

DOG FIGHTING DEPRESSION



Dogfighting Depression:

*A Navy Fighter Pilot's Guide to
Victory + Inner Peace*

Dave Dequeljoe

Dedication

For my children: if we still aren't speaking by the time I die...first off, that's a horrible thought. But if that has happened, don't worry, all is well; I love you more than you can ever know.

I am smiling now to know that someday you will read this book. Inside you will find all the wisdom, adrenaline, and fire I have gathered; if you ever get stuck in your life, I hope this will help you find your way out quickly and with a dash of humor.

As for living your lives to the fullest, I trust you will find something awesome to do, something you love doing. I approve and respect whatever decisions you make; I only ask one thing: look to share your gifts with the world and make a positive impact wherever you go.

Enjoy every moment and live free.

Love, Dad



Updated 2020 Dedication:

I'm sorry and I love you, and I miss you every single day.

It was all my fault and it took me so long because I am so stupidly stubborn.

I've dedicated my life to making sure no one else follows in my footsteps, which doesn't really sound too fun, but it has been more rewarding than I would have ever guessed.

I pray every day that I can see your beautiful faces; I am working intensely and passionately with all my strength to be ready for that day.

When it comes please forgive me for crying uncontrollably, because it is what I want more than anything else in this world, but it is ok, you can laugh at me and I will laugh along with you.

Then we can watch a game together or just get ice cream, and I will listen equally intently as you tell me all the wonderful and horrible things that have happened to you since we last spoke.

In the meantime, I am rooting for you, a million miles away. Attack each day with joy, courage, acceptance and trust, and with an enthusiasm unknown to this planet.

Love, Dad

2020 chapter e-1

WTF Happened Bro?

You used to be so happy & cheerful...so full of life...?

I used to have an intense joy for living, an unrivaled enthusiasm, and a never-ending laugh.

But I returned home from my second combat cruise stuck in darkness. My body came home, but the rest of me was somewhere lost at sea.

I was the lone wolf. **Hungry.**

The wild card. Never satisfied unless the danger factor was maxed out.

Way too cool for your boring civilian life. No thanks.

*"What do you mean Officer!? 100mph is still about 60 knots slower than my actual **takeoff** speed...duh..."*

I had spit-with-disgust scorn for the slow-to-change, lazy, incompetent clueless people that surrounded me on all sides.

"I didn't risk my life every day to come back and fill your stupid form out five different times! Get it together already!"

They didn't have to do anything **close** to what we did. And why were they yelling at each other about petty nonsense all the time.

"Who is Kim Kardashian again, and tell me why she hates Taylor Swift?"

I couldn't **slow my mind** down. Hyperaware of every little noise and motion, I'd call out tallies in the car **"Rage 14, tally two, right two o'clock high"** as I'd switch the air-conditioning to air-to-air combat mode.

Repressed **rage** bubbled lava-hot just below my pretend smiling exterior. I didn't know what was happening to me, but I happily discovered that **fiery anger** trumped all other emotions. So what. Don't judge me. It felt like a warm blanket, comforting and familiar. With rage on my side, and my rumbling machine speeding me past it all, I was invulnerable. **Slowing down meant extreme pain, and certain death.**

So I looked for any and everything to keep the airspeed up and the throttles mashed past the detent. **Civilian afterburners baby.**

I'd go all in on any poker hand, with or without the winning cards. I didn't care. No one could match my raw aggression. *"I'm tougher and braver than all of you combined. I see you blinking; now I own you."*

I'd start fights on the basketball court. *"You call that a foul?! You're a total #\$\$@!"*

I'd drive like the wind everywhere I went; sometimes nitro-fueled with JP5 whiskey-propellant, outracing the darkness, **invincible** once again.

Windows full down, volume 11 up, screaming snarlingly violent lyrics at a stagnant, apathetic, purposeless world.

Every day blended into one another, I started talking to myself in the shower and washing my hands constantly as I raced to outfly the memories incessantly chasing me.

Anything to stop the noise, anything and everything.

Driving **fast** was my favorite instant remedy. I unleashed fury on hapless motorists with NASCAR worthy 'rubbin'-is-racin' close passes woven into tight traffic; with heavy black-carbon-gloved palm heels honking ***"get-the-f-outta-my-way-dummy;"*** with double-barreled middle-fingers flashing pure malice.

*"Can't we just have a left lane for awesome people, please? Where you need to take a test to qualify, or if you're a fighter pilot you automatically get one in the mail, along with a sticker that says **"I'm amazing, and you + your minivan suck."**"*

My special-order Virginia license plate translated to **'I hate you and I'm better than you.'**

If we were friends, squadron-mates, or if you **IMMEDIATELY** vacated the left lane for me to pass... I was the best wingman you could ask for.

BUT if I didn't know you or immediately respect you, my scorn and poisonous disdain radiated outward viciously; kinda like the 9-inch-fingernail-daggers that scary lady throws at everyone in *Thor: Ragnarok*. Boy was she upset about something. Anyway, where was I. Oh yeah.

No patience.

No time for antics.

Just the mission.

But there was no mission.

I fell into the trap of believing I could fill the echoing emptiness with things; with more adventure, more danger, more chaos, more competition, and more fighting.

And I judged you. Harshly. As I judged myself. **And hated myself. Intensely.**

The flat spin became *flatter* and *faster*.

You needed to earn my love and respect, just as we had to earn our place in the military.

I was out of the military, **but not**.

My mind obsessed about every little mistake I had made on my last cruise. But there was no next cruise to continue to refine, improve, perfect. I was stuck on an endless infinity===loop.

WTF is happening to me.

The **obsession** to **be the best** of the best, to constantly **thrive in danger and chaos**, to **compete with everyone mercilessly** until I was the last man standing; my favorite characteristics that had made me **victorious** in a fighter squadron were now **paralyzing** me, **crushing** me in this incredibly mind-numbingly boring civilian world. But if one is good, aren't two better? I doubled down on the intensity.

I was destroying myself from within.

My second combat deployment was the exact opposite of the rewarding and heroic first: long, dreary, and **soul-sucking**. Our new chest-constricting Rules of Engagement had tightened so chokingly that all we could do was drill random holes in the sky, and make a lot of 'scary' jet-noises in the futile attempt to keep our guys & gals on deck safe.

The **bulkhead-banging frustration** of not being able to help our troops in constant danger accumulated with the fatigue of long 7-hour night missions.

My oldest son had just been born before our ship went out to sea, and I was pissed.

Holding him in my arms as the bucolic sun set behind the trees in our backyard was beautiful; **it was the first time I had ever felt the elusive 'inner peace' I had been searching for my entire life.**

I stared at his cute, smart, little-guy face taped to the ceiling above my top bunk every night like *mister-I've-lost-the-edge-Cougar*, painfully counting the days until I could be with him again. I didn't lose the edge; it was more than that. I had lost my will and desire and **NEED** to fight; obviously made worse by the crippling circumstances making us unnecessary high-priced assets, now turned liabilities.

Without naming names, we had some leadership and corruption issues on the boat; this compounded the situation even more. I had joined to be a **hero**; to save lives; to use my strength and wits to win, no matter what. To be with like-minded

heroes who you could count on to fight until victory was earned. I didn't join to play *House of Cards: The Stupid Political Navy Edition*.

When I got vertigo for the first time in the cloudy night skies of Iraq, I almost cockpit-face-planted our Tomcat into the fat Air Force tanker's nose. Even worse, I felt afraid for the first time, and the shame and guilt of wanting to return to the boat stayed with me for 14 years before I had the courage to even speak of it.

But this nuclear-powered cocktail isn't quite finished yet. Let's sprinkle in some unresolved childhood issues: sexual + verbal abuse by older women that left me determined to never feel emotions again.

The *correct* emotions, and the *acceptable* emotions available to a hot-shot fighter pilot were: ***ecstasy, rage and boredom***.

And I had those dialed in air-tight, 4 point-oh-sailor supreme. Who's the good little midshipman. I lived and breathed what I did, because in order to be good at anything you need to go all-in.

As for all the rest of '*the feels*,' as the kids say these days... well let's say that ***outrun, outfly, outwit*** is a good summary of my overall emotional gameplan.

I believe that **NOW** we have the stage properly set for complete disaster.

You still with me?

Oh, I did forget one thing: I had internalized & adopted my New York City high school motto of "***if you ain't the best, you ain't shit***."

Loosely translated from caveman, I didn't think I was worthy of being loved or even being on the planet if I wasn't number one.

This made arguing or contradicting me hell for my opponent. My only mission was to win, and while my quick comebacks were funny for some, they didn't really endear me to most. Ah, now we are really ready for the final showdown; a righteous reckoning, I reckon.

Confidence feels great.

Cockiness feels even better.

But I selected the extended-stay, max-suffering option in downtown *Cockyville* and lost everything.

How? Why? It is the sneaky slow decay of discipline that's required to continuously learn, to constantly debrief all of your actions, to aggressively learn from your mistakes; this slow decay eventually catches up to you, and when you

need it the most, the muscle has atrophied. In order to adapt and thrive in chaos we **MUST** be dedicated to lifelong learning, to innovation, to flexibility, and to empathy.

With the decay of these principles came it's stubborn cousin **REPRESSION**, and a powerful **reluctance** to turn and fight at the merge of *unpleasant emotions and memories*.

And so that's exactly what happened. I sped away from my stinging past, 100% believing my new 'just-trust-me' winking tour-guide: blinding **rage against the** weak, touchy-feely-side-of-my-brain **machine**.

I chased the adrenaline, excitement, and danger train all the way until Divorce St. When I lost my relationship with my four beloved children, well, I wasn't exactly about to get off the train then. I wasn't aware of any other ways to solve the pain riddle; **rage** had been working so perfectly.

So I stormed up to the caboose or wherever the f the driver sits, and I sped that thing up even more. "***This locomotive is now making only express stops,***" I called out over the *1MC* to no one in particular, and rode the lonely addiction monorail until the very. last .stop. You have to admire my determination, at least. Stick to it-iveness!

But what's waiting for you at the last stop, you might wonder? Well, you're about to find out. It isn't pretty. But I'm determined to keep you from arriving. And if you've *already* disembarked onto shell-shock block, here's a bit of good news: **I'm your wingman that's flying you outta here**. Let's rock.

2020 chapter e-2

wtf is up with your old 2018 version of this book?

It is March 29th, 2020, and we are glumly locked into the *Era of the Coronavirus*.

Chaos grips our world. Our brothers and sisters are suffering, so it is time for this book to go to the next level.

The first time I wrote this back in 2018, I was homeless living out of my beat up old 2001 *Ford Taurus*.

It was naïve, oversimplified, and more basic than a no-frills white t-shirt from Target. Friends told me it **wasn't raw enough, wasn't real enough; they said it sucked.**

But it was enthusiastic, ambitious, and aggressive in its *purpose: to save your life*. And thank goodness, I know of a few people whose lives were saved.

It is really tempting for all of us to fight through depression quietly, and return back to 'normal' life like **"hey! All good! Nothing to see here!"** but one of the best things I learned in a fighter squadron was we don't roll that way.

When a mistake is made, when a jet crashes, when we lose one of our teammates, **we don't cover it up.**

We broadcast the mistake. Widely. So we don't lose anybody else.

So I'm not thrilled to step up to the stage and proclaim my hugest loss of my life: my four beautiful children, who I miss every single day, more than I could ever express. But I am **COMPELLED** to write this, and talk about it, so that we don't lose anybody else.

So we don't leave anyone behind.

So that when you come home, ALL of you makes it home too.

So welcome home my friends, you are all welcome here. Ditch any stupid ideas that you don't deserve to have an awesome life. You do. Jettison overboard whatever ridiculous reason you think you're not worthy of it. You are. That means the dudes in the rear with the gear, that means all the reservists, that means even all of our civilian family. I've heard all of your reasons that you diminish yourselves, and they're all garbage.

Pain knows no boundaries, no religions, no races, no whatever category people use to divide us up.

We are all human, and even though it sucks to be human sometimes because it is hard to get the balance just right, there is beauty and joy and music and laughter and camaraderie waiting for you on the other side.

All you need to do is join up on my wing for a bit.

Yes I'm over the top, a bit overdramatic like a *Mean Girl*, a bit overenthusiastic and probably a bit too cocky about this whole fighter pilot thing, but what I do have to offer you is **unqualified acceptance, empathy, and love** – along with every bit of my soul to urge you, to encourage you, to push you to keep fighting, no matter what.

We need you to stay with us. You've got something awesome inside of you, and I have no f'in idea what it is, but it is up to you to share it with us. To make us all better in some way, in any way you can, while you're on this planet.

And it is this sharing of the unique gift we all have that makes life worth living. It also is counterintuitive as hell; how is helping **OTHERS** going to help me?! My mother told me this advice when I was 'bout 7 years old, and I thought it was **just about the dumbest thing I had ever heard.**

You're going to just have to trust your new wingman on this one, my life is better than it has ever been now, because once you start giving with no expectation in return, the floodgates open. And they open in a surprisingly good way.

But for now, I'll leave you with one thing to consider carefully: **it is all your choice.**

It is always your choice.

Every *day*,

every *hour*,

every *second*.

How will you **respond** to your **despondence**? (*Sorry I was trying to rhyme there and it came out kind of clunky. Respond; despond...ence... it's close, come on*)

Anyway, famous people like Peter Drucker (*old school Harvard Business writer*) have uncovered words of wisdom supporting this principle of 'choice', for example: **"people are way more likely to see a course of action through if they have helped decide that course of action."**

And you've all heard the *Alice in Wonderland* thing, and the legendary *Matrix* blue pill vs red pill choice that Keanu Reeves has to whoa himself through.

But I can't take any chances with your life. **So you're coming with me.** Let's do this.

2020 chapter e-3: Frequently Asked Questions

Dogfighting Depression FAQ's

1. **Dear Dave, why are you so f'in stupid?** *Great question, this is very helpful feedback. Unknown.*
2. **Dear Dave, who the f* are you to write this book?** *I am no one, if you like Game of Thrones. I grew up in NYC the son of an immigrant-turned-Naval Officer + a hippie-turned-caring Nurse of the Year at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital. After getting tossed out of college, I enlisted in the Nuclear Engineering program because the recruiter promised me this was the best way to become a Navy fighter pilot, my dream as a kid. It wasn't, but I loved the discipline and the camaraderie, and fortunately achieved the dream of flying F-14's for **Fighter Squadron Thirty-Two, the Swordsmen**. Gypsy Roll! Came back home, didn't care about transitioning properly because I thought I was sooo cool, and after cracking the code on financial independence through entrepreneurship, promptly lost it all due to my inability to find inner peace. Struggled in pain for many years, ate leftover food from customer's plates as a server, was homeless and wandered the earth trying to figure it all out. Did a speech to save someone's life, it did, wrote this book, and now teach leadership globally, which I **LOVE**. I'm not a Doc, but this book has saved a few lives so I offer it humbly with the intent to keep you off the ramp.*
3. **Dear Dave, do you really think your dumb book is going to help me?** *Yep. A key part of this is your belief; do you think it will help you? Are you open to trying something new? You can always discard whatever you don't like, but it might be worth a shot to see what's inside. Skip to a random page and see what happens. Really, what else are you doing rn? (rn = right now; the kids these days are so clever and they just love time-saving)*
4. **Dear Dave, wtf is TLDR?** *"tldr" is another abbrev the kids love these days, especially in tech. It stands for **'Too Long, Didn't Read'** your junky book. The attitude is: "Can you summarize it for me instead of me actually reading it all rn? PS: I am really cool." I've added "tldr" sections to each of the Original chapters, mostly to entertain myself, but also give you a little sneak preview that's hopefully helpful. If they seem glib or like I'm taking this not seriously, that is not my intent. We can still fight the good fight vs depression and have fun along the way, right? Rn?*

2020 chapter e-4:

exactly htf are you going to be my wingman when you don't exist to me, except in these pages?

This is a quality question, and it is great you're asking questions, because curiosity to learn new stuff is going to be a huge asset on this little scrap we've found ourselves in. *These 'e' chapters are designed to be a counterpoint to the 'o' chapters:*

The 'e' chapters are raw, honest and to the point. Practical stuff you need to fight and win.

The 'o' chapters are basically the original 2018 version of this book. I've cut out all the stuff that **made me cringe**, but left a lot of it since it has helped save lives. You just never know.

In my opinion you're probably going to need both in your fight. But who knows, maybe you just need one. **Your call.**

But first things first; time to arm up in your fight. Below are some quick, emergency first-aid type things that really helped me recover from the intense mental stall I was in. The following ten mini-chapters are all weapons you might consider adding to your overall dogfighting depression strategy. Kind of like the opening scene in some video game, where you have to pick what you're going to take with you on your journey. Good times.

FIVE EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

FOR YOUR

MENTAL/PHYSICAL/EMOTIONAL HEALTH:

1. **Sleep:** sleeping in your car is tough, sleeping on the streets even harder. If you're on the streets please find a shelter that the VA approves. If you're in your car look for a safe neighborhood and a spot you can back into with something (*like a brick wall*) that will block your driver's side door from opening. This gives you a bit more warning time should bandits appear. Also helpful is taking a hot shower (*YMCA rocks for discounted veteran memberships – I love you YMCA staff, you saved me!*) followed by a cold rinse. The cold water (*especially on the back of your neck*) is known to help depression, and the process of tensing up your muscles and then relaxing them will help you sleep better. Deep, slow breaths before you sleep, and turn your mind's focus to determination you **WILL** win: you're more resourceful and resilient than you think. You got this. If you slid

backwards today, that's ok; you will thrust forward tomorrow stronger than ever.

2. **Eat:** You can eat relatively healthy on not that much money. Maybe a bit pricier are cashews, but they have been shown to help depression and they are also tasty AF. Please drink water and not soda; the highs and lows from sugar crashes are not exactly the greatest thing for you rn. Bananas are cheap and good for fiber and stuff. Of all the little protein bars, I like Go-Macro the best. If you ask the VA they can give you a list of local places where you can get food too.
3. **Learn:** Are you willing to adapt and thrive in this new world you've found yourself in? If you have this book you're rockin' this principle already! The library is free and has so much for you, whether it is related to fighting depression, or just something you're interested in, please take some time each day to learn something new. It will take your mind off of whatever ails you, at least temporarily, and you will be laying the foundation for the freaking comeback of the century. **Your comeback.** I have confidence in you. Decide you will win, and you will.
4. **Teach/Give:** Sounds a bit counterintuitive at this point maybe, but trust me. The very best way I have found (*and I've tried 'em all*) to gain some airspeed and momentum in your fight is to help others. **FIND someone to help, FIND someone to teach, and do it without any expectations** in return. Your life will magically get better. Don't believe me? Try it...
5. **Fun:** Last bit, and maybe the most important to prioritize, because this is probably the first one to fall off your list. Find a way to **find joy each and every day**. This might take a bit of creativity on your part, but it can be done with focus and your deliberate intention. Make a list of your favorite things, and keep refining it as you go. The sharpest minds know *EXACTLY* what they love, so they can try to add as much of the list to their daily lives. **Example:** my favorite things are music, sports/competition, comedy, learning, teaching, writing, creating, and innovating. And adventure and being courageous. And starting the positive ripple effect. I tried to do all of that each and every day, and it really helped. Take a minute to think about the stuff you love. *I'm not sure I want to know what y'all love, I KNOW some of you are into some wacky stuff, but as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else, it's prob ok that you like N*SYNC or whatever.*

2020 chapter e-5:

dogfighting depression weapon #1 - courage

This kind of stuff gets me so fired up. Because you can't be brave if you're not afraid. And just like that nasty case of vertigo in the night clouds over Iraq, my mind was f'in with me pretty good. And I was afraid for the first time in the jet; prior to that I was always in control, I always had confidence in my ability to get out of a jam. I wasn't afraid when we took AAA fire: ***"hah, you can't get me, I am the master of jinking."***

Even when I ejected upside-down and I thought for sure I was dead, I wasn't afraid. I had clarity and I had **MORE focus**. Time slowed down and I was able to figure it out.

But when your mind isn't right, now that is crazy scary. So *this*, my friends, is a challenge worthy of the name 'challenge.'

I read the other day that the normal person looks at everything as a blessing or a curse, but **the warrior sees all as a challenge**.

If you're buying that statement, then it is freaking game time!

And this victory will one you can be proud of, forever, because right now we are in the dark ages of mental health.

And let's be clear, no one is coming to save us, so we have to save ourselves. Here's the top 3 things you can apply your first weapon of COURAGE to:

1. **Air Support/Stigma:** people can talk all they want about the stigma being gone, it is clearly not. *But you wouldn't hesitate to call for air support, now wouldya?* Same for this; don't cripple your chances for success by doing this alone. Our false beliefs can live in the darkness like the coronavirus, but when they hit the sunlight...**poof!** People can help you fight this, keep looking until you find the right 'fit' for you. Big shoutout to my guy Steven Hardy who convinced me to get my first VA counselor by saying she looked just like *Michonne* from *The Walking Dead*. I thought that sounded cool, so why the hell not? Turns out she was super cool, and she helped me heal tremendously, with love and compassion. Thanks Doc!
2. **Being Yourself & Relationships:** it takes a lot of courage to be authentically who you really are. The pressure to conform, to fit in, to stay with the pack is so strong, only the most brave among us figure this one out. The key is to be authentic AND still be courageous enough to honestly consider feedback about how you can improve your work +

behavior. This is also the key to forming new relationships, which the smart-Harvard kids figured out was the ***number one predictor of long-term happiness***. Are you able to find new relationships when the old ones are lost? This takes courage too. Can you adapt to this very new situation you're in? Yep, you got this.

3. **Teaching / Sharing your story:** hey let's be clear, this is optional, and totally up to you. But ***let's be clear, and let me say it again; no one is coming to save us, so we have to save ourselves***. If you're brave enough to open up and teach others what you've learned, we can solve our veteran suicide problem. Together. The time I was most afraid in my entire life was the 5-minute speech to save a life at the *Permission To Start Dreaming Foundation in Gig Harbor, WA*. (video on *dogfightingdepression.com*) The very last thing you want to do in a fighter squadron is be 'vulnerable.' Ick. Now THAT was a great challenge. I was terrified. But I did it anyway. I wrote for six months trying to get the speech just right, and ended up re-writing it again at 2am the night before. And you know what? ***The very first guy who came up to me afterwards was an Apache pilot, and he told me in so many words that my mission was accomplished***. Not only did he stay alive, he went on to write his own book and speak to help our brothers and sisters. If you've never experienced the feeling of saving someone's life, you are going to freaking LOVE it.

"...every act of kindness has a ripple effect with no logical end..."

– Scott Adams

2020 chapter e-6:

dogfighting depression weapon #2 - forgiveness

Maybe the most important weapon you'll pick up here. On behalf of a grateful nation, welcome home. **You are forgiven, for everything you did do, and for everything you didn't do.**

It is time to heal up.

You deserve a great life too, and the awesome things you go on to do from this point on is what will define you. It is **NEVER too late** to turn it around. It just gets harder the longer you wait. So have the courage to forgive yourself. You need this release. You deserve this release from the bondage of guilt and shame.

In SERE school they taught us that the enemy would just love for us to torture ourselves, even when they weren't present. Don't torture yourself by not forgiving yourself.

Level two of this concept is forgiving others, for all they did, and for all they didn't do. *People aren't against you, they are merely for themselves.* They have human failings, as we all do, and there's usually something really painful driving their actions. Or something they are afraid of.

If you can't rise to the level of Mother Theresa, here's another option: it doesn't really matter why they did it, or didn't do it, **forgiving them will set you free of the chains of thinking about them.** Then you can start your new mission, and make it rock. Which is a lot more fun than holding a grudge. Give yourself a little gift, and make it one of forgiveness.

IMAGE: *holding in shame, guilt, rage, envy, grudges, etc only slows your jet down, like a giant speed brake dragging your airspeed to zero. If you've ever held a garbage bag out the window when you're driving down the highway, that's what you're doing when you hold onto all that baggage.*

2020 chapter e-7:

dogfighting depression weapon #3 – self-awareness

Sun-Tzu knew some stuff. And he taught us that if we know ourselves, and we know our enemies, in a thousand battles we will never be defeated. That sounds cool.

My dad taught me when I was seven years old that you could learn something from everyone you meet, even the homeless people on the street in hometown New York City. Now that you're reading this book, and hopefully you've learned something already, you can say that you've learned something from a homeless guy too.

The book *Mindset* by Carol Dweck (*DWYCK is an awesome song by Nice n Smooth, but I really don't think they stole it from her*) talks a lot about the fixed mindset vs the growth mindset. Although I recommend this book highly, I'll save you a trip to the library and summarize: you can learn anything, and *everything* about all of us can be infinitely better. The trick I've discovered is to de-couple your self-esteem, your self-worth, and your ego from your **PERFORMANCE**. This thought makes me much more open to receiving feedback and improving myself. Detach your **PERSONALITY** from your **BEHAVIOR**, and you'll be less likely to trigger the *fight vs flight* part of your brain. Remember, you don't have to TAKE the advice or perspective given, it is always your choice. But it is very wise to consider all angles.

If this helps, here is my **Big League CHEW** acronym I try to remember whenever it is learning time, and spoiler alert, if you want to be successful and happy, it is **ALWAYS** learning time...

1. be **C**urious: ask a lot of genuine questions to grow
2. be **H**umble: when you're stuck, you're doing it wrong. Someone, somewhere in this amazing world knows the answer. (*speaking of 'answers', Crosby, Stills & Nash have this old school song 'Judy Blue Eyes' worth checking out*) All you need to do is ask. Use the wisdom of the crowd. You do NOT get cool points for trying to figure it all out yourself.
3. be **E**nthusiastic: if you're going to do anything, you might as well give it your all. Besides, this is the only way to become a master at anything. And you make it more fun for everyone else around you. General Colin Powell called **enthusiasm the ultimate force multiplier**. If you're smart enough to know he actually said this about '*optimism*' don't ruin it for everyone else in the Amazon review comments ok?
4. get **W**ise: they used to tell us in the squadron "*get smart*" which was hysterical, because they didn't say "*get smart-ER*", which would imply we

were already a little smart. Just get smart, dummy. Haha I loved that. Be humble and just assume you're not smart about mental health, because like I said, we are in the freaking stone ages of mental health! I'm only like *0.0000002%* ahead of you at this point, if anything...

2020 chapter e-8:

dogfighting depression weapon #4 – joy

These mini-chapters are getting a bit intense so let's take a second to go straight to my favorite one: **joy; or fun; or play; or game**. Your choice, whatever your favorite word for this concept is, let's go with that.

I made a pact with myself when I was first homeless in Connecticut, when it was getting pretty miserable. I promised myself one day, in a moment of enlightenment, that I was going to make each day as fun as I possibly could. For myself, and for everyone around me. I called it *The Wesport Accord*, like it was the *Declaration of Independence* or something, believe it or not. Sounds goofy in retrospect, but hey I was homeless, so spot me this one, ok?

Now that I think on it, it was actually just like the *Declaration of Independence*.

Independence from my current, crappy circumstances.

I heard once, a long time ago, that to be a hero meant thinking and acting greater than your **PAST**, your **EMOTIONS**, and your **CIRCUMSTANCES**.

A big part of knowing yourself is discovering, very deliberately and very aggressively, what you love and what you don't love. Then you can attempt to fill each day with the people and activities you love, and try to avoid the people and activities you don't love. You can do this, it just requires some conscious thought. Simple, but NOT easy. Spend some time on this, just as you would all the other weapons to fight depression.

WARNING: *do NOT wait to make it to the 'finish line' to enjoy your life, to take a deep breath, to relax a bit... you might never get to the 'finish line', and you might just waste away your life by adopting this all-too-common mindset.* Oh, and one more thing; I thought that by getting all my desires met, I would achieve inner peace. I didn't. And reuniting with my children probably won't get me to inner peace either; although this doesn't mean I'm giving up at all, it does mean that **I shouldn't WAIT to experience joy**, wherever and whenever I can find it.

NOTE: I try to find **knowledge**, **music**, and **comedy** in each day. I start each morning by **reading a book** I'm excited about; and not the terrible news that seemingly just gets worse each day! I play **music** constantly, as it enhances all emotions, and allows you to enjoy the ride up and down with equal enthusiasm. Check dogfightingdepression.com for cool playlists for every situation. Finally my definition of **comedy**: *it's being enthusiastic about the truth, and doing it with style and joyful imagination. It's about surfing the delicate balance between too much and not enough; in all things.* It might be hard to do this now; I get it. Try anyway.

2020 chapter e-9:

dogfighting depression weapon #5 – empathy

This is going to be a tough one to teach for some of you. Let's start by saying the way you treat others is usually how you treat yourself.

Example: *I used to be insanely impatient with other people. I was ALSO insanely impatient with myself. This caused a lot of unnecessary pain for me, and for the people I loved.*

If you still hold on to hate for other people, I'm not judging you, because I have felt a lot of hate for people in my day. But I've learned, through traveling this wide earth, and encountering many a bandit and many an angel; **there are 'good' and 'bad' people from EVERY possible group you can select.**

I've also learned that by attempting to see the best in other people, you actually encourage the best in them to rise to the top. This is one of the greatest gifts you can give someone.

But I acknowledge some of you aren't even on the **TOLERANCE** part of the sliding scale yet, and I would list my caveman-like-understanding of the scale as: *hate < dislike < tolerance < sympathy < empathy < compassion.*

So for those of you to the left of tolerance, why dontcha try the **1% rule:** try to find just **ONE** percent of similarity between you and the person in front of you.

What is something you two share? *Like my guy ENS Jesse Brown, WWII fighter pilot from my squadron, VF-32. He used to look up at the airplanes when he was a kid. Just like me.* Luckily he found a flight instructor who was also a poor country boy, just like him; that's why he took the time to mentor him in flight school when no one else wanted to teach the first black *Student Naval Aviator*.

Still not feeling me? When you can find empathy for **everyone you meet**, no matter how shitty they are behaving, you are on the way to true emotional mastery. And that, my friends, is a goal worth striving for. A goal that will enhance your life in ways you might not be able to predict right now. *Imagine how powerful and good it would feel to genuinely root for everyone you meet, and now imagine how powerful the force that rises up to root for you in return will be.*

Imagine the entire world rooting for you. That's what happens when you genuinely root for others. **It'll blow your socks off.**

2020 chapter e-10:

dogfighting depression weapon #6 – creativity

An infinitely powerful weapon at your disposal 24/7 is your **IMAGINATION**.

Einstein said that *logic will get you from A to B, but **imagination will take you everywhere***. Freaking love that guy.

In order for you to rock and thrive in chaos, and in order to win the fight vs depression, you're going to need to think bigger than you think you can think. That is a bit *Doctor Seuss-ish* but you get the point. Part of the problem with depression is that you're stuck in this killer death spiral down the toilet bowl of shitty thoughts.

Creativity can break that cycle. Innovation can solve your unique mutation of this virus that plagues so many of us. Necessity is the mother of invention, and right now you are definitely in need. Give yourself the time and space to create. For me it is the shower; no one is bugging me, and my phone is thankfully out of reach.

There's also this thing about running water containing something called '*negative ions*,' which is one of the reasons why the ocean waves are so soothing to us. Anyway, the shower contains plenty of these mystical '*negative ions*' that, wait for it...actually help with depression.

So take a few minutes next shower, and imagine something you really need. A place you'd love to go. A dream you'd love to make happen. And dream like there is no fear of failure.

One more related 'sidearm' for you: the genius of the word '**AND**' when brainstorming innovating solutions. Weak minds will gravitate towards an '**OR**' solution, which is very limiting. The brightest minds know that there could be an **AND** solution, one where you can do **BOTH** things, when you previously thought you could only do one...

2020 chapter e-11:

dogfighting depression weapon #7 – generosity

I was lucky enough to be both *enlisted* **AND** *an officer* during my time in the military, and I learned a tremendous amount from both experiences.

Maybe the most relevant lesson was that the **very best leaders all shared one thing: they were generous with their time, their words and their actions.** They all took the time to help me be successful.

One way they did this is by sincerely and specifically praising my work & behavior, to *let me know what to keep doing*. They also did the same with specific criticism, to *help me know what to do better*.

In my opinion, one of the very best gifts you can give to every single person you meet is generosity.

If you take the time to try to leave them better off than when you first encountered them, in every way you possibly can; this is the essence of a life worth living.

Think of the phenomenal positive impact you could make on the world, if you just followed this one principle.

The highest level of this is looking to make everyone's life better, WITHOUT any expectation in return from them, or anyone else. When you can accomplish this, well my friend, then you are truly enlightened at the highest level.

And, maybe counterintuitively for some, when you do this **genuinely for others...your life will be better than you might ever imagine.**

WARNING: *Just like you shouldn't wait until [X] happens to experience daily JOY, you shouldn't be tempted to wait until you have it ALL to experience pure generosity. Counterintuitively, being generous will get you to everything you could possibly want SOONER. The trick is to be genuinely generous, without any expectations in return...*

2020 chapter e-12:

dogfighting depression weapon #8 – acceptance

The highest form of acceptance is **GRATITUDE**. If you can dig deep and find a way to be grateful for the situation you're in; that is a phenomenal step towards emotional mastery.

If you can find a way to be *grateful* for this challenge you're in; if you can understand that this will make you stronger, wiser, and you'll be infinitely better off as you progress down this difficult road; if you can find a way to find joy in each day, and find a way to help others along your rocky road... **well, then you've already achieved victory.**

If you're not there, all good, it is ok, you're human. In the meantime, please try to find a way to have unqualified acceptance and empathy for yourself. Try to find a way to love yourself, flaws and all. Think that's mission impossible? **Well, you at least have one person that loves you: me.**

I am writing this book for you silly. I know you're out there, and I know your mind is in constant turmoil. But you're not alone. That's the one great thing about talking about this kind of stuff; you realize there's **millions** out there **suffering too.**

Want to know why? Because we are in the freaking **DARK AGES** of mental health!! This fact, coupled with the ever-present stigma, keeps so many of our brothers and sisters suffering in silence, siloed and alone. And that stinks. So don't beat yourself up, you're just human like the rest of us.

I know you know how to fight, you just don't know how to fight this... **YET**. Find something to be grateful for; discipline yourself to repeat it every morning and every night, and as many times during the day when your mind is spinning. It could always be worse. And you're a fighter. Just don't fight the facts of your current situation, otherwise you'll have to google what '*cognitive dissonance*' is.

Accept what's happening; **AND** still think big and optimistically. Accept all the responsibility; **AND** don't blame yourself, because blame is toxic and unnecessary. *Accountability = good. Ownership = good. Resolve to never make the same mistake again = excellent. **Blame = needless pain*** and potential defensiveness, which moves all parties away from the solution.

So fight hard, but fight with intelligent aggressiveness, just as they taught us in our *TOPGUN air-to-air* combat briefs. **Study hard; memorization is the first step to mastery.** Then when the moment comes, **you'll have the correct dogfighting weapon you need handy. Decide you will win**, take the necessary actions to win, **and you WILL win. Of this I am confident.**

2020 chapter e-13:

dogfighting depression weapon #9 – enthusiasm

*“Security is mostly superstition...avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring **adventure** or **nothing**.”*

- Helen Keller

The depth of beauty you’re able to attain in life is in direct proportion to how much pain you’re willing to endure. After my dog died when I was 5 years old, and after I sobbed uncontrollably for 24 hours straight, I resolved to NEVER love a dog again. Sure, this kept me safe from dog-dying-pain, but it also prevented me from enjoying the fun of man’s best friend all these years.

You’re in the smoky black hole now, but when you survey the landscape of our finest singers, comedians, and writers of all time, you might realize that the brightest light usually shines from those who see the darkest. There are great days ahead for you, and they probably involve showing everyone what you see; what brilliant piece of beauty that managed to lighthouse its way through to you.

If you haven’t picked up on my enthusiasm for this topic yet, I’m a crappier writer than I feared. But the secret is really not this topic; the secret is, I’ve found through trial and error, that **my attitude has impacted the outcome way** more than I ever thought when I was a young laddie.

I’ve learned that if you’re going to take the time to do anything, you might as well give it your all. Otherwise, don’t even bother. You may or may not be a Tom Brady fan, but I respect his success and his words have stung my brain ever since I heard them: *“I’ve given up my life to be the best; if you want to beat me, you had better be willing to give up yours too.”*

You’re in a fight for your life. **If you want it, you must fight hard**, every single day, and draw on reserves you might not think you’ve got, but **I know you do**.

Do you want to win this epic struggle you’re in vs depression? Even if you don’t think you do right now, **I’m telling you from experience that life gets beautiful again, unbelievably beautiful. And it would be just the coolest if you were around to see that day.** Which leads me perfectly to the last weapon vs depression...

2020 chapter e-14:

dogfighting depression weapon #10 – trust

The final weapon in your new arsenal is **TRUST**. The highest form of trust, in my opinion is faith.

Just so we are completely clear, I'm not pressing any religious or spiritual beliefs on you. Those are your choice to adopt or to not, and I don't judge you either way.

All I would love for you to do is have faith in yourself.

You can do this.

There were **many** times when the pain of losing my children was too much to bear. *The tears wouldn't stop racing down my face, blurring the highway, the **guilt** and **pain** and **rage** and **frustration** and **inability** to control the situation like I had always done in my fighter jet where I was in complete control; **the wracking, soul-piercing, primal scream into the wind of concentrated ferocity was incredible**, but when it faded and I was exhausted and spent, and the highway never ended, and the road to victory seemed unclear and impossible, continuing seemed useless.*

Why keep going?

You might hit this same spot, or worse. It's ok. Keep going. Keep fighting. Someone who was once an enemy asked me to summarize this book in one sentence.

It took me by surprise.

I thought about it for a second, and decided to give the question my best attempt.

"Love yourself, love others, and just keep learning, that's all that matters."

I chose to love her despite our differences, and now she's one of the most important people in my life because she's not afraid to call me out when I'm screwed up. And that's one of the best gifts you can give someone. But I would never have arrived at this spot if I didn't choose, in the moment, to end the hard-to-stop fighting. To give love where I felt none in return.

So give **yourself** some love even though you may feel none in return.

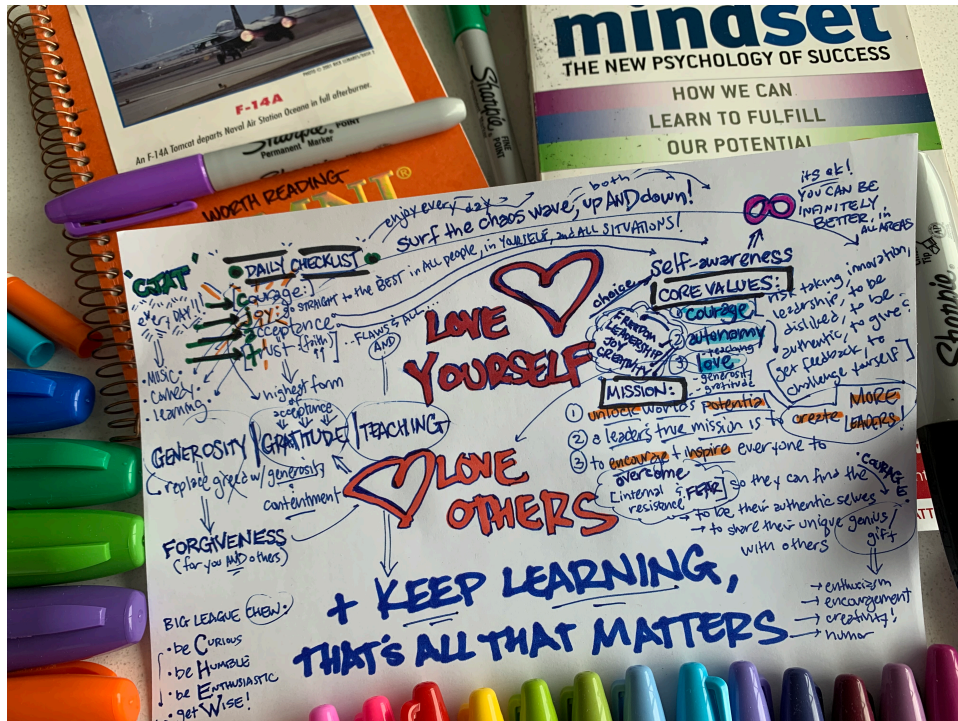
Give **others** love with the rare gifts of *unqualified acceptance, empathy, forgiveness, and generosity*.

Live an enthusiastic life of *courage, joy, acceptance, and trust*.

When you fall, and you will, **keep learning and remember to forgive yourself** as you discover deeper levels of self-awareness.

Our brothers and sisters are suffering, so it is time for this book to go to the next level. **And I need you in this fight. I can't do this alone.** Join up on my wing, and let's go get the rest of our brothers and sisters. Let's make sure we all get home.

I love you my friend, good hunting.



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If you wanna fly,
you got to give up the
shit that weighs you down.

- Toni Morrison,
Song of Solomon

- courtesy Army veteran @TinaMae3232

tldr: I'm cool, this book is cool, and it's really important to take this seriously. Did I mention I was a Navy fighter pilot?

Warning

The bold **WARNING** heading is sprinkled throughout our top-secret squadron documents. Seasoned fighter pilots say these sections of our operations manuals are written in blood. Mistakes that led to the death of our aircrew need to be remembered. So we record them, embrace them, and use those errors to the fullest. This painful honesty ensures we will not fail in the future. We absorb our mistakes completely so that when it is time for the next mission, we will win. Every deployed Navy fighter squadron must always maintain air superiority over our oceans, no points for second place. Last Top Gun reference, I promise.

This book was written with an optimistic, enthusiastic, and encouraging tone, because you **will overcome**. But make no mistake: you're in for the fight of your life. Fighting depression is harder than anything I have done in my whole life. Harder than landing on an aircraft carrier on a pitching deck at night, with no moonlight to guide us and no horizon to figure out which way up was. Way harder than some easy jinking to avoid ground fire while waaay below the minimum safe altitude hard deck, don't tell the CAG... Harder even than understanding a heavily accented foreign exchange Naval Officer teaching Celestial Navigation after a heavy lunch in King Hall.

So what's at stake here, my new wingman? If you lose your fight vs. depression, you're a statistic. Veterans are 1.5 times as likely to commit suicide as nonveterans. A staggering 22+ veterans commit suicide every day. This is unacceptable. You know how to fight, you just don't know how to fight this. Yet. We are going to get there. Fast. I'm editing this book right now because the first version sucked, but everyone was too nice to tell me. This new version is faster and funnier than ever, and all the extra nonsense is hitting the cutting room floor. Hard.

While I wrote this book as a runway beacon shining the way home for veterans, I'd love it to be the definitive anti-suicide book for everyone, including you land-loving civilians. We are going to go over every advantage I have found to actually work in real life, skipping the boring theory from people speculating what it *might* be like to be severely depressed.

BUT, for your part, **you're going to have to fight** your ass off. Every day. It takes dedication to decide to be happy and make each day great, so why wouldn't it take a monumental effort to overcome the darkness? So take a deep breath. If you're not feeling particularly strong right now, don't worry I'm your wingman from here on in. I've got extra everything now; I've got enough strength, hope, and fighting spirit to help even the sorriest of you out there. Please borrow from my wisdom, learned the hard way. But, you are going to have to absorb it quickly and get fired up, because failure in this fight isn't going to work out well for us. **We are decisively engaged with the enemy, meaning there is no option for us to surrender. We are going to win.**

So get strapped in to the ejection seat of your cockpit and get ready to fight. Hard. You are going to make it through this. You are going to adapt the lessons learned and apply them to your specific, miserable situation. Then you will emerge from the darkness, grateful and overwhelmed with your newfound steel-forged wisdom and strength.

Let's begin.

Author: Dave Dequeljoe, (U.S. Navy Fighter Pilot)
dogfightdave@gmail.com

Edited by: Mark Joseph Mongilutz, (Writer, U.S. Army Veteran)

Photography:
Dave "BIO" Baranek (Intro F-14 Afterburner Climb)
Phil "Sammy" Decker (Ch. 1 F-14 Sunset Wingman)
U.S. Naval Flight Officers
Fighter Squadron 32 (VF-32 Swordsmen)
U.S. Navy

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Jorge Camacho, Photoshop Artist

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tldr: I'm your virtual wingman, my mother's advice as a young boy, a cool Rage Against The Machine quote

Introduction



NOTE: Hey, this is all your choice to do this. Freaking nice work. You're on the right path, and I am proud as f of you. I wrote this while I was living out of my car, so please excuse the extreme naivete and ridiculously over the top enthusiasm. I meant every single word with all my heart and soul, so I am leaving it in there for you. Take what you love, and ridicule me for the rest. Good hunting my friend, I love you and I am rooting for you, with every ounce of my being.

Welcome and congratulations! **You now have a wingman** in your mission to overcome depression, get “unstuck” and perhaps more importantly, while you are tackling that unpleasant business, dedicate some energy to actually having fun and

achieving your wildest dreams. Pat yourself on the back for taking the initiative to **MAKE** your life better! You now have the controls of the most complex machine ever created, your thick headed brain.

But Dave, why is having a wingman so important? You ground-pounders call it 'battle buddies' or something goofy like that, so you probably already get this. Hang with me so our civilian friends can catch up; the concept of ***mutual support*** was drilled into us from day one of Flight School.

Once we tricked the instructors into letting us graduate, our real fleet squadron was no different. For every time we hit the afterburners (listen I know the new Tomcats didn't need burners to take off, but your skeptical attitude is going to ruin the dramatic picture I'm painting here) and launched from the deck of our aircraft carrier on a combat mission, we had to have a wingman. **No wingman, no launch.**

No exceptions.

Do you like winning? Having another winged Naval Aviator at your side juiced the odds in your favor. Even just one clueless wingman exponentially increased your survivability and the chances of successfully completing your mission. With a wingman, you had another set of eyes to watch out for threats from the air and the ground, you had someone else to cover your tail in a dogfight,¹ and you had someone else to safely guide you home '*back to the boat*' if your navigation equipment failed at night while floating blindly in inky-black-squid clouds, which of course it sometimes did...

We also learned a surprising fact at **SERE School**, the Navy's extremely unpleasant Prisoner-Of-War-simulation. *S.E.R.E. stands for Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape*. These four vital skills are necessary for stranded combat pilots to have, but obviously not too much fun to practice. Can you say 'fish out of water'? "Hey Gunny, where's the safety on this thing again..."

1. A 'dogfight' is pilot term for air-to-air combat within visual range.

But if you were shot down in enemy territory, **can you guess the number one factor, above all else, that would increase your chances of survival?** After just successfully completing two years of hyper-competitive cocky-as-hell-jet-jock flight school, we thought we knew just about everything. And if you've ever been in a room of fighter pilots, you will know that while some of us love to talk loudly, we aren't really too concerned with what anyone else is actually saying. So in this chaos, simultaneous assaults of obnoxiousness came from seemingly everywhere: "flashlight! plenty of food and water! a crossbow!" There were also some other predictably low-brow ideas that probably shouldn't be mentioned in front of proper ladies and gentlemen of the civilized world like yourselves.

The actual correct answer is having **another survivor** present with you in the wilderness. The number two factor that most increases your chance of success is maintaining an optimistic attitude but under extreme duress you can't trust that you will always stay focused and positive. In fact, believe it or not in some cases **pilots who were shot down would actually turn themselves in to the enemy** out of hunger, desperation, loneliness, fear, and hopelessness.

As it turns out, having a good buddy with you is the perfect antidote to combat such misgivings.

Here is a sample conversation between two pilots shot down behind enemy lines, with no working method of communication back to home base. They have been lost for two weeks and the situation is looking rather bleak for them:

LIEUTENANT JUNIOR GRADE WILSON, on his first combat cruise:

"Lieutenant Castaway, I am SO freaking cold. It is colder than a penguin's little Chilly Willy's out here. Maybe we should turn ourselves in, get warm, and get something to eat."

LIEUTENANT CASTAWAY, his stalwart senior companion:

*"Hey Wilson, allow me to give you a status update on my little Chilly Willy's, which are both currently **M.I.A.**"*

*“As far as your idea about turning ourselves in, now is probably a good time to remind you that we **would most likely be tortured, and/or killed.**”*

*“And although we are currently being tortured by the freezing wind, **your very loud and over-dramatic teeth chattering,** as well as your incessant yammering about frozen Reese’s pieces, we are, at the moment, free.*

“So, get it together and keep moving...”

Or something like that. Valid point. Then the pair would continue glumly seeking their way back to friendly lines, hungry and cold, but once again focused on their mission.

**Always remember, in a survival type situation,
two is one, one is none.**

So, here I am, tada! Your very own B+ wingman and fellow survivor-behind-enemy-lines. I’ll show you how I made my way back to friendly territory and escaped to start living and enjoying every second of my life again. I will tell you some sort-of funny stories, some inspirational stories, and I’ll share the tools you need to climb out of the “pit of despair.”

You will read the same inspiring quotes that forever changed my ways of thinking for the better. You will learn the steps I took that actually worked to overcome my depression and see first-hand what made a positive impact on my life. I will include the best aspects of the books I read and loved, in the hope that you might benefit from them as well. Most importantly, I will include exactly where I found these sources of inspiration (from podcasts, books, videos, music, interviews), so if you’re interested in continuing the learning process, it will save you time and energy of wondering, *“Where do I get started...and where do I look?”*

* How to Use This Book Most Effectively *

In our fighter squadron, we were always looking for ways to do things more effectively and efficiently. Our skipper's intent was that this process would help us achieve victory in combat, but it ALSO had the side benefit of allowing the junior officers more free time to do the things we loved. In other words, we finally had discovered a noble goal worth innovating for. How could we complete quickly and correctly whatever miserable task we were assigned, so we could go on to something more fun?



Listen to me, Smalls: Fighting depression is a real miserable mission to be a part of, but we don't always get to hand pick which mission we are sent on.

Our only remaining option? Let's make this as enjoyable and rewarding as we possibly can. The silver lining to this dark thundercloud is that once we get started on this path and build up some momentum, you might actually embrace and relish the challenge of it all. I believe when you're depressed, it is your mind's way of telling you you're on the wrong path. **That you need to be doing something different.**

So, think of being engaged in this fight as a **badge of honor**. After all, most people in their struggle vs. depression will fail: horribly. Then they will eke out their remaining days unhappily, flitting from one addiction, medication, and distraction to another until they are defeated, alone, and isolated from the world. Yikes. Sounds pretty bleak, right? Yep.

But don't worry, President Lincoln struggled with a lifetime of depression after a rough childhood, and he used his lessons learned to become one of the best leaders we've ever seen. Not a fan of history? Ok, how about Bob Marley? He sang that every little thing is going to be all right. This reminds me, medical marijuana is better for you than alcohol or drugs, and it helps heal combat injuries too. It makes singing reggae in the shower more fun too. Not that I know, I just heard it from the tik-tok place. Anyway, **I will be your wingman all along the way, and since I just hate losing, failure is not going to be part of our flightpath today.**

Since failure is not an acceptable outcome for us, we just simply won't give up until we win. Winning is contagious, and the standard of measure for success isn't just you figure it out. That's thinking small. The standard is you know this stuff so well, you can TEACH it. Because when you teach, you learn twice. And no one is coming to save us, so we are just going to have to save ourselves.

Best-case scenario? You read this entire book in one sitting, jump out of your chair and throw it against the wall, get ALL fired up and yell AND-ONE! Then after your Draymond-ish technical, you can intelligently and aggressively adapt these lessons learned into your life, and blaze your own trail towards redemption and happiness.

I would love nothing more than to hear from you that this book helped in some way, because I wrote this book for **you**. So find me on Twitter or whatever when you're feeling good and give me a shout. I'm can't WAIT until the day when you wake up excited, ready to tackle your newest challenges and goals, and not holding back any of your talent.

My mother once wisely advised me: **"Your greatest day will be when you realize that what you *perceive* to be your biggest weakness is actually your biggest strength."** I KNOW you have a gift inside you, some area of pure genius that you can use to make other people's lives better. You may not see it or be ready for it now, but I am planting the seed inside your brain right here, for this is the correct path. When the time comes, you will be ready.

Courage, Momentum, Hope, Confidence, and VICTORY

For now, **we need to begin by replacing any fears you may have with COURAGE to take control of your life and take positive action.** Fear is crippling, and internal resistance will strangle you lifeless. So start by implementing just one of the tools detailed in this book today. Just one is better than zero, and tomorrow your one tool can grow into two.

Remember, every step, no matter how small, helps you get closer to your goals. Once you get moving you will have captured one of the most essential elements of victory: **MOMENTUM**. Objects in motion tend to stay in motion, and all that.

Your newfound momentum and activity will quickly lead to **HOPE** that you are actually gaining some ground and that there *is actually a way out* of the darkness. This may sound corny, but a way out is not always readily apparent when you're mired in depression. Lack of hope is, I strongly believe, the number one cause of suicide.

WHEN WILL I SEE THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL?

When you gather the courage to take control of your life and start moving in the right direction, you gain momentum and hope, which will invariably lead to **CONFIDENCE** that you are on the right path. With confidence you will walk taller, communicate more effectively, and get a little airspeed boost in your movement. People and events will respond to you differently. *Good* differently. Command of yourself and discipline of your mind are attractive traits. People will magnetize to you and want to know more about you.

All of these factors are going to eventually lead to a **VICTORY** of some kind. **Victory is one of my favorite words in the English language.** Maybe it is my favorite. If you want to win, it is time to lock in and get focused. It can be a long ride, but don't worry, I am going to lay it out for you each step of the way.

The positivity of a victory, no matter how small, will charge up your soul and will lead to more momentum, more growth, and even more awareness of the beauty and depth of the world. You will learn to see **abundance** in the world instead of focusing on the **scarcity**, or lack of things in your life. Before you know it you will love your life again, or maybe for the first time, and you will look back on this challenging time with gratitude as a formative experience that shaped your **indefatigable** spirit. If you're an infantry guy, *indefatigable* means you aren't ever going to give up.

"Suffering leads to greatness."

- Anonymous. (Well, someone must have been the first to say this line, but I don't exactly know who...)

WINGMAN NOTE:

We are going to take the intense and sometimes overwhelming feeling of depression *and* use it to our advantage.

We can, and we will transform the lessons learned by this experience into something that makes us, and everyone around us, better. That is real courage, real leadership and this one act will be something of which we can be forever proud.

“The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing.”

- Walt Disney

WINGMAN NOTE:

No time like the present!

Disney was a *day-dreaming civilian* who was made fun of as a kid for being a recluse. Look what he turned out to be.

You can do it too.

I know this to be true.

Need a bonus quote with some more firepower than Mickey, Goofy, and crew?

Here is a song to listen to if you want to get fired up:

***“What better place than here,
what better time than now?”***

- Rage Against the Machine

I am sure ***Rage Against the Machine*** was not thinking about fighting depression when they wrote ***Guerrilla Radio***, and they might object to me subjecting it here. But I love the message for us and our purpose of getting started, so whatever, Rage. Sounds like they will be pissed regardless.

So, let's get it going, for time keeps ticking, and a better life is out there, just waiting for you to **decide to be ready to enjoy it**. Up next is a general outline of this book and some tricks to take advantage of the framework of its design. I have written this for you to be as accessible as possible, as fun as possible, and as helpful to YOU as possible.

This book is designed to fit into your life. For the leaders out there that have volunteered to educate themselves in order to best serve their troops, I salute you. Some concepts might seem simple, but *remember when you're stuck in the darkness even the most basic lessons can't be seen*. You never know what piece of information is going to open the maze up for someone, so pay close attention to all the tiny details. That's where the code can be broken, and that is where you will be the hero.

Having said that, it is your life. **IT IS YOUR CHOICE**. You are in control, of your learning and your healing. Read a chapter a day when you can, or blast through the whole thing. Read it out of order if you like, re-read the parts you love, and definitely skip the parts you feel you don't need right now. Of the books I read and loved during my Houdini-like escape from depression, I found that when I was bored it was best to just move to the next chapter and look to pick up a new tip or lesson there.

Another 'I'm not homeless anymore' note for you: Escaping from depression wasn't that easy, or quick, really. And I'm pretty sure when any poor unfortunate soul (Queen Ursula?) happened to be watching me, they were NOT entertained.

WARNING:

Don't get stuck, discouraged, or overwhelmed! Keep moving and gravitate to what interests you the most. You may find that when you read it a second time you pick up something valuable you weren't quite ready for the first time around.

This is *your* book, so take notes in it, dog-ear the heck out of the pages, and put the wisdom here to work for you. I recommend you write down the quotes you love, either on paper or on your phone so you can refer to them daily. If you are in a hurry, you can simply snap a picture of what inspires you.

I discovered when I was feeling down, sometimes the best remedy would be to read my favorite quotes. So, I put them in the notes app on my phone and would

look at them every morning, or before a big event in which I needed to be at the top of my game.

This concept worked so well that I stepped it up a level by creating a whiteboard in my room with all my favorite quotes and sayings. I would read them every morning and it would help to put me in the right frame of mind. I took a picture of this “*Path to Victory*” board and kept it on “**Alert 5**”; ready on my phone when I needed to ‘reset’ my negative thoughts into more positive, productive thoughts.

READY ROOM TIP:

*An **Alert 5 fighter** is placed on the aircraft carrier catapult, ready to launch quickly to respond to an emergency or threat situation.*

What I needed more than anything was to rewire my brain and adapt it to my new situation. Believe in the power of your mind, and believe in your ability to turn your problems around. You can do it. I am rooting for you, and so are all your ancestors.*

**** I’m not really sure exactly how your ancestors are watching you, but I believe they are, and that they are out there in the universe somewhere shouting “Get after it!” Make them proud and let’s pull it together. One step at a time, one stroke at a time, one stride at a time, one day at a time. Keep breathing and keep swimming towards your goal, no matter how far away it seems right now. (See Chapter 13, *Design Your Own Path to Victory Board*, for a description of this story)***

EDITOR’S NOTE:

Though Dave was reluctant to do so, I earnestly advised that he include herein the rather breathtaking tale of his perilous inverted ejection from a fast-moving fighter jet. The story is compelling, it is cinematic in its details, and its absence from these pages would truly have amounted to a high shame.

*** Dave's counterpoint: So we fought. We threw things. Army vs. Navy. Then we compromised and now you can read the entire tale in the Appendix...*

Quick Preflight Briefing!

It would be hard to find a more impatient group of aggressively-intelligent people than you would find in a fighter squadron. When a ready room brief started dragging on too long, one of the junior officers in the back would invariably inform you by bellowing out:

“BOOORING!”

Very helpful, thanks.

The next phase of the alarm warning would come from the senior pilots in the front rows, clustered around the middle aisle where the Commanding Officer and his sidekick Executive Officer sat regally. If either one shifted in his seat, one of their fawning, promotion-seeking Lieutenant Commanders would lean in angrily and demand you move it along:

“FASTER. FUNNIER.”

Despite the intense pressure to get to the point, somewhere along the way some booger-eater intel guy figured out if you gave a brief overview of what to expect, it helped the caveman part of your brain synthesize the whole thing a lot better. So here is your caveman overview.

This will lay the foundations of the runway we are going to build together, and will help your mind absorb the material so we can start winning faster. So, read it and love it. Or skip it. But NO complaining!

Section 1. Be Humble

In this section, we will discuss how taking extreme ownership of everything in your life will set you free to take action and take control of your life again. I used to hate the word “humility,” because I thought it was either a sign of weakness or a disingenuous move by fake athletes just trying to be “cool” on ESPN. “**Pride**” was the word I loved; confidence and cockiness were, in my mind, awesome traits. To be fair,

I believed I needed them to be able to launch off the carrier deck at night into the blackness, and I probably did!

BUT, although confidence and cockiness were helpful at the time, there is a secret blind spot embedded malevolently (*like those old school pop-up banner ads for AOL Online; so what I am older than you. #BoomerBringin'ItBaby So I'm not really a boomer, but it's hysterical how there is this wacky age war going on. Everybody CHILL please*) when you adopt these traits. Confidence, and its nasty second cousin '**cockiness**' will both flood you with immediate power. However, left unchecked, they lead to a slow, insidious decrease in your hunger for learning and your appetite for growth.

This decaying trend can slowly creep into your life until your blind spots are suddenly large and surprisingly crippling. Big mistake. Whoops. I would ask you kindly to read this humility stuff with an open mind. But it is your choice.

If you are too proud right now (*and if you aren't self-aware enough to think that it **might** be you, this **probably** applies to you*), you might think, 'Well that is stupid, I'm awesome and I definitely don't need this chapter.'

Read it anyway, tough guy. We will also talk about **true courage** and why it is better than confidence. I will also show you how to develop the ability to laugh when in danger, to laugh during a crisis and the power of laughing at yourself.

I've never laughed harder than I did in some of the most extreme, life-threatening situations. If you haven't served in the military/law enforcement, or experienced high-pressure athletics, performance art, or the negotiating of big-time business deals, we will talk about this critical skill and the mindset that fosters its growth.

"When the student is ready, the teacher appears."

– This is what the Singapore salesman told me the ancient Chinese letters said on a watercolor painting. To be fair, I'm not sure WHAT the Chinese characters translate to; it could just as easily be "Haha, thanks for the cash,

dipshit," but I love to assume the best in people so let's just assume it is correct.

WINGMAN NOTE

This is one of the most powerful quotes to cure your overconfidence, especially for arrogant, former know-it-all's like me. The knowledge was always all around me, it was just ME that wasn't ready for it at the time. This, it turns out, is quite the painful mistake to make.
Learn from my error, and stay curious!

PRE-FLIGHT EXERCISE

Take a deep breath right now and clear your mind. A good, deep breath for five seconds and hold it. Then release slowly. Most of us don't breathe deeply enough, and the effects are pronounced. Realize if you are depressed, something in your life isn't working well. Life is meant to be full and free, and if you open yourself to learning new ways of thinking, you can create a path towards your ideal 'dream life.' The first step is to be ready to accept instruction. So, clear your mind of all the things you *think* you know and if you don't quite get there, at least the deep breath of oxygen is good for your body...

EXTRA BONUS FACT

Scientists say that 50% of the things we think we know during any time period in human history are wrong. The problem is, I'm not quite sure how to prove this, but it proves the point I'm trying to make, so be a good wingman and just accept this as truth. And not part of the 50% that scientists say is dead wrong.

PS: A smart man I know named Russ says 'there is no truth, only perspective.' Clearly that can't be right, but there it is for you anyway.

Section 2. Be PATIENT

Section 2 is about mental toughness and the art of turning a bad situation around, which forgive me for assuming, you are most likely deeply mired in right now. If you are as impatient as I am, or easily frustrated, or get road rage, or lash out at others, don't worry; I have found the cure for you.

If you are angelic like Mary Poppins and don't show signs of impatience (but inwardly you are dismayed and discouraged at the lack of progress in your life), don't worry—we will talk about this, too. There are ways to control this negative spiral of thought, so you can focus on more fun issues, like achieving your dreams.

We will also talk about my 50lb weight loss (too many Entenmann's chocolate donuts + Mallowmars), and the importance of keeping yourself physically active during tough times, no matter how busy or tired you are. As we are strengthening ourselves mentally and physically, we should not ignore the other pillars of our souls: emotional, spiritual, and our intuition. More critically, how to start from zero, get the ball rolling, and make it a fun process as you develop all aspects of yourself to transform into a wise superhero-type of person, worthy of your own respect.

***“Victorious warriors win first in their minds, and then go to war.
Defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win.”***

– Sun Tzu (544 BC – 496 BC)

WINGMAN NOTE

In my haste to 'fix' everything all at once, I made everything worse. If something is going wrong in your life, resist the temptation to blame others or put it off as freakish bad luck. Instead, go back to the drawing board and make sure you are as educated about the topic as you can be before re-entering the 'battlefield.' After a particularly painful event, I marched right over to the nearest Barnes & Noble and pulled the three most relevant books from the shelf and sat

down to remedy the problem. This was a memorable and important day in my recovery.

Bonus quote for you, along the same vein:

“Muddy water, let stand, becomes clear.”

– Lao Tzu

I’m fairly certain Lao Tzu and Sun Tzu are not related, and it is purely coincidence that they are lumped here together in the same section of quotes. So, no, I’m not a quote segregationist or anything. The muddy water thing might be the best advice I’ve ever seen about being patient. Plus, it just *sounds* really wise. If you like this, write it down somewhere visible where you can think about it during the day. Seeing it frequently will help you incorporate it into your life.

Section 3. Think BIG!

“Nurture your mind with great thoughts. For you will never go any higher than you think.”

– Benjamin Disraeli

PRE-FLIGHT EXERCISE

Self-imposed limitations suck. Take a moment and think about your life and what limitations you have placed on yourself. Limitations are usually a result of fear or anxiety, and we are going to do our best to remove all fear from our lives. Even if you’re unafraid in some areas, you can still be afraid in others, so take heed. Removing fear and self-imposed limitations is going to lead us to true happiness and fulfillment in life.

I would love for you to **start understanding that anything is possible**. I went from getting kicked out of college to becoming a Navy fighter pilot, and it came solely from believing I could do it and the **strength of will** to make it happen.

NOTE: *Then I went from homeless to fancy-pants tech executive, teaching leadership across our fine planet. **DOUBLE NOTE:** Not humble-bragging, just actually full-on, ‘in-your-face-dude’ bragging. What. Write your own book.*

This section will set you on the path towards creatively thinking, imagining, and realizing the life of your dreams. Keep in mind you might have difficulties getting to this level of thinking until you have the other two sections (**Be Humble + Be Patient**) wired, but you can and should put your brain to work on this in tandem with your development of the other skills.

In fact, thinking big will most likely provide you with **a reason to push hard**. Thinking big can inspire you to do the grunt work of the other two sections so that you can get to the promised land of your ideal life. In this chapter we will talk about the very best quotes and tools to help you design and achieve a remarkable life.

“Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.”

-Albert Einstein

WINGMAN NOTE

You may or may not remember the character Hannibal from the original *A-Team* television series. I **LOVED** that show when I was a young boy. Whenever they got in trouble and were severely outnumbered and outgunned, he would create some outlandish plan to use their strengths while minimizing their weaknesses. Be Hannibal in your life—don’t be constrained by money or time or whatever other excuse you can come up with—think about what you CAN do and think **creatively** to figure out a solution.

Genius Level, *Top Gun*-style Move

Try thinking about your issue right before you go to bed, and ask your subconscious to help out and work on a solution. You might be surprised at the

result! I first learned this in a kids' book series titled *"The Great Brain,"* about two young, smart, rambunctious brothers growing up in early America. Whether you have kids or you don't, check it out, the series is worth reading. This reminds me of a great quote:

"Whether you think you can or you think you can't, you're right."

- Henry Ford

WINGMAN NOTE

We don't yet fully understand the power of the mind , but I can tell you this for sure—this sentiment is dead on accurate. Maybe.

"Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd."

- Voltaire (1694-1778)

Redefine the Fight

Imagine yourself as the character from yet another TV show, *Quantum Leap*. The premise of this show was the main character would 'zap!' into a person's body from the past, and he would have to quickly figure out how to solve a crisis so everything in history worked out OK. If you imagine yourself as 'zapping' into your body, it can help you objectively think of a solution without all the emotions involved. This is why it is easier to give someone else advice but difficult to follow it yourself. Don't fall into the trap like that guy in Billy Joel's *Piano Man* 'if I could only...'; they stay stuck their entire lives, wailing that they are just *so wise* but can't fix their own junk. Be wise **AND** learn to listen to your own sage counsel.

Life is a lot more fun when you're getting it right. This book is about how to get it ALL right and start enjoying every moment in life, whether the wave is going up or down. It is going to take some effort, but it is worth it. This is to voyage to mastery of your mind, so we are way past 'basic' at this point. Whatever. Let's go.

Section I: Be HUMBLE



tldr: a dedication to our warriors, a Boston taxi driver's advice, and I know you know how to fight, you just don't know how to fight this...yet.

Chapter One

Introduction to *Be HUMBLE*

"Only the penitent man shall pass..."

- said Indiana Jones, to himself... remembering to be humble just in the nick of time, thereby saving his famous hat (along with attached head) from that nasty booby-trap pastrami slicer.

As I am writing this, today is Memorial Day, and I am thinking about a great American and Wingman we lost at sea, Captain Franklin "Puj" Hooks, USMC. This section is dedicated to him, as well as to fellow Soldiers, Marines, Airmen, Navy SEALs, Army Rangers, Special Operations Warriors, POWs/MIAs, and all veterans of wars past and present.

GET FIRED UP! Your life is about to get a LOT better. Yeah, I know I've said that already. When I say things twice to you, it is because it's important. In this case, I'm saying it again because anything worth doing in this life is worth doing with every ounce of fire, enthusiasm, and passion you can scrape off the walls of your almost empty peanut butter jar. The great news is once you start getting good at scraping and scrapping, you will **never** be out of peanut butter.

This book is a roadmap for you on how to engage depression in life or death combat, and win. No eye-rolling, devil dogs. Fighting depression **is** life or death. Twenty-two veterans commit suicide every day, and we do not want you to be one of them. You have a lot more left in you. Remember, life has a strange way of changing directions suddenly. You want to be around when things change for the better, and I want you to be around, too.

I know you know how to fight, so I'm confident this next statement will amp you up: this mission will NOT be easy. It is going to take some extraordinary willpower, discipline, and desire, as well as a great sense of humor. But it will be worth it. And I'm guessing if you're reading this, your life isn't exactly all puppy dogs and sunshine at the moment.

WARNING:

Don't be fooled by temporary victories. **Depression is not easily killed off. It likes to lurk around the corner, just waiting for you to slack off.** Continue to actively fight to make your life better and more fun, regardless of your circumstances. Some of my favorite days were when I was homeless. Please stay focused; guard against any lame relapses, and remember that life is meant to be enjoyed each and every day. No matter what has happened to you, you deserve a great life too, and don't you forget that. If you don't feel like you haven't earned this, you can earn it right now by teaching someone else what you've learned so far. When you teach, you learn twice. Lastly, no one is coming to save us, so we are compelled to save ourselves. I read the other day that 'to save ONE life is equivalent to saving the entire WORLD...'

I went through some serious pain to come out on top, but don't wait until you are healed to rescue one of our brothers and sisters;. as my mother always wisely advised me: ***"When you aren't feeling good about yourself, the very best thing you can do is go help someone else."*** Let's be real for a second. When I was 7 years old, this was just about the dumbest thing I had ever heard from anyone. I did a super dramatic eye-roll with a heavy sigh, as if to say "oh mother... I do appreciate all your lessons, but this one really sucks." Ridiculous or not, everything about your life-decisions from here on in will be your choice. All you need to do is try it yourself to feel how true it is. You won't regret it, I promise.

In fact, check this deep Matrix red/blue pill thing: What you are holding in your hands is a physical manifestation of this very principle; it is my attempt to **turn an otherwise horrific situation into something great** that will help others. If you can benefit from my experiences and what inspired me to turn it around, then something positive will have come about from a rotten scenario that at one point seemed completely hopeless.

UPDATE: it already has... this lousy book you're reading has saved a few lives that I know about. Why don't you hook me up and be the next one. And message me, because I'm so soft now, and I just love hearing when my people are rockin' 100% again.

"IT IS NEVER TOO LATE," said the crusty old taxi driver on the way to the Boston U-Haul rental center. I was moving to be closer to my children, desperate to reunite with them, but overwhelmed at how impossible a mission it seemed. That kind, salt-of-the-earth Watertown veteran turned around and smiled at me knowingly.

He **encouraged me to keep going, no matter what.** He successfully got me to stop fixating on the past and what had gone wrong and start focusing more on what I could do at the present moment in time, which really was unlimited.

This may seem like basic advice, but when you are lost in the depths of depression you need all the encouraging words you can get. I will always remember this seemingly random encounter. It gave me a huge boost when I had no airspeed, and it is another example of how much one tiny encounter can impact someone's life. As you move forward, try to be the wise cab driver; you just never know who you're speaking to, and what they're going through..

Another key part of your recovery process is to remember and be grateful for everything and everyone that helps you get to the next step. Gratitude is such an overused, played-out word these days, and to be fair, it kind of makes me cringe a bit when I see it. However, it's omni-prevalence is for good reason: Gratitude can NOT co-exist with any other bad emotions. It cleans the soul. *Cleanses* the soul? You get what I mean.

So get ready, get excited, here we go baby! Read this as it fits in your life—read a chapter a day when you can, or blast through the whole thing. Take notes, dog-ear pages, and put the advice here to work for you. If it is in here, it is only because it has actually worked for me, and my life has unexpectedly become awesome and beautiful again.

Never underestimate the difference one day, one conversation can make. It will get better.

Good hunting my friend, let's get after it!

tldr: if you remove all the pressure to be the hero and perfect, you just might be more open to actually learning something. Oh yeah, and I'm still a Navy fighter pilot. Remember?

Chapter Two

How to Get Started

"The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing."

- Walt Disney



The most critical part of our mission is to get you to understand one thing: **everything in your life right now is on you.** There is a small, very small chance that you believe this particular lesson doesn't apply at all to your current misery. If this is the case, feel free to skip ahead to the next chapter.

However, I would warn you if your depression is due to a death of a loved one and you are in a period of **excessive** grieving (*grieving is a natural process and I*

don't consider that depression), do not skip this chapter. **Be a leader.** Other people are counting on you, and you are depriving them of the love, knowledge, and all that you have to offer. Lastly, I am confident your loved ones would not want you to waste away your days suffering. You are meant to live a fulfilling life and experience the full range of emotions.

If the lesson of “**everything in your life right now, both good and bad, is all on you**” does apply to you, open your mind up and be ready to embrace this concept. It will **give you more power** than you can possibly imagine.

You are the master of your fate, you are the captain of your soul. Nothing will cleanse your soul faster and prepare you more for this journey than **removing all blame** from external sources.

There will always be bad luck, so don't dwell on that. In everyone's life there will be a sprinkling, or in some cases a downpour, of bad luck. Shrug your shoulders and spit out the rainwater. Anyone play Clash Royale? The fisherman guy taunt? Ok, moving on.

Don't be a victim.

VICTIMHOOD = SUFFERING

****Milkshake's Corner aka the SQUADRON INTEL OFFICER'S STAT***

*Every squadron has an Intelligence Officer, responsible for keeping **TOP SECRET** data safe and giving us relevant updates about our missions.*

So what? When you see these little boxes, you will know you're getting the intel YOU need to drive forward in your quest to overcome depression.

*Our Intel Officer's callsign was **MILKSHAKE**, from that one-hit wonder song where the song proclaims, "My milkshake brings all the boys to the yard..."*

Long story, but it has something to do with a video game called Dance Revolution and tighty-whities after a night of partying in port.

Did you know that smart researchers have proven **Internal Locus of Control** is a powerful predictor of happiness? Internal Locus of Control is a feeling that you are

responsible and in charge of all the outcomes in your life. Hey, looks like the lab-coat-wearing booger-eaters got another one right—so let's learn from this.

From here on in, we are going to **focus on taking positive action to get control of all aspects of our lives. Think of what IS possible, which is a lot. Find a way. If it really matters to you, find a way.**

“This ship was built to fight. You had better know how.”

- Admiral Arleigh Burke, United States Navy

UPDATE: I used to blame everyone. For everything. It actually felt great, because my pride was left spit-shined and intact. I had my self-worth and self-esteem connected with my performance, so when people were criticizing what I had done, it felt like a personal attack. Like I wasn't worthy of being loved. Which triggered an immediate and hostile counterattack. And the blame was happily hot-potatoed right back into your lap, buster!

BUT, my relationships were a disaster. Blaming is an extreme form of being a 'struggler' (being a struggler is the very worst thing you can be accused of in a fighter squadron), because you're saying you are incapable of overcoming what the other person said or did. You are declaring to the world, and to anyone who will listen, that you're a loser.

Imagine if someone came up to you and proclaimed “You see, this time that I lost, it was because of THAT guy, and now I am just incapable of ever living a great life again.” – you would probably want to run in the other direction and make friends with someone that wasn't so easily overcome by events and other people.

Therefore, you **must take command of your life** and of your current situation. It may look impossible, but it's not! Think of yourself in the cockpit of your mind, responsible for all the critical decisions necessary to fight and win. So, congratulations, I am promoting you to Captain of your ship; AKA: your life.

CIVILIAN ALERT:

(this next segment is to help them get up to speed with what you already know)

You are the leader now. At the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, there is an infamous story passed down to young officers in training. I'm not sure if

it actually ever happened, but let's pretend it did, because it will seem more important.

The story goes something like this:

A promising officer has been working hard his entire career and finally gets his dream promotion: skipper of a brand spanking new flagship cruiser. His ship is top of the line—it has all the best new technology, the best weaponry, and the finest crew the Navy could assemble. All is well in the world.

On his first night of command, he lays down in his very own rack with a smile on his face. *I have finally arrived*, he thinks happily. He falls asleep easily, with the knowledge that he is a 'made man' now.

BOOM! The crash wakes up the newly minted skipper, who then hears an even worse sound—the awful groaning of his freshly painted Navy grey steel hull as it is rendered apart by the rocky shoals of an unseen outcropping. Not good.

Outcome: The proud flagship is dead in the water, run aground in the middle of the night, all while the Captain was sleeping.

Who is responsible and what is a fair punishment? This is the question now demanded of the young officers in training, called midshipmen.

Midshipman Clueless:

"Umm, who was steering the ship at the time, sir?"

Drill Instructor 2/C David:

"The officer at the helm was the most junior officer on the ship, with the unenviable middle-of-the-night duty."

Midshipman Clueless:

"Uhh, so the junior officer should lose his qualification, or wait, maybe the Navigator should lose his quals too...?"

No.

You and all your platoonmates can start doing pushups. Don't stop until you're told to stop. The correct answer: the skipper is responsible and is immediately relieved of his new command. If he was a pilot, he might then get assigned to fly cargo planes full of rubber dog 'droppings' out of Hong Kong, as was famously threatened in *Top Gun*. But since he is a Surface Warfare Officer, I guess he could be placed in charge of the cute little floaty rafts at Summer Camp Woebegone.

Not fair, you say? Who is in charge of training the junior officers and certifying them ready to stand watch? Who is in charge of deciding who is ready to helm the ship? The buck must stop somewhere. Someone must be accountable. And in your life that person is now you. Not your parents, not your girlfriend or spouse, boss, neighbor, older sibling, coach, etc. **YOU**.

The sooner you embrace this, the better. And the sooner you remove blame from your vocabulary, the better. You will live a much happier and successful life, I promise. More importantly, **you will be much more likely to take action** and try something new and creative to change your current crappy circumstances.

Real Life Applications

Fighter pilot stuff: We were always taught in the squadron to evaluate winning vs. losing while engaged in dogfighting (air-to-air combat within visual range). **Take the ego out of it, be a neutral observer.** If losing, and if our situation was worsening, we had to **REDEFINE THE FIGHT**. That was, we had to use one of our top-secret tactics to change the entire fight, change the 3D geometry, and calmly use our minds to regain the advantage even during an impending death type of situation. We were also drilled to remove all thoughts of how we got there, and not dwell on what mistakes **were** made, but instead to focus ONLY on: ***"In this current situation, what is my next best move?"***

Entrepreneur stuff: Silicon Valley startup veterans encourage new founders to FAIL FAST, PIVOT, and MOVE ON to a new venture if the outlook is bleak, no matter

how much time was spent on the failing venture to date. Thinking creatively and moving quickly are the takeaways here.

Poker stuff: World Series of Poker champions know throwing good money into the pot to 'chase' the bad money they bet is always a bad idea. Make the best decision at the current moment, without letting the fear of losing what has already been spent negatively influence your choice.

Don't concern yourself with the failures of your past. Learn from them and move on. **Thomas Watson** had an insightful take on this:

"Would you like me to give you a formula for success? It's quite simple, really: Double your rate of failure. You are thinking of failure as the enemy of success. But it isn't at all. You can be discouraged by failure or you can learn from it, so go ahead and make mistakes. Make all you can. Because remember, that's where you will find success."

Let's double down on the failure quotes:

"When we fail, I think 'good,' now I know our weaknesses, 'good,' now I know what the enemy will do in this situation, 'GOOD,' now we know how to train better for next time."

– Jocko Willink, former Navy SEAL Commander, from an excellent interview on the EntreLeadership podcast. Definitely worth listening to.

This is a healthy attitude to have for certain failure that will come your way eventually. Don't let it trap you or get you stuck!

Hit the AFTERBURNERS and gain MOMENTUM

What can you do right now to hit your afterburners and gain some momentum in your life?

A quote or mantra is invaluable when you need to change the direction of your thinking. Being depressed is like having thousand unwanted new demon-buddies, and they are all screaming negative thoughts in your face. They say a picture is worth a thousand words. **A powerful quote is worth a thousand thoughts.** It puts an extremely complex concept into a few tightly worded sentences.. The right quote is like a killer magic spell; it gives you the power to recall and duplicate wisdom at will. A great quote also reveals part of the much larger equation that solves the riddle of the universe.

Pick a mantra or a quote you can repeat to yourself to REPLACE the self-defeating messages you have bouncing around inside your head. Did you know scientists say around 77% of the thoughts we think are negative? It has to do with the way our brains are wired to survive. We look for the negative because combating the negative, or the darkness, helps us spot threats and come up with a gameplan before we are eaten by Fred Flintstone's sabretooth tiger..

Throughout this book you will find my favorite quotes of all time. Your new objective? Pick one and memorize it. Live by it. When you slip backwards into bad habits and thoughts, tell your mind to chill for a sec, hit the **master reset button**, then think about your new quote. This simple act of defiance to fight your old habits will empower you and give you momentum in the right direction towards mental freedom.

IMPORTANT: This is the path out of depression. Really fight hard here—the very worst part of depression is that you can't see the way out of it. **Accepting responsibility** for everything in your life will **give you the power** to start to control things you can control, which, in reality, is quite a bit more than you think!

"The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any."

-Alice Walker

It is your choice, but please consider adopting a mantra or a quote you love. It will give you a solid piton, a steady hand-hold you can use to climb out of the hole. It can reset your mindset into a winning one. Do **NOT** put this off. This is step one.

"What better place than here, what better time than now"

*- **Rage Against the Machine** has some serious anti-military and radical political overtones. The "five-sided fistagon" and the top brass may have looked down their collective noses at Rage, but in our squadron they were kings. The above quote is from the song 'Guerrilla Radio.' It's great for getting geared up in the paraloft before a mission, but maybe NOT so great for family picnics...*

Fighter Pilot's Kneeboard Card

"People with an internal locus of control believe that they are responsible for (or at least can influence) their own fates and life outcomes. They may or may not feel they are leaders, but they feel that they are essentially in charge of their lives. Those with an external locus of control see themselves as relatively powerless"

pawns in some game played by others; they believe that other people, environmental forces, the weather, malevolent gods, the alignment of celestial bodies—basically any and all external events—exert the most influence on their lives.”

– Daniel J Levitin

If you can't think of any quote you like, or you are just too overwhelmed with your current situation, for now let's stick with this simple one: ***“I can do this.”***. Even if you currently don't believe in yourself, and you don't believe anyone else does either, **I believe in you**. I know you can do it. And do it you will.

Remember, *what* you say to yourself isn't quite as important as saying *something* to yourself to turn the negative tide around. When you slide into the booby trap of thinking your current situation can't be changed, your new mantra will give you some much needed jet fuel to keep pushing forward even though the horizon looks bleak. Make this the very first habit you introduce into your new, soon to be amazing life. Your future life is a blank slate at this point. Craft it carefully and deliberately. Good times are coming, so hang in back there R2!

***“Sow a thought, reap an action;
Sow an action, reap a habit;
Sow a habit, reap a character;
Sow a character, reap a destiny.”***

- Chinese Proverb

***T-BAG's Corner: SQUADRON DUTY OFFICER'S SONG RECOMMENDATION:**

Every day, one of the junior officers needs to stand duty in the ready room, and act as the skipper's representative.

*There are a lot of important tasks assigned to the **SDO**, like preparing firearms for combat missions, coordinating the flight schedule with Maintenance and Operations, in addition to an endless, boring list of administrative chores.*

As a side note, any boring chore in a pilot's life is nicknamed "ADMIN."

Most important of all the duties though, is the duty to keep the pilots entertained and fired up so they can perform at their best when it's game time.

One of the ways this is done is by playing music in the ready room. Of all the SDOs, perhaps the best was a young RIO with the callsign T-BAG.

We will omit the story of how he got that name, but suffice it to say he knew his music. T-BAG was a tall, lanky, guitar-toting musician, and the ladies loved him. Think of a better looking 'Goose,' the RIO/navigator from Top Gun, and you've got the image.

T-BAG always kept his cool, and somehow figured out how to wire his iPod into our jet's internal intercom radio so we could listen to music while circling overhead the aircraft carrier waiting to land.

*Although T-BAG may or may not have recommended these songs to me, he did recommend a large number of great tunes to the squadron, which improved everyone's quality of life. **In his honor**, these musical sections are named after him.*

T-BAG's Squadron Music Recommendations for Chapter 2:

"What better place than here, what better time than now"

- Rage Against the Machine, 'Guerrilla Radio'

"If you fall from the race, it's no disgrace, just pick yourself from off the ground. Though the road is rough, don't you ever, ever get stuck. So, take your time, take it easy, no need to hurry."

- Hopeton Lewis, 'Take it Easy'

TOPGUN Instructor's Book Recommendations:

Extreme Ownership, by Jocko Willink & Leif Babin

This book marked the start of my turnaround—it took military guys to remind me of what I had once known, but had forgotten during my transition to boring civilian life.

One key to being an awesome pilot was to keep your mouth shut during the mission debrief so you could absorb every last bit of criticism. Then you were free to learn and grow at an exponential rate.

*The point I'd like you to grasp here is that if you're thinking of becoming an author, then do it. If you're thinking of starting a business, do it. **You've got someone to help and someone to inspire out there**; I know you have a unique viewpoint and your own way of explaining things, and I'm confident there are people that will only be able to 'hear' it from you. They need you. If you are a leader, you **must** lead.*

*Here are three examples of leaders turning a bad situation into something awesome by **creating 'something out of nothing'...***

*John Allen, **ELITE MEET**: Pairing Special Operations Forces + Fighter Pilots with high-powered companies for the benefit of both parties.*

*Jason Van Camp, **WARRIOR RISING**: Teaching & mentoring veterans in their quest for entrepreneurship and the American Dream.*

*Tracy & Kevin McAdams, **WATERFRONT WARRIORS SOUTH**: Providing time & space for warriors to decompress + heal with their families in beautiful Naples, Florida.*

tldr: a sweet preflight briefing board, paired with an unlikely combination of quotes from Brene Brown, Snoop Dogg, and the Urban Dictionary. Also introducing your new Intel Officer & TOPGUN instructor.

Chapter Three

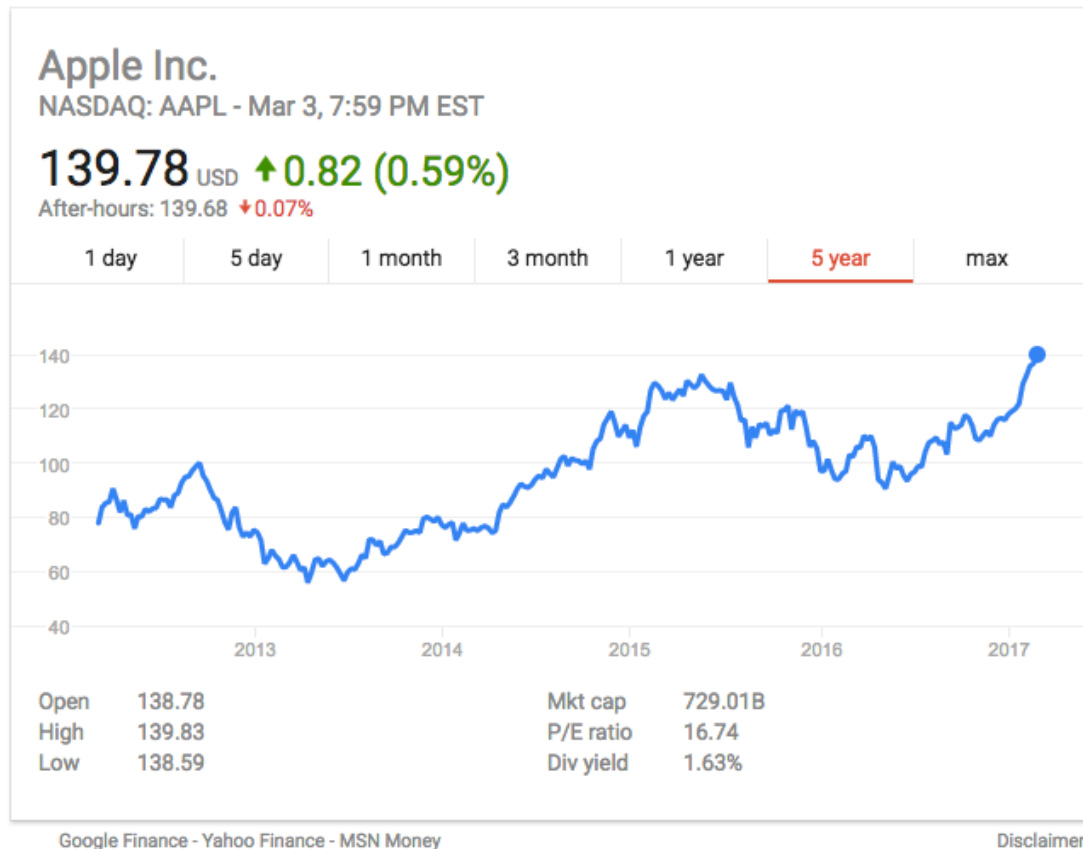
Arrow of Pebbles

“When you halt in the desert, make an arrow from pebbles, so if suddenly woken up, you’ll grasp which way to go.”

– Joseph Brodsky

Hey, we are tight now, right? So we can be honest with each other. As much as I love you—and I AM your dedicated new wingman—one of the main reasons I wrote this book is to combat against falling off the correct path.

When you are emerging from depression, it isn’t exactly a straight line up. It is more like a crazy stock market chart, with dips and valleys along the steadily climbing trend.

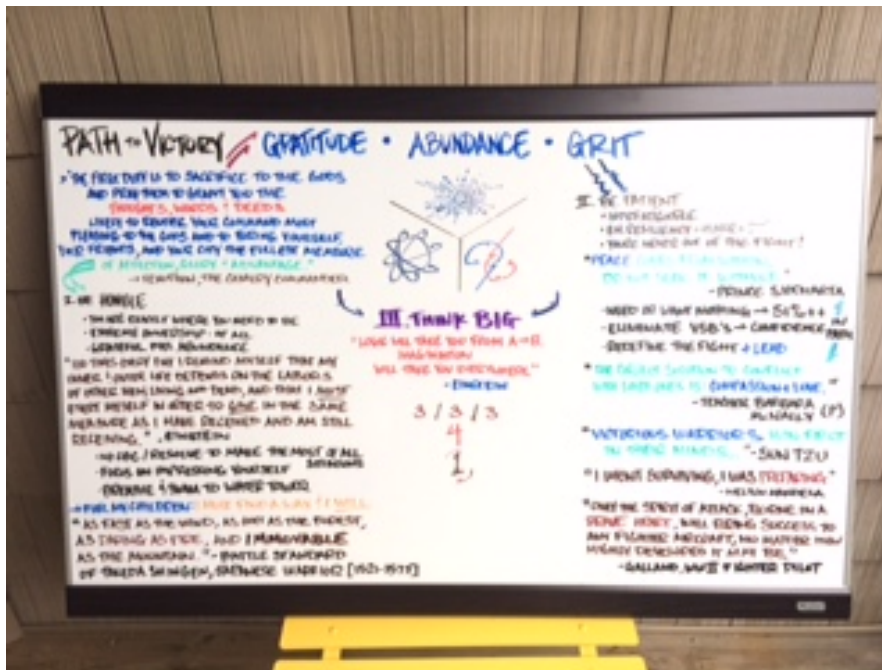


That’s why it is very important to have a roadmap— an **“arrow of pebbles”** to guide you along the way when you get lost or stuck. When you are drowning in depression, each new day can feel like you are starting over at the bottom rung of Chutes & Ladders, with zero forward progress.

During my dogfight vs depression, I felt just like the main character from the movie *Memento*, who awoke with no memory of his past. His solution? He tattooed himself with all the important clues he needed to unravel the mystery he was trying to solve.

All the credit in the world goes to the screenwriter of that Hollywood gem. Christopher Nolan’s (just found out he also wrote HBO’s *Westworld*!) movie subconsciously gave me the idea to create my *“Path to Victory”* – a fighter-pilot style dry erase board of quotes and characteristics I was working so hard to attain.

[Please see Chapter 13 for how to design your OWN board.]



My dry erase board, my arrow of pebbles.

I would look at this board every morning to get myself into the correct mindset for game day. I took a picture of it and kept it on my phone, so I could look at whenever I was in need. As time progressed, I needed it less and less, but it was there to remind me when I lost my way.

I credit this one board for helping me stay sane and focused during the darkest of times. I loved reading it and I loved the impact it had on me. There is a study we learned at Harvard of the importance of written goals: I don't remember the exact stat, but, needless to say, written goals exponentially increase your chances for success.

This magic board proved Harvard's theory in real life—having a written roadmap of concepts and goals for my rewired brain was instrumental in keeping me on the correct flightpath. It was my 'arrow of pebbles.'

I know this might seem overwhelming. Don't worry, this isn't art class. It only has to be something that is effective. It doesn't have to be in color, or on a dry erase board—it can be a sloppy piece of torn-out, loose-leaf torn paper with chicken scratch pencil notes. If it works for you, that is what is important! It just has to

point you towards the emergency exit, because when the drain starts swirling its disorienting AF. The kids like to use “AF” these days, and it makes me laugh hard AF every time.

It is worth noting that nothing lasts forever, either good or bad. But it definitely feels that way when you’re locked in mortal combat with the darkness.. Interestingly, the feeling of permanence is identical whether you are laughing carefree in a period of awesome times or whether you’re stuck in the black hole.

***“Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.
Just keep going. No feeling is final.”***

- Rainier Maria Wilke (and yes I knew this quote before JoJo Rabbit)

So remember to cherish the amazing moments; don’t delay fun or ruin happiness with sad thoughts of the past or worried thoughts of the future. This is what that corny expression that well-intentioned yoga fans are always yapping about when they urge everyone they see to “*be in the moment.*” Namaste, and all that. Give your entire focus to where you are. To what you are doing. To who you are with. It’s never been clearer to me than it is right now. And it’s a lot more fun.

Feeling Worthy Fuels Optimism

Author Brene Brown has an interesting TED talk in which she reveals the **one common thread** happy people share and sad people don’t have: **feeling WORTHY of being loved.** That’s it.

Guess who decides if and when you are worthy? Spoiler alert, it is your stubborn ass. **Stop waiting** for the time when you lose weight, get promoted, move to a new place, whatever the goal is that is keeping you from feeling worthy of being loved.

One more tidbit of awesomeness along the same lines: ***“Desire is a contract you make with yourself to be miserable until you get what you want.”*** Isn’t that deep?

Be aware of this sneaky-disastrous loophole in desire and take good care of yourself, as if you are Old Yeller or Lassie. Or Benji. Or if you don't know these faithful wingmen movie dogs, maybe you'll recognize Toto. You get it. Enjoy each unique wave, and find a way to laugh whether you're going up or down. WARNING: do NOT wait to enjoy yourself at the finish line! You may never arrive, and you will have wasted quite a bit of your precious time fretting about ridiculousness. Like 'likes'.



So laugh with whoever² you are with. If it is just you, your very own VIP party of one, let loose and don't worry about who is watching you. If you are young, I can tell you from years of experience, no one really cares anyway one way or the other! Their reaction to you says more about what they have going on in their lives than what you're doing or saying. Haters gonna hate, right? You need to keep living, and don't ever subordinate yourself to what people might say.

[DEFINITION TIME: the ubiquitous phrase “*Haters gonna hate*” – according to the witty but not exactly 100% accurate Urban Dictionary – here are two people's take on this phrase]:

PRO: *“Haters gonna hate... A phrase used to acknowledge individual superiority in the face of negative external accusations. Can be repeated twice for emphasis. Often accompanied by a strutting walk away from offending party.”*

CON: *“Haters gonna hate... This phrase is rarely used by anybody above the age of 15 and with an IQ above 95.”*

2. Judging by the hate signals coming from my laptop, I think both Word and Bill Gates want me to use the word “whomever” here...but really, who talks like that?

So enjoy yourself! As much as possible, wherever possible. As long as what you are doing isn't hurting anyone else, you should live your life to the fullest as if you have no fear and no cares at all. Of course, don't neglect what is important and necessary, but you get what I am saying. Balance. You know who knows balance?

“With so much drama in the LBC, it's kinda hard being Snoop D O double G, but I, somehow, some way, keep coming up with funky ass lyrics like every single day.”

- Snoop Dogg, 'Gin & Juice'

After you have almost died a few times you gain a new perspective on making the most of every day. Don't wait until you have a near-death experience to enjoy life. Those who have had that experience and have the discipline to forgive themselves know how to squeeze every possible moment of joy out of every single day.

Random side note: When I was homeless and had nothing, I saw a clip of my favorite player of all time (Steph Curry) playing with such energy and passion it stopped me in my tracks. I remembered when I loved playing hoops as a kid in the city. I distilled what I respect about him to **JOY + FIGHTING SPIRIT + DISCIPLINE**.

On the flip side if you are feeling down, remember ***“this too shall pass.”*** Cultivate optimism and the belief that everything happens for a reason. I remember a flight school buddy of mine used to make fun of me for saying this. “DQ!”³ Jeff would say, ***“you're just a hopeless optimist. 'Everything happens for a reason' is bullshit. It is just your way of looking at it.”***

That is a reasonable counterpoint. But check out this quote and you can decide for yourself:

3. DQ was my callsign in flight school, before I got the acronym nickname 'PIRP' after ejecting from an F-14 Tomcat. It stands for 'Pilot In RIO's Parachute,' but that is a story for another time...[UPDATE: my editor insisted I tell it, so now you can find it in the Appendix!]

“An optimist and a pessimist can have the exact same circumstances, they can both have their wildest dreams come true, but I think you can guess who is going to enjoy their lives a lot more.”

- Anonymous. To be fair, I made this up when I couldn't find the quote I was looking for, but I feel like when someone famous has uttered wisdom, it somehow carries more weight than just some New York City kid who grew up in Washington Heights. I've met many a miserable millionaire, and many a happy surfer/baller/entrepreneur. All the riches...

Then there is this classic punchline, serendipitously found during the futile search for the author of the previous quote that doesn't exist:

“It doesn't hurt to be optimistic. You can always cry later.”

– Lucimar Santos de Lima

Here is one more shining example of optimism from our friends in the world of college athletics. I saw a clip on **ESPN's Sportscenter** where a coach recently made this phrase his team's motto:

“OPPORTUNITYISNOWHERE”

This can be read as opportunity is 'nowhere' or opportunity is 'now here.' Which way do you read it? What do you believe? If you believe it is **nowhere**, you probably won't look for it. If you believe it is **now here**, you're going to look for a way to make it happen, if only to prove yourself right.

The brain can be tricky. Take advantage of a known loophole: Humans **love to be correct in life, so be optimistic about your success and prove yourself to be a genius.**

Lastly, we need to consult *Milkshake*, our Squadron Intelligence Officer for some facts, or else the data lovers out there just won't be convinced:

<i>Milkshake time - SQUADRON INTEL OFFICER'S STAT:</i>

*Did you know that smart researchers have proven that **OPTIMISM** is also a powerful predictor of happiness?*

Think of optimism as a muscle that needs to be worked out—if you are a gloomy, cranky pessimist who everyone avoids, start working out a positive outlook.

*You'll be a better leader and more importantly, **you'll start looking for ways** to make your rosy predictions come true.*

One Thing that Is NOT the Answer

On a serious note, **if you are contemplating suicide: don't.** The old stale line you've probably heard is that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. To be sure, depression doesn't feel so temporary when you're going through it. When I was younger, I heard someone I respected say that suicide was a coward's way out; an easy out that left everyone behind sad and robbed of your future potential. I always remembered this strong word of caution when I was feeling down, because who wants to be a coward? And who wants to be supremely unfair to those left behind? **But more importantly, there is a magical gift inside of you that you are compelled to share with others. By 'opting out' of life's email list, you are sort of cheating the rest of us; we'll never know what that gift is. Not cool.**

I'm your wingman. Let's tough it out together. Add "grit" to your list of personal characteristics you want to strengthen. Keep pressing forward. You are going to make it through this time in your life. Better days are coming, that is for sure. You need to redefine the fight and change your environment and way of thinking. You most assuredly will.

If you need some immediate help, please, please call one of these hotline numbers:

Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255
24/7 Suicide Prevention: 1-800-273-8255

If you're smart, you'll notice they're the same number. And if you're really smart you probably think most of my 'standard' advice to people considering suicide is garbage. And you'd be right. That's because you might assume that my 'logical' advice means that **I don't know what it is *really* like to suffer so intensely**. That I don't know how the seconds turn into hours, the hours turn into days, and the days seem like eternity. But I do know. And I do know if you join up on my wing, I'm going to fly us both out of here.

And while I don't know *exactly* what you're feeling, I do know that the usual cocktail gets mixed cruelly and neat: with guilt, shame, doubt, hopelessness, and fear. A fear that is infused with hurricane power after it gets injected with **a strong belief** that your psychic pain will never end. Or **a strong belief** that you don't deserve to stick around. Or **a strong belief** that people won't miss you. Or you're doing them a favor by saying sayonara. Let me be the first to tell you; all these fears and doubts are normal (*remember everyone has 77% negative thoughts*), but they are as incorrect as everyone who **had a strong belief the Wright brothers would never fly**. It might seem like you will never fly again, never soar and never enjoy anything. You will. You just need to visually identify the enemy and then counter it. Basic in-flight, on-the-fly, make-it-happen dogfighting tactics. Simple, right?

But, Who Is the Enemy?

The problem is your brain is working **24/7, Seaman-Recruit-deck-swabbing hard** to protect you from pain. So it sends you vivid nightmares and very convincing doubts in the hope that you will never repeat what hurt you in the first place. But your brain doesn't know when to stop; and once you're stuck, it can be almost impossible to get un-stuck.

That's why **you need airspeed**, a lot of it. **You need momentum**, which is why you need to fly hard with an old-school "***rubbin' is racin'***," tight-formation on the correct flightpath. And **you need imagination**. For people with brilliant

imaginations, the mental prisons we create can seem even more intense. Maybe that's why so many artists disproportionately struggle with depression, too. But, if your imagination got you into this, imagination must be part of the road to freedom. I heard a wise man say once, ***"Of this world, we can create either a prison or a palace."*** The cool thing is you have been granted the power to choose for yourself. Every single morning.

But a whole bunch of our brothers and sisters who served their country are holding on to something that prevents them from escaping their self-made jail cells. So if you don't have anyone to tell you that knows this, or anyone who loves you right now, let me be your wingman and let me love you; **you are forgiven**. For all that you had to do, and all that you couldn't do. On behalf of a grateful nation, **welcome home**.

You deserve a great life too. You can be free from guilt, worry, and shame. It is **never too late** to come back to the light. You're never too far gone. And you're NOT broken. It has taken me a long time to realize the truth; **our souls are indestructible**. It's just your mind that can get corrupted. The connections can get all scrambled up and you may not have a slick app, or a maintenance manual, or a wise Master Chief that can unscramble it for you.

That is why maybe most of all **you need a fighting spirit**. Fight hard to create order out of chaos. Fight the urge to do things that will add "drag" to your fighter jet. Fight the urge to let the terrible trio (***of your past, your environment, and the way you feel***) overcome your pursuit of happiness. You're going to be so proud of yourself when you win! When you learn to master your mind, you'll feel stronger and more powerful than ever. I can promise you that.

"Nothing good comes easily, sometimes you have to fight."

- 311, 'Amber'

Never give up! The best in life is reserved for those who persevere.

“Only the fittest of the fittest shall survive. STAY ALIVE! Could you be loved? Then be loved...”

- Bob Marley, ‘Could You Be Loved’

No matter what, *stay alive*. Even if you don’t feel like you can be loved right now, you can be. For now, treat *yourself* with the compassion and love you would give to the person who you love the most in the world: be a great wingman to yourself. Better days are coming.

“In the water where I center my emotions, all the world could pass me by.”

- Red Hot Chili Peppers, ‘Zephyr Song’

If you can get to the ocean, go. The water and the sun are soothing for your soul. If you can’t, use time in the shower to change your ‘environment’ and your thoughts. Close your eyes and let the water run over your head as if you were under a waterfall in Hawaii. Take a deep breath, and think of what you would do if you won the lottery, or how you would live if all your dreams came true. Changing your thinking changes your actual physical being. Try it.

Find Something to Love

There is so much fun and joy waiting for you in this world. You just have to go actively find it, and be open to it when you see it. The solutions to your situation are usually swirling around you the whole time.

Here is a random example of what I am talking about: last night I stumbled on the iPad app, ***figure***. I had the time of my life creating new songs and beats. It is actually very user-friendly and easy to do, even if you have no musical experience. It is free, and there are no rules to read or follow. You just start tapping away; don’t worry, if it’s intuitive enough for a stick monkey* you’ll figure it out no problem!

READY ROOM LINGO

A “stick monkey” is a derogative term for a pilot, when not so lovingly addressed by his navigator/RIO.

*As in: "Hey you stupid stick monkey, I said turn **LEFT** to the carrier! If you look outside **you can actually see it**. You know, that big boat in the water with the three-mile long wake; that is where we live, you know.*

*So GO... **LEFT!**"*

My point is, even though you may actually hate music and my app recommendation, you **can** find something you love if you open your mind up to finding it. ***Think for a second of what you would do if you could do anything in the world. No limits. No fear. Everyone was rooting for you. Nothing holding you back. What would you do if you won the lottery tomorrow? How would you spend your days?*** That is how to find out what you love.

"Clarity of mind means clarity of passion, too; this is why a great and clear mind loves ardently and sees distinctly what it loves."

- Blaise Pascal, mathematician and philosopher

Once you discover something you are excited about, a whole new world of possibilities will open up to you. It's OK if you're not feeling it right now; just know the day of excitement **will** return. Then you can send me a note or a tweet and let me know the great news. Your personal wingman will be overjoyed at your success.

It is impossible to replace bad feelings or hate with nothing. So when you're stopping yourself from thinking negative thoughts, and you're mashing down on the '**master reset**' button, remember to seek to replace those negative thoughts with passion and love. When I was in flight school (one of the happiest periods of my life), I loved flying so much, I would stay in the simulator building until they closed it at midnight.

I would fly the missions faster and lower than the actual flights, so the real thing would be a piece of cake. I practiced emergency procedures, knew every switch and knew every internal system of the jet cold. On my days off, I would come into the training squadron and ask to fly in the empty backseat of instructor's jets to

observe flights. The best flights by far to observe were air-to-air combat maneuvering, more commonly referred to as ‘dogfighting’.

That love and passion made the time fly by so fast. When you’re not feeling great and you’re not excited about anything, the time can drag on like Squints says so dramatically in *The Sandlot*, “...forrrreeeevvvverrrrr⁴...”– Get aggressive about looking for something you can get fired up about.

WINGMAN NOTE + WARNING

Not something you think other people will think is cool, or what your friends or family want, something YOU are passionate about.

"No matter what the situation may be, the right course of action is always compassion and love."

- (Paraphrased from Neil Strauss' teacher Barbara McNally)

This quote plays a huge role in saving the day when dealing with people you love. It also should be applied to the way you deal with yourself. Don't beat yourself up right now—you're injured just as if you had a broken arm. You wouldn't be hard on yourself for not pitching the next game with a broken arm, would you? Similarly, take it easy on yourself if you aren't at full speed yet.

Depression can throttle you in an almost inescapable, rear-naked choke-hold. It's OK if you aren't operating at 100%. Each day, resolve to learn a little more, get a little better, move forward a bit more. You are going to make it, don't worry.

"The truth is there is nothing noble in being superior to somebody else. The only real nobility is being superior to your former self."

- Whitney Young (Ernest Hemingway)

4. Outkast fans might wonder “forEVER ever???”

Squadron TOPGUN Instructor, callsign Charmin

It is time to introduce your very own TOPGUN instructor. Each squadron sends one of its best pilots to TOPGUN school; the intention is to intensely train these hand-picked pilots, teach them the best practices and lessons learned from squadrons around the world, then send them back to their carriers to pass on their newfound knowledge.

*If you ever saw the movie **Dune**, where the time-crunched resistance fighters came up with the brilliant idea to teach 100 men, then have those 100 men teach 100 men, this is the same concept.*

***Charmin** was a natural fighter pilot, charismatic, instinctive, and aggressive as hell. His sections will help teach you the best tactics and strategies you'll need to dogfight depression and achieve lasting victory.*

TOPGUN Debrief Method, GOODS & 'OTHERS':

*When debriefing tough alpha dog fighter pilots, you need to start with 'goods' and **then** go into the bad stuff, which you can't even call 'bad stuff' because their egos are so fragile. So, we innocuously call their mistakes during the flight '**others**'...*

*Every night before you go to bed, **review the 'goods and others'** of your day. What can you improve upon? What was the best part of the day? Be honest with yourself and be analytical. If you were advising yourself by observing from outside your life, what would you tell yourself?*

Make a note and resolve to do more of what you love, more of what made you feel great, and less of what slowed your momentum down. After just a few days of this, you'll be surprised at how much better you're performing.

*At TOPGUN, they teach us to be '**INTELLIGENTLY AGGRESSIVE**'*

***This** is the path to victory.*

Get moving.

tldr: a killer quote from Helen Keller, with supporting evidence from Yoda & Yeats, and the power of encouragement. Also, the Hangar Bay sailor story + Cookie Crisp, for no good reason other than it's tasty

Chapter Four

Courage and Encouragement and Cookie Crisp

Courage vs. Fear
Abundance vs. Scarcity
Courage > Confidence

"If I always did just what I was qualified to do, I'd be pushing a broom somewhere."

– Ramit Sethi [Tim Ferris podcast #210, Upper East Side NYC YMCA 2016]



Confidence used to be one of my favorite words. To be honest, it still is. But here is the rub. Confidence can quickly lead to cockiness (*too much confidence*) and pride

(which can easily degrade into complacency and laziness). Not good. So is confidence overrated? Han Solo was confident, and he was the man. What could be better than confidence?

Confidence comes from having successfully completed a task a number of times. You feel great about that skill, so, boom—confidence. However, what makes you try that task or that mission the very first time?

Courage

Courage isn't being fearless. Courage is when you're scared out of your mind, but you go anyway. That's why I value courage over confidence, because courage is the root of confidence, the highest form of confidence. **Courage is the antidote to fear.**

READY ROOM TIP

Replacing ALL of my fears with courage was my goal while I was escaping the clutches of depression. Now I realize that emotional mastery, and mastery of anything requires the daily conquering of fear.

I used to think naively that I wasn't afraid of anything, because I love risk and thrive under pressure situations.

But when reflected on my life honestly, I remembered that I almost didn't apply to the Naval Academy for fear of what it would mean about me if I was rejected.

Not so courageous.

I was also terrified to start this book, because I thought it might suck and then I couldn't be a writer.

Even less courageous.

Then came the unacceptable stat: 22 veteran suicides a day, so I had to put myself out on the chopping block or forever regret it. Better that my first book sucks and everyone makes fun of it, so long as it saves one person.

Here's how we win. My mission impossible challenge to you: I challenge you to be that ONE person who gets saved by this book, and unimaginably great karma-extra-credit if you can find someone else to save too.

Something has to change—and it starts right now, within your mind. A fighter jet in the hangar is safe. But that isn't what a fighter is built for.

Neither were you built to stay inside and stay safe.

Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it... Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. The fearful are caught as often as the bold. Faith alone defends. **Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.** To keep our faces toward change and behave like free spirits in the presence of fate is strength undefeatable.

"Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it... Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. The fearful are caught as often as the bold. Faith alone defends. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing. To keep our faces toward change and behave like free spirits in the presence of fate is strength undefeatable."

– Helen Keller (dude, she was blind and mute and deaf, so if this doesn't get you fired up...)

Risk... and either you win, or you learn.

Then risk again.

The hardest risk will be the first one, but that will start you on the path out of depression.

But before we go hunting down our fears to replace them with courage, let's get some intel about the most common types of fear. We're going to ask our Intel Officer **Milkshake** for the details, but sometimes the best way to learn is to challenge yourself and use your imagination. Can you guess what the most common types of fear are?

- **Fear of being unsafe** (*number one Family Feud answer on the board - before you look below, what are the next two?*)
- **Fear of being unworthy** (*this can be crippling and paralyzing*)
- **Fear of being alone** (*leads to horrible, needy decisions*)

Fight HARD to replace your normal human being standard issue, built-in, self-preservation instinct of fear with world-conquering, universe-expanding-with-possibilities-and-beauty **COURAGE**. It will set you free to discover your true path, joy, and wisdom. True friendships, true fulfillment, true happiness.

“Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.”

– Wise Old Yoda

Little old, gnarled, green-guy-extraordinaire Yoda knew it, and if you’re a Star Wars fan you already know that was a loooong, long time ago! Hateful people live a dark and limited existence. The key to transforming hate is empathy and unqualified acceptance. You can still give feedback to people and help them improve their performance and behaviors, but start off by welcoming them into your family. This sounds intensely corny, but try it. The world opens up and becomes instantly beautiful and full of wonder.

Conquering your hate and fear leads to courage, self-awareness, self-esteem, and value, and best of all: **strength to give *others* courage and confidence.**

This is how great families, organizations, teams, and civilizations are built. **Someone needs to go first.** Someone needs to start. If you’re in a group that trash talks other groups, or in an abusive relationship of any kind; be courageous, be a leader, and **YOU** start on the right path by refusing to hate in return. For as in any good physics equation, all forces are opposed by an equal and opposite force. Or something like that, you get my point. Conflict can never end when both sides see each other as inhuman, and not worthy of being loved.

The Power of Encouragement

Of all the leadership qualities I’ve seen over my lifetime, I’ve found that **ENCOURAGEMENT is the most powerful.** It is the strongest, the longest lasting, and gets the biggest bang for your buck. Notice the word ***courage*** is tucked into it neatly. When I was younger it seemed almost babyish to me—too much hand-holding and softness. But after seeing surprising results in a wide range of environments, in my opinion nothing works more powerfully than encouragement.

Of all of my memories and accomplishments while I was in the Navy, this *Hangar Bay Sailor* story is one of the most profoundly stunning moments, and stands out as a perfect example of the power of an encouraging word:

A Navy aircraft carrier has been described as a ‘floating city at sea.’

Stretching over three football fields in length, taller than a lot of my hometown New York City apartment buildings, and home to over 5,000 sailors, visitors frequently get lost all the time.

When walking from one end of the carrier to the other, a task we had to do several times a day, we had to step over an endless tunnel of “*knee-knockers*,” open metal oval portholes that require NFL-combine cone-drill knee-high steps to clear. Not paying attention or lackadaisical timing would result in painful shin bruises from the unforgiving metal lower lips.

There is also the tiresome business of standing to the side for a higher-ranking officer. If you see someone approaching in the narrow corridor that outranks you, you respectfully step to the side to make way for them to pass first. Either way you slice it, you’re waiting or you’re making someone else wait a bunch of times during your journey, so the whole trip is a constant “*good morning, sir!*” formal affair that seems to take a lot longer than you really want it to take. Lastly, there is the ever-present hazard of hitting your head on the hard, cold steel of the low hanging portion of the open hatchways.

While sprinting to an emergency briefing in the squadron ready room (*or to be fair, sprinting to a regular, non-emergency briefing when we lost track of time...*), I have seen stars from jumping over the knee knockers and unintentionally bludgeoning my head into the porthole more times than I can count. It is possible that I can’t recount all the times due to too many of these self-inflicted mini-concussions, but you get the idea. There is an intense, temporary fading-out-of-all-light type of pain that you would think might stop us from running to the ready room in this fashion, ***but at the time it just seemed like something young, aggressive fighter pilots should do.***

In stark contrast to this miserable death by a thousand greetings, repeated knee-knocking, and occasional blackouts from unwanted head-crushings, was the awe inspiring trip through a hangar bay with its full complement of a fighting Carrier Air Wing embarked aboard. Standing proudly for what seems like miles, are airplanes and fighter jets from all the various squadrons, wings tucked or folded to save space. Chains extend down from multiple points on the jets to little steel pad-eyes⁵ on the deck; the overall impression to an onlooker at the edge of the hangar bay is that the mighty fighters would seek to shoot skyward if they weren't held down by the chains.

***“An image of its state;
The wings half spread for flight
The breast thrust out in pride
Whether to play, or to ride
Those winds that clamor of approaching night.”***

- William Butler Yeats (Nineteen hundred and nineteen)



5. Google Translate NAVY to ENGLISH: ‘pad-eyes’ are little scoop outs on the non-skid covered steel deck; inside are hook points to attach chains so the planes don’t slide around during rough seas or ship maneuvers.

I used to LOVE to walk through the hangar bay, checking out the jets in various stages of maintenance, saying hello to our enlisted team, and enjoying the wind and waves through the open, wide-oval hangar bay doors that ran the length of the ship. I was inspired every time; by the sleek and powerful aerodynamic lines on the jets, by the hard work of our crew to maintain these 30-year-old antique workhorse fighters, and by sharing a few laughs with some of the young guys that coincidentally grew up near me in Washington Heights, NYC.⁶

So that is quite a lot of setup, but now you get a clear picture of where I was when the first chapter of this story opens. I had just landed from a combat mission over Iraq, in support of our special operations troops in the Northern part of the country. I was all pumped up from adrenaline and gratitude to still be alive, and I was in belly-full of Cookie Crisp, fat-dumb-and-happy mode.

For some reason unknown to me, I never ate so much food in my life as I did after a mission. Our dedicated cooks were great and would make the returning pilots special-order stuff. This is quite a luxury on the boat where meals are usually made in precious, delicate quantities of you know, five-**THOUSAND** or so.

I would regularly make multiple trips back to the line to get sandwiches, pasta, and multiple bowls of sugary cereal (it reminded me of home, give me a break). After this huge victory meal in the wardroom, I slid down* the steep steps to the hangar bay, feeling refreshed and fully alive.

READY ROOM TIP

Always looking for ways to save time and get places quicker, we picked up a great practice from the salty full-time sailors attached to the boat: if you kept your feet on the top step of the metal ladder, leaned forward halfway down to grab the metal railing on both sides, you could swing your feet through your

6. At the time, the Jay-Z 'brush your shoulders off' move was a favorite of our hardcore, red-jacketed ordinance (AO) division that loaded bombs and missiles to our jets. If you were ever looking for a unit with a great fighting spirit onboard the carrier, the AO Division crew would never let you down. IYAOYAS!

body and traverse the incredibly steep landing to land at the bottom deck in one smooth motion.

Well to be fair, that wasn't always how it worked out, but that was the goal. The other option was to awkwardly step straight down one uneasy step at a time, a process that would involve me still being in the Navy trying to complete all the steps necessary to get where I was going. I'm not sure why speed was one of the best characteristics a fighter pilot could have, but we embraced it wholeheartedly and it was a blast!

As this 'jumping-a-flight-of-stairs' move was dangerous and illegal, you had to of course watch out for the ever-patrolling ship's Safety Officer, but there is only one of him and so, so many ladders on an aircraft carrier...

There, laying face down on the rough, corrugated non-skid metal deck was the most unhappy, dejected sailor I had ever seen. He was wearing a colored float-coat (*safety flotation device for all sailors that work on the flight deck and hangar bay*) that I could tell was once a color, but now was mostly jet-black from all the engine exhaust and flying bits of dislodged deck non-skid. His face was similarly covered in black soot and he looked like one of the sad orphans from *Oliver Twist*. He was engaged in probably the most miserable of hangar bay duties: cleaning out the indented pad-eyes on the deck flooring. Ever so slowly, he was scrubbing a grimy pad-eye, one out of probably 20,000 similar pad-eyes checkerboarded as far as the eye could see. He radiated gloominess, so I sauntered over to him to see what the story was.

"How's everything going tonight?" I asked him. "Fine, sir" he mumbled back. "Let's talk for a second." I said. "Why don't you put that down for a second and I will tell you about the mission we just flew."

I relayed to him how we had just launched from this very ship,⁷ flew from the Mediterranean, over Turkey, and into Northern Iraq. There was a team of our special operations soldiers getting overrun by the enemy, so we flew below the minimum altitude directed by our CAG (by necessity due to the weather and the

7. Navy pilots call the aircraft carrier "the boat", probably in part because it makes the full time Surface Warfare Officers, in charge of driving the boat, irritated...IT IS A SHIP, NOT A BOAT! Another good reason is that, in retrospect, it made the whole death-defying carrier landings seem a lot easier. It's just a harmless boat, after all, right? Apply this to areas in your life that seem hard – give them a nickname that makes it seem less daunting.

direness of their situation), beat back the advancing armor column, and enabled our guys to escape the area safely. ***A huge victory for our team, and an extremely rewarding, life-saving mission.***

I told him how he played a part in that by being part of the crew that enabled us to launch. He thought that was cool, but his mood wasn't necessarily elevated.

I then told him how I started off as an enlisted man⁸ just like he did, went to the Naval Academy and worked my way through flight school to get my dream slot as an F-14 fighter pilot. I told him how the Navy was full of opportunities, and if I could do it, so could he.

Take advantage of the opportunities around you, and make the most of every situation you're in.

I encouraged him to be the “go-to” guy for his chain of command; taking the **initiative** would lead to a lot of possibilities for him in the future. Lastly, I told him that I almost didn't apply to the Naval Academy because I was afraid I wouldn't get in, so he should never hold back when chasing his dreams and goals. He stood up a little taller, nodded in affirmation, and set his jaw. He told me he was very grateful as we shook hands. I had completely forgotten about this little talk, until...

...a full ***two years later***, I was walking through the boat somewhere, randomly. You know, the glorious thing about being carrier pilots was we did pretty much what we liked when we weren't fighting or mission planning. Sweet freedom, within the confines of a seven-month anti-pleasure cruise. A tall sailor with a yellow float-coat came up to me and shook my hand.

“You probably don't remember me, sir, but I just wanted to say thank you so much. You took the time to come talk to me after a mission on our last cruise [to Iraq], and it really made an impact on me. I was so down that night and thinking about quitting. You really inspired me to chase after my dreams and reach my full

8. The lowest rank you can start off as in the military is an E-1, or Seaman Recruit – enlisted personnel go to boot camp, vice Officers who are commissioned at the Naval Academy, ROTC or Officer Candidate School.

potential. I got a bunch of qualifications, I got promoted to Petty Officer Third Class, and now I am in charge of my own team!"

Wow. Surprise and triumphant ending to a story I didn't even remember. This is the impact of encouragement. A short conversation, with someone I didn't even know; for the life of me I don't even know this sailor's name, but what a great outcome.

I encourage everyone reading this book to do the same whenever and wherever possible, especially to young people, where your words are the most meaningful and can have the most impact.

The power of one person to make a difference in this world, and to make a difference in people's lives, is tremendous. If you ever doubt that, remember this story. Take a second today and look to encourage someone who looks blue. They can do it, and so can you.

This is partly why I believe the strongest, and longest lasting leadership trait is **encouragement**. The effects go on forever, and who knows how many people that young sailor will go on to encourage and lead? I hope if he reads this book or hears about this story and he will send me a message and let me know how he is doing right now. I hope he is the Admiral of the Navy!

Part two of this: be aware of how you talk to yourself. Are you encouraging yourself with the same enthusiasm that you boost up others? You are worthy of your own love, and your own loyalty to yourself can be tested by doubt, fear, anxiety, and guilt.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURE:

1. transform doubt into: curiosity + excitement (*learn something new*)
2. transform fear & anger into: clarity + determination (*you're resourceful and resilient, no matter what happens you can make the best of it, it is your choice*)

3. transform jealousy into: acceptance + love (*after all, jealousy frequently has the opposite effect you want it to*)
4. transform greed into: contentment + generosity (*something mind-boggling about generosity, it makes your whole life better...*)

“Keep your fears to yourself, but share your courage with others.”

– Robert Louis Stevenson

FLIGHT DEBRIEF TAKEAWAYS

Power of one person to make an impact.

Strength of will.

Make a positive impact wherever you go through encouragement.

“How you do ANYTHING is how you do EVERYTHING.”

– Navy SEAL BUD/S instructors

At BUD/S, the Navy SEAL’s infamous bootcamp, the SEAL instructors are watching every move you make to see if you are worthy of becoming part of their elite team. **Whatever** you do in a given situation will be extrapolated to define your entire character, because it is likely to be what you will do in **every** situation. Doesn’t sound fair to you? Give this some thought and you might see the truth in this concept. If you are capable of doing something undesirable even once, you probably will do it again. Of course, we all will have our weak moments, but the goal is to eliminate them wherever possible. Do the right thing for your team, your family, for yourself, no matter who is watching, because someone is *always watching*. I believe your ancestors—and the entire universe—are watching everything you do. Are you worthy? If not, let’s get after it. It is never too late to turn it around. Start today. Get healthy and make a positive impact on the world. Make them proud!

tldr: Einstein, muddy water, discipline, and airspeed is life. Duh.

Chapter Five

Momentum + AIRSPEED IS LIFE!



An F-14 Tomcat from the legendary Jolly Rogers squadron breaks the speed of sound during a carrier fly-by. The vapor cloud burst forms around the wing as the plane transitions to supersonic flight, but more importantly, it looks cool.

If our flight instructors could only say three words, they would be “***AIRSPEED IS LIFE!***”

Why is this so important in aviation? Think for a second and see if you can guess why.

- **You’re obviously harder to hit from ground fire + AAA** (anti-aircraft artillery)
- **You can trade airspeed for altitude** (if you lose an engine or two, you can pull up and have some time to restart, or EJECT!)

- **In a dogfight, you can trade airspeed for angles:** This allows you to aggressively point your nose at the bad guys, take a shot or pull Gs hard to avoid a heat-seeking missile. Pulling Gs quickly will bleed off airspeed in a hurry, so this is a last ditch, life-saving type of maneuver. BUT, you can't make this lifesaving move if you don't have the airspeed available to convert to angles.
- **When you run out of airspeed, you're probably dead.** Most fixed-wing airplanes, unfortunately, can't just hover like helicopters. At some point, you reach 'stall speed;' when you stall, the plane stops flying and you lose control of your jet. If you are low to the ground **AND** you stall, you're probably toast.

Fun History Lesson: in the early days of aviation when pilots would stall, they would panic and mash all the controls frantically to try to regain control of their aircraft. Think of the movie *Top Gun*, when Maverick first enters that nasty flat spin, he is all over the place trying to get control and can't. They end up ejecting, and his best friend and navigator Goose dies during the high-speed ejection. That still gets me choked up...

2020 Update: *I am the only homeless person in Top Gun 2: Maverick, as far as I know. But that is a story for another time...*

Fascinatingly, the best thing to do in most cases in a stall situation is to actually take your **HANDS OFF the stick**; let the nose of the plane seek the relative wind, regain airspeed, then when you are past stall speed, recover and fly away, all cool and stuff. Nonchalantly. Yeah, I got this.

"Muddy water, let stand, becomes clear."

- Lao Tzu, founder of Taoism

How does this apply to depression?

If you are feeling down, your instincts might lead you to overcontrol new situations. Especially ones where you're not feeling any control. There is a very peculiar situation in flying where the pilot's actions can actually cause big problems.

This usually happens in stormy weather and in a cloud of darkness, where you have no outside reference point.

Here is a good example of this point: landing on the aircraft carrier on a cloudy night with no moon or visible horizon.

It is dark...really, *really* dark...and you can't tell which way is up because you're thick in the smoky goo.

Our fearless nugget pilot looks down at his instruments and has one mission: to line up the directional crosshair needles. His goal is to make the shape of a 'plus' sign, which means you are golden, which means you are **"on and on" (on flightpath, and on the correct course)**, and this means you will land safely on the carrier deck, and this means you will **not** in a fiery explosion on the back of the carrier ramp.

So the plus sign, got it! I've got to make the two lines into a freaking plus sign!

But it is disorienting, and this is after an adrenaline filled 7 hour mission, and it's his first cruise so he doesn't have a lot of experience to fall back on...

Seeing he's off course, our **stressed-out pilot*** makes an aggressive move to get back into the rapidly narrowing funnel that guides him in to a perfect landing. Guess what happens next? Our rookie pilot swings right through the correct glidepath, and is startled to see the needles swinging rapidly in the **other** direction. Panic! Then he makes another aggressive move back the way he came....

***SQUADRON SDO TIP:**

The Squadron Duty Officer is an unhappy junior pilot forced to stand boring watch for 24 hours, instead of flying, which is awesome. On top of a lot of other duties that include getting pistols and ammunition ready for combat flight aircrew, the SDO is in charge of entertaining the ready room with music.

*There is a group called **21 Pilots** that has a song called 'Stressed Out,' which is incredibly irritating.*

However, they DO have a cool song 'Ride' that has a line, "I'm Falling, So I'm Taking My Time On My Ride Down," which made me laugh when I was crazy depressed.

***Lesson Learned:** *If you're going to be in a tailspin, you might as well take your time and enjoy the ride. What else are you doing, really.*

As you get closer to the carrier, the moves you need to make to get back into the correct landing window become increasingly more slight and subtle. What starts off as a 30' by 30' window closes down to a 2' by 2' square you've got to thread your big fat helmet through.

Unfortunately, the opposite is happening in our panicked pilot's cockpit—he is making more and more aggressive moves to fix the situation, and rocking back and forth like the homesick Cougar during the start of *Top Gun*.

Top Gun fan note: *between me and you, there would have been no way Cougar could have landed with that wing wag! Wave Off good buddy!*

This type of out-of-control downward spiral is called **PIO, or Pilot Induced Oscillation**.

Many people put themselves into their very own personal **PIO** when things start to go badly. Frantic unplanned action ends up making everything worse for themselves and everyone around them. I did this when I was experiencing rocky times, and it was catastrophic. To say the least.

FLIGHT DEBRIEF TAKEAWAY

Learn from my mistake!

When you feel yourself off course, be aggressive AND patient.

*The trick is to take action to LEARN & GROW quickly, but deliberately get feedback and constantly re-evaluate as you bring yourself back on track.
Don't chase the needles!*

Mistakes That Will Sap Your Airspeed

During flight school, sometimes the most helpful way to prepare was to read the instructor published “**COMMON STUDENT MISTAKES**” list for that particular flight. I could have used a list of what not to do when I was off course, but there didn’t seem to be any instructor manuals just laying around.

Here is my list for you of “common student mistakes” in the hope it is helpful for you:

Using Addictions and Numbing Agents

These actually extend and exacerbate your stall/depression.

Chasing women, alcohol, drugs, gambling, and other addictions will feel great temporarily, but will do nothing to help your overall problem. In fact, they decrease your airspeed and momentum and can leave you feeling exhausted. In some cases, you might be left with a more hopeless feeling than you had before. I’m not going to preach to you here—just letting you know this has been tried before by many people and it usually results in a fiery crash. Boom. It will be a spectacular crash, but not in a fun or pleasant way as you try to extract yourself from the wreckage. If you even can. If you haven’t started down this dark path, don’t. If you have, get serious about finding out what’s causing the pain. You can’t outrun the pain forever. It eventually catches up to you. When you hit the merge vs tough emotions, don’t blow through. Turn and fight.

If you can’t bring yourself to discipline hard and quit, get help.

I’m serious, in a take this very seriously sort of way. Get professional counseling, get into recovery, whatever it takes. Get it done. For you and for those who love you. You can always return to it in moderation when your ship is back on the right track.

***[*NOTE:** Returning to whatever you’re addicted to later maybe isn’t the greatest idea, but if it consoles you in this moment and encourages you to quit, then why not.*

Jedi mind trick yourself, and you never know; you might just find yourself happier like many people do and not want to go back]

Remember the universe and your ancestors are always watching. And ***if not now, then when? This takes courage, but you're a courageous sort of fella, right?***

Lack of Exercise/Physical Discipline

You have got to keep yourself moving physically and mentally, no matter what. Right now, gain some airspeed for yourself. Just do one minute; one super-easy minute of jumping jacks, pushups, sit-ups. Piece of cake. By the time you are done rationalizing to yourself why *now is not a good time for you*, you could have already done it.

There is a reason why the military made us train physically. It helps increase your metabolism, immune system, mental toughness and ***guards against***, wait for it... ***depression***. Endorphins are released, your circulation improves and your whole body starts to heal and grow again.

So, get up, right now and take advice from Outkast: shake it like a Polaroid picture.

Do something, anything—at the very least it will take your mind off of whatever is depressing you for a bit.

Transform your anger, fear, or sadness into: clarity and determination.

Clarity of mind: you know what to do to improve.

Determination to overcome this obstacle or pain: Motion helps. Trust me. Get up.

Lack of Learning / Not Getting Help / Trying to go all Han Solo

Congratulations, since you are reading this, you've already got this one licked! Great work.

There is so much helpful information out there. Books, videos, podcasts, music. I am attempting to put it ALL into one book for your convenience, so you don't have to get hot and bothered trying to find it all yourself. You're welcome!

Thank me by making your comeback a success story that will inspire someone else. Then you can write a book about it and bang, the universe is back in order. Good karma and all that.

TOP GUN Instructor Recommended Tactic

There's not too much more impactful in this life than giving a pilot who's about to stall an airspeed boost that keeps him alive. Emulate veteran leaders like Steven Michaels & Allan Del Castillo, who head up the Home Deployment Project in Las Vegas. Their mission? To rescue homeless veterans and reintegrate them back into society; they do this work by hand, themselves. Check out their story at: www.thehdp.org

"I hate discipline. I have a negative association with discipline"

- Lots of people

Why is discipline so great, anyway?

Discipline is your very own pair of built-in afterburning GE-110 engines, capable of propelling your sorry ass over two times the speed of sound. Mach 2.4 is hauling the mail at a good clip, and as it relates to your actual life: don't you want to be a fast-moving fighter? Or are you happy being a sad target?

In our squadron, there was a popular saying:

"Only two things in the sky. Fighter planes and targets."

Get yourself moving, and the airspeed you build up will turn into even more momentum. Each day you will get a little stronger and a little smarter and a little

tougher than you were the day before. It won't be a straight-line progression to awesomeness.

Learn from your mistakes every day, do an honest debrief of your daily mission and how you performed. Make today better than yesterday. And do that again tomorrow. And the next day. Don't be a target any more. Fly high and gain **air superiority**. That term, by the way, is one of my favorites of all time. You can gain air superiority in your mind by adopting discipline and extracting all the bountiful rewards it will bring you. I promise, this will work!

Air Superiority Daily Checklist

Here are three small steps you can take every day to easily boost your airspeed and momentum.

Start Your Day the Right Way

- First thing in the morning try a glass of cool water. Easiest two ways to help depression are what you eat and how you sleep. Water is good for ya.
- **Gratitude:** *Simple answer, hard to do. Break the negative thought-cycle by looking hard for what's going well.* Breathe deeply and be **grateful** for something in your life, anything! You're alive, right? So you're still in the fight. Thank whoever you believe in who is responsible for your good fortune; God, the Universe, Mother Nature, Steve Jobs, whoever it is, just focus for a second on being happy for what you've got. You are exactly where you need to be.
- **Abundance:** *Super corny played out word; but a powerful concept in that it can help you arrive at **generosity**. Generosity, without expectations, brings everything you could imagine to your doorstep. You're going to just have to trust me on this one, I know it sounds super-Matrix'y.* Then imagine living a life of **abundance**. Picture everything you want working out perfectly, imagine a dream-type scenario playing out over the next few months, the next few years, and ten years from now. [See Chapter 13 for How to Design a Remarkable Life exercise—this

could be the most important chapter in this book for you - made all the difference in the world for me]

- **Grit:** *You might be tempted to think, what's the point? Why bother? This is for you. This will help you think more clearly, and thinking clearly is what you need right now. Please trust me.* Begin your **MORNING ROUTINE:** Do a quick two-minute exercise and stretch routine for *your* mental and physical health. (*Jumping jacks, pushups, and sit-ups—it's just two minutes, so **grit your teeth**, hit the deck and get started!*) If you don't have **two minutes** to spare in the morning (*and I don't believe you, by the way*), park far away from your destination and walk, or take the stairs all day long as penance for your extreme shadiness.

Make Someone Else's Day Better

- Find someone, select them as the lucky recipient, and look to make their day better somehow, some way.
- My mom always wisely counseled me, ***"If you aren't feeling great about yourself, or you're feeling down, the very best thing you can do is go help someone else."*** When I was a young boy, I thought, well that is just the worst advice I have ever heard in my life. How is helping someone else going to help my favorite person: me? Give it a shot. Trust mom.
- For the unimaginative, here is a good way to practice this: People in the service industry are overworked and underpaid, and are generally one bad comment away from throwing anything close at hand as hard as they can against the wall. Cashiers, restaurant servers, toll booth collectors. If they have to deal with all of us crazies during the day, they have probably had enough within hour one.
Smile and say hello, ask how they are doing, then say something to encourage them. Sometimes you will even get way more than you thought you would out of it. You can also wave people in front of you in traffic; somehow it took me **many** years to stop being so competitive and racing everyone, any time, but my life has dramatically improved since she showed me there was a better alternative than Mad Max style road-raging everywhere we went.

- If you are Mr. or Mrs. Antisocial, here is another way for you. **Pick out two random people an hour, and wish the best for them.** Wish them love, peace, and prosperity in their lives. They can be in traffic next to you, walking past you on the NYC subway, in line at the grocery store, whatever. Just genuinely wish them good thoughts and the best of luck. Sounds corny as all hell, but there is science behind this, and it's just a nice, good karma-building thing for you to do. But if you're not into karma and you're just in this for yourself, keep reading for more on why this is **scientifically good for your happiness** levels.

Inspire Yourself

- Make just one little, positive note for yourself on your phone or a notepad.
- You get to choose! Pick the funniest comment, the coolest event, the best conversation, a positive inspiring thought or a brilliant idea you had during your day. Just pick one, because I think that more than one will be too much for the inertia crowd. Write down just one thing and keep it somewhere easily accessible, like the notes section on your phone or in a little notepad dedicated to this task.
- At night or in the morning, or whenever you like, you can review these gems. Pretty soon, you will have an impressive collection.
- Turns out, your caveman brain can't distinguish between actually living these events and reliving these memories by reading them. When you read them, you relive these positive moments over and over! **Airspeed boost.** More good things start to happen. More fun memories. More airspeed. Momentum. Sonic BOOM. **Break the speed of sound barrier and never look back.**

On never looking back: *It's OK if you must look back from time to time when you get slowed down by life: you know what to do now.*

Arrow of pebbles: *Take out your trusty notes, remember the inspirational quotes, funny memories, meaningful moments, big victories of your life and regain some airspeed again.*

REMEMBER:

Airspeed

-<leads to>-

Momentum

-<leads to>-

Air Superiority of Your Mind

“The mind acts like an enemy for those who don't control it.”

- Bhagavad Gita, ancient Hindu text

“If the only prayer you say in your entire life is - 'thank you' - that is enough.”

- Meister Eckhart

“Extend to each person, no matter how trivial the contact, all the care and kindness and understanding and love that you can muster, and do it with no thought of any reward. Your life will never be the same again.”

- Og Mandino, author

“100 times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life depends on the labors of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving.”

- Albert Einstein

tldr: how to get back up when you have nothing, and nobody loves you anymore. Wow that sounds bleak. Poem by Kipling + Grunts by Grunts + Hope by Bob Marley!

Chapter Six Transform Defeat Into Victory



“Within every defeat, no matter how bleak the outcome, lay the seeds of an incredible comeback and inspirational victory, if you would only take a step back, breathe, and feel the full intensity and power of the universe’s gift and lesson.”

These words come from extreme pain. I am hopeful these words will inspire you to turn your own struggle into something that fuels your flight to a better chapter in your life.

First off, some ground rules. This “gift/lesson” from the universe **has** to be opened and you can’t regift it to someone else. As unwanted as it may be, you might have to just put this horrendous hand-knit Christmas sweater on, wear it proudly, and own it. You can’t explain it away or say you have to wear it to appease your grandma, or something lame like that. You are going to have to get gritty and just integrate this sweater and all it stands for into your life. Eventually, you will love that dumb sweater because your character will be stronger and your life more fulfilling because of it.

Sound too corny? Let me give you an alternate version, especially for my U.S. Marine Corps brothers and sisters out there.

Why do the Marines Get Their Own Special Version of this Quote?

Our Air Wing sister squadron on the aircraft carrier USS *Truman* was VMFA-115, nicknamed the Silver Eagles. We flew all of our combat missions with them as our wingmen or flight leads; they were an absolute joy to fly with. Always ready to go, always ready to fight and defend our troops on the ground, and always ready to crack a joke or two: usually at the Navy’s expense. The Marine Corps is technically part of the Department of the Navy, but in their minds, we are just a fancy bus-driving style, white-glove ferry service that takes the **real heroes** (meaning: them) into action.

The USMC is famous for its discipline and teamwork; their adherence to orders and their mission is admirable. I always laugh at the scene in *A Few Good Men*, when **Jack Nicholson’s** character yells for one of his men to come into his office. He barks at him to call up the President and “**...tell him we’re closing Guantanamo Bay.**” He isn’t serious, of course, he is trying to prove a point to the upstart Tom Cruise’s lawyer character. The Marine doesn’t blink: he nods his head, says “**Yes, sir,**” matter-of-factly, and starts to leave so he can execute this new order immediately.

Unlike their portrayal in some movies, the **Marines are *not mindless grunts*** who blindly obey orders. On the contrary, they are extremely sharp and will keep you on your toes if you're not on your game. **Their extreme use of discipline allows them to function brilliantly under all sets of harsh conditions and within the fog of war.** Take a look at their historic battles and their long record of valiant wins for our country despite seemingly impossible odds.

However, the Marines *do* seem to like their learning liberally sprinkled with curse words and vulgarities. It is for this crowd that I offer a substitute for the above quote:

"When you suffer a crushing loss, you're getting f'ed either way you slice it, so you might as well embrace the full fury of defeat, the full resolve to never let that happen again, the full impact of the wisdom from lessons learned, and the full humiliation of losing; take all of that inside of you, let it knock all your senses aware, let it impregnate your soul and be borne inside of you so that you are reborn into a battle-scarred warrior, but one now infinitely stronger, wiser, and more invulnerable than you were before."

How's that. Some will say that's too many words for the Semper Fi crowd, but maybe they can Google Translate to **"Grunt"** and it will all work out OK. And don't tell them I said that, or they will wait for me outside a book-signing with their infamous pugil sticks* and it will be all over for me.

READY ROOM TIP

**Pugil sticks are hand-to-hand combat training staffs with what feels like, when it hits your head, padded dumbbells welded onto either side...*

...So, if a Marine asks you to train with him using pugil sticks, no matter how fun and light-hearted he makes it seem, your answer should probably be NO.

What's the Worst Defeat You Have Ever Had in Your Life?

In my life I have overcome a few things, and I'm proud that I have. I was tossed out of college my first go-around. I was lost and didn't know what to do. My father told me correctly that I needed some discipline. So I worked hard, reluctantly at first, enlisted in the Navy, earned a spot to the United States Naval Academy, earned flight school, earned jets, earned fighters, and earned my dream goal of flying F-14 Tomcat fighter planes. There is a lot more to this story than that, but at the time I thought, *"Hey, what a great turnaround!"* Little did I know that there was going to be a much tougher turnaround crisis in my future.

Let me pause and give you this advice: It is a lot easier to keep a good situation going than it is to turn the whole dang ship around. My parents were loving, wise, and overall awesome. I was very privileged to grow up in this country and have been blessed with the ability to learn extremely quickly. I didn't have to put myself in a situation that required such a dramatic turnaround. I have to take ownership of the fact that I tend to sprint and rest. My rest periods in life have been too long, and it has caused me a lot of problems. Do you 'sprint-and-rest'? If so, don't let yourself get complacent; rest and recover your energy, then jump back into the fight! Learn from my mistakes and don't let this happen to you!

The worst defeat of my life was a complete knockout blow. More correctly, I absorbed a lot of knockout blows. It was a slow burn, encompassing a series of losses and defeats. It took a few years to develop, so the pain was stretched out over an almost interminably long period. I lost everything; my children, my ex-wife, my girlfriend, my businesses, my car, even my apartment. I was completely broke, in debt big time. Everyone I loved and cared about was angry with me. To say it was not looking very good is a gigantic understatement.

I thought I wasn't afraid of anything. I had, after all, flown nighttime combat missions off an aircraft carrier, almost died a bunch of times, and was generally

carefree and a huge risk taker. But, and this is big, this was a blind spot in my awareness. I was actually afraid of quite a few things. Fear led me to make bad decisions; decisions that ultimately paved the path to losing everything.

Navigator's Tip

As you're working your way through the flightpath of your life, you'll discover how fear of losing something actually contributes to you losing it.

TOP GUN Instructor Recommended Tactic

Life will continue to plague you relentlessly with the same fear until you turn at the merge and engage. You can hit the afterburners and extend once or twice, but this fear never runs out of fuel. It will catch you when are low on airspeed and you will have limited options. The recommended best move is to immediately face your fear and keep engaging until you are victorious.]

After I awoke to my fears, I wrote a poem titled **INDEFATIGABLE**. Let me be clear—I am *not* a poet. I only really like one poem: **IF** by Rudyard Kipling, which everyone should read to their children. My poem is corny as hell, and you may laugh at its simplicity, but the message acted as a physical wakeup call for me. I could spend the rest of my days a victim, feeling miserable and hopeless; not such a great option. Or, I could *carpe diem*⁹ the “F” out of this situation, take control of the things I could control, overcome all obstacles, and start enjoying and living my life. No fear. No holding back. Methodically recognize and replace all my doubts, fears, and worries with **courage**. Explore, grow, and make the most out of every second and every moment.

Strangely, losing everything I cared about cleared my mind of all of those fears, and I was ready to rock. I had nothing, so I might as well go for it. What's the worst that can happen? I'm already at the bottom!

*So, what if all the publishers in the world think this book is worthless, at least it was fun to write! **When you teach, you learn twice.*** Teaching you, my trusty wingman, through the medium of this book, solidifies these lessons for me.

9. Latin for 'seize the day'

FLIGHT DEBRIEF / LESSON LEARNED

Just in case you skimmed over this sentence, here it is again for the thick-skulled readers out there: *When you teach, you learn twice.* Try to teach a friend one thing you learned in this book—you'll probably feel better afterwards, and even if they don't really listen, you will have reinforced the teaching point within your mind!]

The Surprising Secret to My Comeback

I am extremely grateful for my new chance at life. When you observe the totality of all the seemingly random events and coincidences that had to transpire for me to get from A to B, it seems as if the chances are polarized: either the odds were close to or equal to **ZERO**, or the probability was **ONE**.¹⁰

As a child, I loved Greek Mythology. One of my favorite stories was of The Fates. The Fates, if you don't remember, were the blind old women who weaved the tapestry of everyone's lives in and out over the course of their lifetimes. At times, your part of the tapestry would blend with another person for a period, and sometimes your lives would intertwine for the briefest of moments. My father once wisely taught me ***"Son, you can learn something from everyone you meet. Everyone. Be open to learning and be ready in that moment."***

After my Boston startup fizzled like a warm, flat Diet Coke (and I hate diet drinks), I was left penniless. I had used everything I had to fight until the bitter end, sure we would be able to make it work. At the end of the rope, I didn't even have money for food. I started my very own "Entrepreneur Boot Camp" month; that entailed two entry-level jobs, one at a sales call center and one as a server in a Boston Harbor restaurant. I worked 14 hours a day.

10. A probability of ONE means 100% chance of occurring.

It was the biggest blessing ever. I learned a lifetime of lessons, because when you're starting out from the bottom you're in a great position to just observe everything going on around you. At my day job I was able to see the inner workings of a successful startup franchise and their award-winning positive culture.¹¹ At my night job, there was a swirling chaotic dance at our popular, upscale tourist-destination restaurant that reminded me a lot of aircraft carrier flight deck operations.

There were a myriad of problems and issues to absorb at both places, and it was refreshing to be the new guy; I had a unique outsider's perspective that allowed me to see clearly without emotional attachment. Everyone I came in contact with was extremely welcoming, friendly, and supportive; well almost everyone, but that adversity taught me a lot, as well, so I am equally as grateful.

Best of all, during this experience I rediscovered the secret to being a successful and happy entrepreneur. It is also the secret to living a full, happy life, and transforming defeat into victory over depression. The secret is (Ta-da!):

"Make others lives better in every way you can, and you will in turn be rewarded beyond your wildest dreams. The more people you help, and the greater the depth of your assistance, the better your life will be."

OK, so that's cute and everything. But how do I actually get this done?

Transform Defeat Into Victory Checklist

Memorize "ALRIGHT"

- Absorb
- Learn
- Read

11. Voted Best Places to Work every year for the past five years!

- Integrate
- Grow
- Humor
- Teach Others

The Navy uses acronyms for everything. It's how they teach, how they organize, and how they make you memorize. We made fun of it constantly, but man, is it effective. I have to admit something to you, my new wingman in cahoots. I just totally made up the acronym "ALRIGHT" and shoehorned the words in so it's easy to memorize. Spot me that one, because someone out there is going to read this, memorize it, remember it, use it in a critical situation, and that will be awesome. Everything is going to be alright. Didn't Bob Marley say something like that? He knew what's up. He deserved that Order of Merit, big time. Here is the breakdown:

A: Absorb

Absorb the lesson from defeat, accept it, and let it be part of your soul. *[Tom Brady is hated or loved, not usually anywhere in between. Put that aside for a second, and watch ESPN's excellent documentary, The Brady 6. Brady essentially invented a slight to be upset about; after all, getting drafted in the NFL isn't the worst thing that could happen to someone, but his last-round selection brings him to tears in the video. Whatever, he makes it a big issue, and he uses it to drive himself towards perfection. Every day. You have to respect that, even if you're a Jets fan, Gary V...]*

L: Learn

Pay close attention to strong signs in your life. Figure out what the universe is trying to tell you from this defeat. What is the key lesson? What are the key takeaways? Emotionally disconnect so you can see the situation for what it really is. If you can't detach, ask someone you trust for their advice. Tell them to be harsh and don't hold back. Saving your feelings from getting hurt is going to cost you in the long run, so take your lumps like a champ. Don't talk while they are talking to you! At the Naval Academy, during our plebe (freshman) year, we were allowed to say only 5 initial responses to an upperclassman's order or question: Yes, sir; No, sir; Aye-Aye, sir; I'll find out, sir; No excuse, sir.

Be a plebe for a second and just listen.

R: Read

There was an expression in our squadron for new nuggets entering from flight school: **GET SMART**. Not 'get smart-er,' which would imply you were already at least a little smart. No. Just get smart. Start from scratch. Leave no stone unturned and figure out if you have some holes in your game, which you must have if you lost. Seek out the experts in this particular area, and be humble. When I say 'read', this can also mean podcasts and videos, as they are an excellent way to learn depending on what is most effective for your style.

I: Integrate

Nothing worse than going through this whole painful process, then failing to integrate it into your life. I see this all the time with people. They get all fired up, then they completely forget about their lesson. Geez, I guess that is what happened to me. I forgot (or ignored) all the great stuff I knew, then I had to go and relearn it all—very frustrating to do it the second time, and realize *'Hey, I already knew that!'* Write down the key points, quote, or new gameplan somewhere where you can see it every day. Dry erase board, kitchen pinup, on your phone, by your bathroom wall, wherever you are going to see it a lot, and give it continuous thought until it becomes part of your life. You should **MEMORIZE THIS**. Don't be lazy. Memorize your favorite quote/new lesson and be able to teach it without referring to any notes.

G: Grow

Just as your muscles are broken down by doing pull-ups, your defeat will have broken down part of you. But all is not lost. If you integrate this new lesson into your life and resolve to never let it happen again, your character will grow stronger. Your determination and wisdom will increase. Your soul will flourish. Good stuff. Don't wallow in the loss or feel sorry for yourself, NO COMPLAINING, NO EXCUSES. Take your lesson and use it to make yourself better.

“Comfort is the enemy of change. Comfort is the enemy of great.”

H: Humor

One of the best lessons I learned in the military was the ability to laugh in crisis, in danger, and in misery. It helps keep your mind focused and thinking innovatively. It keeps fear at bay and keeps depression at bay. The opposite of depression is HUMOR. So build up, or rebuild the ability to laugh, enjoy life, enjoy the moment, and for heaven’s sake, don’t take yourself so seriously! Say goodbye to your ego... and you will be saying hello to courage, freedom, and happiness.

T: Teach Others

When you teach, you learn twice. Yeah, I know I’ve said that already in this chapter. There are some other benefits you are going to love. When you teach, you make a real and lasting impact on someone else. This is inspiring and rewarding. You will also regain some critically important self-worth, which is seriously lacking when you are depressed. When I recently helped prepare young candidates looking to enter the military, I remembered the fire, passion, and enthusiasm I had when I was their age. I also remembered a lot of long-forgotten lessons in the process. This rediscovered wisdom and knowledge boosted my confidence and my courage to press on and rebuild a newer and better life than I had before. One complete with a newfound respect for the people I love and the knowledge of how better to achieve my goals without hurting anyone else in the process because of my needs and shortcomings. Some dopes say: ‘Those who can’t do, teach;’ this is bullshit. In general, we don’t give enough respect to our nation’s teachers. When you teach, you share your gift, and you will personally get way more out of it than you may have thought at the beginning. Of this I am certain. I encourage you to give it a shot. Don’t be afraid. Young people will probably discard half of what you say; it’s OK, no teacher is perfect. But you will make a positive impact, and you do have something valuable to pass along. At least one valuable lesson. Don’t keep it inside. Be bold. You just might be inspired and rewarded in ways you could never have dreamt...

“...because every little thing, is gonna be alright...”

– Bob Marley, from the uplifting reggae song: Three Little Birds

Section II: Be PATIENT



tldr: can you hurry this up...?

Chapter 7

When to be Patient and When NOT to be Patient

"Go straight to the good in everything. It is a happy lot of those with good taste. The bee goes straight for sweetness, and the viper for the bitterness it needs for its poison. So with tastes: some go for the best, others for the worst. There is nothing that doesn't have something good, especially books, where good is imagined.

Some people's temperaments are so unfortunate that among a thousand perfections they will find a single defect and censure it and blow it out of proportion. They are the garbage collectors of the will and of the intellect, burdened down with blemishes and defects: punishment for their poor discernment rather than proof of their subtlety.

They are unhappy, for they batten on bitterness and graze on imperfections. Others have a happier sort of taste: among a thousand defects they discover some perfection that good luck happened to let drop."

- Balthasar Gracian, The Art of Worldly Wisdom

Patience is not my strongest attribute. Let's be real—I HATE patience. Even the word "patience" just looks stupid.

Almost above all else I value SPEED. I want to get places quickly, achieve objectives immediately, and I like for all conflicts to be all wrapped up expeditiously and with a bow, just like a pleasant Disney movie. I used to drive everywhere at 99 miles an hour when I was younger. Flying fighters past the speed of sound was a dream come true for me. But the truth is, even that wasn't fast enough. ***"Hey PIRP,"*** chided my navigator post flight, ***"we don't need to always hit the afterburners when we do everything. We live on this boat in the middle of the ocean, and fuel***

is critically important. We can't just roll into a 7-11 and get gas whenever we want to. We need to conserve fuel, so save it for when there is an emergency, got it?"

I didn't get it. Maybe if you're reading this, you like to go fast too. There is power in that. Lots of power. But there is also an almost infinite amount of power in patience, especially when you are depressed. We will get to that in this section. I'm going to show you how to channel your fire in a way that can sustain you indefinitely. Don't worry, you can still blast your way out of Mos Eisley when you need to, but having some of the tools I discovered will help you when times are bleak and speed won't cure the problem.

"Muddy water, let stand, becomes clear."

– Lao Tzu

First, let's talk about when to NOT be patient. This is critical. When it comes to your health and living your life to the fullest, do NOT hold back. There is a whole world of beauty out there, and too many times I see people holding themselves back with self-imposed limitations.

Don't think this is true about yourself? Have you ever not gone to a place that you loved because *<insert your own questionable personal reason here>*? Have you ever not done something great for your heart or health because of money or time? Even worse, because you feel you are not worthy or high-class enough? *"Oh, that's just something that rich or famous people, or star athletes get to do."*

These are just weak excuses at best, or self-defeating thoughts at their worst. Don't self-select yourself OUT of a good time or activities that are good for you. If it is about money, think about how you can afford it instead of why you can't. Time? If it's important enough to you, you can find the time.

RIO/NAVIGATOR'S TIP:

There's a great way to think about how to add the good things to your life. Remember the childhood beach activity of filling a jar with seashells and sand? If you put a bunch of sand (all the extra junk you don't need) in first, there's no room for the seashells (the most important things and people in your life).

I got an email the other day: "So Dave, the sand is the extra junk...wtf. I hate you."

Most critically, don't opt out before you even try something because of fear or thinking you're not worthy enough, or believing it is only for the wealthy.

Here's a little combat cruise story about how my squadron overcame all of these played-out, flawed thought routines. Believe me, there were some hesitant nugget pilots who needed to be convinced that this way of thinking was superior. But once they were, life became a LOT better.

"It only costs a little more to go first class. And we might die tomorrow anyway on the back of the ramp or in-country¹², so let's go all the way."

The above quote is kind of paraphrased, but this was the general sentiment from the senior officers in our Ready Room as we were mulling over where to stay in port. When an aircraft carrier pulls into a foreign port, there is a lot more planning going on than you might expect. The boat will send out teams of people to scout out the landscape, find places to stay, coordinate with security, and pave the way for the incoming horde of sailors and aircrew.

Our scout team came back and reported the options for our 'admin', a joint gathering 'not-so-safe' place for us to have a few drinks, kick back, fight each other, and generally act like barbarians for a few days. In pre-international cell phone days, if you were lost or things got hairy in town, you knew where you could find your crew to link back up and you had a relatively-ish clean place to stay.

12. Enemy territory.

So, it was decision time: which of the lodging options presented to us should we select? The modestly priced one, far away from all the fun, with dingy beds and old, dog-haired couches? Or the deluxe kingmaker suite, close to the main drag, with nicer everything?

Back and forth the argument went, with the deluxe crowd stating, “The total price is distributed among everyone, so it won’t be that much more per person,” and with the holdouts crying, “I need to save money for little Susie’s braces, we won’t be there that long to justify the cost, blah blah.”

Eventually our skipper, who had fought in the first Gulf War as an A-6 Intruder pilot and lost many wingmen to withering ground fire, got up and weighed in:

“Gentlemen, this vote has to do with money so I am not going to insist on either decision. It is a personal choice, and it is each person’s to make alone. However, what will you remember at the end of your life: the good times and memories, or a few extra dollars in your bank account. Also, we are headed to war. The end of your life might be sooner than you expect. I have given my vote to the XO, and I am headed to the hangar to check on the status of repairs to our downed Tomcats. Let me know how it turns out.”

With that, he walked out the door, and the deluxe suite won in a landslide.

I am giving you permission to treat yourself like a King, or like a soldier about to die. Live your life to the fullest, and look to experience all of the world’s beauty. Like Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson singing “*Shake it Off*” in his car (you should pause to YouTube that gem, from his HBO show *Ballers*...), be man enough to enjoy even the silliest of things without worrying who is watching. This whole depression thing gets really bleak sometimes. While you are being patient with your recovery, you’re going to have to unwind.

Turning around a bad situation is tough. Rough. Gritty. You’re going to have to be hardcore. Getting unstuck is not Hollywood stuff. Well maybe *Rocky*, or *True Hollywood Story*, but you get what I mean. It’s more like U.S Marine Corps stuff, in

the trenches, slugging it out inch-by-inch, and you're going to get dirty. And no one, not even our hard-as-nails Devil Dog crew, has an unlimited supply of energy.

We spend one-third of our lives sleeping and regenerating. Pro athletes and Olympians know that recovery time is just as important as exercise time. So, while you are being eternally patient, you are going to have to take great care of yourself, in mind, body and spirit. And bear with me on this super-soft sounding advice: You are going to have to grit your teeth and really love yourself. Not in the narcissistic Iceman-flexing-while-playing-beach-volleyball-in-jean-shorts way, but in a true, loving yourself for who you really are way.

"You can't really love someone else until you truly love yourself first."

– Mom

READY ROOM TIP: URGENT!

We're also going to have to take care of the people who love and support US while we are trying to unspiral out of depression.

Grit time. Don't let someone else carry your load. Exception to this: while you are temporarily injured, it is good to seek out help. This is a sign of self-awareness and strength. The key here is balance. Let's just not let this drag on longer than it needs to take, OK?

Seek help and utilize it, but don't bask in it. We want to actively and aggressively get out of the darkness.

I say this not out of haughtiness, but out of a painful, personal lesson learned. Seeking help or talking to a loved one can become a really bad habit, quickly. It feels good temporarily to get some empathy, especially if the person is a natural and beautiful healer, as my ex-girlfriend thankfully was. But you can drain that person's pool of energy faster than a catapult shot, leaving them empty and

possibly/probably resentful. Get some guidance, get healthy, get on track, then fly from that nest of safety as fast as your restored wings will let you.

Learning Some Patience the Hard Way

Impatient as I am, I pretty much have to learn the hard way. One of my best, toughest lessons came during air-to-air combat training.

[Advanced Jets Phase, Flight School, Naval Air Station, Meridian, Mississippi]

“ACM (air combat maneuvering, or dogfighting) is the sport of kings. Quick, decisive, 3D, lightning-fast, grandmaster chess, aerodynamic next-level thinking with \$50 million fighters, and let’s be clear: it is winner take all.

In dogfighting, you’re either going undefeated or you’re going to be a statistic and a flag for your wife. Stay mentally sharp and focused, all the time. And never, ever stop fighting, even if you’re completely defensive. Get ready, today is your final grad hop.”

- Major “Tiny” Johnson, USMC F/A-18 Pilot and Advanced Strike Flight Instructor, Naval Aviator Flight School

“What’s it going to be there DQ? Are you going to be my next laughingstock victim today? More ready room fun at your expense as we watch my HUD¹³ camera footage of me gunning you down?” barked Major Johnson to me in the squadron hallway.

“Not a chance, sir,” I came back brashly, ***“I’m most likely going to kick your ass today.”***

Not sure why I said that, but I was feeling pretty confident after a few successful ACM flights. ACM, or air-to-air combat maneuvering (aka: dogfighting) was my

13. The HUD is a pilot’s Heads Up Display, a cool piece of gear that allows you to be ‘heads out of the cockpit’ for vital information like airspeed, angle of attack, G’s you are pulling, and targeting data. When someone says they are ‘heads down in the cockpit’ it means they are busy working on an in-flight emergency, so as a good fellow aircrew you should keep your head up and out for threats. This applies to real life: when your wingman is ‘heads down’ temporarily, you need to watch their back and cover their six.

favorite stage in flight school. You had to think cleverly and make intelligently aggressive moves with your jet to win. Starting the aerial fighting sets at high speeds, your initial break turn would result in over 6 Gs on your body, so a 200-pound man in a high-G turn will feel like his body weighs 1,200 lbs.

Twisting and turning through the air, each pilot uses geometric angles and airspeed to gain the advantage of getting behind the other; once behind the opponent, you would speed in to close the range for the prized **'guns kill.'** If you could get a rare guns kill on an instructor, you were THE man.

I smiled to myself as I walked to prepare the white board for our flight brief. This was going to be the day when I jacked an instructor and claimed my rightful spot as king of the student pilot ready room.

BOOM! I saw stars and struggled to catch my breath as Major Johnson turned me around. He had slammed me against the hallway lockers and now had me pinned up by my shoulders. Oops. Tactical error.

Some background description on the ultra-aggressive, bright-red, flushed skin Major Johnson: He was tall, wiry strong, and had a severe blond and white-shocked Marine Corps crew cut. In general, he could usually be found around the briefing spaces conducting his favorite pastime: yelling at students about how much they sucked.

As he stared at me at uncomfortably + intensely close range, I noticed he had a black eye.

"Howdja get that shiner, sir?" I asked. "Shut the f up, DQ. I'm going to completely wipe the sky's a\$\$hole with you today, then throw you away like a used douche."

He ended up beating me pretty bad that day. To top it off, he presented me with my very own parting gift: his used in-flight yellow gel-filled piss bag, which he

claimed he nonchalantly used while gunning me and my little training jet. All of the instructors and my fellow students thought that was a lot funnier than I did.

Patience

“Patience.” He told me in the debrief. “You aren’t going to beat me today. Or tomorrow. But I love your aggression and I love your attitude. That was some hellacious guns-D today. You never gave up, even when I was within guns range and you were out of airspeed. Your aggressive fighting spirit is what’s going to allow you to actually beat me someday, and that’s really what I want more than anything. You are the next generation to go protect our skies. So, train hard, keep studying, and keep learning. Improve every single flight. Our nation, your wingmen, and our Marines on the ground are depending on you. So get smart.

And shut the f up. Don’t talk so much. Balance out the fire. Remember you’re still an un-winged student.”

He got up and started to walk out the debriefing room door. “And I got the black eye from a mixed martial arts class out in town. Don’t worry, I kicked his ass just like I kicked yours today.”

Well you either win or you learn. That was how I learned patience as it relates to training to be a fighter pilot. The hard way, from a great American with an iron will. Unfortunately, I had to learn the lesson about patience in real life again.

My failure to apply the critical lessons learned from my professional craft to my personal life was something I would love for you to remember. Within each profession there lie universal truths that apply to your life. If you are excellent within your field, but are having trouble outside, sometimes you need to look no further than your ‘day job.’

Apply the principles that make you successful there to your own mind. Take care of your mind, yourself, and your loved ones with the same intensity you exhibit in taking care of your chosen business.

“No life worthy of the name consists of anything more than the continual series of struggles to develop one's character through the medium of whatever one has chosen as a career.”

This quote is from the infamously slow-reflexes-having Bullfighter Juan Belmonte, who was nicknamed "the flying matador" because he was frequently airborne after getting tossed around by raging bulls! But to his credit, he never gave up trying to be the best bullfighter. In the end he realized the common truth we all share; no matter where you live or what your struggle is, keep fighting and keep improving your character. It matters, and it is NEVER too late.

“FEARLESSNESS.”

From Adam Robinson, who relayed the above story about Juan Belmonte in The Tim Ferris podcast #210. This was his answer when Tim asked him what characteristic he wanted to improve the most. Reinforcing your own fearlessness is the answer to overcoming depression; it is also coincidentally the answer to finding true happiness. Thanks, Adam. And thanks, Tim! Another fine example of how sharing your gift and sharing your knowledge sends out a ripple effect that you can never predict.

T-BAG's Squadron Music Recommendations for Section II:

Stir It Up, Bob Marley

(This might be one of the best reggae songs of all time)

“Take your time, don't live too fast, Troubles will come, and they will pass.”

- Lynyrd Skynyrd, 'Simple Man'

“Let the lovin' come back to me.”

- Sublime, 'What I Got'

tldr: Audioslave, Steph Curry, surfers & Einstein help us find the best in everyone you meet, find the best in every situation, and *find the best in YOURSELF...*

Chapter 8

Who Has The Most Fun In Life?



“How do you know when you meet a fighter pilot? Don’t worry, he’ll tell you.”

– Navy joke that Shoes like to tell, at the expense of fighter pilots...*

[*Milkshake time, our very own SQUADRON INTEL OFFICER:

The Navy slang term ‘Shoes’ refers to Surface Warfare Officers, non-flyers, condemned to walk the Earth without knowing the joys of aviation. They wear black shoes, unlike our brown aviator boots. At some point in WWII the rambunctious pilots focused on this visible difference between cool and un-cool, and started calling the very serious, never venturing from the box, ship-bound Officers ‘Shoes’.]

Before we get into all this unpleasant ‘patience’ stuff, let’s talk about the people in the world who have the most fun in life. Who really enjoys themselves the most? I know it is considered a bad thing to think you’re the greatest, but a little of it certainly isn’t bad for you. Why?

While being your worst critic is important, following Steph Curry’s advice to simultaneously “be your biggest fan” leads to a tremendous amount of unexpected benefits for your mind, body, and soul. The trick is to find the right balance as you surf the ever-changing thought waves of critic and cheerleader.

When things are going poorly in your life, you’re going to need every single pom-pom and smiley head-nod you can get from the cheerleader. But when things are going well, I can tell you from experience which way you should lean. I bought a one-way ticket on the Self-Loving Express; went a bit too far into the land of overconfidence, illegally slid across the border into cockiness, then stumbled into the dreaded valley of slow decay... down I went, dazed and confused all the way to the depths of complacency.

We have all heard the maxim “*Pride goeth before the fall*”, but I always just thought it was only for losers. It also never really made sense to me. Pride is championed in our country as a fine attribute. When I was young I misinterpreted it to mean that you should always compete and win; win, no matter what. Never back down. This is great for fighting, not so great for relationships with the ones you love.

I know, I know, this sounds like basic grade school type stuff. Remember when you’re depressed, common-sense advice will elude you. You’re just not sleeping well and thinking clearly. Your mind is a thick Dagobah-fog malted shake from Dairy Queen, with extra malt.

But stories are easier to recall; so when you feel yourself ambling too close to the border of complacency, remember my tragic mistake. And if you’re at the bottom right now, don’t be too proud to talk to someone. In the eerie song “*Shadow on the*

Sun", Audioslave leadman Chris Cornell shrieks ***"I can tell you why people go insane..."***; I can tell you why too: they isolate themselves. **Isolation = Suffering**. But when dark secrets hit the sunlight, they don't seem so bad after all. Plus, all the moldy bad thoughts and stuff will melt away. Magic.

Having properly qualified the dangers and perils of overconfidence, a healthy dose of self-love is refreshing to your soul, and it is refreshing to be around people that have it, in the proper proportion of course. Let's take a look at some of the outliers in this category and what we can learn from them.

Fighter pilots: Does any one group love themselves more than this one? I remember laughing to myself when reading a story about the F/A-18 training pipeline – one of the pilots was at a banquet sitting next to the legendary actor Charlton Heston. A reporter asked him if he was nervous or in awe of meeting him. ***"Why should I be nervous?"*** he replied casually with a dip in his cheek, ***"His job is to pretend to be me. I'm the real deal."*** Obviously some people are turned off by this extreme confidence. But there is a powerful element to this type of thinking that will help you when you're depressed. His answer, or more precisely, his thinking could have easily drifted to ***"you know what, you're right. He's rich and famous, and I'm neither, so therefore I'm worthless."*** Society values fame and fortune way more than skill and competence, so he could have fallen along in lockstep with this popular belief. Instead, however, he focused on what made him great, and didn't allow his thinking to be corrupted by outside views or suggestion that he defer and subordinate himself to the famous actor. Don't you dare to ever subordinate yourself! Appreciate and respect the accomplishments of others, and remember that doesn't diminish your star at all.

"Peace comes from within, do not seek it without"

- Prince Siddhārtha Gautama

Surfers: One of the most celebrated figures in Western culture is that of the surfer. Sun-kissed, living free, enjoying the water and music by day, feasting on

something awesome, tasty, and healthy by bonfire at night. Surfers, and their descendants skateboarders and snowboarders, are enduring counter culture figures, refusing to accept the 9-5 grind-it-out lifestyle under which most Americans suffer. Cold water, maybe not coincidentally, has been found to be a good cure for depression, especially when applied to the neck and back of your shoulders. I love being in and near the water – it is calming and powerful all at the same time. I used to love riding the ferry to the gym when I lived in Boston. The sun, the Boston skyline, the waves and the wake made from the ship slicing through the water – it was very therapeutic for me during a dark time. I would encourage you to get as much sun, water (cold water!) and nature exposure as you possibly can while you fight your way back into a good spot.

Entrepreneurs: There is a real blessing in this world: the existence of entrepreneurs, and their mostly non-profit cousins, artists. They make the products and come up with the ideas that make our lives better. Being an entrepreneur is challenging but it comes with the freedom to make your own way and be in charge of your own destiny. I read something as a small child that stuck with me all these years: **If you wanted to improve morale on a space station, the number one thing you could do was to build two ways for astronauts to get to their specific work space in the morning.** Wow. Just that one small option, one small choice to feel in control – THAT is what led to improved morale? This is one of the driving forces for entrepreneurs; they make a zillion decisions on their own. No red tape, no big bureaucracy, no focus groups to make each and every move. Just actions guided by their own intelligence and intuition. What can we learn from this? Gain control of your lives, in any and every way you can. If you actually want to start your own business, then let's go! What are you waiting for? The conditions will never be perfect. I read a study once that polled people on what they thought of the current times – the entrepreneurs were way more optimistic about the opportunities available. Think creatively. There is a way. Independence and self-determination doesn't guarantee happiness, but I can tell you from experience it is a great kick-start on your journey.

READY ROOM TIP

Speaking of kick-starting, if you need funding for your new business, check out [Kickstarter.com](https://www.kickstarter.com) for ways to raise money from a benevolent and curious public. If you are military, there are a number of options including [StreetShares.com](https://www.streetshares.com), a crowdfunding source of capital for veterans.

“Build your intuition. The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.”

– Albert Einstein

OK, we could go on for a while here discussing who lives the happiest lives, but this is a good place to stop and pose a question to you. What can we learn from the above? That I secretly desire to start a new hybrid surfing/flight school business in Jamaica? Well, maybe. More importantly, there’s a common thread here.

FLIGHT PREP TIME

Make a list of the people YOU believe to be the happiest in the world. Then take an objective look at the similarities.

Are the qualities and characteristics of what they do far from what you currently do? Maybe it is time for a career change.

Or change in location.

Or at the very least, surround yourself with pictures and images of the things and people you love.

If you can’t move or change careers, adopt the characteristics and habits of those who DO love their lives.

READY ROOM TIP:

My father taught me, when I was just a little boy, that the world was generally a reflection of you. If I were to look at your social media account, I could learn a lot about you. Is your feed full of chaos, drama, conflict and even hate?

Use Instagram as a way to take a mini-vacation during the day when you need to refuel; instead of making it a carbon copy of your Facebook, fill it with the places and things you dream about. Immerse yourself in the people you aspire to be like, the beautiful island of Bali, the stars and the heavens.

Regaining Airspeed for Self-Esteem

Let's go back for a second and talk about loving yourself. I asked earlier if anyone loves themselves more than fighter pilots, well I found a possible candidate.

Comedian *Aziz Ansari* would immediately tell you it has got to be *Kanye West*. He was stunned to see a life-size Kanye poster inside Kanye's house. Aziz called him out on it, and Kanye retorted "*I've got to love myself first before anyone else can.*" That's actually very true, but hey, Kanye, maybe the life-size poster is a bit excessive...

Top Gun Instructor Recommended Tactic:

Check out Pandora's stand-up comedy channels. You can create a station from your favorite comedians and enjoy long drives or walks. When things were looking rough, sometimes only humor kept me moving forward.

...Nevertheless, I want **you to put your poster** up on the wall. Maybe not a floor-to-ceiling Fathead poster, but you get the idea. Put up a picture or accomplishment from when you felt good about yourself. Confident. Strong. Find some moment when you were the happiest and put that where you can see it. What were you thinking at the time? What made those times great? We don't want to get stuck in remorseful *Bruce Springsteen, Glory Days* style reminiscing, but I want you to remember how it felt for a second.

Momentum was on your side, everything was going your way. Amazing coincidences, all in your favor.



You would flop Royal Flushes, sink every basket you shot, hit every pitch out of the park. Everyone would smile at you on the street, the sun was always shining on your face, life was good! If this never happened to you, don't worry, we are going to teach you how you can get your snowball rolling downhill and gathering speed in *Section III, Think Big.*

But, if you did have a Golden Age in your life, close your eyes for a second and remember those thoughts and feelings. Dust off the old pictures and awards from the garage, and recall what made those days great. What **thoughts, words and deeds** helped get you to that point? They are going to help you transition to the next Golden Age of your life, one that will be even more glorious and rewarding than the previous one. Life is long, and you never know just what is going to happen next.

"It is never too late..."

-Cool, wise, old Uber Boston driver

"Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."

- Wise young Ferris Bueller in the classic movie Ferris Bueller's Day Off

In the next few chapters, we are going to talk about some ways to take great care of yourself in all areas of your life: MIND, BODY, SPIRIT, LOVE, HEALTH, DIET, EXERCISE, FINANCIAL, TEAMWORK, MENTAL TOUGHNESS, MUSIC, PODCASTS, VIDEOS, MOVIES, BOOKS, QUOTES, you name it!

Take what you need, make it your own, **but be patient with yourself along the way**. Give yourself a break; what you are attempting to do is extremely difficult. If you were healing a broken leg, you wouldn't beat yourself up or call yourself a puss for not running a race the next day. Same-same with depression. Cut yourself some slack and eliminate self-defeating talk and behaviors.

Replace your doubt with excitement and curiosity to learn something new; excitement of developing a new skill that will help you overcome the obstacle.

Ignite a Learning Revolution

How Can You Get a Free Startup Loan from the Universe?

Ignite the afterburners in your mind and start the momentum right now for inciting your personal learning revolution.

For too long, I was the same person, generally making the same mistakes over and over. Stagnant. Overconfident. Quick to blame outside forces and other people. They're screwed up, not me. I'm awesome. Only some incremental learning was taking place, but unfortunately not too much implementation of these new ideas. I was comfortable.

- Rich.
- Retired.
- Lazy.

Pleasantly plump, or if you're not PC, *fat*.

I had allowed myself to believe that luxury was comfort and comfort was the main goal. Modern society portrays images of success as only the after-effects and benefits of having unlimited resources. **We rarely celebrate the pictures of the struggle it took to get there.**

Remember that comfort is the enemy of change and the enemy of great. The process of learning, refining, and growing is what brings true joy. We all need to rest and recuperate, and we should enjoy our victories, but don't hang out for too long.

When you feel yourself getting too comfortable, picture the image of my slow slide into decay. Things naturally devolve into chaos without energy and leadership and love. When you love something or someone, fight every day to keep that alive and going strong. Failure to do this is not being grateful, and you will end up losing it.

It is a lot easier to keep up than to catch up. Catching up takes a LOT of energy and a lot of fuel to hit the afterburners. You may never catch up with some things; and trust me, that is not a fun feeling. So fight every day, stay humble, and be ready to learn so you stay relevant and worthy of being a leader.

“When the student is ready, the teacher appears.”

Then, thankfully, my learning revolution started. And life began anew. Again. Round two of the comeback story. And it will for you. So, hang on back there, R2, and let's find ways to treat yourself first-class as you continue your path.

You deserve it.

Why?

Because you are going to use your new skills to help others – this is the way you will earn it, even if you feel you don't deserve it now. So, think of it as the universe giving you an advance SBA loan to heal yourself, then you can pay it back by making the world better. In this way, we all win and move forward.

Take a deep breath and look around you. Think of our history on this planet. **We are all moving forward together, as one.** We don't always feel connected, but we are all intimately connected in a deeper way than I think we understand. We were lucky in the military to have a chance to fight intensely alongside people from every imaginable culture. This gave us the rare opportunity to arrive at the truth that most people sadly never truly comprehend: **there are awesome people AND annoying people from every single race and country in the world.** Eventually we will arrive at an enlightened time when we can evaluate each person on a case-by-case basis. THEN you can hate them...

I read recently that **everyone alive has the same mother**, and she lived around 3000 years ago. That's not too long ago. We really aren't that different from each other. Some have big clown noses, some have big floppy Dumbo ears, and some of us (like me) have big ol' XL noggins. When you hate someone or a group of people, you are unconsciously decreasing your happiness. Trust me on this. Remember, love and compassion is the correct solution for conflict with loved ones. So next time you're thinking about honking that horn in anger, or flipping someone off, remember that's a cousin of yours!

[See Chapter 11 on disconnectedness + Dr. Glasser's theory.]

Dr. Glasser believes almost all of human suffering comes from feeling disconnected from others. **Stay connected by refusing to criticize, blame, or complain.**

The other disconnecting habits are: nagging, threatening, punishing, rewarding for control.

Instead, replace those disconnecting habits with: supporting, encouraging, listening, accepting, trusting, respecting, negotiating differences.

"Butterfly effect, b!tch!"

- Smiling homeless guy to me in NYC Subway as he held the door for me, right after someone gave him a sandwich. Yum! Said his beaming face...

“Remember there’s no such thing as a small act of kindness. Every act creates a ripple with no logical end.”

- Scott Adams

On a much smaller scale than the butterfly effect and the rules that govern the entire universe is our beloved economic system of capitalism.

What Part of Capitalism is the Awesome-est?

Capitalism rocks because even if you’re a complete selfish d-bag, you get rewarded big time for making others lives better.

Look at the iPhone. **Steve Jobs** hustled and insisted on his vision of glass screens, child-like ease of use, and integration of third-party apps that would exponentially increase value for the owner, who could then customize their phone at will to their heart’s delight.

Big invention = big reward.

Seinfeld. He made people’s lives better through comedy; comedy about nothing! Now he drives around randomly with other funny people enjoying himself to the max.

Steph Curry. He wasn’t the biggest or the tallest or the fastest or the strongest. When he first entered the league, he was definitely NOT a superstar. He worked hard tirelessly every day to improve his skills, (check out the YouTube videos on his work ethic) proved himself in the NBA and now he’s one of the best. His story inspires the small kid in all of us every day. Tell me you haven’t tried to dribble two balls at once after watching his pre-game routine!

The list of successful and inspirational people goes on, and YOU could be on that list.

“Pleasure is a knowledge or feeling of perfection, not only in ourselves, but also in others, for in this way some further perfection is aroused in us.”

- Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz

So, fix yourself. Heal yourself. Then transcend the darkness to greatness. It can be done. I’ve taken classes at Harvard, seen the finest military leaders in the Navy, flown over Yankee Stadium for Game One of the World Series, traveled across both hemispheres and discovered a hidden secret: the most successful and self-actualized people are NOT the most talented, the smartest, the fastest, the most gifted. I say this not to take away from their achievements, but to give you this takeaway: It can be done. By you. Wherever you live. Whatever your circumstances.

Set the stage for your greatness. You DO have something awesome to offer the world.

READY ROOM TIP

Want to be an entrepreneur but don’t think you have the skills or creativity to do so? We recently saw a guy make millions on Shark Tank by inventing a better way to take a deuce. It was called the Toilet Step Stool or something crazy. Don’t tell me, and don’t tell yourself you can’t come up with an idea that will help others. After all, he didn’t manufacture the toilet stepstool himself, or chisel it out of marble like Michelangelo. He came up with the idea, pitched it to investors, and figured out a way to make it a reality. You could be that guy, of this I’m sure! Think BIG!

Be patient with yourself and learn to love yourself while you are healing. In the meantime, fill up your soul with positivity, goodness, and optimism. The more you enrich your soul and spirit, the better person you will be and the more you will have to give to others.

“I am still determined to be cheerful and happy, in whatever situation I may be; for I have also learned from experience that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends on our dispositions, and not upon our circumstances.”

- Martha Washington (1732-1802)

Think of taking action to take care of your mind just like filling up an infinity pool overlooking some beautiful tropical island. Right now you can't swim in your infinity pool. The water level is only a few inches high, with old, dirty leaves and coconut branches littered all over the surface. Bad news, your pool is kind of stagnant and there's definitely *not* a party happening.

When you do something to nourish your soul, spirit, body, mind, etc., you are putting clean, fresh water in that cool pool of yours. Sometimes it will just be a drop, almost imperceptible. Sometimes it will be a whole dump truck full. But adding to the water level you are, just the same, slowly. Surely. When that water starts flowing over the edge, all cool infinity pool waterfall style, it is party time, baby! Then we will officially be out of the turnaround situation and BACK into a new Golden Age.

So let's get pouring!

tldr: wtf is a 'pilot induced oscillation'?! And seriously, another Einstein quote...?

Chapter 9

Fast Scan, Smooth Hands...



Finding Equilibrium vs. Quest for Perfection

"You're never just maintaining, or staying the same. You're either getting better, or you're getting worse."

– Vince Lombardi

There is a fierce debate raging inside of you; you need to decide right now what side you are on. **What is more important to you**, finding equilibrium and balance in your life, or the quest for perfection?

Come on, no one is watching, think for a second and answer honestly. I'll wait.

They are actually the same concept, but are commonly split by many into two separate endeavors.

When things are going poorly, do you tend to batten down the hatches and hunker down in a cave? If you do that, information will stop flowing, learning will slow down, and everything will grind to a halt. Your quest for **SECURITY trumps** your **desire** for **GROWTH**, and this puts you in a dark place in life.

The trick is to claw your way up Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and start living life to the fullest. I know this firsthand. I was camped out at the bottom of Mas's little triangle for a long, long time. **RESIST the temptation to** play it safe—this will **RESTRICT** your life as you slowly eliminate the people and activities you love the most. During these dark times you need to be even more aggressive about learning and about your health. Get after it with an *enthusiasm unknown to man*.¹⁴

When it comes to finding equilibrium and the quest for perfection, there is no better example than learning to land on an aircraft carrier with the 54,000 pound F-14 Tomcat. (It is so big it is called derisively by rival-hater F/A-18 Hornet pilots a *'flying tennis court'*.)

The goal in a carrier landing is to set up your huge fighter on the perfect glide slope with:

- **The exact right** rate of descent.
- **The exact right** angle of attack (so your hook has the best chance of catching the thick cables that will slow you down).

14. Shout out to Michigan Coach Harbaugh's father who told him as a young boy to attack the day with an enthusiasm unknown to man. Even when times were rough and he walked the brothers to school, he would say, "Who has it better than us?"

- **The exact right** course so you land on the centerline of the carrier landing strip.

Of course, everything is constantly changing while you attempt to find this ideal line: wind, the burble, turbulence, pitching deck due to rough seas, and oh yeah, the ship is moving away from you, so your little ‘runway’ on the angled deck is constantly sliding to your right.

As a Landing Signal Officer¹⁵ I gave a lot of briefings to our squadron about how to land safely. It turns out that in the hallowed history of naval aviation, landing safely on the carrier was not something that pilots really cared about as much as you would think.

Let me rephrase this: landing **PERFECTLY** was not something they cared about. However, the safest way to land on an aircraft carrier is to actually attempt to do it perfectly. How do you incentivize a bunch of alpha, adrenaline-loving fighter pilots to care?

You do it by displaying all their landing grades in the squadron ready room for all to see: aircrew visiting from other squadrons, the Admiral of the Fleet, even President George W. Bush when he came to inspect. Everyone.

Making it a competition and making the grades public was the trick to get the pilots on board with adopting the very demanding process of making perfect landings the goal. Teaching the art of carrier landings is challenging, because landing on the aircraft carrier is an art.

“The most perfect technique is that which is not noticed at all.”

– Pablo Casals

When a fighter pilot executes an aircraft carrier landing well, it doesn’t look all that fancy. In fact, the **best grade you can get is just an “OK”!**

15. LSOs are squadron pilots who help their fellow pilots land safely during day and night carrier operations—if you remember the opening scene from Top Gun when the voices were yelling at Cougar “power... POWER!” as he plummeted towards the steel ramp, those were the LSOs’ voices!

When a landing goes poorly, even a casual observer can appreciate just how difficult it is to maintain equilibrium in the chute.¹⁶ To get an OK grade, the pilot has to stay perfectly on course the whole way down, including in the tricky burble of disturbed air just over the ramp, then fly his jet with the right angle to catch the middle arresting wire and safely stop on the centerline of the landing area. Done correctly, **the pilot's helmet will pass through an imaginary square only two feet wide.**

If you're off centerline you could crash into the other jets parked on either side of the foul line. If you're too high you will miss all the wires, bolter, and have to go around for another pass.¹⁷ In the meantime the carrier is steaming in the same direction, vulnerable and potentially running out of room in the tight confines of the Gulf. You're running out of fuel and the entire ship is waiting just for you. Talk about a lot of pressure.

However, if you're too low during your approach, **BOOM**—the steel ramp on the back of the carrier is **undefeated** when engaged in collisions with aircraft.

Fast Scan, Smooth Hands

How do you make this entire evolution safer? Over many dangerous years of trial and error, our naval aviation grandfathers boiled it down to what's most important. There are many things for a pilot to look at during his approach to the aircraft carrier, but only three really matter: **MEATBALL, LINEUP, AOA.**

Hey, Milkshake, Intel Officer: WTF is MEATBALL, LINEUP, AOA?!?

Hmm, how can I describe these 3 things...in a nutshell, the meatball tells you if you're high or low, lineup is the centerline of the landing area, and AOA tells you if your

16. The chute, or the perfect landing funnel, is relatively wide a few miles behind the ship. As you get closer to the deck of the carrier, the chute narrows to a small box about 2 feet by 2 feet.

17. Not only do they shout "BOLTER BOLTER BOLTER!" into the radio for all to hear, but also you get a big bolt stuck over your ready room chair until the next hapless pilot bolters.

arresting hook is at the right angle to catch a wire so your jet can stop on the deck and not fall into the water...

My slogan to help pilots successfully juggle this trio was: “**fast scan, smooth hands.**” The key was to drive your visual scan of all three components incredibly hard and lightning fast.

The AOA light on the left side of the cockpit can be seen with your peripheral vision, but the runway centerline needs an actual look. Especially since when the ship is generating its own wind,¹⁸ it is steaming away from you quickly. This wouldn't be a problem if the carrier flight deck was pointed in the same direction that the ship was headed, but since our landing area is angled, you have to constantly put in little right wing down inputs to keep on centerline.

GET AGGRESSIVE EARLY, then shift to SUBTLE MOVES IN-CLOSE

Here is a great lesson that can be applied to your life. A key learning point for new pilots is to learn to get aggressive early in the landing. Once you are in the groove and wings level, you have about 15 seconds before you touch down.

At the start, being on glide slope and seeing a centered ‘meatball’ means you are within about **30 feet** of being perfect. In-close to the carrier deck, that cone narrows down to only **two feet**.

Getting on track aggressively early makes it easier to make the corrections as you get closer to landing. Over the deck of the carrier, your inputs need to be ever so slight and finessed. The hand motions in the cockpit that are the difference between life and death are so minimal, you would be stunned. It requires 100% laser focus and discipline.

18. Pilots always, always land INTO the wind. Why? The primary reason might surprise you. Our jets need about 30 knots of wind to safely land on the carrier – this keeps our jet engine throttle settings high. At high power settings, jet engines are the most efficient AND can better handle a pilot's subtle inputs for slight power changes.

Once you got the mechanics down, in order to take your landing skill to an even higher level required something else. At the time I called it getting in the zone, but now I know it as intuition.

“Build your intuition. The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.”

– Albert Einstein

When you first start flight school, the instructors warn that you will be hanging onto the tail of the aircraft during your first few flights. You’re useless dead-weight along for the ride. A call for YOU will come in on the radio, but you’re still thinking about what happened a few seconds ago. **Slow to process information and easily overwhelmed, nothing in the skies can be more dangerous than a shiny new clueless student pilot!**

As you gain experience, your focus eventually catches up to where you are sitting in your high-tech cockpit. Now you have control over the jet and you’re able to sort out the myriad lights, dials, and instruments at your disposal.

Mastery comes though when you’re able to do all of that AND extend your focus outside of the cockpit: be the first to see tallies,¹⁹ know exactly where your wingmen are (situational awareness), and understand what’s happening in the battlespace around you.

Yet another level of skill above mastery comes when you can anticipate what’s going to happen before it happens. I’m not really sure how to explain this, but intuition could be **the Force** that George Lucas made popular in *Star Wars*!

When you really concentrate and are in tune with what’s happening, you can feel the buffet of the air on your wings before you hit turbulence or settle hard into the burble. You can hear and feel the whine of the engines and know instinctively if you

19. “Enemy fighters spotted” means it is game time—from the old school legends in WWII, Tally HO!

need to add a little more power. You can tell if something is amiss in the cockpit. **You just *know*.**

Mastering the Quest

You're asking yourself: So what? What the heck does all this flying junk mean to me?

The lesson here is to learn to **master your life like we mastered combat aviation**. Put that same level of determination and desire and passion and focus and competitiveness and put **EVERYTHING** into mastering yourself.

You should want to know how your body, mind, and spirit work, just as we had to memorize and draw the schematics of the arcane inner depths of Grumman's aeronautical engineering.

You can and you should put a lot of energy into improving yourself every day, in every way. And a wise wingman will put a lot of care and love into taking measures to ensure you're he's on top of his game. As our famous F-14 Tomcat motto proclaimed: **ANYTIME, BABY...!**



DANGER!

Keep competing!

When you stop competing, bad things can occur. One time, a long while ago, some progressive educator-type decided to get rid of the Greenie Board, where all the pilots landing grades are posted in the ready room.

The result?

Disaster.

Pilots started 'spotting the deck' and chaos ensued behind the boat. After a couple of near mishaps and hook-slap ramp strikes, back up on the wall went the ol' Greenie Board...

"The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor."

– Vince Lombardi

Aim for Balance + Perfection

Aim for balance and perfection in *body, mind, spirit*:

Nutrition

- **Breathe deeply:** Relax your mind and body: try cycles of five-second inhales, hold for five seconds, slowly exhale for five seconds, leave it out for five seconds.
- **Drink plenty of fresh water:** You want your body to be a clean, flowing waterfall, not a cesspool of trashy sugar drinks.
- **Eat healthy food that gives you long-term energy, not food that saps your energy quickly:** Please see my website, dogfightingdepression.org, for a list of some great choices to substitute into your nutrition plan. Start tomorrow with a banana with vanilla almond butter spread on it for breakfast.

SLEEP

- **Cold air is best:** 60-67 degrees F.
- **Quiet + dark:** Get blackout curtains and a white noise machine.
- **Prop up pillows:** Sleep with your head slightly elevated and supported; this can help immensely.
- **Don't eat and drink before bed:** Try to finish eating and drinking a few hours before you put your head down. Alcohol and caffeine can inhibit critical sleep cycles. Bananas, oatmeal, and almonds have some wacky scientific way of helping out as well...
- **Hot / Cold Shower:** Taking a hot shower will relax your muscles and help you decompress from the day. Rinsing with cold water will flex all of your muscles; when they all slowly relax, you'll sleep better afterwards. Trust me on this one...
- **Reflection time:** I recoil from the word 'journaling,' but writing down the best part of your day or something you want to improve on is great for your soul. There's also a real power to setting your brain to work on an issue before you sleep—in the morning you'll sometimes wake up with the answer!

Exercise

- **Morning routine:** Start with a few jumping jacks, pushups, and sit-ups—even two minutes will get your blood pumping and speed up your metabolism! I KNOW you have two minutes in the morning. No excuses!
- **Brisk 20-minute walk in the morning:** Whether or not you do this is one of the main predictors of happiness; along with random acts of kindness + remembering happy memories from a journal or from favorite pictures.
- **Stretches:** I resisted yoga for years because it sounded ridiculously boring, but adding stretching into my life was critical for me after injuries sustained from ejecting from an F-14 and getting knee + back surgeries. Stretching encourages blood flow, and blood flow = healing. Get after it.
- **Competition/Teamwork/Camaraderie:** Play a sport you love or engage in an activity you're passionate about—the time will fly, and I'm confident you'll learn a great deal more than you expected. The big-brain kids also did a study that showed team sports helped the most in decreasing mental stress. Check out my twitter feed @davedequeljoe for more information.

Learning

- **Read something new each day:** Our brains are capable of so much more than we know. Read an article, a book, even if it is just one chapter or one page! This will help you get into the habit, and your brain will have something to focus on besides your current bad state of affairs. There's a great saying that goes something like this: If you're going through hell, don't stop, keep going! Engaging your mind in new ideas keeps your airspeed high.
- **Podcasts or audio books in the car:** Pick something you're interested in learning more about. There are a million different podcasts and you can find one on just about any topic.

- **Develop your own “Path to Victory” Board:** Put things on fridge/bathroom wall/public space (where you can easily see it) to focus on throughout the day. Mastery of your mind takes a LOT of time, best to start now...

Love + Family + Relationships

- **Be a better listener.**
- **Random acts of kindness.**
- **Teaching & helping others:** Try to give 51% of the value in all relationships.
- **Dr. Glasser’s advice on communication + connectedness** [see Chapter 11]: No CBC (criticizing, blaming, complaining). Instead, replace these with listening, understanding, negotiating differences.
- **Compassion + Love** = The solution to conflict with loved ones: always. See it from their point of view before you react. Realize that they are acting a certain way based on what they believe to be true, or a fear or worry. If you step in with compassion and love, as corny as that sounds, it WILL work. Took me a long time to figure this gem out...

Church / Meditation / Deep Thought / Dreams

- **Quiet time:** For reflection and inner peace. The precise path required for landing on the aircraft carrier safely can be related to the straight and narrow path to everlasting bliss; or so two little angels said to me...
- **Change your environment:** Change your physical surroundings; if not possible, change your THOUGHTS by using pictures (Instagram feed of all your favorite things), movies (comedies), images (*fill your mind with visions of everything working out perfectly... what you can envision, you can make a reality*).
- **Preflight shower** = **“victorious warriors win first in their minds”**: Take time in the shower or while getting ready to review your goals for the day. Get yourself in the right mindset to make the biggest possible positive impact; focusing externally will help keep you from spiraling downward.
- **Hobby / Sport / Hike:** I need to thank Steph Curry for saving my life. I admire his formula of **discipline + joy + fighting spirit**. So, I adopted his habit of not leaving the gym until *hitting 10 free throws in a row*. Nothing sharpens my mind

more than the focus it requires to do this. Plus, unlike mental progress, you can physically see your progress on the long road of mastering your mind. Try it out!

- **Dream big:** One of the keys to escaping the maze of darkness is using imagination, intuition, and innovation. Don't forget this. What WOULD you do, if you COULD do anything? If you knew you would be successful? Dream, with no fear of failure...

Music

- **Explore new artists and genres.** You can do this easily on the internet, Pandora, Spotify, etc.
- **A great way to change your environment** is to listen to music, or music unfamiliar to you as a way to expand your horizon. Don't worry about what music you think you're supposed to listen to. Each style of music has great artists and you're cheating yourself if you only listen to one category.
- Please visit dogfightingdepression.org for some songs that really helped me when I was stuck. 2020 UPDATE: I have two years of developed playlists for you, including a soundtrack for this book! Music is for everyone, and I have compiled my favorites from just about every category. And I'd **love** to hear yours; email me dogfightDave@gmail.com and let me know your favorite songs!
- Lastly, recently I read an article about how **singing is good for your health**, and does all sorts of great things for your immune system and stuff. So, if you hate karaoke night, when you're by yourself in the car or the shower, just belt it out like there's no tomorrow...

**tldr: listen, this is what my hot ex-gf told me, so I would be paying close attention if I were you. Who doesn't want to be sexy?
Just sayin'...**

Chapter 10

Emotional Resiliency + Sense of Humor Is Sexy



“Hey, Babe, did you know that emotional resiliency is really sexy?”

– My superhot & wise ex-girlfriend. OK, when you say it like that, now I’m listening...

“Need or want nothing...”

– Tao

There is a real aspect of being depressed that is more crippling and damaging to your chances of recovering than any other: **When you're feeling down you are an emotional black hole.**

Your intense neediness sucks the life out of everything around you. There is no amount of love, sex, affection, attention, alcohol, sunlight, great food, entertainment, or anything that will satisfy you.

EVERYTHING gets absorbed by your horrifically, terrifying, open maw of suck.

"Get in mah BELLY!" says Fat Bastard, in *Austin Powers*.

But here's the bad news, now you're even worse than that guy. And he had some extremely questionable hygiene. So, what can you do to remedy this?

There is a fascinating line in the book *Pitch Anything* that describes how validation-seeking behavior triggers **FEAR** in the primitive recesses of our human brains.

This makes a lot of sense as applied to our current dilemma of depression: When we need people the most, and we need the most help, our neediness actually drives that help away.

Fear and neediness subconsciously push away the people we love. Fear shoves us in the back and down we go, sliding down into the dark cave of intense needy desire as we look for help. Now that we are in full-on-needy-struggler²⁰ mode, our neediness crushes our weak attempts to climb out of the darkness. Why? Because we are *selfishly and helplessly focused inwards*.

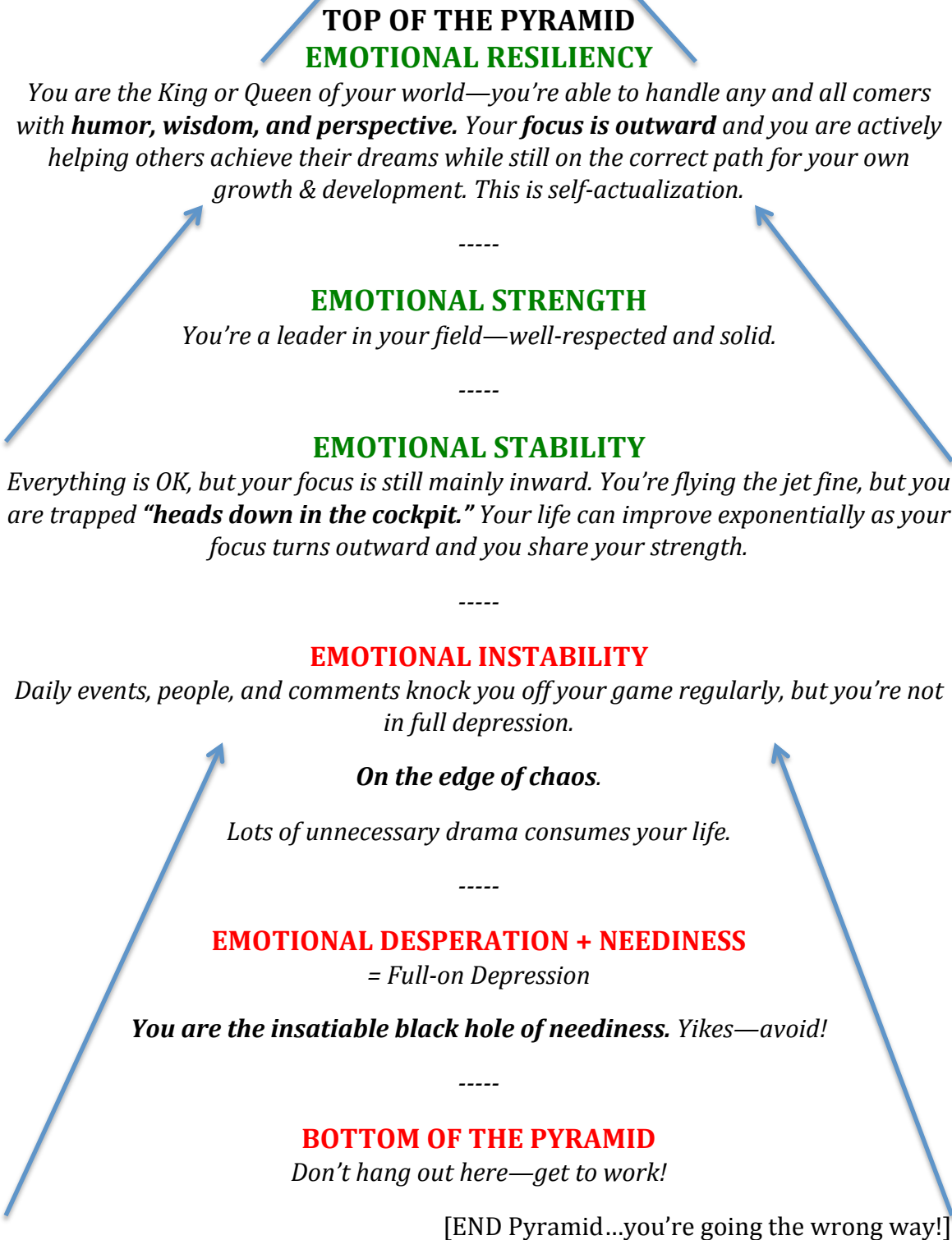
The solution is simple: you must force yourself to focus outward

20. I'm not sure there was a worse insult in the squadron than to be called a "struggler." The absolute worst. If you were outside the squadron and pegged a struggler, you no longer existed. If you were inside the squadron, the collective strength of will of the aircrew made you eliminate the struggler behavior. It was actually pretty funny to watch. Until it was you, then it was extremely unpleasant—but you were grateful afterwards, because now you, and the team, were that much stronger, and more likely to achieve my favorite word: VICTORY

My mom's sage advice, "***When you're feeling down, the best thing you can do is to help others,***" has never been more applicable. Let's look at the depression version of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and see why you need to get the heck out of the bottom stage right now:

[Figure: Emotional Pyramid... stay at the top!]

[The Depression Version of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs]



So, this is the root of the problem. Once you're on the right path, it is still difficult to reach the top of the pyramid—some people take a lifetime of striving and searching and never get there. This is why you need to break out of the bottom of your personal Hierarchy of Needs pyramid right NOW. You're wasting time on a part of life that is destructive, self-indulgent, and, frankly, where scared people live in fear and mistrust.

Don't believe me yet? Let's take a look at a wide range of sources; within you will see the element of universal truth:

*"You can get so confused
that you'll start in to race
down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace
and grind on for miles cross weirdish wild space,
headed, I fear, toward a most useless place.
The Waiting Place...*

*...for people just waiting.
Waiting for a train to go
or a bus to come, or a plane to go
or the mail to come, or the rain to go
or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow
or the waiting around for a Yes or No
or waiting for their hair to grow.
Everyone is just waiting.*

*Waiting for the fish to bite
or waiting for the wind to fly a kite
or waiting around for Friday night
or waiting, perhaps, for their Uncle Jake
or a pot to boil, or a Better Break
or a string of pearls, or a pair of pants
or a wig with curls, or Another Chance.
Everyone is just waiting.*

NO!
That's not for you!"

- Dr. Seuss, from *Oh the Places You'll Go*

We might as well start from the beginning, with children's books! As I read this to my children, I remembered all the people I knew who would say ***"I will be happy when..."***, ***"I will start that passion of mine when..."***, ***"I'm going to take a deep breath, but only after this happens..."*** Do NOT ever be that person. The time is now. It is never going to be easy to start something. It won't get any easier if you wait.

Fortune favors the bold. Begin now.

"Oh, it's just me, myself and I
Solo ride until I die
Cause I got me for life
(Got me for life, yeah)
Oh, I don't need a hand to hold
Even when the night is cold
I got that **fire** in my soul"

- G-Easy & Bebe Rexha, *"Me Myself & I"*

Moving to current music for our younger readers. You do NOT need a hand to hold. Other people can and will help you, but you don't NEED that. There is no magic pill, no easy out, no quick fix. And really, you don't want that. Start building momentum, every day a little better than the previous. Start gaining airspeed, and you'll start to enjoy the hard work. You'll feel proud of yourself and you'll gain self-esteem.

As author *Brene Brown* discovered in her six years of interviewing people, the one common aspect that happy people share is the feeling that they **feel WORTHY of success**. Don't feel worthy of being loved or of good things now? That's OK. Put in the hard work and the drive for continuous self-improvement in all areas, and you're going to get there. Fast. Afterburners fast. And you will have earned it yourself.

“Peace comes from within. Do not seek it without.”

- Prince Siddhārtha Gautama

Everything you need is within you. The answers you seek. The solution to the complex riddle of depression. *The way you find it is from within.* Definitely seek out knowledge and inspiration from all sources. But don’t expect or want anyone to hold your hand through the process. You’re going to have to cast off the lines and take off solo. Believe me, it is worth it.

Holding On to Something Because It Is Comfortable+ Familiar

I listened to an interesting podcast recently about how writers get depressed **when they finish a screenplay**. ‘*Post-scriptum depression*’ they called it, or something clever like that. BUT WHY would you get depressed when you finished something that **you wanted to finish**?

Craig Maizen, half of the excellent duo of the Scriptnotes podcast, said it was due to a loss of something very familiar. The script gave him purpose and gave him direction every day. Letting go of it when it was complete was hard.

It occurred to me, **this is very similar to depression**. If you are experiencing depression, you probably have developed bad habits and terrible thought patterns to go along with it—like peanut butter and jelly, paired perfectly together. Familiarity is comfortable. It’s easy. Feels good. You know what to do. You can just wake up, settle back into the same routine, every day. Auto pilot. Cake.

What will you do without it?

**Comfort is the enemy of change.
Comfort is the enemy of great.**

You must replace this fear of the unknown with courage to start living your life. Your fear is that this process will be hard. Well, guess what? It will be. You feel like it's hopeless. I get it.

The fear is that you won't be good enough. You might not be at first, but you must try, or you die a coward.

It is never too late, said the wise old Uber driver to me in Boston, as he shuttled me to the U-Haul place to begin my emergency move to be closer to my children. Don't wait a minute longer.

"The best time to plant a tree was thirty years ago. The second-best time is right now."

- Ancient Japanese Proverb

Depression is a **SIGNAL** from your unconscious mind, an alert from the universe, a wakeup call from the front desk of ***Hotel Awesome Life***, and it's telling you something deep: **YOU ARE ON THE WRONG PATH**. So, get excited if you're depressed, because climbing out of this is the start of something new and amazing for you.

Here is one of my favorite quotes, which we had to memorize freshman (Plebe) year at the United States Naval Academy:

"It is not the critic who counts, not the one who points out how the strong man stumbled or how the doer of deeds might have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred with sweat and dust and blood; who strives valiantly, who errs and comes short again and again, who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who if he wins, knows the triumph of high achievement; and who, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat."

- Theodore Roosevelt

Man in the arena, baby. That is now **YOU**, whether you like it or not.

So embrace the press out of depression, (now you have 'deion'? Prime Time baby!) grab it with both hands and stare it in the face. Resolve with steel determination that you're going to beat it.

You're going to find the message hidden within the darkness. Use the fire you've been tortured in to catapult yourself to a newer better life. You're going to rise up out of the ashes, remade into something stronger, smarter, and wiser. And it is going to be glorious. Trust me.

"I wasn't surviving. I was preparing."

- Nelson Mandela, when asked how he survived all those years in captivity

[Figure: Memorization is the first step to mastery. It is your choice to memorize it, but know that memorization was the key to victory in Nuclear Engineering School, Navy Flight School, AND dogfighting depression...]

WARNING

Emotional Resiliency EMERGENCY PROCEDURES:

Take a deep breath (five seconds is best, through your nose).

Replace negative emotions with ones that will help you achieve victory.

- Replace ANGER/FEAR with CLARITY + DETERMINATION
- Replace GREED with CONTENTMENT + GENEROSITY
- Replace DOUBT with CURIOSITY + EXCITEMENT
- Replace JEALOUSY with ACCEPTANCE + LOVE

Eventually your primary emotions will become the healthy expressions of the negative emotions. Fear will become courage. Anger will turn to joy. Jealousy will be replaced by acceptance. Pessimism transforms to trust.

(Adapted from The Way of the SEAL, an excellent book by Commander Mark Divine.)

[END Figure: I'm not kidding about the memorization thing; it is your choice, but I would strongly advise you to take a pic, screenshot, or write this down where you can see it every day. This one def comes in handy...]

***TOPGUN Instructor recommended tactic:
MEMORIZE & RECITE EVERY DAY***

< THIS IS THE PATH TO MASTERING YOUR MIND >

Remember: The first step to mastery is...memorization...

(ps: repetition doesn't spoil the prayer – thanks for teaching me this Russ!)

7 Habits Of People with Remarkable Mental Toughness

1. Always act as if you are in total control.
(“Pray as if God will take care of all; act as if all us up to you.” – Ignatius)
2. Put aside things you have no ability to impact.
(No one has unlimited mental strength, save yours for what you can do.)
3. See the past as valuable training and nothing more.
(Make sure next time you and your team get it right.)
4. Celebrate the success of others.
(No hating!)
5. Never allow yourself to whine.
(Friends also don’t let friends whine, they help them make their lives better.)
6. Focus only on impressing yourself.
(Leads to genuine relationships.)
7. Count your blessings.
(Best way to recharge your mental batteries.)

(From an extremely impactful article at Inc.com, definitely worth reading; simple and powerful summary...Thanks, Jeff! Link: <http://www.inc.com/jeff-haden/7-habits-of-people-with-remarkable-mental-toughness.html>)

tldr: Harvard studies show that the depth of your relationships are the biggest predictor of happiness + fulfillment, but do you know *HOW* to make them all richer + more satisfying?

Chapter 11

Stay Connected & Improve All of Your Relationships



“The correct solution to solve conflict with loved ones is always compassion and love”

– Teacher Barbara McNally

THIS IS A CBC FREE ZONE, read the sign on the wall.

Sounds like a radiological nuclear hazard warning, but it is really a guiding principle at the lovely St. Patrick Catholic School in Norfolk, Virginia.

It means: no criticizing, no blaming, and no complaining.

The goal is to establish a healthy environment for children to learn and develop. I would love for the best practices from all the private schools in the country to be adopted by our public schools. Perhaps if you are an educational entrepreneur you can adopt this mission as your own. Or maybe I can figure out a way to overcome internal resistance and get this done myself. My next book maybe?

I was 19 years old when I first got stuck in life. After getting booted from my first attempt at college I was at a major crossroads. It was my education that saved me.

My education allowed me the freedom to choose a new path I loved, and gave me the horsepower to execute it. That path bought me so much joy and happiness; I would love to help others have a similar chance at pursuing their dreams. Maybe my second round of getting stuck—into an even worse depression—was a gift from the universe to help guide me on this path.

Anyway, back to the whole **“CBC FREE ZONE”** concept. It was developed by Doctor Glasser, who believes almost all human suffering and unhappiness comes from being disconnected. Good news is that he’s identified the seven most destructive disconnecting habits and the seven most connecting habits for us. You can see them in the following figure:

Where is the Love?

Keys to Improving Our Communication

Seven Connecting Habits

1. Supporting
2. Encouraging
3. Listening
4. Accepting
5. Trusting
6. Respecting
7. Negotiating Differences

Seven Disconnecting Habits

1. Criticizing
2. Blaming
3. Complaining
4. Nagging
5. Threatening
6. Punishing
7. Rewarding for Control

- The Seven Disconnecting Habits are destructive to relationships.
- When used in relationships, the 7 “Bad” Habits will eventually destroy the relationship, and result in people feeling disconnected.
- Disconnectedness is the source of almost all human problems.
- Try to replace the “Bad” Habits with the “Good” Habits – it will take time, but it will definitely make a huge difference in your life, as well as the lives of your peers, your families, and the ones you love.

I was so enthralled by this concept, I made a slide (above) and put it on my fridge; I also put it in the breakroom and offices of the businesses I owned. When clients or guests would see them they would ask about it, so I started handing out copies for people to take home.

Word of caution: when I first put it up on the wall, I spent a LOT of time CBC'ing people who were CBC'ing. *“Hey, you’re complaining too much,”* I chastised a friend...

This is OK—being aware of these principles helped us all to recognize it and stop it.

WARNING:

Nothing is more destructive to a unit, family, or business than complaining and blaming.

The ‘complaining, blaming & criticizing’ trio is a cancer and must be eliminated immediately from your life and especially your thoughts.

WARNING #2:

This new productive habit of replacing disconnecting habits with connecting habits can fade quickly if you don't stay vigilant.

Somewhere along the line, I lost track of these principles. That proved disastrous for me. I would encourage you to put this up somewhere you can see it frequently. It is currently BACK up on my fridge. I will probably leave it up there forever, so I don't forget.

READY ROOM TIP

It is critically important to leave key points to memorize or adopt into your life in places you can see them. When I was in flight school, I would place everything I needed to memorize on one sheet of paper, and leave it up on the wall in my house. On the fridge, above my bed, and in the bathroom. Constant viewing and no resistance to opening a book meant I was always learning. This was a key factor in my success.

Take Great Care of Those Who Love You

It is going to take some extreme patience to cross the finish line. Your journey out of depression is going to be a lot more pleasant if you have some loved ones to support you while you're engaged in the fight of your life. Here are some quick tips for you that I learned the hard way:

- Friends and family might not see positive changes in you immediately. Be patient.

“We judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing, while others judge us by what we have already done.”

– Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

- Everyone can help you on your journey; assistance might come from where you least expect it. While you are focused on your fight, that's not a free pass to treat

people harshly or curtly. Remember my dad's advice, you can learn something from everyone you meet: Be ready.

“Despise not any man, and do not spurn anything; for there is no man who has not his hour, nor is there anything that has not its place.”

– Ben Azai

- If people don't have time or resources or extra mental firepower to assist you in your current state of affairs, never take it personally. It might just mean they can't right now, or they are too wrapped up in their own personal struggle to help you. Just as the founder of WhatsApp doesn't hold it against Facebook for not hiring him, then was amused to see their billion-dollar purchase offer years later for his invention! Everything happens as it should, and when it should, so tread lightly and don't hold grudges. Thank people for their help, and understand when they can't give any.

“Men are not against you; they are merely for themselves.”

– Gene Fowler

- As you learn and grow, don't be a living documentary on how others aren't living their lives correctly. Look to share what you have learned, but don't force it on anyone. Remember: When the student is ready, the teacher appears.

“The truth is there is nothing noble in being superior to somebody else. The only real nobility is being superior to your former self.”

– Whitney Young (1921-1971) [Ernest Hemingway]

- Above all else, remember this one rule! If you are in a conflict with someone you love, take a deep breath and try to see it from their side. Then act with love and compassion towards them. Always.

= = =

You can't really control anyone or any situation in life—people definitely try to do it, but it never works out well in the long run. Seeking to control life seems like a crazy form of OCD, and is super-destructive to relationships. You can and should try to influence people for good, but remember, it is their life. Smile and be gracious, and appreciate them for who they are. Be grateful for your time with them. Look to make their lives better in every way you can. It still might not work, but don't get discouraged. Just as we remember things our parents never thought we heard, our children and loved ones are listening. They just may not be ready to act on your pearls of wisdom. So, laugh and keep loving them anyway. Focus on their strengths and what you love about them: you might be surprised that you will usually get more of that.

"Deal with others in grand way. Aspire to elevation. The great should never be petty. You needn't go into all the details when conversing with others, especially when the subject is distasteful.

Notice things, but do so casually; it isn't good to turn conversation into detailed interrogation. Act with a courteous, noble generality, which is a sort of gallantry. A large part of ruling lies in feigning indifference.

Learn to overlook most of the things that happen among your close friends, your acquaintances, and especially among your enemies. Unscrupulousness is irritating, and if it forms part of your character you will be tiresome to others. To keep circling around something unpleasant is a sort of mania. Remember that people usually behave like what they are: according to their own heart and their own capacity."

- Balthasar Gracian, The Art of Worldly Wisdom

Section III.

Think BIG!



tldr: this is where it gets real; for a lot of you this will be the MOST important chapter...

Chapter 12

Craft Your Own *PATH TO VICTORY* Board

"The first duty is to sacrifice to the gods and pray them to grant you the thoughts, words and deeds likely to render your command most pleasing to the gods and to bring yourself, your friends and your city the fullest measure of affection, glory and advantage."

– Xenophon, The Cavalry Commander

This might be the most important chapter in this book for some of you. You might just need what's found in this chapter alone to find your way out of the maze of depression, forever. Your life will begin again. A smile will appear on your lips, as you see what you've been missing all these years. Don't waste a minute of this new joyful period wistfully regretting anything—jump into it head first and resolve to live each new moment to the max.

Laugh at yourself and the situation. Leave people better off in some way than when you found them. Learn from them and grow yourself continually towards the light and the truth. For me, it is shooting for the stars. For you, it could be surfing, or learning to be a rodeo champ, or playing the piano. Whatever it is, find out your unique path to victory using the ideas that you place on your own *Path to Victory* board—distill the truth and essence of what you are, what you need, and what you love.

"Clarity of mind means clarity of passion, too; this is why a great and clear mind loves ardently and sees distinctly what it loves."

- Blaise Pascal, mathematician and philosopher

Here's how:



Start by taking the most powerful quote you can think of. What is your favorite quote? What will help propel you? Write it down, put it on your fridge, or your phone, or somewhere visible where you will see it a lot. Memorize it.

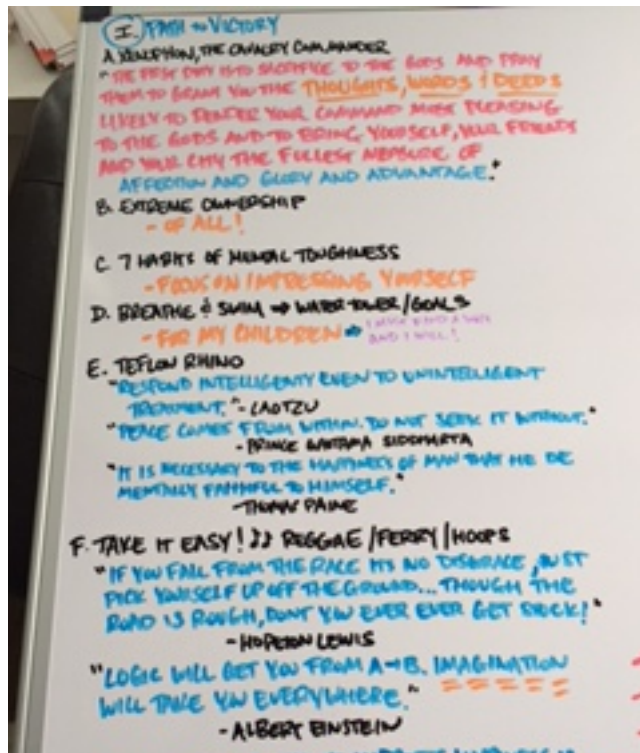
Get a white board, or a blank sheet of printer paper. Write down your favorite parts of your favorite movie, book, song, speech, poem, etc. What makes you the strongest? Happiest? Focused? Write it all down, put it out where you will see it. Look at it every morning.

What are you the most drawn to? What helps you the most? Take those most powerful winning quotes or thoughts and rewrite your board with just the best.

Consolidate like-minded thoughts into the very best one. Add new things that you've discovered on your Memento-like quest out of the maze. Keep refining your thoughts until you have a good idea of what makes you tick and what you need to perform at your best. Don't worry about making it look good or making it perfect—it isn't going to ever be perfect, but it is what you need right now, so put it on there.

No one needs to see it but you, so it can be personal. I'm mortified to be sharing mine, but you need to see an example for this to make sense. Follow with me for a second while I explain how this all came to be.

[You will evolve the board and it will improve over time, so don't worry about making the first one perfect.]



Fighting depression feels like you're starting fresh, or even starting from behind, every time you wake up. Every morning, it can feel like you've made no gains from the day before. You're stuck as ever, feeling hopeless, and there doesn't seem to be any end in sight. This sucks. How best to combat this particular side of the darkness?

Give the 'new you' who just woke up a reminder from the day before. What did you learn? What gains did you make? Lock them into concrete by chiseling out the thoughts and words that will lead to victorious deeds. Winning will lead to momentum, confidence, and hope. When you fall from the path along the way, and you will, don't despair or panic.

"If you fall from the race, it's no disgrace, just pick yourself from off the ground. Though the road is rough, don't you ever, ever get stuck. So take your time, take it easy, no need to hurry."

- Hopeton Lewis, 'Take it Easy'

Not to worry. This is part of the stock market-like chart climb out of the maze. The trick is to be guided by your arrow of pebbles.

“When you halt in the desert, make an arrow from pebbles, so if suddenly woken up, you’ll grasp which way to go.”

– Joseph Brodsky

Recite the material you’ve collected. Memorize it. Integrate it into your very soul. Rewire your fighter jet and upgrade the combat systems so you keep moving forward and you can adapt to any new adventure.

“She may not look like much, but she's got it where it counts, kid. I've made a lot of special modifications myself.”

- Han Solo

Rinse. Lather. Repeat.

A word of caution here: don’t overthink this and don’t look for an easy way around it.

“...Because I find smart people spend their whole lifetime figuring things out. They also try to figure out an easier way and a quicker way. And another thing I found out about smart people is they just don’t get around to doin’ nothin’...”

- Art Williams. ²¹

Here is where the discipline and hard work and grit come into play. This stuff is really not that fun at first. It takes a lot of mental energy to change the way you normally operate. A good friend once said to me that people can only change about 10% of themselves. I objected, and they said laughingly well maybe for YOU, since you’re so focused, you actually *can* do a complete 100% rehaul.

21. Check out his funny and powerful speech on YouTube; I think this inspired the famous Nike ad campaign “Just Do It,” but that’s just me speculating...

The thing is, it is a lot, ***lot easier to stay the same***. But then you get the same junk results. Father Time is going to keep on ticking regardless, so you had better get up and start running.

“Never give up on a dream just because of the time it will take to accomplish it. The time will pass anyway.”

- Earl Nightingale

Remember the gains at first are miniscule—you might not feel anything is different or better. But keep swinging, keep chipping away at it. Just like good ol' unassuming Andy Dufresne tunneling his way out of prison in *The Shawshank Redemption*.

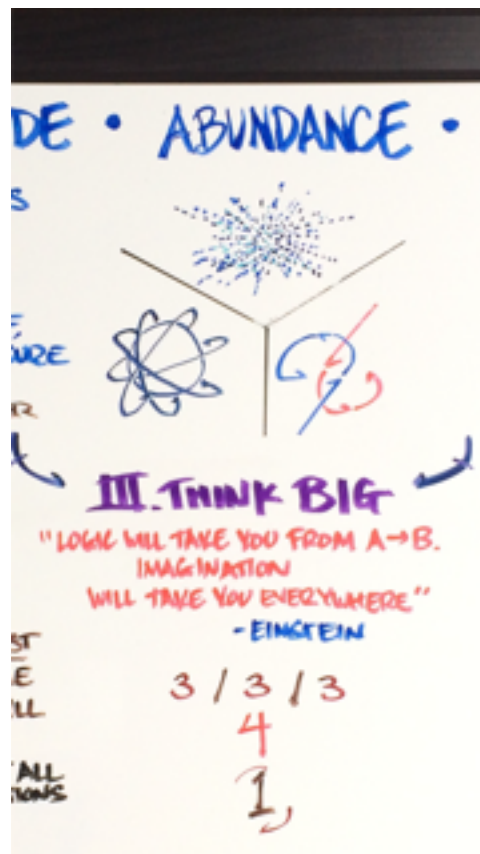
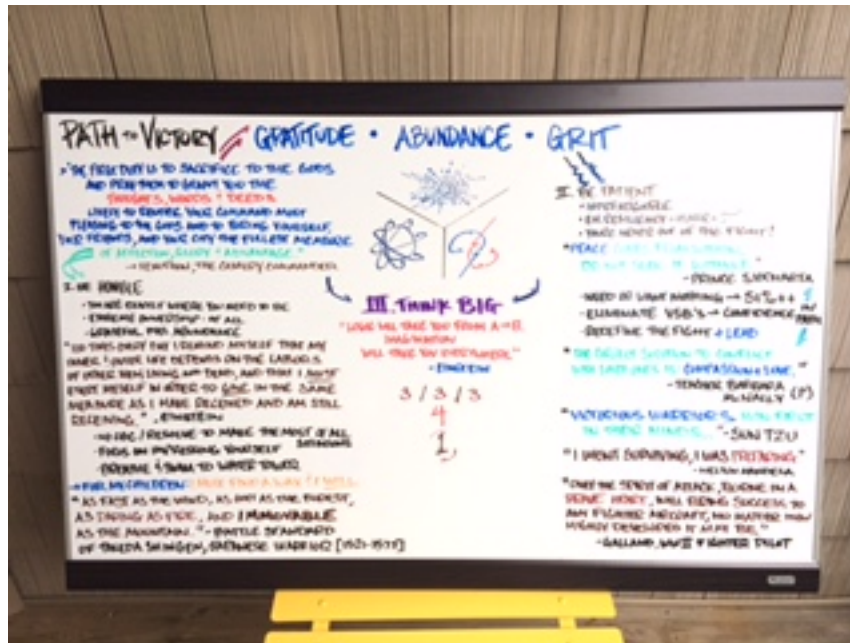
Fortune favors the brave. There really is no other way, not that I have found. You're going to have to buckle in, get dirty, and start fighting. You're going to get shot down once or twice, or a hundred times. Luckily for you, you get a brand new fighter jet each day, so make that thing hum and fly your ass off until you win.

“Discipline = FREEDOM”

- Jocko Willink, former Navy SEAL Commander

“Only the spirit of attack borne in a brave heart will bring success to any fighter aircraft, no matter how highly developed it may be.”

- Adolf Galland, WWII Fighter Pilot



BONUS:

Behind the Scenes of Dogfighting Depression

- An explanation of my **Path to Victory** board and why I selected the quotes/thoughts + their deeper meaning.

TOPGUN Instructor Recommended Tactic:

This reminds me of how the Blue Angels famously 'fly' their entire flight in the ready room on the ground before they walk to their jets. "Victorious warriors win first in their minds..."

Gratitude / Abundance / Grit

- A lot of books and quotes reference **gratitude**, and it is critically important to be grateful. But to me it USED to seem like if you were really grateful, you just weren't pushing forward with your life and were happily content with where you are. The dangerous side of too much gratitude, I felt, was complacency, which as we have seen was soul-crushing. **I needed more.**
- **Abundance** came to me next, seemingly out of nowhere. The power of this word is limitless, especially as it contrasts with scarcity, the overwhelming mode for the way you think when you're depressed. Abundance is all about dreaming and imagining what is possible. It is awesome. But you can easily get lost in the clouds and ***there needs to be another, third power to balance this.***
- **Grit** was added to complete the equation, because you need to fight and compete, every day. It can't be all puppy dogs and ice cream and kumbaya and holding hands and sunsets—there is evil and darkness in the world and if you aren't ready for it, or are blind to it, it will envelop and crush you. Grit, of course, isn't enough by itself either—we all know plenty of tough guys who are crazy, dumb, and unimaginative. Don't be an incomplete man—**complete yourself** and complete the equation with all three—**GRATITUDE/ABUNDANCE/GRIT**

Xenophon Quote

- From the book *The War of Art* by Stephen Pressfield, which should be on your reading list ASAP. This quote reminds me of his best book, *Gates of Fire*, and reminds me to be a leader. There is more to the world than you and your individual goals—you have a command, and a responsibility. The more you grow the more you realize that your ‘command’, your team, the people you are leading and inspiring, is an ever-increasing circle. You also get the sense the universe is always watching, and it is. Everything is seen, everything matters, everything counts. So make every moment count, act as if all your ancestors can see your behavior, act as if you’re on a nationally televised show, and make yourself proud of your actions. Even more important, maybe the most important part of it all, is that your actions are not enough. You need the thoughts, the words, and the deeds. All three. All three must be in line and according to the ultimate highest expression of your capabilities and potential. Not there yet? Keep **sacrificing** (by spending **TIME** thinking about it, not sacrificing a roasted pig or something crazy!) to the gods in the morning and praying for it. Then push and scrap and fight and compete to forge yourself to be **indefatigable**.

“Pray as if God will take care of all. Act as if it is all up to you”

– Saint Ignatius

Be Humble

- “You are exactly where you need to be,” from Boho Beautiful YouTube video.
 - I froze when I saw this. The words popped off the screen to me as it is very similar to one of my favorite expressions “everything happens for a reason;” but this phrase has twin afterburning engines attached to it. Yes. Whether this is true or not, it focuses your mind to accept where you are, embrace the suck (the Navy SEAL’s version of this quote), and make the very best in every possible way of wherever you are. Laugh, enjoy, live the current second to the fullest. Because, as a great song says, “*...but we will never be here again...*” – *Take it Easy*, The Eagles

- “Extreme ownership – of all”: another book you should add to your list is *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win*, by Jocko Willink & Leif Babin.
- Powerful phrase that gives you command and power over your own life. By agreeing with, and checking the box of the ‘terms and conditions,’ you own everything and every situation in your life. The good and the bad. It is on you. Ouch. Stings a bit, but then the realization of extreme power floods you: **if** it is all on you, **then** YOU have the POWER to take control and get after fixing it. Internal locus of control, the belief that you are in command of your life and destiny, is a major keystone in overcoming depression. Adopt this mindset and start shaping the life of your dreams. Now.
- “*Gratitude for abundance.*” “If the only prayer you say is ‘thank you,’ that is enough.” – Meister Eckhart.
- Fill your soul with gratitude for what abounds around you. The sun, the stars, the moon, the wind, the trees, the waves, the food, the inspirational people, and the people you love. Be one with it, and add to it in your own way. Share your gift and embrace the light side. Replace fear, anger, jealousy, and pessimism with courage, joy, acceptance, and trust.

“100 times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life depends on the labors of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving.”

- Einstein

- Listen, if the greatest genius of our time thinks he should be getting after it to be grateful, then we all should. Find your gift, have the courage to go chase it, hone it, and perfect it, then, for the love of God, share it with the whole world!

“No CBC / resolve to make the most of all situations”

CBC is from Chapter 11; no criticizing, blaming, or complaining.

- All of those are cancerous and must be eliminated from yourself and your teams. Healthy criticism and communication are vital, so replace the disconnecting

habits with connecting habits. Strengthen your relationships and improve your life dramatically. Resolving to make the most of every situation is a winning attitude and the way to enjoy life. Don't wait until conditions are perfect for you to celebrate life and enjoy yourself. Those times come rarely. And you aren't as in control as you think—instead, embrace what and who is around you, and look to learn the lesson presented to you. Look to give and help the people around you, lead them to victory, too. Everyone IS all of us, anyway, we are so interconnected that to fail here means failing at life. Pick yourself up off the ground, correct this imbalance, and press forward! Find something to laugh at in any situation, and find something good or valuable in each moment. It is there, you just have to look. Don't be on autopilot, drifting around lazily. So click off your internal boring-but-safe autopilot, grab the stick, roll in, and engage.

“For my children: I must find a way and I will.”

The whole reason I'm writing this book.

- There is a popular book floating around called “*Start With Why*” that people have recommended—I should check it out. In the meantime, here is my “why?” **My children.** Never give up. “It’s never too late” said the Uber cab driver from Boston (U-Haul move to Conn.).

“As fast as the wind, as quiet as the forest, as daring as fire, and immovable as the mountain”

– Battle Standard of Takeda Shingen, Japanese Warrior [1521-1573]

- This is just an awesome quote and it balances out the ‘be humble/continual learning’ section in this way: most people are content to just be one thing. Concentrating your forces and skills is a powerful move and has had tremendous success in history: military, business, sports examples.
- However, there is a time to spread the net wide, and the time and place is right now. My kids used to love the cartoon “***The Last Airbender.***” In this fantasy world, there were people who had powers of controlling fire, earth, water, and air. Just one little kid, the Last Airbender, could control all four elements. In life, wouldn’t you rather be the Last Airbender? Figure it all out; don’t sell yourself

short. As modern hero and Navy SEAL Jocko Willink said gruffly on the Tim Ferris Show, *"I'm working on all things at all times. Working on improving one aspect of my life doesn't prohibit me from working on other aspects. So I'm working on everything, all at once."* Get some, Jocko. Thanks.

BONUS tip: Check out the podcast "Work on Your Game" with DreAllDay Baldwin; his no-nonsense style and uniquely refreshing perspective will undoubtedly resonate with some of you hard-chargers out there...

Be Patient

- **"INDEFATIGABLE"** – From the poem I wrote (*please see Appendix for two versions of this poem*) while in extreme pain—my relationship with my children was at an all-time low, and I was at the bottom of life. Camping out at the lowest rung of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. **Indefatigable** reminds me to never give up and think clearly as if I had just been *Quantum Leap*'ed into my body and had to solve a puzzle. I also use this time to focus on healing my mind, body, and soul. If it's all in our minds, and I believe it is, then you hold the power to heal yourself. Try it out, what's the worst that can happen?
- **"Emotional Resiliency + sense of humor is sexy."** – The two wavy lines are a woman's shape. My ex-gf gets all the credit for this one, because when she says something is sexy, I do it. Emotional resiliency is what makes humor so powerful, so laugh in danger and laugh during a crisis—it will help you focus your mind and find the best solution. Remember that **two types of humor are related to happiness: self-enhancing and affiliative (brings the group together)**; avoid self-deprecating and destructive humor.
- **"You're never out of the fight."** – Thanks to our friends over at Navy Special Warfare for this gem, probably my favorite military creed of all time.

"My nation expects me to be physically stronger and mentally harder than our enemies. I will draw upon every ounce of strength to

protect my teammates and accomplish our mission. If knocked down, I will get up. Every time. I am never out of the fight.”

- **If you’re still breathing, you’re still in the fight.** Damn, don’t you just LOVE that?! Gather your energy and your courage and step back into the arena. Competition and the struggle to improve is what makes us great. Remember what my agent taught me: *“if you want to be a hero, you’ve got to think and act greater than your past, your environment, and the way you feel.”*

“Peace comes from within, do not seek it without.”

– Prince Siddhārtha Gautama

- Inner peace isn’t going to come from a promotion, new business, book review, a girlfriend’s kiss, or your children’s love. You’re going to have to wade in deep and figure it out on your own. Sorry. Good news is, it is worth it. The process takes a while, so you may as well get started on the journey now. You don’t need anything with you, just get moving. You can start this new adventure by writing down your favorite quote, which I am guessing you didn’t do yet. If you prefer music quotes, Lynyrd Skynyrd’s classic song *Simple Man*: ***“All that you need...is in your soul...”***

“Need or want nothing / 51% ++”

This is a Tao saying I love.

- Let me expand it to say, “Need or want nothing **from other people.**” Find your own happiness and path and don’t expect others to love it or congratulate you. Don’t look for others to complete you—they can’t and they won’t. And if they could, they shouldn’t. Do it yourself. The 51% ++ refers to the best part of **Gary Vaynerchuk’s** book—he counseled everyone to provide more than half the value in all of your relationships. This is going to be a lot easier for you to do when you don’t need or want anything from people. Get after it; become self-actualization, and all that.
- ***“Eliminate VSB’s / Confidence in Path.”*** – Eliminate validation-seeking behaviors is the best part of the book *“Pitch Anything”* by Oren Klaff.

- He correctly states that validation-seeking behavior triggers fear in the primitive, intuitive parts of our brains, and you have then lost the sale or relationship. A great way to eliminate VSBs is to have confidence in your own 'path to victory' board, which you should start writing immediately. Have you written down your favorite quote of all time yet? You can change it every day if you like; it isn't permanent, so just write something down and put it on the fridge. Right now.
- ***"Redefine the fight + LEAD"*** – A classic fighter pilot air-to-air combat maneuvering principle.
- If you are losing, don't continue the same losing game plan. Redefine the fight. You are depressed right now, so your game plan clearly sucks. Get a new one. Think big. Think creatively. Think imaginatively. Once you figure it out, you are compelled to lead by example for the ones you love. And for the entire world, really; if you aren't quite that altruistic yet, get there.

"The correct solution to conflict with loved ones is: COMPASSION + LOVE"

– Teacher Barbara McNally.

- OK, so this isn't really her exact quote. Hers is a lot more inclusive, it doesn't specify 'loved ones.' I'm not exactly all there yet, because sometimes you need to fight. Having said that, I refer to this handy quote multiple times a day when I get irritated with the people around me. And do you know what the result is? This principle always works brilliantly. Like Mizio's YouTube video, **the correct theory must work every single time**. This one does, albeit in its slightly, aggressively altered format!

"Victorious warriors win first in their minds..."

– Sun Tzu.

- The complete quote is finished with **"...while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win."** Be patient. Win first in your mind. Then make it a reality. I use this time to go over my goals for right now, as well as the ten-year vision, which you will learn how to do in the next chapter. In his funny book, ***"How to***

Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big,” Dilbert cartoonist Scott Adams talks about the mysterious power of writing down a goal and proclaiming out loud, “I (*say your name*) will do/become (*your awesome vision*).” I can tell you that there’s not too much that sounds cornier, but I tried it... and it works. The first time I felt like Al Franken in the famous Saturday Night Live skit ***“I’m good enough, I’m smart enough, and gosh darn it, people like me,”*** but whatever, when you’re working your guns defense in a low-air-speed flat scissors, you need every possible advantage you can get... be intelligently aggressive and reverse the fight on your mind; regain command of one of the only three things you can control: **THOUGHTS, WORDS, DEEDS.**

- ***“HOLLAND / FLIGHT SCHOOL / RIVERFRONT”*** – Some of my favorite memories.
- Holland at 12 years old—family came from all over to meet me for the first time. Unconditional love from people I have never met; to this day it is the ideal family feeling I have never had. Flight school at ages 26-28: competition, continuous fast-paced learning, hard work, passion, intensity, joy, camaraderie. F-14 Tomcats as the grand prize. Proof that you can make a dream happen through sheer force of will. Riverfront at 34 years old—custom-designed and built a beautiful house, with **my beloved children** all under one roof. The best of times and the worst of times. The dream life, in part a reality. The rest of it a nightmare because of **my incompleteness**. A reminder to never let that happen again, and a reminder of what a beautiful life you can sculpt if you are patient. Architecture remains a passion, and the positive impact of the correct architecture on a man’s soul is limitless. Look through floor plans, find one you love, modify it to the way you live, and the way you want to live. Take pictures of places and feelings that you love—synthesize them into the physical dream life. Add colors, materials, life to this. Find a piece of property that feels right. For me it was the sweeping gentle rolling green hills, the distant wooden bridge and the water beyond. I knew it when I first stepped on it. **Breathtaking when it is right.** Wait for it to be right. It is a big decision.

“ENCOURAGE / INSPIRE / LEAD”

“LAUGHTER / LEADERSHIP / CREATIVITY”

***“You can learn something from everyone you meet son. Learn. Teach.
Leave everyone better than when you found them.”***

– Dad

“I wasn’t surviving, I was preparing.”

– Nelson Mandela.

- When Mandela was asked how he survived all those years in captivity, he replied with this classic gem of a thought. Forget surviving, I was **PREPARING**. Think about this a lot while you are working your way out of the maze—while you are down and things aren’t going your way, work hard and be intelligently aggressive about getting ready for when things DO start coming your way. You’ll be making the most of your downtime and you will be so grateful you started when you did. Life has a way of changing very quickly. Be ready!

“Only the spirit of attack borne in a brave heart will bring success to any fighter aircraft, no matter how highly developed it may be.”

– Adolph Galland, WWII Fighter Pilot

- This was the lead quote in our top-secret air-to-air combat **TOPGUN** manual. I don’t know that I have another quote that I loved more than this one while I was flying. I was reminded of it recently when I saw twins, genetically identical and raised in the same environment—but very different. You CAN change your destiny and you CAN change the current course of life you are on. As a big influence on my life, client Peter Von Der Ahe once told me: **MAKE it a great day**. Wake up, prepare like you’re in the Super Bowl, performing at Lincoln Center, operating a critical surgery on someone you love, whatever the peak event is for you, prepare every day as if it is that event. Celebrate as if **“every day’s the 4th of July”**²² (thanks, Chicago!), and you have achieved every goal you ever wanted. Be willing to laugh at yourself and any and all situations. Your life can either be a **WARNING** or an **INSPIRATION**. Be a leader and inspire others to

22. “Saturday in the Park” by Chicago

achieve and grow. Now THAT is making the most of each day and will get you ready for anything that comes your way.

Think Big!

“Logic will take you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.”

– Einstein.

- I’m not sure there is a better quote for this section, and it might just stand alone. Thinking big NEEDS to be part of your daily fight, because this is what’s going to help set you free. You need a goal and a dream worthy of fighting for. Thinking big lets YOU find and discover what that is for you. Also, just fighting it out in the trenches might not be the most effective use of your time and talent—could be there is a better path. Get creative. There are a million solutions to any given problem: search and brainstorm until you find one you love. Launch your fighter on course, then keep reevaluating in-flight!

- *“Morning Routine / HOOPS / Continual LEARNING”*

“Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success.”

– Schweitzer

“Nurture your mind with great thoughts, for you will never go any higher than you think.”

– Disraeli

“Your greatest day will be when you realize that what you perceive is your greatest weakness is actually your greatest strength.”

– Mom

- The numbers: my goals, my four beloved children, and the vision of conducting myself and **giving to people** (please see **GENEROSITY** in the ‘e’ chapters that begin this book) as if I have already achieved all of my goals—this helps me enjoy every moment for what it is and focus on what’s most important to me. One love. We are all connected. **Everyone has a tiny piece of the puzzle we are all**

trying to solve. Learn from them and teach them something. Leave everyone better off than when you found them. When you love yourself and you have everything you need, you can rise above 'struggler mode' and really make a lasting positive impact on the world.



AMOR OMNIA VINCIT = LOVE CONQUERS ALL:
picture from Robin Williams' Villa Sorriso, House of Smiles

T-BAG's Squadron Music Recommendations for Section III:

(If you don't like classical music, maybe it is because you haven't heard the best two pieces ever composed. I am recommending one fast one and one slow one. Check them out on YouTube for free and open your mind to what is possible in the world – this will help you to think big! The third selection is a bonus, the only EDM electronic dance music song I will recommend)

This song is fast and lively, and showcases Mozart's genius ability as well as his sense of humor. There are many versions of this by different artists, but you should listen to the one from the movie soundtrack AMADEUS because it is the best.

- Mozart, 'Concerto for 2 Pianos' performed by Sir Neville Marriner & Academy of St Martin In The Fields

The following song is perhaps the most beautiful song ever made. Again, there are many versions, but the one from Disney's Fantasia is the best.

- Beethoven, 'The Pastoral Symphony (The Sixth)' performed by Leopold Stokowski & The Philadelphia Orchestra

One last bonus song for you; it isn't classical but might be considered a modern day twist on classical. Worth a listen—one night in the depths of the darkness I couldn't sleep and lucked on a picture of a brilliant & starry night; it reminded me to think big

and be creative, to turn my focus to the stars and the heavens. I knew the solution was going to be found somewhere there, so Flume, whoever you are, thank you...

- Flume, 'Sleepless"

tldr: this one requires you to sit your ass down and do some hard work; BUT the results are the stuff of dreams... YOUR dreams, so don't skip this one!

Chapter 13

Design a Remarkable Life



“Logic will take you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.”

- Einstein. He's my boy!

I wrote this chapter LAST, because it is probably the most important to me. This book is largely about finding your way OUT of the maze of depression. Since you're presently, unhappily stuck, I need to find a way to fly into your brain, toss you an

emergency parachute, strap you into our getaway interstellar/interbrain fighter jet, and fly us both out of the dreadful waiting place²³ to a happier location.

What is waiting for you at that location? **The life of your dreams.**

Your true destiny.

What you have always wanted.

Your mission once you get there is to elevate your loved ones and contribute to the entire world. What is that life exactly?

What does it look like?

I have no freaking idea. But **YOU do. You know.**

It is all around you. On the walls. On your bookshelves, maybe unread. In your music on your iPod, on a sticker on your car or skateboard, on your PJs, keychain or t-shirt.

Look around, the answer to the question, “What does the life of your dreams look like?” is most likely hidden in plain view, and ***impatiently staring you in the face.***

While you are contemplating that, let’s start the fun of what will be one of the most important days of your life.

The ANNUAL DEQUELJOE PODCAST EPISODE OF THE YEAR AWARD goes to...

...The Tim Ferris Show, for his interview with Debbie Millman titled, “How to Design a Remarkable Life.”

Anyway, there isn’t really a podcast episode of the year award, but there should be, and since this section is titled **“THINK BIG,”** I felt I should start this award right now, and this is it.

23. See Dr. Seuss quote in Chapter 11, and read “Oh, the Places You’ll Go” for some surprisingly great wisdom found in a children’s book!

Criteria: the most deserving and influential episode that changed the most people's lives for the better.

Do I have any real data to back this up? Not exactly, not yet, but let's agree to not let that get in the way of things. After people read this and actually do the following exercise, the impact will be tremendous. We might not find out for ten years or so, when all these previously unknown people mysteriously start crushing their industries, making miraculous new discoveries, creating stunning art, and founding beloved businesses. Only then we will look back at this podcast and realize this award will have been justly given.

THEN it is party time—we can be justified in having ourselves a little get together to celebrate this awesome prediction. But until that day of positive reckoning comes, trust me for now and let's dive in and find out what makes this interview so powerful.

Who is John Galt, and who is Tim Ferris?

You may have seen the "WHO IS JOHN GALT" bumper stickers here and there. Tim Ferris has nothing to do with that, at all.

Tim Ferris, if you're not familiar with him, is a lovable uber-nerd whose mutant power can be best described as a '*human skill centrifuge*.' Round and round he goes with you during your interview, until at the end he has separated the key components of what makes you so awesome.

Everyone has at least one thing that makes them awesome—**remember my dad said you could learn something from every person you meet.**

Well, some people have multiple aspects that make them fascinating. Tim breaks those aspects down into replicable words, phrases, or concepts so we can incorporate them into our lives.

Tim Ferris is also an author, and you should skip his first few warm-up books and go right for the masterpiece: *Tools of Titans*. Given to me in a fortunate

coincidental turn of events, it, the author, **and the man who gifted it**,²⁴ mean a lot to me. I'm not even done with it yet, and it has sparked a learning revolution unrivaled in any part of my life.

"Just write two crappy pages a day," advice in *Tools of Titans* that awoke me, was as an antidote for procrastination and writer's block that got me to this point. As I write this, I am proud to say that I am almost done with my first book—thanks, Tim!

The podcast ***Scriptnotes*** wins my award for podcast show of the year, and I also discovered it in *Tools of Titans*.

Even better, I've incorporated into my daily life the countless invaluable tips on routines, habits, and best practices I found in *Tools of Titans*. I encourage you to read it. See what resonates with you. I guarantee there will be some life-changers.. Tim Ferris, you rock.

But perhaps better than all the fantastic tidbits included in that book, and a moment pivotal to my escaping depression, is maybe Ferris' finest work in the form of an interview with the unassuming **Debbie Millman**.

Tim's curious line of questioning gets the absolute best from her, and her advice is powerful. She overcame sexual abuse, physical abuse, self-doubt, and self-torture, imagining others thinking the worst of her, fear of rejection, sexual discrimination, public slander, humiliation; all to arrive at antivictim nirvana, where she passes along gems of wisdom with a smile and a loving and compassionate laugh at the entirety of her struggles.

24. Successful commercial real estate broker and family man extraordinaire Peter Von Der Ahe—he welcomed me into his life and taught me more than I ever taught him, even though he was paying me to train him! His positivity and dedication to crushing ALL aspects of his life serve as an inspiration to me on a daily basis. I hope and I know he will go on to write a book about his parenting knowledge, as the world will be better off knowing how a dad can manage to hit on all cylinders in every category imaginable: family/personal growth/business, you name it, every single day. Thank you, Peter!

* This is why when you are strong, you should look to share your strength. You just never know who is waiting for, or intensely needing your leadership. The best part is, the powerful ripple effect radiates outwards and never ends...

An Exercise to Ignite Your Life

Clearly, if this woman can overcome all the huge obstacles thrown at her, we need to listen to her finest moment carefully. If you're too impatient to listen to the entire shebang, you can fast forward to around the 1 hour and 30 minute mark, where she launches into the **HOW TO DESIGN A REMARKABLE LIFE** exercise:

- Where did she get the idea? An old professor of hers, Milton Glaser, remarked that teaching this process to his students **was the most important thing he did in his life.**
- He challenged the class to **envision the life they could have if they pursued everything they wanted with the certainty that they would succeed.**

His instructions to the class were simple—two rules and one warning:

**Dream big
Don't edit**

WARNING!

This exercise has a magical quality to it, so be careful what you wish for.

It worked for her **incredulously** and she now teaches the exercise to her undergrad and grad students. I believe the trick and the magic here is encapsulated in the urging to write with **NO FEAR OF FAILURE**. It is liberating in a way I can't explain until you do it yourself.

Here are her comments about what guidelines you can use to get started and some sample questions you can use as you write a day-in-your-life ten years from now, **after you have achieved everything you ever wanted to achieve:**

"So, let's say it is Winter 2027.

What does your life look like? What are you doing? Where are you living? Who are you living with? Do you have pets? What kind of house are you in? Is it an apartment, are you in the city, are you in the country?

What does your furniture look like? What is your bed like? What are your sheets like? What kind of clothes do you wear? What kind of hair do you have?

Tell me about your pets, tell me about your significant other, do you have children? Do you have a car? Do you have a boat? Talk about your career. What do you want? What are you reading? What are you making? What excites you? What is your health like?

And write about this day, this one day, ten years from now. So one day in the winter of 2027, what does your whole day look like? Start from the minute you wake up, brush your teeth, have your coffee or tea, all the way through until the minute you tuck yourself in at night. What is that day like for you?

Dream big, dream without any fear. Write it all down. You don't have to share it with anyone other than yourself. Put your whole heart into it. And write like there is no tomorrow; write like your life depends on it because it does.

And then read it, once a year, and see what happens.

It's magic."

– Debbie Millman

Skeptical as heck, but compelled by the inner peace and pure honest strength of conviction in her voice, I attempted the exercise. I didn't use any of her questions, and I didn't write it in paragraph form; I only used bullets because I am so impatient with stuff like this.

But guess what happened?

It turned my entire life around. In conjunction with the *Path to Victory* board I had crafted, it helped me **redefine the fight and redefine my life.**

I needed some serious airspeed to escape the black hole of depression. I needed to see past what was my current state of bleakness.

The inexorable pull from the sneaky black hole/revolving doorway can be inescapably strong.²⁵ This particular revolving door spins you around and then spits you directly back into the dark room of your mind that IS depression.

The trick is to gather enough **energy and momentum and airspeed** to hit that revolving door **HARD**, stumble past all the obstacles on the other side without losing your footing, then dive headfirst with **no fear**, over the waterfall escape route and into the unknown watery mist.

Any hint of a lack of confidence, any remaining fears, any lingering doubts of what is beyond the mist, and you won't have what it takes to escape the gravitas of the bad funk. You will be all Mrs. Doubtfire, clumsily misfiring and harmlessly shooting blanks against the cresting tide of **RESISTANCE**. *Boo, you hooch.*²⁶

What is one necessary component for your pending escape?

You have to have the knowledge and vision of your TRUE dream life. This gives you the requisite rocket fuel you need to reach for the stars.

WARNING!

This dream life is NOT what others want for you. NOT what you think others will think is cool, or possible, or realistic, or acceptable. What YOU want to do.

How YOU want to live YOUR life.

Once you have written about your remarkable life, look at it! How much? All the time! Revise it, update it, refine it. When changing your environment is not possible, change your thoughts and your emotions. Replace fear, anger, jealousy, and pessimism with the healthy expressions of **courage, joy, acceptance, and trust**.

25. In Stephen Pressfield's excellent *Gates of Fire*, his Spartans talk about avoiding certain rooms in your mind, because once trapped there, it is almost impossible to escape. The longer you stay there, the harder it is to get out. Like the Hotel California, I guess...

26 A la *Regina George*, head Queen-Bee Mean Girl supreme. She is looking down her nose at you scornfully right now. So prove her wrong. Then check out the movie *Mean Girls* for a laugh. And I don't want to hear that you don't want to watch it because it is a girl movie, even President Obama told Rachel McAdams he loved it!

Remember Xenophon's quote—you're going to need the correct **thoughts, words, and deeds** to escape the pit of despair.

WARNING #2!

The pit of despair can get kind of cozy. You probably have a blanket there, some snacks, an old tube of Pringles, a hacky sack, an old yellow Sony Walkman. Comfort is the enemy of change and the enemy of great, so don't get comfortable. Get your gear and get up. Even better, leave your gear there and get a running head start on the exit!

Refocus your mind on what you really want. No fear. No worries about any timing or resources or lame excuses that may sound good, but are really crippling. Your remarkable life should be a glorious document. If it isn't, you need to rewrite it!

Write it until it feels impossible—the result should be if you showed it to someone, they would immediately roll their eyes and say “*aaaah, get the F# outtahere!*”

Which brings to mind good ol' Robert DeNiro...

“I got TWO words for you... SHUT THE F!@\$ UP!”

– Robert DeNiro, from the hysterical movie Midnight Run; surprisingly not that many people have seen this road trip classic. Check it out!

Write your aspirations that make your dream life seem almost impossible. People will shake their heads in disbelief. That's how wild and dreamlike I want your goals to be. Then, set your mind to creating the neural pathways you need. And you're going to need some fancy new super-highway-type neural pathways in that **great brain**²⁷ of yours.

27. Check out the series of kids' books titled *The Great Brain*, an extremely clever and funny set by John D. Fitzgerald

What new skills do you need? I can feel some of you might be doubting yourself out there—remember to replace **DOUBT** with **CURIOSITY** and **EXCITEMENT**. You're going to learn something new, so get fired up.

What characteristics do you need to add, or beef up? Smile to yourself, smile with confidence that you are going to figure this out, then get after it.

Find a way, or make one. Man in the arena. You're never out of the fight. Nurture your mind with great thoughts. All that.

Whatever quote gets you going, go. GO!

"All ships are safe in the harbor, but that's not what ships are made for."

tldr: game time; this is where it all comes together, and that's pretty good, since this is the LAST chapter...

Chapter 14

Think BIG!



“Nurture your mind with great thoughts, for you will never go any higher than you think.”

– Benjamin Disraeli, British Prime Minister

So I just solved the equation for depression. Boom.²⁸ You're welcome. It took me about three years, which was probably way too long for me. But now that the dust has settled, I have to say, the journey was extremely rewarding. And now you get to benefit from my arrow of pebbles.

28. There is a great quote from Art of Worldly Wisdom that goes something like this: 'attempt the easy as if it were difficult (so you don't get too cocky), and approach the impossible as if it were easy' (so you don't get overwhelmed). I don't mean to say that fixing your depression will be easy, just that you should attack it with confidence!

My hope is that you have enough knowledge now to build a fighter that is fast enough to break free of your landlocked gravitational-field prison and escape beyond the heavens; that you continue to gain strength and airspeed and achieve the life of your wildest dreams; that you realize the stars are not the limit of the richness and beauty of life.

You have the power to create a remarkable life of your dreams. The path to that amazing life is to be **humble, be patient, and think big**. Use inspiring quotes, which are the modern day equivalent of J.K. Rowling's magic spells, to focus your mind and fill holes in your incompleteness.

“And above all, watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places. Those who don't believe in magic will never find it.”

- Roald Dahl

Use exercise, nutrition, deep breathing, and imagination as fuel for your starship. You'll be able to go anywhere. Learn every day, but don't just be a consumer of information: take this knowledge, put your own spin on it and share it with others, so that they may grow, too. This connectedness, both from learning and through sharing, is easier now than ever with technology. We are in a Golden Age of expanding what is possible. Events and breakthroughs are happening at breakneck speeds.

Don't sit on the sideline of this once-in-a-lifetime-High-School-Dance. Be the Man in the Arena. Have the courage to stumble and fall, and don't you dare let fear or shame keep you from picking yourself up and trying again.

“Though the road is rough, don't you ever, ever get stuck. So, take your time, take it easy, no need to hurry.”

- Hopeton Lewis, from his island reggae classic, “Take It Easy”

Along your journey, step softly; don't injure or put a burden upon the ones you love. The right solution is one of "*compassion and love*." Don't get discouraged if you don't get immediate results—be patient, learn from your mistakes, do a thorough flight debrief, and hit it hard the next time. **Indefatigable, baby.**

Encourage other people you meet along the way. **Learn** from everyone you meet. Try to leave everyone better off in some way than when you first encountered them. As you work to solve the equation of your particular profession or passion, learn to enjoy the beauty and each moment of the process. When you have solved the particular equation of the day, your **DUTY** is to **share** it with others.

The brilliance of our world is that you will be rewarded beyond your wildest dreams: the **reward comes in direct proportion with how many people you help** and the depth of your contribution to their lives. The brilliance of our human mind is that it intimately knows money is artificial, so you will also be rewarded with the joy of teaching, sharing, leading. This joy comes from helping the community, the world, and therefore the universe.

If you have any vestiges of hate or prejudice, which arises from fear, it is time to leave that behind. We are all connected in a way we don't understand, but connected we are just the same.

Tread lightly, but don't be afraid to **make your powerful positive stamp**; it is time for you to take your part in the infinitely awesome whirlwind of the progression of life and awareness. Failure to participate in this inexorably brilliant process leads to depression and lack of fulfillment.

So **jump** from the safe nest of your stable airplane; **jump** with enthusiasm and curiosity; know with tentative confidence that you will be able to build your parachute on the journey down, some how, some way. You won't be alone. There will be other jumpers in the air with you; don't be so focused on your parachute and problem that you fail to help them, or fail to take their assistance. Sometimes you won't see any other jumpers. That's OK, stay on course. You can do it.

Once your parachute, is cleverly constructed the way you like it and you land safely, remember that it is your **MISSION**; it is imperative that you **share your solution**. It is why you are here on Earth.

So celebrate success, spread the love and the party wherever you travel, take a deep breath, and strap back in for another ride. **Fortune favors the brave.**

There is
within human
Nature an
amazing potential
for GOODNESS

EPILOGUE

Ok. This is it.

Here we go. How can I find something epic and awesome to tell you?

I think I'll close by telling you the most important things I've learned, which follows the killer concept of going **straight to the best in everything**; in yourself, in others, and in every situation you find yourself in.

Let's start with the challenge of describing all I've learned about fighting depression in just one sentence: **love yourself, love others, and just keep learning, that's all that matters.**

Let's fill the middle of this epilogue Oreo with what I'd love for you to try to stuff each and every day with: **Courage, Joy, Acceptance & Trust.**

Courage to be **authentically** who you REALLY are, **AND** the courage to combine that brave authenticity with **relentless driving to RIP** yourself each day. *[Refine, Improve, Perfect: after all, all of us can be infinitely better in all that we do. To thrive in chaos, hold white-knuckle tight to your core values, **AND** combine that unyielding spirit with **enthusiasm to innovate** everything else about you]*

Joy every single day, no matter what. A brilliant mind (*that's you*) knows intimately what it loves and will find a way to create a life where you surround yourself with the people, concepts, and aspects of life that fill you with the highest grade jet fuel for your soul. For me it is comedy, music, and learning. And being friends with people who inspire me to be better; who love me with unconditional acceptance + empathy; and who are courageous enough to give me the feedback I need to grow.

Acceptance might be the toughest one for some of you; the highest form of acceptance is **GRATITUDE**. When you **rise above just accepting** what's happened

to you (*which is hard enough!*); when you can find the **fire to be grateful** for the wave whether it is rising or crashing; when you can **get excited about overcoming fear, anxiety, doubt, greed, anger, envy**; when you no longer see events as 'good' or 'bad', but only as **uniquely creative challenges, specifically designed to test what you're really made of...**

That, my friends, is true mastery of your mind and your emotions, and that is true leadership. If you're a leader, and if you're reading this I know you are: if you're a leader, you **MUST** lead. ***Feel that blood flow increasing?*** You're subconsciously getting ready...

Last one in my daily '**C.J.A.T.**' fighter-pilot-checklist is **Trust**. The highest form of trust is faith, and only you can choose what you believe in. But a word of advice: '*strong opinions, weakly held*' is a mindset that might help you have the **flexibility** to instantly jump to a better idea when you hear it.

WARNING:

...if you're 'wed' to your idea, or you're choosing a stance just because your 'enemy' has chosen the opposite position, take a deep breath.

*It is the ultimate in stupid stubbornness to cling to outdated concepts, or disagree with an answer just because Jerky Joe liked it first. And we are now in the Big League **CHEW** business of being **Curious, Humble, and Enthusiastic** about **learning**, so we can get **Wise**.*

I have **faith** that everything happens as it should, how it should, and exactly when it should. This belief helps me find the very best in each situation so I can max out the potential benefit for me, and my crew. By the way, you're my crew. And I'm rooting for you, forever. No matter how bleak it seems now, hang on in the storm, and have **trust** that you **WILL** find your way home.

The past two years since I wrote the first edition of this book have been so beautiful; so full of laughter, adventure, learning, music, new exhilarating

relationships & partnerships; along with stumbles, ups and downs, impossible challenges, and big mistakes on my part.

But now I am more confident than ever in the resiliency and resourcefulness of the human spirit. When pressed, just like you are now, is when the true soul rises to the top. Remember, **you're the winning design**, after all these years of evolution and war and strife, your mothers and fathers **WON**.

VICTORY.

They stayed alive by adapting under the most extreme circumstances, and so will you.

I will leave you one last little gift: below is a rough picture sketch of my next book. It is going to be a book about leadership, and I can't wait for you all to read it. **Airspeed is LIFE**, and in order to thrive in this new crazy chaotic coronavirus era our leaders need to commit to **lifelong learning**, to being **innovative** to create new cool solutions, to being **flexible** (*remember Genghis Khan said the strongest part of any system was the most FLEXIBLE part*) and ready to **adapt to anything, anytime baby...** and they need to commit to doing it all with **empathy** for the people who entrust them with the **responsibility of enabling their success**.

I love you my brothers and sisters, it is sad to say goodbye to you and to this book that has meant so much to me, for so many years.

Writing it has made me an infinitely better man, better human, and hopefully a better father when I reunite with my beautiful children.

I hope you have absorbed something too; but remember, the standard of measure for this book is NOT just that you learned something cool. The standard is that you learn it so well you can **TEACH** it, you can pass it on, you can positively impact someone else's life, forever.

Just like you have impacted me.

Just by existing, and knowing you're out there suffering, has forced me to be a better teacher. After all when you teach, you learn twice. Ok now that I'm getting a little choked up writing this, I should end with a joke or something funny.

On the next page is the infamously intense inverted-flat-spin ejection story, so let's take a minute to groan at this Dad joke I heard the other day:

Hmmm... how about this one... **BREAKING NEWS:** *Scientists have confirmed a new study – only one animal is **immune** from contracting the dreaded coronavirus – surprisingly it is the **anteaters**?!*

Yeah, for real! Apparently, they are just filled with anty bodies.

THANE in:

• AIRSPEED is LIFE! •

CHAOTIC NEW WORLD

requires.

lifelong commitment
to LEARNING LEADERSHIP

if you're a LEADER,
you MUST LEAD

[core values]

COURAGE → candor, transparency, clarity
AUTONOMY → freedom to make choices to collaborate
LOVE → generosity, teaching & sharing & learning

INNOVATION!

+ CREATIVITY!

F

FLEXIBILITY!

STRAIN USA!
Jenghis Khan TULUGMA

= the strongest part of
any system is the most flexible part

E

EMPATHY

UNQUALIFIED
ACCEPTANCE

criticize
+ praise
specifically
to help people

enable their
success

enthusiasm
encouragement

improve, stretch, grow

CORE
C - culture of
A - act on
R - respect
S - support

SCORE
S - status
C - certainty
A - action
R - resources

only the spirit of attack
borne in a brave heart will
bring success to any fight
if only no matter how long
the struggle developed it must be

calmness & passion
courage, feedback
JIT
A - acceptance
T - trust

ensure every
voice is heard, including
my own, so that the best
ideas win. (not necessarily
my own)

Appendix I.

The infamous inverted flat spin ejection story

It was the summer of 2002, and everything in Virginia Beach was just peachy. It was exactly where I had dreamed of being...for nine long years.

It all started after I got tossed out of college for extreme rebelliousness; I wasn't a bad kid, but I had no love for boring classes or wasting time. Apparently, I also had no love for discipline. At my father's insistence I marched glumly down to the recruiter; **discipline** was all I needed, he said, and if I would just go see what they had to offer me...

I grew up in New York City only wanting to be one thing: a space fighter pilot. The first movie I ever saw was the original *Star Wars*. My hero, Han Solo, saves the day with his wingman Chewie in the Millennium Falcon. After receiving a cool medal with a wink, he falls in love with the smart and sassy Princess Leia.

Since this all happened a 'long, long time ago,' I assumed Han Solo was the original and ultimate **comedian, entrepreneur, and space fighter pilot**; not too bad of a combo in my five-year-old eyes.

After that I would watch anything with a space fighter pilot in it, and luckily that's all there seemed to be back then.

My favorite TV show was the original *Battlestar Galactica*. My idol, Starbuck, just happened to be the human race's best space fighter pilot. He used his interstellar aviation Viper skills to save what was left of our people from the

evil robot Centurions. He was brave and funny, and had an awesome girlfriend: a warm, natural-healer heroine with a big heart named Cassiopeia.

Even the cartoons back in the day, like the innovative *Robotech*, featured transforming-space-fighter jets that looked exactly like F-14 Tomcats. The Skull squadron (*Jolly Rogers knock-off!*) fought off the invaders to protect the Earth. Sound familiar? The *Transformers* totally copied them!

Then, when I was older, the classic *Top Gun* came out. Could there be any more challenging and fun thing to do than use your bravery and wits to compete in the air and defend the entire fleet? No way. The only problem was I thought that flying was something only people who had a pilot as a parent could do. Not sure why I thought that, but my dream seemed far off and unattainable.

The next summer, as chance would have it, my dad was working overseas. At the American Embassy I met my best friend after a heated argument about which fighter starred in *Top Gun* and which was tougher, the F-14 vs. the F-15; he just happened to have a Navy fighter pilot father, so he won that argument.

He got a kick out of our aviation enthusiasm, so he invited us onboard the aircraft carrier USS *Ranger* for Singapore's Independence Day: we saw the mighty Tomcats streak by in tight diamond formation, crazy low and just overhead our little rocking barge.

It was breathtaking. Exhilarating. I felt it deep inside me. What would it be like to be in that cockpit? Defender of the Fleet...

We took a ferry to the ship and talked to actual F-14 pilots. The Tomcat poised powerfully chained to the deck, looming impossibly large over us in my

wide little boy eyes, straining ready to leap off the catapult; **I loved every second of it.**

Still, I never thought it was something I could do. Strangely, losing everything, or at least the desperate feeling of losing everything when I was kicked out of college, liberated me.

What WOULD I do, if I could do anything at all? Well, seeing as how NASA didn't have any laser guns yet, I guess I'd settle for being a Navy fighter pilot. Duh.

I must have been a dream come true for the recruiter when I walked in staring at the wall-sized midnight blue banner, featuring two Toms racing towards the carrier with glowing afterburners. **"Oh, do I know exactly what you should do to achieve your dream!"** he babbled enthusiastically.

And so it was that somewhat misguided advice that I started off at the extreme bottom of the military totem pole as an E-1; enlisting in the Navy as a Seaman Recruit in the Nuclear Engineering program.

Working my way from swabbing decks, to the Naval Academy, from flight school to advanced strike fighter training, it wasn't exactly as easy as my recruiter had made it seem. I'm not sure he even thought there was a chance I would do it all. Nevertheless, I had finally fought all the way to my childhood dream: I earned my Wings of Gold. I was officially a Naval Aviator, but had one more final hurdle to jump over before I could enter the fleet and be ready to rock.

THE MASTER JET BASE

I had finally arrived! I was at the promised land; **Naval Air Station Oceana** in Virginia Beach. **"The MASTER JET BASE,"** read the sign at the

gate. There was no way I could contain my enthusiasm. I jumped out of my car and watched the jets sweep their wings back and rip the skies full speed for the Naval Aviation hallmark 'carrier break.'

I ran my hands along the haze grey nose cone of the front-gate Tomcat static display, and wondered, ***"Does life get any better than this...?"***

LIFE SAVING ADVICE

"Just make sure you tighten your lap belt as tight as you can..." said all my buddies in the ready room. ***"You're not used to being in the RIO's seat, and when you start the maneuvering, you're going to get thrown around a bunch. So just hang on and you'll get through it just fine."***

That seemingly throwaway comment saved my life. If my lap belt hadn't been so tight, the ejection seat would **have broken my back** by the time it accelerated into my spine. As it was, I was still hanging a few inches below the seat when it fired, because we were spinning upside down and gravity pulled me dangerously further away than I should have been.

The fateful flight / Flip Flop Hop

The first ever F-14 Tomcat Air-to-Air Combat Maneuvering (*aka 'dogfighting'*) flight is called the FLIP-FLOP-HOP, because the instructor pilot flies the first half to demonstrate how the jet handles, then sits in Goose's seat for the second half to watch your rookie ass fumble through the maneuvers.

We lost a lot of pilots in World War II because when their planes would lose control, they would panic and stir the stick all over the place. In a stall, you actually have to point the nose **DOWN** towards the ground to regain airspeed. This is the **LAST** thing you want to do when you're about to crash, and it

requires you to break an intense natural instinct to PULL UP away from the ground so you don't die.

If you remember in *Top Gun*, Maverick and Goose are chasing a bandit uphill. Goose exclaims, "***We're going ballistic!***" as they streak skyward, nose straight up. Eventually every aircraft will run out of speed and stall if you don't change your attitude. The maneuver we had begun simulated this ballistic-ness.

It is called the "**zero airspeed departure**," and mimics what happens if you chase a bad guy straight upwards for too long. The idea is that we would intentionally STALL; the pilot goes hands off the stick, the plane will eventually go nose low, seek the relative wind, and when the airspeed is enough to fly, we pull up and escape.

Piece o' cake.

The goal was to never SPIN; this is a dangerous maneuver and is **prohibited** because you could die. Easily. Just like poor Goose.

Unaware of what was to happen next, up we shot at a cool 70-degree angle, topping out at a kiss-the-sky 30,000 feet.

But instead of the nose tracking down like it was supposed to, a sudden wind gust tumbled us upside-down, past pure inverted and we entered a gnarly inverted flat spin.

This is *just like the flat spin* from *Top Gun*, except we were unhappily staring at the ocean, with a reservation for two in Davey Jones' Locker.

I remember thinking, '***good thing I tightened my lap belt all the way,***' as I hung in my straps.

“Angle of Attack is zero, airspeed is 80 knots, we’re in an inverted flat spin!” I transmitted on the ICS in an attempt to be helpful. ***“Roger, inverted flat spin,”*** he echoed back calmly from the front seat.

“Twenty-five-thousand feet...”

“Check rudder full opposite turn needle,” I replied with the first step in the emergency procedure, which we all had memorize and recite before each hop. All the dust and what seemed to be years of loose paint chips floated around my head while we corkscrewed towards the deck.

“Twenty-thousand feet...”

“Roger, rudder is FULL opposite the turn needle,” my instructor said nonchalantly. Faster and faster we plummeted, the spin got flatter and more intense.

“Fifteen-thousand feet...”

We were falling faster and were rapidly running out of altitude. The emergency procedure says to eject by 10,000 feet, because you are going to get launched straight down into the ground, and clearly, hitting the ground before your parachute opens isn't the best option.

“TEN-THOUSAND FEET now!”

I would like to say I was ready to rescue us and had my hand on the ejection handle, but I really felt confident we would get out of it. I also was a brand-new student at the RAG and wasn't about to punch out of a \$40 million airplane in my first week....

“Give me another turn or two...” my instructor said. I was all on board with that game plan. Yes, sir. You got it.

But the plane wasn't responding. And the Atlantic Ocean wasn't really looking like it wanted to move out of our way. Something had to give.

“MAYDAY MAYDAY MAYDAY! Gunfighter 101 is ejecting Area 2 Alpha....”

My instructor had luckily come to the same conclusion.

“You all set back there? Get ready... EJECT! EJECT! EJECT!”

I crossed my arms tightly across my chest, as that position gives you the best chance of not breaking your limbs when you hit the airstream. I closed my eyes, partly because I didn't want rocket fuel burning my eyeballs, but also because I was kind of a terrified baby at this sudden turn of events. Hey, don't judge me!

When YOU are in an inverted flat spin ejecting straight into the water, YOU can leave your eyes open and report back how tough you are. If you're around to tell the story.

This is when the fabled time-compression-phenomenon kicked in.

Einstein was right on the money when he said that time was relative, because this entire ejection sequence normally takes 0.5 seconds. That is *zero point five seconds*. You know how much can happen to a guy in zero point five seconds? Not too much. I've timed it. But for me, I had what seemed to be about twenty-five seconds of thought.

“Why aren't we ejecting... why isn't it working... is the rocket going to fire?”

I must have said that about three times to myself when I heard the canopy charges explode the plexiglass off and the wind rush into the cockpit. Then another eternity as I waited for the seats to detonate. There's actually a bunch of explosives below the seat, and I had time to wonder worriedly if those brainiacs at Martin-Baker and Grumman Ironworks were paying close attention the day in 1970-whatever when they installed it.

I felt the seat launch into my body and I could feel my head slowly roll into my chest from the force. I felt the drogue chute deploy and then waited impatiently for the main chute to open. It did, finally, and I opened my eyes to only hear a curious sound I wasn't expecting.

Wind whistled loudly in my helmet, like an old Western movie where they are in some deserted canyon and everything is super quiet. I must have looked like the completely clueless rookie I was, because my awesome instructor had lowered his handheld radio and was yelling and screaming at me, gesturing for me to begin the pre-water-entry-checklist.

Oh yeah...hey thanks...there actually was a lot to do, because we weren't out of the woods yet. A lot of pilots had died after ejecting safely, and I scrambled through my memories to try to remember all the hazards.

I stole a quick glance at my instructor, who was calmly and coolly back on the radio coordinating the rescue flight, while keeping a wary eye on his hapless student. I looked down and our jet was already in the water churning.

Fortunately, the aforementioned brainiacs and engineers who designed the Tomcat had allowed for just such an unlikely spinning ejection. The seats fired out at an angle, so instead of getting chopped up by the spinning grey Grumman steel blender, I was thrown out one direction, and he was rocketed in the other. The aircraft had spun right in between us, extremely closely, but

thankfully safely. I wanted to buy an “**I LOVE NERDS**” t-shirt but had other pressing issues to worry about. The possibility of drowning in the silk was something they had stressed to us in water survival school, and I needed to prep myself, fast.

“Oh yeah, the Atlantic Ocean seems to be coming up quickly, let me release my Koch fittings so I don't drown in my parachute...” I threw my hands up quickly and prepared to release the metal buckles that connected me to my billowy life-saving picnic blanket, and then stopped dead. I had just remembered the counter-story: one time a guy bailed out of a T-34 but died because he released his Koch fittings too soon. Apparently, you have no depth perception over open waters...

Down came my hands rapidly to my side, as I thanked the heavens for reminding me of the little asterisk on *that* procedure. Definitely don't want to plunge to my death. Right about that time, my thankful thoughts turned to fiery pain as my cheek burned and ripped.

Our old 1970's, *Final Countdown*-era antique chutes barely slowed my descent from our last-minute inverted punch-out. I hit the water like a dancing *Disney Fantasia* hippopotamus, and the impact shoved my oxygen mask bayonet fitting up, slicing my face. The momentum carried me down into the dark abyss so long I thought I would never stop sinking. It took three, long, adrenaline-powered sculls to hit the water's surface again, and I ended right smack in the middle of my parachute, which is a less than ideal outcome, if you have your choice of how it's going to play out.

Tangled up and without oxygen, I fought to break free, straining to remember our one solitary day of Pensacola water survival training. What did that old crusty Senior Chief say to me again? Oh yeah... **R E L A X** ...calmly sweep the chute away in one direction...thanks, Senior...

After almost drowning in my chute the first time, I emerged from underneath giddily, only to find I was about to drown...again. The unhelpful antique parachute was now full of ocean water and was understandably sinking. Thanks a bunch, dumb parachute. It was only following the laws of gravity, but with part of it unluckily tangled up on my flight suit, unfortunately so was I...

I gathered up all my remaining strength into a tight ball like that karate guy from *Street Fighter*, and thrust upwards, hard; hoping to get one last gasp of air before I had to play the lead role in ***Sherlock Holmes: Underwater Diver***. I guess it was my lucky day because I managed to inhale one big ol' mouthful of air, then I somewhat reluctantly-enthusiastically plunged my head under the water to find the source of the problem.

I reached down fumbling for the tangle point, and found my kneeboard was the culprit.

Thankfully, all the more senior student pilots in Pensacola had urged us to upgrade our kneeboards.

Kneeboards are strapped to your thigh and exist to have a handy place to write down all the callsigns and mission-critical information. I'll never forget the little small red pencil with the fat tip I had tied and duct taped to it.

The standard Navy-issue kneeboard was super clunky and impossible to remove. The new high-tech one that I purchased from our local Aviation store had a quick release button.

Once again, a seemingly random thing saved my life; in this case, I needed every single last one of these random things! Thanks giver of random-things!

I clicked the little clicky-thing and shot up to the surface, free at last!

I can't tell you how great it was to take a deep breath of fresh air and be alive, but I think you get the point. My instructor wasn't thrilled with my ecstatic shouts for joy because he was on the radio still coordinating, and not-so-gently urged me to get into my raft before the unimpressed sharks came and ate my grateful ass off.

In Pensacola survival training, the life-raft is one of the hardest things to get into. Fully encumbered with flight gear, with all sorts of flashlights and stupid things hanging off your chest, it is close to impossible to wiggle up and get in.

Not today.

I had so much adrenaline I almost launched myself clear across the raft and over the other side. I yanked my helmet off and let out a yell of pure exhilaration.

We.

Were.

ALIVE!

“Hey, doofus!” shouted my instructor. ***“Get your pencil flares ready, the rescue helo is close by.”*** By some additional random-things-category miracle, someone had earlier called in a false alarm to the good men & women at the *Coast Guard*. So it was that a rescue chopper, complete with a shiny new Search and Rescue [SAR] swimmer, was right in our area, ready to rock.

“I see them!” I shouted. ***“Great,”*** my instructor replied, ***“get the flares ready to signal them so they see us.”***

Apparently the helo pilots weren't pleased with my exuberance, because they called and asked politely if the pilot that was shooting multiple flares at their cockpit would CEASE FIRE!

“errr Sir, I just wanted to make sure they saw us...” I shrugged my shoulders.

All of this fun pencil-flare shooting had caused one of my eardrums to burst so I put my helmet back on and got ready for the rescue. The young SAR swimmer jumped in the water and shouted with an optimistic wink, ***“How ya doin', sir!”***... What a great American, and **long live the Coast Guard** by the way.

“I'm doing awesome. Thanks, man! But let's get out of here ASAP, the sharks are coming!” I urged.

The USCG helo took us to *Naval Hospital Portsmouth*, where we got into a little scuffle when some unsuspecting guy yelled at us for tracking water on the deck, but all ended up well.

Our squadron corpsman came and got us and drove me home. My wife was deployed with her helo squadron at the time, so I was dropped off to an empty house, with an apron-gown-exposed butt, since they took my flight suit for investigation purposes.

Thank God for my Tomcat pilot neighbors, who saw us on TV and were waiting for me with a beer. I was thankful to be alive and the clean summer air never tasted so good. All in a good day's work as a fighter pilot.

Lesson for you to consider:

This parachute, as old school and un-aerodynamic as it was, actually did save my life. However, once it was full of water, this same thing that saved my life was now threatening to kill me.

How many times do we hold on to old thoughts, relationships, emotions?

Even when those things may have at one time bought us joy; when they are threatening our lives, we are COMPELLED to jettison them. Let me be clear: understanding, mastery, and then air superiority of your minds, my new friends... that is what we are pursuing now.

This is our new mission. Good hunting...



Appendix II.

Indefatigable

Listen, it's not Robert Frost or anything, but it's from the heart. I wrote this at the very bottom, when the pain was the most intense. At that point, I decided to fight, and I hope you will, too. Never give up, no matter what. Life has a way of getting awesome all of a sudden, and all I want is for you to stick around to see the tide turn. You'll be happy you did.

INDEFATIGABLE

What would you do
If given another shot at this life
From a faraway space
You could observe your history and
Current state of affairs,
Gifted the chance to zap back into yourself
Full of strength and vigor.
Would you lament the mistakes made
And curse the struggles
Or would you grab precious seconds
And let your life soar
Chase and get your dreams
Love the people you choose
Focus on the best aspects of
Every moment
And make a positive mark
With every remaining breath
Not for glory or praise
But for your own concept of what's good
And what's important.
It's never too late
the wise old Uber driver said.
It's never too late
Say the memories of your ancestors.
It's never, ever too late
Should echo in your head
When doubt slides around the corner.
So get jumping and flying again my friend
For your human soul hums at its best when you forge it to be

Indefatigable

Jan 31, 2017

**tldr: 2020 coronavirus era update
new tldr version of the above poem
or maybe a complementary flip-side to it
or maybe neither**

INDEFATIGABLE part 2

SOUL FORGERY

I spent a lifetime
Stumbling to fit in
Hating myself for imperfections
Judging you for sucking
Competing with the world
For one slot
Who's worthy of being loved
Only what society says so
A million soul forgeries
Yearning for someone's approval
But who is someone
To deem me worthy
By chasing inner peace
Foolishly everywhere
I found it
No where
Every where
In chaos
Stillness
By fighting through pain
By fighting to discover
By forging my soul
To
be
Indefatigable

April 11, 2020

Appendix III.

Acknowledgements

First, to my four children. When things were looking impossibly bleak, I would look at your beautiful pictures and think of all the times we laughed together. I knew I needed to figure it out, some how. Some way. Daddy was lost at sea for many years, and it wasn't your fault. I thought I could handle it all on my own, and I was too proud and too arrogant to go get help. I will understand if you never forgive me, but I pray every day anyway that we will be reunited. I hope you are enjoying every moment as much as you can, and are smiling through both the good and bad times. I love you, and I miss you. Remember to keep fighting hard for your dreams, keep laughing even harder and never pass up the chance to help someone out; you'll never regret living like that. **All my love, Dad**

To my ex-wife, I'm forever grateful for your strength, discipline and unwavering steadiness. One of the reasons I married you was because I knew if I was killed in combat or a flight accident, you'd be capable enough to raise our children the right way. It's forever my fault that I ended up dead in another way, and that I didn't take action sooner. I really hope we will be able to start fresh some day, because even after everything, I have nothing but **love and respect for you**. I'm also proud to hear from your Squadron Helo bubbas that you were quite the **fantastic stick** (*stick means 'pilot', for you civilians*) in your day.

To my ex-girlfriend, you deserve all the credit for this book, because you're the one who showed me there's a better way to live life. Before you, I was all competition and aggressiveness, impatience and recklessness. With your love, and your unimaginable patience, you saw through the fake shield and invented swagger, to the young boy that was deeply hurt and flawed. I'm not sure why or how you loved and healed me so completely, but you taught me the most

important lesson of all: aggression can win some battles, but love conquers all. You're also the most miraculous healer I've ever seen or heard about, and even space-fighter-pilot-supreme *Starbuck* would be sending his darling *Cassiopeia* to you for some pointers. I hope someday when the dust settles and I'm at full strength we can at least be lifelong friends. You have the gift, and I can't wait to see the immense positive impact you have on our world. Thank you for saving my life and for seeing the good side of me when everyone else had given up. **I love you.**

To the best agent of all time, Robert Vera, I'm not sure how many homeless veterans have a literary agent, but I'm forever grateful you made me quite possibly the first. All the countless hours on the phone paid off; I'm not sure you ever thought you would break through my extreme stubbornness and resistance to conformity, but you taught me more about the depth and similarity of the veteran plight than I might ever have learned on my own. Your uncanny assignment of the Seattle PTSD Gig Harbor prayer breakfast speech gave me something to live for; the chance to save just one of our brothers and sisters gave me a reason to live, a reason to train hard, and a reason to keep pressing forward. **You amazingly only had one funny joke in 8 months, but I still love you, man!**

To the finest editor this great land has ever seen: I'm sending a big shout out to the Army's finest wordsmith, Mark Mongilutz. I'm not sure there has been a more opposite odd couple in the history of author/editor, but it's really cool that you allowed me to be this enthusiastic and naïve first-time author, and gave me space to run with my full color and seemingly random approach to this serious topic. Your initial remarks gave me infinite airspeed, when I thought the book would seriously suck. Thank you for really getting it; for understanding what I was attempting to do, and for not wanting to change it at all. Except for my punctuation. And using too many words per sentence. **Hah, it is an amazing blessing that we met!**

To all the authors, podcasters, YouTubers, recording artists, etc.: I may not have included every single person in the book, but I'm amazed at how whatever I needed, I found. The answers are truly everywhere; discovering people saying similar things and coming from all walks of life and all unrelated professions proved to me that I had finally found the truth. Thank you for doing what you do; **your ripple effect lives on and will never die.**

To the fine people of Connecticut, I know I bashed your state incessantly for its rampant materialism and obsession with Range Rovers (*hey, they do look cool...*), but I'm still amazed there are so many genuinely good people living there. There are too many of you to list that kept me going when I was about to stall out, but I have to mention **Jacob Lavian** of Performance Motorcars (Wappingers Falls), who generously gave me a car when I was at zero airspeed and zero altitude. For all the military in New York area, please go see Jacob and give him your business; **he's one of the good guys.**

I hope everyone else will forgive me for not mentioning them by name, because this section would go on for another 50 pages. The number of people that helped me when I really needed it is extraordinary. It's why I am **compelled** to sacrifice all to keep helping people; because I'm completely aware that the amount of advice, help, and love I received is most likely not able to be duplicated towards most other veterans. Therefore **I must share what I've learned** because I'm not sure I'd be alive without every single one of you. Your compassion and love lives on forever with this book, and everyone who is moved by it somehow. I am forever grateful and I'll be looking to square up sometime soon. You deserve the very best in life, and if I can give anything to you at all, you know where to go. I am indebted to you in a way I can't express.

Thank you, and I love you.

I have to thank my **Mother** and **Father**: your wisdom appeared to me out of the darkness like *Obi-Wan* to super-whiny *Luke* when he was about to pass out in the snow. I know it seemed like I wasn't listening as a kid, but when I really needed it, I remembered your advice. **I love you.**

Lastly, to all of you out there who are strong; if you are strong, you must lend your strength. And if you're a leader, you must lead. We are going to need every single one of you to stop Veteran suicide. **If everyone commits to teaching, mentoring or listening to just one veteran, we can turn the tide in this battle.** Because the ones you save, will go on in turn to each save one themselves. Then we have the "*Dune*" solution of exponential impact. You have your orders; **execute.** Good hunting, and **fly hard.** Dave

Last round: For someone that says they don't like poetry, I'm ending with a hypocritical bang here, I know. Please read this classic aviation poem and play "Take it Easy" (both *The Eagles* & *Hopeton Lewis* versions) at my funeral. I'd like it to be a fun party; my only wish is that everyone comes together with laughter and love.

High Flight

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of earth,
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds, --and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of --Wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air...
Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace
Where never lark or even eagle flew --
And, while with silent lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.

- John Gillespie Magee, Jr.