

12. Approaching varied nettles – evolving a self-help strategy

So, in the final chapter, we're going to review key coping areas of this book, in an interactive way which will get you focusing down your path ahead. You're going to need that notebook and pen again – and you may, on occasion, have to refer to your previous responses. (If you inadvertently forgot to respond earlier (!) – you may have to spend a little time reading the previous exercises again and formulating some answers). This is your future we're considering, after all, so it's worth a bit of effort!

I'll be selecting particular areas involving coping from each chapter, as we progress through the book. That doesn't of course mean that these are the only important considerations incorporated in the contents – do return to the chapters you feel are most relevant to you and delve ever deeper. Like the bible – and like the inspirational sayings in my books and those of others – each message comes in several different levels of understanding, if you pause and think about it. Don't just settle for the first response – explore further.

12.1 Past, present and future

As the introductory chapter, this is quite brief. The key areas covered involved an introduction to the concept of thinking primarily in the Now and how this related to past and future. Think about the following questions and really try to come up with appropriate answers. If it helps, make notes of your responses – even discuss them with a colleague or mentor.

- ❖ What do you understand by the concept of “living in the Now”?
- ❖ How would you describe a positive way of thinking about the future?
- ❖ Think of a problem you have experienced, where having a possible future strategy in mind helped you respond to/resolve the situation more rapidly.
- ❖ Identify a scenario where you managed to use your past experience in that area to suggest changes and refinements, which resulted in an improved end result.
- ❖ Identify an activity you could be asked to do, which you would consider to be stressful. List three actions you might carry out, in order to reduce the amount of fear and stress involved in the carrying out the activity.

This is our first experience (in the book anyway) of thinking in the Now.

- ❖ How would you describe the process?
- ❖ What would you say was a key benefit of applying it?
- ❖ Describe a personal situation where you plan to apply it.

There are no “answer sections” to these – and subsequent – questions in this chapter. The detail is there in the text and I hope now instilled in your mind, if you've followed the content of the book. If not, check back in the relevant chapter again – or discuss the question with your mentor.

If you really get stuck, send me a brief e-mail to : chris.sangster@btinternet.com. I won't promise to give you an answer by return but I'll certainly get back to you with a (brief) answer to your questions or ideas, relative to the book's contents. Further than that, it's up to you to

establish your own coping strategies – becoming involved and thinking through strategies yourself is part of the solution!

12.2 Living in the Now

This chapter considers a range of examples which illustrate thinking in the Now in different ways. These review a variety of coping strategies where focusing on the Now moment can help. Consider and elaborate upon the following :

- ❖ Situations where we might apply “Now focus”, in order to prevent ourselves from worrying about possible future problems
- ❖ Note any additional coping examples you can, where animals benefit from existing in the Now
- ❖ Describe situations where eye contact & lack of it could each be applied as coping strategies – perhaps in potentially fearful circumstances

You could think of mindfulness as being totally focused and aware of the present moment – and the activities, experiences, thoughts and sensations which are going on around you at that moment.

- ❖ How would you compare these key criteria with those relating to meditation?

(Think of the different focus and degree of concentration of the two).

- ❖ When involved in repetitive/boring tasks, how can you use mindfulness and focus on the Now to maintain interest, progress and standards?

(Bear in mind the envelope-stuffing example [p] but think of a similar example that you may have been involved with).

When you get the opportunity, Google MBCT (Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy) on the computer and find out some more about how it is applied to help people cope with depression. Make notes of any key points which you may find.

In this chapter, we considered how getting a more ordered approach to life – cutting out clutter and getting into a regime of regular meditation and exercise – would help us cope with the stresses of life.

- ❖ Make a list of several areas in your own life and/or work, where a programme of “de-cluttering” would make your life easier to cope with, generally.

Before we leave this chapter two review, focus on how thinking in the Now will help you cope more easily with your day-to-day life. Make some notes.

12.3 Strategies for coping – embracing nettles gently

This chapter considers a wide range of coping strategies – you should use it as the central reference point when thinking of responses to specific problem examples in the future. Extending Now thinking, taking each day – and section of day – as it comes and focusing on progressing positively through it, is a good starting point.

- ❖ Review the differing effects of thinking positively and negatively with regard to the future. How can positive future thinking help us cope with each Now moment.

We considered the benefits of conscious (or mindful) breathing, both as an exercise in itself and as a component of other coping strategies.

- ❖ Spend a little time consciously breathing, as described in the chapter. Sit up straight-backed with hands on thighs or stand upright. Notice how you feel after doing this deeply for several minutes.
- ❖ List three of the benefits of focused breathing which were identified

The chapter considers six different strategies for coping with different problem areas we might encounter.

- ❖ Considering two or three of the areas which are most relevant to your current needs, note down the key actions and criteria for each as separate “quick reference” lists.
- ❖ Taking a challenging area with which you’ve had to deal (at life or work) in the fairly recent past, select the coping strategy which you would be most likely to use – and make some notes of how you think the situation might have progressed, if you had applied that coping strategy.
- ❖ Think about a situation where you felt empowered. How did you feel and what were the positive outcomes of the situation?

We considered the problems associated with coping with money problems.

- ❖ If your financial circumstances became dramatically worse for some reason, make a list of three or four economies which you could make – which would help you budget. Indicate roughly how much you might save monthly doing this – and prioritise your list, with number one being the economy which would save you most.

Family matters - From an awareness of your own children (if relevant) or the children of families known to you, identify four of the given criteria [p] which appear key issues to you and make brief notes of how these might apply.

Remember to consult this chapter in the future, when trying to apply coping strategies for the specific areas covered in later chapters.

12.4 Help from healing processes

This chapter looked at various aspects of and approaches to healing.

- ❖ If you’re aware of anyone involved in spiritual healing, ask to talk to them about healing, to get a better insight into how it’s seen to work.
- ❖ If you can’t speak to anyone about it – or even if you can – explore the subject by reading books or calling up “Spiritual/Contact/Absent Healing” on Google.
- ❖ If you haven’t tried this before, sit and meditate for a while and, when you feel in a relaxed, meditative state, concentrate on trying to imagine positive healing energy coming into your being. (You may feel a pressure or tingling in the “third eye” area of your central brow).

- ❖ Try this previous exercise regularly. It may not “work” dramatically at first but, once you’ve experienced energy flow and are aware how it manifests itself, your explorations should become progressively more interesting!

We considered the responsibilities and pressures which relations involved in caring experienced. As we established caring happens at all levels, from fairly constant supervision to degrees of involvement in direct nursing of the patient/member of the family. Whatever the level, one of the major coping aspects is the constancy of the situation, which can lead to the carer feeling rather trapped and overwhelmed.

- ❖ If you are aware of anyone – member of family, friend, neighbour – who is involved in caring, talk to them about their experiences and coping situations which they might sometimes find difficult.
- ❖ Having made the contact, find out how you might help periodically – probably by relieving them to have some quality “me time”, however they perceive that.
- ❖ Try to maintain this support. It may only be a couple of hours which you’re spending periodically – but it will mean the world to the carer.

In this chapter, we considered several situations where some form of relaxation or entering an inner state of mind helped as a coping strategy.

- ❖ Identify a particular image, activity or situation which you personally would find very relaxing. It may be an experience you have already had – or it may be an ultimate event you can imagine doing in the future
- ❖ Consider the carer(s) you have made contact with and find out what their vision of a relaxing event might be. Some might be relatively easy to achieve.
- ❖ Think of ways that you might be able to help any family carers in the longer term.

Try to become more aware of – and even involved in – the overall healing process, from conventional medical interventions to spiritual healing involving absent and contact methods. Different forms work for different people – try to respond to their beliefs with a degree of self-less understanding. Your role is to support, not undermine!

12.5 Harnessing the light of Love

Here, we have considered the broader interpretations of the concept of applied love – and how it manifests itself through more general emotions such as respect, understanding, involvement and intuition. By consciously applying these, we can build positive and co-operative relationships in our dealings with others.

- ❖ Have you ever volunteered to do anything? Think of the relationships and activities you experienced – how did these affect other people?
- ❖ In these kinds of situations, how would you describe the “love feelings” that became part of the way you carried out the activities?

- ❖ The chapter suggests some of the differences that are coming about as we move into the age of Aquarius. Have you had any experiences, perhaps concerning inter-relationships at work or in society, that illustrate these changes?
- ❖ Can you think of an altruistic situation you have experienced, where you changed your own priorities and wishes in favour of those of someone else?

We also considered the applications of Love when thinking in the Now moment. There will be occasions where you will give way to allow someone else to take over doing something, either because they are better at doing it or it will benefit them more doing it – perhaps as a learning experience for them.

- ❖ Think of a situation where you allowed someone else to do something, for their benefit rather than yours.
- ❖ Once you've established that, think of another situation where someone deferred to you, allowing you to develop by taking the leading role.
- ❖ Are you aware of any relationship(s) where there is a problem/struggle for some reason, where the relationship is being held together by existing in a “day-by-day” approach – progressing in positive Now moments?
- ❖ Have you any ideas that might be applied to improve this relationship situation?

This chapter included considerations about positive and negative, in terms of light and darkness. It established that we required both for balance – and that efforts to respond positively to the darker moments of our life would progress our positive thoughts more dynamically.

- ❖ Considering Love as Light, have you experienced a situation where you have had to adjust your way of life in some way, to move from a dark phase towards something more light and positive?
- ❖ Is there any dark situation either you or someone close to you is experiencing, where it is difficult to see how this can be lightened? If so, close your eyes and meditate on it for a few minutes, to see if any enlightenment evolves.

The final section of the chapter was a visualisation of progress of your personal path along the track of life. It involved considering not only how your individual path evolved – but also how this path impacted on the paths of others (and vice versa).

- ❖ Did you spend some time experiencing the visualisation, either by getting someone to read it to you while you meditated, or by recording it to play back? If not, have a go at doing it now – it really is worth while!
- ❖ Thinking through your future progress, what would you say were the next three or four milestones which you see ahead of you on your path?
- ❖ Considering each, can you identify any possible blockages which might slow down your progress for any reason (we're thinking positively here – it's “slow down”, not “prevent”!) If there are any blockages, do you have any ideas how to circumvent these potential blockages?
- ❖ What approximate timescales would you give yourself for achieving these different milestones? What might you have to do to get started on the first one now?

- ❖ Think about setting down the possible milestones for your future progress of your path on some form of chart, to give yourself reference points.

12.6 The Power of Sound

Using sound is a wonderful means of coping with stress, tiredness and concern. Some of us gain relaxation by listening to music, or going for a walk in the peaceful countryside (which still of course has its natural sounds). Others use instruments to play our own music – or create our own sounds. Sound is used in some healing techniques, either as background music or through the use of specific instruments (such as gongs, singing bowls, Freenotes or shamanic drums, for example).

- ❖ If you felt the need to relieve stress, which of your CD or MP3 tracks would you normally play?
- ❖ Which two or three instruments do you find most relaxing to listen to, for meditation or healing purposes?
- ❖ In recent years, have you ever sung or played music with others? If so, have you ever experienced the effects of entrainment (sounds merging together within the group)? If so, recall the experience in as much detail as you can – with special attention paid to the positive effects received by yourself and the others.

In this chapter, we also considered the range of brain wave patterns, which create different vibrations – and therefore effects – in our brains.

- ❖ There were the four different divisions – in no particular order, these are: Alpha, Theta, Beta and Delta. Position each of these at the brain wave state (in Hz) it represents –

13 - 40 Hz
8 - 12 Hz
4 - 7 Hz
0.5 - 3 Hz

- ❖ The state of deep meditation is achieved in the Theta state, which is represented by a low hertz value. Can you remember how this might be achieved, using indigenous instruments such as gongs or singing bowls?
- ❖ Think of several sounds/noises which you experience day-to-day, which might cause you discomfort or even pain. Against each one, consider a strategy which might help you to cope with these to a greater degree.
- ❖ If you have ever experienced chanting – either real or recorded – what would you say were the effects which gave you most peace, relaxation or the best meditative state?
- ❖ If you were involved in a sound workshop, what would be the two or three main benefits you personally would hope to gain?

12.7 Communicating for Now

Many stressful situations at work or in life generally are caused by poor communication – both spoken and written. This chapter concerns itself as much with methods of communicating more effectively, to prevent misunderstanding – as it does with strategies for coping with the effects of poor communication, thereby reducing stress.

- ❖ Can you think of an example in the past months where you got into a relatively stressful argumentative situation? If yes and with reference to the various response options given early in the chapter, analyse how the situation progressed – and how it might have progressed differently, given changed responses and reactions.
- ❖ Have you ever given a relatively formal presentation to a group of people? If so, what do you find the hardest part of the overall activity – and how might you improve your technique, to make it easier for you to cope?
- ❖ Do you own a thesaurus? If so, spend ten minutes looking up several words and thinking about the breadth of choice offered – and where you would use them in sentences. (if you don't own one – try to borrow one for a while, to see how useful they are to find the correct word or generally broaden your vocabulary)
- ❖ Consider the content and structure of the texts, e-mails and letters that you receive. How do they differ? Which elements (such as layout and use of abbreviations) are unique to each. As a reader, are there any features of any of these forms of written communication that you find annoying or frustrating? How could you improve the situation.
- ❖ Do you find received written communications stressful for any reason? If so, try to isolate the reason – and then consider a coping strategy which you might use to reduce your associated stress. What can you learn from this, with a view to reconsidering the effectiveness of your own writing?

Communication lies at the root of many problematical situations in life – often because the language, knowledge or awareness levels vary so much between the different people involved in the discussion. Maintaining an awareness of how your message is being received – and adjusting it accordingly where necessary, is one of the first steps towards effective communications.

12.8 Structuring your life – business strategies for life adventures

Here, we consider the various implications of work/life balance – and how we can use these in coping strategies. Time is a key issue (which is considered in greater detail in a later chapter, so we'll leave it here) but in this chapter, we focused more on the more spiritually-based aspects of Love, harmony and service.

- ❖ How would you describe and explain the applications of a more spiritual approach to life, within a business context?
- ❖ From your awareness of work/life balance, what one particular element of your life would you say was most out of balance? From the approaches described in the chapter, how do you think you might “rebalance” this element?
- ❖ From the list of criteria which constitute a “spiritual person”, which one would you select as the most important area requiring developmental input?

- ❖ Consistency was described as one of the key criteria for achieving a good level of balance in both work and life. How would you understand this to apply in both your work and life environments?
- ❖ The chapter listed the “seven Cs of effective management”. Can you remember what these were – and what each meant in the work context (clue: one of them is mentioned in the previous paragraph!) As a further extension, once you’ve listed the seven, think of the extent to which they apply in a Life context as well.

Latterly in the chapter, we considered a variety of coping strategies, which could be applied in any necessary attempt to redress balance. Two of these were incorporating “Me time” and saying “No” constructively.

- ❖ Have you ever been in a work situation where you have been stretched beyond normal expectations, with additional and/or last minute work being pushed your way? If so, think through how the event progressed and, in the light of our considerations, think how you might have handled it, to give you a more acceptable outcome.
- ❖ Bearing in mind your previous thoughts regarding your milestones along the path, what would you say were two or three of your future goals (written in such a way as to be quite specific and measurable)?

The final section in the chapter considered the integration progression of:

BELONGING ► ASSERTION ► CO-OPERATION

We saw that each could be viewed as a positive stage in our personal development – even assertion (or assertiveness), which is sometimes viewed quite negatively. Several application models were given, covering both work and life scenarios.

- ❖ Consider your own situation, where you are perhaps at an early “belonging” level for some particular stage in your development. Reviewing possible progress, what experiences might you add, to give yourself future positive stages of both “assertion” and “co-operation”?
- ❖ How might you use assertion to ensure that your personal work/life balance became as acceptable as possible?

12.9 Addressing the nettles of pain, stress and fear

Here, we consider the various conditions which potentially cause us problems – and with which we can find extreme difficulties in coping. The chapter reviews a whole range of situations and considerations, with reference to the coping strategies discussed in chapter three. It also links with our earlier considerations of the effects of dwelling on the past or becoming concerned with possible future repercussions – or the benefits of thinking in the Now.

- ❖ The chapter identifies the benefit of looking beyond having only a Plan A, in terms of reviewing positive future strategies. Thinking of a particular situation you have (or potentially could have) experienced, describe some of the benefits of having possible future strategies “up your sleeve”.
- ❖ In order to reduce your own stress levels (and reinforce the working standards you expect from others), consider how you would say “no” positively but in a non-

confronting way. Thinking of a real situation you might potentially experience (or have experienced), plan a strategy for reaching a compromise outcome.

- ❖ In terms of physical pain, what is the greatest pain you have had to endure? Was it long or short-term. Did you have some form of (chemical) pain relief or management to help you cope with the pain?
- ❖ From your personal experience, what would you say was the greatest source of stress to which you have had to respond? Did you manage to control it – if “yes”, what strategy did you apply?
- ❖ This chapter covered the concept of “Type ‘A’ stress”, listing a range of indicators which can be applied. Checking through the list again objectively, are there any of the indicators which you’d honestly say applied to you, to some large extent?
- ❖ Referring to “prevention being better than cure”, list three or four areas of your life and work where a change of conditions, attitudes or decisions would create the situation where your stress levels could potentially be reduced dramatically.

Our final section considered fear in its various shapes and forms. We established that much of this occurred when we moved away from focusing on the Now and started dwelling on difficult examples we’d heard about from the past – or imagining the worst that could occur in the future.

- ❖ Why would you say thinking in the Now would help to control fear?
- ❖ Thinking about some fearful situation you have experienced in the past, how well do you think you coped with it at the time? With the benefit of hindsight (and having considered the proposals here), might you have approached the situation differently? Imagine what might have happened, given that revised stance.
- ❖ The chapter mentioned a range of different fearful situations, from lack of money through to fear of physical assault. Knowing your own pain/fear thresholds to some extent, what would you consider to be a very fearful situation for you to experience personally?
- ❖ Do you fear death? If you do, what would you consider to be the main cause of this fear? Can you think of any strategy or belief system which you might apply, which might reduce the fear to some degree?

12.10 Making time for the Now

This chapter considers some of the concepts used in business training to improve the use and control of time - but applies them in a broader way. As with problems created by poor communication, there are many situations where we find ourselves coping with the effects of poor time management. The problem is quite often that it’s someone else’s poor management which is filtering down to affect us!

- ❖ Think of some situation from your past, where you found yourself running out of time to complete a volume of work or activities. Thinking in the Now, how might you have organised your workload better (including delegation and saying “No”), to complete the work comfortably?

- ❖ Can you describe two or three benefits which you could achieve from setting yourself goals and/or objectives?
- ❖ If you are clearer in your mind about future development due to having established goals, how would this reduce any stress associated with your workload?
- ❖ If you have stated different options in terms of objective statements (with end actions and standards included), describe in a fairly objective way (think of Plan A/B etc), how will this help you if you hit a difficult problem with Plan A?
- ❖ We described prioritisation in some detail. Thinking of any experience you have had of this (think “things to do lists”), how does prioritisation help you cope with work loads?
- ❖ If you carried out the time mapping exercise described in this chapter (or if you didn't, think through the stages in your “normal day” now), what are two or three activities that you compositely spend too much time doing during your average day? How could you reduce these?
- ❖ We considered a variety of ways that we could make our (formal and informal) meetings more effective. From the list, identify two or three areas which you have perhaps experienced problems in the past and think of an improving strategy.

Time management in its various forms will help you control your workload better and cope with the potential stresses associated with time pressures, at work and in life generally. It's worth considering and applying, as widely as possible.

12.11 Driving your life forward – personal empowerment and holistic tenets

In this final chapter, we first considered empowerment and then reviewed how this would progress in greater detail towards enlightenment. We also reviewed light and energy and how these might be considered to be the “lifeblood” of our existence.

- ❖ Thinking back through your life experiences to date, identify a specific activity or occasion where you felt particularly empowered – resulting in greater involvement, contentment and a better outcome.
- ❖ How would you describe experiencing a degree of enlightenment in your life? Can you think of any situation where you felt enlightened (or inspired) to any degree? Think about it – or make notes – to establish how you might proceed further with this experience.
- ❖ At various points, we considered the wisdom which is considered to come through the Hierarchy, as the basic tenets of life. We may continue to search for this (as the holy grail, second coming etc) but how would you describe the basics of this wisdom, as they can be applied simply?
- ❖ We considered an exercise, reviewing steps towards enlightenment – and you may have made some notes on this. From these various points, identify one which you felt you had progressed with (and maybe think about it some more), then identify one area which perhaps puzzled you – and discuss this with your mentor, to gain further clarification.

- ❖ How would you consider that a raised awareness of enlightenment, applied in your day-to-day experiences, will help you to cope with life's nettles?
- ❖ Considering the list of twenty tenets for a more spiritual way of life, select three or four which you think you may need to improve. Taking each in turn, review a few strategies that you might apply to achieve this improvement – and set yourself goals which you can progress towards.
- ❖ How experienced are you at meditation? At this point, settle yourself into a comfortable but upright position, close your eyes and relax into a meditative state. Focus on your life as it is at the present time – and consider the next steps and stages in your life, leading towards further enlightenment.

Many of these questions are open ended. You may therefore find it useful to return to them periodically, to review your current stance and progress. Discuss your thoughts with your mentor, if you can find someone to help you. My e-mail address is : chris.sangster@btinternet.com – I can't promise to reply by return but I will get back to you, if you have any questions you want to share.

Good luck in your quest towards enlightenment – and your efforts at coping more confidently with those various nettles of life. Embrace them confidently!