

MO(MEN)TUM

The operating system for men who weren't given one.

By Ollie Chick



A Note Before You Start

This is Draft One. You're reading it before anyone else.

This book will eventually be published on Amazon — properly formatted, properly edited, the full thing. But right now, I'm giving it away for free because I'd rather it reach people than sit on a hard drive waiting to be perfect.

I grew up thirsty for knowledge and skint. Couldn't afford the books that might've changed things earlier. If someone had handed me this for free when I was eighteen — obese, addicted, nihilistic, lying in bed at 4am wondering what the point was — it would've saved me years.

So this is my gift back. Download it. Read it. Send it to someone who needs it.

And if you have feedback — anything at all, a typo, a chapter that didn't land, something that hit hard, something that felt off — I genuinely want to hear it. This book gets better with honest input.

Email: hello@mo-men-tum.com

Every piece of feedback will be read. By me. Not a team. Just me, probably at 4am, probably in Bali, probably after a run.

Thank you for reading the draft. It means more than you know.

— Ollie

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For the man who told me I saved him. But really, he saved me.

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PART ONE: THE WAKE-UP

Chapter 1: Nothing Matters

I was eighteen and I believed that sentence. Fully. Not in the way teenagers say it to sound edgy or dark or interesting at parties. I believed it the way you believe the floor is under your feet. Gravity-level certainty.

Nothing matters. We all die. Who gives a shit.

I weighed about nineteen stone. Maybe more. I'd stopped checking. The bathroom mirror was something I walked past with my eyes on the door handle, and the scales were buried under a pile of clothes I hadn't washed in weeks. My bedroom was a cave. Curtains closed at midday, two monitors glowing, empty cans on the desk, plates crusted with whatever I'd eaten at 2am. That was my ecosystem. That was the world I chose every single day.

Downstairs, my parents were fighting again.

Muffled at first, then sharp. I could track the exact trajectory of their arguments by volume alone. Kitchen voices rising through the hallway, a door slamming that shook the ceiling light in my room, then silence that felt worse than the shouting. I'd turn the volume up on whatever I was watching. Porn, mostly. YouTube rabbit holes. Anything that wasn't the sound of two people who loved me going through the hardest time of their lives.

I understand now what I couldn't understand then. They were under enormous pressure. Unfortunate things had happened to them. The environment was rough, and the stress of it spilled over into the way they spoke to each other. It wasn't that they didn't love each other. It wasn't that they didn't love me. It was that life had squeezed them until the only thing that came out was noise. A rough time for the whole family. And they were still there. Every morning. Still trying.

I was addicted to everything and committed to nothing.

I know what you're thinking. Classic origin story. Goggins had it worse. Everyone's had it worse. Some kid reading this right now is going through something that makes my situation look like a bad holiday. I'm not claiming suffering Olympics gold.

But here's what I know now and didn't know then.

Comparisons don't help when you're drowning. The water doesn't care how deep someone else's pool is. You're still drowning.

The nihilism wasn't a phase. It was a philosophy. I had arguments for it. Good ones. We live on a rock spinning through infinite nothing. Every civilisation that ever existed has collapsed. Every person who's ever loved someone has watched them die or died first. The universe is expanding into cold darkness and one day there won't even be light. In the face of that, getting a job and paying rent and pretending to care about your credit score felt genuinely, mathematically insane.

I'd lie in bed at four in the morning, screen light reflecting off my face, and run these thought experiments. What would happen if I just disappeared? Who would actually notice? My parents would be sad for a while. My mates would post something on Facebook. And then the world would keep spinning. Same speed. Same direction. Same nothing.

I wasn't suicidal. Not exactly. But I wasn't far from it either.

There's a zone between wanting to die and wanting to live where you just sort of exist. Inert, like a rock at the bottom of a river. The water moves over you but you don't. You watch your own life like it belongs to someone else. A rider on a horse, and the horse is sprinting toward a cliff, and you can feel the reins in your hands but you don't pull them.

That's what I felt like. A passenger.

The horse was my body, my habits, my addictions, my default patterns. It did whatever it wanted. Wake up late. Eat shit. Watch porn. Stay up until sunrise. Repeat. I wasn't choosing any of it. I was observing.

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The food needs its own section because it's the one that embarrasses me most and therefore the one I have to tell you about first.

My mum made me a full packed lunch every single day. Sandwiches, fruit, crisps, the lot. Proper mum lunch. She made it with love. She packed it carefully. She handed it to me at the door. She dragged me to the gym every Saturday. She took me to the doctors. She weighed me. She changed my environment so I'd have a chance at improving. She did everything she could.

And I'd eat her packed lunch. All of it.

Then I'd buy a full KFC. A full meal. Multiple pieces. Then a full pizza. Then four or five bars of chocolate. Not fun-size. Full bars. Dairy Milk, Galaxy, the big ones. I smuggled Oreos into the gym in my bag like contraband. Stuffed them in the side pocket under a towel. Eighteen stone and hiding biscuits from people who could clearly see I was eighteen stone.

I stole money from my parents to fund it.

That's the part that still sits heavy. I looked them in the eye and lied. I manipulated situations to get cash. I became genuinely skilled at deception because the addiction demanded it. And every time I got away with it, the shame doubled, and the shame drove me straight back to the food because the food was the only thing that made the shame quiet down for five minutes.

And when they found out? They didn't react badly. They didn't throw me out. They didn't scream or shame me. They were still there. Still showing up. Still trying to help their son. I think about that now and it breaks me in a completely different way. The kind of breaking that's actually gratitude.

I forced myself to throw up. I starved myself for days. Then I binged so hard I couldn't move. The full cycle. Binge, purge, starve, repeat. And nobody talks about this in men. Nobody. Eating disorders are supposed to be a women's issue, and so men with the exact same patterns just carry them in silence and pretend they're fine.

I wasn't fine. I was destroying my body and my relationships and my self-respect with KFC and Dairy Milk instead of drugs, and somehow that made it invisible. Nobody stages an intervention for a fat kid. Nobody sends you to rehab for chocolate. The substance is socially acceptable, which means the addiction is socially invisible, which means the suffering happens in silence, which means it gets worse.

And the worst part? The lying. The manipulation. The looking-them-in-the-eye-and-denying-it. My parents would ask where the money went. I'd have a story ready. I always had a story ready. Because the addiction didn't just teach me to eat. It taught me to perform. To construct

plausible explanations on the spot. To manage other people's perception of me with surgical precision.

I became skilled at it. Actually skilled. The kind of skill that impresses you when you step back and look at it objectively, the way you might admire the engineering of a virus. Beautiful mechanism. Terrible purpose. And every lie that worked, every deception that landed, tightened the loop. The shame of the lie drove me to the food. The food drove me to lie about the food. The lying drove the shame. And around and around.

This is what addiction looks like from the inside. Not a character failing. Not a lack of willpower. A closed-loop system with no exit, where every element reinforces every other element, and the person trapped inside can see the walls but can't find the door.

The food loop was identical to the porn loop. Emotion arrives. Can't sit with it. Reach for the thing that changes how you feel fastest. Temporary relief. Deeper emptiness on the other side. Stronger emotion. Reach again.

The substance doesn't matter. The mechanism is the same.

The addiction to porn needs its own paragraph because it's the one nobody talks about and everyone is doing. Hours of it. Every day. Not because I enjoyed it. Because it was the fastest, cheapest, most accessible way to change how I felt. Bored? Porn. Anxious? Porn. Angry? Porn. Sad? Porn.

The feeling arrives, the hand reaches for the phone, and within thirty seconds the neurochemistry shifts and the original feeling is replaced by something artificial, something that doesn't last, something that leaves you emptier than before it started.

And the emptiness cycles back into the next hit. Emotion, avoidance, temporary relief, deeper emptiness, stronger emotion, avoidance. Every cycle the baseline drops. Every cycle you need more stimulation to reach the same height. Every cycle the real world feels less accessible because the artificial version has warped your expectations.

I didn't have the language for it at the time. I just knew that I couldn't stop, and that the inability to stop made me hate myself, and that the self-hatred made me watch more, and the watching more made the self-hatred worse. A perfect, sealed, airtight loop of destruction.

If you're in that loop right now, I want you to know something.

The loop is not a character flaw. The loop is a behavioural mechanism. The emotion is real. The avoidance strategy is just miscalibrated. And the solution isn't willpower or shame or a browser blocker. The solution is learning to read the original signal and responding with a behaviour that actually resolves it instead of one that temporarily masks it.

We'll get to that. The whole book is about that.

But I needed to name this one specifically because it's the one men carry in silence and shame and never mention, even when they're being honest about everything else.

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My parents. And I'll say this clearly because I owe them everything and I'll get to that.

They were the only reason I was still moving at all. My mum dragged me to the gym every Saturday. My dad got me into push-ups. He taught me every sport I ever played. He was a postman — out in the rain at 3am providing for the family, and then home by afternoon standing in my doorway telling me to get up. They fought each other, and the fighting was the stress of their environment spilling over, unfortunate things that happened to a family under pressure. But they united around one project: making sure their son didn't become a permanent fixture on the sofa. They forced me to go to the gym. Physically dragged me some mornings.

They tried their best. Always supportive. Always there. I completely understand them now, and I thank them.

I resented it at the time. Of course I did.

I had no money. No job. No clients. No prospects. No plan that extended beyond the next meal and the next episode and the next 2am scroll into nothing. The bank account was empty in the way that bank accounts are empty when you're eighteen and have never earned anything and have no reason to believe you ever will.

But the alternative was staying still. And staying still, when you're that heavy and that numb, is a form of dying slowly while your heart keeps beating.

My mates were in similar spots. Not all of them. Some had jobs, girlfriends, plans. But enough of us were floating that it felt normal. We'd play FIFA until 3am and talk about nothing and laugh at nothing and feel nothing and that was friendship. Nobody asked how you were doing. Nobody said, "Mate, I think we might be in trouble here."

We just existed alongside each other like furniture in the same room.

I look back at those friendships now and I understand something about them that I didn't understand then. We weren't bad friends. We weren't even failing each other. We were doing the best we could with the tools we had. And the tools were: silence, avoidance, and distraction. The same tools every man in this country is handed by default. The same tools that are keeping the suicide rate at 125 a week.

Nobody taught us how to say "I'm struggling." Nobody modelled vulnerability. Nobody showed us that it was possible to be honest about your inner life and still be considered a man. So we did what men do: we sat next to each other in the dark and pretended the dark was normal.

I saw the worst in everyone. That was the nihilism doing its work. My parents didn't love each other, they were just too scared to leave. My friends didn't care about me, they were just bored and I was available. My teachers didn't believe in me, they were collecting a salary. The entire adult world was a performance. Everyone faking it. Everyone scared.

I believed all of that. It was airtight.

And it was completely wrong. But wrong in the way a locked room is wrong. From the inside, it feels like the whole world. My parents loved each other. They loved me. They were two people under enormous stress doing everything they could. And the nihilistic kid upstairs with his headphones on was too far gone to see it.

The shame was the worst part. Because I knew, somewhere under the fat and the excuses and the bitterness, that I was capable of more. That made it worse, not better. If I'd genuinely been stupid or broken, the nihilism would've been easier to maintain. But I wasn't stupid. I knew I was choosing this. I just couldn't figure out how to choose something different.

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The things that destroyed me became my superpowers. I didn't plan that. I didn't see it coming. But looking back, every single one of the addictions and failures from those years gave me something I use every day now.

Gaming. I played for thousands of hours. Obsessively. The kind of obsession that worried my parents and made my teachers write me off. But the entire gamification system at Cali Unity came from that. The fifteen-level coach progression, the Skill Swirl map where you can see every movement you've unlocked and every one you haven't, the way we track progress like XP in an RPG. That's gaming language. That's the reward architecture I absorbed from a decade of staring at screens.

And beyond the product, gaming taught me tunnel vision. It taught me how to sit with one problem for fourteen hours straight until I solved it. Systems thinking. Collaboration under pressure. An obsessive work ethic that people now call discipline but which started as addiction to levelling up.

Lying. This one's harder to say out loud. But the exact skills I developed to hide my addictions are now the skills that make me a good coach and a decent salesman. I learned to read people because I had to. Body language, micro-expressions, tone shifts, the tiny signals that tell you someone is hiding something or about to shut down.

I know how men think when they're in pain because I've been that man, running the same scripts, telling the same lies. When a client sits across from me and says "yeah I'm fine, just a bit tired," I know exactly what's underneath that sentence. The manipulation became empathy. The deception became perception.

The internet nearly killed me. Porn, doom-scrolling, isolation, hours of consuming nothing that mattered. But I wouldn't be who I am without the internet either. Goggins, Hormozi, Ross Edgley, Marcus Aurelius, Seneca. I accessed every single one of them through the same device I used to watch porn at 3am. The internet is like money. It builds hospitals or it builds bombs. Same tool. Same raw material. The difference is who's holding it and what they point it at.

The shadows become the superpowers. That's the pattern. The kid who couldn't stop eating is now the coach who understands emotional regulation from the inside. The kid who lied to everyone is now the man who can read a room in seconds. The kid who gamed until sunrise is now building gamified fitness systems that actually change people's lives.

None of that happened despite the destruction. It happened because of it. The hard years became the adult toolkit. Not automatically. Not easily. But the raw materials were already there, forged in the toughest stretch of my family's life, waiting to be repurposed.

Every shadow has a superpower hiding inside it. That's not inspiration. That's observation. I've watched it happen in myself and in every person I've ever coached who made it through. The thing that nearly destroyed them became the thing that made them extraordinary. Not because suffering is good. Suffering is suffering. But because the skills you develop to survive are the same skills that let you thrive, pointed in a different direction.

The question isn't whether you have shadows. Everyone does. The question is whether you're going to let them control the wheel or hand them the map.

I look at my life now and I see the wreckage repurposed at every level. The food obsession became a deep understanding of nutrition, intermittent fasting, keto, every dietary approach under the sun. Been obese. Been through the binge-purge cycle. Can coach from lived experience in a way that someone who's always been lean simply can't.

The gaming obsession became the product. The systems thinking. The ability to see complex interconnections and simplify them. The tunnel vision that lets me sit with a single problem for sixteen hours straight until it cracks.

The internet addiction, the bottomless consumption of content and information, became the raw material for every framework in this book. Goggins. Hormozi. Edgley. Seneca. Epictetus. All of them entered my life through the same phone that showed me things I shouldn't have been watching at 3am.

You can't separate the tools from the person who holds them. The same brain wiring that made me an addict makes me a good coach, a decent builder, and an effective communicator. The intensity hasn't changed. The direction has.

That's the whole game. Same wiring. Better direction.

And that's available to everyone. Not just me. Not just people who got lucky or found the right therapist or stumbled onto the right book at the right moment. Everyone. Because the wiring doesn't change. The shadows don't disappear. The capacity for destruction is the same capacity for creation. The question is always and only: where do you point it?

If you're reading this and you hate yourself for the things you've done, the addictions, the lies, the damage, I want you to know that those same traits, redirected, become your greatest strengths. The obsession becomes focus. The lying becomes perception. The avoidance becomes awareness. The destruction becomes creation.

But only if you redirect them. They won't redirect themselves. That's the work. That's what the operating system is for.

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People talk about rock bottom like it's a single moment. A dramatic scene. You collapse in the shower. You crash the car. You get the diagnosis.

For me, rock bottom was a Tuesday in November that looked exactly like the Monday before it.

Nothing happened. That was the point. Nothing was happening. Nothing was going to happen. And I knew, in my gut, in my bones, in the part of my brain that still worked, that unless something changed, nothing ever would.

So I went to the gym.

Not because I wanted to. Not because I had a vision or a plan or a goal. Because my dad stood in my doorway at 7am and said, "Get up. We're going." And I was too tired to argue.

That morning meant nothing at the time. I did some half-arsed sets. I could barely bench the bar. I looked at the men around me, lean, tattooed, confident, moving through their routines like they owned the building, and I felt like an intruder. A zoo animal that had wandered into the wrong enclosure.

But I went back. Not the next day. Maybe three days later. Then again. Then again.

I remember specific things from those early sessions that probably seem insignificant to anyone else but that I carry like coins in a pocket.

The smell. That specific cocktail of rubber mats, old sweat, and the faint chemical tang of cleaning spray that wasn't quite winning against the reality of human effort. I hated it at first. Then I got used to it. Then I started associating it with something I couldn't yet name.

The sound of other people's effort. Grunting, breathing, the clang of plates, the rhythmic thud of someone running on a treadmill. In my bedroom the loudest sound was my own thoughts. In the gym the loudest sound was other people working. And there was something about being surrounded by effort, by the physical evidence that other humans were choosing discomfort on purpose, that made my own discomfort feel less lonely.

The first person who spoke to me. A woman in her fifties, doing bicep curls with two-kilogram dumbbells, who looked at me between sets and said, "First time?" I said yeah. She said, "Good for you."

That's all. Two words and a nod.

And I thought about those two words for the rest of the day because they contained something I hadn't received in months. Acknowledgement. Not evaluation. Not judgment. Just: I see you. You're here. Good.

Something cracked. Not broke. Cracked. A hairline fracture in the wall I'd built around myself, small enough that I almost missed it. The kind of crack you only see when the light hits it at the right angle.

I didn't know what it meant yet. I wouldn't know for years.

But the crack was there. And cracks, if you're paying attention, don't close on their own.

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Chapter 2: Rings Over a Tree

The park in Bath has a name. Victoria Park. But nobody calls it that. It's just "the park." The kind of green space where students lie on the grass in summer and dog walkers circle the perimeter in winter and nothing particularly remarkable has ever happened in its entire municipal existence.

Except once.

It was 2021. Lockdown was technically over but the aftershock was still rattling through everything. People were cautious. Weird. You could see it in the way strangers walked around each other on pavements, that performative six-foot swerve, the masks pulled up, the eyes that didn't quite meet. Everyone had been alone for months and it had done something to them.

Kiera and I had been doing calisthenics for a couple of years by then. Nothing serious. Rings, bars, bodyweight stuff. We'd gotten decent at it. And during lockdown, with every gym in the country bolted shut, the parks were the only place left to train. We'd slung a set of rings over a tree branch and just worked out in the open air.

After the restrictions lifted, we had this thought. Not even a proper thought, really. More like an itch.

People were lonely. You could feel it everywhere. In the queues at Tesco where nobody made eye contact. In the group chats that had gone quiet during lockdown and never really recovered. In the faces of people walking down Milsom Street, moving through the same space but inhabiting separate worlds.

The isolation had stripped something away. Not just social contact. Something deeper. Some connective tissue between people that we'd all taken for granted. The casual encounters, the bumping into someone at the pub, the conversations at gym water fountains. All of it ripped out for over a year, and the scar tissue that replaced it was made of suspicion and distance and the lingering fear that other humans might literally kill you by standing too close.

We thought: what if we just invited anyone who wanted to come? Free. No membership. No pitch. No plan. Just show up, move, be around other humans.

So that's what we did.

Every week. Same tree. Same branch. Same rings. Kiera would text a few people. I'd post something on a Bath community group. Casual, not salesy, just: "We're training in the park on Saturday morning. 10am. Free. Just turn up."

And they'd come. Three people at first, then eight, then twelve. Sometimes twenty. All ages. All levels. A fifty-year-old woman who'd never done a day of exercise in her life. A teenager who was trying to do muscle-ups and failing magnificently. A bloke who'd just been through a divorce and didn't know where else to go on a Saturday morning.

Some had never touched a gymnastics ring in their life. Some could barely hang for ten seconds. Didn't matter. The point wasn't performance. The point was presence.

There was something about those sessions that I didn't understand at the time and that I've spent years trying to articulate. Something about the combination of outdoor air, physical effort, shared struggle, and the absence of any commercial agenda that created a space people wanted to be in. Nobody was selling anything. Nobody was being sold to. We were just people in a park, hanging from rings and falling off and laughing about it.

And in that space, something happened that never happens in formal settings. People relaxed. The masks dropped. Not all at once. Not on the first session. But over weeks, the performative layers peeled back and the real people emerged.

The guy who seemed confident turned out to be deeply lonely. The woman who seemed shy turned out to be fiercely funny once she was comfortable. The teenager who barely spoke turned out to be the most dedicated person there, arriving early and staying late and quietly becoming the best athlete in the group.

There's an Australian study that found men connect side-by-side, not face-to-face. Women bond looking at each other. Men bond working alongside each other. That's why the gym works. That's why the park worked. That's why the Wednesday 6am sessions work. You put men shoulder to shoulder, give them something hard to do together, and the walls come down on their own.

Nobody had to say "let's talk about our feelings." The talking just happened. Between sets. After sessions. In the car park, steam rising off their bodies, everyone too tired to maintain the performance. Because the shared physical effort had created something that words alone never

could: trust.

I watched it happen so many times that I could predict it. A new member, three or four weeks in, standing in the car park after a session. Someone asks a casual question. And the answer that comes back is real. Not "fine." Real. "Actually, my wife and I are struggling." Or "honestly, I've been drinking too much." Or "I haven't felt like myself in months."

These admissions never happened in the consultation room. They never happened over coffee. They happened in the car park, after a hard session, with sweat still on their shirts and the adrenaline still clearing. Because the body had opened a door that the mind had been keeping locked.

Brene Brown figured this out before me: vulnerability is the gateway to connection. But what I'd add is this: you can't force vulnerability. You have to create the conditions for it. And the conditions are: shared physical effort, in a group that holds both support and standard, over enough time for trust to accumulate.

That's what Cali Unity is. Not a gym. A vulnerability machine disguised as a gym. A place where the hardest part isn't the physical work. The hardest part is letting someone see you sweat. Letting someone see you struggle. Letting someone see you fail a rep and say "I'll get it next time" instead of pretending you weren't trying.

And in that small act of letting someone see you as you actually are, not the curated version, not the social media highlight reel, not the "I'm fine" performance, the real you, sweaty and struggling and trying, the connection forms. Because connection isn't built on performance. It's built on honesty. And there's no honest place left in most men's lives where they can be seen without judgment.

The gym is that place. Or it should be. And building that kind of gym, that kind of community, that kind of belonging machine, is what I've spent the last five years of my life doing.

Not because I'm altruistic. Because I needed it too. And the man who builds the community he needs is the man who helps other men find the community they need. And that's the selfish-to-selfless arc again. Full circle. Always full circle.

The park taught me more about human behaviour than any book. Because the park was a laboratory without walls, without fees, without structure. Just humans in proximity, doing something hard together, and watching what emerged from the shared effort.

What emerged was community. Real community. The kind that texts you when you don't show up. The kind that notices when you're not yourself. The kind that, as it turns out, saves lives.

I didn't know what we were building. Looking back, it was the seed of Cali Unity, the gym, the community, everything that came after. But at the time it was just rings over a tree branch and a few people who needed somewhere to go on a Saturday morning.

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There was a guy who started coming about two months in. Quiet. Shy. Stayed near the back of the group. Did his exercises without much conversation. He'd arrive on time, do his thing, and leave without fanfare. I knew his face but not his name.

I remember the morning it happened because of the cold. One of those English mornings where the air has a bite to it, a metallic edge, and your fingers go numb on the rings within minutes. The grass was wet. The sky was that particular shade of grey that Bath does better than anywhere. Not threatening, not dramatic, just flat and permanent, like someone had painted the ceiling of the world with primer.

Kiera and I arrived early to set up. The rings take a minute to throw over the branch. You have to get the height right, adjust the straps, test the hang. We were doing that when I saw him walking across the park toward us.

He was early. That was the first thing I noticed. He'd never been early before. Always exactly on time or a minute late. But today he was walking across the wet grass while we were still rigging the straps, and he had this look on his face. Nervous. Like he'd rehearsed something in his head and was trying to remember the lines.

I straightened up. Said something like, "Morning, mate. You're keen." Something meaningless. He didn't smile.

He stopped about two metres away. Kiera was behind me, tying off a strap. The rings swung gently between us.

And he said this:

"Hey man, I just wanted to say. You don't know who I am. I'm quite shy. These events are quite quiet. But thanks to these meetups and thanks to you guys — you stopped me from killing myself."

Nine words at the end. Nine words that disassembled everything I thought I knew about the world.

He didn't elaborate. He didn't cry. He didn't wait for a response. He just said it. Flat, almost rehearsed, like he'd been carrying it in his chest for weeks and needed to put it down. And then he walked to his usual spot at the edge of the group and started warming up.

I stood there.

Kiera looked at me. I looked at her. Neither of us said anything for a long time.

I'd like to tell you I was wise in that moment. That I understood immediately what it meant. That some grand clarity descended and I saw my purpose and the path ahead lit up like a runway.

That's not what happened.

What happened was: I felt like the ground had shifted beneath me. Like I'd been standing on something I'd thought was solid, the nihilism, the nothing-matters certainty, and his words had punched a hole through it and I could see all the way down.

Because here's what I couldn't reconcile. We hadn't done anything. We'd thrown some rings over a tree. We hadn't started a charity. We hadn't launched a mental health campaign. We hadn't trained as counsellors or therapists or specialists. We'd just shown up, every week, in a park, and said: come move with us.

And that, that stupid, tiny, insignificant thing, had kept a man alive.

How do you go back to believing nothing matters after that?

You don't.

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The nihilism didn't die that morning. It died over the weeks and months that followed, as I turned that sentence over and over in my mind like a stone in a river. Polishing it. Wearing away my own resistance to what it meant.

If throwing some rings over a tree could do that, what could we build on purpose?

If an accidental community in a park could give one man enough reason to stay, what could an intentional community do? What could a gym do? A programme? A system? A book?

I know the guy now. We're friends. He's one of the strongest people I've ever met, and I don't mean on the rings. He showed up that morning and said the hardest sentence a human can say. He asked for nothing. He just wanted me to know.

But what he gave me was everything.

He gave me the death of the lie I'd been telling myself for years. That nothing matters. That the world is indifferent. That we're all just atoms bouncing off each other in the void.

We're not.

Every smile matters. Every interaction matters. Every small, stupid, insignificant thing you do for another human being might be the thing that keeps them here. You won't know it. They might never tell you. But the weight of it is real.

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Looking back, I can trace the arc now. From selfish to useful. From "I want" to "how can I help." And it happened so gradually that I didn't notice it until it was already done.

At eighteen, every thought I had started with I. I want to feel better. I want to escape. I want to eat. I want to watch. I want, I want, I want. Even the nihilism was self-obsessed. I'm in pain. I don't matter. Nothing affects me. The universe doesn't care about me. I, I, I, I.

During lockdown, something shifted. Instead of "I want to quit engineering," I started asking "how can I be useful?" Not because I suddenly became a saint. Because I'd run out of things the "I want" loop could give me. I'd tried every flavour of selfishness available. Eaten every KFC.

Watched every video. Played every game. Scrolled every feed. And all of it had left me exactly where it found me. Nowhere.

So I turned outward. Not from virtue. From exhaustion. The self-focused loop had run dry.

And that's when the rings went over the tree. Not because I wanted to be a good person. Because I'd used up all the other options.

I went from being selfish to being useful. Not overnight. Not in a montage. Over months and years of showing up and helping people move their bodies and watching what happened to their minds when they did.

That's the arc of this entire book. That's the throughline underneath everything I'm about to tell you. The shift from self to service. From I to you. From "what do I need" to "what can I give."

And that shift, more than any framework or dictionary or system, is the thing that saved my life.

I see the same arc in every person I've ever watched transform. In my clients, in my friends, in the men who come to Cali Unity broken and leave whole. The shape is always the same. They arrive focused on themselves. I want to lose weight. I want to feel better. I want to look good. I, I, I. And that's exactly where they should start. The oxygen mask goes on you first. Always.

But somewhere along the way, if the environment is right, if the community is doing its job, the focus shifts. They stop counting their own reps and start counting someone else's. They stop thinking about their own transformation and start helping someone else begin theirs. The language changes. The posture changes. The whole person changes. Because the thing that was eating them alive, the self-obsession, the inward spiral, the endless loop of I-I-I, has been interrupted by something stronger.

Someone else's need.

And in meeting that need, in being useful to another person, they find the thing they'd been looking for in every KFC and every bottle and every scroll through nothing at 3am: meaning.

Not grand meaning. Not the meaning of life written across the sky. Just the quiet, specific, human meaning that comes from helping someone who needs help. From being the reason someone's day was slightly better. From mattering, in a small and specific way, to someone

who isn't you.

That's enough. It was enough for me. It's enough for anyone.



Over a thousand sales conversations where I sat across from men who were drowning and figured out, one person at a time, what actually works. Over years of coaching where the patterns repeated themselves so reliably that they stopped being anecdotes and started being principles.

Sadness is a lack of options. Create one. Anxiety is too many options. Decide. Fear is an imagined future. Act now.

These aren't theories. They're battle-tested instructions from a decade of watching men fall apart and put themselves back together.

And the more I helped, the more the nihilism cracked. Every man who walked into the gym broken and walked out slightly less broken was a vote against the nothing-matters thesis. Every success story was evidence that effort compounds and meaning exists and the universe, whatever it is, responds to action.

Until one day I looked for the nihilism, reached for that familiar certainty that nothing means anything, and it wasn't there anymore.

He'd taken it with him. The man in the park. With his nine words and his nervous walk and his courage.



That's why I'm writing this book.

Not because I have all the answers. Not because I've figured out masculinity or mental health or the meaning of life. I'm twenty-seven years old and I live in Bali and I still eat too many things from the warung and I still stay up too late and I still struggle with focus and patience and the gap between who I am and who I want to be.

But I know something. I know it in my bones, in my body, in the part of me that was formed in that park on that cold morning.

I know that small things save lives. That showing up matters. That the act of being useful is the most reliable antidote to despair ever discovered.

And I think there might be other men out there who are waiting for their version of that morning. Waiting for their rings over a tree. Waiting for someone to say, in a way they can hear: you're not alone, you're not broken, and there's a way through this.

If this book feels like nothing, if it feels like throwing some rings over a tree, it might give one man what he needs.

And that is enough.



Before we move on, I need to say something about the rest of this book and who it's written to.

Every sentence that follows is written to one person: sixteen-year-old Ollie. The kid in the bedroom. The kid with the curtains closed and the monitors glowing and the KFC wrapper hidden under the bed. The kid who believed nothing mattered and had evidence to prove it.

I'm not writing to "men." I'm not writing to a demographic or a target audience or a persona in a marketing plan. I'm writing to him. Because he needed this book and it didn't exist. And if I write it well enough, clearly enough, honestly enough, maybe it'll reach another kid in another bedroom in another city who's running the same loops and believing the same lies and carrying the same weight.

Maybe it won't. Maybe this book sits on a digital shelf and collects virtual dust and helps exactly nobody.

But maybe. And maybe is enough to start. It was enough to start the park sessions. It was enough to start the gym. It was enough to start every single thing I've ever built that mattered.

Maybe is the most powerful word in the English language. Because maybe contains possibility. And possibility is the antidote to the certainty of nihilism. Nihilism says: nothing matters. Maybe says: something might. And something might is enough to get out of bed. To make the call. To go to the gym. To throw some rings over a tree.

Every good thing starts with maybe.



Chapter 3: The Map They Never Gave You

One hundred and twenty-five men kill themselves every week in the United Kingdom.

I need you to sit with that number for a second. Not skim past it. Not nod and move on.

A hundred and twenty-five. Every week. That's roughly one every ninety minutes. By the time you finish reading this chapter, statistically, another man in this country will have decided he has no other option.

The two most common words found in men's suicide notes are "useless" and "worthless."

Not "sad." Not "broken." Not "lonely." Useless and worthless. Men don't kill themselves because they feel too much. They kill themselves because they feel they have nothing to offer. Because the story in their head says: the world would be better without me in it. I contribute nothing. I matter to no one. I am a net negative.

That story is always wrong. But it doesn't feel wrong when you're inside it.

And here's what terrifies me. We're entering an era where AI can write your emails, build your website, create your presentations, answer your customer's questions, and generate your marketing campaign faster and cheaper than you can. The jobs that gave men their identity, their sense of usefulness, their answer to the question "what do you do?" are evaporating. Not in fifty years. Now. This year. This month.

If the two most common words on a suicide note are "useless" and "worthless," and the thing that's coming makes men feel more useless and more worthless than they've ever felt before, then what we're facing isn't a mental health crisis. It's an avalanche.

Either AI kills everyone, Terminator-style, or we live in abundance. Either way, men won't be linked to work output anymore. The question "what do you do?" will stop being a question about employment and start being a question about identity.

And what will we be linked to?

Human connection. Physical capability. Usefulness to other people. Community.

The things you can't automate. The things a machine can't replicate. The things this whole book is about.

That's the life I already live. Complete freedom, abundance, all-in on human things. Not because I'm special. Because I saw the wave coming and I chose to build on the only ground that won't wash away.

The men who survive what's coming won't be the ones with the best CV or the highest salary or the most LinkedIn endorsements. They'll be the ones who know who they are when the job title is stripped away. Who have a body that works, a community that knows their name, beliefs they've examined, behaviours they've chosen, and something they've built that matters to other people.

That's the operating system. And it matters more now than it ever has.

• • •

These aren't weak men dying. I need to say that clearly because someone reading this is already thinking it. "That wouldn't be me." Or: "Those guys had other problems." Or the worst one: "They should have just talked to someone."

Should have talked to someone. Right. And said what, exactly?

Because here's the thing nobody wants to admit. Telling men to "talk about it" without giving them a language for what they're feeling is like handing someone a map with no labels. Go ahead. Navigate. Find your way. But every road is blank and every town is unnamed and you've been told that asking for directions is a sign of weakness, so you drive in circles until you run out of fuel.

That's the reality for most men.

Not because they're emotionally deficient. Not because testosterone destroys empathy. But because the instructions they were given are useless.

"Man up."

Man up and do what?

"Don't be sad."

Okay. What should I be instead? And how do I get there?

"Stop overthinking."

With what? Which lever do I pull? Where's the off switch?

These aren't instructions. They're commands with no manual. They're like telling someone drowning to "just swim" without ever teaching them the stroke.

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I spent years watching men drown in this exact way. Not in water. In their own heads. In Cali Unity, the gym Kiera and I built after the park meetups, I'd sit across from a new member during their consultation and ask them how they were doing. And almost every time, the answer was some version of fine.

Fine.

The most dangerous word in the English language when a man says it.

Fine means: I don't have the vocabulary for what I'm experiencing, and I don't have permission to find out, and even if I did have the vocabulary I wouldn't know what to do with it, so let's just talk about reps and sets and whether I should eat more protein.

I've done thousands of these conversations. Not exaggerating. Thousands. Sales calls, consultations, onboarding sessions, check-ins, catch-ups, the conversations that happen between sets when a man's guard is down and the sweat has loosened something inside him. And every single time, underneath the training goals and the body composition targets and the "I just want to feel better" vagueness, there's an emotion they can't name.

They feel it. God, they feel it. It sits on their chest. It wakes them at 3am. It makes them snap at their kids and drink too much on Fridays and scroll until their eyes burn. They feel it every day of their lives.

But they can't name it.

And because they can't name it, they can't change it.

Because here's what I've learned, and what nobody told me, and what this entire book is about: you cannot fix what you cannot define. And the definitions most men are working with are broken.

• • •

I used to think emotions were enemies. Things that happened to me. Weather systems that rolled in uninvited and wrecked my plans. Sadness just showed up. Anxiety just appeared. Anger just exploded. I was a passive recipient of my own internal experience, and the best I could do was white-knuckle my way through it until it passed.

I was wrong.

Emotions aren't weather. They're signals. They're your internal system telling you something specific about your situation and what you need to do about it. Every feeling has a message. Every message has a behaviour attached to it. And when you match the right behaviour to the right emotion, the emotion resolves.

Sadness isn't a mood. Sadness is your mind telling you that you lack options. The behavioural lever is to create one.

Anxiety isn't a disorder. Anxiety is what happens when you have too many options. The lever: decide.

Fear isn't weakness. Fear is your brain running a simulation of a future that hasn't happened yet and treating the simulation as real. The lever: act in the present.

This isn't therapy. I'm not a therapist. This is engineering. Looking at the human operating system and asking: what if we just read the dashboard instead of smashing it?

What if, instead of teaching men to suppress their feelings or wallow in them, we taught them to read them? Like a fuel gauge or a temperature warning. The light comes on. You don't panic. You don't ignore it. You check what it means and you respond accordingly.

Every destructive behaviour I've ever witnessed, in myself, in my clients, in the men I've coached, comes from the same source: a man who felt an emotion, couldn't identify it, and reached for the nearest available response. Alcohol. Porn. Anger. Withdrawal. Overwork. Control of everything around him because he couldn't control what was inside him.

Every act of self-destruction is an act of control.

Read that again.

The man who drinks himself unconscious is controlling his inner state. The man who loses himself in pornography is controlling the noise. The man who punches a wall is controlling the pressure. The man who works eighty hours a week is controlling the fear of stillness. And the man who takes his own life, that man has reached the end of every control mechanism he knows. It's not giving up. It's the last thing he can control when everything else has failed.

I don't say that to glorify it. I say it because until you understand that mechanism, that all human behaviour is an attempt to regulate internal experience, you'll never understand why people do what they do. And you definitely won't know how to help them stop.

• • •

This book is the map they never gave you.

Not a motivational speech. Not a collection of affirmations. Not "ten steps to a better mindset" or whatever else is clogging the self-help shelves.

This is a behavioural operating system. A way of reading your own internal signals, translating them into specific actions, and building a life that doesn't require constant crisis management because you've learned how to respond to the signals before they become crises.

I built it through years of getting it wrong. Through being that eighteen-year-old who couldn't name a single thing he was feeling. Through coaching men who were breaking apart and learning, one conversation at a time, what actually fixes things versus what just feels good to say.

I had addictions. I got help. And then I studied everything I could get my hands on. The Stoics. Buddhism. Recovery programmes. Behavioural science. Neuroscience. Cognitive behavioural therapy. Motivational interviewing. Everything. I wasn't looking for one answer. I was trying to understand myself from every angle, because no single framework explained the whole picture.

Nobody gave me this map. So I drew one.

And if the map I drew is even slightly useful to one person reading this, if it stops one man from believing that the only option left is the worst one, then the whole thing was worth it. Every word. Every page. Every minute spent writing when I could've been training or building or sleeping.

• • •

I need to say something about the mental health conversation before we go any further.

If you are in crisis right now, if you're reading this and you have a plan to hurt yourself, put this book down and call someone. In the UK: Samaritans, 116 123, twenty-four hours a day, every day. Text SHOUT to 85258. Or go to A&E. Right now. The book will be here when you get back.

Therapy works. Medication works. Professional support works. I believe in all of it. I'd be a fool not to.

But.

Most men who are suffering aren't in clinical crisis. They're not psychotic. They're not experiencing pathological conditions that require pharmaceutical intervention. Most men who are suffering are experiencing entirely normal emotional responses to entirely manageable situations, and they lack the tools to manage them.

They don't need a diagnosis. They need a dictionary.

They don't need medication. They need a behavioural lever.

They don't need to "talk to someone" in the vague, general, stigma-reducing sense. They need to know specifically what they're feeling and specifically what to do about it.

That's the gap this book fills. Not instead of therapy. Not instead of medication. Alongside them. Before them. After them. Between appointments.

On the days when the therapist isn't available and the feelings are loud and you need something to do right now, tonight, this minute. The operating system is the thing that lives in the gaps between professional appointments. It's the 3am tool. The "I can't afford therapy but I need to do something" tool. The thing a man can reach for when everything else is closed and the only voice in the room is the one inside his head.

My sister has been bipolar for about fourteen years. I've watched her journey. Watched medication help her stabilise. Watched her try to come off it and struggle. Watched the cycle of dependency that can form when medication becomes the only tool in the kit. I believe in medication. I also believe it works best when it's not the only thing you're doing. When there's a framework alongside it. When there's community. When there are skills that give you agency alongside the chemistry that gives you stability.

This operating system doesn't replace professional care. It gives you a way to manage yourself between sessions. A language for the things you're feeling so that when you do talk to a professional, you can say something more useful than "I'm not great."

• • •

The men who are dying, the 125 per week, they're not a different species from you. They're dads. Brothers. Mates. Colleagues. The bloke who serves your coffee every morning. The man who sat next to you on the train.

They looked fine. They said fine. And then one day they weren't.

The gap between "fine" and "dead" is not as wide as you think. And the bridge across it is not as complicated as the mental health industry sometimes makes it seem. The bridge is: a man who can read his own signals, match them to the right behaviour, and take one action.

One action. That's often the difference.

Create one option. Make one decision. Take one step.

The operating system is the thing that makes that one action possible. Because without it, the man doesn't know which action to take. He's standing at a crossroads with no signs. And he picks the worst road because it's the only one he recognises.

Give him signs. Give him a map. Give him the language.

That's what we're doing here.

Because I know what it feels like to have no map. To be standing in the dark with no language for what you're feeling and no instructions for what to do about it.

And I know what happened when someone finally handed me a direction.

It wasn't a therapist. It wasn't a teacher. It wasn't a self-help book. It was a gym, and a woman with two-kilogram dumbbells, and a man in a park, and a framework that assembled itself on a run, and thousands of conversations that taught me, one mistake at a time, how human beings actually work.

This book is the assembled version of all of that. Not perfect. Not complete. Not the final word on anything. But useful. And useful is enough.

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PART TWO: THE OPERATING SYSTEM

Chapter 4: Emotions Are Signals

I need to tell you something that might sound obvious once you hear it but probably isn't, because nobody in my life ever said it to me and I've never seen it written in the way I mean it.

Your emotions are not your enemies.

They're not random. They're not chemical glitches. They're not signs that something is wrong with you. They're information. Precise, actionable, specific information about your current situation and what your body and brain think you should do about it.

Every emotion is energy. Actual, physical, measurable energy moving through your nervous system with a specific purpose: to push you toward a behaviour.

And here's what I think most people get backwards. What came first, the thing or the feeling? Most of us assume the feeling arrives independently, like weather. But I think it's the other way round. The thing happens first. The situation, the event, the circumstance. And then the body turns that thing into a feeling. The feeling is the body's way of getting you to do something about the thing. It's a translation. A signal. Not a random experience, a specific instruction.

Sadness is energy that says: create an option. Anxiety is energy that says: make a decision. Fear is energy that says: act now. Anger is energy that says: enforce a boundary.

Each one is a signal designed to move you. Designed to produce a specific behaviour that resolves the emotion and returns you to baseline.

People sometimes think I'm a psychopath. Or autistic. Or just wired differently. Because when something bad happens, I don't spiral. I don't rage. I get quiet for a second, and then I move.

They look at me like there's something missing. Like I should be more upset.

But it's not that I don't feel the emotion. I feel it clearly. I just read it now. My reaction to a wave of stress or anger or sadness isn't "oh God, what's wrong with me." It's "oh, thank you. Thank you, body, for the signal. I didn't even realise I was out of balance."

The body sent a signal. I received it. That's the whole interaction.

And that's the thing nobody tells you. Your emotions are a gift. Not a curse, not a weakness, not a disorder. A gift.

Think about it. Stress and burnout are your body saying "mate, you've been going too hard in the wrong direction and if I don't make you feel terrible right now, you'll push until something actually breaks." Without that signal, you'd drive yourself into the ground and never know why. The discomfort is the thing that forces the change. It's the body's last line of defence before real damage.

If everything felt good all the time, you'd never change anything. You'd stay in the wrong relationship. You'd keep running the failing business. You'd keep eating the food that's slowly killing you. Because why would you change? It feels fine.

Discomfort is the reinforcement loop. Pleasure and pain. That's it. Those are the only two levers behaviour runs on. Every decision you've ever made was moving toward one or away from the other. And the people who learn to read their pain as information instead of treating it as punishment are the ones who actually change their lives.

But we were never taught this.

We were taught that emotions are feelings. Things you experience. Weather that passes through. And so men, most men, the ones I grew up with, the ones I coach now, treat their emotions like background noise. They wait for them to pass. They suppress them. They distract themselves. They drink, scroll, train, work, anything to avoid sitting with the feeling long enough to ask: what is this actually telling me?

And when the emotion doesn't resolve, because it can't resolve without the correct behaviour, it compounds. It stacks. Today's unresolved sadness sits on top of yesterday's, which sits on top of last week's. The signal gets louder. The energy gets more desperate. The system starts screaming. And eventually the man snaps. Or shuts down. Or does something destructive to discharge the pressure because he never learned how to listen to the warning light.

This is the loop. Emotion, Behaviour, Resolution. That's how it's supposed to work. The emotion arrives. It carries a message. You respond with the correct behaviour. The emotion resolves. You return to baseline. Loop complete.

But when the loop breaks, when you avoid the behaviour, or pick the wrong one, or don't understand what the emotion is asking for, the loop stays open. The energy has nowhere to go. It circulates. It intensifies. It warps into something you can't recognise anymore, something that feels like depression or rage or numbness or all three simultaneously.

And then you end up in my gym, sitting across from me, saying you're fine.

Let me take you through the main ones. Not as a textbook. As my life.

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Sadness hit me hardest at eighteen. Not as crying. I didn't cry. Crying would've been a relief. Sadness at eighteen felt like concrete. Like someone had poured it into my chest and it had set overnight and now I had to carry it everywhere.

I'd wake up and the first thought wasn't about breakfast or school or anything useful. The first thought was: what's the point? And that thought was so heavy and so immediate that getting out of bed felt like bench pressing a weight I hadn't trained for.

I didn't understand it. I called it depression. My parents probably called it worry — theirs, not mine. They could see something was wrong and they didn't know how to fix it, so they did the only thing they knew how: they kept showing up. The internet called it a chemical imbalance. But years later, looking back with everything I've learned, I can see exactly what it was.

I had no options.

That's what sadness is. Your mind scanning your environment, your future, your situation, and finding no available path forward. No exit. No doorway. Nothing you can do that will change your circumstances. Sadness is the emotional experience of being trapped.

And at eighteen, I was trapped. Living at home. No job. No skills. No direction. No money. Parents going through the hardest stretch of their lives but still there, still trying. A body I hated. Addictions that controlled me. When I ran the mental calculation, "What can I do to change this?" the answer, every time, was nothing. I couldn't see a single lever I could pull.

The behaviour that resolves sadness is the simplest one in this book, and also the hardest: create one option. Not twelve. Not a five-year plan. One. One thing you can do, today, that moves you from "no options" to "one option." One door you can push on.

For me, it was the gym. Not because the gym was the answer. But because going to the gym was one thing I could do. One act of agency in a life that felt entirely passive.

And sadness doesn't need a grand solution. It needs evidence that a solution exists. Even a shit one.

• • •

Anxiety came later. Mid-twenties. Building the business. Cali Unity growing. Coaching clients. Learning to sell. Learning to market. Learning to manage people. And every new skill opened three new doors and each door led to ten new problems and suddenly I had so many things pulling at me that I couldn't sleep.

This is the one most men misidentify. They think anxiety is stress. They think it's overwork. They think it's caring too much.

Anxiety is too many options.

Your brain is running parallel simulations of every possible path. Should I focus on marketing or product? Should I reply to this client or that one? Should I raise prices or cut costs? Each decision is a fork, and your brain won't let you walk past a fork without glancing down both paths, and now you've got forty-seven paths in your peripheral vision and you can't commit to any of them because what if you pick wrong?

That's anxiety. Computational overload. Your internal processor has too many tabs open and it's overheating.

The fix is brutal in its simplicity. Decide. Pick one. Close the other tabs. Not because the decision is perfect, it won't be, but because anxiety cannot coexist with commitment. The moment you commit, the parallel simulations stop running. The processor cools. The anxiety drops.

Someone said something that landed like a hammer. "If you have more than three priorities, you have no priorities." I wrote that on a Post-it note and stuck it to my monitor and stared at it for ten minutes. And then I cut. I cut seven things down to three. And the anxiety dropped within hours. Not days. Hours.

• • •

Fear is the one I'm most grateful for understanding.

The Stoics got there first. Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, Epictetus. Blokes who lived two thousand years ago and figured out something that most modern self-help hasn't caught up with.

We suffer more in imagination than in reality.

Fear is not a response to something happening. Fear is a response to something you're imagining might happen. It's a projection. A simulation. Your brain constructing a worst-case future and then reacting to that construction as if it were real.

The exam isn't killing you. Your simulation of failing the exam is killing you. The sales call isn't the problem. Your simulation of being rejected on the sales call is the problem.

I read Seneca at twenty-one. In a park in Bath, on my phone, between sets. Not because I was some intellectual, because a YouTube algorithm sent me a video about Stoicism and I followed the rabbit hole. And there was this line, I'm paraphrasing, but it said something like: the man who anticipates every misfortune suffers every misfortune he anticipates, while the man who waits for reality to arrive often finds it manageable.

That hit.

The behavioural lever for fear is the most counterintuitive one: act now. In the present. Not later. Not after you've prepared. Not when you feel ready. Now. Because fear is a future-tense emotion. It can only survive in the gap between now and later. The moment you act, you collapse the gap. You're in the present. And in the present, fear dissolves. What replaces it is usually far less dramatic than what you imagined.

I've made thousands of cold calls. Thousands. The first second of every single one felt like stepping off a cliff. By the third second, it was just a conversation. Every time.



And then there's the one that nearly killed me.

Depression. Real depression. Not the sadness I described earlier. Depression, the kind that turns the lights off inside you, is something else entirely.

For years I thought depression was sadness that had gotten too heavy. I was wrong. Depression, the way I experienced it, was the result of one specific thing.

Hiding.

I wasn't allowing myself to be me.

At eighteen, nineteen, twenty, I was performing a version of myself that I thought other people wanted. The funny one. The easy-going one. The one who didn't take things too seriously. The one who didn't have opinions about things that mattered because having opinions meant you could be wrong and being wrong meant you were vulnerable and being vulnerable meant people could hurt you.

So I hid. Behind humour. Behind nihilism. Behind a screen. Behind a body so large that nobody could see the person inside it.

Depression is what happens when you suppress yourself for long enough. When the gap between who you are and who you're pretending to be becomes so wide that your psyche can't bridge it anymore. The system shuts down. Not because you're broken. Because the effort of maintaining the performance has exhausted every resource you have.

The behavioural lever for depression isn't "be yourself." God, I hate that phrase. It's more specific. Express one truth. Say one real thing. Out loud. To another person. Not the whole truth. Not a confessional. Just one brick of honesty placed in a wall of pretence.

I remember the first time I said something real to someone. In a gym, to a coach I barely knew. I said: "I don't actually know what I'm doing with my life and I think about that every day." He looked at me and said: "Yeah, mate. Same." And we both kind of laughed. And the relief was so immediate and so physical, I could feel it in my shoulders, that I understood something in my body before my mind caught up.

Hiding takes energy. Truth gives it back.



I need to add something here about my family, because it connects to the hiding pattern and it's something I fight every day.

My sister has been bipolar for about fourteen years. I've watched her journey from the inside. Watched the medication cycles. Watched the stability it brought and the dependency it created. Watched her try to come off it, struggle, go back. The pattern repeating. And it shaped how I think about all of this.

I believe in medication. I believe it saves lives. I believe there are people for whom it is the difference between functioning and not functioning, and those people should take it without shame or hesitation.

But I also believe that medication alone, as the sole long-term strategy, can create a dependency that replaces one problem with another. What I've seen, in my sister and in others, is that the best outcomes come from medication plus skills. Chemistry plus framework. The pill that stabilises you AND the operating system that teaches you to manage what the pill can't reach.

Neither one alone is enough for most people. Both together are powerful.



I see my dad's traits in myself. His impatience. His capacity to go quiet when he should speak. I also see his work ethic. His willingness to get up at 3am and walk through the rain to provide for his family. His refusal to let his son stay in bed when staying in bed was killing him. The traits aren't all bad. Not even close. But some of them, pointed in the wrong direction, can do damage.

I see myself wanting to withdraw from Kiera when she needs connection. Wanting to snap when she asks a question I don't want to answer. Wanting to repeat dynamics I watched play out in my parents' house, because the neural pathways are there, laid down in childhood,

waiting to fire. My dad wasn't a bad man. He was a man under pressure, shaped by his own upbringing, doing his best. And his best included standing in my doorway every morning and refusing to let me quit. That's love. That's what love looks like when it doesn't have the words.

The operating system is what stops the unhelpful patterns from firing. Not always. Not perfectly. But often enough that the pattern doesn't complete. I catch the impulse. I read the signal. I choose the behaviour. And the loop closes differently than it would have if I'd been running on autopilot.

That's not a cure. It's a practice. And some days the practice fails and I repeat something I wish I hadn't. And then I come back. Not with shame. With the curiosity that the system taught me. What happened? Which signal did I miss?

And I try again. Because trying again is the whole thing. The whole book compressed into two words.

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It's very hard to be depressed when you're thinking about other people.

I need to be careful how I say this. I'm not saying suicidal people are selfish. I'm not saying that. What I'm observing, from my own experience and from years of watching this pattern in others, is that all suffering tends to orbit the word "I."

I'm in pain. I can't cope. I'm worthless. I'm stuck. My life. My problems. My failure. My shame.

When you're drowning, the world shrinks to a single person: you. The water fills your vision. The noise fills your ears. And the only voice you can hear is the one inside your head, and that voice is usually not kind.

But the moment the focus shifts outward, something changes. Not a cure. Not a fix. A change. A small crack in the wall of self-obsession that lets in a sliver of light from somewhere else. Someone else's problem. Someone else's need. Someone else's pain that, for a moment, pulls you out of your own.

That's what happened to me in the park. I stopped thinking about my own misery and started thinking about other people's bodies. How to help this woman do a pull-up. How to modify this exercise for that bloke's dodgy knee. How to welcome the nervous guy who'd just walked in. Small acts of usefulness that, accumulated over months, rewired my attention from inward to outward.

The shift from self to service is the most reliable antidote to despair I've ever found. Not because it erases the pain. Because it puts the pain in context. Your suffering exists, and it's real, and it deserves attention. But it's not the only thing in the world. Other people are suffering too. And you might be able to help one of them. And that ability, that usefulness, is proof that you matter.

And mattering is the opposite of useless and worthless.

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Each of these definitions, sadness as lack of options, anxiety as too many options, fear as imagined future, depression as suppressed self, I discovered first in my own experience. In the mess. In the confusion. Looking back and asking, what was actually happening there?

But they solidified through coaching. Through sitting across from men and watching the same patterns repeat.

The man who came to me anxious about his career. We talked for an hour. Peeled back layers. Underneath the anxiety was a man with three job offers who couldn't choose between them. The anxiety wasn't about the jobs. It was about the choice. We picked one. The anxiety evaporated before he left the room.

The woman who told me she was depressed. We talked. I asked: "What part of yourself are you not showing anyone?" Silence. Long silence. Then: "I hate my marriage and I've never said that out loud before." The word came out and something in her face changed. Not happiness. Relief. The relief of not pretending.

The teenager who was terrified of performing at a calisthenics event. I asked what exactly he was afraid of. He described, in vivid detail, falling from the bar, the crowd watching, the embarrassment. I said: "Has that happened before?" He said no. "Have you practised the

routine?" He said fifty times. "So what you're afraid of is something that has never happened and that you've trained fifty times to prevent." He laughed. We went and did the routine. He nailed it.

Every time, the pattern held. Name the emotion correctly. Match it to the right behaviour. Watch the loop close.



There's one more emotion I haven't covered yet in this chapter, and it ties all the others together.

Loneliness.

Loneliness isn't an emotion in the same category as sadness or anxiety. It's more like a meta-emotion. An emotional state that amplifies every other emotion and makes all of them harder to resolve.

When you're lonely, sadness hits harder because there's no one to create options with. Anxiety escalates because there's no one to help you decide. Fear grows because there's no one to act alongside. Anger turns inward because there's no one to express it to.

Loneliness is the multiplier. It takes every emotional signal and turns the volume up. Not slightly. Dramatically. The same setback that a connected man processes in an afternoon, a lonely man carries for weeks.

And men are lonelier than they've ever been. The data is clear. Male friendships have declined consistently for decades. The average man in his thirties has fewer close friends than at any point in recorded history. Social media creates the illusion of connection while providing none of its benefits. And the pandemic accelerated the trend by years.

The behavioural lever for loneliness is the same as the lever for sadness, applied socially: create one connection. Not a network. One conversation with one person where you say one real thing. That's the minimum effective dose.

This is why Belonging is the second B. Without it, every other B is harder. The body heals slower in isolation. Beliefs go unchallenged. Behaviour lacks the social reinforcement that makes it stick.

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I want to address something that comes up every time I talk about this framework. People say: "You're oversimplifying. Emotions are more complex than that. You can't reduce the human experience to a lookup table."

They're right that emotions are complex. They're wrong that the complexity means we shouldn't try to understand them.

A map of the London Underground is a simplification. It bears almost no relationship to the actual geography of London. The distances are wrong. The directions are wrong. The surface-level reality is completely absent. And yet the Tube map is one of the most useful documents ever created. Because it gives you enough information to navigate. To get from here to there. To make a decision about which train to catch.

The behavioural dictionary is a Tube map for your inner world. It's not the territory. It's a simplification that makes the territory navigable.

Yes, the neuroscience is more nuanced than "sadness equals lack of options." Yes, there are clinical conditions where these definitions don't apply and professional help is essential. Yes, a real neuroscientist would read my definitions and point out seventeen things I've oversimplified or gotten slightly wrong.

They'd be right. And the man who's drowning at 3am wouldn't care. Because the man who's drowning doesn't need a textbook. He needs a Tube map. Something that says: you're here. The exit is there. Get on this train.

I'd rather give someone a simplified tool that they actually use than a perfect theory that sits on a shelf gathering dust alongside all the other perfect theories that nobody applies. Imperfect and applied beats perfect and theoretical. Every time. In every domain. In the gym, in business, in relationships, in life.

The operating system is not perfect. The definitions will evolve. They'll be refined by new research, new coaching experiences, new conversations with men who bring new angles I haven't considered. But right now, today, in this version, they work. They work well enough to close the loop. They work well enough to save lives.

And "well enough to save lives" is a pretty high bar for an imperfect system.

Use the system. Test it against your own experience. Refine it. Improve it. Make it yours. The definitions are a starting point, not a destination. They're meant to be questioned, challenged, and updated as you learn more about your own internal world.

But start with them. Because starting with something is infinitely better than starting with nothing. And nothing is what most men have right now. A void where the language should be. A blank page where the dictionary should live. An empty space where the operating system should run.

This book fills that space. Imperfectly. But it fills it. And an imperfect system is always, always, always better than no system at all.

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This isn't magic. It's engineering. And like all engineering, it works regardless of who you are, how you feel about it, or whether you believe in it.

You don't need to believe in gravity for it to hold you to the floor.

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Chapter 5: The Behavioural Dictionary

This chapter is a field guide.

Not a lecture. Not a list of fancy definitions to memorise. Something you dog-ear, bend the spine on, come back to at 3am when your head is loud and you can't figure out what's happening inside you.

Every word here was discovered in the mess. In my own breakdown, in a thousand coaching conversations, in watching men struggle to describe what they're feeling because nobody ever gave them the vocabulary.

Before we start, I need to tell you the test that every definition has to pass. I call it the observational test. The question is simple: what would have to occur in the environment for us to be sure that this adjective is true?

Every entry here passes that test. You can point to observable behaviour that proves it. Sadness isn't a vibe. It's observable: withdrawal, reduced speech, fixation on the past, the absence of forward motion. You can see it. You can measure it.

If you can't observe it, you can't define it. If you can't define it, you can't change it. That's the rule.

Here's how each entry works. A definition, what the emotion actually is. A description, what it looks like when it's running. A behavioural lever, the specific action that resolves it. And an insight, one line to carry with you.

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THE INSTINCTS

These are your alarm system. They fire fast, they fire loud, and they exist to protect you. The problem is that protection in the modern world looks nothing like protection on the savannah where these instincts were built. Your amygdala doesn't know the difference between a lion

and a difficult email. So you have to learn to read the alarm instead of just reacting to it.



FEAR

Definition: The experience of imagining a negative future and treating the imagination as real.

What it looks like: Avoidance. Procrastination. Overthinking that feels productive but produces nothing. The thing you need to do sitting on your to-do list for weeks, untouched, while you do seventeen easier things around it.

Behavioural lever: Act in the present. Do the thing now. Not when you're ready. Now. Fear collapses the moment you step into reality, because reality is almost always more manageable than the simulation.

Insight: Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is fear that decided to act anyway.



STRESS

Definition: The experience of opposing forces. Two demands pulling in different directions. Or your actions pointing one way while your values point another.

What it looks like: Tension in your shoulders. Short temper. The feeling that you're being pulled apart. Working harder and harder but feeling like you're going backwards.

Behavioural lever: Align or choose. Identify the two forces. Pick one. If your job demands sixty hours and your family demands forty, you don't have a time management problem. You have an alignment problem. Reduce one or restructure the other.

Insight: Stress is not a sign of working hard. It's a sign of working misaligned.



ANXIETY

Definition: The experience of too many options. Too many open loops. Too many unmade decisions running simultaneously.

What it looks like: Background hum. Can't sit still. Can't focus. Starting things without finishing them. The mind jumping from worry to worry. Waking up at 4am with a head full of things you haven't done.

Behavioural lever: Decide. Pick one path. Close the other tabs. Commit. Anxiety cannot coexist with commitment.

Insight: Anxiety is not caring too much. It's deciding too little.

I want to be clear about something: anxiety and fear are different things, and most people conflate them. Fear is about one specific thing. Anxiety is about everything at once. The man who can't sleep because he's worried about a specific conversation tomorrow has fear. The man who can't sleep because there are forty-seven things competing for his attention has anxiety. The treatment is different. The man with fear needs to have the conversation. The man with anxiety needs to pick three things and let the rest go. If you apply the wrong treatment, the emotion doesn't resolve, and the man concludes the tools don't work when actually the diagnosis was wrong.

This is why the dictionary matters. Precision of diagnosis determines precision of treatment. Wrong word, wrong prescription.



SADNESS

Definition: The experience of having no options. The perception that your current situation has no exit, no path forward, no available change.

What it looks like: Flatness. Heaviness. The world losing its colour. Not wanting to get out of bed, not because you're tired but because there's nothing worth getting up for.

Behavioural lever: Create one option. One door. One possibility. Not a solution, just proof that a solution could exist. Apply for one job. Send one message. Go for one walk.

Insight: Sadness lifts when you find a door. Even one you don't walk through yet.

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ANGER

Definition: The experience of a boundary being violated. Something you value is being threatened or disrespected.

What it looks like: Heat. Volume. The urge to destroy something or dominate someone. In suppressed form: cold resentment, passive aggression, withdrawal.

Behavioural lever: Enforce the boundary. Name the violation. State what you need. "This isn't acceptable. Here's what needs to change." Anger expressed through clear communication resolves. Anger suppressed mutates into resentment. Anger unleashed without aim causes damage.

Insight: Anger is the emotion of self-respect. The problem is never the anger. It's where you aim it.

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DISGUST

Definition: The experience of encountering something that violates your standards. A behaviour, a person, a situation that conflicts with what you believe is acceptable.

What it looks like: Recoil. The urge to distance yourself. Sometimes directed at others. Often directed at yourself, at a behaviour you did that falls below your own standard.

Behavioural lever: Set or raise the standard. If the disgust is directed at yourself, use it as fuel to change the behaviour. If external, set the boundary or leave the environment.

Insight: Self-disgust is not self-hatred. It's the part of you that still has standards trying to pull you back to them.



THE MOTIVATIONS

These are the emotions that pull you forward. They don't need fixing. They need feeding.



DESIRE

Definition: The experience of wanting something you don't yet have. The pull toward a future state.

What it looks like: Restlessness with a direction. Can't stop thinking about the thing. Planning, researching, imagining.

Behavioural lever: Take the first step toward the thing. Not the whole journey. The first concrete action. Desire that stays in your head becomes fantasy. Desire that touches reality becomes ambition.

Insight: Desire without action is daydreaming. Desire with action is the engine of every achievement in human history.



EXCITEMENT

Definition: High-energy anticipation. The body preparing for something it perceives as both challenging and rewarding.

What it looks like: Can't sit still, but in a good way. Talking fast. Eyes wide. Butterflies that don't feel like fear.

Behavioural lever: Channel it. Excitement is unstructured energy. Point it somewhere. Start the project, make the call, begin the workout. Unchannelled, it burns out as anxiety.

Insight: Excitement and anxiety are the same chemical cocktail. The only difference is whether you trust yourself to handle what's coming.

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HOPE

Definition: The belief that a positive future is possible, even if you can't yet see the path to it.

What it looks like: A lightness in the chest. The first crack in despair. The willingness to try one more time.

Behavioural lever: Protect it. Hope is fragile. It needs small, repeated evidence that the future might be worth reaching. One good day. One small win. One person who sees you.

Insight: Hope is not naivety. Hope is the minimum belief required to take the next step.

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FAITH

Definition: Trust in a process you can't fully see. Commitment to an outcome that isn't yet visible but that evidence suggests is possible.

What it looks like: Showing up when you can't see results. Training for months without visible change. Building through the silent period where nothing grows.

Here's what I've come to believe about faith.

If you knew things weren't going to get better, you'd kill yourself. The fact that you're alive means you think things will get better. That belief, however faint, however buried under layers of cynicism and pain and exhaustion, IS faith. Everyone has it. Even atheists. Even nihilists. Even the man who says he doesn't believe in anything has enough belief to eat breakfast and walk outside and draw another breath.

Faith in yourself. Faith in tomorrow. Faith in the possibility that the next chapter might be different from the last one. You're still here, which means the faith is still there, buried somewhere, keeping the engine running.

When I mention God in this book, and I will a few times, I mean this: God is just the word we put on things we don't understand. The force that makes flowers grow and wounds heal and broken people rebuild. The thing that connects the dots in ways you can't see until you look backwards. Call it God, call it the universe, call it dumb luck, call it whatever makes it real for you. The label doesn't matter. The faith does.

Behavioural lever: Continue. Faith is a behaviour, not a feeling. You don't feel faithful and then persist. You persist and the faith follows. The action precedes the emotion.

Insight: Faith is what you have when evidence hasn't arrived yet but effort has already been spent.

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CURIOSITY

Definition: The experience of encountering something unknown and feeling pulled toward it rather than away from it.

What it looks like: Questions. The urge to understand. Reading, asking, testing, experimenting.

Behavioural lever: Follow it. Curiosity is your brain's way of saying "this matters." The best things I've ever built started because something made me curious and I didn't suppress the urge to investigate.

Insight: Curiosity is the emotion that precedes mastery. Every expert in every field started by being curious about one specific thing.

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THE BLOCKS

These are the emotions that stop you. Not because they're enemies, because they're signals you haven't processed yet. They accumulate when loops stay open. They dissolve when you do the work.



GUILT

Definition: The experience of recognising a gap between your behaviour and your values. You did something. You know it falls below your standard.

What it looks like: Heaviness. Avoidance of the person or situation you feel guilty about. Lying awake replaying the moment.

Behavioural lever: Repair. Apologise if an apology is owed. Change the behaviour if the behaviour was wrong. Guilt is productive when it drives repair. Toxic when you sit in it without acting.

Insight: Guilt says "I did something bad." Shame says "I am bad." Know the difference. One motivates repair. The other motivates hiding.



SHAME

Definition: The belief that something is fundamentally wrong with you. Not that you did a bad thing, that you are a bad thing. Identity-level rejection of self.

What it looks like: Withdrawal. Silence. The inability to make eye contact. The deep conviction that if people really knew you, they'd leave.

Behavioural lever: Share one truth with one person. Shame dies when it's spoken. Every time. It cannot survive being witnessed. The sentence that breaks shame is: "This is who I actually am." Spoken out loud. To a person who doesn't leave.

Insight: Shame is a lie that feels like the truth. It tells you that you're the only one. You're never the only one.



REGRET

Definition: Wishing a past decision had been different. A backward-facing emotion that traps attention in a moment you can't change.

What it looks like: Replaying scenarios. "If only I had..." The paralysing loop of revisiting a choice you already made and torturing yourself with the alternative.

Behavioural lever: Extract the lesson. Commit to the correction. Then release the moment. Regret is useful for exactly one purpose: teaching you what to do differently next time. After that, it has no remaining function.

Insight: Regret is a teacher that overstays its welcome. Learn the lesson and show it the door.



RESENTMENT

Definition: Anger that was never expressed. A boundary that was violated but never enforced. The emotional equivalent of an unpaid debt.

What it looks like: Bitterness. Keeping score. Passive aggression. Thinking about someone else's behaviour more than your own.

Behavioural lever: Express the need or release the expectation. Either say what you need to say, or accept that the person cannot give you what you want and choose to let the debt go.

Insight: Resentment doesn't punish the person who wronged you. It punishes you while they go about their day.



APATHY

Definition: The shutdown state. The absence of motivation, interest, or desire. Not peaceful quiet. Dead-battery quiet.

What it looks like: Nothing matters. Can't be bothered. Scrolling without registering. Eating without tasting. Going through motions that feel like someone else's routine.

Behavioural lever: Do one small thing. Not a big thing. Apathy doesn't respond to grand plans. It responds to tiny actions. Making the bed. Going for a ten-minute walk. Texting one person. Micro-actions generate micro-feedback, and micro-feedback is enough to restart the engine.

Insight: Apathy is not the absence of emotion. It's emotion's fuse blowing after sustained overload.



BURNOUT

Definition: The state where effort no longer produces reward. The reward loop has habituated. The thing that used to feel satisfying now feels empty.

What it looks like: Exhaustion that sleep doesn't fix. Cynicism about work you used to love. Emotional detachment from people and projects.

Behavioural lever: Change the reward, not the effort. Burnout is not a volume problem, it's a reward problem. The stimulus has stopped producing a response. You need novelty, rest, or a different form of recognition.

Insight: Burnout is not weakness. It's what happens when a machine runs without maintenance.



THE STATES OF MASTERY

These are the emotions you build toward. They're not endpoints. They're ongoing practices.



CONFIDENCE

Definition: The accumulated memory of past success. A score. A metric. Each time you do what you said you'd do, the score goes up. Each time you don't, it goes down.

What it looks like: Calm competence. Speaking without hedging. Moving without hesitation. Trust in your own capability based on evidence, not hope.

Behavioural lever: Make a promise to yourself. Keep it. Repeat. Confidence is not something you find. It's something you build. One kept promise at a time.

Insight: Confidence is not a personality trait. It's a receipt of past behaviour.



META-CONFIDENCE

Definition: The confidence that you can build confidence. The belief that even if you lose everything, you know the formula to rebuild.

What it looks like: Resilience. The man who fails and starts again without spiralling.

Behavioural lever: Reflect on your rebuild history. Remember every time you started with nothing and created something.

Insight: The man who's been broken and rebuilt is more dangerous than the man who's never been tested.



COURAGE

Definition: Action in the presence of fear. Not the absence of fear.

What it looks like: Doing the thing with shaking hands. Having the conversation with a trembling voice.

Behavioural lever: Start before you're ready. Courage is a muscle that atrophies without use.

Insight: You don't wait until you're brave to act. You act, and the bravery follows.



DISCIPLINE

Definition: The ability to do what you said you'd do, even when you don't want to. Especially when you don't want to.

What it looks like: The alarm goes off at 4am. You get up. Not because you want to. Because you committed.

Behavioural lever: Remove the decision. Pre-commit. Set the alarm, lay out the clothes, prepare the meal, book the session. Discipline is easier when friction is removed.

Insight: Discipline is not punishment. Discipline is the thing that sets you free.



PATIENCE

Definition: The ability to sustain effort without immediate reward. The willingness to wait for compound returns.

What it looks like: Training for months without visible progress. Posting content into the void. Trusting the reps.

Behavioural lever: Track the process, not the outcome. Measure inputs, not outputs. Did you show up? Did you do the work? Then you're winning, even if the scoreboard hasn't updated yet.

Insight: Patience is not passive. It's active waiting. You're not sitting still. You're compounding.



GRATITUDE

Definition: The recognition of value in what you already have. The antidote to the endless wanting that makes success feel empty.

What it looks like: Pausing. Noticing. The cold water hitting your face in the morning and feeling it. The first sip of coffee. A friend who checked in. A body that works.

Behavioural lever: Name three things. Every morning. Specific, concrete, real. Not "I'm grateful for my health." That's a platitude. "I'm grateful that my knee didn't hurt on yesterday's run." Specificity makes gratitude real.

Insight: Gratitude and misery cannot occupy the same moment. Pick one.



HUMILITY

Definition: Accurate self-assessment. Not thinking less of yourself. Thinking of yourself less.

What it looks like: Asking questions when you could pretend to know. Admitting you were wrong without collapse.

Behavioural lever: Seek environments that humble you. If you're the strongest person in every room, you've run out of rooms.

Insight: Ego and growth cannot coexist. One feeds the other's death.



MENTAL TOUGHNESS

Definition: The capacity to sustain effort and quality of decision-making under discomfort, fatigue, or adversity. Not a trait. A skill. Built through repetition.

What it looks like: The same quality of effort at mile 80 as at mile 1. Not the absence of quitting thoughts, the presence of action despite them.

Behavioural lever: Do hard things when you don't have to. Cold showers. Early alarms. The extra set. The conversation you're avoiding. Each one is a rep for mental toughness, and like any muscle, it grows only under load.

Insight: Mental toughness is not genetic. It's calloused. And you build the callous by choosing discomfort when comfort is available.

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HAPPINESS

Definition: Not a destination. A frequency. Moments of alignment between your actions, your values, and your environment.

What it looks like: Laughter that catches you off guard. The sense of being exactly where you're supposed to be, doing exactly what you're supposed to be doing. Not permanent. Not constant. Flickering, intermittent, real.

Behavioural lever: Pursue alignment, not pleasure. Pleasure fades. Alignment sustains. When what you're doing matches what you believe in and who you're becoming, happiness shows up uninvited.

Insight: The happiest men I know aren't the richest or the leanest. They're the most aligned.

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FLOW

Definition: Total absorption in a task that matches your skill level with an appropriate challenge. Consciousness disappearing into the work.

What it looks like: Three hours passing in what feels like thirty minutes. No internal narration. No self-consciousness. Just the work.

Behavioural lever: Match challenge to skill. Too easy and you're bored. Too hard and you're anxious. The sweet spot, where the task is just beyond your current capability but within reach if you stretch, is where flow lives.

Insight: Flow is not magic. It's engineering. Set the conditions, and it arrives.



FOCUS

Definition: The ability to commit attention to one thing while the world offers a thousand distractions.

What it looks like: Single-tasking. Deep work. The state where time disappears because you're fully absorbed. Saying no to everything that isn't the priority.

Behavioural lever: Choose the one thing. Protect the environment. Phone off. Door shut. One tab open. Focus is not a talent. It's an environment design choice.

Insight: What you pay attention to becomes your reality. Choose your attention like you'd choose your investments.



A note before we leave this chapter.

These definitions will evolve. They'll sharpen, refine, change as I learn more and coach more and live more. This is Version 1.0.

But the principle underneath won't change. Every emotion is a signal. Every signal has a corresponding behaviour. When you match the right behaviour to the right signal, the emotion resolves.

That's the operating system. Everything else is commentary.

I need to tell you something about how I use this dictionary in my own life. Not in coaching sessions, where there's time to think and space to analyse. In the trenches. In the 4am moments. In the arguments with Kiera. In the failures that wake me up in a cold sweat.

I don't sit down with a checklist. I don't open this chapter and scroll through entries. The dictionary has to be internalised. It has to become reflex. The way a boxer doesn't think about ducking a punch. His body knows. The way a driver doesn't think about the clutch. His foot knows. The dictionary, practised enough times, becomes the same kind of reflex.

Something fires inside me. I feel the tightness, the heat, the constriction, whatever form it takes. And the question arrives automatically: what's the signal?

If it's tightness in my chest and a sense of being trapped: sadness. Create an option.

If it's a buzzing, scattered, can't-sit-still energy: anxiety. Decide something.

If it's a focused, specific dread about a single thing: fear. Do the thing.

If it's heat and the urge to shout: anger. Boundary violated. Name it and enforce it.

The identification takes seconds. The behaviour follows. The loop closes.

I'm not perfect at this. Some days I get it wrong. Some days I'm too deep in the emotion to step back and read it. Some days the old patterns win, the avoidance, the scrolling, the distraction. And then I come back. Not with shame. With curiosity. What happened? Which signal did I miss? Where did the loop break?

The operating system isn't a cure. It's a practice. Like the gym. Like calisthenics. Like anything worth getting good at. You don't master it once and then coast. You practise it daily. And some days you're sharp and the signals are clear and the behaviours flow. And some days you're a mess and the dictionary feels useless and you wonder if any of this works.

It works. Come back to it.

Keep this chapter close. Come back to it. Let it become a reflex. When something fires inside you, flip to the entry and ask: what's the signal, and what's the behaviour?

The answers are always here.



Chapter 6: Words as Power

Most men think words are just noise. Sounds that come out of your mouth or appear on a screen. Interchangeable. Approximate. Close enough.

They're wrong. And that wrongness is costing them.

Language shapes perception. Perception shapes behaviour. Behaviour shapes your life. The words you use to describe your internal experience are not trivial. They are the operating code of your entire existence.

When a man says "I'm depressed" and means "I'm sad," he gives himself the wrong instruction. Depression, in common usage, implies a medical condition. A chemical problem. Something that requires medication, therapy, maybe years of work. And for some people, it is exactly that.

But for many men, what they're actually experiencing is sadness. A lack of options. A feeling of being trapped. And the behavioural lever for sadness isn't medication. It's creating one option.

Label it wrong and you reach for the wrong tool. Like trying to fix a flat tyre with a hammer.

I see this constantly.

A man tells me he has anxiety. I ask him to describe it. He says he can't stop worrying about one specific thing. That's not anxiety, that's fear. Anxiety is too many things. Fear is one thing, imagined. The prescription for anxiety is "decide." The prescription for fear is "act now." If he follows the wrong prescription, he'll cut things from his life that don't need cutting and still lie awake worrying about the one thing he hasn't addressed.

Words matter. Precision matters.

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Think of it as a hierarchy.

At the bottom: noise. Raw sensation. Something happening in your body that you can't yet label. Tightness in your chest. Heat in your face. A pit in your stomach.

Next level: a word. You label the sensation. "I'm anxious." "I'm angry." "I'm stressed." This is where most people stop.

Next: a definition. What does that word actually mean? Not the dictionary definition, the operational definition. What is the emotion telling you?

Then: a behaviour. The specific action the emotion is requesting.

And finally: a skill. When you can reliably read the signal, translate it correctly, and execute the right behaviour, the whole sequence becomes a skill. Like driving. You don't think about the clutch anymore.

Noise, Word, Definition, Behaviour, Skill.

Most men are stuck at level two. A word without a definition. A label without an instruction. A map without any roads on it.

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There's a difference between "I am anxious" and "I feel anxious."

Tiny difference. Grammatical. Barely noticeable. And the gap between the two sentences is the difference between identity and information.

"I am anxious" is an identity statement. It says: anxiety is who I am. It's baked in. Permanent. When you say "I am" something, your brain files it under identity, which means it actively seeks evidence to confirm it and resists evidence that contradicts it.

"I feel anxious" is an information statement. It says: right now, in this moment, I'm experiencing a sensation called anxiety. It's temporary. Data, not destiny.

Same three letters removed. Completely different relationship to the experience.

I coach men to stop using "I am" when they describe their emotional states. You're not depressed. You feel depressed right now. You're not angry. You feel angry about this specific thing. The shift from identity to information is the first step toward agency.

Viktor Frankl, the psychiatrist who survived Auschwitz, said: "Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom."

Language is the space. The words you use to interpret what's happening to you are the space between the stimulus and the response. Get the words wrong and the response is wrong. Get the words right and the response is right.

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I'll end this chapter with a practical test. Something you can run tonight.

The next time you feel something, don't reach for the first word that comes to mind. Pause. Ask yourself: "What is this actually?"

If you feel a weight in your chest, don't say "I'm depressed." Ask: "Do I feel trapped? Do I lack options? Am I hiding something?"

If you feel scattered, don't say "I'm stressed." Ask: "Do I have too many things competing for my attention? Am I avoiding a decision?"

If you feel dread about tomorrow, don't say "I'm nervous." Ask: "Am I imagining a negative outcome? What exactly am I picturing?"

The practice of asking "what is this actually?" is the core skill of the entire operating system. Everything else builds on it.

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There's a phrase I use with clients that catches them off guard: "What do you mean?"

Not confrontational. Genuinely curious. A man says, "I'm stressed." I say, "What do you mean by that?"

And almost every time, the pause that follows is the most productive moment in the conversation. Because he's never been asked to define it. He's always been told to manage it. Reduce it. Breathe through it. But nobody's ever said: "Before we manage it, can we figure out what it actually is?"

And when he tries to define it, the emotion reclassifies itself. "I'm stressed" becomes "I'm overwhelmed" becomes "I have three deadlines and I can't figure out which one to do first" becomes anxiety, too many options, which has a clear behavioural lever: pick one, do it, then do the next.

The word "stressed" is useless. It contains no instruction. It's a bucket term that people throw everything into. But "too many options without a decision" is precise. And precision creates action.



There's a metaphor I keep coming back to. A river.

Heraclitus said you can't step into the same river twice. The water that was there a moment ago has moved on. New water has arrived. The river looks the same but it's completely different.

Language is like that. The words look the same but the meaning shifts. "Anxiety" in a clinical setting means something very different from "anxiety" on a podcast. "Depression" in a psychiatrist's office means something very different from "depression" between two mates at the pub.

But we treat the words as fixed. We hear "I'm anxious" and we apply one meaning, usually the scariest one, the one that implies something is wrong with the person rather than wrong with their situation.

What if we used the word differently? What if anxiety wasn't a diagnosis but a data point? What if it simply meant: this person has too many open loops and needs to close some?

I'm not dismissing clinical anxiety. Some people need medication and therapy and professional support. But many men aren't clinically anxious. They're operationally overwhelmed. And the difference between those two things is the difference between a medical condition and a behavioural problem. One requires a doctor. The other requires a decision.



Truth and approximation are not the same thing.

Most of what we say to each other is approximate. "How are you?" "Fine." "Good day?" "Yeah, not bad." We live in approximation. And for small talk, that's fine.

But when it comes to your internal experience, the thing that determines your behaviour, your decisions, your relationships, and ultimately your life, approximation will kill you. Slowly, maybe. But it'll kill you.

Approximate language leads to approximate understanding. Approximate understanding leads to approximate action. And approximate action leads to approximate results. Which means you spend your life getting approximately what you want, which isn't what you want at all.

The man who says "I need to get my life together" is approximating. The man who says "I need to decide between staying in this job or starting my business, and I've been avoiding the decision for six months because I'm afraid of the wrong choice" is being precise. And precision is the only thing that produces change.

I learned this in sales. The clients who gave me vague problems got vague solutions and vague results. The clients who could articulate exactly what was wrong, exactly what they felt, exactly where they were stuck, those clients improved. Fast.

Precision isn't natural. Your brain prefers the vague because the vague is safer. If you never define the problem clearly, you never have to face the solution. Vagueness is a defence mechanism.



Let me give you an example of how words operate as power in a way most people miss entirely.

There's a metaphor I use in coaching. Your body doesn't interpret emotions with words. It interprets them with sensations. Tightness. Heat. Heaviness. Nausea. Buzzing. These are the raw data, the noise level in the hierarchy. And the word you choose to describe those sensations determines everything that follows.

Two men feel the same thing before a public speech. Same heart rate, same sweating, same stomach flip. One says: "I'm terrified." The other says: "I'm excited."

Same physiology. Different word. Completely different experience. The terrified man wants to run. The excited man wants to perform. The word created the reality.

This isn't semantic gymnastics. This is the actual mechanism by which language shapes behaviour. The word is the fork in the road. And most people take the fork without realising there was a choice.

The Behavioural Dictionary is, in the most literal sense, a language pack. An upgrade to the operating language your brain uses to interpret its own signals. Install the upgrade and the interpretations change. The behaviours change. The outcomes change.

It starts with a word.

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PART THREE: THE 5 B'S

The 5 B's were invented on a run. I should tell you that before we go any further, because the origin story matters and it's not very dignified.

I was running through Bath. Early morning, probably 6am, still dark. I had Hormozi's podcast in my ears. He was talking about frameworks, about how the best ideas can be compressed into structures simple enough to remember without writing them down. And my brain started playing a game. B-words.

Business. That was obvious. Behaviour. Brotherhood. Belonging, that felt right, that felt like the one that made people stick around. And then I was trying to find one for fitness, for the physical side, for the thing that started everything. Body. Body wasn't even named yet when I started the game. It arrived mid-stride, somewhere near the canal path, while I was out of breath and probably running too fast because I always run too fast when I'm thinking.

The whole framework assembled itself in about fifteen minutes. Five B's. Five domains. Five things a man needs to get right, in roughly that order. I said them out loud, gasping, between breaths, to nobody, and by the time I got home I'd mapped the structure of this entire section of the book without meaning to.

That's how the best ideas arrive. Not at a desk. Not in a meeting. On a road, moving, with your brain half-occupied by the effort of keeping your legs going.

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Chapter 7: Body — Control Yourself

Before anything else, there is the body.

Not because the body is the most important thing. Because the body is the first thing. The first feedback loop between you and the world. The first domain where you can test whether your will actually produces results. The first place where you learn the most critical lesson of your life: what I do matters.

I was nineteen stone when my parents dragged me to the gym. My mum every Saturday. My dad whenever he could after his postal rounds. They refused to give up on me even when I'd given up on myself. I couldn't bench the bar. I couldn't do a single pull-up. I got winded walking up the stairs. My body was a monument to years of choosing the easy option. The takeaway over the kitchen, the sofa over the park, the screen over the sun. It was the physical evidence of every decision I'd made and every decision I'd avoided.

And that was the first honest mirror I ever looked into.

Because your body doesn't lie to you. People lie. Your ego lies. Your excuses lie. But the mirror and the barbell and the scale and the pull-up bar are honest. They show you exactly where you are, right now, with no spin and no negotiation.

When my dad stood in the doorway and said "get up, we're going," he didn't know he was starting a chain reaction that would rewire my entire operating system. He thought he was doing what he always did — providing. The same way he provided by walking through the rain at 3am to deliver post. The same way he provided by teaching me push-ups and every sport I ever played. What he was actually doing was placing me in the one environment where the link between effort and result is immediate and undeniable.

You lift the weight or you don't. You complete the rep or you fail. There is no argument, no excuse, no narrative that changes the physics. Gravity doesn't care about your backstory.

I was terrible. For months. The kind of terrible where other people in the gym look away out of pity. My form was wrong, my breathing was wrong, my programming was nonexistent. I'd do random machines in random order for random amounts of time and call it a workout.

But I kept going. Not because I was disciplined. Because my parents kept showing up for me, kept refusing to let me quit, and because, somewhere in the chaos of those early sessions, something was happening that I couldn't name.

My body was responding. Slowly. Barely perceptibly. But responding. A rep I couldn't do last week, I could do this week. A weight that had been impossible became merely difficult. The walk to the gym got shorter. Not literally. But it felt that way.

And each of those tiny changes was a receipt.

A receipt of control. Evidence that what I did mattered. Proof that the world responded to my effort. That cause and effect still applied to my life, even though I'd spent years believing it didn't.

This is what the body teaches you before anything else: you are not a passenger. You are not riding a horse you can't control. You have reins. And when you pull them, something happens.

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The gym is the simplest possible version of the behaviour loop.

Action, Feedback, Adjustment, Repeat.

You squat. The mirror shows your form. Your coach says "knees out." You adjust. You squat again. Better. The feedback is instant. The loop is tight. The learning is fast.

Compare that to the rest of life. You make a business decision. The results show up in three months. The loop is so loose that most people can't connect their actions to the outcomes.

But the gym? Two-second feedback loop. Every rep tells you something. Every session confirms or denies your hypothesis. You become a scientist of your own body.

That's why I tell every man who walks into Cali Unity: "Your body is your first laboratory." Before you try to fix your mindset, your relationships, your career, your finances, fix this. Not because the body is the most important thing. Because it's the fastest place to learn the skill of change.



Movement precedes mindset. I'm going to say that again because it's the one insight I'd tattoo on the inside of my own eyelids if I could.

Movement precedes mindset.

You don't think your way into a new way of acting. You act your way into a new way of thinking. The body leads. The mind follows. And the gap between feeling like shit and feeling okay is, in almost every case, about thirty minutes of physical effort.

I've seen this hundreds of times. A man walks into the gym looking like the world is ending. Shoulders forward, eyes down, jaw clenched. He's had a terrible day.

But he's here. So he warms up. And the warm-up is grudging and half-arsed. But then the first working set hits. And the weight requires something of him, requires his attention, his effort, his presence, and for thirty seconds he's not thinking about his boss or his girlfriend or his bank account. He's thinking about the barbell.

And by the end of the session, sixty minutes later, he's a different man. Not because his problems are solved. They're not. But something internal has shifted. The chemistry is different.

He walked in feeling powerless. He walks out having proven, physically, that he can do hard things. And that proof changes the way he approaches everything else.

That's the mechanism. Not the calories burned or the muscle built. The proof of agency. The evidence of control. The receipt.



Let me tell you about the first time my body did something my mind didn't think was possible.

Four months into training. I couldn't do a pull-up. Not one. I'd hang from the bar like a sack of rice and try to pull and nothing happened. My arms shook. My face went red. My feet stayed exactly where they were.

I tried negatives. Jumping to the top and lowering myself as slowly as I could. Which at first was not slow at all. More like a controlled fall. But I did them. Every session. Three sets of whatever I could manage.

Weeks passed. The negatives got slower. Five seconds. Eight. Ten.

And one day, I grabbed the bar, pulled, and my chin went over the top.

One rep.

One shitty, grinding, form-destroyed rep that probably looked embarrassing from the outside. But from the inside, from the perspective of a man who had spent eighteen years believing his body was a prison, that single rep was a revolution.

My mind had said: you can't do this. You're too heavy. You're too weak.

And the body said: watch me.

One rep. The distance between "I can't" and "I can" was exactly one rep. Not a year of therapy. Not a spiritual awakening. Not a life-changing conversation. One physical act that took approximately three seconds and falsified a belief I'd held for eighteen years.

Three seconds. Eighteen years of belief. Demolished.

That's what the body teaches. Not strength. Not muscle. Not aesthetics. Agency. The visceral, physical proof that what you do changes what you can do. That effort accumulates. That the impossible is just the not-yet-achieved.

I carried that rep like a trophy for weeks. Thought about it at night. Thought about it in the morning. It wasn't the physical achievement. It was the philosophical one. My mind had made a prediction: you can't do this. And the body had falsified the prediction. Which meant: how many other predictions is my mind making that are also wrong? How many things am I telling myself I can't do that I actually can?

That question changed everything. It's the question I still ask myself every morning in Bali at 4am when the alarm goes off and the darkness outside the window says stay in bed. Can I? My mind says no. My body says: we've been through this. We both know the answer. Get up.

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I now train calisthenics at a level that eighteen-year-old me would've dismissed as fantasy. Planche work. Front lever progressions. Muscle-ups on rings. Handstand practice. Skills that require years of consistent training. I went from obese to running ultramarathons, to powerlifting, to calisthenics, to teaching others, and now I'm about to run 1,000 miles across the United Kingdom.

Every single one of those things started with a single rep I could barely manage.

Progressive overload applies to everything. To business, start with one client, then three, then ten. To relationships, start with one honest conversation, then another. To courage, start with one small risk, then a slightly bigger one.

The body teaches this through experience, not theory. You live it. You feel the weight get heavier. You feel your capacity expand. And that lived experience rewires your relationship with effort in every other area of your life.

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Discipline is a funny word. Most people hear it and think punishment. Think restriction. Think gritted teeth and forced compliance and the crushing of desire under the weight of obligation.

That's not what discipline is.

Discipline is the act of keeping a promise to yourself. That's it. You said you'd train today. You train today. You said you'd eat protein first. You eat protein first. You said you'd go to bed by ten. You go to bed by ten.

Each kept promise builds something. Not muscle, though that comes too. Something else. A relationship with yourself. Trust. Self-trust. The slowly accumulating belief that you are a person who does what they say they'll do.

And that belief, compounded over months and years, is what people call confidence. But confidence isn't a character trait. It's a score. A running tally. Every kept promise adds a point. Every broken promise subtracts one. Your current confidence level is the sum of that equation.

The gym is where the equation starts. Because the gym is the simplest domain in which to make and keep promises. "I will train three times this week." Do it. Score goes up. Don't. Score goes down.

Nobody needs to motivate you to keep going. You just need to watch the score. And protect it. And refuse to let it drop.



I want to address something that might stop some men from starting. The body shame.

Walking into a gym for the first time when you're overweight, when you've never lifted anything heavier than a remote control, that takes more courage than most fit people will ever understand. The fit bloke doing bicep curls in the mirror has no idea what it cost you to walk through that door.

I know because I was you. Nineteen stone, soaking wet, looking at the equipment like it was designed for a species I didn't belong to. Every mirror was an enemy. Every fit person was a jury.

And here's what nobody tells you: nobody is watching. Nobody cares. The fit bloke with the bicep curls is looking at himself, not you. The woman on the treadmill is thinking about her own problems.

And the few people who ARE looking? They're looking with respect. Because they remember what it felt like to walk in for the first time. And every single one of them, if you asked, would say the same thing: "Fair play, mate. Welcome."



Your body is not separate from your mind. The split between physical and mental health is a fiction invented by a healthcare system that needed to put different departments in different buildings.

When you don't sleep, your emotional regulation collapses. When you eat poorly, your mood deteriorates. When you don't move, your anxiety increases.

Antonio Damasio proved this decades ago. He studied patients with damage to the part of the brain that connects emotion to decision-making. These patients could reason perfectly. IQ intact. Logic intact. But they couldn't decide. They'd sit in restaurants for an hour trying to choose between salads.

Descartes said "I think, therefore I am." He was wrong. It's closer to: I feel, therefore I decide. Without feeling, thinking produces nothing. The emotions aren't noise in the decision-making system. They are the system.

Taking care of your body is not vanity. It's the single most reliable way to take care of your mind. The body responds to input predictably. Sleep more: feel better. Eat well: think clearer. Train hard: regulate easier.

The body doesn't lie, and it doesn't negotiate.

The body is the first B. Not because it's the most important. Because it's the foundation that makes the rest possible.

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Chapter 8: Belonging — Control Your Environment

Humans don't become themselves in isolation. They become themselves in relation to other people. And if you get the people wrong, you'll get yourself wrong.

This isn't a theory. It's biology. It's the most replicated finding in the history of psychology. Who you surround yourself with determines who you become. Your brain is a social organ that adapts, constantly, unconsciously, automatically, to the norms, behaviours, and expectations of your tribe.

You don't decide to become like the people around you. You just do. The accent shifts. The vocabulary adjusts. The priorities realign. You barely notice it happening because the process is so gradual and so biological that it feels like your own choice.

It's not.

Or rather, it is, but the choice isn't "do I adapt to my tribe?" That happens regardless. The choice is which tribe you put yourself in.

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At eighteen, my tribe was a group of lads who stayed up until 4am playing video games, eating takeaway, and slowly falling apart. None of us said we were falling apart. We were having fun. But the trajectory was downward, and I was descending with it, matching the ambient level of effort and ambition and health because that was what the group modelled.

Nobody in that group trained. So I didn't train. Nobody talked about feelings. So I didn't talk about feelings. Nobody had plans or goals or any sense that tomorrow could be different from today. So I didn't either.

Then I started going to the gym. And slowly, my tribe changed.

The guys at the gym had different norms. They showed up early. They trained hard. They tracked their food. They had goals. And because I was around them, the specificity rubbed off. Not because they lectured me. Because behaviour is contagious and the strongest signal in any room is the behaviour of the people in it.

Within six months, I was training consistently. Within a year, I was eating better. Within two years, I was coaching. Not because I had a moment of inspiration. Because my environment changed, and the changed environment changed my behaviour, and the changed behaviour changed my identity.

I didn't choose any of this consciously. That's the point. I didn't sit down with a journal and write "I'm going to change my peer group to improve my outcomes." I just went to the gym. And the gym had different people. And the different people had different norms. And the norms reshaped me without my permission or awareness.

Which is terrifying when you think about it. Because it means the wrong environment is doing the same thing in the other direction. Right now. To men who don't know it's happening. The group of lads who drink every Friday are not just drinking. They're normalising a behaviour that will compound over years. The colleague who moans about management every lunchtime isn't just venting. He's installing a belief system in everyone who listens.

Environment is not neutral. It's directional. It's shaping you right now, in real time, toward something. The question is: toward what? And did you choose it?

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Cali Unity is the proof of this theory at scale.

When Kiera and I started the gym, we didn't have a business plan. We had a tree branch and some rings and a belief that people needed somewhere to go. But what we accidentally built, what grew out of those Saturday park sessions and into a physical space, was a belonging machine.

A place where the ambient behaviour was movement, effort, honesty, and showing up. Where the norms were: you train, you struggle, you ask for help, you help others, you come back tomorrow. A place where men who had never spoken about their inner lives found themselves

speaking, not because someone told them to, but because the tribe had made speaking normal.



The man in the park wasn't saved by calisthenics. He was saved by belonging. By having somewhere to go every week where people knew his face, where his absence would be noticed, where his presence mattered even if nobody said it out loud.

Isolation doesn't just make people lonely. Isolation distorts reality. When you're alone, truly alone, your inner narrative runs unchecked. The negative thoughts loop without interruption. The shame magnifies. The fear inflates. And there's no corrective input. No one to say, "Mate, that's not as bad as you think."

Isolation is a hall of mirrors. Every reflection is you, distorted, repeated, amplified.

Community is the antidote. Not a perfect community. Not a community of saints. A community of people who show up.



"I become the men I stand beside."

I wrote that on a whiteboard in the gym two years ago and I've never wiped it off.

The single highest-leverage decision you can make is: who do you stand beside? Not who do you follow on Instagram. Not who do you admire from a distance. Who do you stand next to, physically, regularly, in a context where real behaviour is visible?

Because that's the input. And the output, your health, your mindset, your ambition, follows directly from it.



I want to tell you about the Wednesday 6am sessions.

Every Wednesday morning. Six o'clock. Dark outside, cold, often raining because this is Bath and rain is the default setting. We meet. We train. We suffer together.

Nobody has to come. No attendance record. No penalty. Free. Voluntary. Completely optional.

And people come. Every week. Because at 5:30am, when the alarm goes off and the bed is warm and the world outside is black and wet and hostile, there's a thought that overrides the comfort. "The lads will be there. I said I'd show up."

That's belonging. Not a membership fee. Not a contract. A pull.

The Wednesday sessions have produced more breakthroughs than any programme I've ever written. Not because the training is special. Because the context is. Men train harder when men are watching. Men dig deeper when the group standard demands it. Men show up when the alternative is letting down people who showed up for them.

And after the session, when we're standing around in the car park, steam rising off our bodies, breath visible in the cold, that's when the real work happens. The conversations that wouldn't happen in any other context. The admission that things aren't great at home. The vulnerability that only exists when you've just done something hard together and the pretence has been sweated out.

Men connect side-by-side. Working, sweating, running, lifting. That's when the walls come down. Not across a coffee table in a therapist's office. Not face-to-face, forced, staged. Shoulder to shoulder, doing something hard, where the talking happens as a byproduct and the honesty arrives without being requested.

That's why the gym works. That's why the park worked. That's why the run will work. You put men next to each other, give them something to carry, and the connection takes care of itself.

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A community that only validates you is useless. A group that tells you everything you do is fine, that your choices are always valid, will keep you exactly where you are.

The communities that change people hold you to a standard. Gently, sometimes. Firmly, often. But consistently. The people around you expect effort. They expect growth. They notice when you backslide and they say something about it.

Cali Unity works because it's both. Warm and welcoming and inclusive and also: get on the bar. Do the reps. Show up tomorrow. We'll help you, but we won't carry you. You have to move your own body. We're just here to make sure you don't do it alone.

Support and standard. That combination is the engine of belonging. Either one alone is incomplete. Support without standard is a comfort zone. Standard without support is a pressure cooker. Together, they create an environment where growth is inevitable.



Social isolation is as dangerous as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day. Loneliness increases the risk of premature death by 26%. The single strongest predictor of recovery from mental illness is social support.

Men are dying from loneliness. Not all of them by suicide. Some by heart disease. Some by addiction. Some by the slow deterioration that comes from having nobody who knows the truth about how they're doing.

And the fix is absurdly simple. Find your group. Show up. Regularly. Let the proximity do the work.



The practical application of belonging is embarrassingly simple.

Find a group that does the thing you want to do. Go there. Regularly. Even if it's awkward. Even if you feel like an outsider. Even if the first session is uncomfortable and you want to leave halfway through. Go back. Again. And again.

Not because the group is magic. Because proximity does the work. Being near people who train makes training normal. Being near people who eat well makes eating well normal. Being near people who are honest about their struggles makes honesty normal.

You don't need to change your character. You need to change your coordinates. Place yourself next to the right people and the right behaviour becomes the path of least resistance.

And the right group makes the wrong behaviour harder. That's equally important. If your Saturday mornings are spent at the gym with people who know your name and expect you to show up, then staying in bed until noon becomes socially costly. Not because anyone punishes you. Because absence is visible. And visibility creates accountability.

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Kiera. My partner. The person who threw the rings over the tree with me and has been there for every single step of what followed.

I am not the self-made man the origin story might suggest. I'm the man who was lucky enough to find someone who believed in the same thing and was willing to build it with me.

Belonging isn't just about groups. It's about the person who stands closest to you. The one who sees you without the performance.

If you have that person, protect the relationship like it's the most important thing in your life. Because it probably is.

If you don't have that person yet, start with the group. The group is where those people are found.

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One more thing about belonging, and it's personal to me.

Loneliness isn't just an emotion. It's a multiplier. It takes every emotional signal and turns the volume up. Not slightly. Dramatically. The same setback that a connected man processes in an afternoon, a lonely man will carry for weeks.

When you're lonely, sadness hits harder because there's no one to create options with. Anxiety escalates because there's no one to help you decide. Fear grows because there's no one to act alongside. Anger turns inward because there's no one to express it to.

And men are lonelier than they've ever been. Male friendships have declined consistently for decades. Social media creates the illusion of connection while providing none of its benefits. The pandemic accelerated the trend by years.

The behavioural lever for loneliness is the same as the lever for sadness, applied socially: create one connection. Not a network. Not a community. One conversation with one person where you say one real thing. That's the minimum effective dose.

This is why Belonging is the second B. Because without it, every other B is harder. The body heals slower in isolation. Beliefs go unchallenged. Behaviour lacks the social reinforcement that makes it stick. Building without a tribe is grinding without a safety net.

Find one person. Say one real thing. Start there.

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Let me tell you about a man I'll call Marcus because that's not his name and the details are changed enough to protect him but true enough to matter.

Marcus was a software developer. Thirty-four. Worked from home. Hadn't left his flat for more than groceries in about eight months. He told me this on his consultation call, matter-of-factly, like it was a weather report. "Yeah, I just sort of stopped going out."

His belief system was sophisticated. He'd thought about it. People are exhausting. Social situations are performative. He was an introvert. He needed his space. The arguments were polished. Like they'd been rehearsed in the mirror.

Underneath all of them was one unexamined belief: "I don't belong anywhere."

That belief had been installed in childhood and reinforced by a decade of social experiences interpreted through that lens. Every awkward interaction confirmed it. Every friendship that faded confirmed it. A closed loop with no exit.

So we didn't start with belief. We started with body.

Come to the gym. Just once. You don't have to talk to anyone. Just move. Put your body in a room with other bodies.

He came. He was terrified. He told me later that he sat in his car for twenty minutes before walking in. But he walked in.

And here's what happened, slowly, over weeks: the belief started to crack. Not because anyone said anything profound. But because his body was in a room with other bodies, and the other bodies didn't reject him, and the absence of rejection was, for Marcus, revolutionary evidence.

Week four, someone said "nice work" after a set. Week six, he stayed for a coffee after the session. Week ten, he came to a Wednesday 6am. Week fourteen, he told me Cali Unity was the only place he felt normal.

We didn't change his belief directly. We changed his environment, which gave his body new data, which gave his brain new evidence, which updated the belief automatically.

Body, Belonging, Belief. The order matters.

Marcus trains four times a week now. He coaches beginners on Saturdays. His flat is still his base but it's not his prison anymore. And the belief, "I don't belong anywhere," hasn't been argued with or talked through in therapy. It's been overwritten. By a thousand small experiences that said otherwise.

That's how belief changes. Not through argument. Through evidence. And the body is the fastest evidence generator you have.

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Chapter 9: Belief — Control Your Narrative

Your beliefs are running your life and you didn't write most of them.

The story you tell yourself about who you are, your identity, your capabilities, your worth, your future, was largely installed by other people. Parents, teachers, peers, culture, the internet. And now you're running on that code. Making decisions based on beliefs you've never examined.

Identity is a story. Not a fixed truth. Not a permanent characteristic. A story that you tell yourself repeatedly until it feels like a fact. "I'm not a morning person." "I'm not good with money." "I'm not the kind of guy who goes to the gym." These aren't descriptions of reality. They're beliefs that you've repeated so many times that they've hardened into certainty.

And certainty, false certainty, unexamined certainty, is the most dangerous thing in the world.

"I'm not confident" becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. You avoid situations that require confidence. The avoidance gives you no evidence of confidence. The lack of evidence confirms the belief. And around you go, in a loop so tight it feels like identity.

But it's not identity. It's software. And software can be updated.

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There's an old Taoist story about a farmer.

A boy gets a horse. The village says: good fortune. The farmer says: we'll see.

The boy falls off the horse and breaks his leg. The village says: bad fortune. The farmer says: we'll see.

The army comes through, conscripting every young man for war. They pass the boy because of his broken leg. The village says: good fortune.

The farmer says: we'll see.

Steve Jobs said you can only connect the dots looking backwards. Shakespeare wrote "nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." The Stoics built an entire philosophy on the idea that we don't control events, only our interpretation of them.

The horse story says the same thing, but simpler. You don't know. You never know. The thing you're calling a disaster might be the best thing that ever happened to you, but you won't see it for years. And the thing you're celebrating might be setting up a fall you can't imagine yet.

We'll see.

Taken to its extreme, you only truly know at the deathbed. And by then you're dead. Which means we spend our entire lives interpreting events as good or bad when we literally cannot know until the story is finished. And the story is never finished until we are.

So what do you do with that? You stop labelling events and start using them. Not "this is bad" or "this is good." Instead: "What would it take for this to be the best thing that's ever happened to me?"

That's not denial. That's not putting a positive spin on tragedy. That's a genuine engineering question. Given this event, this reality, this thing that has happened and cannot be unhappened, what is the most useful thing I can build from the wreckage?

The answer is always there. Always. Sometimes it's obvious. Sometimes it takes years to see. But it's always there.

Nothing is good or bad, but thinking makes it so. Shakespeare put it in Hamlet's mouth four hundred years ago. The Stoics said the same thing two thousand years ago. The Taoists said it even earlier. And they were all saying the same thing: the event is neutral. The interpretation is everything. And the interpretation is yours.

I've lived this. The nihilism that nearly killed me became the foundation of the operating system that now helps other men. The addictions that destroyed my teenage years became the superpowers I coach with. The hard times my family went through taught me more about blame, power, love, and forgiveness than any book ever could.

Was any of it good? Was it bad?

We'll see.

The best therapy question I've ever heard is this: "What would it take for this to be the best thing that's ever happened to me?"

Not "look on the bright side." Not "everything happens for a reason." Something harder. A genuine search for the interpretation that produces the most useful behaviour.

The event is fixed. It happened. The interpretation is yours. And the interpretation determines everything that follows.

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I was a nihilist. That was my software. Nothing matters. People suck. The world is meaningless.

That belief controlled everything. My eating. My training. My relationships, my ambition, my willingness to try. Why bother getting in shape if we all die? Why bother building something if it'll all collapse?

The nihilism wasn't a mood. It was an operating system. Every decision ran through it.

And I had evidence for it. That's what made it so hard to shake. I could point to the stress in my house. To friends who'd let me down. The evidence was real. The interpretation was the problem.

Because the evidence for the opposite story was equally real. Parents who, despite everything they were going through, believed in me enough to drag me to the gym every week. A dad who got up at 3am to deliver post and still had the energy to stand in my doorway and make me move. A mum who took me to the doctors, weighed me, changed my environment, did everything in her power. Friends who showed up, imperfectly, but showed up.

Both stories were available. Both had evidence. I was choosing one and ignoring the other. A habit of interpretation. A default setting that could be changed.

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James Clear writes about identity-based habits. The idea: most people try to change their behaviour directly, "I'll go to the gym three times this week." And that works for a while. But the underlying identity hasn't changed. You're a person-who-doesn't-go-to-the-gym forcing themselves to go to the gym. The identity and the behaviour are in conflict. And in the long run, identity always wins.

The alternative: change the identity first. "I'm a person who trains." Then the behaviour follows naturally.

But how? Not through affirmation. Not through sticking quotes on your mirror.

Through action. Every action is a vote for the person you want to become. Go to the gym: one vote for "I'm someone who trains." Eat protein first: one vote for "I'm someone who takes their health seriously." Show up when you said you would: one vote for "I'm someone who keeps promises."

Cast enough votes and the election is won. The identity shifts. Not all at once. Gradually. Vote by vote. Rep by rep. Until one day you realise you're not forcing yourself to train anymore. You're just training. Because that's who you are.

This is how I went from nihilist to builder. Not through a single revelation. Through thousands of tiny actions that accumulated until the weight of evidence overwhelmed the old story.

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It's not Be-Do-Have. It's Do-Be-Have.

Most people operate on: "Once I AM confident, I'll DO the hard things, and I'll HAVE the results." They wait to become before they act. They wait for the feeling of confidence before they take the risk.

They'll wait forever.

You DO the thing. Show up, take the risk, make the call. Then you BECOME the person who does that thing. Then you HAVE the results.

Action precedes identity. Not the other way around.



There's a popular concept, manifestation, that most serious people dismiss. And I get why. The way it's usually presented is magical thinking. Visualise what you want. Believe hard enough. The universe will deliver.

That's bollocks. The universe doesn't know you exist and it definitely doesn't have a postal service.

But there's a mechanism underneath the bollocks that's real. The Reticular Activating System, RAS. A network of neurons in your brainstem that filters the flood of sensory information hitting your brain every second and decides what reaches your conscious awareness.

The RAS is programmed by what you focus on.

You're in a crowded room. Hundreds of conversations happening simultaneously. You can't hear any of them. Then someone across the room says your name. Instantly, your attention snaps to them. You heard your name through the noise because your RAS is permanently tuned to it.

Now apply that to goals. If you spend time thinking about what you want, visualising it, planning it, writing about it, your RAS starts filtering for information relevant to that goal. Opportunities you would've missed, you now notice. Resources that were always there become visible.

That's not magic. That's neurology. And it's the mechanism that makes "believe it before you see it" work. Not because belief conjures reality, but because belief programs the filter that determines which parts of reality you see.

So when I say "control your narrative," I don't mean lie to yourself. I mean: examine the beliefs you're running. Ask where they came from. Test them against evidence. And if they're not serving you, update them. Deliberately. Through action. Through casting votes for the person you're becoming instead of the person you were told you are.



I want to tell you about a belief that nearly stopped me from building Cali Unity.

"I'm not qualified."

That sentence ran like a screensaver in my head for months. Every time someone asked me to coach them. Every time I thought about opening the gym. "I'm not qualified." And the sentence felt absolutely true, because I didn't have a formal coaching qualification at the time.

But the belief was doing a specific job. It was protecting me from failure. If I never try, I can never fail. If I never claim to be a coach, I can never be exposed as a fraud. The belief was a safety mechanism disguised as humility.

I see this in men constantly. "I'm not ready." "I don't know enough." "I need another qualification." "I need to get in better shape first." Each one is a protective belief. A reason not to act that sounds reasonable but is actually fear wearing a sensible jacket.

The test is simple. Ask: "If I knew I couldn't fail, would I still need this qualification?" If the answer is no, the belief is a shield, not a truth.

I started coaching without a qualification. I was honest about it. "I don't have a certificate. I do have five hundred hours of training and a hundred conversations that taught me what works." And people responded to the honesty. Because honesty is its own qualification.

I've since gotten qualified. Active IQ Level 2 and Level 3. Because qualifications matter. But the belief that I needed the qualification before I could start, that belief, unexamined, would've killed Cali Unity in the womb.

How many things in your life are being killed by a belief you've never examined?

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Let me give you one more practical tool for belief change. Because theory without application is just entertainment.

There's a concept I call belief auditing. Once a month, or whenever things feel stuck, sit down with a piece of paper and write the sentences you say about yourself most often. The scripts that run on loop. "I'm not good enough." "I'm not smart enough." "I don't have what it takes."

"People like me don't get to do things like that."

Write them down. All of them. Don't filter.

Then next to each one, write the source. Where did this belief come from? Who said it first? A parent? A teacher? A bully? A coach who gave up on you? An ex who told you something in anger that you filed away as fact?

Most of the time, the source surprises people. The belief they thought was a fact turns out to be one sentence, said once, by one person, in one moment, that they never questioned. And that unquestioned sentence has been running their operating system for ten or twenty years.

You wouldn't run your business on software from 2004. Why are you running your life on beliefs from year eight?

Update the software. Test the beliefs against current evidence. If they don't hold up, if the evidence of your actual life contradicts the belief, delete it. Install a new one. Through action. Through evidence. Through doing the thing the old belief said you couldn't do.

That's belief auditing. It takes twenty minutes. And it might surface the belief that's been holding you in place for the last decade.

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Chapter 10: Behaviour — Control Your Actions

Every meaningful change in my life came from the same place: a conversation.

Not a book. Not a podcast. Not a vision board or a journal prompt. A conversation. Between me and another person, where something was said that shifted the way I saw myself or my situation, and that shift produced a behaviour that produced a result.

That's why sales changed my life.

I know that sounds bizarre. Sales. The word conjures up sleazy car dealers and LinkedIn robots with too many emojis.

But the sales I'm talking about, the kind I learned over years of coaching consultations, is the purest form of behaviour change I've ever encountered.

Here's what a sales conversation actually is, stripped of everything: one person helping another person see something they can't see on their own, and then helping them take an action they wouldn't take alone.

That's coaching. That's therapy. That's parenting. That's leadership. That's friendship, when it's working properly.

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I've sat across from men and heard every version of the same thing.

"I don't have time." Avoidance. "I can't afford it." Lack of options. Sadness by another name. "I need to think about it." Too many options. Anxiety wearing a sensible disguise. "My partner wouldn't like it." Externalised fear. "I've tried before and it didn't work." Regret masquerading as logic.

Every objection is an emotion disguised as a reason.

"I don't have time" sounds like a scheduling problem. It's not. Nobody who wants something badly enough lacks time. You found time to scroll Instagram for two hours yesterday. Time exists. What doesn't exist is the emotional permission to prioritise yourself. And that's a shame problem, not a calendar problem.



Action ends anxiety. The moment of highest anxiety is always the moment before the action. The second before you press send. The second before you walk into the room. That second is where anxiety lives, in the gap between intention and action.

And then you act. And the anxiety drops. Not gradually. Immediately. Because anxiety is a future-tense emotion and action puts you in the present tense.

This is the fundamental insight about behaviour: behaviour is the only thing you actually control. You can't control your emotions directly. You can't control other people. You can control exactly one thing: what you do.

And what you do determines every outcome in your life.



Every person you meet is trying to control their inner state.

Every one. The angry customer. The resistant client. The passive-aggressive colleague. The man who won't talk about his feelings. The teenager scrolling endlessly.

All of them are engaged in the same project: managing the way they feel. The methods vary. The sophistication varies. But the project is universal.

When you see people through that lens, not as difficult or broken or wrong, but as humans trying to regulate their internal experience with the tools they have, everything changes. Empathy becomes natural. Patience becomes easier.

Nobody is actually bad. They're just ignorant.

I know that sounds naive. Or arrogant. Or like something a twenty-seven-year-old would say who hasn't seen enough of the world yet.

But I mean it precisely. You can't both hate and understand someone at the same time. Try it. Think of someone you despise. Now imagine seeing their entire life, from birth, every moment, every influence, every wound, every choice, every consequence. Every time they were hurt. Every time they learned the wrong lesson from the right experience. Every time the world taught them something that was wrong and they believed it because they had no reason not to.

If you could see all of that, would you still hate them? Or would you understand them? Not approve. Not forgive. Understand. See how the inputs produced the outputs. See the logic, even the terrible logic, that connects who they are to what happened to them.

I think you'd understand. And I think understanding and hatred can't coexist.

Which means: nobody is evil. There are people doing terrible things. But the terrible things come from narrow windows. Compressed perspectives where their own pain is all they can see. They can't see how their behaviour ripples outward, how it damages the people around them, how it compounds into suffering they'll never witness. Not because they don't care. Because they can't see it. The window is too narrow.

Widen the window and the behaviour changes.

This is why I teach. Not to punish ignorance. To replace it with understanding. Because understanding changes behaviour in ways that punishment never will.

This is why the operating system works. Not because it makes you smarter. Because it widens the window. It gives you a broader view of your own internal world, which gives you a broader view of other people's, which gives you a broader view of the entire mess of being alive.

Ignorance is the enemy. Not people. Not circumstances. Not the universe. Ignorance. And the antidote to ignorance is exactly what you're holding in your hands. A wider window. A better map. A set of definitions that turns confusion into clarity and clarity into action.

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I've made thousands of cold calls. I've walked into rooms where I knew nobody. I've had conversations where I could feel my heart rate spiking and my voice threatening to crack. Every time, the worst part was the second before. Every time, the thing itself was fine.

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There's a concept I need to name. Behavioural volume.

The number of conscious behavioural choices you make per day determines the speed of your transformation.

Most people make very few conscious choices in a day. They run on autopilot. Wake up the same way, eat the same things, take the same route, respond to the same triggers with the same reactions.

The man who's changing, the man who's actively running the operating system, makes twenty or thirty conscious choices a day. He notices the emotion. He names it. He selects the behaviour. He acts. He observes the result. Each of those moments is a conscious choice. And each conscious choice is a training rep.

More reps. Faster improvement. Same equation as the gym.

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Let me walk you through a real sales conversation. Not the sanitised version. A real one.

A man books a consultation. Forty-two. Works in finance. Hasn't trained in three years. His wife sent him. He doesn't want to be here.

I can see it in his body language before he opens his mouth. Arms crossed. Leaning back. Eyes scanning the gym like he's calculating the fastest exit route.

I start with Clarify. Not "what are your goals?" He'll answer that on autopilot. Instead: "What made you book this today? What happened?"

Silence. Then: "My wife's worried about me. I've put on three stone since COVID. I don't sleep. I drink too much."

Honest. More honest than most first answers. So I stay quiet and let the silence do its work. After a few seconds, he adds: "I think I'm depressed."

Now we're somewhere real. I ask him to describe what that feels like. "Like nothing matters. Like I go through the motions at work and come home and sit on the sofa and drink wine and watch TV and it's the same thing every day and I can't see it changing."

I hear it. Nothing matters. No visible change. No options. This isn't clinical depression. This is sadness. A man who can't see a single lever he can pull to change his trajectory.

I ask what he's tried. "Bought a Peloton. Did it for two weeks. Joined a gym near work. Went three times. Tried dry January. Made it to the tenth."

He's not lazy. He's tried multiple things. Each one failed because the loop never closed. The Peloton was isolated. The gym was anonymous. The dry January had no replacement behaviour for the drinking.

I paint the destination: "Imagine it's three months from now. You're sleeping properly. You've lost a stone. You've got a group of blokes you train with who actually know your name. And the wine is down to weekends because you've got something you'd rather do with your evenings. What does that feel like?"

His posture changes. Arms uncross slightly.

"That sounds... good."

"That's what we do here. Not just training. A place to be. People who notice if you don't show up."

He has two concerns: money and time. Money: I show him the cost per session versus the cost of his wine habit per week. The numbers are embarrassing in our favour. Time: I show him the schedule and ask him to pick two sessions. He finds them immediately.

He signs up. He comes twice a week. By month two, he's coming three times. By month four, the wine is weekends only and he's sleeping through the night and he's lost eleven pounds and his wife has stopped worrying.

He told me later that the thing that changed wasn't the exercise. It was that sentence about belonging. "People who notice if you don't show up." He'd been invisible for three years. At work, he was a face on a Zoom call. At home, he was a presence on the sofa. Nobody was tracking him. Nobody missed him when he wasn't there. He'd become furniture in his own life.

The gym gave him visibility. Real, physical, in-person visibility. His name on a whiteboard. His spot in the class. The nod from the coach when he walked in. The question when he missed a session. "Everything alright, mate? We missed you Tuesday."

Four words that changed the trajectory of a man's life. "We missed you Tuesday."

Those four words did something that no training programme could do. They made him feel seen. They made him feel like his presence mattered. They turned him from a face in a crowd into a person with a name and a spot and a role.

That's belonging in action. That's the operating system applied to a real person in real time. And the whole interaction, from consultation to transformation, followed the emotional logic we've been discussing. Identify the real emotion. Match it to the real need. Take the real action.

One conversation. Twenty minutes.

That's sales. That's coaching. That's behaviour change. They're the same thing.

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This is what Hormozi calls the CLOSER framework, and when I first learned it, it changed how I understood every interaction.

Clarify why they're here. Label the problem. Overview what they've tried. Sell the destination, not the vehicle. Explain away concerns. Reinforce the decision.

I use it in sales calls. In coaching sessions. In conversations with my parents. In arguments with Kiera. In my own head when I'm trying to make a decision and can't.

Why am I here? Clarify. What's the actual problem? Label. What have I tried that didn't work? Overview. What does the future look like if I solve this? Sell the destination. What's really stopping me? Explain away the concern. Am I making the right call? Reinforce.

It works everywhere because the mechanics are universal. Behaviour change is behaviour change whether you're selling a gym membership or deciding whether to leave a job. The emotions are the same. The resistance is the same. The path through is the same.

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There are three types of objections, and I learned this from studying both sales psychology and behavioural therapy. Every objection a person raises falls into one of three categories.

Environmental blame: "The timing isn't right." "My schedule doesn't allow it." The person is pointing at circumstances outside themselves. The reframe: "When will the timing be right? What specifically needs to change?"

External responsibility: "I need to ask my partner." "My mate tried this and it didn't work for him." The person is delegating the decision to someone else. The reframe: "Would your partner want you to keep struggling? Or would they want you to get help?"

Internal conflict: "I'm not sure this is for me." "I've never been able to stick with anything." The person is doubting themselves. The reframe: "What specifically makes you unsure? Let's address that thing."

Each type requires a different response. Environmental blame needs reality-testing. External responsibility needs ownership. Internal conflict needs evidence.

But all three share something: they're emotions disguised as reasons. The environmental blamer is afraid. The external delegator is anxious. The internal doubter is ashamed.

Read the emotion. Address the emotion. The objection dissolves.

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I used to be terrified of sales. The idea of asking someone for money made me nauseous.

And then I reframed it.

What if selling isn't taking from someone? What if it's giving someone something they need and asking them to invest in themselves? What if the act of buying is the first behaviour change, the first commitment, the first vote for the person they want to become?

Because that's what happens. The man who pays for coaching has just made his first behavioural commitment. He's put money down. He's invested. And investment changes his relationship to the process. You treat differently the things you've invested in.

Selling someone coaching isn't taking their money. It's helping them take themselves seriously.

That reframe changed everything. It made me better at coaching, better at business, better at relationships. Because the skill underneath sales is the same skill underneath all of those: the ability to help someone see what they can't see on their own and then help them act on it.

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Every person you talk to has a gap. A gap between where they are and where they want to be. And every emotion they're experiencing is generated by that gap.

The man who's frustrated at work has a gap between his current role and the role he wants. The man who's angry at his partner has a gap between the relationship he has and the relationship he wants.

Your job, as a coach, a friend, a partner, a parent, is to make the gap visible and then help them build a bridge.

Not to close it for them. Nobody can close another person's gap. But you can help them see it clearly. And most people feel the gap without seeing it. They feel the discomfort of the distance without knowing what they're distant from.

Name the gap. Build the bridge. Close the loop. That's behaviour change. That's coaching. That's sales. That's service.

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Feedback is the other half of the equation.

Action without feedback is just movement. Effort with no information. You're working hard but you don't know if you're working in the right direction.

Feedback tightens the loop. You act. You see what happened. You adjust. You act again. Better. The faster the feedback, the faster the learning.

The gym has the fastest feedback in any domain. You lift. You feel it. You see it in the mirror. The next rep is informed by the last one. The loop is two seconds long.

Business has slower feedback. You launch something. You wait. You measure. You adjust. The loop might be two weeks. Or two months.

Relationships have the slowest feedback of all. You change a behaviour. You wait. You observe the response. The other person might not notice for months.

The speed of the feedback loop determines how quickly you improve. Which is why the body is the first B. Because the feedback is instant. And why building comes last. Because the feedback is slow and you need to have trained your patience and discipline in faster loops first.

Volume times Feedback equals Mastery. That's the equation. More reps with tighter feedback loops produces faster improvement. In the gym, in sales, in relationships, in life.

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Chapter 11: Building — Control Your Future

The first four B's are about you. Body, Belonging, Belief, Behaviour. Internal. Getting your own house in order.

The fifth B is about everyone else.

Building is what happens when you've done enough internal work that your energy starts pointing outward. You're no longer in survival mode. The fires are under control. And now you have surplus energy, attention, effort, time, skill, and you need somewhere to put it.

Building is creation. The act of taking what you've learned and turning it into something that outlives you. Something that helps other people. Something that compounds over time.

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This is where the selfish-to-selfless arc completes itself.

I've watched this pattern in three places now. Each time, the same shape. Each time, invisible until you step back far enough to see it.

First: the Cali Unity customer journey. I was standing at a whiteboard one evening, mapping it out. New member arrives. "I want to get in shape." I. I. I. I. Everything is about them, which is fine, which is exactly where it should start. They train for a few months. The body changes. The confidence builds. They start helping the person next to them. Small things. Spotting a set. Explaining a movement. Making the new person feel welcome the way someone once made them feel welcome.

Then six months in, they're coaching beginners in Saturday sessions. Volunteering their time. Giving away what they learned. And the language has shifted completely. It's not "I want to get in shape" anymore. It's "how can I help this person?" From raving customer to unpaid advocate to someone whose identity is wrapped up in being useful to the community.

Selfish to useful. Every time. The same arc.

Second: my own career. "I want to quit engineering." I. I. I. I. "How can I be useful during lockdown?" You. We. Us. The rings over the tree. Everything that followed.

Third: the Academy book I wrote for coaches. Fifteen levels. And the structure, without me planning it, mirrors the arc perfectly. Levels 1 through 5: proof. Get your body right. Get your certifications. Show that you can do the thing. That's the selfish phase. Not bad selfish. Necessary selfish. Because you can't teach what you haven't done.

Levels 6 through 10: usefulness. Start coaching. Start helping. Apply the proof to other people's problems. You've earned the right to be useful.

Levels 11 through 15: giving back. Mentor other coaches. Build systems that work without you. Create things that outlive your direct involvement.

Proof. Usefulness. Giving back. That's the arc. And it shows up everywhere, in every life that goes from surviving to thriving, once you know what to look for.

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There's a principle from recovery programmes that I think is one of the most powerful ideas in human behaviour: in order to keep something, you have to give it away.

The sponsorship model. One man who's been through the fire walks alongside another man who's still in it. Not a therapist. Not a professional. Just someone who's lived it, offering what they learned.

That's what Cali Unity is at its core. That's what coaching is. That's what this book is. Me giving away what I've learned, not to be generous but because the giving is what makes it real. The teaching is what solidifies the learning. The helping is what proves the help was worth receiving.

Goggins says this without saying it. He ran 10K. Then he ran 20K. Then he ran 100 miles. And then he told the world about it. Not for attention. Because the telling is part of the keeping. You share the lesson or it evaporates.

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The practical application is this: once you have proof, be useful. Once you're useful, give it back.

Step 1: PROOF. "Why should I listen to you?" That's the question every reader, every client, every student is asking. And the answer can't be "because I read a book about it." The answer has to be "because I've done it."

I went from obese to running ultramarathons. From addicted to coaching others through addiction. From nihilistic to building a gym that won Best Business in Bath. That's proof. Not bragging. Receipts.

Get your proof first. Do the hard thing. Build the body. Run the race. Coach the client. Start the business. Prove it works through your own life before you try to prove it works through anyone else's.

Step 2: Be useful. Take the proof and apply it. Help one person. Then another. Let the helping become the habit. Let the usefulness become the identity.

Step 3: Give it away. Teach others to do what you did. Build the system that runs without you. Write the book. Create the programme. Train the coaches.

The arc always ends with giving. Because giving is the thing that turns individual progress into collective impact. And collective impact is the only thing that scales.

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There's a quote from the Book of Job that I think about.

God takes everything from Job. His wealth, his family, his health. Everything. And Job, sitting in the rubble of his life, keeps faith. He nearly gives up. He questions everything. He rages. He despairs. He argues with God. He demands explanations. He says things that would get him thrown out of most churches.

But he doesn't quit.

And then, after the suffering, after the questioning, after the raging, he sees something larger. He can't explain it. He can't rationalise it. He can't fit it into a neat moral framework where good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. He just sees that his perspective was always too narrow to understand the full design.

I'm not religious in a church sense. But I'm deeply spiritual in the sense that I believe there's a pattern larger than any individual life. That the dots connect backwards, even when they look random forwards. That the worst chapter might be the setup for the best one.

When I mention God, I mean this: God is just the word we put on things we don't understand. The force that makes flowers grow and wounds heal and broken people rebuild. The thing that connects the dots in ways you can't see until you look backwards. Call it God, call it the universe, call it dumb luck, call it whatever makes it real for you.

I am a rusty pipe. And whatever you want to call the force that flows through human beings when they're aligned and useful, it flows through me when I'm useful and put others first. When I'm selfish, the pipe blocks. When I'm useful, it opens.

The serenity prayer says it better than I can: "Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

I say that to myself most mornings. Not to a bearded man in the sky. To whatever it is that keeps me moving. Thy will be done. Help me to be useful.

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"I build things that build people."

I wrote that on a whiteboard at 2am in Bali and I've never been able to improve on it. That's the engine. That's the whole thing. I don't build for scale or exit multiples or LinkedIn clout. I build because building is the highest-leverage way to help people.

One conversation helps one person. One book helps thousands. One gym helps a community. One framework, if it's good enough, helps anyone who encounters it for as long as the framework exists.

Building is service expressed as creation. And creation is the only way to play a long-term game with long-term people in a long-term way.



The practical side of building is unglamorous. It's systems and processes and spreadsheets and meetings and things breaking and fixing and breaking again. It's hiring the wrong person and firing them three months later. It's launching a product nobody wants and pivoting to one they do. It's cash flow problems at 6am and client crises at midnight and the constant, gnawing uncertainty of whether any of this will work.

And I love it. Not despite the mess. Because of it.

Because the mess is the feedback. Every failure is a signal. Every broken thing is a lesson. Every crisis is a test of the operating system I built in the first four B's. Can I regulate under pressure? Can I make decisions with incomplete information? Can I stay disciplined when the dopamine of easy wins isn't flowing?

If yes: keep building. If no: go back to the foundation. Train the body. Reconnect with the tribe. Examine the beliefs. Practise the behaviour.

Building is not an escape from the inner work. It's the application of it. The arena where everything you've learned gets tested at scale.

I'm building CaliOnline now, an online coaching platform designed to take the principles from the gym and deliver them to anyone in the world with an internet connection. I'm building CaliAcademy, a coach education programme that trains other coaches to do what I do, so the impact multiplies. I'm building the Mo(men)tum podcast, a platform for the conversations men need to hear. And I'm writing this book.

Each one is a different bet on the same thesis: the operating system works, it can be packaged and transmitted, and when it reaches the right person at the right time, it changes their trajectory.

Some of these will fail. I know that. The failure rate for new ventures is brutal and I'm not arrogant enough to think I'm exempt. But the reps are the point. Build, test, learn, adjust, build again. The same feedback loop from the gym, applied at a different scale.

And the long game, the real long game, is this: in ten years, there could be hundreds of coaches trained in this framework, each one coaching dozens of people, each of those people impacting the people around them. The leverage is geometric. One becomes a hundred becomes ten thousand. And the founder, me, becomes increasingly unnecessary. Which is exactly the point.

Because the best things outlive the people who made them. And the best builders make themselves redundant.



Wealth is not money. Money is a side effect. Wealth is the combination of leverage and time freedom.

Leverage: the ability to produce outcomes disproportionate to your effort. Writing a book is leverage. Building a system is leverage. Teaching a framework is leverage.

Time freedom: the ability to choose how you spend your hours.

I don't build for scale or exit multiples or LinkedIn clout. I build because building is the highest-leverage way to help people. One conversation helps one person. One book helps thousands. One gym helps a community.

"I build things that build people."

That's it. That's the engine.



Let me tell you about the moment I understood what building actually means.

It was 2023. Cali Unity had been running for about two years. We had maybe eighty members. I was coaching a morning class. Eight people. Halfway through the session, a new guy walked in. Late twenties, nervous, clearly out of his comfort zone.

I welcomed him in, showed him the basics, paired him with another member who could keep an eye on him.

And then something happened that made me stop mid-sentence.

The member I'd paired him with, a guy called Tom, been with us about a year, started coaching the new guy. Not because I'd asked him to. Because Tom had been the nervous new guy twelve months ago, and he knew exactly what this man needed to hear.

I stood back and watched.

Tom said the right things. He demonstrated the right movements. He created the right atmosphere of calm competence that lets a beginner breathe. He didn't rush. He didn't overwhelm. He gave exactly what was needed, no more, no less.

And I realised: this is what building means. Not the gym. Not the equipment. Not the membership fees. This. A man who was changed by the community paying it forward to a man who just walked in. The system reproducing itself. The DNA of the community replicating in a new host.

Tom didn't need me in that moment. He had absorbed the principles, the welcome, the patience, the standard, the support, and he was transmitting them. Like a cell dividing.

That's a system. That's building. When the thing you created creates more of itself, you've built something that outlives your effort.

I think a lot about legacy. Not in the dramatic, write-your-name-in-history sense. In the practical sense: what will still be running when I stop?

Cali Unity runs without me now. Harvey manages the day-to-day. Kiera handles operations. The coaches coach. The members help each other. I'm in Bali building the next things, and the gym is growing.

That's the test of real building. Does it need you? If it dies when you stop, you built a job, not a system. If it grows when you step away, you built something real.

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I'll say something about money, because men have a complicated relationship with it and most of them won't admit it.

Money is not evil. Wanting money is not shallow. Making money is not selfish.

Money is a tool. Like a hammer. You can build a house with it or you can hurt someone with it. The hammer isn't the problem. The hand holding it is.

The men with the healthiest relationship to money see it as a measure of value created. "I earned X because I created Y amount of value for Z number of people."

The men with the worst relationship worship it or demonise it. The worshippers sacrifice everything and discover that the money doesn't fill the hole. The demonisers refuse to pursue it on principle, then resent the people who have it.

Both positions are avoidance strategies. The balanced position: money is a byproduct of building things that matter. Pursue the building. The money follows.

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Long-term games with long-term people.

Naval Ravikant said it, and it's stuck with me like a tattoo on the inside of my skull. The biggest returns come from playing the same game for a long time with the same people.

Short-term games are transactional. You extract value and move on. Long-term games are relational. You invest value and let it accumulate. The returns are delayed but they compound exponentially.

Every great thing I've built has come from long-term games. Cali Unity exists because Kiera and I played the same game for years. The coaching framework exists because I stayed in the same conversations for a decade.

I'm playing the long game. With the podcast. With this book. With the run. Not because I'm patient by nature. Ask anyone who's worked with me. Because I've learned, painfully and expensively, that the short game is a lie. The short game promises speed and delivers nothing. The long game promises nothing and delivers everything.

Build for the long term. Build things that compound. Build things that build people. And play the same game, with the same people, for as long as the game is worth playing.

That's the fifth B. Not a destination. An ongoing practice of creation in service of others. The logical endpoint of the selfish-to-selfless arc. You started by fixing yourself. You end by fixing the world. Or your corner of it, anyway. One gym. One book. One run. One conversation at a time.

That's building. That's what I do. And it's enough.



PART FOUR: THE PHYSICS OF CHANGE

Chapter 12: First Principles

Let me show you the physics underneath everything I've been saying.

Not metaphorical physics. The actual mechanics. The gears that turn when a man changes his behaviour, his identity, his life.

Start here.

Control = Prediction.

That's the deepest principle. Your nervous system craves control not because it's power-hungry but because control is how it predicts the future. And prediction is how it keeps you alive.

Think about what anxiety actually is, at the neurological level. Your brain running predictions about what might happen and finding too many possible outcomes. Each prediction is a thread, and the threads are tangling. The brain can't determine which future is coming, so it can't prepare, so it panics.

Now think about confidence. Confidence is the state where your predictions match your reality. You've done this before. You know what happens. The prediction and the outcome align. No gap. No panic.

Prediction = Safety. When the brain can predict what's coming, it feels safe. Not comfortable. Safe. The nervous system relaxes.

Safety = Peace. The sustained, baseline experience of a nervous system that trusts itself.

Control, Prediction, Safety, Peace. That's the chain. And behaviour, the right behaviour matched to the right signal, is how you build each link.



Let me make this concrete.

A man walks into a job interview. He's prepared. He knows the company. He's rehearsed his answers. He's done this before.

His prediction: "I'll answer the questions competently. They'll probably ask about X and Y. I know what to say."

His nervous system: calm. Not comfortable. There's still adrenaline, still sharpened awareness. But calm. Because the prediction is intact. He knows what's coming and he knows he can handle it.

Same man. Different scenario. He walks into a room he's never been in, to meet people he's never met, for a reason nobody has explained. No preparation. No context. No ability to predict what happens next.

His nervous system: screaming. Palms wet. Heart rate spiking. Mouth dry. Every alarm firing simultaneously. Not because the room is dangerous. Because the room is unpredictable. And unpredictable, to the nervous system, is the same as dangerous.

The difference between those two scenarios isn't threat level. It's predictability.

Now apply this to emotional regulation. A man who can predict his own emotional responses, who can say "when this situation happens, I tend to feel X, and when I feel X, the behaviour is Y," that man's nervous system is calm. He's prepared. The process is familiar.

A man who cannot predict his own emotional responses, who is ambushed by feelings he can't name, triggered by events he doesn't understand, driven by impulses he can't explain, that man's nervous system is in permanent emergency mode. Every day. All day.

The behavioural dictionary is interview preparation for your own inner world. It takes the unpredictable and makes it predictable. And in doing so, it calms the nervous system to a point where rational decision-making becomes possible again.

This is why step one of the operating system isn't "make better decisions." Step one is "calm the system down enough that better decisions become available." Because you can't make better decisions when your nervous system is in emergency mode. The frontal cortex, the part of your brain that does the rational thinking, goes offline when the amygdala takes over. Literally offline. Blood flow redirects. Cognitive function drops. You lose access to the part of your brain that could help you, precisely when you need it most.

This is why men who are spiralling can't "just think clearly." This is why the advice to "stop and think rationally" is useless when someone is triggered. The rational brain isn't available. It's been locked out by the alarm system. You can't think your way out of an amygdala hijack any more than you can reason your way out of a house fire. You need to get safe first. Then think.

The dictionary gets you safe. It provides enough predictability, enough structure, enough "I know what this is and I know what to do," that the frontal cortex comes back online. And once it's back online, rational decision-making resumes.

That's the sequence. Calm first. Think second. Act third.

Not think first. That's the mistake everyone makes. They try to think their way through a panic response. You can't. The hardware won't allow it. You have to calm the alarm system before the thinking brain reconnects.

And the way you calm the alarm system is through prediction. Through knowing what the emotion is and what the behaviour should be. Through having a map for the territory you're standing in.

That map is this book.



Most people think being human means the prefrontal cortex is driving. The rational mind. The planner. The adult. And the monkey brain, the amygdala, the fear centre, the ancient survival hardware, is strapped into the back seat, gagged, told to shut up and behave.

In reality it's the other way round.

The monkey is driving. Has always been driving. You're in the back seat. The monkey grabs the wheel and swerves toward food, sex, danger, comfort, anything that kept your ancestors alive on the savannah. It doesn't think. It reacts. And it's faster than you'll ever be.

The only thing you get to do is hand the monkey a map.

You don't wrestle the steering wheel away. That's a fight you lose every time. You give it direction. You define the terms. You write the dictionary that tells the monkey what the signals mean and where to drive when they fire.

That map, the definitions, the dictionary, the operating system, is the thing you actually control. Not the monkey. The map.

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When prediction fails repeatedly, you get something worse than anxiety. You get learned helplessness.

The brain concludes that nothing you do affects the outcome. You push a button and sometimes food comes out and sometimes a shock comes and the timing is random. So the brain stops pushing the button. It gives up. Not because the situation is hopeless. Because the brain has concluded that its actions don't produce predictable results.

This is depression at its most mechanical. The complete shutdown of the action system because the system has concluded that action is pointless.

And this is why the behavioural dictionary matters. What it does, at the neurological level, is restore prediction. When you can identify the emotion, you can predict the behaviour that resolves it. When you can predict the resolution, the system restarts. The button works again. The brain learns that action produces results, and the helplessness recedes.

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Your nervous system would rather be in a painful situation it can predict than a pleasant situation it can't.

This is why people stay in bad relationships. Why they return to environments that harm them. Why they recreate familiar patterns of suffering even when they know better.

It's not masochism. It's the nervous system prioritising prediction over pleasure. Because prediction, even the prediction of pain, is safer than uncertainty.

This explains addiction at a fundamental level. The alcoholic knows what happens when he drinks. Drink, feel numb, feel worse, drink again. Terrible loop. But predictable. And the alternative, sobriety, with its unfamiliar feelings and unpredictable emotions, is not predictable. So the nervous system chooses the suffering.

Understanding this changes how you approach change. You don't just need a better alternative. You need a predictable alternative. "Here's the plan. Here's day one. Here's what you'll feel. Here's what you'll do when you feel it."



The nervous system doesn't distinguish between physical threats and social threats.

Getting punched and getting rejected activate the same neural pathways. Being chased by a predator and being laughed at in a meeting produce the same cortisol spike.

In a tribe of fifty humans on a savannah, being kicked out meant being alone, and being alone meant being dead. Your brain evolved under those conditions. It still processes social rejection as existential threat.

This is why the man who can't speak in a meeting isn't weak. His nervous system is protecting him from perceived annihilation. This is why walking into a gym for the first time when you're overweight feels like walking into a war zone.

The solution: understand the signal, choose the behaviour, act anyway. Walk into the gym, survive, and the system recalibrates. Evidence rewrites prediction. One rep at a time.



There's another first principle I need to name. Pain is physiological. Suffering is psychological.

You can't change the physiological. If your knee hurts, your knee hurts. If you're hungry, you're hungry. If the temperature is freezing, the temperature is freezing. The physical sensation is real and present and non-negotiable.

But the suffering, the story you wrap around the sensation, that's entirely constructed. "My knee hurts and it'll never get better and I'll never run again and my life is over." That's not the knee talking. That's the narrator.

The knee says: pain, 6 out of 10, left side, weight-bearing.

The narrator says: you're done. You'll never recover. This is permanent. You'll be limping at fifty. You should give up.

The knee is honest. The narrator is a catastrophist. And most people listen to the narrator instead of the knee.

I discovered this on a long run. Mile thirty-something. Everything hurt. My feet were destroyed. My hips were grinding. And I noticed, for the first time, that the pain itself was manageable. What was unbearable was the story I was telling about the pain. "How am I going to do this for another twenty miles?" "What if it gets worse?" "What if something tears?"

When I dropped the story and just listened to the body, the pain was still there but the suffering halved. The knee hurt. That was a fact. Everything else was narration. And narration, unlike facts, can be changed.

This distinction, between what's actually happening and the story you're telling about what's happening, is the single most useful tool I've ever learned. And it applies to everything, not just physical pain. Emotional pain. Professional setbacks. Relationship conflicts. The event is one thing. The narration is another. And the narration is always, always, always worse than the event.

The Stoics knew this. "It's not things that upset us, but our judgments about things." Epictetus said that two thousand years ago. And he was right. And most people still haven't learned it.

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People ask me why I keep saying "everything is sales" and getting annoyed when they hear it. So let me explain the connection to the first principles.

Sales, in the way I use the word, is the act of helping someone change their behaviour. That's all. You present information. You address concerns. You help them see something they couldn't see on their own. And they act.

That's what coaching is. That's what parenting is. That's what friendship is, at its best. That's what this book is.

You're not reading this for entertainment. You're reading this because you want to change something. And if this book succeeds, it will change your behaviour. It will sell you on a new way of seeing your emotions, which will produce new behaviours, which will produce new outcomes.

The purest kind of sales. Not manipulation. Service.

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The Triangle of Mastery ties this together.

Three corners. Control. Behaviour. Sales.

Control is the goal. Prediction, safety, peace.

Behaviour is the mechanism. The only variable you actually control.

Sales is the skill of transmitting behaviour change to others. First to yourself, persuading yourself to act when the old software says don't bother. Then to the people around you. Then at scale, through building.

Control lives at the top because it's the product of the other two. Master your behaviour.

Master the transmission of behaviour change. And control follows. Not the illusion of control.

The control of the one thing that was always yours: your response.

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I want to address something that might be forming in your head. "This is too mechanical. Humans aren't machines."

You're right. And I'm not trying to reduce the human experience to inputs and outputs.

The mechanics are the foundation. The way you build on that foundation is yours. Your specific life, your specific relationships, your specific pain and joy and love, those can't be captured in a framework.

But the mechanics matter because they're the part that's learnable. You can't teach someone to fall in love. You can teach them to recognise when they're afraid and act anyway. You can't teach someone to find meaning. You can teach them to stop avoiding the search.

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I want to go deeper on prediction, because it explains something that confuses people: why we seek out situations that hurt us.

Your nervous system would rather be in a painful situation it can predict than a pleasant situation it can't. This is why people stay in bad relationships. Why they return to environments that harm them.

It's not masochism. The nervous system prioritises prediction over pleasure. Because prediction, even the prediction of pain, is safer than uncertainty.

This also explains why people resist help.

You'd think someone drowning would grab the life ring. You'd think a man who knows his behaviour is destroying his life would leap at the chance to change.

But they don't. They resist. They deflect. They cancel the appointment. They stop replying to messages.

This isn't stupidity. It's the prediction system in action.

Change is unpredictable. If you change your behaviour, you enter territory the nervous system hasn't mapped. New routines. New social dynamics. New emotional responses. An entire unmapped landscape.

And the nervous system would rather have predicted pain than unpredicted pleasure. So it generates objections. "I'm not ready." "This isn't the right programme." "I'll start when things settle down." Each objection sounds rational. Each one is the nervous system trying to maintain the status quo because the status quo, however painful, is at least predictable.

The way through resistance is not force. Not persuasion. Predictability. You make the new path as predictable as possible. "Here's exactly what will happen. Here's day one. Here's what you'll feel. Here's what we'll do when you feel it."

Each piece of predictability lowers the nervous system's threat assessment. And at some point, the balance tips. The predicted new path becomes less threatening than the continuation of the old one.

That's the moment of change. Not a lightning bolt. A tipping point.

I've watched this happen with men who spent months saying "I'll start next week." Week after week. The nervous system resisting. And then one day, often triggered by something small, a photo they didn't like, a flight of stairs that winded them, a comment from their kid, the tipping point arrives. They don't make a dramatic announcement. They just show up. Quietly. Early on a Tuesday.

And the resistance, which had looked insurmountable from the outside, turns out to have been paper-thin. It was always paper-thin. It just needed to be pushed from the right angle.

Your job, as someone who wants to change, is to keep showing up to the wall. Keep pushing. Not harder. Just consistently. From slightly different angles. And one day the wall gives. Not because you became stronger. Because the wall was never as solid as it felt.

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Chapter 13: The Mechanics of Behaviour

Feedback loops are the engine of all change.

Every time you do something and observe the result, a loop forms. Action, Result, Adjustment, Action. The tightness of the loop determines the speed of the change.

Tight loop: you throw a punch. The coach says "rotate your hips." You throw again. Better. Four seconds. Instant learning.

Loose loop: you change your diet. You wait two weeks. You check the scale. Maybe it moved. The signal is buried in noise.

Broken loop: you try something. Nothing happens. You try again. Nothing. The loop never closes. This is where people give up.

Behaviour = Volume times Feedback. High volume with tight feedback produces transformation. High volume with no feedback produces wasted effort.

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Framing is the other mechanism.

A frame is the lens through which you interpret information. You lose your job. Through one frame: disaster. Through another: the freedom to try the thing you've been thinking about for three years. Same event. Different frame. Completely different emotional response. Completely different behaviour.

Framing isn't positive thinking. Positive thinking is lazy. Framing says: "What is the most useful way to interpret this event?" Not the most comfortable. The most useful.

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The Laws of Behavioural Engineering. Operating principles from years of coaching.

Specificity. Vague goals produce vague behaviour. "I want to get healthier" produces nothing. "I will eat 200 grams of protein every day this week" produces action.

Proximity. The closer the reward to the behaviour, the stronger the reinforcement. The gym works because the endorphin hit comes during the session, not six months later.

Modelling. Humans learn through observation, not instruction. This is why belonging changes behaviour faster than any book.

Iteration. The first version of anything is bad. Improvement comes from repetition, not planning.

Environment. Behaviour follows the path of least resistance. You don't change behaviour by increasing willpower. You change it by redesigning the environment.

Accountability. Behaviour that's observed changes. When someone else knows your commitment, breaking it costs more.

Compounding. Small behaviours repeated consistently produce disproportionate results over time. The first month produces almost nothing visible. Month twelve produces more than the first eleven combined. Most people quit in month two because they don't understand compounding. They expect linear returns from an exponential process. And so they abandon the process right at the point where the curve is about to bend upward.

I see this constantly. The man who trains for six weeks, can't see a difference in the mirror, and decides the gym doesn't work. Six weeks. The compound effect needs six months before the visible results start matching the invisible ones. He quit at the exact wrong moment. Not because the system failed. Because his expectations were linear and reality is exponential.

If I could install one belief in every man I work with, it would be this: the results are always behind the effort. Always. The effort comes first. The results follow later. And the gap between effort and visible result is where most people give up, which is exactly why most people stay stuck.

Trust the gap. Keep working. The curve bends.



The willpower myth. The single most damaging idea in popular self-help.

Willpower is a finite, depletable resource. Every decision you make, every temptation you resist, drains the pool. By evening, the pool is empty. Which is why you stick to your diet at breakfast and eat ice cream at 10pm.

Designing your life around willpower is designing for failure. You're building a house on a resource that depletes daily.

The alternative: design for environment. Make the right behaviour the easy behaviour. Stock the fridge with good food. Lay out gym clothes the night before. Delete the apps that steal your time. Put your phone in another room.

The man who succeeds at behaviour change is not the man with the strongest willpower. He's the man who designed his environment so willpower is rarely needed.

Every great coach I've ever studied, Hormozi, Goggins, Edgley, Jocko, Clear, understands this intuitively. They don't rely on motivation. They design systems. Processes. Environments. Routines that run on autopilot so the finite resource of willpower is reserved for the moments when it's actually needed.

That's engineering. Not inspiration. Architecture.



I want to talk about failure. Because most people treat failure as a stop signal.

Failure is not a stop signal. Failure is feedback. The most information-rich feedback available.

Success tells you: keep doing this. Failure tells you: adjust this. Both are useful. But failure is more instructive, because it reveals the specific point where the system broke down.

I've failed at more things than I can count. Business ideas that flopped. Coaching approaches that didn't work. Sales pitches that fell flat. Training programmes that produced zero results. A 400-mile bike ride that ended on a roadside in the Midlands with a blown knee.

Every single one taught me something specific. Something I couldn't have learned from success because success doesn't expose the fault lines.

The men who improve fastest in the gym are the ones who fail most often. They try the skill, they fall, they adjust, they try again. The ones who improve slowest only attempt things they know they can do.

Failure is not the opposite of success. Failure is the mechanism of success. The feedback loop runs on failure. Remove failure and the loop has nothing to process.

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The minimum effective dose.

The gym world obsesses over volume. More sets. More reps. More exercises. But for most people, especially people starting out, volume is the enemy.

The minimum effective dose is the smallest intervention that produces a measurable result. One set of squats. One honest conversation. One kept promise.

Most people fail at behaviour change because they try to change too much at once. They go from zero exercise to five gym sessions a week. By Wednesday, they've failed. Because the gap between current behaviour and target behaviour was too wide.

The fix: make the change so small it's almost impossible to fail. One push-up. One glass of water. One honest answer when someone asks how you're doing.

The minimum effective dose produces the minimum effective result. Which is enough. Because the result, however small, closes a feedback loop. And a closed loop generates momentum. And momentum, once started, is harder to stop than to continue.

That last sentence is the whole book in one line. Momentum is harder to stop than to continue. Once you're moving, keeping moving requires less energy than starting did. That's physics. That's the name of this book. And it's the reason the first step is the hardest and the hundredth step is the easiest.

Get moving. Stay moving. Let the momentum carry you.



There's a study from Princeton Theological Seminary, 1973. Darley and Batson. They set up seminary students, men training to become priests, to give a talk about the Good Samaritan. The parable about helping the stranger on the road.

On the way to give the talk, they passed a man slumped in a doorway. Clearly in trouble.

The researchers wanted to know: what predicts who stops to help?

Not empathy. Not wealth. Not religious belief. Not personality. Not how recently they'd read about the Good Samaritan.

The only thing that predicted helping was whether they were in a hurry.

Of the students who were told they had plenty of time, 63% stopped. Of the students who were told they were running late, 10% stopped. The majority of men, on their way to give a speech about helping strangers, stepped over a man in distress because they didn't have time.

That hit me when I first read it. Because it explains something I'd been struggling with.

You can't pour from an empty cup. It's not a platitude. It's physics.

The man who is rushed, depleted, overwhelmed, running on empty, will not help others. Not because he's selfish. Because his system has nothing left to give. The survival mechanism is too loud. The monkey is driving too fast. There's no bandwidth for compassion.

Which means: the selfish phase isn't optional. You have to fill your own cup first. You have to get your body right, your finances stable, your mind clear, your energy surplus. Not because selfishness is the goal. Because selfishness is the prerequisite for selflessness.

The oxygen mask goes on you first. Not because you matter more than the person next to you. Because if you pass out from hypoxia, you can't help anyone.

That's the permission I'm giving you. Permission to be selfish for a while. To get your proof first. To build your body. To stabilise your finances. To cut the friends who drain you. To think of yourself first. To put the oxygen mask on before you help the person next to you.

Not because selfishness is the goal. Because selfishness is the prerequisite for selflessness. You can't give what you don't have. You can't pour from an empty cup. You can't be useful to anyone if you're drowning yourself.

Fill the cup first.

But hold the intention. Hold it tight. The intention is to become useful. The selfishness is the runway. The usefulness is the flight. And the runway only exists so you can take off.

I look at my life now and I see the result of that sequence. I spent years being selfish. Getting qualified. Building my body. Fixing my mind. Learning the frameworks. Studying the Stoics. Coaching myself before I coached anyone else. All of that was the runway.

And now I'm flying. Not in a material sense, not private jets and penthouse suites. In a purpose sense. I wake up every morning knowing exactly why I'm alive and exactly what I'm supposed to do with the day. Coach people. Build things. Write this book. Run across a country. Be useful.

That clarity, that sense of being exactly where you're supposed to be, is not something I was born with. It's something I built. One rep at a time. One kept promise at a time. One conversation at a time. One year of being selfish, followed by a year of being useful, followed by a lifetime of trying to give away what I was given.

The oxygen mask goes on you first. But you take it off as soon as you can breathe. And then you help the person next to you.

That's the whole arc. That's the whole book. That's the whole life.

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Chapter 14: The Trap of Power

This is the chapter that makes people uncomfortable. Good.

Most men give their power away. Not because they're weak. Because they've been trained to.

Blame is the mechanism. Every time you blame someone else for your situation, you're making a trade. You're trading responsibility for comfort. And the exchange rate is brutal: every unit of blame you assign to someone else is a unit of control you lose over your own life.

If your boss is the reason you're unhappy, then only your boss can make you happy. You've placed the lever in someone else's hands.

If your parents are the reason you're broken, then only your parents can fix you. And since they're probably not equipped to do that, you've just guaranteed that you stay broken. Forever.

The blame-control paradox: the more you blame, the less control you have.

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"Life is not my fault, but it is my responsibility."

Fault is backward-looking. It's about who caused the situation. Responsibility is forward-looking. It's about who's going to fix it. Two entirely different questions.

You can spend your life answering the first question. You can build an airtight case for why none of this is your fault. And you'd be right. The case would hold up in court.

But the court can't change your life. Only you can.

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I had addictions. I got help. I studied everything. The Stoics, Buddhism, recovery programmes, behavioural science, neuroscience, cognitive behavioural therapy. Everything. I was trying to understand myself from every angle because no single framework explained the whole picture.

One of the things I studied deeply was the twelve-step model. And there's a principle in recovery that I think is one of the most powerful ideas in human behaviour: in order to keep something, you have to give it away.

The sponsorship model. One man who's been through the fire walking alongside another man who's still in it. Connection as the antidote to addiction. That idea changed how I think about coaching, about community, about what Cali Unity actually is at its core.

The first step in that model is admitting powerlessness. That your life has become unmanageable. I understand why it's there. It breaks through denial. It stops the ego from pretending everything's under control when the house is on fire.

But I think there's a better starting point.

You're not powerless. You're miscalibrated.

Your feedback loops are broken, not your character. The man who drinks every night isn't a fundamentally defective person who needs to surrender before he can heal. He's a man who feels an emotion, can't identify it, and reaches for the nearest available behaviour that changes how he feels. The drinking is a control mechanism. A bad one. A destructive one. But a mechanism with identifiable inputs and outputs.

And mechanisms can be reprogrammed.

Not easily. Not overnight. Not by reading a book on a Sunday afternoon and expecting Monday to be different. Reprogramming takes the same time and effort that the original programming took. Years of wrong loops require years of right ones. The timeline isn't fair. It isn't fast. But it's real, and it works, and the evidence is everywhere if you know where to look.

I'm not saying recovery programmes don't work. They obviously do. Millions of people are alive because of them, and anyone who's found sobriety through that path has my complete respect. What I'm saying is that there might be a complementary perspective. One that starts with agency rather than powerlessness.

What if the starting point was: you have power, but you've been aiming it wrong? What if the work wasn't about surrendering control but about learning to use it properly?

That's the Behavioural OS. Not a replacement for recovery. A different entry point. A complementary perspective that says the system isn't broken beyond repair. The system is running on bad definitions and bad loops, and those can be updated.

Powerlessness as a starting point can become powerlessness as an identity. I've watched it happen. Men who've been sober for years but still define themselves by the thing they've overcome. Still carry the identity of someone who is fundamentally at the mercy of a force they can't control. The label becomes the ceiling.

I've studied these models. I have deep respect for them. People are alive because of them. But I also believe that agency is the thing that changes lives, not surrender. The acknowledgement "I'm struggling and I need help" is not the same as "I'm powerless." The first is honest. The second is a belief. And beliefs, as we discussed in Chapter 9, create the reality they describe.

You are not powerless. You are miscalibrated. And miscalibration can be fixed.

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The Responsibility Ladder.

Blame. "This is someone else's fault." The bottom rung. Maximum comfort, zero power.

Justify. "It's not my fault but here's why I can't change it either." Still no power.

Shame. "It IS my fault and that makes me a bad person." Dangerous rung. Shame feels like progress but it's a trap. Shame doesn't produce action. It produces hiding.

Awareness. "I can see the pattern." The first rung that matters. You haven't changed anything yet, but you can see it.

Ownership. "This is my responsibility and I'm going to do something about it." The breakthrough. Forward-looking. Action-producing.

Creation. "I'm building something new from the wreckage." The top rung. You've stopped managing the damage and started creating the alternative.



I want to share something about my parents. And I want to be careful with it, because if they read this, I want them to know it comes from love. Every word.

My parents got stuck in a blame loop. It happens to good people. My mum blamed my dad. My dad blamed my mum. Each one had a case. Each one was, to a degree, correct.

But here's what I understand now that I didn't understand as a kid listening through the bedroom floor. They were under enormous stress. Unfortunate things had happened to them. The environment was hard. And the fighting wasn't because they were bad people. It was because they were good people in a bad situation, and nobody had given them the tools to handle it differently. A rough time for the whole family.

And through all of it — through every argument, every slammed door, every silence — they were still there. Still making packed lunches. Still dragging me to the gym. Still taking me to the doctors. Still getting up at 3am to deliver post so the family had what it needed. Still standing in my doorway saying "get up." They tried their best. Always supportive. Always there.

My parents separated eventually. And the separation, painful as it was, gave each of them something the marriage hadn't: their power back.

I don't tell you this to blame them for anything. I tell you this because the blame-power lesson is one of the most important in the book, and I learned it from two people who loved me completely and did their absolute best with what they had. I understand them. And I thank them.

But the lesson stands. And it's the hardest lesson in this book.

Your life is not your fault. But it is your responsibility.

You can hold both of those truths simultaneously. You can acknowledge that bad things happened to you, that people failed you, that systems disadvantaged you, that the hand you were dealt was worse than someone else's, AND take full responsibility for what you do next.

The "and" is everything.

Not "but." Not "however." And. Both truths. At the same time. Without contradiction.

You were dealt a shit hand AND you're the one who plays it.

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I see my dad's traits in myself. His impatience. His tendency to go quiet when he should speak. But also his strength. His stubbornness that looks a lot like loyalty. His work ethic that borders on self-punishment. His willingness to do the hard thing when nobody's watching.

My dad was a postman. Out in the rain at 3am. Providing. Every single day. And then home by afternoon, standing in my doorway, refusing to let me waste my life. That's not anger. That's love without the vocabulary.

I see myself wanting to withdraw from Kiera when she needs connection. Wanting to snap. Wanting to repeat patterns I absorbed as a kid. The impulse arrives and I have to make a conscious choice to do something different. Every day. Not occasionally. Daily. And some days I fail. Some days the pattern completes before I catch it and I say the wrong thing in the wrong tone and I see her face change and I know I just repeated something I wish I hadn't.

And then I repair. Not with excuses. Not with "I'm sorry but." With honesty. "The pattern fired. I'm sorry. I'm working on it."

That's the operating system in its least glamorous form. Not the confident coach delivering frameworks to paying clients. A man in his kitchen catching a generational pattern three seconds after it fires and choosing, painfully, imperfectly, to interrupt it.

That's the real work. Everything else is commentary.

I'm a rusty pipe. And God flows through me as long as I'm useful and put others first. When I revert to the old patterns, selfish, closed, shut down, the pipe blocks. When I stay open, when I stay useful, when I stay honest, it flows.

And when I say God I mean whatever word you want to put on the thing that makes flowers grow and makes broken men rebuild and makes two strangers in a park at 9am on a cold morning in Bath connect across the void of their separate existences. The word doesn't matter. The force does.

Some people call it God. Some call it the universe. Some call it luck or coincidence or neural networks or random chance. I've tried all the labels. None of them fit perfectly. All of them point at the same thing.

There's something larger than me. I don't need to understand it. I just need to stay useful to it. And when I do, the pipe opens, and whatever flows through it ends up helping someone. And when I don't, when I close down, when I revert to the selfishness and the old loops, the pipe blocks. And nothing flows. And nothing helps. And the darkness comes back.

That's not religion. That's experience. I've tested both modes. I know which one works.

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There's an art piece I keep seeing in my head. Haven't made it yet. Maybe someone will.

A sculpture of a father shouting at his son. Life-size. You walk up to it and you judge the dad. What a prick. What kind of man shouts at his kid like that?

But then you walk to the side. And behind that dad is another dad shouting at another son. And behind him, another. And another. A hundred figures deep. A hundred generations of fathers shouting at sons, each one shaped by the one before him, each one passing down the only language he was ever taught.

And when you step back far enough, the hundred figures form a sentence.

Break the cycle.

Nobody is bad. Not my dad. Not his dad. Not the man reading this who sees his own father's worst traits firing through his own hands. It's the environment. Generational patterns. Behaviour passed down like a family heirloom nobody asked for. Upbringing shaping upbringing shaping upbringing, all the way back to a man nobody remembers who was probably doing his best too.

It's not your fault. But it is your responsibility.

You might not fix everything. You probably won't. The patterns run deep and they're stubborn and some days they win. But anything you interrupt now, anything you catch and redirect and choose differently, makes life easier for your kids. For the next generation. For the son or daughter who won't have to sit in a bedroom listening through the floor because you decided, today, to do one thing differently than the man who raised you.

That's the work. Not perfection. Progress. One interrupted pattern at a time.

My dad gave me push-ups and stubbornness and a refusal to quit. He also gave me patterns I have to fight every day. Both things are true. Both things are gifts, in different ways. And my job isn't to judge him for the patterns. My job is to keep the good ones, interrupt the harmful ones, and pass something better forward.

That's what breaking the cycle means. Not erasing the past. Building from it.

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Toxic masculinity isn't masculinity that's toxic. It's the toxic things we've added to masculinity that don't belong there. The suppression. The stoicism-without-outlet. The "boys don't cry." The equation of vulnerability with weakness.

These additions are killing men. 125 a week.

But the solution isn't to dismantle masculinity. It's to remove the toxic additions and reinforce the healthy core. Discipline. Courage. Responsibility. Protection. Provision. Service. Strength, real strength, which includes the strength to be honest about what you're feeling.

The man who walked into the park and told a stranger "you stopped me from killing myself" is masculine. Deeply, authentically masculine. He did the hardest thing a man can do. He spoke truth when every part of his conditioning told him to stay silent.

Real men don't suppress their emotions. Real men read them. That's the upgrade.

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I coached a man for three months who couldn't stop blaming his ex-wife for the state of his life. And I get it. She'd done things. Real things. Measurable damage. I'm not going to minimise that.

But he'd been carrying that grievance for four years. Four years of repeating the story. Four years of starting every conversation with "if she hadn't..." Four years of handing her, a woman who was probably not thinking about him at all, the keys to his emotional regulation.

I asked him a question one day that made him angry with me for about a week. "If everything you're saying about her is true, if she really did all of this, then she's been controlling your life for four years without lifting a finger. She goes to work, picks up the kids, eats dinner, sleeps. And you spend your evenings reliving 2022. Who's really in control here?"

He didn't speak to me for six days.

Then he came to the gym and said: "You're right and I hate it."

We started working. Not on forgiveness. We worked on reclaiming his attention. On redirecting the hours he spent in blame toward something productive. On building something, a fitness routine, a social group, a weekly schedule, that was his, that she couldn't touch, that belonged to the future instead of the past.

Within three months, he'd stopped mentioning her. Not because he'd forgiven her. Because he'd redirected his energy. The blame had been filling a gap, the gap where purpose should have been. Once the gap was filled with something real, the blame became unnecessary.

That's what blame does. It fills the gap. It gives you something to think about, someone to be angry at, a narrative to repeat. And the narrative is seductive because it's comfortable. It doesn't require change. It only requires repetition.

But the gap it fills should be filled with creation. With building. With forward motion. And no amount of blame will build anything.

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PART FIVE: THE RUN

Chapter 15: The Symbol

There's a line from The Dark Knight that I've carried in my head for years. Bruce Wayne says it to Alfred, and it's the only piece of fictional dialogue I've ever treated as philosophy.

"As a man I can be corrupted. I can be destroyed. But as a symbol, as a symbol I can be everlasting."

Replace Batman with Momentum.

That's what this is. Not the podcast. Not the book. Not the run. All of it, together. A symbol. Something bigger than one man's story. Something that can't be corrupted by my failures or destroyed by my weaknesses because it doesn't belong to me. It belongs to everyone who encounters it and finds something useful.

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In 2024, I tried to cycle from one end of this country to the other. I made it 400 miles. My knee gave out somewhere in the Midlands, on a grey road that looked like every other grey road, and I sat on the verge and cried and called it off.

That failure sat with me for two years. Not as motivation. Motivation is a feeling. Feelings pass. Commitment stays.

It sat with me as an open loop. An unfinished thing. A promise broken. And broken promises subtract from the confidence score.

The run is the repair.

John o'Groats to Land's End. 1,000 miles. Thirty running days. November. Through Scotland, through the Midlands, through Bath, past Cali Unity, through the city where the rings started everything, and down to the tip of Cornwall.

Not a race. A war of attrition.

I'm using Ross Edgley's framing deliberately. Because that's what this is. You don't win a 900-mile run. You survive it. Day after day. Wake up, eat, run, eat, sleep, repeat. The same act, repeated until the geography runs out.

Every mile is a conversation. Between me and the road. Between me and the weather. Between me and the part of my brain that will spend thirty days telling me to stop.

And every mile is a fundraiser. For Movember. For men's mental health. For the 125 men a week who don't make it.

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My dad is driving the support vehicle.

My dad. The man who got me into push-ups. Who taught me every sport. Who was a postman — out in the rain at 3am providing for the family while I was upstairs in my cave doing nothing with the life he was working to fund. The man who stood in my doorway at 7am and said "get up, we're going" on the morning that changed everything.

Our relationship was complicated for a long time. We were both angry. Both stubborn. Both bad at saying what we meant. We performed the father-son dynamic without ever actually inhabiting it.

But here's what I know now. He tried his best. He always tried his best. The anger wasn't who he was. It was the pressure of an environment that was squeezing everyone. And through all of it, he was still there. Every morning. Still providing. Still pushing. Still refusing to let his son give up.

The run is partly for us.

Thirty days in a van. Thirty days of him meeting me at checkpoints with food and dry clothes. Thirty days of shared purpose, shared discomfort, shared meals in lay-bys and shared silence on motorways.

I'm not naive enough to think a run fixes everything. But I know this: proximity under pressure produces honesty. And honesty is the currency of repair. And I want him to know — through thirty days of being there for me again — that I see what he did. All of it. And I'm grateful.

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The run failed once already. I need you to know that. I need you to know that the man writing this book about behaviour and control and mastery has a 400-mile DNF on his record. Because if I pretend that failure didn't happen, the rest of this book is a lie.

It happened. The knee went. The body quit before the mind did.

That's what the cookie jar is for. That DNF isn't shame. It's a cookie. A memory of surviving something hard. A data point that says: you tried, you failed, you're still here.

This time I'm running, not cycling. Because the body is different now. The training is different now. I'm different now.

But also: because the run has a purpose the bike ride didn't.

The bike ride was for me. The run is for the 125.

For every man who's sitting in a room right now, believing nothing matters, believing the darkness is permanent, believing the horse has bolted and there's no way to pull the reins.

This run is proof that the reins work. That the horse can be redirected. That the operating system functions in the real world, under real pressure, when it matters.

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Start at John o'Groats. The top of Scotland. A car park and a signpost and the wind coming off the North Sea so hard it bends you sideways. November in the Scottish Highlands is not hospitable.

South through Caithness. Through Sutherland. Empty moorland and single-track roads and the occasional sheep that looks at you like you've lost your mind.

Down through Inverness. The Great Glen. Fort William, where Ben Nevis sits in the cloud like a silent witness.

Edgley calls it a war of attrition. He's right. The swims around Britain, 157 days in the sea, taught him something that applies directly: the opponent is not distance. The opponent is time. The distance is fixed. But time stretches. Day one is an adventure. Day ten is a grind. Day twenty is a war against your own brain.

Through Glasgow. Through the Central Belt. Through the Borders, where Scotland becomes England. This is where the bike failed last time. Somewhere in this grey corridor of motorways and retail parks.

This time, I'll be running through it. Past the exact spot where the knee gave out. Past the verge where I sat and cried.

And I won't stop. Not because I'm tougher. Because this time the purpose is bigger than my discomfort.

Then: Bath.

I'll run through Bath. Down through the city I helped build something in. Past Cali Unity. Past Victoria Park. Past the tree where we threw the rings. Past the exact spot where that man walked toward me and said the nine words.

I'll run past all of it. And I'll keep running.

Because the run isn't a destination. It's a statement. Every mile past Bath says: this is what momentum looks like. Forward. Always forward. And the man who nearly killed himself in a park in this city is alive and strong and coaching others, and the man who was too broken to leave his bedroom is running 1,000 miles for every other man still sitting in that bedroom, still believing the lie that nothing matters.

Then south. Bristol. Somerset. Devon. Cornwall. Down through Bodmin Moor. Past Truro. Past Penzance. To Land's End.

A signpost. A cliff. The sea.

Thirty days. One thousand miles. A body that started at nineteen stone and a mind that started with nothing matters.

Done.



The mental game is where it will be won or lost. Not the legs. Not the lungs. The head.

Chunking. That's the strategy. You don't run 1,000 miles. You run to the next checkpoint. Then to the next one. Then to the next. The distance is abstract. The checkpoint is real. One tree. One signpost. One bend in the road.

And when the low points come, and they will come, because the majority of DNFs don't come from unbearable pain but from the accumulation of discomfort and the slow passage of time, the cookie jar is the thing that keeps you moving. Goggins' concept. A mental box full of every hard thing you've ever survived. Every obstacle overcome. Every time you were done and kept going.

My cookie jar has the first pull-up at nineteen stone. The gym sessions I didn't want to go to. The coaching consultations that went sideways and I recovered. The bike ride that failed at 400 miles and the fact that I got up the next day. The mornings in Bali at 4am writing when every part of me wanted to sleep.

Each one is a data point. Each one says: you've been here before. You survived. You'll survive this too.

And the mantras. Simple phrases repeated until the words lose meaning and become rhythm. "Relentless forward progress." "One more mile." "Stay hard." Not because the words are magic. Because the repetition occupies the part of the brain that would otherwise be running simulations of failure.

The best mental strategy for ultra running is the simplest one: respond to discomfort with openness rather than resistance. Every bad patch passes. The man who welcomes the suffering, who says "this is the part where it gets hard, and I trained for this," survives. The man who fights the suffering, who says "this shouldn't be happening, something is wrong," breaks.

Pain is physiological. Suffering is psychological. You can't change the physiological. But you can change the psychological.

Huge.

That distinction, discovered on a run, listening to Hormozi, gasping for breath near the canal path in Bath, changed how I approach everything. Training. Coaching. Business. Arguments with Kiera. The 4am alarm. Everything.

The pain is real. The story about the pain is optional.

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I want to be specific about the training. Because this run isn't just ambition. It's engineering. And the engineering matters.

At ninety kilos, I'll be carrying significantly more than the typical ultra runner. Their average weight is sixty-five to seventy. Every step absorbs two to four times body weight. That's 180 to 360 kilos of force, every step, forty to fifty thousand steps per day, for thirty days.

The cushion my calisthenics background provides is an advantage. Stronger legs. More resilient connective tissue. Better joint stability from years of ring work and handstand training. But it doesn't eliminate the physics. Heavier bodies break more under impact.

So the training programme is specific. Upper body calisthenics maintained at minimum effective dose. Two sessions a week. Enough to keep the planche and front lever progressions alive, not enough to generate fatigue that interferes with running.

Lower body becomes entirely running-dominant from summer onwards. Long zone two runs building from sixty minutes to multi-hour efforts. Back-to-back long runs on weekends, which is the specific adaptation ultra runners need because the second long run, on fatigued legs, simulates the conditions of the second half of an ultra.

One quality session per week. Tempo or intervals. Not to build speed. To build running economy, the efficiency of movement at pace, which is what actually predicts ultra performance. David Roche, one of the best ultra coaches alive, says it directly: speed develops running economy, and economy transfers to distance. You don't get better at running 100 miles by running 100 miles. You get better by running faster over shorter distances and then applying that efficiency to the long stuff.

The nutrition practice starts now, not in November. Because the gut needs to learn to process food while moving, and that adaptation takes months. Every long run from here to November will include practising eating on the move. Gels, sandwiches, bananas, potatoes. Testing what works, what the stomach tolerates, what provides sustained energy without nausea.

Boring details. But boring details are how things get done. The run will be decided not by how tough I am but by how well I've prepared. And preparation is engineering. Not motivation. Architecture.

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Every day will be documented. Filmed. Shared. Not for vanity. For impact.

The format: daily vlog footage, raw, unpolished. Morning check-in. Midday check-in. Evening recap. The blisters, the mental battles, the conversations with my dad in the van, the moments when I want to quit and don't and the moments when I want to quit and nearly do.

Because the honesty is the point. If I present a polished version of the run, it's content. If I present the truth, ugly, exhausted, doubtful, afraid, it's proof.

And alongside the daily content: the fundraiser. Every penny goes to Movember. Men's mental health. The 125.

I don't want to make money from this run. I want to make noise. I want it to be loud enough that it reaches men who would never read a self-help book, never walk into a gym, never sign up for coaching, but who might watch a video of a bloke in the rain at 6am on day seventeen and think: if he can keep going, maybe I can too.

That "maybe" is worth everything.

Because dramatic events shake people out of apathy. Not the finish line. Not the medal. The shaking. The disruption. The moment where someone scrolling past sees a man in the rain, mile 600, and thinks: maybe I could do something hard too.

Cracks are how the light gets in.



The run won't happen alone. And that's deliberate. Because the whole book has been arguing that isolation kills and connection saves.

My dad is the anchor. The man who stood in my doorway at 7am and said "get up" is now the man who'll be waiting at the next checkpoint with food and dry socks. The man who pushed his son toward the first physical challenge is now supporting the biggest one.

And there will be others. Men from the gym. Men from the podcast. Men who hear about the run and want to run a section alongside me.

Because the run isn't a solo expedition. It's a demonstration of the second B. Belonging. A crew of men who show up for each other, under pressure, in the rain, in November, in Scotland.

That's what men do. At their best. They choose hard things together. They carry the load alongside each other. They don't pretend it's easy, and they don't pretend they could do it alone.

I couldn't do it alone. And the willingness to say "I need help and I need people and I need my dad in a van at mile 600" is itself part of the message. Because the men who are suffering in silence, the men this book is for, have been told that needing help is weakness. And watching a man run the length of a country while openly relying on his crew is proof that needing help is not weakness.

Needing help is intelligence. Needing help is how the thing gets done.



The bike ride failed for a specific reason and the reason matters. Not the knee. The knee was the symptom. The reason was this: the bike ride was for me. Just me. A personal challenge, a personal goal, a test of my own limits.

And when the knee went, and the pain was unbearable, and every rotation of the pedal was a negotiation with a body that was screaming stop, the question I asked myself was: "Is this worth it?"

For me? At that moment? The honest answer was no. Not worth permanent damage to my knee. Not worth the risk of serious injury. Not for a personal record. Not for content. Not for my ego.

So I stopped. And the stopping was the right decision. And I'd make it again.

The run is different. Not because my body is different, though it is. Not because running is kinder on the joints than cycling, though at my weight it might not be. The run is different because the answer to "is this worth it?" is different.

Is it worth it for the 125 men a week?

Is it worth it for the man who's sitting in his flat right now, the way I sat in my bedroom at eighteen, and who might see a video of me at mile 600 in the rain and think: maybe there's a reason to keep going?

Is it worth it for that man?

Yes. It is. And that answer, the one that points outward instead of inward, is the one that will carry me through day twenty-three when my body tells me to stop and my mind tells me to quit and the road tells me there's no point.

There is a point. The point isn't me.

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Chapter 16: Being

There's a sixth B. I've been holding it back.

Body. Belonging. Belief. Behaviour. Building. And then, beyond all five: Being.

Being is what happens when the system stops being a system and starts being you. When the dictionary is internalised. When the loops are automatic. When you've trained the skill so thoroughly that the skill disappears and what's left is just a person, moving through the world, responding to signals without the manual.

Like driving. You don't think about the clutch anymore.

Being is the state where effort and intention merge. Where you stop acting to prove and start acting to express. Where creation becomes play and discipline becomes preference and the gap between who you are and who you're performing closes to zero.

I'm not there yet. I want to be honest about that. I have moments of it. On the rings, mid-session, when the movement flows and the mind is quiet and the body just does what it knows how to do. During a coaching conversation that runs deep, where the words come without scripting. In Bali at 4am, writing, when the sentences form faster than I can type and the world shrinks to the screen and the keys and the dark room.

Those moments are Being. And they're rare enough that I notice them when they happen.

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Control, Creation, Contribution, Peace.

You learn to control yourself. Then you create. Then you contribute. And the peace that follows isn't the peace of doing nothing. It's the peace of doing the right thing, easily, without internal resistance.

Freedom, real freedom, the kind worth chasing, is not doing whatever you want. Doing whatever you want is how I lived at eighteen. Scrolling, eating, avoiding, decaying. That's not freedom. That's captivity with better marketing.

Real freedom is wanting whatever you do.

When the action and the desire align. When you don't need to force yourself because the thing you're doing is the thing you want to be doing.

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There was a morning in Bali. I'd been up since 4am. Writing. The sun was coming up over the rice paddies and the light was doing that thing tropical light does, turning everything gold and green and impossibly saturated. I'd been writing for two hours. The coffee was cold. My screen was full of words.

And I realised, without any fanfare or dramatic music, that I was exactly where I wanted to be, doing exactly what I wanted to be doing, and the gap between my actions and my desires was zero.

Zero.

No internal negotiation. No forcing. No discipline required. Just a man, doing his work, in a place he chose to be, at a time he chose to be there.

That's peace. And it lasted maybe twenty minutes before my brain started planning the next thing and the gap reopened and the work resumed. But those twenty minutes were enough. Proof of concept. Evidence that the endgame exists.

And the proof of concept is what keeps me going. Because if twenty minutes is possible, then thirty is possible. Then an hour. Then a day. Then a life.

Not likely. Not easy. But possible. And possible is enough to chase.

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I think the purpose of life is to be useful.

That's it. Simple. Almost disappointingly simple. But simple things are usually the true ones.

Be useful. To yourself first. Get your body working, get your mind stable, get your behaviour under control. Then to the people around you, your family, your friends, your tribe. Then, if you choose, to the wider world, through building, through creating, through giving.

I went from being selfish to being useful. And the transition, which took years, and involved a park, some rings, a man, nine words, a gym, a partner, a thousand coaching conversations, and more failure than I care to count, was the single most important shift of my life.

When you're useful, the nihilism can't hold. Because usefulness is evidence of meaning. Every person you help is proof that your existence matters. Not in the grand, cosmic sense. You're still a speck on a rock. But in the human sense. In the only sense that actually feels real when you're alive and breathing and standing in front of another person who needs what you have.

Usefulness is meaning. And meaning is the antidote to despair.

Viktor Frankl survived Auschwitz. He watched men die around him, not from the physical conditions, though those were horrific, but from the loss of meaning. The men who gave up were the ones who lost their "why." The men who survived were the ones who held onto a reason, any reason, to keep going. A person waiting for them. A book left unfinished. A task left undone.

Frankl wrote: "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how."

That's the deepest truth in this book. The "how," the operating system, the dictionary, the 5 B's, the feedback loops, all of it, is only as strong as the "why" underneath it. And the "why" that holds up, the one that survives the darkest nights and the hardest days, is always the same one: someone else needs what you have.

Not "I want to get rich." Not "I want to look good." Not "I want to be famous." Those whys collapse under pressure because they're self-referential. They loop back to I. And the I-loop, as we've discussed, is where despair lives.

The why that survives is: someone is waiting for me to be useful. My kid needs me to show up. My client needs me to coach them. The man in the park needs me to throw the rings. The reader of this book needs me to finish writing it.

That's the why. And it's always outward. Always toward someone else. Always useful.



There's a clinical question used in dialectical behaviour therapy, developed by Marsha Linehan. I'm going to share it with you and I need you to understand the context before you react to it.

Linehan developed this question for people in genuine crisis. It's designed to reveal, in the darkest moment, the reason a person is still alive. It's not a suggestion. It's the opposite of a suggestion. It's a way of finding the light when everything else has gone dark.

The question is: "Why haven't you killed yourself yet?"

Read it again. Slowly. It's not asking why you should. It's asking why you haven't. Because the answer to that question, whatever it is, is the thing you're living for.

"My kids." "My dog." "I haven't finished the book." "I promised someone I'd try." "I'm curious about what happens next." "Because fuck that."

Whatever the answer is, that's your anchor. That's the thing that kept you here when everything else said leave. And that thing, however small, however quiet, however impossible to explain to anyone else, is enough.

It was always enough.

If you're reading this right now and the question hit hard, sit with the answer. Write it down. Remember it. Because the next time the darkness comes, and it will come, because life is waves, you'll have something to hold onto. Not a platitude. Not a motivational quote. Your own answer, in your own words, about your own reason for being here.

That's the most real thing you'll ever write.



I think the best analogy for Being is music.

When a musician is learning, every note is conscious. Finger here. Breath here. Timing here. The effort is visible, audible, almost painful. You can hear the thinking in the playing.

And then, after thousands of hours, something shifts. The musician stops playing the notes and starts playing the music. The technique doesn't disappear. It's still there, still the foundation. But it's been absorbed into something larger. The conscious process has become unconscious.

Being is that shift. From conscious to unconscious. From effort to expression.

I've felt it in coaching. In conversations where the framework is running underneath but the words aren't scripted. They're arriving in real time, shaped by the person in front of me. Those conversations produce insights I couldn't have planned. The system is working but the system isn't the point anymore. The person is the point.

I've felt it in training. On the rings, mid-flow, when the transitions happen without thought and the body knows where to go and the mind is quiet. Those moments last seconds. Sometimes minutes. And then the conscious mind kicks back in and the magic breaks and I'm just a bloke on gymnastics rings again.

But those seconds are worth years of practice.

• • •

I should warn you about something. The pursuit of mastery can become its own trap.

Optimisation addiction. The endless tweaking. The constant improvement that never reaches satisfaction because there's always another level.

I've fallen into this. More than once. The body is good but it could be better. The business is working but it could be bigger. The framework is solid but it could be sharper. And the pursuit of "better" becomes so all-consuming that you forget to inhabit "good."

Being is the antidote. Being says: enough. Not forever. Just for now. Put the tools down. Stop building. Stop optimising. Stop measuring.

Just be here.

In the gym, mid-set, when the muscles are burning and the only thing in the world is the bar and your hands.

In a conversation, when the other person says something true and you feel it land in your chest.

In the morning, in the dark, when the world is quiet and the day hasn't started yet and everything is potential.

The 5 B's aren't a ladder you climb and stand on top of forever. They're a loop. You cycle through them. You maintain them. They maintain you. Being is the moment when the cycle spins so smoothly that you can't feel the gears anymore.

And then you can.

And then you're back in the workshop. Adjusting, recalibrating, rebuilding. That's fine. That's the work. That's life.

• • •

I want to talk about peace. Not the greeting-card version. The real version. The kind that comes after years of war.

I've had moments of it. Brief. Fleeting. But real enough to know the direction is correct.

Peace is not happiness, which is a frequency. Not contentment, which can shade into complacency. Peace is the deep, settled, structural experience of a nervous system that trusts itself.

A man at peace is not a man without problems. He's a man whose operating system is good enough to handle whatever comes next.

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The endgame of this book is not perfection. Not enlightenment. Not some Instagram version of wellness.

The endgame is this: when the next wave comes, and it will come, you know what to do.

You can read the signal. You can identify the emotion. You can match it to the behaviour. You can act. And the loop closes. The wave passes. You're still standing.

Not because you're invincible. Because you have a system. Because the operating system works.

And because, somewhere in a park in Bath, someone threw some rings over a tree. And a man walked across wet grass. And nine words were spoken.

And it turned out that mattered. More than anything else in this whole story.

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Epilogue: For the Man Who Saved Me

This is for you.

You walked across wet grass on a cold morning and said nine words that changed my life. You didn't know you were doing that. You thought you were thanking someone. You thought you were giving a gift. But the gift went both ways. You gave me a purpose. You gave me a direction. You killed the lie that had been running my operating system for years and replaced it with something so simple and so true that I've built everything since on its foundation.

Small things save lives.

I don't know if you'll ever read this. Maybe you will. Maybe it'll find its way to you through an algorithm or a recommendation or someone who knows us both. And you'll recognise yourself in these pages. And you'll know, in your chest, the same way I knew it in mine that morning, that your courage made all of this possible.

The gym. The community. The coaching. The framework. The podcast. The run. This book.

All of it started with you.

With your willingness to say the hardest thing a person can say. Out loud. To someone who barely knew you. In a park. Before 9am.

But you didn't stay quiet.

You spoke.

And speaking saved us both.

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I know you now. We're friends. You're one of the strongest people I've ever met. And I don't mean on the rings.

Most men would rather die than do what you did. Most men would rather suffer in silence, drown in the dark, maintain the performance of being fine, than speak nine words to a bloke they don't know in a park in Bath.

You weren't most men. And because you weren't, I'm not either.

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This book is also for the man who's reading it right now and recognising something.

Maybe not the whole thing. Maybe just a chapter. Maybe just a sentence. Maybe just the knowledge that someone else has stood in the same darkness and lived through it and came out the other side with something to show.

If that's you, if you're in it right now, if the water is rising, if the horse has bolted and you're hanging on with both hands and the reins are cutting into your palms, I need you to know something.

You're not weak.

You're not broken.

You're not beyond repair.

You're not the only one.

You're a man running a system without a manual. A human being trying to regulate an inner world that nobody taught you to read, using tools that nobody gave you, in a culture that told you the feelings were the problem instead of the signal.

The feelings aren't the problem. They're the data. And this book, imperfect, human, probably full of things I'll want to rewrite in five years, is the manual.

Use it.

Start with the body. Tomorrow morning. Set an alarm thirty minutes earlier. Do ten push-ups. Or five. Or one. Go for a walk around the block. Prove to yourself, through your body, that what you do changes what you feel.

Find your tribe. Not online. In person. A gym. A park session. A group of people who show up and move and don't judge you for being new or nervous or afraid.

Examine the beliefs. The stories you're telling yourself about who you are. Ask where those stories came from. Give yourself permission to rewrite them. Through action. Through evidence. Through casting votes for the person you want to become.

Act. Now. Not when you're ready. Because the readiness arrives in the doing.

Build. Once your energy starts pointing outward, create something. Anything. Something that helps one person. Take what you've learned and give it away. Because somewhere out there, a man is waiting for his version of the rings over the tree, and you might be the one who throws them.

Keep going.

Momentum is not a feeling. Momentum is a physics term. It means: a body in motion tends to stay in motion.

Stay in motion. Through the bad days and the worse days and the days when the operating system feels like it's failing and the emotions are loud and the behaviour is hard and the progress is invisible.

Stay in motion. Because the compound effect is real. Every rep accumulates. Every kept promise adds to the score. Every day you choose to show up instead of shut down is another vote for the man you're becoming.

Stay in motion. For the man who told me I saved him, but really saved me. For the 125 men who won't make it this week. For the boy you were at sixteen who needed someone to hand him a map and say: here. It gets better. I promise. I know because I walked this road and the other side exists and it's worth the journey.

Stay in motion.

For yourself.



I want to end with something that might contradict everything I've just said. Or maybe it completes it. I'm not sure. I'm still working this one out, and the fact that I'm not sure is part of why I trust it.

Contradictions are allowed. In this book, in life, in the messy experience of being a human who is simultaneously flawed and trying. I've told you that emotions are signals and also that they can be overwhelming. I've told you that you have agency and also that the monkey is driving. I've told you that the selfish phase is necessary and also that usefulness is the purpose. Both things are true. At the same time. Without contradiction.

Because that's what lived thinking looks like. It contradicts itself. It holds two truths in the same hand and doesn't need them to agree. It says "I am strong" and "I need help" in the same breath and doesn't flinch.

If you take one thing from this book, make it this: the gap between who you are and who you could be is not fixed. It's not a permanent condition. It's not your identity. It's a distance. And distances can be closed. One step at a time. One rep. One conversation. One kept promise. One morning where you get up when the alarm goes off and do the thing you said you'd do.

That's momentum. Not a feeling. A physics term.

A body in motion tends to stay in motion.

Stay in motion.

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If you're reading this and you're in trouble, here are the numbers. Don't wait. Don't think about it.

UK: Samaritans — 116 123 (24 hours, every day). Text SHOUT to 85258. **Australia:** Lifeline — 13 11 14. Beyond Blue — 1300 22 4636. **International:** findahelpline.com

You're not alone. You're never alone.

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Years before I wrote this book, years before I even knew it would be a book, I had a picture in my head. A single scene that I replayed like a film clip on a loop.

I'm standing in front of Hormozi. I don't know where. Some event, some conference, some corridor backstage. Doesn't matter. And I'm holding a book. Five hundred pages. Five years to write. And I hand it to him and I say: you changed my life. This is yours. Use it. Don't even credit me. I don't care. It's my gift back.

That scene kept me writing. On the nights when the words wouldn't come and the framework felt stupid and the voice in my head said nobody's going to read this. That scene. That moment. The idea that one day I could hand something back to the man whose voice in my earphones on a dark morning run in Bath started a chain reaction that became the 5 B's, the dictionary, the operating system, the gym, the podcast, the run, this book.

I don't know if that moment will ever happen. Probably not. He's busy. I'm nobody. The world doesn't arrange itself around the scenes we rehearse in our heads.

But the book is real. And the dedication is real.

• • •

Dedicated to Alex Hormozi, who showed me that giving away the secrets is the most powerful thing you can do.

And to my parents. Mum, you dragged me to the gym every Saturday. You took me to the doctors. You weighed me. You changed my environment so I'd have a chance. You did everything you could and it was more than enough. Dad, you got me into push-ups. You taught me every sport. You stood in my doorway and refused to let me quit. You walked through the rain at 3am to provide for us and never once complained. You were both under enormous pressure. You were going through a rough time and life wasn't fair to you. But you were always there. Always supportive. Always trying. I understand you completely. And I thank you for everything.

And to Kiera, who threw the rings over the tree with me and has been beside me for every single step of what followed. Without you, none of this exists.

And to David Goggins, whose voice in my headphones at 5am taught me that the mind lies and the body proves it wrong.

And to every man who's ever sat in the dark and wondered if it matters.

It does. More than you know.

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- Jocko Willink — extreme ownership, "good," discipline equals freedom
- Marsha Linehan — dialectical behaviour therapy

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This book is free. It will always be free.

If it helped you, share it with one person who needs it.

That's the only thing I'll ever ask.

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If you bought this on Amazon — thank you. Every penny goes to men's mental health. I make nothing from it. The reviews help it reach more men, and that's what matters.

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