

Chapter One

GOOD NEWS

*Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom.
Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power.*

—Tao Te Ching

It is in self-imitation that a master first shows himself.

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,
German playwright, poet,
novelist, and dramatist, 1749–1832

*A man who is master of himself can end a sorrow as easily as
he can invent a pleasure.*

I don't want to be at the mercy of my emotions.

I want to use them, to enjoy them, and to dominate them.

—Oscar Wilde,
Irish poet, novelist,
dramatist, and critic, 1854–1900

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Imagine . . .

It's Monday morning. You're in the car, just heading to work after a two-week trip to Cancun.

On the way in, your cell phone hasn't stopped ringing, traffic is mostly stopped, and you can't imagine what must be waiting for you at the office. You feel your relaxed nerves slowly tightening.

Sure enough, just after greeting you with a hearty "Welcome back," the boss asks you to locate suitable office space "within the next two months" for a new foray into the Chicago region. You learn that Human Resources is behind schedule in downsizing (or "right-sizing," as the board likes to call it) 5 percent of the employees at two facilities, with a six-month deadline looming. And Sales and Marketing informs you that the personnel cuts are causing morale problems, which in turn threaten to adversely affect customer sales and perception.

And that's just the half of it. Thanks to right-sizing in other departments last year, you already feel like you have more on your plate than you can handle. What a day!

You arrive home exhausted. The relaxation you felt in Cancun is all but completely faded, and you go to bed early.

The next day, Tuesday morning, you take the train to work.

Well, at least you can respond to text messages on the train—that's a distinct advantage over driving! Small consolation. You're still wondering how to address your wife's new concerns about the big family move you decided to make to a new neighborhood. She wants to talk about it after dinner tonight. And then there's that urgent memo from the VP that came in just as you were leaving work yesterday. Now that you think of it, what are you going to do about your vacation resolution to "keep in shape no matter what"?

It hardly feels like you even had a vacation.

How often have you felt—at work or home—as though you had to act like everything is under control, but inside you are silently wondering how you're going to manage, how you're going to get it all done and on time?

You're not alone.

Like most of us, in this age of multitasking, information overload, and trying to juggle more responsibilities thanks to corporate downsizing—oops, I mean right-sizing—sometimes you just want to jump in the car and spend the day at the beach or by the lake, or hang out with friends, or go golfing, or go

running, do *anything*, be *anywhere* else—just to get away from it all, clear your head, and try to gain some perspective.

Yes, after a mental break or physical activity, things do seem a little better. It's good to take a break. Yet the anxiety of trying to manage it all creeps quickly back and weighs even more heavily on your energy and spirit.

Wouldn't it be nice to have a simple system that made it all easy?

Even better, wouldn't it be nice to have a fast and easy system to juggle all these projects and demands?

"If only," you sigh, but you just arrived at work and must return to the projects at hand. Hey, is that your cell phone ringing again, or another text message?

Finally, you somehow manage to make it successfully through all the week's mountains. You feel tremendous relief—relaxation, even—and a sense of accomplishment. All the pressure that you felt at the beginning of the week is off your shoulders. You feel pounds lighter, lighter than air. It's almost as if those big Mount Everests of last week never existed. And after a little rest, you even feel a surge of newfound energy and an attitude of "I can do anything—bring it on!"

Then—BAM—slammed again. More deadlines, new goals, new mountains—the cycle repeats.

Is this what our leadership calls operating at optimum efficiency? Clearly this can't go on forever. I know a lot of my colleagues compare this new performance expectation to

“feeling like they’re on a hamster wheel,” while trying to fit in eating, sleeping, and maintaining some kind of social life at the same time.

There must be a better way to deal with what’s asked of you in life and work.

Believe me, I understand your pain!

When starting out in my career, I often felt the same way, overwhelmed beyond words. Soon I was juggling increasing corporate demands, a wonderful new, young and growing, family and a blur of projects, obligations, and dreams.

Like you, I wondered how I could keep it all together, keep making progress, and, frankly, stay sane in the process.

Don’t get me wrong. I loved what I did. I still do. I love my family, too, which has always been the most important priority to me. Yet, even so, nothing changed how overwhelmed I often felt during those early years.

Then one day I made a breakthrough observation.

This observation led me to embark on a quest that resulted in the simple system you’ll learn in this book: *a simple system that, once mastered, will enable you to achieve your goals and dreams with speed, ease, and confidence, and will greatly reduce your stress and worry.*

Imagine achieving what today seems overwhelming and impossible, with speed, ease, and confidence. Less stress and worry. It sounds like a dream come true.

THE OBSERVATION

One day it struck me that it must be possible to be successful in life and not feel constantly overwhelmed, because I had seen a handful of people who truly lived like this.

For me, these people were like seasoned mountain climbers, who are so skilled and confident in their ability to scale the tallest peaks that it almost seems to be second nature to them. They do things fast that would take me hours. I'm merely a weekend warrior who enjoys hiking. But merely observing the seasoned climber's level of expertise, confidence, and skill in mountain climbing—including how to handle outdoor emergencies and contingencies—was proof that if I ever desired to become an expert outdoor mountain climber, I knew at least it would be possible to gain this skill.

I learned something else from this observation. Both the seasoned mountain climber and the weekend hiker share something in common at the end of the journey. As they head down the mountain and back to the base camp, regardless of how steep or how rigorous the path, both veteran and weekender feel a sense of satisfaction, tired exhilaration, and relief, after accomplishing a great feat—almost as though the once-looming mountain is now easy.

The only difference between outdoor mountain climbing and the project mountains I faced every week at work, was that choosing to devote time and energy to climb the Himalayas or Mount Everest was a luxury for me. Whereas climbing my

weekly mountain range of projects and responsibilities was not a luxury. It was a necessity.

People who exhibited these skills were like seasoned mountain climbers.

These few standout individuals always seemed to have it together, even though they juggled immense and highly demanding careers and responsibilities that were much greater than mine. Even in the midst of crises, these individuals exhibited a surprising sense of peace and calm clarity of thought and direction.

These individuals were not the ones clamoring for attention and stepping on others to promote themselves. Sometimes they weren't even the head of the department or company. And they didn't need a title to attract others to follow them.

Instead, these individuals were genuine leaders, anchors amid the chaos. They always seemed to have time to give an encouraging word, or to quickly redirect a project that had become derailed. Sometimes I'd come to these individuals to seek advice or to discuss a project. Always I'd walk away satisfied, at peace, because I had regained clarity about my concerns thanks to their comments.

That observation gave me hope. This was good news! After all, if these individuals could do it, so could I—but how?

Before we get to “how,” it's important to ground ourselves in the good news that you and I—anyone who wants to—can master core thinking skills using a simple system that will eliminate the overwhelmed feelings that often plague us.

DO IT:

Go ahead, discover for yourself the same breakthrough that I had. This will give you practical evidence and hope that it is possible to have calm achievement in the face of great storms and responsibilities.

Write down the names of three people who seem to accomplish a lot with their lives, who are successful leaders, and yet who never seem to be overwhelmed in handling multiple responsibilities, or in facing new problems or challenges that come up. By leaders, I don't necessarily mean CEOs of multimillion-dollar companies. I mean people to whom others look for guidance and reassurance, steady anchors in a storm. These people may be from your work, your family, your church, or even someone you've observed at a favorite restaurant or somewhere else.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now take it a step further. Observe how these people address the onslaught of concerns that come their way. Write down your answers to these questions:

- How do these individuals maintain their composure in a crisis?

- How do these individuals get their group focused on the highest priority?

- How do these individuals initially respond to any concern presented?

- Were these individuals rational in their approach, or did they just react emotionally?

- How did these individuals make others feel when others offered their ideas?

Now, take a look at what you wrote.

If you want to become more like these people, the thinking skills you will learn from reading this book will help you get there.

YES, YOU CAN DO IT!

Over the years, I've seen countless people get off the hamster wheel and lead extraordinary lives of achievement—men and

women of all ages, from senior executives and CEOs, to middle managers and new employees, to young parents, athletes, and entrepreneurs. And they did it because they embraced the simple system of thinking skills presented in this book. My hope is that you will have the same results. I know you can do it!

Take my word for it now, it *is* possible to achieve consistent clarity and calmness in the midst of whatever overwhelming and even unexpected projects and responsibilities come your way.

Let's look at how you, too, can master these same thinking skills with ease and confidence—and how you can do it in minutes a day.

TRUST THE PROCESS

Before we begin, I must insist on one thing: Trust the process!

If you trust the simple method I show you, you will discover—and truly master—problem solving, decision making, and planning so effectively that people will look to you as a leader. They will see you as a calm, steady, and effective guide, even through the toughest crisis situations. And, in truth, you will be just that. Others will want to emulate your qualities.

Now you might wonder, why should you trust me to guide you?

Let me tell you a quick story.

When I was first starting out on my career path, like most people, I wasn't exactly sure where I'd end up. Like you, each year it seemed that I faced increasing responsibilities—in life

and at work—that required more thinking and management skills than I had.

Like you, I noticed that some senior executives and leaders exemplified how I wanted to be. They were calm, clear thinking, and effective, no matter what (or how much) came their way. They generated a reassuring sense of peace and direction and a can-do leadership approach that energized and focused others. Projects they managed ran smoothly, effectively, and on time. These projects were often even fun because we had real teamwork.

At the time, I knew inside that I did not possess these skills, but I wanted them. So I began a quest, with a small group of friends and colleagues who shared my observations.

Eventually we developed a foolproof system, based on observations, questions, time-consuming research, and relentless testing.

Now, having worked with tens of thousands of individuals, in literally thousands of companies nationwide and internationally, including individuals in more than 200 Fortune 500 companies, I can tell you that this system works.

On a personal level, I can tell you candidly that following this system has had one of the biggest impacts on my success in business and even in developing a harmonious family dynamic. It has made it possible to continue achieving my goals and dreams. And it has helped countless others as well, mainly corporate leaders and managers, whom my colleagues and I

have had the privilege to train over the years, in the United States and around the world.

Again and again we witnessed furrowed brows on stressed-out employees, managers, and leaders at all levels, transform into grateful smiles. It never failed.

In writing this book, I simplify this system, these secrets of success, to make it even easier to possess the thinking skills of highly effective, productive leaders. By mastering these skills, you too will lead a satisfying, clear, and focused life—a life based on clear principles, not crazed reactions.

Are you ready?

Let's get started.

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