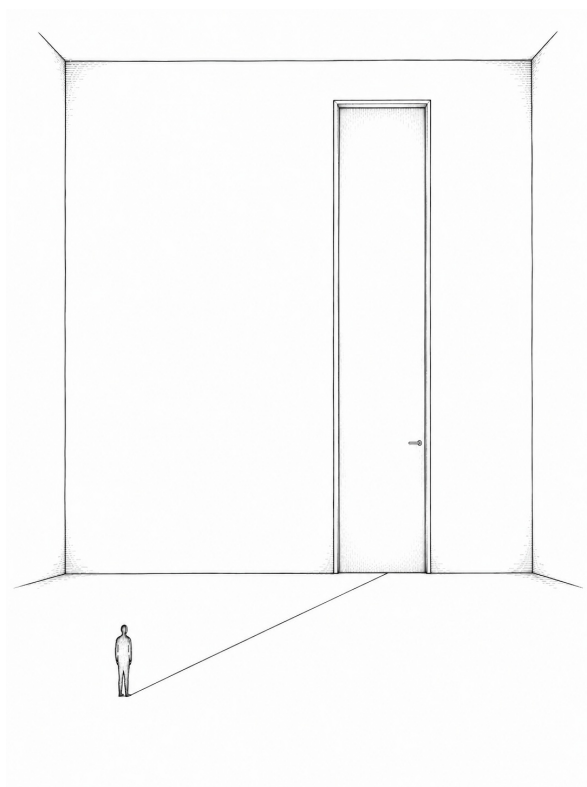
Then open a note on your phone and title it with the thing you defined. Everything you notice goes there, one line, no commentary. You will need it in chapter ten.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have a target with edges and a filter that now knows what to interrupt you for.

Both of these are preparation, which is the honest word for everything in this part of the book.

The next chapter deals with the question every reader of this subject eventually asks: whether any of it reaches the physical world (and what the physics actually says).



PART TWO

The Quantum Question

The strangeness is real. The bridge from it to your intention is not.

You have met this argument. Particles behave differently when observed, everything is entangled with everything, therefore thought shapes matter. It appears in nearly every book on this subject and it is the reason serious people put those books down at page thirty.

I am going to give you the honest version, because you will be asked about this by someone who knows the physics, probably at a dinner (and I would rather you had an answer than a slogan).

WHAT THE DOUBLE SLIT SHOWS. Send particles one at a time through two openings. Left alone they build a pattern that only makes sense if each particle somehow went through both. Install a detector that records which opening was used and the pattern disappears. This is genuinely strange and it is not in dispute. What it does not show is that a mind is required. The detector produces the effect whether or not any human being ever looks at the data, ever reads the printout, ever knows the experiment happened. In physics the word observation means physical interaction. It does not mean attention.

WHAT ENTANGLEMENT SHOWS. Two particles can be linked so that measuring one tells you at once about the other, at any distance. Also real, also strange. What you cannot do with it is send anything or influence any outcome. That is not a gap waiting to be filled by better equipment. The mathematics forbids it. So the sentence everything is connected is beautiful and this experiment is not what makes it true.

WHY NONE OF IT REACHES YOU. Quantum behaviour survives in systems that are cold, isolated and protected with enormous care. A brain is warm and wet and extremely noisy. Coherence there collapses in a fraction of the time a single thought needs to form. There is no route from the particle to the intention. Anyone who tells you otherwise is selling the gap rather than crossing it.

WHY THE ARGUMENT KEEPS COMING BACK. It survives because it is useful, not because it is

sound. A physical mechanism, however borrowed, relieves you of the part that is uncomfortable: that the work is psychological, that it is yours and that nothing external is going to arrange it on your behalf. I have watched people hold on to the quantum story hardest at exactly the moment they were being asked to do something concrete on a Monday morning.

WHAT IS TRUE IS CLOSER THAN THAT

So the mechanism is not the one you were sold. I do not think this is bad news. Here is why.

Expectation alters perception before you are aware of it. What you believe about an outcome changes your posture, your voice, the questions you ask, which of two emails you answer first, whether you make the call on Monday or leave it until it no longer matters. Medicine has measured a version of this for decades under a distinctly unglamorous name. The effect is not smaller for having an explanation. It is nearer. It happens inside a system you actually have access to, which is more than can be said for a particle in a laboratory in Geneva.

Keep the image if it moves you. Hold it as a description of a stance rather than a theory of the universe: acting as though the outcome were already possible instead of already refused. Named as a metaphor it costs you nothing. Presented as physics it costs you the only readers whose judgment is worth having.

IN PRACTICE

A client of mine had spent two years unable to discuss any of this with her husband, an engineer, because the one time she tried he had taken apart the quantum argument in about four minutes and she had felt ridiculous. After that the whole subject became something she did privately, which meant she also did it badly.

What changed was giving up the part that was not true. She told him she was not claiming her thoughts moved objects. She was claiming that a defined target changes what a person notices and that she wanted to test it for ninety days. He said that sounded reasonable. He asked her twice a month how it was going, which turned out to be worth more than anything she had read.

There is a general rule under that story. The parts of this practice that require you to defend the indefensible are the parts you will end up hiding. Hidden practice decays.

TWO MINUTES

Write down one sentence about how you think this works that you would not want to say in front of a sceptical friend.

Underneath, write the version of it you could defend. Keep only the second one. If nothing survives the translation, you have found something you believed rather than something that was true.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You now know which part of this is physics (very little) and which part is you (nearly all of it).

Both this chapter and the next are about the distance between a thing being possible and a thing being real.

The next chapter measures that distance in hours. It is about the short window in which something you noticed is still available, and why it usually closes for reasons that have nothing to do with luck.

The Window

Most opportunities are not lost. They are answered late.

A noticed thing does not stay available. Somebody mentions a gap in their team and within nine days it has been filled by whoever was nearest. A conversation carries a certain warmth and by the following month that warmth has cooled into politeness. The window is not a metaphor. It is a real and usually short period during which a small action produces an effect that the same action, taken later, will not produce at all.

This is where the practice of the last two chapters either becomes a life or stays a notebook.

ANSWER BADLY ON THE DAY RATHER THAN WELL IN A FORTNIGHT. The reply you send within twenty-four hours, imperfect and three lines long, outperforms the considered one that arrives when the person has moved on. Quality matters enormously in the work. In the response it is almost always beaten by speed. People who are excellent at their jobs find this the hardest sentence in the chapter to accept.

DEFINE THE SMALLEST MOVE. Not the plan. The single action that takes under an hour and that only you can do: the message, the question, the request for a name. Windows close on projects. They rarely close on a question asked the same afternoon.

SEPARATE SPEED FROM HASTE. Responding quickly is not the same as committing quickly. Answer within the day, then take a week to decide. What people do instead is the exact inverse: they take a week to answer and then, feeling late and embarrassed, commit to something in an afternoon.

KNOW WHAT WAITING IS ACTUALLY FOR. The delay is rarely about time. You had four minutes on Tuesday. The delay is that acting makes the thing real and a real thing can be refused, priced, disappointed or won. For as long as the message sits unsent, the possibility remains intact and so do you. This is not laziness. It is protection, worth naming as such, because you cannot correct a fault you have misfiled as a scheduling problem.

ONE WINDOW AT A TIME. If your notes hold six open things, you will move on none of them.

Take the oldest, not the most exciting. The oldest is the one that is teaching you that noticing leads nowhere.

LOWER THE COST OF MOVING. Most windows close because the response you imagine is too expensive to produce. You picture a proposal, a portfolio, a paragraph that sounds impressive. Since none of that exists on a Wednesday evening you do nothing. Decide in advance what your minimum viable reply looks like (four lines, no attachment, one clear question) and the cost of acting drops far enough that you actually act.

WHERE THE WINDOW DOES NOT APPLY

There are decisions that deserve slowness: anything that binds you for years, anything involving money you cannot afford to lose, anything a person is pressing you to sign this evening. Urgency created by someone else is a warning rather than a window. The rule in this chapter is about your response, never about your consent.

IN PRACTICE

A man in his forties, an architect by training, was at a dinner where somebody mentioned that their firm was looking for a consultant for a six-month project. He thought about it for the rest of the evening. He drafted a message the following week, decided it sounded desperate and rewrote it twice. He sent nothing.

Eleven weeks later he learned the role had gone to a person who had asked one question at the same dinner: who should I talk to about that.

He told me this as a story about bad luck. It is not. Nothing about the outcome required him to be better, more qualified or more deserving than the other man. It required a sentence spoken while both of them were standing in the same room. He now keeps a rule that he calls the same-evening rule, which is less elegant than it sounds and has been worth a great deal to him.

The detail he skipped for a long time is that he had the man's name and place of work by ten o'clock that night. Everything he needed was already in his possession. What he did not have was permission from himself to send something ordinary. Ordinary was the only thing the situation required.

TWO MINUTES

Open the note you started in chapter three. Find the oldest line in it.

Send three sentences about it today. Not a proposal. A question. If the window has closed, you will find out in an afternoon rather than carrying it for another year.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You know now that the delay was never about time and that the smallest move is the one that keeps a window open.

Both this chapter and the next are about rehearsal: what you practise in your mind is what you find yourself able to do when the moment is short.

The next chapter is about that rehearsal and about why picturing the finished thing is the least useful version of it.

Rehearsing the Road, Not the Arrival

The version of this that feels best is the version that works least.

Almost everyone taught to visualize was taught to picture the ending. The cheque, the keys, the applause, the face of the person saying yes. It is pleasant, it takes four minutes and there is a body of work in psychology suggesting that on its own it can quietly reduce the effort you then put in. Your system takes the rehearsal as partial payment and relaxes.

Which does not mean the practice is worthless. It means it has been aimed at the wrong thing.

REHEARSE THE DIFFICULT MINUTE. Not the signed contract. The forty seconds in which you say your new price and then stop talking. Not the new life abroad. The phone call to your mother in which you tell her. Every outcome you want has one or two minutes inside it that you are avoiding and those minutes are the only ones worth practising, precisely because they are the ones you would otherwise improvise badly.

REHEARSE FROM INSIDE, NOT FROM THE BALCONY. Most people picture themselves as if watching a film of a person who resembles them. Do it from behind your own eyes: your hands, the sound of the room, what you are looking at while you wait for the answer. The difference is not decorative. Watching yourself succeed is entertainment. Being inside the moment is preparation.

REHEARSE THE THING GOING WRONG. Include the pause that lasts too long, the objection to your number, the moment you lose your place. Then rehearse what you do next, which is usually one sentence. People who have practised only the smooth version fall apart at the first friction, because friction was not in the script and they experience it as evidence that the whole thing was a mistake.

SHORT AND OFTEN, NEVER LONG AND RARE. Ninety seconds before the event beats forty minutes on a Sunday. This is closer to how a musician warms up than to meditation (and the resemblance is not accidental).

FINISH ON THE ORDINARY TUESDAY. Return, at the end, to the day you described in chapter

two. Not the ceremony. The Tuesday. It is the image that keeps a target alive across months, because it is the only one that does not exhaust itself the moment it is imagined.

REHEARSE THE OBJECTION IN THE OTHER PERSON'S VOICE. Say it in their words rather than yours. People rehearse their own case beautifully and are then undone by a single question they had never let themselves hear. If you cannot state the strongest objection to what you want in the voice of the person who will raise it, you are not ready. No amount of confidence will substitute for that particular piece of preparation.

WHAT REHEARSAL CANNOT DO

It cannot install a competence you do not have. No amount of picturing will let you conduct a negotiation you have never studied and I would be doing you a disservice if I left that out. What it does is remove the friction between a competence you already possess and the moment in which you are asked to use it under pressure. That gap is where most capable people lose things, so the return is considerable. It is simply not the return that was advertised.

IN PRACTICE

A woman preparing to speak at an industry conference had spent weeks imagining the room applauding. She arrived, walked to the lectern, lost her thread in the second minute and never fully recovered. She described it afterwards as proof that she was not built for that kind of thing.

We changed what she practised. Ninety seconds, twice a day, on three things only: the walk from the seat to the lectern, the first two sentences and what she would say if she lost her place, which was a single line she wrote down and rehearsed until it was boring. The line was that she would look at her notes and say she wanted to get this part right.

At the next event she lost her place again. She used the line. Nobody in the room registered anything except a woman taking her subject seriously. The thing she had feared happened exactly as before. What had changed was that this time it was in the script.

She kept one habit from that period. Before anything that matters she now asks herself what the worst thirty seconds will be. Then she writes the sentence she will use when it arrives. She has never needed most of them. The point was never the sentence. The point was arriving in a room where nothing that happens is unexpected.

TWO MINUTES

Take the next real step in front of you. Find the one minute inside it that you are avoiding.

Rehearse it twice from behind your own eyes: once going well, once going wrong with your recovery line. Write the recovery line down. It is the only part you must not

| improvise.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have moved the rehearsal from the arrival to the road, which is where it does its work.

Both this chapter and the next are about what you say to yourself in the seconds before something difficult.

The next chapter is about the sentences themselves and about why most affirmations fail for a reason nobody mentions: the mind refuses a claim it can immediately disprove.

Sentences the Mind Will Accept

A claim you can disprove in half a second does not lift you. It argues with you.

Stand in front of a mirror and say you are wealthy while your account says otherwise and something specific happens. A part of you produces the counter evidence immediately, in detail, with dates. You have not installed a belief. You have started a debate and supplied the other side with material.

This is the failure nobody in this field mentions and it is the reason so many people conclude that affirmations are nonsense. The instrument is not nonsense. It has been pointed at claims it cannot support.

TEST THE SENTENCE FOR INSTANT DISPROOF. Say it and watch what comes back within two seconds. If a specific objection arrives (the overdraft, the last three refusals, your brother's face) the sentence is too far ahead of the evidence. Move it closer until nothing answers back. The right sentence produces a small silence rather than an argument.

SAY WHAT YOU DO, NOT WHAT YOU ARE. I am confident is a claim about identity and identity is exactly what the counter evidence is stored under. I ask for the number and then I stop talking is a claim about behaviour and behaviour can be true this afternoon regardless of what you were last year.

BUILD A BRIDGE RATHER THAN A LEAP. Two structures carry almost everything. I am learning to, which is unfalsifiable and quietly true. And the double clause: I am not there yet and I am the person who sends the message anyway. The second half survives because the first half already conceded the point your objection was going to make.

ASK INSTEAD OF ASSERTING. There is decent evidence that a question outperforms a statement here. Will I ask for the meeting today works better than I will ask for the meeting today, because a question sets the mind looking for reasons and means, while a statement invites it to check whether the claim is true. Most people find this counterintuitive for about a week and then find it obvious.

SAY IT WHERE IT IS USED. Not at seven in the morning to your reflection. In the corridor,

thirty seconds before the conversation, in the parked car outside the building. A sentence rehearsed far from the moment is a hobby. A sentence said at the door is equipment.

ONCE, OUT LOUD, THEN MOVE. Repetition past three or four times stops functioning as preparation and starts functioning as reassurance (and reassurance is what people reach for instead of acting). Say it. Then do the thing while the sentence is still in the room.

KEEP IT IN YOUR OWN VOCABULARY. If the sentence contains a word you would never say to a friend (abundance, worthy, aligned) your mind treats it as a quotation from somebody else. Quotations do not move anyone. Write it the way you actually speak, including the ordinary words, even if it reads badly on paper. It is not for the page.

THE ONE PLACE TO BE CAREFUL

There is research suggesting that grand positive statements can leave people who already think badly of themselves feeling worse afterwards rather than better, which fits everything above. If a sentence consistently makes you feel small, that is information rather than weakness. It means the gap between the claim and the evidence is too wide to cross with words. Narrow the claim. Do not increase the volume.

IN PRACTICE

A consultant I worked with had spent a year saying that he was excellent at what he did. He was excellent at what he did. He also charged less than everyone he competed with and every repetition of the sentence quietly reminded him of the contradiction, which is why he ended each session feeling slightly worse than when he began.

We replaced it with two lines. The first was that he was learning to charge what the work is worth. The second, said in the car before meetings, was a question: will I say the number today and then be quiet.

He did not say it the first time. He said it the third time and then it became ordinary. What interests me is that his opinion of himself never changed during those weeks. It changed afterwards, once there was something new to have an opinion about.

One more detail, because it is the one people miss. He kept a note of every meeting in which he said the number. Not the results. Just whether he said it. After eleven entries the question had stopped being useful, which is how you know a sentence has finished its work.

TWO MINUTES

Take an affirmation you have used and say it once out loud. Write down whatever answers back, in its own words.

Now write two replacements: one beginning I am learning to and one in question form for the exact moment you will need it. Discard the original.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have sentences that your mind can accept, aimed at behaviour instead of identity and said where they are used.

Words work on a state that is already close. They do very little against one that is far away, which is the limit this chapter keeps running into.

The next chapter is about that state: how it is cultivated over hours rather than summoned in a moment and why forcing it is the most reliable way to lose it.

Cultivating a State Instead of Forcing One

Nobody has ever felt better by deciding to.

Everything in the last three chapters runs better from a particular state. Not happiness. Something plainer: steady, unhurried, willing to be told no. You have noticed that the same email is easy to send at nine in the morning and impossible at six in the evening (and that the difference had nothing to do with the email).

The mistake is to treat that state as something you summon at the moment you need it. It is grown over hours, mostly by removing what destroys it. The removing is unglamorous work that nobody sells because it cannot be photographed.

STOP TRYING TO FEEL IT ON COMMAND. Effortful positivity produces the opposite. Watch someone talk themselves into enthusiasm before a call and you are watching the enthusiasm drain out. What you can do is arrange the conditions and then leave the state alone, in the way you water a plant rather than pull at it.

PROTECT THE NINETY MINUTES THAT ARE ACTUALLY YOURS. Most people have a window in the day when they are clearest and most people spend it on correspondence because correspondence is what arrives first. Move one difficult thing into that window and move the answering of messages out of it. This single rearrangement changes more than any technique in this book.

LOWER THE FLOOR BEFORE RAISING THE CEILING. You probably know the two or three things that reliably wreck a day: the late night before something that matters, the conversation you have at eleven at night, the first hour spent inside a screen. Removing one of them is worth more than adding three new practices, because a good state is mostly the absence of the things that were dismantling it.

MOVE FIRST, FEEL AFTERWARDS. The order almost everyone believes in is wrong. Waiting to feel ready produces very little. Acting, even slightly, tends to produce the state that you were waiting for, which is why a short walk before a hard call is not superstition. It is the cheapest available intervention.

NOTICE WHOSE STATE YOU ARE BORROWING. Spend an hour with somebody aggrieved and you

will carry it into the next room without noticing the transfer. This is not a reason to abandon anyone. It is a reason to know what you are walking into and to choose, where you can, who is in the hour before something important.

BUILD A METHOD THAT SURVIVES A BAD DAY. If your practice requires you to feel positive, it will collapse in the first difficult week and take your confidence with it. Everything in this book is designed to be done badly, on a grey Tuesday, by somebody who is not in the mood. That is the only version that lasts ninety days.

KEEP ONE THING THAT RETURNS YOU. Everyone has something that resets them faster than anything else: cold air, a particular walk, twenty minutes of an instrument, a specific piece of music that has never once failed. Find yours by observation rather than by theory, then treat it as equipment instead of as a luxury to be earned once the work is finished. It is the work.

WHERE THIS IS NOT THE RIGHT CHAPTER

There is a difference between a low state and something that does not lift. If the flatness has been there for weeks, if it is there on good days and after rest, then it is not a matter of arranging your morning better and I would be careless to suggest it were. That belongs with a doctor or a therapist. Saying so is not a formality. It is the same principle as the rest of the book: name the thing correctly and you can act on it.

IN PRACTICE

A woman running her own studio had scheduled every difficult conversation for late afternoon, on the reasoning that mornings were for real work. By four o'clock she had spent the day on other people and she was conducting her most important negotiations from the worst state she reached all day.

We moved them to half past nine. Nothing else changed. Her rate of getting what she asked for rose enough that she assumed at first she had simply been lucky for a month.

She said afterwards that the hard part was not the schedule. It was accepting that her capability varied across a day, which she had spent years treating as a weakness rather than as a fact to build around.

There is a wider version of that sentence and it belongs here. Most people organise their days as though they were the same person at every hour. You are not, nobody is. Building around the truth costs nothing while pretending otherwise costs a great deal.

TWO MINUTES

Write the time of day when you are at your clearest. Be honest rather than aspirational.

Then move one difficult thing into that window tomorrow. Then name the single habit that most reliably ruins your state. You do not have to fix it today. Naming it is today's work.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have a state that is arranged rather than summoned and a method built to run on a bad day.

Both this chapter and the next are about attention turned inward: what you keep noticing determines what your days feel like.

The next chapter takes the most overused practice in this field and makes it operational, because gratitude as it is usually taught is a mood and gratitude done properly is a form of evidence.

Gratitude, Operationally

Done as a mood it lasts a fortnight. Done as evidence it changes what you believe is possible.

This is the most recommended practice in the field and the most abandoned. People keep the journal for eleven days, write my health, my family, my home three times in a row, notice they feel nothing and stop. They conclude the practice is empty. What was empty was the entry.

The version worth your time is not about feeling grateful. It is about assembling a record of what actually works in your life, including the parts you are responsible for, which is the half nobody writes down.

SPECIFIC, SMALL AND FROM THE LAST DAY. Not my family. The moment on Tuesday when your daughter told you something she had not told anyone else. General entries produce no image and an entry with no image does nothing at all. If you could not photograph it, it is too vague.

WRITE WHAT YOU DID. Here is the operational turn. At least one line must be something that happened partly because of a move you made: you asked, you replied the same day, you said the number and stopped talking. Ordinary gratitude records what arrived. This version records the connection between what you did and what arrived, which is the only record that eventually changes how you act.

INCLUDE WHAT DID NOT HAPPEN. The argument you did not have, the client you declined and did not spend six months regretting, the message you nearly sent at midnight. Absences are invisible by construction, so they never enter the account unless you deliberately put them there.

THREE LINES, NOT EVERY DAY. Daily entries become recitation within a fortnight and there is evidence that less frequent practice holds its effect better. Twice a week is plenty. The instrument is a notebook, not a devotion.

SAY IT TO THE PERSON. The highest return version of this practice is not written at all. Tell

someone precisely what they did and what difference it made. It costs a minute, it is remembered for years and it does more for the state described in the last chapter than any amount of private writing.

READ IT BACK WHEN YOU ARE CERTAIN NOTHING IS WORKING. That is the entire purpose of keeping it. In the flat weeks (and there will be flat weeks) the notebook is the only thing in the room that disagrees with you, with dates attached.

KEEP IT WHERE YOU ALREADY ARE. The practice dies in a beautiful notebook kept in a drawer. Put it in the note you started in chapter three, under the same target, so that what you noticed and what worked accumulate in one place. By the end of the ninety days that single file is worth more than anything else you will produce, without a single minute set aside for it.

WHERE IT TURNS AGAINST YOU

Gratitude is regularly used to close a subject that should stay open. Something is wrong at work and you list three things you are lucky to have and the discomfort recedes for an afternoon, which is exactly the outcome that keeps the situation intact for another year. Noticing what is good has nothing to do with accepting what is not. Any practice that quietly converts the first into the second is being used against you. We return to this properly in the third part.

The other misuse is subtler. People use it to talk themselves out of wanting more, as though the two could not sit in the same person on the same day. They can. Most decent lives contain both.

IN PRACTICE

A man in his thirties kept the practice for two years and told me it had done nothing. I asked to see it. Every page held the same four items, written in the same order, in a hand that had clearly stopped reading itself.

We changed one rule: one line each time had to be a thing that happened because he had done something. Within a month the entries had become concrete and slightly uncomfortable, because the pattern they exposed was that almost everything good in his year had followed a conversation he had initiated while he had spent that same year describing himself as unlucky.

He did not become more grateful. He became better informed, which turned out to be what he had needed.

There is a version of that discovery available to almost everyone reading this. The record does not have to be long. It has to contain the causes.

TWO MINUTES

Write three lines from the last twenty four hours. Specific enough to photograph.

One of the three must be something that happened partly because of an action you took. If you cannot find one, that is today's most useful piece of information.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have a record of what works, including your own part in it, which is the part that had been going unrecorded.

That record has a purpose beyond reassurance: it shows you which of your actions actually produce things.

The next chapter closes this part of the book by turning that into a mechanism, so that the right action happens at the right moment without depending on you remembering to be someone different.

The Bridge to Action

Decide once, in advance, so that the moment does not have to decide for you.

Everything so far has been preparation. A target with edges, a filter that notices, a rehearsed minute, sentences you can accept, a state arranged rather than summoned, a record of what works. None of it produces anything until a hand moves.

The problem is that the hand has to move in a specific hour, usually a bad one, when you are tired and have twenty other things in front of you. Willpower in that hour is a poor instrument. What works instead is a decision made now, in a form the future version of you can execute without deliberating.

The form is simple and it has been studied for thirty years. If this specific thing happens, then I do that specific thing. That is the whole apparatus.

MAKE THE CUE OBSERVABLE. Not when I feel ready or when things calm down, because neither of those is an event and neither will ever arrive. When I close the Monday call. When I sit down in the car after dropping the children. When the invoice lands in my inbox. A cue you could point at from across the room.

MAKE THE ACTION SMALL ENOUGH TO BE EMBARRASSING. Then I open the note and write one line. Then I send four sentences. Grand plans do not fire. The point of the plan is not to accomplish the thing. It is to make the first move automatic. The first move is where all the resistance lives.

ATTACH IT TO SOMETHING ALREADY HAPPENING. You do not need a new slot in your week. You need an existing anchor: the coffee, the commute, closing the laptop, Friday afternoon when nothing important ever happens anyway. New behaviours ride on old ones or they do not ride at all.

WRITE THE OBSTACLE PLAN TOO. Name the thing most likely to stop you and answer it in advance. If I open the laptop and there are forty messages, then I write my one line before I read any of them. If he says he needs to think about it, then I ask when I should follow up rather than saying no problem. The obstacle version does more work than the main plan, because the main plan fails through the obstacle almost every time.

ONE PLAN AT A TIME. Two is already a system and systems require maintenance you will not do. One plan, running for a fortnight, until it stops requiring any thought. Then the next.

PUT IT WHERE THE CUE IS. On the card in the car, on the note taped inside the laptop lid, as the name of the calendar entry itself. Held only in your head it is a good intention (and you have had a great many of those).

KEEP IT IN THE WORDS YOU WOULD USE OUT LOUD. A plan written in the language of a productivity book will not fire, because at the moment it matters you will not recognise it as something you said. Write it the way you would say it to a friend in the passenger seat, including the shortcuts and the ordinary phrasing. Recognition is half of what makes it work.

WHAT THIS CANNOT CARRY

A plan cannot execute a decision you have not made. If you write if the meeting ends, then I will ask for the raise, while you have not truly decided to ask, the cue will arrive and you will watch yourself not do it. That is not a failure of the technique. It is the sixth reason from chapter one, still unresolved, wearing a new format.

And there is a second limit, which is the one this part of the book has been circling. Sometimes the plan is sound, the cue arrives, the action is small and still nothing moves. When that happens repeatedly with the same kind of action, you are not looking at a mechanical fault any more.

IN PRACTICE

A woman who had wanted for two years to move her business into a new market wrote one plan: when I finish the Thursday invoicing, then I send one message to one person in that sector. One message. Nothing else specified.

She sent nine over three months. Seven produced nothing. One produced a conversation and one produced the introduction that eventually changed her year. She points out, correctly, that she could not have known in advance which one it would be, which is the entire argument for the mechanism rather than for inspiration.

She also missed four Thursdays. The plan survived because missing a Thursday was not evidence of anything. It was just a Thursday.

That last point is worth more than it looks. Most practices die not on the day they are broken but on the day the person decides that breaking them means something about who they are.

TWO MINUTES

Write one sentence in the form: if [observable cue], then I [small action]. Anchor it to something that already happens in your week.

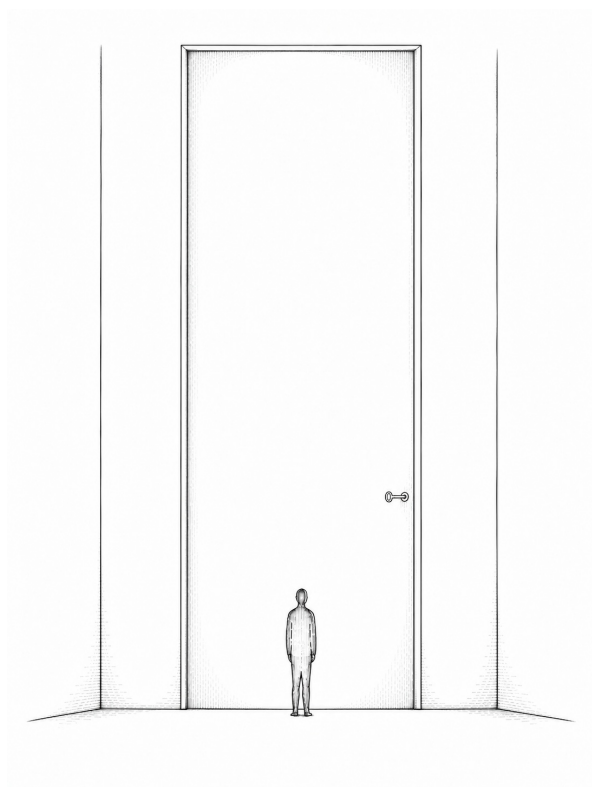
Underneath, write the obstacle version: the thing most likely to stop you, then what you do instead. Put both where the cue happens, not in this book.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You now have the complete mechanical apparatus: define, notice, move inside the window, rehearse, speak, arrange the state, record, execute on a cue.

This chapter ends the part of the book that works on the mechanism. What it could not reach is the thing that decides in advance what you are permitted to want.

The next part is about that. It begins with the rule you were handed before you were old enough to refuse it.



PART THREE

The Rule You Never Chose

Somewhere in you is a promise you never made out loud. You have been keeping it perfectly.

This is the chapter the rest of the book has been walking towards. It is where my own work lives, so I will be careful to say only what I can stand behind.

Long before you read anything about attraction you were given instructions about what a person like you may have. They were almost never spoken. They arrived as a father's silence after a promotion, as a mother who called ambitious people vulgar, as the family story about the uncle who reached too far and lost everything, told often enough that nobody needed to draw the moral. By the time you were old enough to examine any of it, it had stopped being an opinion and become the shape of the room.

Nothing in the previous chapters can move against that. A cue arrives, the action is small, the plan is sound and you watch yourself not do it. You conclude that you lack discipline. You do not lack discipline. You are being loyal.

THE SIGNS ARE CONSISTENT. Things go well and then something goes wrong at the threshold, repeatedly, always at the same height. You cannot make the wish concrete no matter how many times you sit down with the paper. There is a small relief when it falls through. The act itself (naming a price, taking the credit, leaving the town, being seen) produces a physical response out of proportion to the act. Any one of these is ordinary. Together, in the same area of a life, for years, they are a rule.

THE RULE IS IN SOMEONE'S VOICE. When you finally write the sentence down, ask who is saying it. Almost nobody hears their own voice. It belongs to a parent, a grandmother, a teacher, occasionally to a whole family speaking at once. This is not an accusation of anyone. It is simply how the thing is stored. Knowing the voice makes it audible for the first time.

IT PROTECTED SOMETHING ONCE. The rule was not malice. Staying small kept a child safe in a house where standing out was punished. Not wanting kept somebody from the humiliation of asking. Earning less than your father kept a fragile man intact and kept

the family functioning. Rules of this kind were adaptations, often intelligent ones. They are simply still running in a life they no longer fit.

SEPARATE THE LOYALTY FROM THE LIMIT. This is the move that matters. The instinct is to fight the rule, which tends to fail because fighting it feels like betraying the person it belongs to and you will choose the person every time. What works better is to ask what loyalty the rule is serving, then ask whether that loyalty requires this particular price. You can honour a father without staying beneath him. You can carry a family's caution without inheriting its ceiling. Said plainly it sounds obvious. Held properly it takes months.

EXPECT THE PRACTICAL VERSION TO BE SMALL. Nothing dramatic follows. What follows is that the same email is now sendable, or that a number comes out of your mouth that never had before. The work is invisible from the outside, which is why people around you will attribute the change to luck.

WHAT A BOOK CAN DO HERE

It can help you name the rule. Naming is genuinely most of the first stretch. Many people find that one accurate sentence loosens something that ten years of effort did not.

What a book cannot do is sit with you while the sentence turns out to be about your mother. It cannot notice what you avoid saying. If the rule has roots in something that was frightening rather than merely restrictive, this is not the right instrument at all and I would be doing you harm by implying otherwise. That belongs with a therapist. Choosing one is not a defeat. It is the same instruction as everywhere else in this book: name the thing correctly, then use the tool that matches it.

IN PRACTICE

A man of forty-six had built a business that was doing well and had twice, at the point of expanding it, done something that made expansion impossible. The second time he described it to me as bad timing. It was the same month of the year as the first time, which is the sort of detail that stops sounding like coincidence when you write it down.

The sentence, when he found it, was that men in his family do not get above themselves. It was in his grandfather's voice. His grandfather had lost a business and the family had spent thirty years telling that story as a warning rather than as a loss.

He did not resolve it in an afternoon. What changed first was the fight going out of it. He stopped treating himself as someone who self sabotaged, which had been a private humiliation, then started treating himself as someone keeping a promise to a man he had loved. From there it became a question he could actually work with: whether the promise required this.

TWO MINUTES

Complete this sentence without editing it: in my family, someone like me is not allowed to

_____.

Then two lines. Whose voice is it in. What did it protect. Do not try to solve anything today.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have a sentence, a voice and some idea of what the rule was once protecting.

What follows now is time, which is precisely the thing this kind of work asks for and precisely the thing nobody wants to give it.

The next chapter is about that: impatience, checking and the particular way a person can undo months of steady work in a single week of wanting it faster.

Impatience and the Grip on the Outcome

Asking every morning whether it has worked is how you spend the thing you are building.

A woman told me once that she had done everything in the method for three weeks and it had not worked. Three weeks. She had also, by her own count, checked her email for a particular reply roughly two hundred times.

Impatience is not a character flaw here. It is a mechanism that does specific damage that is worth understanding rather than scolding yourself about.

CHECKING REHEARSES THE ABSENCE. Every time you ask whether it has arrived, you place yourself for a moment in the state of it not having arrived. Do that thirty times a day and you have practised absence more thoroughly than you have practised anything in this book. The habit feels like diligence. It is closer to picking at a wound to see whether it has healed.

SET THE REVIEW DATE AND REFUSE THE QUESTION IN BETWEEN. Decide now when you will look: the last Friday of the month, ninety days from Tuesday, whatever suits. Between those dates the question is not open. This sounds like a discipline problem and is actually an administrative one. A question with a scheduled answer stops interrupting you.

TRACK WHAT YOU DID, NEVER WHAT ARRIVED. The only number worth writing down is how many times you performed your action. Messages sent, prices stated, mornings protected. Outcomes arrive on their own schedule and are largely outside your control, so measuring them daily produces nothing but weather reports about your own worth. Process is countable and it is yours.

STOP COMPARING YOUR WEEK TO SOMEBODY ELSE'S YEAR. What reaches you about other people is their announcements, arranged after the fact into a story with no waiting in it. Their nine silent months are not in the photograph. Almost everyone who feels behind is comparing an interior to an exterior, which is not a comparison at all.

LOOSEN THE GRIP ON THE ROUTE. Attachment is rarely to the outcome. It is to one particular

version: that company, that person, that month. When you find yourself unable to consider any other route, you have stopped defining and started demanding. Demanding narrows what you notice at exactly the moment you need it wide.

EXPECT LAG AND NAME IT IN ADVANCE. There is a period in which you are doing the work and nothing is visible. It is not a sign of failure. It is the ordinary shape of anything built by accumulation. The reason most people stop is that nobody told them the flat stretch was standard. Write down now how long you will continue before you draw a conclusion. Written in advance, it will be honest. Written in week five, it will be despair with a calendar.

GIVE THE WAITING SOMEWHERE TO GO. Impatience is energy with no assignment. Put it on the next action rather than on the last one: while you are waiting for an answer from one person, the practice is to send something to a second. This is not a trick to distract you. A person with three things in motion checks none of them the way a person with one thing in motion checks that one.

WHERE PATIENCE IS THE WRONG ANSWER

There is an opposite failure and I see it as often. Patience becomes the reason for not acting: a person waits serenely for years, calls it trust and never sends anything. If your review dates keep arriving and the count of actions you performed is near zero, the problem is not impatience. It is the window from chapter five, where no amount of calm will substitute for a message sent on a Tuesday.

Detachment, in the sense worth having, is not indifference to the outcome. It is not requiring the answer today.

IN PRACTICE

A man waiting to hear about a position had reached the point of refreshing his inbox during dinner with his children. He knew how it looked. He could not stop, because stopping felt like giving up on the thing.

We agreed on two changes. He would check twice a day at fixed hours and he would keep one number on a card: applications sent that week. Nothing about outcomes.

Within a fortnight the number on the card was four rather than one, for the simple reason that a person who is waiting is not applying. He had experienced his waiting as effort. It had been the opposite. No amount of wanting it more would have shown him that. Only counting did.

He kept the card afterwards. Not for encouragement. He said it was the first honest record he had ever had of his own behaviour, as opposed to his own intentions. The gap between the two had been the real subject all along.

Write the date on which you will next assess whether this is working. Put it in the calendar. Until then the question is closed.

Then write the one process number you will count between now and that date. One number, countable by you, with nothing to do with what arrives.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have a review date, a number you control and a clearer idea of what checking was actually costing you.

Everything in this chapter depends on being able to sit with a situation that is not yet resolved.

The next chapter is about the most common way people avoid doing exactly that: the cheerful sentence used to close a subject that should have stayed open.

The Cheerful Sentence That Closes a Subject

A feeling that has been argued with does not leave. It waits.

Everything in this book can be misused in one particular way. It is common enough that I would rather write a chapter about it than pretend it happens to other people.

The misuse is this. Something in your life is wrong. You notice the discomfort. You reach for a good sentence (everything happens for a reason, at least I have my health, other people have it worse) and within a minute the discomfort has receded. Nothing has been solved. What has happened is that the alarm has been switched off while the fire continues quietly in another room.

THE FEELING WAS CARRYING INFORMATION. Anger usually reports that a line was crossed. Dread before a meeting often reports something true about the arrangement rather than something shameful about you. Resentment that will not fade is nearly always a request that has never been made out loud. Talk yourself out of the feeling and you lose the message with it, which is expensive, because the message was the useful part.

SUPPRESSION DOES NOT REMOVE, IT POSTPONES. The emotion continues underneath. It emerges later in a form you will not connect to the original cause: in the tone you use with somebody who did nothing, in the tiredness that does not respond to sleep. This is not a mystical claim. It is the observation of anyone who works with people for long enough.

WATCH FOR THE PRACTICE BEING USED AS AN EXIT. The visualization done instead of the difficult conversation. The gratitude list written instead of looking at the numbers. The affirmation repeated instead of seeing a doctor, a lawyer, an accountant. Any practice in this book that is being used to avoid a specific concrete act has been turned against you. The giveaway is always that you feel calmer without anything having changed.

NOTICE WHEN IT IS USED ON YOU. Stay positive is regularly deployed to end a conversation that somebody else finds uncomfortable. Being told you are negative when you raise a real problem is a way of moving the subject from the problem to your character. You do not have to accept the transfer. The question stays open until it is answered.

WITH OTHER PEOPLE, SAY THE SMALL TRUE THING. When someone is in the middle of a loss,

everything happens for a reason is not comfort. It asks them to accept a meaning for their own catastrophe at the least possible moment. Say that you are sorry, that it is unfair, that you are here on Thursday. Small and true beats large and consoling, every time, in every language I have worked in.

FEEL IT FULLY, THEN DECIDE. The sequence that works is not positive instead of negative. It is: name the feeling accurately, let it be there for its duration, take what it was reporting, then choose the action. Optimism belongs at the decision, never at the diagnosis.

DISTINGUISH THE REPORT FROM THE VERDICT. A feeling tells you accurately that something is happening. It is not reliable about what it means or what to do. Dread before a meeting is real information. That you are unfit for the work is a verdict rather than a report, attached to the feeling without having earned its place. Take the first, examine the second.

WHERE THE LINE ACTUALLY FALLS

None of this is an argument for dwelling. There is a difference between feeling something and running it in a loop for a year (and the loop has its own costs). The distinction I find useful is between what you can influence and what is simply happening. Optimism applied to what you can influence is fuel. Optimism applied to what is happening is denial. Denial is expensive in a way that always comes due.

IN PRACTICE

A woman in business with a partner who had stopped paying her share spent nine months being encouraged, by well meaning friends, to stay positive and trust the process. She was excellent at it. She had a gratitude practice and she used it faithfully every time the subject rose in her chest.

By the time she raised it properly the amount was large enough to require lawyers. Her first sentence to me was that she should have seen it, which was not true. She had seen it. She had seen it every week for nine months and had a practice that reliably made the seeing go away.

What she carried out of it is worth more than the money she recovered. The discomfort was not a failure of positivity. It was the only part of her that was reading the situation correctly.

There is a general rule here that I would put on the wall if I put things on walls. A practice that makes an accurate perception more comfortable is doing you harm. A practice that makes an accurate perception bearable enough to act on is doing exactly what it should.

TWO MINUTES

Write the sentence you personally use to close a subject. Everyone has one.

Now write what it has been closing lately, then one line on what that feeling was trying to report. You are not obliged to act on it today. You are obliged to stop arguing with it.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have a way of telling the difference between optimism that fuels a decision and optimism that hides one.

Both this chapter and the next are about what happens when the practice stops being clean: when it is misused, or simply dropped.

The next chapter is about dropping it, which you will, then about the single belief that decides whether that becomes a pause or an ending.

Stopping and Coming Back

You will stop. What matters is what you decide that means.

Somewhere between the third and the seventh week you will miss a day, then a second, then a fortnight will have gone. This is not a risk to be guarded against. It is a certainty, it happens to everyone including me. A method that has not planned for it is not a method.

The interruption itself costs very little. What costs a great deal is the sentence that follows it.

THE DAMAGE IS IN THE INTERPRETATION. Missing two weeks is an event. Concluding that you never finish anything is a verdict about your character. Once that verdict is in place the practice is no longer something you paused. It has become evidence in a case against yourself, where nobody willingly returns to the scene of that.

RESUME, NEVER RESTART. The instinct is to go back to day one and do it properly this time. Resist it completely. Restarting turns a two week gap into a twelve week obligation. The size of that obligation is precisely why you will not begin. Pick up on the day you are on. The calendar is a convenience, not a judge.

WRITE THE RETURN RULE NOW, BEFORE YOU NEED IT. In the form from chapter ten: if I notice I have missed more than a week, then I do the two minute version once, today, without reviewing anything. No assessment, no promises about tomorrow. One small act performed while still ashamed is what ends the interruption. Nothing else does.

SHRINK RATHER THAN QUIT. There is always a smaller version. A week that cannot hold the practice can hold one line in the note. A month that cannot hold the review can hold a single sentence said in the car. People treat their practice as something that runs or does not run, when the useful setting is the low one that survives a difficult month intact.

FIND OUT WHAT YOUR TRIGGER IS. Interruptions are not random. They cluster: travel, an argument at home, a period of overwork, illness in the family. Look back at the last three times you dropped something and you will usually find the same shape. A trigger

you can name can be planned for. The plan is always the small version rather than heroism.

WATCH THE ONES THAT FOLLOW A SUCCESS. This is the one people never expect. A good month arrives and the practice stops immediately afterwards. Sometimes that is simple relaxation. Sometimes it is chapter eleven arriving on schedule, because the rule about what you are permitted to have does not object while you are trying. It objects when you begin to succeed.

TELL ONE PERSON THAT YOU STOPPED. Said out loud to somebody who is not going to be disappointed in you, an interruption returns to its actual size in about ten seconds. Held privately it grows for weeks, because privately you are the only witness and you are not, in that particular month, an impartial one.

WHEN STOPPING IS THE RIGHT INFORMATION

Not every abandonment is a failure of will. Occasionally you stop because the target belonged to somebody else: a parent's idea of a life, a version of yourself from ten years ago that you have quietly outgrown. There is a test I trust. Imagine giving it up permanently, today, with nobody knowing. If what you feel is grief, resume. If what you feel is relief, you have not been failing at the practice. You have been unable to want the thing. That deserves an honest afternoon rather than more discipline.

IN PRACTICE

A woman who had run her ninety days almost perfectly stopped in week eleven and did not return for two months. When she came back she opened by apologising to me, which tells you most of what had happened in her head during those weeks.

Week eleven was the week her work had been publicly praised for the first time. She had never connected the two events. When she looked at the previous decade she found the same pattern twice more, both times within a month of something going well.

Her return rule is now four words long and lives on the back of a card in her bag. She has used it three times. She points out that the practice has never once resumed because she felt motivated. It has resumed because the card told her what to do while she was still embarrassed.

I would put that last observation above almost everything else in this part of the book. Motivation is not what returns people to their work. A written instruction is, working precisely on the days when nothing else would have.

TWO MINUTES

Write your return rule now, in one sentence: if I have missed more than a week, then I _____, today, without reviewing anything.

Put it where you will find it in a bad month. Not in this book. The back of a card, the note

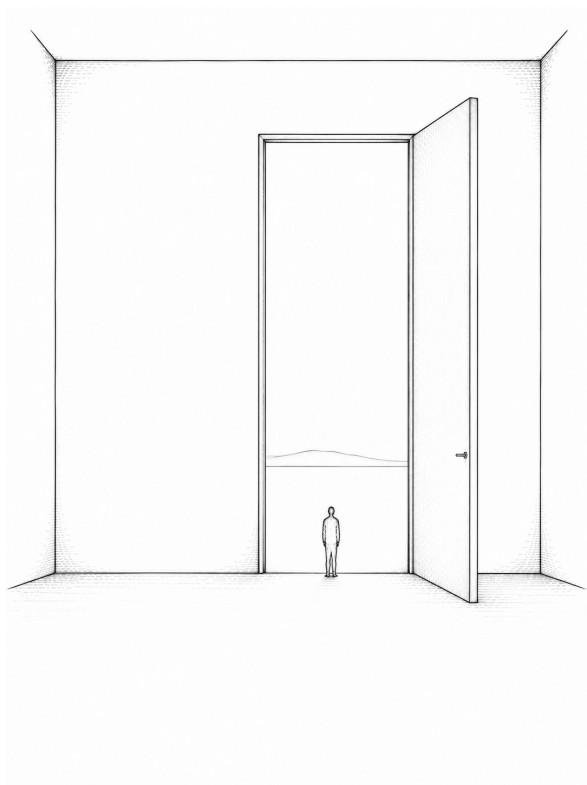
| on your phone, the inside of a drawer you open every day.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have a rule for coming back, which is the only part of a practice that determines whether it lasts a season or a decade.

That closes the part of the book about what gets in the way. Everything that remains is application.

The next part takes all of it into the specific rooms where people actually want change: money, work, the people they live with, the body they are doing it in and the decisions that will not resolve themselves.



PART FOUR

Money and the Question of Enough

A target that moves every time you reach it was never a target.

This is not a chapter about investing and I am not the person to write that one. It is about the part of money that behaves like everything else in this book: what you define, what you notice, what you are permitted to ask for.

Money is also where inherited rules sit closest to the surface, which is why a chapter that ought to be arithmetic turns out to be about a kitchen in 1987.

FIND THE NUMBER THAT CHANGES SOMETHING SPECIFIC. A round figure chosen because it sounds substantial is not a target, it is a wish wearing a suit. The useful number is the one attached to a change you can describe: the month in which you stop taking the work you dislike, the sum that means a bad quarter is inconvenient rather than frightening. Name the change first. The number follows from it. It is usually smaller than the round one.

WRITE DOWN WHAT ENOUGH IS. Most people have never done this, which is why every increase is absorbed within a season and the feeling never arrives. Without a written line, enough is defined by whoever you spoke to most recently. With a written line, you can actually reach something. Reaching it is the only way the relief you are working for ever becomes available.

LOOK AT THE NUMBER YOU ARE AVOIDING. Nearly everyone has one: the monthly total, the balance on that account, what the year actually produced. The avoidance is not laziness and it is not innumeracy. It is that the figure carries a verdict. Look at it on a Tuesday morning, in one sitting, with somebody in the room if that helps. What people report afterwards is almost never that it was worse than they feared. It is that they had been paying interest on not knowing.

SAY THE PRICE AND THEN STOP TALKING. The whole of chapter seven concentrates into one moment here. State the number, in a plain voice, then let the silence do what silence does. The instinct to fill it with justification is what costs people their margin, year after year, in every profession I have seen from the inside.

ASK WHAT THE MONEY IS STANDING IN FOR. Behind almost every financial target sits something else: safety, proof, permission, the end of a conversation you had with a parent thirty years ago. The money will buy the first of those and it will not buy the others. It is worth knowing which one you are chasing, because if it is proof, no figure will ever be the figure.

EARNING IS ONE OF THREE VERBS. Earning, keeping, using. Most effort goes into the first while the other two are left to accident. It is entirely possible to raise the first for a decade with nothing to show for it. If your income has risen and your circumstances have not changed, the work is not in the earning.

NOTICE WHAT MONEY MEANT IN THE HOUSE YOU GREW UP IN. Every family teaches a position on it and almost none of them teach it explicitly. Money was danger, or proof of worth, or something not discussed at the table, or the thing that made your parents polite to people they disliked. Whichever it was, you took a position in relation to it at about nine years old and you have very likely never revisited it. That position, not your income, is what determines how you behave in the minute somebody says a number to you.

WHERE THIS CHAPTER STOPS

Everything technical (debt, tax, what to do with what you have) belongs with somebody qualified. The psychological work in this chapter is not a substitute for that conversation. What this chapter can do is get you into the room. A surprising number of people who need an accountant or an adviser do not have one because making the appointment would mean saying the numbers out loud to a stranger.

IN PRACTICE

A man who had increased his income every year for eleven years told me he felt exactly as he had at the beginning. He was not exaggerating for effect. Each rise had been followed within four months by a new comparison, a new standard, a new figure that would be the one.

I asked him to write down the amount at which he would stop. He could not. He had never in his life considered the question. He found the exercise so uncomfortable that we did not finish it that day.

The line he eventually wrote was lower than what he was already earning. He had passed his own definition of enough some years earlier without noticing, because nothing in him was watching for it. He did not retire. He did start refusing the kind of work that had been making him miserable, which had been available to him for three years.

He also said something I have heard in different words many times. He had assumed that the feeling would arrive on its own once the figure was high enough. That assumption had cost him eleven years of a particular kind of attention that could have

gone somewhere else.

TWO MINUTES

Write one line: what enough looks like, as a number, attached to a specific change in how you live.

Then write the number you have been avoiding looking at. Not the answer. Just name which number it is, then when this week you will look at it.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have a definition of enough, which is the only thing that makes any financial target reachable rather than receding.

Money and work are separated in this book on purpose, because people routinely try to solve one by adjusting the other.

The next chapter is about the work itself: what you are actually being paid for, plus the difference between advancing in a thing and being unable to leave it.

Work: Advancing or Simply Staying

Careers move by default. The only question is whether the default is yours.

Almost nobody chooses a career. People choose a first job, then respond to what happens, then fifteen years later they are somewhere they never selected. That is not a moral failing. It is what happens in the absence of a defined target, which is the subject of this whole book applied to the place where most people spend most of their hours.

KNOW WHAT YOU ARE ACTUALLY PAID FOR. Not your job title and not your list of tasks. The one or two things that would be missed on the Monday you did not appear. Most people cannot name theirs, which means they cannot protect their time around it, so they spend their best hours on the work that is merely visible rather than on the work that is load bearing.

WORK NOBODY KNOWS ABOUT DOES NOT ACCUMULATE. Excellence performed quietly is not a strategy, it is a hope that somebody is watching. They are not watching, not because they are unkind but because they are busy. Say what you did once, plainly, without decoration, to the person for whom it matters. That single habit changes more careers than any amount of additional effort.

ASK PRECISELY. Nobody has ever been promoted by deserving it in silence. The request has to name the thing, the timing and the terms: I would like to lead this, from March, plus here is what I would need. Vague hopes for growth produce vague encouragement, which is what people receive for years and then resent.

SEPARATE ADVANCING FROM BEING UNABLE TO LEAVE. There is a test worth running once a year. If somebody offered you the identical money elsewhere, would you stay. If the answer is no, you are not advancing in that job, you are being retained by it. The two feel similar from the inside for a surprisingly long time.

IF YOU WORK FOR YOURSELF, CHOOSE WHO YOU SERVE. Taking whatever arrives is how a practice ends up shaped by its worst clients. Every twelve months, look at the work that made the year unpleasant and notice how much of it came through the same door. You are permitted to close that door. The revenue you lose is almost always smaller than the

capacity you recover.

DECIDE THE SENTENCE PEOPLE USE ABOUT YOU. When you are not in the room, colleagues describe you in about eight words. Those eight words determine what you are offered. They are not a matter of luck: they are formed by what you repeatedly do in front of people. You can choose them, then behave in the direction of the choice for a year. They will change.

NOTICE THE DRIFT AND GIVE IT A DATE. Nobody decides to stay somewhere for eleven years. They decide to stay for another few months, repeatedly, until the months do the deciding. If you have been telling yourself the same sentence about your work for more than a year (after this project, once things settle, when the market improves) put an actual date in the calendar for reviewing it. A drift with a date attached becomes a choice, which is the only condition under which you can be responsible for it.

WHERE THIS IS NOT A MINDSET QUESTION

Some workplaces are simply bad. If you are underpaid relative to people doing the same work, if the environment is hostile, if promises have been made and broken repeatedly, that is a situation rather than an attitude. No amount of defining, noticing or rehearsing will correct someone else's behaviour. Applying this chapter there produces only a more articulate version of staying. The relevant instrument in that case is either a difficult conversation with terms attached or a door.

IN PRACTICE

A woman who had been eleven years in the same organisation was passed over twice. She was, by every account including her critics, the most capable person in her department. She was also the person who fixed things quietly at the weekend so that nobody ever discovered there had been a problem.

Her eight words, when we asked people, were reliable, safe pair of hands, no trouble. Every one of them true. None of them describing somebody you promote.

What changed was not her work, which was already excellent. It was that she began saying, once, in the meeting, what had almost gone wrong and what she had done about it. She found this excruciating for about four months. The promotion came the following year. What she noticed afterwards was that nobody had ever been withholding it. They had genuinely not known.

There is a lesson under that which applies well beyond her. Being indispensable and being promotable are different qualities. A great many careful people spend a decade becoming the first while assuming it will produce the second.

TWO MINUTES

Write the eight words people currently use about you when you are not in the room. Be accurate rather than kind.

Then write the eight you would need for the thing you want next, then name the one behaviour that sits between the two lists.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have a clearer view of what you are paid for, what people say about you and whether you are advancing or being retained.

Work and the people closest to you are the two places where an unspoken request does the most damage.

The next chapter moves to those people, to the particular difficulty of applying any of this to someone who did not ask to be part of your practice.

People Who Did Not Sign Up for Your Practice

You can define your own behaviour. You cannot define somebody else's answer.

Everything in this book has assumed a target that sits inside your own life. Relationships break that assumption, because the thing you want is located in another person. That person has their own history, their own rules and no interest whatever in your ninety days.

Most of what goes wrong here comes from ignoring that single fact.

DEFINE YOUR SIDE, NEVER THEIRS. I want him to be more affectionate is not a target, it is a hope about somebody else's interior. I will say what I want on the day I notice it rather than three weeks later is a target. You will be told this is not enough. In my experience it changes more than any amount of work aimed at the other person, for the plain reason that it is the only part of the system you can operate.

RESENTMENT IS ALMOST ALWAYS A REQUEST THAT WAS NEVER MADE. Sit with the thing you have been carrying about someone and look for the sentence underneath it. It is usually short and slightly embarrassing: I want you to ask me about my day. I want to be told before you invite people. People carry these for years, convinced that having to ask would ruin the answer. It does not ruin the answer. It is the only way there is one.

ASK FOR A BEHAVIOUR YOU COULD FILM. Care more, be present, make an effort: none of these can be delivered because none of them describes an action. Send me a message when you are leaving. Sit at the table for the first ten minutes without your phone. Specific requests get met surprisingly often. Vague ones get agreed to and then quietly forgotten by both of you.

THE WINDOW APPLIES HERE MORE THAN ANYWHERE. The thing said on the day is a conversation. The same thing said five weeks later is a case for the prosecution, complete with evidence, so it will be received as an attack because by then it is one.

ATTENTION SHAPES WHAT YOU GET, IN BOTH DIRECTIONS. If you spend a month noticing every

irritating thing your partner does, you will end the month with an excellent collection. This is the mechanism from chapter three running domestically. It is not a reason to ignore real problems. It is a reason to know that your filter has been set to something, then to check what.

OLD RULES ARE LOUDEST IN INTIMACY. What love cost in the house you grew up in is what you will expect it to cost now: attention that had to be earned, affection that arrived with conditions, or a parent who withdrew for days. You will recreate the arrangement without meaning to and you will call it your type. Chapter eleven applies here with more force than it does to money.

GIVE THE OTHER PERSON A VERSION THEY CAN SUCCEED AT. Requests are often written so that only perfection counts, which guarantees that everybody fails and that the subject returns. If what you asked for happens four times out of five, say so and mean it. People repeat what they are thanked for and abandon what only ever gets audited.

WHERE THIS CHAPTER DOES NOT APPLY

If you are afraid of someone, if you are being controlled, monitored or made small on purpose, none of this is the right instrument and I want to be unambiguous about it. That is not a communication problem and no request, however well phrased, is the answer to it. Speak to someone outside the situation: a professional, a service, a friend who is not shared. There is no version of this book that is a substitute for that.

IN PRACTICE

A couple I saw had spent two years in the same argument about weekends. She experienced him as absent. He experienced himself as working hard for the family. Both were accurate, which is what made it insoluble at the level they were fighting it.

The request underneath, when she finally said it, was that she wanted to know on Wednesday what Saturday looked like. Not more time. Information, in advance, so she could stop spending three days waiting to find out.

He was visibly relieved, because for two years he had believed he was being asked for something he could not give. What was actually being asked took him about a minute a week. She had not asked for it earlier because it seemed too small to say out loud, which is the exact reason most of these requests go unmade.

Small is the point, not the weakness. In my experience the requests that transform an arrangement are almost never grand ones. They are the ones a person has decided are too minor to justify a conversation, then carries for a decade at enormous cost.

TWO MINUTES

Take the resentment you are currently carrying about one person. Write the request underneath it in one sentence.

Now rewrite it as something you could film them doing. Say it this week, on a good day,

| without the two years of context attached.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have a request converted into something askable, aimed at your own behaviour rather than at somebody else's character.

Everything in this part of the book so far has assumed you have the energy to do it.

The next chapter is about that assumption, which is the one people notice only when it stops being true.

The Body Everything Else Runs On

This is the one chapter where the target is not an achievement. It is capacity.

I am not a doctor and this is not a chapter about what to eat or how to train. There are people qualified to tell you that and I am not one of them. What belongs here is the part that behaves like everything else in this book: what you define, what you avoid knowing, plus the rules you were handed about your own body before you had any say in them.

DEFINE A CAPACITY, NOT AN APPEARANCE. There is a useful test. Targets about how you look are usually borrowed from somebody else. They have the property of never arriving, because the standard moves. Targets about what you can do belong to you: carrying the shopping up three flights without stopping, getting through a long day without the afternoon collapse, being able to play with a child on the floor and get up again easily. These arrive. You notice them arriving. That is the whole difference.

THE FLOOR VERSION MATTERS MORE HERE THAN ANYWHERE. Health is where people are at their most all or nothing, where all or nothing reliably becomes nothing by the third week. Whatever you choose, define the smallest version that survives a bad month, a work trip and a family crisis. The impressive version will look after itself in the good weeks. Nothing is built by the good weeks.

ATTACH IT TO SOMETHING THAT ALREADY HAPPENS. No new slot in the day, no new identity. The existing anchors from chapter ten: after the school run, before the shower, on the walk you already take to the station. New routines that require a rearranged life are abandoned at the first week that refuses to be rearranged.

SLEEP IS THE THING YOU WILL TRADE FIRST. It is also the one that quietly determines your state, your patience and your judgment in the difficult minute. People negotiate it away because it is the only thing in the day that does not complain when it is cut. Protect the hour before it rather than the hour of it: what happens in the ninety minutes beforehand decides most of what follows.

LOOK AT WHAT YOU ARE AVOIDING KNOWING. The appointment postponed for two years. The

symptom you have decided not to mention. This is the money chapter again in a different room. The mechanism is identical: the avoidance is not laziness, it is that finding out would make the thing real. Book it. Almost everybody reports afterwards that the waiting was the expensive part.

NOTICE THE FAMILY RULE ABOUT BODIES. Some houses taught that you do not make a fuss, that rest is idleness, that pain is complained about only when it is unmanageable. Whatever yours taught, you are still following it, usually without ever having examined it. It is worth asking who you learned it from, in the same way as everything else in chapter eleven.

COUNT THE DAYS YOU TURNED UP, NEVER THE RESULTS. The chapter on impatience applies here with unusual force, because the body reports back slowly and dishonestly. Weekly measurement of outcomes produces a mood swing rather than information. Keep one line: did I do the small version today. Everything else is weather.

WHERE THIS CHAPTER ENDS AND SOMEONE ELSE BEGINS

Anything persistent belongs with a doctor rather than with a method. And if your relationship with food, exercise or your own body has become a source of anxiety or control rather than of capacity, this chapter is not the right instrument at all. That is a real difficulty, it is common, it responds to proper help. I would rather say this plainly than leave you to work it out alone with a book.

IN PRACTICE

A man in his fifties had begun an ambitious regime four times in six years. Each attempt lasted between two and five weeks and ended during a period of travel. He described himself, by the fourth time, as somebody without discipline, which was untrue of every other area of his life.

We defined a version that could be done in a hotel corridor, badly, while tired. It was almost insultingly small. He kept it for eleven months, including two difficult periods that would have ended any of the previous four attempts.

What he noticed was not the physical change, although there was one. It was that he stopped being a person who fails at this, which had been quietly leaking into how he saw himself in other rooms.

That last part is the reason this chapter sits in a book about attraction at all. What you believe about your own reliability does not stay in one compartment. It follows you into the meeting, into the conversation you have been avoiding, into every place where you have to be somebody who does what he said he would.

TWO MINUTES

Write one capacity you want, described as something you would be able to do. Not a look, not a number.

Then name the appointment or the conversation you have been postponing, then the day this week you will make it happen.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have a target described as capacity, a version small enough to survive a bad month and one postponed thing with a date on it.

This part of the book has moved through money, work, the people close to you and the body doing all of it.

The next chapter closes it with the situation none of these methods dissolve on their own: the decision that has been sitting unmade for a year.

The Decision You Have Been Carrying

Not deciding is a decision, made again every morning, in favour of what already exists.

Most people reading this have one. The job, the house, the relationship, the country, the treatment. It has been sitting there for months, occasionally for years, developing the particular quality of feeling permanent rather than pending.

Nothing else in this book dissolves it. A defined target, a filter, a rehearsed minute: all of them assume you have chosen a direction. This chapter is about the moment before that.

ASK FIRST WHETHER IT CAN BE UNDONE. A decision you can reverse deserves speed, because the information you need is on the other side of trying it. A decision you cannot reverse deserves genuine slowness. Almost everybody does this backwards: months of deliberation over something they could have tested in a fortnight, then an irreversible choice made in an afternoon because they were tired of thinking.

WRITE THE OPTIONS AS FULL SENTENCES. Undecided things survive by staying vague. On paper, in complete sentences, with the actual consequences attached, one of them usually turns out to be something you were never seriously going to do. That is not a wasted exercise. Discovering there was only ever one real option is itself a decision.

LOOK FOR THE CRITERION, NOT FOR MORE INFORMATION. Endless research is the most respectable form of delay. Ask what specifically would have to be true for you to choose A. Then ask whether more information could change it. If nothing you could find out would move you, the deliberation is finished and what remains is the courage part, which no further reading improves.

WATCH WHAT YOUR BODY DOES AT THE COIN TOSS. Decide arbitrarily, in your head, then notice what arrives in the next two seconds. Relief or a small drop. This is not mysticism. It is the fastest way to read a preference that you have been arguing yourself out of, in about four seconds.

PRICE THE DELAY. Staying feels free and it is not. Write down what another year of this costs, in the specific currencies you care about: hours, health, the relationship with the person who is watching you not decide. Undecided situations are expensive in instalments, which is exactly why the bill is never noticed.

SEPARATE THE DECISION FROM THE ANNOUNCEMENT. Very often the choice was made long ago and what is unbearable is telling one particular person: a father, a partner, a business associate. If that is your case, then you do not have a decision problem at all. You have one difficult sentence to prepare, which is chapter six. It is a far smaller thing than the one you have been carrying.

GIVE IT A DATE. If it is genuinely too early, postpone deliberately: I will decide on the fourteenth, with whatever I know then. A postponement with a date is a plan. A postponement without one is simply the situation continuing to choose for you.

ASK WHAT YOU WOULD TELL SOMEBODY ELSE. Describe your own situation to yourself as though it belonged to a friend, in their words, then notice how quickly the answer arrives. People are decisive about other people's lives and paralysed about their own, which suggests that what is missing is rarely clarity. It is permission.

TWO CAUTIONS

Anything with legal or financial consequences needs somebody qualified before it needs clarity of mind. Getting advice is not indecision, it is part of deciding well.

And decisions taken in exhaustion, grief or the first weeks after a shock are a different matter. Not because you cannot think, but because the ground is still moving. Postpone those on purpose and with a date, rather than by default.

IN PRACTICE

A woman had spent nearly three years deciding whether to leave the family business. She had made lists. She had, by her own description, examined it from every angle and arrived nowhere.

When I asked what she would have to believe to stay, she answered in one sentence and then stopped, because the sentence she had produced was about her father rather than about the business.

She had decided years earlier. What she had not been able to do was say it to him. Once that was named, the work stopped being a decision and became a conversation she prepared for over three weeks, in the way described earlier in this book. It went better than she expected. Most of them do, which is not a promise, only an observation from a great many rooms.

The pattern in that story is more common than any other in this chapter. When a decision has resisted three years of thinking, the thing being avoided is usually not the choice. It is a specific face on the other side of the choice. Until that face is named the

deliberation can continue indefinitely without ever getting anywhere.

TWO MINUTES

Write both options as complete sentences, consequences included. Then write what would have to be true for you to choose the one you keep avoiding.

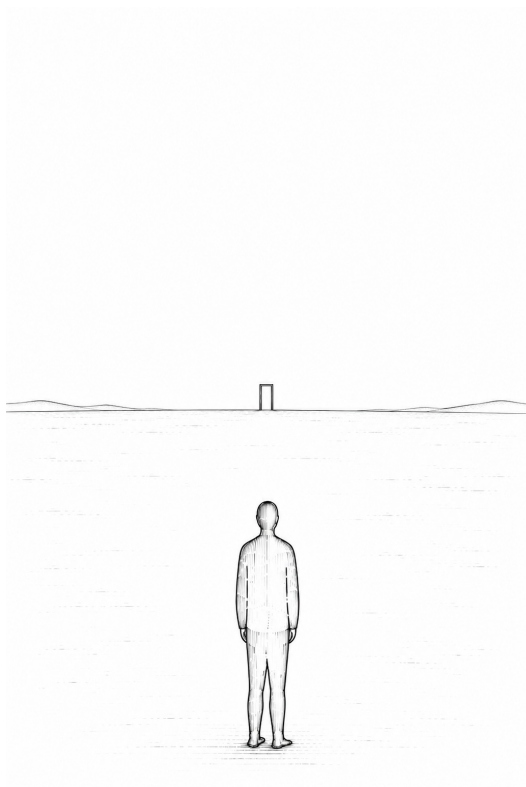
Then one more line: is there a person you are afraid to tell. If there is, that is the actual task.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have the decision separated from the announcement, priced, either taken or postponed with a date on it.

That closes the applications. Everything in this book now exists as understanding, which is the least durable form anything takes.

The last part turns all of it into ninety days of ordinary practice, beginning with two weeks that ask almost nothing of you.



PART FIVE

Weeks One and Two: Clarity

These two weeks ask almost nothing of you, which is the point.

Everything from here on is a protocol rather than an argument. Ninety days, four stages, plus a design principle that runs through all of them: the early weeks are deliberately undemanding, because the failure mode of every method like this is a first fortnight of enthusiasm followed by nothing.

In these two weeks you will not be asked to change your behaviour at all. You will be asked to decide what you are doing and to watch yourself for a while before you interfere.

WEEK ONE. DAY ONE. CHOOSE ONE THING. One. Not three, not a category. If several are competing, take the one that would change the others if it moved first, which is rarely the loudest. It is usually the one you have carried longest and mentioned least.

WEEK ONE. WRITE THE SENTENCE. Chapter two, done properly and slowly: a number and a month, stated in the affirmative, route left open. Then two lines describing an ordinary Tuesday once it is true. This takes most people two or three attempts across several days. The attempts that feel false are part of the process rather than evidence against it.

WEEK ONE. RUN THE DIAGNOSIS. The seven reasons from chapter one, read against the thing you just wrote. Note the number you stopped at, mechanical and structural. Write them at the top of the page. Everything in the next eleven weeks is aimed at those, not at the general problem of improving your life.

WEEK ONE. SET THE TWO DATES. The review date from chapter twelve, put in the calendar rather than in your head. And the return rule from chapter fourteen, written now, while you are still confident, because it exists precisely for the week when you are not.

WEEK TWO. OBSERVE WITHOUT CHANGING ANYTHING. This is the instruction people most want to skip and the one that pays best. For one week, carry the note from chapter three and record what you notice about your chosen thing. Change nothing. Do not improve. You are establishing what a normal week actually looks like, so without it you will have nothing to compare against in week eight except a feeling.

WEEK TWO. COUNT YOUR BASELINE. One number, the process kind: how many times, in this ordinary week, did you do the thing that would move this forward. Messages sent, prices stated, mornings protected. Most people discover the honest figure is zero or one, which is uncomfortable and enormously useful, because it means the first improvement is available immediately.

END OF WEEK TWO. SAY IT TO ONE PERSON. Not five yet. One person who will not make it a project. Saying the sentence out loud to a human being is the moment it stops being a private hope and becomes a thing that exists in the world.

BOTH WEEKS. KEEP THE BAR EMBARRASSINGLY LOW. If you find yourself designing a system with columns, colours or an application, stop. The entire apparatus of these ninety days is one page and one note on a phone. Elaborate setups are a form of preparation that feels like progress. The people who build them are reliably the people who abandon the practice by week five.

THE TWO MISTAKES OF THIS STAGE

The first is starting the action phase early because you feel motivated. Enthusiasm in week one predicts almost nothing about week nine. Spending it in advance leaves you nothing when the flat stretch arrives.

The second is choosing a target that belongs to somebody else. If you cannot describe the ordinary Tuesday, or if writing the sentence produces boredom rather than resistance, look again at whether you actually want the thing. Better to lose two weeks here than eleven later.

IN PRACTICE

A man who began this went straight to week three because the early instructions seemed trivial to somebody who had already read a great deal. By week six he had lost the thread and could not say whether anything had changed, since there was nothing to compare against.

He started again and did the two weeks as written. He described the observation week as the single most uncomfortable part of the whole ninety days, because he spent seven days watching himself do very little about something he had claimed to want for four years.

That week, he says, was the one that did the work. Everything after it was easier, for the simple reason that he had stopped arguing with himself about whether there was a problem.

His experience is the ordinary one. The observation week is unpleasant precisely because it removes the last comfortable explanation, which was that the situation was somehow unclear.

Open one page. Write four things: the sentence, the ordinary Tuesday, the two reason numbers from chapter one, the review date.

That page is the whole of week one. Everything for the next twelve weeks refers back to it, so keep it somewhere you will not have to look for it.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have one target with edges, an honest baseline and two dates written down while you were still confident.

Nothing has been asked of your behaviour yet, which is why this stage is survivable.

The next four weeks are where the practice becomes daily, with the whole design built around being possible on the worst day of the month rather than the best.

Weeks Three to Six: The Daily Ten Minutes

Four weeks of doing this badly will beat one week of doing it properly.

From here the practice becomes daily. It is smaller than you are expecting. Ten minutes, most of them in fragments of ninety seconds, attached to things you already do. If it requires a quiet room and a free half hour you will do it for nine days.

The whole sequence, in order.

MORNING, NINETY SECONDS. Read your sentence once. Then rehearse the one difficult minute that is actually in front of you today, from behind your own eyes, including the version where it goes wrong and the line you use to recover. If nothing difficult is scheduled, rehearse the next one that is.

ONE IF-THEN PLAN, RUNNING ALL FOUR WEEKS. Not a new one each week. The same plan, on the same anchor, until it stops requiring any thought. If you cannot remember what your plan is without looking, it is too complicated and you should shrink it today.

DURING THE DAY, ONE LINE AT A TIME. Anything noticed goes in the note, immediately, in whatever words arrive. A name that came up twice. A remark about a budget. The thing you almost said. It does not need to be significant. Significance is only visible later.

TWICE A WEEK, THREE LINES. The gratitude entries from chapter nine, one of which must be something that happened partly because of an action you took. Twice, not daily. Daily becomes recitation.

SUNDAY, TEN MINUTES. Read the week's lines. One question only: is there a next move here that takes under an hour. Most weeks the answer is no. Write your process number for the week, the count of times you did the thing, then close it.

ONCE, IN WEEK THREE. TELL THE FIVE PEOPLE. Your sentence is stable now, so say it to five people who move in different rooms from each other. Precisely, with the number in it. This is a single act, not a campaign, yet it produces more traffic over the following two months than anything else in the protocol.

EVERY DAY, THE FLOOR VERSION EXISTS. On the days that cannot hold ten minutes, the practice is one line in the note and nothing else. Written into the design in advance, that line is the practice rather than a failure of it, which is the entire difference between a method that reaches week thirteen and one that does not.

WHAT NOT TO DO IN THESE FOUR WEEKS

Do not assess whether it is working. That question has a date and the date is not in this stage. Every time you ask it early you are spending the practice on reassurance rather than on the thing.

Do not add anything. No second target, no additional plan, no improvements to the system. The design is deliberately thin so that it survives a bad month, so every addition lowers the odds that it does.

Do not increase the size when you feel good. The version you perform in a strong week sets an expectation that the weak week cannot meet. The gap between them is where people quit.

WHERE IT WILL GO WRONG

Somewhere in week four or five it will flatten. Nothing visible will be happening, the note will look trivial, the whole thing faintly ridiculous. This is not a warning sign. It is the standard shape, it arrives for nearly everyone at nearly the same point. It is the exact moment the return rule from chapter fourteen was written for.

IN PRACTICE

A woman doing this told me her weeks three to six consisted of ninety seconds in the car before the school run, one line in the note perhaps three times a week, plus ten minutes on Sunday evening while the kitchen emptied. She missed nine days out of twenty eight.

Her process number went from one in the baseline week to five by week six. Nothing had arrived. She could not point to a single result.

What she could point to, when we looked at the note together, was eleven observations she would not otherwise have made, two of which turned into the only things that mattered in her following year. Neither looked like anything on the day it was written down.

Nine missed days out of twenty eight is worth stating plainly, because the version of this that exists in most people's imagination has none. Two thirds is a working practice. Waiting for the version with no gaps in it is how people end up with no practice at all.

TWO MINUTES

Write your ten minutes as a fixed sequence, with the anchor next to each part: where the ninety seconds happens, where the note lives, which evening is Sunday for you.

Then delete one thing from it. Whatever you are least likely to do on a bad day should not be in the design at all.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have a daily practice small enough to survive, a plan running on an anchor and a page of observations you would not otherwise have.

Everything in these four weeks has been preparation and noticing, which is exactly as far as preparation can take anybody.

The next four weeks are the ones the whole book has been building towards. They consist almost entirely of doing things while insufficiently ready.

Weeks Seven to Ten: Acting

Everything until now produced readiness. Readiness produces nothing.

The daily ten minutes continue unchanged. What changes is the weight: from noticing to sending, from rehearsing to saying. These four weeks are where the ninety days either produce something or turn out to have been a pleasant course of reading.

SET THE WEEKLY NUMBER, THEN SET IT LOW. Take your baseline from week two and add two. If you counted one, the target is three. Not ten. A number you will hit in a bad week is worth more than an ambitious one you abandon in week eight. The whole point of a countable target is that it removes the daily negotiation about whether today is a good day for this.

MOVE ON THE SAME DAY. The window rule from chapter five now runs daily. Anything in the note that has a move under an hour gets that move on the day you see it. Four lines, no attachment, one question. The polished version that arrives in three weeks is a different and much weaker object.

DO THE DIFFICULT MINUTE AT LEAST ONCE IN THESE FOUR WEEKS. The price said out loud. The request made to the specific person. The announcement. You have rehearsed it since week three, where rehearsal past a certain point becomes another form of waiting. Put a date on it now, inside this stage, while the structure is still holding you.

COUNT REFUSALS AS EVIDENCE THAT THE METHOD IS RUNNING. A week with three noes in it is a working week. A week with none usually means nothing was asked, which is the failure you cannot see because it does not hurt. Some people find it useful to keep the refusals as their own small list. It reframes the thing quickly.

KEEP THE REVIEW DATE SACRED. You are now doing things, which makes the urge to audit results almost unbearable. Resist it for four more weeks. Judging a harvest in week eight is how people conclude that a functioning practice has failed.

STAY ON ONE TARGET. Action produces energy and energy wants to spread. You will be tempted to start something adjacent, to redesign your website, to open a second front.

Scattering at exactly this point is the most common way an otherwise good ninety days ends with nothing finished.

WATCH THE WEEK AFTER SOMETHING GOES WELL. This is the likeliest place in the whole protocol for the practice to stop. It will not feel like stopping. It will feel like a natural pause after an achievement. Chapter fourteen described why. If your return rule is going to be needed once, it will probably be here.

WRITE THE MESSAGE BEFORE YOU DECIDE WHETHER TO SEND IT. Deciding and composing at the same time is what produces the evening spent not writing four sentences. Separate them: draft it in two minutes without judging it, then read it once and send. Almost nobody who has written the thing then declines to send it. The refusal happens earlier, at the blank page, which is why the blank page is the part to remove.

THE DISTINCTION THAT MATTERS IN THIS STAGE

Activity and action are not the same. Rewriting your profile, reading two more books, organising the note into folders: all of these feel like work and none of them is the thing. The test is simple and slightly unpleasant. Does this move involve another human being who could say no. If not, it is preparation wearing a costume.

IN PRACTICE

A man with a baseline of one set his number at three. Over the four weeks he managed eleven, so slightly below target. Of the eleven, seven produced nothing at all, two produced polite refusals, one produced a conversation that went nowhere and one produced a meeting.

The meeting became the thing that changed the year. He is quick to point out that he could not have predicted which of the eleven it would be, or that his instinct on the day would have ranked it eighth or ninth.

He also stopped for eleven days after the meeting was confirmed, which he now finds funny and did not find funny at the time. The card in his wallet brought him back.

Eleven attempts, one result, no way of knowing in advance which one. That ratio is the honest shape of this stage and it is worth carrying into the next ninety days as well. People who expect three attempts to produce three answers stop at the second silence.

TWO MINUTES

Write your weekly number: baseline plus two. Write it where you keep the process count. Then put a date, inside these four weeks, on the one difficult minute you have been rehearsing. A date, not a week. Somebody else should be in the diary entry with you.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have a countable weekly target, at least one difficult minute performed and a collection of refusals that prove the machine is turning.

What you do not yet have is a verdict, which has been waiting on a date since week one.

The next three weeks are that date: what actually changed, what the numbers say rather than what the mood says, then what you do with the answer.

Weeks Eleven to Thirteen: The Verdict

The verdict is not how you feel about it. It is what the page says.

The date you set in week one has arrived. Before anything else, notice that you kept an appointment with yourself made three months ago, which a great many people never manage once.

Three weeks: one to read, one to correct, one to decide what stays.

WEEK ELEVEN. READ BEFORE YOU CONCLUDE. Sit with the whole record in one sitting: the page from week one, the note, the weekly counts, the twice weekly lines. Read it all before forming an opinion. The opinion you arrive with is made of the last fortnight, which is the least representative sample available.

ANSWER FOUR QUESTIONS IN WRITING. What did I actually do, in numbers. What arrived, if anything. What did I notice that I would have missed three months ago. What did I avoid, repeatedly, then how did I explain it to myself at the time. The fourth is the one that pays. It is also the one people leave out.

JUDGE THE PROCESS BEFORE THE OUTCOME. If the count rose and nothing arrived, the practice worked and the target needs more time or a different route. That is a completely different situation from a count that never moved. Confusing the two is how people abandon methods that were functioning. Outcomes are slow and partly outside you. Counts are neither.

THEN LOCATE THE CORRECTION, TAKING ONLY ONE. There are three places it usually sits. The definition was still too vague, so nothing could be recognised. The action was the wrong kind, meaning it never involved another person who could say no. Or the structural rule from chapter eleven is still running, which shows up as a cue that arrived repeatedly with nothing following it. Choose the single most likely one. Correcting three things at once tells you nothing about which correction worked.

WEEK TWELVE. RUN THE CORRECTED VERSION FOR SEVEN DAYS. Not a new ninety days. One week, with the single change in place, to see whether it moves the count. A correction that cannot move a number in a week is usually the wrong correction.

WEEK THIRTEEN. DECIDE WHAT BECOMES PERMANENT. Keep only what survived a bad week. For most people that is two things: the note and the Sunday ten minutes. Everything else can be picked up when needed. A practice you keep for a decade is always smaller than the one you designed in week one.

TELL THE PERSON FROM WEEK TWO. Whatever the outcome. Saying out loud what happened, including the parts that did not, closes the ninety days properly and makes the next set considerably easier to begin.

LOOK FOR WHAT CHANGED THAT YOU DID NOT AIM AT. Almost everyone finishes with something they were not tracking: a conversation that became easier, a person they stopped avoiding, a price they now say without preparing for it. These do not appear in the counts because nobody thought to count them. Read the note specifically for them before you decide the quarter produced nothing.

THE TWO WAYS THIS STAGE GOES WRONG

The first is judging by feeling. You will feel, in week eleven, roughly what you felt in week five, because feelings track the last few days rather than the quarter. That is precisely why the record exists.

The second is starting again from the beginning. If the count rose, you do not need a fresh start, you need one correction. The instinct to rebuild from scratch is the same instinct from chapter fourteen, arriving in a more respectable costume.

IN PRACTICE

A woman reached week eleven convinced the whole thing had failed. Her sentence had been about a specific kind of client and none had arrived.

Her counts told a different story. From one in the baseline week to an average of four across the action weeks, with nineteen approaches in total. The practice had plainly run. What had not worked was the route: seventeen of the nineteen had gone to the same category of person, all of whom were her competitors rather than her buyers.

The correction was one line. Same target, same count, different door. Two arrived within six weeks. She describes the review as the moment she stopped grading herself and started reading her own data, which she says is the only part of the ninety days she has kept permanently.

Her case is the common one and it is why this stage exists at all. Effort and direction fail differently, they feel identical from the inside, so only the written record can tell you which of the two you are dealing with.

TWO MINUTES

Answer the four questions on one page. Numbers where numbers exist.

Then write your single correction as one sentence, plus the seven days in which you will

| test it.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have a verdict built from a record rather than from a mood, one correction and a short list of what stays.

All of this has depended on having somewhere to write things down.

The next chapter is that: the pages themselves, laid out so you can use them directly rather than designing something first.

The Pages

Write in this book. It is the only way it becomes yours rather than mine.

Four pages carry the whole of the ninety days. They are printed here so that you can begin without designing anything first, then repeated as blank copies at the back of the book for the thirteen weeks. If you prefer a notebook or a note on your phone, copy the fields exactly and change nothing about them.

Everything on these pages is deliberately small. There is no space for reflection because reflection is not what has been missing.

ONE. THE WEEK ONE PAGE

WEEK ONE

THE SENTENCE: A NUMBER, A MONTH, AFFIRMATIVE, ROUTE OPEN

AN ORDINARY TUESDAY, ONCE IT IS TRUE

MECHANICAL REASON

STRUCTURAL REASON

BASELINE COUNT, WEEK TWO

REVIEW DATE

RETURN RULE: IF I HAVE MISSED MORE THAN A WEEK, THEN

TWO. THE WEEKLY PAGE

WEEK NUMBER	TIMES I DID THE THING
NOTICED THIS WEEK, ONE LINE EACH	
ANYTHING HERE WITH A NEXT MOVE UNDER AN HOUR	
REFUSALS, SILENCES, NOTHING HAPPENED	

THREE. THE TWICE WEEKLY LINES

SPECIFIC ENOUGH TO PHOTOGRAPH. ONE MUST BE CAUSED BY SOMETHING I DID

FOUR. THE REVIEW PAGE

WEEK ELEVEN

WHAT I DID, IN NUMBERS

WHAT ARRIVED

WHAT I NOTICED THAT I WOULD HAVE MISSED THREE MONTHS AGO

WHAT I AVOIDED, PLUS HOW I EXPLAINED IT TO MYSELF

THE ONE CORRECTION, IN A SENTENCE

HOW TO USE THEM BADLY, WHICH IS HOW THEY WORK

Half the fields will be empty most weeks. Leave them empty. A page with two lines on it

is a completed page. The instinct to fill everything properly is the same instinct that produces beautiful notebooks abandoned in March.

Do not rewrite a week that went badly. The record is useful precisely because it contains the weeks you would rather not remember. In week eleven those are the pages you will learn the most from.

TWO MINUTES

Fill in the week one page now, in pen, in this book. Not later, not somewhere neater.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have the pages, which means there is nothing left to prepare.

Everything from here concerns what happens after the ninety days end, whether they went well or not.

The next chapter is for the reader whose count rose and whose life did not, which is a more common outcome than any book in this field admits.

When It Did Not Work: The Second Ninety Days

One quarter is a measurement. It is not a verdict on a life.

No book in this field wants this chapter, which is exactly why it is here. A significant number of people finish ninety honest days with very little to show. If that is you, the useful question is not whether to continue. It is which of three quite different situations you are in.

ONE. THE COUNT NEVER MOVED. If you performed the action roughly as often as in the baseline week, then the practice did not run and there is no point examining outcomes at all. Two causes account for nearly all of these. Either the target belongs to somebody else, which the relief test from chapter fourteen will tell you in about a minute, or the structural rule from chapter eleven is still running and simply cannot be out-planned. Look there before you look anywhere else.

TWO. THE COUNT MOVED AND NOTHING ARRIVED. This is the most common and the most misread. The practice worked. What is unresolved is either the route or the time. Route problems look like effort aimed at the wrong door, which is usually visible in the note once somebody points at it. Time problems are simply what they are: some things take four quarters and no method compresses them.

THREE. SOMETHING ARRIVED AND YOU FEEL NOTHING. This is the one that unsettles people most. If the thing came and the relief did not, the target was standing in for something else. Chapter fifteen applies whether or not money was involved. Write down what you expected to feel. That sentence is your actual target and you have just found it eleven weeks earlier than most people do.

CHANGE ONE VARIABLE, NOT THE METHOD. In the second ninety days keep the protocol identical and alter a single thing: the door, the size of the ask, the person you are asking, the hour of day you do it. One variable keeps the quarter legible. Change three and you will end up in the same position with no idea which part was responsible.

SHORTEN THE SETUP. The second round needs one week of preparation rather than two, because the sentence exists and the baseline is now a real number instead of a guess.

Everything else runs as written.

DECIDE IN ADVANCE HOW MANY QUARTERS YOU ARE GIVING IT. Two, four, six. Write the number down now, while you can still think clearly about it. A commitment with a stated end is a decision. A commitment that renews itself silently every ninety days is the drift from chapter sixteen wearing the clothes of persistence.

AFTER THE SECOND UNPRODUCTIVE QUARTER, STOP DIAGNOSING YOURSELF ALONE. Two rounds of honest work with no movement is the point at which another pair of eyes earns its cost, whether that is a coach, a therapist, a colleague who owes you the truth. What you cannot see about your own situation is, by definition, not visible to you.

KEEP THE RECORD FROM THE FIRST ROUND. Do not start a clean page. The value of a second quarter comes almost entirely from being able to lay it beside the first. People who begin again in a fresh notebook lose the only comparison they will ever have. Two mediocre quarters side by side will tell you something neither could tell you alone.

PERMISSION, STATED PLAINLY

You are allowed to stop and choose something else. Not every target deserves four quarters of a life. Abandoning one that has gone quiet is a legitimate result rather than a failure of character. The test remains the one from chapter fourteen: imagine dropping it permanently, today, with nobody knowing. Grief means continue. Relief means you have your answer and can stop paying for a decision you already made.

IN PRACTICE

A man finished his first ninety days having done almost nothing, which he attributed to a difficult period at work. His second quarter produced a count that quadrupled and still nothing arrived. He was, by his own account, ready to conclude that this was not for him.

The note showed that every approach had been made on a Friday afternoon, after everything else, when he had nothing left. He changed one variable. Same target, same count, Tuesday mornings.

He describes the third quarter as the one where it finally worked and I would put it differently. The third quarter is where the first two paid, because without them nobody could have known that the problem was the hour of the day.

The general point is worth stating without decoration. A quarter that produces no result still produces information, provided you wrote things down. A quarter that produces neither is the only genuinely wasted one, where the difference between the two is a notebook.

TWO MINUTES

Write which of the three situations you are in. Use the numbers rather than the feeling.

Then write the single variable you will change, plus how many quarters you are prepared to give this before you choose something else.

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

You have a diagnosis, one variable to change and a stated limit on your own patience.

What remains is the question of what survives once the structure of ninety days is no longer holding you up.

The last chapter is about that: the very small amount of this that is worth keeping permanently.

What Is Worth Keeping

What lasts is always smaller than what you designed.

The ninety days are structure. Structure is scaffolding. It goes up around a building for a while and then it comes down. What remains standing was never the scaffolding.

Almost everyone who does this properly ends up keeping two things. It is worth knowing in advance that it will be two rather than eleven, so that you do not experience the shrinking as a decline.

THE NOTE. One place where things you notice go, one line each, indefinitely. It costs nothing and it is the only reason you will still be catching the thing that surfaced on a Tuesday when you were busy with something else. Ten years of that note is a strange and valuable document.

THE TEN MINUTES ON A SUNDAY. Read the week, ask the single question: is there a next move here that takes under an hour. Most weeks the answer is no and it takes four minutes. That question, asked fifty times a year for a decade, will produce more than any programme you could design.

THE RETURN RULE, KEPT FOR LIFE. You will stop things repeatedly between now and the end. That is not a character defect, it is what a life with illness and travel and other people in it does to any practice. The written instruction that brings you back is the single most durable thing in this book. It goes on working long after you have forgotten which chapter it came from.

RUN THE FULL NINETY DAYS ONLY WHEN SOMETHING IS BEGINNING. A new target, a change of direction, a decision that has become unavoidable. The rest of the year runs on the light version. People who attempt to hold the full protocol permanently abandon it within two quarters, which is the ordinary fate of anything that requires you to be a slightly better person indefinitely.

ONE DAY A YEAR, ASK THE FOUR QUESTIONS. What did I do, what arrived, what did I notice, what did I keep avoiding. Put it in the same week each year, near a date you cannot forget. It is the smallest maintenance any of this needs.

NOTICE WHAT YOU CARRY RATHER THAN WHAT YOU PERFORM. A year from now the visible practice may be almost nothing. What will have changed is how you read a silence, whether a refusal knocks you out for a week or an afternoon, how long a message sits unsent, what you do with the small clear signal that something is wrong. That is the actual inheritance from these pages. None of it appears in a count.

GIVE IT TO ONE PERSON, ONCE. Not as a doctrine. When somebody near you is stuck in the way you were, tell them the one part that applies: the target with edges, or the note, or the sentence about the rule they never chose. Saying it out loud to someone else is how you find out what you actually understood, which is a different and smaller quantity than what you have read.

THE WHOLE OF IT, BRIEFLY

Define the thing precisely enough that you would recognise it. Aim your attention at it and write down what you find. Move inside the short window in which what you noticed is still available. Rehearse the difficult minute. Say sentences you can accept. Arrange your state rather than summoning it. Keep a record that includes your own part. Act on a cue instead of on willpower. And look honestly at the rule you were handed about what a person like you is permitted to have.

That is the entire mechanism. There is nothing mystical in it, which I have said several times because the promise of something mystical is what keeps people reading books like this one instead of finishing them and going outside.

It is also, in my experience, sufficient. Not for everything, not on any schedule you would choose. But sufficient more often than most people discover, because most people stop somewhere in the flat weeks and conclude that the failure was in themselves.

A LAST WORD

If one sentence from this book stays with you, I would prefer it to be this one. You have probably been keeping a promise you never made out loud. You are allowed to renegotiate the terms without betraying anyone.

Everything else here is method. That part is yours.

TWO MINUTES

Decide the two things you are keeping and write them on the first page of this book, where you will see them if you ever open it again.

Then put next year's review date in the calendar. It takes ten seconds and it is the only appointment this book asks of you permanently.

BEFORE YOU CLOSE THE BOOK

You have a target you can recognise, a record of your own behaviour and a way back after every interruption.

What began as reading has become two small habits and one honest question, which is all this was ever going to be.

The rest happens off the page, on ordinary days, in the minutes you have been avoiding. Go and have one of them.

The Ninety Second Script

Read this once before you use it, then work from memory. It is meant to be done sitting in a car, standing in a corridor or waiting for a lift, with your eyes open if that is where you are.

TEN SECONDS Say your sentence, the one with the number and the month in it. Once, silently or out loud.

TWENTY SECONDS Find the one difficult minute in front of you today. Not the whole meeting. The specific minute: the moment you say the price, ask the question, tell them you are leaving.

TWENTY SECONDS Run it from behind your own eyes. What you are looking at. Where your hands are. The sound of the room. Say the words internally in the order you will say them.

TWENTY SECONDS Now run it going wrong. The pause that goes on too long, the objection, the moment you lose your place. Watch yourself use your recovery line. Hear it land as ordinary rather than as a disaster.

TEN SECONDS Return to the ordinary Tuesday. Not the ceremony, not the announcement. A normal day, after it is true.

TEN SECONDS Ask the question: will I do it today.

If any part feels false, shorten it rather than embellish it. The script is a tool for aiming, not an experience to be enjoyed.

Fifty Sentences That Survive Scrutiny

Use these as models rather than as text. Rewrite each one in your own vocabulary, since a sentence containing a word you would never say aloud is read by your mind as a quotation from somebody else. Every entry here is either behavioural, a bridge or a question, for the reasons set out in chapter seven.

MONEY

- I am learning to charge what the work is worth.
- I say the number, then I stop talking.
- Will I look at the figure today rather than next month.
- I am not there yet and I am the person who sends the invoice on time.
- I know what enough looks like for me.
- I am learning to hear a price without apologising for it.
- Will I ask what the budget is before I quote.
- Money is a tool in my hands rather than a verdict on me.
- I open the statement on the first Tuesday of the month.
- I am learning that being paid properly is not the same as being greedy.

WORK

- I say what I did, once, plainly, to the person for whom it matters.
- Will I ask for the thing by name today.
- I am learning to be visible without performing.
- I protect the hours in which I am actually useful.
- I am not there yet and I put my name on my own work.
- Will I send four sentences rather than wait for a perfect page.
- I finish the conversation I have been postponing.
- I am learning to decline work that costs more than it pays.
- Being reliable and being invisible are not the same thing.
- Will I answer this today, badly, rather than next month, beautifully.

RELATIONSHIPS

- I say what I want on the day I notice it.
- Will I make the request instead of waiting to be understood.
- I am learning to ask for something small without apologising for its size.
- I ask for a behaviour rather than for a feeling.
- I am not there yet and I say the thing before it becomes a case.
- Will I thank them for the four times rather than audit the fifth.
- I am learning to let a silence be a silence.
- What I keep noticing is what I will end the month holding.
- I can be loyal to where I come from without staying beneath it.
- Will I say the small true thing rather than the comforting one.

BODY AND ENERGY

- I do the small version on the days that cannot hold the large one.
- Will I turn up today, badly, for two minutes.
- I am learning to treat rest as equipment rather than as a reward.
- I count the days I showed up, never the results.
- I am not there yet and I book the appointment this week.
- Will I protect the ninety minutes before sleep.
- I am learning to say when something hurts.
- I want to be able to do this, rather than to look like that.
- A missed week is a week, not a verdict.
- Will I move first and see how I feel afterwards.

DECISIONS AND EVERYTHING ELSE

- I decide on the fourteenth, with whatever I know then.
- Will I write the message before I decide whether to send it.
- I am learning to act while insufficiently ready.
- Not deciding is a decision I am making every morning.
- I am not there yet and I do the two minute version today.
- Will I tell one person what I am actually trying to do.
- I am learning to let a refusal take an afternoon rather than a week.
- A feeling is a report rather than a verdict.
- I keep the promise I made to myself in week one.
- Will I come back today, without reviewing anything first.

The Ten Minute Day

EVERY DAY

- Ninety seconds, on an existing anchor: the sentence, the difficult minute, the recovery line.
- One if-then plan, unchanged, running on its cue.
- One line in the note whenever something surfaces.
- On a bad day: the note only. That is the practice, not a failure of it.

TWICE A WEEK

- Three lines, specific enough to photograph. One caused by something you did.

ONCE A WEEK

- Ten minutes. Read the week. Is there a next move here that takes under an hour.
- Write the count: how many times you did the thing.

ONCE A QUARTER

- The four questions. What I did, what arrived, what I noticed, what I avoided.
- One correction, tested for seven days.

ONCE A YEAR

- The same four questions, in the same week, near a date you cannot forget.

The Mistakes, Collected

- Choosing three targets, which reliably produces none.
- Defining the vehicle instead of the outcome, so that one closed door ends the whole thing.
- Skipping the observation week, then having nothing to compare against.
- Rehearsing the arrival rather than the road.
- Using an affirmation your mind can disprove in half a second.
- Waiting to feel ready, which is not an event and will not arrive.
- Answering beautifully in three weeks instead of badly on the day.
- Measuring outcomes daily and calling it diligence.
- Building a system with columns and colours instead of a page and a note.
- Increasing the practice in a good week, so the bad week cannot meet it.
- Restarting from day one after a gap, which turns two weeks into twelve.
- Treating a missed fortnight as evidence about your character.
- Using a cheerful sentence to close a subject that should stay open.
- Mistaking activity for action: if nobody can say no to it, it is preparation.
- Stopping in the week after something finally went well.
- Concluding from one quarter that the method does not work, when the count never moved.

Where to Look Next

A short list rather than a long one, on the principle that runs through this series. Each of these covers one of the mechanisms in this book in more depth than a short guide can.

- On why picturing success alone can reduce effort, plus on pairing a wish with its obstacle: the research literature on mental contrasting.
- On if-then plans: the work on implementation intentions, which is thirty years old and still underused.
- On expectation altering perception and outcome: the clinical literature on placebo, which is more interesting than its reputation.
- On habit and the return after interruption: any of the recent behavioural science on cues and context.
- On family loyalty and inherited obligation: the systemic literature in family therapy.

A note on systemic constellations. You may come across this one if you start looking into inherited family patterns. It is an experiential method, usually done in a group, where people stand in for members of your family so you can see the shape of the thing from the outside instead of only from inside your own head. I use it in my own work with clients. A word of warning, said plainly: it has not been tested the way a clinical treatment is tested, so you will find people who swear by it alongside people who dismiss it entirely. Treat it as a way of looking at something rather than as proof of anything. If it interests you, look for someone properly trained and go with your eyes open.

Nothing in this appendix is required reading. If you have the page from week one filled in, you have more than any of these will give you.

The Thirteen Weeks

One page per week. Half the fields will be empty most weeks, which is correct. A page with two lines on it is a completed page.

Do not rewrite a week that went badly. In week eleven those are the pages that will teach you the most.

WEEK 1

TIMES I DID THE THING

DATES

NOTICED THIS WEEK, ONE LINE EACH

ANYTHING HERE WITH A NEXT MOVE UNDER AN HOUR

REFUSALS, SILENCES, NOTHING HAPPENED

THREE LINES, TWICE THIS WEEK. ONE CAUSED BY SOMETHING I DID

WEEK 2

TIMES I DID THE THING

DATES

NOTICED THIS WEEK, ONE LINE EACH

ANYTHING HERE WITH A NEXT MOVE UNDER AN HOUR

REFUSALS, SILENCES, NOTHING HAPPENED

THREE LINES, TWICE THIS WEEK. ONE CAUSED BY SOMETHING I DID

WEEK 3

TIMES I DID THE THING

DATES

NOTICED THIS WEEK, ONE LINE EACH

ANYTHING HERE WITH A NEXT MOVE UNDER AN HOUR

REFUSALS, SILENCES, NOTHING HAPPENED

THREE LINES, TWICE THIS WEEK. ONE CAUSED BY SOMETHING I DID

WEEK 4

TIMES I DID THE THING

DATES

NOTICED THIS WEEK, ONE LINE EACH

ANYTHING HERE WITH A NEXT MOVE UNDER AN HOUR

REFUSALS, SILENCES, NOTHING HAPPENED

THREE LINES, TWICE THIS WEEK. ONE CAUSED BY SOMETHING I DID

WEEK 5

TIMES I DID THE THING

DATES

NOTICED THIS WEEK, ONE LINE EACH

ANYTHING HERE WITH A NEXT MOVE UNDER AN HOUR

REFUSALS, SILENCES, NOTHING HAPPENED

THREE LINES, TWICE THIS WEEK. ONE CAUSED BY SOMETHING I DID

WEEK 6

TIMES I DID THE THING

DATES

NOTICED THIS WEEK, ONE LINE EACH

ANYTHING HERE WITH A NEXT MOVE UNDER AN HOUR

REFUSALS, SILENCES, NOTHING HAPPENED

THREE LINES, TWICE THIS WEEK. ONE CAUSED BY SOMETHING I DID

WEEK 7

TIMES I DID THE THING

DATES

NOTICED THIS WEEK, ONE LINE EACH

ANYTHING HERE WITH A NEXT MOVE UNDER AN HOUR

REFUSALS, SILENCES, NOTHING HAPPENED

THREE LINES, TWICE THIS WEEK. ONE CAUSED BY SOMETHING I DID

WEEK 8

TIMES I DID THE THING

DATES

NOTICED THIS WEEK, ONE LINE EACH

ANYTHING HERE WITH A NEXT MOVE UNDER AN HOUR

REFUSALS, SILENCES, NOTHING HAPPENED

THREE LINES, TWICE THIS WEEK. ONE CAUSED BY SOMETHING I DID

WEEK 9

TIMES I DID THE THING

DATES

NOTICED THIS WEEK, ONE LINE EACH

ANYTHING HERE WITH A NEXT MOVE UNDER AN HOUR

REFUSALS, SILENCES, NOTHING HAPPENED

THREE LINES, TWICE THIS WEEK. ONE CAUSED BY SOMETHING I DID

WEEK 10

TIMES I DID THE THING

DATES

NOTICED THIS WEEK, ONE LINE EACH

ANYTHING HERE WITH A NEXT MOVE UNDER AN HOUR

REFUSALS, SILENCES, NOTHING HAPPENED

THREE LINES, TWICE THIS WEEK. ONE CAUSED BY SOMETHING I DID

WEEK 11

TIMES I DID THE THING

DATES

NOTICED THIS WEEK, ONE LINE EACH

ANYTHING HERE WITH A NEXT MOVE UNDER AN HOUR

REFUSALS, SILENCES, NOTHING HAPPENED

THREE LINES, TWICE THIS WEEK. ONE CAUSED BY SOMETHING I DID

WEEK 12

TIMES I DID THE THING

DATES

NOTICED THIS WEEK, ONE LINE EACH

ANYTHING HERE WITH A NEXT MOVE UNDER AN HOUR

REFUSALS, SILENCES, NOTHING HAPPENED

THREE LINES, TWICE THIS WEEK. ONE CAUSED BY SOMETHING I DID

WEEK 13

TIMES I DID THE THING

DATES

NOTICED THIS WEEK, ONE LINE EACH

ANYTHING HERE WITH A NEXT MOVE UNDER AN HOUR

REFUSALS, SILENCES, NOTHING HAPPENED

THREE LINES, TWICE THIS WEEK. ONE CAUSED BY SOMETHING I DID

About the Author

Vivien Marsh holds degrees in law and in economics and has spent a working life as an advisor across corporate, financial and private client work in several countries. Cross-border structures, succession, ownership, governance: the technical side of decisions that families and business owners cannot afford to get wrong. Alongside it, brand and marketing work, which turned out to be the same subject approached from the other end.

The interest behind this book came from what happened in the room. Sitting across the table from people at the moment a decision stops being technical and becomes personal, the same thing kept appearing. The obstacle was almost never the information. Two clients would receive the same analysis and the same options, yet one would move while the other spent three years preparing to.

That pattern led to years of reading in psychology and behavioural science, pursued not academically but for the parts that bore directly on the work. Marketing sharpened the same question from the outside: what makes somebody act, why a good argument so often fails to move anyone, what a person has to believe before a reason can reach them. The two sides turned out to be one subject.

Hence this book. Why do some people change their lives while others, equally capable and equally serious, stay exactly where they are? The answer that emerged had little to do with belief. It had to do with definition, with attention, with acting inside the short window a thing stays available, plus the rules people inherit about what somebody like them is permitted to have.

No claim is made here to clinical training and this book is not therapy. What is offered is an account of the mechanisms that appear to work, drawn from thirty years of watching people decide, written in the conviction that anything true can be said clearly.

Outside the work: a private pilot's licence used mostly for short flights over water, a long habit of solo travel in places with poor phone coverage, an ongoing argument with a cello that is being lost slowly. Marsh lives between two countries and has never managed to say which one is home.

This is the first book in the Knowledge, Simply series.