

PROFESSIONAL RESILIENCE



THE **CONSCIOUS**
PROFESSIONAL

The Conscious Professional



The Conscious Professional offers mindful education to corporate clients through innovative training programs, coaching and consultancy. Founded by Neil Seligman in 2012, our mission is to introduce firms to the benefits of mindfulness, resilience and wellbeing services to improve the experience of professionals both at home and at work. Our vision holds a place for conscious businesses and enlightened executives.

The Conscious Professional's growing suite of training solutions includes Professional Resilience, Mindfulness 101, Mindfulness-Based Professional Effectiveness (MBPE), Mindfulness Retreats at Champneys Health Spa, Powerful Communication and The Conscious Leader. We also offer Wellbeing and Personal Excellence Programs and Events which can include talks, classes and workshops on subjects including Conscious Nutrition, Sleep Optimisation, Conscious Fitness, Yoga, Pilates, Mindfulness, Digital Wellbeing and many more.

Conscious Coaching can be provided for those who wish to take their learning further.

We believe that when professionals increase their capacity for self-awareness and resilience, they are healthier, more productive and more likely to express excellence in all aspects of their lives.

Welcome to your conscious future!

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when professionals increase
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— THE CONSCIOUS PROFESSIONAL —

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1. Resilience Awareness



What is Resilience?

*The greatest glory in living
lies not in never falling,
but in rising every time we fall.*

— NELSON MANDELA —

There are many aspects of life that fall outside of our control. Our daily experience delivers the unexpected, the unwanted, the feared and the dreaded as well as the fun, the challenging and the joyful.

Attempting to control the world is always going to be futile. Yet there is one common factor within the ever-changing Universe that you can rely upon. You.

You are always at choice as to how you respond to any situation, event or person.

Learning to respond in a way that represents your professional best in any situation is a skill that can be taught, practiced and learnt. That skill is Professional Resilience.

EXERCISE 1: What does resilience mean to you?

Please write a few sentences below:

Make a list of times in your life when you demonstrated particular resilience:

<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>

Defining Resilience



The Oxford English Dictionary:

- 1) The ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape; elasticity:*
- 2) The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness.*

The Mayo Clinic for Medical Education and Research:

“(Resilience is) being able to adapt to life’s misfortunes and setbacks.”

The Naval Centre for Combat and Operational Stress Control in California:

“Mental resilience reflects the ability of individuals to maintain relatively stable mental function throughout the course of events.”

Shamash Alidina author of Mindfulness at Work for Dummies

“The capacity to handle difficulties, demands and high pressure without becoming stressed...performing well under pressure...responding flexibly and being able to adapt to changing circumstances. An ability to bounce back from defeat and disaster.”

Academic Researchers Masten, Cutuli, Herbers & Reed, 2009, p.119

“Positive adaptation in the context of significant challenges, variously referring to the capacity for, process of, or outcomes of successful life-course development during or following exposure to potentially life-altering experiences.”

Assessing your Resilience



INSTRUCTIONS:

Read each of the statements below and give yourself a mark out of five in the right hand column based on how strongly you agree. Then, add up your scores and enter your total at the bottom.

ASSESSING YOUR RESILIENCE

STATEMENT	SCORE
1. I do not take myself too seriously. I am playful by nature and can find humour even in difficult situations.	
2. I have grown through my experiences and value the experience of others.	
3. When faced with a crisis I remain calm and productive.	
4. I am not phased by uncertainty or ambiguity at work or in my personal life.	
5. I am resourceful and creative when faced with difficulties.	
6. Although I notice that I tune into the communication styles of others, I am true to myself and feel authentic.	
7. I am confident using my own initiative and most effective when I have freedom to create my own choices.	
8. I am compassionate with myself when I feel emotional. I have a support network of people to turn to when things are difficult.	
9. I am optimistic by nature.	
10. I am confident and appreciate myself.	
11. I am inquisitive by nature and experimental when it comes to problem solving.	
12. I work well within a team and when taking a leadership role. Whichever role I am in, I make effective contributions.	
13. I am intuitive.	
14. I am empathic.	
15. I value different personalities and am non-judgmental in my approach to colleagues, friends, family members and new people.	
16. I am independent at heart but am cooperative in my working style.	
17. I see tough times as opportunities for growth and personal development.	
18. I do not linger on negative feelings and situations, I look for the silver lining and move on.	
19. I acknowledge my own creativity and use it when it comes to problem solving or generating new ideas.	
20. Although life is full of positive and negative surprises I can rely on myself to respond appropriately and remain stable.	
TOTAL:	

KEY TO SCORES:

- 1 ▶ Not at all
- 2 ▶ Slightly Agree
- 3 ▶ Applies Sometimes
- 4 ▶ Agree
- 5 ▶ Strongly agree

INTERPRETING YOUR SCORE

Scoring:

80 or higher

You are very resilient. Congratulations.

65–80

You demonstrate marked resilience in most situations.

50–65

Adequately resilient – aim to increase your resilience.

40–50

Your resilience is low – you may find high pressure situations very challenging.

40 or under

Very low resilience. Consider seeking greater support to help you with this.

Characteristics of Resilient People



—
*Live life as if
everything is rigged
in your favour.*

— RUMI —

BE PLAYFUL, CHILDLIKE, CURIOUS

Resilient professionals find fun in all tasks even when menial or repetitive. They ask questions, experiment with new ways of working, they are not afraid of making mistakes, they can laugh at themselves, fall down and get back up with a smile on their face.

WELCOME NEW LEARNING

Resilient professionals can rapidly assimilate new and unexpected experiences and coach themselves through the process by finding the learning within each situation. They reflect on their own performance by asking what they could have done better, what they missed and what they gained.

BE ADAPTABLE

Resilient professionals are mentally and emotionally flexible and are comfortable with contradictory personality qualities. They can be both strong and gentle, sensitive and tough, logical and intuitive, calm and emotional, serious and playful etc. They can also think in negative ways to reach positive outcomes. “What could go wrong, so it can be avoided?”

HAVE CONFIDENCE AND STRONG SELF-ESTEEM

Resilient professionals feel comfortable in their own skin and give themselves permission to take appropriate risks. They are able to receive compliments and praise as well as constructive criticism.

VALUE FRIENDSHIPS AND LOVING RELATIONSHIPS

Research shows that people in toxic working conditions are more stress-resistant and are less likely to get sick when they have a loving family and good friendships. Talking with friends and family diminishes the impact of difficulties and increases feelings of self-worth and self-confidence.

EVOLVE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Resilient professionals are able to have an authentic relationship with the emotions that they feel whilst having the ability to appropriately express emotions at suitable times.

BE OPTIMISTIC

Resilient professional will find a way of seeing that the glass is half full.

BE EMPATHIC

Resilient professionals have spent time increasing their capacity for empathic listening. They are able to sense feelings in others and respond appropriately in different situations.

BE INTUITIVE

Resilient professionals trust their gut feeling and go with what feels most true and authentic in each situation. They honour both the rational and the intuitive.



HAVE CLEAR BOUNDARIES

Resilient professionals are able to say no when appropriate. They balance their own needs with the needs of others and demonstrate assertive behaviours. They are able to speak up when things are wrong and trust the importance of their own feelings and judgments.

SEEK SERENDIPITY

The word serendipity was coined by Horace Walpole, in *The Three Princes of Serendip*, a fairy tale in which the heroes “were always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things they were not in quest of.” Resilient professionals live their life as if everything was rigged in their favour, just as Rumi counsels.

FIND THE AUTHENTIC SILVER LINING

Resilient professionals know that the biggest setbacks often bring the greatest breakthroughs and learning opportunities. They don’t enjoy hardship but they find wisdom in the experience.

COMMIT TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Sometimes referred to as Kaizen, a commitment to continuous improvement means that day-by-day you look for ways to increase your wellbeing, happiness, productivity, efficiency and capacity for excellence.

Discussion Exercise

Now, in pairs or small groups discuss your own characteristics by sharing:

- 1) One characteristic that enhances your Resilience.
- 2) One characteristic that detracts from your Resilience.
- 3) Reflect on where your strengths and weaknesses in this regard may have come from?
- 4) Name one characteristic that you notice and admire in resilient individuals, and would like to emulate yourself.

2. The Conscious Guide to Stress



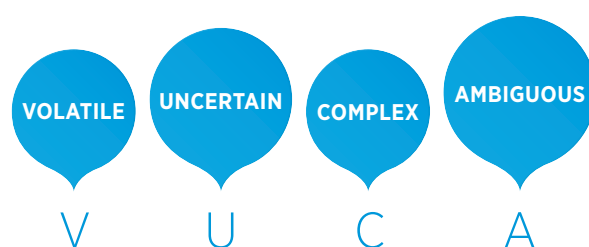
If you want the rainbow, you gotta have the rain

— DOLLY PARTON —

The Cortisol Trap

Today's professional workplaces have been likened to warzones by some commentators. This may seem dramatic, but it turns out that our physiology reacts in similar ways when we are under high stress at work, almost as if we were in the trenches or flying a fighter jet.

Both workplace and warzones can be described by the acronym VUCA.



Humans evolved with hormones to control life-threatening situations with a 'fight or flight' response. The hormone cortisol is released into the body when you feel under threat from your boss or colleagues at work. As cortisol enters the blood-stream throughout the day it finds no natural physical expression in the body due to our predominantly sedentary office habits. Worryingly the results of this 'cortisol poisoning' can be anxiety, depression, heart disease, obesity, type 2 diabetes, cancer or long-term immune-system deficiency.

If left to our own devices we typically resort to substances such as coffee, sugar, carbohydrates, alcohol or nicotine. Although we enjoy the high, we know instinctively that these substances give their kick at a cost. In fact, both caffeine and alcohol further increase the release of cortisol. We might also notice that an unexamined relationship with such substances adds to an underlying sense of unease and distress.

Another common response to the mental and physical strain of high cortisol is to undertake activities that are high-energy such as running, cycling, high-intensity-interval-training, triathlons or aerobics.

Although these do come with physical benefits and some instant stress relief (due to the post-exercise endorphin rush) they cannot help to provide a long-term solution. In fact, they actually cause more cortisol to be released and thus make further demands on our neural activity. This then means that the high-functioning individual is in a perpetual cycle of over-exertion. Eventually this must lead to a crash of some form or another, stress-related or otherwise.

In short, what goes up, must come down.

Brainstorming your Stressors

Fill out both sides of the table below. Include both personal and work-related stressors as both will impact your ability to do your job effectively.



EXTERNAL STRESSORS AND INTERNAL STRESSORS

EXTERNAL	INTERNAL
<div>Eg. Difficult colleagues</div> <div>Unreasonable deadlines</div>	<div>Eg. Perfectionist approach to your work</div> <div>Worry about job security</div>

CASE STUDY: NID’S DAY AT THE OFFICE

As a lawyer, there can be some very complex heavy thinking work and then more simple day-to-day tasks to handle; it often feels like there is a long list of to-do items as well as a long list of people wanting to discuss their issues with you. Nid found that when working in-house it was easy to become distracted by a client’s smaller dilemma when she needed to be concentrating on complex higher value projects. With a very long list of to-do items she could feel panicked when she would try and deal with them all. Working longer hours, being more stressed and grumpy at colleagues led to poorer decision-making and relationships with colleagues.

Nid found that by blocking out early morning hours for heavy cognitive tasks, such as drafting, as though it was a meeting and ignoring her phone ring, even putting her out of office on and turning off all notifications on her computer gave her the quiet time to focus on her complex work. Then shortly before lunchtime, as she became tired and concentration began to flag, she would address emails and missed calls. Ensuring a proper lunchtime break (20 minutes minimum) meant that she was more clear headed to handle some more difficult tasks, before the mid-afternoon slump kicked in and she would take a tea break and then deal with smaller emails or issues during that time. As she picked up in energy at 4.30pm there would be the last serious blast of attention on the complex work and often meetings to address matters that she could deal with first thing the following morning. This approach to her day ensured that she maintained peak performance of her lawyerly duties, but also improved her relationships with colleagues and made her less stressed about her workload.

When Resilience is Absent



Individuals that have low resilience are more likely to suffer from stress, burnout and addiction. Awareness is of key importance. If you notice symptoms as described in the sections below or are worried about yourself or a colleague then it may be time to seek further support.

Stress

SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

(Based on data from the UK National Work-Stress Network)

BEHAVIOURAL SYMPTOMS

- ▶ Irritability, aggression, withdrawal, isolation.
- ▶ Changing eating habits / sleeping patterns.
- ▶ Increasing consumption of alcohol, tobacco, tea, coffee, illicit or prescription drugs.
- ▶ Becoming uncooperative, difficult, accident prone, less sociable.
- ▶ Inability to cope with domestic roles, neglecting personal appearance, increasing unease in social situations.

PHYSIOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS

Headaches, migraines, stomach disorders, raised blood pressure, changing sleep patterns, muscle spasms, back/shoulder/neck pain, a sense of feeling unwell, an unwillingness to work.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS

- ▶ A growing feeling that the workplace is a 'threat', a place of anxiety, tension and the cause of irritability.
- ▶ Low self-esteem, forgetfulness.
- ▶ An increase in worry about problems yet feeling powerless to change the situation.

EXAMPLE OF STRESS IN THE PROFESSIONS

LawCare conducted an online survey into Stress in the Legal Profession during 2012. Over 1,000 lawyers responded. The results showed that three-quarters of legal professionals are more stressed now than they were five years ago.

74.7% of respondents said that they were more stressed than five years ago. The main reasons given for their stress were being overloaded with work; poor management, including lack of appreciation; and feeling isolated or unsupported. Other reasons stated included having unattainable targets, long hours, poor pay and job insecurity.

Addiction



Professionals may use substances such as nicotine, alcohol and sugar to numb difficult emotions and painful thoughts or to 'take the edge off' life and escape from anxieties.

If you are looking to rebalance your relationship with a substance first get clear about your motivations. Write down the reasons behind your decision and set a powerful intention, with a realistic timeline, tied to achievable changes in behaviour.

To support your body and mind-set further, increase physical fitness through exercise and conscious eating, reconnect with creative pursuits and spend more time in nature or quiet contemplation.

Be honest with yourself if you think you may have a problem.

Listen to the people that care about you if they give you feedback about your habits and seek help early.

For up-to-date addiction support and information visit:

www.addaction.org.uk

Stressing About Stress?



An important study on stress was published in the September 2012 edition of *Health Psychology* titled “Does the perception that stress affects health matter? The association with health and mortality” by Abiola Keller et al. It examined data from the *US National Health Interview Survey* of 1998 and compared it to data from the *National Death Index* in 2006. The aim was to understand better the relationship between the perception that stress affects health and current health, mental health, and mortality.

KEY FINDINGS:

- One third of the subjects thought their stress would cause adverse health effects.
- The perception that stress affects one’s health is conceptually distinct from the amount of stress an individual experiences. (Eg. one could report experiencing very little stress but still believe it to have a great impact on their health.)
- Both higher levels of reported stress and the perception that stress affects health were independently associated with an increased likelihood of worse health and mental health outcomes.
- The amount of stress and the perception that stress affects health interacted such that those who reported a lot of stress and believed that stress impacted their health a lot had a 43% increased risk of premature death.

On Stress And Resilience

Abiola Keller of the Department of Population Health Sciences at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and lead author of the above study says:

“Individuals who have experienced a moderate amount of adversity in the past exhibit more resilience to recent adversity, suggesting that previous experiences with stress may help individuals cope with current stress. Resilient individuals, therefore, may not perceive that stress affects their health or experience negative health outcomes even when faced with a lot of stress. Research is needed to evaluate the relationship between resiliency and the perception that stress impacts one’s health to further determine whether resiliency development interventions could improve health outcomes among those with high stress.”

The Conscious Approach



BE AWARE

BE CLEAR

BE POSITIVE

BE REALISTIC

1) BE AWARE

Know what your physical and mental signs of stress are. Notice when they are prevalent and take action.

2) BE CLEAR

Work out which activities spend your energy and which restore it. Restorative activities might include exercise, holidays, yoga, meditation, spending time in nature etc. Learn to keep your scales balanced.

SPEND

RESTORE

3) BE POSITIVE

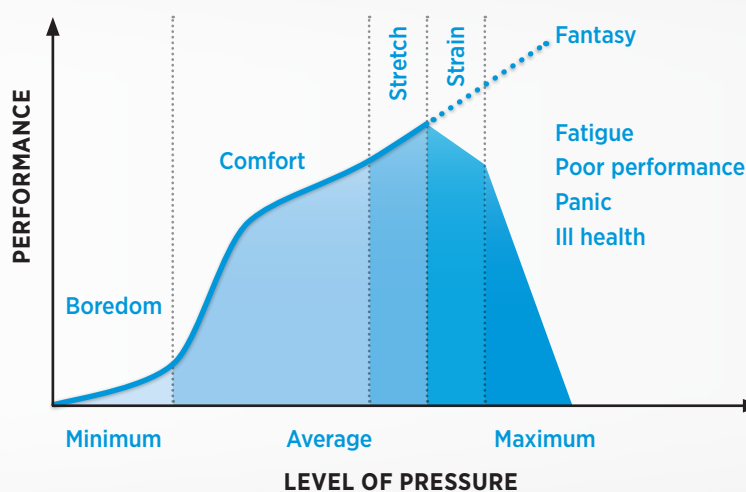
If you are in a period of high stress, take adequate steps to support yourself through it. Tell yourself you are well equipped for this challenge and that you can meet it.

4) BE REALISTIC

Consider the Pressure / Performance Scale below. Are you in Stretch, Strain or Fantasy? Stretch can be sustained with the right support. Excessive strain can only lead to deterioration of both performance and wellbeing.

Pressure And Performance

THE PRESSURE / PERFORMANCE SCALE



3. Digital Wellbeing



What is Digital Wellbeing?

Digital wellbeing is characterised by behavioural-awareness leading to intentional engagement with data and connection.

Assess Your Digital Life

INSTRUCTIONS:

Read each of the statements below and give yourself a mark out of 5 in the right hand column based on how strongly you agree. Then add up your scores and enter your total at the bottom.

PART 1 – BEHAVIOURAL AWARENESS

STATEMENT	SCORE
1. I use my phone to tell the time.	
2. I use my phone as an alarm clock.	
3. I use my device whilst walking.	
4. I use my device (eg texting) whilst driving.	
5. I use my device whilst on the toilet.	
6. I stop breathing when I check my email.	
7. I work with many tabs and applications open on my computer.	
8. I reach for my device even when there has been no alert.	
9. I experience phantom vibrations from my device. Eg. In my leg.	
10. I feel anxious when my device is not with me.	
11. I use my device in the bedroom.	
12. I wake up at night and check my device.	
TOTAL:	

KEY TO SCORES:

- 1 ▶ Not at all
- 2 ▶ Rarely
- 3 ▶ Applies Sometimes
- 4 ▶ Agree
- 5 ▶ Strongly agree

INTERPRETING YOUR SCORES

Scoring:

45–60

Extreme usage and reliance on your digital devices.
Time to make some changes.

30–45

Heavy usage and reliance.
Time to make some changes.

15–30

Medium usage. You demonstrate healthy habits on the whole but take care this doesn't slip over time.

0–15

Light usage. You demonstrate excellent digital resilience skills. Congratulations!

INSTRUCTIONS:

Now please take a look at your phone and answer the questions in PART 2.



PART 2 – YOUR SMART DEVICE

QUESTION	ANSWER
1. Before you enter your passcode how many alerts are on the lock screen?	
2. How many unread emails?	
3. How many new texts or IM messages?	
4. How many new voicemails?	
5. How many push notifications (eg red alerts on FB)?	
6. On average how many hours do you spend a day looking at screens? (Include phone + laptop + desktop + tv + tablet)	
7. How many apps can deliver messages (push notifications) to your home screen?	
8. How many meals a day do you eat in front of a screen or phone?	
9. What is the first thing you do when you wake up?	
10. What is the last thing you do before you go to sleep?	
11. How many times a day do you check your device?	

QUESTION: *How do you feel right now?*

The Problem – How Did This Happen?

Digital devices have successfully infiltrated every sphere of life. What is more, they demand our attention and distract us from real-life, present-moment awareness and connection. The beeps, buzzes, red flags, pings, whooshes and notifications are addictive because they affect our brain chemistry. These cues initiate a dopamine release which sends us straight to our screen to check for whatever may be new, exciting, important or urgent.

DIGITAL TIMELINE

1969	Internet Born
1971	First Personal Computers
1998	Google
1999	Blackberrys
2001	3G Mobile
2007	iPhone launched
2009	4G Smartphones
2010	iPad launched

One of the troubling outcomes of this, is that we have become conditioned to respond to our smartphone in preference to the person sat in front of us.

To make matters worse we are increasingly flooded with information from email, social media and online sources. The deluge begins the moment we wake up, and ends just before we go to sleep. For many of us it is overwhelming and what started out as an enjoyable experience of connection becomes another source of stress and anxiety.

Digital Ailments



Attention Deficit Trait (ADT)

Information and brain overload causing brain to lose capacity to attend fully.

Email Apnoea

80% of office-workers hold their breath whilst checking email.

Digital Dementia

Over-use and over-reliance on technology damaging short-term memory.

Continuous Partial Attention (CPA)

Process of paying simultaneous attention to a number of sources but at a superficial level and splintering focus.

Nomophobia

Fear of being out of mobile phone contact.

Phantom Vibration Syndrome / Hypo-vibochondria / Ringxiety

Perception that one's phone is ringing or vibrating when it's not.

The Solution

Here are ten practical things you can do to support a mindful engagement with your digital world:

10 TECHNIQUES FOR TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR DIGITAL LIFE

1) Turn off as many push notifications as you can.

Push notifications allow an application to send a message direct to your home screen.

Whilst there is a case for texts to come in as a push notification, there is usually no need for Facebook, Pinterest or Candy Crush to do the same. Review your settings regularly and make smart choices to put you back in the driving seat.

2) Introduce at least 1 device-free meal a day.

Yes this is hard, but so vital. The quality of your consciousness whilst you eat is as important in nourishing you as the food itself.

3) Enforce tech-free zones in your home.

For example: Choose your bedroom to become a tech-free sanctuary. A place to sleep, read, share time with loved ones and where you choose not to be disturbed by your devices.

4) Buy an alarm clock.

Having your phone act as an alarm clock is a way of ensuring you are never free of its interruptions. If you can, sleep away from your phone and other technology.

5) Have a tech-curfew.

Eg. No screen time after 10pm. Shut them down. Do real-life stuff.

6) Wear a watch.

Each time you check the time on your phone, you run the risk of starting a whole cycle of distraction and multi-tasking. Choose a simple watch that expresses your unique style. Wear it.

7) Close screens/tabs/inbox when not in active use.

This helps us keep on task and away from time-wasting and procrastination.

8) Introduce Tech-Breaks

Create a schedule for when you check your technology. Stick to it.

9) Internalise your experience: Share it with yourself

Sometimes the urge to share our best experiences on social media is so powerful that it in fact removes us from the experience itself. Learn that the urge can be there and resisted. Some experiences are just for you. Enjoy them fully.

10) Like people in person

Instead of liking people and their updates on Facebook, spend time appreciating the people in your life in person. Tell them how you feel and why.

SINGLE-TASKING



All of the empirical evidence demonstrates that multi-tasking is ineffective and inefficient.

Whilst we might believe that we are being effective as we dart between different applications, screens, devices and conversations, we are in fact dispersing our focus and losing time to distraction.

Single-tasking is the way forward. To be a successful single-tasker follow this simple protocol:

SINGLE-TASKING PROTOCOL

1. Do one thing at a time.
2. Protect your single task from distraction by turning off or minimising all other non-essential data streams such as internet tabs, Facebook, Twitter, half-finished emails etc.
3. Focus on the task to completion.

My Digital Boundaries Exercise

You are now better informed of the complex issues that relate to your digital wellbeing. It is now time for you to consider whether you need to update your digital boundaries. Remember that any boundaries must still allow you to comply with the specifics of your employment and care-taking responsibilities.

Here is a table to help you create a list of new commitments. If you do not feel able to change a particular boundary, simply state it as it currently is. This allows you to consciously own the status quo and makes your behaviour intentional. Owning our current behaviour is a step in the right direction.

MY DIGITAL BOUNDARIES

CONSIDER EACH OF THESE ELEMENTS	WEEKDAYS	WEEKEND
DEVICES: TURN ON Allowing yourself a screen-free wake-up period, set a time for 'First Check'		
COMMUTE Can you dedicate an element of your journey to non-screen activities?		
OFFICE Allocate a sanctuary where you can be device-free Eg toilet/canteen/water-cooler		
PUSH NOTIFICATIONS Choose which apps can PUSH you data. (Turn PN's on the others off)		
HOME Allocate one room or more to be a device-free zone		
PEOPLE When I am with these people I commit to being fully present and device-free Eg partner, children, best friend, dog		
ACTIVITIES When I do [...] I will be fully present Eg gym, walk, cycling, knitting, socialising		
TV I will not watch TV after this time (Late screen-watching disturbs circadian rhythms)		
DEVICES: TURN OFF Giving yourself a screen-free chill-down, set a time for 'Last Check'		
SHOPPING LIST What do you need to buy in order to make these new boundaries practical Eg alarm clock, watch etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">••	<ul style="list-style-type: none">••

Inbox Zero: Email Management



The aim of inbox zero is an empty (or near empty) inbox at the end of every email session. The following process is simply a suggestion for you to adapt to your own needs and the needs of the organisation in which you work. If in doubt always check the suitability of your chosen process with your manager, supervisor or boss.

THEORY

- ▶ Email is always going to be important every day so allocate a realistic amount of time to handling messages. Aim for an hour and then assess whether this is too little or too much as you go forward.
- ▶ Dedicate one, two or three periods in your day to actively work on your inbox. Eg. 20 mins at both 9am Noon and 3pm. (That's not to say that you can ignore your inbox for the rest of the day – critical situations arise and you will need to monitor.)
- ▶ Let people know that you won't be handling email until your chosen times.
Your auto-reply might say:

Thanks for your message. I check email at 9am, Noon and 3pm [tell the sender your time zone] so you can expect a reply around these times. If your need is more urgent, you can reach me via [IM,SMS, mobile, etc.]. (Recommendation: show your auto-reply to your boss before you turn it on to ensure this is appropriate in your firm.)
- ▶ Use a read-later service such as Instapaper or Pocket for anything interesting, but unimportant that gets shared with you.
- ▶ Use Folders & Filters diligently. Anything that isn't in your inbox is something that you can handle when time allows. But don't move things away just to avoid or forget about them.
- ▶ Clean Out Your Contacts – Keep your contacts up-to-date and remove old email addresses etc. It seems laborious but saves a lot of time and frustration in the long run.

PRACTICE

YOU HAVE SET TIME ASIDE FOR ACTIVE EMAIL MANAGEMENT – HERE'S A STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS YOU MIGHT FOLLOW:

1. If you can handle it in under 2 minutes, do it now.
2. Keep your replies short. Aim for 3 sentences or less.
3. Move all task-based emails to your to-do list.
4. File important emails that don't require a reply.
5. Move interesting but unimportant emails to your read-later service.
6. Delete anything that has no place in your inbox right now.
7. Unsubscribe immediately from anything that no longer interests you.
8. Turn on auto-reply, go about your day.

REALITY CHECK

Changing habits is hard. Inbox zero will initially take you more time than before. However, within a week or so, you will start feeling more in control of your email and your efficiency will increase. Investing time up front will pay dividends in the long run.

4. Perfectionism



*Understanding the difference between healthy striving
and perfectionism is critical to laying down
the shield and picking up your life.*

*Research shows that perfectionism hampers success.
In fact, it's often the path to depression, anxiety,
addiction, and life paralysis.*

— BRENE BROWN, *THE GIFTS OF IMPERFECTION* —

What is Perfectionism?

Perfectionism is the need to be perfect, or at least appear that way in the eyes of others.

Many professionals are proud to consider themselves perfectionists. Perfectionism is thought to be a skill that enhances professionalism and performance.

However, whilst it might be believed that perfectionism brings about excellence, it has a darker side too, as the recent research paper (summarised overleaf) reveals.

10 WAYS TO TELL IF YOU ARE A PERFECTIONIST

1. You are **highly conscious and hyper-critical of mistakes.**
2. You aim to be the **best** in everything you do, even if it is something that you are **not interested in.**
3. You spend **copious** amounts of time perfecting things even at the expense of your wellbeing.
4. You set **absolute ideals.** There is only black and white, no grey.
5. You are your **harshest critic.** You beat yourself up over the smallest thing that goes wrong.
6. You mull over outcomes when they do not go as envisioned.
7. You are **defensive towards criticism** and have a **fear of failure.**
8. You **only care** about the **end goal**, paying no heed to the journey.
9. You have an **all-or-nothing** approach.
10. You are **conscious** of any situation which might give others the **perception** you are **not perfect.**

Perfectionism: A Word of Warning



PERFECTIONISM CAN:

- 1) Negatively impact performance, due to anxiety over mistakes.
- 2) Contribute to unhappiness.
- 3) Disable you from appreciating your successes.
- 4) Lead to anxiety or depression.
- 5) Be a risk factor for suicide.

(*The destructiveness of perfectionism revisited*. By Flett, Gordon L.; Hewitt, Paul L.; Heisel, Marnin J. *Review of General Psychology*, Vol 18(3), Sep 2014, 156–172.)

Beneath perfectionism can hide a deep-seated anxiety around failure.

TEMPERING PERFECTIONISM

The aim is to reduce the anxiety that arises when perfectionism is present whilst retaining appropriate standards of excellence. Here are some practical suggestions to assist:

- 1) Know that it is possible to retain excellence without being a hard-line perfectionist. Allow your approach to achievement to soften.
- 2) We all have an inner critic – it is that voice that tells you that you might be wrong, you didn't spend enough time working, that you are lazy etc. When you hear that voice, don't fight it but add your own positive message to your thought process. Tell yourself 'I am on track' 'I will complete this tomorrow if I don't complete it today' 'I am working hard'. We cannot silence the inner critic but we can even the playing field.
- 3) The research suggests that a key quality that perfectionists lack is self-compassion. When you feel the anxiety of perfectionism remind yourself that, irrespective of this piece of work, you are enough. Your validity as a human being does not depend upon it.
- 4) Perfectionism can easily spill over from your work into other aspects of your life such as relationships, leisure activities and goals. Consider whether perfectionism truly adds value to those areas?

Consider also this chart taken from *The Pursuit of Perfect* by Tal Ben-Shahar:

THE PERFECTIONIST	↔	THE OPTIMALIST
Journey as a straight line	↔	Journey as an irregular spiral
Fear of failure	↔	Failure as feedback
Focus on destination	↔	Focus on journey and destination
All-or-nothing thinking	↔	Nuanced, complex thinking
Defensive	↔	Open to suggestions
Faultfinder	↔	Benefit finder
Harsh	↔	Forgiving
Rigid, static	↔	Adaptable, dynamic

PAIRS EXERCISE

Consider and discuss the following questions:

To what degree do I consider myself to be a perfectionist?

How does perfectionism help me?

How does perfectionism harm me?

5. Personal Wellbeing



*There is more to life
than simply increasing its speed.*

— MAHATMA GANDHI —

We are each responsible for our own wellbeing. Wellbeing is a skill, a practice, an art even. It requires commitment, intentionality and resourcefulness. Consider the following exercise your next step towards mastering the art of personal wellbeing.

Exercise: Six Months Back / Six Months Forward

The following task asks you to:

- 1) Analyse your commitment to wellbeing over the last six months.
- 2) Pause and reflect on your score.
- 3) Create a set of commitments that will become your wellbeing plan for the next six months.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Read each of the statements in the left hand column and score yourself out of 5 based on the key. Add up your score and enter your total. For each factor where you scored 3 or less, write your new commitment in the right hand column.

Commitments should be clear, specific and where necessary have a deadline.

KEY TO SCORES:

- 1 ▶ Gave no thought / effort to this
- 2 ▶ Gave little thought / effort to this
- 3 ▶ Gave good thought and reasonable effort to this
- 4 ▶ Prioritised this but occasionally slipped
- 5 ▶ Couldn't be better / Absolutely

WELLBEING – QUIZ

STATEMENT	SIX MONTHS BACK HOW DID YOU DO?	SIX MONTHS FORWARD TODAY I COMMIT TO:
1. MIND How calm and peaceful has your mental state been?		
2. MEDICAL WELLBEING Have you visited the Dr when required?		
3. DENTAL Are you up-to-date with check-ups, hygienist etc?		
4. EMOTION How well have you managed your moods?		
5. NUTRITION How clean and fresh has your diet been?		
6. HYDRATION Have you consistently been drinking enough?		
7. EXERCISE How well have you cared for your body?		
8. MINDFULNESS How well have you honoured your requirement for quiet contemplation and stillness?		
9. JOY Have you been laughing as much as you'd like?		
10. FRIENDS How much quality time have you spent connecting?		
11. FAMILY How much quality time have you spent connecting?		
12. HOLIDAY Have you taken enough?		
13. NEIGHBOURHOOD How connected have you felt to your neighbours and local area?		
14. NATURE How connected have you felt to nature?		
15. HOBBIES Have you found time?		
16. CREATIVITY Have you honoured yours?		
17. CULTURE Have you found time for art, music, theatre and live events?		
18. LEARNING Have you made time to learn new things?		
19. SELF-WORTH Have you felt valued and spoken up for your values?		
20. GIVING Have you shared your time, abundance and skills with others?		
TOTAL:		

INTERPRETING YOUR SCORE

SCORING:

80-100	Top marks for wellbeing. Keep doing what you are doing.
65-80	Strong wellbeing skills present. Consider strengthening any weak commitments.
50-65	Plenty of room for improving your wellbeing. Carefully craft some new commitments.
35-50	Your wellbeing seems to be suffering. How can you rebalance this?
35 or lower	Low wellbeing. Serious changes are required. Consider seeking support.



*Talent wins games,
but teamwork and intelligence
wins championships.*

— MICHAEL JORDAN —

The Corporate Athlete is a concept that many companies are working with to help develop well-rounded professionals with the resilience and wellbeing skills required for long, rewarding careers.

Forward-thinking employers are now beginning to look at the professional as a whole human being with emotional, physical, wellbeing and even spiritual needs that must be acknowledged and developed as vital assets.

An elite athlete such as an Olympic runner is supported by a whole team of people that both contribute to and share in that person's success.

A typical team would include a physio, nutritionist, masseur, psychologist, coach and other professionals. Vital support will also be harnessed from peers, team-mates, friends and family.

Top professionals in the workplace are the Olympians of the corporate world often working harder, longer and under greater pressure than anyone else.

The macho corporate model of 'work hard / play hard' and 'no complaints' has failed. It is time for a more sustainable and compassionate paradigm to take its place.

As a hard-working trainer, coach, business-owner and artist, my own support team is absolutely crucial to my success.

My team includes a coach, acupuncturist, osteopath, kinesiologist, GP, dentist, dental hygienist, massage therapist, colonic therapist, my partner, brother, parents and best friends.

Who is on your team?

Exercise: Support Team



In the bubbles below name your current support team and in the Recruit List add anything that you consider to be lacking.



RECRUIT LIST

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

ACTION:

Now it's your job to do the recruiting. Take personal recommendations, find local people with flexible appointment times. Book early, regularly and keep your appointments with your support team.

6. Neuroplasticity and Happiness



*Happiness is when what you think, what you say,
and what you do are in harmony.*

— MAHATMA GANDHI —

Neuroplasticity

Neuroplasticity, also known as brain plasticity refers to changes in neural pathways and synapses due to changes in behaviour, environment, thinking and emotions, as well as changes resulting from bodily injury.

During most of the 20th century, the scientific consensus among neuroscientists was that the brain's structure was relatively fixed after a critical period during early childhood. This belief has been challenged by new findings revealing that many aspects of the brain remain plastic even into adulthood.

NEED-TO-KNOW

1) The brain is plastic

It evolves with you throughout your life.

2) Neurons that fire together, wire together

Whatever we repeatedly sense, feel, want and think is slowly and surely sculpting our neural structures.

3) Mental states become mental traits

Intense, prolonged or repeated mental activity leaves an enduring imprint.

4) Use it or lose it

Active synapses become more sensitive, unused synapses wither away.

5) Be the change

Through self-directed neuroplasticity (harnessing intention, focus and self-awareness) you can shape your own brain.

The Science of Happiness

Hardwiring Happiness by Rick Hanson lays out a simple method that uses the power of everyday experiences to build new neural structures characterised by happiness, confidence, and peace. Dr. Hanson's four steps build strengths into your brain, balancing its ancient negativity bias, making contentment and a powerful sense of resilience the new normal. With simple daily practices we can transform our brains into centres of calm and happiness.

A Practice of Happiness



Thanks to evolution our brains are wired to scout for the bad stuff. As Hanson explains, the brain is velcro for the negative, teflon for the positive. As a result, your brain fixates on danger, threats and problems whilst positive experiences are skipped over quickly. The brain is therefore scanning perpetually for dangers in our environment.

This then is the negativity bias referred to by Hanson as 'a kind of bug in the stone-age brain in the 21st century which makes it hard for us to learn from our positive experiences. It also leads to us spending the majority of our mental energy on worry rather than appreciation.

To further complicate the matter, positive and negative emotions use different memory systems in the brain and positive emotions don't transfer as easily to long-term memory.

The answer according to Hanson is to 'Take in the good'.

Taking in the good means that we should make time to appreciate small moments of joy and increase their intensity and duration by lingering on them for longer, effectively 'wiring' them into our brains. Hanson summarises his four step process with the acronym HEAL.

HEAL

H Have a positive experience

No matter how small. You can even select something good to remember or something you are grateful for.

E Enrich it

Stay with it for 5-10 seconds or more. Open to the feelings, sense them in your body. Let it fill your mind. Find something new about it.

A Absorb it

Intend, sense or imagine that this experience is sinking into you as you sink into it. Visualise it moving through you like water sinking through sand.

L Link it (Optional)

Whilst having the positive experience link it to a negative experience that you are dealing with and gradually allow the positive to take the place of the negative. Start with smaller negative experiences and build up, but be aware that deeper traumas should not be the subject of linking without appropriate professional psychological support.

Results

In a pilot study that followed two sets of delegates on Rick Hanson's course teaching them how to 'Take in the Good', a set of psychological tests was administered before and after the course. The results showed that after taking the course, delegates reported significantly:

- ▶ Less anxiety and depression.
- ▶ More love and self-compassion.
- ▶ More gratitude.
- ▶ Higher self-esteem.
- ▶ More savouring and enjoyment of life.
- ▶ More positive emotions and fewer negative ones.
- ▶ Greater mindfulness.
- ▶ Increased satisfaction with life.
- ▶ Better self-control.
- ▶ Greater overall happiness.

As Hanson concludes, when you appreciate and maximize the small positive experiences, increasingly there's a sense of being filled up already inside, feeling safe, loved, liked and respected. Insecurity falls away because you have a unique personal reservoir of happiness inside yourself.

7. Alignment and Success



*Choose a job you love,
and you will never have to work a day in your life.*

— CONFUCIUS —

The Difference Between Success and Alignment?

Alignment feels quite different to success. Whilst success is predominantly egoic, Alignment goes far deeper. Consequently, whilst the ego is never satisfied, no matter how many awards, prizes or bonuses you gather, the gifts of alignment are peacefulness, contentment and a distinct feeling of having, and more importantly being, enough.

Whilst success is easily lauded by others, Alignment is a little quieter, and once you have it, you don't need others to tell you well done.

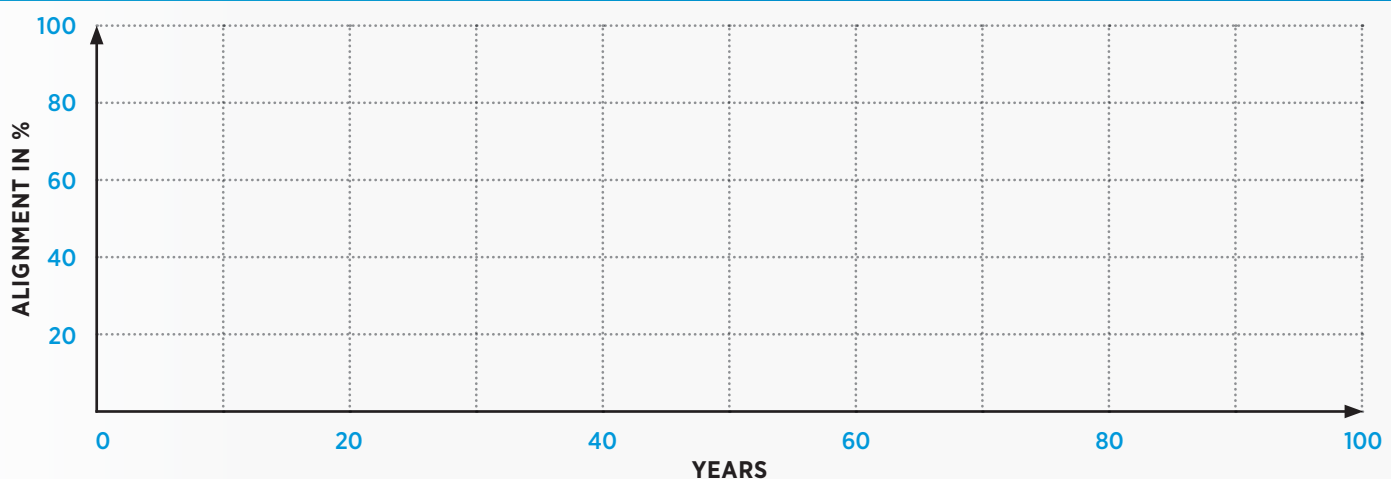
Every truly conscious professional will have spent time understanding their unique nature and discovering what is important to them: their values. These can then be expressed in all aspects of life. In this way we feel purposeful, useful and valuable.

This is then Alignment: a state in which decisions are easily made, authenticity is present and right-action becomes clear.

EXERCISE 1: Alignment over Time

Plot your assessment of your own Alignment over your lifetime. Make as many marks on the graph as you like at different ages and then connect them to create your Alignment Graph.

ALIGNMENT GRAPH



PAIRS EXERCISE

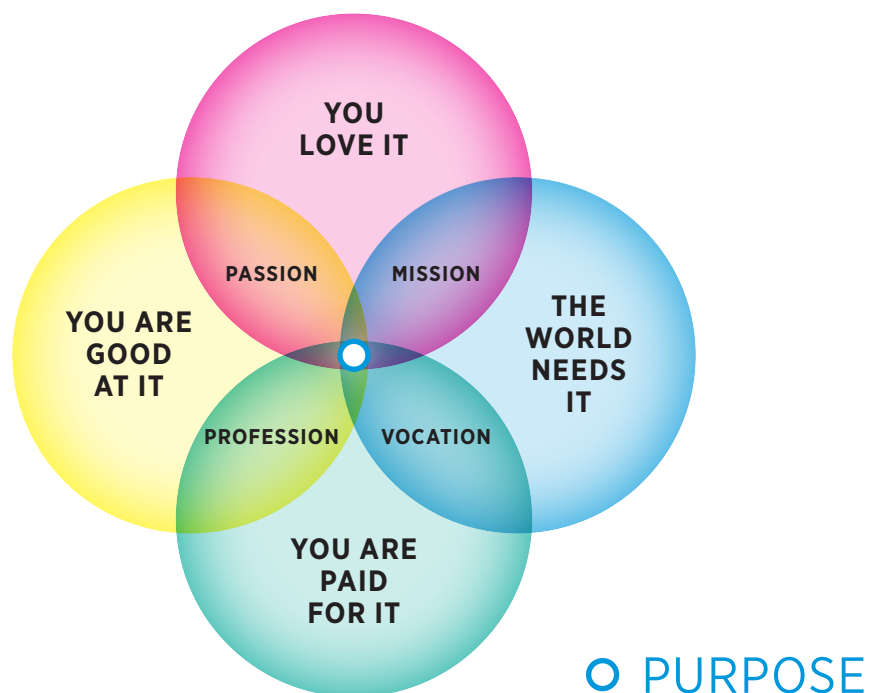
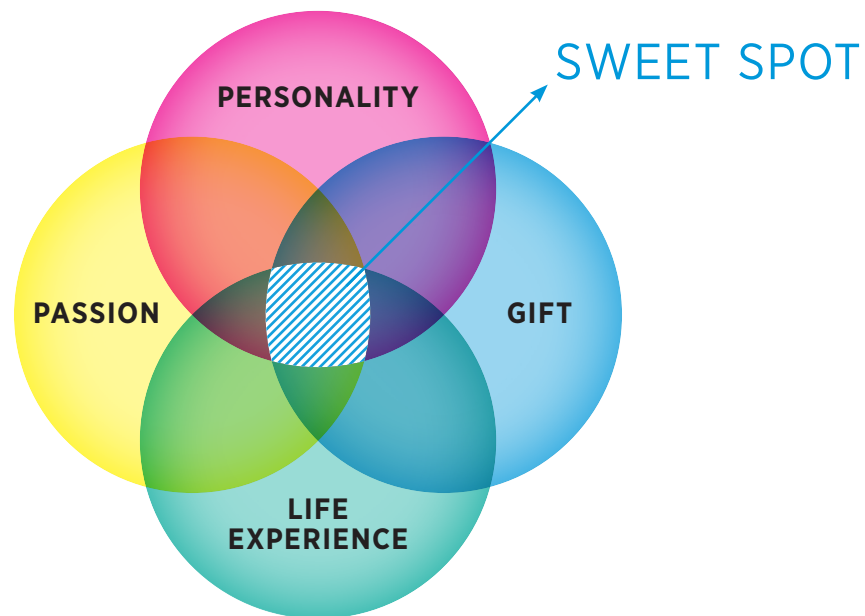
Reflect on the material above and consider these questions:
To what degree do I currently experience Alignment in my life?
How might I increase my experience of Alignment?

Moving Towards Alignment



Here are some tools to help you understand your own journey towards Alignment.

First, consider these two diagrams, **The Sweet Spot** and **Finding Your Purpose**:





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 The Conscious Professional

 Neil Seligman

Further Reading and Internet Resources

100 Mindfulness Meditations by Neil Seligman

Be Bulletproof— How to Achieve Success in Tough Times at Work by James Brooke and Simone Brooke

Build Your Resilience by Donald Robertson

Mindfulness at Work for Dummies by Shamash Alidina and Juliet Adams

The Mindful Way Through Stress by Shamash Alidina

The Pursuit of Perfect by Tal Ben-Shahar

Hardwiring Happiness by Rick Hanson

www.mindfulnet.org

www.bemindful.co.uk

www.getsomeheadspace.com

Mindfulness Retreats

Neil Seligman leads Luxury Mindfulness Retreat weekends at Champneys.

See our website for more information.

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