

# MY HANDBOOK

Survive first and then thrive



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## A Guide to Surviving and Thriving Through Life's Changes

*Based on the journey of Dr. Toyé Oyelese*

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# Introduction: You're Already a Winner

Let me tell you something that might surprise you: you're already a champion.

Think about it. Before you were even born, you beat odds that would make any lottery jealous. Out of millions of possibilities, you were the one who made it. You survived nine months in conditions that would challenge any Navy SEAL, transitioned from breathing water to breathing air, and figured out how to get food without even knowing what hunger meant.

You've been taking care of yourself since you were just two cells. The same mechanism that built the complex structure you now call your body has been helping you navigate challenges your entire life. Yet somehow, somewhere along the way, you might have started calling yourself a loser.

My friend, if you're reading this, you're not losing—you're winning, even when it doesn't feel like it.

This handbook comes from my own journey of rediscovering that truth. I went from being a young doctor in Nigeria to working as a security guard in freezing Toronto winters, from having a clear path to feeling completely lost, from confidence to panic attacks, and back to finding my footing again. Along the way, I learned that life isn't about avoiding the storms—it's about learning to dance in the rain.

The principles in this book aren't theories from a textbook. They're tools forged in the fire of real experience, tested in moments when everything seemed impossible, and refined through years of helping others find their way. They're simple enough to remember when you're stressed, practical enough to use immediately, and powerful enough to change your entire trajectory.

Whether you're facing a career change, relationship challenges, financial stress, health issues, or just the everyday struggle of figuring out who you are and where you're going, this handbook is your compass.

You don't need to have it all figured out. You just need to know how to take the next step.

Let's begin.

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# Chapter 1: Change is Your Only Constant

*"The truth is that nothing ever stays the same and everything is constantly changing, sometimes almost imperceptibly, and sometimes inescapably."*

## The Swimming Pool Story

Imagine you're handed a bucket and told to fill a swimming pool. Your first reaction might be to complain about how unfair it is, or to analyze whether it's even possible. But you have three real choices:

1. Complain about it
2. Shut up and fill the bucket with water, dump it in the pool, repeat
3. Fill the pool with a bucket while you complain about it

I chose option three when I moved from Nigeria to Canada at 24. While it's important to acknowledge when situations are unfair, it's more important to do what you need to do to survive and thrive in the long run.

## Change Happens Whether You Like It or Not

Here's the hard truth: you live on a planet whose core is molten lava, whose ecosystem is so delicate that a meteorite could end all life as we know it. Yet you talk about being in control?

The moment I realized that my sense of control was largely an illusion, I began finding ways to recreate it whenever I needed to. Control isn't about commanding the universe—it's about managing your response to what the universe throws at you.

## The Two Outcomes of Change

Every change in your life will produce one of two results:

1. Results you want
2. Results you don't want

That's it. No other categories exist.

When I was ten years old, my father died suddenly in a car accident. This was definitely a result I didn't want. But it taught me one of life's most important lessons: the only thing I really lost was my illusion of control, and I could regain that feeling by focusing on what was actually within my power.

## The Model for Change

When I work with people who feel stuck, I start with four simple agreements:

1. **You're here because change is required.** We don't know exactly what needs to change, but we know something isn't working the way you want it to.
2. **This change hasn't happened yet.** If it had, you wouldn't be feeling frustrated or seeking help.
3. **Working together, we can facilitate this change.** We're both invested in making things better.
4. **Change will happen.** We won't quit. We'll find a way.

This might seem obvious, but you'd be amazed how many people never explicitly commit to these four points. They stay stuck because they're secretly hoping things will change without them having to change anything.

## When I First Landed in Canada

Everything was different. Things that Canadians took for granted were completely foreign to me. I remember riding the subway when a man politely asked, "Do you want to close the window please?"

I said no.

He got visibly angry. The woman next to me whispered, "He wants you to close the window."

I was confused. "Why didn't he just say so?"

He had said so—but in the Canadian way of putting requests in the form of questions. "Could you close the window" means do it soon. "Will you close the window" means you have no choice. But "Do you want to close the window" seemed like he was just asking about my preferences, not making a request.

This small misunderstanding taught me that adapting to change often means learning new languages—not just words, but entire ways of communicating and being in the world.

## The Reality Creation Machine

Here's something fascinating: reality is created by how you perceive things. Even when your perception is wrong, it still impacts your experience. If you're afraid of snakes because you think they're all dangerous, you'll treat a harmless garden snake as a threat until you learn otherwise.

Your perception shapes your reality, which shapes your actions, which shapes your results. This chain reaction means that changing how you see things can literally change your life.

## Taking Ownership of Change

You have three choices when facing any change:

1. **Resist it** (and usually lose)
2. **Let it happen to you** (and feel powerless)
3. **Participate in shaping it** (and increase your chances of getting what you want)

The third option requires taking responsibility for your choices, knowing that the results you want are a natural consequence of those choices. In any situation, you always have some choice. When you fail to exercise that choice, you're asking "the system" to choose for you, which dramatically reduces your odds of success.

### Points to Remember

- Change produces both wanted and unwanted results—that's normal
- You can't control what happens, but you can influence how you respond
- Functional adaptation means using tactics that increase your chances of getting the results you want
- Taking responsibility for your choices is the first step toward taking control of your direction
- Sometimes what you need to do is different from what you want to do—and what you need always takes precedence

The goal isn't to avoid change or control it completely. The goal is to dance with it skillfully enough that you end up where you want to be.

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## Chapter 2: Finding Your Direction

*"We aspire through desire, but succeed through action. Our desires are the catalysts for action, but our actions create success."*

### **The Burning Building**

Let me give you the most important question you can ask yourself when facing any crisis:  
"Where do I go from here?"

If you wake up in a burning building, does it really matter how you got there? Understanding how the fire started might be important for preventing future fires, but right now, what matters most for your survival is finding the exit.

This became my mantra during the hardest years of my life, and it can be yours too.

### **Survive First, Then Thrive**

When I first arrived in Canada, I quickly realized I had underestimated the obstacles. Medical school positions were being cut. Canadian graduates were having to do internships in the United States. This was before the internet, so I had little access to information about getting back into the medical system.

I started working as a security guard just days after arriving. It was October, winter was coming, and I had never been so cold. I caught four different buses to get to work. Sometimes on weekends, when I couldn't get extra shifts, I would ride the subway for hours just to be around other people and stay warm.

Standing with thousands of people where nobody knows you exist, where if you disappeared no one would notice—that's a special kind of loneliness.

I learned a crucial distinction: anything that wants to exist must first survive, then flourish. But once it begins to thrive, it must never forget how to survive.

## **The Two Mindsets**

### **Survival Mode:**

- Plan for the unexpected
- Focus on needs: "What must I have?"
- Ask: "What's the worst that could happen, and how do I prevent it?"
- When you achieve your goal: relief and hope

### **Thrive Mode:**

- Plan for maximum success
- Focus on wants: "What do I desire?"
- Ask: "What's the best that could happen, and how do I achieve it?"
- When you achieve your goal: anxiety about maintaining it

### **Survive & Thrive Mode:**

- Plan for the unexpected while hoping for the best outcome
- Balance needs and wants
- Ask: "How do I prepare for challenges while moving toward my dreams?"

The magic happens when you master both mindsets and know when to use each one.

## **My Lowest Point**

After refusing to fold personal flyers for my security supervisor (because that wasn't my job), I was fired. For three weeks, I couldn't find work anywhere. I traveled two hours by bus and train from Scarborough to downtown Toronto every day, applying for any job I could find. I even interviewed to be a dishwasher but wasn't hired.

I came home that day and cried.

That's when I discovered something powerful: I was alone, but I didn't have to be lonely. I started talking to myself out loud—not because I was going crazy, but because I needed to hear a friendly voice, even if it was my own.

This led to a breakthrough: my most important relationship is the one I have with myself.



## The Three-Part Alignment

Setting direction requires aligning three things:

1. **Thoughts:** Use your imagination to develop your desired results until they become tangible. See them, feel them, know exactly what they look like.
2. **Words:** Express what you want to happen. Instead of "I don't want to fail," say "I want to succeed." Instead of "I'm afraid," say "I'm confident."
3. **Actions:** Deliberately take steps that move you toward your desired results. If you talk the talk, you must walk the walk.

When these three are out of alignment, you're working against yourself. When they're aligned, you become unstoppable.

## Finding Solutions in Complex Situations

When I encountered problems I had no idea how to solve, I developed a simple approach: every complex situation is made up of multiple simple pieces. My job was to find the simplest piece while keeping aware of the complexity.

I also learned that every system, no matter how complicated, is governed by rules. Once you understand the rules, you can navigate the system.

## The Lucky Break

After months of rejection letters from medical residency programs, I wondered if the Canadian Armed Forces might train physicians. I went to their recruiting office and discovered they had a Medical Officer Training Program.

Even though most programs had already turned me down, I wrote to them again—this time as someone who would be a military officer. I got a few polite replies, but still no offers.

Then one day, I came home from my factory job to find a blinking light on my answering machine. A program in Saskatoon needed someone immediately because their original candidate had backed out.

Looking back, I set the direction with my imagination, refused to accept no as an answer, and maintained an unbreakable will. But luck played a role too. The key insight: focusing on what you can control increases your chances of being lucky.

## The Energy Equation

You have limited energy and resources, so efficiency is crucial. It takes enormous energy to understand everything that has happened to you, how you feel about it, and how it affects your behavior. While these factors are relevant, they don't always answer the most important survival question: "Where do I go from here?"

Focus your energy on actions that move you toward your desired results rather than analyzing results you don't want.

## The Direction Formula

1. **Identify your needs** (what you must have to survive)
2. **Identify your wants** (what you desire to thrive)
3. **Know the difference** between them
4. **Do what you need to do first**, even if it's not what you want to do
5. **Use the energy created by meeting your needs** to pursue what you want

## Points to Remember

- "Where do I go from here?" is the most important question you can ask
- Survive first, then thrive—but don't forget how to survive once you're thriving
- Align your thoughts, words, and actions with your desired direction
- Complex problems are made of simple pieces—find the simplest piece first
- Focus your energy on what you can control
- Every "no" gets you closer to a "yes" if you keep moving in the right direction

Your past does not determine your future. Your direction does.

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## Chapter 3: See It, Speak It, Be It

*"Success requires a healthy imagination and a stubborn will."*

### The Contest Between Will and Imagination

Here's something that might surprise you: when your willpower fights against your imagination, your imagination always wins.

Think about it. You can willpower yourself to go on a diet, but if you keep imagining how good that chocolate cake would taste, eventually your imagination will overrule your willpower. You can force yourself to approach someone you're attracted to, but if you're imagining all the ways they might reject you, your imagination will sabotage your efforts.

This is why most people struggle with change. They're trying to use willpower to fight their imagination instead of getting them to work together.

### The Two Tools Working Together

**Imagination** is your GPS—it shows you where you want to go and helps you visualize the route. It provides direction and makes your goals feel real and achievable.

**Willpower** is your engine—it gets you there through repetition and persistence. It doesn't need to be creative; it just needs to keep doing the same helpful actions over and over again.

The secret is to use your imagination to create a clear, compelling picture of what you want, then use your willpower to take the steps that move you toward that picture.

### The Power of Action Words

Words shape imagination, and imagination drives action. How you describe things matters more than you think.

If I want to prevent someone from dropping a vase, I'm more likely to succeed by saying "hold on to it" than "don't drop that." The first phrase makes them imagine holding; the second makes them imagine dropping.

This principle applies to everything. Instead of "I hope I don't fail," try "I hope I succeed." Instead of "I'm trying not to be nervous," try "I'm building my confidence."

Your unconscious mind doesn't process negatives well. When you say "don't think of a pink elephant," what's the first thing that pops into your head?

## The Daily Programming

I learned a technique from a French psychologist named Émile Coué, but I adapted it to work better for me. Every morning and evening, I would say out loud:

*Every day*  
*In every way*  
*Getting better and better*  
*More capable*  
*More able*

The key is to say it like you mean it, not to analyze what you're saying. Let each line paint a picture:

- "Every day" helps you visualize time moving forward
- "In every way" helps you visualize all possibilities
- "Getting better and better" helps you visualize improvement
- "More capable, more able" helps you visualize your growing strength

## Visualization vs. Delusion

There's a crucial difference between healthy visualization and harmful delusion:

**Visualization** acknowledges current reality while imagining a better future. You know where you are, but you can clearly see where you want to be.

**Delusion** denies current reality and replaces it with fantasy. You pretend things are different than they actually are.

Visualization is like having a map that shows both your current location and your destination. Delusion is like pretending you're already at your destination when you're actually lost.

## Making It Real

To make visualization work, you need three elements:

1. **Make it specific:** Instead of "I want to be successful," visualize exactly what success looks like for you. What are you doing? Where are you? How do you feel? What does your typical day look like?
2. **Make it repeatable:** The same vision, over and over, until it becomes as familiar as a song you know by heart.
3. **Make it believable:** Your vision should be a stretch, but not a fantasy. If you currently make \$30,000 a year, visualizing \$50,000 next year is believable. Visualizing \$500,000 next year is probably delusion.

## When I Was Unemployed

During those three weeks when I couldn't find work, I had plenty of time to think. I could have used that time to imagine all the ways things could go wrong—and believe me, there were plenty.

Instead, I made a choice. I decided to imagine finding the right opportunity, even when everything suggested otherwise. I visualized myself getting a call, going to an interview, being offered a position that would move me toward my goals.

I didn't pretend I wasn't worried. I didn't deny that my situation was difficult. But I chose to point my imagination toward the outcome I wanted rather than the one I feared.

## The Five Quick Wins

When facing a complex problem, I learned to quickly remind myself of five simple things that were going well. Not big things—small things. I can see. I can think. I can walk. I have food today. I solved a problem yesterday.

This isn't about forced positivity. It's about balance. When your mind is flooded with problems, you need to remind it that not everything is broken.

## The Three-Step Process

1. **Self-affirmation statements:** Use phrases like the daily programming above to orient your mind toward what you want.
2. **Appropriate verbalization:** Speak about your goals in positive, specific terms. Say what you want, not what you don't want.
3. **Appropriate action:** Take concrete steps that align with your vision, even small ones.

## Practical Application

Let's say you want to improve your relationship with your spouse. Don't visualize "not fighting anymore." Instead, visualize specific moments of connection: having coffee together in the morning, laughing at something funny, working as a team to solve a problem.

Then use words that support this vision: "We're building a stronger relationship" instead of "We need to stop arguing so much."

Finally, take actions that match the vision: suggest having coffee together, share something that made you smile, ask how you can help with something they're working on.

## **Points to Remember**

- Your imagination always beats your willpower, so get them working together
- Words shape imagination, which drives action
- Visualize what you want, not what you don't want
- Be specific, be repetitive, be believable
- Balance awareness of problems with awareness of possibilities
- Small, consistent actions in the right direction create big changes over time

Remember: you're not pretending to be something you're not. You're rehearsing to become what you can be.

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## Chapter 4: Making Friends with Fear

*"Be fearful but don't be ruled by fear."*

### Fear is Your Early Warning System

Let me tell you about the most frightening decision I ever made. Just before my 24th birthday, I decided to move from Nigeria to Canada. Even though I was born in Canada, Nigeria was the only country I really knew. Despite all its problems, it was a society I understood.

As we approached the airport on departure day, I felt intense fear. I had never really been away from home. I knew that around any corner in Nigeria, I'd run into a familiar face. Now I was heading to a place where I might never see these faces again.

I must have changed my mind fifty times before check-in. It felt like deciding to perform on a trapeze without a safety net.

But here's what I learned: that fear wasn't my enemy. It was my friend, warning me that I was about to make a life-changing decision. The question wasn't whether to feel afraid—the question was what to do with that fear.

### The Spectrum of Fear

Fear isn't just one thing. It's a spectrum, ranging from mild uneasiness to overwhelming terror. At its core, fear is an unpleasant emotion triggered by the perception of danger or threat. It's your mind's way of saying, "Pay attention—something important is happening."

The problem isn't fear itself. The problem is when fear runs your life instead of informing your decisions.

### When Fear Became My Prison

In my late teens and early twenties, I suffered from panic attacks that seemed to come from nowhere. Suddenly, everything would become muffled and unreal. My thoughts would race. I'd feel like I was in a tunnel, with lead for legs, convinced I was dying or losing my mind.

My lips would tingle, I couldn't breathe properly, and sometimes my fingers and toes would curl into spasms. I'd often faint, only to wake up with everything back to normal.

These attacks made social situations nearly impossible. I was constantly wondering when I'd make a complete fool of myself.

## The Turning Point

Instead of trying to control these attacks, I learned to adapt to them. I made a list of what I experienced:

- Fear of losing my mind
- Feeling disconnected from everything around me
- Sensitivity to noise and light
- Physical symptoms like tingling and cramping
- Exhaustion afterward

Simply writing down what happened made the next attack less frightening because it was familiar rather than completely unknown.

Then I had a realization: if I was actually losing my mind, I wouldn't be aware of it. The fact that I was worried about losing my mind was proof that I wasn't.

## The Wave-Riding Technique

I developed a method I call "riding the wave." Instead of trying to stop panic attacks, I learned to surf them.

When an attack started, I would:

1. **Focus on one simple thing** and repeat it continuously (I chose "99")
2. **Say it out loud** while breathing into my cupped hands
3. **Remember that thinking during an attack makes it worse** (like pouring gasoline on a fire)
4. **Ride each wave** instead of fighting it

The first few times I tried this, it didn't work well. But I kept practicing, even when I wasn't having an attack. Eventually, I successfully rode through an entire panic attack without losing control.

I haven't had a panic attack since.



## The Two Types of Fear

Through experience, I learned there are two kinds of fear:

### Productive Fear:

- Alerts you to real dangers
- Motivates appropriate caution
- Enhances your survival instincts
- Feels like excitement mixed with caution
- Usually signals that important change is coming

### Unproductive Fear:

- Paralyzes you with imaginary dangers
- Prevents you from taking necessary risks
- Wastes energy on things you can't control
- Feels overwhelming and hopeless
- Keeps you stuck in place

The difference isn't in the feeling itself—it's in how you process it.

## The Three-Step Fear Processing

1. **Recognition:** Notice the psychological and physical effects of fear. Don't try to analyze why you're afraid; just acknowledge that you are.
2. **Acceptance:** Don't waste energy trying to control or eliminate fear. Accept that you're afraid and move on to action.
3. **Action:** Focus your imagination on what you need to do to achieve your goal, despite being afraid.

## **The Security Guard Story**

During my first job in Canada as a security guard, I was subjected to racial harassment from an older colleague. He would wipe his hands with a white handkerchief after shaking mine and make comments like "take your cotton-picking hands off me."

I was afraid of losing my job, so I kept quiet and hoped he'd leave me alone. But the harassment continued.

I noticed he was very religious and always carried a Bible. One day I told him, "I know you're a very good man, and when you die—which I hope won't be for a long time—you'll definitely go to heaven."

He seemed surprised and touched. "That was very nice of you to say."

Then I continued: "I only worry about one thing for you."

"What's that?"

"What will you do when you get to heaven and realize God is black?"

The look on his face was priceless. For once, he was speechless. A couple weeks later, he stopped harassing me. Two weeks after that, he emotionally apologized, saying he'd never considered that God might be black and couldn't stop thinking about it.

I felt fear throughout this entire process, but I acted despite the fear, not because of its absence.

## **Fear as Your Friend**

Here's the key insight: fear often signals that change is required and imminent. When you feel afraid, instead of asking "How do I get rid of this fear?" ask "What is this fear trying to tell me?"

Fear of heights can keep you from falling off cliffs. Fear of rejection can motivate you to prepare better for important conversations. Fear of failure can help you pay attention to details you might otherwise miss.

The goal isn't to become fearless. The goal is to become skilled at acting appropriately while afraid.

## Practical Steps

When you feel afraid:

1. **Pause and breathe:** Don't react immediately. Give yourself a moment to process what you're experiencing.
2. **Name the fear:** "I'm afraid of looking foolish" or "I'm afraid of losing money" or "I'm afraid of being rejected."
3. **Assess the threat:** Is this fear warning you about a real danger or an imaginary one?
4. **Choose your action:** What step can you take toward your goal, even while feeling afraid?
5. **Take the step:** Move forward despite the fear, not because it's gone.

## Points to Remember

- Fear is information, not instruction
- Productive fear enhances survival; unproductive fear prevents living
- Processing fear is more effective than trying to eliminate it
- You can be strong while afraid
- Fear often signals that important change is coming
- The courage isn't the absence of fear—it's acting appropriately despite fear

Remember: every hero in every story felt afraid. What made them heroes wasn't their fearlessness—it was their willingness to do what needed to be done while afraid.

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## Chapter 5: The Power of Possibility

*"Hope is the belief that good things will happen despite the circumstances and events in one's life."*

### Hope is Your Lottery Ticket

Wanting to win the lottery but not buying a ticket is like hoping for a better life but not taking action toward it. The odds of winning might be slim, but without a ticket, your odds are zero.

Being hopeful is like buying that lottery ticket. It doesn't guarantee you'll win, but it gives you a chance. And in life, having a chance is often all you need.

Hope is free. It costs nothing to believe that good things are possible. Yet it can be the difference between giving up and finding a way through.

### Growing Up with Stories

In Nigeria, I was raised on stories that taught life lessons. Every challenge was presented as an opportunity for learning and growth. When things didn't turn out as planned, I learned to see the outcome as either a work in progress or a complete failure.

Here's the crucial insight: how you perceive what happens is often more important than what actually happens.

The experiences that initially seemed unpleasant often taught me more than the ones that seemed pleasant. I'm not recommending that you seek out unpleasant experiences, but I am suggesting you look for the lesson and the opportunity in whatever life gives you.

### The Three Elements of Hope

True hope isn't wishful thinking or naive optimism. It's an active process with three components:

1. **Possibility Thinking:** Allow yourself to believe that what you want could happen. Use your imagination to visualize it clearly.
2. **Verbal Programming:** State your expectations out loud in ways that align with what you want. Say it like you mean it, without necessarily analyzing what you're saying.
3. **Consistent Reinforcement:** Repeat the process regularly to build the habit of being hopeful.

## **When Everything Looked Impossible**

During my three weeks of unemployment in Toronto, hope was all I had. I was staying in a small room, applying for any job I could find, getting rejected everywhere. My savings were disappearing, winter was coming, and I had no family support system.

I could have focused on all the reasons why things would never work out. Instead, I chose to maintain hope by doing something that felt slightly crazy: I kept talking to myself out loud, encouraging myself, and choosing to see possibility in every situation.

I would say things like:

- "Something good is going to happen today"
- "The right opportunity is looking for me too"
- "This is temporary, not permanent"
- "I'm getting stronger through this challenge"

I didn't wait until I felt hopeful to say these things. I said them to create hopefulness.

## **The Daily Practice**

I developed a routine that I still use today. Every morning, I would say out loud (quietly, but audibly):

*Today will bring something good*  
*I am open to opportunities*  
*I have what it takes*  
*Good things are possible*  
*I am moving in the right direction*

Ten repetitions in the morning, ten at night. The key was to say it convincingly without overanalyzing the words. It was a form of "self-programming."

## Hope vs. Wishful Thinking

There's an important difference:

**Wishful Thinking:** "I hope things will magically get better without me having to do anything."

**Active Hope:** "I believe good outcomes are possible, and I'm taking steps to make them more likely."

**Wishful Thinking:** "Maybe someone will offer me a job without me having to apply."

**Active Hope:** "I believe the right opportunity exists, so I'll keep applying and improving my approach."

Wishful thinking is passive. Hope is active.

## Redefining Your Reality

When you don't get the results you want, you have a choice in how to define what happened:

- **Fixed Mindset:** "This failed. I'm not good at this. It's never going to work."
- **Growth Mindset:** "This didn't work yet. I'm learning what doesn't work. I'm getting closer to what does work."

The facts might be the same, but the story you tell yourself about those facts will determine your next actions.

## **The Storytelling Tradition**

Growing up with African storytelling traditions taught me that every story has multiple layers of meaning. A single event can be viewed as a tragedy, a comedy, a lesson, or a stepping stone—depending on how you frame it.

When I was fired from my security guard job for refusing to fold my supervisor's personal flyers, I could have seen it as:

- Proof that I was unemployable in Canada
- Evidence that the system was against me
- Confirmation that I should give up and go home

Instead, I chose to see it as:

- A lesson about workplace boundaries
- An opportunity to find something better
- Evidence that I was willing to stand up for myself

The second framework gave me hope and energy to keep moving forward. The first would have drained my energy and motivation.

## **Balanced Hope**

I'm not suggesting toxic positivity or denial of reality. Balanced hope means:

- Acknowledging current challenges while believing improvement is possible
- Being cautiously optimistic, not naively enthusiastic
- Accepting vulnerability while working toward strength
- Seeing setbacks as temporary, not permanent

When people tell me I'm being "unrealistic," I remind them that hope isn't about predicting the future—it's about keeping your mind open to positive possibilities while working toward them.

## **The Validation Connection**

Hope is closely connected to feeling valuable and worthwhile. When you believe your existence matters and has purpose, hope comes more naturally. When you doubt your worth, hope becomes harder to maintain.

This is why the relationship with yourself is so important. If you don't believe you deserve good things, you won't hope for them. If you don't think you're capable of creating change, you won't hope for better circumstances.

## **Creating a Hope-Friendly Environment**

Surround yourself with reminders that good things are possible:

- **Stories of people who overcame similar challenges**
- **Evidence of your past successes, however small**
- **Relationships with people who believe in possibilities**
- **Daily practices that reinforce positive expectations**
- **Goals that are challenging but achievable**

## **Points to Remember**

- Hope is an active process, not passive wishing
- How you perceive events often matters more than the events themselves
- Daily verbal programming can create and maintain hopefulness
- Balanced hope acknowledges reality while believing in possibility
- Your relationship with yourself affects your ability to hope
- Hope doesn't guarantee specific outcomes, but it increases their likelihood

The most important thing to remember: hope is always available to you, no matter what your circumstances. It's a choice you can make moment by moment, day by day. And that choice can change everything.

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## Chapter 6: Feelings vs. Actions

*"How I feel and how I act are independent processes. The relationship between them is one that I have created."*

### The Artist's Paint and Brush

Think of your feelings as an artist's paint—they add color and richness to your existence, creating awareness and filling you with a sense of purpose and endless potential.

Your actions are like the artist's brush strokes—repeatedly dipping into that paint and creating the actual picture on the canvas of your life.

The paint doesn't control the brush, and the brush doesn't control the paint. They work together, but they're separate tools. The artist—you—decides how to use both.

### The Great Misunderstanding

Most people believe their feelings automatically determine their actions. They say things like:

- "I can't help it—I was angry"
- "I had to yell—I was frustrated"
- "I couldn't speak up—I was nervous"
- "I ate the whole cake—I was sad"

But here's the truth: the relationship between your feelings and your actions is something you created. It can be changed.

A tired parent who feels angry at a crying baby can choose to cuddle the child instead of shaking it. A nervous person can choose to speak up despite their anxiety. A heartbroken person can choose to take care of themselves instead of staying in bed for weeks.

### The Survival Connection

Your brain evolved to connect feelings with actions for survival purposes. When our ancestors felt fear, they needed to run or fight immediately. When they felt hunger, they needed to search for food. Quick feeling-to-action connections kept them alive.

But in modern life, most of our feelings aren't about immediate survival. They're about complex social, emotional, and psychological situations that require more thoughtful responses.

The problem is that your brain is still operating with ancient software, creating automatic feeling-action connections that might not serve you well in today's world.

## Processing vs. Suppressing

Many people suppress their feelings because they're afraid of what actions those feelings might lead to. But suppression doesn't work—it just pushes the feelings underground where they can cause more damage.

The solution is processing: allowing yourself to feel completely while consciously choosing your actions.

Here's the difference:

**Suppression:** "I'm not angry" (when you clearly are) **Processing:** "I'm angry, and I'm choosing to respond thoughtfully"

**Suppression:** "I shouldn't feel this way" **Processing:** "I feel this way, and that's information I can use"

**Suppression:** "If I let myself feel sad, I'll fall apart" **Processing:** "I'm sad, and I'm still capable of taking care of myself"

## The Best Friend Rule

Here's a simple rule that can revolutionize your life: no matter how you feel, there's only one action available to you—be your own best friend.

You have the right to feel:

- Angry
- Sad
- Disappointed
- Ashamed
- Excited
- Confused
- Any other emotion

But regardless of what you feel, ask yourself: "What would a best friend do for me right now?"

Would a best friend:

- Encourage you or criticize you?
- Help you solve the problem or make it worse?
- Take care of your basic needs or ignore them?
- Speak to you kindly or harshly?
- Support your growth or keep you stuck?

## When I Hit Bottom

During my unemployment period, I felt angry, ashamed, frustrated, and hopeless. Those feelings were completely valid—my situation was genuinely difficult.

But I had a choice about what to do with those feelings. I could:

- Blame everyone else for my situation
- Give up and stop looking for work
- Spend all day feeling sorry for myself
- Take my frustrations out on the few people who tried to help me

Instead, I chose to be my own best friend. That meant:

- Acknowledging my feelings without judgment
- Taking care of my basic needs (food, shelter, hygiene)
- Continuing to look for opportunities
- Speaking to myself with encouragement rather than criticism
- Looking for lessons I could learn from the experience

## The Feeling-Action Independence

Here are some examples of how feelings and actions can be independent:

**Feeling scared + Action of moving forward = Courage**  
**Feeling sad + Action of taking care of yourself = Resilience**  
**Feeling angry + Action of problem-solving = Effectiveness**  
**Feeling disappointed + Action of trying again = Persistence**  
**Feeling overwhelmed + Action of taking one small step = Progress**

The feeling doesn't have to change for you to take helpful action. You can feel scared and still speak up. You can feel sad and still exercise. You can feel angry and still respond thoughtfully.

## Self-Awareness and Self-Acceptance

Being your own best friend requires two things:

**Self-Awareness:** Knowing everything about yourself—the good, the bad, the ugly, and the beautiful. No hiding, no pretending, no denial.

**Self-Acceptance:** Acknowledging that this is who you are right now, without judgment. Taking responsibility without shame.

Self-Awareness + Self-Acceptance = Self-Love

## The Internal Dialogue

The most important relationship you have is with yourself. Like any relationship, it requires:

1. **Communication:** Having honest conversations with yourself about what you're feeling and experiencing.
2. **Trust:** Believing that you'll take care of yourself and keep your own best interests at heart.
3. **Intimacy:** Being comfortable with all parts of yourself, even the parts you'd rather hide from others.

Most people are terrible at all three of these with themselves, which is why they struggle in relationships with others. You can't give what you don't have.

## Practical Application

The next time you experience a strong emotion:

1. **Name it:** "I'm feeling angry" or "I'm feeling scared" or "I'm feeling disappointed."
2. **Accept it:** "It's okay to feel this way. This feeling is giving me information."
3. **Choose your action:** "What would my best friend do for me right now?"
4. **Act on that choice:** Do the thing that takes care of you and moves you in the direction you want to go.

## Common Mistakes

**Mistake 1:** "I need to feel better before I can take action." **Truth:** Action often comes before feeling better.

**Mistake 2:** "If I acknowledge negative feelings, they'll get worse." **Truth:** Acknowledged feelings usually decrease in intensity; suppressed feelings usually increase.

**Mistake 3:** "I should only act when I feel motivated." **Truth:** Motivation often follows action, not the other way around.

## Points to Remember

- Feelings provide information; they don't give commands
- You created the relationship between your feelings and actions, so you can change it
- Processing feelings is more effective than suppressing them
- Being your own best friend is the one action that's always appropriate
- Self-awareness plus self-acceptance equals self-love
- You can take helpful action regardless of how you feel

The goal isn't to control your feelings—it's to choose your actions wisely while honoring your emotional experience.

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## Chapter 7: Process Over Outcome

*"Life is a process, and outcomes are its products. Focusing on the process will always result in the outcomes I need, even if it's not what I expected."*

### The Minutes, Hours, Days Formula

I used to spend so much time worrying about how next year would turn out that I forgot about what was happening right now. Then I learned something simple but powerful:

60 good seconds = 1 good minute

60 good minutes = 1 good hour

24 good hours = 1 good day

7 good days = 1 good week

52 good weeks = 1 good year

If you want a good year, focus on having a good day. If you want a good day, focus on having a good hour. If you want a good hour, focus on having a good minute.

Right now, in this minute, what can you do that's aligned with who you want to become?

### The Process vs. Outcome Conflict

When your process (what you're actually doing) conflicts with your outcome (what you want to achieve), the process always wins.

Examples:

- **Want:** To be healthy  
**Process:** Worrying about health while eating poorly and not exercising  
**Result:** Poor health
- **Want:** To have a good relationship  
**Process:** Criticizing your partner while hoping they'll change  
**Result:** Damaged relationship
- **Want:** To build confidence  
**Process:** Focusing on everything you're bad at  
**Result:** Decreased confidence

The outcome you get will always match your process, not your intentions.

## **My Factory Job Revelation**

When I started working at the chemical factory, mixing soaps and lotions, I learned something important about process. The quality of the final product depended entirely on following the process correctly.

If I rushed through the steps because I was focused on finishing quickly, the product would be flawed. If I got distracted thinking about what the customer would think of the final result, I'd make mistakes in the mixing.

But when I focused completely on each step of the process—measuring accurately, mixing thoroughly, timing precisely—the outcome took care of itself.

This became a metaphor for everything else in my life.

## **The Happiness Example**

Many people ask, "How do I become happy?" But happiness is an outcome, not a process. It's like asking, "How do I become 'arrived'?"

Instead, ask: "What does a happy person do? How do they spend their time? What thoughts do they think? How do they treat themselves and others?"

Then focus on doing those things, regardless of whether you feel happy yet. The feeling of happiness emerges from the process of living like a happy person.

## **Process-Driven vs. Outcome-Driven**

### **Outcome-Driven Approach:**

- "I need to lose 30 pounds"
- Gets discouraged when progress is slow
- Gives up if results don't come quickly
- All-or-nothing thinking

### **Process-Driven Approach:**

- "I'm becoming someone who eats well and exercises regularly"
- Celebrates small daily wins
- Stays consistent regardless of daily results
- Focus on building sustainable habits

The process-driven approach is more likely to achieve the desired outcome and maintain it long-term.

## **The New York Trip Analogy**

If I wanted to go to New York to see a show or buy something unavailable in Canada, getting there would be my outcome. But without the process—buying a ticket, getting my passport, packing, leaving for the airport on time, boarding the plane—the outcome wouldn't happen.

Interestingly, while focusing on these steps, I might discover I could accomplish the same goal without going that far. Maybe the show is being filmed and I can watch it online. Maybe the product is available through online ordering.

The process of pursuing one outcome often reveals better outcomes you hadn't considered.

## **Breaking Down Complex Goals**

Every complex process consists of simpler components. When facing a complicated challenge, I break it down:

1. **Identify the final outcome I want**
2. **List the major steps required**
3. **Break each major step into smaller actions**
4. **Focus on completing one small action at a time**
5. **Trust that the outcome will emerge from the process**

## **The Furniture Rearranging Solution**

I discovered something unusual about problem-solving. When I had a problem I couldn't solve, I would keep it in the back of my mind while doing something completely different—like rearranging my furniture.

Usually, while I was focused on finding the perfect arrangement for my living room, I would suddenly see a solution to the original problem. I called this "substitution of processes."

My theory: when your conscious mind is occupied with a different creative process, your unconscious mind continues working on the original problem without the interference of anxiety and overthinking.

## Daily Process Focus

Instead of asking "Am I successful yet?" ask:

- "What did I do today that successful people do?"
- "How did I grow today?"
- "What skills did I practice?"
- "What habits did I reinforce?"

Instead of asking "Am I happy yet?" ask:

- "What brought me joy today?"
- "How did I take care of myself?"
- "What did I appreciate?"
- "How was I kind to myself and others?"

## The Compound Effect

Small processes, repeated consistently, create dramatic outcomes over time. This works both positively and negatively:

### Positive Compound Effect:

- Reading 15 minutes daily = 90+ hours of learning per year
- Exercising 20 minutes daily = 120+ hours of fitness per year
- Expressing gratitude daily = Significant improvement in mental health

### Negative Compound Effect:

- Complaining daily = Increasingly negative mindset
- Avoiding challenges daily = Decreasing confidence and skills
- Neglecting relationships daily = Isolation and loneliness

## Trusting the Process

Sometimes the process leads to better outcomes than you originally planned. When I started applying for medical residencies, my original plan was to practice in Toronto. The process led me to Saskatoon, which turned out to be exactly what I needed.

When you're truly committed to the process, you become open to outcomes you never considered—many of which are better than your original goal.



## **The Process of Becoming**

You are always in the process of becoming someone. The question is: who are you becoming?

- Are you becoming someone who gives up when things get difficult, or someone who finds ways through challenges?
- Are you becoming someone who blames circumstances, or someone who takes responsibility?
- Are you becoming someone who waits for motivation, or someone who acts regardless of how they feel?

Your daily processes are votes for the person you're becoming.

### **Points to Remember**

- Focus on the process, and outcomes take care of themselves
- When process and outcome conflict, process always wins
- Complex goals are achieved through simple, repeated actions
- Small daily processes compound into significant long-term results
- You are always in the process of becoming someone—choose wisely
- Trust that consistent, aligned actions will lead to appropriate outcomes

The goal isn't to control the outcome—it's to commit to a process that naturally leads to the outcomes you want.

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## Chapter 8: Your Inner Cheerleader

*"My most important relationship is with myself."*

### **The Bank Account Analogy**

Imagine your self-worth as a bank account. Every interaction you have with yourself is either a deposit or a withdrawal. You are both the bank and the banker—the only one who can make deposits and withdrawals.

Most people go through life making constant withdrawals without enough deposits, then wonder why they feel emotionally bankrupt.

#### **Deposits:**

- Acknowledging your efforts
- Celebrating small wins
- Speaking to yourself kindly
- Taking care of your basic needs
- Recognizing your growth

#### **Withdrawals:**

- Self-criticism
- Comparing yourself negatively to others
- Ignoring your accomplishments
- Neglecting your needs
- Focusing only on mistakes

### **When I Hit Rock Bottom**

During my three weeks of unemployment, I felt like the most worthless person on earth. I had graduated medical school at 22, yet I couldn't even get hired as a dishwasher. I was a highly educated man asking for welfare assistance in a country I was born in but felt like a complete stranger.

I discovered something crucial: I was hardwired for validation—information that made me feel valuable and worthwhile. This wasn't a weakness or character flaw; it was human nature.

But I was depending entirely on external validation (from others) while my internal validation (from myself) was non-existent. When external validation disappeared, I had nothing left.

## **The Internal vs. External Validation**

### **External Validation:**

- Comes from other people
- Feels good but is temporary
- You have no control over it
- Can be withdrawn at any time
- Creates dependency

### **Internal Validation:**

- Comes from yourself
- Builds lasting self-worth
- You have complete control over it
- Always available
- Creates independence

External validation works like a reminder note telling you to make a deposit in your self-worth bank. But if you don't actually make the deposit yourself, the reminder note is worthless.

## **The Daily Deposit Practice**

When I realized I could validate myself even when others didn't, I started a simple practice. Whenever I felt put down or less valuable, I would immediately remind myself of 2-3 things that made me feel valid. I always said them out loud so my brain could hear them:

- "I'm learning new things every day"
- "I didn't give up when things got difficult"
- "I treated someone kindly today"
- "I solved a problem yesterday"
- "I have skills that could help others"

Over time, I found I felt much better about myself. Then I decided not to wait until I felt bad. I started making these daily deposits like putting money in a savings account for when I needed it.

## **The 2:1 Ratio**

As someone who naturally focuses on problems that need solving, I tend to remember what's not going well more than what is going well. Sound familiar?

To counteract this tendency, I developed a ratio approach: For every negative thought or criticism, I would consciously acknowledge two positive things. When things were really tough, I increased the ratio to 3:1 or even 5:1.

This isn't about denial or fake positivity. It's about balance. If your mind naturally focuses on problems, you need to consciously focus on strengths to get an accurate picture of reality.

## **Self-Awareness + Self-Acceptance = Self-Love**

### **Self-Awareness means:**

- Knowing everything about yourself—assets and liabilities
- Being honest about your strengths and weaknesses
- Having conversations with yourself about difficult topics
- Not hiding from truths about who you are

### **Self-Acceptance means:**

- Acknowledging that this is who you are right now
- Taking responsibility without shame
- Managing your characteristics appropriately
- Refusing to apologize for your existence

When you combine complete self-awareness with unconditional self-acceptance, you create genuine self-love.

## The Mirror Conversation

The most important relationship you have is with yourself. Like any relationship, it requires:

1. **Communication:** Honest, kind dialogue with yourself
2. **Trust:** Believing you'll take care of yourself
3. **Intimacy:** Comfort with all parts of who you are

Most people have terrible communication with themselves. They say things to themselves they would never say to a friend:

- "You're so stupid"
- "You never do anything right"
- "Nobody could love you"
- "You're such a failure"

If you spoke to your friends the way you speak to yourself, you'd have no friends.

## The Best Friend Standard

Here's a simple test for any action you're considering: "Would my best friend do this for me?"

Before you:

- Skip a meal because you're "too busy"
- Stay up all night worrying
- Accept treatment you don't deserve
- Ignore your own needs
- Criticize yourself harshly

Ask: "Would my best friend want this for me?"

The answer will guide you toward self-loving actions.

## External Validation as Bonus, Not Necessity

When you build a strong foundation of internal validation, external validation becomes a pleasant bonus rather than a desperate necessity.

You can:

- Appreciate compliments without depending on them
- Handle criticism without being destroyed by it
- Pursue goals for your own satisfaction, not just approval
- Maintain confidence even when others doubt you
- Give validation to others because you're not depleted

## The Validation Currency

Think of validation as currency:

- **Poor validation habits:** Living paycheck to paycheck, always desperate for the next external approval
- **Rich validation habits:** Having savings built up from consistent internal deposits, able to weather criticism and setbacks

The goal is to become validation-wealthy through your own efforts.

## Common Validation Mistakes

**Mistake 1:** "If I love myself, I'll become arrogant or lazy" **Truth:** Self-love actually makes you more motivated and kinder to others

**Mistake 2:** "I need to earn self-love by achieving things" **Truth:** Self-love is the foundation that enables achievement

**Mistake 3:** "Other people's opinions don't matter" **Truth:** Others' opinions matter, but your opinion of yourself matters more

**Mistake 4:** "I should be able to feel good about myself without any effort" **Truth:** Self-love is a practice that requires consistent attention

## Building Your Validation Practice

1. **Morning deposit:** Start each day by acknowledging something you're grateful for about yourself
2. **Evening review:** End each day by recognizing one thing you did well
3. **Challenge responses:** When you face setbacks, ask "How can I be my own best friend right now?"
4. **Kind self-talk:** Notice when you're being self-critical and consciously choose kinder words
5. **Celebration ritual:** Acknowledge your progress, even small steps

## Points to Remember

- You are both the bank and the banker for your self-worth
- Internal validation is always available and under your control
- Self-awareness plus self-acceptance equals self-love
- Treat yourself with the same kindness you'd show your best friend
- External validation is a bonus, not a necessity
- Consistent small deposits create lasting confidence

Remember: if you don't love yourself, you can't truly love anyone else. If you don't respect yourself, you can't truly respect anyone else. The relationship with yourself is the foundation for all other relationships.

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## Chapter 9: Learning the Game

*"In many cases, people are confused not because they lack knowledge, but because they are not aware of what game is being played."*

### The Four Rules of Any System

Whether you're starting a new job, moving to a new city, beginning a relationship, or facing any challenging situation, these four rules will help you navigate successfully:

**Rule #1:** Name the system - "What game are we playing?" **Rule #2:** Know the rules (whether you agree with them or not) **Rule #3:** Know your choices under these rules **Rule #4:** Choose and move on

#### Rule #1: Name the Game

The first step to winning any game is knowing which game you're playing. If everyone else is playing chess and you think it's checkers, you're going to be very confused and frustrated.

When I first arrived in Canada, I thought I was playing the "qualified professional gets hired" game. But the actual game was "foreign-trained professional proves their worth in a new system." Once I understood the real game, I could start playing it effectively.

#### Examples of misnamed games:

- Thinking you're in a "friendship" when the other person thinks it's a "professional relationship"
- Believing you're in a "collaborative discussion" when it's actually a "formal evaluation"
- Assuming you're playing "patient customer service" when the system is designed for "quick efficiency"

#### Rule #2: Know the Rules

Every system has rules, whether written or unwritten. Your job is to learn them all, even if you don't like them.

When I worked as a security guard, I didn't understand the unwritten rules of Canadian workplace culture. I learned the hard way that:

- Requests are often phrased as questions ("Do you want to close the window?")
- Passion can be mistaken for anger if expressed too intensely
- There are subtle hierarchies that aren't explicitly stated
- Personal tasks during work hours weren't acceptable, even if asked



### **How to learn the rules:**

- **Observe carefully** what happens and what doesn't happen
- **Ask questions** of people who are successful in the system
- **Research online** for official policies and unofficial advice
- **Test small boundaries** to understand flexibility
- **Learn from mistakes** without getting defensive

### **Rule #3: Know Your Choices**

Once you understand the rules, list all your options within those rules. Don't evaluate whether you like the choices—just identify what they are.

When I was struggling to get into a medical residency program, my choices within the Canadian system were:

- Apply to every program and hope for acceptance
- Find an alternative pathway (like the military program)
- Meet additional requirements to become more competitive
- Consider practicing in a different location
- Pursue a different specialization
- Leave medicine entirely

I didn't love all these options, but knowing them empowered me to make strategic decisions.

### **Rule #4: Choose and Move On**

The only thing worse than a bad decision is no decision at all. When you refuse to choose, you're asking the system to choose for you, which dramatically reduces your chances of getting what you want.

After researching the Canadian Armed Forces Medical Officer Training Program, I had to choose: commit to three years of military service for the chance at a residency, or keep waiting and hoping for civilian opportunities.

I chose the military path. It wasn't my first preference, but it was a clear path forward. That choice led to my medical career in Canada.

## The Parent-Teenager Example

I often work with families where parents and teenagers are constantly in conflict. Usually, they're playing completely different games:

**Parent thinks:** "We're playing the 'parent-child' game where I have authority and they should obey" **Teenager thinks:** "We're playing the 'emerging adult' game where I should have increasing independence"

Once they name the actual games being played and understand each other's rules, they can negotiate a system that works for both.

## The Dating Game

Many relationship problems come from rule confusion:

**One person's game:** "Let's get to know each other casually" **Other person's game:** "Let's evaluate each other as potential life partners"

Different games, different rules, different expectations. No wonder there's conflict.

## Common System Navigation Mistakes

**Mistake 1:** Assuming everyone is playing the same game you are **Mistake 2:** Refusing to learn rules you don't like **Mistake 3:** Complaining about rules instead of working within them **Mistake 4:** Waiting for perfect options instead of choosing from available ones

## The Medical System Example

When I worked with injured workers in the compensation system, many were frustrated because they didn't understand the game. They thought it was "caring medical provider helps injured person get better." The actual game was "regulated system balances worker needs with cost containment and fraud prevention."

Once they understood the real rules, they could navigate more effectively:

- Document everything
- Follow procedures exactly
- Meet deadlines consistently
- Communicate through proper channels
- Focus on functional improvement, not just pain relief

## Adapting When Rules Change

Systems evolve. The game you learned last year might have new rules this year. Successful people regularly check Rule #1 to make sure they're still playing the game they think they're playing.

The internet changed many systems:

- Dating (online platforms vs. meeting in person)
- Job searching (LinkedIn vs. newspaper ads)
- Shopping (e-commerce vs. physical stores)
- Learning (online courses vs. formal education)

## The Complexity Factor

Some systems are simple (ordering food at a restaurant). Others are complex (navigating healthcare, legal systems, or corporate hierarchies).

For complex systems:

- **Break them into smaller subsystems**
- **Find guides who know the system well**
- **Start with low-stakes practice**
- **Build relationships with people inside the system**
- **Be patient with the learning curve**

## Cultural System Differences

Moving between cultures means learning entirely new systems. What worked in Nigeria didn't work in Canada. Some examples:

**Nigeria:** Direct communication was respected **Canada:** Indirect communication was preferred

**Nigeria:** Passion showed engagement **Canada:** Modulated tone showed professionalism

**Nigeria:** Extended negotiation was normal **Canada:** Quick decisions were expected

## Practical Application Steps

When facing any new or challenging situation:

1. **Pause and ask:** "What game is being played here?"
2. **Research:** What are the written and unwritten rules?
3. **List options:** What choices do I have within these rules?
4. **Decide:** Which option best serves my goals?
5. **Act:** Move forward with commitment
6. **Adjust:** Learn from results and refine your approach

## Points to Remember

- Most confusion comes from not knowing which game is being played
- Learn all the rules, even ones you don't like
- You always have more choices than you think
- Not choosing is also a choice (usually a bad one)
- Systems change, so regularly reassess which game you're playing
- Adaptation to systems is a skill that improves with practice

The goal isn't to love every system you encounter. The goal is to navigate them skillfully enough to achieve your objectives and maintain your integrity.

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## Chapter 10: Building Your "Can Do" Bank

*"I can only make withdrawals from banks where I have deposits, so if all my deposits are in the bank of 'can do,' then I can withdraw from there."*

### The Mental Bank Account

Imagine your mind as a bank with different accounts:

- The "Can Do" account
- The "Can't Do" account
- The "What's Wrong" account
- The "What's Right" account

Every thought you think, every word you speak, and every focus you maintain is making a deposit into one of these accounts. At the end of any day, week, or month, you can only withdraw from the accounts where you've been making deposits.

If you spend all your time depositing into "What's Wrong" and "Can't Do," that's all you'll have available when you need confidence and problem-solving ability.

### Trying Not to Fail vs. Trying to Succeed

There's a crucial difference between these two approaches that most people miss:

#### Trying not to fail:

- Your energy focuses on avoiding problems
- Your imagination pictures all the ways things could go wrong
- Your words express what you don't want
- Your actions are defensive and tentative

#### Trying to succeed:

- Your energy focuses on creating solutions
- Your imagination pictures what success looks like
- Your words express what you want
- Your actions are purposeful and confident

Both require effort, but they lead to completely different results.

## The "Don't Drop It" Problem

If I want to prevent someone from dropping an expensive vase, I could say either:

- "Don't drop that!"
- "Hold on to it carefully!"

The first command makes them picture dropping it. The second makes them picture holding it securely. Since the mind tends to move toward whatever it's picturing, the second command is more effective.

This principle applies to everything:

- Instead of "I hope I don't mess this up," try "I hope I do this well"
- Instead of "I don't want to be rejected," try "I want to be accepted"
- Instead of "I can't afford to lose this job," try "I want to keep performing well"

## The Ratio Strategy

I discovered that maintaining balance was more effective than trying to eliminate negative thoughts entirely. Here's how it works:

**Basic Ratio (3:1):** For every "can't do" thought, consciously identify three "can do" thoughts.

**Challenge Ratio (5:1):** When facing difficult situations, increase to five "can do" thoughts for every "can't do."

**Crisis Ratio (10:1):** During major challenges, go to ten positive thoughts for every negative one.

Example during my job search:

- **Can't:** "I can't get hired anywhere"
- **Can:** "I can keep improving my interview skills"
- **Can:** "I can apply to different types of positions"
- **Can:** "I can learn from each rejection"

## **The Daily Programming Practice**

Every morning and evening, I would spend two minutes depositing into my "Can Do" account:

### **Morning Deposits:**

- "I can handle whatever today brings"
- "I can find solutions to problems"
- "I can learn from any situation"
- "I can take steps toward my goals"
- "I can be kind to myself and others"

### **Evening Deposits:**

- "I did something useful today"
- "I learned something valuable"
- "I showed up despite challenges"
- "I'm building strength through experience"
- "I'm capable of more than I realize"

## **When Everything Was Going Wrong**

During my three weeks of unemployment, it would have been easy to fill my "Can't Do" account:

- "I can't get hired for anything"
- "I can't understand this new culture"
- "I can't survive much longer financially"
- "I can't figure out how this system works"

Instead, I made a conscious choice to focus on deposits into my "Can Do" account:

- "I can learn from every interview"
- "I can improve my approach each day"
- "I can find ways to stretch my money"
- "I can ask for help when I need it"
- "I can stay positive despite setbacks"

This wasn't denial—my challenges were real. But focusing on what I could do gave me energy and ideas for moving forward.

## The Two-Step North Strategy

If you want to go north, it makes sense to take steps in that direction. Even if circumstances force you to take an occasional step south, the overall pattern should be northward.

Think of it this way: Two steps north plus one step south still equals one step of progress north.

Apply this to your mental deposits:

- **Goal:** Build confidence
- **Strategy:** Make more confidence deposits than confidence withdrawals
- **Result:** Net gain in confidence over time

## The Balanced Stress Approach

Instead of trying to eliminate all stress (which is impossible and unhealthy), I learned to balance stress with stress-relief activities.

Rather than "stress reduction," I practice "stress balance":

- **High-stress project** balanced with **relaxing hobby**
- **Difficult conversation** balanced with **enjoyable social time**
- **Physical challenge** balanced with **mental rest**

This maintains my resilience without trying to eliminate the stress that actually makes life interesting and meaningful.

## The Quick Redirect Technique

When you catch yourself making deposits into the wrong account:

1. **Notice** the negative thought or statement
2. **Don't fight it** or judge yourself for having it
3. **Immediately make** 2-3 deposits into your "Can Do" account
4. **Move on** without dwelling on the negative thought

Example:

- **Negative thought:** "I'm terrible at public speaking"
- **Quick redirects:** "I can prepare well," "I can practice more," "I can improve with experience"



## Building Others' "Can Do" Accounts

This principle works in relationships too. You can help others by making deposits into their "Can Do" accounts:

- **Notice their efforts**, not just results
- **Acknowledge their strengths** in specific situations
- **Express confidence** in their ability to handle challenges
- **Remind them** of past successes when they're struggling

## The Emergency Fund

Just like financial planning, it's smart to build up your "Can Do" account before you need it. During good times, make extra deposits so you have reserves during difficult periods.

### Daily maintenance deposits:

- Acknowledge small accomplishments
- Recognize personal growth
- Appreciate your efforts
- Note problems you've solved
- Remember challenges you've overcome

## Common "Can Do" Account Mistakes

**Mistake 1:** Waiting until you feel confident to make deposits **Truth:** Make deposits to create confidence

**Mistake 2:** Dismissing small accomplishments **Truth:** Small deposits add up to large balances

**Mistake 3:** Only focusing on major achievements **Truth:** Daily efforts are more important than occasional victories

**Mistake 4:** Comparing your inside to others' outside **Truth:** Focus on your own growth and progress

## **Practical Daily Applications**

### **At work:**

- "I can contribute value to this project"
- "I can learn from feedback"
- "I can collaborate effectively"

### **In relationships:**

- "I can listen well"
- "I can communicate my needs"
- "I can be understanding"

### **During challenges:**

- "I can take this one step at a time"
- "I can ask for help when needed"
- "I can find lessons in this experience"

## **Points to Remember**

- You can only withdraw from accounts where you make deposits
- Focus on what you want, not what you don't want
- Maintain a positive ratio of "Can Do" to "Can't Do" thoughts
- Make daily deposits, especially during good times
- Balance challenges with recovery, don't try to eliminate all stress
- Small, consistent deposits create large reserves over time

The goal isn't to become unrealistically positive. The goal is to build a genuine foundation of confidence and capability that you can draw from when you need it most.

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# Chapter 11: Being Your Own Best Friend

*"Allow yourself to feel unlimited emotions, but remember there is only one action available to you: be your own best friend."*

## The Poem That Changed Everything

During one of my darkest periods, I wrote a poem to myself that became my guide:

*I will be my own best friend.*

*When I do not feel like hearing myself  
I will find a way to listen.*

*When I do not feel like seeing myself  
I will find a way to look.*

*When I do not feel I love myself  
I will find a way to care.*

*When I do not feel I deserve anything  
I will find a way to give.*

*When I feel that no one is there  
I will be my own best friend.*

This wasn't about pretending everything was fine. It was about committing to treat myself with the same kindness I would show someone I truly cared about.

## The Revolutionary Insight

Most people believe that how they feel determines how they should treat themselves:

- Feel proud → Be kind to yourself
- Feel ashamed → Be harsh with yourself
- Feel confident → Take good care of yourself
- Feel worthless → Neglect yourself

But this creates a downward spiral. When you're struggling most, you treat yourself worst, which makes you struggle more.

The revolutionary approach: **No matter how you feel about yourself, there is only one appropriate action—be your own best friend.**

## What Being Your Best Friend Means

Think about how you treat your very best friend:

**You listen** without immediately trying to fix or judge **You encourage** them when they're struggling **You celebrate** their wins, even small ones **You forgive** their mistakes and help them learn **You protect** them from harmful people and situations **You believe** in their potential, even when they don't **You're honest** with them, but always from a place of care

Now ask yourself: Do you treat yourself this way?

## The Self-Love Equation

Through years of trial and error, I developed a simple formula:

**Self-Awareness + Self-Acceptance = Self-Love**

**Self-Awareness:** Knowing everything about yourself—your strengths, weaknesses, patterns, triggers, dreams, and fears. No hiding, no pretending.

**Self-Acceptance:** Acknowledging that this is who you are right now, without judgment. Taking responsibility without shame.

## The Complete Self-Awareness Challenge

True self-awareness means that no one could tell you anything about yourself that you don't already know. This includes:

### Your Assets:

- Natural talents and developed skills
- Character strengths and positive qualities
- Past achievements and growth areas
- Ways you contribute value to others

### Your Liabilities:

- Areas where you struggle or need growth
- Patterns that don't serve you well
- Triggers that throw you off balance
- Mistakes you've made and learned from

The goal isn't to have no liabilities—it's to know and manage them effectively.

## **The Self-Acceptance Practice**

Self-acceptance doesn't mean:

- Being satisfied with areas where you want to grow
- Making excuses for harmful behavior
- Giving up on improvement
- Pretending problems don't exist

Self-acceptance does mean:

- Acknowledging reality without self-attack
- Taking responsibility without shame
- Working with who you are, not fighting against it
- Treating your flaws as information, not judgment

## **The Best Friend Test**

Before taking any action, ask yourself: **"Is this what my best friend would want for me?"**

### **Examples:**

*Staying up all night worrying:* Best friend test: "Would my best friend want me to lose sleep over something I can't control right now?" Best friend action: "Get rest so I can think clearly tomorrow."

*Accepting disrespectful treatment:* Best friend test: "Would my best friend want me to be treated this way?" Best friend action: "Set a boundary or remove myself from this situation."

*Eating junk food when stressed:* Best friend test: "Would my best friend want me to handle stress by damaging my health?" Best friend action: "Find a healthier way to cope with this stress."

## **My Security Guard Experience**

When I was being harassed by my racist colleague, I had every right to feel angry, hurt, and frustrated. Those feelings were completely valid.

But I had to ask myself: "What would my best friend want me to do in this situation?"

My best friend would want me to:

- Protect my dignity
- Stand up for myself appropriately
- Find a way to improve the situation
- Learn from the experience
- Not let someone else's problems become my identity

This guidance led me to respond with the question about God's skin color—a response that was firm but not destructive, and ultimately changed the dynamic entirely.

## **The Internal Relationship**

The most important relationship you'll ever have is with yourself. Like any relationship, it requires:

**Communication:** Regular, honest conversations with yourself about what you're experiencing, feeling, and needing.

**Trust:** Confidence that you'll take care of yourself and keep your own best interests at heart.

**Intimacy:** Comfort with all parts of yourself, including the parts you'd rather keep private from others.

Most people have terrible relationships with themselves, which makes it impossible to have great relationships with others. You can't give what you don't have.

## **The Three Types of Self-Talk**

### **Critical Self-Talk:**

- "You're so stupid"
- "You never do anything right"
- "Everyone else is better than you"

### **Neutral Self-Talk:**

- "That didn't work"
- "I need to try a different approach"
- "This is challenging"

### **Best Friend Self-Talk:**

- "You're learning and growing"
- "You handled that really well"
- "I'm proud of you for trying"

Aim for neutral as your minimum standard, and best friend talk as your goal.

## **Practical Daily Applications**

**Morning Check-in:** "What does my body need today?" "What would support my goals?" "How can I be kind to myself while being productive?"

**During Challenges:** "What would my best friend tell me right now?" "How can I take care of myself while handling this?" "What do I need to remember about my strengths?"

**Evening Review:** "What did I do well today?" "What can I learn from today's challenges?" "How can I appreciate myself for today's efforts?"

## When Others Don't Treat You Well

Being your own best friend becomes even more important when others are critical, dismissive, or unkind. You can't control how others treat you, but you can always control how you treat yourself.

This doesn't mean:

- Accepting poor treatment from others
- Isolating yourself from feedback
- Becoming defensive about legitimate criticism

It does mean:

- Maintaining your own standard of self-care regardless of external treatment
- Protecting yourself from people who are consistently harmful
- Getting support from people who genuinely care about your wellbeing

## The Ripple Effect

When you become skilled at being your own best friend, several things happen:

1. **You become less desperate** for external validation
2. **You make better decisions** because you're not operating from desperation
3. **You attract healthier relationships** because you model good relationship skills
4. **You become more generous** with others because you're not emotionally depleted
5. **You handle setbacks better** because you have internal support

## Points to Remember

- How you feel doesn't determine how you should treat yourself
- Self-awareness plus self-acceptance equals self-love
- The "best friend test" guides you toward self-caring actions
- Your relationship with yourself is the foundation for all other relationships
- You can't control others' treatment, but you can always be your own advocate
- Being your own best friend makes you better at being a friend to others

This isn't about becoming selfish or self-absorbed. It's about developing the internal stability and kindness that allows you to show up fully for your own life and the people you care about.

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## Chapter 12: The Committee in Your Head

*"Thoughts are conversations we have with ourselves."*

### Welcome to Your Internal House

Imagine your mind as a house where different aspects of your personality live as residents. These aren't different people—they're all you—but they each have distinct characteristics, opinions, and ways of seeing the world.

In my house, I've identified about seven main residents:

- **Confident T** (my dominant leader most of the time)
- **Fearful T** (alerts me to dangers)
- **Conniving T** (helps me navigate tricky situations)
- **Responsible T** (keeps me focused on duties and obligations)
- **Creative T** (generates new ideas and solutions)
- **Little T** (represents my inner child and core vulnerabilities)
- **Wise T** (provides perspective and long-term thinking)

### The House Rules

Just like any house with multiple residents, mine needed rules for everyone to get along:

**Rule 1:** Every resident has dignity and a place in the house. Even the ones I'm not particularly proud of have a right to exist and be heard.

**Rule 2:** All residents will be heard. I won't suppress or ignore any part of myself, even the uncomfortable parts.

**Rule 3:** I recognize residents by the feelings they generate, and these feelings influence my potential actions.

**Rule 4:** The dominant resident is determined by which one I reinforce most through attention and action.

**Rule 5:** The dominant resident speaks for the house and interacts with the external world.

## **How Leadership Changes**

When I suffered from panic attacks, "Fearful T" was the dominant resident. He spoke for the house, making most decisions from a place of anxiety and worry. I reinforced his leadership by:

- Constantly focusing on what could go wrong
- Avoiding situations that felt scary
- Analyzing my fears extensively
- Trying to control everything

Ironically, the more I tried to suppress "Fearful T," the stronger he became. Attention is like voting—whatever you focus on most becomes your leader.

To change leadership, I had to shift my attention and reinforcement to "Confident T" by:

- Acknowledging my capabilities
- Taking action despite feeling afraid
- Celebrating small successes
- Focusing on what I could control

## **The Importance of Accepting All Residents**

I used to think I should try to evict the residents I didn't like. But I learned that once a resident is in your house, they're there to stay. The goal isn't eviction—it's management.

Even "Conniving T," who can be destructive if left unchecked, serves important purposes:

- Helps me navigate political situations
- Alerts me to others' hidden agendas
- Provides creative solutions to complex problems
- Gives me an edge in negotiations

The key is making sure "Responsible T" or "Wise T" supervises these activities rather than letting "Conniving T" run wild.

## When Different Residents Are Needed

Different situations call for different residents to take the lead:

**Job Interview:** "Confident T" takes the lead, with "Responsible T" ensuring good preparation and "Wise T" providing perspective.

**Relationship Conflict:** "Wise T" leads, with "Creative T" helping find solutions and "Little T" ensuring core needs are heard.

**Crisis Situation:** "Responsible T" leads, with "Fearful T" providing necessary caution and "Confident T" maintaining belief in my abilities.

**Creative Project:** "Creative T" leads, with "Confident T" providing courage to share ideas and "Responsible T" ensuring follow-through.

## The Internal Meetings

When facing important decisions, I imagine calling a house meeting where all residents can voice their opinions:

**Big Decision: Should I take this new job opportunity?**

*Fearful T:* "What if you fail? What if it's too much responsibility? What if they fire you?"

*Confident T:* "You have the skills for this. It's a chance to grow and prove yourself."

*Responsible T:* "Consider the practical implications: salary, benefits, impact on family, long-term career path."

*Creative T:* "Think about the exciting possibilities and new challenges you could tackle."

*Wise T:* "How does this align with your long-term values and goals?"

*Little T:* "Will you still have time for fun? Will people still like you?"

After hearing from everyone, "Wise T" usually helps synthesize the input into a decision that honors all perspectives.

## Managing Difficult Residents

Some residents require more careful management:

### When "Fearful T" becomes overwhelming:

- Acknowledge the fear without being ruled by it
- Ask "What specific action can I take right now?"
- Have "Confident T" remind me of past successes
- Let "Wise T" provide long-term perspective

### When "Conniving T" gets too dominant:

- Have "Responsible T" check whether the approach is ethical
- Ask "Will I be proud of this choice later?"
- Ensure the strategy serves long-term goals, not just short-term wins

### When "Little T" feels hurt:

- Give this part of myself extra care and attention
- Remember that core needs for safety and belonging are important
- Don't dismiss emotional needs as "childish"

## The Integration Process

The goal isn't to eliminate any residents or always have the same one in charge. The goal is integration—having all parts of yourself working together harmoniously.

### Integrated Response to Criticism:

- *Fearful T* feels the initial sting and alerts me to potential threat
- *Responsible T* evaluates whether the criticism has merit
- *Wise T* considers the source and context
- *Confident T* maintains perspective on my overall worth
- *Creative T* looks for ways to use the feedback constructively

## Practical Applications

**Daily Check-ins:** "Which resident has been dominant today?" "Who needs more attention or care?" "What does each part of me need right now?"

**Stress Management:** "Which resident is creating this stress?" "What do they need to feel more secure?" "Which resident can help solve this problem?"

**Relationship Issues:** "Which part of me is hurt/angry/confused?" "What does that part need?" "Which resident can help communicate this effectively?"

## **The External Reflection**

Often, the residents who annoy you most in other people are the ones you're trying to suppress in yourself:

- If someone's arrogance bothers you, you might be suppressing your own "Confident T"
- If someone's emotional expression irritates you, you might be ignoring your own "Little T"
- If someone's caution frustrates you, you might be dismissing your own "Fearful T"

## **Building House Harmony**

**Morning House Meeting:** "What does each part of me need today to feel supported?"

**Decision Making:** "Let me hear from all residents before choosing."

**Evening Review:** "Which residents contributed well today? Who needs more attention tomorrow?"

**Conflict Resolution:** "Which part of me is upset, and what do they need?"

## **Points to Remember**

- All parts of yourself have value and deserve acknowledgment
- The resident you reinforce most becomes your dominant leader
- Different situations benefit from different residents taking the lead
- Integration is better than suppression or elimination
- Your relationship with your internal residents affects all external relationships
- Self-awareness means knowing all your residents; self-acceptance means honoring them all

The goal isn't to become someone different. The goal is to become a skilled conductor of the orchestra that is already you, helping all the different instruments create beautiful music together.

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## **Conclusion: Your New Beginning**

*"The same mechanism that made you replicate cells and build the complex structure you inhabit has been helping you survive and make survival decisions since before you had a brain."*

### **You've Always Been Doing This**

As we reach the end of this handbook, I want you to remember something crucial: you've been successfully navigating change, surviving challenges, and finding ways forward your entire life.

The baby who figured out how to get food without knowing what hunger meant, the child who learned to walk despite falling countless times, the teenager who survived the chaos of adolescence, the young adult who made it through your first heartbreak—that person is still you.

You've always had these capabilities. This handbook simply gives you a more conscious, systematic way to use them.

## **The Four-Step Summary**

Everything in this handbook can be summarized in four steps:

### **Step One: Accept That Change is Required**

- Change is happening whether you participate or not
- You can influence the direction, but you can't stop the process
- Functional adaptation means using tactics that increase your chances of getting the results you want

### **Step Two: Choose Your Direction**

- Survive first, then thrive
- Focus on "Where do I go from here?" rather than "How did I get here?"
- Align your thoughts, words, and actions with your desired direction

### **Step Three: Use Your Mental Tools**

- Visualize what you want, not what you don't want
- Process fear instead of trying to eliminate it
- Maintain active hope through daily practice
- Remember that feelings and actions are independent
- Focus on process over outcome
- Validate yourself regularly

### **Step Four: Apply Your Life Tactics**

- Learn the rules of whatever system you're in
- Build your "Can Do" account through daily deposits
- Be your own best friend regardless of how you feel
- Manage all the residents in your mental house

## **Your Unique Journey**

My story involved moving from Nigeria to Canada, starting over in a new culture, facing unemployment and discrimination, and eventually building a successful medical career. Your story will be different.

You might be facing:

- A career change or job loss
- Relationship challenges or divorce
- Health issues or family crises
- Financial stress or business struggles
- Educational decisions or geographic moves
- Loss of a loved one or major disappointment

The specific challenges are different, but the principles remain the same. These tools work because they're based on how humans actually function, not on wishful thinking or temporary motivation.

## **The Practice, Not Perfection**

This isn't about becoming perfect or eliminating all problems from your life. It's about becoming skillful at handling whatever life brings you.

You'll still feel afraid sometimes—but you'll know how to process that fear productively. You'll still face setbacks—but you'll know how to maintain hope and keep moving forward. You'll still have difficult emotions—but you'll know how to be your own best friend through them. You'll still encounter confusing situations—but you'll know how to figure out the rules and find your options.

## **The Compound Effect**

Small changes, applied consistently, create dramatic results over time. You don't need to transform your entire life overnight. You just need to start making slightly better choices each day.

- Replace one "can't do" thought with three "can do" thoughts
- Ask "Where do I go from here?" instead of "Why did this happen to me?"
- Treat yourself like your own best friend in one small way each day
- Make one daily deposit into your validation account
- Practice one of the mental tools until it becomes automatic

These small shifts compound into profound changes over months and years.



## Your Support System

While this handbook emphasizes self-reliance and internal resources, don't forget the importance of community. The strongest people know when to ask for help and how to build supportive relationships.

Surround yourself with people who:

- Believe in your ability to grow and change
- Support your efforts to improve your life
- Practice healthy responses to their own challenges
- Celebrate your successes without jealousy
- Offer honest feedback from a place of care

## When You Face Your Next Crisis

Because you will face difficulties again—that's guaranteed. When you do, remember:

1. **You've survived every difficult day of your life so far.** Your track record for getting through hard times is 100%.
2. **This situation is temporary.** Everything changes, including whatever you're facing right now.
3. **You have tools.** You know how to process fear, maintain hope, be your own best friend, and find your way through systems.
4. **Focus on the next step.** You don't need to solve everything at once. Just figure out the next right action.
5. **Your value isn't determined by your circumstances.** You were a winner before this challenge, and you'll be a winner after it.

## The Ripple Effect

As you practice these principles, you'll notice something beautiful happening: other people start responding to you differently. When you're more confident, others treat you with more respect. When you're hopeful, others feel more optimistic around you. When you're your own best friend, others want to be your friend too.

This isn't magic—it's natural human response. People are drawn to those who have learned to manage their internal world skillfully. You become a source of stability and possibility for others.

## Your Next Chapter

Right now, as you finish reading this handbook, you're at the beginning of a new chapter in your life. You might not know exactly what that chapter will contain, but you know you have the tools to write it well.

The sperm cell that became you beat impossible odds to get here. The baby who learned to breathe air instead of amniotic fluid figured out how to survive a complete environment change. The child who learned language, walking, and countless other skills proved that you can adapt to new circumstances.

That same resilient, adaptable, problem-solving being is reading these words right now. You haven't lost those capabilities—you've only forgotten how powerful you already are.

## Your Personal Handbook

Take these principles and make them your own. Adapt them to your personality, your circumstances, your goals. Add your own discoveries and insights. Cross out what doesn't work for you and emphasize what does.

This is your handbook now. Use it, modify it, live it.

## The Most Important Thing

If you remember only one thing from this entire handbook, let it be this: **you are already equipped with everything you need to handle whatever life brings you.**

You might need to develop your skills, expand your knowledge, or build your support system. But the fundamental capability to survive, adapt, learn, and thrive is already within you.

You've always been a winner. Now you have the tools to win more consciously, more consistently, and with greater joy in the process.

The next page of your story is blank and waiting. What will you write?

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**"You are more than you know, stronger than you think, and more capable than you imagine. Trust yourself, be your own best friend, and remember: you've got this."**

*—Your journey continues now.*