The Power of Personality

Bespoke Personality



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Production by My Bestseller.

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Preface

This book showcases the 'power of personality' in achieving life's goals. It is a collective effort of the team at Bespoke Personality which provides a tailored personality assessment and guidance service to private clients. They have produced a practical psychology based on sound scientific foundations for use in everyday life: we can all benefit.

I am an academic at City, University of London, where I specialise in behavioural and personality science. During my training, research and experience, and as a Chartered Psychologist of nearly 30 years, I have come to the conclusion that there are too few high-quality psychological assessment services available to the private client and even fewer that provide effective, actionable strategies based on the best of behavioural science. This is to be regretted, as I know that personality insights are vitally important, especially in these turbulent times. We're all faced with revaluating our priorities in life and planning for the future. I decided now is the right time to coordinate a book to convey the value of personality self-knowledge and insight.

This book has been written to highlight the many ways personality assessment and tailored feedback can markedly improve life. Many *real life* stories are included to share people's everyday experiences—you should be able to identify with many of them. They should help you reflect upon your own life and *what* you really want to achieve in the future and, importantly, *how* you intend to get to where you want to be.

If you want to change your life for the better, there's really no time quite like the present.

You can find out more about power of personality on our website:
www.bespokepersonality.com

Dr Philip J Corr
Professor of Psychology

Acknowledgements

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The Bespoke Personality Team are especially grateful to the many people who generously shared their inspiring stories. They ensured that the book reflected the real, everyday experiences that are the stuff of life. The book is dedicated to them.

1 Personality and You

How You Can Better Achieve *Your* Goals in Life

It's a very curious fact. Most of us would never leave home without first grooming and wearing appropriate clothing—we're obviously far too sensible to neglect such important matters. Yet, we're often not concerned with how the attire of personality is impacting our lives, relationships, success, and well-being.

From decades of research, we know that all social encounters come with implicit personality judgement. People act on how they see others *expressing* their personality—in consequence, this has very real effects on our success, happiness and general fulfilment in life.

Why Personality Is Important for *You*

Personality is our most precious possession. It can also be our undoing. The troubling aspect of life is that we're often simply unaware of the impact our personality is having on others, and on our own inner psychological life.

We recognise that the *hub* of personality is very difficult to alter—our basic inner self has been crystallising over a lifetime and is not easily amenable to change. We can, however, change how we're *expressing* our personality in the different domains of life. First, though, we must gain insight into our own self. Only then can we come to understand how our behaviours are impacting other people, both positively and negatively, and, in turn, how other people are impacting us in multiple ways.

Personality affects all areas of life

Personality is defined as the habitual ways we think, feel, and behave. Personality traits predict how we react to, and cope with, different situations. Traits are relatively stable over time. The scientific fact is that we all differ, and these differences have life-enhancing and impairing consequences. Indeed, many successful people have already benefitted from gaining insights into their own personality.

Personality self-knowledge is especially valuable when we experience troubles in our life. Few of us need telling that life can be difficult, sometimes it knocks hard. Problems can even seem insurmountable. They can most certainly drain the joy out of life. From a psychological point of view, one very real, yet neglected, 'problem' is not having the necessary self-knowledge and insight to deal with these hard knocks. But, we *can* learn to manage the problems of life more effectively.

To make sense of problems in life, how they are related to our personality, and how we can manage them, it is useful to think in terms of PAM:

Problem-Assessment-Management



Problem: we all have challenges in life that can trouble us greatly and they need a solution.

Assessment: self-discovery reveals how we define and process the problems in our life.

Management: psychological/behavioural tools are needed to manage our life problems.

In the life-problem equation, we—our personalities—are the important part. Indeed, to a considerable extent, our unique personality profile defines the problem we are facing, and it is our personality that determines which

psychological tools are best suited to providing the most effective solutions. PAM can put us back in control.

Personality self-knowledge and insight allow us to manage our problems most effectively and point us towards greater success and fulfilment, making life more rewarding in so many different areas: romantic relationships, social activities, parenting, work, wellbeing, happiness and general flourishing.

When thinking about the major dimensions of personality that impact our lives in so many different ways—both positively and negatively—one popular model is the Big-5, which measures:

- Openness to Experience—creative, curious and intellectual
- Extraversion—sociable, lively and optimistic
- Emotionality—reactive, inhibited and pessimistic
- Agreeableness—affable, friendly and harmonious
- Conscientiousness—diligent, detailed and focused

Over the past 50 years, research has shown these dimensions are related to all areas of life functioning and flourishing. Traits of personality are known to be related to many outcomes:

- Subjective well-being and flourishing
- Relationship success and satisfaction
- Physical and psychological health and illness
- Occupational performance
- Educational attainment
- Reputation and credibility
- Social relations
- Interpersonal influence
- Self-esteem and self-identity

The impressive scope of personality psychology is shown in the following comprehensive handbook: Corr, P. J. & Matthews, G. (2020, 2nd edition). *The Cambridge Handbook of Personality Psychology*. Cambridge University Press.

A Personality 'Make-Over'

There is some good news we need to know about. Just as we can have a wardrobe or beauty/grooming make-over, we can have a personality make-over. As we can't easily change our underlying bone structure or skin, we *can*

alter how they're presented to the world—how they exhibit to other people and the face we choose to present to the world.

Much the same is true of personality. Although we can't easily change our underlying traits—after all, we've spent a lifetime developing them—we can alter how they're *expressed* and, therefore, how they impact the world, including not only other people but also our own internal world of thoughts and feelings.

Personality insights, coupled with rigorous and actionable behavioural strategies, mean we can modify how we make decisions and behave in ways that achieve effective 'traction' with the external world and our own internal world—to make a real difference.

Personality Assessment

There are many good personality tests freely available. They provide scores on the major dimensions/traits, show where the test taker stands in relation to other people, and they usually offer some form of general description of the psychological nature of these traits—sometimes even respondent-relevant feedback.

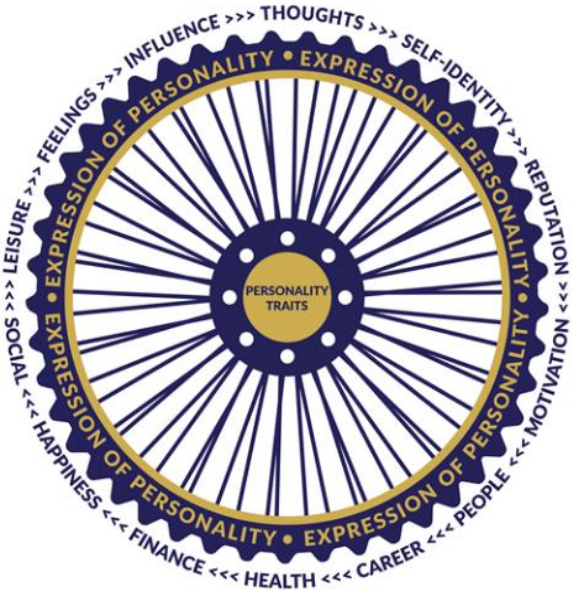
These tests (or feedback) are fine as far as they go; the problem is, *they don't go anywhere near far enough to be truly useful*. In particular, they do not provide the pointers to how effectively to make changes in one's life by going with rather against the grain of personality.

It is for this reason that we developed the BE*spoke* Method. This is a unique combination of scientific personality research, assessment and insights from behavioural economics and science, and the new field of personality neuroscience. This knowledge and its application ensure the services provided by Bespoke Personality are truly unique.

We developed an illustrative wheel to show how an assessment of the major traits of personality work together to form a *configuration*—that is, the unique personality type characterising *you*. The *hub* of the wheel contains the relatively enduring traits of personality: your core self that is relatively stable over time.

The wheel encompasses knowledge of how the 'mind (really) works', especially what behavioural economics/science tells us about the heuristics and biases that make up our decision making and choice behaviour. These heuristics and biases transmit the influence of core (*hub*) traits to the outer

world—the *spokes* of the wheel represent this knowledge. In addition, the wheel incorporates understanding of how these spokes gain behavioural traction with the external world, as well as one's internal world of thoughts and feelings—this is the *tread* of the personality wheel.



The BE*spoke* Method contains actionable, practicable and effective behavioural and psychological strategies—*small* alterations in everyday life that accumulate to achieve *large* long-term gains. These strategies positively impact the external domains of life, including career, relationships, finances, self-identity, wellbeing, and much else that makes up our life.

The investment of small daily changes in our life can reap compound benefits, defined by material success and personal flourishing. What better gift could we give to ourselves?

It's hard not to agree with Warren Buffett, one of the richest and most fulfilled men in the world:

"By far the best investment you can make is in yourself"

A Psychological Road Map

Few of us have combinations of personality traits that are *truly* optimal, that is, left to our own devices, we will always achieve the best personal outcome.

More often, we blunder about, make mistakes, without even knowing why, and sometimes we resort to blaming others.

This wayward style of behaving impairs our happiness and success in life and can even ruin relationships and reputation. Research has shown that this way of behaving can also have a significantly negative impact upon our physical and psychological health.

Know Thyself is the key to making long-lasting positive changes, but it must first start with personality insight

Not knowing our personality is like going on a road trip without a map; we might get somewhere near where we want to be, but not the actual location. We must then settle for second best.

We need to appreciate that most of our thoughts, feelings and actions are on auto-pilot—they happen without us knowing or having much deliberative control over them. In behavioural economics, this is known as System 1. In contrast, System 2 is more controlled and logical, although very slow and resource-limited.

Our personality traits—and the whole configuration of our personality— work by biasing thoughts, feelings and behaviours in specific ways. Similar to the forms of the auto-pilot System 1, which uses several psychological short-cuts (called *heuristics*).

We put ourselves at a grave disadvantage by not knowing how the 'mind (really) works'. This is unfortunate, but we can avoid it. Bespoke Personality provides the service to make this happen.

Professor Philip Corr

2 The Making and Breaking of Hearts

Building Better Romantic Relationships

Finding a fully functioning and satisfying romantic relationship has never been easy. One problem is that when looking for a partner, it's easy to succumb to social norms or social pressures—often without even knowing this is happening. Once we're in a relationship, it's common to go through a rollercoaster of emotions ranging from love to hate, all whilst trying to get our psychological and emotional needs met. If they aren't met, mental health or relationship struggles ensue. So, what's the answer to solving the conundrum of love? We think it's understanding our own and our partner's personality.

Personality helps us make sense of our partner, understand how to best approach all aspects of a relationship and, perhaps most importantly, it teaches us about ourselves and how the *expression* of our personality is perceived by, and affects others. Only when we understand ourselves can we know how best to interact with potential and current romantic partners. But none of this comes 'naturally', and it needs work.

Knowing your own and your partner's personality will help put a lid on conflicts before they get out of hand. It will also help create a loving, symbiotic relationship by understanding each other much better. It improves relationship stability and quality by making communication more effective and helps to lead to lasting happiness (at least to the extent that anything can!). The more we know about our personality, the easier it is to find a suitable partner in the first place, as it allows us to see things in a more objective, rational and unbiased way.

The problem is that we tend to believe we know our own personality best and how we're expressing it to others. But we're often blind to our strengths and weaknesses, which can lead to unwanted and damaging consequences in our relationships. Without even knowing it, we could be pushing our loved one's away from us, but with a few small changes, we can bring them back again. Self-knowledge and insight are powerfully personal assets.

Our common lack of self-insight reinforces claims by society that suggest relationships should work or fail without much effort—the 'chemistry of love'. This is a dangerous belief to hold and may be responsible for more broken relationships than anything else. Relationship success takes insight and work—it won't just happen by chance alone.

Do you know why your past relationships failed? Do you know how to protect your current and future relationships? We're all faced with these questions,

and the answers are usually not easy to find. First, we must start by looking at ourselves, that is, our fundamental personality traits and how we're *expressing* them in all areas of our life—especially in our most precious and meaningful relationships.

A relationship should work for, not against, you – but we need to know first how to make it work

Couples deserve more of a chance of success than they currently get, especially young couples at the start of their romantic career. Like job success, relationships require work and we need the tools to get the job done. We tend not to think this way, do we? But why not? Personality matters more than we generally know. More people need to know this fact of psychological life, so they have the resources to give their relationships the best possible chance of success.

Self-knowledge and insight are needed more than ever as modern-day relationships suffer from the pressures and expectations of an ever-busy life. Not to mention social media and the current troubled times that are straining life more generally. There's never been a more testing time of loyalty, communication, and honesty.

As nearly half of all marriages end in divorce and many more 'common law' marriages fail, we have a problem. Maybe couples are giving in too easily to the pressures of life. It's true that fewer young people are getting married in the first place. Maybe some people have settled too quickly for a partner that they aren't suited to in the first place. The world is different today, and we're very different to our forebearers. We need to appreciate that, in these ever-changing times, we require proper psychological resources to make our relationships work in ways that are most meaningful to us, making our life as best as it can possibly be.

Whatever is going on in society, numerous challenges face us individually when in a relationship, both emotional and psychological, including feelings of love, lust, and even sometimes hate. Poor relationships have a detrimental effect on our well-being and mental health. As our intimate relationships are such an essential part of our life, we owe it to ourselves to give them the best chance of success.

Knowing our personality is crucial as it can highlight helpful and problematic traits. Such traits can make, and sometimes break, our most precious relationships.

It's an undeniable fact that couples that *truly* understand each other and are willing to put in the effort to make their relationship work are at a considerable advantage when it comes to achieving a meaningful, loving and lasting relationship.

Yet too many of us believe that 'love will conquer all'. Many of us even believe that if we need to 'work at the relationship' then it's probably not a relationship worth having—nothing could be furthest from the truth. It's understandable, though, that personality assessment isn't the first thing on the minds of romantic partners. After all, who thinks they need a personality test on their quest to find, and more importantly keep, lasting love? It's a shame because personality is what makes relationships work, but it can also be the thing that breaks them!

For example, you might be an extravert and your partner more of an introvert. As a result, it might be tempting to think that their reluctance to accompany you to wild parties reflects their losing interest in you. But this could be an invalid conclusion to draw—maybe they would prefer to cosy-up on the sofa with you rather than being out with, as they see them, loud, drunk, and boorish people.

Or one of you might be lower on the personality trait of Agreeableness and quite fond of argumentative banter which the other partner perceives as hostility. Minor niggles can accumulate until they burst out into full-blown arguments—we can then be in dangerous relationship territory.

There's something we need to know *more* about. Improvements in relationships come not only from 'compatibility'—this can take various forms—but also from how we *express* our personality traits. And we do have a *choice* in this matter. However, we need first to know our own personality and, vitally, how we're *expressing* it to our loved one. None of this is apparent though.

Psychologists know that personality self-knowledge and insight are key to a long-lasting and trusting relationship. It's also a way of giving yourself the upper hand: you feel empowered by the newly acquired knowledge and the control it gives you to make your relationship work. You're confident you aren't leaving things to chance, as many of your friends and family do—look at some of their relationships!

The Key to a Lasting Relationship

The key to a lasting and loving relationship, and how to choose the *right* partner in the first place, essentially depends on us knowing about ourselves—how could it be otherwise? But we've some tough questions to answer. Do we choose a partner who is similar or dissimilar to us? How should we express ourselves to them? How should we interpret how they're expressing themselves to us? It's confusing! There must be an easier way to get through the matchmaking process.

Well, some dating sites do match through personality characteristics. We're not convinced this is necessarily a good idea as opposite personalities can work too. Indeed, the resulting relationship can be all the more interesting and stronger for it. It's probably true that if we simply let 'true love' run its course, then personality compatibility is likely to lead to fewer conflicts and problems.

But, there's a logical problem here. The fact that this is the way most relationships play out skews the data. What about those (far fewer) couples who've worked hard at their relationships to make them work. They may have started very differently, but they've become compatible by working on their relationship to make it successful.

Finding your perfect partner is one element of the love equation, keeping them in a loving relationship is another

There is a strong case to be made for the claim that it's not so much how our personality matches our partners, or even what we're looking for in a partner, but rather how we communicate with each other: the style, the words, the gestures, and the *intent* all of this conveys. It's not only what's coming from us but, more importantly, it's what our partner perceives which is filtered through *their* personality.

It's no surprise that 'personality clashes' are common in relationships. For this reason, it's necessary to assess each partner's personality and identify their similarities and differences, especially in those areas requiring attention and work.

Personality knowledge and self-insight allow us to stand back and observe what's going on in our relationship more objectively than is typical. This can lead to a *debiasing effect*: we adopt a more rational and logical way of thinking about our partners and ourselves.

Working at a relationship isn't antithetical to love; it's in its service: the business of love needs planning and monitoring, as it won't 'run itself', and when it's allowed to do so, it often runs into the ground. Such self-insight is especially important when we feel the urge to blame our partner or to infer malign motives, as couples do from time-to-time. It's all too natural and all too harmful.

Cheryl & Paul's Story

Personality similarity works for newlyweds Cheryl and Paul. Both describe themselves as extraverted, outgoing, and confident individuals, who have similar likes and interests. They've observed how having highly similar personalities have led to a greater understanding of each other. Cheryl says, "my relationship works well because we're so alike. Our principles allow us to agree on most things and it makes things easier in the relationship. Having similar personalities and interests means that we enjoy each other's company and are never lost for conversation. Like every couple, we bicker now and then, but ultimately, we're best friends".

Personality self-insight is vital ingredient in romantic relationships

Cheryl's perspective illustrates that having similar personality traits allows for the smooth running of a relationship. It makes things easier as both individuals have the same view on life. However, this doesn't mean that successful relationships are only or most likely found in partners with the same or similar personalities.

Now, some studies have found certain characteristics that predict relationship breakdown, especially in heterosexual relationships: the woman being taller than the man; the importance of sexual fidelity; physical attractiveness; preferred type of relationship; liking for parties; sexual experience; and libido. Even with these 'strong' predictors, the magnitude of the correlations between (a) the differences between couples on these variables and (b) measures of relationship satisfaction is minimal, meaning that the vast majority of the variance in relationship success and satisfaction is left unexplained. In addition, these measures are self-report, which can be a problem. For example, one partner may not be significantly more or less attractive than the other, but they may think they are. This, in turn, could reflect a self-esteem issue which, itself, might be contributing to undermining the relationship, and this would be personality-based.

In any case, assuming that the differences between these variables are not very large, there's all to play for. It's here that personality can make a very significant difference to relationship success and satisfaction. In fact,

psychologists are becoming more aware of the 'opposites attract' notion—that people are attracted to partners who are very different to them. They may find that their partner's personality complements their own (e.g., if one partner is very creative while the other has a practical mind, combined, they make a perfect match).

Alice & David's Story

Having dissimilar personalities works for David and Alice. Alice describes herself as introverted, thoughtful but something of an overthinker. In contrast, David sees himself as friendly, generous, and laid back. As Alice says, "Where David is relaxed it helps me realise that sometimes I may be thinking too much and helps me make rational decisions. We find a middle ground as I'm indecisive and David is decisive, so we balance each other out. I overthink but then he will step in and help. If we both worry, then it would be problematic and cause rifts in the relationship."

Alice's perspective suggests that introverts need a partner who's reassuring and strong-minded enough to help them grow and overcome challenges. Therefore, having dissimilar personalities isn't necessarily a problem, but they may need work. Indeed, differences in personality can keep relationships alive by bringing in freshness and excitement, and as a result, perhaps better understanding of each other. When there's a perceived need to make the relationship work, people put in the work—this can often be lacking in those apparently compatible partners where, from the start, such work is deemed unnecessary: *this* alone could be the key ingredient to relationship failure.

As the above perspectives show, there's probably no 'perfect partner' as everyone is different. The most important thing is to identify how personality influences relationships. Then we can use this information to our advantage by identifying strengths and weaknesses, and then working with and around them. Lack of such self-knowledge and insight are likely to lead couples to pointless arguments and clashes and an increased probability of the breakdown of the relationship.

From the Wrong to the Right Side of a Relationship

Relationships can be hard. There's no getting away from this fact! On the one hand, we must look after our own emotional needs whilst, on the other hand, we need to be conscious of our partner's. We especially need to know how our actions affect them, and in (re)turn us. If we're honest with ourselves, we can often see how our personality traits can be detrimental to our relationships. Relationships test our patience, loyalty and trust; we have the added complication of understanding our partner's characteristic styles of thinking, feeling, and behaving—especially when they grate on us! We can simply choose to ignore this complication and hope for the best, although, this helps no one but divorce lawyers.

Our personality can be the making and breaking of our relationship

We're all fallible. This is something we need to embrace. We all make mistakes in our relationships, and too often we don't have a clue as to *how* or *why*—we're in the psychological dark. But by becoming more aware of our personality and that of our partner, we can reduce our mistakes and understand and correct them when they occur—and they will!—before they cause harm. By this means, we stop ourselves losing out on a potentially lasting and fulfilling relationship.

Georgia knows this very well. She highlights how knowing more about her personality has enabled her to overcome setbacks in her relationships. Being aware of her thoughtful and resilient traits, she's been able to recover quickly from disagreements with her partner and remain positive through the "tough times". Georgia found that her outgoing traits can sometimes annoy her partner. Still, being aware of them, she's been able to gain back control, and she works to improve her relationship. For example, in certain situations, she can be too talkative and overpowering, which can make her relaxed and quiet partner feel uncomfortable, but now she has knowledge of these traits, she can use them more appropriately.

Georgia's example shows that personality self-insight can help couples overcome (apparent) incompatibilities. It highlights (perceived) strengths and possible weaknesses within couples' personalities. This can make us all the more tolerant and forgiving of them. Sometimes we aren't really aware of how our partner 'ticks', but with a few minor changes, we can learn more about them and manage our relationship more effectively to create a lasting, positive outcome.

> "The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed", Carl Jung

It's sad to see relationships failing because of the absence of knowledge about the role played by personality. It's even sadder to see that couples don't know this. However, it can be much more apparent to the impartial observer—consider your friends and family! It comes down to the lack of resources provided to couples, as they're left to get on with writing their own operating manual, too often with disastrous results.

We'd all like to believe we know ourselves and our partner inside-out, but this isn't the case at all. We have blind spots to our personality flaws. We don't have much of a clue that they're the making, and too often the breaking, of our most precious relationships. Society reinforces this fallacy, insisting that

relationships should work according to prevailing social norms, but they're changing all the time!

Experience brings home the realisation that *we* make and break our own relationships; *we* need to take personal responsibility, which entails gaining insight into *our* psychological make-up, as well as our partner's. What could be more valuable than investing in lasting love?

3 Life's Hard Knocks

Building Resilience and Effective Coping Strategies

Life will put roadblocks up for us—this is a guarantee at some point in our lives. We're challenged in many ways, and we must face these challenges. How we cope with them determines their lasting impact on us. So, if it's more a matter of *when* than *if*, what can we do to prepare ourselves?

It's true, we often lack control over external events, but we don't lack control over how we deal with them. We have *choices*. We use various coping mechanisms; some are more adaptive than others. Sigmund Freud is famous for uncovering the range of defence mechanisms we deploy in order not to spin out of control (from denial of bad thoughts to sublimation of them through the production of art). The forms of coping we use determine our resilience.

Crucially, our unique personalities determine our coping strategies. For this reason, it's vital to know about our inner self to learn how best to respond to life's challenges, which are coming our way in one form or another. Preparation doesn't come easily. Still, knowing much more about the role played by personality can help enormously.

Personality Matters When We're Knocked Hard

As we all learn sooner or later, life is rarely plain sailing. We will all experience the hard knocks of life. Although we might not be able to prevent them from hitting us, we *can* gain control over the extent of their impact. We don't need to be a victim. We can learn valuable lessons at the School of Hard Knocks. We can develop effective coping strategies, leading to resilience and personal strength.

But there's a rub: this can't be taken for granted, and it doesn't happen automatically. We must be proactive. Coping, resilience, and strength won't simply drop into our lap. We first need to acquire knowledge and insight into our very selves—especially the typical ways we think, feel, and behave, which comprises *our* unique personality.

So, we *can* prepare ourselves, not for the occurrence of unpleasant events but for how we deal with them and, therefore, how they impact us. Though this takes effort, and it entails that we invest in *ourselves*—it's the best investment any of us will ever make. Otherwise, we could sit back, do nothing and hope for the best without preparing for the worst. We might even find some meagre

comfort in the wishful adage, "What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger" (Friedrich Nietzsche). But the psychological truth is that misfortune may not often 'kill', but it can seriously weaken us. Sometimes breaking us to the point of no return where we no longer care about what happens. We could become helpless and hopeless, and place our future wellbeing in the uncertain, and often cruel, hands of fate which is no way to live a fulfilling life.

Now, there's a way out of this dismal future facing many of us. We can gain self-knowledge, making us better equipped to deal with life's hard knocks when they come our way. We can learn to be *resilient*, and we can develop personal *strength* through adversity. We can survive and, importantly, thrive, but this will take careful preparation. For those of us preparing for our future wellbeing, we need to know about our unique personality because what works for one person may not work for another: we all need to develop ways of coping with adversities that are consistent with our core self.

Divorce

Although there's some evidence of a recent decline in divorce rates, they're still high and cause much damage to the adults and children involved and society more widely. Of course, many couples never marry and have children out of wedlock. Today, close to 50% of babies are born to single or co-habiting mothers. We know that a third of marriages end in divorce, and many 'common law' partnerships breakdown in a similar fashion.

Just think about it. It would be a great achievement if we could reduce the disruption and distress caused by marriage/partnership breakdowns. Solving this could help the couple themselves, their children, their extended family, friends and a wider social circle.

Often, it's how we're *expressing* our personality traits that are doing the damage. We don't realise the negative impact this is having on the other person. The sad fact is that, at the time, we often don't even know this is happening; yet when we look back over the years, it becomes much more obvious, by which time it's often too late.

Personality self-knowledge and insight can go a long way to inoculate relationships from the infection of harmful conflict. It's about finding out more about your intended spouse on the psychological attributes that matter. This *really* must start with yourself: recognising those traits that make your life easier and those waiting to throw a spanner in your relationship works.

It might be that Conscientiousness is high on your list of personality priorities; however, if your intended spouse scores low on it, there's some serious discussion to be had. For example, suppose you want to be the high-flyer in the family and be supported by your spouse. In that case, this difference will need to be understood and accepted by both of you; else conflicts are likely to occur.

Or, if you want the whole family to be reaching for the stars at the same time, then some questions may also need to be asked, and decisions made, leaving emotions and blame at the front door. It's all about having crucial psychological information to hand to engage in discussions and sensible decisions.

Merely hoping for the best—"love will conquer all"—isn't advisable. We know that often life simply doesn't turn out this way. If we want, we *can* choose a different path.

Bereavement

Another common hardship we'll experience is the loss of a loved one. We've all lost someone we love and we'll probably lose more. It's one of the most painful experiences in life and there's little sugar-coating on it. We all react in different ways, often with a surprising mix of emotions that can confuse our feelings for the person and make our sense of loss all the worse.

Our relationship with the deceased person—it can even be a cherished pet—determines how we react and *process* the loss. Do we celebrate a good life well-lived, or do we blame ourselves for not doing more—perhaps that unkind word uttered long ago floods our mind. Some mourners turn to religion in their time of need, offering them solace and meaning of the life now passed. We all turn to *something*; ultimately, it must be to ourselves.

Personality matters here too. For example, a high score on the trait of Openness to Experience helps to support us during these difficult times. Having a curious and imaginative mind allows us to consider all the alternative ways to comprehend the loss and attempt to make some sense of it and create something positive from it. Being open to experience, especially if you are also extraverted, would mean preferring to be around other people. These people would provide valuable social support. Or the person might benefit from therapy where they could explore new solutions. In contrast, a more practically-minded person, especially if they're also introverted, might prefer a much more directive approach. Discussing and exploring new solutions may only make their bereavement all the worse.

As in other areas of life, it's not appropriate to think that a one-size-fits-all approach can apply to everyone. We're all very different, and these individual differences matter. This is yet another reason why we all need to know much more about our personality.

Of course, a loss can come in various guises. One of our respondents lost her dog at the ripe old age of eighteen years. It can be a *very* distressing time for people who've loved their dog for many years, something that many non-dog owners find hard to understand. As one respondent says, "I struggled to come to terms that she [her dog] was no longer there and I felt guilt that I couldn't have saved her from the inevitable, which was selfish on my part as she had already gone past her best and wasn't able to do many of things that she previously took for granted".

When dealing with loss, we might even start to engage in magical thinking. This respondent remembers, "I'm not a religious person, but I felt myself looking up to the sky and talking to her. I started to think about what and where she would be when she entered the afterlife, or if she were reborn. This imaginative side of my personality helped me to some extent".

There's nothing wrong with a *little* bit of magical thinking—as John Lennon said, *"Whatever gets you thru the night, It's all right..."*

Guilt is something we often have to deal with. It is a form of self-punishment. It's not the experience of such *feelings* that really matter as they're inevitable; rather, it's how we *cope* with them and put them into perspective. Consider someone who's especially high on Emotionality and who easily generates strong negative emotions. They're likely to suffer pangs of guilt as well as other negative emotional states, including ruminating on what they could've done better and worrying about something similar happening in the future. They're highly likely to take these feelings to heart, and, accordingly, find it difficult than most to bring them into appropriate focus.

But here's the thing: if these people knew they were prone to these feelings, and related thoughts and behaviours, due to their inherent personality, then not only would they gain self-insight (comforting in itself), but they would also be in a better position to deal with them (e.g., by using more adaptive coping strategies rather than less adaptive ones).

Health and Illness

Illness comes to us all from time to time, fortunately most often in minor form, but sometimes in a more serious way. Once again, our personality is essential: it will shape how we deal with illness. For example, the author knows a psychologist who in the last year was in a severe car crash (5 broken ribs and a broken leg). Later in the same year, he suffered a blood clot on the brain that necessitated urgent brain surgery. Due to his extraverted, emotionally stable, and *repressor* personality—the opposite to a *sensitiser* who magnifies the experience of unpleasant events—he's, quite literally, back on his feet, back to work and as productive as ever. Indeed, he was back to work only a few days after his emergency brain operation! How other people would've reacted to these very negative events would, in all likelihood, be very different.

More generally, in terms of how personality relates to our coping with health and illness, the traits of Emotionality and Conscientiousness are especially important. Emotionality describes the likelihood of experiencing strong emotions (e.g., anxiety, fear, and sadness), especially negative ones, in response to everyday situations. People high on this trait typically respond with strong negative emotions to events that wouldn't affect most people, at least not to the same extent. This hyper-emotionality means that such individuals are more likely to interpret ordinary situations as threatening, and they will tend to experience minor frustrations as particularly difficult challenges. In consequence, they'll often feel and report being "stressed-out".

Often the danger or threat is *perceived* rather than an *actual* encounter. Where it exists, its potency is magnified and looms large in the mind of the person high on this personality trait. These problems in emotional regulation can diminish the ability to think clearly, make sensible decisions, and cope effectively with adversity. Experiencing frequent and intense negative emotional reactions isn't good from a psychological or physiological perspective. They may be beneficial in some situations, where such emotions can be triggers to appropriate action, but not in most everyday situations.

The research literature is reasonably clear: people who are high on the personality trait of Emotionality are much more likely to report medical complaints and seek medical care, compared to people who are lower on this personality trait. However, high scorers aren't necessarily objectively unhealthier, although they tend to engage in wishful thinking, withdrawal, and emotion-focused coping, which aren't beneficial to health—this is especially true if they're also low on the personality trait of Conscientiousness.

Some scientific studies have shown that high Emotionality is a *risk* factor for early mortality; while other studies haven't found such an association, and some have even found that high Emotionality is a protective factor against early death. It, therefore, seems that high Emotionality is sometimes adaptive, but at other times maladaptive. This inconsistency of research findings suggests something important about this trait of personality: it *can* be a significant risk factor, but it depends on the behaviours adopted by the person.

This, in turn, points to ways of reducing the *potentially* harmful effects of high Emotionality, especially as it relates to health and illness.

- On the unhealthy pathway, an individual distracts themselves from distressing emotions (e.g., with the use of alcohol and cigarettes), they become too anxious to follow medical advice, and fail to maintain healthy relationships.

- On the healthy pathway an individual is cautious and adheres to medical treatment. They're hyper-vigilant about their health, always on the look out for symptoms to discuss with their doctor and too anxious to engage in risky behaviours. Relatedly, the *perception* of poor health promotes the adoption of health-protective behaviours and, in this way, improves *objective* health outcomes. In general, such an individual engages in healthy behaviours while avoiding unhealthy ones and seeks treatment for symptoms more quickly leading to earlier diagnosis and treatment where a medical problem exists.

However, a low score on Conscientiousness is known to be a major risk factor for illness and mortality. This makes sense since a person high on this trait of personality is much more likely to engage in health-promoting activities, from sensible eating, exercising, and adhering to medication—they're conscientious about many things in their life.

In particular, people low on Conscientiousness are less likely to use effective problem-solving, which can lead to making sub-optimal decisions. This can lead to the absence of the resources needed to dampen the effects of stressors, such as career failure, which is one area where significant improvements are possible, positively impacting life outcomes across a range of areas.
Conscientiousness is a fundamental important personality trait because it has the power to modify other traits, especially Emotionality. For this reason, a low score on Conscientiousness is a serious concern as it predicts a wide range

of unhealthy behaviours and outcomes. It affects many decisions that impact different areas of life (e.g., work, finances and relationships).

When thinking about personality effects, it's crucial to understand that it's not the personality trait itself that leads directly to bad outcomes. It's more the case that personality biases certain behaviours and ways of coping with what life throws at us. This being the case, it's possible to work against these low Conscientiousness tendencies to mitigate their worst excesses.

Some pointers for people low in the trait of Conscientiousness:

- People who are less inclined to engage in a range of healthy behaviours should *design* themselves health-promoting behaviours and devise a detailed plan to which they can adhere.

- People in this group are inclined to 'forget' health-related goals and plans. They might benefit from employing a 'commitment device'—for example, telling their family and friends what they intend to do and then having them monitor their actions. Some people may even want to lodge a sum of money that they can afford to lose (but sufficiently large that it would be unpleasant to lose it) with a family member or friend, and each time they fail to stick to their plan, they give away a small sum to an organisation they loath (e.g., a political party or campaign)—such commitment devices have proved to be especially useful. The benefits in terms of improved health would be worth every penny lost.

- They would benefit from higher levels of *extrinsic* incentive and more reminders to stick to their health programme—for example, receiving timely text messages to prompt them to exercise. They're best not 'left to your own devices' as they're bound to return to their old ways.

- They should place more focus on the future—how are their behaviours *today* working for or against their *future* self? They should try to avoid thinking only of the *here-and-now* and consider more carefully than they typically do the consequences of their decisions and actions—getting away from the notion of living for today because tomorrow will never come (remember: today is yesterday's tomorrow!)

The difficulty here, as with elsewhere, is that without knowing one's personality in the first place, it's not possible to know which strategies are likely to be effective. However, with this knowledge at hand, it's possible to derive very practicable strategies for life-enhancing behavioural changes.

The very good news is that the success of a plan to increase conscientious health-related behaviours and coping mechanisms will impact on many other areas of life affected by this personality trait, including, as we've seen above, reducing the negative effects of high Emotionality.

Unemployment

Unexpectedly losing a job—which is an important part of our social identity—can be psychologically, as well as financially, debilitating. In fact, for many, it can be a crushing experience. But, for others, it can be a liberating one. How we react depends, to a large extent, on our personality. For example, a person who is low on the personality trait of Conscientiousness is especially prone to struggle, and if they're also high on Emotionality, they may go down-hill rapidly. This is likely to be one reason why, as of August 2019, according to the UK government, 3.8 million people were claiming Personal Independence Payment or Disability Living Allowance.

We know that long-term unemployment can have a scarring psychological effect that impacts negatively on employability, especially on young people. It's for this reason that the government does its best to get young people into work-related activities. For example, those who are high on Conscientiousness are much more likely to keep themselves busy and take active measures to seek employment or activities with employment-enhancing capabilities (e.g., voluntary work). They realise that *doing* anything is psychologically better than doing nothing. So, we see, those with the 'get up and go', get going, whereas those without it are more likely to resign themselves, and become demotivated, demoralised, and despondent. They are also much more likely to segue to long-term unemployment and welfare dependency with all the associated negative outcomes.

This negative outcome is especially likely if the unemployed person is also low on the personality trait of Agreeableness. Not having the ability to get on with people easily

is a sure-fire way of not getting ahead in the world of work. In addition, those high on Emotionality are more likely to suffer anxiety and depression, which can become a long-term disability. High Emotionality, low Conscientiousness and low Agreeableness is an especially lethal personality combination. However, the more fortunate individuals who are highly conscientious are more likely to view unemployment as a challenge. They may even use it as an opportunity to take stock of their life, move off in different directions, and maybe even be entrepreneurial. They're the ones who have it relatively easy, especially if they're low on Emotionality and high on Agreeableness.

The point to make is that although personality *influences* how we react to unemployment and career-related instability, it doesn't have to determine our future—in fact, we shouldn't allow it to. We can *choose* to think, feel, and behave in more adaptive and positive ways.

Disappointment

Disappointment is something we all feel at some point in our life: we didn't get the job we wanted; our husband/wife didn't get us the birthday present we expected; our children haven't got the best results; they haven't achieved a career in line with their education, and so on...and this list can get *very* long! These little everyday disappointments can build up over the longer term, and before we know it, they have us within their grip. They can add up to such an extent that they consume the narrative we've constructed about ourselves and the world around us – and then, they can become a self-fulfilling prophecy: "I told you so!".

The person scoring high on Emotionality is especially prone to experiencing this form of negative emotional state. This then leads to more negative thoughts, feelings and demotivated behaviour. This can also lead to getting 'stuck in a rut', psychologically-speaking.

We need to recognise, though, that disappointments are what *we* make of them—the 'disappointment' of something *we* were expecting. They don't exist in isolation from our expectations—in fact they define them. To help overcome disappointments, they can be 'reframed': either the narrative we've placed on the event can be changed, or we can see the 'disappointing' outcome as a source of valuable information that we would be wise not to ignore (what's it telling us about our world, and how we've been thinking about it?). Reframing and accepting disappointment can make us more realistic; challenge us to make changes for the better, and encourage us to focus on the more positive aspects of life.

It's within our powers to take a more positive path in life, especially when *life knocks hard*.

4 Psychological Self-Punishment

Regret/Remorse and Guilt-Shame

Sometimes bad events happen—yes, life can knock hard. We must do the best we can to deal with them. However, sometimes, we can be the agents of our own misery without even knowing it.

Now, most of us have felt regret and remorse, and related guilt and shame, at some time in our life. Our personality shapes the frequency, intensity, and consequences of these emotional and moral states of mind. Although guilt and shame are widely understood as psychologically unpleasant states of mind relating, respectively, to knowing one has done something wrong and a sense of personal humiliation or distress, the differences between regret and remorse are less clear-cut.

We feel regret when we wish we had *not* done something. An example could be buying a cheap toaster that stopped working almost immediately to cheating on a romantic partner. Regret is focused on ourselves when it leads to harm in financial or emotional terms, but it can also relate to regretting an action that has hurt someone else. Regret is a form of self-punishment, and often accompanies feelings of grief, sorrow, and anger.

In contrast to regret, remorse reflects empathy with the distress caused to another person because of one's actions—it's focused on how the other person is feeling. Remorse entails accepting one's mistakes and taking responsibility for them. This state of mind can be calmed by offering a sincere apology.

Both regret and remorse serve an important function: to motivate us to avoid future actions that might result in these unpleasant states of mind. In technical, psychological terms, regret and remorse act as a form of 'negative reinforcement'. In everyday terms, we avoid undertaking actions because of the fear of self-punishment (e.g., self-recrimination and loathing).

Negative Emotionality

Emotionality is the principal personality trait related to regret, remorse, guilt, and shame. Its influence increases as we move along the intensity gradient: higher levels of Emotionality are associated with more frequent and intense levels of negative emotions, as these are very self-centred and cut to the core of our self-identity.

The trait of Emotionality is composed of sub-factors of fear and anxiety, and it's the anxiety factor that's most important in these negative emotional and moral states of mind. To understand what's going on, we need to know that anxiety is related to *goal-conflict* ("*I* wanted *x* outcome, but *I* got *y* and *I* now need to work out why this happened and how *I* can prevent it happening again in the future"—the *I* reflects the self-focused nature of these states of mind).

In clinical psychology, thinking about negative events in the past is called *rumination*, while thinking about possible negative events in the future is called *worry*. This form of *goal-conflict* is controlled by a *behavioural inhibition system* (BIS). The BIS detects goal-conflict and then tries to resolve it, one way or the other. This can be either achieved by immediate avoidance/escape if the perceived threat is close and intense or, cautious approach if the threat isn't clear-cut.

In extreme cases, this form of negative processing can lead to Obsessional-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) where the inherent conflict (e.g., "Are my hands still contaminated?") doesn't get resolved, even after 100s of hand washes. Suppose the threat is perceived as more imagined than real. In that case, we return to pre-conflict behaviour (e.g., watching another episode of our favourite Netflix series).

Such negative states of mind are psychologically debilitating, especially if they're long-standing and, thus, chronic as opposed to acute. This is particularly true if their origins aren't clear in the first place and/or have become wrapped-up with other events (and people). The emotional turmoil can be hard to resolve; sometimes, even hard to define. This lack of clarity can, itself, become a source of conflict and distress.

Toxic states of mind cut to the very core of self-identity, competence, and control over the world, and one's safe place in it. For this reason, we mustn't let them get out of hand, especially if they're reminders of actions we had wished we hadn't performed. Highly emotional people are prone to experience prolonged bouts of these distressing thoughts and feelings; the resulting anxiety and depression, general feelings of self-disgust and loathing, can significantly impair quality of life.

Hell's Kitchen

Sometimes we get ourselves into a difficult position, for example in a new work environment. We may have started out with high hopes and full of

positive energy, but only then for these to be undermined and even destroyed. Yet even such a dismal situation can lead to something positive as it can make us make changes in our life for the better.

One correspondent, Nicola, who is now successfully studying for a university degree, recalled her experiences of managing a difficult work-life that invaded her personal one, and it also negatively impacted her psychological world and sense of worth and well-being.

Nicola recalls,

"Prior to making the leap into higher education, I had a career as a chef for just over a decade. It's no secret there is much psychological abuse at stake in the hospitality industry, but it's not commonly known how much it can infiltrate through a person's life. Changing career is a journey in itself. I am learning more about myself every day but reflecting on times of real despair I recognise how the power of personality could have helped me shortcut much heartache and internal struggle."

Remembering the early days, Nicola recollects,

"At the young age of 22, I returned to London from New York after spending some time cooking in a Michelin starred restaurant in Manhattan. Many American cooks I encountered regurgitated pages from the late Anthony Bourdain's *Kitchen Confidential.* It was a toxic, drug-fuelled environment, high on stress and high on demands. Nothing was good enough for the Chef, and they appeared to be physically incapable of praising any of their cooks. At best, you took silence as a compliment or, if you were really lucky, they might tap your pan with their spoon—the equivalent of a gold star. This kind of behaviour impacts how you regard yourself and value your work, and if you are a perfectionist like me, it fuels the concerns that inhibit your development and cause low self-esteem rather than the elements that help you build confidence and strive."

Things seemed to be on the up, but they did not turn out well, as Nicola remembers,

"I returned from New York feeling lost and searching for a kinder, more wholesome community. So, when I was approached to help open a restaurant that appeared to be actively trying to create the secure conducive environment I was searching for, I threw my heart and soul at it. I quite literally gave everything I had, and they quite literally took it all. I worked around the clock with little support. My employer spent more time writing articles for *Vogue*

and *Good Housekeeping* than they did in their own kitchen. Once, they even feigned an injury and sent their unqualified husband to work for them on the busiest brunch of the year. Eventually, I stopped being so grateful for the opportunity; I opened my eyes to the fact they were slowly chipping away at me. I didn't recognise myself anymore, and nor did my friends or family."

Life can get stressful, and mental well-being can suffer, as Nicola recounts,

"Trying to assert your worth when your chips are down is an exhausting and endless task. Only when I was pushed to the brink—when I actively considered causing injury to myself as more fathomable than getting through the day—did I choose to step back. My mental health was rock bottom, and it took a couple of years to overcome the experiences before I could even tackle the idea of changing my career. Understanding my personality could have saved me from an enormous amount of turmoil.

Perfectionistic traits can be a chef's best and worst friend."

But things have improved markedly, but not without a struggle, and it could have been much easier.

"Resilience is powerful but dangerous and self-exposing when not properly managed. Had I had a better understanding of my traits, I could have put boundaries in place with my employers and ensured I was valued and greeted with the necessary level of respect. I learnt some valuable life lessons—the hard way."

Self-insight can never come too late.

"Now I figure, only by understanding ourselves, our strengths and limitations, can we assert ourselves fully and navigate new or even comprising situations."

Nicola's experience shows that we can struggle to make life better by ourselves, but this can be very hard. It's far better to have the appropriate psychological resources to hand, not only to assist with the practical aspects of transitioning in life (e.g., careers and countries) but also with the self-confidence that, although life may be very challenging at the present time, there is a path to a brighter future: this comes by taking back control of one's life, especially how we are feeling and behaving. As Nicola's experience shows to us, if we don't do this for ourselves, no one else is going to do it for us—we might like to think otherwise, but it's not going to happen!

The unfortunate reality is that such negative states of mind often do get out of hand, as shown by the truly staggering statistic that nearly 71 million prescriptions were written for antidepressants in 2018 in England alone. Wales and Scotland aren't faring much better.

Now, when we become overwhelmed with negative thoughts and feelings, it's easy to start blaming ourselves. Indeed, this internal locus of control for the cause of bad events is understood to be one of the significant causes of depression. When in this depressed state of mind, we lose proper perspective and we self-punish, sometimes literally self-harm (this is a serious medical concern in its own right).

Although 'to err is human', we need not be slaves to our own personality propensities, even those that lead us to experience regret and remorse, and guilt and shame

By understanding how our personality traits are making us think, feel and behave, we can get a much better perspective on the causes of the events in our life, bad as well as good ones, and importantly we can learn how best to cope with them. We can develop strategies to prevent negative behaviours from occurring in the first place and, by default, promote positive behaviours and outcome.

For instance, if we're low on the personality trait of Agreeableness, we'll be inclined to say hurtful things to people without really intending to. Having this knowledge to hand won't change this personality trait, but it can lead to us not *expressing* it so readily—or apologising and asking forgiveness once we do. And this can change our relationships for the better. Once, but only once, we know we're prone to think, feel and behave in these particular ways are we in a position to be conscious of this fact. Then we can work towards limiting their worst outcomes (e.g., developing strategies to pause before we blurt out what's on our mind).

In terms of other personality traits, if we know we're high on Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience, we'll feel more confident that we have the diligence and cognitive capacity to process what's happened in the past to prevent it from happening again in the future. But, if we're much lower on these two important personality traits, help is at hand: we can learn that these aspects of our personality are relative weaknesses and require attention—for example, we might work on strengthening the behaviours associated with them.

The difficulty is always the same: in order to deal adaptively with these negative states when they occur, crucially, we have to know our own personality type first and how it's shaping our thoughts, feelings and behaviours. To do otherwise is simply to leave our life matters to fate.

5 People-Pleasing

Striking the Right Balance

We like to help people—it gives us a warm glow. We are social creatures with interest in people. Few of us have absolutely no interest in cooperative or altruistic acts. We get pleasure from knowing how others have benefitted, especially family and close friends—and this extends to people in our working life. Benevolent behaviours are rooted in the social nature of our personality—this is where the problem can start.

Are we pleasing people for the right reasons? Are we helping them? Are we helping ourselves? Are people taking advantage of our good nature? There are, indeed, considerations of the pros and cons of people-pleasing to take into account. We all have to decide how to strike the right balance.

People-pleasers come in different types; each has its own underlying psychology, corresponding to how personality traits are expressed. What type of people-pleaser are you?

a. *The Family Pleaser*. The person who desires to 'keep the peace'—to maintain harmonious relationships—acts as a mediator and peacekeeper in the family especially when there are strong personalities who want to get their own way. Although this type could be seen as a people-pleaser in the purest sense, they are usually only trying to hold together the family by reducing conflict. They're altruistic, acting as the calming force in the family—this may also extend to pleasing behaviour outside of the family, at work, social groups, clubs, and such like. They are life's peace makers.

b. *The Management Pleaser*. The person who manages employees and tries to motivate and empower by being accommodating in the attempt to keep them engaged—this is similar to the Family Pleaser. This pleasing behaviour is designed to help others develop confidence in themselves and learn to take the initiative: it's a benevolent form of people-pleasing. However, there's a balance to be struck, as *too* much pleasing won't help the employee to develop true independence—at some point, they have to learn to stand on their own two feet. Too much pleasing might instead make them *more* dependent on the support they are receiving and have come to expect—indeed, to such an extent that its reduction or withdrawal might be perceived as an insult ("You're refusing to help me anymore!").

c. *The Defensive Pleaser*. The person who responds to another person's dominant personality and tries to please—appease—them to keep in their 'good books' and avoid being criticized or otherwise on the receiving end of their hostility—may be perceived as well as real. This people-pleaser type is most likely to be found among those who score high on the personality dimension of Neuroticism (or Emotionality), which is associated with proneness to worry, rumination, low self-esteem, and low self-worth. This type tries to please others to avoid self-punishment (e.g., guilt and remorse). Technically, their behaviour is motivated by *negative reinforcement*: avoiding perceived bad outcomes at all costs, which assumingly will happen if the people-pleasing behaviour stops.

d. *The Reacting Pleaser*. The person who responds to the dominant personality of another person and who tries to please—appease—them to keep in their 'good books' and to avoid being criticized or otherwise to be on the receiving end of their hostility—this may be perceived as well as real. Some people have a particular knack for making us feel this way. For example, think of a strong personality like the former USA President, Donald Trump. To stay on 'his good side', he expected people to bend to his will; to comply to please him; and to acknowledge his superiority: "I'm, like, a smart person". Indeed, according to Trump's own estimates, his IQ is "much higher" than Barack Obama, George W Bush, and Lord Sugar, and many other people! Whatever the truth about Trump's intellectual prowess, we can learn a lot about his personality from his utterances! Dominant personalities score low on Agreeableness and/or low on Honesty-Humility, which are two of the six main dimensions of personality, the other four being: Extraversion (vs. introversion), Neuroticism vs. emotional stability), Conscientiousness (vs. indolence) and Openness to Experience (vs. practical mindedness).

In addition, at the more extreme end of the personality distribution, those people with high narcissism and/or high psychopathy will especially expect to be pleased; in fact, they will demand it. If they sense they are being slighted, if only in a minor way—they are especially prickly in this regard—they will react in an aggressive manner (this might sometimes disguise as *passive* aggressiveness). They will do all they can to "get their own back"—this is very child-like behaviour.

With such dominant personalities, the people-pleaser may not be entirely the victim. Sometimes, they go along with demanding behaviours because they are self-interested: they value the benefits of being on the 'good side' of the powerful who handles the levers of reward and punishment. History attests to the many people drawn towards such dominant personalities—Adolf Hitler knew this well and was surrounded by people-pleasers to serve their own selfish, venal motives. Tellingly, often, we openly say that we value a 'strong' leader and despise a 'weak' one. We only have to look at those who worked for the publisher Robert Maxwell to see this process in play. Many intelligent people worked for him and allowed themselves to be subjected to his frequent abuse, usually made in public to humiliate them further. Yet they desired to please 'Cap'n Bob', as he liked to be called—exceptionally high salaries played its economic part, too.

e. *The Personality Pleaser*. The person whose central personality factor is one of Agreeableness—they have a strong inclination to help others whenever possible and to avoid conflict if at all possible. They want to see the best in other people, and they cannot think of why they should not be affable, helpful, and pleasing. This is an admirable virtue. The downside is that some people detect this good-natured disposition, perceive it as a weakness, and exploit it for their own gain. As they know, the people-pleaser can be made to feel bad about themselves, and manipulative individuals have no qualms about creating psychological tension and conflict to control the people-pleaser in order to get whatever they want.

When thinking about these different types of people-pleasers, we can clearly see the personality-based motivates underlying the behaviour—from the Agreeable person who is naturally good-natured to the more dishonest and hubristic individual who pleases certain people to get more material gain and social status.

An important question, we need to ask ourselves whether people-pleasing is a positive or negative trait? Well, it all depends. Indeed, there's something of an inverted-U curve relationship here. At the extreme ends of the distribution, people-pleasing can be negative. If we are at the low end of the distribution with little people-pleasing, we might be perceived as uncaring and perhaps even hostile, which we might well be if we're low on the personality traits of Agreeableness and/or Honesty-Humility.

On the other hand, if we're at the high end of the distribution, our pleasing-people may make us too much of an "easy touch" —we might even lack self-

regard as we're too willing to jump to other people's tune. The desire to please others at any cost is never sensible but we have to strike the right balance. There's a location in the middle of the distribution where pleasing is appropriate and beneficial to the person doing the pleasing and those who are being pleased: this form of pleasing reflects achieving the right balance. But it can be hard to maintain this balance when others are trying to make us feel guilty—this, by itself, is a sign that it might be a good time to walk away.

The positives of people-pleasing include being the mediator, the peacekeeper, the negotiator, the motivator, and generally empowering people to become independent, leading by example. Appropriate pleasing-people can also be very good for our emotional wellbeing—feeling we are contributing positively to others' lives. The negatives are felt by the high people-pleasers. Let's take a trip to the hairdresser to see how this might play out.

Pleasing may be a short-term virtue but if excessive and inappropriate it can easily turn into a long-term vice

Imagine you have had your hair cut, and you simply hate the result. You might reply to the hairdresser when they ask you what you think of it, "It's lovely, thanks". In reality, it's probably an okay haircut, so you may well reason that you will quickly get over it—after all, it will eventually grow out. You still feel bad, though, for not speaking your mind and you might even experience some degree of self-recrimination. The whole situation grates on you. Or else, you might complain and say how awful you think it is. You might feel bad though for just upsetting someone, perhaps for the rest of the day; after all, they have trained for years, they work 6 days a week, 10 hours a day, and you have just made them feel bad about themselves. Or have you?

Explaining how you feel about the hair cut in an *appropriate manner* may be the best way forward. It might even help the hairdresser develop their skills, especially their communication with what the customer wanted in the first place. In any event, if you're genuinely a people-pleaser, you are going to feel guilty for much longer than the hairdresser, especially as you have to look at your hair every day for many weeks/months now. Unlike you, they're much more likely to get over it quickly, possibly justifying in some way the bad haircut, perhaps dismissing you as just another awkward customer. Alternatively, they might learn from your constructive feedback and be grateful to you for bringing it to their attention.

In this situation, as in all others, your personality will most definitely bias your thoughts, feelings and behaviours in certain directions—including how long and how intense you experience them.

This might seem a rather trivial example, but how many times a week do we find ourselves in a similar situation—when we feel we should have spoken out but felt compelled not to in case we offended the person. But why did we feel the compulsion to please them, especially when it is not in our own interests and possibly not even in theirs?

You can please some of the people some of the time, but you cannot please all of the people all of the time—no matter how hard you try!

We might well dwell on why we desire to please people at all. Does it go back to our childhood? Probably not, but this isn't to say, that it's not *developed* in childhood. It's more likely to be the case that those of us with an inherently agreeable personality had early family experiences which strengthened (i.e., *reinforced*) this pre-existing personality trait. Other members of the family and our childhood friends may have quickly latched on to our good-natured disposition and exploited it for their own benefit. These experiences would have fostered in us the belief that for others to like and approve of us we must do our best to please them. This, then, becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy as it extends into our adult life, where it becomes a part of our core self. The problem is that we rarely test the hypothesis that is driving our behaviour: what would happen if we were *not* so pleasing, and what would this outcome tell us about how others view and (dis)respect us?

How should we strike the right balance—which requires establishing appropriate boundaries—as with so many other things in life, this is easier said than done. Once we've decided on these boundaries, it's important to communicate them clearly to other people (e.g., children) in ways that *they hear*. Certainly, going around pleasing people all the time does no one any good; indeed, it may do some bad—for example, encouraging children to be indolent, lacking independence, "entitled", "needy", and, as it used to be said, "spoiled". It's important to stick to the appropriate boundaries, especially as others may test our resolve at first. That way, we will have fewer feelings of guilt, disappointment, and a range of other negative thoughts and feelings that come when we feel we have "let people down".

Achieving the right balance is especially difficult for some personality types. For example, someone who is high on the personality dimension of Neuroticism/Emotionality—they generate negative emotions easily—will tend to find their negative thoughts and feelings overwhelming them. Consequently, they will be prone to reason that to avoid these bad feelings they should please people all the more (after all, they reason, by not pleasing them, they are feeling bad in the first place—remember the *negative*

reinforcement mentioned above). This is where personality self-knowledge and insights come into their own.

But by knowing our habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving, especially in relation to others, we can more easily realise *why* we are thinking and feeling in the ways we do. This can help us self-regulate better, not only for the benefit of our own peace of mind but also for the benefit of others (e.g., engaging in *appropriate* pleasing behaviour).

In all of this, something is of special relevance. We know from psychology that 'cognitive framing' is crucial in how we perceive and react to the world, including our own internal world of thoughts and feelings. Think about it. Are you *really* "letting people down" by not agreeing to be their domestic servant, or are you by your actions encouraging and empowering them to become independent individuals who don't need the constant reassurance and help from others? It's all about deciding how to think through (i.e., 'frame') these matters.

There's something else too. We know from research on the 'dark side' of personality that people who are overly pleasing are seen by many as "weak", not deserving of respect, and an "easy touch". This can worsen the situation as these 'dark side' people can foster in us the desire to ever-more please in order to stay on their "good side"—this conveys the threat that they have a 'bad side' that we would do well to avoid: this alone should set the alarm bells ringing!

There are some definite advantages to *not* being a people-pleaser!

If people-pleasing has its advantages, so too can disagreeable and displeasing behaviour. If nothing else, it makes the person distinctive, and this attracts attention to them. Think of Donald Trump again. No one could accuse him of being highly agreeable, and many would accuse him of being the exact opposite. Yet, he appealed to many voters—in fact, 73.5 million of them in the 2020 USA Presidential Election (Biden won with 79.3 million votes). This might seem surprising. Many thought that the much more agreeable Joe Biden would outrun the much less agreeable Donald Trump by a much wider margin, but this turned out not to be the case. Perhaps Trump's appeal came from the fact that he was not an agreeable personality—although it could be argued that his *policies* are agreeable to a large proportion of the American electorate.

In moderation, some degree of non-pleasing behaviour can signal to others that we are not be taken advantage of and that we will stand our ground if

required. This can breed appropriate respect, especially in those who are not inclined to afford us much respect in the first place—if nothing else, it can help to deter their manipulative and controlling behaviour. Additionally, this can have the benefit of enhancing our feelings of self-respect and worth, bringing many psychological benefits in their wake.

Of course, there are times when we should people-please—as a mediator, empowering people, peacekeeper, or just a helper, depending on how you want to *frame* matters—because it's the right thing to do. Like taking your child with a car full of their belongings to start a new life at university, rather than requiring them to take the train/bus, dragging all their stuff with them. Or comforting a loved one that's not feeling well and making sure they have everything they need. Of course, it's important to think of ourselves too, although not to a selfish degree. We should think about pleasing ourselves as much as the other person.

Another question to ask is a little more challenging. Do you always want people to like you? If you do, why do you think the best way to achieve this is to please them? If this is how you see the world, how do you then come to terms with the reality that not everyone will like you, no matter how much you try to please or appease them? With hand-on-heart, can *you* say you like everyone who comes into your life, including those who may have gone out of their way to please you? Why should you *have* to like them—or, for that matter, anyone else in your life?

When thinking about how we frame our decisions, words are important. Although words may seem straightforward in meaning, they are drenched with psychological significance. For example, the words 'like' and 'please' are relatively weak when used to describe people. There are stronger, more reflective words that we can use, such as 'admire', 'aspire to', 'inspirational', and so on. These more positive attributes do not come from simply people-pleasing. Maybe you should want to be seen as 'inspirational' rather than merely 'liked'. Your children may not 'like' you sending them to school everyday, but they will come to respect you for giving them the best start in life.

We all need to learn not to worry about being a people-pleaser; what we need to learn is how to make the right decisions for the right reasons. This will be respected and admired by others, even if they don't 'like' us in the short-term—are those who choose not to acknowledge the good intentions of our behaviour really worth trying to please in the first place?

6 Understanding Your Child

Better Parenting and Fewer Conflicts

Parenting will never be easy. There will always be obstacles and even criticisms, but there are solutions too. As a parent, you'll always want what's best for your child; although sometimes it can be difficult to know what actually is best, and 9 times out of 10, this is because of a lack of knowledge parents have of their own and their child's personality—what each *really* needs and wants.

As children grow up, 'personality clashes' can, and often do, happen. Understanding your personality traits and how you *express* them to your child will undoubtedly help avoid arguments and disagreements more generally. Such personality self-knowledge is beneficial in other ways, including helping along romantic relationships. A parent who possesses insight into their own personality is more likely to behave in ways that have a positive impact on their child. An investment in oneself is also an investment in one's child. The results can be quite substantial.

By knowing about personality, we rapidly discover that we're better able to adjust our parenting style to the temperamental features of our children; and, importantly, how they're likely to react in any given situation. Often we fail to understand our children fully because we've failed to understand ourselves and how we respond to our children. This may seem a hackneyed statement, but it's true all the same.

Another thing resulting from you knowing more about your personality is that it'll always stick with you and your children. This is good news as it means that a change in a positive direction in the ways you interact with your child will transfer to them as they learn new social and cognitive skills which they can then use in their own life, including with their own children. Knowing about your personality is a very cost-effective investment in yourself and your children. It's a form of psychological inheritance.

Parenting Challenges Today

Research shows that many parents today are overwhelmed with everyday concerns. Most will have to face significant issues at some point in their child's life. In addition, all parents are now required to adhere to government-imposed duties and responsibilities. On top of all of these pressures are bouts of exhaustion, constant demands from children, as well as trying to live-up to the expectations of family and friends. It's never been as difficult to be a parent as it is today.

We don't need to look too far to find examples of the challenges of parenting. The TV celebrity, Ulrika Jonsson, hasn't been finding it easy with her children during the 2020 lockdown. Ulrika was called 'more impatient than ever' by her 16-year-old daughter, Martha, while her other daughter, Bo, 19, admitted that tensions in the household had reached an all-time high. In response, Ulrika joked that she's 'questioned her sanity'—maybe this 'joke' revealed something more.

Martha says, "I have never known anyone who is so anal and house-proud as Mum"; joking, "having one 'menopausal woman' and 'two hormonal female teenagers' living under one roof during a pandemic is a recipe for disaster". Martha says she feels 'misunderstood' as her mother continues to pester her about sleeping in too late and not cleaning her room. According to her other daughter, Bo, her mother would tell her off for minor things and was constantly up and down with her emotions. She described her relationship with her mum as either 'being best friends or worst enemies'. There's one thing going for Ulrika and her two daughters, though: they're honest which is a good thing in any relationship.

It's hard to deny that parents being more knowledgeable of the perspectives of their children leads to fewer conflicts and better long-term relationships. Also, this helps parents feel more in control and at ease with their parenting skills, and leads to fewer guilty feelings and regrets when things don't go to plan. Although not everything will be plain sailing, with greater knowledge to hand the conflicts that do arise are likely to be resolved much more quickly. It also helps prevent the 'blame game' which can rapidly get out of hand.
Psychologists know that the benefits to the long-term quality of parent-child relationships can be substantial, but this requires greater understanding in the family. It's especially important when parents are facing modern-day challenges, such as maintaining a sensible work-life balance and managing their own wellbeing, as well as doing the very best they can for their family, sometimes in very difficult circumstances. The unfortunate reality is that the pressures of parenting mean that too many mothers and fathers suffer in terms of their own basic needs and wellbeing. As a result, they can be prone to worry and anxiety, even depression, and a general sense of unease and discomfort with their parenting capabilities. Thus reduces the quality of their actual parenting.

Parental Personality Assessment

Personality assessment isn't widely available to the general public, at least, not the scientifically rigorous variety that comes with practicable and actionable

feedback and guidance. What does exist, especially on the internet, is often little more than a 'parlour game' and based on some very dubious psychometrics (i.e., the statistics related to the 'measurement of the mind'), if any at all. It's a shame because personality assessment is highly valuable in all areas of life, particularly with relationships, and is most important in parenting. We could all benefit from insights into how we 'tick' and then use this information to enhance our understanding and relationships with others, especially our children. It really can make all the difference. Those of us who've raised children may look back to realise we should've known more at the time. Maybe then there would have been fewer conflicts and regret.

In the sections below, we see how personality insights throw essential light on parent-child bonds. We see also how parents' and children's perspectives differ, not only by the nature of the relationship (e.g., parents are *always* older and more experienced!) but by how these different perspectives filter through the lens of their different personalities. It's not that one perspective is right while the other is wrong; they're just different, and these differences matter.

One correspondent, Lucy, says she feels that being a psychology student she can apply her knowledge to observations of her own mother [Cheryl] who was a single parent raising four children. Lucy's mother had to face numerous positives and negatives during these years. Lucy thinks that her mother's personality helped her in many ways. For example, being extraverted, she always remained uplifted, which encouraged her children to do well, which considerably boosted their confidence and helped them achieve success at school and university. She was also very patient and always willing to help her children to overcome any problems they had.

Parents benefit from an assessment of their personality to put them on the right path of parenting success

Lucy thinks her mother's personality had some drawbacks. For example, her outspoken and assertive traits meant that sometimes she'd speak for Lucy and her siblings, which resulted in disagreements. Lucy also believes that her mother did not think of herself enough; Cheryl could be 'too caring' and put the wants of her children over her own needs. Personality self-insight could have helped Cheryl in these grey areas. She may have noticed these traits and worked on them to improve herself for the benefit of her children and herself.

Of course, we all have our own perspective, and even children in the same family will have different ones regarding their mother and father—these perspectives are bound to differ from their parents' points of view. In

addition, children often don't appreciate the sacrifices their parents make for them because they usually don't witness this side of the family equation—and parents often hide it from them. These differences can lead to varying states of understanding, and these can, by themselves, lead to confusion and even provoke conflict. Whereas if the circumstances were better known, then, instead of conflict, there would be more gratitude and appreciation.

To get some sense of what might be going on, a number of parents confided their experiences. One correspondent, Rose, who is 60 and a mother of three boys, all now in their late 20s and mid-30s, rightly observes that families are made up of very different personalities, and this can give rise to problems. Rose says, "One of the biggest challenges that I would have benefited from is to learn about personality and how to work with the different personalities within the family. We might like to think our children are like us, but usually they aren't. In fact, they can be very unlike us and this can lead to them *dis*liking us. This is a whole family affair. When the children are still young, the last thing most parents are interested in is themselves. They put everything into doing their best and the outcome is a huge achievement that they can be proud of, the children are an extension of themselves, that's the way it is! Of course, often, our children don't want to be an extension of us and this, in itself, can cause conflict. Parents and children just see things in different ways".

The last point Rose makes is important: parents and children have different information. Often children simply don't know what's going on (e.g., financial pressures), which can lead children to make incorrect inferences and attributions regarding the skills of their parents.

In one sense, a child has the luxury of being self-centred and *self*ish. But because of their responsibilities, most parents don't enjoy this luxury, and they wouldn't expose their children to the harsher facts of life. This can lead to issues, though. As Rose goes on to say, "I would suggest that parents look inward and learn about themselves. Personality insights allow them to overcome challenges and improve the bond with their children".

The Challenges for Parents

Parenting is a long and uneven journey that involves sacrifices. We're motivated to help our children grow into responsible and fulfilled adults. Parents can even find themselves in something of a double-bind: if they don't expect the best for their children and haven't provided them with ample opportunities then they may fear that this will become a self-fulfilling prophesy, and they'll be to blame for any unsuccessful outcome. Whereas if

they always assume the best and give their child everything (including making excuses for their bad behaviour), then this might lead to the child not being exposed to the realities of life and, in consequence, not growing up into a responsible adult.

Practical matters also play a prominent part in parenting. Another of our correspondents, Paul, 54 and a father of two and stepfather of four, found it challenging to manage his family time and work life. He found it especially difficult to spend an adequate amount of time with his children whilst at the same time managing his business. To face this challenge, Paul put to good use knowledge of his personality. Being practical and hardworking, he was able to organise his time more effectively and remove any irrelevant and time-wasting tasks. As a result, he's worked on this aspect of his life and is now overcoming this parental challenge. Paul's children are benefitting too.

In addition to pressures on his time, Paul found that his persuasive and assertive personality traits sometimes caused conflict with his children when he'd be too forceful in expressimg his thoughts and opinions. Here, too, knowledge of Paul's personality traits meant he could recognise the triggers and, as a result, he acquired the ability to suppress his more unhelpful behaviour. This led to an improved parenting style, and his children now see him as more "chilled" and not so uptight. As Paul's example shows, personality self-insight helps to overcome challenges and makes parents aware of areas that need attention and improvement. It *really* can make a difference to the precious bond between parent and child.

At the end of the day, we're all human and prone to making mistakes. No person or parent is perfect! Personality self-insight can make us more open and accepting of our mistakes and those made by others. This greater tolerance of ourselves and others leads to positive spill-over effects in other areas of our life, including employment, education, and romantic relationships.

Turning to the anticipation of a newborn, Rhiannon is a 25-year-old expectant mother. She highlights how self-insight has prepared her for the arrival of her baby. Knowing that she's a confident person makes her feel that she'll be a good and reassuring mother, who will face any challenges with a positive attitude. She also thinks that her organised traits will allow her to be ready for parenthood without too much stress.

Nevertheless, despite her confidence and general positive attitude, Rhiannon has faced some emotional challenges, such as worry and anxiety, which she believes is due to her over-thinking and controlling nature. However,

although she can't entirely stop this worry and anxiety—which is only to be expected in a young expectant mother—she believes that knowing about her own personality has allowed her to identify these traits early on in parenthood, and now she knows how to deal with them. Rhiannon can now stop them from running riot with her everyday thinking and feelings. In other words, she's in control even though such negative states of mind aren't totally absent.

Of course, parenting doesn't stop when children grow up and leave the parental home to make their own way in the world. Take Winnie, who is 83 years old. She still finds herself in the midst of parenting, despite her children now being adults and having their own families. Being an inquisitive person, she helps her children with challenging tasks, such as financial matters. She found, though, in her later years of parenthood, she came to have a personality clash with her daughter.

Winnie and her daughter are both strong, self-assertive women and often find themselves disagreeing on (what in effect are insignificant) issues. Perhaps it's because they're so alike; whatever the truth, there's been too little give-and-take in their past relationship. Learning about her personality has allowed Winnie to control the *expression* of her traits and to 'work' with her daughter. Winnie and her daughter may not always agree, but at least now, unlike before, they don't let disagreements over silly issues get out of hand.

Now, as children grow up, 'personality clashes' inevitably occur, although they may come in disguise, masquerading as different issues. We get a sense of this when we look back at a conflict and see it was over such an insignificant issue—it couldn't surely have been about that in the first place! Knowing and understanding personality traits can enable parents to work with them to avoid damaging disagreements with their children: *de*-escalation rather than escalation.

7 Starting A Career

Graduating from University and the Right Career Steps

Graduates face many challenges upon leaving the confines of university. For sure, this is an exciting time, full of promise; however, it's not without worry: *what* to do next and *how* to do it? Although university equips graduates academically for the world, providing them with a raft of valuable intellectual skills, they do less well on the "human" side—motivation, emotion and social—leaving graduates less well prepared for the reality of the world of work.

Learning how to use ones' personality in the best possible way is the unspoken key to success in all careers, especially finding and keeping that ideal job. Furthermore, businesses are increasingly on the lookout for graduates who possess self-knowledge and insight as this shows they're ready for training and career progression. These so-called 'soft' skills can have very hard outcomes.

Personality is a precious possession, yet it can also be our Achilles' heel, especially in a competitive job market where it's necessary to 'get on' in order to 'get ahead'. What's most important, though, isn't so much the personality traits we possess but how we *express* them—as the old song goes, we need to "accentuate the positive and attenuate the negative". To do this, we first need self-knowledge and insight, as well as effective psychological and behavioural strategies that we can apply on a daily basis. These little changes accumulate to achieve long-term gains.

As any aspiring graduate needs to make the right decisions to set them on the path to success, they also need to know how their behaviour is impacting others, especially co-workers, and themselves (e.g., demotivation). There's only one way to achieve this positive outcome: more personality insight. Indeed, such is its importance, understanding one's own personality is a key variable in achieving healthy and successful social relationships of all types, including those in the world of work. Furthermore, it allows finding a job congruent with one's personality, which leads to a higher chance of success. We aren't only more productive we're all happier and more fulfilled in our lives.

Proud Parents

Once students look forward to closing their textbooks for the last time and wait to receive their hard worked-for golden 'graduate' tickets, parents, family, and friends are rightly proud of them. It's a time to celebrate. Once this positive glow recedes, it's time to give graduates the very best possible chance

of success and happiness in their new life—especially due to the tough job market and increased uncertainty about the future.

When thinking about their future, students and graduates are starting to come to realise that gaining insight into their characteristic preferences for thinking, feeling and behaviour (i.e., personality) is as much a career and life skill as intellectual and IT skills. Arguably they are much more relevant as employers place considerable value on the 'soft skills' that come from self-awareness and insight (e.g., openness to ideas, team-working, and willingness to learn and get along with a diverse range of people).

Alas, not all graduates, especially very young ones, have such self-awareness and insight. Often this is simply because they haven't been given the opportunity to acquire them. This fact could mean that graduates don't quite know how to progress from their current point in life *now* to the place where they think they are or would like to be. Graduates need to be realistic to get on in the real world of work, but most could benefit from some psychological support.

The Start of Another Life Journey

Many employers use personality tests and other forms of psychometric assessment (e.g., cognitive abilities, such as verbal reasoning) to select staff. However, feedback from such assessment is scarce at best, and many applicants are excluded from further consideration without knowing why—for reasons too obvious to mention, employers are naturally reluctant to feedback on negative aspects of a candidate's personality; however, such feedback can be invaluable to the candidate.

We're all curious about who we *really* are. It's important to know, in order to make sensible and realistic life plans. The thing to bear in mind is that there's no way of knowing this without a proper personality assessment.

Many young people have come to the conclusion that personality assessment is for people like them, and they know that they'll be in the minority with this 'insider' knowledge. It's a form of magic: not many people know how the mind works, and such insight can work its charms on how we come across to others, positively impacting success in all areas of our life. Individuals who have this knowledge are way ahead of the game, especially in the world of work because the step from University student life to a professional career is a large one.

Now, it's the case that many newly minted graduates move into professional-level entry roles with ease; others though with more of a challenge; and, alas, some fall at the very first hurdle. It's a *game* in the world of employment. Who will get the job? Who will present themselves best? Who will succeed?

The Handicap of Lack of Self-Insight

It's clear that far too many young people enter the world of work without much thought as to the consequences of how they're *expressing* their personality and how it's impacting the world—and, in turn, how the world is impacting them in many ways that may not be immediately obvious. A lack of self-insight causes this unfortunate outcome; indeed, it can be seen as a form of self-handicapping. More often than not, we can't comprehend or learn the impact we're having on others as they're neither required nor inclined to give us feedback.

Knowledge about one's own personality and its effects are valuable assets to hold. Typically, though, we're not even aware of this psychological reality, and if we are then we often choose to ignore it. Perhaps deep down, we don't want to know the truth?
The scientific fact is that we all differ, and these differences have life-enhancing and impairing consequences: personality *really* does matter. The fact that not all young people have access to insights into their own personality is a major limitation as graduates enter post-University life.

This lack of detailed self-knowledge and insight may be seen as rather strange because parents/guardians and society expend vast amounts of money on higher education, and students leave university with an enormous debt to pay off in the years ahead of them. Also, many parents spend sleepless nights worrying about their children's future.

Graduates face a competitive career landscape—knowing their own personality preferences and styles of expression gives those 'in the know' a distinct advantage

It seems, we're often willing to allow graduates to enter a highly challenging and competitive world of work without the considerable benefits afforded by high-quality assessment, resulting in insights into their true *self*: those who have this knowledge benefit, those who don't struggle.

By learning about themselves and their personality traits, students are in a better position to make more sensible decisions. They can go forward with greater confidence, anticipating a higher likelihood of success and fulfilment.

Graduates who pursue careers with characteristics consistent with their personality traits are much more likely to succeed since they're better suited, more productive, and happier with their lot. They find the world of work much easier to navigate, and their progress is all the smoother.

Student Perspectives

Current students were asked to share their experience. They report that being aware of their personality, as well as what types of environment, peers and corporate structures work best for them, allows them to put their best foot forward and work towards a successful career with the added confidence. In particular, such *realistic* confidence is important. After speaking to students at UK universities, it's clear that personality psychology should play a greater role in shaping the career choices they make.

One student at Cambridge University is an aspiring publisher who believes, "you have to know what the demands of the job are. Although writing and publishing may seem like an independent job, qualities such as patience and the ability to compromise are valued since you'll have to work with, often difficult, authors—it's much easier to understand *their* perspective if you're open-minded". Knowing her personality traits has influenced every step of her decision making. Having completed her IB education in Australia, she knew her extraverted and sociable side would allow her to integrate smoothly at Cambridge; she was confident that she'd make friends whilst settling into a new environment, and thus took the leap to study abroad.

This story illustrates how knowing your personality can act, if nothing else, as a confidence booster, which could be crucial whenever you're navigating through a new stage in life.

In the same vein, having a grasp of personality traits has helped other students get a better sense of direction. Marcus, who is also a student at Exeter University, though more introverted, has a very straightforward work ethic when approaching his History degree, which has helped him succeed during his first two years. He's also open-minded and agreeable, which he believes is crucial to being an unbiased historian. As he prepares to enter the world of finance after graduating, Marcus is confident that his agreeable personality will be just as important as his intellectual skills. Understanding his own personality provides him with the assurance that he'll succeed, and more importantly, that he'll enjoy his new career path.

Picking a career path that corresponds to personality strengthens related traits. This is usually a very rewarding experience—it's like swimming with

rather than against the tide of personality preferences. When this doesn't happen, the results can, and often are, fatigue, frustration, disappointment, disengagement and, even burn-out that's associated with very negative thoughts and feelings. Isn't it so much better to pick the right career path in the first place or even decide that the first career path was not the right one and it's time to change course?

Happiness, success, and fulfilment come from going with, not against, the grain of personality—the rub is, we need to know it first!

Graduates have another challenge to face when deciding which career path might be best for them. There are stereotypes about industries that can cause an 'anchoring' effect and, thereby, deter suitable graduates from pursuing certain career options. For example, it's often stated that extraverted people should work in jobs that involve socialising and communicating with others, such as sales or customer service. In contrast, introverted individuals should focus on careers interacting with technology and avoid any leadership positions that seem to require an outgoing persona.

In fact, despite common stereotypes, the most effective leaders aren't always—perhaps not even often—highly sociable extraverts (think of Bill Gates). And many exceptional leaders are plain difficult (think of Steve Jobs) and they may not seem, prima facie, to possess the requisite traits for effective leadership.

Someone as exceptional as Elon Musk shows us that being authentic is crucial to success and leadership—going *with* the grain of one's own personality is far more important than trying to adhere to other people's expectations. We should remember that few people have truly succeeded by emulating someone else!

Sarah's Story

Sarah is a student at City, University of London. She observes, "My belief is that everything someone does in life gives a piece of the puzzle needed to understand who they really are. Every aspect, whether it be education, personal interests or relationships, is influenced by personality. One day someone learns that they like it when others praise them and another day, they learn that they like working in a team more than they like working alone. Preferences are based on contextual cues. Just because someone likes working in teams at work doesn't mean they don't like giving space to their partner in relationships".

Sarah goes on to note, "Before advancing to university, my time and effort was reserved for meeting deadlines and impressing others as a form of approval. Then one day, there's that sudden realisation that this is not what you really want. Everything you worked for is all a waste of time and there's no way out because in the early systems of education, uniform obedience is an order, not an option! Then it's time for university and there's a great sense of freedom. You can be anything you want. Of course, someone can explore life within a safety net, so they don't have to worry about travelling too far. It's like having wings!"

Lucy's Story

Another City student, Lucy, says, "The knowledge of my personality has enlightened me on the best ways to approach my psychology degree. For example, I would describe myself as being someone who is extraverted (talkative/ outgoing) and intellectually curious, therefore I work best when collecting research and applying it to group work or interactive revision strategies. As well as this, personality insights have helped me become more relaxed with my work as I would consistently worry about mistakes (perfectionist). I would say that I have an 'end of the world' attitude but now knowing that it's just an aspect of my personality. I have become one with it and started to overcome it. Furthermore, the understanding of personality has also put me on a suitable career path. I'm quite an affectionate and caring individual so I feel that a job where I'm helping people, such as a clinical psychologist, is where I would excel the most".

Lucy adds, "This information has not only helped me at university but has also helped me in everyday life. I feel that I can now communicate more confidently and effectively with people whose personalities are very different from mine. Recently, I have found myself to become very close friends with someone who would be described as an introvert. Perhaps, knowing that I understand their personality and I can control mine has helped this friendship. For example, she is quiet and shy, and I try to compliment this by not being too assertive".

Lucy rightly observes, "Acknowledging one's personality is very important. It's very helpful, in the sense that it can lead to success in all areas of life. For example, knowing about your personality can help you make rational decisions leading to greater happiness. Knowing this information can help individuals find job roles and careers that are best suited to them, where they can excel and blossom".

The Prof's Perspective

Philip Corr says, "One of the true privileges of working in a university is to witness students developing, growing, and flourishing. As staff, we would *like* to think we've played a role in their progress! When things 'go to plan', everything is fine, and we expect the student to enter the world of work with the confidence that they can cope with whatever is thrown at them and that their future is assuredly bright and successful. Finding out about our graduates' successes when we encounter them further down their career road is a special delight."

Philip goes on to add, it's almost always the case that, those who went on to successful and fulfilled careers were the ones who, during their studies, were 'switched on' to their psychological life. Other graduates, alas whom we're less likely to encounter after they leave University, seem to be more lost and adrift, and somewhat bewildered with how to navigate life's highways and byways".

On a less optimistic note, Philip says, "I see too many students entering and then leaving the final year of their studies still unclear about their future, despite the wealth of careers advice they've receive. What many seem to lack is a sense of direction and purpose, as well as knowledge regarding how they should go ahead getting on with their life. Although this lack is not entirely down to personality, it's hard not to come to the conclusion that if they had proper insight into their own personality they would have more of a positive start to their work careers".

8 Boosting Your Business Success

Running (Not Ruining) Your Business

Thinking of starting your own business? If so, you aren't alone. Young people, in particular, are leaping at the chance to get started. Many have already taken the leap. Certainly, with job uncertainty—a 'job for life' has long gone—the appeal of striking out on one's own has never been greater. The thought of being independent and taking control of one's life is attractive. Although it comes with many rewards and joys, it also comes with many challenges and pitfalls.

Well, if you're thinking of transitioning from 'employee' to 'employer', or if you prefer to be a one (wo)man band, your personality will have a big impact on how you run your business and the likelihood of its success. Personality can also be the ruin of a business. We need our personality to work for and not against us in business, but this takes self-knowledge and insight, and it really shouldn't be left to chance. The fact is that business life is fraught with challenges: cognitive, emotional, motivational, social, and all have to be managed alongside family life. There's so much to learn and master and so many ways to fail.

It's important that business owners express themselves in the right manner to attract clients and customers, as well as to manage staff, suppliers, and investors. In a small business, the owner *is* the business or, at least, its visible face! But, how best to express our personality in the right ways? Well, it's essential first to understand one's personality: how it's making us think, feel and behave. This will then give clues to how we're expressing our fundamental traits and how this expression is impacting other people, for good or ill.

Take Sir Alan Sugar, for example. Sir Alan comes from a working-class background in North London. He enjoyed only secondary school education. From these humble beginnings, Sir Alan rose to become one of the most successful businessmen in the world. One secret to his success is that he used his strong personality to his advantage—not always to other people's liking perhaps but ultimately to his own business success. The good news is that, like Sir Alan, we can all leverage our personality to build a more successful and personally fulfilling business—and this includes deciding in the first place what type of business is most suited to our personality.

Successful business people have reached deep into their emotional, intellectual, and behavioural resources—that is, into their personality.

Decades of research studies have shown the importance and impact of personality on performance, productivity, effectiveness and optimal decision making. Too often, this critical research literature isn't known to the general public, and they've no way of knowing how they can use it to their own advantage. We can only regret the lack of this practical knowledge in the business world.

What Makes for Business Success?

So, what can we say makes a successful entrepreneur? Research highlights that the most successful entrepreneurs are disciplined, diligent/conscientious, persistent (especially in the face of challenges) and focused on success. They are also open to new ideas, yet not to the point that they agree with everything they hear. They have enough self-insight to be realistic and to know how best to achieve their ambitions. They are also mindful of their limitations and what in their personality may be holding them back, including excessive and *uncontrolled* self-doubt due to their higher-than-average level of Emotionality, or even over-confidence due to their unrestrained level of Extraversion.

The question the business owner must answer: will my personality help me run my business, or does it have the potential to ruin it? This is a tough question and far from being a flippant one, yet it's a question that many new business owners don't feel comfortable asking themselves because it suggests self-doubt. It's nothing of the kind, though, as it's about being realistic, and it's this realistic view of the world and oneself that is most likely to lead to success. It turns out that the most successful business people are, in fact, cautious and, in particular, they avoid excessive risk as they know this is a quick route to failure.

Another important point to bear in mind is that it's all too easy to spend large sums of money when starting up; in the often vain, hope, the business will rapidly repay the investment. This can be a result of over-confidence. We should follow Warren Buffett's first principle of business—"Don't lose money"—before moving onto his second principle—"Don't forget the first principle!"

This takes us onto a related issue: "Why are you going into business in the first place?" The answer to this question may seem obvious: "To make money". However, anyone who has actually started a business knows too well that this isn't quite the whole story, or even a main plotline—often, there are very personal reasons that can't be quantified in monetary terms. For example, for a sense of achievement, to "make something" of one's life, to

impress others, and even to show people how wrong they were. This last point is writ large in the name of the most successful pub chain in the UK: J D Wetherspoons. Tim Martin started the company in the 1970s, and he named it after one of his teachers who believed he wouldn't amount to anything. Now that showed him!

Business is very personal, and it can't be entirely quantified by an accountant—they can keep the books straight, but they're not the ones writing the story in the book. The story is one of a voyage, and it's usually something of a stormy one during the early stages of the journey. Sadly, many start-ups fail, leaving fledging business owners despondent and some even bankrupt.

According to Google, for 21.5% of small businesses, the journey ends before the first year is over, and only around 50% reach their fifth year before throwing in the towel. Anything that can be done to improve these numbers must be advantageous; otherwise, money is lost alongside personal dreams. The general opinion is that if the business is still running after 3 years, then it stands a fairly good chance of success. How one manages to get to the third year is an important issue though.

Nowadays, entrepreneurs educate themselves on their own psychological make-up as they know this is crucial to their business success. Indeed, they see it as the best form of investment. This is the tip of Warren Buffett, one of the most successful business men in the world: invest in yourself as it will pay handsome dividends. This form of investment pays a greater rate of return than learning the ins and outs of book-keeping and accounts, as this can be farmed out to people who do it for a living. Richard Branson of Virgin claims he doesn't even know how to read a balance sheet—he doesn't really need to know.

A Psychological Plan

Not getting the psychological fundamentals right from the get-go means that business owners can suffer. For example, it's known that they're more prone to mental disorder, especially anxiety and depression. This isn't that hard to understand when we appreciate the challenges they have to face and the amount of work needed to make their business a success. Despite its evident upsides, starting and running a business can be psychologically as well as physically draining, and it can also impact family life. It's not for the faint-hearted.

Knowing one's personality is the best personal guide for young entrepreneurs

From what's known about psychology and the realities of the business world, it's a little troubling to realise that most new business owners are unaware of the impact their personality is having on their success and also on their own inner psychological life. When starting a business, it's essential to have a business plan, but just as important is a psychological plan—it's far more likely that the contents of this psychological plan will have more impact than the made up ('projected') numbers in the business plan. In fact, some forward-thinking investment companies assess their analysts and traders on personality characteristics to ensure that they have the right mindset to do the best possible job. Sensibly, they don't leave this important matter to chance.

The rate of business failure suggests that there are still too many entrepreneurs unaware of the crucial role of their personality. This is perhaps understandable. In part, it's due to the fact that most of them have only ever been an employee, and they haven't needed to envision themselves as an independent and successful business person.

In an important sense, being an employee means that they can leave their personality at home when they go to work. Just think how differently you express yourself at work and at home. And, if an employee has been exposed to personality assessment, it was probably because it formed part of job selection—it was the employer assessing it for *them*. The more insightful business owners realise that they could benefit from personality assessment too, this time doing it *for themselves*.

This is an issue especially for young people in the early stages of their business journey. At the very least, appreciating the role played by their personality provides the comfort of knowing that transitioning from an everyday job to becoming the owner of a business is feasible for *them*. Though this is not without challenges, at least then, they will know the personal issues they may face and, importantly, how they can best cope with them. Personality self-insights are an important stepping-stone to helping young people survive, thrive, and feel good about themselves in the process. For this to happen, though, they need a psychological plan.

Entrepreneurs who enjoy the benefits of self-knowledge tend to be more successful, more self-assured, and are better able to make effective business decisions, especially in otherwise stressful situations. This self-knowledge is something of a 'lucky charm' that gives them the confidence to strive for what they want. We see this assured stance in many successful entrepreneurs: they

give off a quiet air of confidence and they seem psychologically grounded, which impresses and reassures others. As a result, they're persuasive and are perceived as a safe pair of hands, especially when handling investor's money.

Transitioning from Employee to Entrepreneur

The transition from employee to entrepreneur is a big step and rarely a smooth one. For a start, it demands an entirely different mindset, especially regarding how the world is viewed. This is under-appreciated in those who haven't yet taken the leap. "Running your own business" just seems so much fun and a great way to make money, and easy, but it is not. Most entrepreneurs start out full of optimism, yet they simply cannot fully anticipate the challenges that lie ahead.

In addition, they no longer have familiar and comfortable support structures. Instead, the entrepreneur must start with a blank sheet of paper, and it's they who need to write their plan on it. Advice can be obtained from the government, advisors, family and friends, yet it's all down to the entrepreneur to make things actually happen. This is where personality insights can come into their own, along with the psychological plan that's needed alongside the business plan.

Entrepreneur's own personality impacts how they go about their business. Often, they can exploit their own unique personality to 'brand' their business. Just think of Richard Branson and Virgin. They may have some areas of weakness, but this need not hold them back, and, in fact, it can help them if used in the right way.

Research suggests that there's an intriguing appeal to a self-declared flaw, as seen in the 'pratfall effect' (greater interest to those individuals who admit their flaws and imperfections as it makes them more relatable)—they seem more *human*. We know everyone is imperfect, so we have a right to mistrust those who don't admit this to themselves and share it with others. (We know from evolutionary theory that we're sensitive to deceit and concealment, so it's wise to get this doubt out of the way as soon as we can.)

Nor is business success merely about education, experience, and social status, although these aren't always a disadvantage! Even when these factors are the same, it's the personalities of entrepreneurs that make all the difference. Sometimes, in unexpected ways. Optimism and confidence may seem desirable virtues, yet most *successful* business people know that caution, risk assessment and reality testing aren't to be overlooked. Remember Warren Buffett's saying: "Don't lose money!".

Certainly, it can't be said that Sir Alan Sugar started his business life on the back of education, experience, and social status. If he had these advantages, then he probably wouldn't have started selling TV aerials out of the back of an old car—if nothing else, this allowed Sir Alan to get to know his customers, and this must have turned out to be useful to him when he started to develop the electronic products that made his name and fortune.

Sir Alan did something clever. He used his personality to great personal advantage. Being extraverted, he could communicate confidently with consumers and investors. He created innovative products and was resilient when he faced challenges. He's also a realist and knows what the consumer does and doesn't want, although he hasn't always got this right. But like Warren Buffett, Sir Alan knows the power of not losing money! Although he has a "big" personality, he knows his limitations too, and he knows how to exploit his strengths for business advantage: Sir Alan has *personal* insight which he applies to great effect.

We can see that personality insights not only help in starting a business, they also help making it a success story. Such self-insights allow entrepreneurs to gain back control of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, which can then be used to shape their business operations and effectively influence their employees, clients, suppliers, and other stakeholders. These personality-informed characteristics have a snowball effect, leading to greater levels of success and fulfilment in different other areas of life. Personality self-insight is a win-win.

Views of Entrepreneurs

It's useful to hear from people who've had the first-hand experience of starting their own business. Take Rhiannon who owns a hair salon. She says, "being independent is what makes things work". Her personality has assisted her through the process of building her now-successful business. Having worked in the beauty industry for 8 years, Rhiannon knew that her extraverted personality would allow her to build a strong clientele base and form positive relationships with both employees and customers. She also highlights how being optimistic allowed her to envision how her business could flourish in the future.

Rhiannon's example shows that personality insight can be exploited to make a business unique from others, which goes a long way in building credibility and trust with customers. It's no coincidence that we talk of "brand personality". Business success isn't limited to the extraverted personality, though. The same can be true for more introverted individuals. The

important thing is to be *true to oneself* and try not to be someone else—this is doomed to failure and misery.

Our personality can be what builds us up
but it can also be what tears us down

Tracey owns and runs a pet grooming business. She's comfortable and most efficient in a quiet setting, which is appropriate for working with animals. She found that recognising her personality has allowed her to integrate easily into her business and highlights how she'll continue to enjoy it. This self-awareness shows how personality insights can help entrepreneurs choose the best industries and sectors to go into in the first place.

This doesn't mean that our personality traits should dictate our business sector choices, but it can provide valuable knowledge and guidance. An introvert may well decide, with the confidence of success, that they want to enter a more extraversion-oriented business. With the necessary self-awareness and insights, they're better equipped to make the business work, maybe delegating more extraverted activities (e.g., sales) to employees with a more conducive personality. When they come up against challenges relating to the more social side of their business, that may make them feel uncomfortable, they now know why this is happening and, this alone can be very reassuring. What's even more, it can stop harmful self-blame and recrimination, and feelings of personal failure.

Of importance, too, personality insights can help entrepreneurs overcome psychological setbacks. This is certainly true for a retail business owner who shared his experience. Paul discovered that he could be very impatient and "doesn't suffer fools gladly", but recognising these personality traits has allowed him to deal more effectively with them: he ensures that these traits don't run riot in his interpersonal dealings. As a result, although Paul struggled initially, his business is now very successful. Paul's example illustrates how personality insights can inform entrepreneurs on their flaws (as seen by other people) and how best to deal with them. Without this self-recognition, failure might result and leave the owner wondering, "where did it all go wrong?".

Another entrepreneur lost her retail business 5 years ago. Being someone who would be described as extraverted, she successfully communicated with customers and sold products. Yet, she feels that her personality disadvantaged her in other areas. She highlights how being too outspoken and a perfectionist negatively affected the running of her business. She found it difficult to be a

team player, and was too dismissive of her employee's ideas and contributions.

Although there may well have been other factors at work affecting her business, her personality most certainly played a part. Perhaps, if she had been more aware of this at the outset, she'd have been better able to deal with the business challenges. As it turned out, this wasn't to be the case. For her business, at least, it's now too late.

These perspectives demonstrate that personality insights can help business owners to be successful and to reduce business failure by recognising their strengths and weaknesses, reflecting on traits that cause habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving—some of which help, while others hinder. Becoming a successful entrepreneur takes time and much effort. Knowing even one small yet crucial detail about yourself can be the key to pushing you further along the road to success.

Personality: What's the Problem?

It's interesting just how many people don't seek the reasons for their behaviour. This tendency somewhat reflects a society that portrays us as slaves to our own biological instincts and the unconscious mind. Another issue is that we think we already know ourselves—after all, how can this not be the case? Well, for one thing, we convince ourselves about things that aren't necessarily true—we're experts at deceiving and deluding ourselves. Secondly, we can't know how we compare to other people—this requires standardised psychometric assessment. Thirdly, we fail to appreciate how the ways we *express* our personality both positively and negatively impact other people.

We know from decades of research that personality correlates with performance, productivity, and effective decision-making. These are all things of value to the entrepreneur. Yet, there's too little recognition of this value of applying research findings to everyday business life, especially in those situations where one or a few persons can make all the difference to business success and failure.

There's another benefit to knowing about one's personality: it aids *debiasing* when it comes to judgement and decision-making. This is a major field of psychology that we now know much about. Alas, the lack of such self-knowledge can lead entrepreneurs down several behavioural blind alleys; for example, they may fall prey to loss aversion (being too cautious and not weighing up potential gains and losses in an unbiased fashion), which can

mean holding onto aspects of the business that are no longer worthwhile. As a result, profit, success, and happiness are undermined, and the business is one step closer to failure.

The good news is that when it comes to psychological characteristics, there isn't one single personality type that defines the successful entrepreneur. There are "different horses for courses" and no right or wrong personality. Well, mostly. Being conscientious and open-minded are obvious strengths, as is having a curious mind that welcomes business puzzles and challenges—being closed-minded, indolent, and hostile to people, maybe not so much!

So, what can we say about what makes a successful entrepreneur and how can we use this knowledge in our own business life? From the above personal accounts and what we know about the science of personality psychology, we can see the successful entrepreneur as someone who is organised and committed to hard work; persistent and focused, yet flexible and open to new ideas—but not so agreeable that they take on board everyone's opinion. Also, they need a certain steely core reflecting a determination to make things happen. Being a visionary is another virtue—seeing the image of what has yet to be created. All of these aspects of personality need to work together, which is hard to achieve in the hustle and bustle of everyday business life.

It's reassuring to know, though, that those entrepreneurs who've enjoyed the advantages of learning about their personality have gone on to build thriving businesses. Not only have they've come to appreciate that their personality is a significant key to their success, but they also know the value of self-investment. They've taken a leaf out of Warren Buffett's playbook for business success: invest in yourself. As a result, they've made the right decisions for the benefit of their business; subsequently, they're more emotionally, intellectually, and behaviourally satisfied than many other people who lack knowledge of themselves.

9 Achieving High Performance

At Work and in Your Personal Life

Winning in life means competing. We must perform not only to our own standards but against other people in the same competitive situation. In other words, we must *perform*. Performance is often considered in a competitive sense, for example a dancer or an athlete, where in-the-moment excellence is a job requirement. While this perception is undoubtedly true, when performance is thought of more holistically, every one of us has to *perform* in some way every day of our life. This fact is especially relevant in the workplace (e.g., a high stakes sales presentation). Less obviously, we're expected to *perform* in many situations each day (e.g., social encounters).

The common-sense notion that performing to a high level, regardless of the task, is highly or completely dependent on practice and hard work is widespread and partly true. Yet it's not the whole story—indeed, it's far from it. It's simply not enough to practice and work hard; we must have an elite mindset as well.

One component of high performance that we know quite a lot about is the power of personality to make a difference—often, quite literally, between being a winner or loser. Indeed, research shows that it can make a massive difference in how we learn to perform at a high level, especially when we're required to compete in a highly pressurised situation. In this regard, how we *perceive* pressure, which we might experience as 'stress', is largely dependent on our personality: the habitual ways we think, feel and behave.

You may have already noticed this: some people seem able to handle a tremendous amount of pressure without getting "stressed out", while others become fragile when faced with even a small degree of pressure, which they immediately perceive as "stress". So, the key is to train ourselves to process pressure in a way that doesn't inhibit, thereby impairing our performance. Accordingly, knowing about the vital aspects of our core self points to the crucial coping resources required to manage pressure appropriately and to stop it segueing into harmful "stress".

Personality doesn't necessarily *directly* influence performance; rather, it can be a mediator in the process. For instance, if you have a high level of Conscientiousness, you're likely to prepare better for a situation where you need to perform, therefore finding mechanisms to cope with pressure and strain. Another individual, say someone who has an introverted personality, is more likely to respond to pressure (or strain) with negative emotions and

thoughts. This is highly likely to impact negatively on the quality of their performance.

Small performance successes and failures accumulate;
improving marginal gains lead to long-term success

That said, how can we improve our performance levels in all areas of life? What does psychology tell us? Well, there are many ways. Setting specific goals can help build confidence, and they can be chained together to achieve big goals. Even if you're not feeling motivated or are lethargic, it's always better to practice than not. Another strategy is visualisation, seeing yourself succeed in the situation you desire. This form of performance reverse engineering will help you plan how to get to where you want to be.

We know a lot about performance success from the world of sport, where decades of research have uncovered real gems of insight. We can apply this knowledge to our everyday life, especially in the workplace where competition is ever-present, although often not spoken about.

In fact, sporting competitions are an ideal testing ground for examining psychological ideas and gaining insight into the factors that promote and hinder performance in a high-effort, pressurised situation. Here, where the stakes are often high, the criterion of success is clear, and there are multiple psychological factors at play (e.g., perseverance and self-regulation). Unlike other areas of performance where outcomes may not be immediately obvious or even easy to define, it is often crystal clear here.
The fact that spectators are *watching* is a major source of pressure, at least for some personality types—by itself, this can significantly impair performance.

As with any performance context, talent, effort, opportunity, and the grit needed to push through barriers, are essential requirements for fulfilling potential. Personality makes all the difference—it can be a source of our (self-inflicted) failure or (self-determined) success. Like the sports person, we can train ourselves to perform to a much higher level than we might even imagine. In stretching ourselves, it's vital to go with, not against, the grain of personality. This fact isn't well understood enough. Practical self-awareness and its application translate into the psychological skills that can help us all 'up our game'.

Personality doesn't *directly influence performance; it's the mindsets, habits, and skills it enables that do—these can be learned*

Training and practice are clearly important, but they are not sufficient on their own. Sports psychologists know that performance is influenced by factors not only related to physical capacity. Psychology is also highly relevant: crucial psychological variables include motivation, attention, stress, anxiety, self-confidence, and self-regulation of dysfunctional thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

The knowledge and manipulation of these key psychological variables are of considerable interest for achieving performance excellence. The coach and the competitor need to understand these psychological factors before designing an effective training programme. There's never a one-size-fits-all. It's the same in everyday life.

The reality is that, all too often, we simply get demotivated and demoralised long before we've got anywhere near our peak performance. We just don't understand *what* is going wrong or *why*. We started with a major handicap: we lacked self-knowledge and insight. Another compounding problem that we need to know about is that we're too close to our own psychological action to see things clearly. However, we have much less trouble seeing this in *other* people.

Personality and Psychological Pressure

Striving for high performance always entails some degree of pressure. The level of pressure can be wide-ranging, as can its effects, whether positive or negative. It's one of the most prominent areas where individual differences in personality play a significant role. This is because 'pressure' isn't simply something 'out there', waiting to impact us. Instead, it's more to do with how we cope with *perceived* external demands ('strain') and the demands we place on ourselves (e.g., perfectionism, see below). This psychological response is what we mean by 'stress'.

People vary remarkably in their capacity to deal with strain and to perform in a highly pressurised situation. In a similar vein, physical materials respond to strain in different ways (this is where the strain-stress idea comes from—some of us are more brittle than others and more readily 'buckle under pressure').

Psychological pressure and the *subjective experience* of stress is especially prevalent when trying to overcome a rival. This is seen in sporting contexts as well as in occupational life. We know that without proper preparation,

knowledge, and awareness ('training'), the *perception* of strain can lead to maladaptive stress responses, including physical and psychological emergency reactions: the *fight-flight-freeze* response—this is an adaptive reaction when faced by a sabre-toothed tiger, but not in the typical human competitive situation.

When in this emergency escape/avoidance state of mind, we automatically focus on possible negative/dangerous outcomes. This blocks functional cognitive and emotional processes, such as calmness, clear thinking, and generally positive and curious open-mindedness. In high-performance situations, this negative state can be disastrous.

In sports performance, psychological pressure can significantly impair the capacity for competition and outstanding performance; so too with artists who can 'choke', and then fail to perform to the best of their ability on stage. Most of us have experienced this response at one time or another, as seen in common situations (e.g., a job interview) when we've found ourselves 'lost for words'—we might even have experienced being 'frozen to the spot' when placed under great strain.

This emergency reaction has been extensively researched and is well understood in behavioural science. We know that it's most likely to occur in people with certain personality profiles, especially those with high Emotionality (low emotional stability) and a weak capacity for self-regulation. From this psychological research, we know that self-knowledge and insight are vital if we want to recognise and then deal adaptively with strain. This *can* be controlled and, thereby stress can be much reduced, even avoided altogether.

We can learn much from the psychology of athletes. Research shows that elite and successful athletes are more committed, motivated, self-confident, focused, and able to cope with pressure and resulting strain. They have the capacity to perform at their peak even under considerable pressure. Now, although athletes have the physical attributes for their chosen sport, it's important to remember that they weren't necessarily built psychologically to deal with the pressure they encounter. Many fail altogether to achieve their full potential because of their psychological reaction.

Of course, it goes without much saying that no top sports person gets away without constant and rigorous training, both physically and psychologically. They need to be in the right condition by deliberative *conditioning* strategies and routines, and this includes psychological processing of possible negative situations and events. Research shows that high performance can be achieved

and maintained by certain psychological devices, including guided imagery, focus, emotion control, positive self-talk, goal-setting and cognitive restructuring.

In addition, *beliefs* about success play a significant role. For example, the belief that effort leads to success facilitates adaptive motivation related to working hard and persisting, especially when the going gets tough. In contrast, those who believe that success is only for those adequately endowed with talent show much lower levels of motivation. In either case, it can lead to functional or dysfunctional coping—this refers to constant changes made by the person through cognitive and emotional efforts to manage external demands. In these ways, people in competitive sports are motivationally, emotionally, and cognitively better equipped to perform to the best of their physical ability. They're in physical *and* psychological tip-top condition. Strategies and routines provide the rungs of the ladder of success—so, too, in the world of work and other areas of life (e.g., social encounters).

Goal-Conflict and Behavioural Inhibition

To achieve full potential, it's especially important to deal with the *inhibition* of behaviour that comes with goal-conflict ("Will I win, will I lose and embarrass myself in front of the crowd?"). Behavioural inhibition can impair well-rehearsed behaviours, be they in the world of sport or work. When activated, the affected person's mind reverts to a more primitive state; one of anxiety, escape, avoidance, and negative ideation and, possibly, sour grapes (post-rationalisation excuses for failure). In a high stakes context, this cannot be allowed to happen as it's bound only to undermine the psychological and behavioural processes required for high performance.

Behavioural inhibition is a well-studied dimension of temperament which is evident in early life and is predictive of behavioural disorders in children. Those who score highly on this trait are more prone to action dysregulation when put under pressure/strain. It's highly correlated with the personality of Emotionality, more specifically anxiety, in adult personalities—we see below that high Emotionality (low emotional stability) is a major predictor of failure in sporting success.

What Does The Empirical Research Tell Us?

Research findings can inform and empower us. What does scientific research tell us about the psychological factors of success and failure in sport? Generally, the personality characteristics of national and Olympic runners, rowers, and wrestlers, as assessed with the Profile of Mood States (POMS),

show that more successful athletes possess greater positive mental health as typified by higher scores of 'vigour' and lower scores on such negative mood states as 'tension', 'depression', 'anger', 'fatigue', and 'confusion'.

We know that moods are related to personality, often measured by the Big-5 model, which, as we have already seen above, taps five major dimensions:

- Openness to Experience
- Extraversion
- Emotionality
- Agreeableness
- Conscientiousness

Athletes competing in national or international competitions report higher levels of Conscientiousness and lower levels of Emotionality as compared with those competing in club or regional competitions. Athletes selected for the Paralympic Games report higher levels of tough-mindedness (a component of low Agreeableness) and lower levels of anxiety. They need this grit to overcome their disabilities.

Longitudinal studies add significantly to the picture. Adolescent athletes with particular personality traits are more likely to progress to professional levels. The personality traits of 32 elite youth athletes were monitored over a 7-year period. It was found that personality traits, in combination with coaches' ratings of their potential, could distinguish those players who progressed to become professional athletes with 100% accuracy (n=13) from those who withdrew from participation (n=19), (84% of athletes were correctly classified on the basis of personality traits alone). As with adult athletes, higher levels of Conscientiousness and/or lower levels of Emotionality are predictive of more successful performance throughout a competitive season.

When highly-trained sprinters, triathletes, long-distance runners, futsal players and taekwondo athletes were assessed on the Big-5 personality dimensions, no statistically significant results were found *between* the groups—they shared pretty much the same personality profile. But when compared *to* the general population, all of the athletes showed higher levels of Conscientiousness.

In addition, sprinters, endurance athletes and futsal players demonstrated significantly lower scores on the scale of Openness to Experience, showing they're more down-to-earth and practical. Endurance athletes and futsal players, in particular, are characterized by lower levels of (negative) Emotionality, which is a common finding, and higher levels of Extraversion

(i.e., more sociability and positive affect). Compared to recreational level athletes, large samples have revealed consistent differences that point toward elite athletes being more extraverted and emotionally stable.

How personality leads to superior performance is suggested by a study of British gymnasts. The results showed that Conscientiousness was positively related to the *quality* of preparation in the lead-up to the competition, and emotional stability (low Emotionality) was positively associated with effective coping during competition. These findings are consistent with what's expected.

Other research has examined the effects of personality on psychological states, such as aggressiveness and coping functions: they point to athletes who have lower levels of Agreeableness, Extraversion, and/or emotional stability as being more prone to aggressive behaviours, whereas athletes with lower levels of Openness to Experience are more prone to use fewer functional avoidance coping strategies. In contrast to these athletes who tend to use maladaptive emotion-based coping strategies, athletes with higher levels of Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and/or emotional stability are likely to use more functional problem-focused coping strategies.

There are important moderating effects on the relationships between personality and performance in a sporting context. This is highly relevant for occupational performance too. Consistent with personality theory more generally, the level of Extraversion moderates the extent to which performance is affected by the presence of an audience and the degree to which emotions have positive or negative effects on sports performance. The nature of this moderation is that extraverted athletes outperform introverted athletes when an audience is present, but not in their absence.

We know that introverts are inhibited by people paying attention to them—this could be due to over-arousal or performance impairing self-evaluation. In the workplace, individuals who are more introverted need to pay particular attention to the possibility of inhibiting their performance when performing in front of people—extraverts take this more naturally in their stride.

Team Performance

Some sports are for individuals, others for teams. The same is true for the workplace. We now understand a great deal about the contribution of personality to team performance. One study based on 527 teams found that performance was positively associated with the team's average levels of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness—relatedly, the greater *within*-team

variability in Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, the worse the team performance. This is an important finding. It supports the claim that team performance is much poorer in cynical, hostile, and indolent teams—no surprise there! Obvious as it may be, how many teams measure individual members' personality traits and then calculate the average performance score for the team? In another study, this time using two independent samples of over 1,400 teams each, the team's average levels of Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion and Openness to Experience were all positively associated with superior team performance.

Knowing how the engine of our mind works is vital for performance efficiency

When we look at the performance of individual sportspeople, Agreeableness isn't related to *performance*. This makes perfect sense, as this personality trait is about how we relate to other people and the extent to which we consider their views and are respectful of them. Higher levels of Agreeableness or Conscientiousness leads to better *relationships* with teammates and coaches: being disagreeable and indolent does little for either performance or relationships.

Moving from performance to satisfaction, in a study of student work groups, greater satisfaction with the team was correlated with higher mean levels of Agreeableness and emotional stability and greater similarity in Conscientiousness. In other words, students were more satisfied when other team members were affable, not emotionally reactive, and similar in terms of work-related diligence. Again, although this is perhaps rather obvious, it's important to know and even more important to act on.

Interestingly, greater *dis*similarity in Extraversion has been correlated with lower levels of satisfaction but only for those introverted team members—maybe they find more extraverted team members too dominant, expressive, impulsive, and *annoying*. Another study of student work groups confirmed that dissimilarity in Conscientiousness was related to lower satisfaction with the team as well as the team's performance—conscientious students working with others they perceive not to be 'pulling their weight' aren't happy.

So, we see that personality traits predict several performance measures in competitive contexts, such as sport, work, and academia. Of particular interest is the finding that personality traits don't influence performance directly. Instead, they're mediated by psychological and behavioural mechanisms. For example, sportspeople with higher levels of Conscientiousness use better preparation strategies, take fewer reckless risks,

and use more effective coping strategies before and during competition. Conscientiousness works for them through behavioural strategies.

In terms of sport, competitors with higher levels of Extraversion or low levels of Emotionality respond to failure with more positive emotions and cognitions, in contrast to introverts and individuals who are emotionally reactive and tend to respond with negative emotions and cognitions, which demotivates them. In these people, rumination and worry are rarely effective responses, at least not without any corrective strategy in place.

Older People

When applied to other areas of life, research tends to confirm what's found in the sporting world. For example, in older people, those with higher levels of Extraversion have greater muscular strength; those with higher levels of Extraversion, Openness to Experience, or Conscientiousness, or lower levels of Emotionality, record greater energy expenditure at peak walking pace. One 3-year longitudinal study of older adults (mean age = 75 years) reported that higher levels of Conscientiousness correlated with faster initial walking speed and a slower decline in walking speed over the course of the study. A 6-year follow-up discovered that higher levels of Openness to Experience related to a reduced risk of acquired walking limitations.

Changes in personality have also been related to physical activity. A longitudinal study discovered that physically active adults showed higher scores on Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, and Agreeableness, as compared to less physically active adults. These findings suggest that an active lifestyle might help to prevent undesirable personality changes.

However, the direction of causation is difficult to discern in such correlational studies as there's always the possibility that some third variable (e.g., something to do with the ageing process) is causing changes in levels of scores on *both* measured variables (in this case, activity level and personality).

However, it wouldn't be too far-fetched to assume that, to some extent, personality traits are constructed through physical activity. For example, physical activity might help lessen cognitive decline or facilitate better coping responses to adverse life events—all point to *mediating* psychological and behavioural mechanisms.

Perfectionism and Performance

We've all heard the expression, "Practice makes perfect". How much practice is enough, and how perfect should we be? We know that Conscientiousness, diligence, and striving are necessary for high performance and achievements in life more generally. When we start to push our emotional and motivational boundaries, we run the risk of entering the territory of maladaptive thinking. This is likely to be a problem when perfectionism starts to take over.

Perfectionism is a double-edged sword. The knowledge we've learned about it means that we can use it to our advantage while avoiding its worst aspects. The rub here, as elsewhere, is that we're much better equipped once we have self-insight into our own personality: our habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

Especially important in the perfectionism literature is the distinction between perfectionistic *striving* and perfectionistic *concerns*. Perfectionist strivings are positively correlated with competitive self-confidence, positive emotions, hope for success, task orientation, and objectives focused on performance and mastery in both training and competition settings. Perfectionistic strivings are also negatively related to competitive anxiety and fear of failure, so they're a very good thing.

In contrast, perfectionistic concerns correlate with negative emotions, competitive and pre-competitive anxiety, low self-esteem, fear of failure and the avoidance of adaptive strategies (e.g., during training). These perfectionistic concerns can significantly impair both training and performance in competition. They contain various aspects: *execution errors* (e.g., "The execution must be perfect; any small failure is a terrible failure"); *self-evaluation* (e.g., "Have I done it well or have I missed something?"); *feelings of uncertainty* (e.g., "What will happen now?"); *parental and external expectations* (e.g., "What will others think of me?"); and *contextual elements*, for example, assigning too much importance to precision, order and organisation (e.g., "This is life for me; I can't afford to fail").

An individual's style of perfectionism is highly relevant and is predicted by personality traits. For example, people who score higher on Emotionality are more prone to dysfunctional perfectionistic *concerns*, whereas those lower on this trait and higher on Conscientiousness are much more likely to engage in functional perfectionistic *strivings*.

Those with strong perfectionistic strivings are much more focused on task-relevant effort, which is related to: enhanced levels of subjective well-being and psychological adjustment; greater motivation for participation in training

and self-determined behaviour at the time of performance; greater mastery of and orientation in tasks (showing a preference for difficult tasks); high self-confidence; better relationships among peers; and greater self-esteem and better coping strategies in difficult situations.

Perfectionism is much more functional when belief schemes have high performance standards combine with an uncritical evaluation of them. By contrast, perfectionism is dysfunctional when high personal standards are associated with an excessively critical self-evaluation.

Strategies for 'Upping Our Game'

What can we all do to enhance our performance based on what we know from research findings and what we know about ourselves? The caveat is that the most effective strategies can only come after rigorous personality assessment, leading to *true* self-knowledge and insight—we need to have a personalised programme.

There are some valuable pointers we can take away from what we've learned above.

1. If you find yourself not being naturally conscientious, make a to-do list containing specific goals, actions, a feedback mechanism, and a monitoring plan: be SMART and make action points.

2. Goal-setting is a powerful performance tool—make your goals small enough to be manageable yet targeted enough to make a difference.

3. Never miss a practice session—even if you don't feel 'motivated' or feel a little 'under the weather'—whatever, do *something* (don't break the training cycle).

4. Don't over-think as this can become a substitute for actually getting on with what needs to be done—the mind is a great organ for generating reasons for not getting on with the actual job.

5. If you're feeling demotivated, switch task or change your environment—and your thoughts *will* change.

6. Give priority to your actions, not your feelings or thoughts—learn to go onto autopilot.

7. If you're a person who easily generates negative emotions and thoughts, start to recognise when they occur and use strategies to distract yourself when they appear. For example, list positive elements of your life or write down exactly what it is you need to hear in moments you need grounding—keep the list nearby.

8. Focus on *strivings*, which is about doing things and don't focus on *concerns*, as this will lead to self-doubt. Don't aim for perfection as it's not going to happen—aim for the best *you* can be.

9. Use visualisation 'see' in advance the outcome in your mind and the steps needed to achieve it. You can then 'reverse engineer' what you need to do to get to your own level of performance excellence.

10. Remove all doubts from your mind about failure—cultivate the attitude that such thinking is simply unhelpful and will lead only to the very things you're trying to avoid.

11. Schedule in your diary a time when you consider negative issues, as they might suggest new ways to improve your training and actual performance. Once you've turned these issues into actionable points which are incorporated into your training, put them out of your mind until *you* decide to revisit them.

Take Home Message

From many decades of research, we've built a solid understanding of the personality factors associated with high performance. We also know something about the psychological factors and processes that *mediate* them (e.g., functional coping strategies). The importance of personality has been shown for individual and team performance and satisfaction. The effects of personality are often not direct; instead, they usually mediate by processes (e.g., coping) that we can manage to our advantage.

There are good reasons for believing that personality is especially relevant in occupational performance, and more generally, career satisfaction and fulfilment. This personality knowledge isn't just theoretical; it's very practical. Sports coaches and recruitment managers know this fact very well. We should all know it too, as it can help us in many different ways.

The very good news is that, with self-insight and effort, we can all 'up our game'. Yet this is only really possible once we understand ourselves and appreciate which personal factors are promoting and preventing our success.

10 Finding Purpose In Life

Becoming Your Authentic Self

The question, "To be, or not to be" are the famous words from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. They chime with the challenges all of us have from early life onwards. Who am I? What might I become? We spend much of life answering such questions. The lack of an accurate answer can be our downfall. Indeed, a part of any answer has to do with one's personality and related preferences for life.

Authenticity refers to being our *genuine* self—not a copy, and certainly not a fake, without the need to pretend and without pretence. We achieve this state when we're consistent with our personality; when we're not blown around by social whims or desirous of the social approval of others for the mere sake of it. We are reliable and stable, in different situations and over time. People recognise this virtue and accord us respect, believing we are trustworthy and predictable—a person they see as genuine.

But human society demands conformity; we can be *different* but only in certain prescribed ways. There's pressure to conform. Yet, to achieve our own version of *self-actualisation*—the pinnacle of the truly authentic self—independent thought and action are paramount. This is difficult for many people to do as it means sailing against the winds of social pressure. By discovering what we need, what we like, and who we *really* are, we're more likely to lead a life of fulfilment. However, we need psychological resources to help us steer the right course on our journey.

A stark—and an uncomfortable fact of life—is that each of us must define what we need; and, in turn, how we are best able to *become* our authentic self. This can't or shouldn't be modelled on anyone else's life—try, though, escaping the allure of *celebrities* and *personalities* splashed daily across the media. All of us, to some extent, aspire to be like other people, but is this in our best interests?

Humanistic psychology informs us that once we recognise the fundamental psychological facts of life, we can *start* to live a more purposeful, fulfilling, and authentic existence. Such recognition is a *positive* force in life; especially, it allows us to have agency and control over how we live, in *our* own unique and meaningful way.

By discovering and developing our authentic self, which *will* mean escaping the societal norms surrounding and pressurising us, we can come to live a life

with purpose—meaning happiness and a much deeper sense of flourishing and wellbeing.

As you may have already experienced, none of this is easy. At various stages in life, we must deal with depression, imposter syndrome, regret, or confusion as we struggle to discover our authentic self. As we get older, this becomes no less urgent; indeed, in a way, the need is magnified as we look at what we've achieved and failed to achieve—all the mistakes we've made.

Finding the authentic self leads to its own form of perfection, *as defined by yourself*, not by others. Bruce Springsteen noted this in one of his earliest songs, Lost in The Flood, in the early 1970s, when he sung about "Spastics reeling perfection"—for those of us prone to be offended by the use of such a word, Ian Dury used this description of his own medical condition (in his song, Spasticus Autisticus) to reclaim the word to build his own authentic life, and by doing so, he entertained and inspired many people, especially those with the same physical disorder. We don't have to be "perfect" to be perfect!

The actor Sharon Stone, famous for her role in the film, Basic Instinct, makes a similar point in her interview with *The New Yorker* magazine in March 2021, where she talked about her recent autobiography, *The Beauty of Living Twice*. She recalls the ways in which she was "odd" but "not on purpose" as a child. As she says,

"So many things. But what I realize now is that so many of us *are* odd. That's what's so great, right? The whole time you're in elementary school and middle school, everything that everybody is saying is wrong with you is what's special and good about you".

Sharon Stone goes on to say,

"Your mom should write all of those things down and then give them to you when you graduate from high school, and go, "Here it is! Here's your special qualities! Go ahead! Go get it!".

Humanistic psychology can help us get back to our psychological roots, to recognise that we have the potential to *become* our *true* self. When we don't achieve this psychological state or even strive for it, we sustain internal conflicts because we're repressing the essential elements of our *true* self. What then happens is that over time our essential being gets overshadowed by the demands imposed upon us by others; and, by relentless repetition and habit formation, we eventually succumb to the mental pressures and end up living an inauthentic life: the (im)perfect reflection of others.

In fact, if we're truthful with ourselves, most if not all of us, at some point in time, have felt alienated from the world around us—that, somehow, we can't or aren't allowed to *be* our true self. The pressures of everyday life mean that it's hard to be authentic and to pursue our own unique path in life. This can lead to frustration and unhappiness, and in too many cases, much worse.

Self-authenticity is the master key that's overlooked when it comes to fulfilment, happiness, and flourishing. How we *strive* for self-authenticity is a tricky matter, and it's far from obvious. It must come from self-discovery and insight, and this must include personality knowledge: it must start with who we really are *inside*.

All the World's a Stage

Long before formal personality assessment and the emergence of a science of psychology, Shakespeare, as so often, got to the point.

> *"All the world's a stage*
> *And all the men and women merely players*
> *They have their exits and their entrances*
> *And one man in his time plays many parts"*

According to Jacques, a character from Shakespeare's play, 'As you like it', there are different ages.

1. *The infant*–the newborn who needs feeding and cradling.
2. *The schoolboy*–the young child who is clothed and sent to school against his will.
3. *The lover*–the foolish teenager who often lets his emotions rule–a romantic.
4. *The soldier*–the enthusiast who aims to be the best and fights through life.
5. *The justice*–the middle-aged man, gained enough experience to judge others.
6. *The pantaloon*–a man approaching old age who starts to lose his sight and money.
7. *The second childishness*–the feeble man, lost his teeth, control and is near death.

Each of these seven ages comes with different goals, priorities, achievements, and challenges. Along the way, we question and discover (if we're lucky enough) our *true* purpose in life. This realisation is a *positive* and powerful

force in life. It allows us to have agency and control over how we live in *our* own unique and meaningful way.

Road to 'Schoolboy'

At the start of life, our world seems simple. We're born with basic survival instincts, without the need for much knowledge of the world. We don't have the capacity to deeply ponder our *purpose* during infancy—getting through the day is purposeful enough. In this state of innocence, all we need to care about is eating, playing, and sleeping: no responsibilities and no expectations—we're free, for the first time and, alas, for the last time.

As we grow up, this changes. We experience new emotions, form attachments, and explore our desires. We're told we must attend school—tellingly, like the 'schoolboy', often screaming on our first day—to learn about atoms, historical events and multiplication tables, and much else that we no longer remember after passing exams. That's when we start to seek answers for the fundamental psychological question: how do we fit into the world in which we find ourselves?

We experience constant changes, physiological and psychological. Puberty hits, and we become sentimental. We find places where we can fit in by experimenting with our self-identity, and later we might tell our parents, "it's not a phase!" yet it usually is. Throughout these years, we're searching for a passion, whether it's football, swimming, drawing, or reading.

The Lost 'Lover'

During our 'lover' age, we don't recognise the importance of self-insight because we think we know it all. We might be sentimental, romantic and struggle to juggle the hormonal imbalances in our body, which makes us foolish and rebellious, seeking constant validation and 'giving *in*' to peer pressure. We're eager to 'fit *in*', and we want to be *in* the world. The problem becomes that, by being *in* the world, the world is in *us*—this can be the start of the erosion of our true, authentic self.

Expectations abound. They're put upon us. They're very vague and unspoken, yet we're expected to understand and make *sense* of them. We might recall speaking to an aunt or uncle on the phone, and when we're a student there's always the question "how are your studies going?" and if you say you're failing maths, your parent(s), sitting beside you might give you *that look*. You're expected to be *fine* every step of the way.

As a reaction to this social pressure, we might fall prey to depression or lose sight of who we *truly* are. We're required to pass school exams, engage in extracurricular activities, and learn a musical instrument, *just* because we're told. Parents then shake their heads and wonder why so many young people indulge in drug-taking or other forms of self-defeating behaviour. Like the child, the parent may start to sense something isn't *quite* right, yet they do not know what.

Children—full of purity, passion, and curiosity—are forced to squeeze them*selves* into a mould of social structures and strictures, to be *more* "realistic", and to fall into *line* and toe the *line*, or else! No matter how hard we try, our sense of free will, agency and control are continuously and ever-so-subtly undermined. As a result, there might seem to be only one option left: follow the herd. After all, isn't it "better to be safe than sorry"?

It takes a certain defiant personality to rebel against the undermining of the authentic self

If we "know what's good for us", we're expected to hide the expression of our personality—our true self. Our own unique human qualities are deemed flawed, in need of a social redesign, and there're plenty of people who are willing to lend a hand to put us "on the straight and narrow"!

Then there comes a time when we are taught more than just mathematics. We're told to "watch" the news to *understand* what's going on in the world—countries bombing one another, trusted public figures sexually assaulting minors and people stealing others' human rights. We're compelled to take sides, which is usually the one positively portrayed on the news. By this stage, we have all but lost our true authentic self. We no longer know quite what to think. In a very real sense, we've lost our mind. What we now have is an assimilated social self; the product of others, and finally, we've become an (im)perfect reflection of them. They've done their work well.

The 'Soldier's March

When interpersonal hatred and destruction becomes too much for us to bear, we enter the 'soldier age'. We quickly learn that it's easier to give up than resist—and the rewards come with the former, not the latter. If we know "what's good for us", we bend with the social winds. We sense that if we can't be true to ourselves, how can we be true to the world? At this stage, we continue to believe we must be perfect—that's expected of us. This is a form of false perfectionism that traps us in a life for which we never asked—we were never quite offered the choice in the first place. Through engagement

with the world and others' expectations, we ever-so-subtly lose *essential* parts of our authentic self. When we don't meet others' expectations, we might start to feel like an impostor, a failure, or our true self might become detached from our social self that we allow the world to see. In consequence, our self can become fragmented: we are a divided self.

All variations of life have equal value and deviation is necessary to be an authentic self

Oftentimes, we don't feel we're living a purposeful, fulfilling, and authentic life. Our every independent action gets judged, every belief ridiculed, and we're bound down by the expectations of our superiors, parents, children and even strangers—and, finally, by ourselves: self-loathing. Well, if you feel this way, you aren't alone!

During the psychological voyage, we often feel we're alone in the universe, struggling to find our proper place. Psychologically speaking, this requires us to find a mechanism to help us cope and survive, and these mechanisms can serve to undermine our authenticity. In our eyes, the world is far from perfect. Frequently, we externalise our inner predicament, seeking answers outside of ourselves. Time flies by, and before we know it, we're at our 'soldier' age. We might find ourselves wanting to achieve the highest sales in our company. We strive to be extraordinary.

We might say Elon Musk is extraordinary for channelling his love for technology and physics from a young age into the creation of Tesla, space aircrafts, online payment systems, brain AI and a tunnel boring system. How's it possible to judge someone like Elon Musk? He's extraordinary because *he* is true to himself.

For most of us, we slowly adapt to the 'imperfect' world by forcing perfection upon our*selves*, becoming socially assimilated and altering our core identity. We might do this through idolisation of celebrities and mascots of social norms, yet even they have problems: competition, criticism, accusations and creating a personality in exchange for material success. Even idols have their problems. Like Cardi B, the well-known American rapper, said, "I feel like the world owns me".

The danger is we become defensive, cynical and destructive. We see this in the opening lines of the well-known song by Supertramp, The Logical Song:

When I was young, it seemed that life was so wonderful
A miracle, oh it was beautiful, magical

And all the birds in the trees, well they'd be singing so happily
Oh joyfully, playfully watching me
But then they send me away to teach me how to be sensible
Logical, oh responsible, practical
And they showed me a world where I could be so dependable
Oh clinical, oh intellectual, cynical

Social Justice

Those of us who can only be our true self in hiding are unlikely to be authentic to ourselves. It's not unusual for us to don a new identity to appease the world—to keep others "happy". The social reality is that we're always on the lookout for social cues to tell us how we should think, feel and behave (this is reinforced daily by the bombardment of social influences, people, media, and so on) and also our self-talk, which has internalised these influences and becomes who we think we are.

Personality assessment can help us appreciate our true self and see our true potential—who we might become

The answer to the question, "who do *you* think you are?" is a resounding "I don't *really* know" from the (honest) less-than-fully authentic self. As a result of how we develop, hypocrisy is a common coping mechanism—it's defined by an inauthentic mode of living. We're expected to 'settle down', perhaps get married, and then kids come along; the mortgage (or rent) needs to be paid whether we like it or not, and then we find ourselves expecting the same of our children. We think we know enough to preach words of wisdom in the 'justice' age to our children. Yet, towards the end of life, many people feel a sense of disappointment of wasted opportunities. Each generation is invariably told by their wiser elders, "Don't live your life like I did".

Advancing Years

Before we know it, we enter 'the pantaloon', too often with a sense of disappointment and regret. It's especially concerning that there's a spike in suicides among older men who suffer stress factors, such as feelings of social disconnectedness and psychological impoverishment, also neurocognitive impairment and chronic physical illnesses/disability that accompanies old age. This is a sad end to many older people's lives—many more suffer in silence, and we never hear of their plight.

Before this time, we start to get a distinct sense of what's to come. The 'middle aged crisis' is real enough—a time when we begin to sense something is not

quite right and we simply do not want to go on as before. We feel the pressing need to re-evaluate our life and make the future much more meaningful and, therefore, fulfilling.

In our much older years—'the second childishness'—we might wonder who we were living our lives for? This is often the time of life when we begin to understand the importance of the self and our place in the world, reflecting on what was and what might have been. In particular, we might have missed the chance to follow our dreams, to *become* our true *authentic* self. It's now too late for many, but not for all.
In 2020, Tom Moore raised £40 million for the NHS by walking around his garden. Sir Tom was knighted for this inspiring example. In his posthumous 2021 book, *Captain Tom's Life Lesson,* this is what he had to say about his approach to life,

> "I was never a hanger-on or a show-off when I was young. I tried to be authenic to my true self" and "Contentment stems from being comfortable with who we are, grateful for what we have achieved, and not comparing ourselves to others. That is the fast lane to discontent. Happily, age can help with this, as money and material possessions no longer feel like such important indicators of our status in life once we are older".

Embracing Your *True* Self

People tend to feel unhappy and have a hard time being their authentic self when they think society wants them to be perfect in some idolised—
yet totally unrealistic—way. As we have seen elsewhere in this book, comparing ourselves with others in terms of tangible material possessions that we can see and covet is futile—something that Sir Tom warns us against—especially as there is no end of such possessions that can make us miserable.

One solution is to find the right size pond in which we can be happy—perhaps even a pond in which we are the bigger fish. But a more authentic way is to have personal 'possessions' that are meaningful in their own right and not in comparison with other people's. Examples include a special relationship, a passion in life, an interest in the beauty of nature, and so much else that can't and shouldn't be quantified in material terms. There's no way in which the other person's sense of beauty is in any way better than yours. *These* experiences are unique: they are the true source of personal richness.

Our propensity for social comparison and the resulting perceived positional standing is why we find it so difficult to get anywhere near *self-actualisation*—

our true authentic self. We tend to focus on what others are doing, we try to emulate them, and we want to be *like* them. We also want to be part of the social herd, to be sociable, and accepted—interestingly, this is something else Sir Tom warns against in his 2021 book.

Yet, despite our desires, too often and in so many different ways, we feel like we're psychological prisoners, surrounded by the bars of the expectations of others and prevailing social norms. But it's a funny kind of jail cell, as Bruce Springsteen sings in his song, *Living Proof*:

> You shot through my anger and rage
> To show me my prison was just an open cage
> There were no keys no guards
> Just one frightened man and some old shadows for bars

We can *choose* to walk out to psychological freedom.

11 Money Sense

Effective Management of Personal Finance

Financial difficulties seem to be a natural part of life for many people, especially in today's troubled times. Now more than ever, it's imperative to understand your money management personality—your *typical* patterns of spending, investing and saving. They can be understood by learning about your personality traits and the pulls and pushes they're exerting on your money related views, decisions, and actions. The good news is that there are very effective personality-informed strategies that can help you manage your money better.

The extent of money problems was highlighted by the Financial Conduct Authority's (FCA; 2021) Financial Lives report, the FCA's flagship survey of UK consumers, providing a wealth of information about consumer attitudes towards managing personal finance. What the FCA found:

- In February 2020, 46% (24.0m) of the population showed one or more characteristics of vulnerability.
- 20.3 million could only continue to cover their living expenses for less than three months if they lost their main source of household income.
- 5.6 million held one or more high-cost loans.
- 5.1 million were constantly or usually overdrawn.
- 2.8 million had persistent credit card debt.
- 14.2 million had low financial resilience in October 2020.

What's disappointing about these recent financial surveys is that this problem has been known about for many years, indeed decades. In particular, as acknowledged by the FCA, financial 'education' (i.e., information alone) has had minimal impact, and this is a surprising fact, especially to mainstream economists who put so much store by the value of information to alter financial choices.

There are two issues of importance here: (1) money management is a psychological, not primarily financial issue; and (2) as we all differ, we have different needs—it's no longer smart to accept a "one-size-fits-all" financial plan.

Using personality self-knowledge and insights, we can gain an understanding of how we (mis)manage our money. For example, if you're high on Extraversion, you're more likely to engage in social comparison regarding your financial standing: you'll compare yourself to your peers in order to

determine your *positional* standing. As a result, you may spend money with the goal of "staying ahead" and keeping up with the fictional Joneses.

On the other hand, if you're high on the personality trait of Emotionality, you'll be overly concerned with loss. As a result, you'll likely be 'loss averse', meaning you're motivated to avoid losses relative to securing gains of the same value. This preference—a cognitive bias—could mean that you miss out on opportunities that require some element of risk. In fact, you'll tend to avoid any loss even if it may have a net positive outcome, such as investments. You may also be fearful of letting possessions go when, in fact, their time has come. At other times, this personality trait may lead to impulsive spending due to the attempt to lessen the unpleasant experience of negative emotional states.

If you aren't convinced of the importance of personality in money management, consider another example: consumer decisions under scarcity. When told that a product is available for only a limited time or there's limited stock, those high in Emotionality will tend to fall for this sales trick in order to avoid the feeling—itself negative—of missing out. In fact, we're all prone to this effect, *even* when we know it's happening!

The first step in learning how to manage *your* money more effectively is to learn about yourself. Knowing about how personality is working for, and sometimes against, us is a good place to start as it underpins so much of our financial judgement, decision making, and choice behaviour—it biases all of our money-related preferences. Well, how can we become more financially savvy and adopt a much better psychologically informed money management strategy?

Knowing about one's personality is so much better than simply being told what we "ought" to be doing—this often comes across as a lecture with no regard for the individual's personal life circumstances and goals. Such advice, aimed at the 'average' household, may be appropriate for Jo(anne), the fictional economic agent who has 2.25 children, lives in a 3.1 bedroomed dwelling, and earns precisely the National Average wage. In fact, even if these people existed, they would still have very different personality and life preferences, and the one-size-fits-all financial advice model wouldn't be appropriate.

Be careful what you swallow – especially financial advice

Do we think we're better off today than 30 years ago? Are we happier? Well, the majority of people have become wealthier by certain measures, that's for sure—even the 'poor' are less poor than they were 30 years ago. Yet many people simply don't feel "better off", or less pressurised about finance, even

though they may have more money—although it may buy a lot less these days (this is the famous 'money illusion', of over-weighting the nominal value of money and not properly considering what it can actually purchase). For example, a young couple 30 years ago had a chance to get on the housing ladder, even in London, without substantial help from their family, but today this is next to impossible for the vast majority of them. Salaries have nowhere near kept pace with house inflation.

Social Comparison: Keeping Up With The Joneses

There's something else going on that means we seem never to "have enough". Behavioural economics reveals that most of us are sensitive to 'positional standing' and not to the absolute level of wealth of the nation—at least, not after a sufficient level of comfort has been attained. When people are asked, a majority of them say they would prefer to earn £40,000 a year if other people made only £25,000 rather than to earn £50,000 if others made £100,000 (we assume the buying power is the same in both scenarios). Given that we have a sufficient level of income/wealth to live a decent life, most (but not all) of us care less about how much we have and much more about how we *compare* with other people.

This behavioural finding has a perverse consequence: we're inclined to waste money competing with others in order to *try* to maintain or improve our (*perceived*) relational standing: keeping up with, or even beating, the Joneses—like the hamster on the treadmill.

In terms of happiness, we get the most satisfaction when our income is greater than our perceived personal needs and wants; but the rub is that this is *relative* and not *absolute*—it's the upward comparison that causes stress and is even associated with a lower life expectancy. We might not be comparing what we have with what we need, but with what the family next door has. An interesting study showed that in those areas where people had won a BMW car in a lottery, BMW sales went up among non-lottery winners in the same area!

If we go against the grain of personality, financial advice doesn't *work*

A new financial advice model, one more based on sound psychology, is required, one which acknowledges how *real* people make decisions about *real* life and what's important *to them*. For each of us to get to this point, we need self-knowledge and insight into who we are as *unique* individuals—none of us is the average Jo(anne)!

The Personality of Money

There does exist an "average" perfect life, but only between the pages of a work of fiction. In the real world, to be happier, people need the skills to determine what *they* want so they can use *their* money as a tool to get it. By contrast, focusing on money alone is likely only to lead to greed, envy, and further anxiety and stress—the very things the possession of money is meant to reduce!

Below we discuss only a few examples of how personality traits are related to various money-related matters—'how the mind works', as revealed by behavioural economics and science.

Mental Accounting

This describes the tendency to allocate money to separate mental accounts. This opposes the notion of mainstream economics that, as money is 'fungible', that we should put all of it into one pot and use the money from this single pot in a behaviourally uniform/consistent way. According to this view, we shouldn't allocate money to separate mental accounts (e.g., mortgage, household bills, holidays, and leisure) and then have different criteria for spending and saving these different pots.

Mainstream economists would call such mental accounting 'irrational'—a word which has little currency in psychology—although we should suspect that most of them engage in this very behaviour!

As bad money habits have been learnt, they can be unlearnt

Now, mental accounting can be a psychologically useful (and effective) method of managing our money, as it makes life easier, which is an entirely rational thing to do. However, it can lead to excessive spending and, resulting, under-savings.

For example, someone who is highly extraverted and enjoys a rewarding social life is prone to be less restrained in their spending, especially if they're drawing upon their social-leisure, "let's have some fun", mental money pot. They're discounting the fact that this money has the same value as other pots of money, which they may be managing by using different criteria for spending and saving.

One way to overcome this behavioural propensity is to pause-and-reflect, to consider the amount of money allocated to the mental pot compared with other pots, and weigh up the pros and cons of saving or spending. Even just a little 'time-out' can take the heat out of excessive spending. This sober financial reckoning will probably reveal financial inefficiencies caused by personality-related decisions and behaviours.

Loss Aversion

This is the subjective experience that "losses loom larger than gains"—typically speaking, we suffer twice the amount of pain when we lose something, compared to the pleasure of gaining something of the same value. This means that, on average, we tend to prefer avoiding losses relative to achieving gains of the same magnitude. Now under some circumstances, loss aversion is either reduced or absent (i.e., when losses aren't made

salient/obvious). This fact provides a clue to how we can 'reframe' gains and losses, so we don't fall prey to this painful cognitive bias.

Personality is important here: if we're in a negative emotional state, we're likely to experience significant loss aversion, and this can mean that we let the prospect of a loss exert disproportionate power over us as compared with the prospect of a gain of the same magnitude. In turn, this can undermine sensible investment decisions. Loss aversion can become overly risk averse, including holding on to possessions, activities, lifestyle, and so on, for much longer than we should.

Take someone high on Emotionality (i.e., they easily generate strongly negative emotional states). They'll be more sensitive to loss aversion and be overly concerned by it. As a consequence, they'll be sensitive to the potential loss of letting things go—even though there may be a corresponding gain of equal, or even greater, magnitude.

People high on Emotionality will find it particularly difficult to 'reframe' the loss/gain ratio, because they're now in the 'domain of loss'. Incidentally, this can lead to an apparently paradoxical effect: impulsive spending, which serves to reduce the negative state associated with high Emotionality.

Important here too is *myopic loss aversion*, which explains why we're willing to pay a higher price to protect against possible (potential) losses—to a far greater extent than the true risk warrants. Although such protection (insurance) can be a good thing, loss aversion can make us over-protect and, therefore, waste our money on preventing an imagined/expected negative emotional state.

Hedonic Adaptation (habituation, hedonic treadmill)

This is the tendency to revert quickly to previous levels of well-being after experiencing a significant positive or negative life event. This adaptation can be complete (i.e., return to the same level of well-being) or partial. Hedonic *adaptation* means that we get the most pleasure when we're *attending* to something (e.g., planning a wedding, preparing for a new baby, arranging a once-in-a-lifetime holiday), but this rapidly wanes once we've obtained the object of our desire.

This is related to *decision* utility—actually making a decision can be as much fun as obtaining the thing we desire, known as *consumption utility*. Now, depending on our personality, we can get trapped into chasing pleasurable items and activities only to find that, in the actual event of experiencing them,

we're rather disappointed, especially as they lose their initial attentional glister. This can set us on a treadmill of consumer spending merely *for the sake of it*.

Take a personality type. As extraverts are more sensitive to reward and pleasurable activities, including economic decisions, they'll tend to be overly focused on such pursuits in the hope that they'll be as fulfilling as promised, but they are to be disappointed. Now, this bias and related behaviours don't relate only to money matters and consumer behaviour, but also to other areas of life, for example romantic relationships, which may start out exciting only then to fizzle out.

Discounting (delay discounting, time discounting)

This relates to the manner in which we discount (devalue) rewards that aren't immediately available. The value of the future reward decreases alongside the delay (this is why banks pay interest on deposits—to counter inflation and compensate for the future which is always uncertain).

The specific manner in which people discount is described by the discount *function*, and the one that characterises our typical decision/choice behaviour is 'hyperbolic' in form. To illustrate, would you prefer £100 today or £110 next week, and how about £100 in 50 weeks' time and £110 in 51 weeks' time? We're prone to choose £100 today yet £110 in week 51. This outcome means that we don't discount the future in constant units: we tend to discount tomorrow more steeply than the same period further out in time.

Thinking about personality, someone *low* on the personality trait of Conscientiousness will tend to experience this effect to a greater extent, causing problems relating to money, and also to health. They have lower cognitive control and are more impulsive, and, therefore, are less able to delay gratification. Being aware of this tendency, and knowing how our personality predisposes to it, is a necessary path to not falling prey to its worst excesses.

Sunk Cost

This is a cost that has already been incurred and cannot be recovered; it's gone forever, never to be recouped. Economics tells us to focus on what we can control: *prospective* (future) costs that haven't yet been incurred and will depend on the choices made *now*.

One way we can behave in sub-optimal financial ways is to be overly sensitive to sunk cost. Sometimes, simply the best thing is to accept that costs/losses

that have been incurred will never be recovered and should not be taken into account when making decisions in the present moment. This can be difficult, though, as losses hurt more than the pleasure we get from gains of the same magnitude (see *loss aversion* above).

How might sensitivity to sunk costs play out in relation to personality? As a person high on Emotionality will tend to be more sensitive to losses, they'll be inclined to take sunk costs into account when coming to a decision regarding the future. Thus, they're prone to arrive at decisions that are sub-optimal.

It's important to know that, as with other biases, this process is relevant to decisions of all types, whether financial, social, occupational, or involving relationships, where past time, effort, and emotion, alas, may have been 'invested' yet yielded little or no return, or even lost. Sometimes it's best just to 'move on' and forget the pat. However, learning why things went wrong in the first place might be a valuable lesson, but this must not be allowed to segue into self-defeating rumination and recrimination. Sometimes though, the very best action is simply to walk away from past loss/cost, however tough this might be to do. It certainly entails self-control and the inhibition of negative thoughts and feelings associated with past failure. This is difficult to achieve not only because of loss aversion but also the related behavioural bias of the *endowment effect*.

Endowment Effect

This relates to the finding that we place a higher value on the things we own than the things we don't. The majority of us possess this tendency. It reveals itself in our valuing of the things we possess as more valuable than what other people are willing to pay for them and what *we* were willing to pay before we acquired them. This goes for ideas, people, as well as consumer goods. This can mean that we're reluctant to let something go—in the case of goods, selling them for a price another person is willing to pay. So too, with relationships and friendships: sometimes we hold on to them for longer than we should—they aren't always worth the value we're placing on them, and sometimes they only mean so much to us because we *possess* them. Once we let them go, we're better placed to measure their true value.

Consider a person who is high on Openness to Experience. They place a high value on ideas, and there's always a risk of over-valuing them to the neglect of even better, though yet to be discovered, ones. This outcome relates to another important idea, that of 'opportunity cost': what we forgo when we choose option A over option B.

The idea of opportunity cost is fundamental to the whole of economics and is a very powerful insight, although one that's rarely salient in our thoughts because the option we have forgone is not readily *available* and not for the forefront of our mind. Now, as we can't have everything, we must *choose* and, therefore, we must forgo the 'utility' (enjoyment/benefit) of the option we did *not* choose.

When playing around with ideas, the open to experience person needs to weigh up whether one idea (e.g., an investment strategy) is *really* better than another idea. Pausing-and-reflecting is, once again, a good strategy to adopt, even (perhaps especially) when the 'right' choice seems obvious and staring us straight in the face. We should ask ourselves: *why* does it seem so attractive to us, and does this perception reflect its true value?

The person high on Openness to Experience needs to learn not to over-value the ideas they hold, and to try as far as possible to evaluate them objectively. This can entail seeking opposing information and viewpoints in an attempt to undermine the idea. This will never be easy or comfortable for us to do, especially when the idea is precious to us. It's always sensible to withhold final judgement until the full range of information has been collected and considered, and importantly that the alternative ideas have a 'run for their money'.

The key here is to critically reflect and test the veracity of the idea not only with new information but with information that contains within it the power to challenge the idea. This form of intellectual challenge is important because we're all prone to *self-confirming bias*: selecting pieces of information that fits our view and discounting all else. We'd do much better to focus on *dis*confirming information. In fact, this is the scientific attitude, and it gets us to well-grounded knowledge better than any other approach. The very technology (e.g., electric light) around you at this precise moment is testimony to this powerful fact. By deliberative self-control, the cognitive bias shown in the endowment effect can be mitigated. Of course, this won't just happen, especially if it's not recognisable in the first place.

Consumer Decisions Under Scarcity

Many retailers, especially those with an online presence, use scarcity as a behavioural/motivational ploy to nudge browsers to become buyers—"a one-time only offer", or "limited stock", and so on. This ploy is often used with hotel rooms and flights—"Reserve it now or lose it".

We need to be wary of such ploys as they may not be quite what they seem, even if they're, technically speaking, correct statements—who is to say that the 'scarce' offer that replaces it tomorrow isn't even better? What type of person is "viewing the hotel room"—may be employees of the company or tyre-kicking browsers? Although few of us are willing to admit that we're silly enough to fall for such shameless sales ploys, the vast majority of us are, even when we know what's going on!

It's for this reason that leading companies use such behavioural tools, such as Booking.com who openly discuss their marketing ploys at behavioural science events (e.g., Nudgestock, run annually by the advertising and communications agency, Ogilvy). Indeed, such websites are performing multiple A/B testing each day to 'optimise' the website they present to browsers in the hope they'll be turned into buyers. (It's interesting to note that this can entail very small changes, such as the size and orientation of an arrow on the website that, although not prominent to the casual observer, still has an effect on the propensity to purchase.)

Now, consider someone high on Emotionality and, therefore, more loss averse than most other people. Would they be especially influenced by the scarcity sales ploy? What do you think? Well, this sales ploy sets up a psychological conflict, which the high Emotionality individual will find most distressing, but to the convenience of the company, this person can resolve their conflict by making a rash and, possibly, reckless (or, at least, sub-optimal) decision. It's a way of escaping from the conflict established by the company, and here's the thing: this isn't accidental. Online companies employ behavioural scientists and psychologists to devise new ways of inducing such conflict in an attempt to 'nudge' the potential customer closer to the final buying decision. This can be especially effective if the potential buyer has been previously 'primed' by persuasive advertising and has been warmed-up to make a purchase.

What's interesting in all of this is that behavioural science informs us that knowing about such sales ploys is no guard against their persuasive effects. Indeed, we're likely to engage in somewhat delusional thinking to justify this to ourselves. For example, we're likely to convince ourselves by saying, "Well, just in case, I better reserve it now", and the retailer will encourage you further by not requiring you to make a troublesome financial transaction at *that* moment: ease of transaction is a major principle of influence in consumer psychology.

If there's any effective advice to give, it's this: to avoid high-pressure selling of any kind simply refuse to make a decision there-and-then and have some

'time-out' from the psychological heat of the moment. Don't rush into things—pause-and-reflect and possibly speak with a trusted friend who can provide a second opinion (just by taking the time to ask them will take the urgency out of the decision and may, by itself, suggest other courses of action).

The Cashless Effect

This describes our tendency willingly to pay more when we use an electronic means of payment rather than cash. As society moves increasingly away from the use of cash to plastic (and smart-phone) money, we're all prone to spending more than we would do otherwise. This is because we easily forget—or don't care as much—how much we're spending when cash isn't used, along with the vague thought that this doesn't *seem* to be real money anyway. In any case, we don't need to repay it until sometime in the future.

The power of the mind is such that we will find a raft of reasons for not thinking of this as real money *now*, especially as we discount the future, we'll tend to view the money spent as being worthless in this vague future time when repayment is due (see *hyperbolic discounting*, above). Credit card companies and other forms of "pay later" suppliers know all-too-well these biases, and they deliberately exploit them to their full commercial advantage. For example, this can be seen with the anchoring of minimum monthly repayments on credit cards. Often, we're encouraged not to think of how much we're borrowing, and certainly not to consider the interest rate and the final sum that we must repay, but rather to focus (i.e., 'anchor') on how little we need to pay back each month.

The fact is that many of us are slavishly influenced by these behaviourally-inspired ploys even though we're loathed to admit it. Our psychological reaction plays directly into the hands of the pay-later credit providers who understand our propensity for denial, and our desire for instant gratification (i.e., *decision utility*, see above).

All of the above are compounded by another important psychological finding: when using cash, we experience loss much more (i.e., *loss aversion*, see above). We notice more what we're spending, as the notes and coins are tangible and tactile—they *embody* psychological meaning. Compared to plastic or phone as a means of payment, cash leads to more pain as we're giving away something we already own (see also *endowment effect*, above). This gives us a clue to know how we might curb our spending: using cash as an effective deterrent when spending unwisely, for example, imagine the emotional differences of using cash or a debit card to gamble in a betting shop!

Cash can make us stop and think about what we're buying and whether it's really value for money. The fact that we have to count out the cash means that this action impresses itself on our mind and highlights the value of money. It also takes time to do, which offers a few more moments to pause-and-reflect on the wisdom of the purchasing decision. Plastic and phone money makes everything so much *easier*, and for this reason, it's all the more damaging to our wealth.

Well, how might the cashless effect play out in terms of personality? Consider a person low on Emotionality who is less prone to loss aversion. They might be more prone to fall prey to the cashless effect as they have a less negative emotional reaction to spending in this way. One behavioural strategy for them to adopt might be to use cash more often and to give themselves a budget to spend, as constrained by the amount of cash they have, quite literally, on them. They'll probably experience this as troublesome and a "bother"; now *this* is the very point—it makes it more difficult to spend in a mindless fashion.

Another strategy might be that they commit to giving away a sum of money that they can afford to an organisation they loath whenever they go over their allocated budget (this is called a *commitment device*)—it has the equivalent effect of snapping an elastic band on the wrist when a negative thought pops into one's head.

If cash isn't a viable option, as is increasingly the case today in our cashless world, then a pre-paid card is another way to curb excessive spending. In fact, a pre-paid card is another example of a useful *commitment device* that allows us, at the *present* moment, to restrain the decisions of our *future* self. Another useful strategy is to visualise what the actual cash in hand would look, and possibly feel, like—this alone should trigger the experience of loss aversion and encourage less spending on things that don't really matter.

We're all prone to a number of systematic behavioural biases, and these can, and do, undermine our ability to manage our money effectively. Personality traits strengthen and weaken these biases; for this reason, to get to the point of effective personalised money management, it's essential first to have acquired personality self-knowledge and insight. Now, this would be money well spent!

12 Entering Civvy Street

Transitioning from Military to Civilian Life

Transitioning from any phase of life can be difficult as new challenges must be faced. The transition from military to civilian life can be especially problematic for the reasons outlined in this chapter. However, as we will also see, help is at hand.

Evidence shows that too many retiring and discharged military personnel suffer mental illness, homelessness, unemployment, and general confusion about how and where they fit into civilian life. Even those with a successful military career and high officer rank can find Civvy Street a strange and unwelcoming place. Transition isn't helped by a lack of information and a lack of understanding shown by many employers—this includes not appreciating the valuable knowledge, experience and skills possessed by those exiting military service.

Research shows that the most difficult part is *identity* transition—a somewhat vague psychological term but one that is concrete enough for those leaving the familiarity of the military. One thing we do know is that appreciating the role played by personality can ease this transition, making the road to integration into civilian life all the smoother and more successful. Personality self-insight can identify those careers that are most likely to be satisfying; and also, of no small importance, is knowledge regarding how to behave around civilians who may have little, or no, prior exposure to military servicemen and women.

Finding a civilian job is a key part of integration into civilian society. Take John, for example, who served in the military for 36 years. His whole life revolved around the military, even from a young age, as his parents and grandparents had also served. Despite being highly trained, he had only ever worked in the military, which in the eyes of many in Civvy Street limited his job prospects. In particular, numerous employers overlooked his considerable experience and skills acquired over many years.

Instead of military experience seen as a hindrance, as was the case with John, it should be seen as an asset. For sure, there's a sociocultural change that needs to take place regarding the value of ex-military personnel and how best they can integrate into civilian society. We can't make this happen overnight, and, in any case, it's not enough. Each leaver needs to know their *own* personal strengths and weaknesses—their personality—as this predicts their specific style of integration and how they can best overcome the challenges

that await them. With this self-knowledge and insight, a challenge can quickly turn into an opportunity, but it won't *just* happen by itself.

Civvy Street fails to appreciate the considerable value offered by ex-military job applicants

In 2019, Philip Corr co-wrote a book with Dr Kevin Wilson-Smith—himself a British Army Reservist and a Chartered Occupational Psychologist—on the topic of military identity and the transition to civilian life. This book included first-hand accounts of 'lifers', the medically discharged and reservist soldiers; some of the cases reviewed are presented below.

> Wilson-Smith, K. M. & Corr, P. J. (2019). *Military Identity and the Transition into Civilian Life—"Lifers", Medically Discharged and Reservist Soldiers*. London: Palgrave.

The life experiences told painted a worrying picture. Irrespective of rank and years-of-service, there was a perceived lack of preparation and support before exit, resulting in a difficult transition period to civilian life, even for those who were best equipped to deal with it (e.g., John, the British Army Major). The psychological impact of the transition was especially marked, and this was noted as the most difficult aspect, even by otherwise tough soldiers.

From the research reported in this book—which is supported by the wider literature on military role/identity transition—one psychological aspect that came out was the role played by personality. Ex-military personnel enter Civvy Street with the legacy of service and their military role identity, which is all wrapped up with their own unique personality. For many of them, this is a powerful mix, yet for others it can be toxic.

There's something else of relevance when we think about the transition of military personnel to Civvy Street. Although it's important to understand one's own personality, it's also vital to know how one's personality *compares with those of others*. Added to this is the fact that those in the military are self-selecting. Most military personnel have little familiarity with the wide range of personalities that exist in Civvy Street, and when they enter it, this can come as something of a shock. This unfamiliarity is related to a second issue: the way personality is *expressed* can easily get confused with military and physical bearing, and the attitude instilled by many years of service. For example, being direct in speech can be confused with aggression and a lack of humility, and even plain rudeness.

Ex-military people can feel like a fish out of water

There's certainly a very strong case to be made that greater personality self-knowledge and insight would better equip military personnel to transition more smoothly to civilian life. This is relevant because the military imposes a rigid and somewhat safe (at least predictable) environment, and the identity of the service man or woman becomes wrapped-up with it. Military values, attitudes and behaviours can be hard to shake off when in civilian life, where things can seem just so difficult, even confusing—certainly much less structured and disciplined. As a result, people in civilian life can seem a little strange (e.g., lazy and disrespectful). As one correspondent confided, people can just seem "half-arsed". Also, age can be confusing because anyone in the military of more advanced years is almost invariably of a higher rank than a younger person, but this is very unlike Civvy Street, where age isn't an indicator of status.

Finding a Civilian Job

Most ex-service personnel are of working age when they exit the military. Many are motivated to find a second career—this motivation comes from the pressure of economic, psychological, and social forces, and usually some combination of all three. Although most find a job (87.5%, according to one 2005 study), the common perception that the transition is straightforward is inaccurate. Indeed, research shows that Army leavers, in particular, are disadvantaged in terms of employment prospects and social relations due to a lack of contact with civilian labour markets. Employers' perceptions are an issue too. One study found that, when questioned about employing ex-soldiers, 61% of employers stated that they had "*little understanding of skills and qualifications ex-servicemen offer*", and three-quarters of ex-veterans going into civilian employment felt they had "*an inability to effectively translate their military skills to civilian terms*". This is hardly conducive to a seamless military-civilian transition.

Also of relevance is the fact that, for many military personnel, there's a certain level of status and power that comes with their service role. When entering civilian life, they can experience this loss experienced as incredibility psychologically debilitating—they can feel lost at sea. Their previously strong and well-defined identity has been taken away, with little substance to replace it.

Psychology can help here—not the wishy-washy variety, but the practical nuts-and-bolts variety that is designed to get the job done. This is most obvious with managing mental health issues which remain a significant problem. But,

more broadly, there's considerable potential for supporting military personnel to develop the coping skills needed to prepare them properly for the occupational challenges that lie ahead. There's also the related problem of integrating back into normal family life, and this alone can present its own significant problems.

Lived Military Experience

Ex-service personnel's stories often reach the national press. One example is Nathan Millward, 25, of South Shields, who was discharged from the British Army on medical grounds. In 2017, he was diagnosed with a heart problem after collapsing. His discharge hit him hard. After joining the Army as a 16-year-old, a future on Civvy Street seemed daunting. After discharge, he struggled with mental health issues and lost his home at the end of a long-term relationship and becoming a young dad.

As Nathan said, "Doing your growing up in the Army teaches you a lot about your physical and mental limits but it doesn't equip anybody for life as an adult in the civilian world...Many 16-year-olds who join the services have only known one form of employment, only had one job interview and had one organisation to look after them. When I left the Army, I must have had 30 job interviews before I was offered a job with most employers saying I have no prior experience in their field. In being discharged from the Army I went from having everything I wanted to having nothing. It felt like life was falling to pieces and in my darkest days I contemplated on whether I wanted to keep on living."

To illustrate the very different 'lived' experiences, summarised below are two case studies that are detailed in the book mentioned above. What's common to all is the challenge faced by the transition, irrespective of the circumstances leading up to it.

John's Story

John served for just short of 36 years in the British Army, retiring, as a Major, at the age of 52. He was immersed in a military environment from an early age; his dad was in the Marines, his Mum had been in the RAF for a short period, and both his grandparents had been in the forces—Marines and RAF. As John said, "...everything I did was centred on being boisterous and having a military orientated attitude. So, joining the military was almost ordained I suppose. It's just the way it was".

Reflecting on his role, John said, "...in my view, one had two personalities, one at work and one-off duty". Also, "There are too many people at all levels

and in the civilian world that just don't understand that's what it's all about". Looking back at his transition period, "In the last period of resettlement and transition, I gained lots of professional accreditation appropriate to rank and experience (these are handed out), I have gained qualifications and completed an MBA etc. and yet despite all this after 18 months of leaving the army I have applied for 102 jobs, had only four interviews and I'm still unemployed".

After many courses, John observed, "It was only then that I realised that I did not only lose my job, but I also lost my status, respectability, and my entire purpose to some degree. My main focus is still on getting a job but it's frustrating." In terms of perceived reaction, "I suppose in reality I currently can't see myself as anything other than a veteran. The civilian environment hasn't welcomed me into its world as I haven't received any additional information to influence me; lots of platitudes but no real assistance to aid in the transition". And this is coming from a highly experienced and skilled senior Officer in the British Army!

John noted, "You can often spot ex-service personnel because of their general demeanour and how they carry themselves, and many people instinctively ask, "*you're ex-military aren't you*"? But this demeanour can come across as a little odd in the civilian world.

Another aspect that isn't correctly understood is the range of skills possessed by ex-military personnel. As John observed, "It has also been suggested that my CV is scaring a potential boss or employer off, but I can't dumb it down and take away 36 years of army experience...If so at the age of 52 it appears that I'm on the scrapheap and my military service is for naught...I don't know how I can move on from where I am, and if I don't I'll be stuck between making a transition and living the rest of my life".

Jack's Story

At the time of telling, Jack was 27, having joined the Army at the age of 20. He recalls that joining was always something he wanted during his childhood; he was keen on rugby at the time and, as he said, he had "real potential with [my] rugby and thought I might end up in the higher leagues, but when that didn't come off then the focus started to shift to how else I could earn money and that's when I decided perhaps the Army was an option".

Then it happened, "So at this point everything was going great and I was at regiment, I had done a few ranges, went bobsleighing, played a lot of corps rugby and done my tank training as well. I had been away to Canada. We got back and began doing pre-deployment training, and my 2I/C of my squadron

wanted me to play rugby on Wednesday. I did not want to because I wanted to play army vs navy under 23s rugby at Twickenham on Saturday and well there is no other way of saying it...I got hurt. I managed to turn around to my squadron leader, who is, to me, very senior, and said something isn't right. I've really hurt my back and he said mate you need to get back out there we haven't got a replacement for you and if you don't stay on, you'll be doing guard duty this weekend. So, I attempted to carry on and was in agony. After that we were due to deploy and I was still having massive pain and still doing my pre-deployment training despite the fact I was physically, virtually unable to walk, let alone run, and I was carrying all the weight, it wasn't great. I finally ended up in hospital with it almost ten months after the initial deployment. I got rushed in. I didn't actually have an MRI until almost ten months after my injury". Things didn't get better, "I was given an MRI and immediately after they got the result, they said, "*you need surgery*" and that was basically it. When I went down to the doctor later, I said to him, "*right you need to cut my leg off, this foot is hardly working just chop it off*".

The future beckoned for Jake, "At this point they said I was probably going to be medically discharged. At the time I was 22 and I was told to stay at home and just claim benefits and I just thought, no...after that they diagnosed me with adjustment depression and at the time I thought "*no way I don't have that*" but looking back now, my other half said, "*oh yeah you did*". I was always very chilled out and I became quite aggressive, if someone said the wrong thing or looked at me the wrong way, road rage became intolerable, it...I...became an absolute nightmare. It was tough".

Jack says, "It's stressful more than anything. People react differently to stress, but I was thinking how I'm going to survive financially. I thought the army compensation would look after me. After I left, I got a place to do civil engineering at University, but my wife was studying to become a teacher, we had also just bought a new house, so I just tried to find full time employment as we had to pay the bills. Now I work as an HGV driver and I'm also a photographer—I found a little niche and take photos of weddings and specialist cars and stuff".

Things are different on Civvy Street; as Jack notes, "Part of the military identity survives though, definitely. I get told off for it sometimes, the language is definitely still there, swearing, etc. When I go into work my wife will tell me off and say I'm too direct with people. She says I don't ask people, I tell them; I bark at them...The transition between army and Civvy Street wound me up because I found people lazy, everyone seemed like they were being half-arsed. I often felt there was no respect and people spoke to you like shit and so I would get grumpy and argue. The hardest part for me was the psychological aspect as no one actually tells you how much you're going to

struggle to just sit around your own house, when everyone else has to go out to work. It's the psychological impact".

Jack hints at the need to gain psychological self-knowledge and understanding: "If I could say anything to someone else going through what I went through I would almost say "*don't worry about your physical injury, watch out for that, the quiet time, the part where you're sitting alone in your house when everyone else is at work*".

There's a happy ending to Jack's story; as he says, "However, it's not all doom and gloom, I love my life now. I get to see my wife every day, I have my own house and you know, would I like to still be in the army, obviously had the experience not happened I would probably still be there now. But all in all, you just have to get on with it."

Underneath the Military Mask—Revealing Personality

One major problem ex-service personnel experience is knowing their own personality and how it's coming across to others and impacting them, in positive and negative ways. This is often made more problematic by the perceptions and expectations civilians have of the ex-military. Personal identity becomes subsumed and defined by their military role, especially when they've served their country for many years. To make an effective transition to Civvy Street, it's necessary to manage these *expressions* of personality; yet this can only really come about from first understanding them.

For all of the above reasons, knowing about one's personality can provide a window into understanding one's true self, identity, and social persona and how it compares with others so that we can know, crucially, how its *expression* is impacting them. Often, the wrong behavioural signals are being given off, leading to misunderstandings and resulting in greater difficulties with adjustment. Furthermore, the expression of personality can easily get confused with military demeanour—this unfortunate fact of civilian life can mean that it's often not apparent until it's too late, and the harm has been done.

Ex-service personnel re-entering or entering Civvy Street for the first time deserve our help and support. Not only have they served their country, but they've acquired valuable knowledge, experience, and skill—all of which is much needed in the civilian world. However, it's important that they understand themselves too: how they're coming across, their physical and psychological bearing, and how they compare to other people on the major traits of personality. They seem to have a particular need for this self-

knowledge and insight because they've been away from the general population for a large part of their adult life, and they don't necessarily know how they compare with other people, and therefore where they fit in. Personality assessment is crucial in order to smooth the transition as merely leaving things to chance and hoping for the best isn't a sensible strategy in the military or life in general.

13 Discover *Your* Personality

Now that you have read the book, we hope you enjoyed it and that it has helped you think about your own life, your priorities, and what you want to change to make your life better.

You can now start your own journey of personality self-discovery.

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