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Time to SPRING-CLEAN your THINKING



Do you feel stuck in a rut and afraid to try new things? Success coach *Sharron Lowe* shows how we can all achieve our dreams simply by changing the way we use our minds

ILLUSTRATIONS *Luci Gutiérrez*





WHEN I HEAR THE WORDS

'I'm fine' I think of this simple mnemonic: Frustrated, Insecure, Negative, Exhausted. Because, more often than not, it's a pretty accurate description of how that person really feels.

It has been said that the definition of insanity is repeating the same actions time and again and expecting a different outcome. If you always do what you have always done then you will always get what you have always got. Life is not a spectator sport – it's a 'get off the sofa, go out on the pitch and play it with all your heart' sport. If you don't like something then change it, and if you cannot change it then change the way you feel and think about it. Don't let anything hold you back from being true to your potential. With the phenomenal power of your mind the habits of a lifetime can be changed.

SMASH OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE

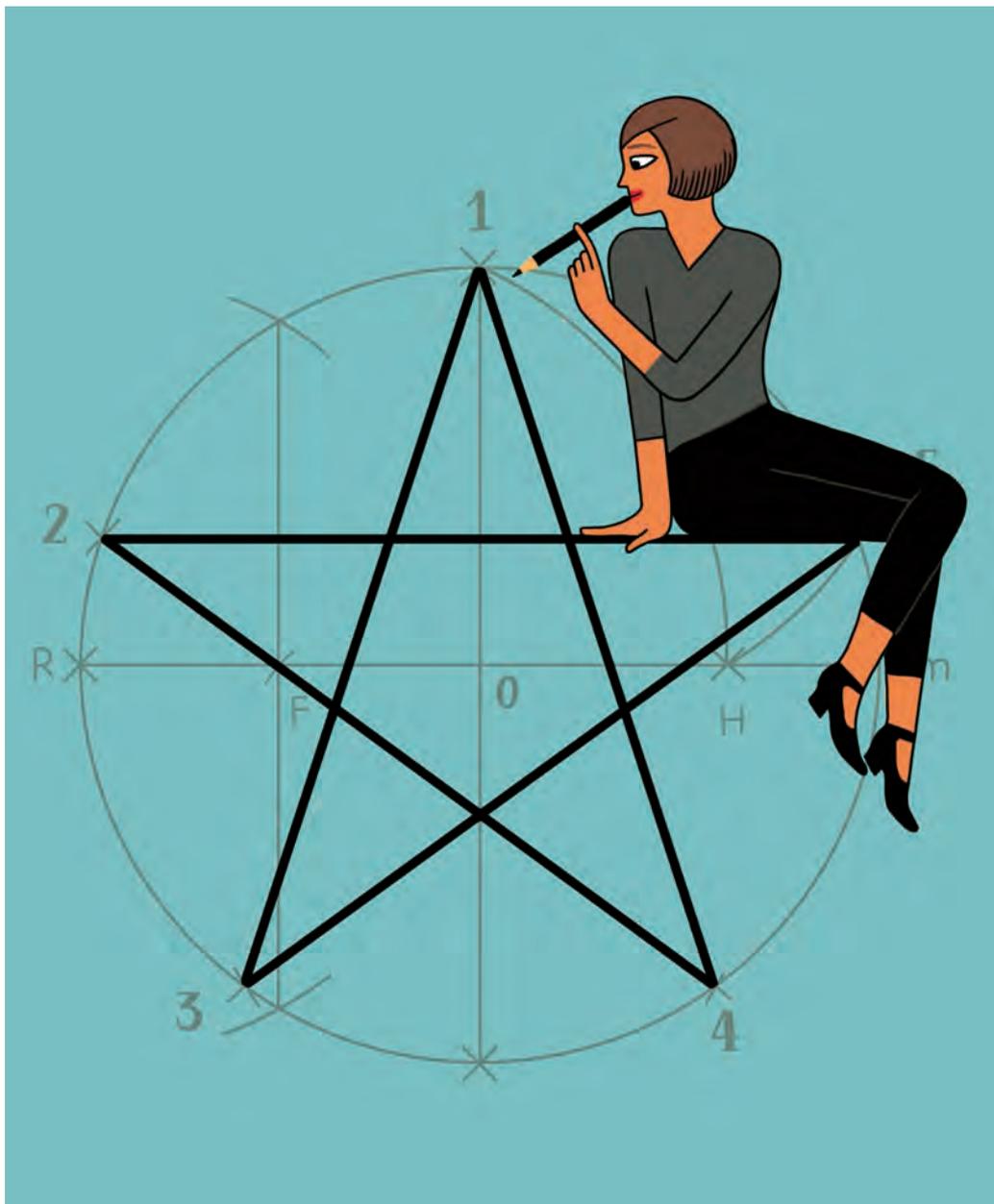
A fascinating illustration as to why staying within our comfort zones is so limiting comes from an experiment with flies. When placed in an open jar they flew out, as you would expect. But when they were enclosed for a day in a ventilated jar with a lid, not one of the flies tried to reach for the top of the jar and escape when the lid was removed. Why? Because they had tried and failed to escape so many times during the day that they simply gave up. The jar had become their world.

You too have been stuck for too long in that jar if you have had the same daydreams for years or feel bored and predictable most of the time. When people say, 'I want to get fit/learn a new skill/change career but I can't because...' they are selling themselves the line that it is not their fault or responsibility. Be honest with yourself. If the answer is 'because I don't know how', you can unblock it with training, knowledge or support; if it's 'I can't be bothered', then think about what could be the benefits – what's in it for you – for motivation.

Think about when you were a child. Each day was a new adventure packed with exciting and new things to do. For children, each day is an opportunity to learn and the more new things they experience, the better the day.

Ask yourself, 'When was the last time I did something for the very first time?' Life becomes much more exciting when you leap out of your comfort zone and push the boundaries. For many of us, the motivation or the inspiration to change things only comes when we are pushed off a 'life cliff' such as going through a divorce or being made redundant. Such experiences can be incredibly motivating, but why wait?

Think about what could be stopping you from ►



◀ living to your full potential in your career, relationships, hobbies, health and financial wellbeing. Why do you limit yourself with thoughts such as, ‘I adore ballroom dancing but it’s something to learn when you’re young’? A great friend of mine started ballroom lessons when she was 53; four years later she is at competition standard and dancing is one of her greatest achievements and joys. Keep asking yourself, ‘When was the last time I did something for the first time?’

IMAGINE AND ASTOUND YOURSELF

Your imagination can move you towards your goals and your best life yet. We all have an imagination, and using it helps you to think and feel your goals

into existence. Top athletes and sports teams use this strategy to achieve success because they understand that mental strength is as crucial as physical skill. In addition to training for years, many athletes say that in their imagination they play out winning over and over again until it feels real.

Business high-flyers also rehearse what they want to achieve in their imagination. This is a particularly effective strategy for giving a presentation, but you can use it for any important event. Imagine yourself achieving your objectives and getting positive feedback from others.

What is the number-one goal you want to live out in your imagination? Picture yourself having already achieved it (the home, job, trip of a lifetime). Use all your senses – as well as seeing it, imagine how it would feel, and hear what it would

sound like. Make the picture bold, in full colour and add sound to it. Make it so real in your mind that you can almost touch it, and then play your goal over and over in your mind, just as you would a DVD on an enormous TV screen, until it becomes fixed.

Several years ago I coached Sarah, the manager of a beauty counter in a department store. She had been set a goal of achieving sales of £1 million in a single year. She told me she was daunted by the target, but after her Mind Makeover coaching her imagination kicked in and she started believing she could do it. She pressed ‘mute’ in her mind when others said it was too difficult, threw out the word impossible and visualised hitting that sales target several times a day. And she got her entire team on board through her determination, passion, enthusiasm and ability to lead.

Four months later my phone rang and I heard squeals of delight. She had just made the sale that had turned that £1 million target into a reality. ‘You knew I could do it,’ she said, ‘then once I got into the habit of visualising my success over and over again I knew I could do it, too.’

PLAN YOUR GOALS

Write down your one big goal and make it SMART – Specific, Measurable, Ambitious, Realistic, Timed. It’s a dream until you write it down and then it becomes a goal.

It must be specific and measurable to get maximum results. A client once told me that his goal was to have more money. I opened my wallet and gave him a pound coin. He hadn’t said how much he wanted! He got the point and was never vague about his goals again. Give your goal a deadline or it will roll on year after year.

Now write a list of every action you can think of that will help you to achieve your goal and break them down into small steps. Then put them in a logical order; assign an appropriate date to every task and commit to ticking them off.

Goal planning is essential to moving you from where you are now to where you want to be.

LISTEN TO YOUR INNER VOICE

There is a downside to using your imagination and one that people often fall victim to. They find worries and worst-case scenarios in everything, hence plenty of reasons not to burst out of their comfort zones. Think of your inner voice as a radio station playing inside your head. You can change the channel; this is your radio and you can choose what you want to listen to. Be sure to tune in to an empowering and uplifting network rather than a negative or depressing one. ‘There is

nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so,' says Hamlet. Your thoughts control your world, but you control your mind: it will only accept what it is told. So if you keep thinking about what you don't want you're likely to just attract more of that back; if you expect to be disappointed, you won't disappoint yourself. Too many people focus on the things that they don't want to happen, such as, 'I don't want to be hurt again/to get this wrong/miss out on promotion'. Then, sure enough, that happens.

Be aware of the inner voice that says things such as, 'I can't do it'; 'I haven't got the time/education/money'; 'I'm too young/old'; 'I never lose weight'; 'I always meet losers'. Notice how many of these statements involve absolutes such as 'never' or 'always'. They create a cycle in which words become actions and outcomes.

You are in control of your thoughts and your emotions. Be aware of times when you allow them to be negative, such as when you think about what is wrong with your life. Choose instead to shift all

your focus on to what is right and what you want to do. Your mind is neutral; it will not judge all the information you choose to feed it. It will just accept what you give it. How tremendous is that?

The good news is that you can change negative self-talk into positive self-talk. Don't allow your inner voice to tell you 'it's impossible' or 'it can't be done'; look around and you will see someone else doing it. Instead tell yourself that all things are possible if you desire them enough.

A pessimistic inner voice will have a massive negative impact on your life. Think about it: you are actually telling yourself that you don't believe in yourself. Negativity cannot survive without your participation and permission. Delete it. Take away

self-imposed limits and watch things improve enormously. In short, never set yourself up to lose; always set yourself up to win. Tell yourself daily that you are braver than you think, more capable than you know, stronger than you seem and smarter than you've been yet.

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Ignore your negative inner voice – you are more capable than you know
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DON'T THINK 'FAILURE', THINK 'EXPERIENCE'

All of us experience things that do not turn out as we planned, but these are not failures. Failure is an attitude, not an end result. When something does not work out as you hoped, this is not a failure – it is an opportunity to learn, to be stretched, to adapt and make positive changes. Use what has happened to motivate you.

Take the story of inventor Thomas Edison, who was seeking to develop a reliable battery. One of his associates recalled meeting him: 'I learned that he had made over 9,000 experiments in trying to devise this new type of storage battery, but had not produced a single thing that promised to solve the question... I said: "Isn't it a shame that with the tremendous amount of work you have done you haven't been able to get any results?" Edison turned on me like a flash, and with a smile replied: "Results! Why, man, I have gotten a lot of results! I know several thousand things that won't work."

The successful are not people without problems. They are people who acknowledge problems and manage them. They know that the biggest mistake you will ever make is to be afraid of making one. Think of the future you want and ask yourself, 'What would I go for if I had no fear of failure?' Ask yourself, 'If I don't do this what will it cost me? What will my reward be if I do go for it?'

For most people, not going for what they want (because of fear of failure) ultimately costs more – self-esteem, pride, happiness; whereas going for what they want (and silencing the inner voice which tells them to be fearful of failing) provides an abundance of motivation, happiness, success and fulfilment. It's an easy choice. ▣

This is an edited extract from The Mind Makeover – The Answers to Becoming the Best You Yet by Sharron Lowe, which will be published by Piatkus on Thursday, price £13.99. YOU and Piatkus Books have teamed up to give one lucky reader the chance to win a mentoring session with Sharron – to enter go to piatkusbooks.net/win-sharron-low. We also have ten signed copies of The Mind Makeover to give away – go to twitter.com/YOUMagSocial, follow and retweet our #MindMakeover tweets.*

Sharron Lowe began her career as a beauty consultant before launching her own business coaching consultancy 25 years ago. Now she is a much sought-after success coach and motivational speaker for top global brands including Chanel, Clinique and Lancôme. She also runs Mind Makeover workshops with the charity Centrepoint, helping homeless young women to plan and achieve their goals.

