Self-Actualization Against The Odds

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Chapter 1

Our Journey Towards Self-actualization

Self-actualization is about our motivation to achieve our full potential. The term was first used by Kurt Goldstein (1939). Maslow (1968) in his hierarchical theory developed the idea further by describing the process we go through to achieve our potential. He describes it as a desire for self-fulfilment to become everything that **'one is capable of becoming'**.

Human beings are capable of extraordinary accomplishments. But how do we discover what we are capable of? How do we get to know ourselves intimately so that we can connect with our potential and create an environment for ourselves within which we can flourish? We all know on some level what our deepest desires are, what we really want. We know what it feels like to be fulfilled. For each of us it is something different and quite unique. How do we learn to really trust ourselves and align ourselves with our ambitions? This book will

explore the obstacles to accomplishing that and put forward pathways that may help you to find your way.

Most people find it difficult to articulate that they have these needs yet pursuit of them is vital to our being fully alive. If we look at our journey through life as having meaning and our dreams and aspirations as having value, then it is also possible for us to perceive unhappiness, anxiety, discontent and neurosis as a sign of our unfulfilled potential. Maslow (1968) believed that nearly all psychological problems stemmed from **'sickness of the soul'** because we lack understanding of our needs and how to meet them. If we view psychological problems as our soul screaming at us to attend to these needs then we open the door to a deeper understanding of our true nature and the possibility of becoming aware of our real potential.

'If the essential core of the person is denied or suppressed, he gets sick sometimes in obvious ways, sometimes immediately, sometimes later', Maslow (1971)

Imagine if we were highly attuned to ourselves and our needs. Imagine if a slight feeling of discontent was a signal for us to listen to the discord inside and to alter our trajectory to realign ourselves with our purpose. Operating in this way would mean that we were never

too far off course and that our symptoms were our guides, assisting us by reminding us to listen and make minor alterations to our lifestyle and choices. Of course, for many of us, ill health either mental or physical may have already reached levels where medication is required, and the notion that our condition is a response to our unfulfilled potential may not have entered our minds or even seem very real to us.

It is believed that less than two percent of the population reach self-actualization.

The research carried out in this book looks at a group of self-actualizers who have achieved their potential against the odds. At junctions in our life journey we have all had times of hardship, indecision, heartbreak, illness and times when we may have lost our way completely. This also happened to our selected group but the approaches they used and the way they overcame obstacles mark them as being out of the ordinary. Their stories might just be the tonic your tired unheeded soul needs to realign yourself with your quest for greater fulfilment. Exploring life through a positive view of human nature, which incorporates and describes the internal and external world of the most fulfilled and therefore happiest people, may open up the possibility of you being able to find a route to unleash your own potential.

We are all on different journeys. The pathway of our life and the obstacles we encounter and our responses to them all combine to make our story unique. The focus of this book is about the journey toward self-actualization, by looking at people who have made it against the odds; we can take a deeper look at the external and internal factors that have formed the foundations of their paths. Against the odds means that in each case unforeseen obstacles had to be overcome and that is was extremely unlikely that they would find a way through. An example, discussed in a later chapter, is Nelson Mandela; what was the probability of his becoming the President of South Africa? I think you would have to agree the odds were not in his favour, especially when you consider that he spent twenty-six years in a South African prison.

Seeking to change some aspect of our lives is a positive move and shows that we aspire to progress from our present position towards a more optimal state with our own efforts. This is our natural growth tendency, which shows courage and a genuine self-reflective approach to our own development. The underlying assumption is that we are seeking to learn the skills to evaluate and develop our own psyches.

Unfortunately, difficulties sometimes arise when subconscious resistance to the desired change appears.

Our attempts, however persistent, to uncover the root cause may not yield results, and all too often, we give up. In my opinion, there is a huge chasm between the skills we need as humans to understand and aid ourselves and each other and the traditional education we receive, which leaves us with huge gaps in our ability to identify and improve our potential and fulfil our aspirations.

I believe the process we go through on our life journey toward self-actualization is of significant interest because even with all the stars aligned, and with everything going in our favour, it is not easy for any one of us to achieve our potential. It requires substantial focus, self-awareness and mental clarity. It requires aligning ourselves with our deepest desires; ploughing a pathway that is unique and navigating our way through unchartered territory to become who we really are.

 It is a really exciting prospect – it is why we are on the planet – but it appears to be laden with pitfalls at every juncture. If we survive our childhood reasonably unscathed, there is still a myriad of traps and obstacles to trip us as we progress into adulthood to continue chasing our dreams.

When I first embarked on this study I did so because I found it exciting and interesting, looking at the routes others had taken towards self-actualization. I felt

admiration and some kind of spiritual bonding with them – whether they knew me or not.

But as my research progressed and the many disparate elements that need to be aligned in order to achieve self-actualization have crystallised, I have realised that the route is even rockier then first envisaged. The imprints we have created during our childhood to define ourselves are cast in solid concrete and have far-reaching effects. Whether they are beneficial or detrimental, they carry our sense of who we are and what we will allow ourselves to attend to.

My goal is to help people attain self-actualization and to live happy and fulfilling lives. I work with individuals to help them deconstruct their negative self-concepts and find themselves again. Armed with more insight and understanding of the difficulties encountered and the many ways they may have stumbled on their paths towards self-actualization they return to their lives with renewed energy and passion.

Achieving your potential is your reason for being here – it is possible, wherever you are starting from.

Untangling your life will involve painful moments and difficult challenges, but you are unique and valuable and you are worth the work and effort involved. Deconstructing and unburdening your troubled soul will give you a fighting chance of finding your way through the haze and confusion that you may feel your life is in just now – and remember, when the going gets tough the elite group struggled too.

Chapter 2

Introduction to the Deconstruction Process

Your evaluations of yourself and the limits you place on yourself are not set in stone, you can change them.

Your current life has been created and constructed by your beliefs, experiences and the choices you have made.

Let's try a little exercise to explain how the deconstruction process works.

Think of one area or aspect of your life that is going really well for you at present. Think about the energy you have for that part of your life. Visualise yourself engaging in this area and ask yourself:

1. **What are the beliefs I have about myself regarding this part of my life?**
2. **Where have they come from?**
3. **What are the emotions and feelings connected with this area for me?**

4. **What future do I envision for this aspect of my life?**
5. **What feedback and evaluations from others do I receive about it?**

Now look back at earlier experiences that you have had in that area of your life.

I am sure you will find that they are also positive and contain happy, energising memories that propel you to keep attaining in the area.

When we focus on something that we are good at, which is going well for us, that we feel positive about or are achieving success in, we feel connected to ourselves and the task. Because we are constructing this area on a continual day-to-day basis and because it is going well, we feel energised so we continue to create in this zone.

The notion that you have constructed your success may seem a bit unreal but if you were to alter your current belief system, and become really convinced in your new belief, then your new thinking would affect the way you feel and the way you would operate in that area in the future.

The same holds true for aspects of our lives that are not going well. The deconstruction process helps us to address our subjective reality and to inspect it, engaging with it emotionally and intellectually. This process then permits us to disentangle the information, discharge the negative emotions and review its impact on us and its value. It is through this deconstruction process that we uncover the root of the confusion and this in turn allows us to construct our new subjective reality. If the process is carried out effectively and to its conclusion, then the roots of fear and other unwanted negative reactions can be discharged and genuine insights can replace the previously stored information.
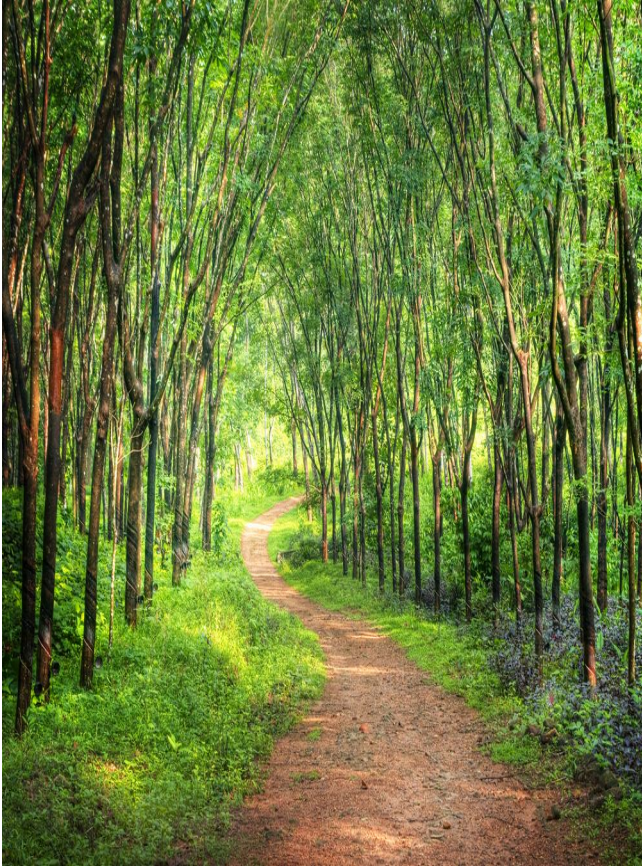
Chapter 3

Where are you on Your Journey?

Your dreams and aspirations hold the key to your growth.

Self-actualization is a fulfilling of the self and also a selflessness which is the ultimate expression of real self. It harmonises the inner and outer self and they fuse and become one and the same. Happy people are the ones that are working on something they consider important. The journey toward self-actualization merged with a commitment to an important job and to worthwhile work could be said to be the path to human happiness.

The method used in this inquiry to determine whether someone had the characteristics of a self-actualizer are largely based on the three areas that are considered to be the most significant factors that decisively affect the way our lives turn out. These are our:

- Internal perceptions of ourselves

- Our life chances
- Our goals and aspirations

Let's have a look at these three areas and the procedures I used to select the individuals whose life stories are included in this book.

Our internal perceptions of ourselves dictate our reality. It is our concepts about the kind of person we are. We draw a mental image of ourselves based on our experiences and on how we have been judged by others. It is based on our unique interpretations of our experiences. Our self-concept can be affected by our environment, especially as children, when others had authority over us. Our overall feeling of self-worth and self-esteem, then, impacts on our interpersonal relationships and the way we proceed to manage our life. To measure our internal perceptions I used the '**Personal Orientation Inventory'** (POI). It was developed by Shostrom (1965) to provide a standardised instrument for the measurement and values hypothesised to be of paramount importance in the development of the self-actualizing individual.

These are**:**

Time Competence: which measures an individual's tendency to live in the present and respond to life in the

here and now, as opposed to being excessively worried about the past and future.

Inner Support: measures our ability to act autonomously, making decisions and being self-motivated but also being able to accept direction from others.

Values: measure the self-actualization values described by Maslow, which include having a more efficient perception of reality and having a greater acceptance of themselves and others. Self-actualizers can maintain inner harmony, are rarely bored, seldom anxious, and mostly live in the flow of life.

Feelings: measure the ability to respond to one's own feelings and needs in a sensitive way and to respond spontaneously to others by being yourself.

Self-Perception: This measures self-worth and self-acceptance.

Synergistic Awareness: This refers to having a constructive view of human beings, seeing people as essentially good.

Interpersonal Sensitivity: measures the capacity to have meaningful, intimate relationships with others, unencumbered by expectation and obligation.

The Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) has been used extensively by Maslow's (1968) followers. I decided to use this inventory too, as it created a benchmark to aid my selection process and it supplies quantitative values

that can be replicated. A graph can then be created to illustrate the internal perceptions we hold of ourselves.

The POI consists of 150 two-choice comparative value judgements questions seen to be important in the development of the self-actualizing individual. These persons may be described as those who utilise their talents and capabilities more fully than the average person. In responding to the Personal Orientation Inventory each examinee is asked to select the one statement in each pair that is most true of him or herself. Clinically derived scales are then used to compare the examinee's responses to normal responses.

If you would like to take the self-actualization test to look at where you are now in terms of self-actualization this is the website.
edits.net Personal Orientation Inventory

Life Chances are all about the opportunities offered to individuals by society or by their position in society, not their personal attributes.

'Their life chances may make or break them, but their lives are a response to these chances' (Weber, 1978).

It seems easy to predict that the child born to a movie star in Hollywood would have more opportunity to develop his/her acting ability and become famous than someone born into poverty in a disadvantaged area with high employment. Equally, the son or daughter of a drug addict or alcoholic may struggle to gain stability in life because of his/her childhood, whereas the offspring of a scientist may receive a fantastic education and find opportunities to pursue research in areas that most people could only dream of. I read about one such case recently where a young man had grown up around NASA because his father was an astronaut there. However, the possible outcomes have many variables and are a mixture of the chances offered and the unique ways we have responded to them.

The Life Chances Interview in this study was conducted in a face-to-face informal style where evidence was gathered about the early years, education, home life and opportunities that were offered. This was based on Maslow Hierarchy of Needs (1987) to review how their basic needs were met as youngsters and whether they came from a secure, stable background emotionally and physically. Each of the questions were open-ended, allowing as much or as little detail to emerge as the interviewee wished.

Here are the **Life Chances Interview** questions.

1. Was it expected that people in your family would stay in the same place they were born in?
2. Was it expected that they would go into further education?
3. If you look at your life now, is it similar to your parents' or guardians'?
4. What were the main concerns of the society you grew up in?
5. What does being from your country mean to you?
6. Has your social position offered you opportunities that might not be available to others?
7. What kind of opportunities have you been offered?
8. Did you feel obliged to follow any particular career path?
9. Were family obligations paramount in your life choices?
10. Was your family subject to prejudice due to race, class or politics during your childhood?
11. Has there been some significant cause around which you have built your life?
12. Was your childhood home stable in terms of food and shelter?
13. Was your childhood home stable in terms of emotional security?
14. Did you compare yourself to others unfavourably when you were young?
15. Was your home environment dominated by:
    - Health problems?

- Relationship problems?
- Financial problems?

16. Were you encouraged to develop interests and further your learning?
17. Were there opportunities that you wished you had taken which you did not?

Goals and Aspirations: Virtually all of us are motivated to give our lives meaning and direction by pursuing certain goals. Baumeister (1989) maintains that we create goals based on our values. Envisioning desired possible outcomes creates positive effects, energises behaviour and makes the attainment of the goals more likely. Our attitude, whether positive or negative, can be seen as a determining factor of success.

What are you pursuing?
Why are you pursuing it?
Shelden, Ryan, Deci and Kasser (2004)

If there is misalignment between our intrinsic and extrinsic goals, or to put it more simply our internal desires and the goals we are pursuing, then the impact on our well-being will be negative. An obvious example of this kind of dilemma is often seen when children feel they have to compete for recognition or love and then go on to pursue goals that would gain them the recognition they crave from their parents whilst completely ignoring

their true desires. As a result they remain other–determined in their goal selection and never truly connect with themselves and their desires. This creates the hunger that Carl Jung (1953) refers to and attempts to satisfy it through alcohol, food or other external indulgences that leads them further away from their true path. It is a denial of what and who they really are. We are all unique and our dreams are our guides that will eventually lead us to achieve our potential and find true happiness.

'A secret unrest gnaws at the roots of our being until we become an individual in the real sense of the word, a whole and indestructible self'.
Carl Jung 1953

The idea that we feel cut off from ourselves and unable to pursue something that we feel is worthwhile affects our happiness. Having to pursue something that is not our natural desire will keep us off centre and unhappy. In the Goals and Aspirations Interview, the focus was on whether participants had achieved their aspirations, how they had responded to obstacles and the path of their life journey.

Goals and Aspirations Interview

1. What did you want to do at age 16?
2. What were the great moments during your university years?
3. What career did you follow – why?
4. Tell me about the route you took.
5. Did you feel you were capable of making the right choices for yourself?
6. Tell me about the rough times.
7. How did you cope?
8. What helped you get through them? Mental strategy?
9. Plan?
10. Therapy?
11. Ability to communicate and ask for help?
12. Any other useful aid?
13. What do you consider is the best way to tackle obstacles?
14. What have been the best times?
15. What were the thrills, peak experiences?
16. What were the rewarding moments?
17. What helped you deal with difficult situations?
18. Is what you do important to you?
19. Do you think your life has meaning?
20. Do you have good relationships with your family and friends?
21. Do you generally feel safe and secure in your home and workplace?

22. Is your day-to-day life normally routine and structured without chaos?
23. Are you satisfied with the responsibilities and roles you have in life?
24. Do you have moments when you are filled with joy and peace?
25. What do you most want to change or improve in your life now?
26. Do you live in harmony with yourself?
27. Overall, do you feel you have been successful in your life?
28. What do you find most rewarding now?

Essentially, there were three distinct phases in this investigatory process. Individuals were selected at random and invited to complete a Personal Orientation Inventory **(POI)**. If the results of the inventory showed that the person was operating as a self-actualizer, that person was then invited to take part in the **Life Chances Interview.** If their life chances showed that they had overcome substantial obstacles and were exhibiting observable characteristics of a self-actualizer, they remained as part of the selected cohort, and a few weeks later I met them again to conduct the **Goals and Aspirations Interview**. By then, a more open relationship had been established, as they had gained greater confidence in engaging with the process. They were keen to discuss their aspirations and the obstacles they had

encountered, including the details of how their life story had evolved. Most of the participants reported that they found this investigatory process truly enlightening and empowering. Reviewing our lives and the decision and choices we have made allows us to acknowledge our successes and sympathise with ourselves over our losses.

Interestingly, none of the selected cohorts had any knowledge of Self-actualization or the Hierarchy of Needs prior to engaging with this process. This gives weight to the notion that, as Maslow (1987) suggests, it is a natural progression.

Selecting a cohort for this study was, if truth be told, a very enjoyable process. It was fascinating to spend time with dynamic people, learn how they manage their lives and gain a bird's-eye view of the landscape, including the unique ways they responded to the challenges and obstacles that beset them. Whilst there may be an argument that the possibility of becoming self-actualized is reserved for the lucky, the rich and the strong – that is, those who do not have to struggle – this does not seem to be the case. While not wanting to dispute that, this study has focused on people who have achieved self-actualization against the odds. It appears that the challenges we face are not as dependent on our social class or opportunity as it is on how we respond to them.

Meet the Self-actualizers

Initially, there were ten people selected, but as the work progressed, only a handful remained to grace these pages. You are probably wondering what caused this. The answer is simply that the *modus operandi* of these amazing people was so similar that it would have been quite repetitive for the reader to have included more subjects. They hailed from such diverse walks of life; I was amazed with the ease with which they could explain their attitude to life and the congruence between them and their empathy for others. They were kindred spirits, although they have never met, as can be seen from their diverse backgrounds.

A few key points: Real names have been changed to protect their anonymity. For the same reason specific locations and place names have been changed. Each individual's story is embedded in the chapter that most closely explores the obstacles they faced.

Mott

We first meet Mott in the discussion on 'Motivation and the Locus of Control'. Imprisoned in a foreign country, he displayed a remarkable ability to deal with the lack of our basic need for safety by engaging with a hostile environment and finding ways to make his captivity manageable. In fact, he talks about it as a learning experience. Mott was in his late twenties at the time and

was included in this study quite by chance. I was talking about my research into this area of self-actualization and he seemed an ideal candidate. However, he was reluctant to take the Personal Orientation Inventory feeling that he would not be of interest. I eventually persuaded him to take part and as you will see a little bit later his story is an exciting and scary adventure but also significant on many levels in relation to our journey toward self-actualization. Mott is now in his fifties and his adventurous spirit is undaunted. He has learned to use fear as a travelling companion, and his trust in life and people is one of his defining characteristics.

Amelia

Amelia is like a bright light and is one of those inspirational characters that you will remember for her humanity and her humour. Now in her forties she is a pretty fair haired lady with a heart of gold. She came to my attention because of her caring nature and her natural ability to resolve conflict in domestic and social situations. Her achievements are at odds with her life chances as you will see in her life story. It is in the further exploration of the values and characteristics; measured in the Personal Orientation Inventory, that Amelia story is set.

Lyndsay

Lindsay came to my attention because I was very surprised to hear of the difficulties she had experienced at school as a result of undiagnosed dyslexia and dyscalculia. It seemed at odds with the successful, self-assured woman she presented as. Having a career in education and personal development, I am only too aware of the struggles for children with any kind of learning difficulty. Self-esteem can be seriously damaged by the education system and as Lyndsay's story unfolds I am sure you will applaud her stoic approach. You may also shed a tear for the lost opportunities you may have experienced as a result of twelve years of compulsory education. Lyndsey is a glamorous lady with a grounded view of life, she is imbued with an enduring self-confidence that she has earned through her persistent hard work and hard-won achievements.

Adam

Adam's story is heart-breaking because his hopes and aspirations could have so easily been supported by his parents had he been born in a different time or place. Fears of being who we really are have derailed most of us at some time in our lives. Obstacles to achieving our aspirations can cause us to have to alter our course or abandon our plans completely. Fear of failure, fear of losing the love of significant others merge with the fear of becoming and being who we really are. You are unique,

there is no mould, no one else is the same as you, and your individuality means that you are different. If we could all embrace this one key concept I believe the world would be a happier place. Not surprisingly you will meet Adam in the 'Goals and Aspirations' chapter and we may learn from him how to rekindle our own lost dreams and look the world in the eye from our unique standpoint.

Aston

Aston's story about his struggle to regain his self-worth and self-esteem is so traumatic that his sense of self submerged many times in his battle to overcome his childhood trauma. His story will resonate with many readers because his battle to regain his life was a battle within himself to realise that he is a worthy person. It is through Aston's life that we look at the deconstruction process in more detail and how he used it to transform his self-concept altering it and his perspective of himself. Our self-determinism is paramount to the effectiveness of the process of deconstruction. Although it is a guided process it is not something being done to you – it is a process that you are actively engaging in.

The subjects' lives are fascinating, and each one brought a renewed belief in me that we all have within us the ability to achieve our potential.

Interestingly, most of Maslow's (1968) research into the distinguishing characteristics of self-actualizers was with famous historical people. His selections included Albert Einstein, William James and Thomas Jefferson. Although the data he collected was viewed as not scientifically reliable, he was nonetheless impressed with his cohort's psychological well-being and described it as an absence of psychoses and neuroses.

Maslow's findings were initially beset with ambiguities and the results were deemed as scientifically inexact, but his research continued to validate the concept of self-actualization empirically. He could describe the characteristics that were present in his selected cohort, even if he could not accurately measure them. It is perhaps understandable why this would be so. Trying to measure an absence of issues for someone is considerably more difficult than measuring existing ones. The absence of aberration is the ideal state, of course, but can it be accurately measured?

Maslow (1968) postulated a role model of **'a full-grown and self-fulfilling human being, the one in which all his potentialities are coming to full development, the one whose inner nature expresses itself freely rather than being warped, suppressed or denied'.**

Maslow (1968) defines a self-actualizing individual as a person being **'more truly themselves, more perfectly actualising their potential, closer to the core of their being, more fully human'.**

Since these people are no longer motivated by their basic needs but by humane motives, Maslow (1968) believed that self-actualized people move on to have higher and higher aspirations as they move closer to the ideally good person. We all want to live and operate at this level and have super-hero status, but surprisingly few of us really do.

Some of the attributes of Self-actualizers are:

- **Have a more efficient perception of reality. They are more capable of perceiving the truth.**
- **Show greater acceptance of themselves and others.**
- **Are more concerned with tasks that will benefit others.**
- **Are less introspective.**
- **Tend not to focus on race, creed or class.**
- **Maintain inner harmony, are rarely bored and seldom anxious, and mostly live in the flow of life. They are in tune with themselves.**
- **Have self-contained goals.**

According to Maslow (1968), self-actualizers share some common characteristics. For example, they perceive reality clearly, accept themselves and others for who they are and are tolerant of differences and inconsistencies in human nature. They are independent and form their own views regardless of their culture or environment. They are autonomous and tend to be true to their ideals and to themselves. They are also humanitarian in their mission and pursue it for the betterment of mankind. The concept of self-actualization used to describe the attainment of potential is a dynamic lifelong process of growth. Knapp (1976) describe the self-actualizing person as one who uses his/her capabilities to their full potential. Experiences that fulfil our inner nature add to our sense of achievement, ego-strength and help to build self-esteem and self-confidence. Tuning into our inner nature and listening to our dreams ignites our energy and fuels our passions.

Chapter 4

Maslow and the Hierarchy of Needs

"There is no passion to be found in playing small – in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living". Nelson Mandela

Most behaviour is considered to be motivated by either physiological or psychological needs. Motivation arises from the necessity to meet the need and that in turn leads to behaviour to satisfy those needs. Motivation refers to the process of initiating and sustaining effort in the direction of goal achievement. The positive approach to human motivation posited by Maslow sees each of us as having a strong desire to realise our full potential. He felt that the path to achieving our full potential was strongly linked to our basic human needs. He created a hierarchical structure believing that lower level needs had to be met to some extent before we can attend to higher level ones. He felt that we had a natural tendency

to do this and that the need for education and personal growth emerged when the deficiency needs were met.

'As human beings there is a natural tendency towards a more complex and complete development. The term used for this is the self-actualizing tendency', Maslow (1968). Maslow's theory is centred on the notion that needs are organised in a hierarchy with basic physiological needs for food and shelter at the lowest level and then safety, social belonging, esteem and self-actualization at the top.

As lower level needs become satisfied, higher level needs become more influential in motivating a person. However, if lower level needs remain unsatisfied then learning creativity and self-esteem stagnate and never rise to the surface. The most pressing need will monopolise the person's consciousness, whereas if our needs are gratified they will no longer operate as motivators.

An example of this can be seen in schoolchildren from dysfunctional families where their home environment is unstable, may have difficulty in routinely focusing on their cognitive growth as their energy and attention will be directed towards the lower level need for security. Equally, a child who feels bullied in the school

environment will not have their attention on academic progress but on their need for safety and belongingness. Life experiences such as job loss and divorce may cause a person to fluctuate between different levels of the hierarchy.

Physiological Needs

If we are starving our strongest motivation will be to find food. This need will drive our behaviour and create anxiety if we are unable to adequately meet this essential basic requirement. Our hunger must be satisfied before we are able to address the need for safety. Hence, people are prepared to steal food and risk imprisonment in order to satisfy this powerful primary urge.

Safety Needs

We need a certain level of security and stability in our lives in order to function. The lack of this basic need creates a tension within us because of the uncertainty we feel in our surroundings. If we come from a stable and secure background then we are more likely to create a similar situation in our current life.

Belongingness and Love Needs

The need for love and belongingness has caused most of us sleepless nights and anxious days. If statistics, love songs, love stories and movies are to be believed, then it

may be the single most important unmet need we humans seek to fulfil. The amount of literature, media attention and magazine articles given to this need would suggest that for most people, when the lower level needs for food, shelter and safety have been met, this need for love dominates and motivates them. It becomes our main concern, our priority.

In an effort to satisfy the need for love, women and men have gone to remarkable extremes. Reading this you are probably reviewing your own life and the way affairs of the heart have impacted you and may even have changed the course of your life.

For some, happily married or in a state of harmony with their partner, this need may be securely met, for others it may be met through relationships with close friends, children or in a community where they feel they belong.

However, if the need to give and receive love and affection is driving you and you are striving to acquire it, then you will view others as potential partners or affection givers. Looking at the world to fulfil this need or deficiency has often been the cause of our lives being held in captivity to the proponent need. We all know someone and may even have been in that situation ourselves where we are waiting for the right person or, having met them, waiting for them to change and

become the partner we are longing for. In the meantime our lives are on hold and we feel unable to progress until this need is met. It acts like an enticement that draws us towards our unmet need.

The need for love and belongingness often finds people sacrificing their lives in the vain hope that they will become the favourite son or daughter and finally feel the sense of love and belonging they have craved since childhood.

Self-Esteem

However, we arrive at our inner sense of self-worth its impact on us determines to some extent what we will let ourselves aspire to. An interesting point to note here is that self-esteem as a psychological concept can be traced to William James (1890). He defines it as self-appreciation, consisting of feelings and emotions toward self. He proposed the idea that self-esteem is a trait and **'that individuals have a baseline feeling of self- worth'.** Captive to the need for money, security, love and self-esteem cause many people to remain stuck, either in unhappy relationships, dead-end jobs or in situations where they have no opportunity to develop and become who they really are because they fear losing their inheritance or some other perceived future security.

What we perceive as the priority need will have the greatest power over our thoughts and actions. However, there is plenty of evidence that supports the idea that our fears and worries are often as a result of past trauma and conditioning. It is the long-term effects of earlier events being retriggered that plays psychological havoc and prevents us moving towards our aspirations.

Adults in dysfunctional relationships have often had similar childhood scenarios that are somehow being recreated in their current life. The perspective they have on the difficulties they are currently experiencing are as a result of their upbringing and may not contain any real threat, but their perception of the situation may be what is causing them to respond in ways that keeps their needs unmet.

This may also prevent them from changing their current circumstances because of their fear of losing something, often undefined but powerful enough to keep them prisoner. As a consequence their development and movement towards becoming who they really are gets halted.

We are all somewhere on Maslow's ladder but may not have consciously been aware of what need is driving us. Have another look at the hierarchy now and try to answer the following questions:

**Are you satisfied with the responsibilities and roles
you have in life?**
**Do you have good relationships with your family and
friends?**
**Do you generally feel safe and secure in your home and
workplace?**
**Is your day-to-day life normally routine and structured
without chaos?**
**Do you have moments when you are filled with joy and
peace?**
**What do you most want to change or improve in your
life now?**
What need do you feel is driving you behaviour?

If we lose our job we immediately become concerned about our basic needs for food and shelter and will descend down the pyramid, and we will be driven by the fears of destitution joblessness evokes. Our motivation in other areas of our lives will diminish as all our efforts go toward solving the priority need.

Maslow wondered why everyone was not operating at their most productive self and why we should be surprised when someone is creative as he sees operating at our potential to be our natural state.

'The key question isn't "What fosters creativity?" But why in God's name isn't everyone creative? Where was the human potential lost?' Maslow (1968).

Yet operating as a self-actualizing being is not as common as one might expect. The lower level needs, the intrinsic beliefs we hold about ourselves merge with negative environmental factors to make the gap between our aspirations and our current perceived position seem like a chasm that we are unable to bridge.

Chapter 5

Motivation and the Locus of Control

'The person who has not conquered, withstood and overcome obstacles continues to doubt themselves and their abilities' Maslow (1963).

Maslow believed these words not only applied to external dangers, but they also held true for the ability to **'control and delay one's own impulses and therefore to be unafraid of them'.**

So is it your driving force, your motivation that determines the outcome?

Although cognitive concepts about motivation differ in many ways, they are unified in the belief that perceived control over task engagement and outcomes is a strong influence on motivation, so our inherent beliefs regarding the locus of control are important determinants of our core behaviour patterns.

The **locus of control** is an expectancy concerning whether our responses influence the attainment of outcomes such as success or failure**. If people believe that** outcomes **occur independently of how they behave, then they could be said to have an external locus of control, whereas if someone has an internal locus of control, then outcomes are highly contingent on his/her behaviour** (Rotter, 1966). However, the locus of control may vary depending on the situations and the areas of life in which one is engaged.

People with an internal locus of control see themselves as high achieving, powerful and capable of affecting change in their lives.

The importance of locus of control regarding aspirations is that expectancy beliefs are seen to affect how we respond. The more a person believes that his/her actions affect an outcome, the more engaged that individual will be in the pursuit of aims and the more willing that person will be to expend effort and persist.

The locus of control's influences on reactions to success and failure are also worth exploring. One experiences greater pride or shame depending on the outcome if one attributes the outcome to internal rather than external causes. Self-esteem issues come into play here, as the impact of outcomes takes its toll on perceived levels of

ability. Theories on self-worth emphasise the perception of ability as the primary influence on motivation.

Evidence exists to indicate that, when people feel they have control over their environment, their tolerance of difficulties and obstacles is greater and they perform at a higher level. Overall, they are better placed to recover from setbacks and eventually succeed. This encapsulates very accurately Mott's approach to life. You probably remember from the introduction that he is an adventurous soul who gets caught up in life-threatening situations.

'If a person can carry all his support within himself then it matters little what the external environment comprises'. Deep Survival, (Gonzales, 2004).

A traumatic, harrowing and long-lasting event occurred to Mott while he was pursuing adventurous endeavours in the Middle East. An excerpt from it is included here, as it demonstrates the dichotomy between Mott and his boss and their different approaches when faced with imprisonment and the threat of execution. In what follows, Mott demonstrates an internal locus of control when dealing with disaster, compared to the helplessness

displayed by his boss as he languished in self-pity throughout the ordeal.

Learned helplessness refers to a mental state involving a disturbance in motivation, mental processing and emotional reaction due to previous experiences of uncontrollability. If a person perceives there is no correlation between their responses and the outcomes, they may choose to do nothing through feeling they have no control over a situation. Interestingly, success-oriented individuals and helpless individuals may not differ in intellectual ability. But as Gonzales (2004) explains in his book Deep Survival, **'The role of cognition is to moderate emotions and physical responses'.**

Having gained a contract to work in his chosen profession, Mott was dismayed to discover that he had inadvertently been placed in the middle of the Gulf War. Like all of us, his first instincts were to leave as quickly as possible, but the Western employees were being strategically placed as part of the Human Shield programme that would protect Iraq's essential installations. Realising that they would be captive in the plant for an unknown period, the teams decided to investigate avenues of escape.

One day, while on a reconnaissance mission, his boss who was driving the vehicle made an arbitrary decision to attempt escape without agreement from his teams at the base or Mott, who was with him. Mott very much opposed the decision, feeling that it was not only dishonourable but also very risky. When they ended up at an Army border post in Iraq, their fate was sealed. Lack of maps and essential navigational equipment played a part in their being captured and arrested, as it was assumed that they were trying to leave Iraq without permission. Although this story starts like a thriller, it is a true account.

As his story unfolds, we see how Mott overcame fear and isolation. In prison in a foreign country, Mott's first thought was escape. On his first night in a detention centre, he managed to find a phone without a dial and somehow managed to get through to his embassy. Despite his plight there was little the embassy could do to assist him, but he felt that 'at least someone knew where they were', and that put order in the chaos that surrounded him.

Faced with death, interrogation and beatings, which prevailed throughout his three-month ordeal, he held to his plan to escape and looked for and evaluated his options at every opportunity. To be able to live with uncertainty and yet function without being paralysed

with fear is a life skill that Mott continues to utilise throughout his life.

During internment, Mott and his boss were imprisoned in a variety of centres with people from all nationalities and cultures, including some Iraqi soldiers and civilians who were still in prison from the earlier war between Iraq and Iran. Mott was frequently 'shocked and incensed' by the injustices and executions.

When I asked Mott how he managed to stay positive, he said, **'I would lie down and visualise future plans in great detail, future expeditions, fun with his friends and delicious meals'**. He would also relive enjoyable moments from his past, as he felt it helped 'balance the horrors'. However, the qualities that denote this person as extraordinary are his motivation and his ability to trust and see the best in people. He spent most of his time communicating with the other prisoners. Even with the language and cultural barriers, he found ways to make friends and gather information on what was likely to happen to them.

Mott built friendships within his community and felt motivated to join with others, which created helpful distractions and allowed him to understand and operate at a higher level in the environment in which he found himself. **Self-efficacy** refers to one's beliefs about one's

capabilities to perform. Self-efficacy is a belief about what one can do and is not the same as knowing what *to* do. The comparison between Mott's attitude and that of his boss, imprisoned with him, is startling. His boss turned his attention inward, pined for his home and family and deteriorated mentally and physically.

Eventually, after months of incarceration, their case was reviewed by the military and they were sentenced. At first it was decided that they should be executed but after further investigation it was reduced to life imprisonment. This is the stuff of nightmares for most of us, but as this real-life ordeal continued Mott describes it as 'tense'.

Eventually, legal intervention reduced the sentence to four years and Mott recalls feeling relieved and willing to accept and work with that outcome as it seemed to be the best deal that could be obtained for them. Then, miraculously, their entire sentence was lifted and they were free to go. Believe it or not, the military returned them to their vehicle with their passports and possessions. As you might expect they left the country hurriedly before any further decisions could be implemented.

Imbued from early childhood with a quest for knowledge and a sense of adventure, the young Mott, grew up in an unsettled family environment. His father

was temperamental, resulting in the family landscape being dominated by physical violence and emotional stress. Mott's response to this was to become more self-sufficient. He says, 'The situation with my father led towards me becoming the polar opposite'. The main area where his father had held power in the family was through his fiscal strength. By withholding a secure financial structure from Mott's mother, there were inevitable arguments and stress connected with planning and long-term security. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs returns many times to the importance of safety, food and shelter as needs that are necessary prerequisites before a person can be motivated to achieve the next level.

Without real guidance and acknowledgement of his successes, Mott's educational achievements suffered. However, by the time he had reached eighteen, he had found a route into his chosen career and a sense of self about which he felt secure. It was as if he had responded to his volatile home environment in a proactive way, seeking survival solutions.

To this day, Mott views money as an 'important enabler', using it to provide for and enable himself and his family. By the age of twenty-one, Mott had set up his own business while he continued his formal training to become an engineer. An enterprising individual, he did

not view obstacles as opposition but as opportunities. When a recession seemed inevitable in the West, he set off on an adventure to the Gulf. Although the time in prison presented unexpected obstacles, Mott survived the experience and describes it as truly enriching, not because of the hunger and hardship but because he found within himself strengths and values that he admires and has continued to build on since his release.

'It is true. I am too trusting, but most of the time, that is the best way to be'. Mott 2016

When Mott completed the **POI,** it was a surprise to see that his score was slightly higher than the optimal score for Synergistic Awareness. **Synergistic awareness** refers to having a constructive view of human beings and seeing people as essentially good. It includes the ability to resolve dichotomies such as good and bad. I would have expected Mott's view of humankind to have become negative given the fact that his boss had tricked him, which caused his imprisonment and having witnessed and experienced horrific situations. When I asked Mott about it, he simply said, 'It is true. I am too trusting, but most of the time, that is the best way to be'. He cites very many positives that have resulted from his experience in prison on a personal level but also understands that people have very similar needs the

world over. Furthermore he has huge empathy with people who have been or still are wrongly imprisoned.

Chapter 6

Motivation and Self-Esteem

'He didn't learn entitlement, he learned constraint. It may be a small thing but it is a crippling handicap'.
Malcolm Gladwell (2008)

In (1965), Rosenberg's research emphasised self-image as a global aspect of the personality and defined it as an attitude toward the self. In his view every aspect of the self is judged according to childhood developed values and self-esteem is a combination of the specific estimates the individual attributes to the individual characteristics. Although the process of self-evaluation can be conducted on a subconscious level, the individual attributes positive or negative values and combines them together.

A child needs to feel valued
The value placed on a particular characteristic depends on the reactions received from others, particularly significant others. Consequently, our self-esteem can be impacted on negatively or positively. We tend to measure ourselves on our circumstances, life roles and

our personal attributes. Our self-worth can be based on a variety of factors and measurements and our self-esteem is **based 'not solely on an assessment of our constituent qualities but on an assessment on the qualities that count' Rosenberg (1979).**

Coopersmith's (1967) research on self-esteem was with school children in the primary sector. He believed that self-esteem was more complex. He proposed that it was a mixture of self-evaluation and a defensive reaction to these evaluations. Arriving at an evaluation of ones self-esteem was through a judgemental process in which performance, attributes and ability are weighed according to personal standards and values that are derived during childhood. Individuals learn their worth initially from their parents which is later reinforced or refuted by others. Coopersmith (1967) argued that **true self-esteem comprised of feeling worthy and valuable.**

Although there are a variety of explanations of how self-esteem is affected by interpersonal interactions, virtually all theories agree that such interactions have a powerful effect on our self-esteem. This would suggest that others play a critical role in the development of self-esteem. To the extent that our relationships with significant others are a major source of self-esteem, it follows that in relationships in which one feels accepted for one's innate qualities may create a more stable sense of self-worth.

While one that depends on conditional elements would be unstable because it is based on acceptance that could be withdrawn at any time depending on our performance or behaviour. However, being valued by others is a crucial factor from which our self-esteem is derived.

Relying on a variety of sources most parents are at sea in their role as facilitators, caretakers and role models for their child's development. However, most parents have the well-being of their child at heart and manage to provide a loving, supportive environment for their children to flourish.

But humans are capable of hurting each other and innocent victims often carry the scars and a burden of guilt from their perpetrators. Frequently in cases where a child is the victim, the perpetrator is a parent or other significant adult; the child's survival is utterly dependent on them. From the child's perspective their survival seems dependent on justifying the perpetrator's actions. Aston's story about his struggle to regain his self-worth and self-esteem is so traumatic that his sense of self submerged many times in his battle to overcome his childhood trauma. Spending most of his adult years on drugs and 'always feeling slightly at odds with himself', he experienced difficulty in forming real relationships

with others and was unable to maintain a strong sense of self.

Although often high on substances and alcohol, Aston admits to feeling down, isolated and quite stressed underneath. His **Life Chances** Interview brought forth some very disturbing detailed information on the abuse he had endured from his earliest memories, which continued until the age of ten. Sickening in its content, its hold on him made him feel debased, useless and guilty. When I ask why he should feel guilty about it he said, **'for not being what he wanted, for not becoming what he wanted, for not being lovable'**.

Survival as a youngster depended on withdrawing into himself. Although he presented at school as a scholarly child who was deemed academically capable, his school reports showed lack of effort and he often failed exams. Aston's father was a minister – of sound social standing; beyond reproach; he was a popular figure in the local community. Aston's desperate attempts to escape the awful cruelty were deemed as wilfulness by his mother and his other close relatives. He was trapped, and each time he found a possible escape route his father would discover his attempts and his punishments and humiliations would be private and extreme. This is the true story of an adult's journey to regain himself.

The mental and emotional damage Aston endured was extensive and the battles for recovery were carried out within himself. The gruelling hours in sessions disclosed the painful truths, followed by his denial of them, then finding them again and denying them again. The ritual was like a replay of his childhood where his dad would at times give him positive attention, buy him an occasional gift, but then relapse into the abuse and cruelty. He was treated by his father as a non-person something to be abused. There was nowhere in the house where he felt safe. If he locked himself in his room his father had a spare key. When he ran away a neighbour brought him back. No one suspected his father. Aston's emotions raged during his sessions, ranging between apathy to disgust, to violent anger and eventually to manageable levels of sadness at his lost and betrayed childhood.

The details are harrowing even for the reader, but imagine if you were the child who had experienced that trauma. Aston and I worked together through about one hundred hours using the deconstruction processes. Gradually Aston began to emerge from the gloom, the haze of drugs and the nightmares. He knew that he had always known about the abuse but he had dealt with it by pretending that it was not true.

Now stronger and living more in the present, he has found his voice and himself. He is a strong purposeful man and continues to discover many reasons to like himself. When Aston finally felt strong enough he confronted his father. His first response to Aston was denial and a torrid of abuse for being an ungrateful son. When Aston told him that he had already confided in his mother his father's anger really escalated, blaming him for trying to break up the family. Aston was prepared for this and had expected it. All the guilt he had carried for all those years had one source and his father was the source. He had robbed his childhood, betrayed his trust and he was not going to let him do it a second time.

The details of the abuse that Aston relayed to him were sickening, but eventually his father confessed, sobbing and begging his son for forgiveness. By the end of their meeting his father's remorse seemed genuine, but Aston recorded the event on video and gave it to his mother later that day. He had been cheated out of his life too many times by his father and he was not going to let it happen again.

'My battle to become my own person has been worth it', Aston 2016

He considers himself lucky to have found a way to deconstruct the damage and to replace his self-image

with a more positive one. His **POI** showed a steady line in the area just below the scores for a self-actualized person. He says his battle to become his own person has been worth it.

Now Aston is a successful man and a father. He feels able to trust again. He says **'one bad person should not make me distrust everyone'.** He still wishes he'd had an advocate as a child and he still has a strong emotional response and views on the power that adults can wield over children. He believes and hopes that abuse cases are rare; he looks back over his childhood and uses it to give his own children a very different experience.

Aston came to be selected for this study because he had been one of my clients years earlier. I explained to him that I was writing about self-actualization and he offered to complete the **POI**. His stability and lack of dependency on drugs and alcohol confirms his recovery to himself and to all those who have known him since childhood.

The Deconstruction Process
Our self-determinism is paramount to the effectiveness of the process of deconstruction. Although it is a guided process it is not something being done to you – it is a process that you are actively engaging in.

At an intellectual level the deconstruction session is like a voyage of discovery for the client, although they are revisiting past scenes from their lives they are able to perceive aspects of it that were not available to them when they were experiencing it first-hand. Now in a safe secure environment working with their guide to help them find their way, the routes and root causes become more accessible.

Our fragile inner world and the private meaning we attribute to our experiences create our internal confusions, joy, anger, hostility and overall sense of self. We feel vulnerable and afraid, and we need to trust. We seek empathy and understanding from others, a human need. Whether this is an innate or learned need is not clear, but Rogers (1959) maintained that was not important. It was the impact of our need for positive regard that mattered. The result of being treated with unconditional positive regard, Rogers (1955) argued, **'would allow the person to become capable of reorganising their self-concept by assimilating these previously threatening experiences'**. He felt they would come to **'evaluate their own experiences more in terms of their organismic valuing process and less in terms of the values endorsed by other people'**. The result would be that people would become more who they are and less what others want them to be.

Kelly's (1955) description of the deconstruction process aligns with Rogers (1961) in the fundamental assumption; that the data stored in our mental world; our constructions; needs to be viewed to allow us to untangle our areas of difficulty. The person-centred approach developed by Rogers (1951) is valuable as attention and sensitivity to our delicate inner world is essential if we are to really hear ourselves and connect with our stored memories, which may contain painful trauma and emotion. Regaining control of our mental world is important because we can then construct more accurate responses to our current environment and engage in life in a more enjoyable way.

The route to healing is through relearning. Maslow (1978) argues that if we seek to change we have to **'change our awareness of ourselves'.** If we currently see ourselves as someone with low self-worth then changing that construct will change what we attend to and what goals we will allow ourselves to pursue.

Rogers' (1955) Person-Centred therapeutic approach provides a meaningful way to understand the unique strengths, weaknesses and concerns of individuals and how their internal world is constructed. Therapy is said to be working if people's self-concept changes from the way people view themselves toward how people would

like to view themselves. Rogers' (1955) views on how therapy should be conducted have made a huge contribution to counselling and therapy. His non-directive person-centred approach was all about the relationship he provided with the client; the client could use this relationship to move toward his/her potential. Implicit in this theory is the notion that we have the capacity for change in constructive ways if therapy and life can provide us with the right conditions for our growth.

This is how Aston described his Self-Discovery Course and the process he went through on his personal journey:

From my perspective the deconstruction process felt like an unburdening of all the layers of unresolved confusions, upsets and negative feelings. The process typically begins with unravelling the stuff uppermost on your mind and this continues until you feel free and able to put your attention on the deeper issues.

The sessions are open-ended in length so it is reassuring to feel that whatever surfaces in the session is resolved before the end. This means that life between sessions can continue as normal, however, during my intensive work the next layer usually surfaced just beforehand and I would start to feel the beginnings of the terrible anxiety of losing my way again. I would question whether I had made any progress, feel I had lost

any ground I had previously made and begin to doubt myself all over again.

It was pretty gruelling in parts; some of the abuse was sexual and had started when I was less than two years old. These revelations were accompanied by horror, disbelief and disgust with myself. My self-hatred had its roots here and I frequently trembled with emotional eruptions. Going through this in session was very painful and at times extremely embarrassing but the process is like working in a team. Marie and I were working together to free me from my torturous past.

She was supportive, sensitive and extremely attuned to what was happening for me. Sometimes I sobbed uncontrollably and then somehow it would all untangle, dissipate and I would glean some insight and begin to feel stronger and better. Because the process is done from the present time and you remain fully conscious throughout it is hard-hitting but extremely empowering.

The differences in my life were noticeable after approximately ten sessions. My life started to feel more under my control somehow, and I even found myself smiling at myself in the mirror, something I had never done in my life. I permitted myself to buy healthier food and stopped the binge drinking sessions. They were subtle changes in the beginning; gradually I started to like myself and had tiny glimpses of who I really was. These were really great moments, I would shed tears of joy

and somehow they sustained me and boosted me with enough energy to tackle the next instalment. One of my deconstruction sessions lasted four hours. It was tough. Layer after layer of trauma surfaced, I got swamped many times, and it seemed never ending. Afterwards I was exhausted but I felt at peace.

During the sessions, I was at times totally lost in the past, totally overcome with the emotion and pain. Some of the beatings I received from my father were so severe that I was barely conscious afterwards. He is a very clever and cruel man, he found opportunities to injure and hurt me whenever my sister and mother were out of the house. He would also take me out on fishing trips, and despite my protestations my mother would insist I accompanied my dad. She felt it was an opportunity for us to spend bonding time together.

When we were alone his punishments were alarming, terrifying and inhumane. Reviewing and reliving this stuff was at times really awful. Although Marie maintained a professional approach at all times, I detected tears in her eyes when she witnessed me reliving my pain, humiliation and terror.

It took weeks before the anger kicked in, but when it did it was like a wall of pure fury directed towards my father. I knew I was recovering. My body would shake with the repressed responses that it was finally able to release. Although it was all

encompassing and at times a bit frightening, it was contained in the secure environment of a guided session.

The angry period, which is how I now refer to it, lasted about two weeks. I remember waking up one morning during that time having had a disturbing dream about my past and feeling that it was never going to end.

On reflection, the most empowering part of the process for me was due to the fact that no value judgements, interpretations or advice was given to me about what sense I should make of the information that was surfacing for me in the sessions.

The whole deconstruction is based on the premise that I have all the answers within myself and I can reconstruct my life from a present time perspective. I only need help to navigate my way through the minefields of my past. This process was exactly what I needed, I was asked the right questions and they triggered memories that were just below my awareness level. The accuracy and precision of the starting point of the process is the key to unravelling the tangles and getting to the root causes of the issue.

Although deconstructing is happening all the way through the process; as the layers of emotions and viewpoints are releasing, it is only when the heat is gone out of the episode that I could start to make sense of it. Once the emotion has drained and the

physical discomfort has abated, only then was it possible to see clearly and draw my own conclusions and really let go of it.

As a child I really could not come out of feeling fearful. I lived in fear. It was very draining, tiring and at times I completely gave up. Later in my life as an adult I would use any and all available stimulants to drown out the feelings and shut out life.

I stumbled across this process quite by accident and using it has given me back my life. I know I probably lost twenty-five years but I am a happy man now and have been blessed with a lovely, caring wife and two beautiful children. One of my greatest pleasures is to sit with my family knowing that they feel safe, happy and loved. There is no big threatening negative presence in their lives and thankfully now none in mine either.
Aston 2016

Chapter 7

Overcoming Obstacles

'Every adversity has the seed of an equivalent or greater benefit'. Napoleon Hill, 1960

This interplay between what happens to us and our response to it has far-reaching effects, as can be seen from the life stories related here. It is commonly accepted that life chances are largely determined by one's social class. There is a positive correlation between social class and life chances.

Efforts to bridge the education divide overlays the familiar pattern that life experiences of parents are frequently replicated by their children. Private education is the strong suit of the rich and education has endorsed the class system through this obvious inequality, with schools and colleges with the most prestigious labels promising brighter futures for their students.

We are offered more opportunities and second chances if we have had a privileged upbringing. Social classes are a

hierarchical arrangement of people in society as economic or cultural groups. Sociologist Max Weber (1978) describes life chances as the opportunities individuals have to improve their quality of life and the extent to which the person has access to important resources, healthcare, food, shelter, education and employment.

Interestingly, he also referred to the subjective nature of life chances: **'one's assessment of one's life chances will affect one's actions'**. If you believe the class you are born into is where you must stay, then you will not seek opportunities outside your sphere; thus, your social class will define you.

People are often unaware of the narrow channel they are walking through and of the opportunities and pitfalls associated with the different classes.

Alongside the socio-economic class which positions us somewhere on a continuum, children are also normed and ranked in terms of their academic ability. This approach still prevalent in schools today impacts on self-esteem and on future aspirations and it continues to be a value judgement young adult's carry with them into their future.

If a child experiences failure at school, the resultant low self-esteem may prevent the child from pursuing worthwhile goals. Inherent in our education system is the belief that the difficulty rests within the child. Lopez (1999) argues that Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests fail to measure real-life ability and attainment, so it could be argued that the curriculum and pedagogy that is offered in schools result in a reduction of life chances. As we can see from the above research, there are negative implications if home and school life does not help the student to develop healthy self-concepts and attain success.

An example of how impactful the effect of ranking children can be is explored in Lindsay's story. Because it starts with her failing the 11+ exam, I have added a brief explanation of what it is here. The 11+ exam was introduced in the UK in 1944 and continued until 1976 to determine which type of school a student should attend after primary school. The options were a grammar school (academic), a secondary modern (functional), or a technical school. Understandably, the system caused fierce competition for places in the prestigious grammar schools and led to the exam results being either a pass or a fail. It became a **'defining moment in many lives' (Richard Hoggart, 1961).** There is an obvious link between social class and life chances, with the white middle class having more favourable outcomes and

critics of the 11+ exam claimed there was a strong social bias with children from middle-class families being more likely to get a place in the grammar school. Whether the criticism was valid or otherwise, it transpired that grammar schools were largely attended by middle-class families while secondary modern schools were attended by mostly working-class children.

Coming from an upper-class background, the expectations were that Lindsay would attend university and go on to develop a professional career, even though being the eldest and a female did not afford her the same opportunities as her younger brother. The impact of failing the 11+ was more significant in her case because the expectation was that she would attend the grammar school. She was the exception, the one that didn't make it. These tags, labels, indictments, or whatever we currently call them, affect our fragile self-image, especially during our formative years.

Lindsay's life story reads like that of a fairy tale princess, and when you meet her, she oozes confidence and a sense of well-being. She is now a self-made woman with a very successful fashion business and a career that has seen her working for famous fashion houses in London, Hong Kong and New York. However, her struggle to recover from academic setbacks, having failed her 11+ exam in a UK school, is a remarkable story.

Here is an excerpt from the Life Chances Interview I carried out with her while we sat conversing in a restaurant.

Lindsay's answers are in italics.

Life Chances Interview – Lindsay

1. Was it expected that people in your family would stay in the same place they were born in? *Yes*
2. Was it expected that they would go into further education? *Yes*
3. If you look at your life now, is it similar to your parents' or guardians'? *No, my dreams are bigger. There are less constraints. I am not really influenced by environment or family.*
4. Has your social position offered you opportunities that might not be available to others? *Not really. Brownies and Guides.(Children's camping clubs for girls in the UK.) However, my brother was offered more opportunities. I come from a stereotypical family where the boy is seen as more important, and as long as the girl can cook and sew, she will get a husband.*
5. What kind of opportunities have you been offered? *I failed my 11+ and as a result had to go to a local secondary school with low aspirations for the students. Most of them were planning to become 'checkout chicks'. When I was older Mum lent me her car – freedom. Dad inspired me to take A-levels and attend university. Four-year clothing management. Overcame a lot of difficulties*

in the first year of my degree. Mrs Fenchurch, my tutor, was an inspiration for me, a catalyst.

6. Did you feel obliged to follow any particular career path? **No**

7. Were family obligations paramount in your life choices? **No, except I had to conform to expectations.**

8. Has there been some significant cause around which you have built your life? **No**

9. Was your childhood home stable in terms of food and shelter? **Yes**

10. Was your childhood home stable in terms of emotional security? **Yes, until I was seventeen. Clashed with my dad. It was time for me to become more independent. I am very like my father.**

11. Did you compare yourself to others unfavourably when you were young? **Yes, my next-door neighbours had girls of the same age who were both attending grammar school. I had a lesser feel about myself. At the local secondary, I was frowned on because of my accent and bullied. I was meek, but I fought back. By the end of secondary school, I had started to find my feet. My parents were very supportive.**

Failing the 11+ exam affected her aspirations because she didn't feel 'academic enough', and she was discouraged from her childhood dream of becoming a marine biologist. **But 'IQ tests don't measure motivation,**

persistence, social skills and a host of other activities of a life that's well lived' (Davidson, 2012).

Although the research on life chances suggests that children from upper-class backgrounds are afforded more opportunities, personal hardships and setbacks still affect their self-esteem and what they allow themselves to aspire to. It is heart-breaking to think that an arbitrary 11+ exam could have such far-reaching effects on a person's life. However, Lindsay's response to her predicament sowed the seeds of the self-made inspirational woman she is today. Her warmth and humour chase away any notions of her feeling 'hard done by'.

Having failed her 11+, her options to attend grammar school were diminished, and she reports that 'she had a lesser feel about herself'. She attended the 'local comprehensive school' instead, where pupils had low aspirations and she struggled to fit in. Her posh accent and her meek disposition attracted bullying, but true to her character, she eventually fought back, gaining respect and making lifelong friends. But this is only the beginning. Lindsay has undiagnosed dyslexia and dyscalculia, and her struggle to acquire a secure knowledge of spelling and mathematical concepts persisted throughout her school life. Scientific research shows that dyslexic students process information

differently and require information to be presented to them in ways that match their learning styles.

Failing the General Certificates in Secondary Education (GCSEs) at sixteen also took their toll because, despite her hard work and huge effort, it continued to create difficulties for her in the options available at Advanced Level (A-Level) and University. She talks candidly about her situation, saying, **'I have always had to find another way to do things, take a different perspective, and try to solve it some other way'.**

Through her early youth and teenage years, Lindsay had always enjoyed following fashion and creating different effects with clothes. When she was offered a clothing management course at university level, she felt she had found her niche. Her marks at the end of her first year **'were awful'**, is how she described them, but gradually she gained success. She found she could really learn and engage with the process because she finally had the big picture of what she was trying to achieve. Dyslexic students frequently find information presented in linear form confusing, but when they grasp the overview, they often excel at spatial reasoning and interconnected thinking, and they display high levels of creativity.

Gardner (1983), abhors the notion of learning based on memorisation and drudgery and proposes combining

certain features of apprenticeship with certain aspects of school in an **'effort to link disparate forms of learning whose separation often cripples efforts to bring about genuine understanding'**.

I could just add a cliché here and say that 'the rest is history', but that would deny the momentous effort, hardships and persistence that she expended to follow her dream to become a buyer at one of Ralph Lauren's fashion houses.

Leaving the UK at the tender age of twenty-three bound for Hong Kong, Lindsay struggled to find work in the clothing industry. Living in very poor accommodations and surviving on cereal, she made her way up from sewing on buttons to attending fashion show meetings in New York. Her success story really does read like a fairy tale, especially when we add her handsome prince and their two wonderful teenage sons. Despite her tremendous success her business has had ups and downs over the years, but Lindsay's belief in herself and her ability 'to find another way' has always stood her in good stead. Her motto is, **'You need to be your own woman and learn from your mistakes'.**

Students with learning difficulties are among the most vulnerable in our education system. There are serious moral and pragmatic implications if we fail to address

the basic changes that would allow students to learn and succeed in their twelve years of compulsory education the current system imposes on them. We foster a belief that people with real talent can survive in the most hostile environments and yet reach their potential.

Teachers are influential in the chain of their experience. By acknowledging students' passion, it helps them to believe in it, too, and in finding a route to make their dream come true. Otherwise, their lives may become a discontented experience filled with a sense of missed purpose and unfulfilled promise.

'You need to be your own woman and learn from your mistakes'. Lindsay 2015

Not everyone has the tenacity, hardiness and resilience displayed by Lindsay. What is also noteworthy here is that she went on to become a marine diver and a licensed skipper. It is true that she has had 'to find another way', but what marks her as extraordinary is that she did!

Michio Kaku (2014) in his book The Future of the Mind notes, **'School grades mean less for life success than your capacity to cooperate, your ability to regulate your emotions, capacity to delay your gratification and your ability to focus your attention'.** Lindsay believes that if she **'sets her sights on something she can achieve it'.**

Arriving in the New York office all those years ago as a buyer for Ralph Lauren was the moment she remembers feeling that she had achieved her ambition, that **'She had become a self-made woman'.**

In the pursuit of education, individual desire is more influential than an institution. Love, affection, belonging and acceptance are esteem needs. All people have a need for firm, stable self-respect, reputation, prestige, dignity and appreciation. Horney (1950) states, **'Each person is born with a unique potential, and self-esteem derives from achieving it'.** Fellow humanist Rogers (1951) defined self-esteem as the extent to which people like, value and accept themselves.

Dweck's (2006) book Mindset poses unsettling questions about the value of assessment and measurement of IQ and ability. Could achieving high scores create a fear of failure that then prevents people from attempting new tasks? For people with **'fixed mind-sets'**, their self-esteem can be linked to their scores. This creates fear that they might not do so well in the next activity, which prevents them from engaging. If exam results and tests define us and we accept those labels, then the impact on our self-esteem can go on to inform what we pursue – and why.

Can the damage be undone? Dweck's (2006) book explores ways to move from the fixed mind-set to the growth mind-set, while the world of education is still driven by assessment frenzy and with measuring and ranking children according to their age and ability. This is clearly detrimental, yet educational psychologists and educators continue to measure current ability as predictors of future performance. Research results appear to take a long time to impact the fixed mind-sets in charge of education.

Using Maslow's (1968) Hierarchy of Needs introduces a holistic approach to education and learning. Viewing the student as having physical, social, emotional and intellectual needs may discourage the notion of benchmarking children's based on their achievements. In applying the hierarchy, a teacher can understand that a child needs to feel valued and respected before he/she can make optimal progress.

In Maslow's (1978) theory, the goal of education should be in facilitating each student to gain their highest potential through discovering their identity and vocation. Maslow saw the roles of schools as helping students look within themselves to gain self-knowledge and felt that if there was too much emphasis on the curriculum it would adversely affect self-discovery.

Emerging research in brain matters suggests that our brain creates new neural pathways each time we learn new information, and this increases our intelligence. The research in support of this is substantial and convincing, and it includes research conducted by Dweck (2006) who proposes that the biggest indicator of improved performance was the willingness to learn by embracing a growth mind-set. While IQ measurements were not part of her research data, the exam and performance outcomes would suggest that student IQs had increased.

Have we been wrong to measure and assess children? Has it been beneficial? Educational psychologists are still using traditional models that maintain the IQ is static and not something that can be increased or altered. It is a fixed measure of general academic ability. In the British education system, we are currently using Cognitive Ability Test scores as predictors of ability and, therefore, exam results. They may be an accurate snapshot of current levels, but do they operate as positive enablers or simply place external limitations on academic achievement?

The idea that traits are fixed does not promote growth, but creates a fixed mind-set, according to Dweck (2006). If you have internalised a fixed mind-set regarding your learning ability or talent, then you are less likely to believe that it can be changed by your efforts, that change

is possible; this is so because of the self-fulfilling prophecy, or Pollyanna Effect.

Following research carried out on hundreds of children, Dweck (2006) wrote, **'Praising children's intelligence harms their motivation, and it harms their performance'** because when they encounter difficulties, their confidence fades and they lose motivation. If they fail, that means they are not intelligent, so they have to pretend, resulting in their not taking on difficult tasks for fear of failure. Imagine the effect of telling a child that they are not intelligent through tests or exams or some other form of grading. What impact does that really have? We have all been through school and have had defining experiences. Can you remember what your experience was like?

Does our fixed view of intelligence create disabilities for children? We need to teach children to appreciate challenges, make mistakes and love learning. If children stop relying on external praise and judgement, will they become more self-reliant and gain confidence in themselves?

Gardner (1983), the founder of 'Multiple Intelligence Theory', argues that **'psychologists have traditionally been far too concerned with norming and ranking children'**. Jung (1953), a founder of analytical

psychology, viewed the environment as a contributing factor in self-rejection. Jung (1953) saw the role of a teacher as one of encouraging students to express their individuality in every subject of a curriculum.
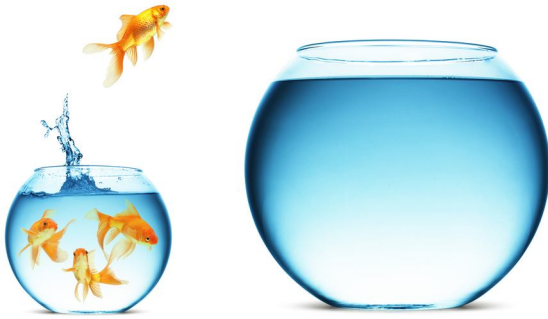
Chapter 8

Goals and Aspirations

Intrinsic goals are pursued because we find them personally rewarding. They are our innate desires.

Extrinsic goals are pursued because we are seeking reward, approval or to avoid punishment.

Research carried out by Kasser et al (1996), found that people who were reared in families where their needs for self-esteem and love were not met were more likely to feel insecure as adults and as a result would go on to pursue goals to achieve social recognition, wealth and power as a means of meeting these needs. The negative implication of this focus on extrinsic goals means there is neglect of personal growth and self-acceptance. The link between the pursuit of extrinsic goals as a way of meeting our basic need for security and self-esteem adversely affects the attainment of self-actualization. The research also found that even when the materialistic goals had been met, these individuals were still insecure because their attention remained on fulfilling their perceived deficiency needs by focusing on extrinsic

values while their growth needs remained unattended to and impoverished.

'Evaluations from others are central determinants of self-esteem because we need feedback from others to ascertain the extent to which we are meeting the various expectations we feel they have and on which our self-worth is based' Rogers (1959).

Strong values attached to extrinsic goals, i.e. the pursuit of money, fame or image are negatively associated with well-being, because research suggest that it results in greater anxiety, depression, narcissism, low self-esteem, vitality and social functioning. In other words the pursuit of these goals results in a reduced ability to reach self-actualization (Kasser and Ryan, 1996).

Autonomous motives significantly predict well-being, whereas materialistic goals are often linked to extrinsic motivation and can impact negatively on us. However, extrinsic goals are not problematic to our well-being except if they are pursued for the wrong reasons such as pressure, control, and insecurity.

Intrinsic goals that focus on growth, connection, contribution, or are personally important to the individual are deemed to have a positive effect on well-

being because they promote satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness; they promote people's natural growth tendencies. Deci and Ryan (2000).

Do you remember these questions from an earlier chapter?

What are you pursuing? Why are you pursuing it?

Here is a little task:

1. What goals are you pursuing?
2. Make a list.
3. Put them into two categories depending on whether they are intrinsic or extrinsic.
4. Try to connect with your reasons for pursuing each goal on your list.
5. We all have had goals and aspirations that have been disappointed and we may have even abandoned them. Is there a buried goal, aspiration or dream that you are still drawn to and want to rekindle?
6. Spend a few moments listening to your dreams and try to capture its essence and why it is important to you.

Shelden, Ryan, Deci and Kasser (2004) concluded that the goals people pursue, whether they strive for extrinsic or intrinsic goals and why people pursue them, autonomous or controlled motives, make significant independent contributions to psychological well-being.

Goals theory points to important links between aspirations, expectations, attributes, conception of ability, motivation, self-concept and achievement, (Bowen 2009). What drives us to achieve our goals, and how does our goal choice link to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs? To measure the extent a person is self-actualized, the focus needs to be on the motives people have for pursuing goals.

According to the famous quote by Srivistava (2001), **'It's not the money; it's the motives',** the clue to whether the goal is being pursued for autonomous or controlled reasons lies not in the goal's content, but in its motive. Autonomous reasons would include personal meaning, fun or enjoyment, whereas controlled reasons would include the need for praise or rewards, or feeling coerced or pressured as the reason for pursuing the goal.

In line with Maslow's (1968) theory, a person operating as a self-actualizer would pursue goals for intrinsic reasons and would be autonomous in their pursuit. The negative relationship between the pursuit of an extrinsic goal such as money stems from the fact that people typically report feeling controlled and insecure when pursuing extrinsic goals.

Deficiency needs dominating our lives explains why the journey towards self-actualization is thwarted for most people, herein laid the dilemma that Adam's dreams floundered in. When I first met him it was his considerate nature that I noticed. He told me that he had spent his earlier life hiding feelings of low self-worth and a wounded heart.

He has found his way into his dream career and he still finds it hard to believe that his current life is really real. His uphill struggle to believe in himself and hear his deepest desires were 'abruptly aided' by a serious car accident that landed him in hospital for three months. He listened to music as he lay confined in his ward and with each passing day he grew angrier with himself for having forsaken his passion.

Accused of being homosexual by his father and laughed at by his peers, he hid his passion for the piano for thirty-five years. He describes his life before the accident as a miserable existence; he lacked commitment in his role as an accountant and found it difficult to form long-term relationships. He knew he was wasting his life but he was too fearful to make the changes. However, lying there in hospital having narrowly escaped death and with both his hands injured he realised that he was getting another chance. Providence was giving him an opportunity to be who he really was and although he

wavered a few more times as he reviewed the safe alternatives he was used to, he knew for the sake of his health and sanity he needed to pursue music and suffer the consequences of choosing to follow his passion.

In his **Life Chances Interview,** Adam talked openly about his fear of rejection as a child, about enduring freezing cold rugby practises, which he had to pretend to enjoy, and about the many nights he cried himself to sleep. Having his sexual orientation linked to his passion made him reluctant to form friendships with other boys of his own age for fear of ridicule by his father. As a result he became more introverted. His father's anxieties about him being homosexual seem to dominate his existence. In retrospect, Adam finds it amusing that he was so affected by his father's value judgements, but at the time his bullying presence seemed to destroy his ability to connect with himself and really hear his own voice.

Rogers believed that when we are guided by the expectations of others that run counter to our innate yearnings problems occur. When our social persona prevents us getting in touch with our true selves, then movement toward self-actualization is hindered. In Roger's view, if a person is placed in a situation where such discord is present the person may get 'a vague sense that something is wrong'. The person may experience

physiological symptoms of anxiety without being able to accurately identify the source of the difficulty. Roger's saw this as a threat to the individual's internal world because if the individual is prevented from clearly perceiving the cause of the difficulty then the defence/survival mechanisms get triggered to cope with the situation, and if the discord is too great it may result in **a profound state of unhappiness and internal disorganisation that the person may be unable to resolve**.

On the **POI** Adam's scores were in the self-actualizing range but he assured me that had I invited him to partake in the study four years earlier the results would be quite different.

Fear of rejection lost Adam many years of his life. During his four years of reconstructing his life he discovered that his uneasiness about his sexual orientation had contributed to him being indifferent in relationships. He was not really living his own life **'just watching it passing by'** is how he described it.

'I have found real happiness in being myself and marching to the beat of my own drum'.
Adam 2015

Finally he embraced the musician in his soul despite his father's objections and initial disassociation from him. He pursued his dreams and eventually made friends with his father again but this time on his own terms.

Although his epiphany occurred as the result of an accident, Adam admits that he knew what he really wanted to do and his soul destroying years were largely his own fault. He has many positives in his life now including being in a committed relationship and pursuing a career that he loves. He says, **'I have found real happiness in being myself and marching to the beat of my own drum'.**

Chapter 9

Life Chances

Life chances are opportunities for individuals to grow from the realisation of their talents, wishes and hopes, and these opportunities are provided by social conditions. There is a balance of life chances for any individual. Dahrendurf (1979) argues that life chances are not simply opportunities in the sense of alternatives to choose from: **'They are a function of two elements, options and ligatures. They can vary independently of each other, but it is their specific combination at any given time which constitutes the chances by which the lives of people in society are determined'**. Some explanation of this comment is in order. **Options** are described as possibilities of choice or opportunities of direction, and **ligatures** are allegiances. One might call them **bonds** or **linkages** as well. By virtue of your social position or role, you are placed in bonds or ligatures. These often contain emotional commitment to, for example, family or religion, and sometimes allow for very little independent choice.

In your life were family obligations paramount in your life choices?
If you look at your life now is it similar to your parents or guardians?

Modern life has contributed hugely to increases in life chances. The number and range of choices has increased, as has the number of people to whom these options are available. Economic growth, social equality and education have contributed greatly to providing increased opportunity. However, Dahrendurf (1979) argues that the lack of bonds and linkages '**have led to increased levels of stress breakdown and suicide and the like'.**

Appreciating that the attainment of many life chances is related in large part to the family into which we are born, it is easier to see why some people feel subordinate and unable to advocate for themselves. **Diminished life chances** refer to a limited amount of opportunities, and they are not the same for every individual. Down through the eons social and economic advantages accentuate and create deep-seated and systematic differences in outcomes between social groups.

There is evidence that psychological characteristics such as feelings of self-esteem and the sense of control

that one feels over one's destiny are strongly associated with social class and background. Research shows that people with high self-esteem experience shorter spells of unemployment and tend to earn higher levels of income in adulthood. Poverty of ambition may act as a barrier; it may result in the perceptions of the prospects available being more pessimistic than the true situation.

Self-esteem also affects attainment at school. In a longitudinal study carried out by Schoon and Duckworth (2012) comprising 6,116 people, the role of socio-economic backgrounds and parental influences, self-concepts and aspirations were investigated as predictors of entrepreneurship. It aimed to examine the validity of early developmental influences and contextual factors in predicting outcomes. Their research pointed to social structure as well as individual self-efficacy as shaping outcomes. Of course, everyone does not start at the same point. Family, social background, education and social structure play a role in the formation of aspirations. As you might expect, the predictions and life chances for adolescents from higher income families suggest that they are more likely to aspire to a professional career, are expected to continue their education and perform better in exams (Ashby & Schoon, 2010).

In modern society, too, identities are perceived, interpreted and rated on bodily attributes within cultural contexts. **The impact of this on individuals' life chances, Back (2012) argues, can be seen through beauty, sporting or creative talents where an individual can gain acceptance that might otherwise be 'scarce within a socially disadvantaged group identity'**. The individual from a disadvantaged background that has made good supports the notion of social equality, but Back argues that it **'offers the illusion that change is possible for anyone who really tries, regardless of background or circumstance'**.

Social Identity Theory focuses on the extent to which individuals identify themselves in terms of group memberships. The central proposition of this theory is that individuals define themselves socially and personally. The struggle for individualism can obviate the fact that people expose their group association and location in the tiny details of their interactions, conversations and personal habits. Although people can be identified and categorised by their social identity, there is inevitably a gap between the subjective sense of self and the social position or recognition. However, the lower the status of one's identity, or the more negative that person is categorised socially, the greater and more painful the gap can be. **Back (2012) argues that those with greater identity normativity as**

well as symbolic and material power can never know at a personal and subjective level 'the mental and physical impact of identity-based prejudice and discrimination'.

Jung (1953) notes, **'The person lives by aims as well as by causes',** meaning our behaviour is conditioned by our racial history and our aspirations. Jung (1953) believed that we are constantly developing as we search for wholeness and completion. He believed that we inherited the experiences of past generations and the foundations of our personality contain primitive innate and unconscious aspects. These predispositions guide and determine what we attend and respond to in our own experiences. This view expands the notion of ourselves as mere physical entities stuck in particular social strata and suggests that our awareness level is also capable of connecting with our spiritual inheritance. Our perception of our own experience is unique to each of us, and what we attend to and how we interpret it creates the seeds of our aspirations. This internal assimilation fuels our desires and explains why people reach their aspirations and achieve their potential against the odds.

'It is an ideal for which I am prepared to die'.

Nelson Mandela

A great leader of our time was the late Nelson Mandela, who led the struggle to replace apartheid (a policy of racial segregation against non-Europeans in the Republic of South Africa) with a multi-racial democracy. Born into the Thembu clan in a small village in South Africa and orphaned at the age of nine, he was placed in the care of the chief of his clan. His experience of racism and discrimination combined with his hard-won law degree exposed him to people from many races and different perspectives. His passion was for politics, and he set up the first black law firm in South Africa.

Earlier, we mentioned Dahrendurf (1979) and the notions of bonds and ligatures and how the situation you are born into can contain opportunities to grow but also contain allegiances. Nelson seems to represent a man born into the role he went on to assume. Joining the African National Congress (ANC), he campaigned against apartheid. In 1960, when the ANC was outlawed, racial tensions soared, marking the end of peaceful resistance. He was charged with attempting to violently overthrow the government. In 1964, this charge of high treason resulted with him being sentenced to life imprisonment. His ideal of harmony and opportunity offered to all people in a democratic

society was his dream. He is quoted as having said, **'It is an ideal for which I am prepared to die'.**

During his twenty-six years in prison, Nelson's dream lived on in his mind, in his heart and in the legacy he had inspired in his people.

> **'The self-actualization tendency can be thwarted or warped, but life will not give up, even if it cannot flourish. Human behaviour can be better understood if we trust this directional tendency. We are striving in the only ways we perceive available to us to move toward growth, toward becoming'. Rogers (1951)**

Finally, in 1990, the ban was lifted on the ANC, and amid huge celebrations Nelson was freed. Talks on forming a new multi-racial democracy began. Five months later he was voted President of South Africa. In 1993, he won a Nobel Peace Prize. His dream manifested itself in reality, and his story is amazing. He remarked:
'Death is something inevitable. When a man has done what he considers to be his duty to his people and his country, he can rest in peace. I believe I have made that effort, and that is therefore why I will sleep for eternity'.
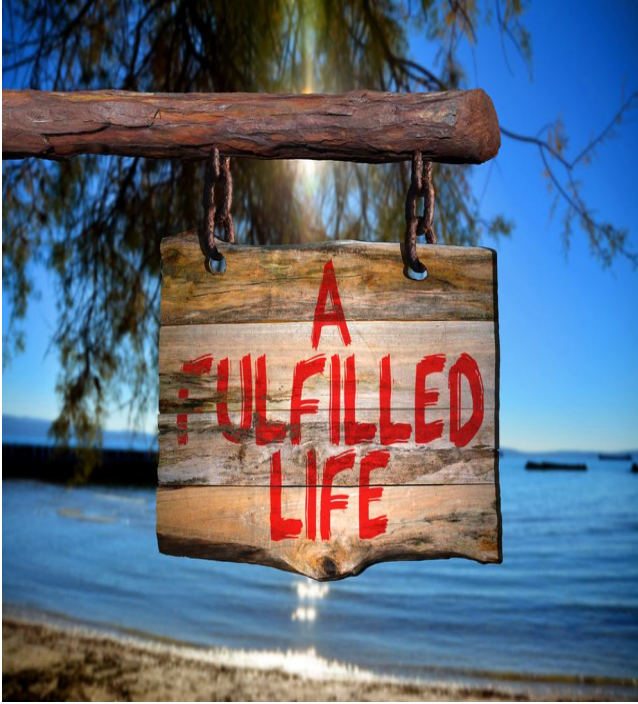
Chapter 10

Self-actualization and the Personal Orientation Inventory

Dr Franz Alexander (1987), an eminent physician, is considered one of the founders of psychosomatic medicine. He noted that:

'The fact that the mind rules the body is in spite of its neglect by biology and medicine is the most fundamental fact which we know about the process of life'. Dr Franz Alexander (1987)

Our minds are delicate and complex instruments that have many functions and many modes of operation. We are capable of responding in a variety of ways and of making the best or worst of situations, depending on our interpretation of them.

Different perspectives on the causes of mental health difficulties range from biological factors to the impact of

life experiences. Emerging research suggests that social factors and life chances may play a more important role than genetic disposition. Most adults with difficulties in their present life experienced problems as children. Changing the external conditions of our lives can provide temporary improvement; however, our internal world and how we feel inside are the most important factors in determining long-term happiness.

Psychologists have proposed that early childhood trauma leads to dysfunctional adults, and most of us would agree that this line of causation is not without basis. **Response Style Theory** (RST) is linked with psychological disorders, particularly depression. It is described as a maladaptive style of compulsive thinking that focuses attention on the symptoms of distress and on its possible causes and consequences, as opposed to its solutions. The theory also links a tendency to ruminate with binge drinking, self-harming, eating disorders and post-traumatic stress.

A 2013 study conducted by Dr Peter Kinderman in the UK on the impact of family history, social circumstances and life events on mental health involved 32,827 people between the ages of 18–85 years old. His findings confirmed that negative life experiences, traumatic and abusive childhoods, poverty and a family history of mental health difficulties were predictors of higher levels

of depression and anxiety. But the results were affected by the response style of the individual, **'specifically lack of adaptive coping strategies, rumination and self-blame'.**

As Dr Kinderman (2013) points out, this outcome has positive implications for the long term for people suffering from anxiety and depression, as our attribution and response styles are amenable to therapy. Goleman (1995) describes chronic worrying as someone being able to **'generate a steady hum of anxiety', their thoughts are unreceptive to reason and 'lock the worrier into a single inflexible view of the worrisome topic'.** If we alter how we respond to external events by evolving a more constructive approach, then we are likely to feel empowered and gain confidence in dealing with future events in a more optimal way. Regaining control of our mental environment is undoubtedly beneficial.

While professional debate continues to determine the variables that result in mental health difficulties, the factors continue to suggest that adverse life events and the environment are major contributors, with biology being the other main factor. The relationship between these three variables is seen as imperative in developing effective treatment. While the dispute continues among the professionals, the study showed that childhood abuse, bullying and stressful life events in adulthood

were the strongest direct predictors of mental health problems.

Response style is defined as a set of responses generally emanating from dispositional factors instead of situational ones. The response style of the individual was also studied by Kinderman (2013) as explained above, and he found that where there was a tendency toward rumination, blaming oneself for difficulties and a lack of coping strategies, the impact of childhood abuse and stressful life events was more significant.

Response style theory also contends that a positive distraction is the healthy alternative to rumination where the focus is on the positive stimulus instead of the distress. If you remember Mott from an earlier chapter, he demonstrated this daily during his time in prison by focusing his attention on the environment and communicating with the other prisoners, while his boss appeared to focus on negative thoughts and withdrew from present time.

Attribution theory deals with how information is received and used to explain the cause of events. It looks at what information is gathered and combined by an individual to form a judgement. It is concerned with how events are explained and how cause and effect are established. An **internal attribution style** is linked to

intention; it assigns the cause of behaviour to personality traits, a person's motives or beliefs. Internal attribution is driven by the motives and emotions of the individual, intended to perhaps place himself/herself in a positive position. Accordingly, their enabling assets cause the event to occur, and their outlook tends to be optimistic. However, an **external attributional style** assigns the cause of behaviours to external situations and situational and environmental factors over which one has no control. This is linked more with having a pessimistic style, so even if something positive happens one is unlikely to attribute the cause to their actions.

Research into attributional style as it relates to mental health and depression in particular found that a person with a negative attribution style will assign bad events that happen in their life to sources that are **'internal, stable and global'.** For example, if a person has experienced rejection in a love affair, he/she will assign the cause to himself/herself, seeing it as his/her fault. That person will also believe that similar outcomes will occur if he/she gets involved with someone else and that other negative things will happen, too. It is their style or characteristic way of making sense of the world, as well as how they see themselves, their life and their future. Depression is linked to this style or way of thinking, but as Dr Kinderman points out it is possible to change our way of perceiving the world to a more positive style.

In contrast, the characteristic of a person with a positive style is a tendency to see bad events as **'external, unstable and specific'** (Martin Seligman, 2002).

As you can see from the description, a person with a positive attributional style will tend to attribute bad events and failures to external causes and feel that it is unlikely that it will happen again, and that it was caused by a specific situation or person. As a result, they maintain a positive outlook on life. Amelia, introduced earlier, views each event independently, and her positive style assumes that '**When one door closes, another opens, and it is always a better door'**. Viewing the world in a positive light creates optimism and an expectation that the future will be even better than the present.

'When one door closes, another opens, and it is always a better door'. Amelia 2015

Big-hearted people seldom count the cost of helping others, and that is certainly true for Amelia, who is one of the self-actualizers included in this study. First, let us look at an overview of her life from a qualitative perspective that also contains excerpts from an interview with her. She is a delightful person to be around, and her story reads a bit like this:

Coming from a big family and recognising that there were few opportunities, the life chances for this amazing lady were certainly not stacked in her favour. Feeling obliged to take care of her parents when her older siblings had flown the nest reduced her options even further. Undaunted by the situation, she used her good judgement and guile to create opportunities for herself. At heart, she is a people person. Although she was successful in a range of careers, her real gift seems to be in her ability to interact with adults and children.

She has the capacity to accept the obligations placed upon her shoulders and carry them, not as a burden but instead making them part of her life. In the way that Nelson embraced the problems of his racial inheritance, Amelia embraced the trauma and difficulties of her parents. Held back from having the freedom and autonomy most young people yearn for, she responded to the situation in a thoughtful, positive way that gave her options. She managed long-standing conflict in the family by somehow uniting people. It is quite remarkable how Amelia moved herself from a position of having all the odds stacked against her to finding opportunities and responding in constructive ways that then allowed her to create her own life while supporting her family emotionally and physically. While accepting dutifully the

responsibilities she inherited she integrated them into her life with flair and enthusiasm.

Amelia is sincere and incredibly genuine in all her dealings with others and believes the real meaning of life is to meet people and for us to help each other. **'It's not what you gather; it's what you scatter'** is one of her favourite sayings. It sums up her approach to life.

'It's not what you gather; it's what you scatter'
Amelia 2015

Her sense of humour is infectious; she lightens up the environment and creates merriment wherever she goes. Even in the depths of misfortune, loss and hardship, she can be counted on to see a way of solving a problem or resolving a conflict. Overcoming obstacles is a skill Amelia learned at an early age. When I asked her what approach she uses, she was quick to explain that she viewed obstacles as challenges. Pausing for a moment, she added, 'When one door closes, another opens, and it is always a better door'. With a wonderful, optimistic, life-affirming philosophy like that, it is not surprising that she is a happy and successful woman. She sees herself as successful, too, but she is shy in accepting

praise, saying she was lucky that opportunities came to her.

Alongside a successful career spanning three decades in which she owns and manages a large playschool, she has reared her own son and opened her doors and her heart to long-term foster care for other children. She is extremely valued by her community, and she is dedicated to meeting the needs of all the children and parents she encounters. She has helped numerous people through severe illnesses, making time to visit them in hospital every day and inviting people into her home to live when they became too frail to manage on their own. She received the Foster Parent of the Year award in 2013.

She possesses an in-built time management system and can multi-task at a level that computers might struggle to keep pace with. Besides her busy schedule, she has managed to continue her education in Childcare and Management. She enjoys the buzz of a busy schedule, loves to take calculated risks. Deep down, she believes in herself and in her ability to accomplish anything she sets her mind to. She has also achieved considerable success in property development and enjoys an active social life. She completed her first marathon in 2007 and continues to train for this each year, always aiming to finish in a shorter time.

With the support of a wonderful husband and a happy marriage for more than twenty-five years, there is much here to suggest that this woman is achieving her potential. She sees herself as ordinary, practical and down to earth, but you only have to be with her a few moments to discover that 'extraordinarily capable' are more appropriate words to describe her.

Using Amelia's scores as an example, we can compare on a quantitative level how her scores on the POI reflect the attitudes and values of a self-actualizing person.

Time Competence measures an individual's tendency to live in the present and respond to life in the here and now, as opposed to being excessively worried about the past and future. A person stuck in the past may be characterised by guilt, regret and remorse. His/her attention is stuck in memories and is not available to process data in the present. Interestingly, on the Personal Orientation Inventory, Amelia's scores for Time Competence were high, suggesting that she lives in the present and responds in the here and now, as opposed to being exceedingly concerned with past or future issues.

Inner Support: A high score on this parameter suggests an ability to act autonomously, making decisions in terms of one's own motivation and being able to integrate being self-directed and other-directed in an

optimal balance. A low score suggests an over-reliance on others, being too susceptible to external influences and the need to be accepted and approved of by others. Amelia's score in the ratio of 1:3 here indicates that she is proactive and capable of operating independently and is not overly reliant on others.

Values measure the self-actualization values described by Maslow. A high score reflects living in accordance with these values whilst being able to respond to situations flexibly using good judgement as opposed to being rigid, compulsive and dogmatic. This measure is best explained by whether someone can live in the flow of life and can respond appropriately to situations as they occur. Here again, Amelia's scores reflect optimal responses, as might be expected.

Feelings measure the ability to respond to one's own feelings and needs in a sensitive way and to respond spontaneously to others by being yourself. A low score would suggest a fear of being so. Although it is difficult to analyse how we respond to our own feelings internally, the POI measurement uses the mid-point of fifty to indicate whether someone is too self-sacrificing or too selfish, depending on whether that person is below or above the mid-point line. Amelia's score is slightly lower, suggesting that her willingness to help others may at times be to her own detriment. However, it is in keeping

with the qualitative picture of her life, as described earlier.

Self-Perception: This measures self-worth and self-acceptance. A high score indicates a positive view of the self and the ability to accept the self, despite weaknesses. Together, these scores measure self-esteem and self-regard. Self-esteem is a pervasive characteristic and has been explored at length in an earlier chapter, but as might be expected Amelia's scores are in the optimal area, suggesting that she is accepting of herself and has high self-worth.

Synergistic Awareness: This refers to having a constructive view of human beings, seeing people as essentially good. It includes the ability to resolve dichotomies such as good/bad and selfishness/selflessness as not necessarily being mutually exclusive. In Amelia's interview, it was easy to observe her forgiving nature and easy acceptance of others' foibles. As might be expected, her scores reflect a very balanced view of humanity.

Interpersonal Sensitivity: A high score suggests being able to accept one's feelings of anger and aggression as normal. A low score suggests repression and denial of these feelings. It also measures the ability to have meaningful, intimate relationships with others,

unencumbered by expectation and obligation. A low score would suggest difficulty in establishing warm interpersonal relationships. People whose needs for belonging, love and esteem have been met will score closer to the self-actualized person in these areas. Amelia's scores suggest that she is living a more enriched life than the average person and has created positive relationships with others on her journey through life.

We all have dreams and desires, and our souls long for the opportunity to realise them. Our lives are created in part by how we respond to our life chances and in how we overcome the obstacles we encounter. Our quest for fulfilment, our passion, drives us to become who we are, and I believe that is much more than what our social class predicts for us.

Chapter 11

POI and Your Self-Discovery Course

The route to healing is through relearning. Maslow (1978) argues that, if we seek to change, we must **'change our awareness of ourselves'**. If we currently see ourselves as having low self-worth, then changing that construct will change what we attend to and what goals we will allow ourselves to pursue.

In my opinion the Personal Orientation Inventory has validity. It measures the behaviour and personal values related to mental health and well-being; Maslow (1971) said self-actualization is what the Personal Orientation Inventory **'test tests'**. In my practice it is used to determine which area of a person's life is below the desired level. Using the POI this way provides therapeutic value because it offers insight into the areas that need to be addressed. It is also a valid tool for

measuring changes after the deconstruction process or other forms of therapy have occurred.

If you have taken the POI already you will know the key areas which are higher or lower than the optimum for a self-actualized person. Seeing your inner world graphed out like this may strike a chord with you. You may have a Eureka moment.

As with all tests and assessments, the scores from the POI should not be viewed as fixed or conclusive and should be considered in conjunction with all other available information. These scores are intended to initiate thought about and a discussion of attitudes and values and as a starting point as to how one can achieve greater personal development. Actualisation is a combination of emotional maturity and personal growth and is a continuous lifelong journey.

If the results are being used to create your Self-Discovery Course (SDC) then the low areas would be explored further with you to get a more accurate picture of where you really are and how you view yourself. Obviously, this process is conducted on a one-to-one basis where confidentially is paramount. When a review of the **POI** is completed then the **Life Chances** and **Goals and Aspirations** interviews are conducted. By the end of the initial consultation the main areas of difficulty in your

life are laid out and your **Self-Discovery Course** is created.

Your course is extremely individualised to address only the issues that concern you. Working on a one-to-one basis the focus is very specific. Somewhere in the process you will find the tiny streamer that is pointing the way towards the root of the difficulty. With careful guidance you will be able to follow the route and locate the source of the issue. Deconstruction is a powerful method because it corresponds to the unique way you have stored your memories and allows you to select with pinpoint accuracy the ones that are negatively impacting you in the present. Using this method, there is no need to blanket your whole life looking for countless negative occurrences; you only deal with the key moments from which the rest of your troubles emanate.

Helping people unlock their troubled minds involves asking open-ended questions to untangle emotional, environmental and contextual content, as well as the cognitive construct. This process allows people to reach a realisation about how their current life situation was informed by their constructions of their experience. Working from a present time perspective, it is possible to untangle and straighten out the past. Locating what lies behind the life episodes which were most crucial to shaping our emotional responses and deconstruct the

most negative and painful ones. **'It is the client who knows what hurts, what direction to go, what problems are crucial, what experiences have been deeply buried'** (Rogers, 1955).

The notion that early emotional interactions lay down the foundations of our emotional learning and responses is a well-established fact in psychoanalysis and is supported by recent research by Le Doux (1986). It is also the premise that underlies the **Self-Discovery Course** which I facilitate and is the basis of many other forms of therapy. The answer to what constitutes a barrier or obstacle is already known to us. It may be in a muddled emotional mess, resisting all lines of analytical enquiry, but we can access and deconstruct it.

Our interpretations of out interactions with others are shaped by our emotional history and not by rational judgements. Our unconscious reactions are a result of our emotional memories being triggered; a sudden surge of anxiety, sadness, hatred, fear or rage can overcome us if our present situation is in some way like our past. As a result, we can overact in ways that are difficult to explain or rationalise.

Psychologists call this trigger action 'precognitive emotions' because it causes us to react before a full analysis can be undertaken. Childhood memories often

contain strong feelings because our emotional brain matures in infancy, but our analytical brain does not mature 'til years later. As a result we can be overwhelmed emotionally as adults but be unable to make a rational link between the feelings we are experiencing and the memories that are fuelling them. As children, our emotional life and our responses are real, raw, true and pure. We feel how we feel, and we act accordingly. Look at children playing together. Their spontaneity and energy is focused on the moment, and their responses are instant. If childhood events are traumatic, the impact on the child is greater because the emotional content is more potent.

Often, emotionally traumatic events leave us with too little time to interpret and react to them because too much critical information is provided at one time. It makes inhumane demands, and the impact cannot be simultaneously analysed and fully comprehended. Thus, we are predisposed to having aspects of the event replay in our minds in times of stress. This is even more intense if our current life situation is unconsciously reminding us of the earlier event.

Rough times in life are often composed of information arriving in a way that was sudden, traumatic, unexpected or unwanted and did not allow us to interpret, assimilate or understand it. The sudden loss of

a loved one, either emotionally or physically; discovering that a partner has been unfaithful; or failing an important exam or interview are all examples of events that may overwhelm us.

If our emotional memories are being triggered as warnings to us that the present situation contains some element that has caused us unhappiness in the past, then although it is creating unpleasant feelings, it can provide the answers to untangling our current difficulties, if it can be successfully deconstructed.

Jung (1951) believed that physical ailments, including hysteria and depression, resulted from un-verbalised emotions. As we develop our inner reality, so too do we develop ways of responding in interpersonal relationships. Jung saw the second half of life as being when individuals sought integration and wholeness.

Change is inevitable
but personal growth
is a choice.

Chapter 12

Deconstruction is an Educational Process

In the same way children learn in a school environment by exploring, manipulating situations, wrestling with questions and controversies, and performing experiments, so too do we arrive at conclusions about ourselves and what we feel we are capable of. While children may have more capable role models in the form of teachers to learn from in their school environment, they suffer greatly if they have no such role models in their home environment.

An individual takes in new ideas through assimilation and then makes room in his/her data files for the new information through a process known as **accommodation.** The result is a new level of awareness and understanding. Cognitive growth occurs when there is equilibrium between the data received and the internal organisational structure. The educationalist Piaget (1970) believed that, when children were allowed to investigate their environment, discovering for themselves rather

than being told how things work, they were better able to construct a more comprehensive study that allowed their thinking to move from the concrete to the abstract. Knowledge development and learning are active processes in which new ideas or concepts are constructed based on past knowledge. An individual transforms information, constructs hypotheses and makes decisions relying on a cognitive structure that provides meaning and organisation to the process. Developing the ability to perform operations requires an active, supportive environment and social interactions that encourage children and adults to construct their own knowledge. Piaget's constructivist theory continues to inform educational technology today. Children actively construct knowledge, and this happens within a social context.

Research into how pupils learn has focused on helping teachers to understand students' developmental readiness and provided insight into ways a teacher can facilitate a child's growth to more complex cognitive levels. Both are essential to developing a child-centred approach to education and a child-directed curriculum. Teachers facilitate cognitive development by providing activities that engage learners, challenge their existing beliefs and stimulate adaptation to new levels of understanding.

Whilst working in the education sector, my focus has never really been on the curriculum or the subjects, but on the inner world of the student. The Special Needs area of education focuses on the difficulties school and learning present to a student and the struggles a child has in making sense of it. Parallels can easily be seen here between the emotional world of adults and how, through the lack of self-knowledge, they have created impossible life situations. Students who have received information in the wrong order for them to assimilate remain in confusion until it gets resolved. In the same way, fixed ideas or constructs that have been formed cause us as adults to be unable to change, resulting in problems and complications with others. This causes further communication difficulties. The individual may become so overwhelmed in personal relationships or life that he/she is unable to untangle the situation or deconstruct the problem because he/she cannot remember what building block created this entrenched position in the first place.

Emotional development is not considered a curriculum subject, and the haphazard approaches and typecasting used in quasi psychology circles to explain our dilemmas rarely go far enough to supply a solution or a process that allows us to learn how to construct a more accurate emotional response.

In the absence of formal training and understanding of cause and effect in interpersonal relationships, irrational responses often occur. Depression, disease and psychosomatic illnesses are all indicators of a lack of information on how we should understand ourselves and why we respond as we do to situations we encounter. Compare this to the world of education, where learning styles and teaching approaches have been researched and devised to help reduce misunderstandings and confusions for learners.

In Western society, people are measured by their role in life, social status and achievements. Their inner world is not seen as so important, and their fears, worries and traumas are expected to be buried or resolved in some hidden way. The stigma attached to mental health difficulties characterises our approach, and we are often at odds to know how to help ourselves or others in times of difficulty. Education focuses on the acquisition of formal and abstract knowledge as a basis for exam results and career success, but people can achieve these benchmarks and yet not really connect with themselves or with what matters most to them.

'What is necessary to change a person is to change his awareness of himself' (Maslow, 1963).

Individuals have within themselves vast resources for self-understanding and for altering their self-concepts, basic attitudes and self-directed behaviour. The subjective experience of individuals informs their judgement and directs their behaviour. Our inner world determines our behaviour. Regardless of external objective reality, a person will respond to the environment and others based on the judgements made by one's subjective reality. Gonzales (2004) maintains, '**Emotion rules, and we need to manage our emotions with analysis'.**

I am sure we have all witnessed and possibly experienced ourselves or someone else being afraid of water. Although individuals can observe and respond to the immediate environment rationally under normal circumstances, now that they are facing a situation where they believe their survival is threatened, their inner reality holds forth, and they are unable to operate outside of it. I have seen expert swimmers standing by, encouraging and coaxing a frightened non-swimmer, and yet they cannot provide enough certainty for the individual to change his/her inner reality.

'Emotion rules and we need to manage our emotions with analysis'. Gonzales (2004)

We all operate in this way. Our internal constructs come in to play and are especially evident when we feel threatened. The fight-or-flight instinct is triggered by our subjective experience. Our response will be even more extreme if our experience has been negative or life threatening. Daniel Goleman (1995) talks about trauma and emotional relearning in his famous book, **Emotional Intelligence**, in a discussion about Holocaust survivors, many of who were suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the positive findings showed how some had recovered, suggesting that **'This finding and others like it hold out the promise that the brain changes in PTSD are not indelible, and that people can recover from even the direst emotional imprinting – in short the emotional circuitry can be re-educated. The good news then is that trauma as profound as PTSD can heal, and the route to such healing is through relearning'.**

The deconstruction process will help you to address your subjective reality and to inspect it, engaging with it emotionally and intellectually. This process then allows you to disentangle the negative memories and misinformation, discharge negative emotions from it and review its impact on you and its value.

It is through this deconstruction process that you can uncover the root of the confusion, and this allows you to construct your new subjective reality. If the process is carried out effectively and to its conclusion, then the roots of fear and other unwanted negative reactions can be discharged, and genuine insights can replace the previously stored information.

The above experience about the person with a fear of deep water may seem extreme; however, if we find out more about how he/she has constructed the information from past experiences, then we can understand the fear and what triggered it. Traumatic incidents can leave emotional and physical scars. They can overwhelm us again in the present time if the memories get triggered by a sound, a smell or some other sense that is similar enough to remind us of the tragedy. By releasing the powerful energy contained in the memory, it allows us to gain understanding and control of the feelings so that the hair-trigger responses lose their power over us. We can then learn a different way of responding to similar threats in the future, without the overwhelming feelings and with renewed belief in ourselves. We can recover from trauma and live fully again.

'Man can enslave himself with his own ideas and then win his freedom again by reconstruing his life' (Kelly, 1955).

Kelly (1955), an American psychologist, saw reality in terms of personal constructs.

He concluded that there were no absolute truths; the meaning of all that happens in a person's life emerges from how he/she interprets it. He coined the term **constructive alternativism**. He believed that as we interpret our environment in a certain way. We then operate with those interpretations in mind. With those mental constructs, we would then go on to have expectations and outcomes in life in line with our experience.

'The cure to what ails us lies within us'.
Kelly, 1955

Far from believing that we are the effect of the environment or outside influences, we are reacting to internal unconscious motivations that we have ourselves constructed. Personal Constructed Psychology, founded by Kelly (1955), has since been seen as a complete psychology and not simply a theory. Its basis is that an individual plans actions based on previously constructed information. During his lifetime, Kelly maintained that 'the cure to what ails us lies within us'. The client has the answers and can find them by deconstructing his/her

interpretations of their past and making sense of them. From this perspective, he saw individuals as being the creators of their own fate: **'man can enslave himself with his own ideas and then win his freedom again by reconstruing his life' (Kelly, 1955).**

Kelly (1955) viewed the person who was unwell as one who was using mental constructs that were untenable because there was false or invalid information stored in them and he felt they needed to be inspected and updated. His view of therapy was to open up the possibility of change in the client's construct system. This is in alignment with Piaget's (1970) learning cycle and the deconstruction and assimilation process used by children to understand and learn new concepts. Often the role of the teacher is to help a child deconstruct misunderstandings in the subject so they can assimilate new information and gain mastery of the topic.

The notion that we know the world through our interpretations of it suggests that we may at times need to inspect those interpretations to update them considering further information or experience. This is especially true if the new experience or information conflicts with our construction of reality. The main implication of this idea is that our constructions of reality are relative and not absolute and can be subject to

revision or replacement. Each person makes sense of the world in a unique way.

In line with the individual nature of each human being, their constructs and beliefs will also be different. The method they use to record their life experiences in their mental information system will be consistent with the characteristic of that individual.

Interestingly, the behaviourist approach was in vogue at the time of Kelly's (1955) discoveries, and subjective reality was not considered relevant in the resolution of personal difficulties. However, later research and modern positive psychology place huge emphasis on the person-centred approach and the cognitive processes that can lead to spiritual and emotional growth. Viewed as a learning theory, it also has far-reaching implications for education. It does not tell us what to think, but directs us to try to understand what we do think.

With no such structure to learn about and organise our emotional growth, we must sometimes rely on poor role models to help us develop healthy self-concepts. It is easy to see how therapy has become the answer to so many unresolved human difficulties. Parenting is probably the hardest role most adults undertake because of the lack of formal training. All too often they impose on their

children their uninspected reality containing a repertoire of dysfunctional data that they received as children.

All our dreams CAN COME TRUE IF WE HAVE THE COURAGE to pursue them
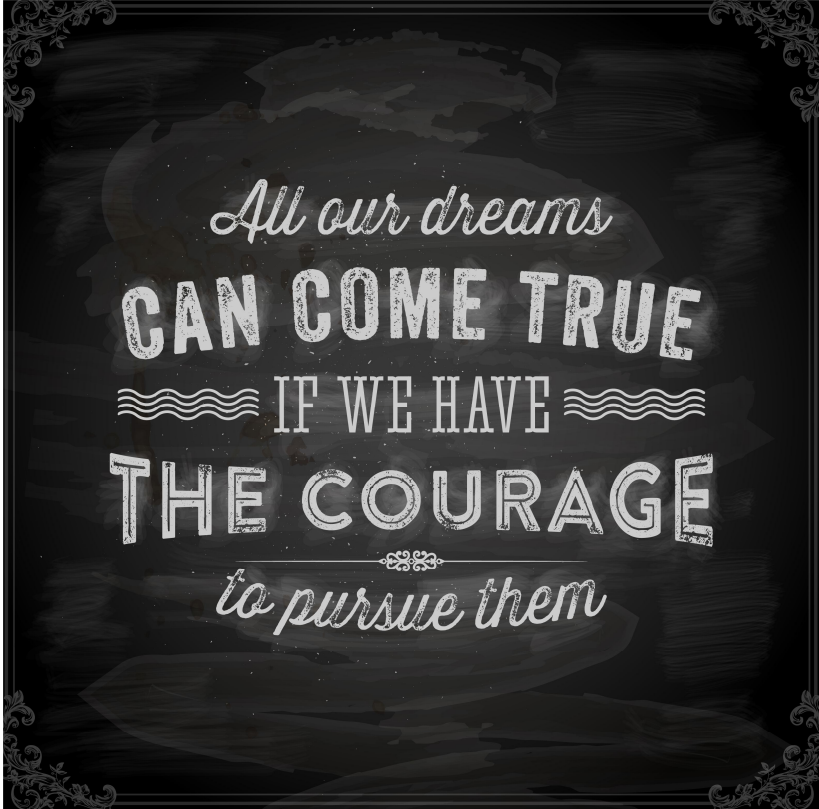
Chapter 13

Conclusion

'The events in our life happen in a sequence in time, but in their significance to ourselves, they find their own order…the continuous thread of revelation' (Eudora Welty, 1972).

At one level, I feel I have naively gone along, hoping that through the exploration of the routes the elite group have taken towards self-actualization I would uncover a faster route for others to follow. But all roads appear to lead back to our core beliefs about ourselves. The fact that they may have been formed due to our being placed in a negative early environment is somehow part of our life chances. Deconstructing these formations seems to be a necessary step if we are to fully connect with ourselves and reconnect with our dreams.

The discontent people feel in not attending to their dreams manifests itself in all manner of negative ways. At some level, like Adam's story, we beat ourselves up for not having pursued our dreams, even though we

know that approach is not helpful or even fair. Perhaps it was our need for safety and belonging that manifested within us the idea to keep our real desires hidden so that we would feel loved and safe by being what we perceived others wanted. While it may have been a useful strategy for us as children, it may not be serving us well as adults. The further we remove ourselves from our dreams, the unhappier we will become.

Closing the divide between people living in the flow of life connected to themselves and achieving their dreams and those struggling to overcome mental and physical difficulties seems a tall order if we look at the outdated way mental well-being is viewed and the stigma still associated with having mental health issues. But from a positive psychology paradigm, the cause of our difficulties may simply **'stem from sickness of the soul'** (Maslow, 1971) because we are not connecting with our true selves. Being accepted for who we are, the social validation of our innate self and who one thinks one really is increase our feeling of self-acceptance and self-worth. Accepting ourselves for who we are is easier if we feel that we are valued and respected by those around us. In Coopersmith's (1967) view, we learn our worth initially from our parents. We can see that, in the case of Aston and Adam, the information they received did not make them feel worthy or valuable, and both spent considerable time deconstructing the damage they

suffered before they could connect more fully with themselves and pursue their dreams. Receiving social validation regarding our positive attributes and achievements are an important aid to our feelings of self-worth.

Self-actualization is rewarding in its own right because of the intrinsic rewards of being who you are and living in the flow of life. Self-actualization is not pursued for deficiency needs but is about being true to your own nature. It is linking our internal world with our external world so there is congruence between them. Self-actualization can only be aimed for when an individual truly is in touch with his/her aspirations and believes it is possible to achieve them.

However we go about our journey through life, there is some common ground that we all travel along. It may seem from the grandiose descriptions of the elite group that they are living in a different plane. But in truth, they are not. Their response to the environment they find themselves in may be different from your current way of operating, but as Dr Kinderman (2013) points out, **our response style is amenable to change.** Remember Amelia from the earlier chapter? She carries within her an optimistic approach to her environment and has resolved and overcome considerable difficulties to be where she is today. Her early life was not easy, and her

options were few. The key to her success lay in her response to her early environment, and that was facilitated by her internal sense of self-worth.

You can change how you respond to your current environment, too. It is not only the forte of the lucky and the strong. You can deconstruct the thinking that causes you to respond as you do and construct a new way. Personal growth and development occur through engaging with the way we think and act and learning to understand ourselves. It is only then that we can make changes – and only in the ways that we are willing to change. Our self-determinism is paramount to the effectiveness of the process of deconstruction. It is not something being done to you – it is a process in which you are actively engaging.

Goleman (1995) describes the logic of the emotional mind as associative**: 'it takes elements that symbolise a reality, or trigger a memory of it, to be the same as the reality'.** As a result, the speed of our emotional reactions is instantaneous. Like a hair trigger, the response overcomes us and prevents us from analysing information logically. Housed in our memory are episodes of loss, threats of loss and painful experiences, both physical and emotional. These contain stored negative energy that can be stimulated if current events appear to be similar in some way.

'It is the client who knows what hurts, what direction to go, what problems are crucial, what experiences have been deeply buried' (Rogers, 1955).

If you ever felt that certain times have been rough and you may still suffer because of them, you are probably right. Negative memories stored in our mind never really go away of their own accord. They can drop from view temporarily but can easily be stirred up again by unforeseen experiences or encounters. Sometimes, even just a few words can bring it all back again. You have probably had this experience of being upset all over again, which happens many times to most of us. Intelligence counts for very little when an emotional response is triggered and reason appears to play a very small role in our behaviour.

Carl Rogers' (1955) Person-Centred Theory revolves around the internal world of the individual. The subjective experiences of the individual, he believes, serve as the basis for all the behaviour the individual exhibits and explain how the individual assimilates and responds to all his/her external experiences. Rogers (1955) also believed in the innate motivation he called the **self-actualizing tendency**, a drive toward the fulfilment of our potential – a drive towards making ourselves more worthwhile human beings. The environment can

facilitate or hinder a person's journey toward self-actualization.

In a longitudinal study **'Living the Dream'**, Ashby and Schoon (2012) analysed the role adolescent career aspirations play in shaping not only adult career development but also identities and well-being. As we might expect, individuals that had achieved their aspirations or were making good progress towards them experienced a greater sense of well-being and happiness. An interesting outcome from this study was that nearly all the participants talked about their adolescent aspirations when asked to look back over their lives at age fifty, and Ashby and Schoon (2012) concluded that this '**indicates that aspirations remain a salient aspect of people's life histories'**. Moreover, **'perceived social class at age fifty seem to be tied to parental social background at age sixteen'.**

Kelly's (1955) description of the deconstruction process aligns with Rogers' (1961) in the fundamental assumption that the data stored in our mental world, our constructions, needs to be viewed to allow us to untangle our areas of difficulty. The person-centred approach developed by Rogers (1951) is valuable, as attention and sensitivity to our delicate inner world is essential if we are to really hear ourselves and connect with our stored memories, which may contain painful trauma and

emotion. Regaining control of our mental world is important because we can then construct more accurate responses to our current environment and engage in life in a more enjoyable way.

In Kelly's (1955) view, no one needs to be the victim of their constructs, provided they are willing to alter them. This is especially true when maintaining a fixed mental stance might be psychologically or physically catastrophic. For change to occur, a construct needs to be altered. If a person is not altered by the events he/she encounters, then there has been no psychological impact, and no change will occur. If people's mental constructs, in other words, their reality, does not allow for new ideas, anything that does not fit into their present system will have no likelihood of ever fitting into it.

The value of instant reactions to real, present dangers is extremely important to our survival. However, if our reactions are based on past events and if they cause us to jump to conclusions without any analysis, we can feel out of control of our lives. The long-term effect of continuous emotional overwhelm can play havoc with our lives, and if it is accompanied by anxiety, confusion and a host of other unwanted feelings, it can clearly disrupt our ability to function and focus on our goals and aspirations. Swamped in a mire of negativity, we are at best surviving, but our lives fall very short of living fully and

enjoying success. At times like this, the notion of self-actualization can seem like a fairy tale or some mythical nonsense.

Happiness and satisfaction with life depend on how small a gap one perceives between one's desires and what he/she possesses already. How our self-image has been constructed and the building blocks we have used to create it may account for some of the unwanted issues and outcomes we face in our everyday lives. This is an exciting discovery, as it corresponds to the way we learn and shows us how we have arrived at these conclusions about ourselves. It suggests that we can deconstruct our current thinking and construct our self-image based on revised data.

The therapeutic approach that emanates from this position is not one of construction or even deconstruction, manipulating or shaping. Instead, it is one of facilitation, aiding the removal of obstacles to growth and helping to uncover the clarity and awareness that have always been there. When people feel they are being listened to, it becomes possible for them to hear themselves and more accurately access their inner experiences and connect with them emotionally and intellectually. As a result, the person learns to understand and value himself/herself.

'We are what we are, because of the vibrations of thought which we pick up and register, through the stimuli of our daily environment'.
Napoleon Hill 1937

In alignment with Maslow's postulate of a whole fully functioning, integrated person, the goal of therapy has always been to help the person to assimilate his/her experiences and understand them. For therapy to occur from insight, it is necessary to experience and observe simultaneously. These resources can be tapped if a conducive environment can be created in which the person feels accepted. The notion of unconditional positive regard is central to the effectiveness of the process.

As I mentioned earlier, it is believed that less than two percent of the population have reached self-actualization. Maslow (1978) wonders **'Where was the human potential lost'?** He believed that courage, commitment and creativity were necessary to achieve it. Our deepest feelings, passions and longings are our guides; they are the driving force, the compass that points to the desires of our heart.

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Appendix 1 – Life Chances Interview

1. Was it expected that people in your family would stay in the same place they were born in?

2. Was it expected that they would go into further education?

3. If you look at your life now, is it similar to your parents' or guardians'?

4. What were the main concerns of the society you grew up in?

5. What does being from your country mean to you?

6. Has your social position offered you opportunities that might not be available to others?

7. What kind of opportunities have you been offered?

8. Did you feel obliged to follow any particular career path?

9. Were family obligations paramount in your life choices?

10. Was your family subject to prejudice due to race, class or politics during your childhood?

11. Has there been some significant cause around which you have built your life?

12. Was your childhood home stable in terms of food and shelter?

13. Was your childhood home stable in terms of emotional security?

14.   Did you compare yourself to others unfavourably when you were young?

15.   Was your home environment dominated by:

•   Health problems?

•   Relationship problems?

•   Financial problems?

16.   Were you encouraged to develop interests and further your learning?

17.   Were there opportunities that you wished you had taken which you did not?

Appendix 2 – Goals and Aspirations Interview

1. What did you want to do at age 16?

2.   What were the great moments during your university years?

3.   What career did you follow – why?

4.   Tell me about the route you took.

5.   Did you feel you were capable of making the right choices for yourself?

6.   Tell me about the rough times.

7.   What helped you get through them? Mental strategy?

8.   Plan?

9.   Therapy?

10.   Ability to communicate and ask for help?

11.   Any other useful aid?

12.   What do you consider is the best way to tackle obstacles?

13.   What have been the best times?

14.   What were the thrills, peak experiences?

15.   What were the rewarding moments?

16.   What helped you deal with difficult situations?

17.   Is what you do important to you?

18.   Do you think your life has meaning?

19.   Do you have good relationships with your family and friends?

20.   Do you generally feel safe and secure in your home and workplace?

21.   Is your day-to-day life normally routine and structured without chaos?

22.   Are you satisfied with the responsibilities and roles you have in life?

23.   Do you have moments when you are filled with joy and peace?

24.   What do you most want to change or improve in your life now?

25.   Do you live in harmony with yourself?

26.   Overall, do you feel you have been successful in your life?

27.   What do you find most rewarding now?

Marie Byrne is the founder of the Self-Actualization Academy. She is a Personal Development Facilitator, Coach and Teacher.

If you would like to find out more about **Self-Discovery Course** and **Self-Actualization Coaching** or to get in touch with Marie the website address is: www.self-actualizationacademy.com or email marie@self-actualizationacademy.com