

Permanent Shift – A Modern Guide to Transitional Goal Setting and Achievement for Successful Professionals

Applying Obvious and Age-Old Techniques to A Not So Obvious Perceptions of Reality and Modern Challenges

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**This is Part 1 of a 3-part series on applying ancient wisdom to modern times to increase and enhance our human and professional performance and experience.*

Abdal Rahman III was the emir of Cordova and crowned himself Caliph in 929 CE. Cordova became a major intellectual center in his time with more than seventy libraries. It was the largest European city of its time when Paris and London were merely dirty villages. He built massive monuments like the Medinat al Zahra palace and the La Mezquita great mosque. He won great victories on the battlefield and forged powerful alliances. He ruminated on life before his death and penned the lines that live on after him:

"I have now reigned above fifty years in victory or peace; beloved by my subjects, dreaded by my enemies, and respected by my allies. Riches and honors, power and pleasure, have waited on my call, nor does any earthly blessing appear to have been wanting to my felicity. In this situation, I have diligently numbered the days of pure and genuine happiness which have fallen to my lot: they amount to Fourteen: - O man! place not thy confidence in this present world!"

—Abdal Rahman III

His discovery is even truer today, yet known by only a few.

We live in the most technically advanced and abundant society known to history, yet only a tiny percentage of "successful" people truly feel satisfied and fulfilled in their lives. And the percentage of people reaching these levels seems to be less and less every year.

This is the quintessential problem of humanity: our search for meaning, and our tendency toward dissatisfaction when we are unable to find it. Sages, Philosophers, sages, and even scientists across cultures and generations have pondered this problem. It is possible, they say, to find satisfaction and fulfillment, if we will only change how we see the world around us, rather than trying to change the world itself.

You can change your mode of thinking, and subsequently, the way you live your life, with a few small but consistent changes. To do this, you must become aware of your thought patterns and realize that the present configuration of your thoughts can be shifted. Then you can apply proven and time-tested techniques to achieve this, and to make your

progress in this manner a lifelong habit. This may take 15 minutes a day or less on average, but can be life changing for yourself and others.

What are thought patterns, and why do we have them? Dr. Srikumar Rao describes these as “mental chatter.” This is a constant mental dialogue consisting of thoughts, self-directed messages, and “internal voices” which give us instruction, observations, and general guidance—whether we want it or not. You are affected by mental chatter every day. Nearly everyone has at some point taken note of the “voice inside their head.”

Individuals who have been coached on observing their mental chatter often find that upon initial observation, the “voice inside your head” is questioning, criticizing and throwing uncertainty on every move they make. Unsurprisingly, this leads to self-doubt, self-castigation, phobias, impulsive reactions and poor decisions. Further, mental chatter cannot be turned off or substantially changed by sheer force of will or reciting positive things over and over again. In fact, trying to “shut off” the voice or change the thoughts is usually unsuccessful or draws more attention to the messages, making them seem stronger than ever.

In order to understand and manage our mental chatter, we must first become aware of it, and of its deep roots in our personal belief systems.

Dr. Rao instructs his students to attentively observe and record their mental chatter. Having a journal available to jot down thoughts at any given moment is imperative. Listen to your mental chatter immediately upon waking, while showering, getting ready in the morning, and intermittently throughout the day for a period of weeks. Definitely write down your mental chatter when you are interrupted, as

this will be very revealing. Write down what you notice immediately.

Over time, this observation will help you recognize how your thought patterns affect various aspects of your life. As a product of being stuck in the cycles of our mental chatter, we often tell ourselves that there is only one way that things can be. Mental chatter can be insidious, illogical, and critical, and often undermines our efforts to achieve our goals.

Once mental chatter is observed, and its fallacies and inconstancies noticed and recorded, you can take the important next step. Realize that happiness, fulfillment and escape from anxiety and other ills are reachable by the vast majority of individuals, namely, you. Even the acknowledgment of this possibility is powerful, and you may find that new opportunities blossom as changes occur before your very eyes.

Remember those philosophers and sages who described the human condition and determined we could find satisfaction and fulfillment? They also developed tools to help us along the way. We can take advantage of these opportunities, which are readily accessible, easily available, and in many cases do not require more than a pen and paper, and a little time and effort. You may even use these tools to quiet your mind without an awareness of what you are doing. These activities will make you feel energized, peaceful, and more complete. A more complete treatment of a number of perceptual enhancement techniques can be found in Dr Rao’s books and course materials, and on his Areyoureadytosucceed.com website and YouTube videos, but a good start on some of these techniques, that we will build on in Part 2, are as follows:

Strategy Number 1 - Write It Down

We have already talked about the importance of writing in identifying and observing your mental chatter. But recording can not only identify unconscious thoughts, it can clarify and amplify conscious and controlled thinking as well.

Many great achievers in history are known to have written down their goals and the challenges they met in accomplishing those goals. Thinking a problem or process through may be very effective, but writing down the conclusion or key analysis from such contemplation will avoid the need to rehash the question later, and will bring a degree of closure or make apparent what next steps need to be taken. It is no coincidence that the greatest thinkers in recorded history were also prolific writers.

A daily task list is a simple but effective way to record your thoughts. Have you ever remembered something important you needed to do at an inopportune moment, when you were unable to complete the task? If in the moment of remembering you are unable to act, that task sits in your mental “inbox,” creating clutter that can distract you from your present activity.

However, if you write the item down on a daily task list, your mind can focus on the task at hand, rather than diverting mental energy to remember all of your other open items.

Writing down each item on a task list also makes the item concrete, rather than a vague notion of a task, and facilitates action steps and a sense of accomplishment.

Strategy Number 2 - Note, Express and Feel Gratitude

The human brain has propelled society to immense achievements, by and large because of our tremendous problem-solving instincts, and our dedication to solving problems. However, this same brain mechanisms that drive us to solve problems also cause us to look for problems, and to feel a constant responsibility to find solutions to those problems. These patterns of thought cause worry, anxiety, and high stress levels.

An antidote is to consciously note gratitude. Pointing out to yourself what's going right rather than what's going wrong is extremely beneficial in calming the mind. Individuals who concentrate on positive events and achievements in their lives, and who express gratitude, will commonly have much more positive mental chatter.

Write down a list each day of things that you are that thankful for. Create a written affirmation that reflects your gratitude for the things you already have in life. As gratitude becomes an embedded practice in your life, you will find the number of things to be thankful for grows rather than diminishes.

Strategy Number 3 - Use the Voice of Reason

One of the most effective strategies in managing mental chatter is to appoint a “voice of reason.” This is a hypothetical person, or even a committee, set up to respond to your mental chatter from an impartial third-party point of view. This voice of reason can objectively decide whether your mental chatter is applicable and appropriate. This voice illuminates where you might be distorting your belief and behavioral systems.

You can imagine the voice of reason to be yourself at an older age, or you with 10 more years of experience and wisdom. Alternatively, you can call on your heroes, living or dead, real or imagined, to weigh in on the issues at hand.

Strategy Number 4 - Exercise Daily

It appears clear that our bodies were designed with both tremendous physical energy and extreme “fight or flight” instincts. When adrenaline is produced at the request of the brain, there is a tremendous amount of energy that allows for an amazing capacity for physical activity.

What does modern man do with such adrenaline, trapped in an office setting for hours at a time? An office environment is not even considered an acceptable place to sweat.

Daily exercise is not only good for the body, it is good for the mind. Six minutes of moderately active activity in the morning can significantly clear the mind of anxiety and unnecessary concerns, while releasing endorphins, activating the vagus nerve, and drastically reducing the “fight or flight” reaction to non-life-threatening events.

Exercise reduces stress, benefits health, and brings about feelings of contentment and self-satisfaction. Further, mental chatter is often significantly reduced or less pronounced during or following vigorous exercise. Focusing intently on the activity itself, rather than providing distractions such as television, may further increase these benefits.

Strategy #5: Look Down From 30,000 Feet, or Use Some Other Way to Look at Life from Outside and Not Inside.

There are many ways to see ourselves from afar, in order to gain a better view of what and where we are, and what we may want to do to best respond to reality. For some, to be free of mental chatter is to be unconscious, or perhaps to be fully conscious of the present moment, depending on how you look at it.

Some use imaging techniques to imagine seeing themselves from afar, or like a fish is seen from the outside of an aquarium. Meditation enables some people to reach an altered state of consciousness where the mind is described as empty, clear, steady or focused.

Contemplation and prayer are other forms of meditation. Exercise is considered meditative by many, particularly activities such as yoga and running. The techniques of meditation have been in existence for thousands of years. Whether you prefer meditating in a religious context, communing with nature, or just spending a few minutes each morning focusing on your breath, this is a valuable tool in helping to calm and clear the mind of mental chatter.

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Srikumar S. Rao, PhD received a physics degree in India and a scholarship to attend Columbia University, where he earned an MBA and a PhD. After a stint in private industry, Professor Rao returned to academia began teaching his Creativity and Personal Mastery (CPM) course at Columbia University in 2003. Professor Rao now provides CPM courses in private workshops for individuals and companies in New York, San Francisco, London and for private companies and individuals.

Rahul N. Mehra is a board-certified adult and child psychiatrist, who established a private company to enhance and administer mental health and behavioral services for large employers, and is familiar with Professor Rao's writings and the system described herein. Dr. Mehra's company, MehraVista Health, provides vital services for employers and healthcare systems to minimize costs and maximize benefits and effectiveness of mental health programs.

Alan S. Gassman is a practicing lawyer and author who took Professor Rao's three-weekend workshop in 2012, and repeated it in 2013. He has a post-law Masters degree in taxation, and represents physicians, businesses, and individuals in tax, business, wealth protection, and related areas.

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